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Monday, April 25

Emmanuel: 6:30 a.m.. Bible Study
School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Postponed: Junior High Track Meet at Britton

Noon: Senior Citizens potluck meeting at Groton
Community Center

School Breakfast: Eggs and breakfast potatoes.

School Lunch: Hamburgers, tiny whole potatoes.

Senior Menu: Swiss steak with mushroom gravy,
mashed potatoes, mixed vegetables, pears, whole
wheat bread.

Tuesday, April 26

State FFA Convention at SDSU

11:30 a.m.: Track Meet in Groton (Aberdeen Cen-
tral, Aberdeen Christian, Aberdeen Roncalli, Britton-
Hecla, Frederick, Griggs-Midkota, Ipswich, James
Valley Christian, Langford, Milbank, Miller, Sisseton,
Tiospa Zina, Tri-State, Wagner Community, Warner
@ Groton Area High School)

School Breakfast: Doughnuts.

School Lunch: Popcorn chicken, tater tots.

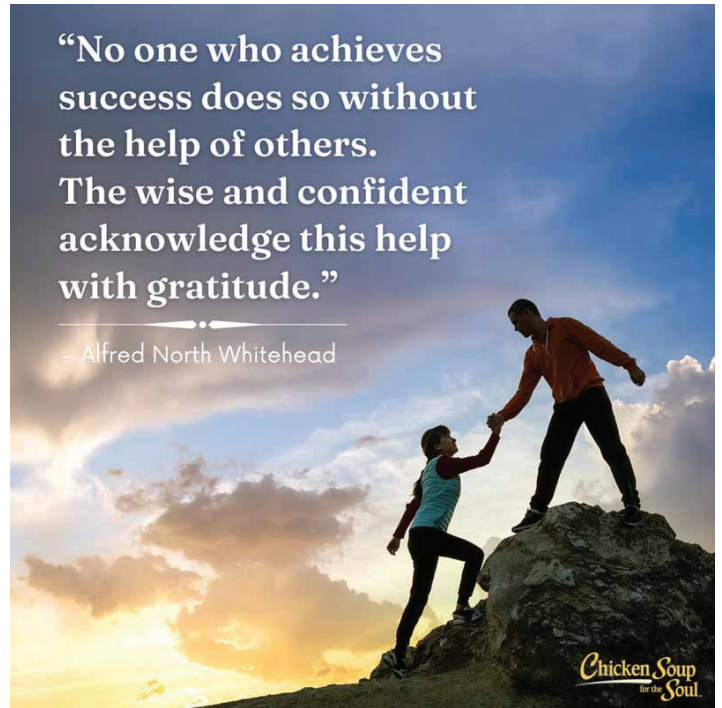
Senior Menu: Lemon chicken breast, creamy
noodles, spinach salad, baked apple slices, whole
wheat bread.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the
city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and
aluminum cans.

“No one who achieves
success does so without
the help of others.
The wise and confident
acknowledge this help
with gratitude.”

— Alfred North Whitehead



Senior Legion Coach Wanted

Groton Legion Post
#39 is seeking quali-
fied applicants for Head
Coach for the Groton
Legion Post #39 Senior
Baseball Team. The ap-
plicant must have pre-
vious coaching experi-
ence. The application
period will close on April
29, 2022.



Applications can be picked up at Groton City
Hall and mailed to:

Doug Hamilton
411 N. 4th St.
Groton, SD 57445

Truss Pros Help Wanted

Truss Pros in Britton is looking to hire a CDL driver
to deliver trusses in the tri-state area. Home every
night. Competitive wage! Full benefit package!

To apply call 605-277-4937 or go to www.uslbm.com/careers and search for jobs in Britton, SD.

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2022 Princess Prom



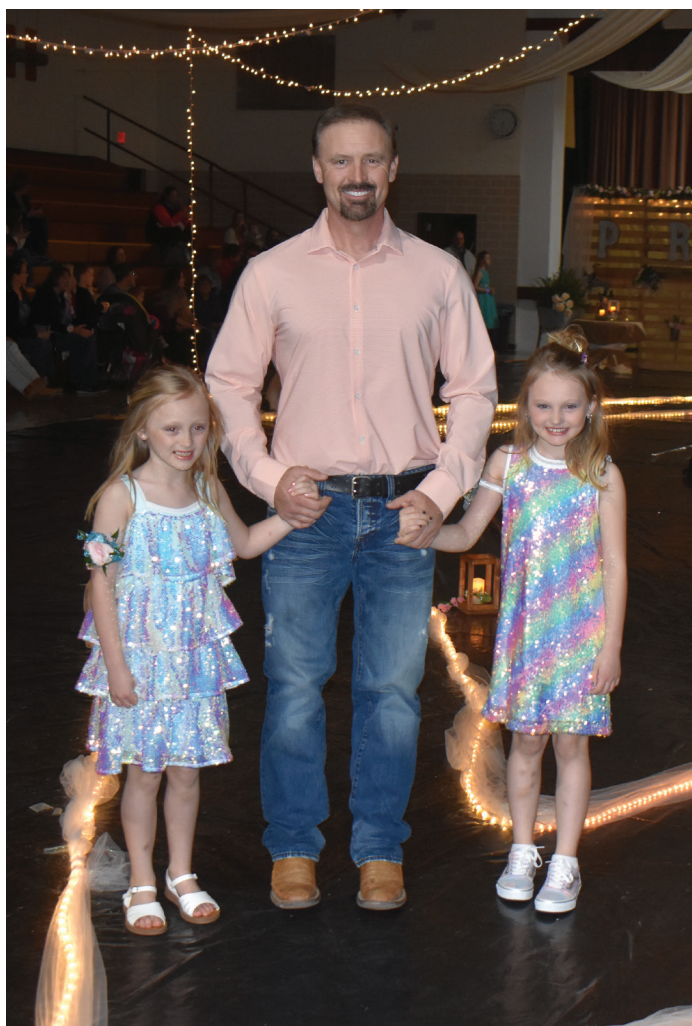
**Randy Herrick escorting princesses
Callie and Maddie.**



**Trey Flihs escorting princesses
Mya and Emme**

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Grant Gilchrist escorting princesses Shealee and Sophia



Chris Raba escorting princess Kayleigh

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**Thomas Wheeler escorting princesses
Peyten and Harper**



**Kevin Kotzer escorting princesses
Adeline and Cora**

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**Jordan Stiegelmeier escorting princesses
Blakely and Veda**



**Matt Johnson escorting princess
Paisley**

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**Ron Loeschke escorting princess
Faith**



**Coy Neu escorting princess
Hazel**

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**Sam Furman escorting princesses
Kinzleigh and Kaylynn**



**Neil Warrington escorting princess
Novelea**

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**Trent Kurtz escorting princess
Calli**



**Justin Morehouse escorting princesses
Kaelee and Jaeden**

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**Heath Giedt escorting princesses
Preslee, Emersyn and Hazel**



**Cody Roettele escorting princess
Avery**

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**Jeremy Dosch escorting princess
Ruby**



**Greyson Cutler escorting princess
Aryanna**

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**Brad Henderson escorting princesses
Eva and Ruby**



**Cole Kampa escorting princess
Andi**

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**Ben Peterson escorting princess
Evalynn**



**Tom Schuster escorting princess
Tori**

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**Jade Weig escorting princess
Jernie**



**Lance Haskell escorting princesses
Kinley, Elizabeth and Aspen**

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**Adrian Daly escorting princess
Isabella**



**Michael Dunbar escorting princesses
Maci, Brielle and Collyns**

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**Trent Traphagen escorting princesses
Taylynn, Aubrie and Collins**



**Weston Dinger escorting princess
Arianna**

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**Brock Sandness escorting princess
Kinley**



**Chad Locken escorting princess
Jorie**

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**Ross Taylor escorting princess
Baylin**



**Justin Perkins escorting princess
Hallie**

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Justin Cleveland escorting princess Harper



Logan Huber escorting princesses Avery and Liv

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**Jordan Bethke escorting princesses
Karter and Riley**



**John Sippel escorting princess
Kaylee**

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**John Withey escorting princess
Chloe**



**Gene Johnson escorting princess
Libby**

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**Nicholas Sauer escorting princesses
Aubrie and Cierra**



**Tyler Neigel escorting princess
Miakoda**

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**Brian Sanderson escorting princess
Destry**



**Seth Erickson escorting princess
Haley**

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**Spencer Locke escorting princesses
Lennox and Lexie**



**Taylor Anderson escorting princess
Maya**

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**Craig Dunker escorting princess
Brynlee**



**Eric Moody escorting princesses
Maycee and Mya**

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**Bryan Sombke escorting princess
Maryn and Teagan**



**Brooks Kleffman escorting princess
Rilynn**

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Travis Swisher escorting princess Molly



Kris Harry escorting princesses Annie and Harper

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**Randy Lord escorting princess
Jozie**



**Chad Kampa escorting princess
Dacey**

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**Shawn Hulbert escorting princess
Rayna**



**Dan Washenberger escorting princesses
Aurora, Sunny and Nova**

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**Austin Fordham escorting princess
Eliana**



**Thomas Bentz escorting princess
Jaclyn**

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**Andries Myburgh escorting princess
Elaina**



**Bruce Babcock escorting princess
Emery**

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**Matt Vogel escorting princess
Peyton**



**Jeff Fliehs escorting princess
Sophia**

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**Michael Feist escorting princesses
Ambrielle and Layla**



**Drake Patterson escorting princess
Rowan**

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**Joshua Cowan escorting princesses
Willow and Aspen**



**Mark Thompson escorting princess
Taylor**

Smokeless Tobacco is a Cancer Risk

From Babe Ruth to John Wayne, Americans have seen chewing tobacco in popular culture for over a century. Spitting chew has been a trademark of cowboys and professional athletes alike and chewing tobacco use continues at high rates in the United States. In 2018 a survey showed 2.4 percent of American adults used smokeless tobacco, with snuff or snus pouch use on the rise and chewing tobacco on the decline.

Though smokeless tobacco use is not associated with lung cancer like smoking is, it has its own set of potential dangers. First, smokeless tobacco does contain nicotine, causes nicotine addiction, and thus can be very difficult to quit.

Chewing tobacco can wreak havoc on a person's teeth and gums. It causes tooth discoloration, dental cavities, tooth loss, and recession of the gums, sometimes requiring oral surgery.

Smokeless tobacco is a major risk factor for cancer of the oral cavity and throat. Smoking cigarettes also increases the risk of this type of cancer. Cancer of this region can be devastating partly because its treatment may result in the inability for a patient to use their mouth, throat, and vocal cords.

A person who uses or has used smokeless tobacco as well as current and former smokers should discuss that with their primary care provider as well as their dentist and dental hygienist, as those professionals can perform thorough oral and neck exams as part of their regular care. Any abnormality found should be investigated thoroughly.

Another crucial note is that many oral, head, and neck cancers are also associated with human papilloma virus, or HPV, infection. If you are on the fence about getting your children or yourself, if eligible, vaccinated for HPV, this disease is another excellent reason to do so.

The iconic Babe Ruth, who chewed tobacco and smoked cigarettes, died prematurely of throat cancer at age 53. Major League Baseball finally prohibited the use of smokeless tobacco in 2016.

If you use smokeless tobacco and are ready to quit, the advice is similar to that for quitting smoking. First, make a plan and talk to people who can help hold you accountable. Get rid of all stashes of tobacco at your home, workplace, and vehicle. Consider use of nicotine replacement therapy, such as patches and/or gum, or prescription medication which may make kicking your nicotine addiction a little easier. Finally, if you aren't successful this time, regroup your plan and try again. It will absolutely be worth it.

Kelly Evans-Hullinger, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices internal medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



Kelly Evans-Hullinger, MD

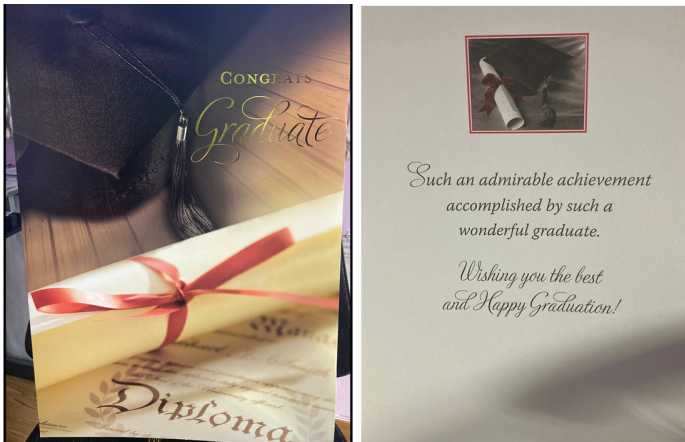
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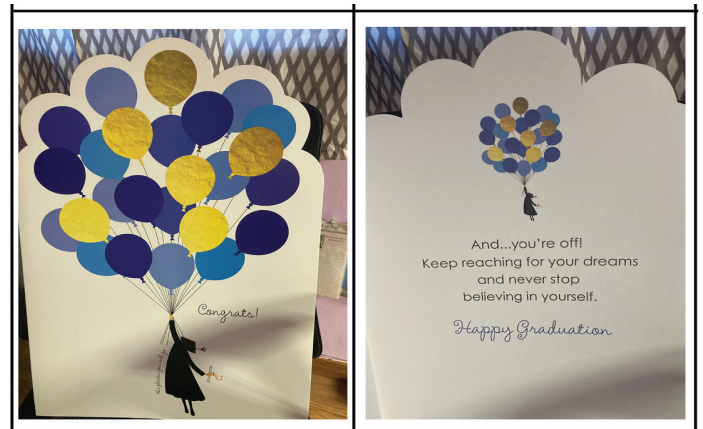
Jumbo Graduation Cards

Only \$7.99 each ~ Card Size: 16.25" x 24"

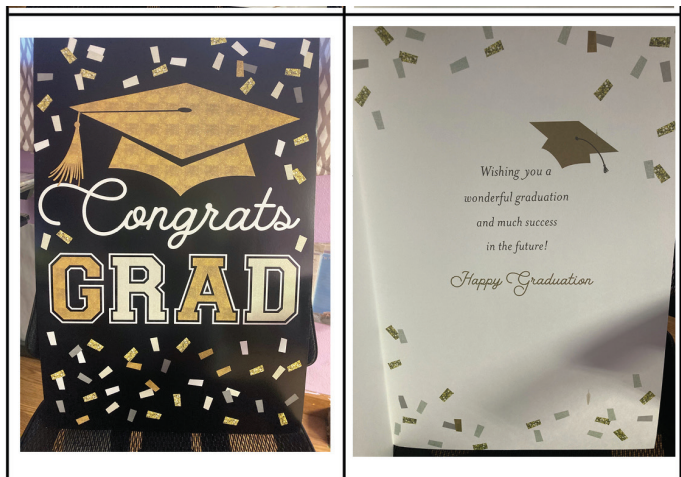
Can now be ordered on-line at 397news.com - Link on Black Bar
Or Call/Text Paul at 605-397-7460 or Tina at 605-397-7285
to reserve your card(s)



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50-10977JM-C
\$7.99



50-9360-C
\$7.99

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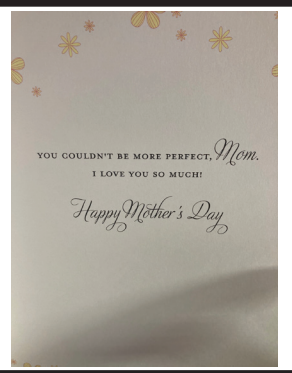
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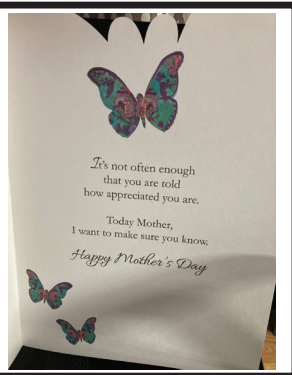
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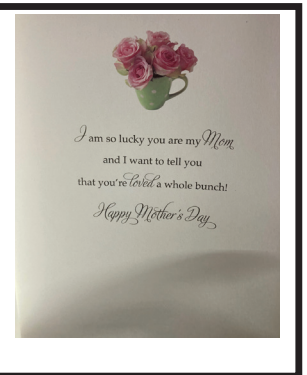
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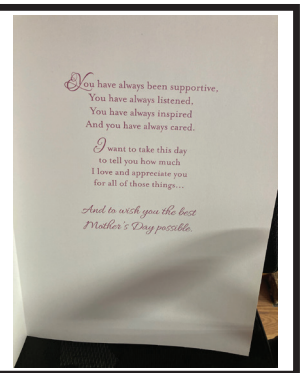
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 PO Box 34, Groton, SD
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 Call/Text Tina: 605/397-7285
 paperpaul@grotonsd.net

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New at the
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 The Stairmaster
 and Air Bike



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Order your Graduation Balloons while we have a good supply!



#1 - \$5



#2 - \$5



#3 - \$6



#4 - \$10 - 45"



#5 - \$5



#6 - \$6



\$3.50 - 9" on a stick



#7 - \$10 - 36"



#8 - \$5



#9 - \$5



#10 - \$5



#11 - \$5



#12 - \$5



#13 - \$8 35"



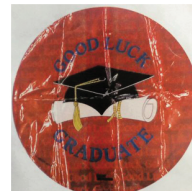
#14 - \$5



#15 - \$5



#16 - \$5



#17 - \$5



#18 - \$5



#19 - \$5



#20 - \$5

We have many other balloons available as well. We now offer locker pickup in the laundromat so you can pick up your order ANY TIME once the order is completed!

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#530 in a series Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

At midday on this Sunday, I'm seeing some troubling trends. The seven-day new-case average is rising fast—by 51 percent over the past two weeks—and is now at 46,582, which puts us back where we were early last month—except back then the number was coming down, not going up. Considering we're more seriously undercounting new cases now than at any point in at least the past year to 18 months, there's a lot of virus around. An indication of this is that a test positivity tracker is showing 38 states with a greater than 25 percent increase in test positivity. You may recall that test positivity is the percentage of tests done that return a positive result, and it has been a good indicator of trends. Pandemic total for reported cases is now at 80,855,787. We'll most likely hit 81 million tomorrow or Tuesday. The rate we're going, we should start ticking off each new million a whole lot faster again too.

Hospitalizations have made their turnaround too, as they stopped declining and began to nudge upward yesterday, the end of a steady decline that began back on January 21. The average at midday today was 15,468. The lag between the increase in cases and the increase in hospitalizations is longer than at any previous point in the pandemic; I will note that no one expects hospitalizations to increase as much as cases have; it's pretty clear that the current variants are not going to result in as much severe disease as earlier ones did. Still, they're going up.

The better news is that deaths are continuing to decline at a pretty good clip. The seven-day average was 370 at midday, and the pandemic total is up to 989,678. We're down to a matter of weeks until that number clicks past one million. And, of course, just as with cases, it's pretty clear we're missing some of these too; people have been dying from unattributed Covid-19 from the earliest days of the pandemic.

I've been thinking back to the early days and the way we were talking about deaths then. We were saying things like, "If we're not careful, there could be as many as 60,000 deaths from this." Lots of folks didn't believe that, thought it was an exaggeration.

What's most painful of all about where we are at the moment shows up in a recent analysis of all those deaths done by the Peterson Center on Healthcare and the Kaiser Family Foundation. Setting June 2021 as the point at which any adult in the US who wanted vaccination could receive it, their estimate is that over 234,000 of us died unvaccinated by choice who could have lived if they'd been vaccinated. Considering nearly two-thirds of the total pandemic deaths had happened before this point, that means a willfully-unvaccinated people have been dying in enormous numbers. The conclusion is inescapable that a very large share of the Covid-19 deaths since last summer were preventable—easily preventable. That is tragic.

The most recent reporting from the CDC indicates the BA.2 and BA.2.12.1 sublineage now account for more than 90 percent of US cases. In that report, BA.2 represented 74.4 percent and BA.2.12.1 19 percent of cases; that 19 is up from just seven percent a week earlier and 3.3 percent two weeks before that—growing fast. Further, in its cradle, BA.2.12.1 is now representing 52.3 percent of cases in the CDC's New York region, which includes surrounding states; that's up from 21 percent two weeks ago and 12 percent the week before. This is viewed as the most contagious version of the virus to date, some 27 percent more transmissible than BA.2, which was 60 percent more contagious than the original Omicron, which was 4.2 times more transmissible than Delta, which was 80 percent more contagious than Alpha, etc., etc., etc. If you think you spot a trend here, you're not alone.

I've read a paper by a research team in Taiwan that was published earlier this month in the International Journal of Molecular Sciences. They used some creative lab techniques to screen FDA-approved drugs

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for the ability to interfere with the binding of SARS-CoV-2 to the angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2) receptors on human cells. You may recall that ACE2 is the point of entry to host cells for this virus; if it can't bind this site, it can't infect. This means a drug which inhibits binding can be used therapeutically in cases of Covid-19.

This group screened 1068 approved drugs for inhibition of this binding by using tissue cultures that express ACE2 and identified nine active drugs. Cytotoxicity assays (to determine whether the drugs were, in the effective concentration, damaging to human cells) reduced the list to just three: Dolutegravir, Etravirine, and Sspemifene. (For the record, our old friend Ivermectin was in the group of nine drugs that showed antiviral activity, but was screened out in the cytotoxicity assay, which pretty much fits with a whole lot of prior research results finding doses high enough to show antiviral activity are toxic to the patient. No one can say that drug hasn't been given a chance.)

The final step in this preliminary analysis was to test the drugs against pseudovirus. We've talked before about the use of pseudoviruses in this sort of work; these are nonreplicating viruses into which have been inserted the genes of interest from SARS-CoV-2, in this case the receptor-binding determinant (RBD) portion of the spike (S) protein. They're used because they are not infectious (that is, dangerous), so they can be handled in labs that are not equipped with the biosafety measures and equipment needed to safely handle replicating virus. So using a plaque reduction neutralization test that compares the amount of viral damage to cell cultures treated with the drug and to cultures not treated with the drug, the researchers were able to determine that Dolutegravir and Etravirine were "potent" and effective in inhibiting wild-type virus and variants.

Since they are both given orally, they may be suitable for pre-exposure or post-exposure prophylaxis. Please understand there's a great deal more work to be done: further laboratory testing followed by clinical trials. Pseudoviruses are not real viruses, and laboratories are not human hosts; but this is a good start. At any stage of the game, one or both candidates might fall out of contention; but it is this sort of work that may well provide us with more and more tools for managing this virus. We'll keep an eye out for further developments.

There appear to be people in the world who, despite multiple high-risk, high-dose exposures, have never been infected with SARS-CoV-2. These are not just folks who didn't develop symptoms; they are unvaccinated people who have never been infected—confirmed by antibody testing. An international consortium of scientists, the COVID Human Genetic Effort, is looking for genetic variations in these folks that might explain their unusual resistance to infection. They have around 1000 participants so far who met study criteria and are having their genes scanned for mutations that are absent in patients who had severe or moderate cases of disease. The work is called genome-wide association study, and it involves comparing the genome of these never-infected people and those who have been infected, looking for correlations between mutations seen and resistance to a disease.

This isn't a wacky idea; we know of genetic variations that confer resistance to other viruses, and sometimes discovering these leads us to treatments. There is, for example a rare mutation that protects a host from HIV. Most of us have a protein on the surfaces of some of our immune cells called the chemokine receptor 5 (CCR5). This is the binding point for HIV on our cells. If you get mutated copies of the gene for CCR5 from both of your parents, you produce a defective copy of this protein, one that HIV can't bind; and you're highly resistant to HIV infection.

As an aside—unrelated to Covid-19—this is an interesting case. If you don't like side trips, just skip to the next paragraph. For those interested in a detour, you may recall that our DNA is built out of a sequence

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of parts called nucleotides, each bearing a particular nitrogen base that pairs up with a specific partner; it is this sequence of bases which produces the code for making proteins like CCR5. When you mess with the sequence of bases, you alter the structure—and often the function—of the protein. Well, this mutation we're talking about here, called delta-32, is a doozy: It involves the deletion of a chunk of DNA that is 32 base pairs long. That's a pretty big loss. Thing is, no one seems to be able to figure out what CCR5 does, so it's difficult to tell whether this mutation is damaging to the person. Chemokines function in the immune response, but there's a boatload of them and we haven't sorted out how each one contributes. Scientists tried to determine whether people with the mutation were more susceptible to infections, but they came up blank until recently when it was discovered those with the deletion are more likely to have severe illness from West Nile virus. That's the only one known to this point. On the plus side, this mutation protects you from a very serious consequence of bone marrow transplantation called graft-versus-host disease (which is every bit as bad as it sounds), and it also protects you from HIV. Weird, huh? At any rate, there is a history here that makes it reasonable to look for mutations in people who don't seem to be able to get infected with SARS-CoV-2.

Welcoming the non-nerd types back to the discussion, a lot of the attention in this investigation is targeting the ACE2 receptor. Seems reasonable to think the viral entry point to the host cell is a likely candidate for a mutation that might confer resistance to infection: If ACE2 is defective, maybe the virus wouldn't be able to recognize or bind it to get into cells. The mutation we're looking for would probably have to be something that doesn't interfere with normal ACE2 function because we know what this protein is for, and it's kind of a big deal. ACE2 is well understood to be critical for both normal cardiovascular and renal functioning and also protects lung cells from damage.

It is important to understand all this work may turn up nothing at all. There are other potential explanations for unusual resistance—exceptionally robust interferon production or cross-protective memory T cells from earlier colds with coronaviruses, for example. Work is being done on these fronts too, and something that's been emerging from some of that work is that some people who weathered early massive exposures infection-free, are now becoming infected by these later highly infectious variants. It could be there is a limit to your genetic resistance—if there is such a thing at all. As far as anyone knows at this point, there is no get-out-of-Covid-free card, but we'll keep looking for it because, if such a mutation does exist, it could teach us something about how to protect other people from infection.

Shingles is a painful rash of blisters on the skin, generally on one side of the body, which is caused by a reactivation of the varicella-zoster virus, the virus that causes chicken pox. Most of us who are over 40 have had chicken pox as a child, and generally it's no big deal. Thing is the virus doesn't usually go away when the acute phase of the chicken pox infection does; instead, the virus goes latent and hangs out in the sensory nerve ganglia of the body. It may remain latent for years or even forever; but if and when it does reactivate, this painful condition called shingles can result. That's most likely after the age of 50 and may be associated with some other challenge to the body or the immune system. It occurs in about a million people a year in the US, and about a third of adults will have shingles at some point in their lives.

One trigger for this reactivation appears to be a SARS-CoV-2 infection according to research from a team in Belgium published in the journal *Open Forum Infectious Diseases* last month; their findings based on around two million people, nearly 400,000 of whom were diagnosed with Covid-19, show that shingles is around 15 percent more likely in those who've had Covid-19 than in those who have not. The risk was greater in older people and those who were hospitalized for Covid-19. There is a way to prevent that outcome; it is a vaccine called Shingrix. Given in two doses at least two, but not more than six, months apart, it confers excellent protection against that reactivation. Seems like a no-brainer to get the Shingrix vaccine, however Medicare does not cover the vaccine and the cost to the individual can run in excess of \$200 per dose, pretty tough to afford for those on a fixed income. Of course, if they get shingles, their

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treatment is likely to cost more than the vaccine, but try to explain that to the risk-management folks at your average insurance company.

I've read a paper from a team at VA St. Louis Health Care System published in February in *Nature Medicine*. The research deals with long-term cardiovascular outcomes of Covid-19, and the news isn't great. Looking at 153,760 adults, mostly older white men, who had Covid-19 from March 2020 to January 2021 and two control groups, one of about 5.6 million treated during the same time period and another of 5.8 million treated before the pandemic, they found those who had Covid-19 were 72 percent more likely to develop coronary artery disease, 3 percent more likely to have a heart attack, and 52 percent more likely to have a stroke. If these findings can be generalized to the general public, that would mean there could be something like "3 million people in the U.S. who have suffered cardiovascular complications due to COVID-19." This risk was not seen only in those with high risk for heart complications—those with high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, or diabetes and smokers—but in anyone infected with the virus—young and old, male and female, any racial or ethnic group, mild and severe cases, and people without any risk factors at all.

I've also read a paper from a group of Japanese researchers from several universities which was led by those at Kumamoto University. This was in preprint, so it has not yet been peer-reviewed. Their interest was in understanding "the characteristics of vaccine-induced T-cells cross-reactive for the Omicron virus," that is, how these T cells induced by RNA from the original wild-type virus cross-react to this newer variant. You may recall that when your cells are infected by a virus, they get commandeered by the virus to replicate virus particles. The short version of a pretty complex process is that, while you're busy making baby viruses, some spare copies of certain viral proteins get shoved into your cells' outer membranes, where they're attached to some of your normal cellular proteins that flag down T cells called CD8+ cells. You can think of these CD8+ cells as terminator cells; they destroy any of your cells that present a viral protein they recognize. Since those are all of the infected cells, this effectively shuts down the infection: If every time the virus sets up housekeeping in a cell of yours, these CD8+s come along and kill their host, then they can't replicate. T cells are specific, that is, they respond only to the antigen which caused them to form in the first place; so the CD8+ T cells are produced in response to vaccine and run around taking out any of your tissue cells that later get infected with that same virus.

The question was whether the mutations that produce a variant like Omicron change that recognition protein sufficiently that your CD8+ cells can still recognize it as "their" protein. Exactly how that might happen was the topic of this study I am reporting here, and what they found was "that a subset of vaccine-induced . . . T cells exhibited enhanced reactivity against the Omicron BA.1 variant." Turns out one of the mutations in the BA.1 spike protein (G446S) actually improves the processing and presentation of the protein on your cell's surfaces where T cells find it. The T cells "strongly suppress viral replication of the Omicron BA.1 variant" and that "vaccine-induced T cells can have an enhanced capacity to cross recognize and suppress emerging SARS-CoV-2 variants."

As we're all well aware, I'm not an immunologist, but I can tell you this is very good news. In addition, it appears to me that these folks may have pioneered the assay technique they used in the study and that it is going to have wider applicability, including to assess vaccine efficacy against future variants, which means a whole lot of good may have come from this work.

Having read this, I was pleased to be served up another article that dealt with efforts to create vaccines designed specifically to elicit robust T-cell responses, especially in immunocompromised people who don't respond well with antibody production to the current vaccines on offer. Now thinking about how infected cells present viral proteins on their cell membranes, triggering these T cells to destroy the cell before it can finish making virus particles, it makes sense that there is interest in identifying particular viral proteins

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that might be good ones for this sort of vaccine. The trick here is going to be to identify the particular viral proteins that (a) will elicit a clone of sensitized T cells that are ready for action, (b) aren't subject to frequent mutation, (c) will be presented on the cell's membrane, and (d) trigger CD8+ cells to go to work. An advantage to using these proteins as a vaccine target is that they tend to be common to many variants, sometimes even to a wider variety of related viruses; this may make it possible to product a vaccine with a much broader spectrum of protection. Several teams think they have something.

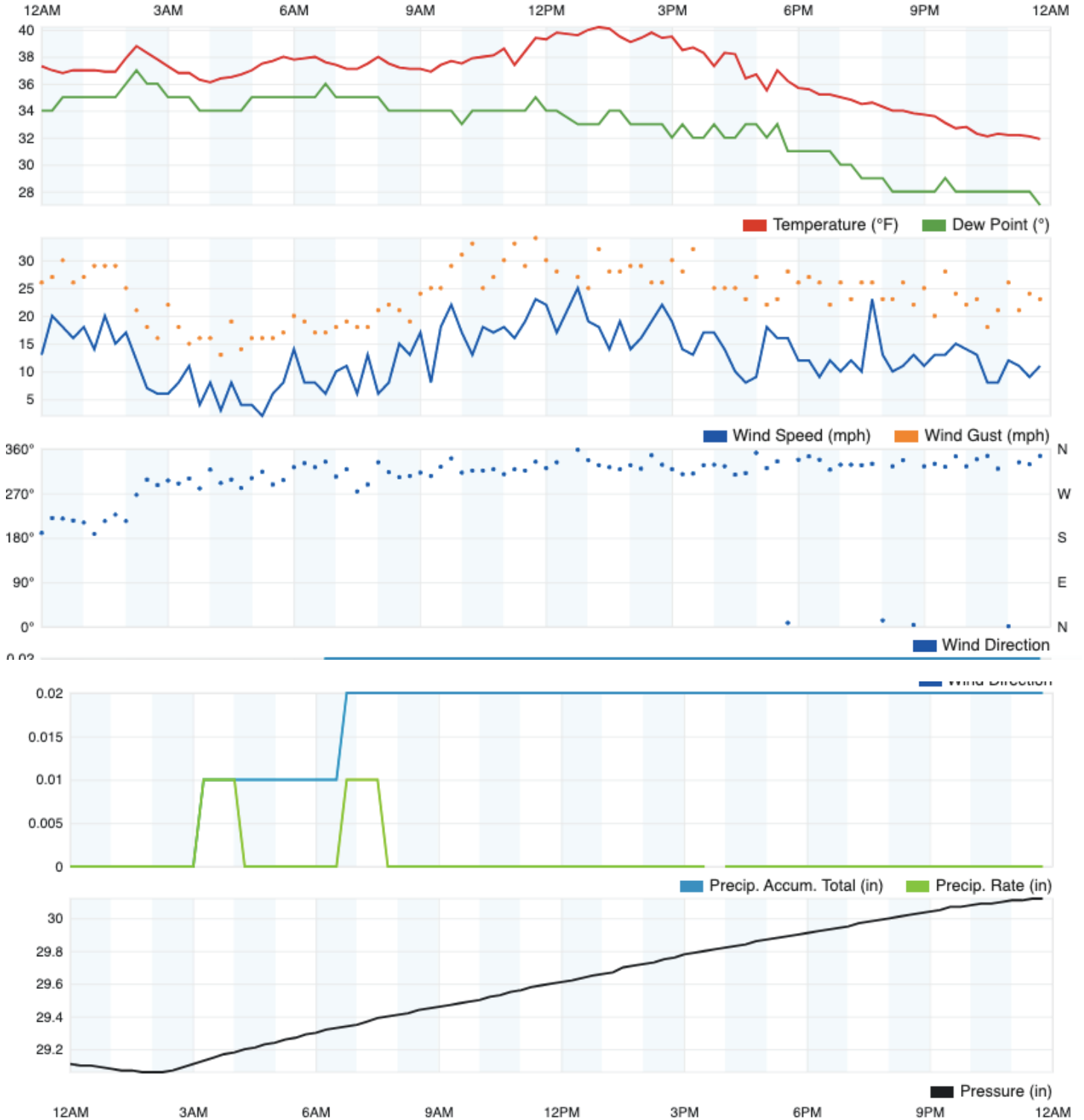
For starters, there's a project underway at the University Hospital Tübingen in Germany. Their vaccine, which they're calling CoVac-1, has fragments of six different viral proteins, only one of which is from the spike. The others are from the viral envelope and capsid (the package for the viral RNA). There's another one underway in France by Osivax, a company which had already been testing a T-cell vaccine for influenza, so they have some experience with this stuff. Then there's work being done by a biotech company in Texas called Vaxxinity; this one is targeted at eliciting both a B-cell (antibody) and a T-cell response. It's still early, but the German vaccine in a very small (just 14 participants) test showed 13 of the 14 had measurable T-cell responses. Because T-cells would take a while to get to infected tissue and go to work, these probably aren't going to prevent infection, but if they pan out, they could be effective at shutting down an infection before it gets out of hand. That's would be more than some immunocompromised folks have now. There is also some hope that these vaccines may reduce the symptoms of long-Covid for some sufferers.

Bad news tempered with hope today. Lots of progress continuing, and plenty of concern. Be well, and we'll talk again in a few days.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Breezy.
Isolated Snow
Showers then
Mostly Sunny

High: 43 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy

Low: 25 °F

Tuesday



Sunny

High: 50 °F

Tuesday
Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 32 °F

Wednesday



Partly Sunny
and Breezy

High: 57 °F

Gradual Warming Through Thursday

Today
April 25th, 2022



38 to 52°

Tuesday
April 26th, 2022



45 to 68°

Wednesday
April 27th, 2022

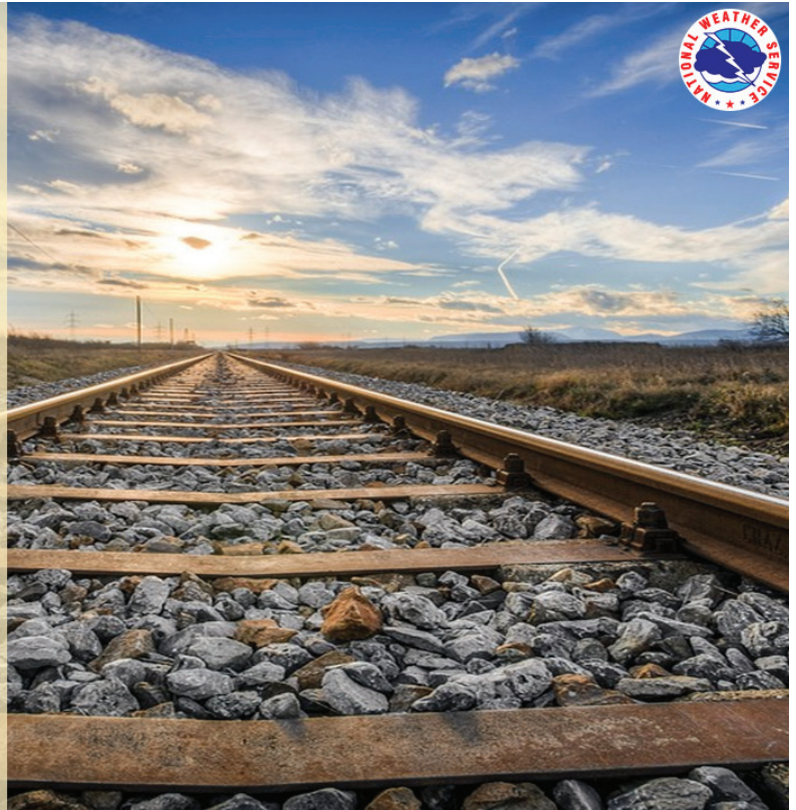


50 to 70°

Cloud cover east of the Missouri River today will gradually give way to sunshine from west to east.

Breezy at times through Wednesday, mostly dry through the day Thursday.

Precipitation chances return Friday through Sunday, along with cooler temperatures and breezy conditions.



Quieter and gradually milder weather is expected over the next few days, but still breezy.

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Today in Weather History

April 25, 1994: Lightning from a thunderstorm 4 miles W of Aberdeen struck two houses, causing structural damage and starting a fire which caused further damage to one home. The second house suffered damage only to a surge protector.

April 25, 1996: An intense area of low pressure brought high winds of 30 to 50 mph with isolated gusts to 80 mph to central and north central South Dakota from the morning to the evening of the 25th. The dry April soil was picked up by the high winds, lowering visibilities in blowing dust. Some places experienced dust storm conditions with low visibilities and drifting dust. Many roofs lost shingles due to the strong winds. In Eagle Butte, the Vietnam Veterans Center roof was blown off. Other buildings were also damaged across the area, along with some broken windows. Some power poles and lines were downed west of Fort Pierre. Some trees and branches were also downed. Near Isabel, a cattle trailer was tipped over, and two calf shelters were destroyed. Also, a twenty foot Conoco sign was blown down near Isabel along with other signs damaged across the area. The dust storm reminded many of the 1930s. Some wind gusts include 60 mph at Mobridge and Selby, 70 mph at Miller, Pierre, and Murdo, and 80 mph at Isabel and Eagle Butte.

1875: New York City received three inches of snow, the latest measurable snowfall on record for that location.

1880: A violent tornado, at times up to 400 yards wide, swept away at least 20 homes in Macon, Mississippi. Pieces of houses were found 15 miles away. 22 people died, and 72 were injured. Loaded freight cars were thrown 100 yards into homes. Clothes were carried for eight miles.

1898 - The temperature at Volcano Springs CA hit 118 degrees to establish a U.S. record for the month of April. (The Weather Channel)

1910: Chicago, Illinois was blanketed with 2.5 inches of snow, and a total of 6.5 inches between the 22nd and the 26th. It was the latest significant snow on record for the city. Atlanta, Georgia also received late-season snowfall when 1.5 inches fell. Their 32 degrees low is the latest freeze on record.

1912: An estimated F4 tornado struck Ponca City, Oklahoma. One person was killed, and 119 homes were damaged or destroyed. Dozens of oil derricks were flattened or twisted, southwest of town. The tornado was reportedly visible and audible for 20 miles.

1920 - Atlanta, GA, received 1.5 inches of snow, and experienced their latest freeze of record with a morning low of 32 degrees. The high of just 39 degrees was only their second daily high colder than 40 degrees in April. (The Weather Channel)

1984 - A late season snowstorm struck the Northern Rockies and the Northern Plains. The storm produced some unusually high snowfall totals. The town of Lead, located in the Black Hills of western South Dakota, was buried under 67 inches of snow. Red Lodge, located in the mountains of southern Montana, reported 72 inches of snow. Up to 60 inches blanketed the mountains of northern Wyoming. It was rated the worst late season storm of record for much of the affected area. (25th-28th) (Storm Data) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Low pressure off the coast of North Carolina produced heavy rain flooding creeks in the foothills and the piedmont area, before moving out to sea. The low pressure system also produced wind gusts to 50 mph in Virginia. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms racing at 65 mph produced large hail in Alabama and Georgia. Hail damage in Alabama was estimated at fifty million dollars, making it their worst weather disaster since Hurricane Frederick in 1979. Hail three inches in diameter accompanied a tornado near Valdosta GA. Hail four and a half inches in diameter was reported south of Atlanta GA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing along a stationary front produced severe weather from North Carolina to Indiana and Ohio, with more than 70 reports of large hail and damaging winds. A strong (F-2) tornado hit Xenia OH injuring 16 persons and causing more than a million dollars damage. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1920 - Atlanta, GA, received 1.5 inches of snow, and experienced their latest freeze of record with a morning low of 32 degrees. The high of just 39 degrees was only their second daily high colder than 40 degrees in April. (The Weather Channel)

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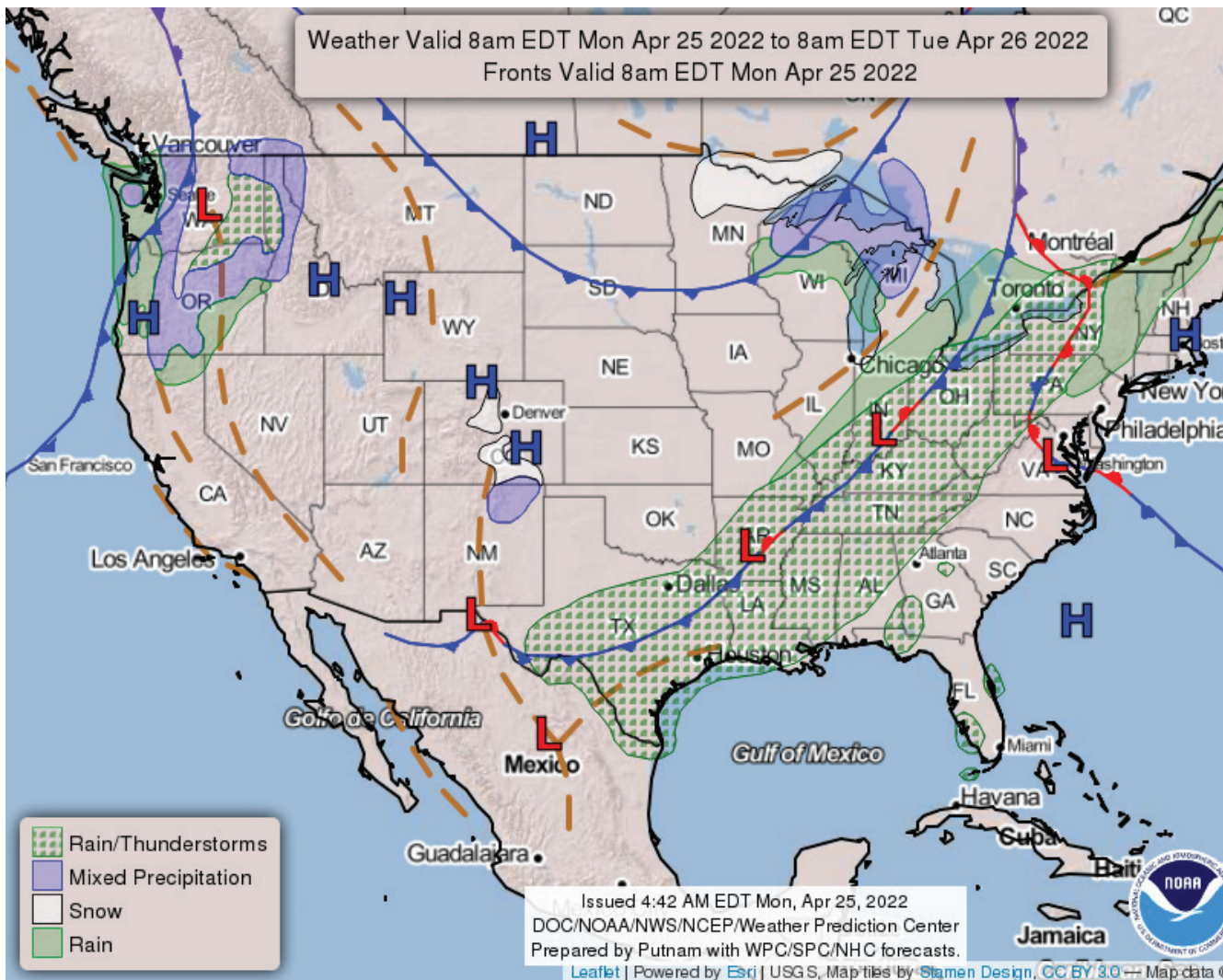
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 40 °F at 1:37 PM
Low Temp: 32 °F at 11:49 PM
Wind: 34 mph at 11:40 AM
Precip: 0.02

Day length: 14 hours, 05 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 97 in 1962
Record Low: 19 in 2013
Average High: 62°F
Average Low: 35°F
Average Precip in April.: 1.45
Precip to date in April.: 3.15
Average Precip to date: 3.51
Precip Year to Date: 4.95
Sunset Tonight: 8:32:50 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:26:10 AM



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GREAT ESCAPES

"Jet away from it all" was a successful advertising campaign of a major airline a few years ago. "If you need to get away from it all, we can help you make it happen" was the intent of their message.

Many people, however, spend their entire life trying to get away from "it" all. But is "it" the problem? Some move from one job to another. Others, from one spouse to another. Then there are many who "bar hop" - looking for the perfect drink and a place to make friends and find counsel. Confused minds and broken hearts often cause people to seek help from others who have no hope to offer.

"What's going on?" we might ask.

It's like a person who has been injured and is in so much pain that he can't be still. He tries to "walk it off" only to discover that the pain and injury are inside and follow him wherever he goes.

So it is with life. "What's going on" is that we cannot run away from ourselves or our problems! They follow us wherever we go.

If we want relief from the pain and problems of our past, it is possible. If we choose to carry the guilt and grief, shame and sorrow, that troubles our mind and disturbs our peace, it is because we want to. Life is choice.

The Psalmist wrote, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?" The guilt and grief, pain and problems that trouble us during the day and keep us awake at night are God's Spirit convicting us of our need to repent from our sinful ways. It is Christ pursuing us wherever we go - calling us to "come back. Let Me rescue you!"

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for loving us so much that You refuse to give up on us. Teach us to hear Your voice. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? Psalm 139:7

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2022 Community Events

- 01/30/2022 84th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
01/30/2022 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am – 1pm, Groton Community Center, 109 N 3rd St, Groton,
04/07/2022 Groton CDE
04/09/2022 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
04/09/2022 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
04/23/2022 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/24/2022 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/07/2022 Lions Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
St John's Lutheran Church VBS 9-11am
05/30/2022 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
Transit Fundraiser at the Community Center 4-7pm (Thursday Mid-June)
06/17/2022 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm Start
06/18/2022 Groton Triathlon
Ladies Invitational at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration 10am Start
07/04/2022 Firecracker Couples Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start
(4th of July)
07/10/2022 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar 11am-1pm at the Groton Legion
Baseball Tourney
07/21/2022 Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
How can we... "Love Groton"? United Methodist Church 9:30am
Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20
Golf Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11a-1pm
08/05/2022 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
08/12/2022 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
United Methodist Church VBS 5-8pm
Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day 4-5pm GHS Parking Lot
09/10/2022 Lions Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3:30-5pm
09/11/2022 Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm
Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
10/14/2022 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am (2nd Friday in October)
10/01/2022 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
10/31/2022 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2022 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/12/2022 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/24/2022 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/03/2022 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course
Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm
01/29/2023 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)

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News from the  Associated Press

Thousands without power after spring blizzard in the Dakotas

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A spring blizzard knocked out power to thousands of people across western North Dakota and northwest South Dakota, and utility officials said it will likely take at least several days to restore power to everyone.

The snow, combined with strong winds that gusted up to 60 mph and freezing rain, to create hazardous driving conditions. And the storm knocked down tree limbs and power lines.

More than 14,000 utility customers in North Dakota and another nearly 1,500 in South Dakota lacked power late Sunday afternoon, according to the www.poweroutage.us website. That is down from Sunday morning when more than 17,000 didn't have electricity in North Dakota.

"As crews have been able to get out to assess damage, we're finding it's extensive in some areas," Montana-Dakotas Utilities spokesman Mark Hanson said to the Bismarck Tribune. "The number of broken crossarms and broken poles is extensive."

The National Weather Service said more than a foot of snow was reported in places across western North Dakota, including 18 inches near Niobe in the northwest corner of the state.

Interstate 94 between Mandan and the Montana border and numerous other highways in the region were closed Sunday morning, but the major highways reopened by Sunday afternoon. But officials cautioned that road conditions might still be poor.

This latest storm follows a three-day blizzard earlier this month and another storm that dropped more snow on the area a few days later on Easter Sunday.

Beijing districts placed under lockdown as COVID cases mount

BEIJING (AP) — China's capital Beijing began testing millions of residents and shutting down residential and business districts Monday amid a new outbreak of COVID-19.

While only 70 cases have been found so far in the city of more than 21 million since the outbreak surfaced Friday, authorities have implemented extreme measures to prevent a further spread of the virus.

Residents were staying home and stocking up on food as a safeguard against the possibility that they could be confined indoors, as has happened in multiple cities including the financial hub of Shanghai.

Shanghai, which has been locked down for more than two weeks, reported more than 19,000 new infections and 51 deaths in the latest 24-hour period, pushing its death toll from the ongoing outbreak to well over 100.

Long lines formed in supermarkets in central Beijing. Shoppers snapped up rice, noodles, vegetables and other food items, while store workers hastily restocked some empty shelves. State media issued reports saying supplies remained plentiful in Beijing despite the buying surge.

Shoppers appeared concerned but not yet panicked. One woman, carrying two bags of vegetables, eggs and frozen dumplings, said she is buying a little more than usual. A man said he isn't worried but is just being cautious since he has a 2-year-old daughter.

Beijing health officials said 29 more cases had been identified in the 24 hours through 4 p.m. Monday, raising the total to 70 since Friday.

The city has ordered mass testing across sprawling Chaoyang district, where 46 of the cases have been found. The more than 3 million residents of Chaoyang, as well as people who work in the district, need to be tested on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Testing sites were set up overnight and in the early morning at residential complexes and office buildings around Chaoyang district.

"I think Beijing should be fine," said Gao Haiyang as he waited on line for a COVID-19 test. "Based on previous response made by my community, if there's any emergency, I think supply can be guaranteed. Plus there were lessons we learned from other cities. I think we can make good preparations."

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The central city of Anyang, along with Dandong on the border with North Korea, also announced lockdowns as the omicron variant spreads across the vast country.

China's borders remain largely closed as its hardline response and the pandemic's economic impact continue to grow.

Supreme Court tackling case about praying football coach

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court will tackle a dispute between public school officials and a former high school football coach who wanted to kneel and pray on the field after games.

The case before the justices on Monday involves Joseph Kennedy, a former football coach at Bremerton High School in Bremerton, Washington. For years, the coach would kneel at the center of the field following games and lead students in prayer. The school district eventually learned what he was doing and asked him to stop.

Kennedy's lawyers say the Constitution's freedom of speech and freedom of religion guarantees allow him to pray on the field, with students free to join. But the school district says Kennedy's religious speech interfered with students' own religious freedom rights, could have the effect of pressuring students to pray and opened the district itself to lawsuits. The school district says it tried to work out a solution so Kennedy, who is Christian, could pray privately before or after the game, including on the field after students left, but Kennedy's lawsuit followed.

The case comes to the court at a time when conservative justices make up a majority of the court and have been sympathetic to the concerns of religious individuals and groups, such as groups that brought challenges to coronavirus restrictions that applied to houses of worship.

But cases involving religion can also unite the court. Last year, for example, the court unanimously sided with a Catholic foster care agency that said its religious views prevent it from working with same-sex couples. Already this term in an 8-1 decision the justices ruled for a Texas death row inmate who sought to have his pastor pray aloud and touch him while his execution was carried out.

The case from Bremerton, meanwhile, has already caught the justices' attention. In 2019 the justices declined to get involved in the case at an earlier stage. But four justices were critical of lower court rulings for the school district, writing that an appeals court's "understanding of the free speech rights of public school teachers is troubling."

Kennedy started working at Bremerton High School in 2008, and it was his practice at the end of games — after the players and coaches from both teams would meet at midfield to shake hands — to pause and kneel to pray. Kennedy said he wanted to give thanks for what his players had accomplished and for their safety, among other things.

Kennedy initially prayed alone on the 50-yard line at the end of games, but students started joining him and over time he began to deliver a short, inspirational talk with religious references. Kennedy says he never required players to join or asked any student to pray. He also led the team in prayer in the locker room before games, a practice that predated him.

The school district didn't learn of Kennedy's practice until 2015. It told him then that he needed to stop praying with students or engaging in overtly religious activity while still "on duty" as a coach. After Kennedy continued to pray on the field, he was placed on paid leave. His contract expired and he didn't reapply to coach the following year, the school says.

A decision is expected before the court begins its summer recess.

The case is Kennedy v. Bremerton School District, 21-418.

U.S. promises more aid, return of diplomats in Kyiv visit

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

NEAR THE POLISH-UKRAINIAN BORDER (AP) — American Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Monday after a secrecy-shrouded visit to Kyiv that Ukrainian President

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Volodymyr Zelenskyy is committed to winning his country's fight against Russia and that the United States will help him achieve that goal.

"He has the mindset that they want to win, and we have the mindset that we want to help them win," Austin told reporters in Poland, the day after the three-hour face-to-face meeting with Zelenskyy in Ukraine.

Austin said that the nature of the fight in Ukraine had changed now that Russia has pulled away from the wooded northern regions to focus on the eastern industrial heartland of the Donbas. Because the nature of the fight has evolved, so have Ukraine's military needs, and Zelenskyy is now focused on more tanks, artillery and other munitions.

"The first step in winning is believing that you can win," Austin said. "We believe that they can win if they have the right equipment, the right support, and we're going to do everything we can ... to ensure that gets to them."

The trip by Blinken and Austin was the highest-level American visit to the capital since Russia invaded in late February.

They told Zelenskyy and his advisers that the U.S. would provide more than \$300 million in foreign military financing and had approved a \$165 million sale of ammunition.

"We had an opportunity to demonstrate directly our strong ongoing support for the Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian people," Blinken said. "This was, in our judgment, an important moment to be there, to have face-to-face conversations in detail."

Blinken said their meeting with the Ukrainians lasted for three hours for wide ranging talks, including what help the country needs in the weeks ahead.

"The strategy that we've put in place, massive support for Ukraine, massive pressure against Russia, solidarity with more than 30 countries engaged in these efforts is having real results," Blinken said.

"When it comes to Russia's war aims, Russia is failing. Ukraine is succeeding. Russia has sought as its principal aim to totally subjugate Ukraine, to take away its sovereignty, to take away its independence. That has failed."

Asked about what the U.S. sees as success, Austin said that "we want to see Ukraine remain a sovereign country, a democratic country able to protect its sovereign territory, we want to see Russia weakened to the point where it can't do things like invade Ukraine."

They also said Biden would soon announce his nominee to be ambassador to Ukraine, Bridget Brink, and that American diplomats who left Ukraine before the war would start returning to the country this coming week. The U.S. Embassy in Kyiv will remain closed for the moment.

Brink, a career foreign service officer, has served since 2019 as ambassador to Slovakia. She previously held assignments in Serbia, Cyprus, Georgia and Uzbekistan as well as with the White House National Security Council. The post requires confirmation by the U.S. Senate.

Journalists who traveled with Austin and Blinken to Poland were barred from reporting on the trip until it was over, were not allowed to accompany them on their overland journey into Ukraine, and were prohibited from specifying where in southeast Poland they met back up with the Cabinet members upon their return. Officials at the State Department and the Pentagon cited security concerns.

Austin and Blinken announced a total of \$713 million in foreign military financing for Ukraine and 15 allied and partner countries; some \$322 million is earmarked for Kyiv. The remainder will be split among NATO members and other nations that have provided Ukraine with critical military supplies since the war with Russia began, officials said.

Such financing is different from previous U.S. military assistance for Ukraine. It is not a donation of drawn-down U.S. Defense Department stockpiles, but rather cash that countries can use to purchase supplies that they might need.

The new money, along with the sale of \$165 million in non-U.S.-made ammunition that is compatible with Soviet-era weapons the Ukrainians use, brings the total amount of American military assistance to Ukraine to \$3.7 billion since the invasion, officials said.

Biden has accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of genocide for the destruction and death wrought

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on Ukraine. Just on Thursday, Biden said he would provide a new package of \$800 million in military aid to Ukraine that included heavy artillery and drones.

Congress approved \$6.5 billion for military assistance last month as part of \$13.6 billion in spending for Ukraine and allies in response to the Russian invasion.

From Poland, Blinken plans to return to Washington while Austin will head to Ramstein, Germany, for a meeting Tuesday of NATO defense ministers and other donor countries.

That discussion will look at battlefield updates from the ground, additional security assistance for Ukraine and longer-term defense needs in Europe, including how to step up military production to fill gaps caused by the war in Ukraine, officials said. More than 20 nations are expected to send representatives to the meeting.

French President Macron reelected: What's happening next?

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — After winning another five years in the French presidential palace, Emmanuel Macron intends to go back to work straightaway on domestic and foreign policy — but he will soon face crucial parliamentary elections where he may struggle to keep his majority.

Here's a look at what comes next for Macron and his leadership of France.

INAUGURATION CEREMONY

The Constitutional Council is to publish the presidential election's official results on Wednesday. On the same day, Macron will hold a Cabinet meeting.

Macron will then need to set a date for the inauguration ceremony, which must be held by May 13, at the Elysee Palace. He will receive the National Guards' honors and make a speech.

Usually, 21 cannon shots are fired to mark the inauguration, though Presidents Francois Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac both skipped that tradition for their reelections in 1988 and 2002. Macron is the only other leader of modern France to win a second term at the ballot box.

MACRON'S FIRST MOVES

Like five years ago, Macron plans to quickly head to Berlin, in line with the tradition providing that the newly elected president makes his first trip abroad to neighboring Germany to celebrate the countries' friendship after multiple wars. He will meet with Chancellor Olaf Scholz, with efforts to try to end the war in Ukraine top of the agenda.

At some point, he may also travel to Kyiv to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a trip he said he would only do on condition that it would have "a useful impact." Macron spoke to Zelenskyy and Scholz within hours of his victory.

On May 9, Macron is expected to make a speech on Europe in Strasbourg, home to the EU parliament.

At home, he said one of his priorities will be to pass by summer a special law to support purchasing power amid the surge in food and energy prices fed by the conflict in Ukraine.

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Prime Minister Jean Castex is expected to submit his government's resignation in the coming days. Macron will then appoint a new caretaker government, but ministers will only be in place for a few weeks.

Nationwide parliamentary elections, scheduled in two rounds on June 12 and 19, will decide who controls a majority of the 577 seats at the National Assembly. If Macron's party wins, he will name a new government accordingly and will be able to pass laws.

If another party gets a majority of seats, he will be forced to appoint a prime minister belonging to that new majority. In such a situation, called "cohabitation" in France, the government would implement policies that diverge from Macron's project. The French president would have sway, however, over the country's foreign policy.

Hunter Biden is prime target if Republicans win Congress

By NOMAAN MERCHANT, FARNOUSH AMIRI and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Intelligence officials had gathered to brief select members of Congress on future threats to U.S. elections when a key lawmaker in the room, No. 3 House Republican Elise Stefanik of New York, tried to move the discussion to a new topic: Hunter Biden's laptop.

Stefanik, who serves on the House Intelligence Committee, asked the officials during the April 1 briefing whether they had any evidence of Russian involvement in the release of Biden's laptop to the news media in the fall of 2020 — a possibility floated by high-ranking former government officials in the weeks before the presidential election. Intelligence officials told Stefanik the question would be better answered by law enforcement.

Stefanik's query, shared with The Associated Press by a person who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the private meeting, reflects a widespread sentiment in the GOP that questions about the financial dealings of President Joe Biden's son remain unanswered. And they say they intend to do something about it.

As Republicans prepare for a possible return to power amid rising hopes of winning the House and the Senate in the November elections, they are laying the groundwork to make Hunter Biden and his business dealings a central target of their investigative and oversight efforts.

Republican lawmakers and staff have discussed analyzing specific messages and financial transactions found on the laptop and have also discussed issuing congressional subpoenas to foreign entities involved in paying Hunter Biden, according to people familiar with the matter who were not authorized to speak publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity. The conversations have been in the early stages but have included talks of bringing on Republican lawyers and former Justice Department officials to help lead the investigations, the people said.

The White House in turn is preparing to defend the Democratic president from any allegations of wrongdoing and make the case that Republicans are driven by opportunism. Democrats are likely to point out how Republicans did not seek investigations into President Donald Trump's own business pursuits in Russia and China or into the foreign dealings of his children and son-in-law while they held key campaign or White House roles.

It all raises the possibility of a messy, politically explosive showdown between a GOP-controlled Congress and the White House, one that could delve deeply into the affairs of the president's family and shape the contours of the 2024 race for the White House.

Hunter Biden's taxes and foreign business work are already under federal investigation, with a grand jury in Delaware hearing testimony in recent months. While he never held a position on the presidential campaign or in the White House, Hunter Biden's membership on the board of a Ukrainian energy company and his efforts to strike deals in China have long raised questions about whether he traded on his father's public service, including reported references in his emails to the "big guy."

Joe Biden has said he's never spoken to his son about his foreign business. And there are no indications that the federal investigation involves the president in any way. The White House declined to comment, and a lawyer for Hunter Biden did not respond to an email.

Republican leaders see Hunter Biden as a unifying force that can bring together different factions of the GOP and potentially satiate those calling for more dramatic action. Some members of the hard-line House Freedom Caucus have said the first order of business for a Republican majority should be an impeachment trial of Joe Biden in retaliation for the two impeachments of Trump.

There's also increasing discussion among Republicans about urging the Justice Department to appoint a special counsel, said people familiar with the matter.

"Hunter Biden's fair game because I believe Hunter Biden is a national security risk," said Rep. James Comer of Kentucky, who is in line to take over the House Oversight Committee if Republicans win the House. "Hopefully, when I get the gavel, we'll take it a step further."

In preparation, Comer's oversight staff has already begun to make document requests and archived information related to the president's son.

The New York Post first reported in October 2020 that it had received from Trump's personal attorney,

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Rudy Giuliani, a copy of a hard drive of a laptop that Hunter Biden had dropped off 18 months earlier at a Delaware computer repair shop and never retrieved.

The story was greeted with skepticism due to questions about the laptop's origins, including Giuliani's involvement, and because top officials in the Trump administration had already warned that Russia was working to denigrate Joe Biden ahead of the November election. The Kremlin had also interfered in the 2016 race by hacking Democratic emails that were subsequently leaked.

Republicans on the House Intelligence Committee now want to probe the origins of a widely shared letter from 50 former intelligence officials released a week after the New York Post story. The letter claimed the laptop carried "all the classic earmarks of a Russian information operation" and suggested that "the Russians are involved in the Hunter Biden email issue."

Joe Biden in the second presidential debate, responding to Trump's reference to the "laptop from hell," said "there are 50 former national intelligence folks who said that what he's accusing me of is a Russian plant." That statement went further than the letter, though it was immediately and widely reported as having labeled the laptop as disinformation. Trump and many Republicans accused Biden of invoking Russia to avoid scrutiny about his son.

No evidence has emerged since of any Russian connections to the laptop or the emails. A declassified U.S. intelligence assessment of the 2020 election alleged that Russian leader Vladimir Putin authorized multiple efforts in support of Trump. Russian state media amplified "disparaging content" about Biden "including stories centered on his son," the assessment said, which also alleges Putin had "purview" over the activities of a Ukrainian lawmaker who met with Giuliani.

Giuliani's attorney, Robert Costello, called allegations that the Russians were behind the laptop "absurd." Stefanik in a statement said "any alleged attempt by the intelligence agencies or intelligence community leadership to portray the facts surrounding Hunter Biden's laptop as misinformation needs to be investigated and prosecuted."

Meanwhile, GOP Sens. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin and Chuck Grassley of Iowa, who in 2020 issued a report on Hunter Biden and his work on behalf of Ukraine gas company Burisma, recently made a presentation on the Senate floor laying out allegations they say the media have ignored but the Justice Department and Congress need to investigate.

"The Biden administration has been totally unresponsive to our oversight requests," Grassley said.

For now, the Biden administration and many top Democrats are not commenting publicly on Hunter Biden. But the White House has already reassigned communications staff to prepare to respond to GOP investigations of Hunter Biden and other likely targets, including the origins of the coronavirus and the American withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Democrats are expected to argue that Hunter Biden is ultimately a distraction to most voters concerned about domestic issues. The current House Oversight chair, Rep. Carolyn Maloney of New York, previewed that argument in a statement responding to Comer, her Republican counterpart.

Said Maloney: "I'd hope my colleagues on the other side of the aisle would be more focused on delivering for the American people than on phony outrage."

UK women slam sexism of 'Basic Instinct' slur on lawmaker

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Women from across British politics called Monday for action to tackle misogyny after a newspaper ran a story accusing the deputy opposition leader of trying to "distract" the prime minister during debates by crossing and uncrossing her legs.

The Mail on Sunday quoted an anonymous Conservative lawmaker as saying Labour Party Deputy Leader Angela Rayner tried to throw Prime Minister Boris Johnson "off his stride" as she sat across from him in the House of Commons. The article likened it to a scene in the 1992 thriller "Basic Instinct" in which Sharon Stone is interrogated by police.

Rayner accused "Boris Johnson's cheerleaders" of using "desperate, perverted smears."

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"I stand accused of a 'ploy' to 'distract' the helpless PM - by being a woman, having legs and wearing clothes," she wrote on Twitter.

"Women in politics face sexism and misogyny every day — and I'm no different."

Rayner, who comes from a working-class family in northern England and left school when she was 16, makes a sharp contrast to Johnson, who was educated at the elite private school Eton and Oxford University. Johnson has sometimes struggled to parry her attacks during debates.

The prime minister condemned the article, writing on Twitter: "As much as I disagree with Angela Rayner on almost every political issue I respect her as a parliamentarian and deplore the misogyny directed at her anonymously today."

Technology Minister Chris Philp said "nobody should have to suffer the kind of misogynistic abuse that sentiment amounts to." He told Sky News that the anonymous lawmaker in the article would be disciplined if identified.

More than a century after the first female lawmaker was elected to Britain's Parliament, women make up 34% of the 650 legislators in the House of Commons. Long known for its boozy, macho atmosphere, Parliament is now a more diverse place.

Some say change has not gone far enough. Many female politicians said the article was an extreme example of the sexism they encounter daily.

"I hope that some good can come out of this awful article in The Mail on Sunday, and that is that people see what it is like in Parliament and people call out this misogyny and sexism for what it is and that we get some change because Angela and no other MP should have to put up with this sort of rubbish," said Labour legislator Rachel Reeves.

Senior Conservatives also condemned the remarks. Health Secretary Sajid Javid tweeted: "No woman in politics should have to put up with this."

Conservative lawmaker Caroline Nokes, who heads Parliament's Women and Equalities Committee, said she had asked the Speaker of the House of Commons, Lindsay Hoyle, to censure Glen Owen, the journalist who wrote the article.

Russian advance in Ukraine slow; US says Moscow 'is failing'

By DAVID KEYTON Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Top American officials pledged Monday to help ensure Ukraine wins its fight against Russia following face-to-face talks with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv, while Britain said Moscow has yet to achieve a significant breakthrough in its offensive in Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland.

In meetings with Zelenskyy, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the United States had approved a \$165 million sale of ammunition for Ukraine's war effort, along with more than \$300 million in foreign military financing.

"The strategy that we've put in place — massive support for Ukraine, massive pressure against Russia, solidarity with more than 30 countries engaged in these efforts — is having real results," Blinken told reporters in Poland the day after meeting with Zelenskyy and other Ukrainian officials.

"When it comes to Russia's war aims, Russia is failing. Ukraine is succeeding. Russia has sought as its principal aim to totally subjugate Ukraine, to take away its sovereignty, to take away its independence. That has failed."

As fighting continued, Russia struck deep into Ukraine, targeting infrastructure far from the front line, according to Ukrainian and Russian reports.

In a series of strikes on Ukraine's railways, a Russian missile hit one facility near Krasne, outside the western city of Lviv, early Monday, sparking a fire, the region's governor said. A total of five railways facilities in central and western Ukraine were hit by Russian strikes, said Oleksandr Kamyshin, the head of the state-run Ukrainian Railways.

Meanwhile, Serhiy Borzov, the governor of Ukraine's central Vinnytsia region, said there were casualties after rocket strikes targeting "critical infrastructure." It was not clear if those strikes were related to the

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attacks on the railways.

Russia also destroyed an oil refinery in Kremenchuk in central Ukraine, along with fuel depots there, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Monday.

He added that other strikes by long-range missiles overnight hit concentrations of troops and weapons and ammunition depots in Barvinkove and Nova Dmytrivka in the Kharkiv region, near the Russian border. In all, he said Russian warplanes destroyed 56 Ukrainian targets.

To Ukraine's north, in the Russian region of Bryansk, a fire erupted early Monday at an oil depot, but no immediate cause was given for the blaze in oil storage tanks.

NASA satellites that track fires showed something burning at coordinates that corresponded to a Rosneft facility some 110 kilometers (70 miles) north of the Ukrainian border. Moscow previously has blamed Ukraine for attacks in Bryansk.

Following the meeting with Blinken and Austin, Zelenskyy said he was "very thankful" for the American aid and particularly praised U.S. President Joe Biden for his "personal support."

"The priorities are weapons and support from the United States of America and our partners, European leaders, in terms of our army's strength and support in certain areas," the Ukrainian president said. "The second issue is the sanctions policy against the Russian Federation because of the full-scale invasion and all the terror they have committed in Ukraine."

The three-hour meeting came Sunday, the 60th day since the start of the invasion, as Ukraine pressed the West for more powerful weapons against Russia's campaign in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, where Moscow's forces sought to dislodge the last Ukrainian troops in the battered port city of Mariupol.

Britain's Ministry of Defense said Monday that Ukrainian troops holed up in a steel plant in the strategic city were tying down Russian forces, and keeping them from being added to the offensive elsewhere in the Donbas.

"Many Russian units remain fixed in the city and cannot be redeployed," the ministry said in a statement posted on Twitter. "Ukraine's defense of Mariupol has also exhausted many Russian units and reduced their combat effectiveness."

The ministry added that, so far, Russia has only made "minor advances in some areas since shifting its focus to fully occupying the Donbas."

"Without sufficient logistical and combat support enablers in place, Russia has yet to achieve a significant breakthrough," the ministry said.

With Russia's shift in focus, Austin said Ukraine's military needs are changing, and Zelenskyy is now focused on more tanks, artillery and other munitions.

"The nature of the fight has evolved, because the terrain they're now focused on is a different type of terrain, so they need long-range fires," Austin said.

Asked about what the U.S. sees as success, Austin said that "we want to see Ukraine remain a sovereign country, a democratic country able to protect its sovereign territory, we want to see Russia weakened to the point where it can't do things like invade Ukraine."

On the diplomatic front, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was scheduled to travel to Turkey on Monday and then Moscow and Kyiv. Zelenskyy said it was a mistake for Guterres to visit Russia before Ukraine.

"Why? To hand over signals from Russia? What should we look for?" Zelenskyy said Saturday. "There are no corpses scattered on the Kutuzovsky Prospect," he said, referring to one of Moscow's main avenues.

Blinken said he had spoken with Guterres on Friday ahead of the trip.

"Our expectation is that he's going to carry a very strong and clear message to Vladimir Putin, which is the need to end this war now," he said.

In a boost in support for Ukraine, French President Emmanuel Macron comfortably won a second term Sunday over far-right challenger Marine Le Pen, who had pledged to dilute France's ties with the European Union and NATO. Le Pen had also spoken out against EU sanctions on Russian energy and had faced scrutiny during the campaign over her previous friendliness with the Kremlin.

Since failing to capture Kyiv, the Russians have aimed to gain full control over the Donbas, the eastern

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industrial heartland, where Moscow-backed separatists controlled some territory before the war.

For the Donbas offensive, Russia has reassembled troops who fought around Kyiv and in northern Ukraine. The British Ministry of Defense said Ukrainian forces had repelled numerous assaults in the past week and "inflicted significant cost on Russian forces."

In the south of the Donbas, in the strategic port city of Mariupol, a small pocket of Ukrainian troops continues to hold out against Russian forces in the Azovstal steel factory, a sprawling facility on the waterfront.

Mariupol has endured fierce fighting since the start of the war because of its location on the Sea of Azov. Its capture would deprive Ukraine of a vital port, free up Russian troops to fight elsewhere, and allow Moscow to establish a land corridor to the Crimean Peninsula, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014.

Over the weekend, Russian forces launched fresh airstrikes on the steel plant in an attempt to dislodge the estimated 2,000 fighters inside. An estimated 1,000 civilians are also sheltering in the factory.

New satellite images by Planet Labs PBC, taken Sunday, show destroyed buildings across the steelworks and smoke rising from one area. Roofs have gaping holes; a soccer field is cratered from incoming fire.

More than 100,000 people — down from a prewar population of about 430,000 — are believed to remain in Mariupol with scant food, water or heat. Ukrainian authorities estimate more than 20,000 civilians have been killed. Recent satellite images showed what appeared to be mass graves to the west and east of Mariupol.

At Gallipoli battlefields, travelers remember fallen Anzacs

By EMRAH GUREL and SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

CANAKKALE, Turkey (AP) — Travelers from Australia and New Zealand joined Turkish and other nations' dignitaries at the former World War I battlefields at Gallipoli for a solemn service at dawn Monday to remember troops killed during an unsuccessful British-led campaign that aimed to take the Ottoman Empire out of the war.

As the sun rose, participants held a minute of silence to reflect on the sacrifices of tens of thousands of soldiers from the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps, known as Anzacs, who landed on the beaches at Gallipoli, in northwest Turkey.

"At this time 107 years ago, on ships that covered the ocean off this tiny bay, thousands of Australians and New Zealanders were preparing to land on this rugged coast," New Zealand army chief, Maj. Gen. John Boswell, said during the ceremony. "For all but a few, this was to be the first experience of the horrors of combat."

"Most were convinced that, as one New Zealand soldier wrote in his story: 'It will be the greatest day in our lives.' The sunrise they witnessed that day was for all too many to be the last they ever saw," he continued. "Across our countries, home after home was plunged into mourning."

The Gallipoli campaign aimed to secure a naval route from the Mediterranean Sea to Istanbul through the Dardanelles, and knock the Ottomans out of the war. The April 25, 1915, landings marked the start of a fierce battle that lasted for eight months.

More than 44,000 Allied soldiers and 86,000 Ottoman soldiers died.

The battlefields and cemeteries at the site in Canakkale, in northwestern Turkey, have become a place of pilgrimage for many Australians and New Zealanders who sleep on the beaches until the start of the dawn service. But the ongoing coronavirus pandemic kept the number of visitors small this year.

Among those who made it to the ceremony was 27-year-old Taylor Murphy from Victoria, Australia, who said the pros of being at Gallipoli "outweighs the cons of the pandemic."

"It feels quite surreal to be here," she said. "We are feeling quite emotional."

Some 2,700 kilometers northwest of Gallipoli at the other extremity of Europe's frontline of World War I, Australian and New Zealand officials gathered in Flanders Fields to remember, but equally to assess the present by centering on the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"War has returned to Europe in the form of Russia's brutal and illegal invasion of Ukraine. Once again,

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our people, Belgians, Australians, New Zealanders and our friends and allies stand shoulder to shoulder with one another in our support for freedom, democracy, and the rule of law," said New Zealand ambassador Diana Reaich.

The war, which has entered its third month, was also on the mind of Australian envoy Caroline Millar, who said that the cornerstones of post-World War II were being put to the test.

"We also recommit in the words of the 1945 Charter of the United Nations to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Tragically, we are called to honor that commitment again today with the terrible violence of Russia's unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine," Millar said.

In Australia's largest city, Sydney, downtown Martin Place was filled to capacity with tens of thousands at its dawn service. Prime Minister Scott Morrison and deputy opposition leader Richard Marles acknowledged Ukraine's fight for freedom when they spoke at a service in the northern city of Darwin, which was devastated by Japanese bombing during World War II.

Australia did not restrict the numbers attending its commemorations for the first time during the pandemic. The service in Auckland, New Zealand, was initially planned to be closed to the public, but a veterans' association intervened and a smaller-than-usual crowd was allowed to attend. A Ukrainian flag was flown above the Auckland War Memorial Museum ceremony.

Monday was the first such commemoration of casualties of all wars since both Australia and New Zealand withdrew troops from Afghanistan last year.

The tragic fate of troops from Australia and New Zealand in the Gallipoli campaign is believed to have inspired the two nations to carve national identities distinct from the British. Anzac Day is marked as a coming of age for the two nations.

Gallipoli is also considered to be an important turning point in the history of modern Turkey. It was at Gallipoli that Mustafa Kemal Ataturk rose to prominence as a commander of the Turkish forces and went on to lead Turkey's War of Independence and found the Turkish Republic.

On Monday, hundreds of Turkish students marched along a 5-kilometer (3-mile) track to honor the soldiers of the Turkish 57th Infantry Regiment, who were among the first to defend against the Gallipoli landings.

Ataturk — who was Lt.Col. Mustafa Kemal at the time — is known to have commanded the regiment: "I do not order you to attack, I order you to die."

On Sunday, the remains of 17 missing French soldiers were handed over to French military officials and put to rest alongside other fallen comrades during separate remembrance ceremonies that were held for French, British and other soldiers. Their remains were found during restoration work on a castle and surrounding areas on the Canakkale Peninsula.

Only one out of the 17 French soldiers — Cpl. Paul Roman, of the 1st Engineers Regiment — has been formally identified.

Reports: Twitter in talks with Musk over bid to buy platform

Twitter's board and Tesla CEO Elon Musk negotiated into the early hours of Monday over his bid to buy the social media platform, The New York Times reported.

Musk said last week that he had lined up \$46.5 billion in financing to buy Twitter, putting pressure on the company's board to negotiate a deal.

The Times, citing people with knowledge of the situation who it did not identify, said the two sides were discussing details including a timeline and fees if an agreement was signed and then fell apart. The people said the situation was fluid and fast-moving.

Twitter had enacted an anti-takeover measure known as a poison pill that could make a takeover attempt prohibitively expensive. But the board decided to negotiate after Musk updated his proposal to show he had secured financing, according to The Wall Street Journal, which was first to report the negotiations were underway.

On April 14, Musk announced an offer to buy the social media platform for \$54.20 per share, or about \$43 billion, but did not say at the time how he would finance the acquisition.

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Last week, he said in documents filed with U.S. securities regulators that the money would come from Morgan Stanley and other banks, some of it secured by his huge stake in the electric car maker.

Twitter has not commented.

Musk has said he wants to buy Twitter because he doesn't feel it's living up to its potential as a platform for free speech.

In recent weeks, he has voiced a number of proposed changes for the company, from relaxing its content restrictions — such as the rules that suspended former President Donald Trump's account — to ridding the platform of its problems with fake and automated accounts.

Musk is the world's wealthiest person, according to Forbes, with a nearly \$279 billion fortune. But much of his money is tied up in Tesla stock — he owns about 17% of the company, according to FactSet, which is valued at more than \$1 trillion — and SpaceX, his privately held space company. It's unclear how much cash Musk has.

Jon Stewart: Authoritarian governments a threat, not comedy

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jon Stewart, accepting the Kennedy Center's Mark Twain Prize for American Humor, warned Sunday night that speculation about the future of comedy amid increased audience cultural sensitivity was ignoring a true and enduring threat: authoritarian governments around the world.

"Comedy doesn't change the world, but it's a bellwether," Stewart said. "When a society feels under threat, comedians are who gets sent away first."

Stewart pointed to Egyptian comedian Bassem Youssef, whose Stewart-inspired political comedy show earned him both fame and self-imposed exile. Youssef's story is "an example of the true threat to comedy," Stewart said.

The intersection of comedy and politics was the main theme as celebrities and comedy royalty gathered to honor Stewart, who set the modern template for mixing the topics during his 16-year run hosting TV's "The Daily Show."

Stewart, the 23rd recipient of the prize, was honored in testimonials from fellow comedians and previous Mark Twain Prize recipients. Stewart himself spoke during Dave Chappelle's Mark Twain ceremony in 2019, and Chappelle returned the favor.

"It is a miracle to watch you work. You are a cure for what ails this country," said Chappelle, who noted that Stewart stepped down from "The Daily Show" one year before the election of Donald Trump as president.

The 59-year-old Stewart — born Jonathan Stuart Leibowitz — rose to prominence as a standup comic and host of multiple failed talk shows before taking over Comedy Central's "The Daily Show" in 1999. He became a cultural and political force as he trained his satirical eye on politics and an increasingly polarized national media.

Several of Sunday's speakers were former "Daily Show" correspondents, including Samantha Bee, Steve Carell, Stephen Colbert and John Oliver.

Carell described his time on the show as full of "excitement, fear, physical distress and laughter." He noted that Stewart seemed to delight in sending him on bizarre assignments that included eating Crisco, dealing with a trailer of snakes, and drinking Long Island ice tea until he vomited. Stewart, he said, was "always supporting us and always cheering us from the comfort and safety of his office."

Oliver, meanwhile, sent in a video message noting that the real Jon Stewart would never spend "two hours squirming in his seat listening to people tell him how much he means to them." Therefore, Oliver concluded, Stewart must be dead and he proceeded to deliver an extended eulogy.

Fellow New Jersey native Bruce Springsteen performed an acoustic version of "Born to Run" and praised Stewart as a patriot determined to speak truth to power.

Stewart's influence was felt far beyond America's borders. Youssef, an Egyptian heart surgeon, started up a modest YouTube show that was directly modeled on Stewart's and became an iconic figure during and after the 2011 Egyptian revolution.

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Describing his show as “clearly a very cheap knockoff” of “The Daily Show,” Youssef detailed how he appeared on Stewart’s show in 2012 and Stewart came to Cairo to do the same in 2013.

Two weeks after that appearance, the Egyptian military overthrew a democratically elected Islamist president amid mass national protests. Youssef said he asked Stewart how to navigate the shifting political climate, and Stewart advised him to stick to his principles even if it caused trouble or cost him popularity.

Youssef, whose show was eventually cancelled and who now lives in the U.S., began cursing Stewart from the stage. “I could have been a very rich sell-out by now!” he yelled in mock anger.

Since retiring from “The Daily Show” in 2015, Stewart has become a vocal proponent of a number of social causes and one of the most prominent voices in support of health care for Sept. 11 first responders in New York City. He recently returned to television as host of “The Problem with Jon Stewart” on Apple TV+.

Stewart’s political influence was apparent Sunday from a guest list that included House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and White House press secretary Jen Psaki.

Pelosi, on the red carpet before the ceremony, said she had interacted with Stewart on multiple occasions while he was lobbying on different causes. She praised his “level of commitment and knowledge” that far outstripped the usual celebrity political involvement.

She also laughingly said that Stewart is “not a patient man” when he feels his cause is just.

This was the first Mark Twain ceremony since Chappelle’s in 2019. The award skipped 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Aside from that two-year break, the prize has been presented annually since 1998, with Richard Pryor receiving the first honors.

Other recipients include Carol Burnett (the oldest recipient at age 80), Tina Fey (the youngest at age 40), Eddie Murphy, Jonathan Winters, George Carlin and Lily Tomlin. 2009 recipient Bill Cosby had his prize rescinded in 2018 amid multiple allegations of sexual assault.

AP-NORC poll: Many support Jackson court confirmation

By JESSICA GRESKO and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — More Americans approve than disapprove of Ketanji Brown Jackson’s confirmation to the Supreme Court as its first Black female justice, a new poll finds, but that support is politically lopsided. And a majority of Black Americans — but fewer white and Hispanic Americans — approve of her confirmation.

Overall, 48% of Americans say they approve and 19% disapprove of Jackson’s confirmation to the high court according to the new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The remaining 32% of Americans hold no opinion.

Jackson’s nomination fulfilled a campaign promise by President Joe Biden to name a Black woman to the court if given the opportunity. The findings suggest the confirmation did more to energize Biden’s Democratic base than it did to energize Republicans in opposition, despite vocal resistance from some GOP lawmakers who were largely united in voting against her April 7 confirmation. Three Republican senators broke with their party to confirm her with a 53-47 tally.

Eighty percent of Democrats and only 18% of Republicans approve of Jackson’s confirmation to replace retiring Justice Stephen Breyer. Among Republicans, though, fewer than half — 43% — say they disapprove of the Harvard law graduate’s confirmation. An additional 37% of Republicans hold neither opinion. Only 5% of Democrats disapprove; 15% say they hold neither opinion.

It’s not unusual for a relatively high share of Americans to express no opinion about a justice’s confirmation. In October 2018, after the vote to confirm Justice Brett Kavanaugh following a rancorous confirmation marked by sexual assault allegations, 35% approved, 43% disapproved and 20% said they held neither opinion. And in October 2020, before the vote to confirm conservative Justice Amy Coney Barrett to the seat of the late liberal Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, 30% were in favor to her being confirmed, 35% were opposed and 34% said they held neither opinion.

Jackson, 51, a federal appeals court judge in Washington, will join the court this summer when Breyer steps down. She will become the third Black person to sit on the court, following the late Justice Thurgood

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Marshall and current Justice Clarence Thomas. The court will for the first time have four women members and two Black members while white men will make up a minority of the court.

"It has taken 232 years and 115 prior appointments for a Black woman to be selected to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States," Jackson said in remarks at the White House after her confirmation. "But we've made it. We've made it, all of us."

Kimberly Brown, 41, is among those who approve of Jackson's confirmation. Brown, who lives in New York and works in health care, is an independent who leans Democratic and called Jackson's confirmation "historic."

"I just feel like it's a historic moment to see a Black woman nominated, and then to also be confirmed to the Supreme Court, which has never been done," said Brown, who is Black. "I'm just excited that she's able to take all of the knowledge and skills that she's developed over the course of her career and education and apply it ... in a seat on the highest court."

Brown said she watched some of Jackson's hearings and felt Jackson "presented herself really well," answering questions from lawmakers thoughtfully and thoroughly.

Jackson's hearings were marked by intense lines of questioning from some Republican senators ranging from her sentencing record on child pornography cases to her views on teaching books on critical race theory in the classroom.

The poll shows about half of Americans, including about a quarter of Republicans, disapprove of how GOP senators handled the confirmation process; only about 2 in 10 of Americans approve. Nearly twice as many Americans approve of how Senate Democrats handled the process. Still, about a third of Americans say they don't have an opinion either way for Republicans or Democrats.

Unlike Brown, Republican Gail Thompson, 77, of Washington state, said she felt Jackson was evasive in answering Republican lawmakers' questions. Thompson, a retired medical assistant, said she also believed Jackson is "soft on crime."

"I don't agree with what she's done," said Thompson, who is white. "And I'm really sad that she's been appointed."

Brown and Thompson reflect not only the partisan divide but also something of a racial divide over Jackson's confirmation. Among Black Americans, 63% approve and 18% disapprove of Jackson's confirmation. Black voters were among the keys to Biden's victory in the 2020 presidential election — about 9 in 10 supported him, according to AP VoteCast — but his approval rating among Black Americans has dipped substantially in AP-NORC polls conducted since his inauguration.

Approval of Jackson's confirmation is lower among white and Hispanic Americans, at 46% and 41%, respectively, though similar percentages across racial and ethnic groups disapprove. Many white and Hispanic Americans say they hold neither opinion.

Overall, more Americans say they approve than disapprove of how Biden handled Jackson's confirmation, 42% to 33%. About 8 in 10 Democrats approve; about two-thirds of Republicans disapprove.

Biden's immediate predecessor, Donald Trump, nominated three conservative justices to the court — Neil Gorsuch, Kavanaugh and Barrett — giving the court a 6-3 conservative advantage, which Jackson's appointment will not change. Biden's one-time boss, former President Barack Obama, nominated two justices — Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor, who is the court's first Latina justice.

The new poll shows confidence in the Supreme Court remains low, according to the poll, but is similar to what it was in a February AP-NORC poll. Eighteen percent of Americans say they have a great deal of confidence in the high court, and 54% have some confidence. An additional 27% say they have hardly any confidence.

Republicans and Democrats have similar levels of confidence in the court. Views also are similar across race and ethnicity groups.

Jurors reject array of defenses at Capitol riot trials

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

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Jurors have heard — and rejected — an array of excuses and arguments from the first rioters to be tried for storming the U.S. Capitol. The next jury to get a Capitol riot case could hear another novel defense this week at the trial of a retired New York City police officer.

Thomas Webster, a 20-year veteran of the NYPD, has claimed he was acting in self-defense when he tackled a police officer who was trying to protect the Capitol from a mob on Jan. 6, 2021. Webster's lawyer also has argued that he was exercising his First Amendment free speech rights when he shouted profanities at police that day.

Webster, 56, will be the fourth Capitol riot defendant to get a jury trial. Each has presented a distinct line of defense.

An Ohio man who stole a coat rack from a Capitol office testified he was "following presidential orders" from Donald Trump. An off-duty police officer from Virginia claimed he only entered the Capitol to retrieve a fellow officer. A lawyer for a Texas man who confronted Capitol police accused prosecutors of rushing to judgment against somebody prone to exaggerating.

Those defenses didn't sway the juries at their respective trials. Collectively, a total of 36 jurors unanimously convicted the three rioters of all 17 counts in their indictments.

Webster faces the same fate if a federal judge's blistering words are any guide. U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta, who will preside over Webster's trial, has described his videotaped conduct as "among the most indefensible and reprehensible" that the judge has seen among Jan. 6 cases, with "no real defense for it."

"You were a police officer and you should have known better," Mehta told Webster during a bond hearing last June, according to a transcript.

But a dozen jurors, not the judge, will decide the case against Webster, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran who retired from the NYPD in 2011. Jury selection is scheduled to start on Monday.

A wealth of video evidence and self-incriminating behavior by riot defendants has given prosecutors the upper hand in many cases. Mary McCord, a Georgetown University Law Center professor and former Justice Department official, said jurors often won't have to rely on witness testimony or circumstantial evidence because videos captured much of the violence and destruction on Jan. 6.

"When I was a prosecutor trying cases, I would have loved to have had cases where the entire crime was on video. That just doesn't happen that often. But for jurors, it can be very powerful," she said.

Webster's trial is the sixth overall. In a pair of bench trials, a different federal judge heard testimony without a jury before acquitting one defendant and partially acquitting another.

U.S. District Judge Trevor McFadden, a Trump nominee who acquitted Matthew Martin of all charges, said it was reasonable for the New Mexico man to believe that police allowed him to enter the Capitol. In the first bench trial, McFadden convicted New Mexico elected official Couy Griffin of illegally entering restricted Capitol grounds but acquitted him of engaging in disorderly conduct.

Stephen Saltzburg, a George Washington Law School professor and former Justice Department official, said it may be difficult for prosecutors to secure convictions against defendants who merely entered the Capitol and didn't exhibit any violent or destructive behavior.

"I think the people with the best chances are those who say, 'I was just there and I got swept up with everybody else.' The government is going to have to have some way to show there's more than that or the government will lose," Saltzburg said.

Webster brought a gun and a Marine Corps flag attached to a metal pole when he traveled alone to Washington from his home in Florida, New York, a village approximately 70 miles northwest of New York City. He wore his NYPD-issued bulletproof vest but says he left the pistol in his hotel room when he headed to the Jan. 6 rally where Trump spoke.

Police body camera video captured Webster's confrontation outside the Capitol with a line of officers, including one identified only as "Officer N.R." in court papers.

The unnamed Metropolitan Police Department officer described the encounter in a written statement. The officer said Webster swung the flagpole at him in a downward chopping motion, hitting a metal barricade, then charged at him with clenched fists.

"He pushed me to the ground and attempted to violently tear away my gas mask and ballistic helmet.

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This caused me to choke and gasp for air before another participant at the riot helped me to my feet," the officer wrote.

The officer said he retreated behind a police line after Webster pinned him to the ground.

"His actions, attack and targeted assault caused me to fear for my life and could have easily left my wife and two small children without a husband and father," the officer wrote.

Defense attorney James Monroe has claimed the unnamed officer gestured toward Webster, "inviting him to engage in a fight," before reaching over a police barrier and punching Webster in his face. Webster "used that amount of force he reasonably believed necessary to protect himself" by tackling the officer to the ground, Monroe said in a court filing.

Mehta, however, said the video doesn't show Webster getting punched in the face. The judge described Webster as an instigator.

"It was his conduct that sort of broke the dam, at least in that area," Mehta added.

Webster, now a self-employed landscaper, enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1985, was honorably discharged in 1989 and joined the NYPD in 1991. His department service included a stint on then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg's private security detail.

Monroe claimed "Officer N.R." had reached over a metal barrier and pushed a "peaceful" man who was blinded by pepper spray.

"As a former U.S. Marine and a member of law enforcement, Mr. Webster's moral instinct was to protect the innocent," Monroe wrote.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Hava Mirell has argued that Webster should be held to a higher standard given his professional experience.

"If he were there to protect the innocent, then he should have been fending other rioters off from the barricade, not the other way around," Mirell said at the bond hearing.

Webster faces six counts, including assaulting, resisting or impeding an officer using a dangerous weapon. He's the first Capitol riot defendant to be tried on an assault charge. He isn't accused of entering the Capitol.

More than 780 people have been charged with riot-related federal crimes. The Justice Department says over 245 of them have been charged with assaulting or impeding law enforcement. More than 250 riot defendants have pleaded guilty, mostly to nonviolent misdemeanors.

Jurors convicted two rioters of interfering with officers. One of them, Thomas Robertson, was an off-duty police officer from Rocky Mount, Virginia. The other, Texas resident Guy Wesley Reffitt, also was convicted of storming the Capitol with a holstered handgun.

The third Capitol rioter to be convicted by a jury was Dustin Byron Thompson, an Ohio man who said he was following Trump's orders.

"Even if jurors accepted that (Thompson) felt like he was doing what the former president wanted, that still wouldn't be a legal excuse," said McCord, the Georgetown professor. "When juries are able to witness what happened, they can make that assessment relatively easily."

'Soft on crime' attacks target Republicans who favor changes

By SARA BURNETT and SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — With violent crime increasing in many parts of the U.S., Republicans see a winning strategy in portraying Democrats as soft on crime ahead of this year's elections. In ads, campaign appearances and interviews, the GOP has ripped liberal policies and blamed Democratic lawmakers from the White House to city councils for the violence.

But in Oklahoma, where Gov. Kevin Stitt is being targeted for mass commutations and a crime that involved cannibalism, the attacks are different: Stitt is a Republican.

In one ad, a woman's voice says Stitt commuted the prison sentence of a man who later "brutally murdered his neighbor, then tried to feed her organs to his family." The ad, paid for by a group called Conservative Voice of America, concludes, "Oklahomans deserve a governor who cracks down on violent criminals, not one who lets them go."

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Democrats have borne the brunt of the political blame for the increase in homicides and other violent crime in recent years. In some cases that's meant backpedaling on major criminal justice overhauls or insisting they don't want to defund police departments, as some activists have advocated.

But now the attacks on some fellow Republicans are intensifying a split within the GOP between hardliners and those conservatives who have shifted to support alternatives to prisons, largely as a way to save money. Groups that advocate various types of criminal justice reform worry the attacks could jeopardize meaningful changes that have occurred, many in heavily Republican states, such as Oklahoma, which has one of the highest incarceration rates, and Texas.

"We had been seeing sort of growing bipartisan consensus on reforms," said Kevin Ring, president of Families Against Mandatory Minimums. But that's gotten tougher because of rising crime and politics.

"There's still some of those old holdouts who just are 'lock them up, throw away the key' types," Ring said. "They've always been there, and I think that they have used the increase in crime to argue for a return to that posture by the party."

Brett Tolman, executive director of the conservative criminal justice advocacy group Right on Crime, said "the accusation of being weak on crime gets thrown around very quickly," causing "a lot of hesitation" in Congress. The former U.S. attorney said he now has to work with people mostly behind the scenes.

Republicans who support the changes say they can reduce crime as well as costs to taxpayers. When Stitt approved the 2019 mass commutation of more than 450 inmates in a single day, he said the release would save Oklahoma an estimated \$11.9 million over the cost of keeping them behind bars. The commutations primarily benefited those convicted of drug possession or low-level property crimes.

Former Texas Gov. Rick Perry, a Republican, says his state saved billions of dollars by investing in alternative sentencing and closing prisons. He's now defending Stitt, who's facing an avalanche of attack ads as he seeks a second term as Oklahoma governor.

"I see the Texas reforms have proven tough on crime but soft on the taxpayer, as any conservative policy should be," Perry wrote in a newspaper column defending Stitt.

The attack ads targeting Stitt were paid for by dark money groups, which don't have to make their donors public. They criticize Stitt for signing off on the parole of a man now accused of three killings, including those of a 4-year-old girl and a neighbor whose heart he cut out and tried to feed to relatives, according to authorities.

Donelle Harder, a spokesperson for Stitt's reelection campaign, said it's not clear who is funding the groups.

"The undisclosed, special interest groups are not conservatives, and they are not being honest about their intentions," Harder said. "Gov. Stitt's commitment to lead as a conservative political outsider is clearly upsetting a small few."

Trebor Worthen, a GOP political consultant who is running one of the dark money groups, Sooner State Leadership PAC, said it is dedicated to public safety and has raised \$10 million. Worthen declined to identify specific donors.

"We are funded by business and community leaders who care deeply about our future and wish to exercise their First Amendment rights to advocate for policy changes that Oklahoma needs and deserves," Worthen said.

The issue also has surfaced in the GOP primary for governor in Nevada. Former Sen. Dean Heller has criticized Clark County Sheriff Joe Lombardo, saying he wants to defund the police. Lombardo told The Associated Press and other media outlets that he has no problem with his department losing funding if the money is used in another area that would benefit law enforcement.

"Who goes on NPR and says they want to defund the police?" Heller told a Nevada TV station during an interview, comparing Lombardo with progressive Democrats who often draw conservative ire, including Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. "AOC, the Squad, and Sheriff Lombardo. They're the ones that say that."

In Illinois, Democrats who control state government hurriedly worked this spring to provide more funding to law enforcement after passing a major criminal justice overhaul last year that set strict standards

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for police behavior and eliminated cash bail beginning next year. Republicans have blasted the criminal justice legislation.

Among the most vocal critics is GOP candidate for governor Richard Irvin, a former prosecutor and defense attorney who is now mayor of Aurora, a Chicago suburb. Irvin, who faces several Republicans in the GOP primary, often touts his prosecutorial background as he blasts Democratic Gov. J.B. Pritzker.

The Democratic Governors Association and Irvin's GOP rivals have questioned his tough-on-crime credentials, however. In an ad, the DGA criticized Irvin's work as a defense attorney, and fellow Republicans have attacked Irvin, who is Black, for expressing support for Black Lives Matter.

A spokesperson for Irvin dismissed the attacks. Eleni Desmertzis said Pritzker is "running scared" and facing "a former criminal prosecutor, tough-on-crime-mayor and strong supporter of law enforcement who has proven he's not afraid to stand up for all lives in Illinois."

Analysis: Loss is victory for far-right in France's election

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The far-right has gone mainstream in France.

That's the headline from the landmark showing by Marine Le Pen in the French presidential election. The fierce nationalist didn't win Sunday. But she edged another step closer — snatching a victory of sorts from her defeat to reelected President Emmanuel Macron.

With 41.5% of the vote, unprecedented for her, Le Pen's anti-foreigner, anti-system politics of disgruntlement are now more entrenched than ever in the psyche, thinking and political landscape of France.

Since the Le Pen dynasty — first her dad, Jean-Marie, and now Marine, his daughter — first started contesting presidential elections in 1974, never have so many French voters bought into their doctrine that multicultural and multiracial France, a country with the words "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" inscribed on its public buildings, would be richer, safer and somehow more French if it was less open to foreigners and the outside world.

Had she become France's first woman president, her plan for fighting Islamic terrorism would have included stripping part of France's population — women who are Muslims — of some of their liberty. She wanted to ban them from wearing headscarves in public — hardly very equal or fraternal. Same goes for her proposals to move French citizens to the front of lines for jobs, benefits and housing.

For headscarf-wearing voter Yasmina Aksas, Le Pen's defeat wasn't a celebration moment — not with such strong backing for her and ideas that "used to be limited to militant far-right groups" becoming increasingly acceptable in polite company.

"It's still 40% of people voting for Le Pen," the 19-year-old law student said. "It's not a victory."

Internationally, Le Pen wanted to start diluting France's relationships with the European Union, NATO and neighbor Germany — moves that would have been seismic for the architecture of peace in Europe, in the midst of Russia's war in Ukraine.

In short, France escaped a political, social and economic electroshock by not voting in Le Pen.

Or perhaps just delayed one, should she choose to stand again in 2027. That's a long way off. Much could change. But Le Pen isn't done yet.

"In this defeat, I can't help but feel a form of hope," she said. "I will never abandon the French."

Surpassing 40% of the vote elevates Le Pen into illustrious, mainstream company. Since Gen. Charles de Gaulle beat François Mitterrand by 55% to 45% in 1965, all defeated finalists lost 40-something to 50-something.

With two exceptions, both named Le Pen.

Jean-Marie was trounced 82% to 18% by Jacques Chirac in 2002 and Marine lost 66% to 34% to Macron in 2017.

Voters used to regard it as their civic duty to keep the Le Pens' score low, seeing a ballot against them as a blow against racism and xenophobia. Fewer think that way now.

By championing cost-of-living issues, befriending the working class, changing her party's name and

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distancing herself from her father, Le Pen broadened her appeal and made herself less scary to growing swaths of France's electorate. Immigration isn't the top concern for all her supporters. They're not all wary of the EU, Muslims and foreigners. But Le Pen does speak to many who feel unheard and uncared for by officials in Paris and Brussels.

And so although Macron became the first French president in 20 years to win a second term, he also has failed: Failed to achieve the goal that he set himself at the outset of his presidency.

Five years ago, in his triumphant victory speech, Macron pledged to cut the ground from under Le Pen's feet by assuaging the voter anger she feeds on.

"I will do everything in the five years to come so there is no more reason to vote for the extremes," he said.

Yet France's extremes are now doing better than ever, finding growing, enthusiastic and completely unabashed audiences for "us against them" far-right rhetoric.

In far-right speak, "us" are largely white and Christian people being submerged by migration, impoverished by globalization, terrorized by Islamic fundamentalists and losing their French identity to imported cultures, religions and values.

"Them" are all those they blame: the elites, foreigners, financiers, the EU, Muslims, "the system." Their list is long.

The market for their politics has become so large that this election saw several strains of extremism to choose from.

Rabble-rousing former TV pundit Eric Zemmour, who has been repeatedly convicted of hate speech, placed fourth out of the 12 candidates in the first round of voting on April 10. He makes racial arguments that white French people risk being replaced by non-European immigrants and their children. He sugarcoated France's collaboration with its Nazi occupiers in World War II. During his campaign, he filled auditoriums with audiences for his anti-Islam, anti-immigration invective.

For Le Pen, he also had the advantage of making her look vanilla and electable in comparison, which also partly explains why she did so well. Together, the far right won 32% of the first-round vote.

Now Le Pen has taken another step forward against Macron in the runoff.

Not enough to get into power.

But closer than ever.

Zelenskyy meets top-level US delegation, gets aid promises

By DAVID KEYTON Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The U.S. secretaries of state and defense met Sunday night with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the highest-level visit to the country's capital by an American delegation since the start of Russia's invasion.

The secretive meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin came as Ukraine pressed the West for more powerful weapons against Russia's campaign in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, where Moscow's forces sought to dislodge the last Ukrainian troops in the battered port of Mariupol.

Blinken and Austin told Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and his advisers that the United States would provide more than \$300 million in foreign military financing and had approved a \$165 million sale of ammunition.

They also said that U.S. President Joe Biden would soon announce his nominee for ambassador to Ukraine and that American diplomats who left Ukraine before the war would start returning to the country this coming week.

Reporters who accompanied Austin and Blinken to Poland were barred by Pentagon and State Department officials from reporting the Kyiv visit until the two men physically left Ukraine. U.S. officials cited security concerns.

Before the session with Blinken and Austin, Zelenskyy said he was looking for the Americans to produce

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results, both in arms and security guarantees.

"You can't come to us empty-handed today, and we are expecting not just presents or some kind of cakes, we are expecting specific things and specific weapons," he said.

Zelenskyy's last face-to-face meeting with a top U.S. official was Feb. 19 in Munich with Vice President Kamala Harris, five days before Russia's invasion. While the West has funneled military equipment to Ukraine, Zelenskyy has stressed repeatedly that his country needs more heavy weapons, including long-range air defense systems and warplanes.

In an apparent boost for Ukraine, polling agencies said French President Emmanuel Macron would win reelection over far right candidate Marine Le Pen, who has faced questions about her ties to Moscow.

The result was hailed by France's allies in the European Union as a reassuring sign of stability and continued support for Ukraine. France has played a leading role in international efforts to punish Russia with sanctions and is supplying weapons systems to Ukraine.

Zelenskyy's meeting with U.S. officials took place as Ukrainians and Russians observed Orthodox Easter. Speaking from Kyiv's ancient St. Sophia Cathedral, Zelenskyy, who is Jewish, highlighted its significance to a nation wracked by nearly two months of war.

"The great holiday today gives us great hope and unwavering faith that light will overcome darkness, good will overcome evil, life will overcome death, and therefore Ukraine will surely win!" he said.

Still, the war cast a shadow over celebrations. In the northern village of Ivanivka, where Russian tanks still littered the roads, Olena Koptyl said "the Easter holiday doesn't bring any joy. I'm crying a lot. We cannot forget how we lived."

The Russian military reported hitting 423 Ukrainian targets overnight, including fortified positions and troop concentrations, while its warplanes destroyed 26 Ukrainian military sites, including an explosives factory and several artillery depots.

Since failing to capture Kyiv, the Russians have aimed to gain full control over the eastern industrial heartland, where Moscow-backed separatists controlled some territory before the war.

Russian forces launched fresh airstrikes on a Mariupol steel plant where an estimated 1,000 civilians are sheltering along with about 2,000 Ukrainian fighters. The Azovstal steel mill where the defenders are holed up is the last corner of resistance in the city, otherwise occupied by the Russians.

Zelenskyy said he stressed the need to evacuate civilians from Mariupol, including from the steel plant, in a Sunday call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is scheduled to speak later with Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

Arestovych, the Zelenskyy adviser, said Ukraine has proposed holding talks with Russia next to the sprawling steel mill. Arestovych said on the Telegram messaging app that Russia has not responded to the proposal that would include establishing humanitarian corridors and the exchange of Russian war prisoners for the fighters still in the plant.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is scheduled to travel to Turkey on Monday and then Moscow and Kyiv. Zelenskyy said it was a mistake for Guterres to visit Russia before Ukraine.

"Why? To hand over signals from Russia? What should we look for?" Zelenskyy said Saturday. "There are no corpses scattered on the Kutuzovsky Prospect," he said, referring to one of Moscow's main avenues.

Mariupol has endured fierce fighting since the start of the war because of its location on the Sea of Azov. Its capture would deprive Ukraine of a vital port, free up Russian troops to fight elsewhere, and allow Moscow to establish a land corridor to the Crimean Peninsula, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014.

More than 100,000 people — down from a prewar population of about 430,000 — are believed to remain in Mariupol with scant food, water or heat. Ukrainian authorities estimate over 20,000 civilians have been killed. Recent satellite images showed what appeared to be mass graves to the west and east of Mariupol.

Children in an underground bunker were seen receiving Easter presents in a video released Sunday by the far-right Azov Battalion, which is among the Ukrainian forces at the steel plant in Mariupol. The group's deputy commander, Sviatoslav Palamar, said the video was shot at the plant.

One toddler is seen wearing homemade diapers made of cellophane and people are seen hanging laun-

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dry on makeshift hangers.

"Please help us," one woman in the video said through tears, appealing to world leaders. "We want to live in our city, in our country. We are tired of these bombings, constant air strikes on our land. How much longer will this continue?"

Mykhailo Podolyak, another presidential adviser, tweeted that the Russian military was attacking the plant with heavy bombs and artillery while accumulating forces and equipment for a direct assault.

Zelenskyy over the weekend accused Russians of committing war crimes by killing civilians and of setting up "filtration camps" near Mariupol for people trying to leave the city. He said the Ukrainians — many of them children — are then sent to areas under Russian occupation or to Russia itself, often as far as Siberia or the Far East. The claims could not be independently verified.

Zelenskyy highlighted the death of a 3-month old girl in a Russian missile strike Saturday on the Black Sea port of Odesa. The baby was among eight people killed when Russia fired cruise missiles at Odesa, Ukrainian officials said.

Ukrainian news agency UNIAN, citing social media, reported that the infant's mother, Valeria Glodan, and grandmother also died when a missile hit a residential area. Zelenskyy promised to find and punish those responsible.

"The war started when this baby was 1 month old," Zelenskyy said. "Can you imagine what is happening? They are filthy scum; there are no other words for it."

For the Donbas offensive, Russia has reassembled troops who fought around Kyiv and in northern Ukraine. The British Ministry of Defense said Ukrainian forces had repelled numerous assaults in the past week and "inflicted significant cost on Russian forces."

A fire erupted early Monday at an oil depot in Russia near its border with Ukraine, but Russia's Tass news agency gave no immediate cause for the blaze in oil storage tanks.

NASA satellites that track fires showed something burning at coordinates that corresponded to a Rosneft facility some 110 kilometers (70 miles) north of the Ukrainian border. Moscow previously has blamed Ukraine for attacks on the Russian region of Bryansk, which borders Ukraine.

The spiritual leaders of the world's Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics on Sunday appealed for relief for Ukraine's suffering population.

China promotes coal in setback for efforts to cut emissions

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — China is promoting coal-fired power as the ruling Communist Party tries to revive a sluggish economy, prompting warnings Beijing is setting back efforts to cut climate-changing carbon emissions from the biggest global source.

Official plans call for boosting coal production capacity by 300 million tons this year, according to news reports. That is equal to 7% of last year's output of 4.1 billion tons, which was an increase of 5.7% over 2020.

China is one of the biggest investors in wind and solar, but jittery leaders called for more coal-fired power after economic growth plunged last year and shortages caused blackouts and factory shutdowns. Russia's attack on Ukraine added to anxiety that foreign oil and coal supplies might be disrupted.

"This mentality of ensuring energy security has become dominant, trumping carbon neutrality," said Li Shuo, a senior global policy adviser for Greenpeace. "We are moving into a relatively unfavorable time period for climate action in China."

Officials face political pressure to ensure stability as President Xi Jinping prepares to try to break with tradition and award himself a third five-year term as ruling party leader in the autumn.

Coal is important for "energy security," Cabinet officials said at an April 20 meeting that approved plans to expand production capacity, according to Caixin, a business news magazine.

The ruling party also is building power plants to inject money into the economy and revive growth that sank to 4% over a year earlier in the final quarter of 2021, down from the full year's 8.1% expansion.

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Governments have pledged to try to limit warming of the atmosphere to 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above the level of pre-industrial times. Leaders say what they really want is a limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit).

Scientists say even if the world hits the 2-degree goal in the 2015 Paris climate pact and the 2021 Glasgow follow-up agreement, that still will lead to higher seas, stronger storms, extinctions of plants and animals and more people dying from heat, smog and infectious diseases.

China is the top producer and consumer of coal. Global trends hinge on what Beijing does.

The Communist Party has rejected binding emissions commitments, citing its economic development needs. Beijing has avoided joining governments that promised to phase out use of coal-fired power.

In a 2020 speech to the United Nations, Xi said carbon emissions will peak by 2030, but he announced no target for the amount. Xi said China aims for carbon neutrality, or removing as much from the atmosphere by planting trees and other tactics as is emitted by industry and households, by 2060.

China accounts for 26.1% of global emissions, more than double the U.S. share of 12.8%, according to the World Resources Institute. Rhodium Group, a research firm, says China emits more than all developed economies combined.

Per person, China's 1.4 billion people on average emit the equivalent of 8.4 tons of carbon dioxide annually, according to WRI. That is less than half the U.S. average of 17.7 tons but more than the European Union's 7.5 tons.

China has abundant supplies of coal and produced more than 90% of the 4.4 billion tons it burned last year. More than half of its oil and gas is imported and leaders see that as a strategic risk.

China's goal of carbon neutrality by 2060 appears to be on track, but using more coal "could jeopardize this, or at least slow it down and make it more costly," Clare Perry of the Environmental Investigations Agency said in an email.

Promoting coal will make emissions "much higher than they need to be" by the 2030 peak year, said Perry. "This move runs entirely counter to the science," she said.

Beijing has spent tens of billions of dollars on building solar and wind farms to reduce reliance on imported oil and gas and clean up its smog-choked cities. China accounted for about half of global investment in wind and solar in 2020.

Still, coal is expected to supply 60% of its power in the near future.

Beijing is cutting millions of jobs to shrink its bloated, state-owned coal mining industry, but output and consumption still are rising.

Authorities say they are shrinking carbon emissions per unit of economic output. The government reported a reduction of 3.8% last year, better than 2020's 1% but down from a 5.1% cut in 2017.

Last year's total energy use increased 5.2% over 2020 after a revival of global demand for Chinese exports propelled a manufacturing boom, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

Stimulus spending also might raise carbon output if it pays for building more bridges, train stations and other public works. That would encourage carbon-intensive steel and cement production.

China's coal-fired power plants operate at about half their capacity on average, but building more creates jobs and economic activity, said Greenpeace's Li. He said even if the power isn't needed now, local leaders face pressure to make them pay for themselves.

"That locks China into a more high-carbon path," Li said. "It's very difficult to fix."

Georgia's Kemp and Perdue clash over elections in debate

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The top two Republicans running for governor in Georgia launched the first of three debates Sunday by bickering over who was responsible for 2020 and 2021 Republican election losses, with former U.S. Sen. David Perdue pressing his attack that incumbent Gov. Brian Kemp is to blame for Democratic control in Washington, while Kemp fired back that Perdue was trying to pass the blame for his own loss to Democrat Jon Ossoff.

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Perdue continued to showcase support for debunked claims that Democrats fraudulently won the 2020 presidential election and the 2021 U.S. Senate runoffs in Georgia.

"The election in 2020 was rigged and stolen," Perdue said during a debate sponsored by Atlanta's WSB-TV. "All the madness we see today ... all that started right here in Georgia when our governor caved and allowed out radical Democrats to steal our elections."

Kemp said he followed the law, that Perdue was lying to voters about his claim that Kemp permitted a settlement agreement over how signatures on absentee ballots were verified, and that the secretary of state and State Election Board have primary responsibility for investigating election wrongdoing.

"I was Secretary of State for eight years," Kemp said, "and I don't need to be lectured by someone that lost their last election about what our voting laws are and who has responsibilities for those in our state."

Kemp was not a party to the settlement agreement, but Perdue claims Kemp should have called a special session and asked lawmakers to reverse it. He also says Kemp should have done more to investigate fraud claims, saying Kemp is the "top cop" in Georgia.

Kemp was required by state law to certify the results and has repeatedly said any other course would have invited endless litigation. Federal and state election officials and Donald Trump's own attorney general have said there is no credible evidence the election was tainted. The former president's allegations of fraud were also roundly rejected by courts, including by judges Trump appointed.

"You have a candidate that is going to attack my record, unfortunately, all night tonight, because they didn't have a record there to beat Jon Ossoff in 2020," Kemp said.

The debates come as voting nears in for the May 24 primary. Counties can begin mailing absentee ballots Monday and early in-person voting begins May 2. Kemp and Perdue are scheduled to meet Thursday in Savannah and May 1 in Atlanta.

Besides Kemp and Perdue, the primary includes Republicans Catherine Davis, Kandiss Taylor and Tom Williams, who were excluded from Sunday's debate. A runoff would be held June 21 if needed.

Kemp, facing a Republican primary electorate that polls show widely believes that Trump did not lose fairly, didn't say he thought the 2020 and 2021 elections were fair, and didn't say he thought there was no fraud.

"Look, I was as frustrated as anybody else," Kemp said. "That's why we passed the strongest election integrity act in the country, because a lot of things were done by other people."

Perdue is endorsed by Trump, who has been focused on defeating Kemp. But Kemp has maintained a lead in fundraising and in the polls as he seeks a second term. That dynamic played out in the debate, with Perdue attacking and Kemp by turns defensive and dismissive.

The incumbent sought to highlight his record, including raising teacher and state employee pay, cutting taxes and quickly lifting restrictions after Georgia's brief COVID-19 lockdown. Kemp said that's a better way to defeat Democrat Stacey Abrams than endless litigation of past elections.

"That is a record that will beat Stacey Abrams in November, not looking in the rearview mirror," Kemp said.

Perdue, though, argues only he can win votes from Trump diehards to beat Abrams.

"He has divided us," Perdue said of Kemp. "He will not be able to beat Stacey Abrams. And if we want to protect our freedom and our values, we have to vote and we have to make sure that Stacey is never our governor."

Kemp repeatedly deflected when asked if he supports the affluent, mostly white Buckhead neighborhood seceding from the poorer, Blacker city of Atlanta. That effort died in the state legislature this year amid opposition from business groups, some Republican lawmakers and Atlanta city leaders. Kemp said instead he was focused on reducing crime in Atlanta.

"I think the debate needs to continue," Kemp said "I'm going to continue to keep my powder dry. Let this movement come forward or not. That's a decision that the legislature is going to make."

Perdue said that was an example of Kemp being a "weak" governor, supporting Buckhead's exit from Atlanta.

"They're trying to protect themselves," Perdue said of his support for letting Buckhead split off. "And the only way to do that is to get control of their own government. Keep your powder dry? People are getting

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killed up there right now.”

Perdue also rapped Kemp for not doing more to arrest people in the country illegally, noting a 2018 ad where Kemp pledged to round up “criminal illegals” and transport them in his “big truck,” if needed.

“What happened, governor? Pickup break down?” Perdue asked.

Kemp defended his record, noting he has stationed Georgia National Guard members near the Mexican border. But he said adding to the jail population would have been a bad idea at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I don’t know how going around picking up people that might have COVID when our law enforcement was sending ventilators and PPE supplies to hospitals would have been a good strategy,” Kemp said.

Australia commemorates war dead with few COVID restrictions

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Large crowds gathered in Australia on Monday to pay tribute to their war dead on Anzac Day largely free of pandemic restrictions for the first time since 2019.

Australia and New Zealand commemorate Anzac Day every April 25 — the date in 1915 when the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps landed in Turkey in an ill-fated campaign that was the soldiers’ first combat of World War I.

Monday was the first such commemoration of casualties of all wars since both nations withdrew troops from Afghanistan last year.

The dawn service in New Zealand’s largest city Auckland was initially planned to be closed to the public due to pandemic restrictions. But a veterans’ association intervened and a smaller-than-usual crowd was allowed to attend. A Ukrainian flag was flown above the Auckland War Memorial Museum ceremony.

In Australia’s largest city, Sydney, downtown Martin Place was filled to capacity with tens of thousands gathered for its dawn service.

There were no restrictions on numbers attending most Australian services, although some, including at the west coast city of Perth, were ticketed events to reduce crowds.

Those who could not attend the Perth service in Kings Park were urged to pay their respects from their driveways at dawn as Australians have done on the previous two Anzac Days.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison and deputy opposition leader Richard Marles acknowledged Ukraine’s fight for freedom when they spoke at a dawn service in the northern city of Darwin, which was devastated by Japanese bombing during World War II.

Marles was standing in for opposition leader Anthony Albanese who is isolating at his Sydney home after testing positive to COVID-19 last week.

Morrison is campaigning for a fourth three-year term for his conservative government at elections on May 21.

Anzac Day has focused attention on a new security threat to Australia, a bilateral security treaty between China and the Solomon Islands announced last week that could potentially result in a Chinese military presence 2,000 kilometers (1,200 miles) from the northeast Australian coast.

Morrison said at the Darwin ceremony that Australia’s freedom had been secured by the sacrifices of previous generations in war.

“An arc of autocracy is challenging the rules-based order our grandparents had secured,” Morrison said, referring to China, Russia and North Korea. “And democratic, free peoples are standing together again.”

Australia is the Solomon Islands main security partner and largest donor of foreign aid. The opposition center-left Labor Party has described the Chinese security pact with the island nation as Australia’s biggest policy failure in the Pacific since World War II.

President Joe Biden’s administration has warned that the United States will take unspecified action against the Solomon Islands should the Chinese pact pose a threat to the U.S. or allied interests.

Cases of the highly transmissible omicron variant of the coronavirus, which was first detected in Australia in December, have peaked across the country in recent weeks.

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Australia began relaxing pandemic restrictions late last year when 80% of adults were fully vaccinated. Australia has one of the most vaccinated populations in the world, with 93% of adults fully vaccinated.

To Europe's relief, France's Macron wins but far-right gains

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron comfortably won a second term Sunday, triggering relief among allies that the nuclear-armed power won't abruptly shift course in the midst of the war in Ukraine from European Union and NATO efforts to punish and contain Russia's military expansionism.

The second five-year term for the 44-year-old centrist spared France and Europe from the seismic upheaval of having firebrand populist Marine Le Pen at the helm, Macron's presidential runoff challenger who quickly conceded defeat but still scored her best-ever electoral showing.

Acknowledging that "numerous" voters cast ballots for him simply to keep out the fiercely nationalist far-right Le Pen, Macron pledged to reunite the country that is "filled with so many doubts, so many divisions" and work to assuage the anger of French voters that fed Le Pen's campaign.

"No one will be left by the side of the road," Macron said in a victory speech against the backdrop of the Eiffel Tower and a projection of the blue-white-and-red tricolor French flag. He was cheered by several hundred supporters who happily waved French and EU flags.

"We have a lot to do and the war in Ukraine reminds us that we are going through tragic times where France must make its voice heard," Macron said.

During her campaign, Le Pen pledged to dilute French ties with the 27-nation EU, NATO and Germany, moves that would have shaken Europe's security architecture as the continent deals with its worst conflict since World War II. Le Pen also spoke against EU sanctions on Russian energy supplies and faced scrutiny during the campaign over her previous friendliness with the Kremlin.

A chorus of European leaders hailed Macron's victory, since France has played a leading role in international efforts to punish Russia with sanctions and is supplying weapons to Ukraine.

"Democracy wins, Europe wins," said Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.

"Together we will make France and Europe advance," tweeted European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

Italian Premier Mario Draghi called Macron's victory "splendid news for all of Europe" and a boost to the EU "being a protagonist in the greatest challenges of our times, starting with the war in Ukraine."

Macron won with 58.5% of the vote to Le Pen's 41.5% — significantly closer than when they first faced off in 2017.

Macron is the first French president in 20 years to win reelection, since incumbent Jacques Chirac trounced Le Pen's father in 2002.

Le Pen called her result "a shining victory," saying that "in this defeat, I can't help but feel a form of hope."

Breaking through the threshold of 40% of the vote is unprecedented for the French far-right. Le Pen was beaten 66% to 34% by Macron in 2017 and her father got less than 20% against Chirac.

She and hard-left leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, one of 10 candidates eliminated in the first round on April 10, both quickly pitched forward Sunday night to France's legislative election in June, urging voters to give them a parliamentary majority to hamstring Macron.

Le Pen's score this time rewarded her years-long efforts to make her far-right politics more palatable to voters. Campaigning hard on cost-of-living issues, she made deep inroads among blue-collar voters in disaffected rural communities and in former industrial centers.

Le Pen voter Jean-Marie Cornic, 78, said he cast his ballot for her because he wanted a president who would prioritize "our daily lives — salaries, taxes, pensions."

The drop in support for Macron compared to five years ago points to a tough battle ahead for the president to rally people behind him in his second term. Many French voters found the 2022 presidential rematch less compelling than in 2017, when Macron was an unknown factor.

Leftist voters — unable to identify with either the centrist president or Le Pen — agonized with Sunday's choice. Some trooped reluctantly to polling stations solely to stop Le Pen, casting joyless votes for Macron.

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"It was the least worst choice," said Stephanie David, a transport logistics worker who backed a communist candidate in round one.

It was an impossible choice for retiree Jean-Pierre Roux. Having also voted communist in round one, he dropped an empty envelope into the ballot box on Sunday, repelled both by Le Pen's politics and what he saw as Macron's arrogance.

"I am not against his ideas but I cannot stand the person," Roux said.

In contrast, Marian Arbre, voting in Paris, cast his ballot for Macron "to avoid a government that finds itself with fascists, racists."

"There's a real risk," the 29-year-old fretted.

Macron went into the vote as the firm favorite but faced a fractured, anxious and tired electorate. The war in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic battered Macron's first term, as did months of violent protests against his economic policies.

In celebrating victory, Macron acknowledged a debt to voters who helped get him over the line, "not to support the ideas I hold, but to block those of the extreme right."

"I want to thank them and tell them that I am aware that their vote obliges me for the years to come," he said. "I am the custodian of their sense of duty, of their attachment to the Republic."

DeSantis tests limits of his combative style in Disney feud

By STEVE PEOPLES and BRENDAN FARRINGTON Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' deepening feud with Walt Disney World is testing the limits of his combative leadership style while sending an unmistakable message to his rivals that virtually nothing is off limits as he plots his political future.

The 43-year-old Republican has repeatedly demonstrated an acute willingness to fight over the course of his decadelong political career. He has turned against former aides and rejected the GOP Legislature's rewrite of congressional maps, forcing lawmakers to accept a version more to his liking and prompting voting rights groups to sue. He's also leaned into simmering tensions with Donald Trump, which is notable for someone seeking to lead a party where loyalty to the former president is a requirement.

But DeSantis' decision to punish Disney World, one of the world's most popular tourist destinations and one of Florida's biggest private employers, took his fighter mentality to a new level. In retribution for Disney's criticism of a new state law condemned by critics as "Don't Say Gay," DeSantis signed legislation on Friday stripping the theme park of a decades-old special agreement that allowed it to govern itself.

To critics, including some in his own party, such a raw exercise of power suggests DeSantis is operating with a sense of invincibility that could come back to haunt him. Others see an ambitious politician emboldened by strong support in his state and a mountain of campaign cash grabbing an opportunity to further stoke the nation's culture wars, turning himself into a hero among Republican voters in the process.

"When you listen to Ron DeSantis, it's righteous indignation: 'Here's why you're wrong and here's why I'm right,'" said Florida Rep. Blaise Ingoglia, a former state GOP chairman. "And it is that righteous indignation and that willingness to fight back that endears people to Ron DeSantis' message. As long as he keeps on showing that he's willing to fight, people are going to continue to keep flocking to him."

DeSantis is up for reelection in November. But in the wake of his scrap with Disney, he will introduce himself to a key group of presidential primary voters this week when he campaigns for Nevada Senate candidate Adam Laxalt. The appearance marks his first of the year in a state featured prominently on the presidential calendar, although DeSantis aides insist it is simply a trip to help out a longtime friend.

Disney drew DeSantis' wrath for opposing a new state law that bars instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade. The DeSantis-backed bill has been condemned by LGBTQ activists nationwide as homophobic, although the measure, like others dealing with transgender athletes and racial history in schools, has emerged as a core piece of the GOP's political strategy.

The Disney legislation, which does not take effect until June 2023, could cause massive economic fallout for the company, the surrounding communities and the millions who visit the Orlando amusement park every year.

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There are risks to DeSantis' embrace of the legislation, particularly if his antagonism towards Disney threatens the GOP's standing with independents and women, who could play crucial roles in the fall campaign. Jenna Ellis, a former Trump administration attorney, called the DeSantis-backed legislation "vengeful."

Democrats who are facing a tough election year are eager to highlight DeSantis' moves as a way to portray the GOP as a party of extremists. In an interview, Democratic National Committee Chairman Jaime Harrison described DeSantis' attack on Disney as a continuation of a "divisive agenda" geared toward booking interviews on conservative media at the expense of his constituents.

"The people of Florida deserve a governor whose first priority is them, not his own political ambition," Harrison said.

President Joe Biden said at a party fundraiser in Seattle that this "is not your father's Republican Party."

"I respect conservatives," Biden told donors on Thursday. "There's nothing conservative about deciding you're going to throw Disney out of its present posture because ... you think we should be not be able to say, 'gay.'"

In a statement, DeSantis' spokesperson Taryn Fenske, called the governor a "principled and driven leader who accomplishes exactly what he says he will do."

Indeed, DeSantis' friends and foes in the GOP agree that his crackdown on Disney is a major political victory among Republican base voters already enamored by his pushback against pandemic-related public health measures over the past two years. They suggest it also taps into a growing Republican embrace of anti-corporate populism and parental control of education that resonates with a wider swath of voters.

Republican pollsters have been privately testing DeSantis' political strength beyond Florida for several months, finding that the only Republican consistently with more support than DeSantis among GOP voters is Trump himself. At the same time, DeSantis is sitting on more than \$100 million in campaign funds.

"He's a very smart guy in what he's doing and how he's doing it," Republican strategist David Urban, a close Trump ally, said of DeSantis.

Those close to the Florida governor say there is one message above all to take away from the Disney fight: that DeSantis, one of the few high-profile Republicans who has not ruled out running against Trump in a 2024 presidential primary, is not afraid of anybody, anything or any fight.

Tensions between the two men have been building for months.

In a Washington Post interview last month, Trump took credit for DeSantis' rise. And last weekend, longtime Trump loyalist Roger Stone released a video clip in which Stone calls DeSantis an expletive while greeting Trump at Mar-a-Lago, his Florida club.

So far, Florida voters seem to be on DeSantis' side.

Nearly 6 in 10 Florida voters approved of DeSantis' job performance in a February poll conducted by the University of North Florida. The poll also asked registered Republicans about a hypothetical presidential primary between Trump and DeSantis. The result? Trump and DeSantis were about even.

Brian Ballard, a Florida lobbyist and a major Republican fundraiser, said DeSantis has "a combination of popularity and instincts" that is shaping the modern-day GOP.

"No other elected official, maybe in the country, has the Republican base support that Ron DeSantis has. So he's incredibly powerful, not only a powerful politician, but a powerful government leader," Ballard said. "The guy really has the reins of power in his hands."

France's youngest president wins again, troubles and all

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — In just five years as France's president, Emmanuel Macron has gone from a young newbie in politics to a key world player and weighty decision-maker in the European Union who has been deeply involved in efforts to end Russia's war in Ukraine.

And now he has won a second term, the first French president to do so in a generation.

The outspoken 44-year-old centrist, with his non-stop diplomatic activism, doesn't always get his way but has earned his place on the international scene. He is expected to pivot back to his work on Ukraine.

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At home, Macron managed to regain some popularity after the “yellow vest” protests against social injustice sent his approval to record lows in 2018. Opinion polls say many French praise his presidential stature and consider him up to the job to face major global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine conflict.

They also show he is often perceived as arrogant and out of touch with ordinary people.

Macron has notably been dubbed “president of the rich,” especially during the yellow vest crisis. Some critics also denounce a perceived authoritarian attitude, holding him responsible for violent incidents involving police during street protests.

The job of president is his first elected office, though he came with a strong pedigree.

Macron studied at France’s elite school Ecole Nationale d’Administration, and he was a senior civil servant, then a banker at Rothschild for a few years, then economic adviser to Socialist President Francois Hollande.

He emerged from that backstage role onto the political scene when he served as economy minister in Hollande’s government from 2014 to 2016.

A series of political surprises — including a corruption scandal involving a key rival — thrust Macron toward presidential victory in 2017. He easily beat far-right candidate Marine Le Pen in their runoff that year on promises to free up France’s economy to boost job creation and attract foreign investment. He beat her again Sunday, but the race was closer and Macron acknowledged that some voters had backed him only to keep Le Pen out of the presidency.

Macron, who describes himself as “a president who believes in Europe,” argues the EU is the way for France to be stronger in a global world.

A strong advocate of entrepreneurial spirit, he has eased rules to hire and fire workers and to made it harder to get unemployment benefits. Critics accuse him of destroying worker protections.

Then the pandemic hit, and he acknowledged the crucial role of the state in supporting the economy, spending massively and vowing to support employees and business via public aid “whatever it costs.”

In his biggest campaign rally near Paris earlier this month, Macron paid an emotional tribute to his wife, Brigitte, the person “I care the most about.” They could be seen on the stadium’s giant screens sending kisses to each other.

On Sunday evening, they arrived hand in hand on the plaza near the Eiffel Tower where Macron made his victory speech.

As first lady, Brigitte Macron, 24 years his senior, has been involved in charities and other programs promoting culture, education and health.

Their romance started when he was a student at the high school where she was teaching in northern France. At the time a married mother of three, she was supervising the drama club. Macron, a literature lover, was a member.

Macron moved to Paris for his last year of high school. She eventually moved to the French capital to join him and divorced. They married in 2007.

Opposition wins Slovenia vote, defeating right-wing populist

By ALI ZERDIN Associated Press

LJUBLJANA, Slovenia (AP) — An opposition liberal party convincingly won Sunday’s parliamentary election in Slovenia, according to early official results, in a major defeat for populist Prime Minister Janez Jansa, who was accused of pushing the small European Union country to the right while in office.

The Freedom Movement won nearly 34% of the votes, compared with around 24% for the governing conservative Slovenian Democratic Party, state election authorities said after counting over 97% of the ballots.

Trailing behind the top two contenders were the New Slovenia party with 7%, followed by the Social Democrats with more than 6% and the Left party with 4%.

The results mean that the Freedom Movement, a newcomer in the election, appears set to form the next government in a coalition with smaller leftist groups. The party leader addressed supporters via a video

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message from his home because he has COVID-19.

"Tonight people dance," Robert Golob told the cheering crowd at the party headquarters. "Tomorrow is a new day and serious work lies ahead."

Jansa, an ally of right-wing Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary, congratulated the "relative winner" of the election in a speech.

"The results are as they are," Jansa said, praising his government's work. "Many challenges lie ahead for the new government, whatever it may look like, but the foundations are solid."

A veteran politician, Jansa became prime minister a little over two years ago after the previous liberal premier resigned. An admirer of former U.S. President Donald Trump, Jansa had pushed the country toward right-wing populism since taking over at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reflecting strong interest in Sunday's election, turnout was higher than usual — around 67% of Slovenia's 1.7 million voters cast their ballot, compared with 52% in the previous election in 2018.

Golob, a U.S.-educated former business executive, came out as a frontrunner shortly after entering the political scene. The Freedom Movement party has advocated a green energy transition and sustainable development over Jansa's nation-centered narrative.

Liberals had described Sunday's election as a referendum on Slovenia's future. They argued that Jansa, if reelected, would push the traditionally moderate nation further away from "core" EU democratic values and toward other populist regimes.

Opinion polls ahead of the vote had predicted that the leading parties would be locked in a tight race.

Jansa's SDS won the most votes in an election four years ago, but couldn't initially find partners for a coalition government. He took over after lawmakers from centrist and left-leaning groups switched sides following the resignation in 2020 of liberal Prime Minister Marjan Sarec.

Jansa, in power, faced accusations of sliding toward authoritarian rule in the Orban style, drawing EU scrutiny amid reports that he pressured opponents and public media, and installed loyalists in key positions for control over state institutions.

The Freedom House democracy watchdog recently said that "while political rights and civil liberties are generally respected (in Slovenia), the current right-wing government has continued attempts to undermine the rule of law and democratic institutions, including the media and judiciary."

Emergency declaration for multiple wildfires in New Mexico

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham has signed emergency declarations as 20 wildfires continued to burn Sunday in nearly half of the state's drought-stricken 33 counties.

One wildfire in northern New Mexico that started April 6 merged with a newer fire Saturday to form the largest blaze in the state, leading to widespread evacuations in Mora and San Miguel counties. That fire was at 84 square miles (217 square kilometers) Sunday and 12% contained.

An uncontained wind-driven wildfire in northern New Mexico that began April 17 had charred 81 square miles (209 square kilometers) of ponderosa pine, oak brush and grass by Sunday morning north of Ocate, an unincorporated community in Mora County.

Meanwhile in Arizona, some residents forced to evacuate due to a wildfire near Flagstaff were allowed to return home Sunday morning.

In Nebraska, authorities said wind-driven wildfires sweeping through parts of the state killed a retired Cambridge fire chief and injured at least 11 firefighters.

Winds and temperatures in New Mexico diminished Saturday but remained strong enough to still fan fires. Dozens of evacuation orders remained in place.

Fire officials were expecting the northern wildfires to slow Sunday as cloud and smoke cover moves in, allowing the forests to retain more moisture. But they added that the interior portions of the fires could show moderate to extreme behavior, which could threaten structures in those areas.

More than 200 structures have been charred by the wildfires thus far and an additional 900 remain threatened, Lujan Grisham said.

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Fire management officials said an exact damage count was unclear because it's still too dangerous for crews to go in and look at all the homes that have been lost.

"We do not know the magnitude of the structure loss. We don't even know the areas where most homes made it through the fire, where homes haven't been damaged or anything like that," said operation sections chief Jayson Coil.

Some 1,000 firefighters were battling the wildfires across New Mexico, which already has secured about \$3 million in grants to help with the fires.

Lujan Grisham said she has asked the White House for more federal resources and she's calling for a ban of fireworks statewide.

"We need more federal bodies for firefighting, fire mitigation, public safety support on the ground in New Mexico," she said. "It's going to be a tough summer. So that's why we are banning fires. And that is why on Monday I will be asking every local government to be thinking about ways to ban the sales of fireworks."

Wildfire has become a year-round threat in the West given changing conditions that include earlier snowmelt and rain coming later in the fall, scientist have said. The problems have been exacerbated by decades of fire suppression and poor management along with a more than 20-year megadrought that studies link to human-caused climate change.

In Arizona, two large wildfires continued to burn Sunday 10 miles (16 kilometers) south of Prescott and 14 miles (22 kilometers) northeast of Flagstaff.

Coconino County authorities lifted the evacuation order Sunday morning for residents living in neighborhoods along Highway 89 after fire management officials determined the Flagstaff-area wildfire no longer posed a threat.

The fire near Flagstaff was at 33 square miles (85 square kilometers) as of Sunday with 3% containment. It forced the evacuation of 766 homes and burned down 30 homes and two dozen other structures since it began a week ago, according to county authorities.

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey declared the fire a state of emergency Thursday for Coconino County to free up recovery aid to affected communities.

The wildfire near Prescott began last Monday and was at 4.8 square miles (12.4 square kilometers) and 15% contained as of Sunday morning as helicopters and air tankers dropped water and retardant to slow the fire's growth.

The cause of the wildfires in New Mexico and Arizona remain under investigation.

Nebraska Emergency Management Agency officials said John P. Trumble, of Arapahoe, was overcome by smoke and fire after his vehicle left the road Friday night because of poor visibility from smoke and dust.

Trumble, 66, was working with firefighters as a spotter in Red Willow County in the southwestern corner of the state and his body was found early Saturday, authorities said.

Wildfires were still burning Saturday night in five Nebraska counties. The Nebraska National Guard deployed three helicopters and several support trucks to help battle the blazes.

Bird flu drives free-range hens indoors to protect poultry

By DAVID PITT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Is it OK for free-range chickens to not range freely?

That's a question free-range egg producers have been pondering lately as they try to be open about their product while also protecting chickens from a highly infectious bird flu that has resulted in the death of roughly 28 million poultry birds across the country.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends that chickens be moved indoors to protect against the disease, but while some are keeping their hens inside, not everyone agrees.

John Brunnquell, the CEO of Indiana-based Egg Innovations, which contracts with more than 50 farms in five states to produce free-range and pasture-raised eggs, said any of his chickens in states with bird flu cases will stay in "confinement mode" until the risk passes.

"We will keep them confined at least until early June," Brunnquell said. "If we go four weeks with no

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more commercial breakouts than we'll look to get the girls back out."

Bird flu cases have been identified in commercial chicken and turkey farms or in backyard flocks in 29 states, according to the USDA. Spread of the disease is largely blamed on the droppings of infected migrating wild birds.

The farms Brunnquell contracts with are in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio and Wisconsin, all of which have had at least once case of bird flu.

But some, like Mike Badger, the executive director of the American Pastured Poultry Producers Association, are taking a different approach.

Badger, whose Pennsylvania-based nonprofit group has about 1,000 members across the country, believes birds kept outdoors are at less risk of infection than chickens and turkeys raised amid thousands of others in large, enclosed barns.

"We put them outside and they get in touch with the environment so I think they have a better immune system to be able to fight off threats as they happen," Badger said.

Research has not clearly proven significant immune system differences in chickens housed outdoors versus indoors. And Badger speculates that lower density of animals, air movement and less sharing of equipment and staff in pasture-raised operations may contribute to a lack of virus infections.

He said the decision whether to bring hens inside to wait out the annual migration of wild waterfowl is a farm-to-farm decision "based on the comfort level with the risk acceptance."

Commercial outdoor flocks make up only a small percentage of U.S. egg production. About 6 million hens, or 2% of national flock, are free-range and about 4.2 million hens, or 1.3% of U.S. egg production, are from pasture-raised chickens.

Chickens are categorized as free-range or pasture-raised primarily by the amount of time they spend outdoors and space they are provided.

Free-range chickens typically must have at least 21.8 square feet (2 square meters) of roaming space outdoors and remain out until temperatures drop below around 30 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 1 Celsius), according to the American Humane Association, which certifies egg operations. Pasture-raised chickens typically must have 108 square feet (10 square meters) outdoors each and remain outside most of the year except during inclement weather.

The certifying organizations have protocols for high-risk situations and allow for temporary housing indoors — a time period not specifically defined — once a farm documents an outbreak near an outdoor flock. Certification agencies monitor farms to ensure they don't use bird flu as an excuse to keep birds inside too long.

Brunnquell said none of his farms had infections during the last big outbreak in 2015, and he hasn't had any cases this year.

Farmers in Europe have been dealing with the bird virus longer than those in the U.S., with cases reported as early as last December.

The United Kingdom has ordered free-range hens to be housed inside to protect them from the avian flu, and that has forced changes to how those eggs are labeled in stores. Free-range packaging is still used but must be marked with an added label of "barn eggs," according to a communications representative for the British Free Range Egg Producers Association. Each egg also is stamped with a No. 2 that denotes "barn" rather than No. 1 for "free-range."

For U.S. consumers, it means the free-range eggs they buy at a premium price could come from a chicken being temporarily kept inside. But producers say they think people who pay more for pasture-raised or free-range eggs have animal-welfare concerns and don't want the chickens to be endangered the virus.

Brunnquell also noted that the certification agencies monitor farms to ensure they don't use bird flu as an excuse to keep birds inside too long.

Eggs of all kinds have grown costlier recently thanks to bird flu concerns and a national spike in food costs.

Last week, prices for conventional eggs increased by 40 cents per dozen to \$1.47 while cage-free egg prices rose 3 cents to \$2.40 per dozen, according to the USDA. Organic eggs, which are from chickens

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required to have access to the outdoors, were selling for a national average of \$4.39 a dozen last week, up from \$3.65 the week before.

The price of eggs used by bakeries and other food products soared to a record high on April 8.

So-called breaker eggs, which will later be broken by processors and sold in containers weighing up to 50 pounds, peaked at \$2.51 per pound, said Karyn Rispoli, egg market reporter for Urner Barry, a New Jersey-based food commodity market research and analytics firm. Many of the egg layers that have died from bird flu were on farms contracted to provide breaker eggs used as food product ingredients, Rispoli said.

Bird flu likely will remain a problem for at least several more weeks as migrating waterfowl will remain on the move in the Mississippi Flyway until June. In the past, warmer weather and the end of migration brought an end to bird flu cases, allowing turkey and chicken farmers to begin the monthslong process of replenishing flocks and resuming production.

'Bad Guys' bests 'The Northman,' Nick Cage at the box office

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — On an unusually crowded weekend at movie theaters that featured a pricey Viking epic and Nicolas Cage playing himself, DreamWorks Animation's "The Bad Guys" bested the field, signaling a continued resurgence for family moviegoing after a downturn during the pandemic.

"The Bad Guys," released by Universal Pictures, debuted with \$24 million in U.S. and Canada ticket sales, according to studio estimates Sunday. That came despite steep competition for families from Paramount Pictures' "Sonic The Hedgehog 2," which stayed in second place with \$15.2 million its third week of release. It's grossed \$145.8 million domestically thus far.

The apparent health of family moviegoing is especially good news for Hollywood as it heads into its lucrative summer season when films like Universal's own "Minions: Rise of Gru" and Walt Disney Co.'s "Lightyear" — the first Pixar film opening in theaters in two years — hope to approach pre-pandemic levels.

"There's reason for being more than cautiously optimistic," said Jim Orr, head of distribution for Universal. "I think audiences this summer are going to be flooding into theaters."

While studios have been hesitant to program many films against each other during the pandemic, the weekend saw a rarity: three new wide releases, all of them well-received, none of them sequels or remakes.

"The Bad Guys," based on Aaron Blabey's children's graphic novel series about a gang of crooked animals with a Quentin Tarantino-for-kids tone, fared well with critics (85% fresh on Rotten Tomatoes) and audiences (an "A" CinemaScore). With little family competition until the release of "Lightyear" in mid-June, "The Bad Guys" should play well for weeks. Having first debuted overseas, the animated film has already grossed \$63.1 million internationally.

The weekend's other new releases — Robert Eggers' "The Northman" and the Cage-starring "The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent" — didn't do as well but still fared reasonably solidly in their first weekend.

"Every weekend is a building block in the recovery, but I don't even want to call it a recovery. I think movie theaters are recovered. We're pretty much there," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for ComScore. "Three newcomers were all well-received, and all of them found an audience."

The risks were greatest for Focus Features' "The Northman," which saw its budget balloon beyond \$70 million, a major increase in scale for Eggers, the director of previous indie historical horrors "The Witch" and "The Lighthouse." The film's path to profitability was unlikely even before launching in theaters, but it opened on the higher side of expectations with \$12 million in ticket sales. It added \$6.3 million internationally in 26 territories.

"The Northman" stars Alexander Skarsgard, Anya Taylor-Joy and Nicole Kidman star in a brutal and bloody revenge saga.

"First and foremost, we wanted to work with Robert Eggers," said Lisa Bunnell, head of distribution for Focus, which had handled international distribution for Eggers' first two films. "The key here is that we got to make a film that we wanted to make with a filmmaker we feel is part of the future of American cinema."

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He's got a very distinctive voice. He's making film with original IP, not just going in: 'Let's make a sequel!'"

Meanwhile, a new installment in a once all-powerful brand, the Harry Potter spinoff "Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore," fell off a cliff in its second weekend in theaters. The Warner Bros. release, the third "Fantastic Beasts" movie, dropped 67% in its second week with \$14 million. That's a bad sign for the future of the franchise, should it be continued by Warner Bros. (The studio has thus far held off on greenlighting a fourth film.) Still, "Secrets of Dumbledore," last week's top film, is doing better overseas. International sales of \$213.2 million account for the lion share of the film's \$280.3 million global haul.

Lionsgate's "The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent," a gonzo meta comedy starring Cage as an exaggerated version of himself, opened with an estimated \$7.2 million. The film, which first launched to warm reviews out of South by Southwest, will depend on good word of mouth to approach netting its \$30 million budget.

That's the kind of success that "Everything Everywhere All at Once" has had. The A24 release, a madcap metaverse fantasy starring Michelle Yeoh, has been one of the brightest signs for the specialty film business, another sector of the industry that struggled theatrically during the pandemic. In its fifth week, "Everything Everywhere All at Once" grossed \$5.4 million, a drop of just 12% from the week prior.

But the biggest breakthrough in theaters this April has been for family moviegoing. It's good timing for the film industry, which will this week convene in Las Vegas for CinemaCon, the annual convention and trade show for trumpeting theatrical exhibition. Expect plenty of proclamations that movie theaters are back.

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. "The Bad Guys," \$24 million.
2. "Sonic the Hedgehog 2," \$15.2 million.
3. "Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore," \$14 million.
4. "The Northman," \$12 million.
5. "The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent," \$7.2 million.
6. "Everything Everywhere All at Once," \$5.4 million.
7. "The Lost City," \$4.4 million.
8. "Father Stu," \$3.4 million.
9. "Morbius," \$2.3 million.
10. "Ambulance," \$1.8 million.

Supreme Court weighs policy for migrants to wait in Mexico

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

TIJUANA, Mexico (AP) — When a woman gashed her leg in mountains inhabited by snakes and scorpions, she told Joel Ubeda to take her 5-year-old daughter. Ubeda refused to let the mother die, despite the advice of their smuggler and another migrant in a group of seven, and helped carry her to safety by shining a mirror in sunlight to flag a U.S. Customs and Border Protection helicopter near San Diego.

The motorcycle mechanic, who used his house in Nicaragua as collateral for a \$6,500 smuggling fee, says the worst day of his life was yet to come.

Arrested after the encounter with U.S. agents, Ubeda learned two days later that he could not pursue asylum in the United States while living with a cousin in Miami. Instead, he would have to wait in the Mexican border city of Tijuana for hearings in U.S. immigration court under a Trump-era policy that will be argued Tuesday before the U.S. Supreme Court.

President Joe Biden halted the "Remain in Mexico" policy his first day in office. A judge forced him to reinstate it in December, but barely 3,000 migrants were enrolled by the end of March, making little impact during a period when authorities stopped migrants about 700,000 times at the border.

Ubeda, like many migrants at a Tijuana shelter, had never heard of the policy, officially called "Migrant Protection Protocols." It was widely known under President Donald Trump, who enrolled about 70,000 migrants after launching it in 2019 and making it a centerpiece of efforts to deter asylum-seekers.

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"It's a frightening experience," Úbeda said after a telephone call with his mother to consider whether to return to Nicaragua to reunite with her, his wife and his daughter. He was perplexed that a vast majority of Nicaraguans are released in the U.S. to pursue asylum, including the woman he saved and her daughter.

Nearly 2,200 asylum-seekers, or 73% of those enrolled through March, are from Nicaragua, with nearly all the rest from Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela. Yet even among Nicaraguans, the policy is small in scope. U.S. authorities stopped Nicaraguans more than 56,000 times from December to March.

Criticisms of the policy are the same under Biden and Trump: Migrants are terrified in dangerous Mexican border cities and it is extremely difficult to find lawyers from Mexico.

U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, in an October order to end "Remain in Mexico," reluctantly conceded that the policy caused a drop in weak asylum claims under Trump but said it did not justify the harms.

Emil Cardenas, 27, said he bloodied his foot and drank his urine after running out of water on a three-day hike in mountains near San Diego with a smuggler who took a \$10,000 installment toward his fee and stole his passport, phone and other identification.

Cardenas hoped to live near his brother, a Catholic priest in New Jersey, while seeking asylum but waits at the Tijuana shelter for his first hearing in San Diego on May 18. He is disheartened to see others at the shelter on their third or fourth hearing.

"One has to find a way to get across," said Cardenas, a Colombian who had attempted twice to enter the U.S. "I'm thinking about what to do."

While waiting for hearings, men at the shelter are attached to smartphones — reading, watching videos and occasionally calling friends and family. A large television facing rows of tables and plastic chairs helps defeat boredom.

Many have been robbed and assaulted in Mexico, making them too scared to leave the shelter. Some chat in small groups but most keep to themselves, lost in thought.

Carlos Humberto Castellano, who repaired cellphones in Colombia and wants to join family in New York, cried for two days after being returned to Tijuana to wait for a court date in San Diego. It cost him about \$6,500 to fly to Mexico and pay a smuggler to cross the border, leaving him in debt, he said.

"I can't leave (the shelter) because I don't know what could happen," said Castellano, 23, recalling that his smuggler took a photo of him. "Getting kidnapped is the fear."

The issue before the Supreme Court is whether the policy is discretionary and can be ended, as the Biden administration argues, or is the only way to comply with what Texas and Missouri say is a congressional command not to release the migrants in the United States.

Without adequate detention facilities, the states argue the administration's only option is to make migrants wait in Mexico for asylum hearings in the U.S.

The two sides also disagree about whether the way the administration ended the policy complies with a federal law that compels agencies to follow certain rules and explain their actions.

A ruling is expected shortly after the administration ends another key Trump-era border policy, lifting pandemic-related authority to expel migrants without a chance to seek asylum on May 23. The decision to end Title 42 authority, named for a 1944 public health law, is being legally challenged by 22 states and faces growing division within Biden's Democratic Party.

Due to costs, logistics and strained diplomatic relations, Title 42 has been difficult to apply to some nationalities, including Nicaraguans, which explains why the administration has favored them for "Remain in Mexico."

The administration made some changes at Mexico's behest, which may explain low enrollment. It pledged to try to resolve cases within six months and agreed to shoulder costs of shuttling migrants to and from the border in Mexico for hearings.

As under Trump, finding a lawyer is a tall order. U.S. authorities give migrants a list of low- or no-cost attorneys but phone lines are overwhelmed.

Judges warn migrants that immigration law is complicated and that they face longer odds without an

attorney. Migrants respond that calls to attorneys go unanswered and they can't afford typical fees.

"I've seen lots of people in your situation who have found attorneys, often for free," Judge Scott Simpson told a migrant this month in a San Diego courtroom before granting more time to hire one.

Victor Cervera, 40, gave up on low-cost attorneys after his calls went unanswered. The Peruvian's online search for those who take "Remain in Mexico" cases yielded one find — a Miami lawyer who charges \$350 for an initial phone consultation.

Nearly all migrants tell U.S. authorities they fear waiting in Mexico, entitling them to a phone interview with an asylum officer. About 15% are spared when the officer agrees their worries are well-founded, while others are excused for reasons deemed to make them vulnerable in Mexico, like gender or sexual orientation.

Those sent back wonder why they were chosen when so many others are released in the U.S to pursue their claims.

"It's a raffle," said Alvaro Galo, 34, a Nicaraguan man who cleans and cooks meals at the shelter to keep his mind busy.

Survivors blame Lebanon navy for deadly migrant boat sinking

By FADI TAWIL Associated Press

TRIPOLI, Lebanon (AP) — Survivors of a doomed migrant boat blamed the Lebanese navy on Sunday for sinking it, saying a naval vessel rammed the packed ship while trying to force it back to shore.

Meanwhile the death toll of Saturday night's disaster rose to seven, with state media reporting the recovery of a body of a man from Tripoli. The incident was the latest in a growing trend involving mostly Lebanese and Syrians trying to travel to Europe from Lebanon in search of better lives.

Survivor Mustafa al-Jundi told The Associated Press that the navy tried to stop the migrant boat but it kept sailing.

"They rammed into us and made us sink then moved away," said al-Jundi, whose two sisters are still missing. He said the Lebanese military returned about 90 minutes later and rescued them.

Angry residents attacked a main army checkpoint in Tripoli earlier in the day, throwing stones at troops who responded by firing into the air. Some shops closed as angry men blocked several streets in Tripoli, Lebanon's most impoverished city. There were no reports of injuries.

The Lebanese military announced that 47 people were rescued, while seven bodies including one of a young girl had been recovered. They said high waves had submerged the boat, which was carrying more people than it could hold.

Col. Haitham Dinnawi, commander of the Lebanese navy, told reporters the old boat had been packed with nearly 60 people, but could only carry six. No precautionary measures were taken onboard, he added, and no one was wearing life vests.

Dinnawi blamed the captain of the migrant boat for maneuvering to avoid being forced to return back to shore, and blamed him for the collision. He showed photographs of the damage on the side and back of one navy boat, adding that the migrant boat sank within seconds after the accident.

"It was a crime to take people on such a boat," Dinnawi said, adding that it was manufactured in 1974 and carrying 15 times its capacity. He said search operations are still ongoing for the missing.

Prime Minister Najib Mikati declared a day of national mourning on Monday.

"It is appalling to see deprivation still drives people to take these dangerous trips across the seas," tweeted Lebanon's U.N. humanitarian coordinator, Najat Rochdi.

Several of the rescued were treated on the spot while others were taken to nearby hospitals. One person was detained on suspicion of being a smuggler involved in organizing the journey, the military said.

Search operations began Saturday night after the boat, apparently heading to Europe, sank shortly after leaving the coastal Lebanese town of Qalamoun.

For many years Lebanon was a country that took in refugees, but since the country's economic meltdown began in October 2019, hundreds of people have left on boats hoping for a better life in Europe.

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Migrants from Lebanon pay thousands of dollars to smugglers to take them to Europe. Hundreds have made it to European countries, while dozens of others have been stopped and forced to return home by the Lebanese navy. Several people have lost their lives on the way to Europe over the past three years.

Lebanon, a small Mediterranean nation of 6 million people, including 1 million Syrian refugees, is in the grip of the worst economic crisis in the country's modern history. The economic meltdown has put more three-quarters of the country's population into poverty.

The World Bank describes the crisis as among the worst in the world since the 1850s. Tens of thousands of people have lost their jobs and the Lebanese pound has lost more than 90% of its value.

Warren calls McCarthy a 'liar' and 'traitor' over Jan 6 tape

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren is slamming Rep. Kevin McCarthy as a "liar and a traitor" over recordings that show the House Republican leader — despite his denials — placing responsibility on then-President Donald Trump for the Capitol riot and suggesting Trump should resign.

It's unusually strong language to use against the House Republican leader, who is in line to become speaker — second in presidential succession — if Republicans win control of the House in the November elections.

But Warren's statement reflects a swell of Democratic criticism against McCarthy. They point to his recorded comments in January 2021 as proof that GOP lawmakers at the highest levels privately acknowledge Trump's role in the insurrection at the Capitol yet continue to defend him in public.

McCarthy, R-Calif., denied a New York Times report last week that detailed phone conversations with House Republican leadership shortly after the riot that he thought Trump should resign. He called it "totally false." But in an audio first posted Thursday by the newspaper and aired on Rachel Maddow's MSNBC show, McCarthy is heard discussing the possibility of urging Trump to leave office amid the Democratic push to impeach him.

Asked Sunday about her reaction, Warren, D-Mass., called the circumstances "outrageous."

"Kevin McCarthy is a liar and a traitor," she told CNN's "State of the Union."

"That is really the illness that pervades the Republican leadership right now, that they say one thing to the American public and something else in private," Warren said. "They understand that it is wrong what happened, an attempt to overthrow our government and that the Republicans instead want to continue to try to figure out how to make 2020 election different instead of spending their energy on how it is that we go forward in order to build an economy, in order to make this country work better for the people who sent us to Washington."

"Shame on Kevin McCarthy," she said.

There was no immediate response Sunday from McCarthy's office to a request for comment.

The crowd that attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, marched there from a rally near the White House where Trump had implored them to fight to overturn Democrat Joe Biden's victory in the presidential election, saying falsely the election was stolen. Trump has denied responsibility for the violence.

McCarthy has been a person of interest for the House committee investigating the storming of the Capitol. The committee requested an interview with McCarthy in mid-January, seeking information on his communications with Trump and White House staff in the week after the violence, including a conversation with Trump that was reportedly heated.

McCarthy issued a statement at the time saying he would refuse to cooperate because he saw the investigation as not legitimate and accused the panel of "abuse of power."

Trump and McCarthy had a strained relationship after the Capitol attack, but made amends after the GOP leader flew to the former president's resort in Florida to smooth things over.

Their alliance renewed, McCarthy is now relying on Trump to help Republicans win the House majority in this November's midterm elections.

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Native American artist, chief, Oklahoma lawmaker Haney dies

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Enoch Kelly Haney, a Native American artist, Seminole Nation chief and Oklahoma state lawmaker, has died at age 81.

Haney's death was announced Saturday by Brian Palmer, assistant chief of the Seminole Nation. A cause of death was not immediately released.

"With a heavy heart, the Seminole Nation woke to the news of the passing of Chief Kelly Haney. An inspiration to many, an accomplished artist, his work with the State and later as Chief highlighted his career, but his greatest achievement is that of family. Keep his family in prayer and may they find comfort in knowing the Seminole Nation and Indian Country mourns his loss," Palmer said in a statement on Facebook.

In a tweet on Saturday, Oklahoma City Mayor David Holt said Haney's "contributions to our state are mighty."

Haney, who had most recently lived in Norman, grew up in Seminole. His grandfather was the chief of the Seminole Tribe in the 1940s.

A Democrat, Haney was a Methodist minister prior to entering politics in 1978 as co-chair of then-Lt. Gov. George Nigh's first of four successful campaigns for governor.

Haney served stints in the state House and Senate from 1980-2002 and was chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee from 1994-2002.

He ran unsuccessfully for the Democratic nomination for governor in 2002 and was elected principal chief of the Seminole Nation in 2005. His 17-foot sculpture "The Guardian," a towering statue of a Native American, was placed atop the state Capitol dome in 2002.

In a 2014 interview with *The Oklahoman*, Haney said his art was grounded in his heritage.

"My grandfather and father were great storytellers, so I have that ability to tell stories, about native people and their history and so forth. So I guess in one sense I'm still the keeper of the traditions," Haney said.

4 Polish miners declared dead; search goes on for 6 missing

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — The death toll from accidents in recent days at two coal mines in southern Poland has increased to nine after four miners were brought to the surface and pronounced dead, authorities said Sunday.

The miners were among 10 missing since an underground tremor and methane gas discharge at the Borynia-Zofiowka mine early Saturday. Six miners there remain missing, but there is no contact with them, and rescuers continue their search.

At the nearby Pniowek mine, five workers died and seven are missing after repeated methane blasts that started Wednesday. The search for the missing there was suspended Friday after new explosions late Thursday injured 10 rescue workers, some seriously.

Both mines are operated by the Jastrzebska Spolka Weglowa, or JSW, in the Jastrzebie-Zdroj region, close to the Czech border.

The majority of Poland's energy comes from coal, a proportion that is drawing criticism from the European Union and environmental groups who are concerned about CO2 emissions and meeting climate change goals. Most Polish coal mines are in the southern Silesia region. Many are characterized by the high presence of methane in the rock.

Poland has been scaling down the use of coal and recently Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki ordered coal imports from Russia and its ally Belarus discontinued — in response to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, but also as part of Poland's years-long drive to reduce its dependence on Russian energy sources.

EXPLAINER: Concern mounts as Melissa Lucio's execution nears

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Nearly half of the jurors who sentenced a Texas woman to die for the 2007 death of one of her 14 children have called for her upcoming execution to be halted and for her to get a new trial.

Melissa Lucio, 52, is set to be executed Wednesday for the death of her 2-year-old daughter Mariah in

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Harlingen, a city of about 75,000 in Texas' southern tip.

Her lawyers say new evidence shows that Mariah's injuries, including a blow to the head, were caused by a fall down a steep staircase, and many lawmakers and celebrities such as Kim Kardashian, an advocate for criminal justice reform, and Amanda Knox — an American who was convicted of murdering a British student in Italy and whose conviction was overturned — have rallied to Lucio's cause. Prosecutors, though, maintain that the girl was the victim of child abuse.

Lucio's lawyers have filed various legal appeals seeking to stop her execution. She also has a clemency application before the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, which is set to consider her case on Monday. Republican Gov. Greg Abbott could also play a role in deciding Lucio's fate. If put to death, Lucio would be the first Latina ever executed by Texas and the first woman the state has put to death since 2014.

Here's what to know as Lucio's execution approaches:

WHAT ISSUES ARE BEING DEBATED IN THE CASE?

Lucio's attorneys say her capital murder conviction was based on an unreliable and coerced confession that was the result of relentless questioning and her long history of sexual, physical and emotional abuse. They say Lucio wasn't allowed to present evidence questioning the validity of her confession.

Her lawyers also contend that unscientific and false evidence misled jurors into believing Mariah's injuries only could have been caused by physical abuse and not by medical complications from a severe fall.

"I knew that what I was accused of doing was not true. My children have always been my world and although my choices in life were not good I would have never hurt any of my children in such a way," Lucio wrote in a letter to Texas lawmakers.

Cameron County District Attorney Luis Saenz, whose office prosecuted the case, has said he disagrees with Lucio's lawyers' claims that new evidence would exonerate her. Prosecutors say Lucio had a history of drug abuse and at times had lost custody of some of her 14 children.

During a sometimes contentious Texas House committee hearing on Lucio's case this month, Saenz initially pushed back on requests to use his power to stop the execution, before later saying he would intervene if the courts didn't act.

"I don't disagree with all the scrutiny this case is getting. I welcome that," Saenz said.

Armando Villalobos was the county's district attorney when Lucio was convicted in 2008, and Lucio's lawyers allege that he pushed for a conviction to help his reelection bid. In 2014, Villalobos was sentenced to 13 years in federal prison for a bribery scheme related to offering favorable prosecutorial decisions.

WHO IS CALLING FOR LUCIO'S EXECUTION TO BE STOPPED?

More than half the members of the Texas House and Senate have asked that her execution be halted. A bipartisan group of Texas lawmakers traveled this month to Gatesville, where the state houses female death row inmates, and prayed with Lucio.

Five of the 12 jurors who sentenced Lucio and one alternate juror have questioned their decision and asked she get a new trial. And Lucio's cause also has the backing of faith leaders and was featured on HBO's "Last Week Tonight with John Oliver."

Lucio's family and supporters have been traveling throughout Texas and holding rallies and screenings of a 2020 documentary about her case, "The State of Texas vs. Melissa."

WHERE DO EFFORTS TO HALT HER EXECUTION STAND?

Appeals seeking to stop Lucio's execution are pending in state and federal courts.

The Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles is considering a request to either commute her death sentence to life imprisonment or grant her a 120-day execution reprieve.

Any decision by the parole board to commute her sentence or grant the reprieve would need Abbott's approval. The governor, who has granted clemency to only one death row inmate since taking office in 2015, could also unilaterally issue a 30-day execution stay. Abbott commuted a death sentence to life without parole for Thomas "Bart" Whitaker, who was convicted of fatally shooting his mother and brother. Whitaker's father was also shot but survived and led the effort to spare his son's life.

HOW FREQUENTLY ARE WOMEN EXECUTED?

It's rare in the U.S. for a woman to be executed, according to the Washington-based Death Penalty Information Center, a nonprofit that opposes capital punishment. Women have accounted for only 3.6%

of the more than 16,000 confirmed executions in the U.S. dating back to the colonial period in the 1600s, according to the group's data.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976, there have been 17 women executed throughout the nation, according to the data. Texas has put more women to death — six — than any other state. Oklahoma is next, with three, and Florida has executed two.

The federal government has executed one woman since 1976. Lisa Montgomery, of Kansas, received a lethal injection in January 2021 after the Trump administration resumed executions in the federal system following a 17-year hiatus. The Justice Department has halted executions again under the Biden administration.

Six soldiers die in attacks targeting Mali military bases

By BABA AHMED Associated Press

BAMAKO, Mali (AP) — A series of attacks targeted three military bases in Mali on Sunday, killing at least six soldiers and injuring nearly a dozen more, the West African nation's army said.

In a tweet, the Malian army said simultaneous attacks were underway in Sevare, Niono and Bapho, three central towns in the sprawling desert nation.

While no one has claimed responsibility for the attack, violence linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State has ravaged the nation for eight years. The military junta that seized power in 2020 has been struggling to stem the violence.

Mali's army has been attacked a number of times this year but this is the first time they are being hit in three different cities.

A military official not authorized to speak to the media said the attacks involved car bombs and that the camp in Bapho was particularly hard hit, with shrapnel from an explosion damaging a helicopter.

The violence occurred in the center of the country where the Malian military together with the Wagner Group, a Russian mercenary force, has been very active and where the junta has been claiming to have been making significant progress, said Michael Shurkin, a former political analyst at the CIA who works with the Dakar-based 14 North Strategies.

"The attacks appear to belie the government's claims. The attacks appear well-coordinated. This is not the work of an adversary whose back is up against a wall," he said.

Biden marks 'Armenian genocide,' aims to stop 'atrocities'

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President Joe Biden on Sunday commemorated the 107th anniversary of the start of the "Armenian genocide," issuing a statement in memory of the 1.5 million Armenians "who were deported, massacred or marched to their deaths in a campaign of extermination" by Ottoman Empire forces. Turkey said Biden's declaration was "incompatible with historical facts and international law."

Biden's statement did not reference the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which Biden has called a genocide. Yet Biden used the anniversary to lay down a set of principles for foreign policy as the United States and its allies arm Ukrainians and impose sanctions on Russia.

"We renew our pledge to remain vigilant against the corrosive influence of hate in all its forms," the president said. "We recommit ourselves to speaking out and stopping atrocities that leave lasting scars on the world."

In 1915, Ottoman officials arrested Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Constantinople, now Istanbul. The Biden statement notes that this event on April 24 marked the beginning of the genocide.

Fulfilling a campaign promise, Biden used the term "genocide" for the first time during last year's anniversary. Past White Houses had avoided that word for decades out of a concern that Turkey — a NATO member — could be offended.

Turkey's government was angered by Biden's declaration on Sunday, just as it was last year.

"Statements that are incompatible with historical facts and international law regarding the events of 1915 are not valid," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Turkey acknowledges that many died in that era, but it says that the death toll is inflated, that the deaths resulted from civil unrest and that Muslim Turks were also killed.

Separately, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Twitter accused some Western leaders of "hypocrisy" for arguing in relation to Russia's actions in Ukraine that the term "genocide" can only be determined by court decisions.

While Biden has said it would be up to lawyers to decide if Russia's conduct met the international standard of genocide, Biden has not been shy about condemning Russian President Vladimir Putin for pursuing genocide.

"It sure seems that way to me," Biden said earlier this month.

Far from home, Ukrainian refugees pray at Easter for peace

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Far from home and unsure when or even if they will ever get back, Ukrainians displaced by war gathered at churches across Eastern Europe on Sunday to celebrate the Orthodox Easter holiday in safety and to pray for an end to the fighting with Russia.

Hundreds of believers crowded into the Church of Saint Michael in Hungary's capital of Budapest to take part in a liturgy delivered by a Ukrainian priest, a sermon that focused on the cohesion of the Ukrainian people and prayer for those left behind.

"As Ukraine celebrates this holiday, for us Ukrainian Christians, it is also a celebration that gives us hope that with the resurrection will also come victory in Ukraine, and that good will prevail over evil," said priest Damien Habory after the one-hour service.

The Easter holiday, observed by Orthodox followers according to the Julian calendar, comes as nearly 5.2 million Ukrainians have been forced to flee the violence unleashed on their country by Russia's invasion.

Most have entered countries on Ukraine's western border: nearly 2.9 million Ukrainians have fled to Poland, while 775,000 others have fled to Romania and 490,000 have crossed into Hungary since the war began two months ago.

In Bucharest, the Romanian capital, dozens of Ukrainian refugees as well as Romanian faithful came to the Brancusi Parish Church for the Easter liturgy, and to hear a choir sing religious songs in Ukrainian. A priest chanted "Christ is Risen!" to the worshippers, to which they responded, "Indeed he is risen!"

Following the service in Budapest, worshippers lined the street in front of the church with Easter baskets packed with offerings of hand-dyed eggs, candles and pasca — a traditional Easter sweet bread. Habory greeted the worshippers and blessing their Easter baskets with holy water flicked from a liturgical brush used for blessings.

Yaroslava Horthyanyi, chairwoman of the Hungarian Ukrainian Cultural Association, said that bringing Ukrainians together for the Easter holiday was an opportunity for them to pray for themselves and for those they left behind.

"We are all happy for the resurrection of Christ, but we don't have happiness in our hearts because at the same moment Ukrainian children, Ukrainian soldiers and Ukrainian people are dying," Horthyanyi said. "People who believe in God believe that this is a way for God to test them ... They believe that their prayers will help their husbands and parents that they left at home."

Kate Gladka, 31, who came to Hungary from Ukraine's capital of Kyiv a month ago, said she had struggled to hold back her tears during the Easter service, which for her is usually a time for celebration.

"We have new meaning this year because we may be the most alive nation in the world now, and we understand what it means to arise all the time," she said.

Ukraine marks Orthodox Easter with prayers for those trapped

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By CARA ANNA and INNA VARENYTSIA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The sun came out as Ukrainians marked Orthodox Easter in the capital, Kyiv, on Sunday with prayers for those fighting on the front lines and others trapped beyond them in places like Mariupol.

St. Volodymyr's Cathedral in Kyiv was ringed by hundreds of worshippers with baskets to be blessed. Inside, a woman clutched the arm of a soldier, turning briefly to kiss his elbow. Other soldiers prayed, holding handfuls of candles, then crossed themselves. An older woman slowly made her way through the crowd and stands of flickering candles. One young woman held daffodils.

Outside the cathedral, a soldier who gave only his first name, Mykhailo, used his helmet as an Easter basket. He said he didn't have another.

"I hope I'll only have to use the helmet for this," he said.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at a service elsewhere in Kyiv urged Ukrainians not to let anger at the war overwhelm them.

"All of us believe our sunrise will come soon," he said.

The spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians called for the opening of humanitarian corridors in Ukraine, saying a "human tragedy" was unfolding in the country.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I spoke Saturday night in Istanbul during midnight Mass. He is considered first among equals among Eastern Orthodox patriarchs, which gives him prominence but not the power of a Catholic pope.

With the Orthodox church split by the tensions between Russia and Ukraine, some worshippers hoped the holy day could inspire gestures of peacemaking. "The church can help," said one man who gave only his first name, Serhii, as he came to a church in Kyiv under the Moscow Patriarchate.

He and others brought baskets to be blessed by priests for Easter, with flicks of a brush sprinkling holy water over offerings of home-dyed eggs, lighted candles and even bottles of Jack Daniel's.

Residents of rural villages battered by the war approached the holiday with some defiance.

"We'll celebrate Easter no matter what, no matter much horror," said Kateryna Lazarenko, 68, in the northern village of Ivanivka outside Chernihiv, where ruined Russian tanks still littered the roads.

"How do I feel? Very nervous, everyone is nervous," said another resident, Olena Koptyl, as she prepared her Easter bread. "The Easter holiday doesn't bring any joy. I'm crying a lot. We cannot forget how we lived." She and 12 others spent a month sheltering from Russian soldiers in the basement of her home before the soldiers withdrew.

In eastern Ukraine, the scene of Russia's latest offensive, worshippers expressed unease along with hope for negotiations.

"God will make them understand and they will reach an agreement, because this should be stopped," said Aleksandra Papravkina in Bakhmut. "Otherwise, Ukraine will not exist."

Ukraine, meanwhile, prepared for the first high-level U.S. trip to Kyiv since before the war began on Feb. 24 after Zelenskyy announced he would meet in Kyiv on Sunday with Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

Zelenskyy in a news conference Saturday night gave few details but said he expected results — "not just presents or some kind of cakes, we are expecting specific things and specific weapons."

Pope Francis renewed his call for an Easter truce. Without naming the aggressors, Francis urged them to "stop the attack to help the suffering of the exhausted people."

Shanghai erects metal barriers in fight against COVID-19

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Volunteers and government workers in Shanghai erected metal barriers in multiple districts to block off small streets and entrances to apartment complexes, as China hardens its strict "zero-COVID" approach in its largest city despite growing complaints from residents.

In the city's financial district, Pudong, the barriers — thin metal sheets or mesh fences — were put up in

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several neighborhoods under a local government directive, according to Caixin, a Chinese business media outlet. Buildings where cases have been found sealed up their main entrances, with a small opening for pandemic prevention workers to pass through.

In Beijing, authorities announced a mass testing starting Monday of Chaoyang district, home to more than 3 million people in the Chinese capital.

The announcement set off panic buying Sunday evening, with vegetables, eggs, soy sauce and other items wiped off grocery shelves.

A fresh outbreak has infected at least 41 people, including 26 in Chaoyang district, state broadcaster CGTN reported.

China reported 21,796 new community transmitted COVID-19 infections on Sunday, with the vast majority being asymptomatic cases in Shanghai. Across the country, many cities and provinces have enforced some version of a lockdown in an attempt to slow the spread of the virus.

The latest outbreak, driven by the highly contagious omicron variant, has spread nationwide, but has been particularly large in Shanghai. The city, a financial hub with 25 million residents, has counted hundreds of thousands of cases but fewer than 100 deaths since the outbreak began nearly two months ago.

An Associated Press examination of the death toll found that despite a history of narrow criteria for linking deaths to particular diseases, especially COVID-19, authorities have changed how they count positive cases, leading to wiggle room in how they arrive at a final death count. The result is almost certainly an undercount of the true death toll.

On social media, people posted videos of the new barriers being put up Saturday, with some expressing anger over the measures. The barriers are meant to leave main roads unblocked, Caixin reported.

In one video, verified by the AP, residents leaving a building in Shanghai's Xuhui district broke down the mesh fence barricade at their front entrance and went looking for the security guard they believed to be responsible for putting it up.

Shanghai is using a tiered system in which neighborhoods are divided into three categories based on the risk of transmission. Those in the first category face the strictest COVID-19 controls and were the main target of the new heightened measures. In the third category, some buildings allow people to leave their homes and visit public areas.

In Shanghai, authorities reported 39 new COVID-19 deaths, raising the official death toll to 4,725 as of the end of Saturday, the National Health Commission said Sunday.

The city's lockdown has drawn global attention for its strict approach and sometimes dangerous consequences. Many residents in the city have had difficulties getting groceries, resorting to bartering and bulk buying. Others have been unable get adequate medical attention in time, owing to the strict controls on movement.

On Friday, Chinese internet users shared a six-minute video called "Voices of April" that documents some of the most challenging public moments the city has experienced in the nearly month-long lockdown. One part features audio of residents in one Shanghai community who protested on April 8, screaming: "Send us food! Send us food! Send us food!" in unison.

The video blanketed WeChat timelines before it was abruptly removed by censors Saturday.

Chinese authorities have continued to say that the "zero-COVID" strategy is the best way forward given low vaccination rates in people over age 60, and that omicron would result in many deaths and severe illnesses if the country ended its strict approach.

Retrial to begin in Texas for man charged with killing 18

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — The retrial of a man charged with killing 18 older women in the Dallas area over a two-year span is set to begin Monday, after the first jury to hear a case against him deadlocked.

Billy Chemirmir, 49, faces life in prison without parole if he's convicted of capital murder in the smothering of 81-year-old Lu Thi Harris. Prosecutors have said he followed the widow home from Walmart, killed

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her, and stole her jewelry and cash.

Chemirmir faces capital murder charges in all 18 of the women's deaths — 13 in Dallas County and five in nearby Collin County. However, he's currently only scheduled to stand trial in the death of Harris. Dallas County District Attorney John Creuzot, who isn't seeking the death penalty for Harris' killing, has said he plans to try Chemirmir for at least one more death, though he hasn't said whose.

Chemirmir has maintained that he's innocent.

Loren Adair Smith, whose 91-year-old mother, Phyllis Payne, is among those Chemirmir is charged with killing, said she was shocked by the mistrial in November and plans to attend the retrial.

"We want justice and we want closure, and we want him to not be able to hurt anyone again," Smith said.

Chemirmir was arrested in March 2018 after 91-year-old Mary Annis Bartel said a man forced his way into her apartment at an independent living community for older people and held a pillow over her face. Bartel, who survived the attack, later discovered she was missing jewelry.

According to police, when officers tracked Chemirmir to his nearby apartment following that attack, he was holding jewelry and cash. Documents in a large red jewelry box that police say he had just thrown away led them to a home, where Harris was dead in her bedroom, lipstick smeared on her pillow.

The number of people Chemirmir was accused of killing grew after his arrest, with most of the families of his alleged victims only learning months or years after their loved one's death that authorities believed they had been killed.

Most of the people Chemirmir is accused of killing were found dead in their apartments at independent living communities for older people, where he allegedly forced his way in or posed as a handyman. He's also accused of killing women in private homes, including the widow of a man he had cared for in his job as an at-home caregiver.

Though Chemirmir was only tried in November for Harris' death, jurors were also told about the attack on Bartel and the killing of 87-year-old Mary Brooks, who was found dead in her home about six weeks before Chemirmir's arrest.

Chemirmir told police in a video-recorded interview that was played at his trial that he made money by buying and selling jewelry and had also worked as an at-home caregiver and as a security guard.

Chemirmir's attorneys rested their case without calling any witnesses or presenting evidence. They dismissed the evidence against their client as "quantity over quality" and asserted that prosecutors hadn't proved Chemirmir's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

Prosecutor Glen Fitzmartin disputed that assertion. He said he proved that Chemirmir and Harris were at a Walmart at the same time, that two-and-a-half hours later he was in possession of her property and that she had been smothered.

Creuzot told The Dallas Morning News: "Circumstantial evidence can sometimes be stronger than eye-witness testimony. So, in a case like this, it's very important that the jury and every individual juror understands that."

Toby Shook, a former Dallas County prosecutor who now works as a defense attorney, said he expects that during the retrial, prosecutors might "change up their preparation or presentation of some of their witnesses in order to make their case clearer to the jury."

"It was surprising that a hung jury resulted in that the state had the advantage of putting on several offenses for the jury to consider and that's a powerful weapon the state has in a case like this," said Shook, who isn't involved in the case.

Smith said her family assumed that her mother's death six years ago in her apartment in an independent living center was from natural causes, though it came as a shock because she was still so active. She said that while packing up her mother's things, they discovered missing jewelry and filed a police report but assumed the items had been taken by someone after her death.

Smith said a police detective called two years later to say investigators believed her mother had been killed. She said that after so many years, a conviction would bring closure and "a great feeling that justice has prevailed."

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Russian officer: Missile to carry several hypersonic weapons

MOSCOW (AP) — A new Russian intercontinental ballistic missile is capable of carrying several hypersonic weapons, a senior Russian military officer said Sunday.

Col. Gen. Sergei Karakayev, the commander of the Russian military's Strategic Missile Forces, said in televised remarks that the new Sarmat ICBM is designed to carry several Avangard hypersonic glide vehicles.

Russia's Defense Ministry said the Sarmat was test-fired for the first time Wednesday from the Plesetsk launch facility in northern Russia and its practice warheads have successfully reached mock targets on the Kura firing range on the far eastern Kamchatka Peninsula.

The test launch came amid soaring tensions between Moscow and the West over the Russian military action in Ukraine and underlines the Kremlin's emphasis on the country's nuclear forces.

Russian President Vladimir Putin hailed the Sarmat launch as a major achievement, claiming that the new missile has no foreign equivalent and is capable of penetrating any prospective missile defense.

"This really unique weapon will strengthen the combat potential of our armed forces, reliably ensure Russia's security from external threats and make those, who in the heat of frantic aggressive rhetoric try to threaten our country, think twice," Putin said Wednesday.

The Sarmat is a heavy missile that has been under development for several years to replace the Soviet-made Voyevoda, which was code-named Satan by the West and forms the core of Russia's nuclear deterrent.

The military has said that the Avangard is capable of flying 27 times faster than the speed of sound and making sharp maneuvers on its way to target to dodge the enemy's missile shield.

In anticipation of the deployment of the Sarmat, the new hypersonic vehicle has been fitted to the existing Soviet-built ICBMs, and the first unit armed with the Avangard entered duty in December 2019.

The director and the designer-in-chief of the Makeyev missile-maker that developed the Sarmat, Vladimir Degtyar, said in televised remarks that its range allows it to fly along any trajectory across north or south poles to hit any target around the world.

Korean American female pastors push back against patriarchy

DEEPA BHARATH Associated Press

When the Rev. Kyunglim Shin Lee was ordained in 1988, it angered her in-laws for contravening long-held Korean cultural values subordinating women's roles in society. Even her husband, a pastor, told her he understood intellectually "but his heart couldn't accept it."

Those reactions broke Lee's heart — and steeled her resolve. Today she is vice president for international relations at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.; has traveled to 60 countries as the seminary's ambassador; and once served as interim lead pastor at a Korean American church for 11 months. Along the journey, she visualized herself as a speeding train.

"People would either have to get in for the ride, or step out of the way," she said. "Once I became convinced that God can use me, no one or nothing could stop me."

Lee's success story is rare in the realm of Korean American churches, where women are seldom seen in the pulpits. In a time when women make up about 20% of Protestant pastors in the United States, Korean American female pastors still struggle to gain acceptance in their home churches and often end up assuming leadership roles elsewhere.

Women like Lee who have broken barriers in these spaces remain pessimistic about the pace of change and are concerned by the resilience of patriarchal attitudes even among second- and third-generation Korean Americans. More representation in church elder boards and in the pulpit is needed to promote equality and provide role models for younger women considering ministry, they say, but bringing about such cultural shift has proved a formidable challenge.

Gender equality in Korean American churches lags well behind congregations in South Korea, according to the Rev. Young Lee Hertig, executive director of Innovative Space for Asian American Christianity, which supports Asian American women in ministry. There are more female lead pastors in South Korea, she said, "because culture changes faster when it is mainstream."

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"Korean American churches are the most patriarchal among Asian American churches. ... Things should have changed by now, but they haven't," Hertig said.

Male dominance in traditional Korean society has roots in Confucianism from centuries ago, when women were subject to the authority of their husbands and fathers and in many ways barred from participating in public life. Many immigrants from Korea still hold such notions, and churches especially have been slow to embrace equality, said Grace Ji-Sun Kim, a theology professor at the Earlham School of Religion in Indiana.

"It's hard for Korean women to be ministers because they are expected to be obedient to men," she said. "It's difficult for (Korean) men to listen to a woman who is preaching because this idea of superiority is embedded in their psyche."

The Rev. Janette Ok, an associate professor specializing in the New Testament at Fuller Seminary and pastor at Ekko Church, a nondenominational congregation in Fullerton, California, agreed that "representation matters."

She was fortunate to have a role model while growing up in the 1980s in Detroit, where she saw a Korean woman leading her church's English-language service every Sunday — but at the time didn't grasp how exceptional that was.

"I watched her give sacraments, give the benediction. I still have this image of her in a pastoral robe and stole," Ok said. "Without her example, I would've never imagined I could become a pastor."

That woman was the Rev. Mary Paik. Now retired and living in Hawaii, Paik said she was only hired as a last resort because the male applicants' English wasn't good enough. She received a "lot of strange looks" as an unmarried, 30-year-old female pastor.

Male church elders were patronizing and treated her like a daughter, while some of the younger men flirted with her or refused to acknowledge her. Many of the older women seemed to find her presence inconceivable.

"But some younger women were standing up a little straighter because I was there," Paik said. "They felt good about it."

She has seen some progress. When the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) started a group in 1991 for female Korean American clergy in the denomination, there were just 18. Today there are 150.

"When I started this, I was alone," Paik said. "Now there are other women who talk to each other, share their struggles with one another. As long as we do it together, it's bearable. And we do it not because it's easy or hard, but because it's a calling."

But Ok said that while there are more of them in ministry now, most end up serving in mainline or multiethnic congregations rather than Korean American churches.

"There is this sense that I love my home church and I don't want to abandon my home community," she said. "But they don't affirm me as a leader. It's heartbreaking."

Ok's own church is largely Asian American, but not specifically Korean. Several years ago she served as interim lead pastor for nine months.

"I was afraid people would leave because I'm a woman, but they didn't," she said. "That was very encouraging. Change doesn't happen overnight. You have to create pathways and pipelines."

Soo Ji Alvarez is in a similar situation. After growing up in a conservative Korean immigrant church in Vancouver, British Columbia, that had no female pastors, today she is lead pastor of The Avenue Church, a multiethnic Free Baptist congregation in Riverside, California.

The move away from her home church was not intentional but happened organically, she said, and she embraces her pastoral position as a role model.

"It's a big deal for me (as a woman of Korean descent) to lead a congregation," she said. "I hope I can help pave the way for others so they know it's possible. Ministry should be like any other career — your ethnicity or gender should not affect your chances."

As for the pastors' male counterparts in Korean American churches, Kim, for one, expressed anger that so many stay silent on the issue: "They feel like fighting social justice issues shouldn't be the church's business. But to me it is God's work. It's important, necessary work."

But Lee, whose ordination was objectionable to her family, said it pleases her to see some male pastors

welcome women to the pulpit — as her husband eventually did.

The Rev. John Park, who leads Numa Church in Buena Park, California, is one male pastor who embraces such allyship. He called on men to consciously work to empower women, citing Scripture in the words of the Apostle Paul: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

"The Bible is clear on the issue of equality," Park said. "But this is an internal battle in our community. We're fighting our own past."

Amazon union could face a tough road ahead after victory

By HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — In the aftermath of their hard-won labor victory, Amazon workers in the New York City borough of Staten Island popped Champagne, cheered their victory and danced in celebration. But their jovial attitude will be tested by a company that seems likely to drag its feet to the bargaining table.

Among other things, the nascent Amazon Labor Union, or ALU, has said it wants longer breaks for warehouse employees, more time off and a dramatically higher minimum hourly wage of \$30, up from just over \$18 an hour now at the Staten Island facility.

To achieve anything close to that, the grassroots union would need to negotiate a contract with Amazon that both sides, as well as union members, agree on. Doing so could prove difficult.

Amazon is seeking to overturn the election, having argued in a filing with the National Labor Relations Board this month that the vote was tainted by organizers and by the board's regional office in Brooklyn that oversaw the election. On Friday, the company submitted material to support its objections in a filing to the agency. A spokeswoman for the labor board said the agency won't make that filing public while the case is still open. A separate NLRB regional office in the Southwest will likely hold hearings and decide whether to certify the results.

If Amazon's effort fails, it could appeal to the national labor board, whose Democratic majority is expected to favor the fledgling union. But even in cases when the agency upholds a union victory, companies often refuse to negotiate — a stance that can trigger lengthy legal battles in federal court as a backdoor way to thwart labor victories.

Data compiled in 2009 by Kate Bronfenbrenner, a labor expert at Cornell University, found that fewer than half of unions obtained their first contract within a year of winning an election, and 30% didn't secure one within three years. In the meantime, time ticks away as workers are left in a state of uncertainty.

John Logan, director of Labor and Employment Studies at San Francisco State University, says anti-union companies have traditionally taken the view that even if they lose an election, the battle isn't truly lost until a union contract is signed.

"There's every incentive for them to delay the process at every opportunity," Logan said. "Law firms and consultants who specialize in continued avoidance activity have, for years, told employers explicitly, 'Time is on your side.'"

Even if Amazon goes to federal court and fails, it could still cause a contract delay and potentially blunt some of the momentum a union victory might create. Chris Smalls, the fired Amazon worker who leads the Amazon Labor Union, has said that since the group won its election earlier this month, workers from more than 100 Amazon facilities in the U.S. have contacted the union about organizing their own workplaces. A neighboring Amazon warehouse on Staten Island, which has roughly 1,500 workers, is set to have its own union election this week.

Experts say delays for a contract can frustrate such union campaigns and undermine employee confidence in organized labor. The result can be a weak contract or diminished interest among workers in organizing.

If Amazon pursues a protracted legal battle before agreeing to a contract, the number of employees at the warehouse who voted for the union would also likely dwindle. Amazon is known for its high turnover rate — up to 73% at the unionizing warehouse in the past two years alone, according to a recent court filing by the company.

One way workers can push back is by employing a strike. That, of course, carries its own risks. Michael

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Duff, a former NLRB lawyer who teaches at University of Wyoming College of Law, noted that Amazon could replace any striker with a substitute worker, potentially leaving strikers out of a job for months or even years.

Some unions have funds to help out-of-work strikers stay afloat. But sustaining such support can be burdensome for unions. It's also difficult for workers to survive long strikes, Duff said, something that employers know well.

Connor Spence, an Amazon employee who is ALU's vice president of membership, says the nascent union is ready to pressure the company by making its case through the news media and by engendering public sympathy. According to a Gallup poll from August, public approval of unions is at its highest level since 1965.

Spence said ALU organizers, who appeared recently at a virtual event with Sen. Bernie Sanders, a long-time champion of labor causes, will also try to persuade lawmakers to lean on the retailer.

"But at the end of the day, it's collective action that works," Spence said.

Organizers could deploy a strike or a walkout to disrupt Amazon's operations on Staten Island, Spence said, noting that walkouts have occurred at other Amazon facilities in recent months. The group also plans to set up a strike fund, using donations collected through its GoFundMe page.

For now, organizers are focused on a rematch with Amazon at the neighboring Staten Island warehouse known as LDJ5. A victory there would give Amazon workers additional leverage during any potential strike or walkout.

Amazon and its CEO, Andy Jassy, have said that while it's up to employees to decide whether to join a union, they believe they're better off not doing so. To press its argument, the company is continuing to hold mandatory anti-union meetings for workers — a practice that the labor board's top prosecutor is trying to get outlawed.

Organizers have previously accused Amazon of confiscating union flyers from the LDJ5 warehouse. Last week, the union filed a complaint with the NLRB, asserting that Amazon has unlawfully barred it from displaying a pro-union sign in the break room. Organizers say workers had been able to display the same sign at JFK8, the neighboring facility that voted to unionize.

Seth Goldstein, a lawyer who is providing pro-bono legal help to the union, contended that Amazon managers told workers that it was against company policy to display the sign but didn't specify the policy and threatened discipline. An Amazon spokesman said some workers had "erected a banner in violation of company policy" but declined to say why the same banner was allowed to be displayed in the nearby warehouse.

"It's an information war," said Madeline Wesley, one of the organizers who works at the LDJ5 warehouse. "It's not going to stop us. But we're going to have to be a little careful, making sure that no one gets to the point where they're starting to get seriously disciplined or lose their job."

COVID shots still work but researchers hunt new improvements

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

COVID-19 vaccinations are at a critical juncture as companies test whether new approaches like combination shots or nasal drops can keep up with a mutating coronavirus — even though it's not clear if changes are needed.

Already there's public confusion about who should get a second booster now and who can wait. There's also debate about whether pretty much everyone might need an extra dose in the fall.

"I'm very concerned about booster fatigue" causing a loss of confidence in vaccines that still offer very strong protection against COVID-19's worst outcomes, said Dr. Beth Bell of the University of Washington, an adviser to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Despite success in preventing serious illness and death, there's growing pressure to develop vaccines better at fending off milder infections, too — as well as options to counter scary variants.

"We go through a fire drill it seems like every quarter, every three months or so" when another mutant

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causes frantic tests to determine if the shots are holding, Pfizer vaccine chief Kathrin Jansen told a recent meeting of the New York Academy of Sciences.

Yet seeking improvements for the next round of vaccinations may seem like a luxury for U.S. families anxious to protect their littlest children — kids under 5 who are not yet eligible for a shot. Moderna's Dr. Jacqueline Miller told The Associated Press that its application to give two low-dose shots to the youngest children would be submitted to the Food and Drug Administration "fairly soon." Pfizer hasn't yet reported data on a third dose of its extra-small shot for tots, after two didn't prove strong enough.

COMBINATION SHOTS MAY BE NEXT

The original COVID-19 vaccines remain strongly protective against serious illness, hospitalization and death, especially after a booster dose, even against the most contagious variants.

Updating the vaccine recipe to match the latest variants is risky, because the next mutant could be completely unrelated. So companies are taking a cue from the flu vaccine, which offers protection against three or four different strains in one shot every year.

Moderna and Pfizer are testing 2-in-1 COVID-19 protection that they hope to offer this fall. Each "bivalent" shot would mix the original, proven vaccine with an omicron-targeted version.

Moderna has a hint the approach could work. It tested a combo shot that targeted the original version of the virus and an earlier variant named beta — and found vaccine recipients developed modest levels of antibodies capable of fighting not just beta but also newer mutants like omicron. Moderna now is testing its omicron-targeted bivalent candidate.

But there's a looming deadline. FDA's Dr. Doran Fink said if any updated shots are to be given in the fall, the agency would have to decide on a recipe change by early summer.

DON'T EXPECT BOOSTERS EVERY FEW MONTHS

For the average person, two doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine plus one booster — a total of three shots — "gets you set up" and ready for what may become an annual booster, said Dr. David Kimberlin, a CDC adviser from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

After that first booster, CDC data suggests an additional dose offers most people an incremental, temporary benefit.

Why the emphasis on three shots? Vaccination triggers development of antibodies that can fend off coronavirus infection but naturally wane over time. The next line of defense: Memory cells that jump into action to make new virus-fighters if an infection sneaks in. Rockefeller University researchers found those memory cells become more potent and able to target more diverse versions of the virus after the third shot.

Even if someone who's vaccinated gets a mild infection, thanks to those memory cells "there's still plenty of time to protect you against severe illness," said Dr. Paul Offit of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

But some people — those with severely weakened immune systems — need more doses up-front for a better chance at protection.

And Americans 50 and older are being offered a second booster, following similar decisions by Israel and other countries that offer the extra shot to give older people a little more protection.

The CDC is developing advice to help those eligible decide whether to get an extra shot now or wait. Among those who might want a second booster sooner are the elderly, people with health problems that make them particularly vulnerable, or who are at high risk of exposure from work or travel.

COULD NASAL VACCINES BLOCK INFECTION?

It's hard for a shot in the arm to form lots of virus-fighting antibodies inside the nose where the coronavirus latches on. But a nasal vaccine might offer a new strategy to prevent infections that disrupt people's everyday lives even if they're mild.

"When I think about what would make me get a second booster, I actually would want to prevent infection," said Dr. Grace Lee of Stanford University, who chairs CDC's immunization advisory committee. "I think we need to do better."

Nasal vaccines are tricky to develop and it's not clear how quickly any could become available. But several are in clinical trials globally. One in late-stage testing, manufactured by India's Bharat Biotech, uses a chimpanzee cold virus to deliver a harmless copy of the coronavirus spike protein to the lining of the nose.

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"I certainly do not want to abandon the success we have had" with COVID-19 shots, said Dr. Michael Diamond of Washington University in St. Louis, who helped create the candidate that's now licensed to Bharat.

But "we're going to have a difficult time stopping transmission with the current systemic vaccines," Diamond added. "We have all learned that."

Remains of 17 French WWI soldiers buried at Gallipoli

By MEHMET GUZEL and SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

CANAKKALE, Turkey (AP) — The remains of 17 missing French soldiers who fought in the World War I Battle of Gallipoli were on Sunday handed over to French military officials and put to rest alongside other fallen comrades more than a century after their deaths.

The remains were found during restoration work on a castle and surrounding areas on Turkey's northwestern Canakkale Peninsula, where Allied forces fought against Ottoman Turks in the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign that started with landings on the peninsula on April 25, 1915.

Col. Philippe Boulogne paid tribute to soldiers who "came to defend their homeland on this distant land, the scene of one of the most tragic episodes in our history" at the handing-over ceremony.

The ceremony coincided with commemorations marking the 107th anniversary of the start of the battle, during which French, British and other soldiers are remembered. On Monday, Australians and New Zealanders will mark Anzac Day to remember their fallen soldiers in a dawn ceremony.

"Zouaves (light-infantry corps) and riflemen from Senegal, Algeria, legionnaires, 10,000 French and colonial soldiers fell in the front at Gallipoli," Boulogne said. "Neither the scale of the losses nor the violence of the war diminished the bravery of these men. Their courage and their sense of sacrifice will never be forgotten."

Only one out of the 17 French soldiers — Cpl. Paul Roman, of the 1st Engineers Regiment — has been formally identified.

Authorities were also able to identify three tombstones belonging to Cmdr. Galinier of the 58th Colonial Infantry Regiment, and Capt. Stefani and 2nd Lt. Charvet of the 4th Zouaves, according to the French Embassy. Only their last names were provided.

The World War I Gallipoli campaign aimed to secure a naval route from the Mediterranean Sea to Istanbul through the Dardanelles, and take the Ottoman Empire out of the war. The Gallipoli landings marked the start of a fierce battle that lasted for eight months.

Around 44,000 Allied troops and 86,000 Ottoman soldiers died in the fighting.

Ismail Tasdemir, the Turkish official in charge of the historical site, said during the handing-over ceremony that the former battlefields have now become a land of "peace, tranquility and trust."

At the soldiers' final resting place at the Seddulbahir French cemetery, French Embassy official Mathilde Grammont read from a message that modern Turkey's founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk — a former Gallipoli commander — wrote for the mothers of the fallen soldiers:

"You, the mothers who sent their sons from faraway countries, wipe away your tears; your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace. After having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as well."

Ads from soft-spoken Arkansas Sen. Boozman reflect GOP fury

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) —

At home, two-term Republican Sen. John Boozman is known as an unassuming figure who talks almost in a whisper and is more comfortable chatting about policy or the University of Arkansas Razorbacks' football record than giving fiery speeches.

But you wouldn't know that if you turned on the television lately.

"John Boozman has always stood up to the gun-grabbing liberals of Washington," a local sheriff says

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in one Boozman ad. In another, fellow Republican Sen. Tom Cotton hails Boozman as "our conservative fighter." Boozman promises to finish building the wall along the U.S. border with Mexico that Donald Trump promised.

The sharper tone is Boozman's effort to deal with an awkward problem as he seeks reelection in a Republican stronghold that Trump won overwhelmingly two years ago: Conservative voters are restive with Trump out of power, and GOP candidates are expected to sound bristling mad about it.

Boozman said the ads are not inconsistent with his low-key style and that he is just focusing on concerns he is hearing from voters.

"These are the things that are on people's minds, so what we're trying to do is address those issues and help them understand we're at the forefront of working hard to get something done," Boozman said. "I'm not an individual that screams and hollers. I'm an individual that gets to work and gets results."

But ferocity just does not come naturally to Boozman. His more combative friends are rallying to help with that.

"He doesn't draw attention to himself," Republican strategist Bill Vickery said of the 71-year-old eye doctor and former Razorbacks football player. "He sort of lets his record speak for himself."

In GOP-led states, even Republicans with seemingly safe seats are trying to ward off any perceptions they are insufficiently loyal to the former president. Such concerns already led Trump to withdraw his endorsement of Mo Brooks in Alabama's Senate race, and have driven him to back an effort to unseat Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp in that state's primary.

Boozman has received Trump's endorsement along with the backing of top Republican figures in Arkansas. That includes Sarah Sanders, the party's likely nominee for governor who was as Trump's press secretary. Boozman also has been endorsed by the National Rifle Association and National Right to Life.

His chief rival in the May 24 primary is Jake Bequette, a former NFL and Razorbacks player who served in the Army and has appeared frequently on Fox News. Bequette's fundraising has paled in comparison to Boozman's, but he is backed by a super political action committee supported by shipping executive Richard Uihlein.

"I think in this political environment, the people of Arkansas and America First patriots around the country, they want conservative warriors," Bequette said.

Boozman's other GOP challengers include Jan Morgan, a former TV reporter and conservative activist who has appeared at the state Capitol frequently to push for bans on vaccine mandates and for looser gun laws.

Both have regularly assailed Boozman as a RINO — Republican In Name Only — even though the incumbent voted more than 91% of the time with Trump, according to the website FiveThirtyEight. Boozman has voted with President Joe Biden 34% of the time, according to FiveThirtyEight's tally, and his challengers say that is too often.

One of the main areas of attack is Boozman's decision to not challenge Biden's victory in the 2020 election, despite Trump's lies that the election was stolen. Boozman's rivals have also criticized the senator for saying Trump bore "some responsibility" for the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol. Boozman voted to acquit Trump during impeachment proceedings.

Boozman said he does not think Trump bears direct responsibility for the riot, and he has called the House committee investigating Jan. 6 a "partisan charade." Boozman said he remains committed to Trump and would support him for president in 2024.

"I do know if he was president now, we would be in a much better position than having President Biden," Boozman said.

With hardly any public polling available, there are few signs indicating trouble for Boozman. The incumbent has been outraising his rivals and blanketing the state with ads, including the one featuring Cotton, a potential White House candidate in 2024. Two super PACs supporting Boozman have recently begun airing TV ads.

Boozman has focused on farming and veterans issues during his time in the Senate, topics that do not lend themselves to viral videos or incendiary speeches but are crucial in this predominantly rural state.

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He is in line to lead the powerful Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee should the GOP win control of the Senate this fall.

Boozman compared his approach to that of the football coaches he said influenced him the most in school. "They didn't just scream and holler. They put game plans in place and worked toward a common goal to get things done versus just screaming about it," Boozman said.

Today in History: April 25, Union fleet captures New Orleans

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, April 25, the 115th day of 2022. There are 250 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On April 25, 1945, during World War II, U.S. and Soviet forces linked up on the Elbe (EL'-beh) River, a meeting that dramatized the collapse of Nazi Germany's defenses.

On this date:

In 404 B.C., the Peloponnesian War ended as Athens surrendered to Sparta.

In 1507, a world map produced by German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller contained the first recorded use of the term "America," in honor of Italian navigator Amerigo Vespucci (veh-SPOO'-chee).

In 1859, ground was broken for the Suez Canal.

In 1862, during the Civil War, a Union fleet commanded by Flag Officer David G. Farragut captured the city of New Orleans.

In 1898, the United States Congress declared war on Spain; the 10-week conflict resulted in an American victory.

In 1901, New York Gov. Benjamin Barker Odell, Jr. signed an automobile registration bill which imposed a 15 mph speed limit on highways.

In 1915, during World War I, Allied soldiers invaded the Gallipoli (guh-LIH'-puh-lee) Peninsula in an unsuccessful attempt to take the Ottoman Empire out of the war.

In 1945, delegates from some 50 countries gathered in San Francisco to organize the United Nations.

In 1990, the Hubble Space Telescope was deployed in orbit from the space shuttle Discovery. (It was later discovered that the telescope's primary mirror was flawed, requiring the installation of corrective components to achieve optimal focus.)

In 1992, Islamic forces in Afghanistan took control of most of the capital of Kabul following the collapse of the Communist government.

In 2002, Lisa "Left Eye" Lopes of the Grammy-winning trio TLC died in an SUV crash in Honduras; she was 30.

In 2019, former Vice President Joe Biden entered the Democratic presidential race, declaring the fight against Donald Trump to be a "battle for the soul of this nation."

Ten years ago: The U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments on Arizona's tough immigration law. (A divided court later threw out major parts of the law.)

Five years ago: A federal judge blocked President Donald Trump's attempt to withhold funding from "sanctuary cities" that did not cooperate with U.S. immigration officials, saying the president had no authority to attach new conditions to federal spending. Ivanka Trump drew groans and hisses from an audience in Berlin while defending her father's attitude toward women, but brushed the negative reaction aside as "politics" during her first overseas trip as a White House adviser.

One year ago: America's top general in Afghanistan said the U.S. military had begun closing down operations in the country and that Afghanistan's security forces "must be ready" to take over. "Nomadland," Chloé Zhao's portrait of itinerant lives on open roads across the American West, won Best Picture at the 93rd Academy Awards; Zhao was honored as best director.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Al Pacino is 82. Ballroom dance judge Len Goodman (TV: "Dancing with the Stars") is 78. Rock musician Stu Cook (Creedence Clearwater Revival) is 77. Singer Bjorn Ulvaeus (BYORN

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ul-VAY'-us) (ABBA) is 77. Actor Talia Shire is 77. Actor Jeffrey DeMunn is 75. Rock musician Steve Ferrone (Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers) is 72. Country singer-songwriter Rob Crosby is 68. Actor Hank Azaria is 58. Rock singer Andy Bell (Erasure) is 58. Rock musician Eric Avery is 57. Country musician Rory Feek (Joey + Rory) is 57. TV personality Jane Clayson is 55. Actor Renee Zellweger is 53. Actor Gina Torres is 53. Actor Jason Lee is 52. Actor Jason Wiles is 52. Actor Emily Bergl is 47. Actor Marguerite Moreau is 45. Singer Jacob Underwood is 42. Actor Melonie Diaz is 38. Actor Sara Paxton is 34. Actor/producer Allisyn Snyder is 26. Actor Jayden Rey is 13.