

Groton Daily Independent

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Monday, May 2

Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes/gravy, coleslaw, peaches, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.

School Lunch: Cheese sticks, marinara sauce, corn.

6:30 a.m.: Emmanuel Bible Study

3:30 p.m.: Junior High Track Meet at Aberdeen Roncalli (moved to Ipswich)

Tuesday, May 3

Senior Menu: Baked fish, au gratin potatoes, 3-bean salad, fruit cobbler, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Hashbrowns, pizza.

School Lunch: Hamburgers, fries.

9:30 a.m.: Methodist Bible Study

1 p.m.: Track meet at Milbank

7 p.m.: Elementary Spring Concert

7 p.m.: City Council Meeting

Wednesday, May 4

Senior Menu: Chicken Tetrizzini, peas, honey fruit salad, vanilla pudding, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Pancake bites.

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, tater tots.

Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Noon: Chamber Meeting at City Hall

5 p.m.: Emmanuel Sarah Circle

6 p.m.: Emmanuel Confirmation

Thursday, May 5 - National Day of Prayer

Senior Menu: Beef tips in gravy over noodles, peas, lettuce salad, fruit, whole wheat bread

School Breakfast: Eggs and sausage.

School Lunch: Taco burgers, spudsters

10 a.m.: Girls Golf at Moccasin Creek CC

2 p.m.: Emmanuel Nigeria Circle

7 p.m.: High School Spring Concert and Awards Night

Friday, May 6

Senior Menu: Bratwurst with bun, mashed potatoes, sauerkraut, green beans, fruit.

School Breakfast: Cinnamon roll bake.

School Lunch: Pizza, green beans.

3 p.m.: Track Meet at Sisseton

6 p.m.: FFA Banquet at GHS Gym.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Amendment C changes vote total needed for ballot issues that raise taxes

By Dana Hess
For the S.D. Newspaper Association

BROOKINGS — Constitutional Amendment C, on the June 7 primary ballot in South Dakota, would change the number of votes needed to pass ballot issues that raise taxes and fees. The increased number of votes would also apply to ballot issues that call for the expenditure of \$10 million over five years.

Backers of the amendment, which they have dubbed the “taxpayer protection amendment,” say the bar for passing ballot issues that deal with raising taxes and fees should be 60% of the vote. Currently ballot issues pass with a 50% plus one majority.

Those who oppose the amendment say that it takes away the ability of citizens to create tax and fee legislation through ballot initiatives.

The amendment was introduced as House Joint Resolution 5003 in the 2021 legislative session. It was sponsored in the House by Republican Rep. Jon Hansen of Dell Rapids. It was approved in the House by a vote of 56-12 and in the Senate by a vote of 18-17. Originally intended for the November 2022 general election ballot, in the Senate the resolution was amended to put it on the primary ballot this June.

The ballot date change was offered by Republican Sen. Lee Schoenbeck of Watertown. The amendment’s foes note that if approved by voters, Amendment C would increase to 60% the number of votes needed for a Medicaid expansion initiative that’s on the November ballot.

Schoenbeck calls Medicaid the “flavor of the day,” saying that passage of Amendment C would protect voters from any number of special interests that seek to use ballot initiatives, constitutional amendments or referred measures to spend taxpayer dollars.

“On a ballot issue, some special interest goes out and gets the signatures and then they run ads in support of it,” Schoenbeck said. “Who’s got the interest to spend the money on the other side? Usually nobody.”

In the Legislature, new taxes or spending programs need a two-thirds majority to be enacted. According to Schoenbeck, Amendment C holds the passage of initiated measures that raise taxes or fees to a similar standard.

He explained that the Legislature must make budget trade-offs. As an example, Schoenbeck said that if lawmakers want to spend more money on nursing homes, there may be less money to spend on education. Special interests don’t take that approach when they place a tax measure on the ballot.

“It’s about special interests putting their spending issues or their tax issues on the ballot without regard to what the whole financial picture for the state looks like,” Schoenbeck said. “And that’s dangerous. There are consequences that they don’t tell people when they do that.”

Brendan Johnson, an attorney for the opponents of Amendment C, says that its passage would take away majority rule, the same majority rule that lawmakers use when they vote on the state budget. While

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new spending requires a two-thirds vote of the Legislature, the state's budget is approved with a simple majority vote.

"This is the Legislature trying to say to the people that anytime that there is a tax or fee that they have to have 60%," Johnson said. "That is not the same rule that applies to the Legislature. They do their appropriation and that's what this would be, an appropriation."

Passage of Amendment C would change forever South Dakota's political legacy of citizen-backed ballot initiatives, according to Johnson.

"This is our right that we've had, as South Dakotans, since the beginning of our state's history," Johnson said. "For the first time, we have a Legislature that wants to take it away from the people of South Dakota so badly that they're putting it on a June primary ballot when they know that the smallest percentage of South Dakota voters will come out to vote."

The constitutionality of the amendment is the subject of a lawsuit that's not likely to be resolved soon. Johnson said summary judgment arguments will be held after the June election. If Amendment C is approved, the lawsuit is likely to make its way to the South Dakota Supreme Court in the fall.

All registered voters are eligible to vote on Amendment C. The voter registration deadline is May 23. Absentee voting started on April 22 and continues until June 6, the day before the primary election.

Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

The 2022 NFL Draft concluded this past Saturday and the Vikings walked away with ten new draftees to the team. This week we will recap the Vikings' first, second, and third-round picks. Next week we will look at the Vikings' fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh-round picks.

Round 1: No. 32 – Lewis Cine, Safety (Georgia)

After trading back to the last pick of the first round, Kwesi Adofo-Mensah made his first pick as Vikings' GM, selecting the hard-hitting safety out of Georgia, Lewis Cine (pronounced seen). Cine possesses the ideal size and speed that you would want in a defensive back, standing 6'2", weighing almost 200 lbs, and running a 4.37 40-yard dash at the NFL Combine.

Cine played on an historic Georgia defense that won the National Championship and ultimately had five players drafted in the first round this year. Many argued that it was maybe the greatest college defense of all time. What is amazing was that with all that talent, Cine was still able to stand out, winning the defensive MVP of the National Championship game.

What makes Cine so special is his ability to read plays and quickly attack whoever has the ball. He is a disruptor that seems to come out of nowhere sometimes. Overall, his aggressiveness is something that the Vikings fans will come to love about him. Moreover, his leadership skills will be a nice addition to the Vikings. Cine was a team captain for Georgia in 2021 as a true junior.

Round 2: No. 42 – Andrew Booth Jr., Cornerback (Clemson)

The Vikings got a much-needed cornerback early in the second round of the draft in Andrew Booth Jr., a fluid athlete with great ball skills. If you watch any of his highlights from his time at Clemson, you will see several one-handed interceptions by him. Although Booth fell to the second round, many experts believe he has the talent and potential to become a true #1 cornerback for the Vikings.

The concern with Booth, however, is injury-related. He has had multiple surgeries and was unable to participate in the entire pre-draft process because of them. The Vikings probably did their due diligence on Booth to make sure he will be healthy by the time the season starts. Nonetheless, it is concerning that Booth, who was rated as a top-three cornerback in the draft by some draft experts, fell down to the 42nd pick of the draft.

Round 2: No. 59 – Ed Ingram, Guard (LSU)

The Vikings bulked up their offensive line room with the pick of Ed Ingram out of LSU. Some felt this was a "reach" by the Vikings as Ingram would have likely been available in later rounds. However, the Vikings must have valued Ingram as a prospect to take him earlier than expected. Although Ingram is not an elite athlete by any means, he does have good size and power, as well as solid fundamentals as a blocker.

It will be interesting to see what the Vikings do with Ingram and the offensive line overall. Ingram, who played guard throughout his entire career at LSU, apparently took snaps at center during the Senior Bowl in February. Since some experts believe that Ingram can start right away, the Vikings might have made this pick intending to use him to replace Garrett Bradbury, who the Vikings are not expected to pick up his fifth-year option on.

Round 3: No. 66 – Brian Asamoah, Linebacker (Oklahoma)

With their last pick on day two of the draft, the Vikings selected Brian Asamoah, a rangy, athletic linebacker out of Oklahoma. Although Asamoah is a little undersized at 6'0", his speed and change-of-direction skills are what make him a very good player that can cover a large amount of space on the field.

Asamoah will need to improve his coverage skills if he wants to be an every-down linebacker. However, many experts believe that the Vikings' 3-4 defensive scheme will benefit Asamoah as an inside linebacker because he will be able to use his talents to pursue the football as both a pass rusher and a run stopper.

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Take a Moment to Breathe

The act of breathing is essential to life and can be done with or without thinking about it. You can control your breath and vary it, but eventually air must come in, and air must go out.

The breath of life and breathing exercises are an important aspect of many religions. In the book of Genesis, when God created man, he formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Several Eastern religions use controlled breathing in meditation and prayer, helping in the processes of consciousness, mindfulness, and visualization.

In this time of increased stress and anxiety over money, wars, and numerous other matters, I encourage us all to take time to focus on our breathing.

One of the simplest ways to combat stress and anxiety is to breathe. It does not cost any money and does not have to take much time. However, deep breathing can decrease your stress, help you feel calmer, reduce pain, reduce your blood pressure, help you focus, and improve digestion. It can also increase your energy and improve your immunity.

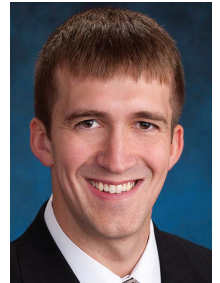
How do you do it? Easy! Just do it. Make sure you are somewhere safe and close your eyes. Breathe in gently through your nose, take about four to five seconds, and fill your belly and chest. Perhaps hold it for another couple seconds. Then release it through your open mouth over five seconds or more, whatever is comfortable. Repeat this at least five times.

When I have patients that have anxiety or panic attacks, I often take a little time to practice this with them. Every time I feel calmer myself, and I hope they find it calming as well.

This week, our television program, On Call with the Prairie Doc®, is celebrating its 20th season of providing truthful, tested, and timely medical information. We are taking time to breathe in and reflect on our past, feeling grateful for our founders, the late Dr. Richard Holm and his wife Joanie, and celebrating the contributions of everyone on our team.

Thank you, our readers, for taking the time to read our columns through the years, and I hope there are many more to come. Now, please take a moment to do some deep breathing. First you breathe in, then breathe out.

Andrew Ellsworth, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.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.



Andrew Ellsworth, MD

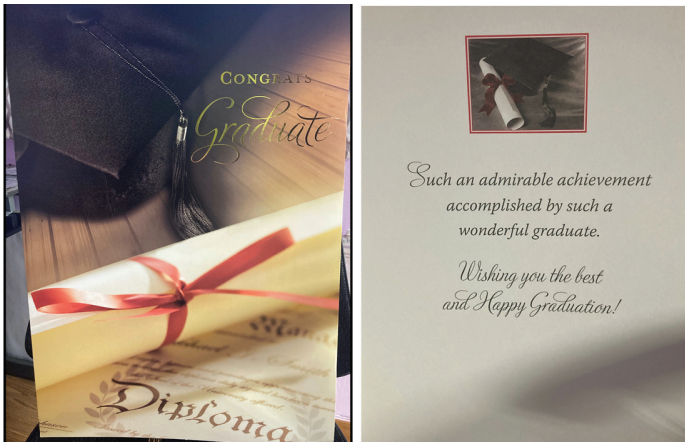
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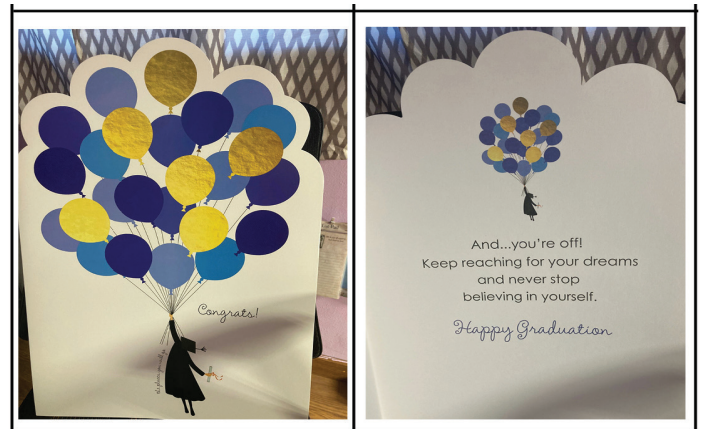
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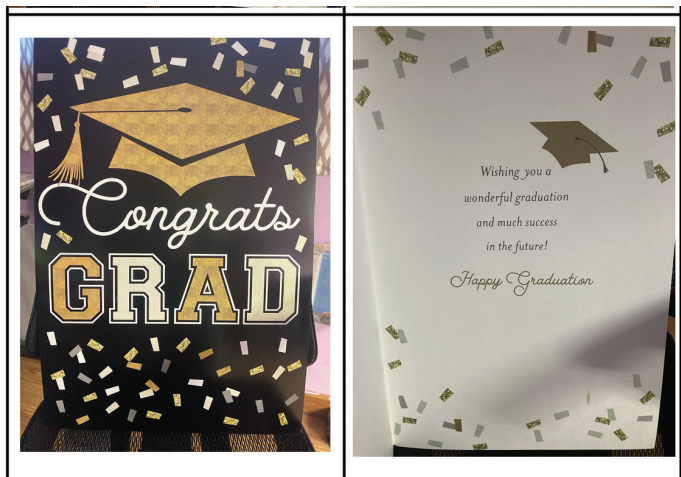
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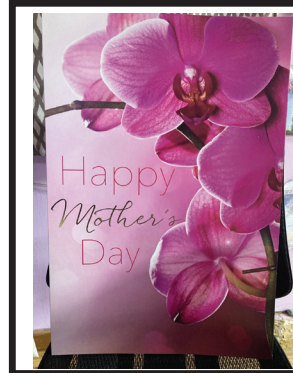
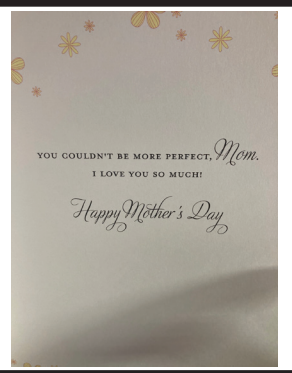
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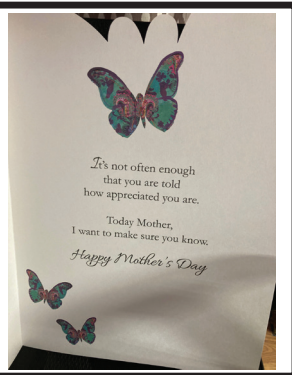
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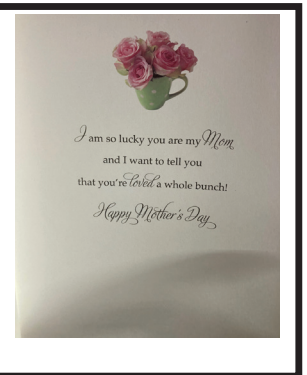
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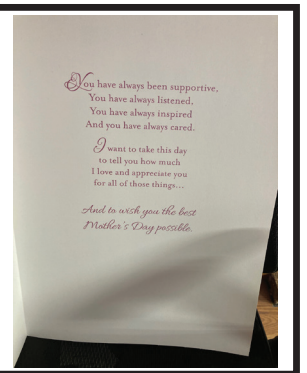
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- NEWS
- LIVE
- FIT
- CLEAN
- RENT

Scan Code Below for More Details



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 PO Box 34, Groton, SD
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www.397news.com
 Call/Text Paul: 605/397-7460
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New at the
GDI FIT
 The Stairmaster
 and Air Bike



Call/Text Paul at 605/397-7460
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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"



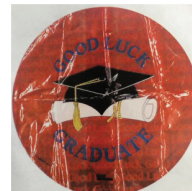
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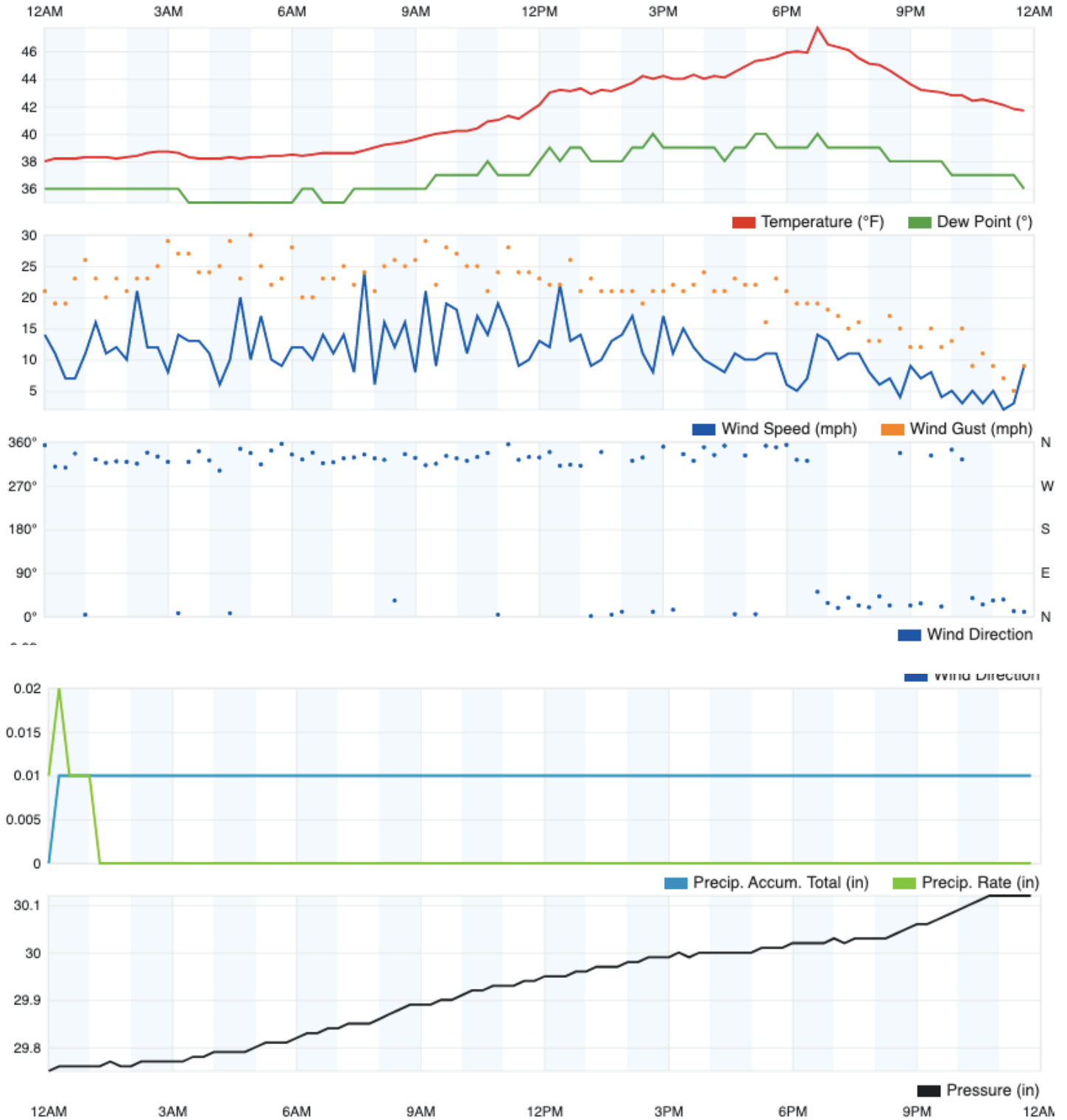
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We have many other balloons available as well. We now offer locker pickup in the laundromat so you can pick up your order ANY TIME once the order is completed!

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Partly Sunny

High: 51 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy

Low: 30 °F

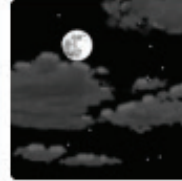
Tuesday



Decreasing
Clouds

High: 57 °F

Tuesday
Night



Partly Cloudy


Low: 38 °F

Wednesday









Mostly Cloudy

High: 59 °F



Warmer this week with relatively light winds...
Enjoy!

Today	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
				
48 to 58°	50s	50s <small>Chance of Rain, mainly over central SD</small>	60s	63 to 72°

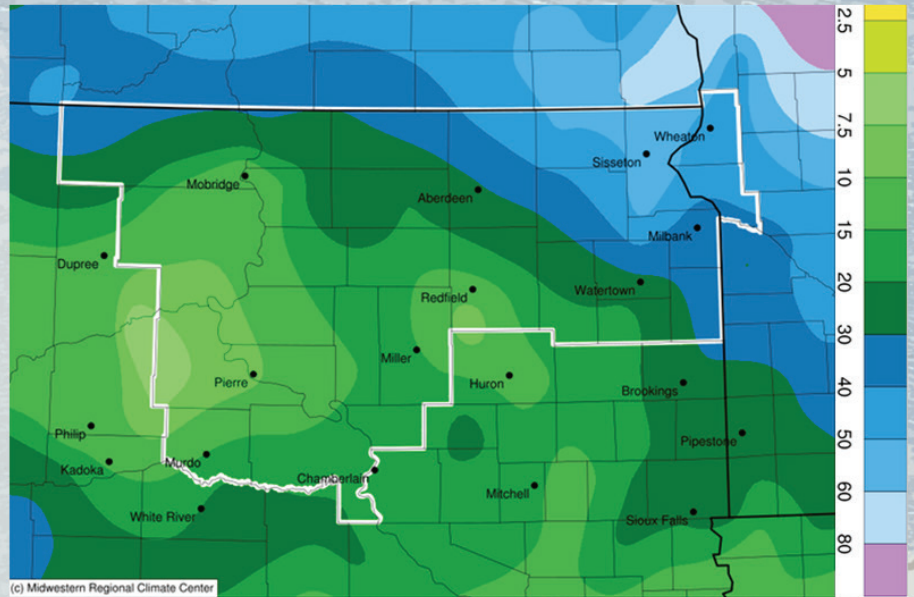


NWS Aberdeen, SD

Temperatures will slowly rise into the 60s and low 70s by Friday. Expect relatively light winds too, compared to what we've been experiencing lately.

2021-2022 Cold Season's Snowfall Totals *As of May 1st, 2022*

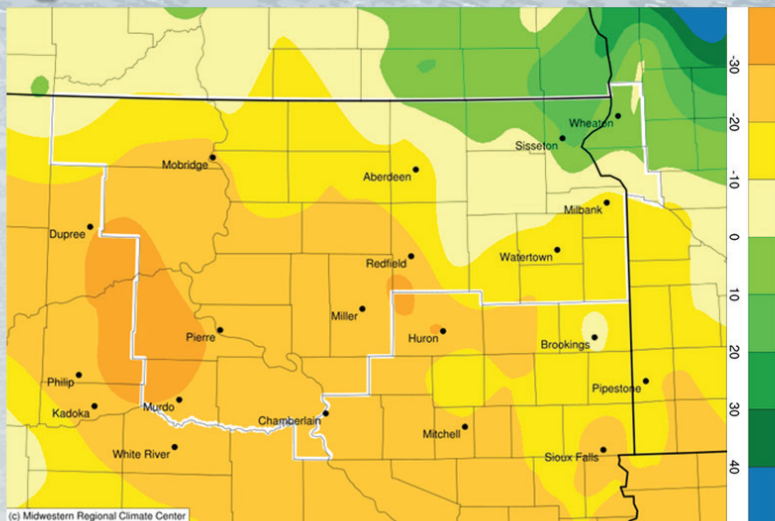
Aberdeen:	29.3"
Kennebec:	18.5"
Mobridge:	9.4"
Pierre:	9.3"
Sisseton:	50.8"
Timber Lake:	14.1"
Wheaton:	45.3"
Watertown:	27.2"



Now that it's May, here's a look back at how much snow fell this past cold season, as well as departures from normal. There was quite a contrast from the far northeast to central SD - just 185 miles meant the difference between more than 50" and less than 10" of total snow!

2021-2022 Cold Season's Snowfall Departures *As of May 1st, 2022*

Aberdeen:	-13.4"
Kennebec:	-21.1"
Mobridge:	-21.6"
Pierre:	-27.9"
Sisseton:	+14.5"
Timber Lake:	-27.1"
Wheaton:	+2.4"
Watertown:	-13.9"



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Today in Weather History

May 2, 1984: High winds picked up a trailer home northwest of the Pierre Airport and hurled it through the air, smashing it to the ground 50 yards away. The upper sections of a home were damaged by the airborne trailer. Several branches and shed roofs were also damaged nearby.

May 2, 2008: A two-day blizzard dropped two to four feet of snow across the northern Black Hills and in Harding and Butte counties. Six to 14 inches of snow fell along the eastern foothills and in western Perkins and Meade counties.

1762: A tornado struck Port Royal Island, South Carolina. It left a path 400 yards wide, tore up trees by the roots, and carried away houses and bridges.

1899 - A storm buried Havre, MT, under 24.8 inches of snow, an all-time record for that location. The water equivalent of 2.48 inches was a record 24 hour total for the month of May. (The Weather Channel)

1920 - A swarm of tornadoes in Rogers, Mayes and Cherokee Counties in Oklahoma killed 64 persons. (David Ludlum)

1929: Virginia's worst tornado disaster occurred on this day. Six tornadoes, two of which were west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, killed 22 people. One tornado killed twelve children and a teacher at Rye Cove, in Scott County. The storms destroyed four schools.

1983: Severe thunderstorms produced 21 tornadoes across the northeastern states of Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York. One tornado even occurred in Ontario, Canada. Of the 21 tornadoes in the United States, nine were rated F3, and six were rated F2. The tornadoes caused five deaths.

1987 - Thunderstorms in the Lower Mississippi Valley produced golf ball size hail in northern Louisiana, and wind gusts to 77 mph at Lake Providence LA. Thunderstorms in Arkansas produced 4.20 inches of rain at Arkadelphia and 4.00 inches at Bismarck. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A powerful storm produced snow and high winds in the Central Rockies and the Central High Plains Region. Snowfall totals in Colorado ranged up to 12 inches at Strasburg, and winds in southeastern Colorado gusted to 87 mph at Lamar. Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in eastern Colorado and southeastern Wyoming. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing to the north of a warm front produced severe weather in Oklahoma and Texas. There were 93 reports of severe weather. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 80 mph at Beattie, and baseball size hail was reported at Ranger and Breckenridge. Juneau AK reported a record high temperature of 72 degrees while Honolulu equalled their record low for the month of May with a reading of 60 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Fourteen cities in Florida, Georgia and South Carolina reported record high temperatures for the date as readings soared into the 90s. Tampa FL reported a record high of 97 degrees, and Fort Stewart GA was the hot spot in the nation with a reading of 100 degrees.

2010: May began with two days of historical rainfall over much of Middle Tennessee, with massive swath stretching along the I-40 corridor from Benton County to Davidson County. Some areas received nearly 20 inches of rain during this 2-day period, the highest of which was 19.41 inches reported by a CoCoRaHS observer in Camden, TN. Numerous rainfall records were broken at the Nashville International Airport, including the most rain received in a 6 hour period, highest calendar day rainfall, and wettest month, along with several others. Incredibly, the Nashville Airport experienced its wettest and third wettest days in history on back to back days. Many area rivers exceeded their record crest levels, including the Harpeth River near Kingston Springs, which rose to 13.8 feet above the previous record. The Cumberland River at Nashville reached its highest level since flood control was implemented in the late 1960s, flooding parts of downtown Nashville. Waters from the Cumberland reached as far inland as 2nd Avenue, flooding many downtown businesses. Forty-nine Tennessee counties were declared disaster areas with damage estimates of between \$2 and \$3 billion statewide. Many Nashville landmarks received damage from floodwaters, including Gaylord Opryland Hotel and the Grand Ole Opry. Other popular Nashville landmarks affected by the floods include LP Field, Bridgestone Arena, the Country Music Hall of Fame, and the Schermerhorn Symphony Center, which received damage to the basement and its contents, including two Steinway grand pianos and the console of the Martin Foundation Concert Organ. Over \$300 million in Federal Disaster Assistance was approved for the people of Tennessee.

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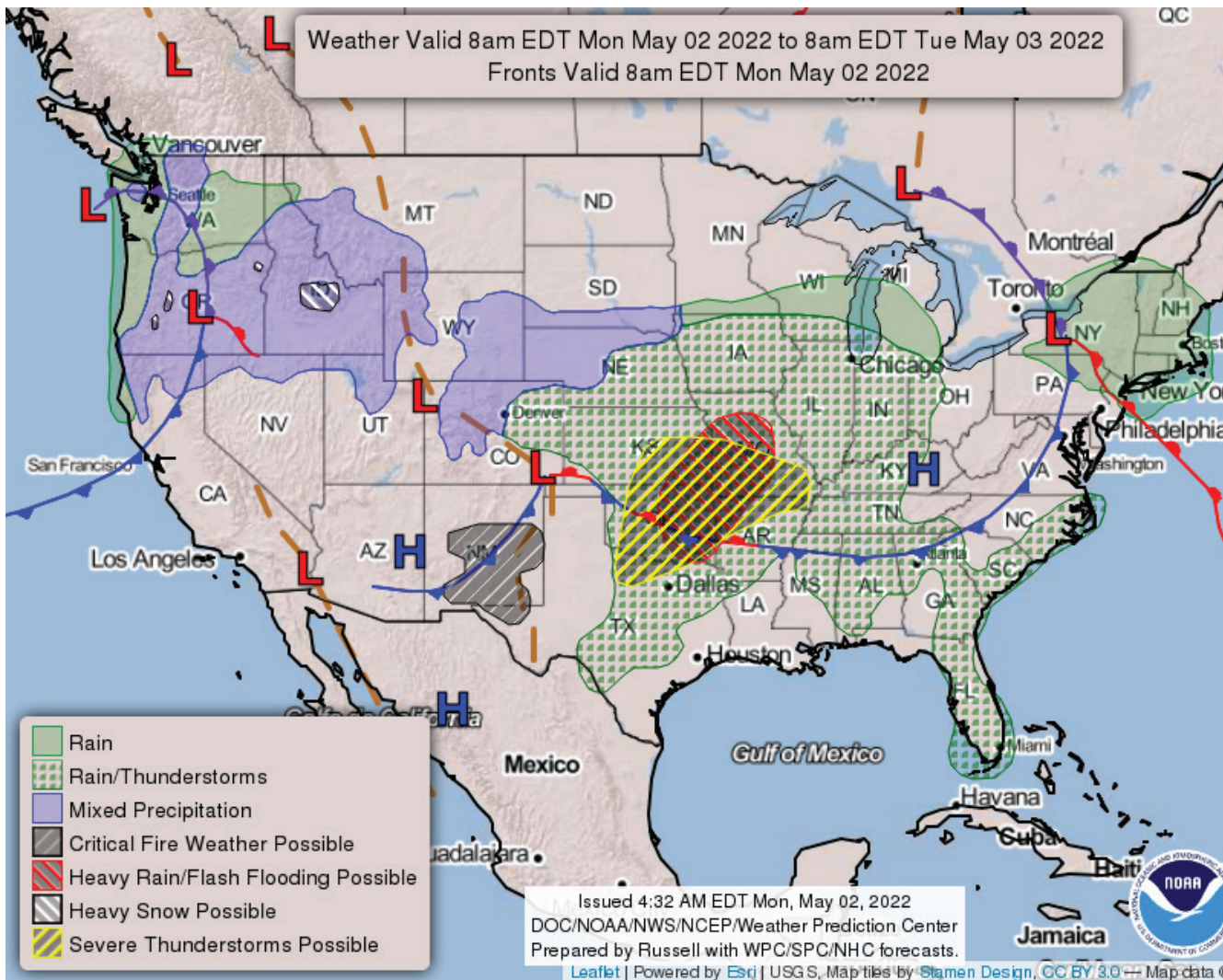
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 48 °F at 6:44 PM
Low Temp: 38 °F at 12:00 AM
Wind: 30 mph at 2:02 AM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 24 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1955
Record Low: 20 in 1909
Average High: 65°F
Average Low: 38°F
Average Precip in May.: 0.22
Precip to date in May.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 4.19
Precip Year to Date: 6.50
Sunset Tonight: 8:41:47 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:15:27 AM



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Free For Now

Two longtime friends were quail hunting - one was a Christian, the other was not a believer. "Why," said the nonbeliever, "is it that the devil always seems to find and tempt you to do the wrong thing and he never bothers me?"

"Oh, you don't understand it," replied his friend. "You see the devil has you and now he spends his time trying to get me back. It's like hunting for quail. We're not after the dead ones. We want those that are still alive. You see, you're dead and the devil doesn't have to worry about you. But he wants me back!"

All Christians face the dangers of temptation that come from the devil. Even Jesus was constantly being tempted and tested. We must always remember that being tempted is not a sin. Sin "happens" when we yield to the temptation.

We must also remember that when we are tempted, it is the devil who tempts us. The Lord does not tempt anyone, and it is through His power that we can resist any temptation that comes our way. It is the devil who is the source of the temptation.

That's his business, and he is very successful at what he does. It is a good thing to remember that mice do not like traps but are caught when the power of the bait overcomes them. He knows the "bait" that is most likely to tempt and trap us to sin and will use any friend or foe, picture or place to his advantage.

David put it this way: "Praise be to the Lord...we have escaped like a bird from the fowler's snare...Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."

We are always going to be tempted. We have years of experience to prove that fact. But we also have the power of God's Word to protect us. As Paul said, "There is no temptation that you cannot bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." Escape is always possible.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for Your strength and power that enables us to escape the temptation to sin. Help us to rely on You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: We have escaped like a bird from the fowler's snare; Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. Psalm 124:7-8

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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 **AP** Associated Press

Polanco drives in 4, Twins beat Rays 9-3 for ninth win in 10

DICK SCANLON Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) — Jorge Polanco drove in four runs with a pair of doubles, Carlos Correa had his fourth straight multi-hit game and the Minnesota Twins beat the Tampa Bay Rays 9-3 on Sunday.

The Twins broke out quickly for five runs in the first inning off Rays starter Josh Fleming and coasted to their ninth win in 10 games.

"That set the tone for everything going on," Twins manager Rocco Baldelli said. "A lot of good at-bats, a lot of good swings, a lot of using the whole field."

Josh Winder (1-0) pitched six shutout innings in his first major league start for the Twins, giving up two hits and striking out seven.

"The at-bats gave Josh a little bit of a springboard," Baldelli said.

Winder's only problems were waiting through the 28-pitch top of the first inning, and another 27 pitches in the top of the fourth.

"Thankfully the game was in Tampa and it wasn't in the Minnesota cold, so I was kind of able to stay loose," he said. "I kind of know how to keep my body loose and stay prepared. So if anything, it got me to settle down and kind of calm down after my bullpen. There was no real effect to that long inning. Those guys can score as much as they want."

Doubles by Polanco and Max Kepler drove in three runs in Minnesota's big first inning. Starting with a throwing error by Rays shortstop Taylor Walls, six of the first seven Minnesota batters reached base against Fleming (2-3), who needed 20 pitches to record his first out.

The left-hander gave up six runs on five hits and three walks in 3 2/3 innings, leaving after Byron Buxton's seventh homer of the season in the fourth.

"This team deserves better from me, and I believe I am better than what I've shown the last couple times," said Fleming, who have up seven runs — all unearned — in his last start. "I think since my first outing against the Orioles, nothing has come easy. It's been a grind."

Robert Dugger threw 87 pitches in his major league debut for the Rays, giving up three runs on eight hits in 5 1/3 innings.

Cole Sanders pitched two innings in his debut for the Twins, giving up two runs on three hits.

Isaac Paredes, acquired from Detroit in exchange for Austin Meadows just before the season started, went 1 for 4 and played third base in his first game with Tampa Bay.

Josh Garlick, who drove in a run with a single in the first inning, left the game in the fourth with right calf tightness.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Twins: 1B Miguel Sano (knee) did not play for the fourth time in five games. ... RHP Sonny Gray (right hamstring strain) pitched on a rehab assignment in Fort Myers, Florida, and is hopeful of returning to the rotation. His last start was April 16.

Rays: SS Wander Franco was scratched from the lineup by right hamstring tightness. ... 1B Ji-Man Choi (loose bodies in his right elbow) was placed on the 10-day injured list, retroactive to April 28.

UP NEXT

Twins: RHP Joe Ryan (3-1, 1.17) will pitch Monday night in the opener of a four-game series at Baltimore.

Rays: The Rays will open a nine-game road trip at Oakland on Monday night behind RHP Drew Rasmusen (1-1, 3.50).

Candidates test skipping debates without upsetting voters

By SUDHIN THANAWALA Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Ted Budd has skipped four Republican primary debates in his bid for a U.S. Senate

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seat in North Carolina. GOP candidates for governor in Ohio, Nevada and Nebraska have also refused to engage with their opponents from the debate podium.

And on Tuesday, Herschel Walker is expected to miss a second debate against his Republican rivals for a crucial U.S. Senate seat after skipping the first one.

As the most competitive phase of the midterm primary season unfolds this week, many candidates for leading offices — often Republicans — are abandoning the time-honored tradition of debating their rivals before Election Day.

For some gaffe-prone candidates such as Walker, avoiding the debate stage reduces the chance of an embarrassing moment. For others, it's an opportunity to snub a media ecosystem they find elitist and cast themselves in the mold of former President Donald Trump, who made a show of missing some debates during the 2016 campaign.

The Republican National Committee is already moving toward withdrawing from the 2024 presidential debates, though the ultimate decision will likely fall on whoever emerges as the party's nominee.

But some of the Republicans who are still engaging in the process say that skipping debates could ultimately leave the eventual nominees vulnerable in a general election, unprepared to answer tough questions or engage with rivals in a way that could appeal to voters beyond the party base.

"If you can't get on the stage and debate fellow Republicans, how the heck are you going to debate with Raphael Warnock in the general election?" asked Latham Saddler, a Navy veteran and former Trump administration official who is among five Republicans challenging Walker, referring to the Democratic incumbent.

"Usually if you're hiding, you're hiding for a reason," Saddler said in an interview.

Walker holds a commanding lead over his rivals heading into the May 24 primary. His campaign has not granted The Associated Press an interview despite repeated requests, including for this story. But after facing criticism from rivals at the first Georgia Republican Senate debate in April, including about his absence, Walker told North Georgia radio station Access WDUN that his opponents were jealous.

"Because right now Herschel's going to win that seat," he said during an April 20 appearance on the program "Newsroom." "They can't win it, so they're going to the old politics where people are tired of that. They want what people are going to do for their state of Georgia, and they can't do anything but complain."

Though many of those who have skipped debates are Republican, some Democrats have followed a similar strategy. In Pennsylvania, which holds primary elections on May 17, Democratic Senate candidate John Fetterman skipped a debate last month, saying he chose to participate in three other debates because they will have wider reach on television.

A spokesman for Budd, Jonathan Felts, has said instead of attending debates, Budd was focused on finishing his tour of North Carolina counties so he could speak directly to voters.

In Walker's case, his reticence extends beyond debating. He doesn't widely publicize his campaign stops and limits appearances mostly to conservative news outlets and friendly audiences. Campaign spokeswoman Mallory Blount said in an email last week that Walker had conducted more than 105 interviews.

"The suggestion that Herschel is not accessible is a lie," she said. "He does interviews and takes questions from thousands of Georgians as he travels across the state every week."

But when Walker does speak, awkward moments can ensue.

He has wrongly referred to the late congressman John Lewis as a senator and said the voting rights activist's eponymous election bill — the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act — "doesn't fit what John Lewis stood for."

Walker recently cast doubt on evolution at a church gathering by questioning why apes still existed if humans originated from them. And he told a reporter in January that asking whether he would have voted for a bipartisan infrastructure bill was "unfair" because he hadn't been "privileged" to receive all the facts about the measure. The bill was signed into law in November.

"You've got to be an Alabama fan because you asked that question there," Walker, a college football star at the University of Georgia, told the reporter for the right-wing news site The Daily Caller.

Walker did not graduate from the University of Georgia, but has said he did — a falsehood repeated initially by his campaign on a website promoting his Senate bid. He repeatedly made false claims of voting fraud

on his Twitter account following Trump's loss to Democrat Joe Biden in the presidential election. In one tweet, he suggested people in several battleground states should be given the opportunity to vote again.

He also posted odd video messages, including one in which he said his takeaway from reading the Constitution the previous night was that "the people in Washington work for the American people, and we can demand and hold them accountable if we count all the legal votes." He went on, "But if we start counting illegal votes, we then start working and depending on the government."

In still another video, he said that anyone who wants to change the Constitution should be impeached because the Constitution has to stand. But then he added, "Maybe amend it a little bit. But we've all got to rejoice in who the Lord Jesus Christ is."

Walker led the University of Georgia football team to a national title in 1981 and won the Heisman Trophy a year later. His status as a Georgia sports legend, along with Trump's endorsement, made him the GOP favorite as soon as he entered the race in August.

Still, limiting questioning and access may help avoid discussions about his turbulent past. Officers responding to a 2001 report that Walker was armed and scaring his estranged wife at a suburban Dallas home later noted that Walker "talked about having a shoot-out with police," according to a police report revealed by the AP in February. In a protective order sought by his then-ex-wife in 2005, Walker was accused of repeatedly threatening her life.

Walker has been open about his long struggle with mental illness and acknowledged violent urges. His campaign has dismissed the report of a shoot out and blamed the media for highlighting it.

While skipping the GOP debates is unlikely to hurt Walker in the primary, a no-show strategy in the general election — when he would face Warnock, an accomplished orator who serves as pastor of one of Georgia's most prominent churches — could be a different story, said Andra Gillespie, a political science professor at Emory University.

Walker may need to persuade some voters to win what would likely be a tight race, and that would require him to "perform" and answer questions, she said.

Asked on WDUN whether he would debate Warnock, Walker said he was committed to doing whatever it took to win.

"So Rev. Warnock better get ready because I'm getting ready," he said.

Ukraine city awaits 1st evacuees from Mariupol steel plant

By CARA ANNA and INNA VARENYTSIA Associated Press

ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine (AP) — A first group of civilians trapped for weeks inside a steel plant in Mariupol under Russian siege was expected to reach a Ukrainian-controlled city on Monday, as a new attempt was launched to allow people sheltering elsewhere in the city to leave.

Video posted online Sunday by Ukrainian forces showed elderly women and mothers with small children climbing over a steep pile of rubble from the sprawling Azovstal steel plant and eventually boarding a bus.

The evacuation, if successful, would represent rare progress in easing the human cost of the almost 10-week war, which has caused particular suffering in Mariupol. Previous attempts to open safe corridors out of the port city on the Sea of Azov and other places have broken down. People fleeing Russian-occupied areas in the past have said their vehicles were fired on, and Ukrainian officials have repeatedly accused Russian forces of shelling agreed-upon evacuation routes.

At least some of the people evacuated from the plant were apparently taken to a village controlled by Moscow-backed separatists, though Russian state media reported they would be allowed to continue on to Ukrainian-held territory if they wanted to. In the past, Ukrainian officials have accused Moscow's troops of forcibly relocating civilians from areas they have captured to Russia; Moscow has said the people wanted to go to Russia.

More than 100 civilians were expected to arrive in Zaporizhzhia on Monday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Sunday.

"Today, for the first time in all the days of the war, this vitally needed green corridor has started work-

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ing," Zelenskyy said in a pre-recorded address published on his Telegram messaging channel.

While official evacuations have often faltered, many people have managed to flee Mariupol under their own steam. Anastasiia Dembytska took advantage of the brief cease-fire around the evacuation of civilians from the steel plant to leave with her daughter, nephew and dog.

She told The Associated Press she could see the steel plant from her window, when she dared to look out. "We could see the rockets flying" and clouds of smoke over the plant, she said.

She said she had to navigate many checkpoints on the journey to Zaporizhzhia and waited 18 hours near the city before being allowed to pass.

Like many Mariupol residents, Dembytska and her family survived by cooking on a makeshift stove and drinking well water under near-constant bombardment.

"I was scared, then I got used to it," her 14-year-old daughter Vladyslava said.

A defender of the steel plant said Russian forces resumed shelling the plant Sunday as soon as the civilians were evacuated.

Denys Shlega, commander of the 12th Operational Brigade of Ukraine's National Guard, said in a televised interview Sunday night that several hundred civilians are still trapped alongside nearly 500 wounded soldiers and "numerous" dead bodies.

"Several dozen small children are still in the bunkers underneath the plant," Shlega said.

As many as 100,000 people may still be in Mariupol, including an estimated 2,000 Ukrainian fighters beneath the sprawling, Soviet-era steel plant — the only part of the city not occupied by the Russians.

A siege of Mariupol since the early days of the war has trapped civilians with scarce access to food, water, medicine and electricity. A Russian airstrike hit a maternity hospital early in the conflict, and hundreds of people were reported killed when a theater was bombed.

The city, which had a pre-war population of more than 400,000, is a key Russian target because its capture would deprive Ukraine of a vital port, allow Moscow to establish a land corridor to the Crimean Peninsula, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014, and free up troops for fighting elsewhere in the Donbas, now Russia's main focus.

A Ukrainian officer at the steel plant urged groups like the U.N. and the Red Cross to also ensure the evacuation of wounded fighters at the plant, though he acknowledged that reaching some of the injured is difficult.

"There's rubble. We have no special equipment. It's hard for soldiers to pick up slabs weighing tons only with their arms," Sviatoslav Palamar, deputy commander of the Azov Regiment, told the AP in an interview. "We hear voices of people who are still alive" inside shattered buildings.

U.N. humanitarian spokesman Saviano Abreu said civilians arriving in Zaporizhzhia, about 140 miles (230 kilometers) northwest of Mariupol, would get immediate support, including psychological services. A Doctors Without Borders team was waiting for the U.N. convoy at a reception center for displaced people in the city.

In his nightly address Sunday, Zelenskyy accused Moscow of waging "a war of extermination," saying Russian shelling had hit food, grain and fertilizer warehouses, and residential neighborhoods in the city of Kharkiv, in the Donbas and other regions.

More than 350,000 people have been evacuated from combat zones thanks to humanitarian corridors pre-agreed with Moscow, he said, adding the "organization of humanitarian corridors is one of the elements of the negotiation process which is ongoing."

In Zaporizhzhia, residents ignored air raid sirens to visit cemeteries on Sunday, the Orthodox Christian day of the dead.

"If our dead could rise and see this, they would say, 'It's not possible, they're worse than the Germans,'" Hennadiy Bondarenko, 61, said while marking the day with his family at a picnic table among the graves. "All our dead would join the fighting, including the Cossacks."

Meanwhile, Russian forces embarked on a major military operation to seize the Donbas, Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, after failing to capture Kyiv.

A full picture of battle unfolding in eastern Ukraine is hard to capture. The fighting makes it dangerous

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for reporters to move around, and both sides have introduced tight restrictions on reporting from the combat zone.

Western officials say Russia is advancing slowly in its eastern offensive and has captured some villages, but is inflicting heavy civilian casualties through indiscriminate bombing. Ukrainian forces are fighting their offensive village-by-village while civilians flee airstrikes and artillery shelling.

The British Defense Ministry said in a daily briefing Monday that it believes more than a quarter of all the fighting units Russia has deployed in Ukraine are now "combat ineffective" — unable to fight because of loss of troops or equipment.

The British military believes Russia committed over 120 so-called "battalion tactical groups" into the war since February, which represents 65% of all of Moscow's combat strength.

Ukraine's military claimed Monday to have destroyed two small Russian patrol boats in the Black Sea. Drone footage posted online showed what the Ukrainians described as two Russian Raptor boats exploding after being struck by missiles.

The AP could not immediately independently confirm the strikes.

Hundreds of millions of dollars in military assistance has flowed into Ukraine during the war, but Russia's vast armories mean Ukraine still needs massive support. Zelenskyy has appealed to the West for more weapons, and tougher economic sanctions on Russia.

U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other U.S. lawmakers visited Zelenskyy on Saturday to show American support.

European Union energy ministers were meeting Monday to discuss a new set of sanctions, which could include restrictions on Russian oil — though Russia-dependent members of the 27-nation bloc including Hungary and Slovakia are wary of taking tough action.

Philippine vote: Volunteers back reformer vs. dictator's son

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — One supporter wrote a stirring campaign song that has been played nearly 4 million times on Spotify. Other volunteers are barnstorming Philippine villages, going door-to-door to endorse Vice President Leni Robredo in next week's presidential election.

The stakes are high: If Robredo's opponent, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., clinches the presidency, as surveys suggest, it will mark a stunning about-face for a nation where millions poured out into the streets in 1986 to force out a dictator, Marcos's father, whose legacy continues to shadow his son.

Followers from diverse backgrounds — families with grandparents and children, doctors, activists, Catholic priests and nuns, TV and movie stars, farmers and students — have joined Robredo's fiesta-like campaign rallies in the tens of thousands. She called the movement a "pink revolution" after the color worn by her volunteers.

The large crowds, as well as drone shots and videos posted online by followers, evoke memories of the massive but largely peaceful 1986 "People Power" uprising that toppled strongman Ferdinand Marcos in an Asian democratic milestone that awed the world.

While the rallying call then was to bring back democracy after years of a brutal and corrupt dictatorship, the battle cry of Robredo's supporters is a promise to bring good and corruption-free governance with her as the reformist torchbearer.

"We've been wanting good governance, honest, hard-working government officials, who genuinely care for the people, and she's finally here," said Nica del Rosario, a 32-year-old musician. "Let's not waste this chance because somebody like her doesn't come very often."

With her colleagues, del Rosario wrote and sang two campaign songs for Robredo, including "Rosas" — Tagalog for roses — a tribute to the opposition leader's patriotic and humble brand of hands-on politics that has become an emotional anthem to her followers. The song has been streamed more than 3.9 million times on Spotify in just two months, and has been widely shared on Facebook and YouTube and driven supporters to tears at rallies.

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But Robredo is fighting an uphill electoral battle against Marcos's son and namesake, who has topped voter-preference surveys with a seemingly insurmountable lead.

Robredo remains in second place in independent surveys for the 10-way presidential race, far behind Marcos Jr., with just a week before 67 million registered voters pick the next Philippine leader on May 9.

Marcos Jr. topped the latest poll by Pulse Asia released on Monday with 56% support while Robredo received 23%. The other candidates lagged far behind in the April 16-21 survey, which polled 2,400 Filipinos of voting age nationwide with a margin of error of 2 percentage points.

Marcos Jr.'s candidacy has been bolstered by his vice presidential running mate, Sara Duterte, the daughter of outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte, who has remained popular despite his bloody crackdown on illegal drugs and dismal human rights record that has left thousands dead since 2016.

"There is still a possibility that people will change their decision," Pulse Asia President Ronald Holmes said of voter preferences. It's also hard to capture the effect of word-of-mouth and house-to-house campaigns, he said.

Activists who helped oust Marcos 36 years ago fear Philippine history will be upended if his son takes over a country long seen as an Asian bulwark of democracy. Marcos Jr., a 64-year-old former senator, has defended his father's legacy and steadfastly refuses to acknowledge or apologize for the widespread abuses and plunder that scarred the Philippines during his martial law rule. Courts in the U.S. and the Philippines as well as government investigations have offered indisputable evidence of that period.

"My worst fear is the return of the Marcoses ... because we will face global condemnation. People will be asking us, 'Haven't you learned? You said in '86 never again and now he's back. So what are you telling us?'" said Florencio Abad, a political detainee in the 1970s under Marcos who later served in top government posts after the dictator's downfall and now advises Robredo's campaign.

Robredo, 57, a former congresswoman and mother of three, is running independently and does not belong to any of the country's entrenched political dynasties and wealthy land-owning clans.

She has been cited for integrity and simplicity in the poverty- and corruption-plagued Southeast Asian nation, where two presidents had been accused of plunder and overthrown, including the elder Marcos, who died in U.S. exile in 1989. A third was detained for nearly four years on a similar allegation but was eventually cleared.

Like her late husband, a respected politician who died in a plane crash in 2012, Robredo's appeal lies in shunning the trappings of power. As a congresswoman, she would regularly travel alone by bus from her province to the capital and back, often at night, using the long trip to sleep.

Aside from their electoral rivalry, Robredo and Marcos Jr. are on opposite sides of history.

As a student at the state-run University of the Philippines in the 1980s, Robredo joined anti-Marcos protests that culminated in the 1986 democratic uprising.

In 2016, she narrowly defeated Marcos Jr. in a cliffhanger race for vice president in their first electoral faceoff. He waged a years-long unsuccessful legal battle to invalidate her victory for alleged fraud and still refuses to concede.

Without the enormous logistics required for a presidential campaign, Robredo did not initially plan to seek the top post but changed her mind at the last minute last year after Marcos Jr. announced his candidacy and talks to field a single opposition candidate fell apart. The emergence of campaign volunteers was a lifeline, according to her allies.

"She did not have any machinery and it was really the volunteers who were energizing the entire campaign," said Georgina Hernandez, who coordinates nationwide volunteer efforts for Robredo.

Robredo's army of volunteers, which Hernandez says numbers close to 2 million, initially engaged in all sorts of campaigning — from turning roadside walls into pink-colored murals with her portrait and mottos to providing free medical and legal services to running soup kitchens for the poor.

Most, however, turned to house-to-house campaigning and organizing star-studded rallies as the election day draws near, she said.

Mary Joan Buan, a volunteer campaigner who also joined the 1986 revolt, said opposing the rise of another Marcos to the presidency decades after the dictator was ousted has become more complex given a

well-funded campaign to refurbish the Marcos family image that began on social media several years ago. "Many rely on social media now and use platforms like TikTok for information so it's doubly challenging," Buan said while going door-to-door for Robredo in a depressed Manila neighborhood. A few residents bluntly told her group they were rooting for BBM, a popularized reference to Marcos Jr. that does not mention his family name.

University of the Philippines sociologist Randy David said the rare and spontaneous volunteer movement that emerged for Robredo is a red flag for potential tyrants.

"Traditional politicians are wary of the unlimited potential of social movements to shape electoral outcomes as well as of their capacity to take new forms and persist beyond elections," David wrote in the Philippine Daily Inquirer, a leading Manila daily. "But it is autocrats who fear them most — because they almost always carry within them the seeds of regime change."

As Iran-Taliban tensions rise, Afghan migrants in tinderbox

By MEHDI FATTAHI and ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — The Taliban members who killed her activist husband offered Zahra Husseini a deal: Marry one of us, and you'll be safe.

Husseini, 31, decided to flee. Through swaths of lawless flatlands she and her two small children trekked by foot, motorcycle and truck until reaching Iran.

As Afghanistan plunged into economic crisis after the United States withdrew troops and the Taliban seized power, the 960-kilometer (572-mile) long border with Iran became a lifeline for Afghans who piled into smugglers' pickups in desperate search of money and work.

But in recent weeks the desert crossing, long a dangerous corner of the world, has become a growing source of tension as an estimated 5,000 Afghans traverse it each day and the neighbors — erstwhile enemies that trade fuel, share water and have a tortured history — navigate an increasingly charged relationship.

In past weeks, skirmishes erupted between Taliban and Iranian border guards. Afghans in three cities rallied against Iran. Demonstrators hurled stones and set fires outside an Iranian Consulate. A fatal stabbing spree, allegedly by an Afghan migrant, at Iran's holiest shrine sent shockwaves through the country.

Political analysts say even as both nations do not want an escalation, long-smoldering hostilities risk spiraling out of control.

"You have one of the world's worst-simmering refugee crises just chugging along on a daily pace and historical enmity," said Andrew Watkins, senior Afghanistan expert at the United States Institute of Peace. "Earthquakes will happen."

The perils are personal for Afghans slipping across the border like Husseini. Since the Taliban takeover, Iran has escalated its deportations of Afghan migrants, according to the U.N. migration agency, warning that its sanctions-hit economy cannot handle the influx.

In the first three months of this year, Iran's deportations jumped 60% each month, said Ashley Carl, deputy chief of the agency's Afghanistan mission. Many of the 251,000 returned from Iran this year bear the wounds and scars of the arduous trip, he said, surviving car accidents, gunshots and other travails.

Roshangol Hakimi, a 35-year-old who fled to Iran after the Taliban takeover, said smugglers held her and her 9-year-old daughter hostage over a week until her relatives paid ransom.

"They would feed us with polluted water and hard, stale bread," she said. "We were dying."

The lucky ones land in the jumble of Tehran, squeezing into dank and crowded alleyways. Iran estimates at least a million Afghans have sought refuge in the country over the last eight months.

Like many, Husseini lives in legal limbo, vulnerable to harassment and exploitation. Her boss at the tailor's shop refuses to pay her salary. Her landlord threatens to kick her out. She can barely cobble together enough cash to feed her children.

"We have nothing and nowhere to go," she said from a cramped room in southern Tehran, furnished with just a donated gas heater, chairs and a few velour blankets.

As more Afghans arrive, helping them gets harder. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh

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lamented last month that "waves of displaced Afghans cannot continue to Iran" because Iran's "capacities are limited." Iran's youth unemployment hovers over 23%. Iran's currency, the rial, has shriveled to less than 50% of its value since 2018.

"The biggest challenge is that Iran is not ready for the new situation of refugees," Tehran-based political analyst Rea Ghobeishavi said of the increasing friction between Afghans and Iranians.

Iran has grown more anxious as a string of bloody attacks in Afghanistan targeting the country's minority Hazara Shiites makes clear that extremist threats proliferate despite Taliban promises to provide security.

"There are reports that some extremists are entering Iran easily with refugees," said Abbas Hussein, a prominent Afghan journalist in Tehran, describing mounting paranoia in Iran.

Last month, Iran's most sacred Shiite shrine in the northeastern city of Mashhad turned into a scene of carnage when an assailant stabbed three clerics, killing two — a rare act of violence at the compound. The attacker was identified in media as an Afghan national of Uzbek ethnicity.

In the following days, a surge of videos agitating against Afghan refugees flooded Iranian social media. Impossible to authenticate, the grainy clips — footage showing Iranians insulting and beating up Afghans — have been dismissed as misleading in Iran but in Afghanistan have dominated headlines, stoking public fury.

Demonstrators attacked the Iranian Consulate in the western city of Herat with stones and protested at Iran's Embassy in Kabul. "Stop killing Afghans," pleaded protesters in the Afghan capital. "Death to Iran," chanted crowds in Herat and the southeastern Khost province. Iran suspended all of its diplomatic missions in Afghanistan for 10 days.

Even as the gate of its consulate smoldered, Iran's special envoy for Afghanistan deflected. Hassan Kazemi Qomi blamed the escalating tensions on a vague "enemy" seeking to subvert the nations' relations. Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi raised his concerns with the Iranian ambassador.

"The ill-treatment of Afghan refugees in Iran adversely affects relations between the two countries ... allowing antagonists to conspire," Muttaqi was quoted as saying.

His careful tone betrays a troubled history.

In 1998, Iran nearly went to war against the Taliban after 10 of its diplomats were killed when their consulate was stormed in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif. But after the U.S.-led invasion, Tehran's Shiite leaders grew wary of the American military presence on their doorstep and took a more pragmatic stance toward the Sunni militant group.

Now, analysts say, with both nations severed from the global banking system and starved for cash, they have come to depend on each other. Neither wants to see tensions mount further.

"Through neighbors, Iran can sanctions-bust, exchange currency, barter and keep its economy alive," said Sanam Vakil, deputy director of Chatham House's Middle East and North Africa Program.

But the neighbors nearly came to blows last week when Taliban guards tried to pave a new road across the border. Iranian guards went on high alert. The vital crossing closed.

Aware of the stakes, the countries are vigorously pursuing diplomacy. Last week, Khatibzadeh promised Tehran would accredit Taliban diplomats for the first time to help process the mountains of consular cases. Taliban officials visited the capital to discuss Iran's treatment of Afghan refugees.

Many of those refugees fleeing Afghanistan's repression and destitution harbor humble dreams: of scraping by as construction laborers, factory workers and farmhands in Iran.

Others, like Hakimi's 9-year-old daughter Yasmin, hope to continue on to Europe. She fantasizes about Germany. Her father, a police officer killed by the Taliban in Logar province, instilled in her the importance of an education, she said.

"We don't want to have a bad future," Yasmin said from her dilapidated Tehran apartment. "We want to become literate people, like my father."

New Zealand welcomes back tourists as pandemic rules eased

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

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WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — New Zealand welcomed tourists from the U.S., Canada, Britain, Japan and more than 50 other countries for the first time in more than two years Monday after dropping most of its remaining pandemic border restrictions.

The country has long been renowned for its breathtaking scenery and adventure tourism offerings such as bungee jumping and skiing. Before the spread of COVID-19, more than 3 million tourists visited each year, accounting for 20% of New Zealand's foreign income and more than 5% of the overall economy.

But international tourism stopped altogether in early 2020 after New Zealand imposed some of the world's toughest border restrictions.

The border rules remained in place as the government at first pursued an elimination strategy and then tried to tightly control the spread of the virus. The spread of omicron and vaccinations of more than 80% of New Zealand's 5 million population prompted the gradual easing of restrictions.

New Zealand reopened to tourists from Australia three weeks ago and on Monday to about 60 visa-waiver countries, including much of Europe. Most tourists from India, China and other non-waiver countries are still not allowed to enter.

Tourists will need to be vaccinated and to test themselves for the virus before and after arriving.

"Today is a day to celebrate, and is a big moment in our reconnection with the world," said Tourism Minister Stuart Nash.

At Auckland Airport, flights bringing in tourists began landing from early in the morning, coming in direct from places including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore.

The border reopening will help boost tourism ahead of New Zealand's upcoming ski season. But the real test of how much the tourism industry rebounds will come in December, when the peak summer season begins in the Southern Hemisphere nation.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said more than 90,000 people had booked flights to New Zealand in the seven weeks since the reopening was announced and 21 international flights were scheduled to land Monday in Auckland.

"Our tourism industry have felt the effects of the global pandemic acutely, and are working hard to prepare," she said.

Ardern said there were no immediate plans to ease virus testing and vaccination requirements for tourists.

The Judds, Ray Charles join the Country Music Hall of Fame

By KRISTIN M. HALL AP Entertainment Writer

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Ray Charles and The Judds joined the Country Music Hall of Fame on Sunday in a ceremony filled with tears, music and laughter, just a day after Naomi Judd died unexpectedly.

The loss of Naomi Judd altered the normally celebratory ceremony, but the music played on, as the genre's singers and musicians mourned the country legend while also celebrating the four inductees: The Judds, Ray Charles, Eddie Bayers and Pete Drake. Garth Brooks, Trisha Yearwood, Vince Gill and many more performed their hit songs.

Naomi and Wynonna Judd were among the most popular duos of the 1980s, scoring 14 No. 1 hits during their nearly three-decade career. On the eve of her induction, the family said in a statement to The Associated Press that Naomi Judd died at the age of 76 due to "the disease of mental illness."

Daughters Wynonna and Ashley Judd accepted the induction amid tears, holding onto each other and reciting a Bible verse together.

"I'm sorry that she couldn't hang on until today," Ashley Judd said of her mother to the crowd while crying. Wynonna Judd talked about the family gathering as they said goodbye to her and she and Ashley Judd recited Psalm 23.

"Though my heart is broken I will continue to sing," Wynonna Judd said.

Fans gathered outside the museum, drawn to a white floral bouquet outside the entrance and a small framed photo of Naomi Judd below. A single rose was laid on the ground.

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Charles' induction showcased his genre-defying country releases, which demonstrated country music's commercial appeal. The Georgia-born singer and piano player grew up listening to the Grand Ole Opry and in 1962 released "Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music," which became one of the best selling country releases of his era.

Blinded and orphaned at a young age, Charles is best known for R&B, gospel and soul, but his decision to record country music changed the way the world thought about the genre, expanding audiences in the Civil Rights era.

Charles' version of "I Can't Stop Loving You," spent five weeks on top of the Billboard 100 chart and remains one of his most popular songs. He died in 2004.

Brooks sang "Seven Spanish Angels," one of Charles' hits with Willie Nelson, while Bettye LaVette performed "I Can't Stop Loving You."

Country Music Hall of Famer Ronnie Milsap said he met Charles when he was a young singer and that others tried to imitate Charles, but no one could measure up.

"There was one of him and only one," said Milsap. "He sang country music like it should be sung."

Charles is only the third Black artist to be inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame, alongside Opry pioneer DeFord Bailey and Charley Pride.

"Mr. Charles always stood his ground for what he loved," said Valerie Ervin, president of the Ray Charles Foundation. "And country music was what he truly, truly loved."

The Hall of Fame also inducted two recordings musicians who were elemental to so many country songs and singers: Eddie Bayers and Pete Drake.

Bayers, a drummer in Nashville for decades who worked on 300 platinum records, is a member of the Grand Ole Opry band. He regularly played on records for The Judds, Ricky Skaggs, George Strait, Alan Jackson and Kenny Chesney. He is the first drummer to join the institution.

Drake, who died in 1988, was a pedal steel guitar player and a member of Nashville's A-team of skilled session musicians, played on hits like "Stand By Your Man" by Tammy Wynette and "He Stopped Loving Her Today" by George Jones. He is the first pedal steel guitar player to become part of the Hall of Fame.

Drake is known for creating the talk box, a technology that allowed him to vocalize through his pedal steel guitar. It was later popularly adopted by artists like Peter Dinklage and many others.

His wife, Rose, said that musicians like her husband deserved a place in musical history.

"The musicians of the '60s, '70s, and '80s created Nashville as Music City and we can't let that get away," Rose Drake said.

2022 midterms: What to know about Ohio, Indiana primaries

By JULIE CARR SMYTH and TOM DAVIES Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — The first multistate contest of the 2022 midterm election season unfolds on Tuesday, as Ohio voters pick nominees for governor and the U.S. Senate while Indiana voters consider whether their Legislature should become even more conservative.

The races, particularly in Ohio, could provide a fresh window into former President Donald Trump's sway among the party faithful. He has been especially involved in Ohio's Senate primary, which has been marred by Republican divisions along with campaigns for the U.S. House and secretary of state.

For Democrats, a potential threat to incumbent U.S. Rep. Shontel Brown in Cleveland is of keen interest. Brown is locked in a rematch against progressive challenger Nina Turner, a former state senator and surrogate for Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders' presidential campaigns. Turner is trying again after losing to Brown in last year's special election.

Voting in Ohio comes against the backdrop of a chaotic and still unresolved redistricting battle.

What to watch as the Ohio and Indiana primaries unfold:

WHO WILL SURVIVE OHIO'S NASTY SENATE PRIMARY?

Seven candidates are on the ballot in Tuesday's Republican faceoff for the coveted open U.S. Senate seat of retiring Republican Rob Portman. They are Trump-endorsed "Hillbilly Elegy" author JD Vance,

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former Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel, Cleveland investment banker Mike Gibbons, former Ohio Republican Chair Jane Timken, state Sen. Matt Dolan, whose family owns the Cleveland Guardians baseball team, and entrepreneurs Mark Pukita and Neil Patel.

The campaign has featured months of jockeying among top contenders for Trump's endorsement, more than \$65 million in TV and radio spending, dozens of debates and candidate forums, and one highly publicized physical confrontation between two candidates.

As Vance rides high on the Trump endorsement, other candidates who campaigned on their loyalty to the former president are hoping that heavy ad spending or a strong ground game can help them win. Dolan is the only candidate who ran as a Portman-like centrist, but Timken landed Portman's endorsement.

Whoever prevails will face the winner of a three-way Democratic primary between 10-term U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan, former consumer protection attorney Morgan Harper and Columbus activist and tech exec Traci Johnson.

IS A TRUMP ENDORSEMENT A SLAM-DUNK IN OHIO?

Trump twice won Ohio by more than 8 percentage points, so many viewed getting his nod in the Senate race as critical to winning the crowded Senate primary. Instead, when he finally chose Vance, it divided the state.

That's because Vance opponents, including Mandel, Gibbons and their allies, had aired months of ads highlighting Vance's past anti-Trump statements. Some tea party Republicans protested an April 23 Trump rally featuring Vance, and one conservative group, Ohio Value Voters, urged its supporters to boycott — or boo Vance when he walked on stage. The deep-pocketed Club for Growth, a conservative group backing Mandel, has taken to TV with ads directly attacking Trump for his choice.

Trump also has backed candidates in two Republican congressional primaries: Max Miller, his former White House and campaign aide, in the sprawling new 7th District in northeast Ohio, and Madison Gesiotto Gilbert in the Akron-area 13th District. He also is backing Secretary of State Frank LaRose in his primary against former state Rep. John Adams, a conservative Trump supporter.

WILL A WOMAN BREAK THROUGH IN OHIO'S GUBERNATORIAL RACE?

Democrat Nan Whaley is seeking to be the first woman in Ohio to get a major party's nomination for governor. The former Dayton mayor is locked in a tight race with ex-Cincinnati Mayor John Cranley, who is endorsed by feminist icon Gloria Steinem.

They see eye-to-eye on most major issues — guns, abortion rights, social justice — but Whaley has repeatedly pointed out that Cranley only recently said he was pro-choice. She also has the backing of the state's top Democrat, U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown.

Neither candidate is a household name across Ohio. Both have struggled to draw attention as much of the state is focused on the contentious U.S. Senate race and ongoing redistricting fight.

The big question for first-term Republican Gov. Mike DeWine is just how many conservative voters will punish him for pushing aggressive mandates and shutdowns during the pandemic.

DeWine is widely known from a 40-year career in Ohio politics and in a solid position to win the GOP's nomination for another four-year term. His two main challengers have tapped into the anger over the governor's COVID-19 policies, but they're likely to split those far-right voters.

DeWine isn't taking any chances, pouring millions into advertising during the weeks leading into the primary. The concern will be whether those same conservative voters who were furious with DeWine will come back to him in November.

WILL CONFUSION OVER OHIO'S PRIMARY CALENDAR AFFECT RESULTS?

A protracted battle over Ohio's congressional and legislative maps has played havoc with the state's 2022 election calendar. For a long time, it looked like the May 3 primary wouldn't go forward amid all the legal wrangling. Then suddenly it did.

Voter advocates, campaigns and political parties have stepped up efforts to get the word out as participation in early voting showed a 40% decline from four years ago.

Tuesday's ballots will not list state legislative races, which are expected to be decided in a second primary

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later this year. The Ohio Redistricting Commission faces a deadline next week to try for a fifth time to draw district lines that don't represent a partisan gerrymander and can meet constitutional muster. If the panel fails, a federal court has said it will force an Aug. 2 primary using one of the previously invalidated maps.

Congressional races have gone forward using a map that has also been invalidated by the Ohio Supreme Court. Ongoing litigation could result in a new map before 2024 elections.

IS INDIANA'S LEGISLATURE CONSERVATIVE ENOUGH?

More than a dozen Indiana House members are trying to hold off Republican primary challengers who argue that the GOP-dominated Legislature hasn't been aggressive enough on issues from attempting to ban abortion to overturning COVID-19 restrictions that were ordered by the state's Republican governor.

Those challengers say they are tapping into frustration among conservative voters and want to push the Legislature further to the right in a state where Republicans control all statewide offices and have had legislative supermajorities for the past decade.

Whether the challengers can defeat incumbents backed by Republican leaders' multimillion-dollar campaign fund should be answered in Tuesday's primary.

Republican legislative leaders argue the "no compromise" stances adopted by many challengers aren't practical and tout the state's low taxes and unemployment and broad private school voucher program among its conservative successes.

Challengers like Brittany Carroll, a family law attorney running for a central Indiana seat, maintain Indiana lawmakers should be aggressively pushing issues such as the Texas ban on abortions after roughly six weeks of pregnancy.

"Indiana could be leading in terms of liberty, like Florida, like Texas," Carroll said.

Trump's bid to shape GOP faces test with voters in May races

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Politics Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's post-presidency enters a new phase this month as voters across the U.S. begin weighing the candidates he elevated to pursue a vision of a Republican Party steeped in hard-line populism, culture wars and denial of his loss in the 2020 campaign.

The first test comes on Tuesday when voters in Ohio choose between the Trump-backed JD Vance for an open U.S. Senate seat and several other contenders who spent months clamoring for the former president's support. In the following weeks, elections in Nebraska, Pennsylvania and North Carolina will also serve as a referendum on Trump's ability to shape the future of the GOP.

In nearly every case, Trump has endorsed only those who embrace his false claims of election fraud and excuse the deadly U.S. Capitol insurrection he inspired last year.

"The month of May is going to be a critical window into where we are," said Maryland Republican Gov. Larry Hogan, a Trump critic defending incumbent GOP governors in Georgia, Ohio and Idaho against Trump-backed challengers this month. "I'm just concerned that there are some people trying to tear the party apart or burn it down."

Few states may be a higher priority for Trump than Georgia, where early voting begins on Monday ahead of the May 24 primary. He's taken a particularly active role in the governor's race there, recruiting a former U.S. senator to take on the incumbent Republican for failing to go along with his election lie. For similar reasons, Trump is also aiming to unseat the Republican secretary of state, who he unsuccessfully pressured to overturn President Joe Biden's victory.

While the primary season will play out deep into the summer, the first batch of races could set the tone for the year. If Republican voters in the early states rally behind the Trump-backed candidates, the former president's kingmaker status would be validated, likely enhancing his power as he considers another bid for the presidency. High-profile setbacks, however, could dent his stature and give stronger footing to those who hope to advance an alternate vision for the GOP.

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz predicted a strong month of May for Trump and his allies.

"The voices in Washington that want him to fade into obscurity or to be silenced are engaged in their

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own form of wishful thinking," Cruz said in an interview. "That's not going to happen. Nor should he."

As Republicans grapple with Trump, Democrats are confronting their own set of revealing primaries.

Candidates representing the Democrats' moderate and progressive wings are yanking the party in opposing directions while offering conflicting messages about how to overcome their acute political shortcomings, Biden's weak standing chief among them. History suggests that Democrats, as the party that controls Washington, may be headed for big losses in November no matter which direction they go.

But as Democrats engage in passionate debates over policies, Republicans are waging deeply personal and expensive attacks against each other that are designed, above all, to win over Trump and his strongest supporters.

Florida Sen. Rick Scott, who leads the GOP's effort to retake the Senate, described the month of May as a brutal sorting period likely to be dominated by Republican infighting instead of the policy solutions or contrasts with Democrats he'd like to see.

"The primaries too often become sort of character assassinations," Scott said in an interview. "That's what has happened."

He added, "Hopefully, people come together."

No race may be messier than the Republican primary election for Georgia's governor. Trump has spent months attacking Republican incumbents Gov. Brian Kemp and Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger. He blames both men for not working hard enough to overturn his narrow loss in 2020 presidential election.

The results in Georgia were certified after a trio of recounts, including one partially done by hand. They all affirmed Biden's victory.

Federal and state election officials and 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.

Georgia Republican Lt. Gov. Geoff Duncan, a frequent Trump critic who is not running for reelection, described Trump's decision to back former Sen. David Perdue against Kemp an "embarrassing" waste of time that could undermine the GOP's broader goals this fall.

Duncan predicted Trump would ultimately win some races and lose others this month, but he was especially optimistic about Kemp's chances to beat back Trump's challenge.

"If a sitting governor is able to defeat that whole Donald Trump notion by a huge amount — and others down the ticket — I think we're gonna send a message that it's gonna take more than a Donald Trump endorsement to call yourself a Republican," he said.

For now, however, Trump is unquestionably the nation's most powerful Republican as even those who find themselves on opposite sides of the former president are careful to note their loyalty to him. Cruz, who is backing opponents of Trump-endorsed Senate candidates in Ohio and Pennsylvania, downplayed any disagreement with him in an interview. Cruz noted he made his picks long before Trump did.

"For the four years he was president, Donald Trump had no stronger ally in the Senate than me," Cruz said.

Six months before the general election, the Republican candidates in key primaries have already spent mountains of campaign cash attacking against each other as Democrats largely save their resources — and sharpest attacks — for the November.

With early voting already underway in Ohio, a half-dozen Republican candidates in the state's high-profile Senate primary and their allied outside groups have spent more than \$66 million this year combined on television advertising as of last week, according to Democratic officials tracking ad spending. The vast majority of the ads were Republican-on-Republican attacks.

Mike Gibbons, a Cleveland real estate developer and investment banker, spent \$15 million alone on television advertising as of last week. That includes an advertising campaign attacking Vance highlighting his past description of Trump as "an idiot."

The pro-Vance super PAC known as Protect Ohio Values, meanwhile, has spent \$10 million on the primary so far, including a recent barrage of attack ads casting Cruz-backed candidate Josh Mandel as "another

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failed career politician squish.”

On the other side, the leading Senate Democratic hopeful, Rep. Tim Ryan, has spent less than \$3 million so far in positive television ads promoting his own push to protect Ohio manufacturing jobs from China.

The spending disparities in high-profile Senate primaries in Pennsylvania and North Carolina were equally stunning.

In the Pennsylvania, where Trump-backed Dr. Mehmet Oz and former hedge fund executive David McCormick are locked in a fierce fight for the GOP nomination, the candidates and allied outside groups have spent more than \$48 million on television advertising so far. Democrats spent just over \$10 million.

And in North Carolina, Republican forces have spent more than \$15 million on a divisive primary pitting Trump-backed Rep. Ted Budd against former Gov. Pat McCrory. Democrats, who have united behind former state Supreme Court Chief Justice Cheri Beasley, spent just over \$2 million.

Michigan Sen. Gary Peters, who leads the effort for Democrats to keep the Senate majority, said Republicans are essentially creating the Democrats’ general election ads for them. He described the intensity of the Republican infighting in several states as “toxic for the character of the Republican candidates.”

“They’re trying to compete to see who is the Trumpiest of the Trumpsters,” Peters said. “They’re not talking about issues that people care about.”

At the same time, Peters acknowledged their own party’s challenges, particularly Biden’s low popularity. He said it would be up to every individual candidate to decide whether to invite the Democratic president to campaign on their behalf.

“I think the president can be helpful,” Peters said of Biden. But “this is about the candidates. They’re running to represent their state in the United States Senate. And they have to rise and fall by who they are as individuals.”

Sneakers, elastic pants: People alter office wear amid COVID

By ANNE D’INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Blazers in knit fabrics, pants with drawstrings or elastic waists, and polo shirts as the new button-down.

Welcome to the post-pandemic dress code for the office.

After working remotely in sweats and yoga pants for two years, many Americans are rethinking their wardrobes to balance comfort and professionalism as offices reopen. They’re giving a heave-ho to the structured suits, zip-front pants and pencil skirts they wore before the COVID-19 pandemic and experimenting with new looks. That has retailers and brands rushing to meet workers’ fashion needs for the future of work.

“Being comfortable is more important than being super structured,” said Kay Martin-Pence, 58, who went back to her Indianapolis office last month in dressy jeans and flowy tops after working remotely in leggings and slippers for two years. “Why feel buttoned up and stiff when I don’t have to?”

Before COVID-19, Martin-Pence used to wear dress pants with blazers to the pharmaceutical company where she works. She’s gone back to heels, but they’re lower, and she says she will never wear dress pants again to the office.

Even before the pandemic, Americans were dressing more casually at work. The time spent in sweats accelerated the shift from “business casual” to “business comfort.”

Still, return-to-office dressing remains a social experiment, said Adam Galinsky, a social psychologist at Columbia Business School who coined the term “enclothed cognition,” or how what people wear affects how they think.

“My guess is that it will go more casual, but maybe it doesn’t,” Galinsky said. “People are going to be consciously thinking about: ‘Am I wearing the right outfit for being in the office?’ They’re going to be thinking about what they’re doing, the context they’re in, and the social comparisons of what others will be doing.”

Steve Smith, CEO of outdoor sportswear brand L.L. Bean, said people are stepping out of their “typical uniform” — whatever form that may take.

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"They're going to expect more flexible hours, to be able to work in hybrid model, and to be comfortable — as comfortable as they were at home," he said. "Some of the office uniforms, office wardrobes, are shifting and changing. There's no reason why it can't be permanent."

Data from market research firm NPD Group and retailers reflect the shifting trends.

Wire-free bras now represent more than 50% of the total, non-sports bra market in the U.S., reversing a long-term trend, according to NPD. Sales of dressy footwear have been rebounding since 2021, but they're still 34% below 2019 levels and more likely fueled by the return of social occasions, not the office, NPD said. Instead, casual sneakers are now the most common shoes for work.

Clothing rental company Rent the Runway said rentals for blazers were up nearly twofold in February from last year, reflecting a return to offices. But its customers are choosing colorful versions like pastel and fabrics like lightweight tweed, linens and twill. It said "business formal" rentals — traditional workwear like basic sheaths, pencil skirts and blazers — are roughly half of what they were in 2019, said Anushka Salinas, president and chief operating officer.

Stitch Fix, a personal shopping and styling service, noted men are increasingly choosing options like hiking and golf pants for the office. For the first three months of the year, revenue for that type of clothing was up nearly threefold over a year ago.

Polo shirts have replaced the collared button-down for men, and there's strong demand for pull-on pants, the company said. The ratio of elastic-waist work pants to those with buttons or zippers on Stitch Fix was one to one in 2019; now it's three to one.

Other workers, however, are feeling excited about dressing up again.

Emily Kirchner, 42, of Stevensville, Michigan, who works in communications for a major appliance manufacturer, said she's investing more in her wardrobe as she returns to the office. She used to wear tunic tops and leggings from Stitch Fix in the pre-pandemic days. Now, she's turning to the service for high-end jeans, blouses and blazers.

"It's kind of fun to dress up," said Kirchner, who had a baby early in the pandemic and wants to wear clothes that don't make her look like what she calls a "frumpy mom." "It's kind of like that back-to-school feeling."

Retailers had to pivot to Americans' changing demands throughout the pandemic and now again with many returning to offices. Upscale department store Nordstrom, for example, has opened women's denim shops to highlight its expanded selection as it sees more women wearing jeans to work.

Even Ministry of Supply, a company looking to make work clothing as comfortable as exercise wear, had to make big changes. When the pandemic hit, it was stuck with piles of tailored pants and jackets in performance fabrics deemed irrelevant for a remote workforce.

The Boston-based company started by graduates from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology quickly reengineered the items, sticking in elastic waistbands and removing zippers. It also slimmed down hems on pant suits to give them "sneaker" cuts.

As workers return to the office, Ministry of Supply is keeping those relaxed looks and sneaker cuts and has permanently eliminated zippers — all its pants have elastic waistbands or drawstrings. It's also reinventing its tailored suit.

"The new challenge is: How do I look presentable when I am in person without sacrificing comfort?" said Gihan Amarasiriwardena, co-founder and president.

The 200-year-old haberdashery Brooks Brothers had a bigger challenge — it never followed the casual office attire trend several years ago like its rivals. Under a new owner and CEO Ken Ohashi, the company has found success in offering relaxed styles in a post-bankruptcy reinvention.

Now, 45% of its offerings are casual sportswear like sweaters and polo shirts. Before the pandemic, that figure was 25%, Ohashi said.

He said dress shirts are making a comeback as workers return to the office. But Brooks Brothers is adding a twist: a stretch version of its cotton-knit shirts with the comfort of a polo. It also is offering colorful jackets.

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"The guy is attracted to novelty right now, novelty color, novelty print, novelty pattern," Ohashi said. "Historically, that guy came in, and he was buying a navy, a charcoal and black suit. He definitely wants to mix it up. And I think that is here to stay."

US pediatricians' group moves to abandon race-based guidance

By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

For years, pediatricians have followed flawed guidelines linking race to risks for urinary infections and newborn jaundice. In a new policy announced Monday, the American Academy of Pediatrics said it is putting all its guidance under the microscope to eliminate "race-based" medicine and resulting health disparities.

A re-examination of AAP treatment recommendations that began before George Floyd's 2020 death and intensified after it has doctors concerned that Black youngsters have been undertreated and overlooked, said Dr. Joseph Wright, lead author of the new policy and chief health equity officer at the University of Maryland's medical system.

The influential academy has begun purging outdated advice. It is committing to scrutinizing its "entire catalog," including guidelines, educational materials, textbooks and newsletter articles, Wright said.

"We are really being much more rigorous about the ways in which we assess risk for disease and health outcomes," Wright said. "We do have to hold ourselves accountable in that way. It's going to require a heavy lift."

Dr. Brittani James, a family medicine doctor and medical director for a Chicago health center, said the academy is making a pivotal move.

"What makes this so monumental is the fact that this is a medical institution and it's not just words. They're acting," James said.

In recent years, other major doctor groups including the American Medical Association have made similar pledges. They are spurred in part by civil rights and social justice movements, but also by science showing the strong roles that social conditions, genetics and other biological factors play in determining health.

Last year, the academy retired a guideline calculation based on the unproven idea that Black children faced lower risks than white kids for urinary infections. A review had shown that the strongest risk factors were prior urinary infections and fevers lasting more than 48 hours, not race, Wright said.

A revision to its newborn jaundice guidance — which currently suggests certain races have higher and lower risks — is planned for this summer, Wright said.

Dr. Nia Heard-Garris, head of an academy group on minority health and equity and a pediatrician at Chicago's Lurie Children's Hospital, noted that the new policy includes a brief history "of how some of our frequently used clinical aids have come to be — via pseudoscience and racism."

Whatever the intent, these aids have harmed patients, she said.

"This violates our oath as physicians — to do no harm — and as such should not be used," Heard-Garris said.

Dr. Valerie Walker, a specialist in newborn care and health equity at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, called the new policy "a critical step" toward reducing racial health disparities.

The academy is urging other medical institutions and specialty groups to take a similar approach in working to eliminate racism in medicine.

"We can't just plug up one leak in a pipe full of holes and expect it to be remedied," said Heard-Garris. "This statement shines a light for pediatricians and other healthcare providers to find and patch those holes."

Met Gala returns to traditional spot on first Monday in May

By LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Well, hello first Monday in May.

The year's biggest night in fashion, the Met Gala, returns to its usual berth on the social calendar this year after pandemic upheaval. And if it feels like one of those what, already moments, it is.

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It's been just under eight months since the last gala, an annual fundraiser that raises eight-figure sums for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute. Pre-pandemic, about 600 A-listers from fashion, sports, music, film, TV, technology and beyond were invited. This year and last, the numbers were closer to 400. The 2020 gala was canceled.

More than \$16.4 million was raised last year. The starry event is the institute's primary budget feeder.

This year's gala coincides with the opening of the second part of a two-part exhibit at the Costume Institute focused on American fashion and style. The evening's dress code is gilded glamour and white tie, à la the Gilded Age, that tumultuous period between the Civil War and the turn of the 20th century known for its robber barons, drama and grandeur.

This year's walk up the Grand Staircase at the Met returns the gala to its legendary berth on the first Monday in May, with the official livestream appearing on Vogue's website.

Vogue's Anna Wintour has run the gala since 1995. She continues as one of the night's honorary co-chairs, along with designer Tom Ford and Instagram's Adam Mosseri. The official co-chairs for 2022 are Regina King, Blake Lively, Ryan Reynolds and Lin-Manuel Miranda.

The cost for a seat at last year's Met Gala started at \$35,000, though some attend for free. Celebrities are sometimes accompanied (and their tabs paid) by the designers who dress them or other companies that invite them. A focus on inclusivity in fashion this year may celebrate and include more unsung designer heroes than usual.

The event is the invention of the late Eleanor Lambert, a fashion publicist as powerful as Wintour in her day. In 1948, she needed to come up with a way to pay for the newly formed Costume Institute, the only department at the Met that must raise its own funds.

While many on Wintour's carefully tended guest list follow the dress code, others go their own way. Interpretation is everything. Think Rihanna in a papal hat, Billy Porter as a sun god carried on a litter by shirtless men and Lady Gaga peeling off layers as the fashion world came to a standstill to watch.

The gala also serves as a twisted time capsule of love gone wrong for celebrity couples who didn't make it. Kim Kardashian and Ye, the former Kanye West, first attended in 2013. Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes went in 2008. Jennifer Lopez attended with Marc Anthony in 2011, then with Alex Rodriguez in 2017, 2018 and 2019. Ben Affleck joined her inside last year after she walked alone.

Charlize Theron and Sean Penn were among the "it" couples invited in 2014. Selena Gomez and The Weeknd showed up together in 2017.

Muslims mark Eid al-Fitr holiday with joy, worry

By MARIAM FAM, NINIEK KARMINI and KATHY GANNON Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — For the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Fitr, the smell of freshly baked orange biscuits and powdered sugar-dusted cookies typically fills the air in Mona Abubakr's home. But due to higher prices, the Egyptian housewife this year made smaller quantities of the sweet treats, some of which she gives as gifts to relatives and neighbors.

The mother of three has also tweaked another tradition this Eid, which began Monday in Egypt and many Muslim-majority countries and marks the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. She bought fewer outfits for her sons to wear during the three-day feast.

"I told them we have to compromise on some things in order to be able to afford other things," she said.

This year, Muslims around the world are observing Eid al-Fitr — typically marked with communal prayers, celebratory gatherings around festive meals and new clothes — in the shadow of a surge in global food prices exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. Against that backdrop, many are still determined to enjoy the Eid amid easing of coronavirus restrictions in their countries while, for others, the festivities are dampened by conflict and economic hardship.

At the largest mosque in Southeast Asia, tens of thousands of Muslims attended prayers Monday morning. The Istiqlal Grand Mosque in Indonesia's capital Jakarta was shuttered when Islam's holiest period coincided with the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 and was closed to communal prayers last year.

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"Words can't describe how happy I am today after two years we were separated by pandemic. Today we can do Eid prayer together again," said Epi Tanjung after he and his wife worshipped at another Jakarta mosque. "Hopefully all of this will make us more faithful."

The war in Ukraine and sanctions on Russia have disrupted supplies of grain and fertilizer, driving up food prices at a time when inflation was already raging. A number of Muslim-majority countries are heavily reliant on Russia and Ukraine for much of their wheat imports, for instance.

Even before the Russian invasion, an unexpectedly strong global recovery from the 2020 coronavirus recession had created supply chain bottlenecks, causing shipping delays and pushing prices of food and other commodities higher.

In some countries, the fallout from the war in Ukraine is only adding to the woes of those already suffering from turmoil, displacement or poverty.

In Syria's rebel-held northwestern province of Idlib, Ramadan this year was more difficult than Ramadans past. Abed Yassin said he, his wife and three children now receive half the amounts of products — including chickpeas, lentils, rice and cooking oil — which last year they used to get from an aid group. It has made life more difficult.

Syria's economy has been hammered by war, Western sanctions, corruption and an economic meltdown in neighboring Lebanon where Syrians have billions of dollars stuck in Lebanese banks.

In the Gaza Strip, though streets and markets are bustling, many say they cannot afford much.

"The situation is difficult," said Um Musab, a mother of five, as she toured a traditional market in Gaza City. "Employees barely make a living but the rest of the people are crushed."

Mahmoud al-Madhoun, who bought some date paste, flour and oil to make Eid cookies, said financial conditions were going from bad to worse. "However, we are determined to rejoice," he added.

The Palestinian enclave, which relies heavily on imports, was already vulnerable before the Ukraine war as it had been under a tight Israeli-Egyptian blockade meant to isolate Hamas, its militant rulers.

Afghans are celebrating the first Eid since the Taliban takeover amid grim security and economic conditions. Many were cautious but poured into Kabul's largest mosques for prayers on Sunday, when the holiday started there, amid tight security.

Frequent explosions marred the period leading to Eid. These included fatal bombings, most claimed by the Islamic State affiliate known as IS in Khorasan Province, targeting ethnic Hazaras who are mostly Shiites, leaving many of them debating whether it was safe to attend Eid prayers at mosques.

"We want to show our resistance, that they cannot push us away," said community leader Dr. Bakr Saeed before Eid. "We will go forward."

Violence wasn't the only cause for worry. Since the Taliban takeover in August, Afghanistan's economy has been in a freefall with food prices and inflation soaring.

At a charity food distribution center in Kabul on Saturday, Din Mohammad, a father of 10, said he expected this Eid to be his worst.

"With poverty, no one can celebrate Eid like in the past," he said. "I wish we had jobs and work so we could buy something for ourselves, not have to wait for people to give us food."

Muslims follow a lunar calendar, and methodologies, including moon sighting, can lead to different countries — or Muslim communities — declaring the start of Eid on different days.

In Iraq, fewer shoppers than usual appeared to have visited the capital's clothing markets this year. Security issues also plague celebrations, with security forces going on high alert from Sunday to Thursday to avert possible attacks after a suicide bombing in Baghdad last year ahead of another major Islamic holiday killed dozens.

In India, the country's Muslim minority is reeling from vilification by hardline Hindu nationalists who have long espoused anti-Muslim stances, with some inciting against Muslims. Tensions boiled over into violence at Ramadan, including stone-throwing between Hindu and Muslim groups.

Muslim preachers cautioned the faithful to remain vigilant during Eid.

Indian Muslims "are proactively preparing themselves to deal with the worst," said Ovais Sultan Khan, a rights activist. "Nothing is as it used to be for Muslims in India, including the Eid."

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Still, many Muslims elsewhere rejoiced in reviving rituals disrupted by pandemic restrictions.

Millions of Indonesians have crammed into trains, ferries and buses ahead of Eid as they poured out of major cities to celebrate with their families in villages in the world's most populous Muslim-majority country. The return of the tradition of homecoming caused great excitement after two years of subdued festivities due to pandemic restrictions.

"The longing for (the) Eid celebration in a normal way has finally been relieved today although the pandemic has not yet ended," said Hadiyul Umam, a resident of Jakarta.

Many in the capital flocked to shopping centers to buy clothes, shoes and sweets before the holiday despite pandemic warnings and food price surges.

Muslims in Malaysia were also in a celebratory mood after their country's borders fully reopened and COVID-19 measures were further loosened. Ramadan bazaars and shopping malls have been filled with shoppers ahead of Eid and many travelled to their hometowns.

"It's a blessing that we can now go back to celebrate," said sales manager Fairuz Mohamad Talib, who works in Kuala Lumpur. His family will celebrate at his wife's village after two years of being apart due to earlier travel curbs.

There, he said, they will visit neighbors after the Eid prayers, chanting praises of Prophet Muhammad, and sharing food at each stop.

"It's not about feasting but about getting together," he said ahead of the holiday. With COVID-19 still on his mind, the family will take precautions such as wearing masks during visits. "There will be no handshakes, just fist bumps."

Live updates | Commander glad for steel mill evacuations

By The Associated Press undefined

KYIV, Ukraine — Sviatoslav Palamar, deputy commander of the Azov Regiment, which is helping defend the last section of Mariupol not occupied by the Russians, said he was glad evacuations had begun.

Palamar hoped the evacuations from the Azovstal steel mill continue until everyone in the plant, civilians and soldiers, had gotten out. It's been difficult even to reach some of the wounded inside the plant, he told The Associated Press in an interview from Mariupol on Sunday.

"There's rubble. We have no special equipment. It's hard for soldiers to pick up slabs weighing tons only with their arms," he said.

The Azovstal plant is strewn with mines, rockets, artillery shells and unexploded cluster ordnance, he said.

Along with the Azov regiment, Palamar said, the plant is being defended by the 36th Marine Brigade, police officers, border guards, coast guard and more. "Some of them guard the territory, some of them prevent attempted attacks, some of them are responsible for a ceasefire, some of them help to clear the rubble under shelling."

He said the presence of children and civilians makes it harder to fight, and there are many injured people in the plant. There's not enough water, he said, and the air smells of decomposing bodies.

The fighters in the plant will continue to resist until they receive an order not to, Palamar said.

"The best solution in this situation is our evacuation. Does it make a sense to continue carrying this massacre?" he asked.

The standoff at the steel plant saved many lives, he believes. "Because if we hadn't done this, the front line would be much bigger. The front line would be in another area."

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR:

- Evacuations underway at steel plant in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol
- Pelosi leads delegation to Kyiv and Poland; vows US support
- Combat death puts spotlight on Americans fighting in Ukraine
- Wives of Mariupol defenders appeal for soldiers' evacuation
- Look for the orange vest: Ukrainians in Romania help others

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— Germany vows to stop using Russian oil exports by late summer

— Ukraine admits 'Ghost of Kyiv' fighter pilot is a myth

Follow all AP stories on Russia's war on Ukraine at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

An explosive device damaged a railway bridge Sunday in the Kursk region of Russia, which borders Ukraine, and a criminal investigation has been started. The region's government reported the blast in a post on Telegram.

Recent weeks have seen a number of fires and explosions in Russian regions near the border, including Kursk. An ammunition depot in the Belgorod region burned after explosions were heard, and authorities in the Voronezh region said an air defense system shot down a drone. An oil storage facility in Bryansk was engulfed by fire a week ago.

The explosion Sunday caused a partial collapse of the bridge near the village of Konopelka, on the Sudzha-Sosnovy Bor railway, the report from Kursk said.

"It was a sabotage, a criminal case has been opened," said the region's governor, Roman Starovoi, according to TASS. He said there were no casualties, and no effect on the movement of trains.

KYIV, Ukraine — Four civilians were reported killed and 11 more were injured by Russian shelling in the Donetsk region on Sunday, the Ukrainian regional governor said that evening.

The deaths and seven of the injuries were in the northern city of Lyman, governor Pavlo Kyrylenko wrote in a Telegram post. One person also died in the city of Bakhmut from injuries received in the Luhansk region, he said.

In the same post, Kyrylenko said that it was impossible to determine the number of victims in the bombed-out port city of Mariupol and the town of Volnovakha, which is controlled by pro-Kremlin separatists.

LVIV, Ukraine — President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused Moscow of waging "a war of extermination," citing strikes against non-military targets on Sunday.

Zelenskyy said in his nightly address that Russian shelling had hit food, grain and fertilizer warehouses, and residential neighborhoods in the Kharkiv, Donbas and other regions.

"The targets they choose prove once again that the war against Ukraine is a war of extermination for the Russian army," he said.

He said Russia will gain nothing from the damage but will further isolate itself from the rest of the world.

"What could be Russia's strategic success in this war?" Zelenskyy said. "Honestly, I do not know."

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's president is describing his hourslong weekend meeting with U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in Kyiv as a powerful signal of support in a difficult time.

In a televised address on Sunday evening, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his meeting with Pelosi included discussions of defense supplies to Ukraine, financial support and sanctions against Russia.

Pelosi and a half dozen U.S. lawmakers met with Zelenskyy and his top aides for about three hours late Saturday to voice American solidarity with the besieged nation and get a first-hand assessment as she works to steer a massive new Ukraine aid package through Congress.

Zelenskyy says Ukrainians "are grateful to all partners who send such important and powerful signals of support by visiting our capital at such a difficult time."

Additionally, Zelenskyy estimated that more than 350,000 people had been evacuated from combat zones thanks to humanitarian corridors pre-arranged with Moscow since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in late February. Many civilians were evacuated Sunday from at a steel plant in the bombed-out city of Mariupol.

KYIV, Ukraine — A Ukrainian military officer says that Russian forces have resumed their shelling of a

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steel plant in the war-torn port city Mariupol immediately after the partial evacuation of civilians.

Ukrainian National Guard brigade commander Denys Shlega said Sunday in a televised interview that the shelling began as soon as rescue crews ceased evacuating civilians at the Azovstal steel mill.

Shlega says that at least one more round of evacuations is needed to clear civilians from the plant. He says dozens of small children remain in bunkers below the industrial facilities.

The commander estimates that several hundred civilians still are trapped at the site alongside nearly 500 wounded soldiers and numerous dead bodies. The plant is the only part of the city not occupied by the Russians.

A video published earlier on Sunday by the Russian defense ministry showed people walking out of the steel plant, including a small group of women accompanied by two pet dogs.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Sunday's evacuations from Mariupol marked the initiation of a vitally need humanitarian corridor.

BERLIN — Germany says it's making progress on weaning itself off Russian fossil fuels and expects to be fully independent of crude oil imports from Russia by late summer.

Economy and Climate Minister Robert Habeck said Sunday that Europe's largest economy has reduced its share of Russian energy imports to 12% for oil, 8% for coal and 35% for natural gas.

Habeck says those steps mean increased costs for the economy and for consumers. But he says the changes are necessary if Germany no longer wants to be "blackmailed by Russia."

The announcement comes as the European Union considers an embargo on Russian oil. The bloc has already decided to ban Russian coal imports starting in August.

Weaning German off Russian natural gas is a far bigger challenge. Before Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, Germany got more than half of its natural gas imports from Russia.

KYIV, Ukraine — The city council in the bombed-out southern Ukrainian city of Mariupol says Monday is the scheduled start date for a broad, U.N.-backed evacuation of its civilians, other than those sheltering at a steel plant.

The city council also confirmed Sunday in a social media post on Telegram that some civilians were being evacuated Sunday from the Azovstal steelworks that is the last Ukrainian defense stronghold in Mariupol. City officials note the support of the Red Cross and say the wider evacuation of the strategic port city was delayed by security concerns.

As many as 100,000 people are believed to still be in blockaded Mariupol, including up to 1,000 civilians who were hunkered down with an estimated 2,000 Ukrainian fighters beneath the Soviet-era steel plant. The plant is the only part of the city not occupied by the Russians.

KYIV, Ukraine — The Ukrainian army says that a Russian offensive along a broad front in the country's east has been stalling amid human and material losses inflicted by Kyiv's forces.

The General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine said Sunday in a Facebook post that Russian troops were trying to advance in the Sloboda, Donetsk and Tauride regions, but were being held back by Ukrainian forces that continue to fight village by village.

Separately, Ukrainian intelligence officials accused Russian forces of destroying medical infrastructure, taking equipment and denying medical care to residents in several occupied cities and towns.

In a Facebook post Sunday, Ukraine's Ministry of Defense claims that ventilators and other equipment provided since 2014 by international donors and the government of Ukraine were removed from a hospital at Starobilsk in Ukraine's eastern Luhansk region.

The same post alleges that tuberculosis patients were denied medical care in the Kharkiv region at Volchansk while several facilities were used to treat wounded Russian troops.

The accuracy of the claims could not be immediately verified.

Ukrainian officials also said Sunday that internet and cellular communications were cut in a large area in the Russian-occupied Kherson region and part of the Zaporizhzhia region and blamed Russian forces.

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The London-based internet monitor Netblocks said the Kherson region lost 75% of internet connectivity beginning Saturday evening.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has confirmed that an evacuation is underway of civilians at a steel plant in the bombed-out city of Mariupol.

Zelenskyy said on social media Sunday that a group of 100 people are on their way from Azovstal steelworks to Ukrainian-controlled territory.

He indicated that plans are underway for a Monday rendezvous with the evacuees at the southeastern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia that has previously been a staging post for those fleeing Mariupol. Zaporizhzhia is located about 230 kilometers (140 miles) from Mariupol.

As many as 100,000 people are believed to still be in blockaded Mariupol, including up to 1,000 civilians who were hunkered down with an estimated 2,000 Ukrainian fighters beneath the Soviet-era steel plant — the only part of the city not occupied by the Russians.

DUSSELDORF, Germany — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has pledged to continue to support Ukraine with money, aid and also weapons, saying a pacifist approach to the war is “outdated.”

Speaking at a May Day rally in Dusseldorf, Scholz said: “I respect all pacifism, I respect all attitudes, but it must seem cynical to a citizen of Ukraine to be told to defend himself against Putin’s aggression without weapons.”

The German leader also warned that the war would have consequences for food supply, potentially leading “to a worldwide hunger crisis.”

Soaring food prices and disruption to supplies coming from Russia and Ukraine have threatened food shortages in countries in the Middle East, Africa and parts of Asia.

ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine — The United Nations has confirmed that an operation to evacuate people from a steel plant in the bombed-out Ukrainian city of Mariupol is underway.

U.N. humanitarian spokesman Saviano Abreu told The Associated Press on Sunday that the effort to bring people out of the sprawling Azovstal steel plant was being done in collaboration with the International Committee for the Red Cross and in coordination with Ukrainian and Russian officials.

He called the situation “very complex” and would not give further details.

Up to 1,000 civilians are believed to be hunkered down with an estimated 2,000 Ukrainian fighters beneath the sprawling Soviet-era steel plant that is the only part of the city not occupied by the Russians.

BERLIN — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has brushed aside criticism that his government is not doing enough to help Ukraine defend itself against Russia’s invasion.

Even though Germany reversed its policy of not sending weapons to countries at war, Scholz has been accused at home and abroad of being hesitant and slow in coming to Ukraine’s aid. In an interview published Sunday by newspaper Bild, the Social Democratic leader defended his government’s approach.

“I make my decisions quickly — and in coordination with our partners,” Scholz was quoted as saying. “I am suspicious of acting too hastily and Germany going it alone.”

Germany broke with tradition after Russia’s invasion on Feb. 24 to supply anti-tank weapons, surface-to-air missiles and other military equipment to Ukraine. It has since agreed to provide Gepard anti-aircraft guns, but Scholz has faced mounting pressure to send other heavy weapons including tanks and other armored vehicles.

Scholz, who replaced Angela Merkel as chancellor late last year, said he wasn’t bothered by opposition claims that he’s too hesitant and timid.

“It is part of a democracy that you are robustly challenged by the opposition,” he said.

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis has appealed again for a safe evacuation of Ukrainians trapped in the steel plant of Mariupol, saying he weeps thinking of their suffering and how their city has been “barba-

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rously bombed and destroyed.”

Speaking Sunday during his traditional noontime prayer, Francis urged all the faithful to pray the Rosary every day in May for peace. He noted that May 1 begins the month Christians dedicate to Mary, the mother of God and for whom Mariupol is named.

He said: “Even now, even from here, I renew the request that safe humanitarian corridors be arranged for the people trapped in the steelworks of that city. I suffer and cry thinking of the suffering of the Ukrainian population, especially the weakest, the elderly and children.”

He noted the “terrible reports of children being expelled and deported” and the “terrible regression of humanity.”

WARSAW, Poland — Poland’s armed forces said Sunday that military exercises involving thousands of NATO soldiers have begun. They are regular exercises aimed at improving the security of the alliance’s eastern flank but come this year with Russia’s war against Ukraine raging nearby.

Due to those circumstances, Poland’s military appealed to the public on Sunday not to publish information or photos of the columns of military vehicles expected to move through the country in the coming weeks.

It warned that “ill-considered activity” could harm the alliance’s security. “Let’s be aware of the dangers!” the statement said.

The Polish Army said in a statement that 18,000 soldiers from over 20 countries were taking part in the Defender Europe 2022 and Swift Response 2022 exercises that are taking place in Poland and eight other countries.

The exercises are scheduled to run May 1-27.

RZESZOW, Poland — U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has praised the courage of the Ukrainian people and vowed continued U.S. support to help Ukraine defeat Russia after leading a congressional delegation to Kyiv to assess Ukraine’s needs for the next phase of the war.

Pelosi, a California Democrat who is next in line to the presidency after the vice president, is the most senior American lawmaker to visit Ukraine since Russia’s war began more than two months ago.

She and a half-dozen U.S. lawmakers met for three hours Saturday with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his top aides. Speaking to reporters Sunday in Poland, the delegation members were unanimous in praising Ukraine’s defenses so far and offering continued long-term military, humanitarian and economic support, vowing the United States would stand with Ukraine until it defeated Russia.

“This is a time we stand up for democracy or we allow autocracy to rule the day,” said Rep. Gregory Meeks, a Democrat from New York.

Rep. Jason Crow, a Democrat from Colorado, a veteran and a member of the House intelligence and armed services committee said he came to Ukraine with three areas of focus: “Weapons, weapons and weapons.”

He said: “We have to make sure the Ukrainians have what they need to win. What we have seen in the last two months is their ferocity, their intense pride, their ability to fight and their ability to win if they have the support to do so.”

Pelosi said she was “dazzled” by Zelenskyy’s expertise of all the issues at hand and described him at their meeting as “a remarkable master class of leadership.”

LONDON — Russian “cyber soldiers” have launched a new offensive against foreign leaders, targeting social media platforms with a large-scale disinformation campaign that seeks to legitimize the invasion of Ukraine, according to research funded by the U.K.

Paid operatives working from a factory in St. Petersburg use the Telegram messaging app to recruit and coordinate supporters who then flood the social media accounts of Kremlin critics with comments supporting Russian President Vladimir Putin and the war in Ukraine, the U.K. Foreign Office said Sunday.

The so-called troll factory has developed new techniques to avoid detection by social media platforms,

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posting comments and amplifying pro-Kremlin content created by legitimate users rather than creating its own content, the Foreign Office said. Traces of its activity have been found on eight social media platforms, including Telegram, Twitter, Facebook and TikTok.

The operation has targeted politicians and wider audiences in a number of countries, including the U.K., South Africa and India, the Foreign Office said. It is believed to have links to Yevgeniy Prigozhin, who has been sanctioned by both the U.S. and Britain for financing the Kremlin's online influence operations.

"We cannot allow the Kremlin and its shady troll farms to invade our online spaces with their lies about Putin's illegal war," Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said in the statement. "The U.K. government has alerted international partners and will continue to work closely with allies and media platforms to undermine Russian information operations."

LVIV, Ukraine — Satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press show damage to oil depots just across the Ukrainian border in Russia after suspected Ukrainian attacks.

The photos from Saturday show damage at two sites in Bryansk. The blasts damaged multiple tanks, leaving the surrounding grounds charred.

The explosions happened Monday. One hit an oil depot owned by Transneft-Druzhba, a subsidiary of the Russian state-controlled company Transneft that operates the western-bound Druzhba (Friendship) pipeline carrying crude oil to Europe.

The second facility is a short distance from the other.

Bryansk is located about 100 kilometers (60 miles) north of the border with Ukraine.

KYIV, Ukraine — U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi has met with Ukraine's president.

Footage released early Sunday by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office showed Pelosi in Kyiv with a Congressional delegation. Those with Pelosi included Reps. Jason Crow, Jim McGovern and Adam Schiff.

Zelenskyy told the delegation: "You all are welcome."

Pelosi later said: "We believe that we are visiting you to say thank you for your fight for freedom. We are on a frontier of freedom and your fight is a fight for everyone. Our commitment is to be there for you until the fight is done."

The visit was not previously announced.

KYIV, Ukraine — Some women and children were evacuated from a steel plant that is the last defensive stronghold in the bombed-out ruins of the port city of Mariupol, a Ukrainian official and Russian state news organizations said.

But hundreds are believed to remain trapped with little food, water or medicine.

The United Nations was working to broker an evacuation of the up to 1,000 civilians living beneath the sprawling Soviet-era Azovstal plant after numerous previous attempts failed.

Ukraine has not said how many fighters are also in the plant, the only part of Mariupol not occupied by Russian forces, but Russia put the number at about 2,000. An estimated 100,000 civilians remain in the city.

U.N. humanitarian spokesperson Saviano Abreu said the world organization was negotiating with authorities in Moscow and Kyiv, but he could not provide details of the ongoing evacuation effort "because of the complexity and fluidity of the operation."

LVIV, Ukraine — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken says American diplomats are making plans to return to Ukraine as soon as possible.

Blinken made the comment while speaking to Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba. An overnight statement Sunday said Blinken told Kuleba that America "plans to return to Kyiv as soon as possible."

He said diplomats had been making "initial visits" to Lviv to prepare.

The U.S. evacuated its embassy in Kyiv in February just before Russia launched its war on the country. The U.S. had been bringing diplomats across the Polish border each day to work in Lviv, a city in western Ukraine, before stopping the practice.

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Lviv has largely been spared in the conflict, though a missile strike several days ago targeted a railroad facility near the city.

The U.S. is one of Ukraine's main backers in the war, providing billions in aid and weaponry.

Evacuations under way in Mariupol; Pelosi visits Ukraine

By CARA ANNA and YESICA FISCH Associated Press

ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine (AP) — A long-awaited evacuation of civilians from a besieged steel plant in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol was under way Sunday, as U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi revealed that she visited Ukraine's president to show unflinching American support for the country's defense against Russia's invasion.

Video posted online by Ukrainian forces showed elderly women and mothers with small children bundled in winter clothing being helped as they climbed a steep pile of debris from the sprawling Azovstal steel plant's rubble, and then eventually boarded a bus.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said more than 100 civilians, primarily women and children, were expected to arrive in the Ukrainian-controlled city of Zaporizhzhia on Monday.

"Today, for the first time in all the days of the war, this vitally needed (humanitarian) corridor has started working," he said in a pre-recorded address published on his Telegram messaging app channel.

The Mariupol City Council said on Telegram that the evacuation of civilians from other parts of the city would begin Monday morning. People fleeing Russian-occupied areas in the past have described their vehicles being fired on, and Ukrainian officials have repeatedly accused Russian forces of shelling evacuation routes on which the two sides had agreed.

Later Sunday, one of the plant's defenders said Russian forces resumed shelling the plant as soon as the evacuation of a group of civilians was completed.

Denys Shlega, the commander of the 12th Operational Brigade of Ukraine's National Guard, said in a televised interview Sunday night that several hundred civilians remain trapped alongside nearly 500 wounded soldiers and "numerous" dead bodies.

"Several dozen small children are still in the bunkers underneath the plant," Shlega said. "We need one or two more rounds of evacuation."

Sviatoslav Palamar, deputy commander of the Azov Regiment, which is helping defend the steel plant, told The Associated Press in an interview from Mariupol on Sunday that it has been difficult even to reach some of the wounded inside the plant.

"There's rubble. We have no special equipment. It's hard for soldiers to pick up slabs weighing tons only with their arms," he said. "We hear voices of people who are still alive" inside shattered buildings.

As many as 100,000 people may still be in blockaded Mariupol, including up to 1,000 civilians hunkered down with an estimated 2,000 Ukrainian fighters beneath the Soviet-era steel plant — the only part of the city not occupied by the Russians.

Mariupol, a port city on the Sea of Azov, is a key target because of its strategic location near the Crimea Peninsula, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014.

U.N. humanitarian spokesman Saviano Abreu said civilians who have been stranded for nearly two months at the plant would receive immediate humanitarian support, including psychological services, once they arrive in Zaporizhzhia, about 140 miles (230 kilometers) northwest of Mariupol.

Mariupol has seen some of the worst suffering. A maternity hospital was hit with a lethal Russian airstrike in the opening weeks of the war, and about 300 people were reported killed in the bombing of a theater where civilians were taking shelter.

A Doctors Without Borders team was at a reception center for displaced people in Zaporizhzhia, in preparation for the U.N. convoy's arrival. Stress, exhaustion and low food supplies have likely weakened civilians trapped underground at the plant.

Ukrainian regiment Deputy Commander Sviatoslav Palamar, meanwhile, called for the evacuation of wounded Ukrainian fighters as well as civilians. "We don't know why they are not taken away, and their evacuation to the territory controlled by Ukraine is not being discussed," he said in a video posted Saturday

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on the regiment's Telegram channel.

Video from inside the steel plant, shared with The Associated Press by two Ukrainian women who said their husbands were among the fighters refusing to surrender there, showed men with blood-stained bandages, open wounds or amputated limbs, including some that appeared gangrenous. The AP could not independently verify the location and date of the video, which the women said was taken last week.

Meanwhile, Pelosi and other U.S. lawmakers visited Kyiv on Saturday. She is the most senior American lawmaker to travel to the country since Russia's Feb. 24 invasion. Her visit came just days after Russia launched rockets at the capital during a visit by U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres.

Rep. Jason Crow, a U.S. Army veteran and a member of the House intelligence and armed services committees, said he came to Ukraine with three areas of focus: "Weapons, weapons and weapons."

In his nightly televised address Sunday, Zelenskyy said more than 350,000 people had been evacuated from combat zones thanks to humanitarian corridors pre-agreed with Moscow since the start of Russia's invasion. "The organization of humanitarian corridors is one of the elements of the negotiation process (with Russia), which is ongoing," he said.

Zelenskyy also accused Moscow of waging "a war of extermination," saying Russian shelling had hit food, grain and fertilizer warehouses, and residential neighborhoods in the Kharkiv, Donbas and other regions.

"What could be Russia's strategic success in this war? Honestly, I do not know. The ruined lives of people and the burned or stolen property will give nothing to Russia," he said.

In Zaporizhzhia, residents ignored air raid sirens and warnings to shelter at home to visit cemeteries Sunday, when Ukrainians observe the Orthodox Christian day of the dead.

"If our dead could rise and see this, they would say, 'It's not possible, they're worse than the Germans,'" Hennadiy Bondarenko, 61, said while marking the day with his family at a picnic table among the graves. "All our dead would join the fighting, including the Cossacks."

Russian forces have embarked on a major military operation to seize significant parts of southern and eastern Ukraine following their failure to capture the capital, Kyiv.

Russia's high-stakes offensive has Ukrainian forces fighting village-by-village and more civilians fleeing airstrikes and artillery shelling.

Ukrainian intelligence officials accused Russian forces of seizing medical facilities to treat wounded Russian soldiers in several occupied towns, as well as "destroying medical infrastructure, taking away equipment, and leaving the population without medical care."

Getting a full picture of the unfolding battle in eastern Ukraine is difficult because airstrikes and artillery barrages have made it extremely dangerous for reporters to move around. Also, both Ukraine and Moscow-backed rebels have introduced tight restrictions on reporting from the combat zone.

But Western military analysts have suggested the offensive was going much slower than planned. So far, Russian troops and separatists appeared to have made only minor gains in the month since Moscow said it would focus its military strength in the east.

Hundreds of millions of dollars in military assistance has flowed into Ukraine since the war began, but Russia's vast armories mean Ukraine will continue to require huge amounts of support.

With plenty of firepower still in reserve, Russia's offensive could intensify and overrun the Ukrainians. Overall the Russian army has an estimated 900,000 active-duty personnel, and a much larger air force and navy.

In Russia's Kursk region, which borders Ukraine, an explosive device damaged a railway bridge Sunday, and a criminal investigation has been started, the region's government reported in a post on Telegram.

Recent weeks have seen a number of fires and explosions in Russian regions near the border, including Kursk. An ammunition depot in the Belgorod region burned after explosions were heard, and authorities in the Voronezh region said an air defense system shot down a drone. An oil storage facility in Bryansk was engulfed by fire a week ago.

Mower, co-inventor of implantable defibrillator, dies at 89

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BALTIMORE (AP) — Dr. Morton Mower, a former Maryland-based cardiologist who helped invent an automatic implantable defibrillator that has helped countless heart patients live longer and healthier, has died at age 89.

Funeral services were held Wednesday for Mower, who died two days earlier of cancer at Porter Adventist Hospital in Denver, The Baltimore Sun reported. The Maryland native had moved to Colorado about a decade ago.

Mower and Dr. Michel Mirowski, both colleagues at Sinai Hospital in Baltimore, began working in 1969 on developing a miniature defibrillator that could be implanted into a patient. The device would correct a patient's over-rapid or inefficient heartbeat with an electric shock to resume its regular rhythm.

"It was the talk of the whole hospital that these two crazy guys are going to put in an automatic defibrillator," Mower said in a 2015 interview with The Lancet medical journal. "If something had gone awry, we would have never lived it down. We were these two crazy guys who wanted to put a time bomb in people's chests, so to speak."

The physicians had, in a matter of months, a model of an automatic implantable cardioverter defibrillator for demonstration. But it wasn't until 1980 that the device was implanted into a human at Johns Hopkins Hospital, the newspaper reported.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the device in 1985. Both doctors shared the patent for the device, the technology of which was sold to pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly. Mower later became director of medical research for the Eli Lilly division that produced the implantable cardioverter defibrillator, according to the newspaper.

"I think Morty had as much influence successfully finding a treatment for sudden death as anyone in our profession," said Dr. David Cannom, a retired Los Angeles cardiologist and longtime friend.

The device "proved that it was better than medication in treating arrhythmia, and they did this against all odds at a small hospital in Baltimore," Cannom added. "And for the past 40 years, it has proven that it's reliable" while saving many lives.

Mower, a Baltimore native who grew up in Frederick, attended Johns Hopkins and the University of Maryland School of Medicine. He worked at Baltimore hospitals and served in the Army before beginning his professional career at Sinai in 1966 as a co-investigator of its Coronary Drug Project. He was chief or acting chief of cardiology at the hospital for several years in the 1970s and 1980s. Sinai Hospital named a medical office building for him in 2005.

Later in his career, he was a consultant or executive for several medical companies.

"He continued his research and worked up until his death," his son, Mark Mower, of Beverly Hills, California, wrote in an email to the newspaper. "He never wanted to waste a moment of his life."

Mower received many awards, including a 2002 induction into the National Inventors Hall of Fame. He also was involved in many Jewish charitable organizations. One group, Jewish National Fund-USA, praised him for his fundraising efforts toward water infrastructure, education and community centers in Israel. Mower and his wife of 57 years, Toby, had visited Israel weeks before his death.

"As a medical inventor, his innovations restarted the hearts of millions, yet he also gave a heartbeat to an entire nation — the land and people of Israel," Jewish National Fund-USA CEO Russell F. Robinson said in a news release.

In addition to his wife and son, Mower is survived by his daughter, Robin Sara Mower of Denver; and three grandchildren.

Combat death puts spotlight on Americans fighting in Ukraine

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

Harrison Jozefowicz quit his job as a Chicago police officer and headed overseas soon after Russia invaded Ukraine. An Army veteran, he said he couldn't help but join American volunteers seeking to help Ukrainians in their fight.

Jozefowicz now heads a group called Task Force Yankee, which he said has placed more than 190 vol-

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unteers in combat slots and other roles while delivering nearly 15,000 first aid kits, helping relocate more than 80 families and helping deliver dozens of pallets of food and medical supplies to the southern and eastern fronts of the war.

It's difficult, dangerous work. But Jozefowicz said he felt helpless watching from the United States last year during the U.S. pullout from Afghanistan, particularly after a close friend, Staff Sgt. Ryan Knauss, died in a suicide bombing at Kabul.

"So, I'm just trying to do everything I can to make sure I can help others not go through what I went through," he said Saturday during an interview conducted through a messaging platform.

A former U.S. Marine who died last week was believed to be the first American citizen killed while fighting in Ukraine. Willy Joseph Cancel, 22, died Monday while working for a military contracting company that sent him to Ukraine, his mother, Rebecca Cabrera, told CNN.

An undetermined number of other Americans — many with military backgrounds — are thought to be in the country battling Russian forces beside both Ukrainians and volunteers from other countries even though U.S. forces aren't directly involved in fighting aside from sending military materiel, humanitarian aid and money. The U.S. government discourages Americans from fighting in Ukraine, which raises legal and national security issues.

Russia's invasion has given Ukraine's embassy in Washington the task of fielding inquiries from thousands of Americans who want to help in the fight, and Ukraine is using the internet to recruit volunteers for a foreign force, the International Legion of Defense of Ukraine.

"Anyone who wants to join the defense of security in Europe and the world can come and stand side by side with the Ukrainians against the invaders of the 21st century," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a recruitment pitch.

Texan Anja Osmon, who did tours in Iraq and Afghanistan while serving in the U.S. Army from 2009 through 2015, said she went to Ukraine on her own. A medic, she said she arrived in Ukraine on March 20 and lived in the woods with other members of the International Legion before a new commander sent her away because he didn't want female fighters.

Osmon, 30, said her mother wants her home before September. But for now she's anxious to get out of the hotel where she is staying in Lviv and catch on with another fighting force nearer the action.

"I can't turn away from injustice," she said. "No one should be scared."

U.S. Marine veteran Eddy Etue said he quit his job in the gig economy, found a friend in Colorado to watch his cat and gave up his home four blocks from the beach in San Diego, California, to help out in Ukraine, where he's been about two weeks. He first worked with an aid organization but now is training with the International Legion.

Etue, 36, said he simply couldn't stay home. "It's just the right thing to do," said Etue, who financed the journey through an online fundraising campaign.

Etue's family history pulled him toward Ukraine. He said his grandparents left Hungary with nothing but their four children and clothes after the 1956 revolution, which was put down by Soviet forces that killed or wounded thousands.

"What's happening here will affect not only the people who are experiencing it but their children and grandchildren as well," he said. "I know that from personal experience."

Jozefowicz, the former Chicago cop, says there are thousands of American and other volunteers in Ukraine. Multiple organizations are operating in the country, and Jozefowicz said his group alone has placed scores of volunteers in positions all over the country, with about 40 of those being combat jobs.

"We do not facilitate a civilian going into any direct-action role. We only guide and connect prior military volunteers," he said.

But there's plenty of other work to do. Groups of volunteers are getting medical and food supplies to people in the nation of 44 million people, he said, and others are working with refugees and others who've had to flee their homes.

"The closer I got into Ukraine and the more time I spent in Ukraine, the more voids I found that needed

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to be filled to maximize my groups volunteer efforts," he said.

Osmon, who said she's been in contact with Jozefowicz's group, said she supplied troops with antibiotics and anti-inflammatory medications after days in the woods.

"Most everyone had air raid fever from hiding in the trenches in the snow and cold air," she said. "Bronchitis was ravaging us."

Etue said he got a feel for the country after making a 24-hour round trip with another volunteer to pick up a vehicle in Odessa. He said he's been impressed with the quality of people serving in the International Legion since Ukrainians have done a good job of weeding out the inexperienced and "war tourists" who don't have much to offer a military unit.

"I think they're doing amazingly well given that they're at war with one of the largest standing armies in the world," he said.

Biden calls former VP Mondale 'giant' of political history

By WILL WEISSERT and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — President Joe Biden saluted his "friend of five decades" Walter Mondale on Sunday, traveling to the University of Minnesota to remember the former vice president and Democratic Party elder whose memorial service was delayed for a year due to the pandemic.

Mondale died in April 2021 at age 93. He is credited with transforming the office of the vice presidency — which Biden himself held for eight years under President Barack Obama — expanding its responsibilities and making himself a key adviser to President Jimmy Carter.

Mondale "was a giant in American political history," Biden said of Mondale, known to friends as "Fritz." He added that Mondale was one of the "toughest, smartest men I've ever worked with" both as Senate colleagues and as a mentor when Biden was Obama's No. 2 and then later as president.

Biden emphasized Mondale's empathy, recalling his own promise during the 2020 presidential campaign to unite the country. That's something the president has strayed from a bit in recent weeks, as he seeks to draw a starker contrast between his administration and congressional Republicans who have opposed it on nearly every major issue.

"It was Fritz who lit the way." Biden said. "Everybody is to be treated with dignity. Everybody."

Biden added of Mondale: "He united people sharing the light, the same hopes — even when we disagreed, he thought that was important."

"It's up to each of us to reflect that light that Fritz was all about."

The invitation-only, 90-minute service Sunday inside a stately campus auditorium featured plentiful organ music. Biden, who received a standing ovation, said he spoke with Mondale's family beforehand and "got emotional" himself.

Democratic Sen. Tina Smith called Mondale a "bona fide political celebrity" who still dedicated time to races large and small back in their home state. Minnesota civil rights icon Josie Johnson spoke of what a good listener Mondale was and how he championed inclusiveness.

Democratic Sen. Amy Klobuchar described once being an intern who climbed under chairs and a table to carry out a furniture inventory when Mondale was vice president.

"That was my first job in Washington. And, thanks to Walter Mondale, this was my second," Klobuchar said of being a senator, noting that Mondale encouraged her to run and taught "the pundits in Washington how to say my name."

Democratic Gov. Tim Walz said Minnesota may be better known as Mondale's home state than its moniker "The Land of 10,000 Lakes," and praised Mondale's intellect, humility, humor and optimism.

"He embodied a sense of joy. He lived his life every single day," Walz said. "At 91, he was still fishing for walleye. Unlike me, he was catching some."

A booklet given to attendees for the "afternoon of remembrance and reflection" quoted from Mondale's 2010 book, "The Good Fight": "I believe that the values of the American people — our fundamental decency, our sense of justice and fairness, our love of freedom — are the country's greatest assets, and

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that steering by their lodestar is the only true course forward.”

Its back cover showed Mondale’s face next to the slogan, “We told the truth. We obeyed the law. We kept the peace,” which Klobuchar described as being memorialized after the then-vice president said them at the end of the Carter administration.

Mondale was a graduate of the University of Minnesota and its law school, which has a building named after him. During Sunday’s remembrance, Biden wiped his eyes as a performance of “Tomorrow” from the musical “Annie” played, and the service closed with the university’s marching band, which sent people away with the “Minnesota Rouser” fight song.

Mondale followed a trail blazed by his political mentor, Hubert H. Humphrey, serving as Minnesota attorney general before replacing Humphrey in the Senate. He was Carter’s vice president from 1977 to 1981.

Mondale also lost one of the most lopsided presidential elections ever, to Ronald Reagan in 1984. He carried only Minnesota and the District of Columbia after bluntly telling voters to expect a tax increase if he won. But he made history in that race by picking Rep. Geraldine Ferraro, of New York, as his running mate, becoming the first major-party nominee to put a woman on the ticket.

Mondale remained an important Democratic voice for decades afterward, and went on to serve as ambassador to Japan under President Bill Clinton. In 2002, at 74, he was drafted to run for the Senate again after Sen. Paul Wellstone was killed in a plane crash shortly before the election. Mondale lost the abbreviated race to Republican Norm Coleman.

Germany: Quitting Russian oil by late summer is ‘realistic’

BERLIN (AP) — Germany says it’s making progress on weaning itself off Russian fossil fuels and expects to be fully independent of Russian crude oil imports by late summer.

Economy and Climate Minister Robert Habeck said Sunday that Europe’s largest economy has reduced the share of Russian energy imports to 12% for oil, 8% for coal and 35% for natural gas. Germany has been under strong pressure from Ukraine and other nations in Europe to cut energy imports from Russia that are worth billions of euros, which help fill Russian President Vladimir Putin’s war chest.

“All these steps that we are taking require an enormous joint effort from all actors and they also mean costs that are felt by both the economy and consumers,” Habeck said in a statement. “But they are necessary if we no longer want to be blackmailed by Russia.”

The announcement comes as the whole European Union considers an embargo on Russian oil following a decision to ban Russian coal imports starting in August. The bloc pays Russia \$850 million a day for oil and natural gas and Germany is one of its top importers of Russian energy.

Germany has managed to shift to oil and coal imports from other countries in a relatively short time, meaning that “the end of dependence on Russian crude oil imports by late summer is realistic,” Habeck’s ministry said.

Weaning German off Russian natural gas is a far bigger challenge.

Before Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, Germany got more than half of its natural gas imports from Russia. That share is now down to 35%, partly due to increased procurement from Norway and the Netherlands, the ministry said.

To further reduce Russian imports, Germany plans to speed up the construction of terminals for liquified natural gas, or LNG. The Energy and Climate Ministry said Germany aims to put several floating LNG terminals into operation as early as this year or next. That’s an ambitious timeline that the ministry acknowledged “requires an enormous commitment from everyone involved.”

Germany has resisted calls for an EU boycott on Russian natural gas. It also watched with worry last week as Moscow immediately halted gas supplies to Poland and Bulgaria after they rejected Russian demands to pay for gas in rubles. European officials called those moves by Russia “energy blackmail.”

Germany’s central bank has said a total cutoff of Russian gas could mean 5 percentage points of lost economic output and higher inflation.

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GOP Gov Hutchinson says 2024 presidential bid 'on the table'

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson said Sunday he is weighing a presidential run in 2024 and his decision won't be affected by whether former President Donald Trump decides to join the race.

Hutchinson, a two-term Republican governor who is restricted under Arkansas law from seeking a third term, said it was time for the national GOP to move on from Trump in regards to the candidates he's endorsing in the 2022 midterm elections as well as "the direction he wants to take our country."

Asked on CNN's "State of the Union" if he was mulling a presidential run, Hutchinson replied: "I am. But you have got to get through, of course, this year, but that's an option that's on the table."

Making clear he was "not aligned" with Trump, Hutchinson added: "I think he did a lot of good things for our country, but we need to go a different direction. And so that's not a factor in my decision-making process."

Currently the chairman of the National Governors Association, Hutchinson in recent months has become a fixture on cable television — at times drawing the ire of Trump — in defending his veto of legislation targeting transgender youths in the state and warning fellow Republicans about tying their fortunes too closely to the former president. After the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot, which led to Trump's impeachment by the House, Hutchinson said he wanted Trump's administration to end. He's made it clear since early 2021 that he would not back a Trump 2024 bid and urged public officials to look ahead rather than focus on Trump's false claims of a stolen 2020 election.

Though Trump remains the most popular figure among Republican voters who dominate primary elections, several GOP figures are considering presidential runs on a platform opposing the former president. Beyond Hutchinson, they include Gov. Larry Hogan of Maryland and Reps. Adam Kinzinger of Illinois and Liz Cheney of Wyoming.

Other candidates eyeing possible runs are Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former Vice President Mike Pence and former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, though they have been less clear about their intentions if Trump enters the race. Nikki Haley, a former South Carolina governor and U.N. ambassador, has said she would stand down on a potential bid if Trump opts to run a second time.

Tourists, rejoice! Italy, Greece relax COVID-19 restrictions

By NICOLE WINFIELD and DEMETRIS NELLAS Associated Press

ROME (AP) — For travelers heading to Europe, summer vacations just got a whole lot easier.

Italy and Greece relaxed some COVID-19 restrictions on Sunday before Europe's peak summer tourist season, in a sign that life was increasingly returning to normal.

Greece's civil aviation authority announced that it was lifting all COVID-19 rules for international and domestic flights except for the wearing of face masks during flights and at airports. Previously, air travelers were required to show proof of vaccination, a negative test or a recent recovery from the disease.

As of Sunday, visitors to Italy no longer have to fill out the EU passenger locator form, a complicated online ordeal required at airport check-in.

Italy also did away with the health pass that had been required to enter restaurants, cinemas, gyms and other venues. The green pass, which showed proof of vaccination, recovery from the virus or a recent negative test, is still required to access hospitals and nursing homes.

Some indoor mask mandates in Italy also ended, including inside supermarkets, workplaces and stores. Masks are still required on public transport, in cinemas and in all health care facilities and nursing homes.

"It was needed," said Claudio Civitelli, a Rome resident having his morning coffee at a bar near the Trevi Fountain. Until Sunday, patrons had to wear a mask to enter bars and restaurants, though they could remove them to eat and drink. "We have waited more than two years."

At a nearby table, Andrea Bichler, an Italian tourist from Trentino Alto-Adige, sat with friends, all without masks.

"It's much better," Bichler said. "Let's say it's a return to life, a free life."

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In Greece, where tourism accounts for about 20% of its GNP, enforcing the rules had already fallen off prior to Sunday. On the tourist island of Mykonos, revelers flooded beaches, bars and restaurant the previous weekend for the Orthodox Easter holiday. Some owners said business was the best they had seen in years and expected that to continue for the long May Day weekend.

Vaccination certificates in Greece were abolished, not permanently, but from May 1 to August 31 and it will be determined in August whether to bring them back. Also suspended were restrictions on the number of customers in indoor spaces. But masks are still required indoors and in vehicles in Greece, and experts recommend using them outdoors in crowded situations like concerts.

Business owners said many unvaccinated people were among those enjoying the end of COVID-19 restrictions.

"We saw again old customers whom we hadn't seen since November," when vaccination certificates first became mandatory, Michalis Epitropidis, general secretary of the association of restaurant, cafe and bar owners in Thessaloniki, told the Associated Press. "By punishing the unvaccinated, the state was punishing us."

Thessaloniki, Greece's second-largest city, was a hotbed of militant vaccine denialism and protests against COVID-19 restrictions.

Like Italy, Greece saw tourism revenues plunge in 2020 and only partially rebound in 2021. Greece is now hoping for a record tourism year in 2022 — and so does neighboring Albania, where restrictions were also lifted Sunday.

Public health officials say masks still remain highly recommended in Italy for all indoor activities, and private companies can still require them.

Given that the virus is still circulating, "we should keep up the vaccine campaign, including boosters, and keep up behavior inspired by prudence: wearing masks indoors or in crowded places or wherever there's a risk of contagion," said Dr. Giovanni Rezza, in charge of prevention at the health ministry.

Arizona wildfire forces fast decision: Fight or flee flames?

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — In a small enclave in northern Arizona where homes are nestled in a Ponderosa pine forest and tourists delight in camping, hiking and cruising on ATVs, high winds are nothing new.

But when those winds recently ramped up and sent what was a small wildfire racing toward their homes, residents in the close-knit Girls Ranch neighborhood near Flagstaff faced a dilemma: quickly grab what they could and flee, or stay behind and try to ward off the towering, erratic flames.

Most of the property owners left. One couple stood their ground. Another raced to save animals on neighbors' properties.

The blaze that started Easter Sunday swept across vacant lots, scorched tree stumps and cast an orange glow on the parched landscape. Flames licked the corner of one woman's porch and destroyed two other homes, leaving a mosaic of charred land as the 30-square-mile (77 square-kilometer) fire finally neared full containment this weekend.

Elsewhere, firefighters in northern New Mexico on Sunday continued to battle the largest active wildfire in the U.S. as strong winds pushed it closer to the small city of Las Vegas.

Officials said the blaze had damaged or destroyed 172 homes and at least 116 structures since it started April 6 and merged with another wildfire a week ago. Officials said the fire had grown to 162 square miles (419 square kilometers), but was still 30% contained.

The blazes are among many this spring that forced panicked residents to make life-or-death, fight-or-flee snap decisions as wildfire season heats up in the U.S. West. Years of hotter and drier weather have the exacerbated blazes, leading them to frequently burn larger areas and for longer periods compared with previous decades.

Some who live in Girls Ranch had just minutes to react.

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Polly Velie rushed out of a physical therapy appointment when she learned her home was in the evacuation zone. She sped through embers and thick smoke to find her husband hosing down the driveway. Her voice shrieked as she yelled above the smoke alarms going off throughout the house.

"Bill, we gotta go!" she hollered.

But Bill Velie — who cut fire lines with a dozer in multiple states for years — was intent on staying. It's the same decision the couple made in 2010 when another wildfire in the area forced evacuations. Polly Velie said she's never been more scared, but the choice wasn't difficult: "This is our house, and he's my husband."

The couple watched neighbors load up horses and donkeys and haul them off. They saw torched tumbleweeds fly across a major highway, flames tear through an old stone house and a propane tank burst.

"Boy, that made her jump," Bill Velie said. "Just like a bomb went off."

Firefighters encouraged them at least a handful of times to leave, and they agreed to if the winds shifted. More than anything, Bill Velie reassured them he had things under control.

He had thinned parts of the national forest on the other side of his property line, and he regularly mows the grass. They kept sprinklers running outside, and Bill Velie bladed the edge of the forest a few times where it looked like the fire was crawling toward neighbors' homes. At night, the flames twinkled on the hill behind them like red stars in the sky.

"I've seen some exciting stuff, but not like this for a while," he said. "Do I miss it? No."

Ali Taranto and her husband, Tim, own a house in the neighborhood. They saw news about the fire on a neighborhood Facebook page and drove from Winslow, where she works as a nurse about an hour away, to check on the 5-acre (2-hectare) property.

Ali Taranto drove past the neighborhood's namesake Girls Ranch property, once a home for troubled girls, and saw parts of the white fence melted to the ground.

She checked on her neighbor, Marianne Leftwich, who said she was fine. But Taranto didn't hear from her for about an hour. Then, Leftwich's daughter called to say her mother was stuck in her house.

Taranto alerted emergency responders, she said, but dispatch told her she'd probably get to Leftwich before they could. Taranto found the woman semi-conscious and gasping for air, in need of help to evacuate, Taranto said.

"As a community in an emergency like this, all the systems were totally overwhelmed," Taranto said. "Thank God I got there and got her out in time."

Taranto took Leftwich's dogs to a kennel, then returned to rescue a goat and a cow she saw roaming around nearby.

Other than some burned grass and brush, Taranto's property was unscathed.

Harriet Young's house overlooks the neighborhood. She hired an arborist last year to remove dead trees and cut low-lying branches as a fire-prevention measure. She had pinkish gravel laid on the long driveway and around the front of her house.

Young believes it saved the home she and her late husband built in the 1990s. The wildfire burned all around it, sparing the house and the invasive olive trees that her daughter wished hadn't survived.

"This was a miracle, that's all I got to say," said Young's daughter, Stacey Aldstadt, who stayed with her mom for a few days after the fire swept through.

When they were allowed back home a week ago on Sunday, they had no heat or hot water. Young spent four days battling with propane companies to get it turned back on. Finally, she persuaded a former fire chief to come by and fix it.

Everyone here knows Young, the staunch Democrat who regularly hosts Christmas parties. She made call after call as the fire progressed and planned to stay home, based on what she'd heard.

But neighbor Jeanne Welnick saw the plume of smoke that seemed so distant grow and move toward their neighborhood, and urged Young to leave.

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"I owe Jeanne a huge 'thank-you,'" Young said.

The Welnicks initially bought the house behind Young's as a vacation property. The previous owners built it with wildfire in mind.

The 14-inch-thick (36-centimeter) exterior walls are concrete sandwiched by Styrofoam cells topped by a metal roof. Those walls are still standing.

The rest of the Victorian ranch-style home painted orange with green trim isn't.

Flames tore through, twisting strips of metal that creaked as the wind blew through. Shards of glass and nails shot out onto the driveway where the Welnicks wrote their names and the year they bought the house, 2004.

A cherub statue the Welnicks placed outside as a memorial to a child they lost to miscarriage looked down at the rubble. Two packages that were delivered to the walkway after the home burned held material for trellis arches the Welnicks planned to assemble over their vegetable garden. Unburned pavers and bags of sand sat off to the side of the garage, ready to be laid down.

At midday, a bell that was near the front door to welcome them home rang out, hidden among piles of debris.

Jeanne Welnick scanned the property, wondering which trees would survive. She grieved the loss of her paintings and a squash blossom necklace that was passed down through her husband's family. She kept it in a glass case.

"I'd like to look for that, but it's probably not even there," said Welnick, an artist.

Their dogs, guitars and some sculptures made it out with them, through what Welnick described as a roaring train, dark, scary, like Armageddon.

In the aftermath, some neighbors struggled with the right words to say to those who lost their homes. Some offered food, clothes, a place to stay and set up fundraising accounts.

"They kept saying, 'We love you so much; we love you so much,'" Welnick said. "And they do."

Homeless shelters begin to see value in making room for pets

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Being homeless in Los Angeles and struggling with addiction is hard enough, but Rachel Niebur couldn't imagine enduring it without her dog Petey.

Niebur credits her constant companion, an energetic black and white chihuahua mix, with helping her keep off drugs and giving her a reason to get up in the morning.

"She needs me. She gives me my focus. I have to feed her. I have to walk her. It's a real relationship," said Niebur, before following Petey to the small, fenced-in dog park on the grounds of the shelter in the Venice neighborhood where the inseparable pair have lived for about two years.

Traditional homeless shelters have long been off limits to pets, leaving animal owners who want to get off the streets with a difficult choice. But as homelessness surges across the U.S., those working toward a solution are increasingly recognizing the importance pets have for vulnerable populations and are looking for ways to keep owners and pets together.

When given the choice between getting shelter or giving up their pet, unhoused people will almost always choose to remain on the streets, said Tim Huxford, the associate director of the Venice facility now home Niebur and Petey.

"So we always want to reduce the amount of barriers that we have for people in bringing them off the street," he said. "We realize that pets are like family to people."

The Venice shelter operated by the nonprofit People Assisting the Homeless, or PATH, was the first of its kind in Los Angeles County to allow residents to bring animal companions, Huxford said.

Thanks to a state grant, PATH has a budget for food, crates, toys and veterinary services under an initiative called the Pet Assistance and Support program. In 2019, the pilot program provided \$5 million to nonprofits and local jurisdictions, and that amount was doubled the following year. Now pending legislation

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would make the grant program permanent, while expanding it across the state.

State Sen. Robert Hertzberg, who wrote the bill that would expand the program, estimates that about 10% of homeless Californians have pets. And the reason many shelters don't accept animals is simply because they don't have resources to care for them, said Hertzberg, a dog owner.

He called pets "our comfort" and cited research that found animals provide companionship and a sense of purpose to people who don't have housing.

The Democrat from Los Angeles said it's just "raging common sense" to give nonprofits and other caregivers the budgets they need to feed and house pets, especially considering how much California already allocates to address the statewide homelessness crisis.

"We're spending a billion dollars over here to get people off the street; why can't we spend a few dollars over there to put together veterinary services and dog food and crates? These are grants of between \$100,000 and \$200,000, so it's not a ton of money in the grand scheme of things," Hertzberg said.

The money would come the state's general fund, so it's not cutting into any existing funding, Hertzberg said. The measure, SB513, unanimously passed the state Senate in January and now awaits consideration in the Assembly.

The California law is part of a larger national recognition of the issue.

In Arizona, for example, there are several organizations that take care of animals for residents who are struggling to get back on their feet.

A nonprofit no-kill shelter called Lost Our Home provides up to 90 days of pet care for homeless people while they search for a permanent place to live following a crisis like eviction, domestic violence or medical treatment.

Don Kitch manages one of several shelters operated in the Phoenix area by the nonprofit Family Promise, among the few that allow people to keep their pets at a separate area for the animals at the site. He said his shelter was currently housing four dogs, two cats and a Guinea pig.

"Unfortunately, there are very few facilities around here that will accept pets," said Kitch.

He said many shelters do allow service animals, and less frequently emotional support animals.

Kitch said the Arizona Humane Society takes in pets for 90 days to allow their owners time to find stable housing, while the Sojourner Center allows domestic violence victims to keep their pets at the shelter.

Kitch said Family Promise used a grant from PetSmart to get started with its program to house pets. He said he'd welcome a law like California's, because "anything to defray the cost would be ideal for a nonprofit homeless shelter like ours."

The national nonprofit Best Friends Animal Society has joined forces with Catholic Charities USA to push for programs that keep homeless people and their pets together. The group Feeding Pets of the Homeless organizes veterinary clinics and donation drives for pet food and supplies.

The ASPCA and other animal care groups are urging the California bills' passage.

"The ASPCA believes that financial circumstances alone are not reliable indicators of the capacity to love and care for a companion animal and that pets are incredible source of support and companionship in our lives, especially during times of stress and uncertainty," said Susan Riggs, the ASPCA's Senior Director of Housing Policy.

One of Petey's canine companions at the Venice PATH facility is Champ, a pit bull mix that his owner Ro Mantooth calls "the mascot" of the shelter.

"He's really my best friend. I don't know what I'd do without him," Mantooth, 29, said of Champ. "I'm lucky to have him. Not a lot of places are going to take animals, you know?"

In addition to Petey and Champ, there are eight other dogs and one cat at the Venice shelter. Huxford said another PATH facility has a parrot in a cage. Technically there are no rules about what animals can be admitted, he said, but that hasn't been tested yet.

"If someone came in with an elephant, I guess we'd have to see," he said.

Researchers returning for assessment of last US slave ship

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MOBILE, Ala. (AP) — Researchers are returning to the Alabama coast near Mobile to assess the sunken remains of the last slave ship to bring captive Africans to the United States more than 160 years ago.

The Alabama Historical Commission says a team will begin a 10-day evaluation of the remnants of the *Clotilda* on Monday. Experts have described the wreck as the most complete slave ship ever discovered.

The agency has hired Resolve Marine, a salvage and services company, for work involving the *Clotilda*. The ship was scuttled in the muddy Mobile River after illegally dropping off 110 West Africans on the Alabama coast in 1860, decades after Congress outlawed the international slave trade.

The company plans to moor a 100-foot-long (30.5-meter-long) barge at the site with equipment to support divers and store artifacts that are removed from the water for analysis and documentation.

"It is a tremendous duty to ensure the *Clotilda* is evaluated and preserved," Aaron Jozsef, the project manager for Resolve Marine, said in a statement.

Some have advocated for removing the wreckage from the water and placing it on display in a new museum that's being discussed, and officials have said the work will help determine whether such a project is possible.

The *Clotilda's* voyage was financed by a wealthy Alabama businessman, Timothy Meaher, whose descendants still have extensive land holdings around Mobile. Enslaved upon their arrival in Alabama, some of the Africans started a community called Africatown USA just north of Mobile after the Civil War, and many of their descendants still live there.

Ship wreckage in the river was identified as being that of the *Clotilda* in 2019, and officials have been assessing the site and deciding what to do with it ever since. While small parts of the two-masted wooden schooner have been brought to the surface, researchers have found that most of the ship — including the pen that was used to imprison the captives — remains intact on the river bottom.

Working with the state and SEARCH Inc., Resolve Marine said it will perform work including an assessment of the *Clotilda's* hull and a limited excavation of artifacts. It's also developing a plan to conserve the wreckage where it's currently located in the river a few miles north of Mobile.

The work, which is being funded with a \$1 million state appropriation, "will add to the collective understanding of the vessel and the site's potential to yield significant archaeological information about the ship and its final voyage," Jozsef said.

104 and no more: Amputee wraps up marathon record quest

By WILLIAM J. KOLE Associated Press

When amputee athlete Jacky Hunt-Broersma says her mantra is, "I can do hard things," she's not kidding — the amputee athlete has run 104 marathons in as many days, all using a carbon-fiber prosthesis.

Hunt-Broersma, 46, completed that epic quest on Saturday near her home in suburban Phoenix, setting an unofficial world record along the way.

"What a journey," she tweeted.

The South Africa native, who lost her left leg below the knee to a rare cancer, gained worldwide attention and a huge social media following after beginning her record attempt on Jan. 17.

Brick Runners, an organization that supports athletes who raise money for charities, even designed a Jacky-inspired Lego-style character complete with one of her favorite T-shirts, which reads: "Strong Has Many Forms."

Hunt-Broersma also raised more than \$67,000 to help fellow amputee blade runners get the expensive prostheses they need. Health insurance typically doesn't cover the cost, which can exceed \$10,000.

Every day since mid-January, she covered the classic 26.2-mile (42.2-kilometer) marathon distance either on a loop course laid out near her home in Gilbert, Arizona, or on a treadmill indoors.

Her original goal was to run 100 marathons in 100 days so she'd beat a record of 95 set in 2020 by Alyssa Amos Clark, a nondisabled runner from Bennington, Vermont, who did it as a pandemic coping strategy. But last month, after nondisabled British runner Kate Jayden unofficially broke Clark's record with 101 marathons in 101 days, Hunt-Broersma realized she'd need to run at least 102.

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In an interview with The Associated Press, she said she hoped her quest would inspire people everywhere to push themselves regardless of their physical limitations.

Guinness World Records spokesperson Amanda Marcus said the Britain-based organization was aware of Hunt-Broersma's attempt, and that it would take 12 to 15 weeks to review the evidence before the record can be confirmed.

Guinness lists the men's record for consecutive daily marathons as 59, set in 2019 by Enzo Caporaso of Italy.

Marshals: Reward for info on escaped inmate, missing officer

FLORENCE, Ala. (AP) — The U.S. Marshals Service said Sunday that it is offering up to \$10,000 for information about an escaped inmate and a "missing and endangered" correctional officer who disappeared Friday after the two left a jail in north Alabama.

Casey Cole White, 38, had been jailed on a capital murder charge in the Lauderdale County Detention Center in Florence, Alabama, about 75 miles (121 kilometers) west of Huntsville.

The inmate and assistant director of corrections Vicky White, 56, left the Lauderdale County Detention Center on Friday morning to go to a nearby courthouse, the sheriff's office said in a Facebook post Saturday. Investigators said the two are not related.

"Casey White is believed to be a serious threat to the corrections officer and the public," the U.S. marshal for northern Alabama, Marty Keely, said in a statement Sunday.

While in state prison for other crimes in 2020, Casey confessed to the 2015 stabbing death of Connie Ridgeway, WHNT-TV reported.

Vicky White has been with the department 16 years. At a news conference Friday, Singleton said she was armed when she left the jail with the inmate and headed to the courthouse for what she said was a mental health evaluation for Casey White. She was alone with the inmate, which the sheriff said violated department policy.

"Our policy is for any inmate with those kinds of charges to have two sworn deputies escort them. And that did not happen," Singleton said.

Singleton also said there was no mental health evaluation for the inmate scheduled at the courthouse. The vehicle the officer and the inmate were in when they left the detention center was found at a nearby shopping center parking lot, according to the sheriff's office.

Vicky White also told co-workers she had a doctor's appointment scheduled, which was confirmed but the office said the deputy never showed, the sheriff said. Officials said no one realized the two were missing until about six hours after they left the jail. Deputies tried to contact Vicky White but her phone repeatedly went to voicemail.

Singleton said his department was "aggressively investigating" the incident and would be looking into previous interaction between the two to "see if something else was going on." Singleton told news outlets that Vicky White had turned in her retirement papers the day before she went missing.

The sheriff told AL.com on Sunday that there were no new developments in the investigation. The Associated Press called the sheriff's office, but a phone message there said the office was closed Sunday.

The Marshals Service said Casey is 6 feet, 9 inches (2.06 meters) tall and weighs about 260 pounds (118 kilograms). He has brown hair and hazel eyes.

The Marshals Service said people with information about Casey White's location or Vicky White's disappearance can call the service at 1-800-336-0102. Anonymous tips may also be submitted through the U.S. Marshals Tip App.

'Bad Guys' repeats at No. 1, Liam Neeson's latest misfires

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

The DreamWorks animated heist movie "The Bad Guys" was the top film in U.S. and Canada theaters for the second straight weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday, while the latest Liam Neeson thriller suggested the actor's particular set of skills may be wearing thin with audiences.

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"The Bad Guys," distributed by Universal Pictures, made \$16.1 million in ticket sales in its second weekend, holding well with only a 33% drop from last weekend. The film, adapted from Aaron Blabey's kids' graphic novel, has helped reignite family moviegoing.

April moviegoing was largely dominated by Paramount Pictures' "Sonic the Hedgehog 2" — which stayed in second place with \$11.4 million, bringing its cumulative total to \$160.9 million — and "The Bad Guys," with \$44.4 million in two weeks.

The latest Neeson thriller, "Memory," however, was mostly forgotten by moviegoers. The Open Road-Briarcliffe Entertainment R-rated release launched with an estimated \$3.1 million in 2,555 locations. That's much in line with the last few films starring Neeson. In the past two years, "Blacklight" (a \$3.5 million debut), "Honest Thief" (\$4.1 million) and "The Marksman" (\$3.1 million) all opened similarly.

The last Neeson thriller to make a dent was 2019's "Cold Pursuit," which debuted with \$11 million and ultimately grossed \$62.6 million worldwide. But either due to oversaturation or lackluster reception ("Memory" has a 30% "fresh" rating on Rotten Tomatoes"), a once dependable box-office force has gone cold.

"Neeson's pre-pandemic crime pics did well, including the successful 'Taken' series, but audiences are showing little interest now," David A. Gross, who runs the movie consultancy FranchiseRe, wrote in a newsletter. "Moviegoing activity is improving, but 'Memory,' as well as 'Blacklight' and 'The Marksman,' are hitting a wall."

The eighth-place "Memory" was the only new wide release on a quiet weekend in theaters ahead of the Friday release of Marvel's "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness." The Walt Disney Co. release will effectively kick off Hollywood's summer season, one the industry is hoping will approach pre-pandemic levels.

Studios last week trumpeted their summer slates at the industry convention CinemaCon, raising expectations for big-budget films like "Top Gun: Maverick" and "Jurassic World Dominion."

The brightest spot in theaters currently continues to be "Everything Everywhere all at Once," which dropped just 2% in its sixth week of release with \$5.5 million. The film, an existential metaverse action comedy starring Michelle Yeoh, has had unusually long legs in theaters, and with \$35.5 million in sales so far, ranks as one of indie studio A24's biggest hits.

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," \$16.1 million.
2. "Sonic the Hedgehog 2," \$11.4 million.
3. "Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore," \$8.3 million.
4. "The Northman," \$6.3 million.
5. "Everything Everywhere all at Once," \$5.5 million.
6. "The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent," \$3.9 million.
7. "The Lost City," \$3.9 million.
8. "Memory," \$3.1 million.
9. "Father Stu," \$2.2 million.
10. "Morbius," \$1.5 million.

Pelosi, in surprise Kyiv trip, vows unbending US support

By VANESSA GERA, NICOLE WINFIELD and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — A top-level U.S. congressional delegation led by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi praised the "ferocity" and resolve of Ukrainians face to face with their leader in a weekend visit to Kyiv undertaken in extraordinary secrecy.

Pelosi, second in line to the presidency after the vice president, was the most senior American lawmaker to visit Ukraine since Russia's war began more than two months ago. Only days earlier, Russia bombed the Ukrainian capital while the U.N. secretary-general was there.

Pelosi and the half dozen U.S. lawmakers with her met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and

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his top aides for three hours late Saturday to voice American solidarity with the besieged nation and get a first-hand assessment of the effort as she works to steer a massive new Ukraine aid package through Congress.

"Our commitment is to be there for you until the fight is done," Pelosi is seen telling Zelenskyy in a video of the meeting released by his office. "We are on a frontier of freedom and your fight is a fight for everyone. Thank you for your fight for freedom."

"You all are welcome," Zelenskyy told the delegation.

Pelosi told reporters in Poland on Sunday the delegation was proud to convey to Zelenskyy "the message of unity from the Congress of the United States, a message of appreciation from the American people for his leadership and admiration for the people of Ukraine for their courage." She is set to meet Polish President Andrzej Duda, a NATO ally, on Monday in Warsaw.

The delegation's trip to Kyiv was not disclosed until the party was safely out of Ukraine. Nor were details given on how they got to the capital and back. A week earlier, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin Zelenskyy traveled to Kyiv overland from Poland for talks with Zelenskyy.

The members of the congressional delegation were unanimous in praising Ukraine's defenses, in painting the battle of one as good against evil and in assuring continued long-term U.S. military, humanitarian and economic support.

"This is a struggle of freedom against tyranny," said Rep. Adam Schiff, chairman of the House Intelligence committee.

The trip came two days after U.S. President Joe Biden asked Congress for \$33 billion to bolster Ukraine's fight against Russia, more than twice the size of the initial \$13.6 billion aid measure that now is almost drained. The measure is designed to signal to Russian President Vladimir Putin that U.S. weaponry and other forms of assistance aren't going away.

Rep. Jason Crow of Colorado, a veteran and a member of the House intelligence and armed services committees, said he went to Ukraine with three areas of focus: "Weapons, weapons and weapons."

"We have to make sure the Ukrainians have what they need to win," he said. "What we have seen in the last two months is their ferocity, their intense pride, their ability to fight and their ability to win if they have the support to do so."

Scores of U.S. lawmakers are trekking to the region to witness first hand the war's toll and shore up U.S. troops in the broader region. Pelosi's delegation was notable for the seniority of its members.

The trip also underscored Pelosi's stature as an ambassador on the global stage. The speaker is well known in Europe and elsewhere abroad, typically leads travel delegations and keeps close relations with allies overseas.

Though all in the delegation were Democrats, the U.S. Congress has displayed a rare and, so far, lasting bipartisan resolve to back Ukraine as it battles Russia. Pelosi has branded the war a conflict between democracy and autocracy and vowed Washington will stand with Ukraine until it defeats the invaders.

Pelosi came with Rep. Gregory Meeks, chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee; Rep. Jim McGovern of Massachusetts, chair of the House Rules Committee; Reps. Barbara Lee of California and Bill Keating of Massachusetts, Crow and Schiff.

"This is a time we stand up for democracy or we allow autocracy to rule the day," Meeks said. Crow said the U.S. "is in this to win, and we will stand with Ukraine until victory is won."

Schiff, as intelligence panel chair, said he was particularly focused on making sure Ukraine is getting the U.S. intelligence support it needs to "defeat Russian forces."

The delegation's visit followed those of several EU officials and European heads of state who have gone to show solidarity with Zelenskyy, starting with the March 15 surprise visit by the leaders of NATO members Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia.

More recently, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres met Zelenskyy in Kyiv on Thursday. A missile strike rained down on the capital barely an hour after their joint press conference, an attack Kyiv's mayor said was Putin giving his "middle finger" to Guterres.

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The delegation was visiting southeast Poland and going later to the capital. Poland has received more than 3 million refugees from Ukraine since Russia launched its war on Feb. 24.

"We look forward to thanking our Polish allies for their dedication and humanitarian efforts," Pelosi said.

McGovern said Russia's war had repercussions far beyond Ukraine and was exacerbating a food crisis that would be disastrous for poor people across the globe.

"Putin's brutal war is no longer only a war against the people of Ukraine," McGovern said. "It's also a war against the world's most vulnerable."

He added: "I don't think that Putin cares if he starves the world."

Ricardo Alarcón, Castro confidant and top Cuban envoy, dies

By ANDREA RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — Ricardo Alarcón, who was for years the head of Cuba's parliament and one of the country's most prominent diplomats, has died in Havana, authorities in Cuba said Sunday. He was 84 years old.

Alarcón was the trusted adviser to Fidel Castro, and his brother and successor Raúl, for decades and was a key negotiator in difficult talks with the United States in issues including immigration and the legal battle for the return of the child Elián González to Cuba in 2000.

Alarcón did not participate directly in negotiations that led to the island's thaw with Washington in 2014 under the direction of Presidents Barack Obama and Raúl Castro, since he had by that time left public life.

However, he was heavily involved in efforts to secure the release of five Cuban intelligence agents detained in Florida in 1999. Their return to Cuba coincided with the process of reestablishing diplomatic relations.

"To Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, master of the diplomats of our generation, we will always keep deep respect, admiration and infinite affection. Thank you for the privilege and honor of having been his disciple," Deputy Minister Josefina Vidal said on Twitter.

Alarcón, who spoke fluent English, was frequently interviewed on U.S. television channels about the policies of the island's communist government.

He was one of the top leaders and a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party, and was even mentioned as a possible successor to Fidel Castro before his brother Raúl Castro assumed the leadership of the country in 2008.

Wearing his traditional guayabera, his cigar between bony hands with long fingers and his thin glasses, Alarcón used to combine harsh rhetoric and fine sarcasm to criticize US policies towards Cuba, which he attributed to the influence of the Cuban exile community in Miami.

During the legal dispute over the custody of Elián González, Alarcón was a personal adviser to the minor's father. During the process, he compared Cuban exiles in Miami with a "banana republic" and a "wild west" where no law reached.

Alarcón, who often described the U.S. embargo as "genocidal," was president of the National Assembly from 1993. He retired as its leader in 2013.

At the head of this institution in 2002, Alarcón led efforts to inscribe the permanence of the socialist system in the Constitution, in defiance of growing demands for democratic reforms from opponents and some governments.

Before becoming a parliamentarian, Alarcón served as foreign minister and twice Cuba's ambassador to the United Nations: between 1966-1978 and between 1990-92. There, he was vice president of the U.N. General Assembly and Chairman of the Administrative Council of the U.N. Development Program.

Born on May 21, 1937, Alarcón had a doctorate in philosophy and literature. As a young man, he was a staunch opponent of the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship and was part of the movement that overthrew him.

Evidence mounts of GOP involvement in Trump election schemes

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rioters who smashed their way into the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, succeeded — at least temporarily — in delaying the certification of Joe Biden's election to the White House.

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Hours before, Rep. Jim Jordan had been trying to achieve the same thing.

Texting with then-White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, a close ally and friend, at nearly midnight on Jan. 5, Jordan offered a legal rationale for what President Donald Trump was publicly demanding — that Vice President Mike Pence, in his ceremonial role presiding over the electoral count, somehow assert the authority to reject electors from Biden-won states.

Pence “should call out all electoral votes that he believes are unconstitutional as no electoral votes at all,” Jordan wrote.

“I have pushed for this,” Meadows replied. “Not sure it is going to happen.”

The text exchange, in an April 22 court filing from the congressional panel investigating the Jan. 6 riot, is in a batch of startling evidence that shows the deep involvement of some House Republicans in Trump’s desperate attempt to stay in power. A review of the evidence finds new details about how, long before the attack on the Capitol unfolded, several GOP lawmakers were participating directly in Trump’s campaign to reverse the results of a free and fair election.

It’s a connection that members of the House Jan. 6 committee are making explicit as they prepare to launch public hearings in June. The Republicans plotting with Trump and the rioters who attacked the Capitol were aligned in their goals, if not the mob’s violent tactics, creating a convergence that nearly upended the nation’s peaceful transfer of power.

“It appears that a significant number of House members and a few senators had more than just a passing role in what went on,” Rep. Bennie Thompson, the Democratic chairman of the Jan. 6 committee, told The Associated Press last week.

Since launching its investigation last summer, the Jan. 6 panel has been slowly gaining new details about what lawmakers said and did in the weeks before the insurrection. Members have asked three GOP lawmakers — Jordan of Ohio, Rep. Scott Perry of Pennsylvania and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California — to testify voluntarily. All have refused. Other lawmakers could be called in the coming days.

So far, the Jan. 6 committee has refrained from issuing subpoenas to lawmakers, fearing the repercussions of such an extraordinary step. But the lack of cooperation from lawmakers hasn’t prevented the panel from obtaining new information about their actions.

The latest court document, submitted in response to a lawsuit from Meadows, contained excerpts from just a handful of the more than 930 interviews the Jan. 6 panel has conducted. It includes information on several high-level meetings nearly a dozen House Republicans attended where Trump’s allies flirted with ways to give him another term.

Among the ideas: naming fake slates of electors in seven swing states, declaring martial law and seizing voting machines.

The efforts started in the weeks after The Associated Press declared Biden president-elect.

In early December 2020, several lawmakers attended a meeting in the White House counsel’s office where attorneys for the president advised them that a plan to put up an alternate slate of electors declaring Trump the winner was not “legally sound.” One lawmaker, Rep. Scott Perry of Pennsylvania, pushed back on that position. So did GOP Reps. Matt Gaetz of Florida and Louie Gohmert of Texas, according to testimony from Cassidy Hutchinson, a former special assistant in the Trump White House.

Despite the warning from the counsel’s office, Trump’s allies moved forward. On Dec. 14, 2020, as rightly chosen Democratic electors in seven states — Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, New Mexico, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin — met at their seat of state government to cast their votes, the fake electors gathered as well.

They declared themselves the rightful electors and submitted false Electoral College certificates declaring Trump the true winner of the presidential election in their states.

Those certificates from the “alternate electors” were then sent to Congress, where they were ignored.

The majority of the lawmakers have since denied their involvement in these efforts.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia testified in a hearing in April that she does not recall conversations she had with the White House or the texts she sent to Meadows about Trump invoking martial law.

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Gohmert told AP he also does not recall being involved and that he is not sure he could be helpful to the committee's investigation. Rep. Jody Hice of Georgia played down his actions, saying it is routine for members of the president's party to be going in and out of the White House to speak about a number of topics. Hice is now running for secretary of state in Georgia, a position responsible for the state's elections.

Rep. Andy Biggs of Arizona didn't deny his public efforts to challenge the election results but called recent reports about his deep involvement untrue.

In a statement Saturday, Rep. Paul Gosar of Arizona reiterated his "serious" concerns about the 2020 election. "Discussions about the Electoral Count Act were appropriate, necessary and warranted," he added. Requests for comment from the other lawmakers were not immediately returned.

Less than a week later after the early December meeting at the White House, another plan emerged. In a meeting with House Freedom Caucus members and Trump White House officials, the discussion turned to the decisive action they believed that Pence could take on Jan. 6.

Those in attendance virtually and in-person, according to committee testimony, were Hice, Biggs, Gosar, Reps. Perry, Gaetz, Jordan, Gohmert, Mo Brooks of Alabama, Debbie Lesko of Arizona, and Greene, then a congresswoman-elect.

"What was the conversation like?" the committee asked Hutchinson, who was a frequent presence in the meetings that took place in December 2020 and January 2021.

"They felt that he had the authority to, pardon me if my phrasing isn't correct on this, but — send votes back to the States or the electors back to the states," Hutchinson said, referring to Pence.

When asked if any of the lawmakers disagreed with the idea that the vice president had such authority, Hutchinson said there was no objection from any of the Republican lawmakers.

In another meeting about Pence's potential role, Trump lawyers Rudy Giuliani, Sidney Powell and Jenna Ellis were joined again by Perry and Jordan as well as Greene and Lauren Boebert, a Republican who had also just been elected to the House from Colorado.

Communication between lawmakers and the White House didn't let up as Jan. 6 drew closer. The day after Christmas, Perry texted Meadows with a countdown.

"11 days to 1/6 and 25 days to inauguration," the text read. "We gotta get going!" Perry urged Meadows to call Jeffrey Clark, an assistant attorney general who championed Trump's efforts to challenge the election results. Perry has acknowledged introducing Clark to Trump.

Clark clashed with Justice Department superiors over his plan to send a letter to Georgia and other battleground states questioning the election results and urging their state legislatures to investigate. It all culminated in a dramatic White House meeting at which Trump considered elevating Clark to attorney general, only to back down after top Justice Department officials made clear they would resign.

Pressure from lawmakers and the White House on the Justice Department is among several areas of inquiry in the Jan. 6 investigation. Rep. Jamie Raskin, a Democratic member of the panel from Maryland, has hinted there are more revelations to come.

"As the mob smashed our windows, bloodied our police and stormed the Capitol, Trump and his accomplices plotted to destroy Biden's majority in the electoral college and overthrow our constitutional order," Raskin tweeted last week.

When the results of the panel's investigation come out, Raskin predicted, "America will see how the coup and insurrection converged."

Black doctors say they face discrimination based on race

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Dr. Dare Adewumi was thrilled when he was hired to lead the neurosurgery practice at an Atlanta-area hospital near where he grew up. But he says he quickly faced racial discrimination that ultimately led to his firing and has prevented him from getting permanent work elsewhere.

His lawyers and other advocates say he's not alone, that Black doctors across the country commonly experience discrimination, ranging from microaggressions to career-threatening disciplinary actions. Biases,

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conscious or not, can become magnified in the fiercely competitive hospital environment, they say, and the underrepresentation of Black doctors can discourage them from speaking up.

"Too many of us are worried about retaliation, what happens when you say something," said Dr. Rachel Villanueva, president of the National Medical Association, which represents Black doctors. "We have scores of doctors that are sending us letters about these same discriminatory practices all the time and seeking our help as an association in fighting that."

According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, Black doctors made up just 5% of active physicians in the U.S. in 2018, the most recent data available. People who identify as Black alone represent 12.4% of the total U.S. population, according to the 2020 U.S. census. For the 2021-2022 academic year, 8.1% of students enrolled in medical schools identified as Black alone. The medical school association and the National Medical Association in 2020 announced an initiative to address the scarcity of Black men in medicine — they made up only 2.9% of 2019-2020 enrolled students.

The American Medical Association, the country's largest, most influential doctors' group, is also trying to attract Black students to medicine, working with historically Black colleges and universities and helping secure scholarships, president Dr. Gerald Harmon said.

"We're trying to put our money where our mouth is on this and our actions where our thoughts are," he said, acknowledging that, among other things, a shortage of Black physicians contributes to poorer health outcomes for Black patients.

Some Black doctors who believe they've been mistreated are speaking out. Adewumi, 39, filed a federal lawsuit in September against Wellstar Medical Group and Wellstar Health Systems alleging employment discrimination based on race.

"If they don't like him, that's one thing, but you can't penalize someone — according to the law — based on race," his lawyer C.K. Hoffer said. "And that's the exact thing that happened to Dare. And that's what many, many highly skilled, highly trained, highly credentialed African American doctors are experiencing in this country."

Adewumi said some of his surgical decisions were questioned and he was placed on a performance review plan, steps he says were a pretext to push him out. He said he had a previously unblemished record and his white colleagues didn't face similar scrutiny.

"I've worked so hard, done so much to get to this level, and all I really wanted to do was help sick people," he said. "And here I was having this taken away from me for no reason other than my skin color."

William Hill, an attorney for Wellstar, said the case is sealed so he's unable to speak about specifics.

"Wellstar does not discriminate. Dr. Adewumi has not been the subject of discrimination or unfair treatment. Patient care and safety are Wellstar's top priorities," Hill wrote in an email, noting that they have filed a motion to dismiss the lawsuit.

Dr. Stella Safo, an HIV specialist, is among a group of past and present employees at the Arnhold Institute for Global Health at Mount Sinai in New York City who in April 2019 sued alleging sex, age and race discrimination. Some claims have been dismissed but others are moving forward. Safo's claims focus on alleged gender discrimination, but she said that, as a Black woman, race and gender discrimination are intertwined. Since filing the lawsuit, she's heard from a lot of people with similar stories.

Adewumi's allegations don't surprise her: "It's what many of us have gone through directly," she said.

Speaking out has been "terrible," Safo said, adding that she risked her career and lost friendships. But she's felt vindicated by changes: The New York City Council last year passed legislation to create an advisory board to examine racial and gender discrimination in hospitals.

A judge sealed Adewumi's lawsuit and some filings in the case at the request of Wellstar, which cited confidential information. The following account of what happened comes from an interview with Adewumi and a complaint he filed with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which in July granted him permission to sue.

Adewumi signed on in March 2018 to lead neurosurgery services at Wellstar Cobb Hospital in Austell, Georgia. The hospital hadn't had a neurosurgeon for a decade and referred patients elsewhere, including Wellstar Kennestone Hospital, where Adewumi's supervisor worked.

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As his practice started to flourish, Adewumi felt his supervisor was targeting him "with the intention of undermining my skill as a physician and pushing me out of the group," the EEOC complaint says.

In November 2018, Adewumi began receiving "letters of inquiry" about surgeries he'd done. These anonymous letters can be submitted by any member of the medical staff or be triggered by a patient complaint. They're reviewed by the hospital's medical executive committee.

At first, Adewumi said, he didn't know what the letters were, having never received anything similar. But within eight months, he had received 15, all but one filed by colleagues.

Separate independent reviews requested by the hospital and by Adewumi's lawyers found that concerns stemmed from differences in opinion about the approach or surgical technique, not patient care standards or safety, according to the EEOC complaint.

In contrast, Adewumi said, he's aware of at least two cases where white colleagues performed surgeries that were unnecessary or left a patient disfigured. He doesn't believe they received letters of inquiry or were disciplined in any way.

After trying unsuccessfully to mend the relationship with his supervisor, Adewumi said he went up the chain to raise concerns and a hospital system executive suggested it might be better if he resigned. Floored by the suggestion, Adewumi refused to quit.

Wellstar then proposed an "action plan." It wasn't meant to be punitive but would help "better integrate" him into the main group of neurosurgeons at Wellstar Kennestone Hospital, he was told.

Several Black doctors in Georgia and elsewhere who spoke to The Associated Press said the hierarchy and competition in hospitals, where surgeons are evaluated and compensated based on productivity, can lead to people being targeted if they aren't liked or are perceived as professional threats. Racial bias can compound that, they said.

Adewumi suspects that's what happened to him. Before arriving at Wellstar, he'd done two fellowships on spine and brain tumors, learning difficult techniques that others within the neurosurgery group couldn't do. Additionally, his presence at Wellstar Cobb meant lucrative surgeries were no longer being referred to his colleagues at Wellstar Kennestone.

During an action plan check-in meeting in August 2019, medical executive committee leaders applauded Adewumi's progress. Two months later, on Oct. 8, he was fired "not for cause." He was assured he'd done "nothing wrong," that he was being dismissed because "certain relationships were not fostered."

His termination was effective at the end of a 180-day notice period, in April 2020, but he wasn't required or allowed to work at the hospital in the meantime. That meant he couldn't fulfill a six-week "mentorship" requirement, leaving his action plan incomplete.

In March 2020, as the coronavirus began to strain hospitals, he emailed Wellstar administrators offering to come back temporarily in any capacity to help. He figured the hospital could use extra hands, and it could allow him to complete his action plan and resolve his situation without suing. But Wellstar refused.

With his action plan incomplete, the hospital refused to give him a "letter of good standing," leaving him unable to find a hospital that will credential him, meaning he can't work as a neurosurgeon.

"They have cornered him and locked him out, effectively," Hoffler said. "You don't do this by happenstance, by mistake. This is intentional and deliberate and that is why we have a lawsuit pending."

Amazon, union face off in a rematch election in New York

By HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Amazon and the nascent group that successfully organized the company's first-ever U.S. union are headed for a rematch Monday, when a federal labor board will tally votes cast by warehouse workers in yet another election on Staten Island.

A second labor win could give workers in other Amazon facilities — and at other companies — the motivation they need to launch similar efforts. It could also cement the power and influence of the Amazon Labor Union, the grassroots group of former and current workers that secured last month's historic victory.

But a union loss could mute some of the labor celebration and raise questions about whether the first

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victory was just a fluke.

The results of the election are expected to be announced early Monday evening by the National Labor Relations Board, which is overseeing the process. Meanwhile, the agency must still decide whether to certify the first win, which has been disputed by Amazon.

There are far fewer workers eligible to vote in this latest election versus last month's — about 1,500 compared with 8,300 at the neighboring Staten Island facility. There are fewer organizers, too — roughly 10 compared with roughly 30.

"It's a much more personal, aggressive fight over here," said Connor Spence, an Amazon employee who works as the union's vice president of membership.

Spence said there was more support for the organizing efforts earlier this year when the ALU filed for an election. But that was quickly overshadowed by the bigger facility across the street, where organizers were directing more of their energy.

Meanwhile, Amazon continued holding mandatory meetings to persuade its workers to reject the union effort, posting anti-union flyers and launching a website urging workers to "vote NO."

Amazon spokesperson Kelly Nantel said in a statement that it is up to employees whether or not they want to join a union. But "as a company, we don't think unions are the best answer for our employees," Nantel said. "Our focus remains on working directly with our team to continue making Amazon a great place to work."

Experts say the scrappy union is disadvantaged by the low number of organizers but that might not spell trouble since the ALU's legitimacy has been bolstered by last month's unexpected win. It has also gotten support from top union leaders and high-profile progressive lawmakers. At a rally held outside the warehouse a day before voting began last week, U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez spoke in support of organizers spearheading the union drive.

"This is certainly about ALU, but it's also about the broader desire for organizing right now," said Sara Nelson, president of the Association of Flight Attendants, who also attended the rally. "And we have to run as fast as we possibly can in this environment to organize millions of people if we're going to change the power structure in this country and actually give working people a fair shot."

After their first Staten Island win, ALU organizers reoriented their attention to the smaller warehouse and reiterated their vision to workers — longer breaks, better job protection and a higher hourly wage of \$30, up from the minimum of just over \$18 currently offered on Staten Island.

Spence said they also tailored their pitch to part-time workers, whom the facility depends on heavily and who have been waiting on their requests to transfer to full-time work at the company. By the time votes were cast, he believed the union had regained its momentum.

"We had to claw it back," he said.

Even with one victory under its belt, progress has been slow for the ALU. Last month, Amazon filed objections over the successful union drive, arguing in a filing with the NLRB that the vote was tainted by organizers and by the board's regional office in Brooklyn that oversaw the election. The company says it wants a redo election, but pro-union experts believe it's an effort to delay contract negotiations and potentially blunt some of the organizing momentum.

Despite the setbacks, the ALU has realized progress in other ways, shining a spotlight on Amazon's anti-union tactics as well as highlighting concerns about its workplace conditions. That in turn has rallied others into taking action.

On Tuesday, Sanders sent a letter to President Joe Biden asking him to sign an executive order that cuts off Amazon's contracts with the government until the retailer stops what Sanders calls its "illegal anti-union activity." Organizers believe such a move would fulfill the president's campaign promise to "ensure federal contracts only go to employers who sign neutrality agreements committing not to run anti-union campaigns."

In New York, two state lawmakers introduced a bill to regulate warehouse productivity quotas, aiming to curtail workplace injuries at facilities operated by Amazon and other companies. The bill's sponsors said they were motivated by ALU's impending contract negotiations with the company, which has been

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criticized for its high warehouse injury rates.

Separately, the ALU, along with American Federation of Teachers and New York State United Teachers, is calling on New York Attorney General Letitia James to investigate Amazon's eligibility for tax credits under a state program designed to draw business to New York. In a letter sent to James, Seth Goldstein, a union attorney who offers pro-bono legal help to the ALU, contends Amazon has committed "flagrant unfair labor practices" during the union drives that violated the worker protector provisions of the program. A spokesperson for Amazon declined to comment.

Back on Staten Island, some workers at the warehouse voted against unionizing, saying they already feel taken care of by the company and would rather wait and see how the contract negotiations go at the other facility before they join the union effort. There's also doubts the ALU can accomplish what it sets out to do.

Alexander Campbell, a 25-year-old warehouse worker, voted against the union, saying he read some things online that convinced him his wages might go down if the warehouse unionized.

But others are lending their support. Michael Aguilar, a part-time warehouse employee turned ALU organizer, said he put in a request with Amazon about two months ago to switch to full-time work. He says that request hasn't been granted but the company continues to bring in new hires. When one of the organizers invited him to a union-organizing call, he attended and eventually decided to join the union drive.

"Everything they were fighting for aligned with everything I experienced," he said. "Once I found that out, I jumped on board."

Elon Musk's big plans for Twitter: What we know so far

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Tesla CEO Elon Musk has laid out some bold, if still vague, plans for transforming Twitter into a place of "maximum fun" once he buys the social media platform for \$44 billion and takes it private.

But enacting what at the moment are little more than a mix of vague principles and technical details could be considerably more complicated than he suggests.

Here's what might happen if Musk follows through on his ideas about free speech, fighting spam and opening up the "black box" of artificial intelligence tools that amplify social media trends.

FREE SPEECH TOWN SQUARE

Musk's feistiest priority — but also the one with the vaguest roadmap — is to make Twitter a "politically neutral" digital town square for the world's discourse that allows as much free speech as each country's laws allow.

He's acknowledged that his plans to reshape Twitter could anger the political left and mostly please the right. He hasn't specified exactly what he'll do about former President Donald Trump's permanently banned account or other right-wing leaders whose tweets have run afoul of the company's restrictions against hate speech, violent threats or harmful misinformation.

Should Musk go this direction, it could mean bringing back not only Trump, but "many, many others that were removed as a result of QAnon conspiracies, targeted harassment of journalists and activists, and of course all of the accounts that were removed after Jan. 6," said Joan Donovan, who studies misinformation at Harvard University. "That could potentially be hundreds of thousands of people."

Musk hasn't ruled out suspending some accounts, but says such bans should be temporary. His latest criticism has centered around what he described as Twitter's "incredibly inappropriate" 2020 blocking of a New York Post article on Hunter Biden, which the company has said was a mistake and corrected within 24 hours.

OPEN-SOURCED ALGORITHMS

Musk's longstanding interest in AI is reflected in one of the most specific proposals he outlined in his merger announcement — the promise of "making the algorithms open source to increase trust." He's talking about the systems that rank content to decide what shows up on users' feeds.

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Partly driving the distrust, at least for Musk supporters, is lore among U.S. political conservatives about “shadow banning” on social media. This is a supposed invisible feature for reducing the reach of badly behaving users without disabling their accounts. There has been no evidence that Twitter’s platform is biased against conservatives; studies have found the opposite when it comes to conservative media in particular.

Musk has called for posting the underlying computer code powering Twitter’s news feed for public inspection on the coder hangout GitHub. But such “code-level transparency” gives users little insight into how Twitter is working for them without the data the algorithms are processing, said Nick Diakopoulos, a Northwestern University computer scientist.

Diakopoulos said there are good intentions in Musk’s broader goal to help people find out why their tweets get promoted or demoted and whether human moderators or automated systems are making those choices. But that’s no easy task. Too much transparency about how individual tweets are ranked, for instance, can make it easier for “disingenuous people” to game the system and manipulate an algorithm to get maximum exposure for their cause, Diakopoulos said.

‘DEFEATING THE SPAM BOTS’

“Spam bots” that mimic real people have been a personal nuisance to Musk, whose popularity on Twitter has inspired countless impersonator accounts that use his image and name — often to promote cryptocurrency scams that look as if they’re coming from the Tesla CEO.

Sure, Twitter users, among them Musk, “don’t want spam,” said David Greene, civil liberties director at the Electronic Frontier Foundation. But who defines what counts as a spam bot?

“Do you mean all bots like, you know, if I follow a Twitter bot that just pulls up historic photos of fruits? I choose to follow that. Is that not allowed to exist?” he said.

There are also plenty of spam-filled Twitter accounts at least partially run by real people that run the gamut from ones that hawk products to those promoting polarizing political content to meddle in other countries’ elections.

‘AUTHENTICATE ALL HUMANS’

Musk has repeatedly said he wants Twitter to “authenticate all humans,” an ambiguous proposal that could be related to his desire to rid the website of spam accounts.

Ramping up mundane identity checks — such as two-factor authentication or popups that ask which of six photos shows a school bus — could discourage anyone from trying to amass an army of bogus accounts.

Musk might also be considering offering more people a “blue check” — the verification checkmark sported on notable Twitter accounts — like Musk’s — to show they’re who they say they are. Musk has suggested users could buy the checkmarks as part of a premium service.

But some digital rights activists are concerned these measures could lead to a “real-name” policy resembling Facebook’s approach of forcing people to validate their full names and use them in their profiles. That would seem to contradict Musk’s free speech focus by muzzling anonymous whistleblowers or people living under authoritarian regimes where it can be dangerous if a dissident message is attributable to a particular person.

AD-FREE TWITTER?

Musk has floated the idea of an ad-free Twitter, though it wasn’t one of the priorities outlined in the official merger announcement. That may be because cutting off the company’s chief way of making money would be a tall order, even for the world’s richest person.

Advertisements accounted for more than 92% of Twitter’s revenue in the January-March fiscal quarter. The company did last year launch a premium subscription service — known as Twitter Blue — but doesn’t appear to have made much headway in getting people to pay for it.

Musk has made clear he favors a stronger subscription-based model for Twitter that gives more people an ad-free option. That would also fit into his push to relax Twitter’s content restrictions — which brands largely favor because they don’t want their ads surrounded by offensive and hate-filled tweets.

WHAT ELSE?

Musk has tweeted and voiced so many proposals for Twitter that it can be hard to know which ones he takes seriously. He’s joined the popular call for an “edit button” — which Twitter says it’s already working

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on — that would enable people to fix a tweet shortly after posting it. A less serious proposal from Musk suggested converting Twitter's downtown San Francisco headquarters to a homeless shelter "since no one shows up anyway" — a comment taken more as a dig on Twitter's pandemic-era workforce than an altruistic vision for the building.

Musk didn't return an emailed request to clarify his plans.

100s of US urban areas will become rural with new criteria

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

Hundreds of urban areas in the U.S. are becoming rural, but it's not because people are leaving.

It's just that the U.S. Census Bureau is changing the definition of an urban area. Under the new criteria, more than 1,300 small cities, towns and villages designated urban a decade ago would be considered rural.

That matters because urban and rural areas qualify for different types of federal funding. Some communities worry the change could affect health clinics in rural areas as well as transportation and education funding from federal programs. But leaders in other communities designated to lose their urban status say it won't make a difference.

"We are rural and we feel rural, and that's how we already identify," said Randy Reeg, city administrator of Mauston, Wisconsin, a city of 4,347 residents about 75 miles (120 kilometers) northwest of Madison.

Groups like the American Hospital Association say the changes, which are the biggest being made to the definitions in decades, could cause problems for people who need medical care in rural areas.

"Going with the new definition could limit the number of rural health clinics moving forward and have a negative impact on rural access to care," said Shannon Wu, senior associate director of policy at the hospital association.

For starters, the Census Bureau is switching to housing units instead of people as the basis for calculating what should be an urban area. Bureau officials say the change will make it easier to update between once-a-decade head counts of the U.S. They also contend that it's needed because a new privacy method introduces errors into 2020 census population numbers at small geographies to protect people's identities. Housing counts stay accurate under the method.

A place had to have at least 2,500 people to be urban under old criteria that lasted more than a century. Now, it will need at least 2,000 housing units, the equivalent of about 5,000 people. A revised list of urban areas won't be released until later this year, but a third of the areas deemed urban a decade ago would be knocked into the rural category under the new criteria.

Places with 50,000 residents or more were considered "urbanized areas," compared with "urban clusters" having between 2,500 and 49,999 residents in the past. But those distinctions will be eliminated and all will be called urban areas under the new definition.

Some communities worry that the switch to housing units will cause some areas to be underestimated if the Census Bureau uses the U.S. average of 2.6 people per household for its calculations. For instance, Madera County, California, has 3.3 people per household, and the change "would not fully represent the community," Patricia Taylor, executive director of the Madera County Transportation Commission, said in a letter to the bureau last year.

The Census Bureau says the new definition should be used for statistical purposes only. But the bureau's urban areas form the cores of metro and micro areas, and its definitions provide the basis for how other agencies classify urban and rural areas in determining eligibility for federal funding. The bureau reviews the definitions every 10 years after a census, and the urban population has grown from about 45% of the total U.S. population in 1910 to more than 80% a decade ago.

"We've heard people say 2,500 was too low. That was the impetus for the increase," said Michael Ratcliffe, a senior geographer with the Census Bureau.

Different federal programs use different definitions of urban and rural, and some communities qualify for rural funding for some programs and not others. But any changes "will have significant implications for many groups and communities," said Kenneth Johnson, a senior demographer at the University of New

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Hampshire who studies rural issues.

"Another likely concern for many rural communities is that if many existing urban areas are redefined as rural, competition for the limited rural funds will increase," Johnson said.

A coalition of associations representing cities, counties, planners and transportation groups had objected to many of the proposed changes last year, saying the switch from people to housing units would miss variations in development and land use patterns.

The Census Bureau tried to address those concerns by creating three levels of urban area definitions for census blocks, which are the nation's smallest geographic unit. Census blocks will be urban if they have 425 housing units per square mile, the equivalent of 1,105 people. Before the change, census blocks with at least 500 people per square mile were considered urban.

The redesignation gives the bureau a way to distinguish between the "urban nucleus" and less densely populated areas, typically on the fringes of urban areas.

Bill Keyrouze, executive director of Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations, said the Census Bureau's revisions, adding different levels of urban areas based on density, "was an adequate compromise."

For the town of DeMotte, Indiana, 85 miles (135 kilometers) southwest of South Bend, which won't qualify as an urban area anymore, it doesn't really matter from a "status" viewpoint, Town Manager Michael Cain said.

"You are who you are. The number of people doesn't matter. It's the spirit of the community that matters, whether your town is a cohesive group of people who care about each other," Cain said.

Look for the orange vest: Ukrainians in Romania help others

By CHISATO TANAKA Associated Press

BUCHAREST, Romania (AP) — Elena Trofimchuk fled Ukraine to Romania more than a month ago. She now sees Bucharest's North Railway Station as a second home.

She doesn't live there, but it's where she spends most of her day welcoming fellow Ukrainian refugees escaping from Russia's war and helping them sort out tickets, accommodation and onward destinations.

The 26-year-old said that keeping herself busy and useful keeps her from dwelling on Russia's shelling of her hometown, Odesa, where many of her friends remain.

"If you sit and do nothing, you can just become crazy because you're always searching for news. It's very hard. So here I can help people buy tickets and find accommodations. I even help Romanians in the kitchen," Trofimchuk said.

Before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, she worked as a photographer.

Trofimchuk is just one of many orange-vested Ukrainian volunteers working at the station.

Ukrainian volunteer Vitalii Ivanchuk flew all the way from Sri Lanka where he lived with his Ukrainian girlfriend to help refugees coming into Romania.

The 29-year-old IT developer said that many Ukrainians have a tough time communicating with Romanians, and volunteers who can speak both Ukrainian and English are in high demand.

His girlfriend, Anastasiia Haiduk, quit her investment job shortly after the war started and decided to volunteer at the station until the war ends and she can be reunited with her family in Ukraine.

The Romanian government is currently giving away free train tickets to Ukrainian refugees arriving in Romania that they can use to travel on to Hungary, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Slovakia and Bulgaria.

Trofimchuk said she was moved by the warm welcome and the Romanians' show of solidarity with Ukraine.

"Every Romanian person wants to help. They're very friendly. And I was shocked about this. I'm so happy that everyone wants to help," Trofimchuk said.

Nearly 5.5 million people have fled Ukraine since the start of Russia's war on Feb. 24, according to data from the U.N. refugee agency.

Most have entered countries on Ukraine's western border: more than 3 million people have fled to Poland, while more than 817,000 others have fled to Romania and around 520,000 have crossed into Hungary, UNHCR statistics show.

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For some Ukrainian volunteers, their Saturday evening ritual is to join a weekly demonstration at the Russian Embassy in Bucharest along with Ukrainian residents and Romanians.

Station volunteers in Bucharest say they are now seeing an increasing number of arrivals from Odesa following Russian missile attacks on the southern Ukrainian port city on the Black Sea.

But Trofimchuk skipped a recent protest, saying she expected people to arrive from her hometown.

"I will stay at the station as late as I can, because there might be people who need my help," Trofimchuk said.

En plein air: NYC aims to keep outdoor lifestyle post-virus

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — As COVID-19 ravaged New York City, virus-wary denizens locked out of indoor public places poured into the streets, sidewalks and parks. They dined with friends in outdoor sheds hastily erected by restaurants, and went to health classes, concerts and even therapy sessions on streets closed to traffic.

Now as the city continues on its path of recovery, the pandemic could be leaving a lasting imprint on how the city uses its roadways: More space for people and less room for cars.

Even though indoor dining has resumed in the city — no masks or vaccine cards required — outdoor dining decks, set up in former parking lanes, have never been more plentiful.

Meanwhile, the city is expanding its Open Streets program, which closes roadways to vehicles and opens them to pedestrians.

The expansion of the program — originally conceived as a way to give New Yorkers more space to exercise — is partly intended to increase foot traffic along struggling business corridors and give lower-income neighborhoods similar opportunities as higher-profile and wealthier enclaves.

"There have been a lot of closings of things during COVID. There are sections of blocks where there's lots and lots of empty storefronts, and that's depressing," said Maura Harway, who lives in Manhattan's Upper West Side. "So anything that brings people back and helps the businesses and helps the neighborhood to feel alive and lively."

New York's streets — once places where kids played stickball — were turned over nearly completely to vehicles in the automobile age, except for the occasional summer street fair.

But for years, some city leaders have sought to "reinvent and repurpose the use of our streets," said the city's transportation commissioner, Ydanis Rodriguez, who wants more neighborhood promenades for outdoor gatherings or give safe spaces where parents can teach children how to roller blade, toss a ball or ride a bike.

"The message to all New Yorkers is that our space is their space — that our streets don't belong to car owners only," said the commissioner, who oversees both the Open Restaurants and Open Streets programs.

That rethinking began before the pandemic. Two decades ago, former Mayor Michael Bloomberg oversaw a major expansion of bike lanes and allowed bike rental stations to be set up on city streets. He championed pedestrian plazas like those in Herald Square and Times Square to keep cars out of pedestrian-heavy corridors. And his administration extended waterfront greenways and parks, especially in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

Mayor Bill de Blasio followed his predecessor's lead and put more measures in place to control and slow vehicular traffic. He also pushed, like Bloomberg, for a system that would charge tolls to drive in a large swath of Manhattan.

Spurred by a traffic accident that killed a 15-year-old girl in the first days of his tenure, the current mayor, Eric Adams, vowed to continue "recapturing space for pedestrians."

Among the legacies of the pandemic could be the remaking of the city's food culture by permanently expanding it from the confines of indoor dining to eating en plein air, giving curbsides a bit of Parisian flair.

Before the pandemic, 1,200 establishments had permits to set up tables and chairs on sidewalks. But under the pandemic era's emergency Open Restaurants program, more than 12,000 eateries and bars

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got permission to extend service into the streets.

New York City officials and restaurateurs alike say that the outdoor dining shacks helped lure diners back to restaurant tables and helped save the jobs of more than 100,000 workers.

Carmen Ortiz, who manages Il Violino, an Italian restaurant in the Upper West Side, is counting on the city's efforts to boost pedestrian traffic to generate more customers after many months of hardship for restaurateurs and their employees.

Ortiz recently returned from a trip to Italy, where she saw lots of folks dining in the sunlight.

"But most of those dining outdoors, they were eating in the sidewalks," she said. "I didn't really notice that they were like in the middle of the street like here."

For now, the city's reimagining of outdoor dining remains in flux because of legal challenges by some community activists and residents who balk at the loss of parking spaces — at least 8,500 spaces in a city where real estate has always been a valuable commodity, whether it be for cars or otherwise.

Critics say the sheds attracted vermin and too many noisy patrons deep into the night — perhaps a sign of recovery for some but an annoyance for others.

"We now have the restaurants on the streets and on the sidewalks," said Judith Burnett, whose apartment windows face Columbus Avenue, in an area lined with restaurants and again will soon be closed to traffic on Sundays.

While she called the initial move to help restaurants a "brilliant way to help people save their businesses," she's now ambivalent if things should stay that way. She doesn't want traffic permanently slowed, including the buses she rides.

"It tangled up so much traffic," Burnett said.

City officials say they took those complaints into account when developing new standards.

"Out of all the doom and gloom from the pandemic, one of the bright spots is that it allowed us to reimagine our relationship with the public space — and that's everything from open restaurants to open streets," said Andrew Rigie, the executive director of the New York City Hospitality Alliance, the trade group for pubs and eateries.

He called outdoor dining a "natural progression," accelerated by necessity and allow New Yorkers to "enjoy the city in a way they may not have prior to the pandemic."

Harway, the Upper West Side resident, also called it progress.

"I never particularly liked to eat on the street in New York before the pandemic. It seemed noisy or dirty," she said. "With everybody eating outdoors at all the restaurants now, it's become more integrated into the life of the city — maybe that's what it's like in Paris or Madrid."

DC's National Guard takes to the streets in recruitment push

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Dressed in full fatigues, Sgt. Michael Ray Forbes stuck out on 14th Street, a bustling and deeply gentrified strip of downtown Washington dotted with restaurants and clubs.

He approached Phillip Wallace, a 26-year old in torn jeans munching a doughnut, chatted him up a bit, exchanged phone numbers and handed him a pamphlet about joining the District of Columbia National Guard.

"Now I'm not going to be burning up your phone bothering you about this," Forbes said in parting. "But you've got my number and you know where to find me if you're interested."

Wallace replied, "Yeah sure, definitely." But he didn't seem to be paying full attention.

The interaction, however brief and halting, represents a new era for the D.C. guard — a quietly critical force that has frequently found itself at the center of intense political debate, most recently over the historic security breakdown on Jan. 6, 2021.

It took about three hours for members of the D.C. guard to respond to Capitol during the insurrection by supporters of then-President Donald Trump, a delay that local officials blame on their lack of authority to deploy the guard. The whole issue has become meshed with Washington's ongoing quest for statehood.

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For more than a decade, the D.C. guard offices have been a semi-hidden presence — sheltered inside the D.C. Armory behind security checkpoints in an area of southeastern Washington with almost-zero foot traffic next to the abandoned hulk of RFK stadium.

But in March, the local guard opened its first proper recruiting office in the city since 2010. The commander, Maj. Gen. Sherrie McCandless, describes the move as a new push for visibility and an emphasis on the guard's local connections at a time when many residents might be ripe for recruitment.

"It's very much a walking city and it's very much an oral-tradition kind of town," McCandless, a former F-16 pilot, said. "We're coming out of the pandemic. People are more mobile again and frankly a lot of people are trying to figure out what's next."

Recruitment chief Lt. Col. Amber Ellison says the sales pitch to potential recruits is that the guard offers many of the same benefits of full-time active military — discipline, education, lasting connections and training in highly marketable skills — for a fraction of the commitment.

They're looking to recruit a specific slice of the population — 17-35-year-olds who see the appeal of a partial military commitment.

"You can serve your country and still keep your civilian job," said recruiter Sgt. Jessica Jones, a officer with the Metropolitan Police Department.

Guardsmen are expected to devote one weekend a month, plus a two-week training stint every summer, with a six-year commitment plus two inactive years. For that, the entry-level pay rate starts at about \$230 per month, plus myriad bonuses and enhancers depending on experience, education and specialization.

"You don't have to move," Ellison said. "You don't have to quit your job. You don't have to quit college. They'll be serving the city in which they live and protecting the nation's capital."

So far, spontaneous walk-ins to the new storefront are still rare and recruiters like Forbes and Jones make most of their contacts at high school and college job fairs or booths at large public events. But they say that for those who are intrigued by the initial proposal, the new storefront is an ideal, accessible location to make an appointment for the follow-up pitch.

"I just tell them my own story and exactly what I've learned and how I've benefitted," Forbes said. "Once they learn what it's about, it sells itself."

And the renewed visibility gives them a chance to field basic questions from curious newbies.

"I hear the 'Am I going to war?' question a lot," Jones said. "And women ask if they'll have to shave their heads."

The 2,200 strong D.C. guard contingent is regularly deployed in a supportive role — traffic control and security around Metro stations — during the multiple D.C.-specific events like the State of the Union address. It is also key in the air defense of the nation's capital, with its own squad of 20 F-16s at Andrews Air Force Base. And D.C. guard pilots fly congressional delegations on overseas trips.

In recent years, the guard has become an emotionally charged topic as a symbol of a D.C.'s entrenched status as less than a state.

Mayor Muriel Bowser, D.C.'s top local elected official, must submit requests to deploy the guard to the Army secretary. The mayor says she operates as a de-facto governor, but is denied governor-specific authorities like National Guard control. Meanwhile the mere presence of the federal government makes the district a far more likely location for civil disturbances that might merit National Guard deployment.

One of those disturbances, the Jan. 6, 2021, riot when Trump supporters overran the Capitol building, served as a real-time example of those limitations. Bowser warned days in advance of the potential for violence. And when it became clear that the U.S. Capitol Police were overmatched by the crowds, Bowser couldn't immediately deploy the D.C. guard. Instead crucial time was lost while the request was considered inside the Pentagon, and protesters rampaged through the building.

The issue had also flared up months earlier, in summer 2020, when violent protests against police brutality and systemic racism erupted in Washington and other cities. Trump accused Bowser of losing control of the capital and flooded Washington with a massive wave of guardsmen and federal agents.

Asked about the significance of the D.C. guard's new visibility push, Bowser curtly stated, "It would be

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more significant if they worked for the chief executive of the city.”

She added, “But we enjoy a great relationship with the commanders.”

For the people in uniform, the debate over their chain of command is irrelevant. McCandless said that whether she’s taking orders from a governor, the Army secretary or the mayor, the mission is the same.

“All of my peers who work for governors, they have pretty much the same experience that I do,” she said.

Today in History: May 2, Mandela claims victory

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, May 2, the 122nd day of 2022. There are 243 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On May 2, 1994, Nelson Mandela claimed victory in the wake of South Africa’s first democratic elections; President F.W. de Klerk acknowledged defeat.

On this date:

In 1863, during the Civil War, Confederate Gen. Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson was accidentally wounded by his own men at Chancellorsville, Virginia; he died eight days later.

In 1890, the Oklahoma Territory was organized.

In 1927, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Buck v. Bell*, upheld 8-1 a Virginia law allowing the forced sterilization of people to promote the “health of the patient and the welfare of society.”

In 1932, Jack Benny’s first radio show, sponsored by Canada Dry, made its debut on the NBC Blue Network.

In 1941, General Mills began shipping its new cereal, “Cheerioats,” to six test markets. (The cereal was later renamed “Cheerios.”)

In 1970, jockey Diane Crump became the first woman to ride in the Kentucky Derby; she finished in 15th place aboard Fathom. (The winning horse was Dust Commander.)

In 1972, a fire at the Sunshine silver mine in Kellogg, Idaho, claimed the lives of 91 workers who succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning. Longtime FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover died in Washington at age 77.

In 1997, Tony Blair, whose new Labour Party crushed John Major’s long-reigning Conservatives in a national election, became at age 43 Britain’s youngest prime minister in 185 years.

In 2005, Pfc. Lynndie England, the young woman pictured in some of the most notorious Abu Ghraib photos, pleaded guilty at Fort Hood, Texas, to mistreating prisoners. (A judge later threw out the plea agreement; England was then convicted in a court-martial and received a three-year sentence, of which she served half.)

In 2010, record rains and flash floods in Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee caused more than 30 deaths and submerged the Grand Ole Opry House stage.

In 2011, al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden, who’d been killed hours earlier in a raid by elite American forces at his Pakistan compound, was buried at sea.

In 2018, the Boy Scouts of America announced that the group’s flagship program would undergo a name change; after being known simply as the Boy Scouts for 108 years, the program would now be called Scouts BSA. (The change came as girls were about to enter the ranks.)

Ten years ago: Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich formally exited the Republican presidential contest. Taliban insurgents attacked a compound housing foreigners in the Afghan capital, killing seven people, hours after President Barack Obama made a surprise visit. Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi (ahng sahn soo chee) was sworn in to Myanmar’s military-backed parliament. Former NFL star Junior Seau (SAY’ow) was found shot to death at his home in Oceanside, California, a suicide.

Five years ago: Michael Slager, a white former police officer whose killing of Walter Scott, an unarmed Black man running from a traffic stop, was captured on cellphone video, pleaded guilty to federal civil rights charges in Charleston, South Carolina. (Slager was sentenced to 20 years in prison.)

One year ago: SpaceX safely returned four astronauts from the International Space Station, making the first U.S. crew splashdown in darkness since the Apollo 8 moonshot. Jacques d’Amboise, who became one

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of the top male dancers at New York City Ballet and then spent more than four decades providing free dance education to countless youngsters, died at his New York home from complications of a stroke; he was 86. Three-time Indianapolis 500 winner Bobby Unser died at his New Mexico home at 87.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Engelbert Humperdinck is 86. Actor-activist Bianca Jagger is 77. Country singer R.C. Bannon is 77. Actor David Suchet (SOO'-shay) is 76. Singer-songwriter Larry Gatlin is 74. Rock singer Lou Gramm (Foreigner) is 72. Actor Christine Baranski is 70. Singer Angela Bofill is 68. Fashion designer Donatella Versace is 67. Actor Brian Tochi is 63. Movie director Stephen Daldry is 62. Actor Elizabeth Ber-ridge is 60. Country singer Ty Herndon is 60. Actor Mitzi Kapture is 60. Commentator Mika Brzezinski is 55. Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb is 54. Rock musician Todd Sucherman (Styx) is 53. Wrestler-turned-actor Dwayne Johnson (AKA The Rock) is 50. Former soccer player David Beckham is 47. Rock singer Jeff Gutt (goot) (Stone Temple Pilots) is 46. Actor Jenna Von Oy is 45. Actor Kumail Nanjiani is 44. Actor Ellie Kemper is 42. Actor Robert Buckley is 41. Actor Gaius (GY'-ehs) Charles is 39. Pop singer Lily Rose Cooper is 37. Olympic gold medal figure skater Sarah Hughes is 37. Actor Thomas McDonell is 36. Actor Kay Panabaker is 32. NBA All-Star Paul George is 32. Princess Charlotte of Cambridge is seven.