

Groton Daily Independent

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Thursday, May 12

Senior Menu: Honey glazed chicken, parsley buttered potatoes, mixed vegetables, ambrosia salad, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.

School Lunch: Chicken fries, puzzle tots.

10 a.m.: Girls Golf at Madison

11 a.m.: NEC Track meet at Britton

Friday, May 13

Senior Menu: BBQ beef sandwich, potato salad, carrots and peas, seasonal fresh fruit.

School Breakfast: Waffles.

School Lunch: Hot dogs, chips.

12:30 p.m.: Elementary Track and Field Day

7 p.m.: All School Play at GHS Gym

Saturday, May 14

SEAS Confession: 3:45-4:15 p.m., SEAS Mass: 4:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 15

2 p.m.: GHS Graduation

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Avantara worship, 3 p.m. (Choir to help); Choir, 7 p.m.

Methodist: Communion Sunday: Conde Worship at 9 a.m., Groton worship at 11 a.m.

St. John's: Bible Study, 8 a.m.; Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Zion worship, 11 a.m.

Ken's **HELP WANTED!** **Groton Store**

Part time cashier & part time deli.
Deli must be 18 years of age or older.
Apply at Ken's in Groton.

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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Groton Area Stymied by Redfield Area Muskrats, Lose 10-1

Groton Area couldn't keep up with Redfield Area Muskrats and fell 10-1 on Wednesday.

Keaton Rohlf's earned the victory on the hill for Redfield Area Muskrats. The righty surrendered one run on four hits over seven innings, striking out two.

Jackson Cogley took the loss for Groton Area. Cogley went five innings, allowing eight runs on 13 hits.

Groton Area totaled four hits. Bradin Althoff and Cole Simon all collected multiple hits for Groton Area. Simon and Althoff each managed two hits to lead Groton Area.

Redfield Area Muskrats saw the ball well today, racking up 16 hits in the game. Fehi Fanoelua, Camden Osborn, Erik Salmen, Rohlf's, Peyton Osborn, and Easton Millar each collected multiple hits for Redfield Area Muskrats. Fanoelua led Redfield Area Muskrats with three hits in four at bats. Redfield Area Muskrats tore up the base paths, as two players stole at least two bases. Osborn led the way with two.

- Seth Erickson

Groton Area's Hoover Throws No-Hitter to Defeat Clark Area

Kaleb Hoover was brilliant on the pitcher's mound on Thursday, as Hoover threw a no-hitter to lead Groton Area past Clark Area 10-0.

Groton Area secured the victory thanks to seven runs in the first inning. The offensive onslaught came from singles by Bradin Althoff, Caden McInerney, and Pierce Kettering and a triple by Hoover.

Groton Area got on the board in the first inning. Althoff drove in one when Althoff singled.

Hoover took the win for Groton Area. The righty allowed zero hits and zero runs over five innings, striking out ten.

Connor Mudgett took the loss for Clark Area. Connor Mudgett went four innings, allowing ten runs on ten hits and striking out six.

Groton Area totaled 11 hits. Althoff, Hoover, and Dillon Abeln all collected multiple hits for Groton Area. Althoff led Groton Area with three hits in four at bats. Groton Area didn't commit a single error in the field. Abeln had ten chances in the field, the most on the team.

- Seth Erickson

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Groton Area 1 - 10 Redfield Area Muskrats

📍 Away 📅 Tuesday May 10, 2022

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E
GRTN	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	4	2
RDFL	0	1	4	2	1	2	X	10	16	1

BATTING

Groton Area	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
P Kettering (CF)	3	0	0	0	0	0
C Simon (2B)	3	1	2	0	0	0
D Abeln (C)	1	0	0	0	1	0
B Althoff (1B)	3	0	2	1	0	0
K Hoover (SS)	2	0	0	0	1	0
C Dunker (3B)	3	0	0	0	0	0
J Cogley (P, LF)	3	0	0	0	0	0
K Antonsen (RF)	2	0	0	0	0	1
C Simon (RF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
B Fliehs (LF)	2	0	0	0	0	0
N Morris (P)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	23	1	4	1	2	2

2B: C Simon, **TB:** C Simon 3, B Althoff 2, **CS:** B Althoff, **HBP:** D Abeln, **LOB:** 4

PITCHING

Groton Area	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
J Cogley	5.0	13	8	6	3	0	0
N Morris	1.0	3	2	2	0	0	0
Totals	6.0	16	10	8	3	0	0

L: J Cogley, **P-S:** J Cogley 97-55, N Morris 14-9, **WP:** N Morris, **BF:** J Cogley 29, N Morris 6

Redfield Area Muskrats	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
C Osborn (CF)	3	1	2	0	1	0
O Osborn (2B)	3	1	1	0	1	0
P Osborn (SS)	4	2	2	0	0	0
F Fanoelua (C)	4	1	3	2	0	0
K Rohlfs (P)	4	2	2	0	0	0
E Millar (RF)	3	2	2	3	1	0
E Salmen (3B)	3	1	2	1	0	0
N Johnson	1	0	0	0	0	0
A Remily (1B)	4	0	1	0	0	0
N Gall (LF)	2	0	0	0	0	0
G Ratigan (LF)	1	0	1	1	0	0
Totals	32	10	16	7	3	0

2B: K Rohlfs, E Salmen, E Millar, F Fanoelua, O Osborn, **TB:** A Remily, K Rohlfs 3, E Salmen 3, C Osborn 2, E Millar 3, F Fanoelua 4, P Osborn 2, O Osborn 2, G Ratigan, **SB:** K Rohlfs, E Salmen, C Osborn 2, E Millar, F Fanoelua, P Osborn 2, O Osborn, **LOB:** 7

Redfield Area	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
K Rohlfs	7.0	4	1	1	2	2	0
Totals	7.0	4	1	1	2	2	0

W: K Rohlfs, **P-S:** K Rohlfs 88-54, **HBP:** K Rohlfs, **BF:** K Rohlfs 26

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Groton Area 10 - 0 Clark Area

📍 Away 📅 Wednesday May 11, 2022

	1	2	3	4	5	R	H	E
GRTN	7	1	0	1	1	10	11	0
CLRK	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2

BATTING

Groton Area	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
P Kettering (CF)	3	1	1	1	1	0
C Simon (2B)	2	1	0	0	1	1
N Morris	1	0	0	0	0	1
D Abeln (C)	3	2	2	0	0	1
C Simon	1	0	0	0	0	1
B Althoff (1B)	4	1	3	3	0	0
K Hoover (P)	4	2	2	3	0	0
C Dunker (3B)	2	0	1	1	0	1
J Cogley (SS)	1	1	0	0	2	1
C McInerney (RF)	3	0	1	2	0	2
B Flihs (LF)	2	2	1	0	1	0
Totals	26	10	11	10	5	8

Clark Area	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
Jakob Steen (SS,...	2	0	0	0	0	0
Connor Mudgett (...	2	0	0	0	0	1
Zach Winter (C)	1	0	0	0	1	1
Collin Gaikowski (...	2	0	0	0	0	1
Bryce Klancke (3B)	1	0	0	0	0	1
Gunnar Kvistad (...	0	0	0	0	1	0
Will Hovde (2B, P)	2	0	0	0	0	2
Damien Severso...	0	0	0	0	0	0
Max Bratland (LF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
Oliver Reitz (LF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
Diego Luis Garcia...	2	0	0	0	0	1
Parker Schmidt (...	1	0	0	0	0	1
Louie Caulfield (...	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	15	0	0	0	2	10

2B: B Althoff, K Hoover, **3B:** K Hoover, **TB:** C Dunker, P Kettering, B Flihs, B Althoff 4, C McInerney, D Abeln 2, K Hoover 5, **HBP:** C Dunker, **SB:** C Dunker, P Kettering 2, **LOB:** 7

LOB: 2

PITCHING

Groton Area	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
K Hoover	5.0	0	0	0	2	10	0
Totals	5.0	0	0	0	2	10	0

Clark Area	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
Connor Mu...	4.0	10	10	9	5	6	0
Will Hovde	1.0	1	0	0	0	2	0
Totals	5.0	11	10	9	5	8	0

W: K Hoover, **P-S:** K Hoover 67-41, **BF:** K Hoover 17

L: Connor Mudgett, **P-S:** Connor Mudgett 110-66, Will Hovde 13-10, **WP:** Connor Mudgett, **HBP:** Connor Mudgett, **BF:** Connor Mudgett 28, Will Hovde 4

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Groton Area JV 0 - 0 Clark Area

📍 Away 📅 Wednesday May 11, 2022

	1	2	3	R	H	E
GRTN	0	0	0	0	1	0
CLRK	0	0	0	0	0	2

BATTING

Groton Area JV	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
B Flihs (SS)	2	0	0	0	0	1
D Abeln (CF)	1	0	1	0	1	0
C Dunker (RF)	2	0	0	0	0	1
B Althoff (1B)	2	0	0	0	0	0
K Hoover (LF)	1	0	0	0	0	0
N Morris (C)	1	0	0	0	0	0
C Simon (3B)	1	0	0	0	0	0
C McInerney (P)	1	0	0	0	0	0
K Antonsen (2B)	1	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	12	0	1	0	1	3

TB: D Abeln, **SB:** D Abeln, **LOB:** 4

PITCHING

Groton Area	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
C McInerney	3.0	0	0	0	1	6	0
Totals	3.0	0	0	0	1	6	0

P-S: C McInerney 45-28, **BF:** C McInerney 10

Clark Area	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
Damien Severson...	2	0	0	0	0	2
Louie Caulfield (3B)	1	0	0	0	0	1
Oliver Reitz (LF)	2	0	0	0	0	1
Bryce Klancke (L...	0	0	0	0	0	0
Diego Luis Garcia...	1	0	0	0	0	0
Gaije Tuttle (1B)	1	0	0	0	0	0
Parker Schmidt (...)	1	0	0	0	0	1
Max Bratland (SS)	1	0	0	0	0	1
Will Hovde (P)	0	0	0	0	1	0
Totals	9	0	0	0	1	6

LOB: 1

Clark Area	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
Will Hovde	3.0	1	0	0	1	3	0
Totals	3.0	1	0	0	1	3	0

P-S: Will Hovde 40-26, **BF:** Will Hovde 13

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Miss South Dakota Celebrates 75 Years!

May 9, 2021, Brookings, SD – The Miss South Dakota organization celebrates 75 years of entertaining talent, glamorous evening gowns, and articulate young women on June 2 - 4 in Brookings. The week will culminate with the crowning of a new Miss South Dakota's Outstanding Teen on Friday, and our 75th Miss South Dakota on Saturday. The competition had its beginnings on the football turf at Woodward Field in Hot Springs, and spent 72 years in Hot Springs. For the past three years it has been held at the Oscar Larson Performing Arts Center on the South Dakota State University campus in Brookings.

Hundreds of young women have competed, earning hundreds of thousands of dollars in scholarships, and gaining personal confidence, performing and speaking skills. In 2006, the Outstanding Teen competition was added, opening up the competition to younger women. The Miss South Dakota competition is a preliminary competition to Miss America, which is the largest provider of scholarship assistance to young women in the United States. This year, the Miss South Dakota competition and Miss South Dakota's Outstanding Teen competition are awarding more than \$60,000 scholarships to the 32 women competing.

Many incredibly intelligent and articulate women have worn the crown over the past 75 years, including Mary Hart, Miss SD 1970, television talk show host formerly of Entertainment Tonight, Shantel Krebs, Miss SD 1997, former South Dakota Secretary of State, State Representative and State Senator, and current Chairperson of the Miss America organization, and Ann McKay Thompson, Miss SD 1968, business professional and South Dakota Hall of Fame inductee.

Buy your tickets now for the preliminary and final competitions, as well as the gala anniversary celebration. There are numerous opportunities to meet and greet the current candidates for Miss South Dakota and Miss South Dakota's Outstanding Teen, as well as the many "Forever" Miss South Dakotas who will be in attendance.



Miss South Dakota's Outstanding Teen 2021 Kianna Healy, and Miss South Dakota 2021 Kaitlin O'Neill.

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New Leanin' Tree Graduation Cards at the GDI

We have a new selection of Leanin' Tree graduation cards at the Groton Daily Independent office. And don't forget, we also have the Jumbo cards and a nice selection of balloons.

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*Weber Landscaping
Greenhouse*
204 N State St., Groton

Opening
for the
season
on Friday,
May 6th!



New products!
New Planters!



We have tons
of hanging
baskets,
vegetables,
annuals,
garden seeds,
gift cards and
much, much
more!



Livingston
garden seeds!!!!

Hours: M-F 10-6, Sat 10-4, Sun 12-4
Look for the green flags! Questions? Call 605-380-6587

THE PANTRY



Opening May 9th at the Groton Community Center

Mondays: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Tuesdays: 4 p.m. to 8 p.m

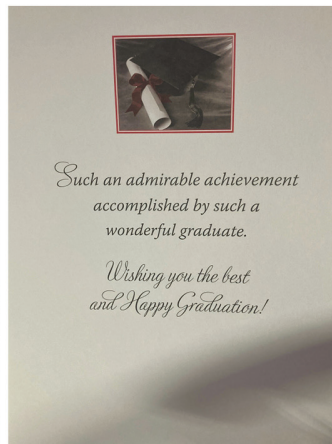
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Jumbo Graduation Cards

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

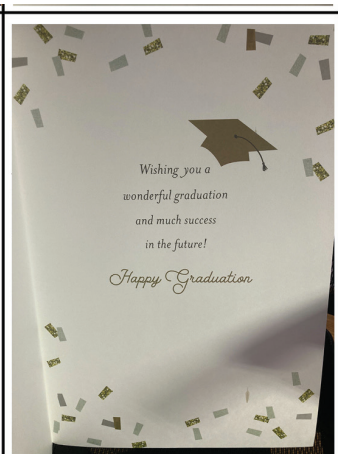
Can now be ordered on-line at 397news.com - Link on Black Bar
Or Call/Text Paul at 605-397-7460 or Tina at 605-397-7285
to reserve your card(s)



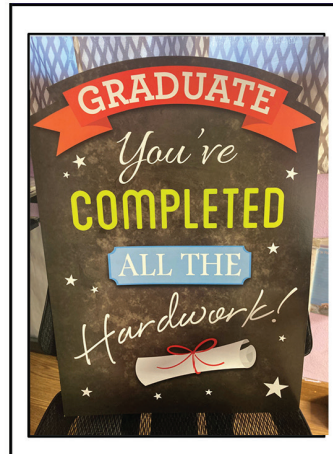
50-9903-C
\$7.99



50-9666-C
\$7.99



50-10977JM-C
\$7.99



50-9360-C
\$7.99

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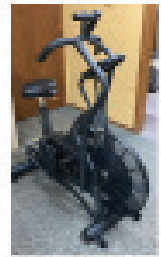


15 N Main St., Groton
 PO Box 34, Groton, SD
 57445-0034
 www.397news.com
 Call/Text Paul: 605/397-7460
 Call/Text Tina: 605/397-7285
 paperpaul@grotonsd.net

Scan Code Below for
 More Details



New at the
GDI FIT
 The Stairmaster
 and Air Bike



Call/Text Paul at 605/397-7460
 or Tina at 605/397-7285
 for membership info

Order your Graduation Balloons while we have a good supply!



#1 - \$5



#2 - \$5



#3 - \$6



#4 - \$10 - 45"



#5 - \$5



#6 - \$6



\$3.50 - 9" on a stick



#7 - \$10 - 36"



#8 - \$5



#9 - \$5



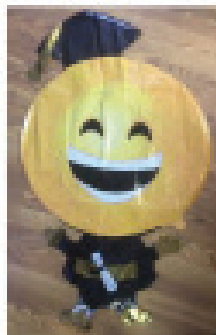
#10 - \$5



#11 - \$5



#12 - \$5



#13 - \$8 35"



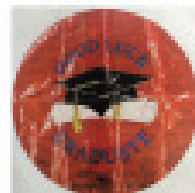
#14 - \$5



#15 - \$5



#16 - \$5



#17 - \$5



#18 - \$5



#19 - \$5



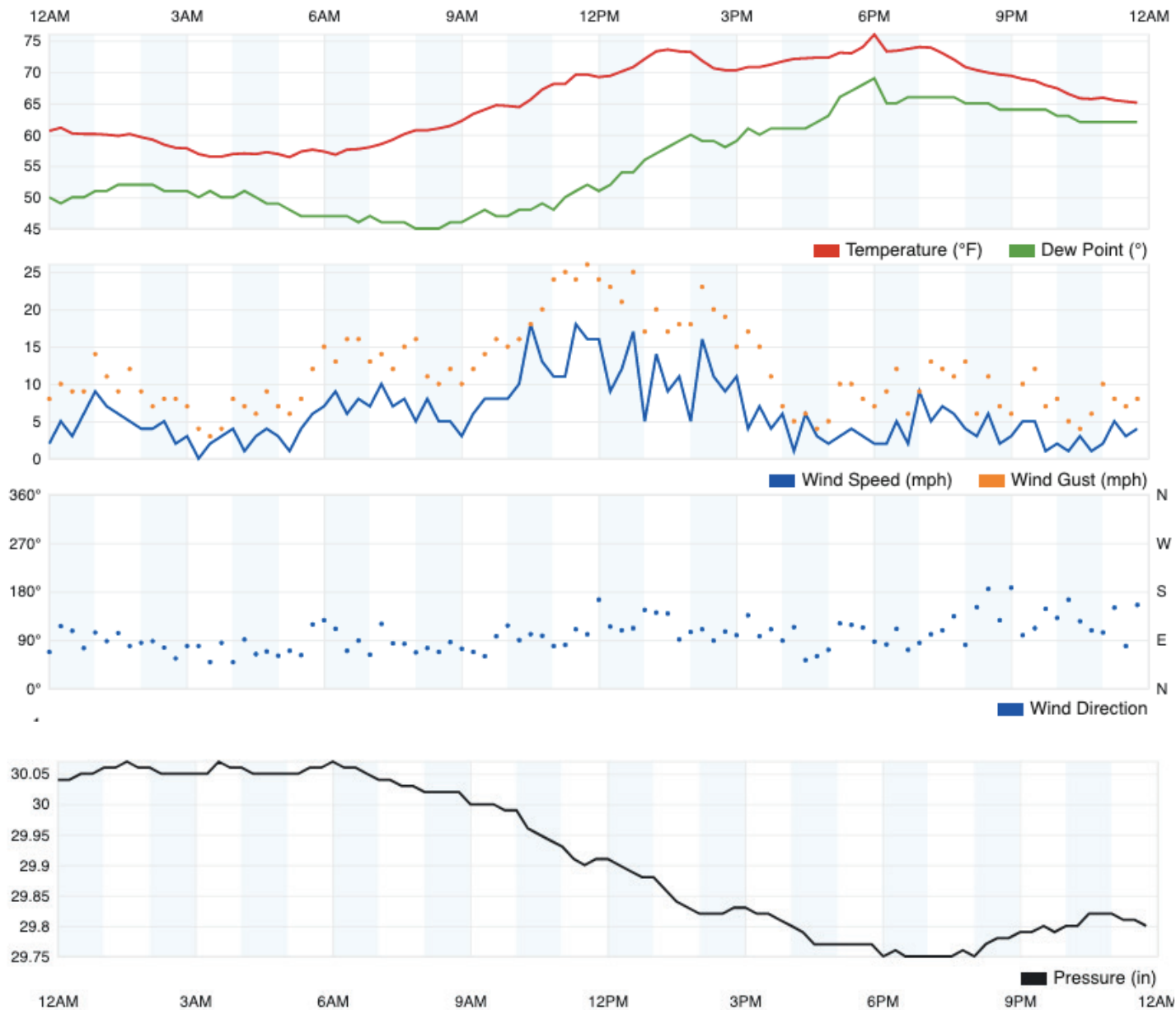
#20 - \$5

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

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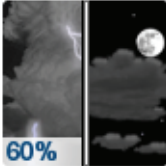



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
				
30%	60%			
Severe Thunderstorms and Patchy Fog	Severe Thunderstorms then Mostly Clear	Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny
High: 82 °F	Low: 51 °F	High: 70 °F	Low: 46 °F	High: 67 °F



Today's Severe Weather Outlook

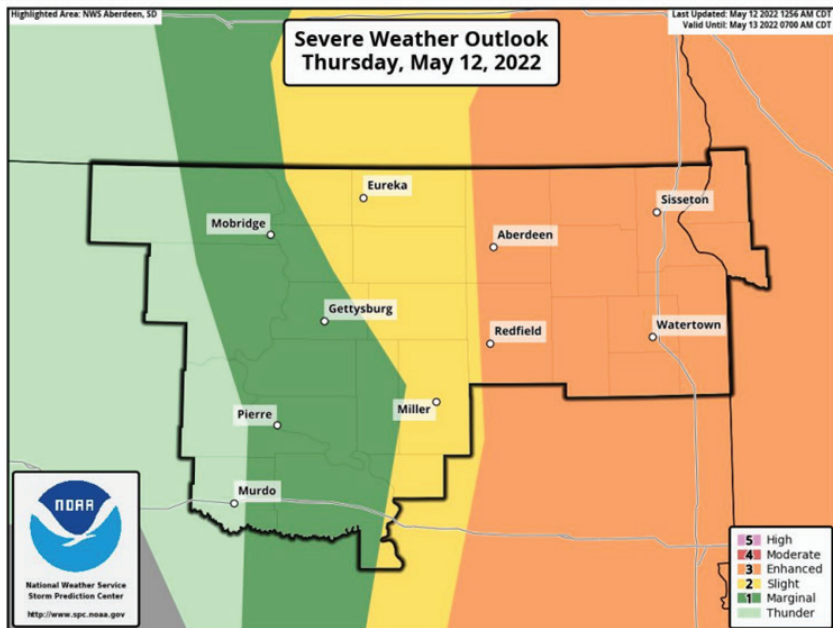
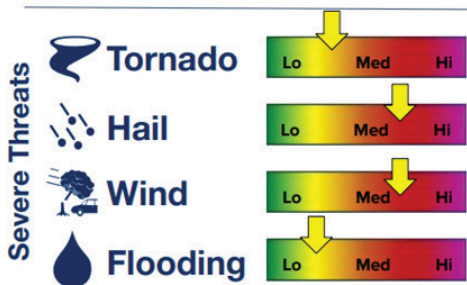
May 12, 2022
3:04 AM

Overview

Severe thunderstorms with large hail, strong winds and even isolated tornadoes possible

Timing

Isolated severe storms possible early this morning, but the **HIGHEST SEVERE THREAT IS FROM 3pm - 9pm CDT THIS AFTERNOON AND EVENING**



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Scattered storms with isolated severe weather are possible early this morning. More coverage of severe weather is expected late this afternoon and evening in eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. Large hail, strong winds and even isolated tornadoes will be possible.

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Today in Weather History

May 12, 1984: An F3 tornado wiped out seven farms, crippled fifteen others, killed livestock and scattered several cars and machinery in its path. The tornado first touched down seven miles north and one mile east of Clark and moved southeast through the southwestern sections of Henry until it dissipated at Grover in Codrington County. The path of destruction began on a farm where two barns, a steel grain bin, and a pole barn were demolished, and machinery was damaged. As the tornado moved further southeast, it struck the southwest sections of Henry and split into two tornadoes that moved in two different directions. One went to the northeast that inflicted no damage and dissipated while the other went southeast that continued its destruction path to Grover. Small hail, accumulation to fifteen inches deep, was experienced at Henry and tornado damage included broken windows, numerous homes, and three trailer homes were demolished. Along the path, 80 power poles and several miles of power lines were lost, affecting the power to over 1,000 people. A small plane, southwest of Garden City, was wrapped around a pole.

1760: Ben Franklin was the first person to identify nor'easters. In a letter on this date to Alexander Small of London, Franklin described an experience that happened to him in November 1743 when storm clouds in Philadelphia blocked his view of an eclipse. Franklin assumed that the storm had blown in from the northeast because the surface winds at his location were from that direction. He was puzzled to find out later that his brother had viewed the eclipse with no problems and that the storm had arrived in Boston four hours later. The information caused Franklin to surmise correctly that the storm had moved from southwest to northeast.

1886: An estimated F4 tornado touched down in Vermilion County near Armstrong, Illinois, and passed between Alvin and Rossville before moving into Indiana. At least five houses were destroyed, two of which were entirely swept away. Three people were killed. Five other strong tornadoes occurred across Illinois that day: two near Mt. Carroll, one near Odell, one near Jacksonville, and one in Iroquois County.

1934 - A dust storm darkened skies from Oklahoma to the Atlantic coast. (David Ludlum)

1971 - Duststorms suddenly reduced visibilities to near zero on Interstate Highway 10 near Casa Grande AZ. Chain reaction accidents involving cars and trucks resulted, killing seven persons. (The Weather Channel)

1972 - In Texas, A cloudburst dumped sixteen inches of rain north of New Braunfels sending a thirty foot wall of water down Blueders Creek into the Comal and Guadalupe Rivers washing away people, houses and automobiles. The flood claimed 18 lives and caused more than twenty million dollars damage. (The Weather Channel)

1982 - A late season snowstorm struck the Front Range of the Colorado Rockies. The storm produced 46 inches of snow at Coal Creek Canyon, located near Boulder. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A heat wave persisted in central California. Afternoon highs of 100 degrees at Fresno CA and 102 degrees at Sacramento CA were records for the date. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Unseasonably warm weather prevailed in the western U.S. Eight cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including Pendleton OR with a high of 92 degrees and Phoenix AZ with a reading of 106 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Showers and thunderstorms associated with a low pressure system stalled over New York State drenched Portland ME with 4.50 inches of rain in 24 hours. Rains of 5 to 7 inches soaked the state of Maine over a four day period causing 1.3 million dollars damage. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from eastern Texas and the Central Gulf Coast States into Missouri and Illinois. Thunderstorms spawned six tornadoes, including one which injured four persons at Doloroso MS. Thunderstorms also produced hail three inches in diameter west of Vicksburg MS, and wind gusts to 83 mph in southern Illinois, north of Vevay Park and at the Coles County Airport. High winds and heavy rain caused 1.6 million dollars crop damage in Calhoun County IL, and in southeastern Louisiana, Saint Joseph was deluged with eight inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1997: A towering F1 tornado ripped its way through the middle of Miami, Biscayne Bay, and Miami Beach right after lunch Monday, smashing cars and windows, tossing trees skyward and scaring the dickens out of thousands of people.

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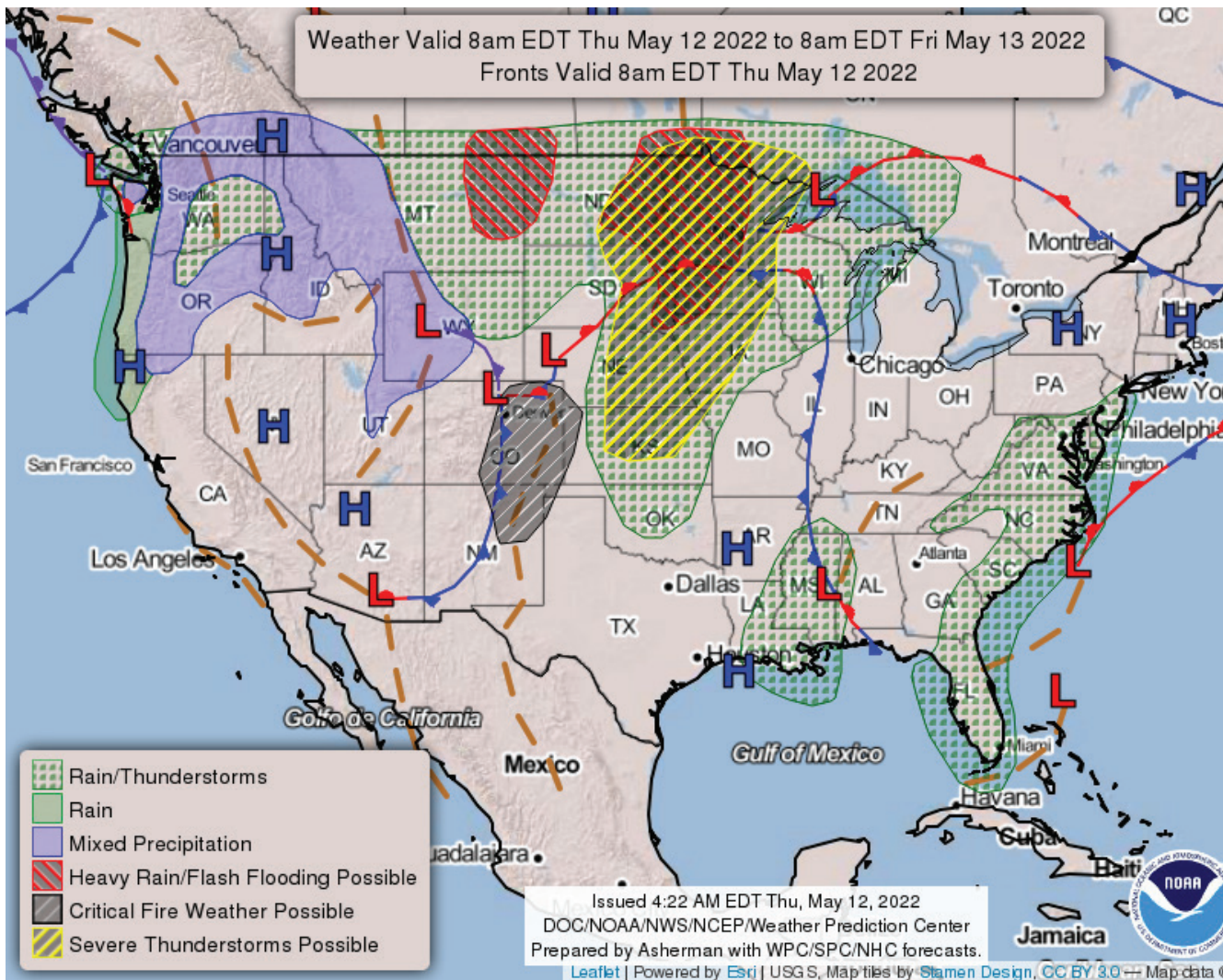
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 76 °F at 6:03 PM
Low Temp: 56 °F at 3:35 AM
Wind: 27 mph at 12:32 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 50 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1900
Record Low: 17 in 1946
Average High: 69°F
Average Low: 43°F
Average Precip in May.: 1.32
Precip to date in May.: 2.08
Average Precip to date: 5.29
Precip Year to Date: 8.58
Sunset Tonight: 8:54:09 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:02:08 AM



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DOES GOD ACTUALLY CARE FOR US?

Most of us are rather strange. We want to live long lives but develop habits that shorten them. We want to be free, yet we make ourselves slaves to sin. We could be saints, but we choose to be sinners. We desire immortality but refuse it because we reject Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord - the only path to eternal life.

Long ago, David the Psalmist asked, "O Lord, what is man that You care for him, the son of man that You think of him?"

Often, we neglect to think about the fact that God created us in His image. We did not evolve from nor ascend from some lower life. We are different from all animals in many ways - physically, mentally, socially - but most of all we have a spiritual nature that no living animal has.

We are what we are because God made us the way we are. If God wanted us to be different from the way we are, we would be. So, what we do matters to God. What happens to each of us matters to God. We are created in His image, and that of itself makes us uniquely different and special - especially to God.

The fact that we are created in the image of God puzzled the Psalmist. So, he decided to ask God, "Why are you concerned with the human race?"

Years later the question was answered: because He loves us. Remember what Jesus said: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

Man: different by design. Different because of God's love.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for a love that is eternal and the opportunity to enjoy a life that is eternal. Your love makes us special. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: O Lord, what is man that You care for him, the son of man that You think of him?
Psalm 144:3

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2022 Community Events

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

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Wednesday:

Dakota Cash

06-19-26-28-33

(six, nineteen, twenty-six, twenty-eight, thirty-three)

Estimated jackpot: \$22,000

Lotto America

26-29-32-36-48, Star Ball: 7, ASB: 3

(twenty-six, twenty-nine, thirty-two, thirty-six, forty-eight; Star Ball: seven; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$13.35 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$99 million

Powerball

05-07-61-63-69, Powerball: 18, Power Play: 2

(five, seven, sixty-one, sixty-three, sixty-nine; Powerball: eighteen; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$68 million

US finds 500 Native American boarding school deaths so far

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — A first-of-its-kind federal study of Native American boarding schools that for over a century sought to assimilate Indigenous children into white society has identified more than 500 student deaths at the institutions, but officials expect that figure to grow exponentially as research continues.

The Interior Department report released Wednesday expands to more than 400 the number of schools that were established or supported by the U.S. government, starting in the early 19th century and continuing in some cases until the late 1960s. The agency identified the deaths in records for about 20 of the schools.

The dark history of Native American boarding schools — where children were forced from their families, prohibited from speaking their languages and often abused — has been felt deeply across Indian Country and through generations.

Many children never returned home, and the Interior Department said that with further investigation the number of known student deaths could climb to the thousands or even tens of thousands. Causes included disease, accidental injuries and abuse.

“Each of those children is a missing family member, a person who was not able to live out their purpose on this Earth because they lost their lives as part of this terrible system,” said Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, whose paternal grandparents were sent to boarding school for several years.

The agency is in the process of poring through thousands of boxes containing more than 98 million pages of records, with help from many Indigenous people who have had to work through their own trauma and pain. Accounting for the number of deaths will be difficult because records weren’t always kept.

A second volume of the report will cover burial sites as well as the federal government’s financial investment in the schools and the impacts of the boarding schools on Indigenous communities, the Interior Department said. It has so far identified at least 53 burial sites at or near boarding schools, not all of which have marked graves.

Tribal leaders have pressed the agency to ensure that any children’s remains are properly cared for and returned to their tribes, if desired. To prevent them from being disturbed, the burial sites’ locations will not be publicly released, said Bryan Newland, the Interior Department’s assistant secretary for Indian Affairs.

At a news conference Wednesday, Haaland choked back tears as she described how the boarding school

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era perpetuated poverty, mental health disorders, substance abuse and premature deaths in Indigenous communities.

"Recognizing the impacts of the federal Indian boarding school system cannot just be a historical reckoning," she said. "We must also chart a path forward to deal with these legacy issues."

Haaland, who is Laguna, announced an initiative last June to investigate the schools' troubled legacy and uncover the truth about the government's role in them. The 408 schools her agency identified operated in 37 states or territories, many of them in Oklahoma, Arizona and New Mexico.

Others who spoke included Deborah Parker, chief executive of the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, who tearfully recalled stories of a boarding school on the Tulalip reservation, where she's from in Washington state. The school had a small jail cell and a basement where at least one girl routinely was chained to a heater and beaten, she said. Others hid to shield themselves from abuse.

"I am concerned when we begin to open these doors for our boarding school survivors to come forward and share their stories," Parker said.

Basil Brave Heart attended Holy Rosary Mission in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, in the 1940s. He called having his hair cut by older students a "divide and conquer" strategy that made Native children take part in their own cultural destruction.

He was prohibited from practicing Lakota spiritual traditions and speaking his language that he said has a spiritual resonance not easily translated into English.

"Taking our language away is huge," he said Wednesday. "It goes to our identity."

The Interior Department acknowledged the number of schools identified could change as more data is gathered. The coronavirus pandemic and budget restrictions hindered some of the research over the past year, said Newland, a citizen of the Bay Mills Indian Community.

The U.S. government directly ran some of the boarding schools. Catholic, Protestant and other churches operated others with federal funding, backed by U.S. laws and policies to "civilize" Native Americans. The federal government still oversees more than 180 schools in nearly two dozen states that serve Native Americans, but the schools' missions are vastly different from the past.

The Interior Department report was prompted by the discovery of hundreds of unmarked graves at former residential school sites in Canada that brought back painful memories for Indigenous communities.

Haaland also announced Wednesday a yearlong tour for Interior Department officials that will allow former boarding school students from Native American tribes, Alaska Native villages and Native Hawaiian communities to share their stories as part of a permanent oral history collection.

The conditions at boarding and residential schools varied across the U.S. and Canada. While some former students have reported positive experiences, children at the schools often were subject to military-style discipline.

James LaBelle Sr., who is Inupiaq, said he attended to two federal boarding schools where he learned about European and American history and language, math and science but nothing about Indigenous cultures and traditions.

"I came out not knowing who I was," he said.

The boarding school coalition, which created an early inventory of the schools and shared its research with the Interior Department, praised Interior's work but noted the agency's scope is limited. The coalition has identified about 90 other boarding schools that fall outside the federal government's criteria.

A U.S. House subcommittee on Thursday will hear testimony on a bill to create a truth and healing commission modeled after one in Canada. Parker said it's important in revealing a fuller truth about what happened to Native children.

"Our children deserve to be found," she said. "Our children deserve to be brought home. We are here for their justice. And we will not stop advocating until the United States fully accounts for the genocide committed against Native children."

Crew safe after fighter jet slides off South Dakota runway

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SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The crew of a South Dakota Air National Guard F-16 fighter jet that slid off the runway while landing at a Sioux Falls airport Wednesday afternoon is safe, authorities said.

The jet from the 114th Fighter Wing overshot the runway at Joe Foss Field about 2:43 p.m. after returning from a routine training mission. Emergency crews responded to the scene, according to Guard officials.

Officials say they are putting together an interim board to investigate the incident. No further information was immediately available.

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

Yankton Press & Dakotan. May 9, 2022.

Editorial: Childhood Hepatitis Cases Raise Concerns

Some health news from three different states may have flown under the general radar last week, but they have not gone unnoticed by health officials.

The South Dakota Department of Health announced it was investigating a suspected case of child hepatitis in the state. The case was identified as a child less than 10 years old living in Brown County (Aberdeen).

A day later, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services said it was investigating nine cases of hepatitis in the state, several of which were reported in the Omaha metro area.

Also, the North Dakota Department of Health announced it was investigating a suspected case of child hepatitis. The child was reported to be recuperating at home after a brief hospitalization.

These cases appear to be part of a larger outbreak across the country. According to NPR late last week, more than 100 cases had been suspected in 25 U.S. states and territories, with five deaths being reported. Also, as hepatitis involves an inflammation of the liver, 14% of the cases wound up needing liver transplants.

This may be part of a recent global rise in hepatitis cases, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO). While hepatitis cases in children do happen, it is considered rare.

This outbreak, which was first detected last fall, is creating a lot of questions but finding few answers.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the first questions have concerned possible connections with the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers have noted that almost all of the children affected so far apparently did not test positive for COVID-19 — or at least weren't diagnosed with it — and they were too young for the COVID vaccine. However, with the investigation ongoing, the link between the hepatitis outbreak and COVID cannot be completely dismissed, Time magazine reported.

Meanwhile, the CDC reported that more than half of the kids had a confirmed adenovirus infection. Adenoviruses are linked with respiratory maladies such as the common cold, bronchitis and pneumonia. In children, adenoviruses can also cause infections in the intestinal tract.

The mystery has created some intriguing theories. For instance, Time magazine reported, "One possible reason for these liver-inflammation cases currently under investigation is that lower circulating levels of adenovirus during pandemic lockdowns may have left children's immune systems unprimed for how to react to the common virus. That, in turn, may be enabling adenovirus infections to overrun children's immune systems — though exactly why that would result in liver disease remains unknown."

For now, the mystery remains just that.

And while it's no reason to panic, it's never a bad idea to be watching for signs for hepatitis symptoms in children. These include nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, darkened urine, yellowing of the skin or eyes, fever and fatigue.

It may be yet another worry for a pandemic-fatigued populace, but vigilance always remains the best defense, especially until more is known.

Rural home sales in South Dakota heat up

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Real estate agents says the hot housing market in South Dakota's larger cities has spilled over to the state's more rural areas.

While the competition is the highest in Sioux Falls and Rapid City where prices have increased about

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20% over last year, the rural real estate market is also changing.

"It just seems like these days it doesn't really matter where it is, homes values are increasing and they're selling and people are looking to move and they like to move to South Dakota," said Fischer Rounds Real Estate broker Micah Volmer.

In the past, home sellers in small farming communities across the state had trouble finding a buyer.

"Historically buyers had a lot of the negotiating power in that market too, now it's completely different," Priority Real Estate & Development owner Christa Helma said.

"We had multiple offers within a week of listing," Volmer said of a property in Kimball. She tells KELO-TV her rural listings near Pierre and Mitchell are now seeing far more competition.

"They are definitely selling a lot quicker than they used to," Volmer said.

A starter home in Alexandria, a community of 800 people, sold for \$115,000 last year after sitting 97 days on the market. Volmer said it was recently relisted for \$185,000 and had a sale pending after five days on the market.

Helma said when the coronavirus pandemic hit, people wanted to get away from the bigger cities.

"A lot of people can work from home now," she said.

North Korea confirms 1st COVID outbreak, Kim orders lockdown

By KIM TONG-HYUNG and HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea imposed a nationwide lockdown Thursday to control its first acknowledged COVID-19 outbreak after holding for more than two years to a widely doubted claim of a perfect record keeping out the virus that has spread to nearly every place in the world.

The outbreak forced leader Kim Jong Un to wear a mask in public, likely for the first time since the start of the pandemic, but the scale of transmissions inside North Korea wasn't immediately known. A failure to slow infections could have serious consequences because the country has a poor health care system and its 26 million people are believed to be mostly unvaccinated. Some experts say North Korea, by its rare admission of an outbreak, may be seeking outside aid.

However, hours after North Korea confirmed the outbreak, South Korea's military said it detected the North had fired three suspected ballistic missiles toward the sea. It was its 16th round of missile launches this year, in brinkmanship aimed at forcing the United States to accept North Korea as a nuclear power and negotiate sanctions relief and other concessions from a position of strength.

The official Korean Central News Agency said tests of virus samples collected Sunday from an unspecified number of people with fevers in the capital, Pyongyang, confirmed they were infected with the omicron variant.

In response, Kim called at a ruling party Politburo meeting for a thorough lockdown of cities and counties and said workplaces should be isolated by units to block the virus from spreading. He urged health workers to step up disinfection efforts at workplaces and homes and mobilize reserve medical supplies.

Kim said it was crucial to control transmissions and eliminate the infection source as fast as possible, while also easing inconveniences to the public caused by the virus controls. He insisted the country will overcome the outbreak because its government and people are "united as one."

Despite the elevated virus response, Kim ordered officials to push ahead with scheduled construction, agricultural development and other state projects while bolstering the country's defense posture to avoid any security vacuum.

North Korea's state TV showed Kim and other senior officials wearing masks as they entered a meeting room, although Kim removed his mask to speak into a set of microphones. Still photos distributed by KNCA showed Kim unmasked and sitting at the head of a table where all other officials remained masked.

South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, couldn't immediately confirm whether it was the first time state media showed Kim wearing a mask since the start of the pandemic. Kim has previously spoken to huge crowds without a mask as he praised the country's earlier pandemic response, and his decision to be seen with a mask could be aimed at raising public vigilance.

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North Korea, which has maintained strict anti-virus controls at its borders for more than two years, didn't provide further details about its new lockdown. But an Associated Press photographer on the South Korean side of the border saw dozens of people working in fields or walking on footpaths at a North Korean border town — an indication the lockdown doesn't require people to stay home, or it exempts farm work.

The measures described in state media and Kim's declaration that economic goals should still be met could indicate that North Korea is focusing more on restricting travel and supplies between regions, analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at South Korea's Sejong Institute said.

North Korea's government has shunned vaccines offered by the U.N.-backed COVAX distribution program, possibly because they have international monitoring requirements.

Seoul's Unification Ministry said South Korea is willing to provide medical assistance and other help to North Korea based on humanitarian considerations. Relations between the Koreas have deteriorated since 2019 amid a stalemate in nuclear negotiations and the North's increasingly provocative weapons tests.

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Beijing is offering North Korea help in dealing with the outbreak. North Korea has reportedly rejected previous Chinese offers of domestically developed vaccines.

Kim Sin-gon, a professor at Seoul's Korea University College of Medicine, said North Korea is likely signaling its willingness to receive outside vaccines, but wants many more doses than offered by COVAX to inoculate its entire population multiple times. He said North Korea would also want COVID-19 medicines and medical equipment shipments that are banned by U.N. sanctions.

Omicron spreads much more easily than earlier variants of the coronavirus, and its fatality and hospitalization rates are high among unvaccinated older people or those with existing health problems. That means the outbreak could cause "a serious situation" because North Korea lacks medical equipment and medicine to treat virus patients and many of its people are not well-nourished, Kim Sin-gon said.

Ahn Kyung-su, head of DPRKHEALTH.ORG, a website focusing on health issues in North Korea, said North Korea's admission of the outbreak is likely designed to press its people harder to guard against the virus as China, which shares a long, porous border with the North, has placed many of its cities under lockdown over virus concerns.

North Korea will also likely stress lockdowns, although the experience of China's "zero-COVID" policy suggests that approach doesn't work against the fast-moving omicron variant, said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Seoul's Ewha Womans University.

"For Pyongyang to publicly admit omicron cases, the public health situation must be serious," Easley said. "This does not mean North Korea is suddenly going to be open to humanitarian assistance and take a more conciliatory line toward Washington and Seoul. But the Kim regime's domestic audience may be less interested in nuclear or missile tests when the urgent threat involves coronavirus rather than a foreign military."

North Korea's previous coronavirus-free claim had been disputed by many foreign experts. But South Korean officials have said North Korea had likely avoided a huge outbreak, in part because it instituted strict virus controls almost from the start of the pandemic.

Early in 2020 — before the coronavirus spread around the world — North Korea took severe steps to keep out the virus and described them as a matter of "national existence." It all but halted cross-border traffic and trade for two years, and is even believed to have ordered troops to shoot on sight any trespassers who crossed its borders.

The extreme border closures further shocked an economy already damaged by decades of mismanagement and U.S.-led sanctions over its nuclear weapons and missile program, pushing Kim to perhaps the toughest moment of his rule since he took power in 2011.

North Korea had been one of the last places in the world without an acknowledged COVID-19 case after the virus first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019 spread to every continent including Antarctica. Turkmenistan, a similarly secretive and authoritarian nation in Central Asia, has reported no cases to the World Health Organization, though its claim also is widely doubted by outside experts.

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In recent months, some Pacific island nations that kept the virus out by their geographic isolation have recorded outbreaks. Only tiny Tuvalu, with a population around 12,000, has escaped the virus so far, while a few other nations – Nauru, Micronesia and Marshall Islands – have stopped cases at their borders and avoided community outbreaks.

North Korea's outbreak comes as China — its close ally and trading partner — battles its biggest outbreak of the pandemic.

In January, North Korea tentatively reopened railroad freight traffic between its border town of Sinuiju and China's Dandong for the first time in two years, but China halted the trade last month due to an outbreak in Liaoning province, which borders North Korea.

N. Korea fires 3 ballistic missiles amid 1st virus outbreak

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea fired three short-range ballistic missiles toward the sea on Thursday, South Korea's military said, in the latest of a series of weapons demonstrations this year that came just hours after it confirmed its first case of the coronavirus since the pandemic began.

The launches could underscore North Korea's determination to press ahead with its efforts to expand its arsenal despite the virus outbreak to rally support behind the leader, Kim Jong Un, and keep up pressure on its rivals amid long-dormant nuclear diplomacy.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement the three missiles launched from the North's capital region on Thursday afternoon flew toward the waters off the country's eastern coast.

It said South Korea's military has boosted its readiness and surveillance while maintaining close coordination with the United States.

Japan also detected the North Korean launches.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida instructed officials to do their utmost to analyze the launch, ensure safety of aircraft and vessels in the area and take precaution and readiness for any possible emergencies, according to his office.

The Japanese coast guard said that a possible ballistic missile from North Korea was believed to have landed at sea. It urged vessels around the Japanese coasts to watch out for falling objects and report them to the authorities.

Earlier Thursday, North Korean state media confirmed the country's first COVID-19 infections as Kim ordered nationwide lockdowns to slow the spread of the virus. Kim also ordered officials to bolster the country's defense posture to avoid any security vacuum.

In recent months, North Korea has test-launched a spate of missiles in what experts call an attempt to modernize its weapons and pressure the United States and its allies into accepting it as a nuclear state and relax sanctions on the North. Some observers say that despite the elevated anti-virus steps, North Korea would likely continue its weapons tests to try to boost public morale at home and strengthen loyalty toward the Kim leadership.

Thursday's launches were the North's first weapons fired since the inauguration of new conservative South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol on Tuesday. Yoon's office said his national security adviser Kim Sung-han was planning to convene a meeting to discuss the launches.

North Korea has a history of rattling new governments in Seoul and Washington in an apparent bid to boost its bargaining chips in future negotiations. The North Korean nuclear threat will likely top the agenda when Yoon meets visiting U.S. President Joe Biden in Seoul next week.

The North Korean weapons tested recently included a variety of nuclear-capable missiles that could potentially reach South Korea, Japan or the mainland U.S.

Last Saturday, South Korea detected a North Korea ballistic missile launch likely from a submarine in its first underwater-launched weapons test since last October. There are also signs that the North is preparing to conduct its first nuclear test in nearly five years at a remote testing ground in its northeast.

Biden hosts ASEAN as he looks to show Pacific commitment

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is hosting leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as his administration makes an extended effort to demonstrate that the United States hasn't lost focus on the Pacific even while dealing with Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Biden will begin his talks over dinner Thursday evening with leaders from the eight ASEAN nations attending the two-day summit. It will be the group's first meeting at the White House. Leaders will take part in more formal talks at the State Department on Friday.

The ASEAN nations include Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Leaders from the other two ASEAN members, Myanmar and the Philippines, are not expected to attend the summit.

The special summit in Washington comes before Biden departs next week for a whirlwind visit to South Korea and Japan — his first visit to Asia as president — for talks with those two countries' leaders. He'll also meet during the trip with leaders from the Indo-Pacific strategic alliance with the U.S. known as the Quad: Australia, India and Japan.

Biden has sought to put greater focus on the Quad and improving relations with Pacific nations in the early going of his presidency as he sees a rising China as the most threatening economic and national security adversary to the United States.

Biden, who vowed to make the Pacific a greater focal point of U.S. policy, has seen his attempt at an "Asia pivot" complicated by the most serious fighting in Europe since World War II, which has consumed much of his foreign policy bandwidth in recent months.

A top White House Asia policy adviser said the administration remains committed to stepping up relations with southeast Asian nations to address climate, economic and education initiatives.

"There has been a sense that in previous administrations that we had set off with a determined pace to focus on East Asia or in the Indo-Pacific and then find ourselves with other pressing challenges that perhaps draws (us) away a little bit," Kurt Campbell, coordinator for Indo-Pacific Affairs on the White House National Security Council, said at an event on Wednesday hosted by the U.S. Institute of Peace. "I think there is a deep sense that that can't happen again."

Outgoing Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte is skipping the summit. The bloc has barred Myanmar — it has been gripped by crisis since the army ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021 — from sending all but nongovernmental leaders for the meetings.

The Biden administration condemned the military coup that led to the ouster of Suu Kyi. She was convicted by a military court last month of corruption and sentenced to five years in prison in the first of several corruption cases against her. Suu Kyi has denied the charges.

Biden is also expected to address the situation in Myanmar with ASEAN leaders, as well as discuss China and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Campbell said the administration expects the private talks will be "direct, polite, but maybe a little bit uncomfortable at times" as the U.S. and ASEAN members are not on the same page on all issues.

Biden has called for Russia to be disinvented from November's scheduled Group of 20 summit because of its invasion of Ukraine. ASEAN member Indonesia, which holds the presidency of the Group of 20 this year, has resisted the calls to pull Moscow's invitation.

At a virtual summit with ASEAN leaders last year, Biden said Washington would look to start talks with Pacific nations about developing a regional economic framework. Campbell said that the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework would be under discussion during this year's summit, though it was unclear how substantive the talks would be.

Japan's Washington ambassador, Tomita Koji, said at another forum in Washington earlier this week that the framework could be launched during Biden's upcoming visit to Japan.

FIFA takes on EA Sports video game in soccer's new rivalry

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By ROB HARRIS AP Global Soccer Writer

LONDON (AP) — The name “FIFA” can bring to mind images of the World Cup and soccer’s greatest players, like Pele, Zinedine Zidane or Lionel Messi. The acronym for the sport’s governing body may also remind some of shameless bribery and corruption.

For many, though, it’s the video game that is synonymous with FIFA.

For three decades, the Switzerland-based soccer body has enjoyed a flourishing, mutually beneficial relationship with EA Sports. The annual edition of the video game, alongside related products, has raked in billions of dollars and has proven to be so lucrative that FIFA thinks it can be making even more on its own.

FIFA severed the licensing deal partnership with Electronic Arts Inc. on Tuesday, making FIFA23 the last new EA game with the involvement of both sides.

They are now becoming opponents.

EA will continue to make soccer games with best players and biggest teams, they will just be stripped of the FIFA brand and instead called EA Sports FC.

Confusingly, perhaps, FIFA24 should also be on the shelves next year because the soccer body is determined to go ahead with its own launch.

EA has already begun to highlight its advantages over the FIFA game, given it has the rights to show 19,000 players from more than 700 teams in more than 30 leagues playing in 100 stadiums. Manchester United, Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain will still be there, along with their best players.

“That is the only place that you can have an authentic, famous and fully representative football experience,” David Jackson, vice president of brand for EA SPORTS FIFA, told The Associated Press. “I do think that there is an element of potential confusion in the marketplace.”

The hyperbole from FIFA is already trying to undercut EA’s marketing by claiming it is in talks with multiple rival gaming companies and has plans to enter the metaverse.

“I can assure you,” FIFA President Gianni Infantino said, “that the only authentic, real game that has the FIFA name will be the best one available for gamers and football fans.”

How that will be achieved is far from clear, although FIFA does hold the rights to the biggest soccer show on earth. The World Cup will disappear from the EA game.

“The FIFA name is the only global, original title,” Infantino said. “FIFA 23, FIFA 24, FIFA 25 and FIFA 26, and so on — the constant is the FIFA name and it will remain forever and remain the best.”

That kind of bombastic talk puts pressure on FIFA to deliver on Infantino’s vision for a game that usurps the EA franchise despite not having the rights to feature leagues such as the Premier League — and the teams that play in them.

“New entrants would face a steep licensing curve to compete with EA,” said Andrew Marok, an analyst covering the digital media sector at investment bank Raymond James.

Soccer gaming is big business for EA. The annual report issued this week showed revenue of \$6.19 billion.

“We’ve just had our biggest year — ever — for EA SPORTS FIFA games,” EA Sports CEO Andrew Wilson told investors on Wednesday, a day after it was announced the FIFA deal would cease at the end of the year.

A huge part of the revenue comes from the Ultimate Team mode, where customers buy extra content in EA sports games. That generated \$1.623 billion in 2021.

“We have historically derived a significant portion of our net revenue from sales related to our largest and most popular game, FIFA, annualized versions of which are consistently one of the best-selling games in the marketplace,” EA told investors.

Brand loyalty will be key starting next year. Will gamers stay with EA’s rebranded product or jump to the rival being launched by FIFA?

It’s already a competitive market with eFootball, the former Pro Evolution Soccer game produced by Japanese firm Konami. That game has a partnership with Manchester United, though the record 20-time English champions will still feature in EA’s game through a Premier League agreement.

EA has already warned its investors of the risks to its soccer gaming business from rivals.

“Any events or circumstances that negatively impact our FIFA franchise, such as product or service quality, other products that take a portion of consumer spending and time, the delay or cancellation of a

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product or service launch, increased competition for key licenses, or real or perceived security risks, could negatively impact our financial results to a disproportionate extent," EA said in its annual report.

EA should get an edge over FIFA by retaining its 300 license partners, 30 leagues and federations, 700 teams and 19,000 athletes, JPMorgan analyst David Karnovsky said in a client note.

"While it's difficult to think there won't be at least some impact from the brand shift to sales, the \$150 million available from the absence of a license fee to FIFA provides ample room for marketing to drive awareness around EA Sports FC," Karnovsky wrote.

Untangling itself from the world of soccer politics has its benefits for EA. Tensions between regional confederations have led to European body UEFA and South American counterpart CONMEBOL circumventing FIFA to launch their own meeting of champions. The debut of the Finalissima will see Italy and Argentina meet at Wembley Stadium in London on June 1. It would seem incongruous for EA to promote its FIFA game at the match.

"What name would we put on a perimeter board in a UEFA-CONMEBOL event? It's really tough for us to put FIFA on there," said Jackson, EA's vice president of brand. "What has previously been a springboard for our brand, and an accelerant to it many years ago, has just become less valuable to us over time."

EA might just have saved the FIFA brand as well. The fond association with the video game by so many fans has balanced against the toxicity of Sepp Blatter-era organization after the opening of sprawling criminal investigations into soccer corruption in 2015.

"If you ask a young football fan what FIFA is, they're more likely to say a video game than they are the global governing body, but that value lives with us, I believe," Jackson said. "We are the predominant voice in the world of football from an interactive entertainment perspective, and we don't see a world where that changes."

EXPLAINER: Why Finland, Sweden joining NATO will be big deal

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — It's likely to be the quickest NATO enlargement ever and one that would redraw Europe's security map. Finnish leaders announced Thursday their belief that Finland should join the world's biggest military organization because of Russia's war in Ukraine. Sweden could soon follow suit.

Should they apply for membership, the move would have far-reaching ramifications for Northern Europe and trans-Atlantic security.

No doubt, it will also anger their large neighbor Russia, which blames, at least in part, its war in Ukraine on NATO's continued expansion closer to its borders. It's unclear how Russian President Vladimir Putin might retaliate. The Kremlin said Thursday that it certainly won't improve European security.

The following is a brief look at what Finland and Sweden's membership in the 30-country NATO alliance could mean, with the Nordic partners expected to announce their intention to join within days.

FINLAND AND SWEDEN

Not neutral like Switzerland, Finland and Sweden traditionally think of themselves as militarily "nonaligned."

But Russia's war in Ukraine and Putin's apparent desire to establish a Moscow-centered "sphere of influence" has shaken their security notions to the core. Just days after he ordered the Feb. 24 invasion, public opinion shifted dramatically.

Support in Finland for NATO membership has hovered around 20-30% for years. It now stands at over 70%. The two are NATO's closest partners but maintaining good ties with Russia has been an important part of their foreign policy, particularly for Finland.

Now they hope for security support from NATO states — primarily the United States — in case Moscow retaliates. Britain pledged on Wednesday to come to their aid.

THE NORDIC REGION

NATO membership for the two, joining regional neighbors Denmark, Norway and Iceland, would formalize their joint security and defense work in ways that their Nordic Defense Cooperation pact hasn't.

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NORDEFCO, as it's known, focuses on cooperation. Working within NATO means putting forces under joint command.

Accession would tighten the strategic Nordic grip on the Baltic Sea — Russia's maritime point of access to the city of St. Petersburg and its Kaliningrad exclave.

Finland and Sweden also join them, along with Iceland, at the heart of the triangle formed with the North Atlantic and maritime areas in the Arctic, to where Russia projects its military might from the northern Kola Peninsula. Integrated NATO military planning will become a lot simpler, making the region easier to defend.

NATO

Finland and Sweden are NATO's closest partners. They contribute to the alliance's operations and air policing.

Most importantly, they already meet NATO's membership criteria, on functioning democracies, good neighborly relations, clear borders and armed forces that are in lock-step with the allies. After the invasion, they formally boosted information exchanges with NATO and sit in on every meeting on war issues.

Both are modernizing their armed forces and investing in new equipment. Finland is purchasing dozens of high-end F-35 warplanes. Sweden has top quality fighter jets, the Gripen.

Finland says it's already hit NATO's defense spending guideline of 2% of gross domestic product. Sweden too is ramping up its military budget and expects to reach the target by 2028. The NATO average was estimated at 1.6% last year.

RUSSIA

Putin has demanded that NATO stop expanding and in his May 9 speech blamed the West for the war.

But public opinion in Finland and Sweden suggests that he has driven them into NATO's arms.

If Finland joins, it would double the length of the alliance's border with Russia, adding a further 1,300 kilometers (830 miles) for Moscow to defend.

Putin has promised a "military, technical" response if they join. But many troops from Russia's western district near Finland were sent to Ukraine, and those units suffered heavy casualties, Western military officers say.

So far, Moscow is doing nothing obvious to dissuade the two — apart perhaps from a couple of incidents where Russian planes entered their airspace. The Kremlin said Thursday that its response could depend on how close NATO infrastructure moves toward Russia's borders.

Some at NATO worry that the Russians might deploy nuclear weapons or more hypersonic missiles to the Kaliningrad exclave, across the Baltic Sea wedged between allies Poland and Lithuania.

Army poised to revamp Alaska forces to prep for Arctic fight

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska (AP) — The U.S. Army is poised to revamp its forces in Alaska to better prepare for future cold-weather conflicts, and it is expected to replace the larger, heavily equipped Stryker Brigade in the state with a more mobile infantry unit better suited for the frigid fight, Army leaders say.

Army Secretary Christine Wormuth said she expects to make a final decision soon about the Alaska troop change, saying she will likely convert the Stryker unit, which uses heavy, eight-wheeled vehicles, to an infantry brigade.

"I think right now the purpose of Army forces in Alaska is much more about creating an extreme cold weather capable formation" that could be used in Europe or the Indo-Pacific, Wormuth told The Associated Press on a recent trip to Alaska to meet with senior commanders and troops. "We're trying to get to a place where we have Arctic capable forces — forces that can survive and operate in that environment."

The U.S. has long viewed the Arctic as a growing area of competition with Russia and China, particularly as climate change brings warmer temperatures and opens the sea lanes for longer periods of time. But officials have acknowledged that the U.S. lags behind those nations. Russia has taken steps to increase its military presence there, and China views the region as economically valuable for shipping and natural

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resources.

The changes in the Army were under consideration well before U.S. tensions with Russia soared following its invasion of Ukraine.

Under the new Army plan, the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, now based in Alaska, would be converted to a light infantry brigade. Combined with the division's 4th Infantry Brigade Combat team, the two units will become the 11th Airborne Division, based in Alaska. And the large Stryker vehicles, which are somewhat old, would be replaced by other vehicles that are more suitable for the icy and snowy terrain, Wormuth said.

The greater focus on cold-weather war includes a move to conduct major training exercises for the Alaska-based troops in their home state, under the weather conditions they would face in an Arctic fight. The troops had been scheduled to go to the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana, in March, but Army leaders decided to keep them in Alaska so they could train under the frigid temperatures and frozen terrain that they would encounter in any cold-weather battle.

"I think it really makes sense to have forces trained in the Arctic environments that they would be used for," Wormuth said after spending two days at the still snowy base. "If we're going to have ground forces in Alaska, that's what we need them to be able to do. They can't get that experience going to the Mojave Desert or to Fort Polk."

Last year, in an initial trial event, Pacific-based forces stayed in Hawaii for their scheduled exercises at the National Training Center in California's Mohave Desert. Commanders said they have learned from these first two moves, as they try to recreate conditions and relocate personnel and equipment from well-established training centers to more remote locations.

During her visit to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Wormuth met with commanders who called the training shift a success. Maj. Gen. Brian Eifler, commander of U.S. Army Alaska, said the benefits outweighed any shortfalls created by the need to build the infrastructure for the training exercise in the remote north.

"You're getting the best of both worlds, without losing too much," Eifler said. "We did get a lot more out of it than we thought we would."

Eifler said that while they didn't have as many training observers or civilian role players as they would have at one of the training centers, the trainers that did come were able to learn more about Arctic weather operations.

In addition, Eifler said, the change avoided the costly and time-consuming shipment of vehicles, weapons and other equipment to Louisiana and back. The lengthy packing and shipping process before and after a training exercise in Louisiana or California often forces troops to be without their weapons systems and other equipment for weeks.

During briefings at the Alaska base, commanders said the training included large-scale combat operations under extreme weather conditions in what they called the "most challenging environment on earth." They said that 10,000 troops — including Canadian Army and Air forces — were involved in the exercise.

But they said the exercise also underscored the need for better cold-weather vehicles, including those capable of carrying Arctic infantry forces.

Gen. Joseph Martin, the vice chief of the Army who was in Alaska this year, said the service has been studying what would be the best type of vehicle for the troops. "Is the Stryker the right vehicle for an Arctic warrior? In the winter, you need vehicles that can move across snow," he said.

In addition, he said, the vehicle also needs to be able to operate in the spring or summer thaw, when the ground turns to mud.

As Wormuth wrapped up her visit, she suggested that the decision on the Stryker Brigade is moving forward soon. Any final decision would need approval from Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

"If you're going to do big movements of equipment and things like that, the summer is a pretty important window because it's a lot easier to move vehicles around than doing it in the dead of winter," she said.

And in conversations with congressional lawmakers, including during a hearing this week, she made clear that the change would not reduce the number of soldiers in Alaska. Instead, she said that while the

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infantry brigade will be smaller, the Army would offset that loss by increasing the size and capabilities of the headquarters.

More broadly, she talked with commanders in Alaska about the potential need for more changes as the U.S. military's Arctic strategy evolves.

The U.S., Wormuth said, has resisted moves to militarize the Arctic, even as Russia has expanded its military presence and basing there. But, she said, "will that mindset continue given what the Russians are doing in Ukraine? Or will that get revisited? Will that create a window to think about things differently?"

Commanders said there are questions about whether one of the Pentagon's combatant commands — such as European Command or Northern Command, based in Colorado — should take full ownership of the Arctic and the U.S. military role there. Wormuth said the issue needs further discussion, and any decision may be years away.

Finland's leaders call for NATO membership 'without delay'

By JARI TANNER Associated Press

HELSINKI (AP) — Finland's leaders said Thursday they're in favor of rapidly applying for NATO membership, paving the way for a historic expansion of the alliance that could deal a serious blow to Russia as its military struggles with its war in Ukraine.

The dramatic move by Finland was announced by President Sauli Niinisto and Prime Minister Sanna Marin. It means that Finland is all but certain to join NATO, though a few steps remain before the application process can begin. Neighboring Sweden is expected to decide on joining NATO in coming days.

The Kremlin reacted to the development a few hours later, saying that Finland's move to join NATO won't help stability and security in Europe. Finland shares a 1,340-kilometer (830-mile) land border with Russia.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Russia's response to the move would depend on what specific steps NATO will take to bring its infrastructure close to Russian borders. He noted that Russian President Vladimir Putin already had ordered to work out steps to strengthen the country's defenses in the west in response to NATO's expansion closer to Russian borders.

Previously, the Kremlin had warned of "military and political repercussions" if Sweden and Finland decide to join NATO. Should they apply, there will be an interim period lasting from when an application has been handed in until all 30 NATO members' parliaments have ratified it.

"NATO membership would strengthen Finland's security. As a member of NATO, Finland would strengthen the entire defence alliance," Niinisto and Marin said in a joint statement. "Finland must apply for NATO membership without delay. We hope that the national steps still needed to make this decision will be taken rapidly within the next few days."

The statement on Thursday came a day after British Prime Minister Boris Johnson visited both Finland and Sweden to sign a military cooperation agreement.

The U.K. pledged on Wednesday to come to the aid of Sweden and Finland if the two Nordic nations came under attack.

During a joint news conference with Johnson and Niinisto in Helsinki, the Finnish head of state said Moscow could only blame itself should his nation of 5.5 million people become a NATO member.

"You (Russia) caused this. Look at the mirror," Niinisto said pointedly Wednesday.

On Thursday, Niinisto tweeted that he spoke with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy about Finland's firm support for Ukraine and the country's intention to join NATO. Niinisto said that Zelenskyy "expressed his full support for it."

In 2017, Sweden and Finland joined the British-led Joint Expeditionary Force, which is designed to be more flexible and respond more quickly than the larger NATO alliance. It uses NATO standards and doctrine, so it can operate in conjunction with NATO, the United Nations or other multinational coalitions. Fully operational since 2018, the force has held a number of exercises both independently and in cooperation with NATO.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, Finland and Sweden have been pondering whether to

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abandon their historic, decades-old neutrality and join the 30-member NATO. After Moscow launched its attack on Ukraine, public support in the two countries started to quickly shift toward membership in NATO, first in Finland and a bit later in Sweden.

The latest opinion poll conducted by Finnish public broadcaster YLE showed earlier this week that 76% of Finns are in favor of joining NATO, a big change from earlier years when only 20-30% of respondents favored such military alignment.

Speaking to European Union lawmakers Thursday as Niinisto's and Marin's announcement was made, Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto said that "the war started by Russia jeopardizes the security and stability of the whole of Europe."

Haavisto said that Russia's unpredictable behavior is a serious concern for Finland, notably Moscow's readiness to wage "high-risk operations" that could lead to many casualties, including among Russians themselves.

Should Finland become a NATO member, it would mean the biggest change in the Nordic country's defense and security policy since World War II when it fought two lost wars against the Soviet Union. Along with Sweden, Finland joined the European Union in 1995 and has the longest border with Russia out of all the bloc's 27 members.

Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde tweeted that Finland's announcement gave an "important message" and Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said that there were "strong messages" from Finland's president and prime minister.

During the Cold War, Finland stayed away from NATO to avoid provoking the Soviet Union, instead opting to remain a neutral buffer between the East and the West while maintaining good relations with Moscow and also with the United States.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has said the military alliance would welcome Finland and Sweden — both of which have strong, modern militaries — with open arms and expects the accession process to be speedy and smooth.

NATO officials say the Nordic duo's accession process could be done "in a couple of weeks." The most time consuming part of the procedure — ratification of the country's protocol by the 30 NATO member countries — could even be completed in less time than the four months or so that it took West Germany, Turkey and Greece to join in the 1950s, when there were only 12 members to ratify their applications.

"These are not normal times," one NATO official said this week, discussing the possible applications of Finland and Sweden. The official was briefing reporters about the accession process on condition that he not be named as no application has been made by the two countries.

Crypto comes to Washington. Will the millions buy influence?

By BRIAN SLODYSKO and FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Erin Houchin braced for the worst when a mysterious, well-financed group started buying television ads last month in her highly competitive southern Indiana congressional race.

Houchin assumed she would face a negative blitz, like the one that crushed her in 2016 when she ran for the same seat. But, in fact, the opposite happened.

American Dream Federal Action, a super PAC financed by a cryptocurrency CEO, saturated the district with ads promoting Houchin as a "Trump Tough" conservative who would "stop the socialists in Washington." That push helped secure her win last week in a Republican primary.

"All you can do is hold your breath," Houchin's longtime consultant, Cam Savage, said of when they learned about the ad buy. "It could help you, but the fear is it will end you." He added that Houchin had not sought the support and had no ties to the industry other than filling out a candidate survey from a cryptocurrency group.

The impact of the unsolicited help shows how cryptocurrency tycoons are emerging as new power players in American politics. They are pouring millions of dollars into primary elections as they try to gain influence over members of Congress, Republican and Democrat, who will write laws governing their industry,

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as well as other government officials who are crafting regulations.

This year, for the first time, industry executives have flooded money into federal races, spending \$20 million so far, according to records and interviews.

It's a delicate but deliberate march by companies that by their very nature make money based in part on evading government attention.

In addition to campaign spending, more than \$100 million has been spent lobbying around the issue since 2018 by crypto companies, as well as those who stand to lose if the industry goes mainstream, records show.

Following a well-worn path, they have retained former high-ranking officials, like Max Baucus, a one-time Democratic senator from Montana who chaired the Finance Committee.

The push comes as the Biden administration and Congress not only consider new regulations but also set funding levels for agencies that will oversee them.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said this week that financial regulators would soon release a report on the risks of cryptocurrency and other digital assets.

"Certainly there are many risks associated with cryptocurrencies," she said during a hearing on financial stability Tuesday.

Officials are considering what consumer protections and financial reporting requirements to implement and how to crack down on criminals who take advantage of the anonymity offered by cryptocurrency to evade taxes, launder money and commit fraud.

"What do they want? They want no regulation, or they want to help write the regulation. What else is new?" asked Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, an industry critic.

Cryptocurrencies are a digital asset that can be traded over the internet without relying on the global banking system. They've been promoted as a way for those with limited means to build wealth by investing in the next big thing. But they're also highly speculative and often lack transparency, which substantially increases risk.

Jan Santiago, deputy director of Global Anti-Scam, an organization that helps victims of cryptocurrency fraud, said the industry has been reluctant to police bad actors.

"Unless it affects their bottom line or public reputation, I don't think there's any financial incentive for them," he said.

There are signs that crypto is going mainstream. Fidelity Investments, one of the nation's largest providers of retirement accounts, announced earlier this month it will start allowing investors to put bitcoin in their 401(k) accounts.

At the same, government scrutiny is increasing.

The Securities and Exchange Commission unveiled a plan last week that would nearly double the size of its staff focused on cryptocurrency oversight. Days later, the Justice Department indicted the CEO of a cryptocurrency platform, alleging he orchestrated a "\$62 million global investment fraud scheme," which is among scores of civil and criminal crypto cases brought by federal authorities. Prosecutors say he promised generous returns but instead absconded with investors money.

Meanwhile, members of Congress and the administration have raised concerns that Russian oligarchs could turn to cryptocurrency to evade U.S. sanctions put in place when Russia invaded Ukraine.

But at least one lawmaker has been an active participant in promoting the allure of crypto riches.

Rep. Madison Cawthorn, R-N.C., touted a new crypto coin called "Let's Go Brandon" — a phrase that has become conservative shorthand for a vulgar insult to Joe Biden. In one video posted to Twitter, Cawthorn appears alongside the cryptocurrency's founder and emphatically declares, "This is going to the moon, baby," while urging viewers to visit the coin's website and "get on the train."

After an initial spike, it plunged in value and is now worth a small fraction of a penny, as first reported by the Washington Examiner.

Cryptocurrency advocates in Congress acknowledge problems but argue the roughly \$2 trillion industry has matured.

"I'm confident that bitcoin protects consumers," said Sen. Cynthia Lummis, R-Wyo., who has invested be-

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tween \$150,002 and \$350,000 in the currency, according to her financial disclosure. "I'm not confident that all cryptocurrencies protect consumers. In fact, I'm willing to bet that the majority of those are fraudulent."

Others believe concern over cryptocurrency fraud is hyped.

"It can be an easy conclusion for people to say there's so much fraud in that space," said Ashley Ebersole, a former SEC attorney. "It makes headlines, but I don't know that it's a greater proportion."

In Washington, Democrats have been far more hawkish than Republicans. "They had me at 'Hello,' so they don't need to lobby me," said Lummis, a Republican. "Democrats are another story."

Many cryptocurrency proponents long opposed regulation. But lobbyists say that's now a settled debate and their current aim is to persuade skeptics not to regulate too aggressively.

Perianne Boring, founder of the Chamber of Digital Commerce, has been lobbying lawmakers and federal agencies since 2017, trying to make the case for developing accounting standards for cryptocurrency and other digital assets and to help crypto firms become publicly traded companies.

"Because there are no standards, many businesses are hesitant to touch cryptocurrency," said Boring, whose group has spent \$1.9 million lobbying the federal government.

Some lobbyists are hoping that a wave of campaign spending could help, much of it directed to Democratic primary races.

"Folks in crypto are, all of a sudden, happy to go to political fundraisers," said Kristin Smith, the executive director of the Blockchain Association. Smith, whose group has spent \$4.2 million on lobbying since 2018. She added, "The government could actually come in and really mess it up if we aren't constructively engaging."

So the industry is pushing hard for certain candidates and that's fostered sense of resentment among some Democrats. In suburban Atlanta, two members of the U.S. House, Democrats Carolyn Bourdeaux and Lucy McBath, are squaring off after their districts were merged during redistricting.

A super PAC called Protect Our Future, financed by Sam Bankman-Fried, the 30-year-old billionaire founder of the cryptocurrency exchange FTX, has spent at least \$2.7 million on ads supporting McBath, highlighting McBath's support of Democratic policy priorities but saying nothing about cryptocurrency.

"They are not doing this out of the goodness of their heart. They are doing this because they want something. And that's to avoid regulation," Bourdeaux said.

FTX and McBath's campaign did not respond to requests for comment. Protect Our Future, which plans to spend at least \$10 million on midterm campaigns, said their expenditures have nothing to do with cryptocurrency regulation.

"There are a number of factors that go into our endorsements, including voting history, policy platforms, viability as a candidate, and public service and professional experience," the group's president, Michael Sadowsky, said in a statement.

Crypto super PACs are active in other marquee races, including Pennsylvania's Democratic Senate primary, where a separate crypto group linked to Bankman-Fried spent \$212,000 last week on ads backing John Fetterman, the state's Democratic lieutenant governor who is running for Senate. The ads say Fetterman won't "get schmoozed by lobbyists or bossed around by politicians."

But overall, the spending is on such a scale that it has generated questions about the industry's motives.

"It tells every Democrat that, if you have a primary, they could come in with \$2 million. They are certainly making a point," said Rep. Brad Sherman, D-Calif., a crypto critic who is chairman of the House Subcommittee on Investor Protection, Entrepreneurship, and Capital Markets. "You don't need a good argument in Washington if you got a lot of well-paid lobbyists and a big PAC — you just need some sort of argument."

Biden marks 1M US COVID deaths, to co-host 2nd global summit

By ZEKE MILLER and MARIA CHENG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden will appeal for a renewed international commitment to attacking COVID-19 as he convenes a second virtual summit on the pandemic and marks 1 million deaths in the United States.

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"As a nation, we must not grow numb to such sorrow," Biden said in a statement Thursday. "To heal, we must remember. We must remain vigilant against this pandemic and do everything we can to save as many lives as possible."

The president called on Congress to provide more funding for testing, vaccines and treatments, something lawmakers have been unwilling to deliver so far.

The lack of funding — Biden has requested another \$22.5 billion of what he calls critically needed money — is a reflection of faltering resolve at home that jeopardizes the global response to the pandemic.

Eight months after he used the first such summit to announce an ambitious pledge to donate 1.2 billion vaccine doses to the world, the urgency of the U.S. and other nations to respond has waned.

Momentum on vaccinations and treatments has faded even as more infectious variants rise and billions of people across the globe remain unprotected.

The White House said Biden will address the opening of the virtual summit Thursday morning with prerecorded remarks and will make the case that addressing COVID-19 "must remain an international priority." The U.S. is co-hosting the summit along with Germany, Indonesia, Senegal and Belize.

The U.S. has shipped nearly 540 million vaccine doses to more than 110 countries and territories, according to the State Department — by far more than any other donor nation.

After the delivery of more than 1 billion vaccines to the developing world, the problem is no longer that there aren't enough shots but a lack of logistical support to get doses into arms. According to government data, more than 680 million donated vaccine doses have been left unused in developing countries because they were set to expire soon and couldn't be administered quickly enough. As of March, 32 poorer countries had used fewer than half of the COVID-19 vaccines they were sent.

U.S. assistance to promote and facilitate vaccinations overseas dried up earlier this year, and Biden has requested about \$5 billion for the effort through the rest of the year.

"We have tens of millions of unclaimed doses because countries lack the resources to build out their cold chains, which basically is the refrigeration systems; to fight disinformation; and to hire vaccinators," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said this week. She added that the summit is "going to be an opportunity to elevate the fact that we need additional funding to continue to be a part of this effort around the world."

"We're going to continue to fight for more funding here," Psaki said. "But we will continue to press other countries to do more to help the world make progress as well."

Congress has balked at the price tag for COVID-19 relief and has thus far refused to take up the package because of political opposition to the impending end of pandemic-era migration restrictions at the U.S.-Mexico border. Even after a consensus for virus funding briefly emerged in March, lawmakers decided to strip out the global aid funding and solely focus the assistance on shoring up U.S. supplies of vaccine booster shots and therapeutics.

Biden has warned that without Congress acting, the U.S. could lose out on access to the next generation of vaccines and treatments, and that the nation won't have enough supply of booster doses or the antiviral drug Paxlovid for later this year. He's also sounding the alarm that more variants will spring up if the U.S. and the world don't do more to contain the virus globally.

"To beat the pandemic here, we need to beat it everywhere," Biden said last September during the first global summit.

The virus has killed more than 995,000 people in the U.S. and at least 6.2 million people globally, according to figures kept by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization.

Demand for COVID-19 vaccines has dropped in some countries as infections and deaths have declined globally in recent months, particularly as the omicron variant has proved to be less severe than earlier versions of the disease. For the first time since it was created, the U.N.-backed COVAX effort has "enough supply to enable countries to meet their national vaccination targets," according to vaccines alliance Gavi CEO Dr. Seth Berkley, which fronts COVAX.

Still, despite more than 65% of the world's population receiving at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose, fewer than 16% of people in poor countries have been immunized. It is highly unlikely countries will hit

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the World Health Organization target of vaccinating 70% of all people by June.

In countries including Cameroon, Uganda and the Ivory Coast, officials have struggled to get enough refrigerators to transport vaccines, send enough syringes for mass campaigns and get enough health workers to inject the shots. Experts also point out that more than half of the health workers needed to administer the vaccines in poorer countries are either underpaid or not paid at all.

Donating more vaccines, critics say, would miss the point entirely.

"It's like donating a bunch of fire trucks to countries that are on fire, but they have no water," said Ritu Sharma, a vice president at the charity CARE, which has helped immunize people in more than 30 countries, including India, South Sudan and Bangladesh.

"We can't be giving countries all these vaccines but no way to use them," she said, adding that the same infrastructure that got the shots administered in the U.S. is now needed elsewhere. "We had to tackle this problem in the U.S., so why are we not now using that knowledge to get vaccines into the people who need them most?"

Sharma said greater investment was needed to counter vaccine hesitancy in developing countries where there are entrenched beliefs about the potential dangers of Western-made medicines.

"Leaders must agree to pursue a coherent strategy to end the pandemic instead of a fragmented approach that will extend the lifespan of this crisis," said Gayle Smith, CEO of The ONE Campaign.

GAVI's Berkley also said that countries are increasingly asking for the pricier messenger RNA vaccines made by Pfizer and Moderna, which are not as easily available as the AstraZeneca vaccine, which made up the bulk of COVAX's supply last year.

The emergence of variants like delta and omicron have led many countries to switch to mRNA vaccines, which seem to provide more protection and are in greater demand globally than traditionally made vaccines like AstraZeneca, Novavax or those made by China and Russia.

Biden calls to congratulate presumptive Philippine president

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — U.S. President Joe Biden called Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Thursday to congratulate him on his apparent landslide victory in the Philippine presidential election, Manila's ambassador to Washington said.

Biden is among the first world leaders to recognize the electoral triumph of the namesake son of the ousted dictator, whose candidacy has alarmed human rights activists and pro-democracy groups.

"President Biden told him Washington is looking forward to working with him and cited the shared history of the longtime treaty allies," Philippine Ambassador Jose Manuel Romualdez told The Associated Press, adding the two spoke for more than 10 minutes.

Biden also aims to expand cooperation on a wide range of issues, including the fight against COVID-19 outbreaks, the climate crisis, fostering economic growth and respect for human rights, according to a White House statement.

Marcos Jr. had more than 31 million votes in the unofficial count from Monday's elections in what's projected to be one of the strongest mandates for a Philippine president in decades. His vice presidential running mate, Sara Duterte, appeared to have also won by a landslide.

Marcos Jr. cited the robust relations between Manila and Washington and said his administration would work to continue building them. He invited Biden to attend his inauguration on June 30, but the U.S. leader said he was dealing with urgent concerns that may prompt him to stay in the U.S. and would instead send a high-level delegation, Romualdez said.

Marcos Jr.'s declared victory Wednesday, saying it was a boost to democracy and promised to seek common ground across the political divide, his spokesman, Vic Rodriguez, said.

"To the world: Judge me not by my ancestors, but by my actions," Rodriguez quoted him as saying.

The election outcome was an astonishing reversal of the army-backed but largely peaceful "People Power" uprising that ousted Marcos's father in 1986 — a democratic triumph in Southeast Asia where

authoritarian regimes flourish.

Marcos Jr., 64, campaigned on a vague national unity theme while avoiding volatile issues in an effort to win over hard-line leftist groups and survivors of the elder Marcos's dictatorship likened to whitewashing of his father's crimes. On Tuesday, he appeared overcome with emotions while visiting his father's grave, which was moved to the national heroes' cemetery under current President Rodrigo Duterte.

Several of Marcos Jr.'s key election rivals have conceded defeat, though the closest, Vice President Leni Robredo, a human rights lawyer who ran on a promise of badly needed reforms, has only acknowledged his massive lead. The U.S. State Department said the elections and subsequent vote count followed international standards without any major incident.

The tabulated results still must be confirmed by Congress. Marcos Jr. and Sara Duterte would then start their single, six-year term leading a Southeast Asian nation battered by the COVID-19 pandemic, wealth inequality, Muslim and communist insurgencies, and political divisions, which were only inflamed by the turbulent presidencies of their fathers.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Vice President Wang Qishan had sent congratulatory messages to Marcos and Sara Duterte on Wednesday, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said in Beijing.

"At present, the China-Philippines relations are in a critical stage of development, facing important opportunities and broad prospects," Zhao told reporters Thursday at a daily briefing. "We attach great importance to the relations with the Philippine side, and we stand ready to work with the Philippines to adhere to good neighborliness and common development and further deepen our comprehensive strategic cooperative relations so as to benefit two countries and the two peoples."

Marcos Jr. has said he wants to pursue closer ties with China, though Beijing during the outgoing Duterte's presidency showed no willingness to compromise on their conflicting territorial claims in the South China Sea. It prompted Manila to lodge an unusually large number of diplomatic protests against Beijing over China's increasingly aggressive actions in the busy waterway.

'This tears my soul apart': A Ukrainian boy and a killing

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

BUCHA, Ukraine (AP) — As he listened to his father die, the boy lay still on the asphalt. His elbow burned where a bullet had pierced him. His thumb stung from being grazed.

Another killing was in progress on a lonely street in Bucha, the community on the outskirts of Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, where bodies of civilians are still being discovered weeks after Russian soldiers withdrew. Many had been shot in the head.

The 14-year-old Yura Nechyporenko was about to become one of them.

Survivors have described soldiers firing guns near their feet or threatening them with grenades, only to be drawn away by a cooler-headed colleague. But there was no one around to restrain the Russian soldier that day in March when Yura and his father, 47-year-old Ruslan, were biking down a tree-lined street.

They were on their way to visit vulnerable neighbors sheltering in basements and homes without electricity or running water. Their bikes were tied with white fabric, in a sign they traveled in peace.

When the soldier stepped from a dirt path to challenge them, Yura and his father immediately stopped and raised their hands.

"What are you doing?" Yura remembers the soldier asking. The soldier didn't give Yura's father time to answer.

The boy heard two gunshots. His father fell, mouth open, already bleeding.

A shot hit Yura's hand, and he fell, too. Another shot struck his elbow. He closed his eyes.

A final shot was fired.

This story is part of an ongoing investigation from The Associated Press and Frontline that includes the War Crimes Watch Ukraine interactive experience and an upcoming documentary.

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Yura's extraordinary account alleging an attempted killing by Russian soldiers stands out as international justice experts descend on Bucha, a center of the horrors and possible war crimes in Ukraine. More than 1,000 bodies have been found so far in Bucha and other communities around Kyiv. In Bucha alone, 31 children under the age of 18 were killed and 19 wounded, according to local authorities.

"All children were killed or injured deliberately, since the Russian soldiers deliberately shot at evacuating cars that had the signs 'CHILDREN' and white fabric tied to them, and they deliberately shot at the homes of civilians," the chief prosecutor of the Bucha region, Ruslan Kravchenko, told the AP.

The U.N. human rights office says at least 202 children across Ukraine have been killed in Russia's invasion, and believes the real number to be considerably higher. The Ukrainian government's count is 217 children killed and over 390 wounded.

The AP and Frontline, drawing from a variety of sources, have independently documented 21 attacks where children were killed that likely meet the definition of a war crime, ranging from the discovery of a child in a shallow grave in Borodyanka to the bombing of a theater in Mariupol. The total number of child victims in the attacks is unknown, and the accounting represents just a fraction of potential war crimes.

Yura is a teenager growing into himself, spindly and spotted, with dark circles pressed under his eyes. Adulthood has been rushed upon him. As he lies on the floor of his family's home to demonstrate what happened, he shows the healing holes in his elbow.

His mother, Alla, takes deep breaths to calm herself. Yura, sitting up, wraps an arm around her, then puts his head on her shoulder.

On that awful day, Yura survived the attempted killing by the awkward grace of that teenage constant, his gray hoodie. It was shot instead of him, and he felt it move.

Yura lay on the street for minutes afterward, waiting for the soldier to walk away.

Then Yura ran. He reached the kindergarten where his mother worked, and where some residents used the basement as a shelter. They were shocked to see the boy and gave him first aid.

He realized he needed to go home. He returned to the streets, not knowing where the next soldier might be.

When he arrived home, his family called the police. The police said they could do nothing because they didn't control the area, according to the family. The ambulance service said the same.

The police told the family that officers didn't know what to do with the case, according to the boy's uncle, Andriy. A prosecutor's report describes the killing and attempted killing in a few bare sentences, including the loss of a cellphone belonging to Yura's father. He would have been of help now — he'd been a lawyer.

Kravchenko told the AP that they continue to work on Yura's case, and expressed confidence that crimes committed during Russia's invasion of Ukraine can be successfully investigated. Among other things, footage from dozens of surveillance cameras in Bucha is being analyzed, and an identification album of Russian soldiers' faces is being assembled.

In March, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court announced that investigations into crimes against children in particular will benefit from a new trust fund. Children account for half or more of those affected by conflict, but are often labeled as too vulnerable to testify or as having inaccurate memories, according to Veronique Aubert, the special adviser on crimes involving children to the prosecutor of the ICC.

Yura's case is unusual.

"Prosecutors may want to take up this case because the victim is still alive and can potentially testify," said Ryan Goodman, a law professor at New York University and former special counsel for the U.S. Defense Department. "It may be difficult if not impossible for a defendant to claim they were somehow justified in trying to kill a child."

It was left to Yura's family to retrieve his father's body.

They did it the following day. Yura's grandmother, who is in her 70s, pleaded with Russian soldiers to let her approach the body.

With their guns cocked, they let her walk ahead of them. Another soldier in the distance shouted, "Don't

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come here or we'll kill you." But he didn't fire.

They brought Yura's father home in a wheelbarrow. He was rolled in a carpet and placed on an old wooden door. Amid the sounds of shelling and gunfire, they buried him in the yard behind the woodshed, in one of many makeshift graves hurriedly dug during the monthlong Russian occupation.

Yura and his family left Bucha the next day along a rare evacuation corridor. The wounded boy walked first through the streets, holding a stick tied with a white towel, with a white sling around his arm. The family had to pass the scene of the shooting.

As they walked closer to the evacuation point, Russian soldiers asked where they were going. They asked what had happened to Yura.

"I was shot by a Russian soldier," the boy replied.

At that, his mother was terrified. "I felt everything collapse inside me," she recalled. "I thought they would shoot us all."

She asked the soldiers to let them pass, saying it was getting late. They did.

The family left town that day.

The gray hoodie, bloodied at the elbow, is now the centerpiece of the family's search for justice. The top seam of the loose fabric has been sliced. Yura's mother insists that it's evidence and can't be thrown away.

The family returned to Bucha in mid-April, after the Russians withdrew. They dug up Yura's father and buried him again in a local cemetery.

The boy's family continues to play detective, scouring the area of the shooting for further evidence and theorizing on the trajectory of bullets. They question neighbors and analyze holes in a metal fence.

As the family shows the AP the scene, Yura wanders in the grass beside the street, head down, looking for bullet casings. He is confident he could identify the Russian soldier, even though the soldier wore a balaclava over part of his face.

Yura will finish ninth grade this year, once electricity returns and he can resume online classes. Until then, he is volunteering like his father did, visiting older residents.

His mother is thinking of sending him overseas for the sake of his mental health. She needs some distance, too.

"I'm never alone physically, but it's possible to be alone mentally," she said, near tears. "I try to avoid this."

Her son's case is still a faint source of hope. There are courts and these courts will work, she believes. No one should go through what her son did.

Yura fears they already have.

"It's not only me who wants justice," he said. "People in Ukraine are still possibly being tortured and killed even now."

Yura turned 15 on April 12. It was a quiet birthday. His father, a good cook, usually grilled to celebrate it.

On April 25, a day after Orthodox Easter, the family again gathered at the grave to mark 40 days after Ruslan's death, by local custom. Food blessed by a priest in Bucha for Easter — dyed eggs, bread — was laid out along with homemade pickles, chocolate and wine. A plastic bag of food was hung on the wooden cross.

Yura stood apart, quietly lighting a candle and placing it on the grave. Then he pulled a hoodie, a black one, over his head to block the chill.

The boy's uncle, Andriy, watches him closely these days. Yura has always been a good kid, but he's become edgy and restless, moving from one task to another. Andriy fears the trauma of surviving death will catch up with Yura and mourns his nephew's damaged childhood.

"This tears my soul apart," said Andriy, in tears. "What we see is suffering after suffering ... (Russian President Vladimir) Putin just decides to make us suffer, and we do."

Protesters vent fury at French company for staying in Russia

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

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WARSAW, Poland (AP) — A man in a Russian military uniform stood at the entrance of a large home improvement store in Poland's capital, saluting shoppers and thanking them for funding Russian President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine.

His chest bedecked with medals, Polish activist Arkadiusz Szczurek was protesting at a French-owned retailer Leroy Merlin store in Warsaw as shoppers flocked to buy plants and gardening equipment with spring's arrival. Some shoppers turned around to go elsewhere. Others were indifferent or irritated.

"Millions of Ukrainians are forced to flee the bombs and shooting, (and) people are dying," Ukrainian activist Natalia Panchenko said at the rally last weekend. "But they keep doing business and see no problem with financing the war."

It marked the latest protest in Poland over Leroy Merlin's decision to keep operating 112 stores in Russia, even as many other Western companies have suspended operations there. Leroy Merlin wouldn't comment other than to say it's not responsible for the war. It's among the foreign companies with a large footprint in Russia that have had to choose between taking the financial hit of leaving or face damage to their reputation by staying.

It is a painful choice for companies based in countries like France and Italy, which do extensive business in Russia and are keeping their sights on future trade once the war is over. However, many corporations with big stakes in Russia have pulled out and are enduring the hit to their bottom lines.

McDonald's closed its 850 stores in Russia in March, but is still paying its 62,000 employees. The fast-food chain said it's losing \$55 million per month in sales from Russia and expects to lose \$100 million worth of inventory because of store closures. Energy company Shell says it's taking a \$3.9 billion charge to cover the cost of exiting investments in Russia, while rival BP said it's taking \$25.5 billion in pretax charges to exit its holdings in Russian energy producer Rosneft.

Other companies are still partially operating in Russia. PepsiCo, Nestle and drugmaker Johnson & Johnson are still supplying essentials like medications and baby formula while halting nonessential sales. Italian tiremaker Pirelli and Danish brewer Carlsberg say they are operating just enough to support their Russian workers.

Leroy Merlin, with stores similar to Home Depot, is among the foreign companies with the highest revenue in Russia. It says it has helped Ukrainian refugees, including its workers. Parent company Adeo Group in Paris didn't reply to multiple requests for comment.

Such French companies with significant operations in Russia have been singled out by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as aiding Russia's war effort. In an address to the French parliament in March, he mentioned carmaker Renault, Leroy Merlin and two other retailers belonging to Adeo Group: supermarket chain Auchan and sporting goods chain Decathlon.

Soon after, Renault and Decathlon said they would suspend Russian operations, but Leroy Merlin and Auchan stayed.

To many in Ukraine, where Leroy Merlin shut its six stores amid bombings, that feels like a betrayal. In Poland, which borders Ukraine and has accepted more refugees than another other country, many people are highly critical of the French company.

Poland is a member of NATO, but there are still fears it also could become a target of the Kremlin's revived colonial ambitions, particularly if Russia claims victory in Ukraine.

Dominik Gąsiorowski, top organizer of the Polish Leroy Merlin Boycott movement, believes withholding business to a company that's a major taxpayer in Russia is one of the few concrete things regular people can do to influence the outcome of the war.

"If we, as Western nations, support businesses staying in Russia, we are paying Putin to invade us eventually," he said. "I refuse to believe that my people, Polish people, cannot make such a small gesture of solidarity during a genocide as choosing another shop a few kilometers away."

During last weekend's picketing, activists held a poster of a container alongside Leroy Merlin's green logo, calling it a "bin for a corpse" with the message "Leroy Kremlin supports the Russian invasion."

It was designed by artist Bartłomiej Kielbowicz, who also has created fake labels people have been sticking on shelves inside Leroy Merlin stores, including one for a broom and dustpan "for sweeping away

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guilt." There is another for hammers — "for killing."

Andrzej Kubisiak, deputy director of the Polish Economic Institute, said it's too soon to know the full effect of the protests but that an app monitoring movement on streets has showed less traffic going to Leroy Merlin, Auchan and Decathlon stores. A Polish bank analysis of card payments also shows a fall in purchases.

But Kubisiak said historically boycott movements lose steam over time, and he expects this one will, too, as Poles, facing inflation of over 12%, will be guided by consumer prices above all else. All three French retailers are known for their competitive prices.

Polish shoppers' reactions to the protests have been mixed.

Wiesław Bobowik, a 64-year-old teacher, said he found the boycott ridiculous and wasn't persuaded to shop elsewhere.

"I would be hurting the French, and they are our friends," he said, loading potted plants and large bags of soil into his car trunk. "Why would I do that?"

The activists also are encouraging people not to shop at Auchan. But Gąsiorowski said the movement is focusing mostly on Leroy Merlin because it was the foreign company with the second-highest revenue in Russia in 2020, following cigarette maker Philip Morris International, which has suspended investments. Auchan was No. 6.

But the movement, he stresses, is larger than Leroy Merlin.

"Every other company is looking at them as an example," he said. "If they succeed while collaborating with Putin, all the major players will return to Russia."

Ukrainian circus comes to town, and stays in Italy, amid war

By TRISHA THOMAS Associated Press

PISTOIA, Italy (AP) — A Ukrainian circus troupe is performing a never-ending "Alice in Wonderland" tour of Italy, caught in the real-world rabbit hole of having to create joyful performances on stage while their families at home are living through war.

Like many Ukrainian artists who were abroad when Russia invaded on Feb. 24, the acrobats and dancers of the Theater Circus Elysium of Kyiv were opening a limited engagement in Italy. The tour, originally scheduled to end in mid-March, has now been extended at least through June as the performers seek to keep working to send money to relatives back home.

On a recent weekend, the Ukrainian circus came to Pistoia, in Tuscany. There was the Mad Hatter, sporting a green top hat and a purple beard; the White Rabbit with a red nose covered in silver glitter and Alice, with a little blue dress and long ringlets.

But behind their colorful costumes, cheerful smiles and fantastical story line of Alice's adventures in Wonderland, troupe members are struggling.

"I feel guilty about people who are staying there because they are not safe, and I am safe and I cannot help them," said Yuliia Palaida, who plays Alice. "I am just fighting with all these feelings," she adds, her voice trembling.

Oleksandr Bandaliuk plays the Mad Hatter and dominates the show. But backstage, he sits glumly between acts.

"It is very hard to work and dance on the Italy stage because we know in our country now (there) is war," he said. "We can't go to Ukraine because in my house now (there are) Russian soldiers."

Theaters across Italy have booked the circus, and their sold-out performances have allowed them to pay for about 50 family members to flee Ukraine by bus and join the troupe in Italy.

"We have four or five dogs, a cat and a grandmother who is 79 years old, a babushka, who is the matriarch of all of us, the grandmother of the company," said the Italian producer of the circus, Roberto Romaniello.

The town of Reggio Emilia found temporary housing for the expanded circus family, while they worked on getting legal documents, access to medical services and apartments for a longer-term stay. They have 10 shows scheduled so far in Sicily in June and are hoping for more.

"Each artist has a lot of people in Ukraine," said Aleksandr Sakhorov, who has relatives in Kyiv and in Zaporizhzhia. "We send money all this time, but if we stop, nobody gets that support because in Ukraine (there are) no jobs now."

Slain Al Jazeera journalist was icon of Palestinian coverage

By AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

An Al Jazeera correspondent who was shot dead on Wednesday during an Israeli raid in the West Bank was a highly respected journalist in the Middle East whose unflinching coverage was known to millions of viewers.

News of Shireen Abu Akleh's death reverberated across the region. The 51-year-old journalist became a household name synonymous with Al Jazeera's coverage of life under occupation during her more than two decades reporting in the Palestinian territories, including during the second intifada, or uprising, that killed thousands on both sides, most of them Palestinians.

Abu Akleh's name trended across Twitter in Arabic on Wednesday, setting social media alight with support for the Palestinians. Her image was projected over the main square in the West Bank city of Ramallah as mourners flooded the Al Jazeera offices there and her family home in east Jerusalem.

Al Jazeera and witnesses, including her producer who was shot in the back Wednesday, said she was killed by Israeli gunfire. Israel said it was unclear who was responsible, calling it "premature and irresponsible to cast blame at this stage." Later Wednesday, Israeli Defense Minister, Benny Gantz promised a transparent investigation, and said he was in touch with U.S. and Palestinian officials.

Abu Akleh's coverage of the harsh realities of Israel's military occupation was inextricably linked with her own experiences as a Palestinian journalist on the front lines. Her death underscores the heavy price the conflict continues to exact on Palestinians, whether they are journalists or not.

Although she was also a U.S. citizen who often visited America in the summers, she lived and worked in east Jerusalem and the West Bank, where those who knew her said she felt most at home. A Palestinian Christian whose family was originally from Bethlehem, she was born and raised in Jerusalem. She leaves behind a brother.

In an Al Jazeera video released last year, Abu Akleh recalled the scale of destruction and "the feeling that death was at times just around the corner" during her coverage of the second intifada, from 2000-2005. "Despite the dangers, we were determined to do the job," she said.

"I chose journalism so I could be close to the people," she added. "It might not be easy to change the reality, but at least I was able to communicate their voice to the world."

Abu Akleh joined Al Jazeera in 1997, just a year after the groundbreaking Arabic news network launched. Among her many assignments were covering five wars in Gaza and Israel's war with Lebanon in 2006. She reported on forced home evictions, the killings of Palestinian youth, the hundreds of Palestinians held without charge in Israeli prisons and the continuous expansion of Jewish settlements.

Her longtime producer, Wessam Hammad, said Abu Akleh possessed an incredible ability to remain calm under pressure.

"Shireen worked all these years with a commitment to the values and ethics of our profession," he said of Abu Akleh, who the network called "the face of Al Jazeera in Palestine."

He and Abu Akleh were often caught in Israeli cross-fire during the many stories they covered together, he said. On one assignment, their car filled with tear gas and they struggled to breathe. When they would think back on these moments, he said Abu Akleh would laugh and marvel at how they managed to survive.

Images of the moments after Abu Akleh was shot in the head on the outskirts of the Jenin refugee camp circulated online and were broadcast on Al Jazeera and other Arabic news channels. Wearing a helmet and a vest clearly marked "PRESS," Abu Akleh's body was shown lying face down in a patch of sand. A Palestinian man jumped over a wall to reach her as gunshots rang out, dragging her motionless body to a car.

In video from the West Bank hospital where Abu Akleh was pronounced dead, a male colleague was seen weeping at her hospital bed as others choked back tears. A female correspondent for Al Jazeera in

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the Gaza Strip wept on air as she reported from a vigil for the journalist.

Later Wednesday, Abu Akleh's body, draped in a Palestinian flag and covered by a wreath of flowers, was carried through downtown Ramallah on a red stretcher. Hundreds chanted, "With our spirit, with our blood, we will redeem you, Shireen."

An outpouring of condemnation came from governments around the world. The U.S. State Department called her death "an affront to media freedom." And U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres said he was "appalled by the killing."

In an opinion piece published in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, columnist Gideon Levy praised her bravery, saying "Abu Akleh died a hero, doing her job," and noted that she went to Jenin and other occupied areas that Israeli journalists "rarely if ever visited."

It had started as another routine assignment for Abu Akleh. She'd emailed colleagues that she was heading to the Jenin refugee camp to check on reports of an Israeli military raid. "I will bring you the news as soon as the picture becomes clear," she wrote.

"Generations grew up seeing her work," producer Hammad, said. "People listened to Shireen's voice and were influenced by her to study journalism so they could be like her."

Abu Akleh's niece, Lina Abu Akleh, described her as a "best friend" and "second mom".

"She is someone that I was looking up to since I was a kid, watching all of her reports," she told journalists from the family's home. "I never thought this day would come where the news would be about her."

China fights economic slump, sticks to costly 'zero COVID'

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — China's leaders are struggling to reverse an economic slump without giving up anti-virus tactics that shut down Shanghai and other cities, adding to challenges for President Xi Jinping as he tries to extend his time in power.

The ruling Communist Party has declared its "zero-COVID" goal of preventing all infections takes priority over the economy. It is a decision with global implications and comes despite warnings by experts including the head of the World Health Organization that the goal might be unattainable.

"We don't think it is sustainable," the WHO director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said Tuesday.

China kept infection numbers low until early this year with a strategy that shut down cities, but entailed soaring costs. Beijing has switched to "dynamic clearing" that seals buildings or neighborhoods if infections are found. But with thousands of new cases of the highly infectious omicron variant reported every day, that keeps most of Shanghai's 25 million people at home. Big parts of Beijing and other cities with tens of millions of people also are closed.

That is disrupting manufacturing and hampering the global flow of goods from smartphones to iron ore, increasing inflation risks in the United States and Europe. Consumer spending is weak, chilling Chinese demand for imports.

The ruling party is promising tax refunds and other aid to struggling entrepreneurs that Beijing counts on to create jobs and wealth. Premier Li Keqiang, the No. 2 leader, warned last week the employment situation is "complex and grim."

On Wednesday, Li called during a Cabinet meeting for officials to focus spending and credit policies on preventing job losses, state TV and the official Xinhua News Agency reported. They gave no details of possible new initiatives.

Despite promises of aid, forecasters say economic growth in the current quarter will fall as low as 1.8% over a year ago from an anemic 4.8% in the last quarter. Growth for the full year is forecast as low as 3.8%, below the ruling party's official 5.5% target and less than half of 2021's 8.1% expansion.

"The Chinese government is willing to make some sacrifices on the economy in the short term to trade for long-term growth," said Nomura economist Ting Lu. However, he said, "achieving 'zero COVID' is quite challenging, because omicron is more infectious."

A foreign ministry spokesman on Wednesday defended China's approach as realistic.

China's strategy is "not to pursue zero infection but to control the epidemic situation in the shortest time

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at the lowest social cost," said Zhao Lijian. "The vast majority of people in most areas in China live and work normally."

Complaints about food shortages and other hardships and videos posted online showing people in Shanghai and other areas arguing with police have been deleted by censors.

Public frustration and economic losses add to complications for Xi ahead of a ruling party congress in October or November at which he is expected to try to break with tradition and award himself a third five-year term as leader.

Xi, the most dominant Chinese leader since at least the 1980s, still is expected to secure another term. But experts say rivals might gain leverage to trim his powers. Supporters of market-style economic reforms also want to roll back policies that favor state industry and tighter control of the private sector, China's economic engine.

Wrangling over the cost of anti-virus strategies gives "an opening to his factional opponents" with "deeper ties to business sectors," said Diana Choyleva of Enodo Economics in a report. "They are more attuned than Xi and his supporters to the impact of zero-Covid on the economy and on middle-class citizens."

In a sign private industry is weakening, 4.4 million companies closed last year while only 1.3 million new enterprises opened, down from 13.8 million in 2019, according to Choyleva.

COVID restrictions have closed factories or suspended access to manufacturing centers for autos, electronics and other industries including Changchun and Jilin in the northeast and Guangzhou and Shenzhen in the south.

In the central city of Zhenzhou, the Xiao Nan Guo restaurant closed May 4 but still is paying its workforce of 100, according to an employee, Wang Huiqin. She said business was down about 40% before restaurants in the city of 13 million people were told to stop providing dine-in service.

"If the situation lasts for a few weeks, the company can handle it," said Wang. "If it lasts longer, there will be problems because the costs will be too much."

In Shanghai, most businesses have been closed since late March at an estimated cost of tens of billions of dollars a month in lost activity.

Cargo volume at the Port of Shanghai, the world's busiest, is down 30%. Economists say foreign customers are looking for non-Chinese suppliers that might be more likely to deliver but charge more.

"This will add further to stagflation risk this year" in Western economies, said Tommy Wu of Oxford Economics, referring to a scenario of rising prices and falling economic activity.

Export growth in April sank to 3.7% over a year earlier from March's 15.7%. Imports crept up 0.7%, in line with the previous month's growth below 1%.

China was the only major economy to grow in 2020 after Beijing shut factories, shops and offices nationwide to fight the virus. The ruling party declared victory after a few months and reopened the economy.

Last year, Xi's government shifted back to long-range plans that include trying to reduce excessive real estate debt. That triggered a plunge in construction and housing sales in mid-2021.

In a sign of the intensity of economic pain, Beijing faces appeals from foreign companies that usually avoid questioning official policy for fear of retaliation.

The American Chamber of Commerce in China says its members want a "more optimal balance" between disease prevention and business.

More than half of 121 companies that responded to an April 29-May 5 survey have delayed or reduced investment, according to the chamber.

"Members don't see any light at the end of the tunnel," said the chamber chairman, Colm Rafferty, in a statement.

At a May 5 meeting, party leaders appeared to reject such appeals and the "living with the virus" stance adopted by other governments.

Relaxing virus-control measures will lead to "large-scale infections, serious illness and deaths" and "seriously affect" the economy, they said in a statement. To shut down debate, it said "all sectors of society" should "unify their thoughts and actions" with party leaders.

Instead of giving up their growth target to pursue "zero-COVID," party leaders "want both," said Larry

Hu and Xinyu Ji of Macquarie Group in a report.

"Zero-COVID at the cost of surging unemployment is a hard sell for China's top leaders, especially in such a year of significant political importance," they wrote.

This week, the industry ministry told local governments to help entrepreneurs pay rent, utilities and other expenses. It warned the "production situation isn't optimistic."

"We urgently need to take further effective measures," a ministry statement said.

Justices to meet for 1st time since leak of draft Roe ruling

By MARK SHERMAN and JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court's nine justices will gather in private for their first scheduled meeting since the leak of a draft opinion that would overrule Roe v. Wade and sharply curtail abortion rights in roughly half the states.

The meeting Thursday in the justices' private, wood-paneled conference room could be a tense affair in a setting noted for its decorum. No one aside from the justices attends and the most junior among them, Justice Amy Coney Barrett, is responsible for taking notes.

Thursday's conference comes at an especially fraught moment, with the future of abortion rights at stake and an investigation underway to try to find the source of the leak.

Chief Justice John Roberts last week confirmed the authenticity of the opinion, revealed by Politico, in ordering the court's marshal to undertake an investigation.

Roberts stressed that the draft, written by Justice Samuel Alito and circulated in February, may not be the court's final word. Supreme Court decisions are not final until they are formally issued and the outcomes in some cases changed between the justices' initial votes shortly after arguments and the official announcement of the decisions.

That's true of a major abortion ruling from 1992 that now is threatened, Planned Parenthood v. Casey, when Justice Anthony Kennedy initially indicated he would be part of a majority to reverse Roe but later was among five justices who affirmed the basic right of a woman to choose abortion that the court first laid out in Roe in 1973.

Kennedy met privately with Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and David Souter to craft a joint opinion, with no hint to the public or even to other justices about what was going on.

"I think it's tradition and decorum that everyone corresponds in writing about things that are in circulation," said Megan Wold, a former law clerk to Alito. "But at the same time, there's nothing to prevent a justice from picking up the phone to call, from visiting someone else in chambers."

A major shift in the current abortion case seems less likely, at least partly because of the leak, abortion law experts and people on both sides of the issue said.

"I think the broad contours are very unlikely to change. To the extent the leak matters, it will make broad changes unlikely," said Mary Ziegler, a scholar of the history of abortion at the Florida State University law school.

Sherif Gergis, a University of Notre Dame law professor who once was a law clerk for Alito, agreed. "I'll be surprised if it changes very much," Gergis said.

It's not clear who leaked the opinion, or for what purpose. But Alito's writing means that there were at least five votes in December to overrule Roe and Casey, just after the court heard arguments over a Mississippi law that would ban abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

Based on their questions at arguments, Justice Clarence Thomas and former President Donald Trump's three appointees, Justices Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Barrett, seemed most likely to join Alito.

Roberts appeared the most inclined among the conservatives to avoid reaching a decision to overrule the landmark abortion rulings, but his questions suggested that he would at the very least vote to uphold the Mississippi law. Even that outcome would dramatically undermine abortion rights and invite states to adopt increasingly stricter limits.

If Roberts, who often prefers incremental steps in an effort to preserve the court's legitimacy, wanted

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to prevent the court from overruling Roe and Casey, he'd need to pick up the vote of just one other colleague. That would be enough to deprive Alito of a majority.

The liberal justices, Stephen Breyer, Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor, are expected to dissent from either outcome. But no dissent, separate opinion from Roberts, or even a revised draft majority opinion has been circulated among the justices, Politico reported.

Majority opinions often change in response to friendly suggestions and barbed criticisms. The justices consider the internal back-and-forth a crucial part of their work.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg remarked that pointed criticism from her friend and ideological opposite, Justice Antonin Scalia, made her opinions better. Scalia died in 2016; Ginsburg, four years later.

The lack of any other opinions surprised some former law clerks to the justices, though Wold said it's also true that bigger, harder cases traditionally take more time.

Several former clerks also said they expect the leak to be discussed at the weekly meeting on Thursday, at which the justices typically finalize opinions in cases they've heard and choose cases to hear in the coming months. The spring normally is a tense time at the court, with major decisions looming that often reveal stark divisions and sometimes produce sharp words.

"I would be shocked if it doesn't come up," Wold said, adding that, given what has happened, the court would probably take additional precautions with drafts circulating in the future, including limiting who has access to them.

Kent Greenfield, a Boston University law professor who spent a year as a clerk to Souter, also speculated that the leak would be on the table Thursday. "Roberts is in a complete bind. He has to address it, but it doesn't strike me that he has many options," Greenfield said.

Creeping COVID-19 cases result in few schools mask mandates

By STEVE LeBLANC and MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) — U.S. COVID-19 cases are up, leading a smattering of school districts, particularly in the Northeast, to bring back mask mandates and recommendations for the first time since the omicron winter surge ended and as the country approaches 1 million deaths in the pandemic.

The return of masking in schools is not nearly as widespread as earlier in the pandemic, particularly as the public's worries over the virus have ebbed. But districts in Maine, New Jersey and Pennsylvania have brought masks back, with a few in Massachusetts also recommending them even as the school year enters its final weeks.

Maine's largest school district, in Portland, said this week masks would return, with Superintendent Xavier Botana saying that was the "safest course at this time" amid rising cases. Bangor, Maine, schools also brought back a universal mask requirement.

High schools in the suburbs of Pittsburgh and in Montclair, New Jersey, a commuter suburb of New York City, also announced a return to masking, albeit temporarily through this week. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, most of the counties in the country considered to have "high" levels of COVID-19 are in the Northeast.

In parts of Massachusetts that have seen high levels of COVID-19 transmission, authorities are also recommending masks in schools.

Reactions have ranged from supportive to angry. On the Facebook page of Woodland Hills High School in suburban Pittsburgh, one woman called the change "#insane."

Diana Martinez and Owen Cornwall, who have a first grader at Graham and Parks School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, have been following the recommendation to mask their daughter.

"We're very happy about it. It gives us a little peace of mind," said Martinez, 42, a professor at Tufts University. "I think the parents generally trend toward wearing them and that gives us some comfort. It's the same case at our pre-school. There will be a couple of parents who don't mask their child, but we will be masking our child."

Cornwall said there seems to be a general consensus in the school community in favor of playing it safe.

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"We're sort of lucky in this neighborhood, that they share our concerns with health," said Cornwall, 37, a visiting scholar at Tufts.

Reported daily cases in the U.S. are averaging 79,000, up 50% over the past two weeks, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. That's a fraction of where daily case counts stood earlier this year, when they topped 800,000.

However, current case counts are a vast undercount because of a major downturn in testing and the fact tests are being taken at home and not reported to health departments.

An influential modeling group at the University of Washington in Seattle estimates that only 13% of cases are being reported to health authorities in the U.S. — which would mean an undercount of more than a half million new infections every day.

Despite the uptick in cases and the return to masking in a small number of schools, the response across the country has been largely subdued, reflecting the public's exhaustion after more than two years of restrictions.

Outside of schools, however, officials have shown little interest in returning to mask mandates.

Last month, Philadelphia abandoned its indoor mask mandate just days after becoming the first large American city to reimpose the requirement in response to an increase in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations.

The United States is approaching the grim marker of 1 million deaths from COVID-19. Globally, there have been more than 6 million deaths in the pandemic, according to a tally from Johns Hopkins University.

Hospital workers at Providence St. Joseph Hospital in Orange, California, who labored through the worst of the pandemic paused Wednesday to recognize the sacrifice.

Intensive care unit nurse coordinator Patsy Brandenburger was among the many hospital caregivers who received a blessing from Father Patrick Okonkwo, a hospital chaplain, during the Roman Catholic ceremony.

She recalled the worst days of the pandemic, when the hospital was filled with hundreds of patients, including dozens on ventilators; now the hospital has just seven COVID-19 patients.

"The amount of patients we saw that passed away in the ICU was so, so, so hard. And just the families that couldn't be there with them was extremely hard on all of us," Brandenburger said fighting away tears.

Holiday stops Celtics' last 2 plays, Bucks take 3-2 lead

By JIMMY GOLEN AP Sports Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Giannis Antetokounmpo was having his best shooting night of the playoffs. Milwaukee dominated on the boards. And still the Bucks trailed Boston by 14 points in a game that could send the defending NBA champions to the brink of elimination.

That's when Jrue Holiday showed the Defensive Player of the Year a thing or two about defense.

Bobby Portis put back Antetokounmpo's missed free throw with 15 seconds left, and Holiday snuffed Marcus Smart on Boston's final two possessions Wednesday night as Milwaukee erased a 14-point, fourth-quarter deficit to beat the Celtics 110-107 and take a 3-2 series lead.

"Obviously, in Boston you're down 14 in the fourth quarter, people would say everything's against us. But we come together," said Holiday, who also hit the tying 3-pointer with 43 seconds left. "We live and die like that."

Antetokounmpo had 40 points and 11 rebounds, making 16 of 27 shots — including a long 3-pointer to make it 105-102 with 1:40 to play. Holiday finished with 24 points, eight rebounds and eight assists and Portis added 14 points and 15 rebounds. The Bucks can advance to the Eastern Conference finals with a victory in Game 6 at home Friday night.

Jayson Tatum scored 34 points and Jaylen Brown had 26 for the Celtics, who need a win in Milwaukee to force a decisive seventh game back in Boston on Sunday.

The Celtics led 93-79 early in the fourth before the Bucks closed the gap, tying it at 105 with 43 seconds to play on back-to-back 3-pointers from Antetokounmpo and Holiday. Tatum hit a pair of free throws to give Boston back the lead.

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Antetokounmpo went to the line with a chance to tie it and made the first, then Portis grabbed the rebound of the second and put it in off the backboard to give Milwaukee its first lead since early in the second quarter.

Smart drove to the basket but Holiday blocked him and came away with the ball, throwing it off the Celtics guard while falling out of bounds.

"Just a great instinctive play by Jrue," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said. "He's a winner. Jrue Holiday's a winner. You ask any player in this league or any coach in this league. He's a winner."

Pat Connaughton made a pair of free throws with six seconds left, then Holiday stole the ball from Smart on his desperation dash for a potential game-tying 3-pointer. The Celtics committed eight of their 10 turnovers in the second half and gave up a 49-36 rebounding edge in all.

"If we box out we win that game," Smart said. "They're the defending champs. They made some championship plays. And now we've got to bounce back."

Milwaukee had 17 offensive rebounds to Boston's five, with Portis grabbing seven.

"Growing up as a kid, I really wasn't very skilled or really had one thing I really did well. I was always like a jack of all trades, did everything good but nothing great," Portis said. "My mom always told me as a kid just to be a garbage man. Being a garbage man is if you want scoring opportunities and you're not getting the ball passed to you, you go get the ball on the offensive glass. That's one thing my mom always taught me. Shoutout to my mom on that."

Jaylen Brown scored 16 points in the third — and 12 of those in the last four minutes of the quarter, when Boston turned a 71-68 edge into a 12-point lead. It was 93-79 with 10:19 to play — Boston's biggest blown lead in the playoffs in more than 25 years.

"Of course, we're gonna be down. Guys are going to be (upset) about the outcome. We outplayed them for 3½ quarters," Celtics coach Ime Udoka said. "We talked about showing our resolve, and we made it tougher on ourselves now. It'll make it sweeter when we bounce back. But we gave up a golden opportunity tonight."

INJURED

The Celtics were without big man Robert Williams III for the second straight game — and the fourth time this postseason — because of left knee soreness. He had been listed as questionable before being ruled out pregame.

Milwaukee remained without Khris Middleton, who has done some on-court work as he attempts to come back from a sprained left knee. He has not played since April 20 in Game 2 of the first-round series against the Bulls.

"He's done a little bit on the court and we're feeling good about where he is and optimistic," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said. "But it's kind of the same update it's been for the last handful of days"

Milwaukee guard George Hill (abdominal soreness) did play.

TIP-INS

Tacko Fall, the 7-foot-6 former Celtic, took in the game from the front row, under the basket. Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker and New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft were also at the game. ... The Celtics only had two turnovers in the first half, to nine for the Bucks. ... Celtics subs Daniel Theis and Derrick White made their first nine shots.

Ukraine to hold first war crimes trial of captured Russian

By ELENA BECATOROS and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's top prosecutor disclosed plans Wednesday for the first war crimes trial of a captured Russian soldier, as fighting raged in the east and south and the Kremlin left open the possibility of annexing a corner of the country it seized early in the invasion.

Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova said her office charged Sgt. Vadim Shyshimarin, 21, in the killing of an unarmed 62-year-old civilian who was gunned down while riding a bicycle in February, four days into the war.

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Shyshimarin, who served with a tank unit, was accused of firing through a car window on the man in the northeastern village of Chupakhivka. Venediktova said the soldier could get up to 15 years in prison. She did not say when the trial would start.

Venediktova's office has said it has been investigating more than 10,700 alleged war crimes committed by Russian forces and has identified over 600 suspects.

Many of the alleged atrocities came to light last month after Moscow's forces aborted their bid to capture Kyiv and withdrew from around the capital, exposing mass graves and streets and yards strewn with bodies in towns such as Bucha. Residents told of killings, burnings, rape, torture and dismemberment.

Volodymyr Yavorskyy of the Center for Civil Liberties said the Ukrainian human rights group will be closely following Shyshimarin's trial to see if it is fair. "It's very difficult to observe all the rules, norms and neutrality of the court proceedings in wartime," he said.

On the economic front, Ukraine shut down a pipeline that carries Russian gas across the country to homes and industries in Western Europe, marking the first time since the start of the war that Kyiv disrupted the flow westward of one of Moscow's most lucrative exports.

But the immediate effect is likely to be limited, in part because Russia can divert the gas to another pipeline and because Europe relies on a variety of suppliers.

Meanwhile, a Kremlin-installed politician in the southern Kherson region, site of the first major Ukrainian city to fall in the war, said officials there want Russian President Vladimir Putin to make Kherson a "proper region" of Russia — that is, annex it.

"The city of Kherson is Russia," Kirill Stremousov, deputy head of the Kherson regional administration appointed by Moscow, told Russia's RIA Novosti news agency.

That raised the possibility that the Kremlin would seek to break off another piece of Ukraine as it tries to salvage an invasion gone awry. Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, which borders the Kherson region, after a disputed referendum in 2014, a move denounced as illegal and rejected by most of the international community.

Kherson, a Black Sea port of roughly 300,000, provides Crimea with access to fresh water and is seen as gateway to wider Russian control over southern Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it would be "up to the residents of the Kherson region after all to decide whether such an appeal should be made or not." He said any move to annex territory would have to be closely evaluated by legal experts to make sure it is "absolutely legitimate, as it was with Crimea."

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak mocked the notion of Kherson's annexation, tweeting: "The invaders may ask to join even Mars or Jupiter. The Ukrainian army will liberate Kherson, no matter what games with words they play."

Inside Kherson, people have taken to the streets to decry the Russian occupation. But a teacher who gave only her first name, Olga, for fear of Russian retaliation said such protests are impossible now because Moscow's troops "kidnapped activists and citizens simply for wearing Ukrainian colors or ribbons." She said "people are scared of talking openly outside their homes" and "everyone walks on the street quickly."

"All people in Kherson are waiting for our troops to come as soon as possible," she added. "Nobody wants to live in Russia or join Russia."

On the battlefield, Ukrainian officials said a Russian rocket attack targeted an area around Zaporizhzhia, destroying unspecified infrastructure. There were no immediate reports of casualties. The southeastern city has been a refuge for civilians fleeing the devastated port city of Mariupol.

Russian forces continued to pound the steel plant that is the last bastion of Ukrainian resistance in Mariupol, its defenders said. The Azov Regiment said on social media that Russian forces carried out 38 airstrikes in the previous 24 hours on the grounds of the Azovstal steelworks.

The plant has sheltered hundreds of Ukrainian troops and civilians during a monthslong siege.

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said Ukraine has offered to release Russian prisoners of war if Russia will allow the badly injured fighters to be evacuated.

An adviser to the Mariupol mayor said Russian forces have blocked all evacuation routes out of the city.

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Petro Andriushchenko said there are few apartment buildings fit to live in and little food or drinking water. He said some remaining residents are cooperating with occupying Russian forces in exchange for food.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy suggested Tuesday that Ukraine's military is gradually pushing Russian troops away from Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city and a key to Russia's offensive in the Donbas, the eastern industrial region whose capture the Kremlin says is its main objective.

Ukraine is also targeting Russian air defenses and resupply vessels on Snake Island in the Black Sea in an effort to disrupt Moscow's efforts to expand its control over the coastline, according to the British Ministry of Defense.

Separately, Ukraine said it shot down a cruise missile targeting the Black Sea port city of Odesa.

Elsewhere, the governor of a Russian region near Ukraine said at least one civilian was killed and six wounded by Ukrainian shelling in the village of Solokhi, near the border. Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov's account couldn't be independently verified, but he said the village will be evacuated.

Ukraine's natural gas pipeline operator said it moved to stop the flow of Russian gas through a compressor station in part of eastern Ukraine controlled by Moscow-backed separatists because enemy forces were interfering with the station's operation and siphoning off gas.

The hub handles about one-third of Russian gas passing through Ukraine to Western Europe. But analysts said much of the gas can be redirected through another pipeline from Russia that crosses Ukraine, and there were indications that was happening. In any case, Europe also gets natural gas from other pipelines and other countries.

It was not clear whether Russia would take any immediate hit, since it has long-term contracts and other ways of transporting gas.

Still, the cutoff underscored the broader risk to gas supplies from the war.

"Yesterday's decision is a small preview of what might happen if gas installations are hit by live fire and face the risk of extended downtimes," said gas analyst Zongqiang Luo at Rystad Energy.

In other developments, Ukraine's Foreign Ministry accused Russia of stealing Ukrainian grain and trying to sell it on global markets. The ministry estimates Russia may have already stolen up to 500,000 metric tons of grain valued at more than \$100 million.

And U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said a ban on sales of semiconductors and other technology to Russia by the West is limiting Russia's ability to manufacture military equipment. Ukrainians who have found Russian equipment reported that it was "filled with semiconductors that they took out of dishwashers and refrigerators," Raimondo said.

US finds 500 Native American boarding school deaths so far

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — A first-of-its-kind federal study of Native American boarding schools that for over a century sought to assimilate Indigenous children into white society has identified more than 500 student deaths at the institutions, but officials expect that figure to grow exponentially as research continues.

The Interior Department report released Wednesday expands to more than 400 the number of schools that were established or supported by the U.S. government, starting in the early 19th century and continuing in some cases until the late 1960s. The agency identified the deaths in records for about 20 of the schools.

The dark history of Native American boarding schools — where children were forced from their families, prohibited from speaking their languages and often abused — has been felt deeply across Indian Country and through generations.

Many children never returned home, and the Interior Department said that with further investigation the number of known student deaths could climb to the thousands or even tens of thousands. Causes included disease, accidental injuries and abuse.

"Each of those children is a missing family member, a person who was not able to live out their purpose on this Earth because they lost their lives as part of this terrible system," said Interior Secretary Deb

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Haaland, whose paternal grandparents were sent to boarding school for several years.

The agency is in the process of poring through thousands of boxes containing more than 98 million pages of records, with help from many Indigenous people who have had to work through their own trauma and pain. Accounting for the number of deaths will be difficult because records weren't always kept.

A second volume of the report will cover burial sites as well as the federal government's financial investment in the schools and the impacts of the boarding schools on Indigenous communities, the Interior Department said. It has so far identified at least 53 burial sites at or near boarding schools, not all of which have marked graves.

Tribal leaders have pressed the agency to ensure that any children's remains are properly cared for and returned to their tribes, if desired. To prevent them from being disturbed, the burial sites' locations will not be publicly released, said Bryan Newland, the Interior Department's assistant secretary for Indian Affairs.

At a news conference Wednesday, Haaland choked back tears as she described how the boarding school era perpetuated poverty, mental health disorders, substance abuse and premature deaths in Indigenous communities.

"Recognizing the impacts of the federal Indian boarding school system cannot just be a historical reckoning," she said. "We must also chart a path forward to deal with these legacy issues."

Haaland, who is Laguna, announced an initiative last June to investigate the schools' troubled legacy and uncover the truth about the government's role in them. The 408 schools her agency identified operated in 37 states or territories, many of them in Oklahoma, Arizona and New Mexico.

Others who spoke included Deborah Parker, chief executive of the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, who tearfully recalled stories of a boarding school on the Tulalip reservation, where she's from in Washington state. The school had a small jail cell and a basement where at least one girl routinely was chained to a heater and beaten, she said. Others hid to shield themselves from abuse.

"I am concerned when we begin to open these doors for our boarding school survivors to come forward and share their stories," Parker said.

Basil Brave Heart attended Holy Rosary Mission in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, in the 1940s. He called having his hair cut by older students a "divide and conquer" strategy that made Native children take part in their own cultural destruction.

He was prohibited from practicing Lakota spiritual traditions and speaking his language that he said has a spiritual resonance not easily translated into English.

"Taking our language away is huge," he said Wednesday. "It goes to our identity."

The Interior Department acknowledged the number of schools identified could change as more data is gathered. The coronavirus pandemic and budget restrictions hindered some of the research over the past year, said Newland, a citizen of the Bay Mills Indian Community.

The U.S. government directly ran some of the boarding schools. Catholic, Protestant and other churches operated others with federal funding, backed by U.S. laws and policies to "civilize" Native Americans. The federal government still oversees more than 180 schools in nearly two dozen states that serve Native Americans, but the schools' missions are vastly different from the past.

The Interior Department report was prompted by the discovery of hundreds of unmarked graves at former residential school sites in Canada that brought back painful memories for Indigenous communities.

Haaland also announced Wednesday a yearlong tour for Interior Department officials that will allow former boarding school students from Native American tribes, Alaska Native villages and Native Hawaiian communities to share their stories as part of a permanent oral history collection.

The conditions at boarding and residential schools varied across the U.S. and Canada. While some former students have reported positive experiences, children at the schools often were subject to military-style discipline.

James LaBelle Sr., who is Inupiaq, said he attended to two federal boarding schools where he learned about European and American history and language, math and science but nothing about Indigenous cultures and traditions.

"I came out not knowing who I was," he said.

The boarding school coalition, which created an early inventory of the schools and shared its research with the Interior Department, praised Interior's work but noted the agency's scope is limited. The coalition has identified about 90 other boarding schools that fall outside the federal government's criteria.

A U.S. House subcommittee on Thursday will hear testimony on a bill to create a truth and healing commission modeled after one in Canada. Parker said it's important in revealing a fuller truth about what happened to Native children.

"Our children deserve to be found," she said. "Our children deserve to be brought home. We are here for their justice. And we will not stop advocating until the United States fully accounts for the genocide committed against Native children."

Court: California's under-21 gun sales ban unconstitutional

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A U.S. appeals court ruled Wednesday that California's ban on the sale of semi-automatic weapons to adults under 21 is unconstitutional.

In a 2-1 ruling, a panel of the San Francisco-based 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said Wednesday the law violates the Second Amendment right to bear arms and a San Diego judge should have blocked what it called "an almost total ban on semiautomatic centerfire rifles" for young adults. "America would not exist without the heroism of the young adults who fought and died in our revolutionary army," Judge Ryan Nelson wrote. "Today we reaffirm that our Constitution still protects the right that enabled their sacrifice: the right of young adults to keep and bear arms."

The Firearms Policy Coalition, which brought the case, said the ruling makes it optimistic age-based gun bans will be overturned in other courts.

Adam Winkler, a law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, said the decision is a clear sign of how courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court which has a major gun case before it, are expanding gun rights.

"Federal judges can read the tea leaves," Winkler said. "In the coming years, the courts seem certain to strike down numerous gun safety measures in the name of the 2nd Amendment. This 9th Circuit ruling is a harbinger of things to come."

The ruling, however, was not a total victory for gun rights advocates.

They also sought an injunction blocking the state from requiring a hunting license for adults under 21 — who are not in the military or law enforcement — to purchase rifles or shotguns.

Handgun sales to those under 21 were already prohibited when the hunting license requirement was passed in 2018 after some of the nation's worst mass shootings were committed by young adults using rifles, including the Valentine's Day slayings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

The following year, the Legislature acted to address what they saw as a loophole after an April 2019 synagogue shooting in San Diego County.

A 19-year-old armed with a semiautomatic rifle he had just purchased with a hunting license killed a 60-year-old woman and injured three others, including the rabbi and an 8-year-old girl at Chabad of Poway.

The state passed the law banning sales of semiautomatic centerfire rifles to anyone under 21. There were exemptions for police or military troops but not for those with hunting licenses.

Matthew Jones, a 20-year-old at the time from Santee in San Diego County, originally sued saying he wanted a gun to defend himself and other lawful purposes but didn't want to obtain a hunting license.

His lawsuit, which had been filed before the under-age ban on semiautomatic weapons, was amended to also challenge that law.

The suit said the state had "whittled down (the) already inapplicable and irrelevant hunting license 'exemption' — the only exemption that is even possible for an ordinary, law abiding young adult who does not wish to enter into a highly dangerous career in law enforcement or the military — by prohibiting an entire class of firearms."

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The 9th Circuit ruled the hunting license requirement was reasonable for increasing public safety through "sensible firearm control."

But it said an outright ban on semiautomatic rifles for those under 21 went too far.

"It's one thing to say that young adults must take a course and purchase a hunting license before obtaining certain firearms," Nelson wrote. "But to say that they must become police officers or join the military? ... It is a blanket ban for everyone except police officers and servicemembers."

Nelson and Judge Kenneth Lee, who ruled in the majority, were part of Republican President Donald Trump's wave of conservative-approved nominees that reshaped the famously liberal court.

Two years ago, Lee authored a 2-1 decision that threw out California's ban on high-capacity ammunition magazines, saying the law violated the U.S. Constitution's protection of the right to bear firearms. That ruling was later overturned by the court's 7-4 review of the decision.

A dissent was written by U.S. District Court Judge Sidney Stein, who was assigned to the panel from the Southern District of New York. Stein was nominated to that court by Democratic President Bill Clinton.

Stein said he would have upheld the lower court's decision not to block either law.

Stein said the regulation did not place a "severe burden" on gun ownership rights on young adults and noted they could get semiautomatic rifles from family members or borrow them from others.

He also said the majority failed to consider the the disproportionate amount of violent crime committed by those under 21 who have relatively less mature cognitive development.

Democratic Sen. Anthony Portantino of La Cañada Flintridge, who wrote both laws, said he was disappointed the semiautomatic ban was struck down but was pleased the hunting license requirement survived.

"I remain committed to keeping deadly weapons out of the wrong hands," Portantino said. "Student safety on our campuses is something we should all rally behind and sensible gun control is part of that solution."

Attorney General Rob Bonta's office said it was reviewing the decision. In a statement, a spokesperson said it was committed to "defending California's commonsense gun laws."

Clarence Dixon dies in Arizona's 1st execution since 2014

By PAUL DAVENPORT and JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

FLORENCE, Ariz. (AP) — An Arizona man convicted of killing a college student in 1978 was put to death Wednesday after a nearly eight-year hiatus in the state's use of the death penalty brought on by a nearly two-hour execution that critics say was botched.

Clarence Dixon, 66, died by lethal injection at the state prison in Florence for his murder conviction in the killing of 21-year-old Arizona State University student Deana Bowdoin, making him the sixth person to be executed in the U.S. in 2022. Dixon's death was announced late Wednesday morning by Frank Strada, a deputy director with Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation and Reentry.

The execution appeared to track the state's protocol, though the medical team had some difficulty finding a vein to administer the lethal drugs. They first tried Dixon's arms and then made an incision in his groin area. That process took about 25 minutes.

After the drugs were injected, Dixon's mouth stayed open and his body did not move. The execution was declared completed about 10 minutes after he was injected.

In the final weeks of Dixon's life, his lawyers tried to postpone the execution, but judges rejected the argument that he was not mentally fit to be executed and did not have a rational understanding of why the state wanted to execute him. The U.S. Supreme Court rejected a last-minute delay of Dixon's execution less than an hour before the execution began.

Dixon earlier declined the option of being killed in Arizona's gas chamber that was refurbished in 2020 — a method that hasn't been used in the U.S. in more than two decades.

Shortly before he was executed with pentobarbital, Strada said Dixon declared: "The Arizona Supreme Court should follow the laws. They denied my appeals and petitions to change the outcome of this trial. I do and will always proclaim innocence. Now, let's do this (expletive)."

And as prison medical staff put an IV line in Dixon's thigh in preparation for the injection, he chided

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them, saying: "This is really funny — trying to be as thorough as possible while you are trying to kill me."

Leslie James, Bowdoin's older sister and a witness to the execution, told reporters after it was conducted that Deana Bowdoin had been poised to graduate from ASU and was planning a career in international marketing. James described her sister as a hard worker who loved to travel, spoke multiple languages and wrote poetry.

She characterized the execution as a relief but criticized how long it took to happen: "This process was way, way, way too long," James said. He had been on death row since his 2008 conviction.

The last time Arizona executed a prisoner was in July 2014, when Joseph Wood was given 15 doses of a two-drug combination over two hours in an execution that his lawyers said was botched. Wood snorted repeatedly and gasped more than 600 times before he died, and an execution that normally would take 10 minutes to complete lasted nearly two hours. The process dragged on for so long that the Arizona Supreme Court convened an emergency hearing during the execution to decide whether to halt the procedure.

States including Arizona have struggled to buy execution drugs in recent years after U.S. and European pharmaceutical companies began blocking the use of their products in lethal injections.

Authorities have said Bowdoin, who was found dead in her apartment in the Phoenix suburb of Tempe, had been raped, stabbed and strangled with a belt.

Dixon, who lived across the street from Bowdoin, had been charged with raping Bowdoin, but the rape charge was later dropped on statute-of-limitation grounds. He was convicted of murder in her killing.

In arguing that Dixon was mentally unfit, his lawyers said he erroneously believed he would be executed because police at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff wrongfully arrested him in another case — a 1985 attack on a 21-year-old student. His attorneys conceded he was lawfully arrested by Flagstaff police.

Dixon was sentenced to life in prison in that case for sexual assault and other convictions. DNA samples taken while he was in prison later linked him to Bowdoin's killing, which had been unsolved.

Prosecutors said there was nothing about Dixon's beliefs that prevented him from understanding the reason for the execution and pointed to court filings that Dixon himself made over the years.

Defense lawyers said Dixon was repeatedly diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, regularly experienced hallucinations over the past 30 years and was found "not guilty by reason of insanity" in a 1977 assault case in which the verdict was delivered by then-Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Sandra Day O'Connor, nearly four years before her appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court. Bowdoin was killed two days after that verdict, according to court records.

Another Arizona death-row prisoner, Frank Atwood, is scheduled to be executed on June 8 in the killing of 8-year-old Vicki Lynne Hoskinson in 1984. Authorities have said Atwood kidnapped the girl.

The child's remains was discovered in the desert northwest of Tucson nearly seven months after her disappearance. Experts could not determine the cause of death from the bones that were found, according to court records.

Arizona now has 112 prisoners left on the state's death row.

Coinbase loses half its value in a week as crypto slumps

By MATT OTT AP Business Writer

SILVER SPRING, Md. (AP) — Cryptocurrency trading platform Coinbase has lost half its value in the past week, including its biggest one-day drop 50 date on Wednesday as the famously volatile crypto market weathers yet another slump.

Coinbase reported a \$430 million net loss in the first quarter, or \$1.98 per share, on declining sales and active users. Analysts were expecting profit of 8 cents per share. Revenue was down as trading volumes fell, and active monthly users declined 19% from the fourth quarter.

It's unlikely those results surprised investors — shares Coinbase Global Inc. declined 43% in the four days leading up to their earnings release Tuesday. On Wednesday, shares fell 26%, to \$53.72 per share. On the day of its initial public offering just 13 months ago, prices hit \$429 per share.

Patrick O'Shaughnessy, an analyst who covers Coinbase for Raymond James, acknowledged in a note to

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clients that there was an ongoing debate over whether the crypto market was in one of its typical funks or if this was the post-pandemic bubble deflating.

"While management strongly believes the former will prove to be true, we suspect there is more than a bit of truth to the latter, particularly with crypto failing to serve as an inflation hedge thus far in 2022," O'Shaughnessy wrote.

Like much of Wall Street, O'Shaughnessy said his firm expects Coinbase to continue to lose money in the coming quarters, and that the "cons of increased crypto regulation down the road will decidedly outweigh the pros."

Government officials have made it clear that regulation is coming. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in April that more government oversight is needed in the fledgling industry and that over the next six months, Treasury would work with the White House and other agencies to develop reports and recommendations on digital currencies.

"Our regulatory frameworks should be designed to support responsible innovation while managing risks – especially those that could disrupt the financial system and economy," Yellen said.

On Tuesday, Yellen testified to the Senate Banking Committee, warning legislators about stablecoins, which are digital currencies usually pegged to the dollar or a commodity such as gold. In theory, stablecoins are better-suited to commercial transactions than other cryptocurrencies that can fluctuate in value. Stablecoins essentially promise investors that they can be redeemed for a dollar. However, a recent run on the TerraUSD stablecoin dropped its value to as low as 30 cents, sowing doubt among investors about the safety of stablecoins. Terra recovered somewhat, to about 68 cents on Wednesday.

"The outstanding stock of stablecoins is growing at a very rapid rate and we really need a consistent federal framework," Yellen told the committee, adding that legislation on stablecoins could be crafted by 2023.

President Joe Biden signed an executive order on digital assets in March that urged the Federal Reserve to explore whether the central bank should create its own digital currency. Biden's order also directed federal agencies to study the impact of cryptocurrency on financial stability and national security.

In a letter to shareholders, Coinbase said it believed that current market conditions were not permanent and it remained focused on the long-term while prioritizing product development.

Jokic's NBA MVP a win for hoops-crazed nations outside US

By KEN MAGUIRE AP Sports Writer

LONDON (AP) — Maybe it's the *ćevapi*, or the *souvlaki*, or the *mbanga* soup.

Whatever it is, there's no denying the tinge of international flavor when it comes to the NBA elite with Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokic winning the league's MVP award for a second straight season Wednesday.

Jokic made it four straight MVPs for foreign-born players.

The Serbian big man beat out two-time MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo of Greece and the reigning champion Milwaukee Bucks and Philadelphia center Joel Embiid of Cameroon to mark another first — never before have the top three in MVP voting all been internationals.

The NBA playoffs are loaded with international talent, including Dallas Mavericks guard Luka Doncic, the 2019 rookie of the year and EuroLeague champion from Slovenia.

The influx of international talent was former Commissioner David Stern's vision. He saw the NBA as a global entity and insisted the league be a driving force in growing the game internationally.

"It's David Stern's dream," Philadelphia coach Doc Rivers said. "Everybody else is good. It's a world game. It's no longer just 'us,' whatever us means. It's a world game and that's a good thing."

The ripple of effect of international players extends well beyond the U.S.

For the basketball-mad countries of Serbia and Greece, the success of Jokic and Antetokounmpo means bragging rights. Antetokounmpo won back-to-back MVP awards (2018-19, 19-20), and now the pride of Sombor, Serbia, has matched him.

"We are a country of basketball. This is more proof that we are the best," said Marko Ćosić, who trained

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a teenage Jokic as strength and conditioning coach at Belgrade club Mega. "It is not easy for a country like Serbia with 7 million people to compete with the rest of the world."

Ćosić, now a professor at the University of Belgrade, said Jokic's style of play "is really poetry. .. he's an artist." The 27-year-old Jokic averaged 27.1 points, 13.8 rebounds and 7.9 assists in the regular season.

Across NBA Europe's social media channels, content featuring Antetokounmpo performs 100% better than the average post, according to the NBA. Jokic content does 10% better than average.

Subscriber growth for NBA League Pass shows a 17% increase in Serbia, 14% in Slovenia and 9% in Greece this season over last season. It was up 40% in Africa as a whole, though the NBA does not release its total number of subscribers.

The league has scheduled the Bucks and Atlanta Hawks to play two preseason matchups at Abu Dhabi in October, marking the NBA's first games in the United Arab Emirates and the Arabian Gulf.

It's impossible to overestimate the impact Antetokounmpo has had on Greece, both as a player and a person. He was born to immigrant Nigerian parents and only acquired a Greek passport shortly before being drafted in 2013.

"Giannis is a hero. He's a good image of Greece. He's an ambassador of Greece worldwide," said Vassilis Skountis, a broadcaster for NBA games on Cosmote TV.

In Greek sports media, there's soccer, basketball, and Giannis.

Yes, Antetokounmpo basically is his own category of news. There's live coverage of games, no matter the hour in Greece, and analysis of his performances.

Parents love him, kids want to be like him.

"He's Greek, he's very spectacular, he's very strong, he dunks, he wins championships, he's playing with the national team," Skountis said. "The kids here in Greece, everybody wants to be like Giannis."

In Cameroon and around Africa, where soccer dominates, Embiid is a budding role model, as is Antetokounmpo.

"These kids coming from abroad ... they end up working twice as hard," said Joe Touomou, associate technical director at NBA Academy Africa. "When it's time to compete, you see the result of that hard work. That's why you see those three foreign guys at the top."

The NBA is helping develop the sport in Africa, opening an academy and partnering with FIBA to run a Champions League-style competition for club teams.

Rivers has seen it, and raves about it.

"I went over to Africa a couple years ago, to Dakar, and it's amazing. It really is," Rivers said. "The academy that the NBA runs in Africa is like no other."

Basketball Without Borders plays a pivotal role, with annual camps showcasing prospects and exposing them to NBA players and coaching.

Embiid was a shy, skinny camper back in 2011.

"Quite frankly, Joel was not the best prospect that we had," said Touomou, who is Cameroonian and a friend of Embiid's family. But he had size, coordination "and he was fearless."

Embiid is reportedly interested in gaining French citizenship, which would make him eligible to play for France as the 2024 Paris Olympics approach. He'd likely be forgiven in Cameroon, which mostly cares about soccer.

In the basketball hotbeds of Europe, though, winning medals for the country is just as important as NBA success — possibly more.

Jokic helped Serbia win silver at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics but sat out the Tokyo Games qualifiers last summer, saying he was exhausted from his first MVP season. Serbia hosted the qualifying tournament but lost to Italy in the decisive game.

"Whatever issues he has playing for the Serbian team, all parties — the Serbian team, the basketball association and him — they need to work together to try to resolve it," said Andrija Pavlovic, a basketball-loving Serb who lives in London. "We need him. We've had great success in the past. It's a tradition we're looking to extend."

Mario Batali acquittal underscores perils of #MeToo cases

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Bill Cosby was released from prison when his conviction that he drugged and assaulted a woman was overturned. Quarterback Deshaun Watson landed a record-setting \$230 million contract, despite an investigation into allegations he assaulted 22 women. Celebrity chef Mario Batali was acquitted this week on just the second day of his sexual assault trial in Boston.

Nearly five years into the #MeToo era, former prosecutors, legal experts and victims' advocates say prosecuting sexual misconduct cases has proven to be no easier than before the reckoning that ignited a firestorm of accusations against powerful, seemingly untouchable men.

Cases such as Batali's, if nothing else, reinforce how the criminal justice system remains "an extremely imperfect tool" for addressing the needs of survivors, said Emily Martin, a vice president at the National Women's Law Center, a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy group.

"Failure to get a criminal conviction doesn't mean that abuse didn't happen or that it was okay," she said. "It will often be extremely hard to prove sexual misconduct beyond a reasonable doubt, especially given the gender stereotypes that lead many people to be especially distrusting when women share their experiences of sexual assault."

Suffolk County Assistant District Attorney Ian Polumbaum, who helped prosecute Batali, declined to comment specifically about the case Wednesday but said sexual assault cases are among the most challenging to prosecute.

"Sexual assault survivors are still trusted less than any other kind of crime victim," he said. "That's the perception we're always fighting. Part of it is public attitudes, part of it is the private nature of the crime in most cases."

Accusing a person of wealth or stature only adds to the challenge because of the heightened public attention and the increased scrutiny of the victim's alleged motives, Polumbaum said.

"We're not afraid to bring the tough cases if they're supported by evidence," he added. "And we hope that survivors are not deterred from coming forward, either."

Batali's case also reinforces how crucial the credibility of the accuser is in a misconduct case, especially when there's scant additional evidence or witnesses to support the claims, says Laurie Levenson, a former federal prosecutor in California who is now a professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles.

The former Food Network personality Batali, 61, was accused of aggressively kissing and groping a woman while taking a selfie at a bar in 2017. Boston prosecutors largely relied on photos taken at the bar that night and the testimony of the now 32-year-old software company worker who accused him of the misconduct.

But Batali's lawyers honed in on the woman's pending civil suit against Batali, which seeks more than \$50,000 in damages, as well as her recent admission that she'd tried to get out of jury duty in another criminal case by claiming to be clairvoyant and, in a separate incident, faked lease documents just to get out of paying a \$200 gym fee.

"These cases are never going to be easy," Levenson said. "But even in the #MeToo era, you need credible victims."

Levenson hopes the Batali verdict serves as a cautionary reminder to abuse survivors that they will always be held to a higher standard, especially in high profile cases.

"There's more temptation in these cases to go off course, and by doing so, you undercut the credibility of your own case," Levenson said. "The whole celebrity nature of it leads victims to do things like offer to sell their story, make demands for money or somehow sensationalize what occurred."

But Stewart Ryan, a former assistant district attorney in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, who helped prosecute Cosby, argued a sexual abuse survivor also seeking damages in a civil lawsuit should be viewed no differently than someone who was hit by a drunk driver suing the defendant while they face criminal charges.

He also stressed the rate of false reports of sexual assault are "minute" compared to the "far greater

percentage of survivors” who never report an attack at all.

“One reason, unfortunately, is the sort of tactics employed here, questioning the motives of a survivor with questions wholly unrelated to whether or not a sexual assault in fact occurred,” Ryan said of the Batali defense strategy.

The Batali acquittal parallels another high-profile #MeToo case in Massachusetts that fell apart over issues involving the accuser.

In 2019, prosecutors were forced to drop indecent assault and battery charges against actor Kevin Spacey after his teen accuser refused to testify to being groped by the “House of Cards” star while working as a busboy at a Nantucket bar.

Meanwhile, actor Cuba Gooding Jr. is poised to avoid jail time after pleading guilty last month to forcibly kissing a worker at a New York City nightclub in 2018.

Even disgraced Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein’s watershed #MeToo conviction in 2020 could be in doubt, with a New York court expected to rule soon on his appeal.

“Sometimes people think since the Weinstein trial and conviction that we are in a different time,” said Michelle Simpson Tuegel, a Dallas-based attorney who has represented gymnasts abused by former USA Gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar and other victims.

“People are definitely more aware and survivors are more supported,” she said. “But by no means are we seeing the level of accountability, especially for people who are super wealthy, very powerful, and who are known to the public.”

Judge: Trump must pay \$110K, meet conditions to end contempt

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A New York judge said Wednesday he will lift Donald Trump’s contempt of court order if the former president meets conditions including paying \$110,000 in fines he’s racked up for being slow to respond to a civil subpoena issued by the state’s attorney general.

Judge Arthur Engoron said he will end his contempt finding if Trump submits additional paperwork by May 20 detailing efforts to search for the subpoenaed records and explaining his and his company’s document retention policies.

Engoron declared Trump in contempt on April 25 and fined him \$10,000 per day for not complying with a subpoena in New York Attorney General Letitia James’ long-running investigation into Trump’s business practices.

James, a Democrat, has said her three-year investigation uncovered evidence that Trump’s company, the Trump Organization, misstated the value of assets like skyscrapers and golf courses on financial statements for over a decade.

Trump, a Republican, denies the allegations. He has calling James’ investigation “racist” and a politically motivated “witch hunt.” James is Black. Trump’s lawyers have accused her of selective prosecution.

Trump’s lawyers contend James is using her civil investigation to gain access to information that could then be used against him in a parallel criminal investigation being conducted by the Manhattan District Attorney, Alvin Bragg, also a Democrat.

Engoron ordered Trump to pay \$110,000 because that is the total amount of fines he accrued through May 6, when Trump’s lawyers submitted 66 pages of court documents detailing the efforts by him and his lawyers to locate the subpoenaed records.

The judge required a company hired by Trump to aid in the search, HaystackID, finish going through 17 boxes kept at an off-site storage facility, and for that company to report its findings and turn over any relevant documents.

Engoron said he could reinstate the fine, retroactive to May 7, if his conditions aren’t met. He told Trump to pay the money directly to James’ office and for the attorney general to hold the money in an escrow account while Trump’s legal team appeals the original contempt finding.

In a statement Wednesday, James praised Engoron’s handling of the contempt allegation.

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"For years, Mr. Trump and the Trump Organization have tried to thwart our lawful investigation, but today's decision makes clear that no one can evade accountability," James said in a statement.

A message seeking comment was left with Trump's lawyer.

The legal battle between James and Trump also played out Wednesday in a midlevel state appeals court, which heard arguments in a related matter: Trump and his two eldest children's appeal of Engoron's Feb. 17 ruling requiring them to answer questions under oath in the civil investigation.

Trump lawyer Alan Futerfas said James was engaging in a trick to get around a state law that requires immunity for people testifying before a criminal grand jury. He also criticized Engoron for not holding a hearing to explore the nature of coordination between James' office and the district attorney's office.

Judith Vale, arguing on behalf of James' office, countered there was ample evidence from the civil investigation to support subpoenas for the Trumps' testimony. She also cited legal precedent allowing the attorney general's office to do so, and said the Trumps could always invoke their Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination — as Trump's son Eric did hundreds of times in a 2020 deposition.

"I agree that it is proper for courts to protect against the evisceration of the privilege against self-incrimination. But what prevents you from invoking that privilege?" appellate court Judge Rolando T. Acosta, one of four judges on the panel, asked Futerfas. "Why do we need to intervene in this case, and interfere or constrain the ample discretion and authority given by statute to the attorney general?"

The court did not give a timetable for a decision.

James had asked Engoron to find Trump in contempt of court after he failed to produce any documents to satisfy a March 31 deadline to meet the terms of her subpoena. She sought documents pertaining to his annual financial statements, development projects, and even communications with Forbes magazine, where he sought to burnish his image as a wealthy businessman.

One of Trump's lawyers, Alina Habba, said in a May 6 court filing that the former president responded to the subpoena completely and no relevant documents were withheld. She said Trump's team looked for records at his offices and private quarters at his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey, and his residence in Florida but didn't find anything relevant that hadn't already been produced. Her filing also detailed searches of other locations including file cabinets and storage areas at the Trump Organization's offices in New York.

In a separate sworn affidavit included with the filing, Trump said he'd turned over all the relevant documents.

He added he owns two cell phones: an iPhone for personal use that he submitted in March to be searched as part of the subpoena, then submitted again in May; plus a second phone he was recently given that's only used to post on Truth Social, the social media network he started after his ban from Twitter, Facebook and other platforms.

Senate bid to save Roe v. Wade falls to GOP-led filibuster

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate fell far short Wednesday in a rushed effort toward enshrining Roe v. Wade abortion access as federal law, blocked by a Republican filibuster in a blunt display of the nation's partisan divide over the landmark court decision and the limits of legislative action.

The almost party-line tally promises to be just the first of several efforts in Congress to preserve the nearly 50-year-old court ruling, which declares a constitutional right to abortion services but is at serious risk of being overturned this summer by a conservative Supreme Court.

President Joe Biden said that Republicans "have chosen to stand in the way of Americans' rights to make the most personal decisions about their own bodies, families and lives."

Biden urged voters to elect more abortion-rights lawmakers in November and pledged in the meantime to explore other ways to secure the rights established in Roe.

For now, his party's slim majority proved unable to overcome the filibuster led by Republicans, who have been working for decades to install conservative Supreme Court justices and end Roe v. Wade. The vote was 51-49 against proceeding, with 60 votes needed to move ahead.

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Congress has battled for years over abortion policy, but the Wednesday vote to take up a House-passed bill was given new urgency after the disclosure of a draft Supreme Court opinion to overturn the Roe decision that many had believed to be settled law.

The outcome of the conservative-majority court's actual ruling, expected this summer, is sure to reverberate around the country and on the campaign trail ahead of the fall midterm elections that will determine which party controls Congress.

Security was tight at the Capitol where Vice President Kamala Harris presided, and it has been bolstered across the street at the Supreme Court after protesters turned out in force last week following the leaked draft.

Scores of House Democratic lawmakers marched protest-style to the Senate and briefly watched from the visitor galleries.

Harris can provide a tie-breaking vote in the 50-50 split Senate, but that was beside the point on Wednesday. One conservative Democrat, Joe Manchin of West Virginia, voted with the Republicans, saying he supported keeping Roe v. Wade but believed the current bill was too broad.

"The Senate is not where the majority of Americans are on this issue," Harris said afterward.

Over several days, Democratic senators delivered speeches contending that undoing abortion access would mean great harm, not only for women but for all Americans planning families and futures.

Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, D-Nev., said that most American women have only known a world where abortion access was guaranteed but could face a future with fewer rights than their mothers or grandmothers.

"That means women will not have the same control over their lives and bodies as men do, and that's wrong," she said in the run-up to Wednesday's vote.

Few Republican senators spoke in favor of ending abortion access, but they embraced the filibuster to block the bill from advancing.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, an architect of the effort to install conservative justices on the Supreme Court — including three during the Trump era — has sought to downplay the outcome of any potential changes in federal abortion policy.

"This issue will be dealt with at the state level," McConnell said.

Some other Republicans, including Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, argue that the House-passed bill is more extreme than Roe, and would expand abortion access beyond what is already the law.

About half the states already have approved laws that would further restrict or ban abortions, including some trigger laws that would take effect once the court rules.

Polls show that most Americans want to preserve access to abortion in the earlier stages of pregnancy, but views are more nuanced and mixed when it comes to later-term abortions.

The draft court ruling on a case from Mississippi suggested the majority of conservative justices are prepared to end the federal right to abortion, leaving it to the states to decide.

Whatever the Supreme Court says this summer, it will almost guarantee a new phase of political fighting in Congress over abortion policy, filibuster rules and the most basic rights to health care, privacy and protecting the unborn.

In recent years, abortion debates have come to a political draw in Congress. Bills would come up for votes — to expand or limit services — only to fail along party lines or be stripped out of broader legislative packages.

In the House, where Democrats have the majority, lawmakers approved the abortion-rights Women's Health Protection Act last year on a largely party line vote after the Supreme Court first signaled it was considering the issue by allowing a Texas law's ban to take effect.

But the bill has languished in the Senate, evenly split with bare Democratic control because of Harris' ability to cast a tie-breaking vote.

Wednesday's failure renewed calls to change Senate rules to do away with the high-bar filibuster threshold, at least on this issue.

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The two Republican senators who support abortion access — Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, who faces her own reelection in November, and Susan Collins of Maine — were also no votes, having proposed their own more tailored approach to counter the Supreme Court's potential action.

Both of the Republican senators, who voted to confirm most of former President Donald Trump's justices, are in talks over alternatives. But Democrats have largely panned the Collins-Murkowski effort as insufficient. "I plan to continue working with my colleagues on legislation to maintain — not expand or restrict — the current legal framework for abortion rights in this country," Collins said in a statement.

Pressure is building on those two senators to join most Democrats in changing the filibuster rules, but that appears unlikely.

Five years ago, it was McConnell who changed Senate rules to selectively do away with the filibuster to confirm Trump's justices after blocking Barack Obama's choice of Merrick Garland to fill a Supreme Court vacancy at the start of the 2016 presidential campaign, leaving the seat open for Trump to fill after he won the White House.

Both parties face enormous pressure to convince voters they are doing all they can — the Democrats working to preserve abortion access, the Republicans to limit or end it — with the fall elections coming up.

The congressional campaign committees are fundraising off the abortion issue, and working furiously to energize voters who are already primed to engage.

Al Jazeera reporter killed during Israeli raid in West Bank

By JOSEF FEDERMAN and FARES AKRAM Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Veteran Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, one of the satellite channel's best-known reporters, was shot and killed on Wednesday while covering an Israeli military raid in the occupied West Bank. The broadcaster and two reporters who were with her blamed Israeli forces.

Israel's defense minister, Benny Gantz, promised a transparent investigation, and said he was in touch with U.S. and Palestinian officials. The Israeli military initially suggested that Abu Akleh might have been killed by stray fire from Palestinians, but Gantz was more cautious Wednesday evening. "We are trying to figure out exactly what happened," he said. "I don't have final conclusions."

He said Israel asked the Palestinian medical team that performed a preliminary autopsy to hand over the fatal bullet for further examination. The head of the Palestinian forensics institute, Rayan al-Ali, said earlier Wednesday that the bullet was deformed, and that he could not yet determine who fired it.

Abu Akleh's death could draw new scrutiny of Israel's military justice system, which is being examined as part of a war crimes probe conducted by the International Criminal Court. It also threatened to further strain often rocky relations between the army and the international media.

Abu Akleh, 51, was a respected and familiar face in the Middle East, known for her coverage on Al Jazeera Arabic of the harsh realities of Israel's open-ended military occupation of the Palestinians, now in its 55th year. She was widely recognized in the West Bank and was also a U.S. citizen.

Her death reverberated across the region. Arab governments condemned the killing.

There was also an outpouring of grief in the West Bank. In Ramallah, the seat of the Palestinian autonomy government, Abu Akleh's body, draped in a Palestinian flag and covered by a wreath of flowers, was carried through downtown streets. Hundreds chanted, "with our spirit, with our blood, we will redeem you, Shireen."

On Thursday, a procession was to take the body for burial in Jerusalem, where Abu Akleh was born.

In east Jerusalem, dozens of mourners gathered at the family home to honor her. Lina Abu Akleh, her niece, called her "my best friend, my second mom, my companion."

"I never thought this day would come, where the news would be about her and she won't be the one covering the news," she said.

At one point, a group of Israeli police entered the home, where they were immediately met with shouts of "killers" and "occupiers" and chants to "get out." It was not immediately clear why the police came, and the officers quickly left.

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Palestinians gathered outside the family's house on Wednesday evening, some holding Palestinian flags and posters with the journalist's photo. When the group walked toward a main thoroughfare, Israeli police tried to stop them. Scuffles ensued. Five Palestinians were hurt and about half a dozen were detained.

Abu Akleh was killed by a shot to the head while on the outskirts of the Jenin refugee camp in the northern West Bank, known as a bastion of militants. Israel has conducted near-daily raids in Jenin in recent weeks following a series of deadly attacks inside Israel carried out by militants from the area.

Gantz said Israeli forces came under attack by indiscriminate fire by Palestinian militants from several directions. The army released a body cam video of forces in the town while heavy fire is heard in the background.

Gantz described the situation as chaotic. He said the soldiers at the scene had all been questioned, but that the investigation could only make progress with the cooperation of the Palestinian forensic team.

"I am very sorry for what happened," Gantz told reporters. "Currently we do not know what was the direct cause of Shireen's death. We are very decisive to have a full-scale investigation ... and we hope to get Palestinian cooperation on this issue."

Al Jazeera accused Israel of "deliberately targeting and killing our colleague." Palestinian journalists who were with Abu Akleh at the time said they made their presence known to Israeli soldiers, and that they did not see militants in the area.

Abu Akleh's producer, Palestinian journalist Ali Samoudi, was hospitalized in stable condition after being shot in the back. He said any suggestion they were shot by militants was a "complete lie."

Relations between Israeli forces and the foreign media, especially Palestinian journalists, are strained.

During last year's war between Israel and Gaza's militant Hamas rulers, an Israeli airstrike destroyed the building in Gaza City housing the offices of The Associated Press and Al Jazeera. Residents were warned to evacuate and no one was hurt in the strike. Israel said Hamas was using the building as a command center but has provided no evidence.

The outcome of Israel's military investigation will be closely watched. The International Criminal Court has opened an investigation into possible war crimes by Israel in both the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Israel does not recognize the court's jurisdiction and has called the investigation unfair and antisemitic. One of its key arguments against the probe has been that its military justice system is capable of investigating itself.

The findings of its probe into Abu Akleh's death could draw new scrutiny. Hussein Al Sheikh, a top Palestinian official, said the Palestinians would transfer information on the case to the court.

In New York, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, called Abu Akleh's death "really horrifying" and called for a transparent investigation. She said protecting American citizens and journalists was "our highest priority."

Thomas-Greenfield said Abu Akleh did "an extraordinary interview" with her in the West Bank last November. "I left there feeling extraordinary respect for her," she said.

The U.N. Human Rights office urged an "independent, transparent investigation into her killing. Impunity must end."

The White House also called for a thorough probe. "Investigating attacks on independent media and prosecuting those responsible are of paramount importance," deputy press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.

At the United Nations, the Palestinian U.N. Ambassador Riyad Mansour, flanked by representatives of the Arab League and the U.N.'s Arab Group, demanded an international independent investigation.

Al Jazeera, which has long had strained relations with Israel, interrupted its broadcast to announce Abu Akleh's death early Wednesday.

In a statement flashed on its channel, it called on the international community to "condemn and hold the Israeli occupation forces accountable for deliberately targeting and killing our colleague."

It aired a video showing Abu Akleh lying motionless on the side of a road wall as another journalist crouches nearby and a man screams for an ambulance. Gunfire rings out in the background. Both report-

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ers were wearing blue flak jackets clearly marked with the word "PRESS." The video did not show the source of the gunfire.

The Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the occupied West Bank and cooperates with Israel on security matters, condemned what it said was a "shocking crime" committed by Israeli forces.

Qatar, the Arab League and Jordan all condemned the shooting, and in the Jordanian capital of Amman, a group of journalists and activists held a solidarity march outside Al Jazeera's offices.

Israelis have long been critical of Al Jazeera's coverage, but authorities generally allow its journalists to operate freely.

A number of Palestinian reporters have been wounded by rubber-coated bullets or tear gas while covering demonstrations in the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

Two Palestinian journalists were shot and killed by Israeli forces while filming violent protests along the Gaza frontier in 2018.

In November of that year, AP cameraman Rashed Rashid was covering a protest near the Gaza frontier when he was shot in the left ankle, apparently by Israeli fire. The military has never acknowledged the shooting.

The Foreign Press Association, which represents some 400 journalists working for international media, said it was "appalled and deeply shocked" by the killing and expressed hope "that those responsible for this horrible death will be held accountable."

High inflation leaves food banks struggling to meet needs

Kendall Nunamaker and her family of five in Kennewick, Washington, faced impossible math this month: How to pay for gas, groceries and the mortgage with inflation driving up prices?

Like many other working families, the Nunamakers are grappling with the 8.3% inflation in the consumer price index in April announced Wednesday — slowing slightly from the March figure which was the largest year-over-year increase since 1981, according to the Labor Department. The national average gas price reached a record high Wednesday of \$4.40 a gallon. And global food prices are climbing after shortages caused by Russia's war against Ukraine and other supply chain problems.

Food banks across America say those economic conditions are intensifying demand for their support at a time when their labor and distribution costs are climbing and donations are slowing. The problem has grown to the point where last week President Joe Biden called for a Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health in September, the first since 1969.

For many families like the Nunamakers, food insecurity became a painful surprise.

"There's no reason us as a couple and a family should be struggling so hard," Nunamaker said. "We make decent money."

She works three days a week at a home décor store for \$15.25 an hour; her husband, Nick, works a full-time union job as a paratransit driver at \$27 an hour. Though they receive some money from a state nutrition program for young children that their two youngest qualify for, they still spent \$360 on groceries last week.

Because of inflated prices, those groceries didn't go far enough to feed everyone. And the family still lacked money to pay other household bills, leaving Nunamaker wondering how she would stretch their next paychecks to cover those bills and their mortgage this month.

In the past, to bridge the gap, the family sold off possessions like VR headsets and firearms.

"At some point," Nunamaker said, "we're not going to have anything because we would have sold everything."

So Nunamaker and her husband visited two local food banks for the first time last week.

The pandemic forced roughly 60 million Americans to seek help for food insecurity, according to Feeding America. At the end of 2021, as hiring boomed, demand for food banks returned to regular levels. But the relief was short-lived.

"In the last few months, with this increase in inflationary pressures, we're seeing 95% of our 200 mem-

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ber food banks saying that they have seen either leveling or an increase in need," said Claire Babineaux-Fontenot, CEO of Feeding America.

In the area along the Columbia River where Nunamaker lives, the number of clients seeking food aid at a church pantry jumped 40% between December and March, according to Eric Williams, director of community partnerships at Second Harvest, an organization that works to supply local pantries with food.

He said his organization must make more happen with less because its suppliers are subject to the same cost increases. The price that Second Harvest pays for obtaining donated produce has risen from about 6 cents a pound a year ago to about 10 or 11 cents a pound now, Williams said.

Some of Feeding America's food pantry partners have closed because of dwindling donations and higher costs for receiving and delivering food. Others have less food on their shelves even though they have higher demand.

"Our network emphasizes access and equity," Babineaux-Fontenot said. "So we are working extra hard to reach people who have the deepest food insecurity rates. Well, how far out can we go when gas prices are high? We have data that shows that race and place are significant indicators of whether or not you will be food insecure and how deeply you will be food insecure."

Because of inflation and a reduction in aid, a food bank that serves three counties in Ohio — also called Second Harvest — is facing a drop in the amount of food it's able to provide.

"Compared to last year at this time, we're about 50% down in what we have received in the past in federal food donations and then about 20% down from food drives in our collection of food at the grocery stores," Executive Director Tyra Jackson said. "All of that combined is truly having an impact on our budget because we're needing to purchase more food outright."

The struggles of families are heightened by the fact that government benefits that were increased during the pandemic like food stamps or unemployment insurance have stopped or will end shortly.

"Our work is always important," Babineaux-Fontenot said. "It's increasingly important when we have all of these headwinds."

Williams, of Spokane, extended gratitude to the donors and volunteers that keep his organization running, some of whom worked more than 100 shifts last year. He said it can be difficult to witness first hand the scale of the food insecurity in his community when helping with distributions at a mobile food bank.

"You see the need and you just go, 'Oh God, oh my God,'" Williams said. "But then as you hand somebody a box of food and they drive off: 'Yeah, we were able to help,' which is heart-wrenching on one hand and heartwarming on the other."

Because it upsets her so much, Nunamaker said, she hasn't discussed her family's struggles with her three children, age 2, 4 and 7, or her network of friends and relatives. She said the food banks helped her family last week.

"People should know that just because you have to go to a food bank or you have to seek assistance, that doesn't make you any less of a parent or a person," she said. "Because everybody needs help sometimes."

Egg-sized diamond fetches over \$21M with fees at Geneva sale

GENEVA (AP) — Christie's says "The Rock," an egg-sized white diamond billed as the largest of its kind to go up for auction, sold Wednesday for more than 21.6 million Swiss francs (\$21.75 million), including fees — though at the low end of the expected range.

The 228-carat pear-shaped G-Color stone, with its platinum pendant mounting, has a gross weight of 61.3 grams (2.2 ounces) and dimensions of 5.4 centimeters by 3.1 centimeters (2.1 inches by 1.2 inches) — making it about the size of a medium hen's egg.

G-Color is not the highest grade, but fourth on the letter rung below the top-grade D-Color diamonds. An unspecified private buyer acquired The Rock, for which the pre-auction estimate was between 19 million and 30 million francs.

Max Fawcett, head of jewelry at Christie's Geneva, hailed a successful sale in "uncharted territory" for a stone of its kind.

Also going under the hammer Wednesday was the "Red Cross" diamond, a 205.1-carat fancy yellow

stone, which fetched nearly 14.2 million francs, double the pre-sale estimate. The diamond was cut from a rough stone unearthed from South Africa's Griqualand mines in the early 20th century, and went up for auction for the first time in 1918.

Fawcett testified to a "huge amount of interest" in the Red Cross diamond, saying that an unspecified "7-figure sum" from the proceeds of the sale to an unspecified private buyer would be donated to the international Red Cross Movement, the Geneva-based humanitarian aid group.

Bob Lanier, NBA force who left big shoes to fill, dies at 73

Bob Lanier, the left-handed big man who muscled up beside the likes of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar as one of the NBA's top players of the 1970s, has died. He was 73.

The NBA said Lanier died Tuesday after a short illness. The Hall of Famer had worked for the league as a global ambassador. The Athletic reported in 2019 that Lanier was being treated for bladder cancer.

Lanier played 14 seasons with the Detroit Pistons and Milwaukee Bucks and averaged 20.1 points and 10.1 rebounds for his career. He is third on the Pistons' career list in both points and rebounds. Detroit drafted Lanier with the No. 1 overall pick in 1970 after he led St. Bonaventure to the Final Four.

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said Lanier was among the most talented centers in league history, and added that his accomplishments went far beyond what he did on the court.

"For more than 30 years, Bob served as our global ambassador and as a special assistant to David Stern and then me, traveling the world to teach the game's values and make a positive impact on young people everywhere," Silver said in a statement. "It was a labor of love for Bob, who was one of the kindest and most genuine people I have ever been around."

At 6-foot-10 and 250 pounds, Lanier was considered a big man during his time and used that bulk to his advantage.

"Bob Lanier will always be one of the big men of basketball," Abdul-Jabbar said in a statement posted on social media. "Not just because of the size of his body but because of the size of his heart."

Lanier went into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 1992. But his boat-size shoes got there ahead of him, with a display of his bronzed sneakers in the shrine.

He was known for wearing size 22 shoes, although that was disputed in 1989 by a Converse representative, who told The Atlanta Constitution that Lanier wore size 18 1/2.

"The 22 he was reputed to wear was a Korean size," shoe rep Gary Stoken said.

Not contested was the abundantly clear fact that his feet were big.

"A lot of people can put both feet into one of my shoes," Lanier told HOOP magazine.

Born Sept. 10, 1948, in Buffalo, New York, Lanier starred in college at St. Bonaventure, where he averaged 27.6 points and 15.7 rebounds in three seasons. The Bonnies made it all the way to the Final Four in 1970, but Lanier had injured his knee in the regional final, and St. Bonaventure lost in the national semifinals to Jacksonville.

Lanier overcame a litany of orthopedic injuries, dealing with shoulder, back, elbow, hand and toe problems during his career. But that didn't prevent him from earning his place among the top NBA centers of his era. After being named to the all-rookie team in 1971, he averaged at least 21 points and 11 rebounds for each of the next seven seasons. Lanier was an eight-time All-Star and the MVP of the 1974 All-Star Game.

He remains the Pistons' franchise leader in scoring average at 22.7 points per game, beloved in Detroit for both his fierceness and friendliness.

"As fierce and as dominant as Bob was on the court, he was equally kind and impactful in the community," the Pistons said. "As an ambassador for both the Pistons organization and the NBA, he represented our league, our franchise and our fans with great passion and integrity. We extend our heartfelt condolences to Bob's family and friends."

Lanier could beat opponents from the inside and the outside while ruling the boards. Although Abdul-Jabbar had a more famous hook shot, the sky hook, Lanier's was very much a weapon.

"Guys didn't change teams as much, so when you were facing the Bulls or the Bucks or New York, you

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had all these rivalries," Lanier told NBA.com in 2018. "Lanier against Jabbar! Jabbar against Willis Reed! And then (Wilt) Chamberlain, and Artis Gilmore, and Bill Walton! You had all these great big men and the game was played from inside out."

As exceptional as Lanier was, the Pistons won only one playoff series with him. He played 64 games or fewer in each of his last four full seasons with Detroit. In February 1980, he was traded to Milwaukee.

Lanier averaged fewer minutes with the Bucks, but he was part of Milwaukee teams that reached the Eastern Conference finals in 1983 and 1984, the final two seasons of his career.

"Even more than his basketball success, which included his being an All-Star in 1982, Bob was one of the most popular players with Bucks fans and known throughout the community for his generosity and kindness," the Bucks said in a statement.

He also served as president of the players' union during the final years of his career, with Silver saying that he played "a key role in the negotiation of a game-changing collective bargaining agreement."

Lanier was Detroit's career leader in points and rebounds before he was passed by Isiah Thomas and Bill Laimbeer in those categories, and his single-game franchise record of 33 rebounds was topped by Dennis Rodman.

"All of us who love the game of basketball are hurting with the loss of Bob Lanier," Thomas said. "He was one of the greatest centers to play the game and one of the toughest and fiercest competitors.

"Just as he impacted the game on the court, Bob was one of the game's greatest ambassadors. His class and caring for others set a great example for so many to follow."

In 1995, Lanier was an assistant coach for the Golden State Warriors, then took over as coach on an interim basis after Don Nelson resigned. Lanier went 12-25, and the Warriors found another coach after the season.

Lanier won the NBA's J. Walter Kennedy Citizenship Award for the 1977-78 season for outstanding community service. Following his playing career, he helped start the NBA's Stay in School campaign and participated in other outreach for the league.

"There's so much need out here," Lanier said. "When you're traveling around to different cities and different countries, you see there are so many people in dire straits that the NBA can only do so much. We make a vast, vast difference, but there's always so much more to do."

The tiniest babies: Shifting the boundary of life earlier

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Michelle Butler was just over halfway through her pregnancy when her water broke and contractions wracked her body. She couldn't escape a terrifying truth: Her twins were coming much too soon.

Dr. Brian Sims entered the delivery room and gently explained that babies born so early likely won't live. He told Butler he could keep them comfortable as they died.

But she pleaded through tears: "Give my twins a chance to survive."

And he did.

Until recently, trying to save babies born this early would have been futile. Butler was in the fifth month of her pregnancy, one day past 21 weeks gestation. That's seven weeks earlier than what doctors once considered "the lower limit of viability," the earliest an infant could possibly survive outside the womb. But over the last half century, medical science has slowly shifted that boundary downward.

And that's made viability — a word many associate with the abortion debate — key to decisions about desperately wanted babies at the very edge of life.

Growing numbers of extremely premature infants are getting lifesaving treatment and surviving. A pivotal study in the Journal of the American Medical Association this year, which looked at nearly 11,000 such births in a neonatal research network that is part of the National Institutes of Health, found that 30% of babies born at 22 weeks, 56% born at 23 weeks and 71% born at 24 weeks lived at least until they were healthy enough to be sent home home if doctors tried to save them.

Those gains happened gradually and quietly as the notion of viability got a lot more attention in the abortion arena. Viability is mentioned 36 times in the initial draft of the leaked majority opinion by the

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U.S. Supreme Court in a Mississippi case that would strike down Roe v. Wade. The decades-old abortion ruling says the Constitution protects a woman's right to an abortion before viability, a standard Mississippi argues is arbitrary.

But viability has nothing to do with the vast majority of abortions; more than 99% of abortions occur at or before 21 weeks, according to federal statistics. So although viability is central to abortion law, the crux of the argument around the procedure comes down to disagreement about whether and in which cases someone should have the choice to terminate a pregnancy.

Meanwhile, viability is a growing real concern for those who care for premature babies as science keeps moving the line lower and lower.

And in this realm, too, it's ethically fraught.

Beyond the risk of death, babies at "borderline viability" are highly susceptible to disabilities such as cerebral palsy, cognitive impairments, blindness and severe lung problems. Often, parents and doctors face a heartbreaking question they must answer together: How do they decide what to do?

"There's a lot of things we can do, a lot of interventions," said Dr. Barbara Warner, a newborn medicine expert at Washington University medical school in St. Louis. "Should we do them?"

In the case of Butler's twins, the answer was yes. Curtis and C'Asya Means came into the world on July 5, 2020, at the University of Alabama hospital in Birmingham, each weighing less than a pound and small enough to fit in an adult's hand.

Their divergent paths reflected both sides of extreme prematurity.

C'Asya lived just one day. Butler keeps her ashes in a tiny pink-and-silver urn.

Curtis is the earliest surviving "micropremie" in the world and is now teething, trying solid foods and tooling around the house in his walker.

'A SLOW EVOLUTION'

Each year in the U.S., about 380,000 babies are born prematurely, or earlier than 37 weeks of a typical 40-week pregnancy. About 19,000 arrive before the third trimester.

Babies born so soon faced bleak prospects until the latter half of the 20th century. That's when incubator technology evolved, neonatology became a specialty and two medications began to be widely used: steroids during pregnancy to speed up fetal lung development, and synthetic "surfactant" given to babies to keep their airways open.

"I don't think I could point to a single new technology or new medication or approach that has been the driver of keeping infants alive at these really low limits of gestation," said Dr. Elizabeth Foglia, a neonatologist at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. "It's just a slow evolution" that cascaded into "a sea change."

For many years, the "edge of viability" remained around 24 weeks, she said. During her pediatric residency from 2006-2009, "those were the patients that were sort of the earliest we would intervene and the patients we were most worried about."

Nicholas Hall's twins, Graham and Reece, were born at 25 weeks in 2006. Graham spent his 45-day life connected to a breathing tube, getting nutrients through an IV. "He could never rest," said the Bloomington, Indiana, dad, who with his now ex-wife started a nonprofit to support parents called Graham's Foundation.

Reece survived. But she spent 119 days in the NICU, needed emergency surgery for a buildup of fluid in her brain, and came home on oxygen. She still has a hearing problem called auditory processing disorder.

Complications remain common even as three decades of research show a progressive increase in survival rates for babies born at 22 to 25 weeks. Care for these babies also remains intense.

Even today, up to a year in the hospital isn't unusual for micropremies, and costs can run into the millions of dollars. Most of these infants spend time on ventilators, are warmed in isolettes and get fluids and nutrition through tubes. Their skin, as delicate as a burn victim's, needs meticulous care.

Hospitals have differing practices on when to provide this sort of care to the very youngest micropremies, which leads to varying survival rates. One survey found that about 6 in 10 U.S. hospitals actively treated 22-week babies in 2019, up from 26% in 2007. The data doesn't include the few surviving babies born during the 21st week of pregnancy.

"If you're an institution that's fully committed to resuscitation at 22 weeks, then studies show pretty

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clearly that just by virtue of offering the full spectrum of intensive care, you are going to be more likely to have babies who survive," Foglia said.

TINY FIGHTER

Sims, who treated Butler's twins, said it would have been "perfectly reasonable" not to try to save them. In such cases, whether to resuscitate or continue lifesaving care is a shared decision between parents and the medical team.

"But even when we don't try anything, a baby that's trying to live will show you that. You'll see that the baby's trying to take a breath," Sims said. "We support the babies that give us those signs."

As soon as Curtis and C'Asya arrived, Sims gave each a little bit of oxygen. Curtis' heart rate quickly rose. His smaller sister didn't respond as well. Other medical measures for the twins, such as ventilators and surfactant, couldn't compensate for her immature lungs.

"They told me it was up to me to make the call" about withdrawing treatment, Butler said. "I actually was praying silently to myself. God came to me and told me, 'If you give me C'Asya, I'll give you Curtis.'"

Butler cradled her daughter for hours after she died. It was the first time she held her.

Curtis stayed in the NICU for nine more months. Butler made the 90-minute trek from her home in rural Eutaw to Birmingham several times a week. She read books to Curtis and often held him inside her shirt so his skin touched hers.

Curtis went home tethered to oxygen. Butler, a single mom with two older kids, made sure the levels didn't drop, gave him medicines five times a day and regularly set his feeding pump to dispense the right amount of food into a tube in his stomach.

More than a year later, Curtis is down to one medication for high blood pressure and two inhalers. He can be unhooked from oxygen for an hour a day. At 22 months old and around 20 pounds, he's an active toddler who crawls, pulls himself up and plays with his older sister and brother.

When Butler woke him one morning, he fussed and fumbled with the feeding tube that still provides much of his nutrition.

But soon he was scooting his walker around the kitchen and curiously opening cabinets as Butler scrambled eggs, one of a growing number of soft and pureed foods he can now ingest.

"Wanna eat-eat?" she coaxed, offering a tiny bit of egg.

He eagerly popped it in his mouth, then smiled and grabbed a much bigger helping from her plate.

BITTERSWEET PROGRESS

In the future, doctors expect more micropreemies like Curtis to survive.

One reason? Saving them will become more accepted and common. Last year, the influential American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists updated its recommendations to say steroids before birth may be considered if resuscitation is planned at 22 weeks. Previously, the measure was not recommended for babies that young.

And down the road, scientists are working on lifesaving equipment tailored to smaller bodies and an artificial womb they hope could someday grow a fetus outside of a person.

Such advances are sure to deepen ethical dilemmas.

"There always will be a limit of viability. Where that limit is may change over time as technology evolves and our ability to care for less and less mature babies evolves," Foglia said. But wherever that limit is, "survival may be possible but not guaranteed. And survival without disability is certainly not guaranteed."

Hall said doctors shouldn't keep trying to move the viability line down until they can truly reduce the long-term medical problems associated with extremely premature babies born today.

Cori Laemmler of Fort Wayne, Indiana, who gave birth to twin boys in 2020 at 22 weeks, said decisions about whether to treat such infants should consider the individual circumstances and be guided by a question: "Are the interventions going to do more harm than good?"

Washington University's Warner said everyone needs to think about how the babies might suffer.

This was why Laemmler and her husband decided to let one of her twins go — he was crashing with a collapsed lung. The other twin responded well to treatment. He's now getting speech and physical therapy and hitting the usual milestones in all areas but speech.

Doctors are hopeful that Curtis Means – he has his father’s last name – will also continue to thrive. Dr. Brett Turner, his pulmonologist, now sees him every two or three months to manage his ongoing lung disease.

“As he grows ... those visits will slowly all be able to be spaced out,” Turner said. “Hopefully, he’ll require fewer and fewer doctors to care for him.”

At home, his 35-year-old mother spends less time tending to Curtis’ medical needs and more time just hanging out with him.

One afternoon, she pulled Curtis out of his walker and into her arms. He grabbed at her face. She kissed his hand. She pulled down his Winnie-the-Pooh shirt, and they touched palms in a high five.

Butler, who is studying to be a cosmetologist, envisions Curtis going to school in a few years and becoming a doctor someday.

But as he grows, she always wants him to remember the twin who will never see such a future.

“Anytime he has a party, it’s going to be about her too,” with both names on the cakes, Butler said. “I mention her name every day for him, to let him know he was a twin and ‘your twin is your angel.’ And when he gets bigger, I’m going to get him a necklace where he can keep her ashes with him.”

Judge says he’ll block Gov. Ron DeSantis’ redistricting plan

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — A congressional map approved by Florida Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis and drawn by his staff is unconstitutional because it breaks up a district where Black voters can choose their representatives, a state judge said Wednesday.

Leon County Circuit Judge Layne Smith said he would issue a formal order Thursday or Friday to keep the maps from taking effect in November’s election. He made it clear he would rule in favor of voting rights groups challenging the maps.

Smith said the order will likely replace the DeSantis map with one of two that the Legislature included in a bill and sent to DeSantis in March. The governor vetoed the bill and later called the Legislature back into special session. The Republican-dominated House and Senate chose not to draw a new map, and instead passed the DeSantis map.

The challenge focuses on a north Florida district now held by Democratic U.S. Rep. Al Lawson. The district runs from Jacksonville west more than 200 miles (322 kilometers) to Gadsden County and nearly half of its population is Black.

“The judge recognizes that this map is unlawful and diminishes African Americans’ ability to elect representatives of their choice,” Lawson said in a statement emailed to news outlets. “DeSantis is wrong for enacting this Republican-leaning map that is in clear violation of the U.S. and state constitutions.”

DeSantis’ proposal prompted a protest by Black House members as the chamber was preparing to vote on the maps.

Smith said he will issue his order as soon as he can so the state can immediately appeal it. It may be the conservative state Supreme Court that ultimately resolves the dispute.

DeSantis’ office confirmed it will appeal.

“As Judge Smith implied, these complex constitutional matters of law were always going to be decided at the appellate level,” DeSantis spokeswoman Taryn Fenske said in an email. “We will undoubtedly be appealing his ruling and are confident the constitutional map enacted by the Florida legislature and signed into law passes legal muster.”

Smith said that while the DeSantis map is more compact, the issue of allowing Black voters to choose their representatives is more important.

“The district that has since been enacted and signed into law by the governor does disperse 367,000 African American votes between four different districts,” Smith said in a video call with both sides. “The African American population is nowhere near a plurality or a majority.”

Equal Ground, one of several voting rights groups that challenged the maps, praised Smith’s decision.

“No Floridian – including Governor DeSantis – is above the law,” Equal Ground founder Jasmine Burney-

Clark said in a statement emailed to news outlets. "This is one step forward in the fight to protect Black voters, and we will keep doing everything in our power to ensure our voices are heard."

The governor's office drew up a map it described as neutral on race and party affiliation, and which it said abided by both the state and federal constitutions.

Smith said his ruling will be based on the state constitution, not the U.S. Constitution.

Qualifying for federal office will run from June 13-17.

Internet troll faces trial after Capitol riot plea fizzles

A federal judge scheduled a trial next year for a far-right internet troll after the man, known to his social media followers as "Baked Alaska," balked at pleading guilty on Wednesday to a criminal charge stemming from the U.S. Capitol riot.

U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan refused to accept a guilty plea by Anthime Gionet after he professed his innocence at the start of what was scheduled to be a plea agreement hearing. Instead, the judge set a March 2023 trial date for Gionet, who is charged with a misdemeanor count of parading, demonstrating or picketing inside a Capitol building.

"If he wants a trial, he'll get a fair trial," Sullivan said.

After privately conferring with Gionet's lawyers, Assistant U.S. Attorney Elizabeth Aloï said prosecutors would leave the plea offer open for 60 days. The judge scheduled a July 22 status hearing for the case.

Gionet would have faced a maximum sentence of six months imprisonment if he had pleaded guilty to the misdemeanor.

During the riot on Jan. 6, 2021, Gionet streamed live video that showed himself inside the Capitol and repeatedly encouraging other rioters to stay there. He joined others in chanting, "Patriots are in control" and "Whose house? Our house!" Before leaving, he profanely called a police officer an "oathbreaker," the FBI said.

Gionet told the judge that he wanted a trial but claimed prosecutors had threatened to "hit" him with an additional felony charge.

"So I think this is probably the better route," he added.

"Are you pleading guilty because you're guilty?" Sullivan asked.

"I believe I'm innocent, your honor," Gionet replied.

"I can't take your plea of guilty if you tell me you're innocent," the judge said.

Aloï said prosecutors never threatened to charge Gionet with a felony if he didn't take the plea deal.

"We did say that the case would continue to be investigated and where the facts led is where the charges would ultimately lead," she said.

"I accept that representation," the judge said. "Your office has proceeded in a very honorable manner."

Gionet's lawyer has claimed he only went to Washington, D.C., to document what happened that day. Prosecutors disputed Gionet's contention that he is a member of the news media.

Other riot defendants have argued that they merely went to the Capitol as journalists to document what happened on Jan. 6. Infowars host Jonathan Owen Shroyer has asked a judge to throw out his riot charges, accusing prosecutors of trampling on his First Amendment rights to "protest, speak freely and report the news."

Federal authorities have used Gionet's video to prosecute other rioters, including three men from New York City. Antonio Ferrigno, Francis Connor and Anton Lunyk pleaded guilty on April 28 to riot-related charges. Gionet's livestream showed them in Sen. Jeff Merkley's office, according to court filings accompanying their plea agreements.

Gionet was arrested in Houston less than two weeks after the riot. He has moved from Arizona to Florida since his arrest.

Gionet, who grew up in Anchorage, Alaska, used social media to build a following in far-right political circles. He became known for posting videos in which he attempts to troll or pull pranks on his targets. He was scheduled to speak at the white nationalist "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, before it

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erupted in violence and bloodshed in 2017.

BuzzFeed, where Gionet once worked, reported that Twitter permanently banned him from its platform after the Charlottesville rally.

In January, Gionet was sentenced to 30 days in jail for misdemeanor convictions stemming from a December 2020 encounter in which authorities say he shot pepper spray at an employee at a bar in Scottsdale, Arizona.

More than 790 people have been charged with federal crimes related to the Capitol riot. Over 280 of them have pleaded guilty, mostly to misdemeanors, and over 170 have been sentenced. Approximately 100 others have trial dates.

US inflation dips from 4-decade high but still causing pain

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inflation eased slightly in April after months of relentless increases but remained near a four-decade high, making it hard for millions of American households to keep up with surging prices.

Consumer prices jumped 8.3% last month from a year ago, the government said Wednesday. That was below the 8.5% year-over-year surge in March, which was the highest since 1981. On a monthly basis, prices rose 0.3% from March to April, the smallest rise in eight months.

Still, Wednesday's report contained some cautionary signs that inflation may be becoming more entrenched. Excluding the volatile food and energy categories, so-called core prices jumped twice as much from March to April as they did the previous month. The increases were fueled by spiking prices for airline tickets, hotel rooms and new cars. Apartment rental costs also kept rising.

Those price jumps "make clear that there is still a long way to go before inflation returns to more acceptable levels," said Eric Winograd, U.S. economist at asset manager AB.

Even if it moderates, inflation will likely remain high well into 2023, economists say, leaving many Americans burdened by price increases that have outpaced pay raises. Especially hurt are lower-income and Black and Hispanic families, who on average spend a greater proportion of their incomes on gas, food and rent.

Wednesday's report also underscored the challenges for the Federal Reserve and White House in their struggles to tame inflation.

In April, a fallback in gas prices helped slow overall inflation. Nationally, average prices for a gallon of gas fell to as low as \$4.10 in April, according to AAA, after having spiked to \$4.32 in March. But since then, gas prices have surged to a record \$4.40 a gallon.

Grocery prices, too, are still soaring, in part because Russia's invasion of Ukraine has heightened the cost of wheat and other grains. Food prices rose 1% from March to April and nearly 11% from a year ago. That year-over-year increase is the biggest since 1980.

Such rapid inflation has led many Americans to cut back on spending. Among them is Patty Blackmon, who said she's been driving to fewer of her grandchildren's sports events since gas spiked to \$5.89 in Las Vegas, where she lives.

To save money, Blackmon, 68, also hasn't visited her hairdresser in 18 months. And she's reconsidering her plan to drive this summer to visit relatives in Arkansas. She was shocked recently, she said, to see a half-gallon of organic milk reach \$6.

"Holy cow!" she thought. "How do parents give their kids milk?"

Blackmon has cut back on meat, and "a steak is almost out of the question," she said. Instead, she is eating more salads and canned soups.

Likewise, David Irby of Halifax, Virginia, said he's been cutting back on food and other higher-cost expenses. A veteran who retired on disability in 2015, Irby, 57, said he has switched to chicken from beef and quit buying bacon or junk food, like his favorite treat, Cheetos.

Irby's biggest worry? Replacing his 22-year-old Ford truck, which is no longer reliable on long trips. A new one costs \$50,000. Even a 5-year old used version is about \$40,000.

"I don't know how people on a fixed income can buy a vehicle now," he said. "It takes me almost two years to make \$40,000."

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Turmoil overseas could potentially accelerate inflation in the coming months. If the European Union, for example, decides to bar imports of Russian oil, world oil prices could rise. So could U.S. gas prices. And China's COVID lockdowns could worsen supply chain snarls.

In April, airfares soared a record 18.6%, the largest monthly increase since record-keeping began in 1963. And hotel prices jumped 1.7% from March to April.

Southwest Airlines said last month that it foresees much higher revenue and profits this year as Americans flood airports after having postponed travel for two years. Southwest said its average fare soared 32% in the first three months of the year from the same period last year.

There are, though, signs that supply chains are improving for some goods. Wednesday's report showed that prices for appliances and clothing both fell 0.8%, while the cost of used cars dropped 0.4%, the third straight decline. Used cars and other goods drove much of the initial inflation spike last year as Americans stepped up spending after vaccines became widespread.

Inflation is also posing a serious political problem for President Joe Biden and congressional Democrats in the midterm election season, with Republicans arguing that Biden's \$1.9 trillion financial support package last March overheated the economy by flooding it with stimulus checks, enhanced unemployment aid and child tax credit payments.

On Tuesday, Biden sought to take the initiative and declared inflation "the No. 1 problem facing families today" and "my top domestic priority."

Previous signs that U.S. inflation might be peaking didn't last. Price increases decelerated last August and September, suggesting at the time that higher inflation might be temporary, as many economists — and officials at the Fed — had suggested. But prices shot up again in October, prompting Fed Chair Jerome Powell to start shifting policy toward higher rates.

Wednesday's figures will keep the Fed on track to implement what may become its fastest series of interest rate increases in 33 years, economists said. Last week, the central bank raised its benchmark short-term rate by a half-point, its steepest increase in two decades. And Powell signaled that more such sharp rate hikes are coming.

The Powell Fed is seeking to pull off the notoriously difficult — and risky — task of cooling the economy enough to slow inflation without causing a recession. Economists say such an outcome is possible but unlikely with inflation this high.

One of the Fed's concerns is that Americans might start to expect chronically high inflation, which can make rising prices harder to bring under control because such expectations can be self-fulfilling. If Americans expect costs to rise, they will likely demand higher pay. Those higher labor costs, in turn, can force companies to charge more, thereby heightening inflation.

So far, measures of longer-term inflation expectations have stayed largely in check even as prices have soared. Still, some people are starting to push for higher wages as prices rise.

"We haven't had raises yet based on inflation, and we think we should because now inflation is so high," Rochelle Guillou, 26, said, referring to her and her friend Hannah Lerman, who work at a startup in Boston.

Lerman, 25, said she thinks the cost of everything from food to online delivery services to clothes is on the way up.

"Rent is a huge issue," she said. "They're actually trying to sell my building right now, so we know our rent is going to go up. We don't even know how much but yeah, rent is going crazy."

Study finds cleaner air leads to more Atlantic hurricanes

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Cleaner air in United States and Europe is brewing more Atlantic hurricanes, a new U.S. government study found.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration study links changes in regionalized air pollution across the globe to storm activity going both up and down. A 50% decrease in pollution particles and droplets in Europe and the U.S. is linked to a 33% increase in Atlantic storm formation in the past couple

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decades, while the opposite is happening in the Pacific with more pollution and fewer typhoons, according to the study published in Wednesday's Science Advances.

NOAA hurricane scientist Hiroyuki Murakami ran numerous climate computer simulations to explain change in storm activity in different parts of the globe that can't be explained by natural climate cycles and found a link to aerosol pollution from industry and cars — sulfur particles and droplets in the air that make it hard to breathe and see.

Scientists had long known that aerosol pollution cools the air, at times reducing the larger effects of greenhouse gases from the burning of fossil fuel and earlier studies mentioned it as a possibility in increase in Atlantic storms, but Murakami found it a factor around the world and a more direct link.

Hurricanes need warm water — which is warmed by the air — for fuel and are harmed by wind shear, which changes in upper level winds that can decapitate storm tops. Cleaner air in the Atlantic and dirtier air in the Pacific, from pollution in China and India, mess with both of those, Murakami said.

In the Atlantic, aerosol pollution peaked around 1980 and has been dropping steadily since. That means the cooling that masked some of the greenhouse gas warming is going away, so sea surface temperatures are increasing even more, Murakami said. On top of that the lack of cooling aerosols has helped push the jet stream — the river of air that moves weather from west to east on a roller-coaster like path — further north, reducing the shear that had been dampening hurricane formation.

"That's why the Atlantic has gone pretty much crazy since the mid-90s and why it was so quiet in the 70s and 80s," said climate and hurricane scientist Jim Kossin of the risk firm The Climate Service. He wasn't part of the study but said it makes sense. The aerosol pollution "gave a lot of people in the 70s and 80s a break, but we're all paying for it now."

There are other factors in tropical cyclone activity with La Nina and El Nino — natural fluctuations in equatorial Pacific temperatures that alter climate worldwide — being huge. Human-caused climate change from greenhouse gases, that will grow as aerosol pollution reductions level out, is another, and there other natural long-term climatic oscillations, Murakami said.

Climate change from greenhouse gases is expected to reduce the overall number of storms slightly, but increase the number and strength of the most intense hurricanes, make them wetter and increase storm surge flooding, Murakami, Kossin and other scientists said.

While aerosol cooling is maybe half to one-third smaller than the warming from greenhouse gases, it is about twice as effective in reducing tropical cyclone intensity compared to warming increasing it, said Columbia University climate scientist Adam Sobel, who wasn't part of the study. As aerosol pollution stays at low levels in the Atlantic and greenhouse gas emissions grow, climate change's impact on storms will increase in the future and become more prominent, Murakami said.

In the Pacific, aerosol pollution from Asian nations has gone up 50% from 1980 to 2010 and is starting to drop now. Tropical cyclone formation from 2001 to 2020 is 14% lower than 1980 to 2000, Murakami said.

Murakami also found a correlation that was a bit different heading south. A drop in European and American aerosol pollution changed global air patterns in a way that it meant a decrease in southern hemisphere storms around Australia.

But as much as more hurricanes in the Atlantic can be a problem, the death from extra storms don't compare to the seven million people a year globally who die from air pollution, said University of Washington public health professor Kristie Ebi, who studies health, climate and extreme weather.

"Air pollution is a major killer, so reducing emissions is critical no matter what happens with the number of cyclones," said Ebi, who wasn't part of the study.

US overdose deaths hit record 107,000 last year, CDC says

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — More than 107,000 Americans died of drug overdoses last year, setting another tragic record in the nation's escalating overdose epidemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated Wednesday.

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The provisional 2021 total translates to roughly one U.S. overdose death every 5 minutes. It marked a 15% increase from the previous record, set the year before. The CDC reviews death certificates and then makes an estimate to account for delayed and incomplete reporting.

Dr. Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, called the latest numbers “truly staggering.”

The White House issued a statement calling the accelerating pace of overdose deaths “unacceptable” and promoting its recently announced national drug control strategy. It calls for measures like connecting more people to treatment, disrupting drug trafficking and expanding access to the overdose-reversing medication naloxone.

U.S. overdose deaths have risen most years for more than two decades. The increase began in the 1990s with overdoses involving opioid painkillers, followed by waves of deaths led by other opioids like heroin and — most recently — illicit fentanyl.

Last year, overdoses involving fentanyl and other synthetic opioids surpassed 71,000, up 23% from the year before. There also was a 23% increase in deaths involving cocaine and a 34% increase in deaths involving meth and other stimulants.

Overdose deaths are often attributed to more than one drug. Some people take multiple drugs and inexpensive fentanyl has been increasingly cut into other drugs, often without the buyers’ knowledge, officials say.

“The net effect is that we have many more people, including those who use drugs occasionally and even adolescents, exposed to these potent substances that can cause someone to overdose even with a relatively small exposure,” Volkow said in a statement.

Experts say the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the problem as lockdowns and other restrictions isolated those with drug addictions and made treatment harder to get.

Overdose death trends are geographically uneven. Alaska saw a 75% increase in 2021 — the largest jump of any state. In Hawaii, overdose deaths fell by 2%.

Most Great Barrier Reef coral studied this year was bleached

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — More than 90% of Great Barrier Reef coral surveyed this year was bleached in the fourth such mass event in seven years in the world’s largest coral reef ecosystem, Australian government scientists said.

Bleaching is caused by global warming, but this is the reef’s first bleaching event during a La Niña weather pattern, which is associated with cooler Pacific Ocean temperatures, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Authority said in its annual report released late Tuesday that found 91% of the areas surveyed were affected.

Bleaching in 2016, 2017 and 2020 damaged two-thirds of the coral in the famed reef off Australia’s eastern coast.

Coral bleaches as a heat stress response and scientists hope most of the coral will recover from the current event, said David Wachenfeld, chief scientist at the authority, which manages the reef ecosystem.

“The early indications are that the mortality won’t be very high,” Wachenfeld said on Wednesday.

“We are hoping that we will see most of the coral that is bleached recover and we will end up with an event rather more like 2020 when, yes, there was mass bleaching, but there was low mortality,” Wachenfeld added.

The bleaching events in 2016 and 2017 led to “quite high levels of coral mortality,” Wachenfeld said.

Simon Bradshaw, a researcher at the Climate Council, an Australia-based group that tracks climate change, said the report demonstrated the reef’s survival depended on steep global emission cuts within the decade.

“This is heartbreaking. This is deeply troubling,” Bradshaw said. “It shows that our Barrier Reef really is in very serious trouble indeed.”

Last December, the first month of the Southern Hemisphere summer, was the hottest December the reef had experienced since 1900. A “marine heatwave” had set in by late February, the report said.

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A United Nations delegation visited the reef in March to assess whether the reef's World Heritage listing should be downgraded due to the ravages of climate change.

In July last year, Australia garnered enough international support to defer an attempt by UNESCO, the United Nations' cultural organization, to downgrade the reef's World Heritage status to "in danger" because of damage caused by climate change.

But the question will be back on the World Heritage Committee's agenda at its next annual meeting.

The Great Barrier Reef accounts for around 10% of the world's coral reef ecosystems and was named because of the extensive hazards it posed to 18th century seafarers. The network of more than 2,500 reefs covers 348,000 square kilometers (134,000 square miles).

Coral is made up of tiny animals called polyps that are fed by microscopic algae that live inside the reefs and are sensitive to changes in water temperatures.

The algae provide the reefs with their kaleidoscope of colors and produce sugars through photosynthesis that provide the coral with most of its nutrients.

Rising ocean temperatures turn the chemicals that the algae produce into toxins. The coral turns white as it effectively spits the poisonous algae out.

Heat stress beyond a few weeks can lead the coral to die of starvation.

The latest bleaching is an unwelcome reminder of the differences in climate change policy among Australian politicians.

The conservative government seeking reelection on May 21 has less ambitious emission reduction targets than the center-left opposition is promising.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison's Liberal Party aims to reduce Australia's emissions by 26% to 28% below 2005 levels by 2030.

The opposition Labor Party has promised to reduce emissions by 43% by the end of the decade.

Morrison was widely criticized at the U.N. climate conference last November for failing to set a more ambitious target.

The environmental group Greenpeace Australia Pacific said in a statement the extent of the latest bleaching was "another damning indictment of the Morrison government which has failed to protect the reef and exacerbated the problem through its support of fossil fuels."

Wives of Mariupol defenders to pope: 'You are our last hope'

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The wives of two Ukrainian soldiers defending the Mariupol steel mill met with Pope Francis on Wednesday and begged him to intervene to arrange for a third-party evacuation of the troops before Russian soldiers capture or kill them.

"You are our last hope. We hope you can save their lives. Please don't let them die," said a weeping Kateryna Prokopenko as she greeted Francis at the end of his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square.

Standing by her side, Yuliia Fedusiuk, told Francis that food and water were running out in the mill, that some soldiers were injured or dead and that those who are alive were ready to lay down their arms if they could be evacuated to a third country.

"They will not go to Russian captivity because they will be tortured and killed," Fedusiuk told Francis, according to a video of the encounter shot by another member of their entourage, Pyotr Verzilov, a prominent member of the Russian protest group Pussy Riot who is working on a documentary about Ukraine.

Prokopenko's husband, Denys Prokopenko, is the commander of the Azov Regiment in the Azovstal mill, while Fedusiuk's husband, Arseniy Fedusiuk, is one of the Azov fighters who have been defending the mill from encroaching Russian forces for more than two months.

The young women have been in Italy for over two weeks seeking to rally international support for a diplomatic resolution to the standoff at the plant, the last holdout of Ukrainian resistance in the strategic port city.

Francis, who has been hobbled by knee trouble that makes walking and standing painful, stood up to

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greet the women, a gesture he didn't extend to others who lined up to see him Wednesday at the end of the audience. He held their hands as they wept, blessed them and said he had spoken about the plight of the soldiers with Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, whom he has dispatched to Ukraine.

Verzilov told Francis that time was running out for the troops in the Azovstal mill.

"We feel that if some emergency intervention does not happen in the next few days it will end in a big tragedy," Verzilov told The Associated Press afterward. He said Francis said he was aware of the standoff. "He understands how tragic it is and will do what he can."

The United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross have organized a series of evacuations of civilians from the mill, which had sheltered hundreds of people in its warren of underground tunnels and bunkers. But soldiers, and apparently some of their family members, have stayed behind.

Verzilov, the Russian activist and a publisher of independent news site Mediazona, said Turkey has been trying to seek a resolution to the standoff, but that none had been found.

"Our soldiers are ready to be evacuated to a third country. They are ready to lay down their arms in case of evacuation to a third country," Propkopenko told journalists after the brief meeting. "We all are ready to help them I hope."

Fedusiuk said her husband had recently asked her to research how to survive without water.

"Water is running out. They have no food, no water, no medicine," she said. "They are dying every day. Every day one or two injured soldiers are dying."

She said she understood some civilians, who were relatives of the soldiers, remained in the mill because they feared they would be identified at Russian-run "filtration camps" along the evacuation route and wouldn't be allowed to enter Ukrainian territory.

Retired AP photographer Ut gives pope 'Napalm Girl' photo

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Retired Associated Press photographer Nick Ut met Wednesday with Pope Francis and gave him a copy of his Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of a young Vietnamese girl running naked down the road after a napalm attack.

Ut and Kim Phuc Phan Thi, whose terror the AP photographer captured on June 8, 1972 during the Vietnam War, greeted Francis at the end of his general audience Wednesday in St. Peter's Square, ahead of the 50th anniversary of the iconic image.

Kim Phuc, who later resettled in Canada and raised a family there, had met the former Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio several years ago in his native Buenos Aires, Argentina, where she had travelled as part of her work as a goodwill ambassador for the U.N. culture agency.

"He looked at the picture and remembered her right away," Ut told AP in the piazza moments after the encounter. Kim Phuc said she wasn't sure Francis would remember her, given the hundreds of people he meets every day.

"But he remembered very well. He said 'I remember you, I know you. Do you remember we met each other in Buenos Aires?' and I said 'Yes I do. I said 'God bless you with good health and for all you have done for peace.'"

Ut and Kim Phuc were in Italy to open an exhibit of his photographs in Milan ahead of the anniversary of his "Napalm Girl" photograph. Such images have a potent effect on Francis: He has previously handed out pocket-sized copies of another wartime photograph of a young Nagasaki boy carrying his dead brother on his back that was taken by an American military photographer during World War II.

Francis, who named himself after the peace-loving St. Francis of Assisi, had printed on the photo "The fruit of war."

Ut was only 21 when he took the Vietnam photo, then set his camera aside to rush the 9-year-old Kim Phuc to a hospital, where doctors saved her life.

"It was only me with my driver there, then I said I don't want to leave because I know she will die," Ut recalled. "Then I picked her up, put her in the van and I brought her to the hospital."

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Ut later became a AP photographer based in Los Angeles, photographing A-list celebrities until he retired from the news agency in 2017.

Recalling the horror of that day, Kim Phuc said that 50 years ago she was known to the world only as a victim of war.

"But right now, 50 years later, I am no longer a victim of war. I am a mother, a grandmother and a survivor calling out for peace," she said.

Climate change to make droughts longer, more common, says UN

By WANJOHI KABUKURU Associated Press

The frequency and duration of droughts will continue to increase due to human-caused climate change, with water scarcity already affecting billions of people across the world, the United Nations warned in a report Wednesday.

The U.N. desertification agency, which is currently hosting a conference of parties in Abidjan in Ivory Coast, estimates that roughly one third of the world's population — 2.3 billion people — is already facing water scarcity, with that number expected to double by 2050.

Although no region is spared from drought, the report noted that Africa is the hardest hit continent, with the Americas, India and Australia also highlighted as areas of particular current and future concern.

The ongoing debilitating drought in the east and Horn of Africa was highlighted as one of the "dramatic consequences" of climate change by the U.N. agency. The continent suffered 134 recorded droughts in the past century, with over half occurring in east Africa.

"We used to be able to grow enough tomatoes that we could stay fed for 8 months," said Kenyan farmer Kheira Osman Yusuf, whose crops have been without rain for over a year. "We used to have luscious mango trees and papaya trees." She added that food sources have become incredibly scarce and the drinking water supply has also greatly suffered. She explained they sometimes had to resort to drinking from the livestock reservoir, running the risk of getting sick from contamination.

The agency's lead scientist Barron Orr told the Associated Press that the world needs to be more proactive rather than reactive when it comes to dealing with drought-related disasters. Orr said the next step for hardest-hit Africa is to "direct investments to build resilience, so as to bounce back from drought."

India saw a drought-related shrink of 5% to its gross domestic product between 1998 and 2017 and Australia's agricultural productivity slumped 18% between 2002 and 2010 due to drought. The country can also expect more wildfires like those in late 2019 and early 2020 which were spurred by a lack of rainfall, the report warned.

The same is true for the Amazon, the U.N. said, with three droughts occurring since the turn of the century and triggering forest fires, with climate change and deforestation also to blame. The agency estimates that 16% of the region's remaining forests will burn by 2050 if deforestation continues at its current rate.

But with the right adaptation measures, water scarcity across the globe can be limited, the report said. It suggests smarter agricultural techniques which use less water while producing more food, drought action plans and greater investment in soil health, new technologies and early warning systems can all help curtail food and water shortages.

"We need to steer towards the solutions rather than continuing with destructive actions," Ibrahim Thiaw, the executive secretary of the desertification agency, said. "We must build and rebuild our landscapes better, mimicking nature wherever possible and creating functional ecological systems."

US, Western Europe fret over uncertain Ukraine war endgame

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — An interminable and unwinnable war in Europe? That's what NATO leaders fear and are bracing for as Russia's war in Ukraine grinds into its third month with little sign of a decisive military victory for either side and no resolution in sight.

The possibility of a stalemate is fueling concerns that Ukraine may remain a deadly European battlefield

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and a source of continental and global instability for months, or even years, to come.

Energy and food security are the most immediate worries, but massive Western support for Ukraine while the world is still emerging from coronavirus pandemic and struggling to deal with the effects of climate change could deepen the toll on the global economy. And should Russia choose to escalate, the risk of a broader conflict rises.

The U.S. and its allies are pumping a steady stream of lethal weaponry into Ukraine to keep it in the fight. While most analysts say Kyiv is holding its own at the least, those infusions must continue if they are to support President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's vow to win, or at least continue to match or beat back, Moscow's advances.

Just as Russian President Vladimir Putin has not signaled a willingness to intensify the invasion with either a general mobilization of troops or the use of unconventional arms, neither has he shown any sign of backing down. Nor has Zelenskyy, who is now asserting that Ukraine will not only beat back the current Russian invasion but regain control of Crimea and other areas that Russia has occupied or otherwise controlled since 2014.

"It's very difficult to see how you could get a negotiated solution at this point," said Ian Kelly, a retired veteran diplomat who served as U.S. ambassador to Georgia, another former Soviet republic on which Russia has territorial designs. He added, "Neither side is willing to stop fighting and probably the likeliest outcome is a war that lasts a couple of years. Ukraine would be a festering sore in the middle of Europe."

"There's no way that Ukraine is going to step back," Kelly said. "They think they're gonna win."

At the same time, Kelly said that no matter how many miscalculations Putin has made about the strength and will of Ukraine to resist or the unity and resolve of the NATO allies, Putin cannot accept defeat or anything short of a scenario that he can claim has achieved success.

"It would be political suicide for Putin to withdraw," Kelly said.

U.S. officials, starting with President Joe Biden, seem to agree, even after Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin raised eyebrows by saying after a visit to Kyiv last month that Washington's goal is not only to help Ukraine defend itself but to "weaken" Russia to the point where it does not pose a threat.

Putin "doesn't have a way out right now, and I'm trying to figure out what we do about that," Biden said on Monday even after he signed legislation designed to reboot the World War II-era "lend-lease" program and appealed to Congress to approve a \$40 billion package of military and humanitarian aid for Ukraine.

So what to do? French President Emmanuel Macron has placed a premium on a negotiated settlement that saves face for both Russia and Ukraine.

"We will have a peace to build tomorrow, let us never forget that," Macron said on Monday. "We will have to do this with Ukraine and Russia around the table. The end of the discussion and the negotiation will be set by Ukraine and Russia. But it will not be done in denial, nor in exclusion of each other, nor even in humiliation."

U.S. officials aren't so sure, although they allow that the endgame is up to Ukraine.

"Our strategy is to see to it that Ukraine emerges from this victorious," State Department spokesman Ned Price said this week. "Ukraine will do so at the negotiating table. Our goal is to strengthen Ukraine's position at that negotiating table as we continue to place mounting costs on the Russian Federation."

But, the high-stakes uncertainty over what constitutes a "victorious" Ukraine has alarmed officials in some European capitals, notably those in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which are NATO members bordering Russia and especially worried about Moscow's possible future intentions.

For Baltic nations and other countries on NATO's eastern flank, the threat is real and memories of Soviet occupation and rule remain fresh. Concessions to Russia in Ukraine will only embolden Putin to push further west, they say.

"To be honest, we are still not talking about the endgame," Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis lamented to the The Associated Press in an interview on Monday. He said any territorial concessions in Ukraine would usher in a world where the "rules-based order" has been replaced by a "jungle rules-based order."

Landsbergis suggested that Western nations issue public statements about what success would be.

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"Where we would consider what we would take for victory, actual victory? What would be the scenario that we would like?"

Landsbergis has been outspoken in calls for Putin to be ousted as Russia's leader, going well beyond the U.S. position and that of other NATO leaders. He says regime change in Moscow is the only way to protect European and Western security in the long term.

"Coming from me it's much easier to say we need regime change in Russia, so we've been quite blunt and open about it," he said. "Maybe for United States it's much more much more difficult to be open about it, but still, at some point we have to talk about this because it's so important."

Young athletes from Ukraine escape war, train in Albania

By LLAZAR SEMINI Associated Press

ELBASAN, Albania (AP) — After fleeing from a war zone, a group of young Ukrainian track and field athletes have made their way to safety in Albania. Their minds are still between the two countries.

"I miss my mother's food and grandmother's advice," said 17-year-old Maria Lariva, who throws the shot put. "I miss my coach and the stadium, my city, home, my country, everything."

Lariva and seven other teenage athletes were evacuated from Bakhmut, a city in the Donetsk region that is part of Ukraine's industrial heartland — where Russia has focused its fighting after its early failure to sweep across the country and overrun the capital.

Their families have stayed behind.

"I talk with my family every day. Many times a day," said 17-year-old Valentyn Loboda, a pole vaulter who has been training in the long jump since the group arrived in Elbasan on March 31. "We speak about how is going on in Ukraine, how's going on in Albania."

The eight athletes are training at the Sport Club Elbasani with help from the Albanian Olympic committee and the city itself, which is located about 45 kilometers (30 miles) south of the capital Tirana.

Leaving home was hard, and the train ride was dangerous.

"(Everybody) lied down, closed doors and windows for about 30 minutes fearing the aircrafts flying quite close," Lariva said, describing the journey from Kramatorsk to Dubno.

The group then made their way to Lutsk before entering Poland and taking a flight to Albania.

The athletes compete in various sports in track and field. Some of them are aiming to reach the required standards to take part in the World Athletics U20 Championship in Cali, Colombia, in early August.

Lariva, playing a video sent to her from her mother showing a giant whole near her home created by a bomb, said she breaks down in tears when her mother doesn't respond to phone calls.

"During shelling there is no internet," she said.

Pavlo Zadorozhiy, a 71-year-old coach, is worried that this experience will affect the potential career of his athletes. But he said he is "more concerned of the people dying in my country, the children, and seeing horrible views every day, broken houses."

Artin Kovaci, the head of the Elbasani sports club, said the hosts try to fulfil "any request they have," adding that a club official accompanies the athletes almost all day long.

There was even a pleasant surprise when Albanian long jumper Izmir Smajlaj came to Elbasan to meet with Loboda. Smajlaj won the gold medal at the 2017 European indoor championships in Belgrade, Serbia, and is the country's record holder in the event.

"We were friends in Facebook," Loboda said. "It was great that Izmir, the great athlete, came to meet me."

Loboda said he hopes to have a successful sports career and one day return home to Ukraine to teach English.

"I want to go back because I miss my family," Loboda said. "Albania is a good country, but we are Ukrainian. We want to (go to) our home, to our parents."

Today in History: May 12, Soviets lift Berlin Blockade

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By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, May 12, the 132nd day of 2022. There are 233 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 12, 1949, the Soviet Union lifted the Berlin Blockade, which the Western powers had succeeded in circumventing with their Berlin Airlift.

On this date:

In 1780, during the Revolutionary War, the besieged city of Charleston, South Carolina, surrendered to British forces.

In 1932, the body of Charles Lindbergh Jr., the 20-month-old kidnapped son of Charles and Anne Lindbergh, was found in a wooded area near Hopewell, New Jersey.

In 1933, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration were established to provide help for the needy and farmers.

In 1943, during World War II, Axis forces in North Africa surrendered. The two-week Trident Conference, headed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, opened in Washington.

In 1958, the United States and Canada signed an agreement to create the North American Air Defense Command (later the North American Aerospace Defense Command, or NORAD).

In 1970, the Senate voted unanimously to confirm Harry A. Blackmun as a Supreme Court justice.

In 1975, the White House announced the new Cambodian government had seized an American merchant ship, the *Mayaguez*, in international waters. (U.S. Marines gained control of the ship three days after its seizure, not knowing the 39 civilian members of the crew had already been released by Cambodia.)

In 1982, in Fatima, Portugal, security guards overpowered a Spanish priest armed with a bayonet who attacked Pope John Paul II. (In 2008, the pope's longtime private secretary revealed that the pontiff was slightly wounded in the assault.)

In 1986, the military action-drama film "Top Gun," starring Tom Cruise and Kelly McGillis and released by Paramount Pictures, had its world premiere in New York.

In 2008, a devastating 7.9 magnitude earthquake in China's Sichuan province left more than 87,000 people dead or missing.

In 2009, five Miami men were convicted in a plot to blow up FBI buildings and Chicago's Sears Tower; one man was acquitted. Suspected Nazi death camp guard John Demjanjuk (dem-YAHN'-yuk) was deported from the United States to Germany. (On this date in 2011, Demjanjuk, who maintained his innocence, would be convicted by a German court of being an accessory to the murder of tens of thousands of Jews; he died in March 2012 at age 91.)

In 2011, CEOs of the five largest oil companies went before the Senate Finance Committee, where Democrats challenged the executives to justify tax breaks at a time when people were paying \$4 a gallon for gas.

Ten years ago: Miami's LeBron James became the eighth player in NBA history to receive the MVP award three times.

Five years ago: Dozens of countries were hit with a huge cyberextortion attack that locked up computers and held users' files for ransom at a multitude of hospitals, companies and government agencies. Pope Francis urged Catholics to "tear down all walls" and spread peace during a visit to Fatima, Portugal, as he marked the 100th anniversary of one of the most unique events of the 20th-century Catholic Church: the visions of the Virgin Mary reported by three illiterate shepherd children.

One year ago: Israel pressed ahead with a fierce military offensive in the Gaza Strip, killing as many as 10 senior Hamas military figures and toppling two high-rise towers housing Hamas facilities; the Islamic militant group showed no signs of backing down, and fired hundreds of rockets at Israeli cities. Republicans dumped Rep. Liz Cheney from her House leadership post for her persistent repudiation of Donald Trump's election falsehoods, underscoring the hold that Trump retained on his party. The nation's largest fuel pipeline restarted operations, days after it was forced to shut down by a gang of hackers. Jay-Z, Foo

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Fighters and the Go-Go's were elected to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame their first time on the ballot, leading a class that also included Tina Turner, Carole King and Todd Rundgren.

Today's Birthdays: Composer Burt Bacharach is 94. Actor Millie Perkins is 86. R&B singer Jayotis Washington is 81. Country singer Billy Swan is 80. Actor Linda Dano is 79. Actor Lindsay Crouse is 74. Singer-musician Steve Winwood is 74. Actor Gabriel Byrne is 72. Actor Bruce Boxleitner is 72. Singer Billy Squier is 72. Blues singer-musician Guy Davis is 70. Country singer Kix Brooks is 67. Actor Kim Greist is 64. Rock musician Eric Singer (KISS) is 64. Actor Ving Rhames is 63. Rock musician Billy Duffy is 61. Actor Emilio Estevez is 60. Actor April Grace is 60. Actor Vanessa A. Williams is 59. TV personality/chef Carla Hall is 58. Actor Stephen Baldwin is 56. Actor Scott Schwartz is 54. Actor Kim Fields is 53. Actor Samantha Mathis is 52. Actor Jamie Luner is 51. Actor Christian Campbell is 50. Actor Rhea Seehorn is 50. Actor Mackenzie Astin is 49. Country musician Matt Mangano (The Zac Brown Band) is 46. Actor Rebecca Herbst is 45. Actor Malin (MAH'-lin) Akerman is 44. Actor Jason Biggs is 44. Actor Rami Malek (RAH'-mee MA'-lihk) is 41. Actor-singer Clare Bowen is 38. Actor Emily VanCamp is 36. Actor Malcolm David Kelley is 30. Actor Sullivan Sweeten is 27.