

Groton Daily Independent

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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 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.

Monday, May 16

Senior Menu: Chicken Alfredo, broccoli, spinach salad, mandarin oranges, bread stick.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal with toppings.

School Lunch: Mac and cheese, cooked carrots.

6:30 a.m.: Emmanuel Bible Study

10 a.m.: NEC GIRLS Golf at Moccasin Creek CC

10 a.m.: JH Track Meet at Hamlin

1 p.m.: Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center

7:30 p.m.: St. John's Christian Literature Circle

Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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

Tuesday, May 17

Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potatoes, stewed tomatoes, apricots, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Hashbrowns, pizza.

School Lunch: Popcorn chicken, mashed potatoes.

9 a.m.: St. John's Quilting

2 p.m.: DARE Graduation in the Arena

7 p.m.: City Council Meeting

Methodist: Bible Study at 9:30 a.m.; Conde Ad Council

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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A sign of Spring

The weather has seen its ups and downs, but Julianna Kosel caught this picture of a butterfly on a blooming plum tree on a beautiful sunny day.

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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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GHS Graduation is Sunday, 2 p.m.

The graduation ceremony for the GHS 2022 graduating seniors will be held Sunday, May 15, 2022, at the GHS Arena. The event will be livestreamed on GDILIVE.COM. As a GDI Subscriber, you will be able to watch the event for free.

The following students will take to the stage.

Kennedy Anderson

Jordan Bjerke

Madisen Bjerke

Jackson Cogley

Jace Craig

Ryder Daly

Andrea Davidson

Madeline Fliehs

Megan Fliehs

Kelsie Frost

Marcos Garcia

Hannah Gustafson

Brayden Hansen

Wyatt Hearnen

Brooklyn Imrie

Sarah Jacobs

Rease Jandel

Seth Johnson

Trey Johnson

Trista Keith

Pierce Kettering

Landon Kokales

Julianna Kosel

Jace Kroll

Kansas Kroll

Lane Krueger

Kaden Kurtz

Kody Lehr

Riley Leicht

Allyssa Locke

Macine McGannon

Evin Nehls

River Pardick

Favian

Sanchez-Gonzalez

Cassandra Schultz

Trinity Smith

Spencer Sperry

Michal Tabke

Alyssa Thaler

Emilie Thurston

Travis Townsend

Torrence Wiseman

Tatum Wright

Jayden Zak

Christina Zoellner

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THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

*Flowers appear on the earth;
the season of singing has come,
the cooing of doves is heard
in our land.*

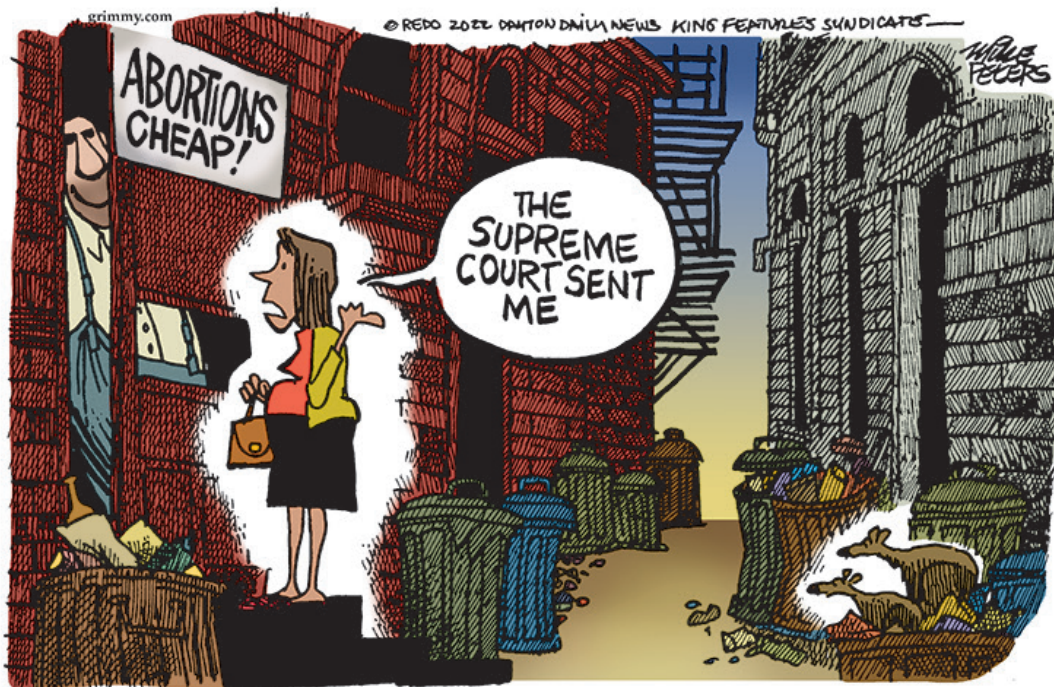
Song of Songs 2:12



Program cover design by Georges Auriol (1895)



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BIBLE TRIVIA by Wilson Casey

1. Is the book of Ezra in the Old Testament, New Testament or neither?
2. From Galatians 5:22-23, the fruit of the Spirit is made up of how many traits? 3, 4, 9, 12
3. Which son of David had been drinking much wine when he was killed? *Amnon, Kileab, Absalom, Shephatiah*
4. From Psalms 114, what do mountains skip like? *Rocks, Children, Rams, Stars*
5. Who was the mother of Samuel? *Deborah, Rachel, Sarai, Hannah*
6. In Judges 15, who prayed for a drink of water? *Elijah, Jeremiah, Samson, Ezekiel*

ANSWERS: 1) Old; 2) 9; 3) Amnon; 4) Rams; 5) Hannah; 6) Samson

“Test Your Bible Knowledge,” a book with 1,206 multiple-choice questions by columnist Wilson Casey, is available in stores and online.

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Comfort foods Made fast and healthy by Healthy Exchanges Chicken Fricassee

My grandmother could make something out of nothing ... and often had to! She ran a boarding house during the Great Depression, and she was well-known as a great cook. This is a healthier (and easier) version of one of my favorites.

- 16 ounces skinned and boned uncooked chicken breasts, cut into 4 pieces
- 1 1/2 cups frozen sliced carrots, thawed
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 1 (10 3/4-ounce) can reduced-fat and -sodium cream of chicken soup
- 1/4 cup water
- 1/2 teaspoon dried marjoram
- 2 teaspoons dried parsley flakes

1. Spray a pressure cooker container with butter-flavored cooking spray. Evenly place chicken pieces in prepared container and cook uncovered over medium heat for 4 minutes on each side. Sprinkle carrots, celery and onion over chicken.

2. In a small bowl, combine chicken soup, water, marjoram and parsley. Pour soup mixture evenly over top. Cover and bring to low pressure. Lower heat to stabilize pressure and cook 12 minutes.

3. Remove from heat, wait for pressure to be released, remove cover and stir. For each serving, place 1 piece of chicken on a plate and evenly spoon about 1/2 cup vegetable mixture next to it. Makes 4 servings. Freezes well.

* Each serving equals: 192 calories, 4g fat, 25g protein, 14g carb., 405mg sodium, 2g fiber; Diabetic Exchanges: 3 Meat, 1 Vegetable, 1/2 Starch.

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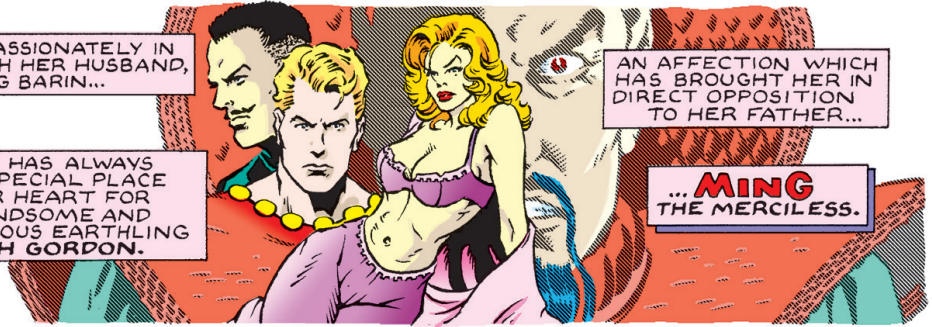
FLASH GORDON
Character Profile:
Aura

THOUGH PASSIONATELY IN LOVE WITH HER HUSBAND, KING BARIN...

...AURA HAS ALWAYS HAD A SPECIAL PLACE IN HER HEART FOR THE HANDSOME AND COURAGEOUS EARTHLING FLASH GORDON.

AN AFFECTION WHICH HAS BROUGHT HER IN DIRECT OPPOSITION TO HER FATHER...

...**MING**
THE MERCILESS.



FLASH GORDON
5-8
By JIM KEEFE

AS THE CREATURES LOCK IN A DEATH EMBRACE, A SECTION OF MING'S SPECTATOR BOOTH IS TORN ASUNDER.



BARIN!

HE'S GONE...
CHOKE!
AND IT'S ALL MY FAULT!
WHY DID I EVER LISTEN TO YOU!



IT'S TOO LATE FOR REGRETS. YOU'VE CHOSEN YOUR PATH. YOUR PLACE IS WITH ME NOW.

AS MING LEADS HIS GRIEF-STRIKEN DAUGHTER AWAY...

BELOW, IN THE WRECKAGE, FLASH QUICKLY MAKES USE OF THE FALLEN GUARD'S KEYS.

ANYTHING BROKEN?

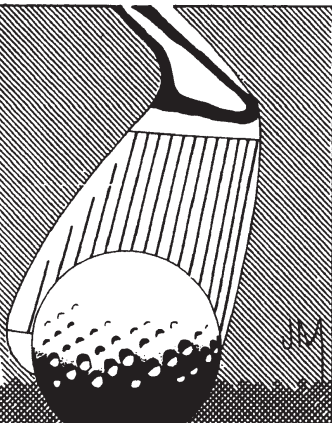
I'LL BE OKAY... THE DRAGON MAN BROKE MY FALL.

HOLD...
SOMEONE'S APPROACHING!

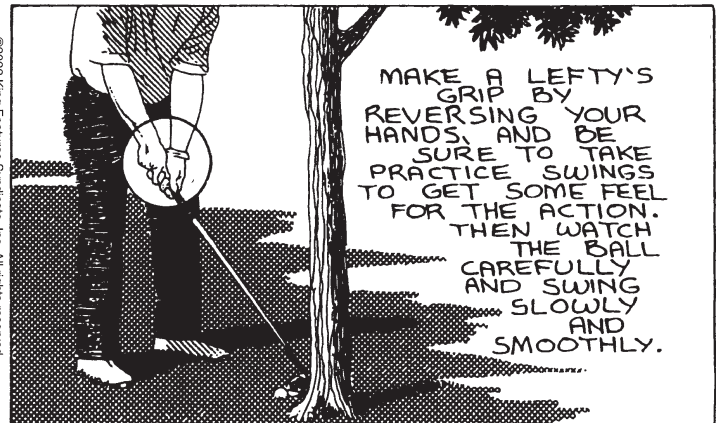


Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS

CONSIDER SWINGING LEFT-HANDED WHEN THERE'S NO OTHER WAY TO ADVANCE THE BALL.
TAKE A WELL-LOFTED IRON — A 6, 7 OR 8 — AND REVERSE THE BLADE AS YOU SEE HERE.



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MAKE A LEFTY'S GRIP BY REVERSING YOUR HANDS, AND BE SURE TO TAKE PRACTICE SWINGS TO GET SOME FEEL FOR THE ACTION. THEN WATCH THE BALL CAREFULLY AND SWING SLOWLY AND SMOOTHLY.

Walking Difficult After Visit to Bowling Alley



DEAR DR. ROACH: My partner and I are in our 60s, exercise regularly (three to five times per week), eat a well-balanced diet and are of average weight. Recently, we went bowling for two games and found ourselves sore in the area right below our buttocks. We were very sore for several days, making walking difficult, especially up and down stairs. What would have caused this area to get so sore? We named it "bowling butt" for lack of a medical term. -- M.B.

ANSWER: Starting a new activity will often cause people to overuse some muscles that aren't used to the strain. Bowling involves forceful extension of the thigh, which is the gluteus maximus muscle, as well as other muscles in the hip to maintain stability. Two games were enough to exhaust that muscle, and the untrained muscle will often suffer small tears, which take days to heal

properly. The fact that you were sore with activities involving thigh extension helps confirm the diagnosis. Some people think it's lactic acid in the muscle, but that is gone after a few hours.

Naming a disease is serious business, and I did a look for similar names in the literature. I did find "Wii butt," a pain sensation after playing games, including bowling, on the Wii video game system, but none for actual bowling. I'm not sure "bowling butt" will catch on, however.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I have no health issues, but I'm a cheapskate. I see products labeled as "grain-free" or as "gluten-free," but they always cost more than the regular product. Are there any health benefits to using these, or are they marketing gimmicks? -- L.C.

ANSWER: They are not marketing gimmicks at all. People with celiac disease have a sensitivity to a protein in gluten, called gliadin. Even small amounts of gluten can cause long-lasting damage to the intestines, and many people with celiac disease will be unable to properly absorb nutrients if they are regularly exposed to gluten. This can manifest with severe symptoms, such as weight loss, diarrhea and severe metabolic disturbance. Or it can trigger much milder ones, such as mild abdominal discomfort after eating, skin changes, anemia or joint pains.

Because the symptoms of celiac disease are so varied, a physician must be fairly convinced it's celiac before making the diagnosis. Biopsy is the gold standard for certainty, but blood testing -- if done while consuming a diet containing gluten -- is suggestive. I strongly recommend getting a diagnosis before going on a strict gluten-free diet if you suspect celiac disease.

For people with diagnosed celiac disease, strict adherence to a gluten-free diet is essential, and the increasing availability of gluten-free foods has made the lives of people with celiac disease better. Many grains are gluten-free naturally.

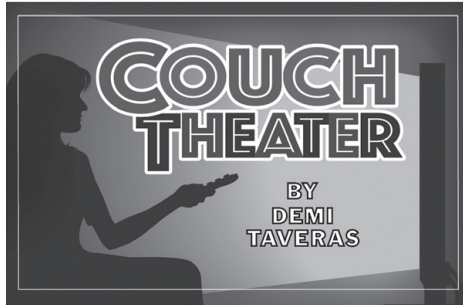
There are people with symptoms from gluten-containing foods but who do not have celiac disease. The term is "non-celiac gluten sensitivity." Some people with this condition are sensitive to components of the food other than the gluten, although there are some people who are sensitive to gluten but do not have celiac disease.

For people without NCGS and without celiac disease, avoiding gluten is not necessary. A diet with many different whole grains has been proven to reduce heart disease risk compared with a more meat-based diet.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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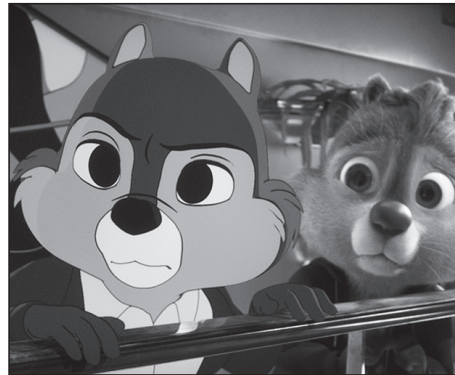
The Time Traveler's Wife (TV-MA) — If the title of this new series seems a little familiar, that's because a film of the same name was released in 2009, and both are adaptations of the novel "The Time Traveler's Wife," first published in 2003. The story follows Henry (Theo James), a man who has a rare disorder that forces him to travel through time, and his wife, Clare (Rose Leslie), whose relationship with Henry warps and changes dramatically due to his disorder. Streaming now. (HBO Max)

Night Sky (NR) — Irene and Franklin York have a long, well-kept secret within their marriage, but it's not what you might think. In the backyard of their quiet home, there's a portal. This portal leads to another planet, one that is completely deserted. When a mysterious person appears in the portal begging for their help, Irene and Franklin realize that their secret is much bigger than they thought. This sci-fi drama series features the highly acclaimed Sissy Spacek and J.K. Simmons as Irene and Franklin. Premieres May 20. (Prime Video)

Chip 'n Dale: Rescue Rangers (PG) — Have you ever wondered what happened to those furry partners-in-crime Chip and Dale? In this film, taking place 30 years after the cancellation of their series "Rescue Rangers," the pals have gone their separate ways. Chip sells insurance while Dale works convention events. But when one of Chip and Dale's friends goes missing, the duo must reunite as the Rescue Rangers to save their friend. Can they save what's left of their friendship as

well? Premieres May 20. (Disney+)

A Perfect Pairing (NR) — After quitting her job due to her tyrannical boss, the ambitious Lola Alvarez decides it's time to open her own wine import company. Determined to kick off her business the right way, Lola tries to land a big-time account: Vaughn Family Wines based in Australia. Once Lola reaches the land down under, nothing goes as expected, and she takes up work as a ranch hand while continuing to make her case with Ms. Vaughn. To make matters more complicated, Lola finds herself helplessly enamored with the mysterious Australian man who works on the ranch with her. Victoria Justice stars as Lola in this romantic comedy. Premieres May 19. (Netflix)



Disney+

Scene from "Chip 'n Dale: Rescue Rangers"

Firestarter (R) — Based on the novel by Stephen King, this sci-fi horror film from Blumhouse Productions is out on streaming now. A young girl named Charlie develops pyrokinesis, the ability to control fire with the mind. Charlie, with the help of her parents, attempts to keep her pyrokinetic ability a secret, but the fire can't always be contained when Charlie's emotions go awry. When an agency catches wind of her ability, Charlie and her family fight to protect her, but ultimately, Charlie must find strength within herself and learn how to use her gift. (Peacock)

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FLASH BACK POP, ROCK & SOUL TRIVIA BY MICK HARPER

1. Name the artist who released "You're the First, the Last, My Everything."
2. Which group released "Riders on the Storm"?
3. How did Beatle Paul McCartney come up with the lyric "Ob-la-di, ob-la-da"?
4. Who released "I Hear a Symphony"?
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "And then it happened, It took me by surprise, I knew that you felt it too, By the look in your eyes."

Answers

1. Barry White, in 1974. The songwriters had penned it as "You're My First, You're My Last, My In-Between." White changed the title and lyrics and released it as disco.
2. The Doors, in 1971. It was the last song that singer Jim Morrison released before his death at age 27.
3. His Nigerian drummer friend answered a question with the phrase, "Ob-la-di, ob-la-da, life goes on, brah." The Beatles released the song in 1968.
4. The Supremes, in 1965.
5. "This Magic Moment," by the Drifters in 1960, followed by Jay and the Americans in 1968. Lead singer Jay was "Jay Black," who had been born David Blatt but agreed to legally change his name after the originator of the group, John "Jay" Traynor, left. In 2006, John "Jay" Reincke appeared, the third Jay.

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GRIN and BEAR IT ^{Wagner}

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"Take one of these before each meal,
and then don't eat."

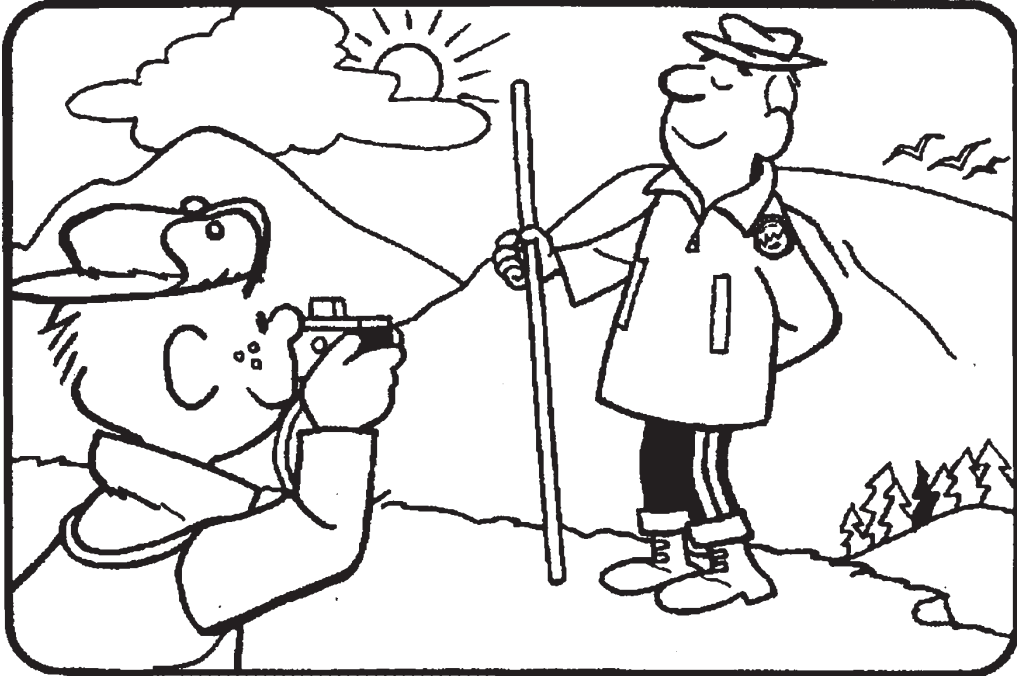
Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps

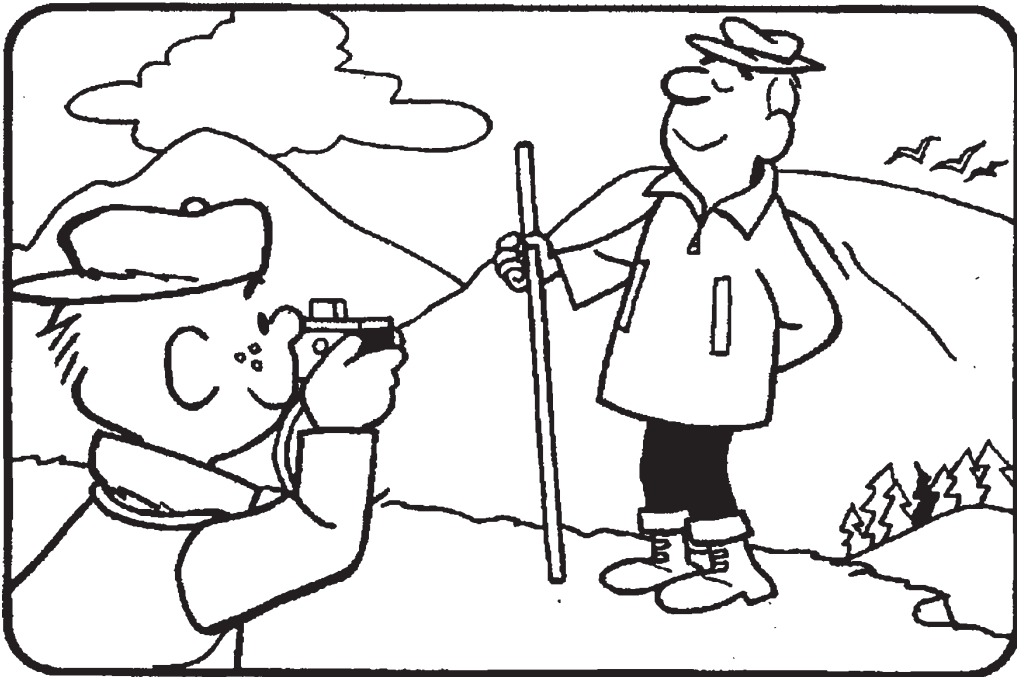


HOCUS-FOCUS

BY
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Sun is missing. 2. Ear flap is missing. 3. Camera cord is shorter. 4. Stick is shorter. 5. Arm patch is missing. 6. Stripe is missing.



- Need a patch for old woodwork? Try mixing paint (whatever color you're using) and flour. Make a paste, fill in the holes and let dry. It's hard like cement, and can be sanded into shape if necessary.

- Use baking soda to scrub away stuck-on food on your grill. Sprinkle it on the metal brush, and scrub away. If your grate is beyond the power of fire and baking soda, remove it and lay it on the ground on some newspaper. Spray with oven cleaner and let sit (keep pets and kids away from it). Rinse with a garden hose and replace on the grill.

- When you get near the end of a roll of paper towels, save it to put in your car. Put together a kit with the following items: a small bottle of Windex or other cleaner, a squeeze bottle of water, some wet wipes and the short roll of paper towels. Now you'll always be ready for a quick on-the-road cleanup.

- “I have a plastic cup that changes color when the drink is hot. Oddly enough, it changes at the perfect temperature for my baby's bath. So, I fill the tub and toss in the cup. When the cup starts to change back to its original color (blue), I know the bathwater is not too hot.” — *P. in Idaho*

- “To remove muffins or rolls from a pan, set it on an old, damp towel for a minute. The steam must loosen the bottoms, because they just slide right out. I thank my mom for this tip.” — *Janey R. via e-mail*

- Sprinkle baby powder in dish gloves to help them slide on in an instant.

Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

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FIND TWINS! Two of these fair damsels look enough alike to be twins. Which two? Study details carefully to decide.

SAY WHAT! There's a 13-letter word expressing little point or purpose that contains the same consonant (S) six times, another consonant (N) twice, another (L) once, and the same vowel (E) four times. What word?
 It is the word 'senselessness.'

PAIR GAME! Many words sound alike but are spelled differently. Examples:

Hey/hay; soar/sore; wear/where; etc. Let's see how quickly you can supply missing letters in the diagram at right to soundlike words for the following:

1. One. 2. Fare. 3. Here. 4. Waste. 5. Right (or rite).

It shouldn't take more than 30 seconds.

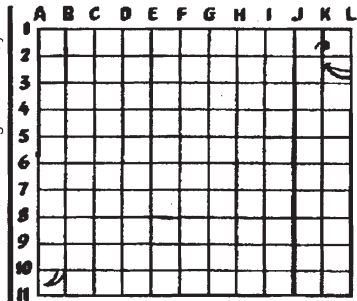
Just for fun, see if you can list 10 more soundlike words.

1. Won. 2. Fair. 3. Hear. 4. Waist. 5. Write.

Junior Whirl

by Hal Kaufman

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SPRING INKLING DRAWING CARD

LET'S hear it for spring from a venerable creature whose outline is concealed in the drawing card shown at left.

To bring this figure into view, simply draw lines in accord with the following letter-number coordinates. A sharp pencil will be of help!

Begin at A-10, draw to C-5, F-4, I-4, E-8, B-10, A-10.

Begin again, this time at B-10, draw to C-11, D-11, C-10, E-11, F-11, D-9, F-8, H-10, I-10, G-8, H-6, J-8, J-9, K-9, K-8, I-5, K-3, L-3, L-1, J-1, J-2, H-4.

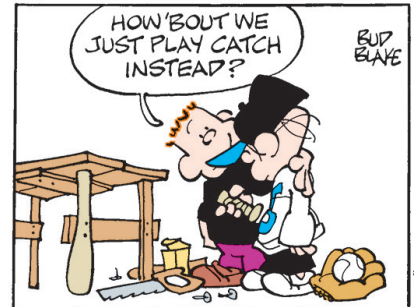
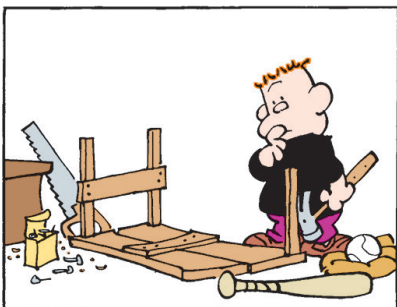
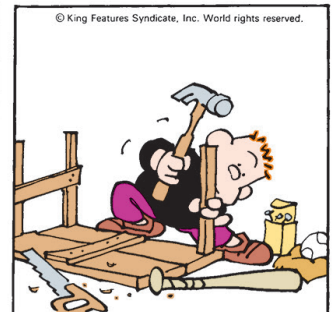
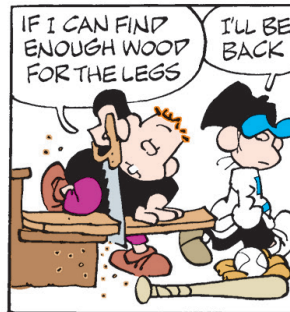
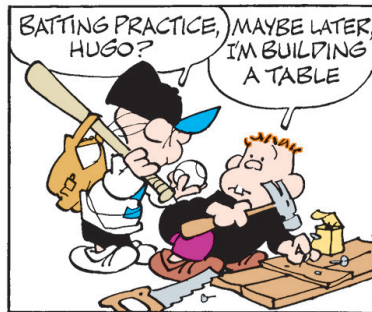
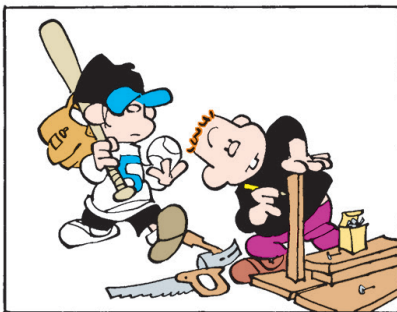
What is it you've drawn?

'Tis a creature whose voice "is heard in the land."

A turtle.

TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



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King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Battery fluid
- 5 Sandwich meat
- 8 Barks
- 12 Leaf
- 13 Out — limb
- 14 Ganges wrap
- 15 Warner —
- 16 Naughtiness
- 18 Flashing disco light
- 20 Trumpet's cousin
- 21 Legal wrong
- 23 Wee dollop
- 24 Sushi bar bowlful
- 28 NYC gallery
- 31 Dos Passos trilogy
- 32 Fizzy drinks
- 34 Bankroll
- 35 Humorist Sahl
- 37 Chooses the wrong actor
- 39 Prattle
- 41 Unpaid TV spots (Abbr.)
- 42 John of "Full House"
- 45 Morals
- 49 Blunders
- 51 "Damn Yankees" vamp
- 52 Celestial bear
- 53 Hosp. section
- 54 McGregor of

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12					13				14			
15					16			17				
18				19			20					
			21			22		23				
24	25	26					27		28		29	30
31				32				33		34		
35			36		37				38			
		39		40		41						
42	43				44		45			46	47	48
49						50			51			
52					53				54			
55					56				57			

- 55 Euclidean subj.
- 7 Fem. counter-part
- 30 Billboards
- 56 Burst
- 8 Hindu retreat
- 33 "Shoo!"
- 57 Orange veggies
- 9 Colorful arcs
- 36 Large gong
- 10 Gratis
- 38 Actress Judd
- 11 Winnow
- 40 Fluffy neck-piece
- 17 Massachusetts cape
- 42 Overconfident
- 19 Pear choice
- 43 Lose energy
- 22 Dutch bloom
- 44 Omit
- 24 Silent
- 46 Hawkeyes' home
- 25 Equal (Pref.)
- 47 Chowder morsel
- 26 Sea of the North Atlantic
- 48 Without
- 27 Refuses, as an offer
- 50 Author Umberto
- 29 Wrestling sur-

DOWN

- 1 LAPD alerts
- 2 Shopper's aid
- 3 Mr. Stravinsky
- 4 Explorer Hernando
- 5 Where the school day starts
- 6 Blackbird

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— King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 22 mins.

A	C	I	D		H	A	M		A	R	F	S
P	A	G	E		O	N	A		S	A	R	I
B	R	O	S		M	I	S	C	H	I	E	F
S	T	R	O	B	E		C	O	R	N	E	T
			T	O	R	T		D	A	B		
M	I	S	O	S	O	U	P		M	O	M	A
U	S	A		C	O	L	A	S		W	A	D
M	O	R	T		M	I	S	C	A	S	T	S
		G	A	B		P	S	A	S			
S	T	A	M	O	S		E	T	H	I	C	S
M	I	S	T	A	K	E	S		L	O	L	A
U	R	S	A		I	C	U		E	W	A	N
G	E	O	M		P	O	P		Y	A	M	S

LAFF - A - DAY



"It's a good story, but not as good as the one you told Mom when you dragged in at two this morning!"

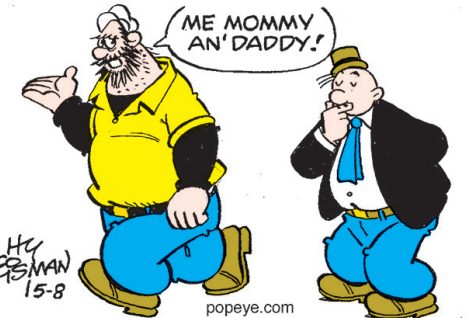
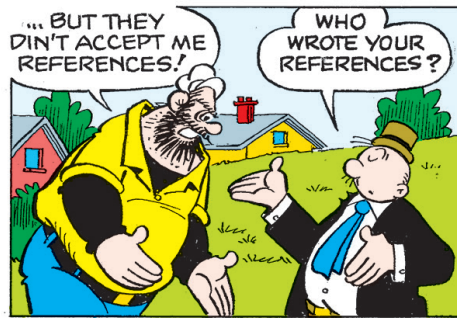
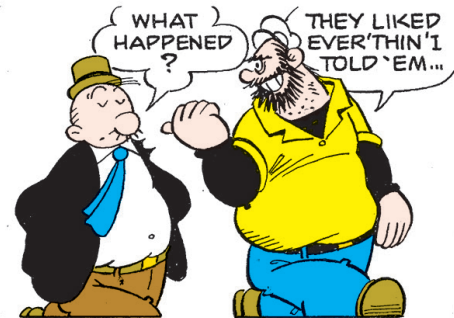
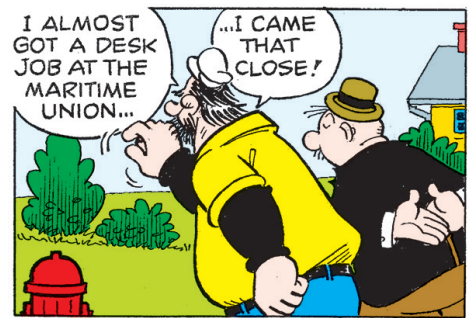
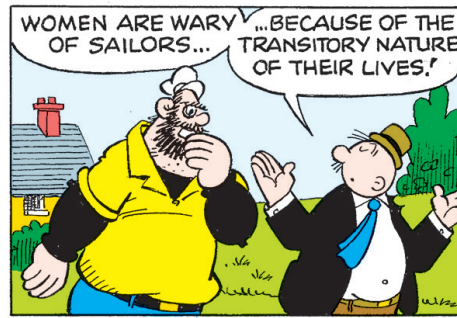
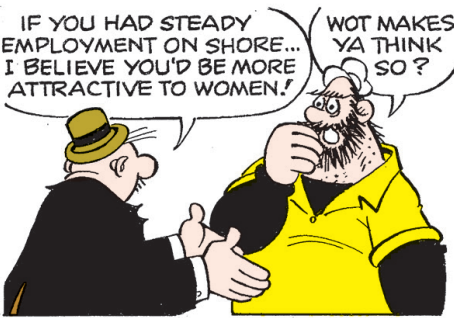
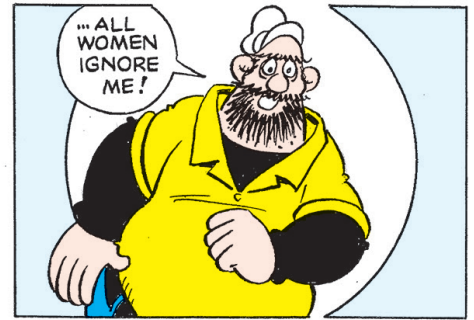
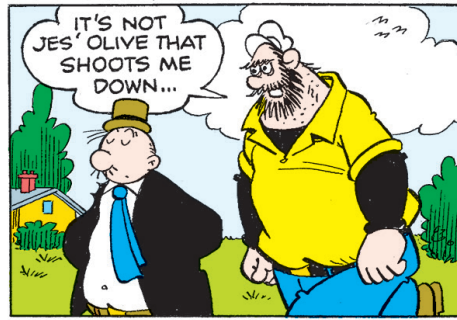
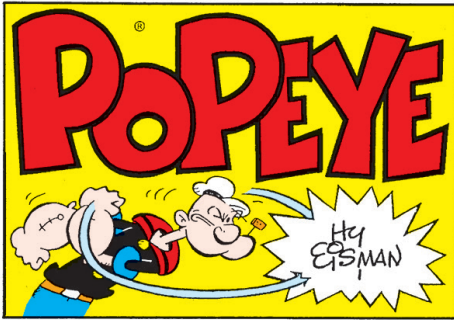
Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



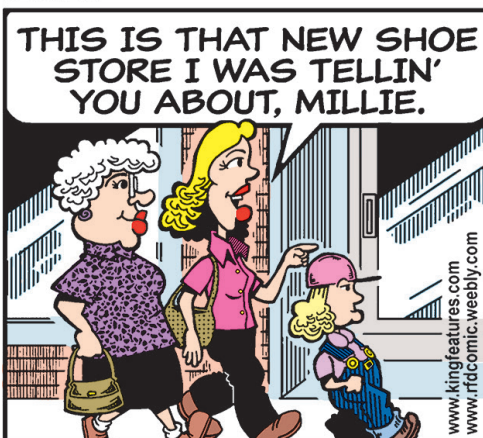
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R.F.D.

by Mike Marland



WOODFIELD SHOES
QUALITY SHOES FOR
MEN, WOMEN, CHILDREN
& HORSES

MARLAND

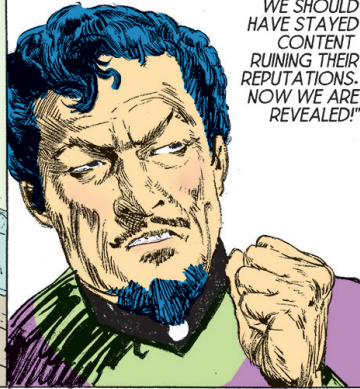
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Hal Foster's
Prince Valiant
BY GIANNI AND SCHULTZ

ALETA AND VAL SEND A POINTED MESSAGE TO MALDUBH AND DRACO VIA THEIR FAILED ASSASSIN.

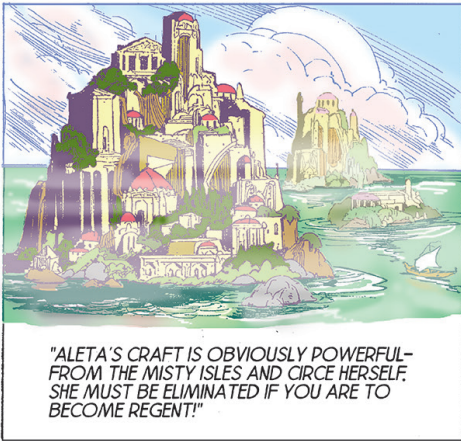


"THIS SCHEME OF YOURS WAS FOLLY! WE SHOULD HAVE STAYED CONTENT RUINING THEIR REPUTATIONS. NOW WE ARE REVEALED!"

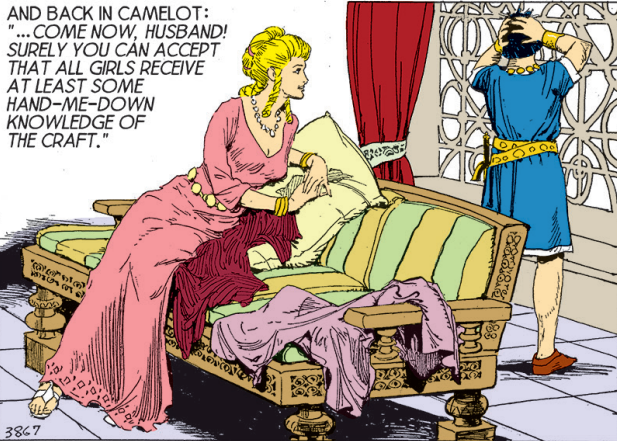


"BE STRONG, LITTLE MAN," MALDUBH SNEERS. "ALETA FORCED OUR HAND. IF THEY MEANT TO REVEAL US, THEY WOULD NOT HAVE SENT THIS CHALLENGE."

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"ALETA'S CRAFT IS OBVIOUSLY POWERFUL-FROM THE MISTY ISLES AND CIRCE HERSELF. SHE MUST BE ELIMINATED IF YOU ARE TO BECOME REGENT!"



AND BACK IN CAMELOT: "...COME NOW, HUSBAND! SURELY YOU CAN ACCEPT THAT ALL GIRLS RECEIVE AT LEAST SOME HAND-ME-DOWN KNOWLEDGE OF THE CRAFT."

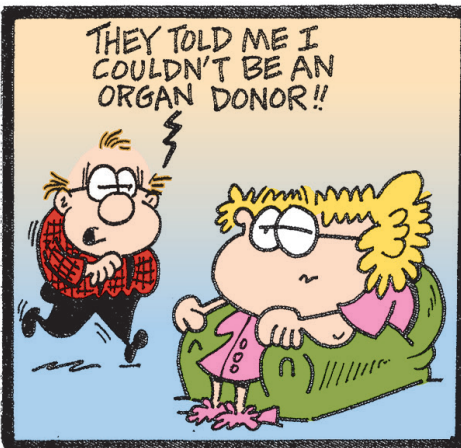
ALETA SMILES RUEFULLY. "I ONLY WISH I'D BEEN A MORE ATTENTIVE STUDENT. OH WELL - WE'LL GET BY."



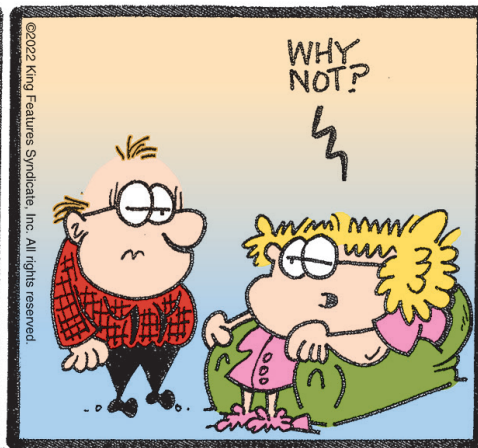
NEXT:
Countermoves

The Spats

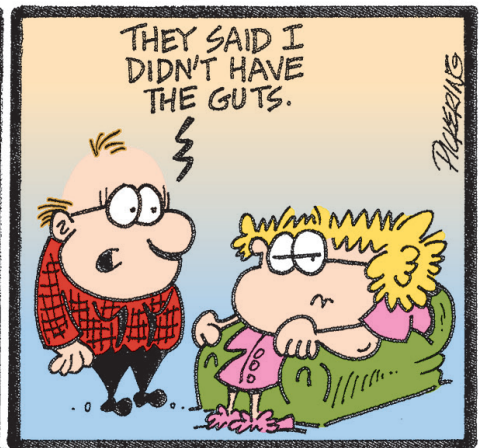
by Jeff Pickering



THEY TOLD ME I COULDN'T BE AN ORGAN DONOR!!



WHY NOT?



THEY SAID I DIDN'T HAVE THE GUTS.

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Pickering

SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Prepare to Age in Place? Been There, Done That

I read an article the other day encouraging seniors to make plans to age in place. Aging in place means to stay in our own homes as we get older so we can maintain our independence.

Planning for it means making whatever changes are necessary to ensure that our homes are safe. Planning also can include surrounding ourselves with a network of people and services for support.

My first thought was ... that's what we've been doing for the past two years, and we certainly didn't have time to plan for it before COVID sent us all into lockdown. Yet here we are ... we survived.

And how did we do that?

We created our own little support networks, mostly by phone since our meetings were canceled. We checked in with each other when the store finally stocked long-missing items. We baked and left cookies on the porches of those we knew would appreciate them.

We learned Zoom and other online

video conference programs so we could have face-to-face meeting with family and friends.

We beefed up our computer skills, at least enough to enable us to place to-go grocery orders at the store or arrange for delivery and to make purchases that Amazon could bring to our door. We roamed YouTube in search of exercise videos for seniors and took free classes of all types.

We took up the scatter rugs that could cause trips and falls because we knew that the EMTs who came to our rescue would be leery of COVID and come through the door fully outfitted in biohazard suits.

We dared to ask questions and learned that the library will deliver books and the pharmacy will mail prescriptions.

All in all, we survived our forced aging in place just fine. We seniors are a tough bunch

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1. What three-time Norris Trophy winner and four-time Stanley Cup champion holds the single-season record for the most goals scored by a defenseman with 48 in 1985-86?

2. Name the British racing pioneer who held the land and water speed records simultaneously in 1930.

3. What French Formula 1 driver crashed into a recovery vehicle at the 2014 Japanese Grand Prix and died from his injuries nine months later?

4. What 1981 song by Terry Cashman included the lyrics “Willie, Mickey and the Duke” in the refrain?

5. Which Pro Football Hall of Fame running back had the higher career average yards per carry in the NFL regular season: Emmitt Smith or Walter Payton?

6. In 1960, team owner Bill Veeck installed Major League Baseball’s first “exploding” scoreboard — complete with flashing lights, pinwheels



by Ryan A. Berenz

and pyrotechnics — at what stadium?

7. Name the Oscar-winning biographical film from 2021 that was executive-produced by tennis stars Venus and Serena Williams.

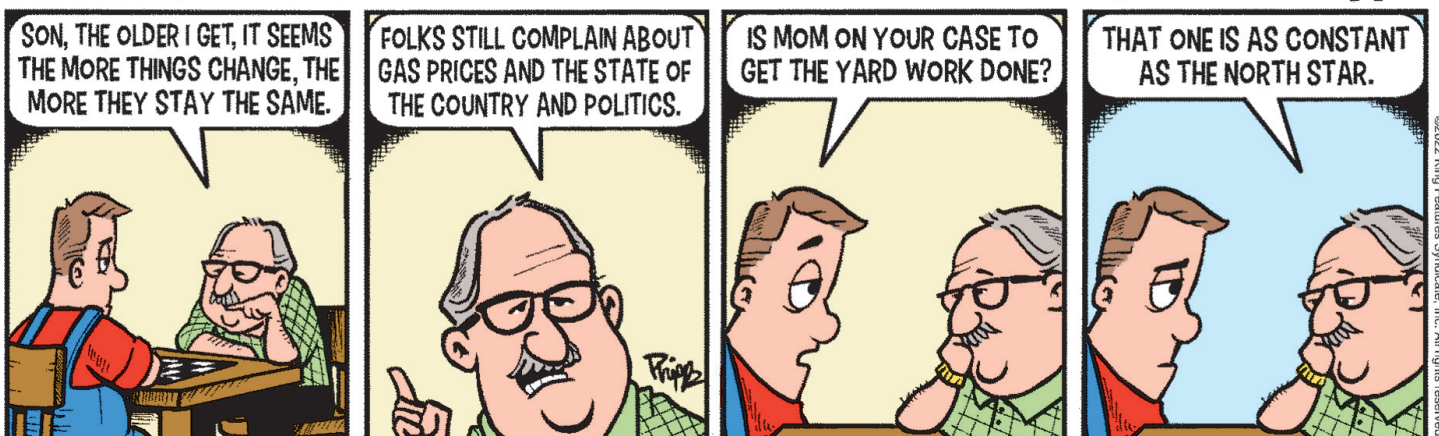
Answers

1. Paul Coffey.
2. Sir Henry Segrave.
3. Jules Bianchi.
4. “Talkin’ Baseball.”
5. Walter Payton had 4.4 yards per carry, Emmitt Smith had 4.2.
6. Chicago’s Comiskey Park.
7. “King Richard.”

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





Veterinarian Wait Times Keep Getting Longer

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: I've been waiting more than three months to get my dog "Maisie" in for a regular checkup and shots. The veterinarian's office says they are running behind and had to delay her appointment. Talking to a friend across the country this week, I learned that they are waiting months to get their pets to the vet as well. Is this a national trend? — Cheryl K.

DEAR CHERYL: Unfortunately, it is, especially in major metropolitan areas. The wait for a vet appointment was already lengthening before 2020. After months of waiting, pet owners are all trying to get caught up on checkups and vaccinations. Many more people adopted pets during the lockdown in

2020 to keep them company. And many pandemic restrictions, such as building occupancy limits, are still in place.

Add to this a chronic shortage of veterinarians — an industry that sees some 2,000 vets leaving every year, citing a poor work-life balance. That's twice the rate of physicians quitting their profession, says the American Veterinary Medical Association.

And the lower availability of vet appointments can be seasonal. For large animal vet practices (which deal with livestock, horses, cattle, etc.), spring is their busiest season with calving and foaling taking place. The warm weather reminds pet owners to take their companion pets to the vet as well.

Until the wave of catch-up appointments subsides, just be patient. Keep the appointment that is already set with the veterinarian and schedule Maisie's checkup for next year, if possible.

Send your tips, comments and questions to ask@pawscorner.com.

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Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

* During World War II, French actress/dancer Leslie Caron's wealthy family suffered such severe financial reversals that she was once forced to make shoes out of her grandmother's opera gloves.

* Until 1937, it was illegal for men to be topless in the U.S., even on beaches.

* Is there a "junk drawer" in your house? If so, you're in good company, as a whopping 80% of Americans have at least one, but the average household actually boasts three. The most common items found in these catchalls are super glue (57%),

writing utensils (also 57%) and duct tape (51%). What's in yours?

* Gary Kremen, the founder of Match.com, one of the world's largest and most popular online dating websites, lost his girlfriend to a guy she met on Match.com.

* The origin of the phrase "in the limelight" comes from the early days of theater, when spotlights were produced by directing a flame at calcium oxide, or quicklime.

* In 1922, Americans consumed around 1,000,000 Eskimo Pies a day, which not only hiked up the cost of cocoa beans by 50%, but also single-handedly lifted Ecuador's economy out of a depression.

* According to the market research firm Euromonitor International, worldwide chewing gum sales have declined by 15% since 2007, the same year that the iPhone came out. The firm attributed the decrease to consumers distracted by their phones in checkout lines, where most gum purchases are made.

* Ichiro Suzuki, baseball's all-time hits leader, learned Spanish solely for the purpose of trash-talking opponents.

* An "endling" is a term used for the last animal of an entire species. When an endling dies, the species is considered extinct.

Thought for the Day: "Respect your efforts, respect yourself. Self-respect leads to self-discipline. When you have both firmly under your belt, that's real power." -- Clint Eastwood

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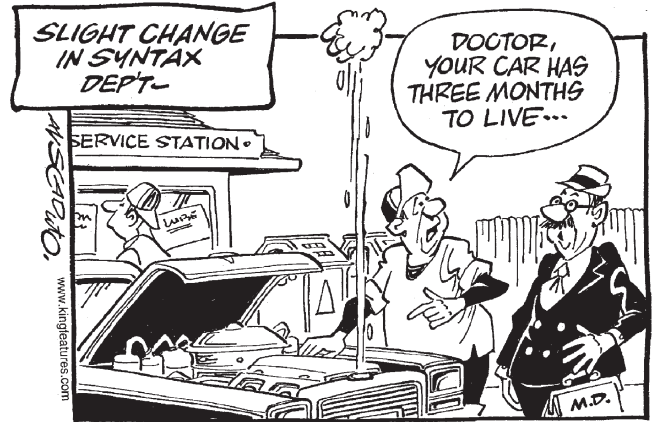
THEY'LL DO IT EVERY TIME

THINGS THAT USED TO BE—AND WE'LL NEVER SEE AGAIN—IN THE WINTER, THAT IS—



Thank to I. ANGLERI, FAIRBURN, GA.

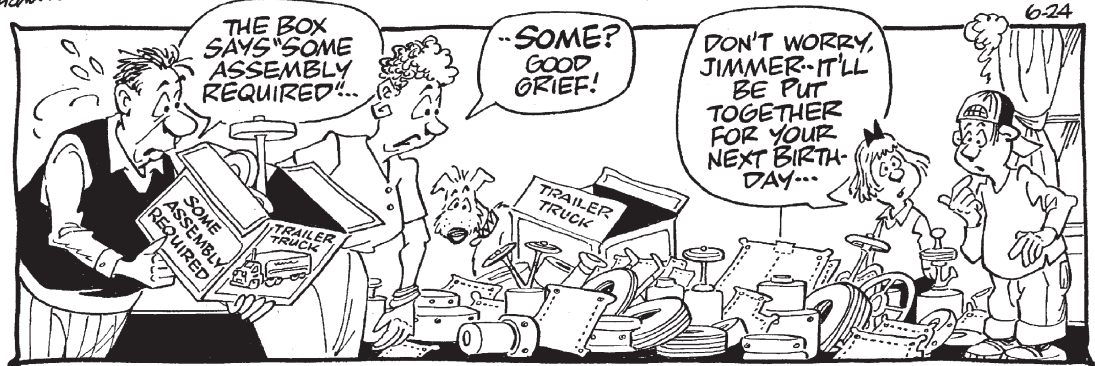
BY AL SCADUTO



Thank to FRED GERMER, BRADENTON, FL.

EVER HAPPEN TO YOU? FINDING OUT WHAT'S WHAT ABOUT THE TOY YOU BOUGHT FOR JUNIOR'S BIRTHDAY...

Thank to MARK VIOLETTE, MILFORD, CT.



Nutmeg

The nutmeg tree is cultivated in many tropical islands and countries, where the soil is very moist and loaded with sand, clay, silt and organic matter. Transferring potted sprouts to the soil must be done carefully, as the root systems are very sensitive to bruising and damage.

— Brenda Weaver

Sources: www.plantguide.org, spices.biodiversityexhibition.com





by Freddy Groves

The VA Releases Its Equity Action Plan

In response to Executive Order 13985, the Department of Veterans Affairs has now released its Equity Action Plan.

The order, signed in January 2021, was intended to bring equity to underserved communities, such as Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans and others, as well as lesbian, transgender, LGBTQ+ and gay persons, as well as those who live in rural areas. The role of the White House Domestic Policy Council was to formulate and implement the administration's policy objectives and embed them across federal government. Hence the VA's newly released Equity Action Plan.

The VA's highest priorities are to provide all veterans with world-class health care, ensure that veterans and their families can access benefits and honor veterans with a final resting place as a tribute to their service.

And it must be done in a fair and impartial way, with tools and resources for all veterans, by eliminating barriers and creating opportunities. To ensure this, the VA will:

- Develop data for equity strategy (capture the demographics so women, LGBTQ+, Blacks and others can be identified),

- Improve access (reduce barriers by “creating institutional pathways for underserved vets to increase awareness” of VA benefits and services),

- Increase contract awards to women-owned businesses and small disadvantaged businesses,

- And address health equity for underserved veterans (which is impacted by race, gender, income, education and more).

VA officials already have started taking steps. For example, they have expanded the gender-affirming care and benefits package for LGBTQ+ veterans. (The VA provides all medically necessary gender-affirming care to transgender veterans, short of surgical interventions.) Additionally, they've instructed VA adjudicators to classify as eligible for benefits any veteran who was discharged due to sexual orientation, gender identification or HIV status. Medical records now display the patient's birth sex, self-identified gender identity, sexual orientation and preferred pronouns.

To read the details of the plan, go to www.va.gov/ORMDI/docs/EO13985-VA_Final_Equity_Action_Plan.pdf



CONGRESSMAN
DUSTY JOHNSON
Representing **SOUTH DAKOTA** at large



BABY FORMULA – Another Supply Chain Crisis

Our moms and babies are facing a huge—and dangerous—problem. The nationwide baby formula supply out-of-stock level is 43%—but in South Dakota, our out-of-stock levels are over 50%. Store shelves are empty. Mothers are worried about being able to feed their babies.

Abbott Nutrition produces 43% of the market's baby formula. Last September, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) became aware of contamination at Abbott Nutrition and subsequently received more consumer complaints through the end of 2021. But the FDA did not begin a follow-up inspection until January 31, 2022—a 44-day delay from the last complaint received.

It wasn't until February 2022 that Abbott Nutrition voluntarily recalled their powdered baby formula. The negligence and slow responses by Abbott Nutrition and the FDA caused at least four cases of sickness, and unfortunately two of those cases are believed to have resulted in death. The FDA has been slow to kickstart supply again—requiring Abbott Nutrition's baby formula to be evaluated and released on a case-by-case basis for two months. This is severely restricting formula supply to return to normal levels.

I sent a letter to the FDA demanding answers for their delay and lack of foresight in this situation. Federal agencies must increase transparency and accountability in their decisions. The FDA needs to answer to the American people why they let this problem get out of hand.

This is a pro-life issue, and my pro-life values continue beyond the womb. While I recently cosponsored two bills, the Heartbeat Protection Act and the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act to protect life in the womb, protecting life after birth is just as essential. Ensuring life means ensuring access to basic needs like formula. A supply shortage of this magnitude is dangerous.

Americans have faced supply chain crisis after supply chain crisis—enough is enough. We need answers & solutions from the FDA, and we need to provide for our nation's babies.

South Dakota Governor

Kristi Noem



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

South Dakota Strong

Nature has a way of humbling us, of stepping into our lives with previously unthought power and reminding us what truly matters. That's how I felt these past two days while surveying storm damage across much of South Dakota.

But the power of the storm was not the only thing that I found humbling. I found it in the families in Castlewood who had lost their homes, but were still grateful to be safe, alive, and together. I found it in the first responders in communities across our state who maintained a cheerful, can-do attitude despite the long road ahead. And I found it in our community leaders who demonstrated the necessary resolve to get our cities and towns back on the right track.

Salem had to evacuate their nursing home. But first, staff moved their residents into an internal room. They had latched the doors, but literally had to hold them shut due to the wind. On the other side of the door, the roof had been completely torn off. That's courage – that's going above and beyond.

In Castlewood, I spent time talking to a woman wearing a "small town proud" shirt. She just happened to be wearing it when the storm hit. But it fit. It demonstrated exactly how I felt in that moment, surrounded by folks I had grown up with, who were facing struggles ahead, but were proud to be from small town South Dakota.

In Madison, first responders reflected on the fact that it wasn't that long ago, in 2019, when we had all been together during another crisis, the flooding that hit that town. They had smiles on their faces last night because they knew from that experience that we could get through this.

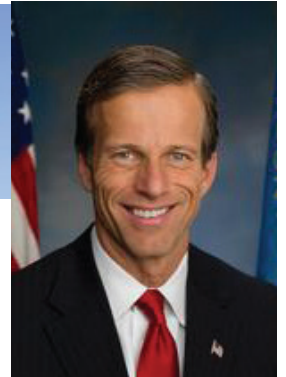
I'm proud of South Dakota. I'm proud of the small towns who are weathering this together, just like they weather everything. I'm proud of our cities who were ready and responded swiftly. I'm proud of our farmers, who had a tough go of it, too. They know that the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away -- that the weather can make their living or wreck it. And they keep on plowing, sowing, and reaping, nonetheless.

We will continue to get information out to our people in the coming days. We are getting emergency resources to communities, deploying the National Guard when necessary, and working with local and federal emergency response to help folks out. There is more work to do -- together we will get it done.

In the meantime, help your neighbors. Check on them if it's safe to do so. And pray for your fellow South Dakotans. Pray for the families in so many communities who will have to spend time away from their homes while we rebuild; for the towns where the lights are still out; for the workers helping to get the lights back on and for the emergency responders helping to keep everyone safe in the process.

We are South Dakota strong. And we will prove it, once again, by getting through this.

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



Back the Blue

Being a police officer isn't just a job. It's a calling. These are the people we call when there is a car accident, when someone is in trouble or in need, or when someone's safety is at risk. These are the people who run toward danger and violence when the natural reaction for others is to run away from it. They have dedicated their lives to protecting our communities and keeping our friends, families, and neighbors safe.

We owe our men and women in law enforcement a great debt – a debt few can fully comprehend. They go out and risk their lives every day of the week, every minute of the day – through holidays and other family celebrations. And they bear a heavy physical and emotional burden. It's tough to have to see such highs and lows on a daily basis – to spend years rescuing children who are in trouble or supporting victims of violence or bringing bad guys to justice. They confront these kinds of things so we don't have to – and they pay a price. We owe them and their families our profound gratitude.

We can and we should be doing more to support law enforcement, from local South Dakota communities to the overwhelmed agents at the southern border and everywhere in between. Earlier this month, U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, while testifying before Congress, said that morale in the Border Patrol is low, which shouldn't come as any surprise. Shockingly, Secretary Mayorkas also said that there were more than 389,000 individuals the Border Patrol saw but was unable to apprehend at our southern border during fiscal year 2021. Our Border Patrol officers do heroic work, but they are stretched incredibly thin and have been for more than a year now. Criminals, including human traffickers, drug smugglers, and gang members, regularly attempt to cross our southern border, and when they do, it impacts local law enforcement in communities throughout the country. In essence, the border crisis turns every town in America into a border town.

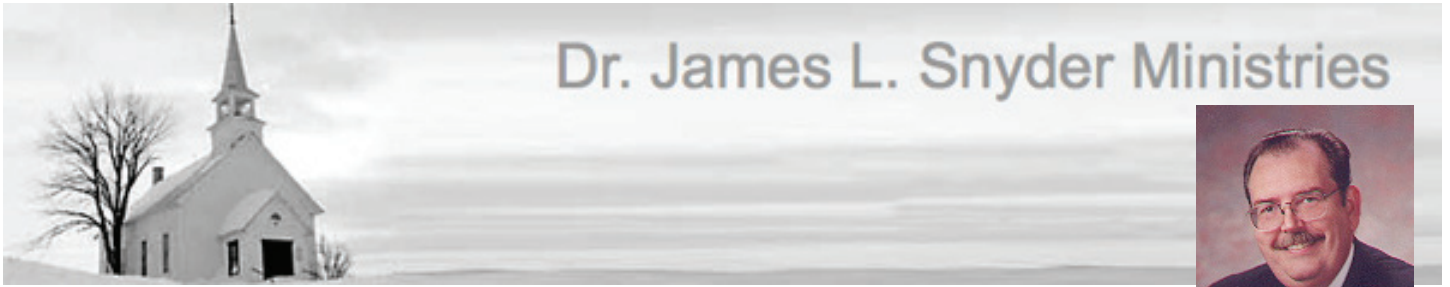
One of the most important ways we can support law enforcement is with our words and with our actions. Unfortunately, Democrats have spent the last two years championing the "defund the police" movement and soft-on-crime policies, which have resulted in skyrocketing crime and murder rates, low morale among officers, and a record number of police being killed in the line of duty. I know most South Dakotans agree, but let me be perfectly clear: Defunding the police is a terrible idea. We need to fully fund law enforcement, support our police and other law enforcement officers, and back the blue.

I am so thankful to those in South Dakota law enforcement who have made our state such a safe place to live, work, and raise a family. Please know that you're appreciated for all you do.

Every week, but especially during National Police Week, I want to recognize and express my sincere gratitude to the men and women who serve our communities and remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. Thank you for working every day to protect us, our children, and the cities and towns we call home.

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Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries



It's All in the Script

Everybody is concerned about details in various aspects of life. I like overseeing the details of my life to make sure I'm going in the right direction. I'm not always going in the right direction, as you can imagine.

However, everybody's idea of detail management is not always the same.

Like me, some people are interested in the overall details. Others, like The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, are concerned about all the details, and can't go deep enough to manipulate the details as best they can.

If you walked into my wife's craft room, you would see how important details are to her. If you would then walk into my office, you would see how flimsy I regard the depths of details.

I don't have to have everything in proper order to be happy with what I'm doing. My idea is, if I can't find what I need, I probably don't need it. And so, I go on with the project.

My wife and I enjoy watching movies together. We prefer recording the movie and watch it later, because we can skip through all those lousy commercials that are so annoying.

I know commercials are important for the media industry. I know television stations need commercials so they can provide the service that we enjoy. I understand all of that, yet I'm still not too fond of commercials.

I may not like commercials, but my wife takes commercials with a doomsday hatred. That's why I take great pleasure in recording a movie and watching it by skipping over the commercials.

Whether it be a movie or a particular program we always like to record it so that we can enjoy the actual story without distraction.

When we're watching a program or a movie, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage is very caught up with the details of the story. I just like watching something for its entertainment value.

But not so with my wife. Every aspect of that program is greatly detailed by her. She knows every aspect of each character and knows who committed the crime from the very beginning, which baffles me.

Every once in a while, a character will do something and my wife will say, "Why in the world did they do that? Don't they know better?"

Being the husband that I am, I cannot keep myself from responding to a query. I usually say something like, "Well, my dear, it's in the script, and they read the script."

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She usually looks at me with one of "her looks," and I usually regret saying what I just said.

No matter what the program is, there will always be some point where she will question the integrity of the character. "Why," she usually says, "did that person do that?"

I had to chuckle because there are some things in life that I have no control over. One thing I don't have control over is sarcastically responding to something my wife says.

After all these years of marital bliss, I should have learned how to keep my mouth shut at certain times. Yes, there are times to speak out, but more often than not, there are times to shut up. I'm still trying to learn the difference.

While watching a program, I enjoy the overall story, whereas my wife is more concerned about each detail of every character in that story. How she does it is beyond my guess machine. I like to follow the story stage by stage, whereas my wife asks a question at each stage of the story.

I must confess that some of the programs are a little amateurish regarding details. Some of the details aren't in real harmony with what the story is all about. But, of course, that never bothers me because I know it's in the script.

We watched one of our favorite programs this past week when something happened that I didn't see coming, my wife said, "Why in the world would they do something like that? That is the most ridiculous thing that anybody could do."

Then she turned her head and looked at me and very seriously said, "And don't you dare tell me that it's in the script."

I couldn't help but laugh for the rest of the program. Although she didn't think it was too funny, I enjoyed that statement for the rest of the program.

Not too long ago, I did something, I can't remember exactly what it was, but it was something that drew my wife's attention, who queried me by saying, "Why are you doing that?"

I knew she was serious, but is very hard for me to be serious at times like this.

I looked at her with a very thoughtful look on my face and said, "Well, my dear, it's in my script."

Although she did not think that was funny, I did, and for the rest of that day, I kept repeating, "It's in my script."

I heard her mumbling, "I wonder who wrote his script?"

Later on that day I was reminded of a verse of Scripture. "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5).

God has already written the script of my life and as I yield to him I begin to discover what that is. The greatest tragedy of human life is rebelling against God's script for me.

EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: You hear a lot about electric cars and trucks these days, but has there been any carbon-saving innovation lately in trains and even planes?

-- Michael C., Summit, NJ

Many environmentalists consider travel an environmental "sin" given the carbon emissions generated by the cars, buses, trains and planes we use to get from Point A to B, but it's up to each of us to determine how much travel is enough. In the meantime, airplane and train manufacturers and the industries that serve them are doing a lot to green their operations and products.

As for airplanes, manufacturers are working hard to replace toxic materials with greener ones. One example is chrome, a carcinogen heavy metal that is used extensively within passenger cabins and elsewhere in many airplanes. Manufacturers have developed 3D printing using carbon fiber compounds to replace chrome and many other metals used throughout a plane's body. This also cuts down significantly on weight, which in turn saves fuel and emissions.

Fuel substitution is another sustainability fix that airlines are starting to take seriously. One particularly green substitute fuel comes from Fulcrum BioEnergy, which converts garbage into jet fuel that can augment regular carbon-intensive jet fuel and thus save on emissions. The company's technology utilizes chemical breakdowns of waste to produce fuels that mix with normal jet fuel, cutting emissions by as much as 20 percent.

Not surprisingly, electric drive planes are also on the horizon. Israel's Eviation has a zero-emission prototype plane that can fly up to an hour after charging for 30 minutes.

Rail companies are pursuing similar strategies, such as electric powered trains. Gravity powered trains use gravitational force—generated by braking (like hybrid electric cars)—to power their batteries. Train builders are also starting to embrace electric drive systems to save on fossil fuel consumption. These newer hybrid systems can cut emissions and fuel usage by up to 11 percent, which amounts to an average fuel savings of some 6,000 gallons of diesel per trip.

Of course, it is important to understand that travel is often a luxury. And while it can be an essential—such as seeing far-flung relatives or participating in work trips—it can often be minimized. To minimize your carbon footprint and—more important—minimize damage to our imperiled planet, consider reducing your plane travel. While both forms of transit are problematic, trains are a better choice for the planet.

The growth of the transit industry and a globalized economy mean that travel is inevitable as a habit, necessity and pastime. Nevertheless, it's important not to take plane and train travel for granted. The less you travel, the lower your carbon footprint will remain, so it's up to you to find the right balance between maintaining your quality of life and helping fight global warming. Maybe in the future we can travel great distances without any environmental guilt. But until then, it's better to think twice about taking any trips that aren't absolutely necessary.

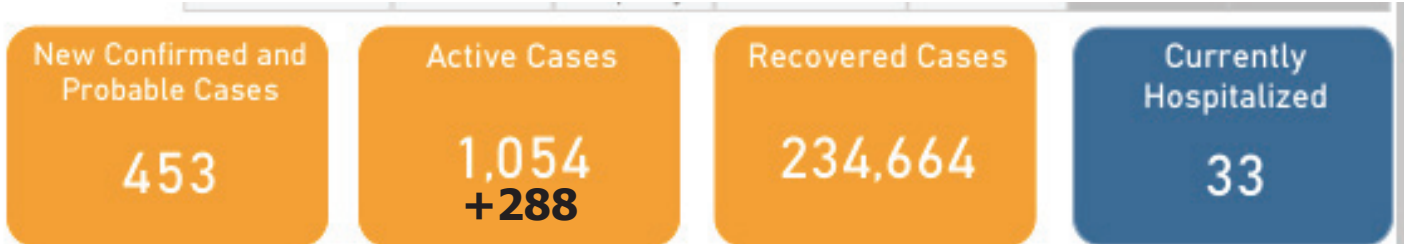


**Eviation's all-electric Alice airplane
Israel's Eviation can fly for an hour on a
battery charge with zero emissions.**

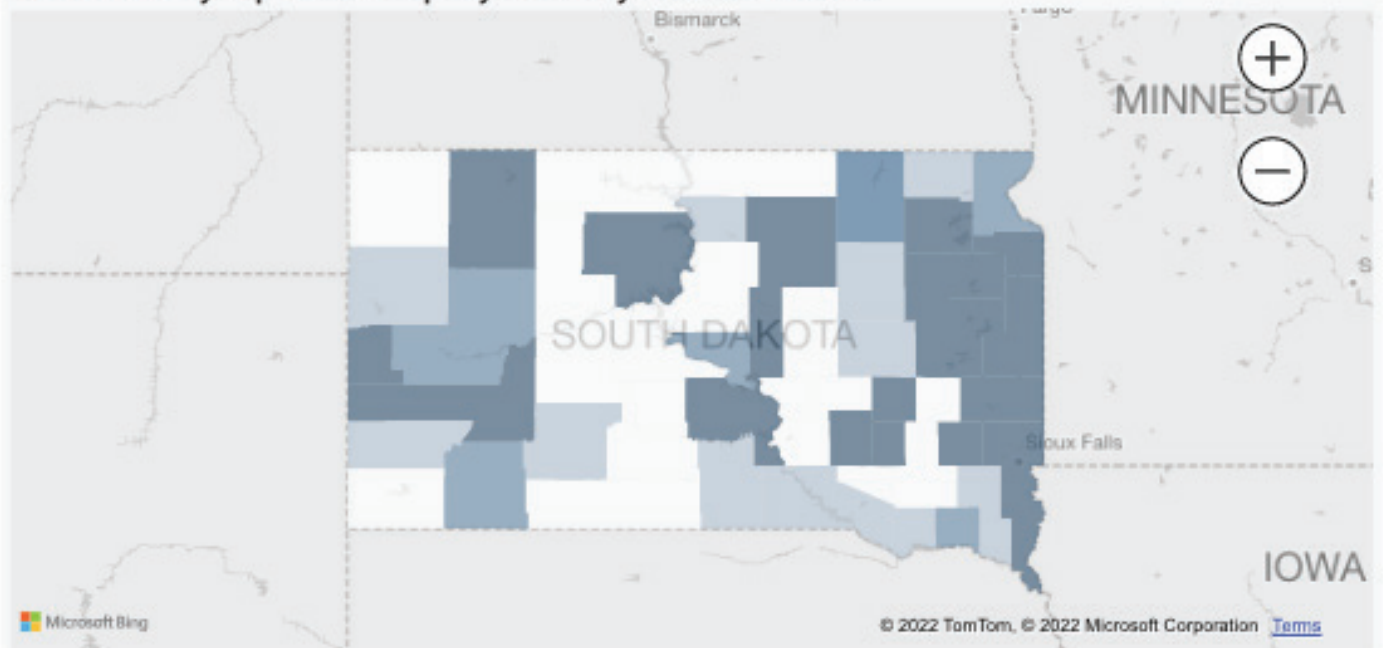
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South Dakota COVID-19 Report

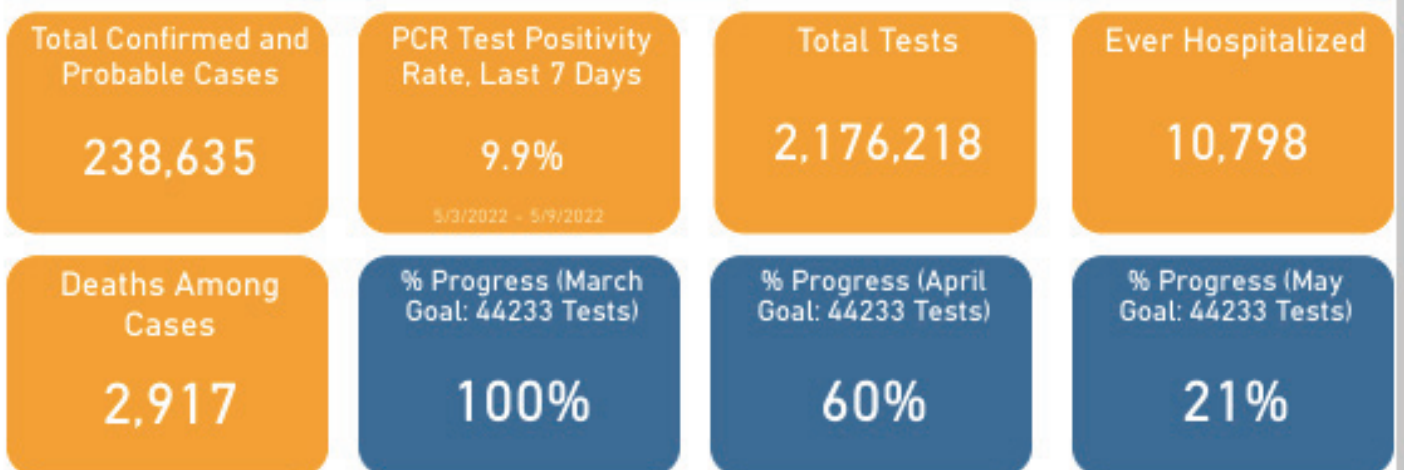


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.

More information on U.S COVID-19 Community levels can be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html>



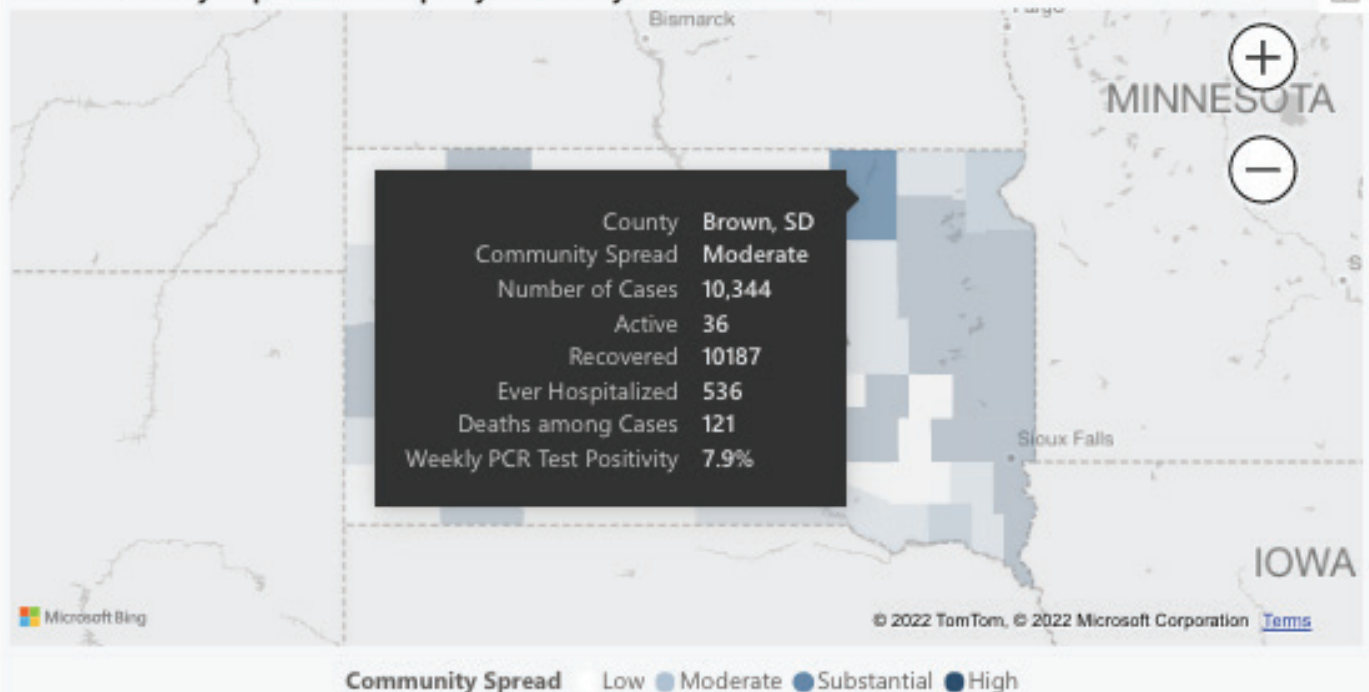
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Brown County COVID-19 Report



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.

More information on U.S COVID-19 Community levels can be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html>



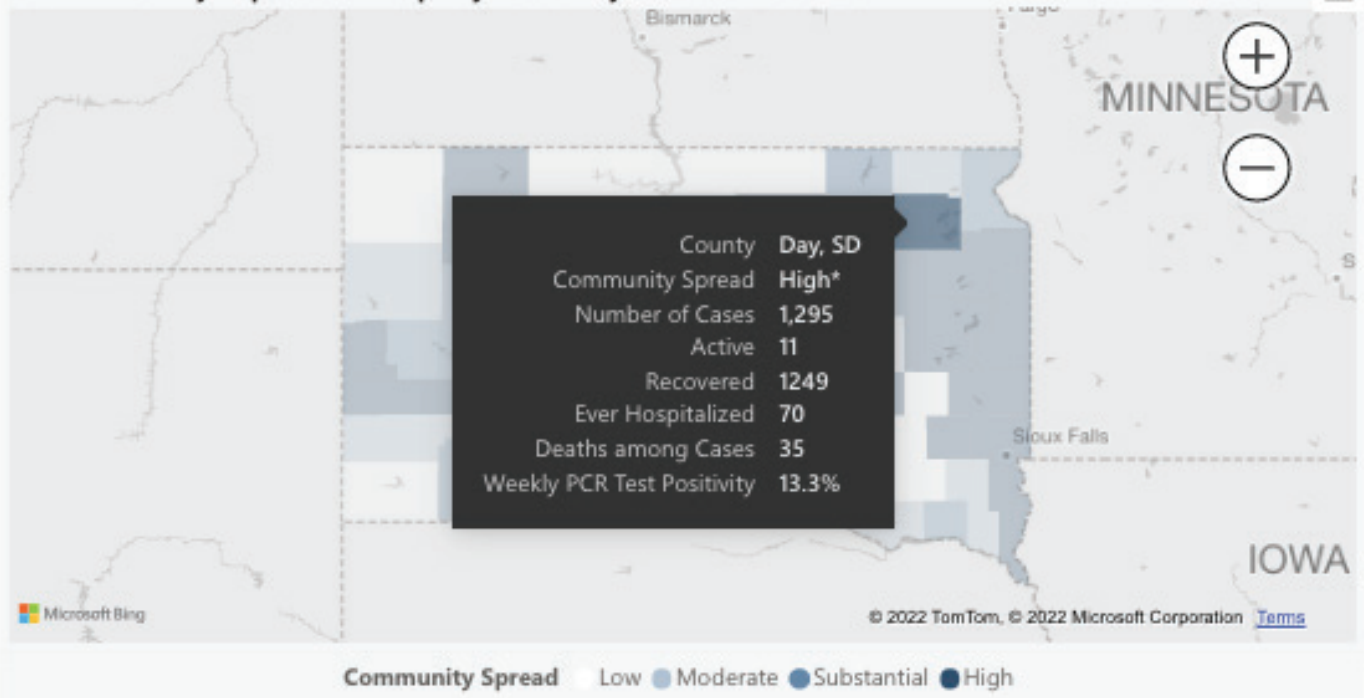
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Day County COVID-19 Report

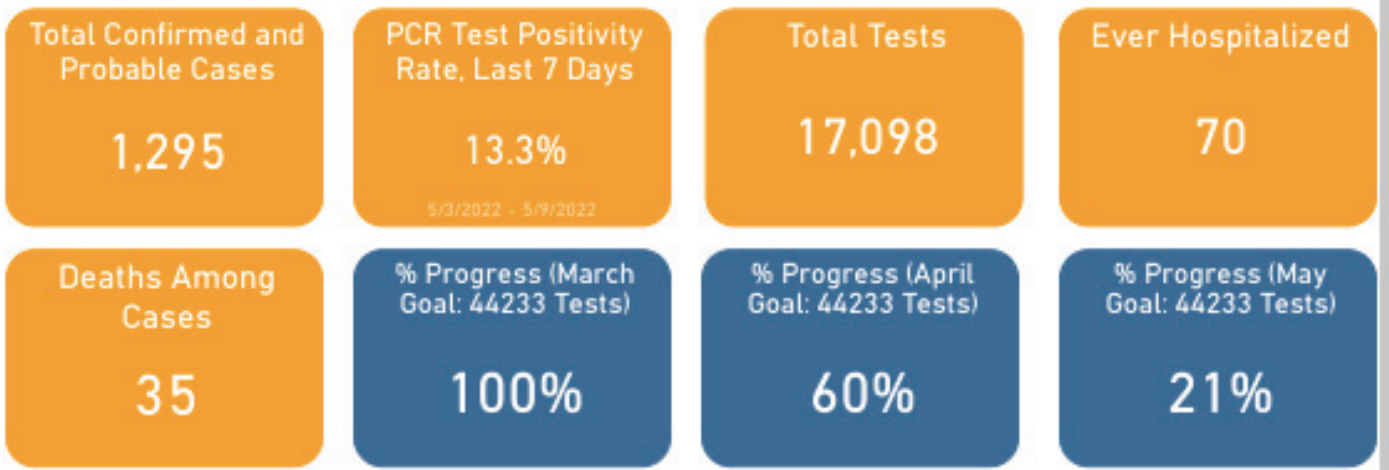


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.

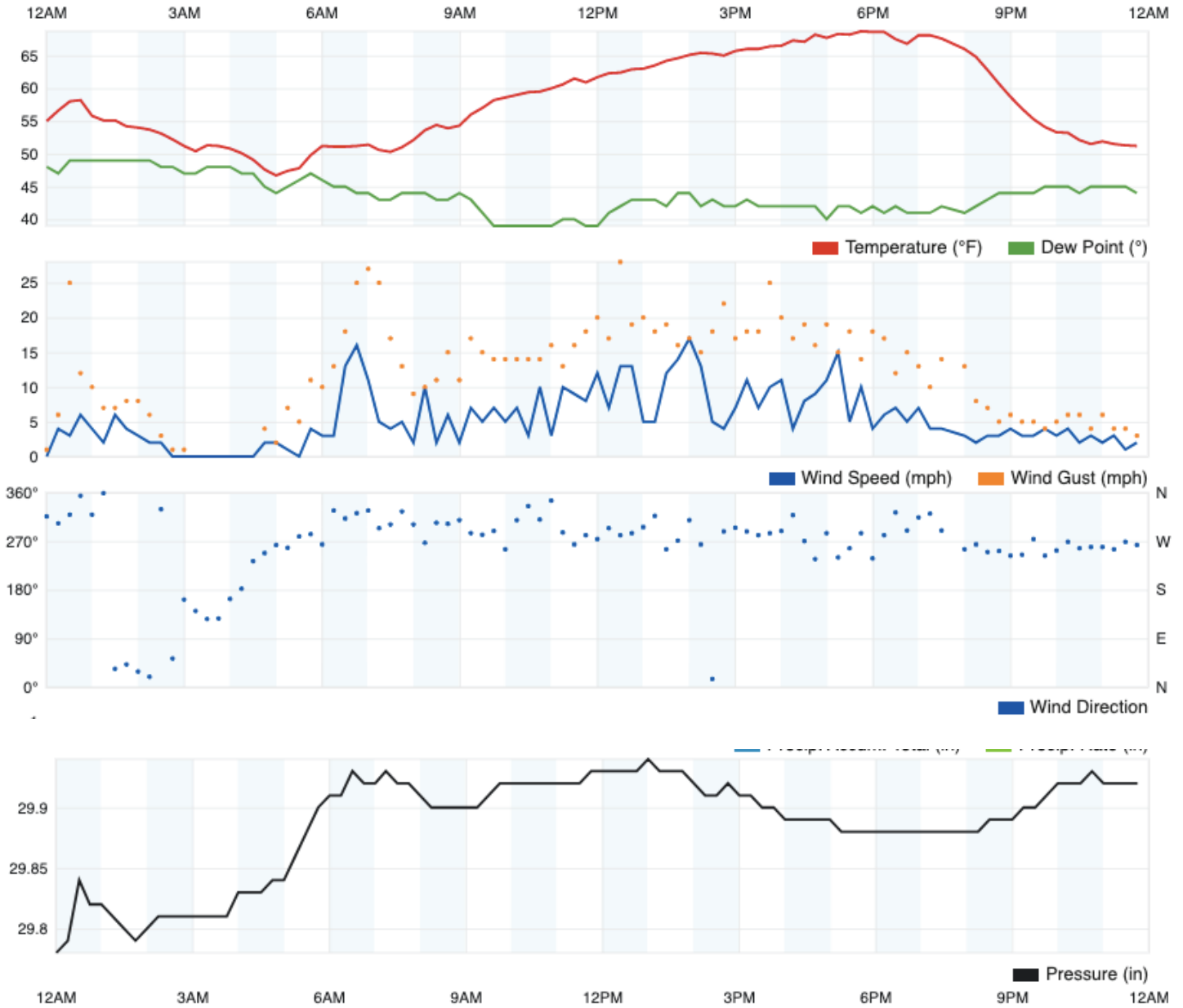
More information on U.S COVID-19 Community levels can be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html>



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Mostly Sunny

High: 70 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 45 °F

Monday



Sunny

High: 71 °F

Monday
Night



Partly Cloudy
then Slight
Chance
Showers

Low: 49 °F

Tuesday



Chance
Showers

High: 63 °F

Today's Forecast

Today: *Highs in the upper 60s/ lower 70s*



Tonight: *Lows ranging in the 40s.*



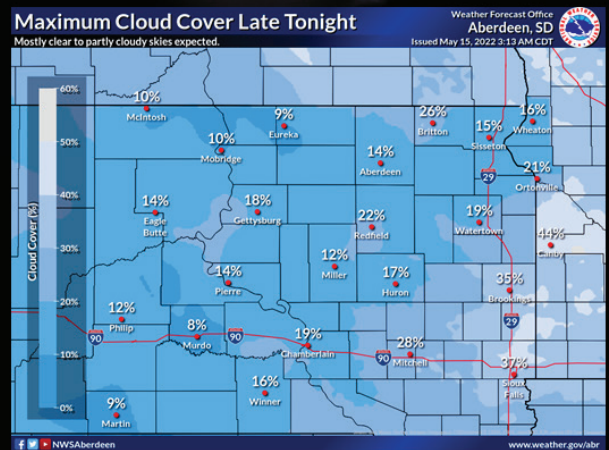
Enjoy the day as it will be quiet with decreasing clouds this morning leading to sunny skies. Pleasant temperatures as well with highs ranging from the mid 60s to the lower 70s across our area. Clear to partly cloudy for tonight with lows ranging in the 40s.

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Lunar Eclipse Tonight!

- Begins at 9:30pm CDT with totality around 10:30pm
- Duration: ~ 3.5 hours
- Should be a great viewing with clear to partly cloudy skies late tonight



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

www.weather.gov/abr

Tonight (May 15/16) is the Super Flower Blood Moon total lunar eclipse! If you can, try to stay up late to watch as we will have perfect viewing conditions! Clear to partly cloudy skies expected late tonight. Totality will be around 10:30pm CDT.

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Today in Weather History

May 15, 1964: A two-day rainfall event ended with 3.57 inches at Rapid City. Damage to roads and bridges was reported in the northern Black Hills.

1834 - The Northern Atlantic Coast States were in the midst of their greatest May snowstorm of record. The hills around Newbury, VT, were covered with two to three feet of snow. (David Ludlum)

1896: An estimated F5 tornado struck Sherman, Texas, killing 73 people; 60 of them in downtown. Tornado victims were found as far as 400 yards away from their original location. A trunk lid was carried 35 miles by the twister.

1957: An F4 tornado killed 20 people in Silverton, Texas. A 5,000-pound gasoline storage tank was reportedly carried 1.5 miles and dropped into a lake. Residents said the tornado "looked like red sand, boiling and rumbling."

1968: Also, an F5 tornado moved through Butler, Chickasaw, Floyd, Franklin, and Howard Counties in northeast Iowa. The tornado touched down northeast from north of Hansell, passing east of Aredale and Marble Rock, before devastating Charles City. The tornado grew more massive and intense as it approached Charles City. The huge funnel passed directly through town, destroying 337 homes, and causing about \$30 million in damage. The tornado continued to the northeast hitting Elma. From there the tornado turned to the north and dissipated south of Chester, 4 miles south of the Minnesota border. Nearly 2000 homes were damaged or destroyed. All 13 deaths occurred in Floyd County. 450 injuries were reported in Floyd County and 12 injuries in Howard County. Another F5 tornado moved north-northeast from southwest of Oelwein to Maynard and east of Randalia in Fayette County, IA. Homes were leveled and swept away in both Oelwein and Maynard. The warning sirens had sounded for only 15 seconds before the power failed in Oelwein. Nearly 1000 homes were damaged or destroyed along the path, and 34 people had to be hospitalized. Almost 1,000 families were affected. In addition to these F5 tornadoes, an F2 tornado touched down 6 miles south of Cresco, IA and two weak F1 tornadoes touched down in Dodge County, MN. Also, baseball size hail fell in Fayette County, IA.

1972: The worst ice jam flooding of memory for long-time residents took place along the Kuskokwim River and Yukon River in Alaska. It was the first time since 1890 that the two rivers "flowed as one." The towns of Oscarville and Napaskiak have been entirely inundated.

1987 - Unseasonably warm weather returned to the north central U.S. Seven cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including Janestown, ND, with a reading of 96 degrees. Thunderstorms in Utah produced five inches of rain south of Bicknell. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms in Oklahoma produced wind gusts to 80 mph in Oklahoma County, and baseball size hail at Pawnee. Hail piled up to a depth of 18 inches south of Pawnee. Hail damage in Oklahoma was estimated at close to 25 million dollars. Thunderstorms in the Upper Midwest produced golf ball size hail around Cleveland, OH, and wind gusts to 83 mph at Angola, IN. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing along and north of a stationary front produced severe weather in the south central U.S. Thunderstorms spawned eleven tornadoes, and there were 145 reports of large hail and damaging winds. Softball size hail caused 2.1 million dollars damage at Sherman, TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Central Plains Region and Oklahoma to Indiana and western Kentucky. Thunderstorms spawned fifteen tornadoes, including seven in Oklahoma, and there were 165 reports of large hail or damaging winds. A tornado killed one person, injured a dozen others, and caused four million dollars damage at Stillwater, OK. Another tornado injured eight persons at Foyil, OK. Thunderstorms in Oklahoma also produced wind gusts to 92 mph at Oologah Lake, and softball size hail at Canton and north of Oakwood. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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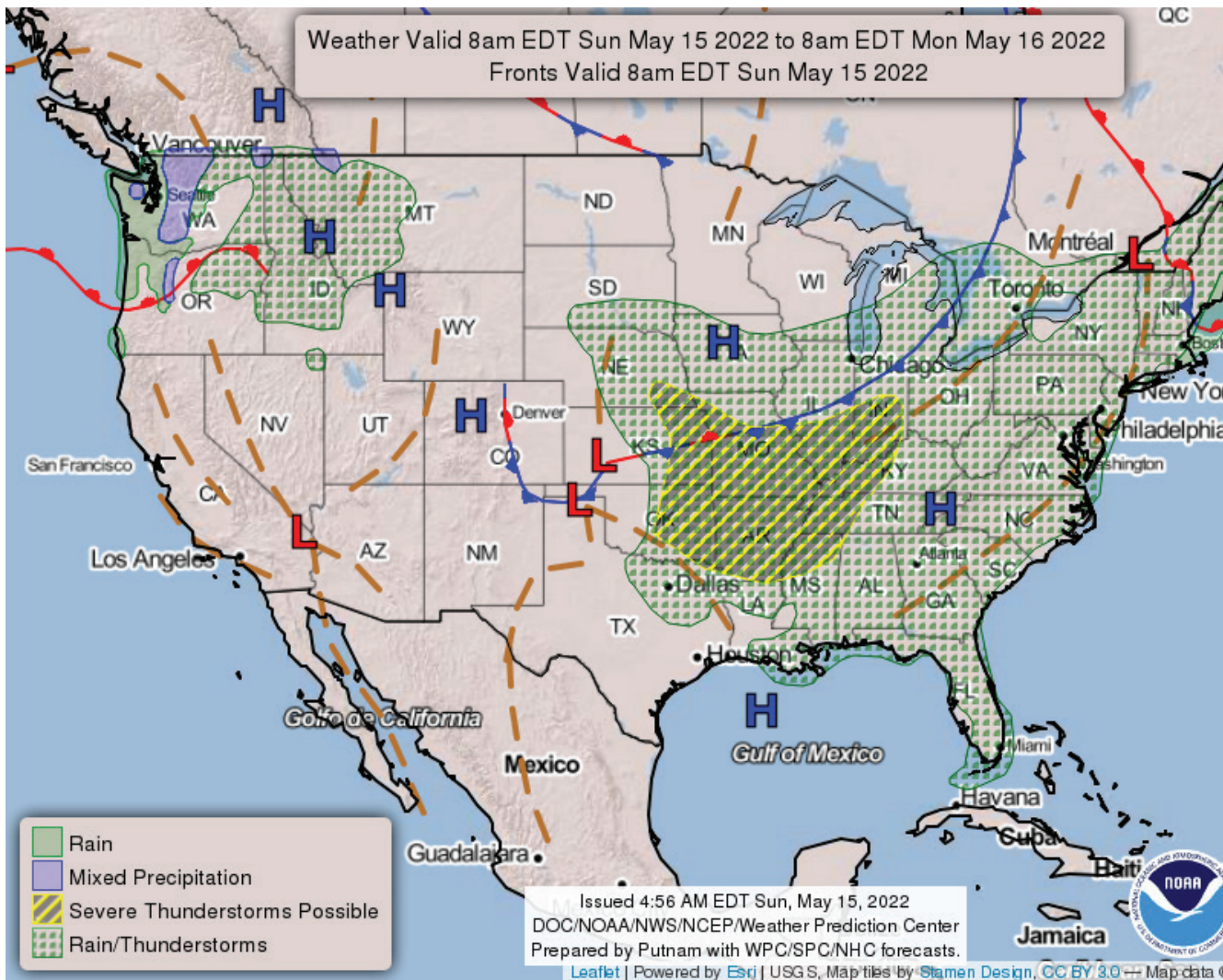
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 69 °F at 5:43 PM
Low Temp: 47 °F at 5:02 AM
Wind: 28 mph at 6:51 AM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 57 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 103 in 1931
Record Low: 23 in 2014
Average High: 70°F
Average Low: 44°F
Average Precip in May.: 1.65
Precip to date in May.: 2.40
Average Precip to date: 5.62
Precip Year to Date: 8.90
Sunset Tonight: 8:57:43 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:58:40 AM



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UNFATHOMABLE MIGHT

A teacher asked his fifth-grade science class a rather probing question: "What's the most powerful combination of words?" "Atomic power," shouted one. Another, raising his hand shouted, "Nuclear power." A third said, "Water power." The class went silent.

Finally, from the back of the room a student held up his hand and said, "Please, Sir, those are powerful words, but I think that the most powerful combination of words is Almighty God."

"Almighty" means "having all might." One who is designated as "almighty" is one who others believe can do anything. Nothing is beyond that one, and no one can even challenge the power vested in that one. Only God Who is the Creator of the universe and everything in it can do anything. His ability to do, control, sustain and work out His purposes is far beyond the power of our minds to understand. It is only something we can accept or reject but never challenge with our finite thoughts. In the final analysis, whatever His wisdom plans, His might and power can perform.

But what do these lofty thoughts mean for us? After all, if we accept the fact that God is Almighty, what real difference does it make to anyone?

The answer is simple and profound: This mighty and powerful God loves us and has sent His Son to save us from ourselves and eternal damnation. He gives us the option to call upon Him not only for salvation but help in times of need, cleansing from guilt and freedom from fear.

Prayer: How wonderful is Your name, O Lord, and how mighty Your thoughts, deeds and love that You care for us. In deed and in essence, You are Great. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. Psalm 145:3

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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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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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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 Saturday:

Dakota Cash

03-07-14-24-26

(three, seven, fourteen, twenty-four, twenty-six)

Estimated jackpot: \$29,000

Lotto America

01-10-30-33-44, Star Ball: 2, ASB: 3

(one, ten, thirty, thirty-three, forty-four; Star Ball: two; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$13,570,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 112,000,000

Powerball

06-40-41-45-52, Powerball: 9, Power Play: 3

(six, forty, forty-one, forty-five, fifty-two; Powerball: nine; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$90,000,000

US report details church-state collusion on Native schools

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

A new Interior Department report on the legacy of boarding schools for Native Americans underscores how closely the U.S. government collaborated with churches to Christianize them as part of a project to sever them from their culture, their identities and ultimately their land.

The role of churches forms a secondary part of the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, released Wednesday after a yearlong review sparked by the 2021 discoveries of hundreds of potential graves at former residential schools in Canada. Most of it focuses on the government's responsibility for its own officials' actions and policies.

But it details how the government provided funding and other support to religious boarding schools for Native children in the 19th and early 20th centuries to an extent that normally would have been prohibited under rules on separation between church and state. Churches had clout with the government as well, it adds, and were able to recommend people for appointments to federal positions on Native affairs.

While this church-state collaboration is well known to specialists in the field and was the subject of federal reports in past generations, the latest one brings it to a wide audience at a time when many Americans are only beginning to learn about the boarding schools.

The Interior Department report, quoting a 1969 Senate investigation, acknowledges that "federal policy toward the Indian was based on the desire to dispossess him of his land. Education policy was a function of our land policy."

A core part of that was training Native Americans in vocations that were less land-intensive — though often ill-suited to available jobs — in addition to breaking down tribal ties.

Christian conversion was also key, the report says, citing an 1886 Commissioner for Indian Affairs document that disparaged Native spiritual traditions and said the government should provide "encouragement and cooperation" to missionaries.

"The government aid furnished enables them to sustain their missions, and renders it possible ... to lead these people, whose paganism has been the chief obstacle to their civilization into the light of Christianity," the commissioner wrote at the time.

This week's report also says the government funded the schools with money held in trust for tribes as

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compensation for land they ceded. A 1908 Supreme Court ruling held that "the prohibition on the Federal Government to spend funds on religious schools did not apply to Indian treaty funds," it notes.

And it says, citing the 1969 Senate investigation, that the U.S. military "was frequently called in to reinforce the missionaries' orders" in the 19th century.

The report identifies 408 boarding schools for Indigenous children in 37 states and former territories that were either run or supported by the government between 1819 and 1969. While it doesn't say how many were church-run, an earlier report by the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition found that more than 150 were, about half each by Catholic and Protestant groups.

At a congressional hearing Thursday on a bill that would authorize a truth-and-healing commission to investigate the boarding schools, modeled on a similar one in Canada, witness Matthew War Bonnet testified about his childhood experience at the St. Francis Boarding School in South Dakota. Priests who ran the facility sought to alienate him from his parents and culture, and at times subjected him to sadistic abuse.

"The boarding schools were sanctioned by the United States Government," said War Bonnet, 76, a Sicangu Lakota from the Rosebud Sioux Reservation. "The government gave the churches our lands to Christianize us, modernize us and civilize us. But the churches treated us wrong. ... The government and the churches need to be held accountable."

The Rev. Bradley Hauff, the Episcopal Church's missionary for Indigenous ministries, who is Lakota and a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, said faith groups must confront their history of collaboration on the schools.

"As much as we in the church might not want to acknowledge that, it is the truth, and we have to acknowledge and reckon with it. We did work hand in hand with the government in the assimilation process," he said. "Most if not all the Christian denominations that had a presence in America in the late 19th century operated at least one Indigenous boarding school."

At its General Convention in July, the Episcopal Church plans to vote on probing its role with the schools and acknowledging its responsibility for causing trauma in generations of Native Americans.

Maka Black Elk, executive director of truth and healing at the Red Cloud Indian School, founded in 1888 by Jesuits in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, agreed that faith groups must reckon with their past. Lakota staffing, language and ritual are central to the modern Red Cloud school, which serves Christians as well as followers of Native spiritual traditions.

"While today we recognize there are many Native people who identify as Christian ... and value that part of their identity, we have to engage deeply with that history," he said.

Any evangelism must be "rooted in people's agency and (be) nonviolent," added Black Elk, who is Oglala Lakota. "That is a big part of our discussion today. That's a broader question for the greater Catholic church, not just us."

In April, Pope Francis apologized at the Vatican to Indigenous delegations from Canada "for the deplorable conduct of those members of the Catholic Church" in operating the schools, where many children were abused and died from disease and other causes. Francis plans to apologize again on Canadian soil in July.

The Friends Committee on National Legislation, a lobby affiliated with the Quaker movement, which operated multiple boarding schools, said in a statement that this week's Interior report should spur congressional approval of the truth and healing commission.

"Further, we call on the faith community at large to share records and accounts of their administration of these schools," the committee said. "Only through complete honesty and transparency can we begin moving towards a more just future."

Small wins buoy Ukraine; West says Russians losing momentum

By OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI and CIARAN McQUILLAN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Almost three months after Russia shocked the world by invading Ukraine, its military faced a bogged-down war, the prospect of a bigger NATO and a defending country buoyed by its win in a hugely popular pan-European music competition Sunday.

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Finland announced it would apply to join NATO, as top diplomats from the Western alliance, including U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, gathered Sunday in Berlin to discuss the war. Sweden's governing party plans to announce its position on seeking NATO membership later Sunday.

The two nonaligned Nordic nations becoming part of the alliance would pose an affront to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has cited NATO's post-Cold War expansion in Eastern Europe as a threat to Russia. NATO says it is a purely defensive alliance.

Ukraine said it was holding off Russian offensives Sunday in the country's east. Western military officials said the campaign Moscow launched there after its forces failed to seize Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, had slowed to a snail's pace.

"The brutal invasion (by) Russia is losing momentum," NATO Deputy Secretary-General Mircea Geoana said. "We know that with the bravery of the Ukrainian people and army, and with our help, Ukraine can win this war."

Ukraine, meanwhile, celebrated a morale-boosting victory in the Eurovision Song Contest. The folk-rap ensemble Kalush Orchestra won the glitzy, televised Eurovision contest with its song "Stefania," which has become a popular anthem among Ukrainians during the war. Votes from home viewers across Europe cemented the victory.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowed his nation would claim the customary winner's honor of hosting the next annual competition.

"Step by step, we are forcing the occupiers to leave the Ukrainian land," Zelenskyy said.

Russian and Ukrainian fighters are engaged in a grinding battle for the country's eastern industrial heartland, the Donbas. Ukraine's most experienced and best-equipped soldiers are based in eastern Ukraine, where they have fought Moscow-backed separatists for eight years.

The Ukrainian military said Sunday that it had held off a renewed Russian offensive near Bakhmut and Slavyansk, in the eastern Donesk region. A regional official said Russian troops also made renewed attempts at a breakthrough near the eastern city of Izyum early Sunday, but were held back by Ukrainian forces.

"The enemy is constantly checking the positions of our armed forces, trying to break through them, but has had no success and again suffered heavy human and equipment losses," Oleh Sinegubov, the governor of Ukraine's Kharkiv region, wrote in a Telegram post.

His claims could not be independently verified.

Britain's Defense Ministry said in its daily intelligence update Sunday that the Russian army had lost up to one-third of the combat strength it committed to Ukraine in late February and continued to suffer "consistently high levels of attrition" while failing to gain any substantial territory.

"Under the current conditions, Russia is unlikely to dramatically accelerate its rate of advance over the next 30 days," the ministry said on Twitter.

The assessments of Russia's war performance by Ukraine's supporters came as Russian troops retreated from around Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, after bombarding it for weeks.

The largely Russian-speaking city with a prewar population of 1.4 million is only 80 kilometers (50 miles) southwest of the Russian city of Belgorod, and was a key military objective earlier in the war, when Moscow hoped to capture and hold major cities.

Ukraine's military has said Moscow is focused now instead on guarding supply routes, while launching mortar, artillery and airstrikes in an attempt to deplete Ukrainian forces and destroy fortifications in the country's east.

Ukrainian troops are clearing villages on the outskirts of Kharkiv after pushing the Russians back, and some residents were returning.

"The war has shifted to a new level of distance artillery fighting -- we fire at them, they fire at us," said a Ukrainian commander who gave only his first name, Serhii.

Russia is also striking railways, factories and other infrastructure across Ukraine. A Russian missile hit "military infrastructure facilities" in the Yavoriv district of western Ukraine, near the border with Poland, early Sunday morning.

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There was no immediate information on dead or injured, Lviv Regional Governor Maksym Kozytskyy posted on the Telegram messaging app.

Russia has targeted rail facilities and other critical infrastructure in western Ukraine a major gateway for NATO-supplied weapons. Western officials have said despite the attacks there has been no appreciable impact on Ukraine's ability to resupply its forces.

After failing to capture Kyiv following the Feb. 24 invasion, Putin has shifted his focus eastward to the Donbas, aiming to seize territory not already occupied by the Moscow-backed separatists.

Airstrikes and artillery barrages make it extremely dangerous for journalists to move around in the east, hindering efforts to get a full picture of the fighting. But it appears to be a back-and-forth slog without major breakthroughs on either side.

In his nightly address Saturday, Zelenskyy said "the situation in Donbas remains very difficult" and Russian troops were "still trying to come out at least somewhat victorious."

In the southern Donbas, the Azov Sea port of Mariupol is now largely under Russian control, except for a few hundred Ukrainian troops who have refused to surrender and remain holed up in the Azovstal steel factory.

A convoy of between 500 and 1,000 cars carrying civilians out of Mariupol reportedly was able to reach the Ukrainian-held city of Zaporizhzhia on Saturday. Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk had said authorities were negotiating the evacuation of 60 severely wounded troops from the steel plant.

Turkey's presidential spokesman, Ibrahim Kalin, said the country had offered to evacuate wounded Ukrainian soldiers and civilians by ship from Azovstal, according to official state broadcaster TRT. Kalin said Russian and Ukrainian officials had not given Turkey a clear answer regarding the evacuation plan, but that it was still on the table.

The invasion of Ukraine has other countries along Russia's flank worried they could be next. The government of long-neutral Finland, which shares both a 1,340-kilometer (830-mile) land border and the Gulf of Finland with Russia, formally announced Sunday that it would apply for NATO membership.

"This is a historic day," President Sauli Niinistö, announcing Finland's decision alongside Prime Minister Sanna Marin, said in Helsinki.

Sweden's governing Social Democratic Party is set to announce its decision on NATO membership Sunday. If it comes out in favor, as is expected, an application to join the Western military alliance could happen within days.

NATO operates by consensus, and the Nordic nations' potential bids were thrown into question Friday when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said his country was "not of a favorable opinion."

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu accused the two countries of supporting Kurdish rebel groups but suggested Turkey would not necessarily block them joining NATO.

"These are the issues that we need to talk, of course, with our NATO allies," he said.

In a phone call Saturday, Putin told the Finnish president that there are no threats to Finland's security and joining NATO would be an "error" and "negatively affect Russian-Finnish relations."

Marin, Finland's prime minister, said joining NATO would help guarantee peace for Finland.

"We have had wars with Russia, and we don't want that kind of future for ourselves or for our children," she said.

Buddhist chaplains on the rise in US, offering broad appeal

By GOSIA WOZNIACKA Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Wedged into a recliner in the corner of her assisted living apartment in Portland, Skylar Freimann, who has a terminal heart condition and pulmonary illness, anxiously eyed her newly arrived hospital bed on a recent day and worried over how she would maintain independence as she further loses mobility.

There to guide her along the journey was the Rev. Jo Laurence, a hospice and palliative care chaplain. But rather than invoking God or a Christian prayer, she talked of meditation, chanting and other Eastern

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spiritual traditions: "The body can weigh us down sometimes," she counseled. "Where is the divine or the sacred in your decline?"

An ordained Sufi minister and practicing Zen Buddhist who brings years of meditation practice and scriptural training to support end-of-life patients, Laurence is part of a burgeoning generation of Buddhist chaplains who are increasingly common in hospitals, hospices and prisons, where the need for their services rose dramatically during the pandemic.

In a profession long dominated in the U.S. by Christian clergy, Buddhists are leading an ever more diverse field that includes Muslim, Hindu, Wiccan and even secular humanist chaplains. Buddhist chaplains say they're uniquely positioned for the times due to their ability to appeal to a broad cultural and religious spectrum, including the growing number of Americans — roughly one-third — who identify as nonreligious.

In response, study and training opportunities have been established or expanded in recent years. They include the Buddhist Ministry Initiative at Harvard Divinity School and the Buddhism track at Union Theological Seminary, an ecumenical Christian liberal seminary in New York City. Colorado's Naropa University, a Buddhist-inspired liberal arts college, recently launched a low-residency hybrid degree chaplaincy program. Nonaccredited certifications such as those offered by the New York Zen Center for Contemplative Care or the Upaya Zen Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico, are also popular.

"The programs keep expanding, so it seems clear that there's a growing demand from students. And the students appear to be finding jobs after graduation," said Monica Sanford, assistant dean for Multireligious Ministry at Harvard Divinity School and an ordained Buddhist minister.

In the past, Buddhist chaplains were often hired by the likes of hospitals and police departments specifically to minister to Asian immigrant communities. During World War II, they served Japanese American soldiers in the military. Today, however, they are more mainstream.

In a first-of-its-kind report published this month, Sanford and a colleague identified 425 chaplains in the United States, Canada and Mexico representing all major branches of Buddhism, though the researchers say there are likely many more. More than 40% work in health care, the Mapping Buddhist Chaplains in North America report found, while others serve in schools, in prisons or as self-employed counselors.

Two-thirds of respondents reported holding a Master of Divinity, another graduate degree or a chaplaincy certificate. Most of those working as staff chaplains also completed clinical pastoral education internships and residencies in health care and other settings.

Maitripa College, a Tibetan Buddhist college also in Portland, has seen increased interest in its Master of Divinity track since its launch 10 years ago, said Leigh Miller, director of academic and public programs. It appeals to a broad range, from older Buddhists with 20 years of practice to new college graduates who just started meditating, from spiritual seekers to people with multiple religious belongings.

Hospitals and other institutions are eager to hire Buddhist chaplains, Miller said, in part to boost staff diversity and also because they are adept at relating to others using inclusive, neutral language.

"Buddhist chaplains are in the habit of speaking in more universal terms, focusing on compassion, being grounded, feeling at peace," she said. "A lot of Christian chaplains fall back on God language, leading prayers or reading Bible scriptures."

Meanwhile, training in mindfulness and meditation, as well as beliefs regarding the nature of self, reality and the impermanence of suffering, give Buddhists unique tools to confront pain and death.

"The fruit of those hours on the (meditation) cushion really shows up in the ability to be present, to drop one's own personal agenda and to have a kind of awareness of self and other that allows for an interdependent relationship to arise," Miller said.

Buddhist chaplaincy also faces challenges, including how to become more accessible to Buddhists of color. The Mapping Buddhist Chaplains in North America report found that most professional Buddhist chaplains today are white and have a Christian family background, even though nearly two-thirds of the faith's followers in the U.S. are Asian American, according to the Pew Research Center.

Traditional Buddhist communities tend to be small and run by volunteers so they often lack the resources to offer endorsements to chaplains — a necessary step for board certification, which is often required for

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employment.

And non-Christian chaplains can struggle with feelings of isolation and a need to code-switch in Christian-founded health care institutions where crosses hang on walls, prayers are offered at staff meetings and Jesus and the Bible are regularly invoked.

Providence Health & Services, a Catholic nonprofit based in Washington state that runs hospitals in seven Western states, is one Christian health care system seeking to change that.

Mark Thomas, a chief mission officer in Oregon, said the system employs 10 Buddhist chaplains not despite but precisely because of its Catholic identity. The aim is to ensure patients get good spiritual care however it best suits them.

"Many patients resonate with some aspect or even just a perception of Buddhism," said Thomas, citing practices like meditation and breathing that can help them cope with suffering. "These tools have been enormously valuable."

Laurence, the hospice chaplain at Portland's Providence Home and Community Services, grew up in London and felt called to Buddhism after witnessing poverty, violence and racism as a caregiver in Mississippi.

She said that as more people become unchurched, many patients don't have a language for their spirituality or it's tied up with religious trauma. Laurence supports them in whatever way they need, be it through Christian prayer, the comfort of a cool washcloth on a forehead or a Buddhist-inspired blessing.

"For some people the language of Buddhism is a respite," she said. "It doesn't have the baggage, and it feels so soothing to them."

Freimann, her patient, said she has practiced Eastern spiritual traditions and therefore was delighted to receive Laurence.

"I don't think of God the way traditionally religious people do," Freimann told her during the visit. "What a joy you're here. ... It would be so much harder to talk with a Christian chaplain."

In early primaries, voters favor polling places over mail

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The great vote-by-mail wave appears to be receding just as quickly as it arrived.

After tens of millions of people in the United States opted for mail ballots during the pandemic election of 2020, voters in early primary states are returning in droves to in-person voting this year.

In Georgia, one of the mostly hotly contested states, about 85,000 voters had requested mail ballots for the May 24 primary, as of Thursday. That is a dramatic decrease from the nearly 1 million who cast mail ballots in the state's 2020 primary at the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

The trend was similar in Ohio, Indiana and West Virginia, which held primaries this month; comparisons were not available for Nebraska, another early primary state.

A step back in mail balloting was expected given easing concerns about COVID-19, but some election officials and voting experts had predicted that far more voters would seek out the convenience of mail voting once they experienced it.

Helping drive the reversal is the rollback of temporary rules expanding mail ballots in 2020, combined with distrust of the process among Republicans and concerns about new voting restrictions among Democrats. And a year and a half of former President Donald Trump and his allies pushing false claims about mail voting to explain his loss to Democrat Joe Biden has also taken a toll on voter confidence.

"It's unfortunate because our election system has been mischaracterized and the integrity of our elections questioned," said Ben Hovland, a Democrat appointed by Trump to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission. "Mail ballots are a safe and secure method of voting used by millions of Americans, including myself."

A record 43% of voters in the U.S. cast mail ballots in 2020, compared with 24.5% in 2016, according to the commission's survey of local election officials. The number of voters who used in-person early voting also increased, although the jump was not quite as large as in mail ballots, the survey found.

Before the November 2020 election, 12 states expanded access to mail ballots by loosening certain requirements. Five more either mailed ballots to all eligible voters or allowed local officials to do so, ac-

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According to the National Conference of State Legislatures. This year, eight states will mail ballots to every eligible voter.

In Georgia, state officials had adopted no-excuse mail ballots and three weeks of early, in-person voting before the pandemic. Laws surrounding mail voting changed after the 2020 election, amid Trump's effort to discredit the outcome after his narrow loss in the state.

There is no evidence to support Trump's claims of widespread fraud or a conspiracy to steal the election. Judges, including some appointed by Trump, dismissed numerous lawsuits challenging the results. An exhaustive review by The Associated Press of every potential 2020 voter fraud case in the six states disputed by Trump found nowhere near enough instances to affect the result.

That has not stopped Republican state lawmakers from citing election security concerns as justification for new restrictions to voting, and mail voting in particular. The changes have confused some voters. In Texas, voters were tripped up by new identification requirements in the state's March primary, resulting in an abnormally high rate of mail ballot rejections.

Requesting a mail ballot is significantly harder now in Georgia than in 2020, when voters could go online to request a ballot be sent to them without a printed request. Part of the 2021 voting law pushed by Republicans required voters to print or obtain a paper form, then sign it in ink before sending it in by mail, email or fax.

Voters also must include their driver's license number or some other form of identification after Republicans decided that the process of matching voter signatures was no longer enough security for an absentee ballot application.

"I couldn't even figure it out," said Ursula Gruenewald, who lives in Cobb County, north of Atlanta. "Before, I used to just click a button on a website, and they'd send me my ballot. I don't know what they want now."

Gruenewald said she usually votes by mail but decided last week to seek out a nearby early voting center, recalling she had waited in line for two hours to vote in person in 2016.

Experts said it is too early to say whether voting patterns have shifted permanently. How people vote in primaries does not necessarily reflect how they will vote in a general election, when turnout will be heavier and voters might be more worried about crowded polling places and long lines.

Preliminary data from Ohio, Indiana and West Virginia also shows the number of mail ballots cast this year is a fraction of what the states saw in the 2020 primaries and tracks closely to 2018 levels.

In the Virginia governor's election last year, the percentage of mail ballots cast was slightly larger than four years earlier but noticeably lower than in 2020, said Charles Stewart III, an elections expert and professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"Elections are kind of going back to where they were," he said.

In Georgia, voting groups are concerned that a new earlier deadline to request a mail ballot will trip up voters if they wait too long. They also are closely watching the rate of ballot rejections. About 1,000 mail ballot applications have been rejected so far, or about 1.2% of all applications received. That is a lower rate than the 2018 primary and slightly higher than the 2020 elections.

As of late last week, 195 mail ballots have been rejected, mostly because of missing or incorrect ID information, which are new requirements under state law. Common Cause Georgia deployed "self-help stations" around the state where voters could access a computer, printer and scanner to print out a mail ballot application before Friday's deadline.

"People are believing political propaganda and not understanding this is creating more hurdles to voting," said Aunna Dennis, the group's executive director.

Georgia voters instead are turning to early, in-person voting, which is setting records. About 305,000 ballots have been cast at early voting locations across the state, or three times as many who did so for the same period during the 2018 primary, according to state officials.

Outside an early voting location north of Atlanta, some voters said they simply preferred the convenience of voting early and in person, while others said they worried mail ballots were not as secure.

"Today I walked in, got my ballot, voted, and I'm leaving," said Bill Baldwin, who was back to voting in

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person after casting a mail ballot in 2020 due to pandemic concerns. "And I'm not standing in a line to the other end of the building."

Debbie Hamby, a nurse who lives in Kennesaw, north of Atlanta, said she supports limits on mail ballots and believes voting in-person is more secure. She, too, voted early last week.

"There's not a question as to who the person is if you have your license and identity," Hamby said. "You can see the person in the picture is the person who's voting, and we know that it's an honest vote."

World leaders descend on UAE to pay respects to late ruler

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — An array of presidents and prime ministers continued to descend on the United Arab Emirates Sunday from around the world to pay their respects to the federation's late ruler. They also came to praise his successor, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan — a vivid sign of Abu Dhabi's influence in Western and Arab capitals.

The first Western leader to jet to the oil-rich emirate was French President Emmanuel Macron. He met Sunday with Sheikh Mohammed to pay tribute to Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the long-ailing ruler who died Friday at the age of 73 after years presiding over the country's rapid transformation into a global business hub and regional power center.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was expected to arrive later Sunday to offer condolences, along with other leaders including Israel's president after the two countries opened formal relations in 2020.

An American delegation led by Vice President Kamala Harris is due to visit the UAE on Monday, a bid to ease tensions and show support as relations between the countries have strained under President Joe Biden.

"He was respected by all for the values of peace, openness and dialogue that he embodied," Macron wrote on Twitter of Sheikh Khalifa, expressing "full support" for the ascension of his half-brother Sheikh Mohammed after rulers in the federation unanimously appointed him as president.

As crown prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed has served as the nation's de facto leader since Sheikh Khalifa suffered a stroke in 2014. He has turned the small UAE — population 10 million — into a most influential state. With Abu Dhabi's petrodollars and substantial military along with Dubai's major firms and glitzy hotels, the UAE has come to wield outsized power across the Middle East and Africa.

Even as the country became entangled in the bloody, yearslong conflict in Yemen and a chaotic proxy war in Libya, it positioned itself as a savvy and reliable partner in Western capitals.

Paris and Abu Dhabi have become increasingly aligned in recent years, sharing a deep mistrust of Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood across the region, including in Turkey and Libya.

France opened a major overseas naval base in Abu Dhabi. French warplanes and personnel are also stationed at a facility outside the Emirati capital. The two governments jointly built a gleaming branch of the Louvre museum in the emirate.

During Macron's visit to Dubai last December, France clinched its biggest overseas order for its Rafale combat jet with the UAE — an \$18 billion deal that came as a planned U.S. sale of advanced F-35 fighter jets to the UAE stalled in part over American concerns about the Emirates' relationship with China.

Sheikh Mohammed's assertive foreign policy in the Arab world was on stark display as allied leaders rushed to the capital on Saturday to express sorrow over Sheikh Khalifa's death and congratulate Sheikh Mohammed on his formal ascension to power.

Among the first was Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi, the Egyptian general who, with Gulf Arab support, overthrew an elected but divisive Islamist government in 2013.

Emirati-backed Tunisian President Kais Saied, who has amassed nearly absolute power in the country since dismissing the prime minister last year, also flew in to pay tribute, along with Jordan's King Abdullah II and Iraq's president and prime minister.

Sudan's Abdel-Fattah Burhan, the general who led the coup in the strategic east African nation last year, has made frequent visits to key backer Sheikh Mohammed. He posted footage on social media Saturday sprinting up stairs to board his plane to Abu Dhabi to honor the late Emirati president.

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The UAE's recent deal to normalize ties with Israel, borne from mutual enmity for Iran, is also indicative of Sheikh Mohammed's quietly assertive foreign policy. Before Israel's largely ceremonial President Isaac Herzog took off for Abu Dhabi on Sunday, he offered words of gratitude for the Emirates' leaders.

"The partnership between our countries is an asset for us and for the whole region and it has been built and is still being built by bold and groundbreaking leaders," he said.

Meanwhile, Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's own upstart crown prince who has had a close relationship with Sheikh Mohammed, delivered his condolences on the phone.

Russian neighbor Finland announces it wants to join NATO

By FRANK JORDANS and JARI TANNER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Finland declared Sunday that it wants to join NATO, as a senior official with the western military alliance expressed hope that — with Russia's military advance appearing to falter — Ukraine can win the war.

President Sauli Niinisto and Prime Minister Sanna Marin made the announcement that Finland would seek membership of NATO during a joint news conference at the Presidential Palace in Helsinki. The previously neutral Nordic country shares a long border with Russia.

"This is a historic day. A new era begins," Niinisto said.

The Finnish Parliament is expected to endorse the decision in coming days. A formal membership application will then be submitted to NATO headquarters in Brussels, most likely at some point next week.

The announcement came as top diplomats from the 30 NATO member states met in Berlin to discuss providing further support to Ukraine and moves by Finland, Sweden and others to join NATO in the face of threats from Russia.

"The brutal invasion (by) Russia is losing momentum," NATO Deputy-Secretary General Mircea Geoana told reporters early Sunday.

"We know that with the bravery of the Ukrainian people and army, and with our help, Ukraine can win this war," he said.

Geoana, who was chairing the meeting while NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg recovers from a COVID-19 infection, said Ukraine's supporters were "united, we are strong, will continue to help Ukraine in winning this war."

Sweden has also already taken steps toward joining the alliance, while Georgia's bid is again being discussed despite dire warnings from Moscow about the consequences if its neighbor becomes part of NATO.

"Finland and Sweden are already the closest partners of NATO," Geoana said, adding that he expected allies to view their applications positively.

Nordic NATO member Norway said it strongly welcomed Finland's decision to seek membership. Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt described Helsinki's move as "a turning point" for the Nordic region's defense and security policies.

"Finnish membership in NATO will be good for Finland, good for the Nordic region, and good for NATO. Finland has Norway's full support," Huitfeldt said in comments emailed to The Associated Press.

Huitfeldt said the Norwegian government would facilitate "a swift consent to ratification by the Norwegian Parliament" for Finland's accession into NATO.

"We are now seeing unprecedented unity in NATO. With the Finnish membership, we will further strengthen the Nordic flank of the military alliance," Huitfeldt said.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said her country and others made clear during a dinner late Saturday that they would be willing to fast-track the national ratification process for both Finland and Sweden.

"If these two countries are deciding to join, they can join very quickly," she said.

Denmark's foreign minister dismissed suggestions that objections from Russian President Vladimir Putin could hinder the alliance from letting in new members.

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"Each and every European country has a fundamental right to choose their own security arrangement," Jeppe Kofod told reporters.

"We see now a world where the enemy of democracy number one is Putin and the thinking that he represents," he said, adding that NATO would also stand with other countries, such as Georgia, which he said were being "instrumentalized" by Russia.

On the sidelines of the meeting, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met earlier Sunday with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba to discuss the impact of the war and how to get Ukraine's grain to international markets.

State Department spokesperson Ned Price said Blinken "underscored the United States' enduring commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of Russia's unprovoked war."

Britain's top diplomat said NATO members would also discuss security issues beyond Europe during their meeting Sunday — a reference to growing unease among democratic nations about the rise of China.

"As well as protecting Euro-Atlantic security, we also need to watch out for Indo-Pacific security," Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said.

The meeting follows a gathering of foreign ministers from the Group of Seven leading economies on Germany's Baltic Sea coast this week. Officials there expressed strong support for Ukraine and warned that Russia's blockade of grain exports from Ukrainian ports risks stoking a global food crisis.

Eurovision win in hand, Ukraine band releases new war video

By NICOLE WINFIELD and PAOLO SANTALUCIA Associated Press

TURIN, Italy (AP) — Ukrainian band Kalush Orchestra, fresh off its Eurovision victory, released a new music video Sunday of its winning hit "Stefania" that features scenes of war-ravaged Ukraine and women in combat gear, as the annual song contest took on ever more political tones.

The video was released hours after Kalush Orchestra brought Ukraine its third Eurovision win, pulling ahead of Britain in the grand final after the votes from some of the estimated 200 million viewers from 40 participating countries were tallied.

Band members posed for photos and signed autographs outside their Turin hotel Sunday, en route to an interview with Italian host broadcaster RAI. They must return to Ukraine on Monday after being given special permission to leave the country to attend the competition.

Russia was barred from the Eurovision Song Contest this year after its Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine, a move organizers said was meant to keep politics out of the contest that promotes diversity and friendship among nations.

But politics nevertheless entered into the fray, with Kalush frontman Oleh Psiuk ending his winning performance Sunday night with a plea from the stage: "I ask all of you, please help Ukraine, Mariupol. Help Azovstal right now!" he said, referring to the besieged steel plant in the strategic port city.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy hailed the victory, saying he hoped Ukraine would be able to host the contest next year and predicting the "victorious chord in the battle with the enemy is not far off."

"Stefania" was penned by lead singer Psiuk as a tribute to his mother, but since Russia's invasion it has become an anthem to the motherland, with lyrics that pledge: "I'll always find my way home, even if all roads are destroyed."

The new music video features women soldiers carrying children out of bombed-out buildings, greeting children in shelters and leaving them behind as they board trains. The video credits said it was shot in towns that have seen some of the worst destruction of the war, including Bucha, Irpin, Borodyanka and Hostomel.

The video was clearly made before the band left Ukraine as it features band members and — presumably — actors performing in the rubble.

"Dedicated to the brave Ukrainian people, to the mothers protecting their children, to all those who gave their lives for our freedom," it said.

Kalush Orchestra includes folklore experts and mixes traditional folk melodies and contemporary hip hop

in a strong defense of Ukrainian culture that has taken on added meaning as Russia has sought falsely to assert that Ukraine's culture is not unique.

At an early Sunday press conference after the contest, Psiuk in his trademark pink bucket hat said the win was particularly meaningful given the war and the popular support that pushed Ukraine to victory.

"We are here to show that Ukrainian culture and Ukrainian music are alive, and they have their own and very special signature," Psiuk said.

Okinawa marks 50 years of end to US rule amid protests

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Okinawa Governor Denny Tamaki on Sunday urged Japan's central government to do more to reduce the U.S. military presence in the southern island group as it marked the 50th anniversary of its return to Japan after 27 years of American rule, amid frustration and bitterness over a lack of support from the mainland.

Tamaki said Okinawa has come a long way since the devastation of World War II and nearly three decades of U.S. rule, which ended when it reverted to Japan on May 15, 1972. But the tiny island group's yearslong demand for the mainland to share its security burden remains unresolved.

"I call on the central government to share with the entire nation the significance of Okinawa's reversion and the importance of permanent peace that Okinawans have long craved for," Tamaki said.

Ceremonies marking the anniversary were held simultaneously in two locations — one in the Okinawan city of Giowan, home to a disputed U.S. air station, and the other in Tokyo. The separate ceremonies symbolize the deep divide in views over Okinawa's history and ongoing suffering.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said he takes Okinawa's concerns seriously and will make efforts to reduce the burden while still maintaining U.S. military deterrence on the islands.

Kishida and his minister in charge of the islands were in Okinawa, where hundreds of protesters staged a rally Saturday demanding a speedier reduction of U.S. military forces, as fears grow that Okinawa may become a front line of conflict amid rising China tensions.

More protests were held Sunday on Okinawa, including one in the prefectural capital of Naha, where nearly 1,000 people renewed their demands for peace.

Resentment and frustration run deep in Okinawa over the heavy U.S. presence and Tokyo's lack of effort to negotiate with Washington to balance the security burden between mainland Japan and the southern island group.

Because of the U.S. bases, Okinawa faces burdens including noise, pollution, accidents and crime related to American troops, Okinawan officials and residents say.

Adding to Okinawa's fears is the growing deployment of Japanese missile defense and amphibious capabilities on Okinawa's outer islands, including Ishigaki, Miyako and Yonaguni, which are close to geopolitical hotspots like Taiwan.

Okinawa was the site of one of the bloodiest battles of World War II, which killed about 200,000 people, nearly half of them Okinawan residents.

Okinawa was sacrificed by Japan's imperial army to defend the mainland, and many Okinawans are skeptical that the Japanese military would protect them in future conflicts, experts say.

The U.S. military kept its troop presence on the island group for 20 years longer than most of Japan, until 1972, due to Okinawa's strategic importance for Pacific security to deter Russia and communism.

Many Okinawans had hoped that the islands' return to Japan would improve the economy and human rights situation as well as base burdens.

Today, a majority of the 50,000 U.S. troops based in Japan under a bilateral security pact and 70% of military facilities are still in Okinawa, which accounts for only 0.6% of Japanese land. The burden has increased from less than 60% in 1972 because unwelcomed U.S. bases were moved from the mainland.

Emperor Naruhito, in his online speech from his Tokyo palace, acknowledged "many issues" remain on Okinawa and said "I hope that the people, including the younger generation, will have a deeper under-

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standing of Okinawa.”

His abdicated father Akihito, devoted to atoning for scars of the war fought in his father Hirohito's name, was nearly hit by a Molotov cocktail during a 1975 visit as crown prince, but continued showing a special interest in Okinawa.

U.S. President Joe Biden, who is scheduled to visit Japan next week, praised the strong U.S.-Japan alliance and their shared values and vision.

“I am profoundly grateful for Japan's resolute support for democracy, freedom, and the rule of law and for Okinawa's contribution to advancing these ideals,” Biden said in a statement.

The biggest sticking point between Okinawa and Tokyo is the central government's insistence that a U.S. marine base in a crowded neighborhood, the Futenma air station, should be relocated within Okinawa instead of moving it elsewhere as demanded by many Okinawans.

Tokyo and Washington initially agreed in 1996 to close the station after the 1995 rape of a schoolgirl by three U.S. military personnel led to a massive anti-base movement.

Tamaki earlier in May submitted a petition to Kishida's government and U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel demanding a significant reduction of the U.S. military in Okinawa, the immediate closure of the Futenma base and the scrapping of a new base in Henoko.

Economic, educational and social development in Okinawa lagged behind as Japan enjoyed a postwar economic surge that was helped by lower defense spending because of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa.

The central government's development fund since the reversion has improved Okinawa's infrastructure but the growth of local industry that was largely hampered during U.S. rule is still largely limited to tourism.

Today, Okinawa's average household income is the lowest and its unemployment is the highest of Japan's 47 prefectures. If land taken by the U.S. military is returned to the prefecture for other use, it would produce three times more income for Okinawa than the island now makes from bases, Tamaki said recently.

Okinawan authorities regularly face denials by the U.S side in criminal and environmental investigations.

Mired in collapse, Lebanese vote for new parliament

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Lebanese voted for a new parliament Sunday against the backdrop of an economic meltdown that is transforming the country and low expectations that the election would significantly alter the political landscape.

A new crop of candidates from the 2019 protest movement are running against the country's entrenched ruling class that is blamed for the collapse, hoping to unseat them. But they are divided and lack the money, experience and other advantages held by traditional political rulers with a decades-long grip on power.

People began casting their ballots shortly after the polls opened under the watchful eye of security forces that have fanned out across the country. Sunday's vote is the first since Lebanon's implosion started in October 2019, triggering widespread anti-government protests.

It is also the first election since the massive August 2020 explosion at Beirut's port that killed more than 200 people, injured thousands and destroyed parts of Lebanon's capital. The blast, widely blamed on negligence, was set off by hundreds of tons of poorly stored ammonium nitrate that ignited in a port warehouse after a fire broke out at the facility.

Sunday's voting is seen as a last chance to reverse course and punish the current crop of politicians, most of whom derive their power from Lebanon's sectarian political system and spoils taken at the end of its 15-year civil war in 1990. But expectations for real change were low amid skepticism and widespread resignation that the vote was sure to bring back the same powerful political parties.

“I did what I can do and I know the situation will not change 180 degrees,” said Rabah Abbas, 74, after casting his ballot in Beirut. He fears the vote is only symbolic and that Lebanon will be stuck again in post-election political bickering over the formation of a new government and electing a new president in October.

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"We will hit a wall again. Lebanon is a hopeless case," he said, echoing common sentiment. Polls close at 7 p.m. local time (1600 GMT) and official results were expected Monday.

The extent of Lebanon's collapse was on full display Sunday. In the northern city of Tripoli, Lebanon's most impoverished city, several polling stations were without electricity and voters had to climb several flights of stairs to cast their ballots. Voters were seen using the light from their mobile phones to check names and lists before casting their ballot.

Mirvat Dimashkieh, 55, a housewife, said she is voting for change and for the "new faces" running, adding that longtime politicians should step aside.

"They should give a chance to others. Enough theft," she said.

Mainstream political parties and politicians remained strong going into the vote, while opposition figures and civil society activists hoping to unseat them are fractured. Lebanese parties have long relied on a system that encourages voters to cast ballots in return for favors and individual benefits.

Money flowed, with political parties offering cash bribes, sandwiches, transportation and other favors to voters.

Since the meltdown began, tens of thousands of people have lost their jobs, the Lebanese pound has shed most more than 90% of its value and many have left the country seeking opportunities abroad. Three quarters of the country's 6 million people, including 1 million Syrian refugees, now live in poverty.

The World Bank has described Lebanon's collapse as one of the world's worst in the past 150 years.

Some 718 candidates on 103 lists are running for seats in the 128-member parliament. The vote is held once every four years. In 2018, voters gave the powerful Hezbollah and its allies the majority with 71 seats.

Lebanon has more than 3.5 million eligible voters, many of whom will cast their ballots in its 15 electoral districts.

Western-backed mainstream parties are hoping to strip the parliamentary majority from Hezbollah, while many independents are hoping to break through traditional party lists and candidates.

Reflecting the tensions, fistfights broke out between Hezbollah supporters and those of the Saudi-backed Christian Lebanese Forces party, which has been among the most vocal critics of the Iran-armed group.

The Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections said its delegates were forced to withdraw from two polling stations following threats by Hezbollah supporters and their allies of the Shiite Amal group.

The vote this year comes as the main Sunni political leader, former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, suspended his work in politics and called for a Sunni boycott. Some have warned this may help Hezbollah's Sunni allies to win more seats.

In a sign of how political allegiances often take precedent in Lebanon, Qassim Shtouni, 71, drove all the way from his village in southern Lebanon to Beirut to vote. He said he chose an alliance consisting of several mainstream groups including Hezbollah, President Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement and the Amal group of Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri.

Sitting on a plastic chair outside a polling station, Shtouni said the main reason he voted for a Hezbollah-led alliance is "because my vote will be against normalization with Israel." He noted recent agreements between Israel and Gulf Arab countries.

"The elections in Lebanon today are not local elections. They are international elections," he said, referring to the political battle between Iran-backed groups and pro-West factions.

After the election results are out, the government of Prime Minister Najib Mikati will become a caretaker Cabinet until the president calls for consultations with the new parliament members, who will choose the next premier.

The new parliament will also elect a new head of state after President Michel Aoun's six-year term expires at the end of October.

Lebanon's parliament and Cabinet seats are equally divided between Muslims and Christians under the constitution that was drafted shortly before the civil war ended.

Pope rallies from knee pain to proclaim 10 new saints

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By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) —

Pope Francis created 10 new saints on Sunday, rallying from knee pain that has forced him to use a wheelchair to preside over the first canonization ceremony at the Vatican in over two years.

Francis stood for a long period at the start to greet priests concelebrating the Mass, presided over the nearly two-hour ceremony and then stood and walked for a good 15 minutes after it ended to greet dozens of cardinals and bishops. Vatican cameras lingered on the scene as if to showcase the pope's mobility and refute speculation about his health and the future of his pontificate.

Francis, 85, then took a lengthy, seated popemobile ride around St. Peter's Square and the boulevard leading to it to greet some of the tens of thousands of people who came out to celebrate the Catholic Church's newest saints. They include a Dutch priest-journalist who was killed by the Nazis, a lay Indian convert who was killed for his faith and a half-dozen French and Italian priests and nuns who founded religious orders.

Francis told the crowd of more than 45,000 that the 10 embodied holiness in everyday life, and said the church needs to embrace this idea rather than an unattainable ideal of personal achievement.

"Holiness does not consist of a few heroic gestures, but of many small acts of daily love," he said from his chair on the altar.

Francis has been complaining of strained ligaments in his right knee for months, and has recently been seen using a wheelchair at public audiences. Sunday's ceremony was evidence that Francis is still able to still walk, but appears to be taking it as easy as possible to let the ligaments heal before an intense period of travel starting in July: The Vatican has confirmed two trips that month, one to Congo and South Sudan and one to Canada.

It was the first canonization Mass at the Vatican since before the coronavirus pandemic and, aside from Easter celebrations last month, drew one of the biggest crowds in recent times.

The Italian president, Dutch foreign minister, French interior minister and the minister for minorities of India, as well as tens of thousands of faithful packed the sunny piazza, which was adorned with Dutch flowers in honor of the Rev. Titus Brandsma, a martyr saint who was killed at the Dachau concentration camp in 1942.

In the runup to the canonization, a group of Dutch and German journalists formally proposed that Brandsma become a co-patron saint of journalists, alongside St. Francis de Sales, given his work to combat propaganda and fake news during the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe. According to an open letter sent to Francis this month, the journalists noted that Brandsma successfully argued for a ban on printing Nazi propaganda in Catholic newspapers. There has been no immediate response from the pope.

In addition to Brandsma, the new saints include the 18th-century Indian convert Lazarus, known also as Devashayam, who mixed with India's lower castes and was considered treasonous by India's royal palace, which ordered him arrested and executed in 1752.

"He is for the poor people," said Arachi Cyril, an Indian pilgrim from Kanyakumari who was in the square for the Mass. "He hated the caste system, still it is going on, but he is the martyr for that," Cyril said.

Also canonized was César de Bus, a French priest who founded the Fathers of Christian Doctrine religious order and died in 1607; Luigi Maria Palazzolo, an Italian priest who cared for orphans and died in 1886; Giustino Maria Russolillo, an Italian priest who founded a religious order dedicated to promoting religious vocations and died in 1955; and Charles de Foucauld, a French missionary who, after rediscovering his faith as a young man, decided to live among the Tuareg peoples in the Algerian Sahara and was killed in 1916.

The four nuns are: Marie Rivier, who overcame a sickly childhood in France to become a nun and found a religious order and died in 1838; Maria Francesca di Gesù Rubatto, an Italian nun who helped found a religious order and died in 1904 in Montevideo, Uruguay; and Italians Maria di Gesù Santocanale and Domenica Mantovani, who founded religious orders and died in 1923 and 1934 respectively.

Ukrainian band Kalush Orchestra wins Eurovision amid war

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By COLLEEN BARRY and PAOLO SANTALUCIA Associated Press

TURIN, Italy (AP) — Ukrainian band Kalush Orchestra won the Eurovision Song Contest, a clear show of popular support for the group's war-ravaged nation that went beyond music.

The band and its song "Stefania" beat 24 other performers early Sunday in the grand final of the competition. The public vote from home, via text message or the Eurovision app, proved decisive, lifting them above British TikTok star Sam Ryder, who led after the national juries in 40 countries cast their votes.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed the victory, Ukraine's third since its 2003 Eurovision debut. He said "we will do our best" to host next year's contest in the devastated port city of Mariupol, which is almost completely occupied by Russian forces.

In describing the city, Zelenskyy underlined "Ukrainian Mariupol," adding: "free, peaceful, rebuilt!"

"I am sure our victorious chord in the battle with the enemy is not far off," Zelenskyy said in a post on the Telegram messaging app.

Kalush Orchestra's frontman, Oleh Psiuk, took advantage of the enormous global audience, last year numbering more than 180 million, to make an impassioned plea to free fighters still trapped beneath a sprawling steel plant in Mariupol.

"Help Azovstal, right now," Psiuk implored following his victory performance, speaking from beneath a bright bucket hat that has become the band's trademark among fans.

He later told a news conference that people can help by "spreading information, talking out this, reaching out to governments to help."

The 439 fan votes is the highest number of televote points ever received in a Eurovision contest, now in its 66th year. Psiuk thanked the Ukrainian diaspora "and everyone around the world who voted for Ukraine. ... The victory is very important to Ukraine. Especially this year."

"Stefania" was penned by Psiuk as a tribute to his mother, but since Russia's Feb. 24 invasion it has become an anthem to the motherland, with lyrics that pledge: "I'll always find my way home, even if all roads are destroyed."

Kalush Orchestra itself is a cultural project that includes folklore experts and mixes traditional folk melodies and contemporary hip hop in a purposeful defense of Ukrainian culture. That has become an even more salient point as Russia through its invasion has sought falsely to assert that Ukraine's culture is not unique.

"We are here to show that Ukrainian culture and Ukrainian music are alive, and they have their own and very special signature," Psiuk told journalists.

The plea to free the remaining Ukrainian fighters trapped beneath the Azovstal plant by Russians served as a somber reminder that the hugely popular and at times flamboyant Eurovision song contest was being played out against the backdrop of a war on Europe's eastern flank.

The Azov battalion, which is among the plant's last 1,000 defenders, sent their thanks from the warren of tunnels beneath the plant, posting on Telegram: "Thank you to Kalush Orchestra for your support! Glory to Ukraine!"

The city itself has been the site of some of the worst destruction of the 2 1/2-month war, as Russia seeks to secure a land bridge between separatist-controlled Donbas and Crimea, which it annexed in 2014.

The six-member, all-male band received special permission to leave the country to represent Ukraine and Ukrainian culture at the music contest. One of the original members stayed to fight, and the others will be back in Ukraine in two days, when their temporary exit permit expires.

Before traveling to Italy, Psiuk was running a volunteer organization he set up early in the war that uses social media to help find transportation and shelter for people in need.

"It is hard to say what I am going to do, because this is the first time I win Eurovision," Psiuk said. "Like every Ukrainian, I am ready to fight and go until the end."

While the support for Ukraine in the song contest was ultimately overwhelming, the contest remained wide open until the final popular votes were tallied. And war or not, fans from Spain, Britain and elsewhere entering the PalaOlimpico venue from throughout Europe were rooting for their own country to win.

Still, Ukrainian music fan Iryna Lasiy said she felt global support for her country in the war and "not

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only for the music.”

Russia was excluded this year after its Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine, a move organizers said was meant to keep politics out of the contest that promotes diversity and friendship among nations.

Back in Ukraine, in the battered northeastern city of Kharkiv, Kalush Orchestra’s participation in Eurovision is seen as giving the nation another platform to garner international support.

“The whole country is rising, everyone in the world supports us. This is extremely nice,” said Julia Vashenko, a 29-year-old teacher.

“I believe that wherever there is Ukraine now and there is an opportunity to talk about the war, we need to talk,” said Alexandra Konovalova, a 23-year-old make-up artist in Kharkiv. “Any competitions are important now, because of them more people learn about what is happening now.”

Ukrainians in Italy also were using the Eurovision event as a backdrop to a flashmob this week to appeal for help for Mariupol. About 30 Ukrainians gathered in a bar in Milan to watch the broadcast, many wearing a bright bucket hat like the one Psiuk sports, in support of the band.

“We are so happy he called on helping to save the people in Mariupol,” said lawyer Zoia Stankovska during the show. “Oh, this victory brings so much hope.”

The winner takes home a glass microphone trophy and a potential career boost — although Kalush Orchestra’s first concern is peace.

The event was hosted by Italy after local rock band Maneskin won last year in Rotterdam. The victory shot the Rome-based band to international fame, opening for the Rolling Stones and appearing on Saturday Night Live and numerous magazine covers in their typically gender-fluid costume code.

Twenty bands were chosen in two semifinals this week, and were competing along with the Big Five of Italy, Britain, France, Germany and Spain, which have permanent berths due to their financial support of the contest.

Ukrainian commentator Timur Miroshnichenko, who does the live voiceover for Ukraine’s broadcast of Eurovision, was participating from a basement in an undisclosed location, rather than from his usual TV studio.

“On the fifth or fourth day of the war, they shot our TV tower in Kyiv,” he said. To keep broadcasting, “we had to move underground somewhere in Ukraine.”

Showing Eurovision in Ukraine was important, online and on TV, he said.

“This year, I think it’s more symbolic than ever,” Miroshnichenko said.

Ukraine was able to participate in the music contest “thanks to the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the resistance of our people,” he said.

North Korea reports 15 more suspected COVID-19 deaths

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea has confirmed 15 more deaths and hundreds of thousands of additional patients with fevers as it mobilizes more than a million health and other workers to try to suppress the country’s first COVID-19 outbreak, state media reported Sunday.

After maintaining a widely disputed claim that it’s been coronavirus-free for more than two years, North Korea announced Thursday that it had found its first COVID-19 patients since the pandemic began.

It said a fever has spread across the country “explosively” since late April but hasn’t disclosed exactly how many COVID-19 cases were found. Some experts say North Korea lacks the diagnostic kits needed to test a large number of suspected COVID-19 patients.

The additional deaths reported Sunday took the country’s reported fever-related fatalities to 42. The official Korean Central News Agency also reported that another 296,180 people with fevers had been tallied, taking the reported total to 820,620.

The outbreak has triggered concern about a humanitarian crisis in North Korea because most of the country’s 26 million people are believed to be unvaccinated against the coronavirus and its public health care system has been in shambles for decades. Some experts say North Korea might suffer huge fatali-

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ties if it doesn't immediately receive outside shipments of vaccines, medicines and other medical supplies.

"Without COVID-19 test kits, North Korea is resorting to body temperature checks to guess at infections. But with such a very inferior and inaccurate method of examination, it's impossible to find asymptomatic virus carriers and control viral surges," said analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at South Korea's Sejong Institute.

"As North Korea's (suspected) COVID-19 infections are explosively increasing, its death toll is expected to continue to rise," Cheong added.

Since Thursday, North Korea has imposed a nationwide lockdown to fight the virus. That could further strain the country's fragile economy, which has suffered in recent years due to sharply reduced external trade caused by pandemic-related border shutdowns, punishing U.N. economic sanctions over its nuclear program and its own mismanagement, observers say.

During a meeting on the outbreak Saturday, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un described the outbreak as a historically "great upheaval" and called for unity between the government and people to stabilize the outbreak as quickly as possible.

KCNA said Sunday that more than 1.3 million people have been engaged in works to examine and treat sick people and raise public awareness of hygiene. It said everyone with fevers and others with abnormal symptoms was being put in quarantine and treated. KCNA said the elevated pandemic response includes the establishment of more quarantine facilities, the urgent transportation of medical supplies to hospitals and increased disinfection efforts.

"All provinces, cities and counties of the country have been totally locked down and working units, production units and residential units closed from each other since the morning of May 12," KCNA said, "and strict and intensive examination of all the people is being conducted."

Of those with symptoms, 496,030 have recovered, while as of Saturday 324,550 were still receiving treatment, KCNA reported, citing the country's emergency epidemic prevention center.

State media reports said Kim and other senior North Korean officials are donating their private reserve medicines to support the country's anti-pandemic fight. During Saturday's meeting, Kim expressed optimism that the country could bring the outbreak under control, saying most transmissions are occurring within communities that are isolated from one another and not spreading from region to region.

Despite the outbreak, Kim has ordered officials to go ahead with planned economic, construction and other state projects, a suggestion that authorities aren't requiring people to confine themselves at home.

Hours after it admitted its virus outbreak Thursday, North Korea fired ballistic missiles toward the sea in a continuation of its recent streak of weapons tests.

KCNA said that Kim, accompanied by top deputies, visited a mourning station Saturday set up for senior official Yang Hyong Sop, who died a day earlier, to express his condolences and meet bereaved relatives. A separate KCNA dispatch said Sunday that officials and laborers in the northeast were launching initiatives to prevent an expected spring drought from damaging crop yields and quality.

South Korea and China have offered to send vaccines, medical supplies and other aid shipments to North Korea, but Pyongyang hasn't publicly responded to the overtures. North Korea previously rebuffed millions of doses of vaccines offered by the U.N.-backed COVAX distribution program amid speculation that it worried about possible side effects of vaccines or international monitoring requirements attached to those shots.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Thursday the United States supported international aid efforts but doesn't plan to share its vaccine supplies with the North. The North Korean virus outbreak could still be a major topic of discussion when President Joe Biden visits Seoul later this week for a summit with newly inaugurated South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol.

South Korea's former spy chief Park Jie-won wrote Friday on Facebook that he had proposed in May 2021 as the then-director of the National Intelligence Service that Washington send 60 million doses of vaccines to North Korea as humanitarian aid via COVAX. He said there were later talks in the U.N. and the Vatican about shipping 60 million doses to North Korea as well, but such aid was never realized as no formal offers were made to North Korea.

Park said he hopes North Korea would accept Yoon's aid offers quickly, though he doubts whether the North would do so.

Saudi oil giant Aramco's first-quarter profits surge 80%

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Oil giant Saudi Aramco said Sunday its profits soared more than 80% in the first three months of the year, as the state-backed company cashes in on the volatility in global energy markets and surging oil prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The bumper first-quarter earnings by the firm formally known as the Saudi Arabian Oil Co., which overtook Apple as the world's most valuable company last week, show a record net income of \$39.5 billion, up from \$21.7 billion during the same period last year.

The figure marks the oil group's highest quarterly profit since 2019, when the Saudi government, which owns 98% of the company, listed a sliver of its worth on Riyadh's Tadawul stock exchange in what was then the world's largest-ever initial public offering.

In a statement, Aramco's chief executive attributed the spike in profits to rising prices as well as the kingdom's increase in production, along with allies in the group known as OPEC Plus. He also appeared to suggest that the disruption from the war in Ukraine had underscored the vital role of oil and gas companies like Aramco.

"Against the backdrop of increased volatility in global markets, we remain focused on helping meet the world's demand for energy that is reliable, affordable and increasingly sustainable," President and CEO Amin H. Nasser said, adding that Aramco was in the midst of increasing its maximum production capacity to meet anticipated demand growth.

Oil prices rallied to a 14-year high of \$139 a barrel in March immediately after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, although later receded as Russian oil continued to flow and renewed lockdowns hurt demand for hydrocarbons in China, a top importer. International benchmark Brent crude traded over \$111 a barrel Sunday.

Shares of Aramco jumped 1.85% on Sunday on the earnings report, with a share costing 41.40 Saudi riyals, or \$11.04 on the Tadawul stock market. Aramco shares have shot up since the start of the year, making it the world's most valuable company last week with a market cap of around \$2.43 trillion.

The oil group said it maintained its \$18.8 billion cash dividend for the fourth quarter of last year — completing one of the biggest full-year cash dividends in the world. The payment is a crucial source of revenue for the Saudi government.

Gearing, which the company defines as the degree to which its operations are financed by debt, dropped from 14% at the end of last year to 8% in the first quarter.

The strong quarterly results come after resurgent economic activity and the relaxation of global coronavirus restrictions had already delivered record annual results for the state-backed company last year after the devastation of the pandemic and years of sluggish growth amid relatively lower prices.

The skyrocketing oil prices have provided a welcome boost to the Saudi economy.

Saudi Arabia — the world's top oil exporter and OPEC's de facto leader — logged its fastest economic growth in a decade during the first quarter of the year, with its gross domestic product growing 9.6% compared to the same period last year, according to its statistics agency. The International Monetary Fund expects the kingdom's economy to expand 7.6% this year.

'Neutral' Europe recedes as Finns, Swedes edge toward NATO

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — With Finland and Sweden taking steps to join NATO, the list of "neutral" countries in Europe appears poised to shrink.

Like the two Nordic countries, other nations joined the European Union for its promise economic and political unity without taking sides in the East-West divide that has endured beyond the end of the Cold war.

But security concerns over Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine changed the calculus for Finland and Sweden which have long espoused neutrality and caused other traditionally "neutral" countries to re-think what that term really means for them. Finland said it will decide on NATO membership in the coming days

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while Sweden could follow suit as public opinion in both Nordic countries has swelled in favor of membership.

While EU members are committed to coming to each other's defense in case of an external attack, the pledge has largely remained on paper as NATO's might overshadows the bloc's own notions of collective defense.

Yet, Turkey could still pour cold water on the NATO ambitions of both Finland and Sweden. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the NATO member's president said his country is "not of a favorable opinion" of the idea because of alleged Nordic country support for Kurdish militants and others that Turkey considers as terrorists.

"This is the key thing about neutrality: It means different things to different people," said historian Samuel Kruizinga of the University of Amsterdam.

Here's a look at some countries that have enshrined "neutrality" into their laws or generally considered themselves neutral in the showdown between the United States and Russia and their respective affiliates. Austria, Ireland, Cyprus and Malta are EU members that have not joined NATO, and Switzerland has stayed out of both.

SWITZERLAND

Arguably the most renowned neutral country in Europe, Switzerland has enshrined neutrality into its constitution and Swiss voters decided decades ago to stay out of the EU. But its government has been at pains in recent weeks to explain its concept of neutrality after lining up behind EU sanctions against Russia — and Swiss neutrality is analyzed almost daily in local media these days.

There's little chance that Switzerland will stray further from its neutrality: Its government has already asked Germany not to pass along Swiss military equipment to Ukraine.

The populist, right-wing party that holds the largest bloc of seats in parliament has been hesitant about further measures against Russia, and the Swiss are fiercely protective of their role as mediator for rival states and as a hub of humanitarian action and human rights. Neutrality helps hone that reputation.

AUSTRIA

Austria's neutrality is a key component of its modern democracy: As a condition of Allied forces leaving the country and its ability to regain independence in 1955, Austria declared itself militarily neutral.

Since the start of Russia's war in Ukraine, Chancellor Karl Nehammer has struck a fine balance with regard to Austria's position. He has maintained that the country has no plans to change its security status, while at the same time declaring that military neutrality doesn't necessarily mean moral neutrality — and that Austria strongly condemns Russia's actions in Ukraine.

IRELAND

Ireland's neutrality has long been a bit of a gray area. Prime Minister Micheal Martin summed up the country's position earlier this year as: "We're not politically neutral, but we're military neutral."

The war in Ukraine has reopened the debate about what Ireland's neutrality means. Ireland has imposed sanctions on Russia and sent non-lethal aid to Ukraine in response to the invasion.

Ireland has been participating in European Union battlegroups — part of the bloc's efforts to harmonize its militaries.

Kruizinga, who has contributed to a Cambridge History of the First World War on neutrality, suggested that the more that EU and NATO memberships are similar, the better it is for the bloc "to portray itself as a geopolitical power."

MALTA

Malta's constitution says the small Mediterranean island is officially neutral, hewing to a policy of "non-alignment and refusing to participate in any military alliance." A poll commissioned by the Foreign Ministry published two weeks before Russia's invasion found a vast majority of respondents supported neutrality — and only 6 percent were against it.

The Times of Malta newspaper on Wednesday reported that Ireland's Higgins, during a state visit, stressed the idea of "positive" neutrality and joined Maltese President George Vella in condemning the war in Ukraine.

CYPRUS

Cyprus' relations with the United States have grown considerably over the last decade, but any idea of

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NATO membership remains off the table — at least for now.

The ethnically split island nation's president said Saturday that "it's much too early" to even contemplate such a move that would invariably meet rival Turkey's strong opposition.

Many Cypriots — particularly those on the political left — continue to blame NATO for the island's de facto partition after Turkish forces invaded in the mid-1970s. Turkey was a NATO member at the time — and the alliance did nothing to prevent the military action.

Stalwart NATO member Britain has two sovereign military bases on Cyprus, which host a sophisticated listening post on the east coast that is co-operated by U.S. personnel.

Cyprus also wants to maintain a veneer of neutrality, and has allowed Russian warships to resupply at Cypriot ports, although that privilege was suspended after war in Ukraine began.

Radio station elevates voices of Hungary's Roma minority

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Intellectuals, broadcasters and cultural figures from Hungary's Roma community are using the airwaves to reframe narratives and elevate the voices of the country's largest minority group.

Radio Dikh — a Romani word that means "to see" — has broadcast since January on FM radio in Hungary's capital, Budapest. Its 11 programs focus on Roma music, culture and the issues faced by their community, and aim to recast the way the often disadvantaged minority group is perceived by broader society.

"Roma people in general don't have enough representation in mainstream media ... and even if they do, it's oftentimes not showing the right picture or the picture that is true to the Roma community," said Bettina Pocsai, co-host of a show that focuses on social issues.

Radio Dikh, she said, aims to "give voice to Roma people and make sure that our voice is also present in the media and that it shows a picture that we are satisfied with."

Some estimates suggest that Roma in Hungary number nearly 1 million, or around 10% of the population. Like their counterparts throughout Europe, many of Hungary's Roma are often the subjects of social and economic exclusion, and face discrimination, segregation and poverty.

Adding to their marginalization are stereotypes about Roma roles in society, where they are often associated with their traditional occupations as musicians, dancers, traders and craftspeople that go back centuries.

These expectations have limited the opportunities for Roma people — especially Roma women — to participate and develop their skills in other fields, said Szandi Minzari, host of a women's radio program.

"We are stereotyped by the majority because they tend to believe that we are very good at singing, dancing, speaking about girly subjects and raising the kids, and that's us. But it's much more," Minzari said.

Programming specifically for women runs for two hours every day, and Minzari's show "Zsa Shej" — which means "Let's go, girls" in the Romani language — focuses on current events and global topics like climate change and other social issues.

Many women in traditional Roma families are highly dependent on male family members, Minzari said, and including them in conversations about topics of public interest is meant to serve as an inspiration for them to engage with a different world.

"We find it very important to speak about heavy subjects ... because we are much more than speaking about nail polish and hairdos and Botox," she said, adding that she would like female listeners to come to the conclusion that "The problem is not me. I want more from life and these girls are doing it, and I can do the same."

Radio Dikh's motto, "About Roma, not just for Roma," reflects the conviction of the hosts that the station can act as a bridge between Roma and non-Roma Hungarians, and can break narratives that tend to associate their community with poverty and other social problems.

In addition to co-hosting her own show, Pocsai in her free time guides informative tours in Budapest that aim to correct misconceptions about Roma people to both Hungarians and foreign tourists. In the city's

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8th district, which has a high concentration of Roma residents, Pocsai gave a presentation to a group of visitors from the United States.

In introducing the Roma's more than 600-year history in Hungary and challenging preconceptions, Pocsai said she aimed to make sure that future generations of Hungarian Roma will not have to go through the challenges she faced as a child.

"I want to change how the Roma people are viewed in society," Pocsai said. "I want to make sure there is enough light on the values that the Roma community provided through history to the non-Roma society."

Dr. Scott Jensen wins GOP endorsement for Minnesota governor

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

ROCHESTER, Minn. (AP) — Dr. Scott Jensen, a skeptic of the government's response to COVID-19, won the Minnesota GOP's endorsement after a wild ride on Saturday to challenge Democratic Gov. Tim Walz in the November election, going over the top on the ninth ballot with 65% of the vote.

Jensen, a former state senator who led on the first two ballots, regained the lead on the seventh ballot with 59%, just below the 60% needed to claim the endorsement, once Lexington Mayor Mike Murphy backed him after being eliminated on the sixth ballot.

"Game over," Jensen told the delegates, accompanied by his running mate, former Minnesota Viking and Baltimore Raven Matt Birk, who used repeated football metaphors to fire up their supporters.

Jensen's comeback ended a surge by business executive Kendall Qualls, who fell to 33% on the final ballot after taking the lead on the fourth ballot. But Jensen hit a bump in the road when Qualls, who was trying to become the Minnesota GOP's first Black gubernatorial endorsee, told the delegates that Murphy falsely claimed that Qualls had offered to make Murphy his running mate, then took back the offer.

The claim angered some Qualls delegates and forced two extra ballots. And Qualls conspicuously did not appear on stage with Jensen for the traditional show of party unity, ending the convention on a note of discord.

But Qualls and most other candidates pledged to honor the party's endorsement and forego the right to run in the Aug. 9 GOP primary, and State Chairman David Hann told reporters he did not expect Jensen to face a serious challenge. Former President Donald Trump, still a potent force within the party, has not endorsed anyone in the Minnesota races.

"Minnesota Republicans have chosen the most extreme and dangerous candidate to lead their party in the fall," Minnesota Democratic Party Chairman Ken Martin said in a statement. "In just the last two weeks, Scott Jensen has promised to ban abortion for rape victims and to throw one of his political opponents in jail. Minnesotans want their leaders to focus on helping working families, but Scott Jensen is only interested in his far-right political agenda."

Jensen, who came into the convention as the presumptive front-runner, acknowledged that he got nervous when he fell behind for four ballots in a row.

"But what made me even more nervous was that I didn't have a clue what was going to happen next," Jensen said. "And, you know, as physician the last thing you want is to be in a position where you don't have control of the situation. So it was a wild ride. I wouldn't make any bones about it."

The 2,100 delegates were aiming to complete their work by a soft 6 p.m. Saturday deadline for vacating the Rochester Mayo Civic Center, but the relatively fast and smooth electronic voting process Friday reduced the chances of running out of time and leaving without an endorsement. Delegates and party leaders are hoping at least one of their candidates becomes the first Republican elected to statewide office since Gov. Tim Pawlenty was reelected in 2006.

Jensen, a family physician from Chaska, got the earliest start in the race and raised the most money. He built a national following as he framed his COVID-19 vaccine skepticism — and opposition to mask mandates and school and business closures — as support for medical freedom. He stressed in his speech his efforts as a state senator to stand up against the Walz administration's handling of the pandemic.

"Everyone in this room has grasped at some level that Tim Walz has failed. He's done. But who's going

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to step forward? Who's going to serve for the benefit, security and the protection of all the people? Who's going to help Minnesota find its way back to be the bright and shining Star of the North?" Jensen asked in a video preceding his speech. "The answer is you."

Jensen was repeatedly accompanied on stage by Birk, who reminded delegates that he refused to visit the White House after the Ravens' 2013 Super Bowl victory because of President Barack Obama's support for abortion rights.

Qualls highlighted his rise from poverty, to going to college, to becoming an Army officer and a business leader. He said his life is a testament to the failure of the Democratic agenda and shows that the American dream is still alive.

"The radical left thinks I shouldn't be here. The media doesn't think I should be here. Tim Walz wishes I wasn't here at all," Qualls said to loud applause. "And poor Joe Biden, he tells people that look like me that I'm not Black, that we're not Black, we didn't vote for him. Well, after voting for Donald J. Trump for president -- both times -- and I'm still Black. And I'm still Republican. And I'm going to be Joe Biden's and Tim Walz's worst nightmare."

Former Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka, a state senator from East Gull Lake who stressed his support for law enforcement, dropped out after the third ballot and threw his support to Qualls. Sen. Michelle Benson, of Ham Lake, who had been a candidate but dropped out before the convention, joined Gazelka in backing Qualls.

However, it wasn't clear Saturday if Jensen would escape a serious primary challenge. Former Hennepin County Sheriff Rich Stanek, who had been seeking the endorsement, was sidelined by a recent car accident, skipped the convention while he recovers and hasn't announced a decision. Hann acknowledged he hadn't spoken recently with the Stanek campaign.

"Rich and his campaign team are evaluating all options for moving forward to beat Walz in November," his campaign said in a statement Saturday.

On Friday night, the convention endorsed business attorney Jim Schultz for attorney general, an office Minnesota Republicans haven't won since 1968. He's hoping to oust incumbent Keith Ellison, a former congressman who led the prosecution team that won the murder conviction of ex-Officer Derek Chauvin in Floyd's death.

Schultz defeated Doug Wardlow, who was the party's candidate in 2018 and is general counsel at MyPillow. That company's CEO, Mike Lindell, has risen to national prominence for perpetuating the false claim that Trump won the 2020 election. Also losing were former Washington County judge Tad Jude and attorney Lynne Torgerson. Former legislator Dennis Smith plans to challenge Schultz in the GOP primary.

Abortion rights backers rally in anger over post-Roe future

By ASHRAF KHALIL and DAVID SHARP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Abortion rights supporters demonstrating at hundreds of marches and rallies Saturday expressed their outrage that the Supreme Court appears prepared to scrap the constitutional right to abortion that has endured for nearly a half-century and their fear about what that could mean for women's reproductive choices.

Incensed after a leaked draft opinion suggested the court's conservative majority would overturn the landmark Roe v. Wade ruling, activists spoke of the need to mobilize quickly because Republican-led states are poised to enact tighter restrictions.

In the nation's capital, thousands gathered in drizzly weather at the Washington Monument to listen to fiery speeches before marching to the Supreme Court, which was surrounded by two layers of security fences.

The mood was one of anger and defiance, three days after the Senate failed to muster enough votes to codify Roe v. Wade.

"I can't believe that at my age, I'm still having to protest over this," said Samantha Rivers, a 64-year-old federal government employee who is preparing for a state-by-state battle over abortion rights.

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Caitlin Loehr, 34, of Washington, wore a black T-shirt with an image of the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's "dissent" collar on it and a necklace that spelled out "vote."

"I think that women should have the right to choose what to do with their bodies and their lives. And I don't think banning abortion will stop abortion. It just makes it unsafe and can cost a woman her life," Loehr said.

A half-dozen anti-abortion demonstrators sent out a countering message, with Jonathan Darnel shouting into a microphone, "Abortion is not health care, folks, because pregnancy is not an illness."

From Pittsburgh to Los Angeles, and Nashville, Tennessee, to Lubbock, Texas, tens of thousands participated in events, where chants of "Bans off our bodies!" and "My body, my choice!" rang out. The gatherings were largely peaceful, but in some cities there were tense confrontations between people on opposing sides of the issue.

Polls show that most Americans want to preserve access to abortion — at least in the earlier stages of pregnancy — but the Supreme Court appeared to be poised to let the states have the final say. If that happens, roughly half of states, mostly in the South and Midwest, are expected to quickly ban abortion.

The battle was personal for some who came out Saturday. In Seattle, some protesters carried photographic images of conservative justices' heads on sticks.

Teisha Kimmons, who traveled 80 miles to attend the Chicago rally, said she fears for women in states that are ready to ban abortion. She said she might not be alive today if she had not had a legal abortion when she was 15.

"I was already starting to self harm and I would have rather died than have a baby," said Kimmons, a massage therapist from Rockford, Illinois.

At that rally, speaker after speaker said that if abortion is banned that the rights of immigrants, minorities and others will also be "gutted," as Amy Eshleman, wife of Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot put it.

"This has never been just about abortion. It's about control," Eshleman told the crowd of thousands. "My marriage is on the menu and we cannot and will not let that happen."

In New York, thousands of people gathered in Brooklyn's courthouse plaza before a march across the Brooklyn Bridge to lower Manhattan for another rally.

"We're here for the women who can't be here, and for the girls who are too young to know what is ahead for them," Angela Hamlet, 60, of Manhattan, said to the backdrop of booming music.

Robin Seidon, who traveled from Montclair, New Jersey, for the rally, said the nation was at a place abortion rights supporters have long feared.

"They've been nibbling at the edges, and it was always a matter of time before they thought they had enough power on the Supreme Court, which they have now," said Seidon, 65.

The upcoming high court ruling in a case from Mississippi stands to energize voters, potentially shaping the upcoming midterm elections.

In Texas, which has a strict law banning many abortions, the challenger to one of the last anti-abortion Democrats in Congress marched in San Antonio.

Jessica Cisneros joined demonstrators just days before early voting begins in her primary runoff against U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar, which could be one of the first tests over whether the court leak will galvanize voters.

In Chicago, Kjirsten Nyquist, a nurse toting daughters ages 1 and 3, agreed about the need to vote. "As much as federal elections, voting in every small election matters just as much," she said.

At many of the rallies, speakers put the issue in stark terms, saying people will die if abortions are outlawed.

In Los Angeles, high-profile lawyer Gloria Allred recounted how she could not get a legal abortion after being raped at gunpoint in the 1960s. She said she ended up having life-threatening bleeding after a "back alley" abortion.

"I want you to vote as though your lives depend on it, because they do," she told the crowd.

'Reprehensible': Oz condemns GOP opponent's tweet on Islam

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By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Politics Writer

CARLISLE, Pa. (AP) — Republican Senate hopeful Mehmet Oz is stepping up his criticism of far-right candidates in Pennsylvania who are gaining traction ahead of Tuesday's primary election.

After spending much of the campaign steering clear of fellow Republican Senate contender Kathy Barnette, Oz on Saturday said she was out of step with the GOP and would be unable to win the general election in November. In an interview, he took issue with a 2015 tweet from Barnette in which she wrote that "Pedophilia is a Cornerstone of Islam."

Oz, who would be the nation's first Muslim senator, described the comments as "disqualifying."

"It's reprehensible that she would tweet out something that is defamatory to an entire religion," Oz told The Associated Press. "This state was based on religious freedom. I'm proud as a Pennsylvanian to uphold those founding beliefs that every faith has its merits."

The Barnette campaign did not respond to a request for comment. Earlier in the week, Barnette told NBC News that she did not make the statement, which was still live on her Twitter feed on Saturday.

For months, the race for the Republican nomination for Pennsylvania's open Senate seat has been an expensive fight between former hedge fund CEO David McCormick and Oz, who have spent millions of dollars attacking each other on television. Each has also faced questions about their ties to Pennsylvania. McCormick grew up in the state, while Oz went to medical school there and was married in Philadelphia.

But in the final days of the Republican primary, a third candidate — Barnette, a conservative commentator who has courted hard-line pro-Trump groups — has emerged. Trump himself has warned that Barnette's background hasn't been properly vetted.

With the election just days away, polls show a tight three-way race with a sizable number of undecided voters who could sway the results next week.

Oz has won Trump's endorsement in the Senate contest, although some Trump supporters continue to question his conservative credentials.

When asked to clarify his views on abortion in the Saturday interview, Oz distanced himself from Trump's newly minted pick for Pennsylvania governor, Doug Mastriano, a far-right conservative who has called abortion "the No. 1 issue." In a recent televised debate, Mastriano said he supports banning abortion from conception, with no exceptions for rape, incest or the life of the mother.

Oz described himself as "pro-life," but said he would prefer an abortion ban in Pennsylvania that would include exceptions for rape, incest and the life of the mother.

"There are times when we disagree with other pro-life advocates," Oz told the AP. "In my case, those disagreements often come about because, as a doctor, I've dealt with issues that threaten the life of the mother."

Oz saved his most pointed criticism for Barnette, however, echoing Trump's concerns that her background hasn't been properly scrutinized. He lashed out at her previous comments on Islam, noting that she also has a history of anti-gay remarks.

"We know so little," Oz said. "Every time she answers a question, she raises more questions. But I think it's disqualifying to make Islamophobic and homophobic comments, not just for the general election, but the Republican primary as well."

Britney Spears says she's lost baby due to miscarriage

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Britney Spears says she has lost a baby early in her pregnancy.

Spears announced the loss on Instagram Saturday in a joint post with her partner, Sam Asghari. The pop superstar, who gained her freedom from a court conservatorship that controlled her life for more than a decade, said in April that she was expecting a child with Asghari.

"It is with deepest sadness we have to announce that we have lost our miracle baby early in the pregnancy. This is a devastating time for any parent," the post said. "Perhaps we should have waited to announce until we were further along however we were overly excited to share the good news."

"Our love for each other is our strength," the post said. "We will continue trying to expand our beautiful family."

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The 40-year-old Spears has said she longed for a baby with the 28-year-old Asghari, a personal trainer, but also said the nearly 14-year-long conservatorship that ended last year forced her to remain on birth control.

The two met on the set of her "Slumber Party" video in 2016.

Spears has two sons with ex-husband Kevin Federline.

Shootings near Milwaukee Bucks playoff game prompt curfew

By JIM SALTER Associated Press

Downtown Milwaukee will be under a limited curfew for the rest of the weekend and a massive watch party scheduled for Sunday has been called off after 21 people were injured in three separate shootings near an entertainment district where thousands gathered for an NBA playoff game.

In one of the shootings Friday night, 17 people were hurt when two groups started firing at each other. Three people were hurt in another shooting, and one in the third. All of the gunfire happened blocks from the arena where the Milwaukee Bucks lost to the Boston Celtics in Game 6 of the NBA's Eastern Conference semifinals. All of the victims are expected to survive.

"What makes people think they can just have a shootout on a public street or in an entertainment district, whether police are there or not?" Assistant Police Chief Nicole Waldner asked at a Saturday news conference.

Mayor Cavalier Johnson said the city imposed a curfew for the downtown area requiring everyone age 20 or younger to be off the street by 11 p.m. for Saturday as well as Sunday — when the Bucks play at Boston in the decisive Game 7.

Meanwhile, a Game 7 outdoor watch party that had been planned in the Deer District entertainment area just outside the arena was called off. Jeff Fleming, a spokesman for Johnson, said in a text that the team decided to cancel the event "after consultation with the city and public safety agencies."

The watch party for the Sunday afternoon game likely would have drawn well over 10,000 people. The Bucks said 11,000 attended a Game 6 watch party, even as more than 19,000 others were inside the arena.

"The shootings that happened in downtown Milwaukee last night were horrific and we condemn this devastating violence," the Bucks said in a statement. It said the watch party was called off "to allow law enforcement to devote needed resources to the continued investigation of last night's events," but noted that Deer District businesses will remain open.

Johnson said those responsible for the shootings will be held accountable.

"We cannot have that in this city, nor anywhere else in this state, nor anywhere else in this country," he said.

Waldner said three people, including a 16-year-old girl, were injured in the first shooting at 9:10 p.m., which was roughly five minutes before the game ended. One man was taken into custody.

The shooting happened just outside the boundaries of the Deer District, a 30-acre entertainment district that was developed after Fiserv Forum opened in 2018. It features numerous bars and restaurants where large crowds often assemble to watch major sporting events or to attend festivals.

Bill Reinemann, a parking attendant at a lot adjacent to Deer District, said he heard gunshots, then saw scores of people running away.

"It sounded like six to eight gunshots," he said. "It was close."

At 10:30 p.m., a second shooting left one person injured. No arrest was made, Waldner said.

Dozens of shots rang out at 11:09 p.m. in the third shooting that left 17 people hurt. Five of the injured were armed and were among the 10 people taken into custody, Waldner said. Police haven't yet determined what set it off.

"There were a couple groups exchanging gunfire despite the incredible amount of police presence that was downtown," Waldner said. "District 1 officers reported bullets whizzing past their heads."

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported that broken glass, empty alcohol bottles, single shoes and two bloody shirts littered the streets in the chaotic aftermath.

Jake O'Kane, 25, of Appleton, Wisconsin, attended the playoff game with his girlfriend. Afterward, they

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saw the commotion from the first shooting, then went a few blocks away and spent a couple hours at bars before deciding to take a Lyft ride to a restaurant.

O'Kane said they were outside waiting for their ride "then all of a sudden you hear the 'pop, pop, pop' behind you."

O'Kane said he heard about 20 shots before he was able to capture 22 more on video. He estimated the gunfire was a few hundred yards away from his group.

When the driver pulled up less than two minutes later, "I said, bro — drive!" O'Kane said.

Milwaukee was among several U.S. cities that saw record numbers of killings in 2021, most of them involving guns. The list also included Philadelphia, Indianapolis and others.

Experts believe stress and pressures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the violence. Johnson blamed easy access to guns.

"A central part of the problem is the fact that individuals easily get their hands on guns," Johnson said. "This is not strictly a Milwaukee problem. Across the country we've seen a rise in shootings, both fatal and non-fatal."

Of Milwaukee's 193 killings in 2021, 180 were by firearms. Another 873 people were wounded in shootings, according to police data.

This year, the pace is even worse. Milwaukee has already recorded 77 killings, a 40% increase from the same time in 2021. The number of nonfatal shootings this year is 264, two less than from the same time a year ago.

O'Kane said he worries about the direction Milwaukee is going.

"Are we going to go to another game again, if we win? Yeah, I'm still going to end up going to Bucks games. But are we going to be partying out afterward outside? Hell no, not a chance."

As Musk buyout looms, Twitter searches for its soul

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A toxic cesspool. A lifeline. A finger on the world's pulse. Twitter is all these things and more to its over 229 million users around the world — politicians, journalists, activists, celebrities, weirdos and normies, cat and dog lovers and just about anyone else with an internet connection.

For Elon Musk, its ultimate troll and perhaps most prolific user whose buyout of the company is on increasingly shaky ground, Twitter is a "de facto town square" in dire need of a libertarian makeover.

Whether and how the takeover will happen, at this stage in the game, is anyone's guess. On Friday, Musk announced that the deal is "on hold," then tweeted that he was still "committed" to it. On Tuesday, the billionaire Tesla CEO said he'd reverse the platform's ban of former President Donald Trump if his purchase goes through but also voiced support for a new European Union law aimed at protecting social media users from harmful content. Twitter's current CEO, meanwhile, fired two top managers on Thursday.

It's been a messy few weeks and only one thing seems sure: the turmoil will continue for Twitter, inside and outside of the company.

"Twitter at its highest levels has always been chaos. It has always had intrigue and it has always had drama," says Leslie Miley, a former Twitter engineering manager. "This," he says, "is in Twitter's DNA."

WHAT PEOPLE ARE THINKING ABOUT

From its 2007 debut as a scrappy "microblogging service" at the South by Southwest Festival in Austin, Texas, Twitter has always punched above its weight.

At a time when its rivals count their users by the billions, it has stayed small, frustrating Wall Street and making it easier for Musk to swoop in with an offer its board could not refuse.

But Twitter also wields unrivaled influence on news, politics and society thanks to its public nature, its simple, largely text-based interface and its sense of chronological immediacy.

"It's a potluck of pithy self-expression simmering with whimsy, narcissism, voyeurism, hucksterism, tedium and sometimes useful information," Associated Press technology writer Michael Liedtke wrote in a 2009 story about the company a few months after it rejected a \$500 million buyout from Facebook. Twitter had

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27 employees at the time, and its most popular user was Barack Obama.

Today, the San Francisco icon employs 7,500 people around the world. Obama is still its most popular account holder, followed by pop stars Justin Bieber and Katy Perry (Musk is No. 6). Twitter's rise to the mainstream can be chronicled through world events, as wars, terror attacks, the Arab Spring, the #metoo movement and other pivotal moments in our collective history played out in real time on the platform.

"Twitter often attracts thinkers. People who are thinking about things tend to be attracted to a text-based platform. And it's full of journalists. So Twitter is both a reflection of and a driver of what people are thinking about," says writer, editor and OnlyFans creator Cathy Reizenwitz, who's been on Twitter since 2010 and has over 18,000 followers.

These days, Reizenwitz tweets about politics, sex work, housing and land use issues among many other things. She finds it great for discovering people and ideas and having others discover her writing and thoughts. That's why she's stayed all these years, despite harassment and even death threats she's received on the platform.

Twitter users in academia, in niche fields, those with quirky interests, subcultures small and big, grassroots activists, researchers and a host of others flock to the platform. Why? Because at its best, it promises an open, free exchange of facts and ideas, where knowledge is shared, debated and questioned. Journalists, Reizenwitz recalled, were among the first to really take on Twitter en masse and make it what it is today.

"If I'm on Twitter, (almost) any journalist, no matter how big their platform was, if you said something interesting would respond to you and you could have a conversation about what they'd written and pretty real time," Reizenwitz says. "And I just thought, this is amazing. Just whatever field you're in, you can talk to the experts and ask them questions."

And those subcultures — they're formidable. There's Black Twitter, feminist Twitter, baseball Twitter, Japanese cat Twitter, ER nurse Twitter and so on.

"It's enabled interest groups, especially those that are organized around social identity, whether we're talking about gender or sexuality or race, to have really important in-group dialogues," says Brooke Erin Duffy, a professor at Cornell University who studies social media.

In a 2018 study on social media subcultures — Black Twitter, Asian American Twitter and feminist Twitter — the Knight Foundation found that they not only helped challenge top-down, sometimes problematic views of the communities but also influence wider media coverage on important issues.

"So there's this really interesting flow of information that's not just top-down, mainstream media communicating to subcultures, but allowing various groups, in this case Black Twitter, to have really important, impactful conversations that the media took up and got disseminated to the wider public," Duffy says.

Software engineer Cher Scarlett says that while Twitter is far from perfect — and, undeniably, home to harassment, hate speech and misinformation — it's still a step above many platforms. That's because Twitter has at least tried to address toxic content, she says, with improvements like Twitter Safety Mode, a product now being tested that would make it easier for users to stop harassment. Scarlett has faced repeated online abuse for her advocacy for women in the tech field.

"I've been on Twitter since it started. A big part of my network is Twitter," Scarlett says. "There is nothing else really like it."

THE DARK SIDE

On the flip side of Twitter's immediacy, public, open nature and 280-character (once 140-character) limit is a perfect recipe for passions to run high — especially anger.

"When dealing with fans, emotions can get boiling, especially if you are sharing anything negative about their teams," says Steve Phillips, a former general manager of the New York Mets who now hosts a show on MLB Network Radio. "The anonymity of Twitter empowers people to take shots sometimes, but it is still one of the most effective ways to communicate with people with similar interests."

But it's not all baseball Twitter out there. There's also the massive, scary, dark part of Twitter. This is the Twitter of Nazis, of demented trolls, of conspiracy theorists and of nation states funding massive networks to influence elections.

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Jaime Longoria, manager of research and training for the Disinfo Defense League, a nonprofit which works with community organizations to fight misinformation, says Musk's purchase of Twitter jeopardizes a platform that many experts believe has done a better job of reining in harmful content than its competitors.

He worries Musk will relax moderation rules that offered some protection against white supremacy, hate speech, threats of violence and harassment. He says he hopes he is wrong. "We're watching and waiting," Longoria says. "The Twitter we know may be over. I think Twitter as we have known it will cease to exist."

In a series of tweets in 2018, then-CEO Jack Dorsey said the company was committed to "collective health, openness, and civility of public conversation, and to hold ourselves publicly accountable towards progress."

"We have witnessed abuse, harassment, troll armies, manipulation through bots and human-coordination, misinformation campaigns, and increasingly divisive echo chambers. We aren't proud of how people have taken advantage of our service, or our inability to address it fast enough," he wrote.

Twitter, led by its trust and safety team, has worked to improve things. It enacted new policies, added labels to false information, kicked off repeated violators of its rules against hate, inciting violence and other harmful activities.

Since the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, social media companies have gone through a reckoning over how Russia used their platforms to influence U.S. politics. In fits and starts, things have started to improve, at least in the United States and Western Europe.

At its best, Twitter connects people across the world to participate in the open exchange of ideas. Musk told The Associated Press recently that he wants Twitter to be "inclusive" and "where ideally most of America is on it and talking." But this does not take into account the fact that most of Twitter's user base is outside of the United States — and that Twitter looks very different in the rest of the world, where American party-line divisions and free speech arguments make little sense.

Outside Western democracies, for instance, users say not much has changed when it comes to clamping down on hate and misinformation.

"There's a lot of hate on Twitter, especially directed at minorities. And so there's always a constant battle to get Twitter to clamp down on hate speech, very often violent hate speech and fake news. And yeah, I think Twitter really does not really do enough for that," says Shoib Daniyal, associate editor with the Indian news website Scroll.

"Twitter is almost like a central node, which feeds political activity out into TV channels and to journalists and WhatsApp groups."

Musk's free speech absolutism, Daniyal says, doesn't make much sense in India because there have not been many curbs on speech on the platform to begin with.

"It's fairly filled with hate anyway," he says. "And Twitter hasn't done a lot about it. So let's see where it goes." Which, given Musk's mercurial nature, could be almost any direction at all.

Putin warns Finland NATO membership would harm relations

By JARI TANNER Associated Press

HELSINKI (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin warned his Finnish counterpart Saturday that relations between the two neighbors could be "negatively affected" if Finland follows through with plans to apply for NATO membership.

The Kremlin's press service said in a statement that Putin told Sauli Niinisto Finland's abandonment "of its traditional policy of military neutrality would be an error since there are no threats to Finland's security."

"Such a change in the country's foreign policy could negatively affect Russian-Finnish relations, which had been built in the spirit of good neighborliness and partnership for many years, and were mutually beneficial," the statement added.

The response came after Niinisto told Putin in a phone conversation that the militarily non-aligned Nordic country, which has a complex history with its huge eastern neighbor, "will decide to apply for NATO membership in the coming days."

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Niinisto's office said in a statement that the Finnish head of state told Putin how starkly Finland's security environment had changed after Moscow's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine, and pointed to Russia's demands for Finland to refrain from seeking membership of the 30-nation Western military alliance.

"The discussion (with Putin) was straightforward and unambiguous and was held without exaggeration. Avoiding tensions was considered important," said Niinisto, Finland's president since 2012 and one of a handful of Western leaders who has been in regular dialogue with Putin over the past decade.

Niinisto pointed out that he had already told Putin at their first meeting in 2012 that "each independent nation would maximize its own security."

"That is still the case. By joining NATO, Finland will strengthen its own security and assume its responsibilities," Niinisto said.

Niinisto stressed that Finland, despite its likely future membership in NATO, wants to continue to deal with Russia bilaterally in "practical issues generated by the border neighborhood" and hopes to engage with Moscow "in a professional manner."

According to the Kremlin statement, the two leaders also discussed Russia's "military operation" in Ukraine, and the possibility of achieving a political solution. Putin said negotiations between Moscow and Kyiv had been suspended due to Ukraine's "lack of interest in a serious and constructive dialogue."

The phone call was conducted on Finland's initiative, Niinisto's office said.

Finland shares a 1,340-kilometer (830-mile) border with Russia, the longest by any European Union member.

Niinisto and Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin on Thursday jointly endorsed their country's NATO bid and recommended that Finland "must apply for NATO membership without delay" to guarantee its security.

A formal announcement from Niinisto and Marin of Finland's intention to apply for NATO membership is expected on Sunday. Marin's governing Social Democratic Party approved the membership bid on Saturday, paving way for a parliamentary vote next week to endorse the move. It's expected to pass with overwhelming support. A formal membership application would then be submitted to NATO headquarters in Brussels.

Neighboring Sweden is set to decide on its NATO stance on Sunday at a meeting of the governing Social Democratic Party led by Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson.

One possible hurdle to Finland and Sweden joining the alliance came from NATO member Turkey, whose president said Friday he was "not favorable" to the idea.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan cited support in Sweden and other Scandinavian countries for Kurdish militants — whom Turkey considers to be terrorists.

Finland's Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto said Saturday that he had already called his Turkish counterpart, Mevlut Cavusoglu, "to take the tensions down."

"I'm sure that we will find a solution to this item as well," he told reporters at the start of an informal NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Berlin late Saturday.

U.S. President Joe Biden held a joint call Friday with both Niinisto and Andersson where, according to a White House statement, he "underscored his support for NATO's Open Door policy and for the right of Finland and Sweden to decide their own future, foreign policy and security arrangements."

PBS' Judy Woodruff plans to step down as 'NewsHour' anchor

WASHINGTON (AP) — Judy Woodruff says she'll be stepping down as anchor of PBS' nightly "NewsHour" program at the end of the year.

Woodruff, 75, said she will report longer pieces for "NewsHour" and do other projects and specials for public television, at least through the 2024 presidential election.

She was part of the "NewsHour" rotating anchor team from 2009 until 2013, when she and Gwen Ifill were named co-anchors of the program. Since Ifill's death in 2016, Woodruff has been the show's sole anchor.

"I love working at the PBS 'NewsHour' and can't imagine it not being a part of my life," Woodruff said in a memo to fellow staff members. She was chief Washington correspondent at "NewsHour" from 1983

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to 1993, and has also worked at CNN and NBC News.

Plans for her replacement will be announced in the fall, a PBS spokesperson said Saturday.

Venezuela plans stock sale in break from socialist model

By REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuela's government is seeking private investors to pump funds into vital but crippled state-run companies, decades after seizing them in the name of socialism.

The government on Monday intends to offer 5% to 10% stakes in companies ranging from telephone and internet service providers to a petrochemical producer. In another country, those industries might be attractive targets for investors, but questions remain as to who would be willing or able to take a minority position in the Venezuelan companies that have suffered from years of neglect and mismanagement.

Adding to the mystery is lack of details provided by the government about the sale, including what price it is seeking for shares in the companies and on what stock market they might be listed. Some are speculating the move could be a first step toward returning the companies to private hands.

"We need capital for the development of all public companies," Maduro said during a televised event Wednesday. "We need technology. We need new markets, and we are going to move forward."

It's a marked departure from Maduro's predecessor, the late President Hugo Chávez, who nationalized many companies in his bid to transform the South American country into a socialist state. Among the companies Maduro mentioned are CANTV and its subsidiary Movilnet, petrochemical producer Petroquímica de Venezuela and a conglomerate focused in the mining sector.

Interest, however, may be limited to investors with ties to the government or those with an appetite for risk.

The country is still under economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. and other countries that prevent investors from being able to funnel money to Venezuela's state-owned companies. And the percentages Maduro announced would not give private investors decision-making powers to undertake much-needed changes within the corporations.

At the turn of the century, Chávez carried out a series of takeovers in the electricity, telecommunications, natural gas and oil sectors. But the government made minimum investments in some of these companies, which have left them providing substandard services.

Days-long power outages are common across the country. Millions of households either do not have access to water or the service is intermittent. Internet and phone services are deficient.

Government supporters and opponents alike complain about poor basic services across the country even if an election is not approaching. But economists point out that Venezuela's government needs to improve some of those services even if it is slightly ahead of the 2024 presidential election.

"We are no doubt seeing a paradigm shift that is largely forced by the circumstances but also largely fueled by political survival," Luis Prato, senior economist with the firm Torino Capital. "Since June 2014, with this significant drop in oil prices, the Maduro administration began to see a drop in oil revenues. Then, we went through a period from 2014 to 2019 of price controls, of a more intervening state."

But as the state lost the ability to generate wealth and growth, Prato said, "it began to make room for participation of the private sector."

Venezuela is still under a protracted social, economic and humanitarian crisis credited to plummeting oil prices, economic sanctions and two decades of mismanagement by socialist governments. But the government has taken steps to relieve some of the economic pressures, including by giving up its long and complicated efforts to restrict transactions in U.S. dollars in favor of the local bolivar, whose value has been obliterated by inflation.

Some shares of CANTV have long traded on the Stock Exchange of Caracas, the country's oldest exchange. Maduro during this week's announcement said the state-owned companies would be listed in the country's "various stock exchanges" without specifying.

But by Friday, Gustavo Pulido, president of the Stock Exchange of Caracas, had not received any infor-

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mation of the planned stock sales. He said the process to register the other companies and eventually list them is lengthy and requires the disclosure of financial documents.

"It takes as long as you want to take to make the placement successful. I couldn't tell you a certain time," Pulido said, adding that an offering on the Stock Exchange of Caracas could not be structured by Monday.

The government established its own exchange in 2010. A government spokesman did not respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press regarding the exchanges it intends to use.

Prato said the government is likely to use its own exchange or a separate digital system for now but that it would have limited results.

Henkel Garcia, director of the Caracas-based firm Econometrica, said the companies require significant investments to improve the quality of their services, which were much better before they were nationalized. But he warned that the country lacks a mechanism to oversee the accounting and financial reporting procedures of the companies, making it impossible to guarantee the private investment in the state companies would be appropriately spent.

That missing component, he said, creates a scenario similar to post-Soviet reforms in which a large number of state-owned companies were privatized.

"If this really is the beginning of the total sale or the total handing over of these companies, which for me is a probable scenario, one would have to ask to whom they would be handed over because we have episodes like the Russian one, in which these companies that once belonged to the state ended up in the hands of people who were close to the government," Henkel said. "So, it is a complex phenomenon that one could say opens the door to something positive, but with the institutional weakness that we have and with the lack of credible referees, well, it might not end in the best way."

Back to normal? Cannes Film Festival prepares to party

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

After the 2020 Cannes Film Festival was canceled by the pandemic and the 2021 edition was scaled back — even kisses were forbade on the red carpet — the lavish French Riviera cinema soiree is set to return with a festival that promises to be something like normal.

Or at least Cannes' very particular brand of normal, where for 12 days formal wear and film mingle in sun-dappled splendor, stopwatch-timed standing ovations stretch for minutes on end and director names like "Kore-eda" and "Denis" are spoken with hushed reverence.

What passes for the usual at Cannes has never been especially ordinary, but it has proven remarkably resilient to the fluctuations of time. Since its first festival, in 1946 on the heels of World War II, Cannes has endured as a maximalist spectacle that puts world cinema and Cote d'Azur glamour in the spotlight. This year marks Cannes' 75 anniversary.

"Hopefully it will back to a normal Cannes now," says Ruben Östlund, who returns this year with the social satire "Triangle of Sadness," a follow-up to his Palme d'Or-winning 2017 film "The Square."

"It's a fantastic place if you're a filmmaker. You feel like you have the attention of the cinema world," adds Östlund. "To hear the buzz that's going on, people talking about the different films. Hopefully, they're talking about your film."

This year's Cannes, which opens Tuesday with the premiere of Michel Hazanavicius' zombie movie "Z," will unfold against not just the late ebbs of the pandemic and the rising tide of streaming but the largest war Europe has seen since WWII, in Ukraine. Begun as a product of war — the festival was initially launched as a French rival to the Venice Film Festival, which Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler had begun interfering with — this year's Cannes will again resound with the echoes of a not-so-far-away conflict.

Cannes organizers have barred Russians with ties to the government from the festival. Set to screen are several films from prominent Ukrainian filmmakers, including Sergei Loznitsa's documentary "The Natural History of Destruction." Footage shot by Lithuanian filmmaker Mantas Kvedaravičius before he was killed in Mariupol in April will also be shown by his fiancée, Hanna Bilobrova.

At the same time, Cannes will host more Hollywood star wattage than it has for three years. Joseph

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Kosinski's pandemic-delayed "Top Gun: Maverick" will be screened shortly before it opens in theaters. Tom Cruise will walk the carpet and sit for a rare, career-spanning interview.

"Every director's dream is to be able to go to Cannes someday," says Kosinski. "To go there with this film and with Tom, to screen it there and be a part of the retrospective they're going to do for him, it's going to be a once in a lifetime experience."

Warner Bros. will premiere Baz Luhrmann's splashy "Elvis," starring Austin Butler and Tom Hanks. George Miller, last in Cannes with "Mad Max: Fury Road," will debut his fantasy epic "Thee Thousand Years of Longing," with Idris Elba and Tilda Swinton. Ethan Coen will premiere his first film without his brother Joel, "Jerry Lee Lewis: Trouble in Mind," a documentary about the rock 'n' roll legend made with archival footage. Also debuting: James Gray's "Armageddon Time," a New York-set semi-autobiographical coming-of-age tale with Anthony Hopkins, Anne Hathaway and Jeremy Strong.

Far from all of Hollywood will be present. Cannes' regulations regarding theatrical release have essentially ruled out streaming services from the competition lineup from which the Palme d'Or winner is chosen. This year's jury is headed by French actor Vincent Lindon.

Last year's Palme winner, Julia Ducournau's explosive "Titane," which starred Lindon, was only the second time Cannes' top honor went to a female filmmaker. This year, there are five movies directed by women in competition for the Palme, a record for Cannes but a low percentage compared to other international festivals.

This year's lineup, too, is full of festival veterans and former Palme winners, including Hirokazu Kore-eda ("Broker"), Christian Mungiu's ("RMN") and Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardennes ("Tori and Lokita"). Iconoclast filmmakers like Claire Denis ("Stars at Noon"), David Cronenberg ("Crimes of the Future") and Park Chan-wook ("Decision to Leave") are also up for the Palme, as is Kelly Reichardt, who reteams with Michelle Williams in "Showing Up."

Even with a robust slate full of Cannes all-stars, how much can the festival really revert back to old times? Last year's light-on-crowds edition included masking inside theaters and regular COVID-19 testing for attendees. It still produced some of the year's most acclaimed films, including the best picture-nominated "Drive My Car," "The Worst Person in the World" and "A Hero." Cannes remains an unparalleled platform for the best in cinema, while still susceptible to criticisms of representation.

What's not likely to return anytime soon is the same amount of partying that characterized the years where Harvey Weinstein was a ubiquitous figure at the festival. COVID-19 concerns aren't gone. Attendees won't be tested and are strongly encouraged to mask. Few non-streaming companies have the budgets for lavish parties. Crowds will be back at Cannes but to what extent?

"It's going to be different than it's ever been before," says Tom Bernard, co-president of Sony Pictures Classic and a longtime Cannes regular. "Are they going to have parties? Are they going to have COVID concerns? Or is everyone going to go there and just try to ignore stuff?"

Bernard has noticed some practices in the Cannes market, where distribution rights for films are bought and sold, remain virtual. Initial meet-and-greets with sellers, in which executives and producers typically hop between hotels along the Croisette, have taken place largely on Zoom before the festival, he says. Deal-making has gotten more focused. Cannes, known for being both high-minded and frivolous, has perhaps grown slightly more sober.

"It's a reshuffle of an event that's always been sort of the same, in every way," says Bernard. "The routine, I think, will change."

One thing that can be relied on with ironclad certainty at Cannes is frequent and ardent overtures to the primacy of the big screen, despite ongoing sea changes in the film industry. Some films, like Östlund's, which co-stars Woody Harrelson, will hope to straddle the disparate movie worlds that collide in Cannes.

"The goal we set out for ourselves," says Östlund, "was to combine the best parts of the American cinema with the European cinema, to try to do something that's really entertaining and at the same time thought-provoking."

Transgender medication law in Alabama blocked by judge

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — A federal judge on Friday blocked part of an Alabama law that made it a felony to prescribe gender-affirming puberty blockers and hormones to transgender minors.

U.S. District Judge Liles Burke issued a preliminary injunction to stop the state from enforcing the medication ban, which took effect May 8, while a lawsuit goes forward. The ruling was a victory for families and advocacy groups who challenged the first-of-its-kind law as an illegal intrusion into family and medical decisions. Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey referred to the ruling as a "temporary legal roadblock." Alabama's state attorney general indicated he will appeal.

"This ruling means that parents of transgender children in Alabama will continue to be able to make the healthcare decisions that are best for their families. It is an extraordinary relief. Parents should not be punished for wanting to do what's best for their kids," said Jennifer Levi, director of the transgender rights project for GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders

The Vulnerable Child Compassion and Protection Act made it a felony, punishable by up to 10 years in prison, to prescribe or administer gender-affirming medication to transgender minors to help affirm their new gender identity. The judge left in place another part of the law that banned gender-affirming surgeries for transgender minors, which doctors had testified are not done on minors in Alabama. He also left in place a provision that requires counselors and other school officials to tell parents if a minor discloses that they think they are transgender.

"We will continue fighting to protect Alabama's children from these radical, unproven, life-altering drugs, despite this temporary legal road block," Ivey said in a statement issued Saturday morning. "It is especially important while they are at such a vulnerable stage in life. We will continue to uphold our duty to ensure that children are free to grow up into the adults God intended them to be, even with today's societal pressures and modern culture."

A spokesman said Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall is disappointed in the court's decision "and is already working on filing an appeal in defense of the law."

Four families with transgender children ranging in ages 12 to 17, had filed a lawsuit challenging the Alabama law as discriminatory, an unconstitutional violation of equal protection and free speech rights and an intrusion into family medical decisions. The U.S. Department of Justice joined the lawsuit seeking to overturn the law.

Burke — nominated to the court by former President Donald Trump in 2017 — ruled that Alabama had produced no credible evidence to show that transitioning medications are "experimental."

He added that "the uncontradicted record evidence is that at least twenty-two major medical associations in the United States endorse transitioning medications as well-established, evidence-based treatments for gender dysphoria in minors." He noted testimony from a mother who said she feared her child would commit suicide if she lost access to the medications.

"Enjoining the Act upholds and reaffirms the 'enduring American tradition' that parents — not the states or federal courts — play the primary role in nurturing and caring for their children," Burke wrote in the opinion.

Jeff Walker of Auburn, Alabama, told The Associated Press on Saturday that the ruling "took a lot of weight off our shoulders." The Walker family is not one of the plaintiffs in the case but said they had been scrambling to figure out how to continue care for their 15-year-old daughter, Harleigh, and if they needed to move to another state.

Harleigh Walker said the decision was a "huge stress relief."

The legislation was part of a wave of bills in Republican-controlled states regarding transgender minors, but was the first to levy criminal penalties against the doctors who provide the medications. In Arkansas, a judge blocked a similar law before it took effect.

Dr. Morissa Ladinsky, a pediatrician who founded a Birmingham medical team that treats children with gender dysphoria, said the decision was a, "huge relief for transgender children and their families."

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"The court's decision recognizes that this is well established care that has been endorsed by 22 major medical associations. This decision will ensure transgender children in Alabama, and beyond, can continue to receive this evidence-based well-known life-saving care," she said.

More than 20 medical and mental health organizations urged Burke to block the law.

Fifteen states filed a brief in the case in support of Alabama's law.

The state attorney general's office argued that the use of the medications is unsettled science, and thus the state has a role in regulation to protect children. During a court hearing before Burke, state attorneys argued European countries take a more conservative approach to the medications. Alabama lawmakers, who approved the bill this spring, said decisions on the medications should wait until adulthood.

EXPLAINER: Why stakes are high in trial tied to Russia probe

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The first trial resulting from special counsel John Durham's investigation of the early days of the Trump-Russia probe hardly seems an explosive affair. It's about a single false statement that a cybersecurity lawyer with ties to the Hillary Clinton campaign is alleged to have made to the FBI in 2016.

Yet the stakes are high.

The verdict in the case of lawyer Michael Sussmann will help shape the fate and legacy of Durham's three-year probe. An acquittal would hasten questions about the purpose of the inquiry and the cost to taxpayers. A guilty verdict would energize supporters of Donald Trump who have long looked to Durham to expose what they see as biased mistreatment of the former president.

The trial, beginning Monday with jury selection in Washington's federal court, will not focus on Trump's claims of government misconduct during the FBI's investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election in the United States. Jurors will not be asked to decide whether the Trump campaign coordinated with the Kremlin to tip the outcome of the race.

But the trial will rewind the clock to a frenetic stretch in recent American history when the FBI was scrambling to investigate ties between Trump and Russia — and the rival Clinton campaign was eager to push its own suspicions.

WHAT'S THE CASE ABOUT?

Sussmann is accused of lying to the FBI's general counsel, James Baker, during a meeting on Sept. 19, 2016, in which Sussmann presented research that he said suggested a possible secret backchannel of communications between computer servers for Russia-based Alfa Bank and Trump's company, the Trump Organization.

The allegation of covert contact, if proved, would have been explosive at a time when the FBI was already investigating whether the Kremlin and the Trump campaign were conspiring to influence the election.

The claim was false, Durham says, but that's not the lie at the center of the Sussmann case.

The indictment accuses Sussmann of misleading the FBI by denying that he was representing any particular client during the meeting when he was actually acting on behalf of two clients: the Clinton campaign and a technology executive who had helped assemble the computer data.

WHY WOULD THAT MATTER AND WHAT DOES SUSSMANN SAY IN HIS DEFENSE?

Had the FBI known Sussmann was representing the interests of the Clinton campaign, prosecutors say, they would have carefully weighed his potential biases and motivations — as well as the reliability of the information he provided — before investigating the Alfa Bank allegations.

Prosecutors insist it was not a stray statement either, pointing to a text message they say Sussmann sent to Baker the night before the meeting in which he requested a sit-down and said that he would be coming on his own and "not on behalf of a client or company."

Sussmann's lawyers deny he lied during the meeting and point out that it wasn't recorded and no one took notes. They say Sussmann's Democratic Party affiliations were well known, including to the FBI. Beyond that, they contend the false statement Sussmann is alleged to have made is ultimately irrelevant because

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they say there's no evidence it influenced the FBI's decision to begin investigating the Alfa Bank claims. In addition, they point to notes from an FBI and Justice Department meeting from March 2017 in which the FBI's then-deputy director is described as telling his colleagues that the Alfa Bank claims were presented to law enforcement by a lawyer acting on behalf of clients. Sussmann's lawyers say that shows the FBI understood Sussmann did indeed have a client in connection with the meeting. They also have argued that allowing the case to proceed could have the effect of discouraging tipsters from reporting suspicions or potential wrongdoing to the FBI if they fear their motivations or possible political biases would be scrutinized.

WHAT DOES THIS CASE HAVE TO DO WITH THE WORK OF SPECIAL COUNSEL ROBERT MUELLER?

The prosecution centers on a limited slice of the original investigation into ties between Russia and the 2016 Trump campaign, which concluded in 2019 with a report from special counsel Robert Mueller and his team.

No matter the jury's verdict, it will not affect the core findings of Mueller's report — that Russia sought to aid Trump's campaign but that insufficient evidence exists to prove the two sides criminally collaborated.

In fact, the Mueller report ignored the Alfa Bank allegations. The FBI did investigate but concluded by early 2017 that there was no troubling contact between the servers.

Even so, the case does make clear that Clinton associates leveraged professional contacts to present the FBI with information about Trump that they thought was pejorative and deserving of investigation. And it will draw attention to the little-known universe of cyber researchers who sift through Internet data for potentially suspicious trends.

WHAT IS DURHAM INVESTIGATING?

Durham, the former top federal prosecutor in Connecticut, was appointed in 2019 by then-Attorney General William Barr to examine whether anyone committed misconduct as federal agencies investigated Russian election interference.

His investigation has gone on longer than Mueller's did and he has charged three people so far, including Sussmann. Though Durham's initial mandate was thought to focus on government officials, and though his team has interviewed FBI personnel, Justice Department lawyers and CIA officials, the investigation has also focused on private citizens such as Sussmann who came forward with information about Trump.

It is unclear how much longer the investigation will last, though Attorney General Merrick Garland has shown no public interest in curtailing the work and Durham was given a specific title of special counsel in the weeks before Barr resigned to ensure he could continue his work in a new administration.

In 2020, a former FBI lawyer named Kevin Clinesmith pleaded guilty to altering an email related to secret FBI surveillance of an ex-Trump campaign adviser, Carter Page. In applying for warrants to eavesdrop on Page, the FBI relied on a dossier of anti-Trump research known colloquially as the "Steele dossier" that contained rumors and uncorroborated claims.

Last year, Durham charged a Russia analyst who was a source for that dossier with lying to the FBI about his own sources of information — among them, a longtime Hillary Clinton supporter. Igor Danchenko has pleaded not guilty. The case is pending and set for trial in October.

Clarence Thomas says abortion leak has changed Supreme Court

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Justice Clarence Thomas says the Supreme Court has been changed by the shocking leak of a draft opinion earlier this month. The opinion suggests the court is poised to overturn the right to an abortion recognized nearly 50 years ago in *Roe v. Wade*.

The conservative Thomas, who joined the court in 1991 and has long called for *Roe v. Wade* to be overturned, described the leak as an unthinkable breach of trust.

"When you lose that trust, especially in the institution that I'm in, it changes the institution fundamentally.

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You begin to look over your shoulder. It's like kind of an infidelity that you can explain it, but you can't undo it," he said while speaking at a conference Friday evening in Dallas.

The court has said the draft does not represent the final position of any of the court's members, and Chief Justice John Roberts has ordered an investigation into the leak.

Thomas, a nominee of President George H.W. Bush, said it was beyond "anyone's imagination" before the May 2 leak of the opinion to Politico that even a line of a draft opinion would be released in advance, much less an entire draft that runs nearly 100 pages. Politico has also reported that in addition to Thomas, conservative justices Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett had voted with the draft opinion's author, Samuel Alito, to overrule Roe v. Wade and a 1992 decision, Planned Parenthood v. Casey, that affirmed Roe's finding of a constitutional right to abortion.

Thomas said that previously, "if someone said that one line of one opinion" would be leaked, the response would have been: "Oh, that's impossible. No one would ever do that."

"Now that trust or that belief is gone forever," Thomas said at the Old Parkland Conference, which describes itself as a conference "to discuss alternative proven approaches to tackling the challenges facing Black Americans today."

Thomas also said at one point: "I do think that what happened at the court is tremendously bad...I wonder how long we're going to have these institutions at the rate we're undermining them."

Thomas also touched in passing on the protests by liberals at conservative justices' homes in Maryland and Virginia that followed the draft opinion's release. Thomas argued that conservatives have never acted that way.

"You would never visit Supreme Court justices' houses when things didn't go our way. We didn't throw temper tantrums. I think it is ... incumbent on us to always act appropriately and not to repay tit for tat," he said.

Protests at the Supreme Court and around the nation were planned for Saturday.

Neither Thomas nor any of the attendees at the Dallas session made mention of the Jan. 6 insurrection or the actions of Thomas' wife, Virginia, in fighting to have the results of the 2020 presidential election overturned.

Clarence Thomas was speaking before an audience as part of a conversation with John Yoo, who is now a Berkeley Law professor but worked for Thomas for a year in the early 1990s as a law clerk.

Each justice generally has four law clerks every year and the current group of law clerks has been a focus of speculation as a possible source of the draft opinion's leak. They are one of a few groups along with the justices and some administrative staff that has access to draft opinions.

Thomas also answered a few questions from the audience, including one from a man who asked about the friendships between liberal and conservative justices on the court, such as a well-known friendship between the late liberal Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the late conservative Justice Antonin Scalia. "How can we foster that same type of relationship within Congress and within the general population?" the man asked.

"Well, I'm just worried about keeping it at the court now," Thomas responded. He went on to speak in glowing terms about former colleagues. "This is not the court of that era," he said.

Despite his comments, Thomas seemed in good spirits — laughing heartily at times. Yoo, who is known for writing the so-called "torture memos" that the George W. Bush administration used to justify using "enhanced interrogation" techniques after the Sept. 11 terror attacks, said at one point that he had taken pictures of notes Thomas had taken during the conference.

"You're going to leak them?" Thomas asked, laughing.

Yoo responded: "Well, I know where to go...Politico will publish anything I give them now."

Challenges for Finkenauer after Iowa Senate ballot woes

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Abby Finkenauer 's bid to clinch the Democratic nomination for a U.S. Senate

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seat in Iowa was not supposed to be so fraught.

Finkenauer, 33, is one of the more prominent Democrats in the state, earning a wunderkind reputation in the Legislature before toppling a Republican congressman in 2018. She was the second-youngest woman elected to Congress, helping Democrats retake control of the U.S. House that year.

Though she would go on to lose the Democratic-leaning district in 2020, her stature suffered little. She raised her profile on cable television and in email attacks on Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley. It all helped her raise millions of dollars before her Senate run.

But Finkenauer's campaign faced unexpected trouble last month when, at least for a moment, it appeared she would not be allowed to compete in the June 7 primary. A judge found errors in Finkenauer's nominating petitions after Republican activists challenged her filings.

The Iowa Supreme Court ultimately assured her spot on the ballot, but the turmoil — and Finkenauer's response — prompted some prominent Democrats to give another look to her chief primary rival, retired Navy admiral Mike Franken.

Some Democrats blame Finkenauer, who blasted the Republican-appointed state judge's ruling as "deeply partisan," for quickly blaming political motivations and not acknowledging her own campaign's organizational mistakes.

"It really just struck me the wrong way," said Bonnie Campbell, a former Iowa attorney general and past Democratic nominee for governor.

Campbell had contributed money to Finkenauer's campaign but also had been eyeing Franken. Finkenauer's remarks tipped the scales, she said.

"It's the same thing Donald Trump says, that this is all about politics," Campbell said. "I thought, what are my alternatives?"

Finkenauer's campaign declined a request for an interview for this story.

There is little reliable polling in the primary, and the winner faces a daunting challenge in Grassley, who raised more money through March than Finkenauer and Franken combined.

Adding to the challenge, Iowa has shifted sharply to the right over the past decade, making the Democratic primary a kind of test case for the party in Iowa and other once-competitive northern rural states about the path back to power.

Still, Finkenauer retains the backing of more Democratic state legislators than Franken. She received the endorsement last month of the Iowa Federation of Labor, Iowa's largest union organization. She also had raised more than \$3 million to Franken's \$1.8 million, according to the most recent finance filings.

Finkenauer has a higher national profile in addition to the cable news appearances, in part as a regular spokeswoman on the presidential campaign trail for Joe Biden ahead of the 2020 election.

But Franken has quietly built a competitive campaign, backed by former party officials such as Campbell and former Lt. Gov. Patty Judge. Franken, a distant second-place finisher in Iowa's 2020 Senate primary, also raised more money in the first quarter of 2022 than Finkenauer, and had more money on hand entering the second quarter. Franken was also first to begin airing TV ads, which began in April. Finkenauer planned to begin advertising next week.

Though Finkenauer and Franken are a close match on policy, they present strikingly different profiles.

Finkenauer is more than 30 years younger than the 64-year-old Franken. Her message leans heavily on her working-class upbringing in blue-collar Dubuque, as it did in her two congressional campaigns and campaigns for state legislature. Often with a wide smile, she campaigns with an impassioned edge, as she did at a recent state Democratic fundraiser.

"I will never ever forget where I come from and who I fight for," Finkenauer promised 600 state party activists at the Iowa Events Center in Des Moines.

Tall, graying and standing ramrod straight, Franken's approach is understated. With a dry sense of humor, Franken spends most of his campaign time answering audience questions, promoting a standard progressive platform but with a calm unfamiliar in much of politics today.

"I'm also running to dial down political tension to achieve these things," Franken told the crowd at the Des Moines banquet.

Finkenauer has been on a political course since college when she volunteered as a college student for

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Joe Biden's 2008 campaign and later as a legislative page. She won an Iowa House seat at age 24 in 2014, earning a reputation as a vocal member in the minority party, and U.S. House seat four years later.

Franken has skippered ships around the world, but also worked on Capitol Hill longer than Finkenauer, as a legislative aide to the late Sen. Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts and the Department of the Navy's legislative liaison during the Obama administration.

It's Finkenauer's stylistic contrast with the 88-year-old, gravelly-voiced Grassley that make her the better choice for Andrea Phillips, a former deputy state Democratic Party chairwoman.

"The contrasts with Abby — you know, younger, fresh ideas, newer generation — it presents voters with a clearer choice," said Phillips.

Phillips, though, would like to have heard Finkenauer take responsibility for her campaign's administrative mistake. When asked repeatedly by reporters, Finkenauer has not said she was at fault for errors the Iowa Supreme Court found not significant enough to keep her off the ballot.

Finkenauer's campaign offered the bare minimum of signatures needed from different counties, leaving herself almost no margin for error. But the judge found a small handful of signatures out of the 5,000 obtained by Finkenauer's campaign were not properly dated, as required by state law.

"As a supporter I probably would have liked her to come out and apologize," Phillips said. "As a supporter I would have liked to have seen an email from her saying that."

At the party fundraiser, Des Moines Democrats Suzanne and Tom Fross were split on the impact of the episode. Suzanne Fross, a retired state employee, said, "She handled it fine. It was a Republican ambush." Her husband, a manufacturing manager, said, "It was embarrassing. She should have owned up to it."

Yet, neither have decided who they'll support with less than a month to go.

Veteran Dubuque Democratic party volunteer Diane Gibson said she "didn't need much of a nudge" to consider Franken after the episode.

"Abby hasn't taken responsibility for her own campaign's failure to do the job," said Gibson. "That's the mark of a rookie."

'Chrisley Knows Best' stars to stand trial in Atlanta

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A federal trial for reality television stars Todd and Julie Chrisley on charges including bank fraud and tax evasion is set to start Monday in Atlanta.

The trial is getting underway just days after E! announced that it is moving forward with a new dating series, "Love Limo," hosted by Todd Chrisley and weeks after the announcement that reality shows "Chrisley Knows Best" and "Growing Up Chrisley" have been renewed on USA Network and E!, respectively.

The Chrisleys were initially indicted in August 2019 and a new indictment was filed in February of this year. Prosecutors allege that the couple submitted fake documents to banks when applying for loans. Julie Chrisley also submitted a false credit report and fake bank statements when trying to rent a house in California, and then the couple refused to pay rent a few months after they started using the home, the indictment says.

The Chrisleys also used a film production company they controlled to hide income to keep the IRS from collecting unpaid taxes owed by Todd Chrisley, prosecutors say.

Both Chrisleys are charged with one count of conspiracy to commit bank fraud, five counts of bank fraud, one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States and one count of tax fraud. Julie Chrisley is also charged with one count of wire fraud and one count of obstruction of justice.

Peter Tarantino, an accountant hired by the Chrisleys, is charged with one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States and two counts of willfully filing false tax returns. He is set to stand trial alongside the Chrisleys.

The Chrisleys and Tarantino have pleaded not guilty to the charges and have been free on bond.

U.S. District Judge Eleanor Ross has said jury selection will take place Monday with opening statements expected on Tuesday.

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"Chrisley Knows Best" follows the tight-knit, boisterous Chrisley family. The series was just renewed by USA for a 10th season, while spinoff "Growing Up Chrisley," featuring Chrisley kids Chase and Savannah living in Los Angeles, was just renewed for a fourth season.

The family had moved to Tennessee by the time the indictment was filed but the criminal charges stem from when they lived in Atlanta's northern suburbs, prosecutors have said.

Before the initial indictment was even announced in August 2019, Todd Chrisley posted a lengthy statement on Instagram denying any wrongdoing. A former employee who was fired after the Chrisleys discovered in 2012 that he was stealing from them retaliated by bringing phony documents to the U.S. attorney's office and telling prosecutors the Chrisleys had committed financial crimes, Chrisley wrote.

Prosecutors have said the Chrisleys directed that former employee to falsify documents. The scheme lasted from at least 2007 to 2012 and involved submitting fake bank and financial statements to financial institutions to get millions of dollars in loans, much of which they used for their personal benefit, the indictment says. They tried to hide their involvement by falsely claiming they didn't know their then-employee had submitted false documents, the indictment says.

Julie Chrisley sent a fake credit report and bank statements showing far more money than they had in their accounts to a California property owner in July 2014 while trying to rent a home, the indictment says. A few months after they began using the home, in October 2014, they refused to pay rent, causing the owner to have to threaten them with eviction.

Money the Chrisleys received from their television show went to a company they controlled called 7C's Productions, but they didn't declare it as income on federal tax returns, prosecutors said. The couple failed to file or pay their federal income taxes on time for multiple years, the indictment says.

Tarantino helped the Chrisleys hide income and lie about their tax returns, telling the IRS that Todd Chrisley didn't have enough money to pay a tax debt from 2009 despite money coming into their production company that they spent on personal purchases, the indictment says. He also filed false corporate tax returns for 7C's Productions to make it look like the company wasn't making money, the indictment says.

After federal agents served a grand jury subpoena on 7C's Productions in February 2018, Julie Chrisley submitted a fraudulent document, the indictment says.

Primaries spotlight coming battles over state supreme courts

By ANDREW DeMILLO and GARY D. ROBERTSON Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — The headliners for North Carolina's primary on Tuesday include Republicans challenging for an open U.S. Senate seat and candidates hoping to give the GOP a shot at veto-proof majorities in the Legislature.

Getting less billing, but with equal long-term political importance, is a contest that will shape the fall matchups for two seats on the state Supreme Court. At stake this year is whether the court remains majority Democrat or flips to Republican control, with consequences for decisions on redistricting and issues championed by Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper.

It's a scene playing out across the country this year, as state judicial races become increasingly politicized over issues such as partisan gerrymandering, abortion and gun rights. Voters in 32 states this year will cast ballots on state supreme court seats, which have become a magnet for spending by national interest groups.

Some \$97 million was spent on state supreme court elections during the 2019-2020 election cycle, according to the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University's law school. Conservative groups and super PACs historically have outspent liberal-leaning organizations in state court races.

Spending and campaigning around the judicial races could intensify if the U.S. Supreme Court overturns *Roe v. Wade*, which a leaked draft opinion indicates justices are prepared to do.

"State courts are going to be front-and-center in the fight over abortion access," said Doug Keith, an attorney in the Brennan Center's Democracy Program. "These races ... in some states are likely going to take a prominence that they've never had before."

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Michigan is among the states where abortion could be a central factor in court races this fall. One Democratic and one Republican justice are up for reelection to a court where Democrats hold a 4-3 majority. The races are technically nonpartisan, even though candidates are nominated by political parties.

Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer is asking the state's high court to recognize a right to abortion in the state Constitution. She also wants it to declare unconstitutional a 1931 near-total abortion ban that would go into effect if Roe is reversed.

Michigan's court seats are among the top priorities for the Republican State Leadership Committee, which plans to spend more than \$5 million this year on state court races, a record for the group, said spokesman Andrew Romeo.

The group's other priorities include the races in North Carolina as well as those in Illinois and Ohio — primarily to better position Republicans in the fights over drawing state legislative and congressional boundaries.

"People used to think redistricting was a 10-year fight," Romeo said. "Now it's going to be a battle every election cycle because there's critical supreme court races every election cycle that have the ability to impact redistricting."

Groups on the left, including the National Democratic Redistricting Committee, also are getting involved, although the group would not say how much it will invest in the races.

"We are already seeing Republicans attempt to rig the judicial system against fairness, particularly in states like Ohio, North Carolina and Michigan, and we will fight back against these attempts to threaten the independence of state courts," Kelly Burton, the committee's president, said in a statement.

The parties have fought bitterly over redistricting in North Carolina since the previous set of maps was drawn following the 2010 Census.

Voters on Tuesday will choose the Republican nominee for one of two seats on the ballot this fall, a race that is among several drawing outside money fueled by redistricting disputes. No primary is needed for the second seat because only one Democratic and one Republican candidate are running.

The court earlier this year struck down maps for Congress and the state legislature that were drawn by the Republican-controlled General Assembly. In its 4-3 ruling, the North Carolina Supreme Court called the districts illegal partisan gerrymanders. Lawmakers will get a chance next year to redraw the congressional map because the one used for this year's election was approved on an interim basis, giving Republicans added motivation to try to unseat the two Democratic justices this year.

Gerrymandering isn't the only reason the court races this fall will be crucial for North Carolina Democrats, said David McLennan, a political science professor at Meredith College in Raleigh. Losing those seats also would be damaging to Cooper, especially if Republicans win veto-proof majorities in the legislature, he said.

"It just puts more pressure upon Democrats to try to retain those (court) seats," he said.

Earlier this year, the Republican state committee targeted Democratic Justice Sam Ervin IV — whose grandfather presided over the Watergate hearings in the U.S. Senate — with an ad calling on him to bow out of the redistricting case because a ruling could have affected the rules for elections this year, when he is on the ballot. Ervin refused to recuse himself.

Court of Appeals Judge April Wood, one of three candidates seeking the GOP nomination to unseat Ervin, said on her website that she's running in part to ensure "a constitutional, conservative majority" on the court. A campaign video by one of her rivals, Administrative Office of the Courts General Counsel Trey Allen, touts him as "the conservative leader we need." Greensboro attorney Victoria Prince also is running in Tuesday's primary.

Another battleground is Ohio, where two Republicans on the state Supreme Court are defending their seats. A third race pits a sitting Republican justice and sitting Democratic justice against each other for the chief justice seat. Though Republicans hold a narrow majority on the court, justices have repeatedly ruled 4-3 against redistricting maps drawn by a GOP commission.

Arkansas has had some of the most acrimonious supreme court races in the country in recent elections. Races for two seats this year could push the court further to the right, even though the seats are officially nonpartisan. Justices Robin Wynne and Karen Baker have served in previous offices as Democrats and

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are facing challenges from candidates with Republican Party ties who promote their membership in the National Rifle Association.

Gunner DeLay, a circuit judge and former state lawmaker challenging Baker, uses his campaign website to highlight his work in the Legislature to restrict abortion and tout his endorsement from Arkansas Right to Life.

"I think we should drop the pretense," he said. "My history is what it is."

District Judge Chris Carnahan, a former executive director of the state Republican Party, and attorney David Sterling are the Republicans vying for Wynne's seat.

The results later this year could have implications for a congressional redistricting case. Lawsuits pending in federal court challenge Republicans' redrawing of a Little Rock-area district that opponents say dilutes the influence of Black voters. Opponents of the redistricting plan are fighting to move one of the cases back to state court.

Sen. Joyce Elliott, a Democrat from Little Rock who is Black, said the politicization of the court races angers her, but she still holds out hope that cases such as the redistricting challenge can get a fair hearing.

"I don't think my anger should be a reason to assume the court won't just do its job," Elliott said. "I am depending on them to do their job and do it in a fair way."

Hezbollah weapons at the heart of Lebanon's elections Sunday

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BAALBEK, Lebanon (AP) — It was a sea of yellow as thousands of men, women and children waving Hezbollah flags and wearing the group's trademark yellow caps rallied on a giant plot of land in the ancient eastern city of Baalbek in support of the heavily armed militant group.

One after another, many attendees vowed to vote Sunday for the Shiite Muslim Hezbollah and its allies in Lebanon's closely watched parliamentary elections, rejecting any attempt to disarm the powerful group.

Despite a devastating economic collapse and multiple other crises gripping Lebanon — the culmination of decades of corruption and mismanagement — the deeply divisive issue of Hezbollah's weapons has been at the center of the vote for a new 128-member parliament.

Disarming the group has dominated political campaigns among almost all of the group's opponents. Those include Western-backed mainstream political groups and independents who played a role in nationwide protests since the start of the economic meltdown in October 2019.

"This is the biggest misinformation campaign. Why? Because they are implementing America's policy against the resistance weapons," senior Hezbollah official Hussein Haj Hassan told The Associated Press on Friday ahead of the rally in Baalbek.

Hezbollah was the only group officially allowed to keep its weapons after the 1975-90 civil war because it was fighting Israeli forces occupying parts of south Lebanon. In 2000, Israel withdrew from Lebanon but Hezbollah and others in the small Mediterranean nation insisted its weapons were necessary to defend it against Israel, which has one of the strongest armies in the region.

Hezbollah has since fought a monthlong war with Israel in 2006 that ended in a draw and after the start of the conflict in neighboring Syria the Iran-backed group sent thousands of fighters to fight alongside President Bashar Assad's forces helping him tip the balance of power in his favor.

Hezbollah's rivals say its weapons and its backing of regional forces such as Assad's and the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen have harmed Lebanon's relations with oil-rich Persian Gulf nations. Those nations have categorized the Lebanese group as a terrorist organization and withheld crucial financial support for the country.

Haj Hassan, a legislator since 1996 and a Cabinet minister three times, said claims that Hezbollah is responsible for Lebanon's collapse were "a big lie."

"They forgot the political system, economic system, corruption, the war in Syria and its effects on Lebanon and they forgot the American sanctions," he said at his home near Baalbek.

The bespectacled 62-year-old lost two brothers who fought for Hezbollah during Lebanon's civil war and

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a nephew in Syria.

Hezbollah maintains its weapons are to defend Lebanon and not for internal use. But the group used them against rivals in May 2008 in the worst fighting at the time in many years. The Hezbollah offensive came after the government of then-Hezbollah opponent Fouad Saniora decided to dismantle the group's military telecommunications network.

"No Lebanese group should have the right to be armed while other Lebanese are not," said Samy Gemayel, head of the right-wing Kataeb party, in comments to the local LBC station Friday night.

The vote this year is the first after the economic collapse, described by the World Bank as one of the worst the world has witnessed in more than 150 years. It is also the first since the August 2020 blast at Beirut's port that killed more than 200, injured thousands and caused largescale damage in the capital.

Three former Cabinet ministers allied with Hezbollah were charged in the port blast investigation but have refused to show up for questioning by the investigative judge. Hezbollah's leader has blasted the judge and called for his replacement, and the investigation has been suspended for months following legal challenges by politicians.

Parliamentary elections are held once every four years and the last vote in 2018 gave a majority of seats to Hezbollah and its allies with 71 legislators.

As Lebanon sinks deeper into poverty, many Lebanese have been more openly critical of Hezbollah. They blame the group — along with the ruling class — for the devastating, multiple crises plaguing the country, including a dramatic currency crash and severe shortages in medicine and fuel.

Some expect its main Christian ally, the Free Patriotic Movement founded by President Michel Aoun, to lose seats. Others have expressed disappointment at Hezbollah's unshakable alliance with Nabih Berri, Lebanon's longtime parliament speaker seen by many as the godfather of Lebanon's corrupt sectarian-based and elite-dominated political system.

Still, a win by Hezbollah is not in doubt. The group has a solid base and masterfully maneuvers its alliances and the electoral system. Intimidation ensures no Shiite threat emerges: Three Shiite candidates allied with the Saudi-backed Lebanese Forces group withdrew from the race in the Baalbek region within days.

In a Shiite village in southern Lebanon, residents were attacked last month as they headed to attend a rally for candidates running against Hezbollah. Weapons were fired in the air to disrupt a gathering by a Shiite cleric running against the Hezbollah-led alliance in Baalbek.

Hezbollah was blamed for intimidating the Shiite candidates, a claim Haj Hassan denied.

"They don't want opposition within the (Shiite) sect. This is clear," said Hilal Khashan, political science professor at the American University of Beirut. Khashan added that Hezbollah and its Shiite ally the Amal group of Berri are trying to maintain control of the 27 seats allocated for the sect.

Little change is expected from the election as mainstream political parties and politicians remain strong while opposition candidates are fractured. Still, Western-backed mainstream parties are hoping to strip the parliamentary majority from Hezbollah, while many independents are hoping to break through traditional party lists and candidates.

The vote comes after a powerful Sunni leader, former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, suspended his work in politics. Some have warned this may help Hezbollah's Sunni allies to win more seats.

"I consider the ballot box as a line of defense for us," said nurse Hoda Falah during the rally in Baalbek. Falah said Hezbollah's weapons have defended eastern Lebanon from attacks by the Islamic State group and al-Qaida-linked militants over the years.

Top Hezbollah official Nabil Kaouk said in a speech last month that the elections will show that his group enjoys the most support in the small nation. He claimed that money flowing from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and the U.S. to their "tools" in Lebanon will not change results.

"May 15 will prove that the American project to target the resistance is sterile and they will only harvest disappointments," Kaouk said.

Today in History: May 15, George Wallace shot and paralyzed

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By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, May 15, the 135th day of 2022. There are 230 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 15, 1948, hours after declaring its independence, the new state of Israel was attacked by Transjordan, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon.

On this date:

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed an act establishing the Department of Agriculture.

In 1928, the Walt Disney cartoon character Mickey Mouse made his debut in the silent animated short "Plane Crazy."

In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court, in its unanimous *In re Gault* decision, ruled that juveniles accused of crimes were entitled to the same due process afforded adults.

In 1970, just after midnight, Phillip Lafayette Gibbs and James Earl Green, two Black students at Jackson State College in Mississippi, were killed as police opened fire during student protests.

In 1972, Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace was shot and left paralyzed while campaigning for president in Laurel, Maryland, by Arthur H. Bremer, who served 35 years for attempted murder.

In 1975, U.S. forces invaded the Cambodian island of Koh Tang and captured the American merchant ship *Mayaguez*, which had been seized by the Khmer Rouge. (All 39 crew members had already been released safely by Cambodia; some 40 U.S. servicemen were killed in connection with the operation.)

In 1988, the Soviet Union began the process of withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan, more than eight years after Soviet forces entered the country.

In 2000, by a 5-4 vote, the U.S. Supreme Court threw out a key provision of the 1994 Violence Against Women Act, saying that rape victims could not sue their attackers in federal court.

In 2007, the Rev. Jerry Falwell, who built the Christian right into a political force, died in Lynchburg, Virginia, at age 73.

In 2009, General Motors told about 1,100 dealers their franchises would be terminated.

In 2015, a jury sentenced Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (joh-HAHR' tsahr-NEYE'-ehv) to death for the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing that killed three and left more than 250 wounded.

In 2020, President Donald Trump formally unveiled a coronavirus vaccine program he called "Operation Warp Speed," to speed development of COVID-19 vaccines and quickly distribute them around the country. Comedic actor Fred Willard, whose films included "Best In Show" and "Anchorman," died at 86.

Ten years ago: Francois Hollande (frahn-SWAH' oh-LAWN'D') became president of France after a ceremony at the Elysee Palace in central Paris; he was the country's first Socialist leader since Francois Mitterrand (frahn-SWAH' mee-teh-RAHN') left office in 1995. Cleveland Cavaliers guard Kyrie Irving was named the NBA's Rookie of the Year.

Five years ago: The United States accused Syria of executing thousands of imprisoned political opponents and burning their bodies in a crematorium to hide the evidence. The Supreme Court shut the door on North Carolina Republicans' effort to revive a state law that mandated voter identification and scaled back early voting, provisions that a lower court said improperly targeted minority voters.

One year ago: Israel escalated its attacks on the Gaza Strip, bombing the home of a senior Hamas leader, killing a family of 10 in a refugee camp and destroying a high-rise that housed The Associated Press and other media; the Hamas militant group continued a stream of rocket volleys into Israel, and one man was killed when a rocket hit his home outside Tel Aviv. China landed a spacecraft on Mars for the first time, in the latest step forward for its ambitious goals in space. Rombauer won the Preakness in Baltimore at odds of 11-1, defeating Medina Spirit, who would later be disqualified from his Kentucky Derby win because of a failed drug test.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-singer Anna Maria Alberghetti is 86. Counterculture icon Wavy Gravy is 86. Singer Lenny Welch is 84. Actor-singer Lainie Kazan is 80. Actor Gunilla Hutton is 80. Actor Chazz Palminteri is 76. Former Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius is 74. Singer-songwriter Brian Eno is 74. Actor Nicholas Hammond (Film: "The Sound of Music") is 72. Baseball Hall of Famer George Brett

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is 69. Musician-composer Mike Oldfield is 69. Actor Lee Horsley is 67. TV personality Giselle Fernández is 61. Rapper Grandmaster Melle Mel is 61. Actor Brenda Bakke is 59. Football Hall of Famer Emmitt Smith is 53. Actor Brad Rowe is 52. Actor David Charvet (shahr-VAY') is 50. Actor Russell Hornsby is 48. Rock musician Ahmet Zappa is 48. Olympic gold medal gymnast Amy Chow is 44. Actor David Krumholtz is 44. Rock musician David Hartley (The War on Drugs) is 42. Actor Jamie-Lynn Sigler is 41. Actor Alexandra Breckenridge is 40. Rock musician Brad Shultz (Cage the Elephant) is 40. Rock musician Nick Perri is 38. Tennis player Andy Murray is 35.