

Groton Daily Independent

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Give yourself permission to immediately walk away from anything that gives you bad vibes.

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

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

Wednesday, May 18

Senior Menu: Teriyaki chicken, almond rice with peas, pineapple strawberry ambrosia, orange sherbet, dinner roll.

School Breakfast: Cook's Choice.

School Lunch: Sack lunch made by kitchen.

LAST DAY OF SCHOOL (Full Day)

Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m., Groton Ad Council at 7 p.m.

Thursday, May 19

Senior Menu: Herbed roast pork, baked potato with sour cream, tomato spoon salad, cinnamon apple sauce, whole wheat bread.

Faculty In-Service

10 a.m.: Girls Golf at Sisseton

10 a.m.: Region 1A Track Meet at Clark

Methodist: Newsletter items due, UMW at 1:30 p.m.

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

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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

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Guthmiller takes second at NEC Golf Meet

Carly Guthmiller placed second at the Northeast Conference golf meet held Monday at Lee Park in Aberdeen. Guthmiller shot a 49 in the front nine and a 45 in the back nine for a total score of 94.

Aberdeen Roncalli's Claire Crawford shot a 43 in both sets for a score of 86 to win the tournament.

Others playing for Groton Area were Emma Schinkel, shooting a 60 and a 61 for a total of 121; Shaylee Peterson, shooting a 58 and a 65 for a total of 123; and Carly Gilbert, shooting a 70 and a 69 for a total score of 139.

Emerald Ash Borer Confirmed Near Crooks

PIERRE S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) Forest Health Team has confirmed the presence of emerald ash borer (EAB) in Minnehaha County near Crooks, South Dakota. EAB has previously been confirmed in other areas of Minnehaha and Lincoln counties.

"Potentially impacted ash trees were reported by a landowner," said Greg Josten, DANR State Forester. "Upon inspection, DANR's Forest Health Team confirmed the presence of EAB pupae in one of the trees."

The movement of infested wood, including firewood, is a common way to spread EAB from one community to another. State and local quarantines are in place to help slow the spread, but it is important to remember not to move firewood – Buy it Where you Burn It!

The state quarantine, which is in place year-round, prohibits the movement of any raw ash wood, such as logs, or firewood from any hardwood species out of Lincoln, Minnehaha, and Turner counties. In addition, the city of Sioux Falls has banned the movement of ash wood from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

For more information about EAB or to report a suspected sighting please visit <https://emeraldashborersouthdakota.sd.gov/>.

In addition, DANR is hosting an online EAB update and seminar on Wednesday, May 18, from 1 to 2 pm CDT via ZOOM. To register please visit:

https://state-sd.zoom.us/meeting/register/%20tJAvd-2qj8sG9ROM9UUtG_G1MFwk0v1J1NN

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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,
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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**



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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Groton City Council Meeting Agenda May 17, 2022 – 7:00pm City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
2. Legion Baseball Discussion
3. Cemetery Discussion
4. Minutes
5. Bills
6. April Finance Report
7. Approval of Electricity Installation at Airport
8. Approval for the City of Groton to provide Mosquito Control services to the City of Bristol
9. Approval of Special Event Alcoholic Beverage License – Groton Amateur Baseball
10. "The Pantry" Update
11. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
12. Hiring of Summer Baseball Employees
13. Authorization to Adjust Pay Raise Continuation for Deputy Finance Officer
14. Adjournment

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Best and Brightest of 2022 Recognized for Academic Excellence

The best and brightest from the Class of 2022 were recognized for their academic achievements during their high school career. Locally, they include Allyssa Locke of Groton Area, Benjamin Gustafson of Langford Area and Katelyn Mehlhaff of Frederick Area.

On Monday (5/9), Governor Kristi Noem and the Associated School Boards of South Dakota (ASBSD) honored students who were identified as the top one percent of their senior class, from the state's Public, Private and Tribal/BIE schools as part of the 32nd Annual Academic Excellence Recognition event.

Students designated as their high school's honoree(s) received a certificate, South Dakota pin and the opportunity to meet and have their photo taken with Governor Noem.

"I am just so proud of you and all your academic accomplishments. I think it's phenomenal the way you've applied yourself," Gov. Noem shared with students during the event, adding the state is "committed to you and what you'd like to do in your future."

"We want you to achieve the highest level of your dreams."

ASBSD President Eric Stroeder added the hope is for these special students to share their talents with the people of South Dakota in the future.

"Many of us hope you will stay in South Dakota and become the next generation of leaders for our state," Stroeder said.

"We need your talents and skills. We need your ideas and creativity. We need you to continue to push our great state forward."

The event was sponsored by the School Administrators of South Dakota, South Dakota Board of Regents, South Dakota Education Association and Wellmark Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Musical entertainment was provided by the Mobridge-Pollock Mixed Choir.

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Alexandra Stange earns University of Nebraska-Lincoln degree

LINCOLN, NE (05/16/2022)-- Alexandra Gaile Stange of Groton was among 3,523 graduates who received degrees from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln during commencement exercises May 13 and 14.

Stange earned a Bachelor of Arts from the College of Arts and Sciences.

The graduates are from 58 countries; 45 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico; and more than 250 Nebraska communities.

Jay Keasling, Philomathia Professor of Alternative Energy at the University of California, Berkeley, and a Husker alumnus, delivered the undergraduate commencement address May 14 at Memorial Stadium. He also received an honorary Doctor of Science during the undergraduate ceremony. Terry L. Fairfield, former president and CEO of the University of Nebraska Foundation, received the Nebraska Builder Award for exceptional service to the state and university during the ceremony.

Marco Barker, vice chancellor for diversity and inclusion at Nebraska, gave the address at the graduate and professional degree ceremony May 13 at Pinnacle Bank Arena. Sara Howard, policy adviser for First Five Nebraska and former state senator, spoke to the law graduates May 14 at the Lied Center for Performing Arts.

In addition, graduates from 2020 and 2021 who were unable to attend their ceremonies were celebrated. More than 20 returned to be recognized.



Custer State Park to Host Event for Bison Center

CUSTER STATE PARK, S.D. – South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) will host a ribbon cutting and grand opening ceremony for the new Custer State Park Bison Center on Friday, May 20 at 11:00 a.m. MT.

"Custer State Park has played a key role in bison conservation for over a century," said Governor Noem. "This one-of-a-kind center will allow the park to tell its story and educate future generations on the importance of the bison, including the bison's importance to our Native American tribes. I'm grateful to Walter Panzirel and the Helmsley Charitable Trust for their generosity and commitment to this project along with the many donors who have helped shape this vision for the Park, for South Dakota, and its visitors."

The Center was made possible thanks to a \$4 million grant from The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, \$500,000 allocated from the South Dakota Legislature and an additional \$500,000 in private donations raised by the South Dakota Parks and Wildlife Foundation. The Bison Center will tell the story of Custer State Park's bison herd and educate future generations on the importance of bison through engaging and dynamic interpretive displays.

The free roaming herd of nearly 1,400 bison at Custer State Park is one of the world's largest publicly owned bison herds.

"The Bison Center will be a landmark destination for visitors from across South Dakota and around the world to understand the North American bison's rich history and learn about Custer State Park's role in preserving this magnificent animal," said Walter Panzirel, a Trustee for the Helmsley Charitable Trust. "It has been exciting to be part of the project since inception, and I am honored to see it come to fruition with the ribbon cutting and grand opening."

Speakers at the event include Lieutenant Governor Larry Rhoden, Walter Panzirel, a Trustee for the Helmsley Charitable Trust, Cabinet Secretary of Game, Fish and Parks Kevin Robling, and Custer State Park Superintendent Matt Snyder.

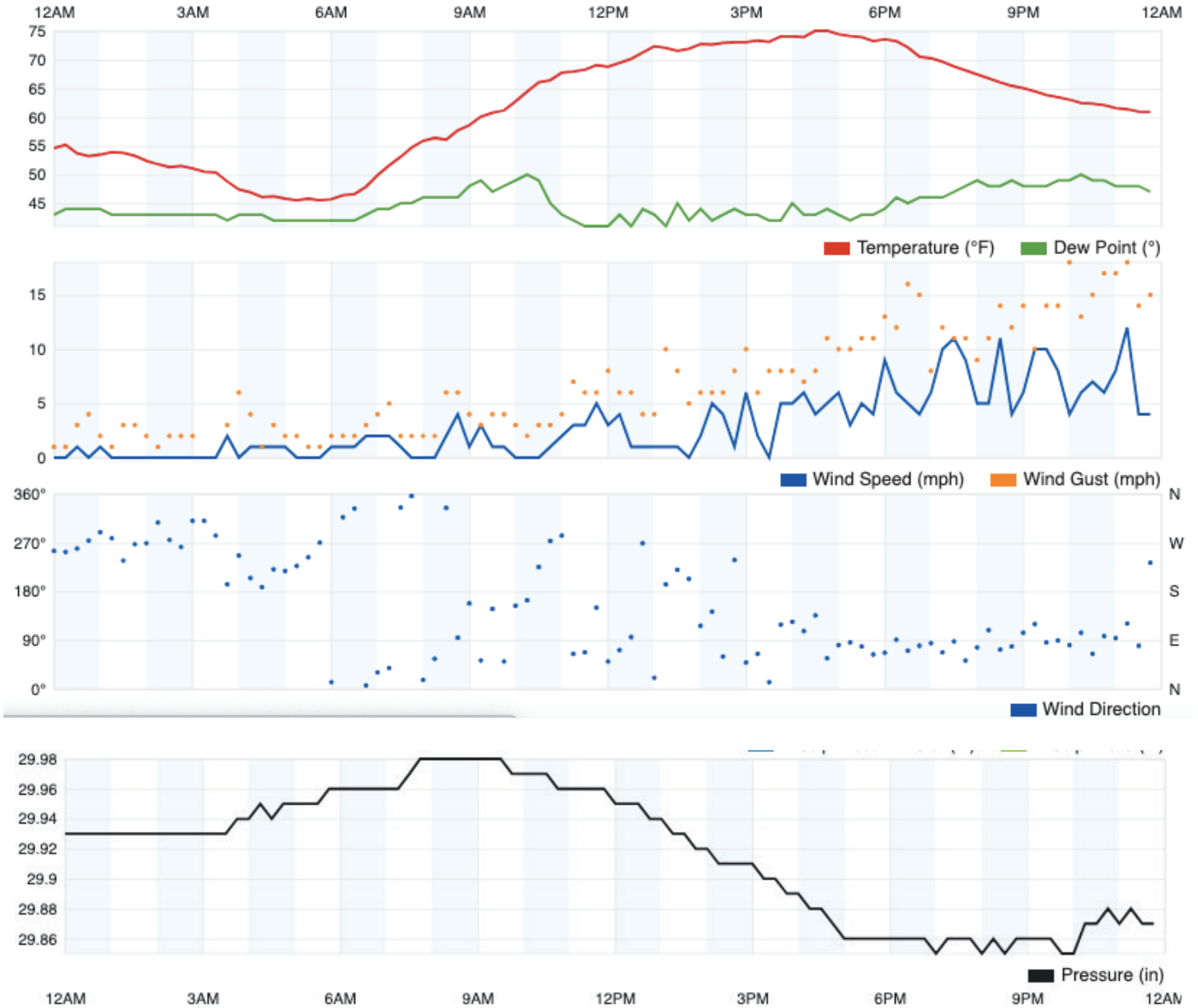
This is an outdoor event, located at The Bison Center near the bison corral complex off Wildlife Loop Road. About The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust

The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust aspires to improve lives by supporting exceptional efforts in the U.S. and around the world in health and select place-based initiatives. Since beginning active grantmaking in 2008, Helmsley has committed more than \$3 billion for a wide range of charitable purposes. Helmsley's Rural Healthcare Program funds innovative projects that use information technologies to connect rural patients to emergency medical care, bring the latest medical therapies to patients in remote areas, and provide state-of-the-art training for rural hospitals and EMS personnel. To date, this program has awarded more than \$500 million to organizations and initiatives in the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming, Minnesota, Iowa, Nevada, and Montana. For more information on Helmsley and its programs, visit helmsleytrust.org.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Chance
T-storms

Tonight



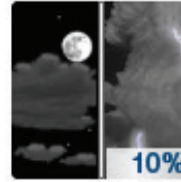
Slight Chance
T-storms then
Partly Cloudy

Wednesday



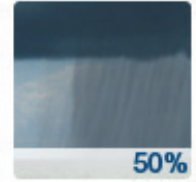
Mostly Sunny

Wednesday
Night



Partly Cloudy
then Slight
Chance
T-storms

Thursday



Chance
Showers

High: 64 °F

Low: 46 °F

High: 74 °F

Low: 46 °F

High: 70 °F

Cooler Days Ahead

Tuesday



Chance of
showers/storms

HI: 62 to 74
LO: 47 to 51

Wednesday



Gusty

HI: 71 to 78
LO: 47 to 51

Thursday



Gusty, chance
of evening
storms

HI: 65 to 79
LO: 37 to 47

Friday



Gusty

HI: 51 to 55
LO: 33 to 38

Saturday



Gusty

HI: 49 to 58
LO: 32 to 37

Showers/storms possible throughout the day Tuesday and gusty winds starting Wednesday. Chance of storms Thursday evening. Temperatures start to cool Friday and continue below average through the weekend.

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Today in Weather History

May 17, 1902: An estimated F3 Tornado moved northeast from 6 miles southwest of Mina to south of Westport, a distance of about 25 miles. A four-year-old girl was killed in one of two farmhouses blown apart in Edmunds County. Three more homes were damaged in Brown County. There were probably two if not three separate tornadoes involved.

May 17, 1937: A complex of tornadoes and downbursts skipped southeast from near Roslyn and Greenville. This storm also caused \$50,000 in damage in downtown Waubay and damaged farm property to about 4 miles west of Gray, Minnesota. About 20 barns were destroyed. Sheep and horses were killed. These events traveled a distance of about 70 miles. The strongest tornado was estimated at F2 strength.

May 17, 1996: An F1 tornado touched down 20 miles southeast of Wilmot or 5 miles northwest of Ortonville, Minnesota at Schmidts Landing on Big Stone Lake. The roof was ripped off of a house, and a garage wall was blown off its foundation. Three RV's were demolished, and a trailer was overturned and destroyed. This tornado moved into Big Stone County and intensified. An F3 tornado crossed Big Stone Lake from Roberts County, South Dakota destroying on a cabin at the Meadowbrook Resort. It also blew the roof off another cabin, and the third cabin was demolished when a tree fell onto it. Several boats on Big Stone Lake were overturned. Approximately 150 buildings sustained damage or were destroyed as the tornado moved northeast across Big Stone County. Southwest of Clinton, a pontoon boat, and a camper were destroyed. East of Clinton, a farm lost all buildings with severe damage to their home. Estimated property damage was listed at \$1.5 million.

A wind gust of 90 mph blew two garage roofs off, destroyed an antenna, blew large trees down, and also a grain dryer was blown down near Dumont, Minnesota.

1883 - A three day flood in the Black Hills of western South Dakota resulted in a million dollars damage at Rapid City. (David Ludlum)

1896: An estimated F5 tornado tracked 100 miles through northeastern Kansas and extreme southeastern Nebraska. Seneca, Oneida, Sabetha, and Reserve, Kansas sustained severe damage. While passing through Reserve, the tornado was 2 miles wide. 25 people were killed, and 200 were injured. The cost was estimated at \$400,000.

1979: A reading of 12 degrees at Mauna Kea Observatory established a record low for the state of Hawaii.

1983 - A golfer playing the Fox Meadows Course in Memphis TN was struck by a bolt of lightning that went through his neck, down his spine, came out a pocket containing his keys, and went into a nearby tree. Miraculously, he survived! (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A summer-like weather pattern continued, with warm temperatures and scattered thunderstorms across much of the nation. A cold front in the north central U.S. produced a sharp contrast in the weather across the state of Minnesota during the afternoon. At the same time Duluth was 50 degrees with rain and fog, Mankato was 95 degrees with sunny skies. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds over the Carolinas during the afternoon and evening. A "thunderstorm of a lifetime" in northern Spartanburg County, SC, produced hail for forty-five minutes, leaving some places knee-deep in hail. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms ravaged the south central U.S. with severe weather for the third day in a row. Thunderstorms spawned another nineteen tornadoes, for a total of fifty tornadoes in three days. A strong (F-2) tornado injured 14 persons and caused two million dollars damage at Apple Springs TX. Baseball size hail was reported at Matador TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather in New York State during the late morning and afternoon. A tornado injured one person at Warren, and wind gusts to 80 mph were reported at Owego. Evening thunderstorms over southwest Texas produced wind gusts to 80 mph at Marfa, along with golf ball size hail which accumulated to a depth of ten inches. Late night thunderstorms over southwest Texas produced up to seven inches of rain in western Crockett County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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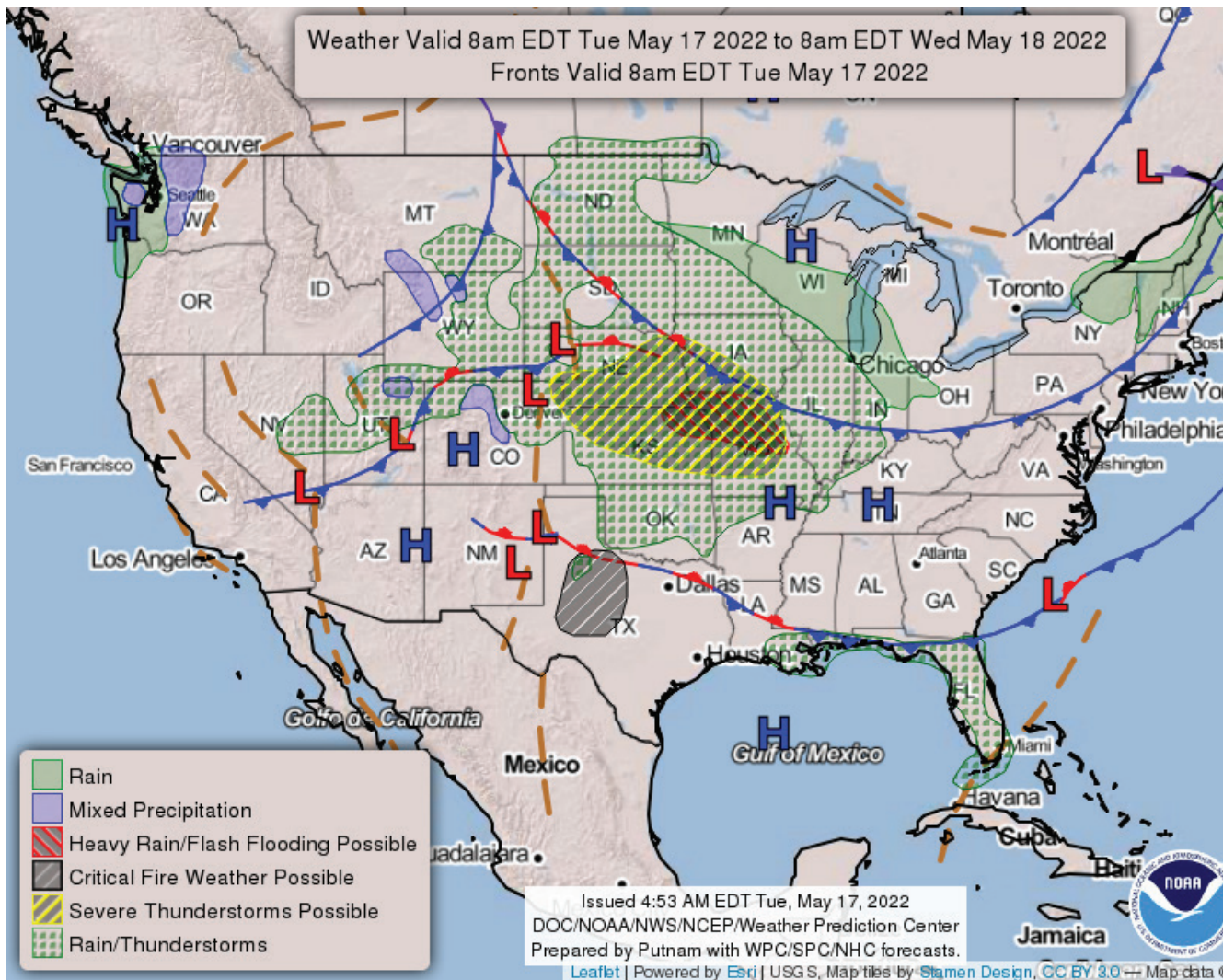
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 75 °F at 4:42 PM
Low Temp: 45 °F at 5:51 AM
Wind: 16 mph at 6:28 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 02 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 103 in 1934
Record Low: 27 in 1925
Average High: 71°F
Average Low: 45°F
Average Precip in May.: 1.88
Precip to date in May.: 2.40
Average Precip to date: 5.85
Precip Year to Date: 8.90
Sunset Tonight: 9:00:02 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:56:31 AM



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GOD IS GOOD

Only God can be called "good." And His very name comes from His "goodness." When "good" and "goodness" are shortened, we end up with "God."

Everything that comes from God - His creation or counsel, His laws and love, His promises and provisions - must be good because the nature of God Himself is "good!"

God is not good to us if we are good, nor does He always treat us bad if we are bad. Those who say, "God won't be good to you if you are bad" do not understand God or who He is.

The Psalmist did. He wrote, "The Lord is good to all!"

We recognize God's goodness in the way He provided for our salvation. After a young Brahman interviewed a missionary, he said, "Hinduism has many things which Christianity has. But there is one thing which you have that we do not have - a Savior."

We have a Savior because of God's goodness. It was His goodness that flowed from His love that He sent His Son to be our Savior. Only a "Good God" would make such a supreme sacrifice to make salvation possible which is available "to all!"

We realize God's goodness in the way He meets the needs of everyone. The food that grows in fields, on bushes and branches, vines and beneath the soil, was first planted by God for everyone. The water, which God gave us for survival, falls on the "just and the unjust." Why?

Again, the Psalmist said: "His tender mercies are over all."

God is good. But one day, all will stand before Him in judgment and be asked: "Is my Son your Savior?"

Prayer: Lord, we recognize Your eternal goodness and grace and ask Your forgiveness and cleansing for our sins. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. Psalm 145:9

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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

Subscription Form

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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 Monday:

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 112,000,000

Powerball

07-15-22-36-64, Powerball: 13, Power Play: 2

(seven, fifteen, twenty-two, thirty-six, sixty-four; Powerball: thirteen; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$101,000,000

GOP lawmakers steered probe into intoxicated state senators

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Senate Republicans in a private 2020 meeting planned how to achieve an already-negotiated outcome to a committee investigating a pair of lawmakers for being intoxicated during legislative proceedings even before the committee had a chance to meet, according to a television report.

A transcript of the April 2020 Republican caucus meeting was obtained by KELO-TV and reported Sunday. It showed how Republicans held a private caucus meeting to discuss how to quickly and quietly resolve a legislative investigation into the two most powerful senators at the time, Sens. Kris Langer and Brock Greenfield. The pair were accused of showing up intoxicated at a legislative session that had stretched into the early morning hours as lawmakers discussed the state's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For critics of Republican rule in South Dakota's Statehouse, the revelation of the meeting's details provided an egregious example of how the fate of bills and the workings of state government are often decided in closed-door GOP meetings.

"It's very closed, very secretive," said Peggy Gibson, a former Democratic House member who spent years advocating, mostly without success, for ethics reforms in the Legislature. "Everything is decided ahead of time."

As lawmakers in 2020 prepared for a special committee appointed to look into the allegations against Langer and Greenfield, the two lawmakers hired former Attorney General Marty Jackley. He then negotiated with Sen. Jim Bolin, who was the Republican assistant majority leader at the time, and Sen. Arthur Rusch, the Republican chosen to chair the investigative committee. They reached a potential resolution: Langer and Greenfield would apologize for their behavior if the Legislature only "admonished" them.

Bolin and Rusch presented that agreement to the Republican caucus and discussed ways to achieve it, according to the transcript from KELO-TV. By the end of the meeting, Bolin chose five lawmakers for the nine-member committee who would hold to the negotiated agreement when the committee met later that month.

Bolin told The Associated Press on Monday that he had been suddenly thrown into leadership at the time and felt he was "informally" tasked with working "through the whole process."

"I've never had to deal with anything like that before or in my life."

Rusch did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the caucus meeting. However, according to the transcript, Rusch, a former judge, likened the agreement to two parties in a criminal or civil case working out a negotiation before it goes to trial.

But the extent to which the caucus planned out the results of the legislative investigation prompted objections even among some Republicans who were a part of the meeting.

Then-Sen. Deb Soholt, a Republican warned during the meeting that such planning would result in a "sham committee" and that voting on a motion to appoint the committee, instead of reaching an informal

consensus, was “unprecedented.”

“Why are we doing the committee step that feels fake?” she asked. “It looks like no room for conversation amongst members that want to talk about it.”

Republican Rep. Phil Jensen, who was in the Senate at the time and initially brought attention to Langer and Greenfield’s condition, echoed that sentiment on Monday.

“It was obvious they were stacking the jury,” he said. “It was a sham committee.”

The committee eventually met for nine hours over two days, but in the end, the committee resolved the investigation just as the caucus had planned. The five Republicans defeated a Democrat-led effort to censure Langer and Greenfield instead of admonishing them. Then Langer and Greenfield both apologized.

While Langer later that year dropped out of her reelection campaign, Greenfield was reelected and is mounting a bid for school and public lands commissioner.

Sioux Falls man guilty of selling drugs that led to 2 deaths

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A 53-year-old South Dakota man has been convicted of distributing a powerful synthetic opioid that resulted in the deaths of two people.

A federal jury on Friday found Jeffrey Moore, of Sioux Falls, guilty of two counts of distribution of a controlled substance resulting in death and one count of conspiracy to distribute a controlled substance. Authorities said the victims died from fentanyl overdoses in November 2018 and June 2019.

Moore was acquitted on one count of conspiracy to distribute crack cocaine.

Moore faces a maximum penalty of life in prison without parole. Sentencing is scheduled for Aug. 1.

Some SD wildlife populations decline due to ongoing drought

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The ongoing drought in South Dakota has been hard on the state’s wildlife.

The U.S. Forest Service says the grouse population in the Fort Pierre National Grassland has declined by 15% in 2022, largely because of the dry conditions.

The total grouse population has averaged around 300 since the mid-1980s. Over the last twenty years, both greater prairie chicken and sharp-tailed grouse populations have primarily remained stable or have grown.

“The thing that I think was really damaging to us last year was we had record high and record dry conditions in early June, right when those birds started incubation or, for the earlier semester, to hatch. And boy, that’s just so tough on a chick to thermoregulate and be able to find sufficient moisture,” District Ranger Dan Svingen said.

Greater prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse both nest on the ground and require tall grass to hide their nests, the Capital Journal reported.

Because they start laying eggs as early as April, before sufficient grass growth, they’re dependent on dead grass from the previous year as cover. However, the drought prevented extensive grass growth in 2021 leaving them more exposed to predators in 2022.

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, a little more than 76% of South Dakota is experiencing some kind of drought.

The drought has also affected the population of other wildlife in the Fort Pierre National Grassland both directly and indirectly.

“Our duck production is going to be way down because of the state of the water and those natural wetlands and stock ponds. Our fish population, 80-100 of those ponds support recreational fisheries, and that’s very hard to support, fish need water,” Svingen said.

Dallas police: Suspect arrested in Koreatown salon shooting

DALLAS (AP) — A suspect has been arrested in connection with a shooting that wounded three women in a hair salon in the city’s Koreatown that authorities have said might have been a hate crime, police said

early Tuesday.

The suspect was being interviewed and processed, the Dallas Police Department said, and Chief Eddie Garcia was expected to release additional information about the arrest later in the day.

Garcia said last week that last Wednesday's shooting at Hair World Salon could be connected to two other shootings at businesses run by Asian Americans.

The Dallas shooting occurred a few days before a white gunman killed 10 Black people Saturday at a Buffalo, New York, supermarket and a gunman authorities said was motivated by political hatred against Taiwan killed one person and wounded five Sunday at a southern California church where mostly elderly Taiwanese parishioners had gathered.

Authorities have said a man dressed all in black opened fire at the salon, then drove off in a maroon minivan. Garcia said investigators found that a similar vehicle was reported to be involved in two other recent shootings, including an April 2 drive-by in the area where the salon is located. No one was injured in either of those shootings.

Garcia said the vehicle was also linked to a drive-by shooting on May 10 about 25 miles (40 kilometers) southeast of the shopping center where Wednesday's shooting happened.

The three women who were shot at the salon were taken to a hospital with injuries that weren't life-threatening.

Jane Bae, the daughter of one of the wounded women, told The Associated Press last week that her mother told her that the man, who she didn't recognize, calmly walked in, opened fire and then left.

"He was calm. He just walked up to it and then stood there — didn't walk around — but stood there and shot like 20 shots and then just calmly went out," said Bae, who wasn't there but had spoken with her mother.

The salon is in the heart of Koreatown, which is in a part of the city that was transformed in the 1980s from an industrial area to a thriving district with shopping, dining, markets, medical offices and salons.

Anti-Asian violence has risen sharply in recent years. Last year, six women of Asian descent were among the eight killed in a shooting at massage businesses in and near Atlanta, heightening anger and fear among Asian Americans.

Ukraine working to pull last fighters from Mariupol mill

By OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI and CIARAN McQUILLAN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Hundreds of Ukrainian fighters defending the last holdout in Mariupol were evacuated to areas controlled by Russian-backed separatists and officials worked Tuesday to get the rest out, signaling the beginning of the end of a siege that became a symbol of Ukrainian resistance.

Russia called the operation a mass surrender. The Ukrainians avoided using that word — but said the garrison had completed its mission.

More than 260 fighters — some severely wounded — were pulled from a steel plant on Monday that is the last redoubt of Ukrainian fighters in the city and transported to two towns controlled by separatists, officials on both sides said. Other fighters — their precise numbers unknown — remain inside the Azovstal steelworks that sprawl over 11 square kilometers (4 square miles) in a city otherwise controlled by Russian forces.

The complete capture of the plant would mark a significant milestone. It would give Russia its biggest victory of the war yet and could help free up forces for offensive action elsewhere in the industrial heartland of eastern Ukraine that is now Russia's focus after a series of setbacks.

"Ukraine needs Ukrainian heroes to be alive. It's our principle," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in announcing that the evacuation had begun from the relentlessly bombarded mill and its warren of tunnels and bunkers.

"There are heavily wounded among them. They are receiving medical help," he said. "The work continues to bring the guys home and it requires delicacy and time."

Ukraine Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar said 264 fighters were evacuated from the plant, including

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53 "heavily wounded" brought to a medical facility. Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov gave slightly different numbers: 265 evacuees, 51 of them seriously wounded. The discrepancy couldn't immediately be explained.

After nightfall Monday, several buses pulled away from the steel mill accompanied by Russian military vehicles. Russian Defense Ministry video of some evacuees did not show any that were armed. The video shows troops patting down and searching the fighters. Some were on stretchers as they were loaded onto the buses.

Oleksandr Danylyuk, a Ukrainian former national security chief and finance minister, told the BBC that because Ukrainian forces were unable to liberate the plant, the negotiated evacuation to Russian-controlled territory had been "the only hope" for Azovstal's defenders.

Those remaining in the plant are still "able to defend it. But I think it's important to understand that their main mission is completed and now their lives need to be saved," he said.

A full negotiated withdrawal could save lives on the Russian side, too, sparing Russian-backed troops from what almost certainly would be a bloody and difficult battle to wrest the labyrinth-like plant from Ukrainian control.

Danylyuk added that those evacuated should be swapped for Russian prisoners — but Vyacheslav Volodin, speaker of the lower house of the Russian parliament, said that there are "war criminals" among the plant defenders and they should not be exchanged but tried.

Maliar heaped praise on the fighters who survived in the plant for nearly three months and said it been impossible to liberate them "by military means."

"Thanks to the defenders of Mariupol, we have gained critically important time to form reserves, to regroup forces and to receive aid from our partners," she said. "Mariupol's defenders have fully accomplished all missions assigned by the commanders."

Russia has been plagued by setbacks in the war, most glaringly in its failure early on to take the capital of Kyiv. Much of the fighting has shifted to the Donbas region in the east but also has turned into a slog, with fighting village-by-village.

Strikes have also occasionally rocked other areas of the country. The western city of Lviv was rocked by loud explosions early Tuesday. Witnesses counted at least eight blasts accompanied by distant booms. The sky west of the city, which was under an overnight curfew, was lit up by an orange glow.

Howitzers from the U.S. and other countries have helped Kyiv hold off or gain ground against Russia, a senior U.S. defense official said. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the U.S. military assessment, said Ukraine has pushed Russian forces in the east to within 1 to 4 kilometers (a half-mile to 2.5 miles) of Russia's border but could not confirm if it was all the way to the frontier.

In another setback for Moscow, Sweden's decided to seek NATO membership following a similar decision by neighboring Finland. That is a historic shift for the countries, which have been nonaligned for generations.

On Tuesday, Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde signed the formal request to join the alliance, which will now be sent to NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg.

Stoltenberg has said the membership process for both could be quick — but President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, a NATO member, has cast doubt on the process. He has objected to allowing Sweden and Finland to join NATO, saying they failed to take a "clear" stance against Kurdish militants and other groups that Ankara considers terrorists, and imposed military sanctions on Turkey.

All 30 current NATO members must agree to let the Nordic neighbors join.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Moscow "does not have a problem" with Sweden or Finland as they apply for NATO membership, but that "the expansion of military infrastructure onto this territory will of course give rise to our reaction in response."

Putin launched the invasion on Feb. 24 in what he said was an effort to check NATO's expansion but has seen that strategy backfire.

Musk: Doubt about spam accounts could scuttle Twitter deal

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LONDON (AP) — Tesla CEO Elon Musk says his deal to buy Twitter can't move forward unless the company shows public proof that less than 5% of the accounts on the social media platform are fake or spam.

Musk made the comment in a reply to another user on Twitter early Tuesday. He spent much of the previous day in a back-and-forth with Twitter CEO Parag Agrawal, who posted a series of tweets explaining his company's effort to fight bots and how it has consistently estimated that less than 5% of Twitter accounts are fake.

In his tweet Tuesday, Musk said that "20% fake/spam accounts, while 4 times what Twitter claims, could be much higher. My offer was based on Twitter's SEC filings being accurate."

He added: "Yesterday, Twitter's CEO publicly refused to show proof of 5%. This deal cannot move forward until he does."

Twitter declined to comment.

It's Musk's latest salvo over inauthentic accounts, a problem he has said he wants to rid Twitter of.

At a Miami technology conference Monday, Musk estimated that at least 20% of Twitter's 229 million accounts are spam bots, a percentage he said was at the low end of his assessment, according to a Bloomberg News report.

The battle over spam accounts kicked off last week when Musk tweeted that the Twitter deal was on hold pending confirmation of the company's estimates that they make up less than 5% of total users.

Also at the All In Summit, Musk gave the strongest hint yet that he would like to pay less for Twitter than the \$44 billion offer he made last month.

He said a viable deal at a lower price would not be out of the question, according to the report by Bloomberg, which said it viewed a livestream video of the conference posted by a Twitter user.

Musk's comments are likely to bolster theories from analysts that the billionaire either wants out of the deal or to buy the company at a cheaper price. His tweet Tuesday came in reply to one from a Tesla news site speculating that Musk "may be looking for a better Twitter deal as \$44 billion seems too high."

"Twitter shares will be under pressure this morning again as the chances of a deal ultimately getting done is not looking good now," Wedbush Securities analyst Dan Ives, who covers both Twitter and Tesla, said in a research note. He estimated that there's "60%+ chance" that Musk ends up walking away from the deal and paying the \$1 billion breakup fee.

Musk made the offer to buy Twitter for \$54.20 per share on April 14. Twitter shares have slid since then and are now down by just over 8%, to close at \$37.39 on Monday.

To finance the acquisition, Musk pledged some of his Tesla shares, which have slumped by about a third since the deal was announced.

War Crimes Watch: Targeting schools, Russia bombs the future

By JASON DEAREN, JULIET LINDERMAN and OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — As she lay buried under the rubble, her legs broken and eyes blinded by blood and thick clouds of dust, all Inna Levchenko could hear was screams. It was 12:15 p.m. on March 3, and moments earlier a blast had pulverized the school where she'd taught for 30 years.

Amid relentless bombing, she'd opened School 21 in Chernihiv as a shelter to frightened families. They painted the word "children" in big, bold letters on the windows, hoping that Russian forces would see it and spare them. The bombs fell anyway.

Though she didn't know it yet, 70 children she'd ordered to shelter in the basement would survive the blast. But at least nine people, including one of her students — a 13-year-old boy — would not.

"Why schools? I cannot comprehend their motivation," she said. "It is painful to realize how many friends of mine died ... and how many children who remained alone without parents, got traumatized. They will remember it all their life and will pass their stories to the next generation."

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

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The Ukrainian government says Russia has shelled more than 1,000 schools, destroying 95. On May 8, a bomb flattened a school in Zaporizhzhia which, like School No. 21 in Chernihiv, was being used as a shelter. As many as 60 people were feared dead.

Intentionally attacking schools and other civilian infrastructure is a war crime. Experts say wide-scale wreckage can be used as evidence of Russian intent, and to refute claims that schools were simply collateral damage.

But the destruction of hundreds of schools is about more than toppling buildings and maiming bodies, according to experts, to teachers and to others who have survived conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, in Syria and beyond. It hinders a nation's ability to rebound after the fighting stops, injuring entire generations and dashing a country's hope for the future.

In the nearly three months since Russia invaded Ukraine, The Associated Press and the PBS series "Frontline" have independently verified 57 schools that were destroyed or damaged in a manner that indicates a possible war crime. The accounting likely represents just a fraction of potential war crimes committed during the conflict and the list is updated daily.

In Chernihiv alone, the city council said only seven of the city's 35 schools were unscathed. Three were reduced to rubble.

The International Criminal Court, prosecutors from across the globe and Ukraine's prosecutor general are investigating more than 8,000 reports of potential war crimes in Ukraine involving 500 suspects. Many are accused of aiming deliberately at civilian structures like hospitals, shelters and residential neighborhoods.

Targeting schools — spaces designed as havens for children to grow, learn and make friends — is particularly harmful, transforming the architecture of childhood into something violent and dangerous: a place that inspires fear.

A geography teacher, Elena Kudrik, lay dead on the floor of School 50 in the eastern Ukrainian town of Gorlovka. Amid the wreckage surrounding her were books and papers, smeared in blood. In the corner, another lifeless body — Elena Ivanova, the assistant headmaster— slumped over in an office chair, a gaping wound torn into her side.

"It's a tragedy for us ... It's a tragedy for the children," said school director Sergey But, standing outside the brick building shortly after the attack. Shards of broken glass and rubble were sprayed across the concrete, where smiling children once flew kites and posed for photos with friends.

A few kilometers away, at the Sonechko pre-school in the city of Okhtyrka, a cluster bomb destroyed a kindergarten, killing a child. Outside the entrance, two more bodies lay in pools of blood.

Valentina Grusha teaches in Kyiv province, where she has worked for 35 years, most recently as a district administrator and foreign literature instructor. Russian troops invaded her village of Ivankiv just as school officials had begun preparations for war. On Feb. 24, Russian forces driving toward Kyiv fatally shot a child and his father there, she said.

"There was no more schooling," she said. "We called all the leaders and stopped instruction because the war started. And then there were 36 days of occupation."

They also shelled and destroyed schools in many nearby villages, she said. Kindergarten buildings were shattered by shrapnel and machine-gun fire.

Despite the widespread damage and destruction to educational infrastructure, war crimes experts say proving an attacking military's intent to target individual schools is difficult. Russian officials deny targeting civilian structures, and local media reports in Russian-held Gorlovka alleged Ukrainian forces trying to recapture the area were to blame for the blast that killed the two teachers there.

But the effects of the destruction are indisputable.

"When I start talking to the directors of destroyed and robbed institutions, they are very worried, crying, telling with pain and regret," Grusha said. "It's part of their lives. And now the school is a ruin that stands in the center of the village and reminds of those terrible air raids and bombings."

UNICEF communications director Toby Fricker, who is currently in Ukraine, agreed. "School is often the heart of the community in many places, and that is so central to everyday life."

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Teachers and students who have lived through other conflicts say the destruction of schools in their countries damaged an entire generation.

Syrian teacher Abdulkafi Alhamdo still thinks about the children's drawings soaked in blood, littered across the floor of a schoolhouse in Aleppo. It had been attacked during the Civil War there in 2014. The teachers and children had been preparing for an art exhibit featuring student work depicting life during wartime.

The blast killed 19 people, including at least 10 children, the AP reported at the time. But it's the survivors who linger in Alhamdo's memory.

"I understood in (their) eyes that they wouldn't go to school anymore," he said. "It doesn't only affect the kids who were running away, with shock and trauma. It affects all kids who heard about the massacre. How can they go back to school? You are not only targeting a school, you're targeting a generation."

Jasminko Halilovic was only 6 years old when Sarajevo, in present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina, was besieged. Now, 30 years after the Bosnian war ended, he and his peers are the ones still picking up the pieces.

Halilovic went to school in a cellar, as many Ukrainian children have done. Desperately chasing safety, the teachers and students moved from basement to basement, leaning chalkboards on chairs instead of hanging them walls.

Halilovic, now 34, founded the War Childhood Museum, which catalogs the stories and objects of children in conflict around the world. He was working in Ukraine with children displaced by Russia's 2014 invasion of the Donbas region when the current war began. He had to evacuate his staff and leave the country.

"Once the fighting ends, the new fight will start. To rebuild cities. To rebuild schools and infrastructure, and to rebuild society. And to heal. And to heal is the most difficult," he said.

Alhamdo said he saw firsthand how the trauma of war influenced the development of children growing up in Aleppo. Instilling fear, anger and a sense of hopelessness is part of the enemy strategy, he said. Some became withdrawn, he said, and others violent.

"When they see their school destroyed, do you know how many dreams have been destroyed? Do you think anybody would believe in peace and love and beauty when the place that taught them about these things has been destroyed?" he said.

Alhamdo stayed in Aleppo and taught children in basements, apartments, anywhere he could, for nearly 10 years. Continuing to teach in spite of war, he said, is an act of defiance.

"I'm not fighting on the front lines," he said. "I'm fighting with my kids."

After the attack on School 50 in Gorlovka, shattered glass from blown-out windows littered the classrooms and hallways and the street outside. The floors were covered in dust and debris: cracked ceiling beams, slabs of drywall, a television that crashed down from the wall. A cell phone sat on the desk next to where one of the teachers was killed.

In Ukraine, some schools still standing have become makeshift shelters for people whose homes were destroyed by shelling and mortar fire.

What often complicates war crimes prosecutions for attacks on civilian buildings is that large facilities like schools are sometimes repurposed for military use during war. If a civilian building is being used militarily, it is a legitimate wartime target, said David Bosco, a professor of international relations at Indiana University whose research focuses on war crimes and the International Criminal Court.

The key for prosecutors, then, will be to show that there was a pattern by the Russians of targeting schools and other civilian buildings nationwide as a concerted military strategy, Bosco said.

"The more you can show a pattern, then the stronger the case becomes that this was really a policy of not discriminating between military and civilian facilities," Bosco said. "(Schools are) a place where children are supposed to feel safe, a second home. Obviously shattering that and in essence attacking the next generation. That's very real. It has a huge impact."

As the war grinds on, more than half of Ukraine's children have been displaced.

In Kharkiv, which has undergone relentless shelling, children's drawings are taped to the walls of an underground subway station that has become not only a family shelter but also a makeshift school. Primary school-age children gather around a table for history and art lessons.

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"It helps to support them mentally," said teacher Valeriy Leiko. In part thanks to the lessons, he said, "They feel that someone loves them."

Millions of kids are continuing to go to school online. The international aid group Save the Children said it is working with the government to establish remote learning programs for students at 50 schools. UNICEF is also trying to help with online instruction.

"Educating every child is essential to preventing grave violations of their rights," the group said in a statement to the AP.

On April 2, Grusha's community outside Kyiv began a slow reemergence. They are still raking and sweeping debris from schools and kindergartens that were damaged but not destroyed, she said, and taking stock of what's left. They started distance learning classes, and planned to relocate children whose schools were destroyed to others close by.

Even with war still raging, there is a return to normal life including schooling, she said.

But Levchenko, who was in Kyiv in early May to undergo surgery for her injuries, said the emotional damage done to so many children who have experienced and witnessed such immense suffering may never be fully repaired.

"It will take so much time for people and kids to recover from what they have lived," she said. The kids, she said, are "staying underground without sun, shivering from siren sounds and anxiety."

"It has a tremendously negative impact. Kids will remember this all their life."

Buffalo shooter's previous threat raises red-flag questions

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST, MICHAEL TARM and JAMES ANDERSON Associated Press

Less than a year before he opened fire and killed 10 people in a racist attack at a Buffalo, New York, grocery store, 18-year-old Payton Gendron was investigated for making a threatening statement at his high school.

New York has a "red flag" law designed to keep firearms away from people who could harm themselves or others, but Gendron was still able to legally buy an AR-15-style rifle.

The "general" threat at Susquehanna Valley High School last June, when he was 17, resulted in state police being called and a mental health evaluation at a hospital. New York Gov. Kathy Hochul told Buffalo radio station WKSE-FM that Gendron had talked about murder and suicide when a teacher asked about his plans after school ended, and it was quickly reported but the threat wasn't considered specific enough to do more. No request was made to remove any firearms from the suspect, New York state police said Monday.

The revelations are raising new questions about why the law wasn't invoked and how the effectiveness of "red flag laws" passed in 19 states and the District of Columbia can differ based on how they're implemented.

WHAT ARE RED FLAG LAWS?

Typically, red-flag laws, also known as extreme risk protection orders, are intended to temporarily remove guns from people with potentially violent behavior, usually up to a year. In many cases, family members or law enforcement must petition the court for an order, though New York is a rare state in which educators can also start the process.

Removing weapons for that long, however, requires a hearing in which prosecutors must convince a judge that the person poses a risk. Most states also block the person from buying more guns during that period.

Red-flag laws are often adopted after tragedies. Florida did so after the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland that killed 17 students. Law enforcement officials had received numerous complaints about the 19-year-old gunman's threatening statements.

"This is actually one of the very few policies we have available where it actually builds on this vanishingly small point of common ground between public health people who want to stop gun violence and gun owners and the gun industry," said Jeffrey Swanson, a professor in psychiatry at Duke University who researches gun violence.

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But, Swanson added: "The issue is it's so easy for people to get guns anyway. ... It's not a one-thing problem, and there's not one solution to it either."

WHAT DOES NEW YORK'S FLAG LAW SAY?

The 2019 law allows family members, prosecutors, police and school officials to ask courts to order the seizure of guns from someone who poses a danger to themselves or others. The subject of the court action is also prohibited from buying guns while the order is in effect.

An explanation of the law on a state government website says the law made New York the first state to give teachers and school administrators the ability "to prevent school shootings by pursuing court intervention."

The online description, crafted before the Buffalo shooting, expresses optimism about the law's impact, saying it would both safeguard gun rights "while ensuring that tragedies, like the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, are not repeated."

The question is why one wasn't used in Gendron's case.

WHAT'S THE PROCESS OF REQUESTING AN ORDER?

Someone seeking an order files a simple, two-page application with the primary county court. It's considered a civil case, with no criminal charge or penalties involved.

A judge decides whether to issue a temporary order on the same day the application is filed, according to a New York courts website. If it is issued, police take the guns.

A hearing, involving witnesses and evidence, is set within 10 days. If the judge decides to issue a permanent order, it would remain in effect for a year. The petitioner can ask for an extension.

HAS THERE BEEN PUSHBACK TO THE LEGISLATION?

Some opponents of the red-flag legislation in New York feared it could lead to false accusations by family members or others with a grudge against a gun owner.

Legislators in New York and elsewhere were aware of the potential legal pitfalls and drafted laws in such a way to avoid constitutional challenges, said Eric Ruben, a fellow at the Brennan Center for Justice who also teaches law at SMU Dedman School of Law in Dallas.

Among the safeguards in New York, he said, is a relatively high standard of proof — clear and convincing evidence — required to secure a final, yearlong order, he said. The law also includes penalties for false applications.

DO RED-FLAG LAWS SAVE LIVES?

The law, Ruben said, "poses significant obstacles" for someone under a red-flag order wanting to buy firearms because they are entered in the background check system as long as the order is in effect. "It wouldn't stop someone from illegal purchases, however."

Experts in red-flag laws contend that the laws have undoubtedly saved lives, be it in cases involving planned mass shootings, suicides or potentially deadly domestic violence cases.

"Certainly, red-flag laws are more than anything else aimed at trying to stop mass shootings," said Dave Kopel, research director at the Colorado-based libertarian think tank Independence Institute, which supports gun rights. "But they can be and should be used for more than just that. A handful of killings or suicides is horrific enough."

Swanson worked on a study that estimated Connecticut prevented one suicide for every 10 to 20 people subjected to gun seizures. A 2019 California study found it was used in mass-shooting threats 21 times. Maryland authorities granted more than 300 petitions in the three months after its law went into effect, including at least four threats of school violence.

That research shows the laws have worked, said Allison Anderman, senior counsel for the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, though absolute proof can be tough.

"It's very hard to prove a law is effective based on things not happening," she said. "We still have a problem where we have more guns than people in this country, and this patchwork system of laws and our overall weak laws."

Livestreamed carnage: Tech's hard lessons from mass killings

By BARBARA ORTUTAY, HALELUYA HADERO and MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writers

These days, mass shooters like the one now held in the Buffalo, N.Y., supermarket attack don't stop with planning out their brutal attacks. They also create marketing plans while arranging to livestream their massacres on social platforms in hopes of fomenting more violence.

Sites like Twitter, Facebook and now the game-streaming platform Twitch have learned painful lessons from dealing with the violent videos that now often accompany such shootings. But experts are calling for a broader discussion around livestreams, including whether they should exist at all, since once such videos go online, they're almost impossible to erase completely.

The self-described white supremacist gunman who police say killed 10 people, most of them Black, at a Buffalo supermarket Saturday had mounted a GoPro camera to his helmet to stream his assault live on Twitch, the video game streaming platform used by another shooter in 2019 who killed two people at a synagogue in Halle, Germany.

He had previously outlined his plan in a detailed but rambling set of online diary entries that were apparently posted publicly ahead of the attack, although it's not clear how many people might have seen them. His goal: to inspire copycats and spread his racist beliefs. After all, he was a copycat himself.

He decided against streaming on Facebook, as yet another mass shooter did when he killed 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, three years ago. Unlike Twitch, Facebook requires users to sign up for an account in order to watch livestreams.

Still, not everything went according to plan. By most accounts the platforms responded more quickly to halt the spread of the Buffalo video than they did after the 2019 Christchurch shooting, said Megan Squire, a senior fellow and technology expert at the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Another Twitch user watching the live video likely flagged it to the attention of Twitch's content moderators, she said, which would have helped Twitch pull down the stream less than two minutes after the first gunshots per a company spokesperson. Twitch has not said how the video was flagged.

"In this case, they did pretty well," Squire said. "The fact that the video is so hard to find right now is proof of that."

In 2019, the Christchurch shooting was streamed live on Facebook for 17 minutes and quickly spread to other platforms. This time, the platforms generally seemed to coordinate better, particularly by sharing digital "signatures" of the video used to detect and remove copies.

But platform algorithms can have a harder time identifying a copycat video if someone has edited it. That's created problems, such as when some internet forums users remade the Buffalo video with twisted attempts at humor. Tech companies would have needed to use "more fancy algorithms" to detect those partial matches, Squire said.

"It seems darker and more cynical," she said of the attempts to spread the shooting video in recent days.

Twitch has more than 2.5 million viewers at any given moment; roughly 8 million content creators stream video on the platform each month, according to the company. The site uses a combination of user reports, algorithms and moderators to detect and remove any violence that occurs on the platform. The company said that it quickly removed the gunman's stream, but hasn't shared many details about what happened on Saturday — including whether the stream was reported or how many people watched the rampage live.

A Twitch spokesperson said the company shared the livestream with the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, a nonprofit group set up by tech companies to help others monitor their own platforms for rebroadcasts. But clips from the video still made their way to other platforms, including the site Streamable, where it was available for millions to view. A spokesperson for Hopin, the company that owns Streamable, said Monday that it's working to remove the videos and terminate the accounts of those who uploaded them.

Looking ahead, platforms may face future moderation complications from a Texas law — reinstated by an appellate court last week — that bans big social media companies from "censoring" users' viewpoints. The shooter "had a very specific viewpoint" and the law is unclear enough to create a risk for platforms that moderate people like him, said Jeff Kosseff, an associate professor of cybersecurity law at the U.S.

Naval Academy. "It really puts the finger on the scale of keeping up harmful content," he said.

Alexa Koenig, executive director of the Human Rights Center at the University of California, Berkeley, said there's been a shift in how tech companies are responding to such events. In particular, Koenig said, coordination between the companies to create fingerprint repositories for extremist videos so they can't be re-uploaded to other platforms "has been an incredibly important development."

A Twitch spokesperson said the company will review how it responded to the gunman's livestream.

Experts suggest that sites such as Twitch could exercise more control over who can livestream and when — for instance, by building in delays or whitelisting valid users while banning rules violators. More broadly, Koenig said, "there's also a general societal conversation that needs to happen around the utility of livestreaming and when it's valuable, when it's not, and how we put safe norms around how it's used and what happens if you use it."

Another option, of course, would be to end livestreaming altogether. But that's almost impossible to imagine given how much tech companies rely on livestreams to attract and keep users engaged in order to bring in money.

Free speech, Koenig said, is often the reason tech platforms give for allowing this form of technology — beyond the unspoken profit component. But that should be balanced "with rights to privacy and some of the other issues that arise in this instance," Koenig said.

In Buffalo, Biden to confront the racism he's vowed to fight

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Joe Biden talks about his decision to run against President Donald Trump in 2020, the story always starts with Charlottesville. He says it was the men with torches shouting bigoted slogans that drove him to join what he calls the "battle for the soul of America."

Now Biden is facing the latest deadly manifestation of hatred after a white supremacist targeted Black people with an assault rifle at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, and left 10 people dead, the most lethal racist attack since he took office.

The president and first lady Jill Biden are to visit the city on Tuesday, where their first stop will be a makeshift memorial outside the supermarket. They're also expected to meet privately with families of the victims, first responders and local officials before the president delivers public remarks.

In a speech at a nearby community center, Biden plans to call for stricter gun laws and urge Americans to reject racism and embrace the nation's diversity, the White House said.

It's a message that Biden has delivered several times since he became the first president to specifically address white supremacy in an inaugural speech, calling it "domestic terrorism that we must confront." However, such beliefs remain an entrenched threat at a time when his administration has been preoccupied with crises involving the pandemic, inflation and the war in Ukraine.

"It's important for him to show up for the families and the community and express his condolences," said Derrick Johnson, the president of the NAACP. "But we're more concerned with preventing this from happening in the future."

It's unclear how Biden will try to do that. Proposals for new gun restrictions have routinely been blocked by Republicans. In addition, the racism that was spouted in Charlottesville, Virginia, appears to have only spread.

The White House said the president and first lady will "grieve with the community that lost 10 lives in a senseless and horrific mass shooting." Three more people were wounded. Nearly all the victims were Black.

Biden was briefed about the shooting by his homeland security adviser, Liz Sherwood-Randall, before he attended church services on Saturday near his family home in Wilmington, Delaware, according to the White House. She called again later to tell him that law enforcement had concluded the attack was racially motivated.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, told a Buffalo radio station that she invited Biden to the city.

"I said, 'Mr. President, it would be so powerful if you came here,'" Hochul said. "This community is in

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such pain, and to see the president of the United States show them the attention that Buffalo doesn't always get."

On Monday, Biden paid particular tribute to one of the victims, retired police officer Aaron Salter, who was working as a security guard at the store. He said Salter "gave his life trying to save others" by opening fire at the gunman, only to be killed himself.

Payton Gendron, 18, was arrested at the supermarket and charged with murder. He has pleaded not guilty.

Before the shooting, Gendron is reported to have posted online a screed overflowing with racism and antisemitism. The writer of the document described himself as a supporter of Dylan Roof, who killed nine Black parishioners at a church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015, and Brenton Tarrant, who targeted mosques in New Zealand in 2019.

Buffalo Police Commissioner Joseph Gramaglia said Gendron is "someone who has hate in their heart, soul and mind," and he called the attack on the store "an absolute racist hate crime."

So far investigators are looking at Gendron's connection to what's known as the "great replacement" theory, which baselessly claims white people are being intentionally overrun by other races through immigration or higher birth rates.

The racist ideology is often interwoven with antisemitism, with Jews identified as the culprits. During the 2017 "Unite the Right" march in Charlottesville, the white supremacists chanted "Jews will not replace us."

"Many of those dark voices still exist today," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Monday. "And the president is determined as he was back then . . . to make sure we fight back against those forces of hate and evil and violence."

In the years since Charlottesville, replacement theory has moved from the online fringe to mainstream right-wing politics. A third of U.S. adults believe there is "a group of people in this country who are trying to replace native-born Americans with immigrants who agree with their political views," according to a poll conducted in December by The Associated Press and the NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Tucker Carlson, the prominent Fox News host, accuses Democrats of orchestrating mass migration to consolidate their power.

"The country is being stolen from American citizens," he said Aug. 23, 2021.

He repeated the same theme a month later, saying that "this policy is called the great replacement, the replacement of legacy Americans with more obedient people from faraway countries."

Carlson's show routinely receives the highest ratings in cable news, and he responded to the furor Monday night by accusing liberals of trying to silence their opponents.

"So because a mentally ill teenager murdered strangers, you cannot be allowed to express your political beliefs out loud," he said.

His commentary reflects how this conspiratorial view of immigration has spread through the Republican Party ahead of this year's midterm elections, which will determine control of Congress.

Facebook advertisements posted last year by the campaign committee of Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y., said Democrats want a "PERMANENT ELECTION INSURRECTION" by granting amnesty to illegal immigrants. The plan would "overthrow our current electorate and create a permanent liberal majority in Washington."

Alex DeGrasse, a senior adviser to Stefanik's campaign, said Monday she "has never advocated for any racist position or made a racist statement." He criticized "sickening and false reporting" about her advertisements.

Stefanik is the third-ranking leader of the House Republican caucus, replacing Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., who angered the party with her denunciations of Trump after the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol.

Cheney, in a tweet on Monday, said the caucus' leadership "has enabled white nationalism, white supremacy, and anti-Semitism. History has taught us that what begins with words ends in far worse."

Replacement theory rhetoric has also rippled through Republican primary campaigns.

"The Democrats want open borders so they can bring in and amnesty tens of millions of illegal aliens — that's their electoral strategy," Blake Masters, who's running in the Republican Senate primary in Arizona, wrote on Twitter hours after the Buffalo shooting. "Not on my watch."

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A spokesperson for Masters did not respond to a request for comment.

Jean-Pierre indicated that the White House would speak more broadly about racism than singling out specific people for criticism.

"Once you get into calling out people's names, then you get away from that issue," she said.

Although Biden has not spoken directly about replacement theory, his warnings about racism remain a fixture of his public speeches.

Three days before the Buffalo shooting, at a Democratic fundraiser in Chicago, Biden said, "I really do think we're still in the battle for the soul of America."

Biden said he hadn't planned to run for president in 2020 — he had already fallen short in two previous campaigns, served as vice president and then stepped aside as Hillary Clinton consolidated support for the 2016 race — and was content to spend some time as a professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

But he said he was disgusted "when those folks came marching out of the fields in Charlottesville, Virginia, carrying torches" and repeating the "same anti-Semitic bile chanted in the streets of everywhere from Nuremberg to Berlin in the early '30s."

And he recalled how Trump responded to questions about the rally, which resulted in the death of Heather Heyer, a young woman who was there to protest the white supremacists.

"He said there are very good people on both sides," Biden said.

He added, "We can't let this happen, guys."

Johnson, the NAACP president, said the country needs to "finally chart a course so we can as a nation begin to address domestic terrorism as we would foreign terrorism — as aggressively as possible."

He added, "White supremacy and democracy cannot coexist."

New Zealand shooting survivor says violence achieved nothing

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — If the Buffalo supermarket shooter had learned anything from the massacre in New Zealand that apparently inspired him, it should have been that the violence didn't achieve any of the gunman's aims, a survivor said Tuesday.

Temel Atacocugu was shot nine times when a white supremacist opened fire during Friday prayers at two mosques in Christchurch three years ago, killing 51 worshippers and severely injuring dozens more.

Atacocugu continues to recover from the gunshot wounds in his mouth, left arm and both legs.

One of the stated aims of the Christchurch gunman was to sow discord between racial and ethnic groups, eventually forcing nonwhite people to leave. But if anything, the opposite happened as Muslims and non-Muslims embraced each other in a shared and enduring grief.

Atacocugu said the news about the shooting in Buffalo, New York, and its connections to the Christchurch massacre was scary, triggering flashbacks for him.

"Violence does not solve the problem. They should see that. People, including the extremists, should see that violence does not fix anything," he said. "Peace will fix it. They have to learn to talk with people around them, too."

Atacocugu said he was heartbroken for the families of the Buffalo victims and wished governments around the world would do more to stop extremism.

"They went to do their shopping and they had no idea what's going to happen," he said. "They were just thinking to buy their food, maybe they're feeding their young kids at home."

The 18-year-old gunman accused of killing 10 Black people in the Buffalo attack had watched a copy of the livestream video the New Zealand mosque shooter had taken, according to a document attributed to him.

In a 180-page diatribe, Payton Gendron said he subscribed to the same racist "great replacement" theory that the New Zealand gunman Brenton Tarrant wrote about in a similar 74-page screed.

And like Tarrant, Gendron allegedly painted slogans on his gun and used a helmet-mounted camera to livestream his attack on the internet.

Gendron, who surrendered inside the supermarket, has pleaded not guilty and was jailed under a suicide

watch.

After eventually pleading guilty, Tarrant, an Australian citizen, in 2020 became the first person in New Zealand to be sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, the toughest sentence available.

The Christchurch attack was livestreamed for 17 minutes and viewed by hundreds of thousands of people on Facebook before it was taken down. The video and Tarrant's screed were quickly banned in New Zealand but can still be found in dark corners of the internet.

Since Christchurch, social platforms have learned to remove videos of extremist shootings faster. The Buffalo shooter allegedly livestreamed the attack to the gaming platform Twitch, which is owned by Amazon. Twitch said it removed the video in less than two minutes.

The Christchurch attacks also prompted the New Zealand government within weeks to pass new laws banning the deadliest types of semi-automatic weapons. Police paid owners to hand over their guns and destroyed more than 50,000 of them.

"We saw in New Zealand the gun control thing," said Muti Bari, another survivor from the Christchurch attacks. "We saw some measures taken by the government immediately after. We are still waiting to see what the U.S.A. government does. But unfortunately, we haven't seen anything like that."

Bari, who hid in a bathroom at the Linwood mosque as the shooter killed people just feet away, said he tries not to think about that day too much but is reminded when he meets his friends, including one family that lost both a father and a son.

He said the easy access to guns in the U.S. coupled with constitutionally protected free speech — and the seeming prevalence of hate speech — was a potent mix that the U.S. government needed to consider more seriously.

The Christchurch attack has also inspired other white supremacist shootings, including a shooting at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, that left 23 people dead.

Atacocugu, the survivor who was shot nine times, this year retraced the route the gunman drove from Dunedin to Christchurch on the morning of the attacks.

Despite his lingering injuries, Atacocugu walked and biked for two weeks along the entire 360-kilometer (224-mile) route. He wanted to bless the route, spread peace and change a journey that began with hate.

From civilian to soldier: Ukrainian army volunteer buried

By ELENA BECATOROS and FRANCISCO SECO Associated Press

ZORYA TRUDA, Ukraine (AP) — The countryside was in full bloom when Iuliia Loseva buried her husband in the village cemetery near her home. On her knees in the grass, she bowed her head over the open coffin and kissed him one last goodbye before they lowered him into his grave.

There was a military band, and a six-gun salute. His teenage sons, pale and stunned, walked behind their father's coffin holding framed photographs of him in his camouflage uniform.

But this was not a military funeral for a career soldier. Volodymyr Losev's foray into the army was as sudden as it was brief.

A little over three months ago the 38-year-old was just another civilian, driving trucks and operating cranes, working to take care of his family in a small village near the port city of Odesa in southwestern Ukraine.

Then the war came, and everything changed.

"He had never been in the army, but he signed up on the first day of the war," said Losev's brother-in-law, Viktor Chesolin after the funeral.

Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24. Like so many other Ukrainian men, Losev decided he wanted to help defend his country. He had no prior military experience. But he knew how to shoot an air rifle, and he had specialized driving skills due to his job, Chesolin said.

So when a letter arrived from the army recruitment center in February, Losev turned up and asked to be enlisted. Skilled drivers were in demand, and the army took him up on his offer.

He left his wife and sons — 13-year-old Hrehorii and 15-year-old Denys — at home and headed off to

western Ukraine for two or three weeks of training. He was a good marksman, it turned out, and the army made him a sniper, said Chesolin.

Soon, he was on the front lines in eastern Ukraine, fighting Russian forces. His family didn't know much about where he was — he didn't discuss locations.

Then the dreaded call came. One of Losev's fellow soldiers, a friend, called Iuliia. Her husband was dead.

Losev had died May 7 near the eastern Ukrainian city of Severodonetsk, his family was told. A mine in the road detonated as the military vehicle he was driving ran over it, wounding the other soldiers in the vehicle and killing Losev, Chesolin said. As far as they know, he died at the scene.

Fighting in the area was fierce, and retrieving his body complicated. It took days for the army to manage to extract him and get him home.

On May 16, Iuliia, her nails painted alternately in the blue and yellow colors of the Ukrainian flag, waited outside their home as the funeral van arrived with his coffin. Mourners lined the street, kneeling in respect as the van drove by.

She clutched her son's hands as the funeral procession made its way to the small cemetery on the outskirts of the village, national flags fluttering in the breeze.

The grave was open and waiting, the band standing to one side. Leaving the mourners behind, his wife walked ahead with the coffin and asked the pallbearers to set him down on the grass.

She sank to her knees, ragged sobs escaping in agonizing breaths. One last time, she caressed his chest and bowed over him. For a final few moments, she could be alone with her husband, the man who had gone so quickly from civilian to soldier — and then was gone.

Massacre video reopens wounds for missing Syrians' families

By LUJAIN JO Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — For years, the Siyam family clung to hope they would one day be reunited with their son Wassim, who they believed was being held in a Syrian government prison after he went missing at a checkpoint nearly a decade ago.

That hope evaporated the moment they saw him in a newly leaked video: He was among dozens of blindfolded, bound men who, one by one, were shot and thrown into a trench by Syrian security agents.

"It shocked us to our core," Siham Siyam said of the gruesome video, which was taken in 2013 and emerged late last month.

"They killed him in cold blood ... No mother can accept to see her child being harmed this way," Siham told The Associated Press from Germany, where she now lives with her family.

The video has set off a wave of grief and fear rippling through the families of the tens of thousands of Syrians who disappeared during their country's long-running civil war. After the video went online, thousands rushed to painstakingly scan through the footage online for traces of vanished relatives.

Even as similar atrocities take place in Ukraine, the Syrian war's years-old massacres and disappearances have gone unpunished and largely uninvestigated. Families of the missing who spoke to the AP describe an endless torture inflicted on them daily, not knowing their loved ones' fate.

The video was allegedly smuggled out of Syria by a pro-government militiaman who gave it to a pair of University of Amsterdam researchers, apparently in hopes it would help him get asylum outside Syria. The researchers worked to verify it and identify the location and some of the perpetrators.

The British newspaper The Guardian first reported on the video in late April, and a fuller version of the video has since circulated widely online.

"Even if the families' loved ones do not appear in the video, the horrible images will be forever etched into their mind, and they will wonder if they faced the same fate," Mohammad Al Abdallah, the Executive Director of the Washington-based Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, told the AP.

He called Syria's network of prisons the "Black Box," with no information about who is held inside and who has been killed.

Learning the truth brings a new kind of torment.

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Siham and her husband vow to watch the video every day, to see their son's last moments alive and to bid him farewell.

The video was stamped with the date April 16, 2013, two days after Wassim, a father of two who would now be 39, disappeared at a checkpoint near the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk on the outskirts of Damascus.

The 6 minute and 43 second clip shows members of Syria's notorious Military Intelligence Branch 227 with a line of around 40 prisoners in an abandoned building in Tadamon, a suburb of Damascus near Yarmouk. For much of the war, the district was a front line between government forces and opposition fighters.

The prisoners are blindfolded, with their arms tied behind their backs. One after another, the Branch 227 gunmen stand them at the edge of a trench filled with old tires, then push or kick the men in, shooting them as they fall.

In a cruel game, the agents tell some — including Wassim — that they are going to pass through a sniper's alley and that they should run. The men tumble onto the bodies of those who went before. As bodies pile up in the trench, some still move, and the gunmen shoot into them.

Then the gunmen set the bodies on fire, presumably to erase all traces of the massacre.

According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, 102,207 people remain missing, more than 11 years since Syria's conflict began.

The group says the one most responsible for forced disappearances is the Syrian government with 86,792 people missing, an unknown number of whom vanished into the murky labyrinth of prisons. The Islamic State group was responsible for 8,648 disappearances, and armed opposition groups for 2,567. The rest were held by the U.S.-backed Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces and al-Qaida-linked militants.

One man who spoke to the AP said 25 of his relatives were taken from their homes in Tadamon by Branch 227 agents in July 2013.

"We are sure they were killed the same way (as those in the video) because they were taken by the same people who appeared in the video," said the man, who asked that his name not be made public.

He said residents know of multiple pits in Tadamon where people were killed and later burned. Security agents who appear in the video were neighbors of the missing families and had known each other for over 30 years, he said.

Among his missing relatives are children and a sister who went to check on her family two days after they were taken from their home. She never returned.

His family's tragedy didn't end there. A few months later, a brother who wasn't present the day his family disappeared was taken from a checkpoint. Years later, a photo of his tortured body appeared in a large file of photos and documents smuggled out by a dissident known as Caesar.

In a May 9 open letter, 17 human rights and civil society organizations urged the U.N. Security Council to launch an investigation into the killings to bring to justice the perpetrators of the massacre and those who gave them orders. They also denounced international inaction over Syria, saying it has allowed Assad and his allies to continue to commit crimes against the Syrian people with impunity.

Families of the disappeared described to the AP the years of anguish and fruitless searching, punctuated by waves of false hope.

One man, Maher, said he still hopes his brother, missing since 2013, is alive and will one day be released. It's a new blow every time a prisoner release is announced, and his brother is not among them.

"One tries to adapt throughout the years, but the wound reopens with every report that comes out," he said, speaking on condition that he be identified only by his first name.

His brother vanished while bringing home food aid from the U.N. agency that helps Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA. Maher said hundreds of people were arrested while going to collect food boxes, so many that they became known as "death boxes."

Hoping to avoid arrest, people would send the elderly to collect the boxes, he said. His brother went four times; on the fifth, he was detained.

If confirmation emerges that he is dead, "the wound would be cut wide open, and the real misery would

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start then," Maher said.

A racket of war profiteers preys on families, extorting large sums of money from them with false promises of an eventual release of missing relatives.

Days after the video showing the killings came to light, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad issued an amnesty for hundreds of prisoners. Families flocked to a Damascus square, holding up pictures of missing relatives and pleading for information, according to videos on pro-government media outlets.

Among them, profiteers circulated, telling families they could get their loved ones' names on the release list in return for 50 million Syrian pounds — nearly \$13,000 — Al Abdullah said.

"These are all lies," he said.

Still, some families pay, desperate for any information.

"How can I say no when my father's life is on hold? ... How can I say no, even if I know they're lying?" Wafa Mustafa told the AP from Berlin.

The walls of her room are covered with pictures of her father, missing since he was taken from his home in 2013.

"It's crazy how after 11 years, and after we have left the country, the regime can still control us and control our mental and physical health," Wafa said. "They control our existence."

Man killed in California church shooting called a hero

By AMY TAXIN and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

LAGUNA WOODS, Calif. (AP) — A gunman motivated by hatred against Taiwan chained shut the doors of a California church and hid firebombs before shooting at a gathering of mostly elderly Taiwanese parishioners, killing a man who tackled him, authorities said.

David Chou, 68, of Las Vegas — a U.S. citizen whom authorities say grew up in Taiwan — drove to Orange County on Saturday and the next day attended a lunch held by Irvine Taiwanese Presbyterian Church, which worships at Geneva Presbyterian Church in the community of Laguna Woods. Though he knew no one there, he spent about an hour mingling with about 40 attendees and then executed his plot, authorities said at a news conference.

He chained the doors and put super glue in the keyholes. He had two 9 mm handguns — legally purchased years ago in Las Vegas — and three bags, containing among other things four Molotov-cocktail-type incendiary devices and extra ammunition. He opened fire and in the ensuing chaos Dr. John Cheng, 52, tackled him, allowing other parishioners to subdue him and tie him up with extension cords.

Cheng died and five people were wounded, the oldest 92. Sheriff Don Barnes called Cheng's heroism "a meeting of good versus evil" that probably saved the lives "of upwards of dozens of people."

Chou was booked on suspicion of murder and attempted murder and jailed on \$1 million bail. He was expected to appear in state court Tuesday. It was not immediately clear whether he had an attorney who could speak on his behalf. A federal hate crimes investigation is also ongoing.

Chou had worked as a security guard in Las Vegas, authorities said.

There was no immediate word on why Chou chose to target the church in Laguna Woods, a scenic coastal area whose population mainly consists of retirees and is near a large gated community.

Barnes said the motive for the shooting was Chou's hatred toward Taiwan that was documented in handwritten notes that authorities found. Chou's family apparently was among many forcibly removed from mainland China to Taiwan sometime after 1948, Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer said.

Relations between mainlanders forced to flee a Communist takeover and native Taiwanese were frequently tense as the new arrivals crowded into slums and military communities. Separated by language and lifestyle, bullying and confrontation were frequent as President Chiang Kai-shek tightly restricted civil liberties under nearly four decades of martial law.

The Presbyterian Church is the most prominent of the Christian dominations in Taiwan and was closely identified with the pro-democracy movement during the martial law era and later with the Taiwan independence cause.

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Barnes referred to Chou as an immigrant from China but Taiwan's Central News Agency says it interviewed Louis M. Huang, director general of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Los Angeles, and he confirmed that Chou was born in Taiwan in 1953.

Barnes said Chou acted alone and was "not believed to be associated with any specific church or any religion, and there's no direct connection to the church or any member of the church that we're aware of."

Baltimore Orellana, a former neighbor, said Chou's life unraveled after his wife left him last year. Before, Chou had been a pleasant man who used to own the Las Vegas apartment building where he lived until being evicted in February, Orellana told The Associated Press.

Records showed the four-unit property was sold last October for a little more than \$500,000. Orellana said Chou's wife used the money from the sale to move to Taiwan.

Before Orellana moved in about five years ago, Chou received a head injury and other serious injuries in an attack by a tenant, the neighbor said. More recently his mental health declined and last summer a gun was fired inside Chou's apartment and the bullet entered Orellana's apartment, although nobody was hurt, Orellana said.

Police reports about the assault and the shooting were not immediately available Monday.

Tensions between China and Taiwan are at the highest in decades, with Beijing stepping up its military harassment by flying fighter jets toward the self-governing island. China has not ruled out force to reunify with Taiwan, which split from the mainland during a civil war in 1949.

Taiwan's chief representative in the U.S., Bi-khim Hsiao, offered condolences to the shooting families on Twitter.

"I join the families of the victims and Taiwanese American communities in grief and pray for the speedy recovery of the wounded survivors," Hsiao wrote on Sunday.

Chinese Embassy spokesperson Liu Pengyu told the AP via email that the Chinese government has "consistently condemned incidents of violence. We express our condolences to the victims and sincere sympathy to the bereaved families and the injured."

Those wounded by gunshots included an 86-year-old woman as well as four men, ages 66, 75, 82 and 92, the sheriff's department said. Authorities on Monday said two of the wounded were in good condition, two were in stable condition and the status of the fifth patient was undetermined.

Jerry Chen, a longtime member of the church, said a group of about 40 congregants had gathered in the fellowship hall for a luncheon after a morning service to welcome their former Pastor Billy Chang, a beloved and respected community member who had served the church for 20 years. Chang moved back to Taiwan two years ago. This was his first time back stateside, Chen said.

Everyone had just finished lunch and were taking photos with Chang when Chen went into the kitchen. That's when he heard the gunshots.

Barnes said Cheng, a sports medicine doctor who is survived by a wife and two children, charged at the shooter and attempted to disarm him, allowing others to intervene. Chang hit the gunman on the head with a chair before other parishioners subdued him.

"I will tell you that evil was in that church," Spitzer said, who added that Chou had "an absolute bias" against Taiwan and its people.

The shooting came a day after an 18-year-old man shot and killed 10 people at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, in a racist rampage where the white gunman allegedly targeted a supermarket in a predominantly Black neighborhood.

N. Korea's Kim faces 'huge dilemma' on aid as virus surges

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

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — During more than a decade as North Korea's leader, Kim Jong Un has made "self-reliance" his governing lynchpin, shunning international help and striving instead for domestic strategies to fix his battered economy.

But as an illness suspected to be COVID-19 sickens hundreds of thousands of his people, Kim stands at

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a critical crossroad: Either swallow his pride and receive foreign help to fight the disease, or go it alone, enduring potential huge fatalities that may undermine his leadership.

"Kim Jong Un is in a dilemma, a really huge dilemma," said Lim Eul-chul, a professor at Kyungnam University's Institute for Far Eastern Studies in Seoul. "If he accepts U.S. or Western assistance, that can shake the self-reliance stance that he has steadfastly maintained and public confidence in him could be weakened."

Doing nothing, however, could be calamitous.

Since acknowledging a COVID-19 outbreak last week, North Korea has said "an explosively spreading fever" has killed 56 people and sickened about 1.5 million others. Outside observers suspect most of those cases were caused by the coronavirus.

Whatever North Korea's state-controlled media says about those who are sick, the outbreak is likely several times worse. North Korea lacks sufficient COVID-19 tests, and experts say it is significantly understating deaths to avoid possible public unrest that could hurt Kim politically.

Some observers say the stated death toll is low for a country where most of the 26 million people are unvaccinated and medicine is in short supply.

The North's apparent underreporting of deaths is meant to defend Kim's authority as he faces "the first and biggest crisis" of his decade of rule, Nam Sung-wook, a professor at Korea University, said.

The North Korean outbreak may be linked to a massive military parade in Pyongyang in late April that Kim organized to feature new weapons and loyal troops. The parade drew tens of thousands of soldiers and residents from around the country. After the event, Kim spent several days taking dozens of commemorative group photos with parade participants, all of whom were without masks. Most of the photos involved dozens or hundreds of people.

North Korea may be able to publicly hide the real number of deaths, but the country's strengthened restrictions on movement and quarantine rules could hurt its agricultural cultivation. Its economy is already battered by more than two years of pandemic-caused border shutdowns and other curbs.

North Korea is also worried about a shortage of medical supplies and food and daily necessities that have dried up in markets during the border closures, Yang Moo-jin, a professor at Seoul's University of North Korean Studies, said.

"They are experiencing another 'arduous march,'" Yang said, referring to the state's euphemism for a devastating famine in the 1990s that killed hundreds of thousands of people.

Kim has previously rebuffed millions of doses of vaccines offered by the U.N.-backed COVAX distribution program. After the North admitted to an outbreak, South Korean and China offered to send vaccines, medicine and other medical supplies to North Korea. The United States said it supports international aid efforts, though it has no current plans to share its vaccine supplies with the North.

Receiving outside help would put the North, which is always intensely proud, despite its poverty, in a difficult position. Kim had repeatedly touted his country as "impregnable" to the pandemic during the past two years. On Saturday, however, he said his country faces "a great upheaval" and that officials must study how China, his country's only major ally, and other nations have handled the pandemic.

Nam, the professor, said Kim will likely eventually want to receive Chinese aid shipments, but not from South Korea, the United States or COVAX.

"Overcoming 'the great upheaval' with help from what North Korea calls American imperialists and from South Korea won't be tolerated because that goes against the dignity of its supreme leader," he said.

And North Korea will only accept Chinese aid if it's made in an informal, unpublicized manner, because it's "a matter of national pride," analyst Seo Yu-Seok at the Seoul-based Institute of North Korean Studies said. He said China will likely agree to this because it views aid shipments as a way to bolster ties with a partner as it confronts the West.

But Cho Han Bum, an analyst at Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification, said North Korea may look to South Korea for support because it questions the effectiveness of Chinese vaccines. He said South Korean shipments over the Korean land border would also be faster.

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Experts are divided over what support North Korea most needs. Some call for sending 60 million to 70 million vaccine doses to inoculate its people multiple times. Others say it's too late to send such a large volume, and that North Korea needs fever reducers, test kits, masks and other daily necessities more.

Because preventing a virus spread across the country's unvaccinated population is already unrealistic, the aim should be providing a limited supply of vaccines to reduce deaths among high-risk groups, including the elderly and people with existing medical conditions, said Jung Jae-hun, a professor of preventive medicine at South Korea's Gachon University.

"Combating COVID-19 requires a comprehensive national ability, including the capacity for testing, treatment and inoculating people with vaccines," Jung said. "The problem can't be solved if the outside world helps with only one or two of those elements."

'Like every other day:' 10 lives lost on a trip to the store

By CAROLYN THOMPSON and MATT SEDENSKY Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — They were caregivers and protectors and helpers, running an errand or doing a favor or finishing out a shift, when their paths crossed with a young man driven by racism and hatred and inane theories.

In a flash, the ordinariness of their day was broken at Tops Friendly Market in Buffalo, where in and around the supermarket's aisles, a symbol of the mundane was transformed to a scene of mass murder.

Carts lay abandoned. Bodies littered the tile floor. Police radios crackled with calls for help.

Investigators will try, for days to come, to piece together the massacre that killed 10 people, all Black and apparently hunted for the color of their skin.

Those who loved them are left with their memories of the lost, who suffered death amid the simple task of buying groceries.

"These people were just shopping," said Steve Carlson, 29, mourning his 72-year-old neighbor Katherine Massey, who checked in often, giving him gifts on his birthday and at Christmas, and pressing money into his hand when he helped with yardwork. "They went to go get food to feed their families."

One came from volunteering at a food bank. Another had been tending to her husband at his nursing home. Most were in their 50s and beyond, and were destined for more, even if just the dinner they planned to make.

Shonnell Harris, a manager at the store, was stocking shelves when she heard the first of what she figured must have been more than 70 shots. She ran for the back door, stumbling a few times along the way. She wondered where her daughter, a grocery clerk, was, and went around to the front of the store.

She saw someone being shot, she said, and a man who looked like he was dressed for the Army.

"Like a nightmare," Harris told The Buffalo News, shaken but grateful to have found her daughter safe.

The grisly scene was broadcast online by the gunman, a video notable not just for the cold-bloodedness of the executions, but how fast they unfolded. In the deafening rat-a-tat of gunfire, 10 voices were silenced, their stories left for others to recite.

Of a woman whose niece swore she was "the apple of God's eye." Of a longtime policeman who became a guard at the store and whose son knew he died a hero. Of an ace baker who'd give you the shirt off her back.

Garnell Whitfield Jr., whose 86-year-old mother Ruth Whitfield was killed in the attack, said she had come to Tops after her daily ritual of visiting her husband of 68 years in his nursing home. In so many ways, for so many years, Whitfield Jr. said his mother had devoted her life to those she loved.

"That day was like every other day for my mom," he said Monday as he pondered how to break the news to his father.

Heyward Patterson, a 67-year-old deacon at State Tabernacle Church of God in Christ, was similarly doing the things he'd long been known for. He had just come from helping at his church's soup kitchen and now was at Tops, volunteering in the community jitney service that shuttles people without a ride to and from the store.

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Pastor Russell Bell of the Tabernacle Church said he believed Patterson had been loading someone's groceries into his trunk when the shots took him down.

"Anywhere he was, he was encouraging people to be the best that they could be," Bell said.

As customers arrived at Tops ahead of the shooting, their purpose was clear.

Roberta Drury, 32, was in search of something for dinner. Andre Mackneil, 53, came to pick up a cake for his son's third birthday. Celestine Chaney, 65, needed some shortcake to go with the strawberries she sliced.

For some in the store, it was likely a trip of necessity, to fill an emptied fridge or get a missing ingredient. For Chaney, though, it was more than some stubborn chore. Stores were her passion.

Her 48-year-old son, Wayne Jones, said he'd typically take his mother shopping each week, stopping at grocery store after grocery store in search of the best deals, with the occasional stop for a hot dog or McDonald's.

"We'd hit four or five stores looking for a deal," he laughed even as his face was wet with tears.

On Saturday, it was Chaney's older sister, JoAnn Daniels, 74, who accompanied her shopping, and the two sisters made a meandering trip through Tops' aisles. Chaney knew she needed shortcakes, but flitting around the store, she decided she wanted to make shrimp salad, too, giggling with her sister as they filled the cart. She surveyed the roast beef and complained about the price of rolls before taking interest in chicken legs.

"You done?" she finally asks her sister, who said she was.

Pops suddenly ricocheted. The sisters thought they were firecrackers, but others started running. They went to follow, but Chaney was knocked down. Daniels said she reached to help, but her sister said she was fine.

"I'm coming," Daniels said her sister assured. She thought she was behind her.

It would be hours before she learned the truth, when her nephew saw the video of the shooting: Her baby sister, who had survived breast cancer and three surgeries for aneurysms, died on a trip to the grocery store.

Authorities: Hate against Taiwanese led to church attack

By AMY TAXIN, KEN RITTER and DEEPA BHARATH Associated Press

LAGUNA WOODS, Calif. (AP) — A gunman motivated by political hatred against Taiwan chained shut the doors of a California church and hid firebombs inside before shooting at a gathering of mostly elderly Taiwanese parishioners, killing a man who tackled him and possibly saved dozens of lives, authorities said Monday.

David Chou, 68, of Las Vegas — a U.S. citizen who authorities say grew up in Taiwan — drove to Orange County on Saturday. The next day, he attended a lunch held by Irvine Taiwanese Presbyterian Church, which worships at Geneva Presbyterian Church in the community of Laguna Woods. Though he knew no one there, he spent about an hour mingling with about 40 attendees and then executed his plot, authorities said at a news conference.

Authorities said Chou chained the doors and put super glue in the keyholes. He had two 9 mm handguns — legally purchased years ago in Las Vegas — and three bags, containing among other things four Molotov-cocktail-type incendiary devices and extra ammunition. He opened fire and in the ensuing chaos Dr. John Cheng, 52, tackled him, allowing other parishioners to subdue him and tie him up with extension cords.

Cheng died and five people were wounded, the oldest 92. Sheriff Don Barnes called Cheng's heroism "a meeting of good versus evil" that probably saved the lives "of upwards of dozens of people."

Chou, who for years worked as a security guard, was booked on suspicion of murder and attempted murder and jailed on \$1 million bail. He was expected to appear in state court Tuesday. It was not immediately clear whether he had an attorney who could speak on his behalf. A federal hate crimes investigation is also ongoing.

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There was no immediate word on why Chou chose to target the church in Laguna Woods, a scenic and affluent coastal area whose population mainly consists of retirees.

Barnes said the motive for the shooting was Chou's hatred toward Taiwan that was documented in handwritten notes that authorities found. Chou's family apparently was among many forcibly removed from mainland China to Taiwan sometime after 1948, Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer said.

Relations between mainlanders forced to flee a Communist takeover and native Taiwanese were frequently tense as the new arrivals crowded into slums and military communities. Separated by language and lifestyle, bullying and confrontation were frequent as President Chiang Kai-shek tightly restricted civil liberties under nearly four decades of martial law.

The Presbyterian Church is the most prominent of the Christian dominations in Taiwan and was closely identified with the pro-democracy movement during the martial law era and later with the Taiwan independence cause.

Barnes referred to Chou as an immigrant from China but Taiwan's Central News Agency says it interviewed Louis M. Huang, director general of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Los Angeles, and he confirmed that Chou was born in Taiwan in 1953.

Barnes said Chou acted alone and was "not believed to be associated with any specific church or any religion, and there's no direct connection to the church or any member of the church that we're aware of," Barnes said.

Baltimore Orellana, a former neighbor, said Chou's life unraveled after his wife left him last year. Before, Chou had been a pleasant man who used to own the Las Vegas apartment building where he lived until being evicted in February, Orellana told The Associated Press.

Records showed the four-unit property was sold last October for a little more than \$500,000. Orellana said Chou's wife used the money from the sale to move to Taiwan.

Before Orellana moved in about five years ago, Chou received a head injury and other serious injuries in an attack by a tenant, the neighbor said. More recently his mental health declined and last summer a gun was fired inside Chou's apartment and the bullet entered Orellana's apartment, although nobody was hurt, Orellana said.

Police reports about the assault and the shooting were not immediately available Monday.

Tensions between China and Taiwan are at the highest in decades, with Beijing stepping up its military harassment by flying fighter jets toward the self-governing island. China has not ruled out force to reunify with Taiwan, which split from the mainland during a civil war in 1949.

Taiwan's chief representative in the U.S., Bi-khim Hsiao, offered condolences to the shooting families on Twitter.

"I join the families of the victims and Taiwanese American communities in grief and pray for the speedy recovery of the wounded survivors," Hsiao wrote on Sunday.

Chinese Embassy spokesperson Liu Pengyu told the AP via email that the Chinese government has "consistently condemned incidents of violence. We express our condolences to the victims and sincere sympathy to the bereaved families and the injured."

Those wounded by gunshots included an 86-year-old woman as well as four men, ages 66, 75, 82 and 92, the sheriff's department said. Authorities on Monday said two of the wounded were in good condition, two were in stable condition and the status of the fifth patient was undetermined.

Jerry Chen, a longtime member of the church, said a group of about 40 congregants had gathered in the fellowship hall for a luncheon after a morning service to welcome their former Pastor Billy Chang, a beloved and respected community member who had served the church for 20 years. Chang moved back to Taiwan two years ago. This was his first time back stateside, Chen said.

Everyone had just finished lunch and were taking photos with Chang when Chen went into the kitchen. That's when he heard the gunshots.

Barnes said Cheng, a sports medicine doctor who is survived by a wife and two children, charged at the shooter and attempted to disarm him, allowing others to intervene. Chang hit the gunman on the head with a chair before other parishioners subdued him.

"I will tell you that evil was in that church," Spitzer said, who added that Chou had "an absolute bias" against Taiwan and its people.

The shooting came a day after an 18-year-old man shot and killed 10 people at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York in a racist rampage where the white gunman allegedly targeted a supermarket in a predominantly Black neighborhood.

New US hospitals face fiscal crisis over COVID relief money

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

THOMASVILLE, Ala. (AP) — A whole town celebrated in 2020 when, early in the coronavirus pandemic, Thomasville Regional Medical Center opened, offering state-of-the-art medicine that was previously unavailable in a poor, isolated part of Alabama. The timing for the ribbon-cutting seemed perfect: New treatment options would be available in an underserved area just as a global health crisis was unfolding.

In the end, that same timing may be the reason for the hospital's undoing.

Now deep in the red two years into the pandemic, the 29-bed, \$40 million hospital with a soaring, sun-drenched lobby and 110 employees is among three medical centers in the United States that say they are missing out on millions in federal pandemic relief money because the facilities are so new they lack full financial statements from before the crisis to prove how much it cost them.

In Thomasville, located in timber country about 95 miles (153 kilometers) north of the Gulf Coast port of Mobile, hospital officials have worked more than a year to convince federal officials they should have gotten \$8.2 million through the CARES Act, not just the \$1 million they received. With a total debt of \$35 million, the quest gets more urgent each day, said Curtis James, the chief executive officer.

"No hospital can sustain itself without getting the CARES Act money that everybody else got," James said.

Employees are trying to save money by cutting back on supplies but residents including Judy Hutto are worried about the hospital's future. Hutto drove there recently for tests from her home 15 miles (24 kilometers) out in the country.

"The areas needs it," she said. "It's a nice hospital."

CEO Barry Beus also is trying to plug a gap at Rock Regional Hospital, located south of Wichita in Derby, Kansas. The hospital is due as much as \$15.8 million, officials said, but because it only opened in April 2019 and lacks complete pre-pandemic financial statements, it has received just a little more than \$985,000.

The only thing that's saved the facility from financial ruin so far is the cooperation of doctors, contractors and vendors who haven't pushed for payments, he said. "If we lose them, we lose the hospital," said Beus.

Three Crosses Regional Hospital opened in 2020 in Las Cruces, New Mexico, and piled up a staggering \$16.8 million in losses in just three quarters while receiving only \$28,000 in aid, said Landon Fulmer, a Washington lobbyist working with all three hospitals to obtain additional funding. Each facility is being penalized for being new even though they provided the same costly COVID-19 care as other medical centers and lost revenue from other procedures including elective surgeries, he said.

"It really is quite a strange situation in a way, one that shouldn't have happened," Fulmer said.

With about 420,000 health care providers nationwide already receiving assistance from a \$178 billion pot, the government isn't covering 100% of losses for anyone, said Chris Lundquist, a spokesman for the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration, which is overseeing the program.

"HRSA has strived to provide as much support as possible to as many hospitals as possible within the limits of the law and funding," he said. The agency said it used proxy financial information for hospitals that opened in 2019 or 2020 to create an equitable payment system.

"They have all received funding," said Lundquist.

While virtually all the aid money is spoken for, Lundquist said hospitals seeking additional aid can go through an appeals process. Hospitals also can seek a supplemental appropriation or funding in the upcoming fiscal years, he said. All three of the hospitals say they deserve more.

Officials in Thomasville are trying to leverage congressional influence. Mayor Sheldon Day has made several trips to Washington, D.C., to speak with members of the state's congressional delegation and

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health officials, and the president of the Alabama Hospital Association, Dr. Don Williamson, has contacted the White House seeking help.

"They've been assured they're going to be taken care of. But the fact is, when you're dealing with government entities, you don't have the money until you have the money," said Williamson.

Located in southwest Alabama, Thomasville lies within an impoverished area called the Black Belt. About 70% of Black Belt residents qualify for Medicare or Medicaid, and health care has been limited for generations.

The last hospital shut down in Thomasville more than a decade ago, leaving only hospitals that offer fewer services in the surrounding region. Officials worked for years to secure a new hospital so residents wouldn't have to drive 90 minutes for high-tech services such as digital imaging, full surgical options, echocardiograms, 3D mammography and more.

Using a partnership between the city and a municipal health care authority, Thomasville Regional secured federal funding from the Department of Agriculture and opened on March 3, 2020, before cases of COVID-19 caught fire in the rural South.

"We thought we were off to a good start," said James, the chief executive. "And then everything shut down."

Patients stopped showing up for scans, elective surgeries, mammographies and other moneymaking services because of pandemic shutdowns, and financial reports that looked promising turned perilous within weeks.

Recognizing that new hospitals couldn't calculate COVID-19 losses because they couldn't compare 2020 numbers with past years, Health and Human Services allowed hospitals to use budget numbers for calculations rather than prior financial statements. That's how the hospital determined that it was missing out on more than \$7 million in aid, James said.

While the hospital is still waiting on that aid, he said, the government did agree to provide \$1 million in assistance that went to all other hospitals.

"That was OK, but other hospitals that are in our region got \$8 million, \$9 million," he said.

The Birmingham-based Medical Properties Trust recently gave the hospital \$2 million and James said leaders are confident Thomasville Regional will eventually get the extra federal aid. "But it will take time," he said.

Like Thomasville Regional, Rock Regional in Kansas saw revenues dry up soon after opening, said Beus, the CEO. It's still experiencing staff shortages because of the pandemic and having to pay a premium to travel nurses to work shifts on the wards, he said, all while working with consultants and members of Congress just trying to stay afloat.

"It's been a little frustrating," he said.

Conspiracy theorists flock to bird flu, spreading falsehoods

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

Brad Moline, a fourth-generation Iowa turkey farmer, saw this happen before. In 2015, a virulent avian flu outbreak nearly wiped out his flock.

Barns once filled with chattering birds were suddenly silent. Employees were anguished by having to kill sickened animals. The family business, started in 1924, was at serious risk.

His business recovered, but now the virus is back, again imperiling the nation's poultry farms. And this time, there's another pernicious force at work: a potent wave of misinformation that claims the bird flu isn't real.

"You just want to beat your head against the wall," Moline said of the Facebook groups in which people insist the flu is fake or, maybe, a bioweapon. "I understand the frustration with how COVID was handled. I understand the lack of trust in the media today. I get it. But this is real."

While it poses little risk to humans, the global outbreak has led farmers to cull millions of birds and threatens to add to already rising food prices.

It's also spawning fantastical claims similar to the ones that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic, un-

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derscoring how conspiracy theories often emerge at times of uncertainty, and how the internet and a deepening distrust of science and institutions fuel their spread.

The claims can be found on obscure online message boards and major platforms like Twitter. Some versions claim the flu is fake, a hoax being used to justify reducing the supply of birds in an effort to drive up food prices, either to wreck the global economy or force people into vegetarianism.

"There is no 'bird flu' outbreak," wrote one man on Reddit. "It's just Covid for chickens."

Other posters insist the flu is real, but that it was genetically engineered as a weapon, possibly intended to touch off a new round of COVID-style lockdowns. A version of the story popular in India posits that 5G cell towers are somehow to blame for the virus.

As evidence, many of those claiming that the flu is fake note that animal health authorities monitoring the outbreak are using some of the same technology used to test for COVID-19.

"They're testing the animals for bird flu with PCR tests. That should give you a clue as to what's going on," wrote one Twitter user, in a post that's been liked and retweeted thousands of times.

In truth, PCR tests have been used routinely in medicine, biology and even law enforcement for decades; their creator won a Nobel Prize in 1993.

The reality of the outbreak is far more mundane, if no less devastating to birds and people who depend on them for their livelihood.

Farmers in states like Wisconsin, Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota have already culled millions of fowl to prevent the outbreak from spreading. Zoos around the U.S. have moved exotic bird exhibits indoors to protect their animals, and wildlife authorities are discouraging backyard bird feeding in some states to prevent the spread by wild birds. The disease has also claimed bald eagles around the country.

The first known human case of the H5N1 outbreak in the U.S. was confirmed last month in Colorado in a prison inmate who had been assisting with culling and disposing of poultry at a local farm.

Most human cases involve direct contact with infected birds, meaning the risk to a broad population is low, but experts around the country are monitoring the virus closely just to be sure, according to Keith Poulsen, director of the Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, an agency that tracks animal disease in part to protect the state's agricultural industries.

"I can guarantee you, this is the real deal," Poulsen told The Associated Press. "We certainly aren't making this up."

Poultry farms drive the local economy in some parts of Wisconsin, Poulsen said, adding that a devastating outbreak of avian flu could create real hardships for farmers as well as consumers.

While the details may vary, the conspiracy theories about avian flu all speak to a distrust of authority and institutions, and a suspicion that millions of doctors, scientists, veterinarians, journalists and elected officials around the world can no longer be trusted.

"Americans clearly understand that the federal government and major media have lied to them repeatedly, and are completely corrupted by the pharmaceutical companies," said Dr. Joseph Mercola, an osteopath whose discredited claims about vaccines, masks and the coronavirus made him a prominent source of COVID-19 misinformation.

Mercola's interest in the bird flu dates back years. A 2009 book for sale on his website, which Mercola uses to sell unproven natural health remedies, is titled "The Great Bird Flu Hoax."

Polls show trust in many American institutions — including the news media — has fallen in recent years. Trust in science and scientific experts is also down, and along partisan lines.

Moline, the Iowa turkey farmer, said he sympathizes with people who question what they read about viruses, given the last two years and bitter debates about masks, vaccines and lockdowns. But he said anyone who doubts the existence or seriousness of the avian flu doesn't understand the threat.

The 2015 outbreak was later determined to be the most expensive animal health disaster in U.S. history. Moline's farm had to cull tens of thousands of turkeys after the flu got into one of his barns. Workers at the farm now abide by a hygiene policy meant to limit the spread of viruses, including using different pairs of boots and clothes for different barns.

Conspiracy theories are bound to flourish during times of social unrest or unease, according to John

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Jackson, dean of the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

Before the internet, there were likely just as many people who privately doubted explanations for big events, Jackson said. But they enjoyed limited opportunities to connect with like-minded individuals, few chances to win new converts, and no way to broadcast their views to strangers.

Now, the conspiracy theories that gain wide popularity — such as the QAnon movement or discredited claims about COVID-19 — work because they give believers a sense of control in a rapidly changing, interconnected world, Jackson said. While they can emerge after disasters, assassinations or plane crashes, they can also appear during times of social upheaval or rapid change.

"There isn't a phenomena on the planet, whether it's the avian flu or 5G, that isn't already primed for conspiracists," Jackson said. "Now we have coronavirus, which has traumatized us so profoundly ... we look at this same idea of bird flu with completely new eyes, and we bring different kinds of conspiracy to it."

Claims that the avian flu is a hoax used to drive up food prices also highlight real-world concerns about inflation and food shortages. Worries that the flu is somehow linked to 5G towers underscore anxieties about technological change. Suggestions that it will be used to mandate vegetarianism, on the other hand, reflect uncertainties about sustainable agriculture, climate change and animal welfare.

By creating explanations, conspiracy theories can offer the believer a sense of power or control, Jackson said. But he said they also defy common sense in their cinematic fantasies about vast, sprawling conspiracies of millions working with clockwork efficiency to undermine human affairs.

"Conspiracy theories rest on the idea that humans have the capacity for keeping secrets," Jackson said. "But they underestimate the reality that we aren't very good at keeping them."

Election 2022: Trump's influence over GOP faces fresh tests

By WILL WEISSERT, MARC LEVY and GARY D. ROBERTSON Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Former President Donald Trump on Tuesday faces the strongest test yet of his ability to shape a new generation of Republicans as GOP primary voters in Pennsylvania and North Carolina decide whether to rally around his hand-picked choices for critical U.S. Senate seats.

As this year's midterm primary season enters its busiest stretch with races also unfolding in Kentucky, Oregon and Idaho, Trump is poised to notch several easy wins. In North Carolina, U.S. Rep. Ted Budd, is expected to best a packed field of GOP rivals, including a former governor. And in Pennsylvania's GOP race for governor, far-right contender Doug Mastriano was already leading before Trump backed him over the weekend.

But Trump's preferred Senate candidate in Pennsylvania, Mehmet Oz, has divided conservatives who are typically in lockstep with Trump. Some are suspicious of the ideological leanings of the celebrity heart surgeon who gained fame as a frequent guest on Oprah Winfrey's talk show, but has been attacked by millions of dollars of TV ads from another rival, former hedge fund CEO David McCormick. That's benefited Kathy Barnette, a conservative commentator who faced little scrutiny for most of the campaign before resonating in the final stretch with a fierce message opposing abortion in all circumstances.

Trump, who has held campaign-style rallies with Oz, insists he is the best candidate to keep the Senate seat in Republican hands in the fall. Given his level of involvement in the race — including a virtual event on Oz's behalf late Monday — a loss would be a notable setback for the former president, who is wielding endorsements as a way to prove his dominance over the GOP ahead of a potential 2024 presidential run.

Democrats, meanwhile, have their own high-profile primaries. In Pennsylvania, progressive Lt. Gov. John Fetterman has dominated the Senate race but was forced off the campaign trail by a stroke. The 52-year-old Fetterman remains hospitalized, though he said he is expected to make a full recovery.

In North Carolina, Cheri Beasley is the clear front-runner in her 11-candidate primary for the Democratic Senate nomination. If she prevails in November, Beasley would be the state's first Black senator — and just the third African American woman ever elected to the chamber.

Tuesday's contests could ultimately determine how competitive the general election will be this fall, when control of Congress, governor's mansions and key elections posts are up for grabs. That's especially true

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in the perennial political battleground of Pennsylvania, where some Republicans are already worried that Mastriano is too extreme to woo moderates who are often decisive in general elections.

"There's definitely some concern in large factions of the party," said Pennsylvania Republican strategist Vince Galko. "Especially those in the suburban areas."

A Barnette victory might potentially hand Democrats a Senate seat, making the GOP's effort to retake the chamber much harder.

More fundamentally, Tuesday's primaries could test voters' commitment to democratic principles. Barnette is running even further to the right than Oz and participated in the January 2021 rally that turned into an insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Then there's Mastriano, who was also outside the Capitol during the mob attack and would appoint Pennsylvania's chief elections official if he becomes governor. He has pledged to take the extraordinary step of requiring voters to "re-register" to vote — even though that's barred by the National Voter Registration Act and likely violates significant protections under federal, and possibly state, law.

"We're going to start all over again," Mastriano, who has barred reporters from his campaign events, said at a recent debate. He's made Trump's lies about widespread electoral fraud costing him the presidency a centerpiece of his campaign — and has even been subpoenaed by the House committee investigating the Capitol riot following his efforts to name a slate of alternate Electoral College electors in Trump's favor.

Trump's safest bet on Tuesday might be Budd, who has overcome a slow start to emerge from 14 Republican primary candidates, including former Gov. Pat McCrory, as a favorite in North Carolina's Republican Senate primary.

"Trump is the most important factor," said David McLennan, a political science professor at Meredith College in the state capital of Raleigh, who also noted that another conservative group, anti-tax Club for Growth Action, has paid for pro-Budd advertising. "Trump's endorsement turned the tide for him."

While much of the attention during the opening phase of the primary season has focused on Trump's grip on the GOP, the contests also serve as a referendum on Biden's leadership of the Democratic Party. In the president's native state of Pennsylvania, U.S. Rep. Conor Lamb, a moderate in the mold of Biden, is at risk of being trounced by Fetterman.

Known for his hulking, 6-foot-8 stature and tattoos, and for championing causes including universal health care, Fetterman has appealed to many Democrats with an outsider image — and that could hold despite his health scare.

Another race testing Biden's national appeal with Democratic primary voters comes across the country in Oregon. That's where the president used his first endorsement of the midterm season to back incumbent Democratic Rep. Kurt Schrader against progressive challenger Jamie McLeod-Skinner.

But Trump's influence on GOP primaries stretches far wider.

In Idaho, Trump-endorsed Lt. Gov. Janice McGeachin is attempting to unseat Republican Gov. Brad Little. McGeachin issued executive orders banning mask mandates during the height of the pandemic when Little was out of state.

The former president's support may also swing U.S. Rep. Madison Cawthorn's race to keep his seat from North Carolina despite recent blunders, and political novice Bo Hines' efforts to win the House nomination for a seat representing a district covering parts of Raleigh and points south.

Tuesday even features a Kentucky lawmaker seeking reelection who benefitted from a Trump reversal. The former president is now praising as a "first-rate Defender of the Constitution" Republican U.S. Rep. Thomas Massie — just two years after he suggested the Republican should be removed from the GOP for opposing \$2 trillion in COVID-19 relief funding.

White House moves to loosen remittance, flight rules on Cuba

By ZEKE MILLER, ANDREA RODRIGUEZ and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration says it will expand flights to Cuba, take steps to loosen restrictions on U.S. travelers to the island, and lift Trump-era restrictions on remittances that immigrants

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can send to people on the island.

The State Department said in a statement Monday that it will remove the current \$1,000-per-quarter limit on family remittances and will allow non-family remittance, which will support independent Cuban entrepreneurs. The U.S. will also allow scheduled and charter flights to locations beyond Havana, according to the State Department.

The administration said it will also move to reinstate the Cuban Family Reunification Parole Program, which has a backlog of more than 20,000 applications, and increase consular services and visa processing.

"With these actions, we aim to support Cubans' aspirations for freedom and for greater economic opportunities so that they can lead successful lives at home," State Department spokesman Ned Price added. "We continue to call on the Cuban government to immediately release political prisoners, to respect the Cuban people's fundamental freedoms and to allow the Cuban people to determine their own futures."

The policy changes come after a review that began soon after a series of widespread protests on the island last July.

Former President Donald Trump had increased sanctions against Cuba, including the cancellation of permits to send remittances and the punishment of oil tankers bound for the island.

These measures and the pandemic contributed to an economic crisis in Cuba, where people suffer from shortages of basic products, power outages and rationing.

The economic situation led thousands of people to the streets across Cuba on July 11, 2021 — the largest such protests in decades on the island. Many people were frustrated with shortages and low salaries, as well with the socialist government. Nongovernmental organizations have reported more than 1,400 arrests and 500 people sentenced to up to 20 years in prison for vandalism or sedition.

In recent weeks, both the U.S. and the Cuban governments have started some conversations, amid a surge of Cubans trying to emigrate illegally to the U.S.

The first week of April, the U.S. Embassy in Havana resumed processing visas for Cubans, though on a limited basis, more than four years after stopping consular services on the island amid a hardening of relations.

Sen. Robert Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat who heads the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the moves send the "wrong message" to Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel's government. Menendez was particularly critical of the administration decision to reinstate travel by groups for educational and cultural exchanges as well as some travel for professional meetings and professional research on the island.

"I am dismayed to learn the Biden administration will begin authorizing group travel to Cuba through visits akin to tourism," Menendez said. "To be clear, those who still believe that increasing travel will breed democracy in Cuba are simply in a state of denial."

Two senior administration officials, who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity, noted that the Treasury Department has the authority to audit groups that are organizing travel and will ensure that travel is purposeful and in accordance with U.S. law. The U.S. is restricting American tourism on the island and won't allow individuals to travel there for educational purposes, officials said.

One official defending the move noted that the president has underscored his belief that "Americans are the best ambassadors for democratic values."

Biden said as a presidential candidate that he would revert to Obama-era policies that loosened decades of embargo restrictions on Havana. Meanwhile, Republicans accused him of not being supportive enough of Cuban dissidents.

President Barack Obama's rapprochement was reversed by Trump, who sharply curtailed remittances that Cuban Americans were allowed to send to relatives on the island, barred financial and commercial transactions with most Cuban companies affiliated with the government or military and, in his final days in office, redesignated Cuba a "state sponsor of terrorism," in part for its support of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., said he would put a hold on all relevant Biden nominees requiring Senate confirmation until the decision is reversed.

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"Biden can frame this however he wants, but this is the truth: this is nothing but an idiotic attempt to return to Obama's failed appeasement policies and clear sign of support for the evil regime," Scott said.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez said on his Twitter account called the Biden administration move "a limited step in the right direction". He added that the decision doesn't change the embargo nor most of Trump measures against the island.

"To know the real scope of this announcement, we must wait for the publication of the regulation that will determine its application," he said.

In Havana, news of the Biden moves was spreading slowly, first among people with access to the internet.

"Beyond the human significance, because families will reunite and there will be a cultural exchange, there will be a blossom of these entrepreneurs little by little," said Erich Garcia, a programmer and local cryptocurrency expert, referring to the small businesses that opened on the island after some internal political and economic changes, and that got a boost after the historic thaw of relations with Cuba under the Obama administration.

In 2010, then-President Raúl Castro promoted an unprecedented, albeit limited opening to the private sector, allowing hundreds of small businesses to open. Some of them targeted tourists who came in significant numbers at the end of 2014 when Obama announced the new era with the island.

When Trump announced the new restrictions to Cuba, this private sector suffered as tourism declined.

White House officials said the U.S. would also increase its diplomatic presence, which was dramatically scaled back in 2017 in response to a spate of unexplained brain injuries suffered by American diplomats, spies and other government employees posted to the island.

The CIA earlier this year determined that it is unlikely that Russia or another foreign adversary has used microwaves or other forms of directed energy to attack the hundreds of American officials in postings around the globe who have attributed symptoms associated with brain injuries to what's come to be known as "Havana syndrome."

An administration official said it did not yet have a conclusion about the mysterious health incidents. Officials did not offer a timeline for ramping up the U.S. diplomatic presence in Cuba.

AP Exclusive: Black Lives Matter has \$42 million in assets

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The foundation started by organizers of the Black Lives Matter movement is still worth tens of millions of dollars, after spending more than \$37 million on grants, real estate, consultants, and other expenses, according to tax documents filed with the IRS.

In a new, 63-page Form 990 shared exclusively with The Associated Press, the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation Inc. reports that it invested \$32 million in stocks from the \$90 million it received as donations amid racial justice protests in 2020. That investment is expected to become an endowment to ensure the foundation's work continues in the future, organizers say.

It ended its last fiscal year — from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021 — with nearly \$42 million in net assets. The foundation had an operating budget of about \$4 million, according to a board member.

The tax filing shows that nearly \$6 million was spent on a Los Angeles-area compound. The Studio City property, which includes a home with six bedrooms and bathrooms, a swimming pool, a soundstage and office space, was intended as a campus for a Black artists fellowship and is currently used for that purpose, the board member said.

This is the BLM foundation's first public accounting of its finances since incorporating in 2017. As a fledgling nonprofit, it had been under the fiscal sponsorship of a well-established charity, and wasn't required to publicly disclose its financials until it became an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit in December 2020.

The tax filing suggests the organization is still finding its footing: It currently has no executive director or in-house staff. Nonprofit experts tell the AP that the BLM foundation seems to be operating like a scrappy organization with far fewer resources, although some say Black-led charities face unfair scrutiny in an overwhelmingly white and wealthy philanthropic landscape.

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Still, its governance structure makes it difficult to disprove allegations of impropriety, financial mismanagement and deviation from mission that have dogged the BLM foundation for years, one expert said.

"It comes across as an early startup nonprofit, without substantial governance structure in place, that got a huge windfall," said Brian Mittendorf, a professor of accounting at Ohio State University who focuses on nonprofit organizations and their financial statements.

"People are going to be quick to assume that mismatch reflects intent," he added. "Whether there's anything improper here, that is another question. But whether they set themselves up for being criticized, I think that certainly is the case because they didn't plug a bunch of those gaps."

The BLM movement first emerged in 2013, after the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the neighborhood watch volunteer who killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in Florida. But it was the 2014 death of Michael Brown at the hands of police in Ferguson, Missouri, that made the slogan "Black lives matter" a rallying cry for progressives and a favorite target of derision for conservatives.

BLM co-founders Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza and Ayo Tometi had pledged to build a decentralized organization governed by the consensus of BLM chapters. But just three years into existence, Cullors was the only movement founder involved in the organization.

And in 2020, a tidal wave of contributions in the aftermath of protests over George Floyd's murder by Minneapolis police meant the BLM organization needed much more infrastructure.

When Cullors revealed the windfall of donations last year, local chapter organizers and families of police brutality victims reacted angrily. Until then, the foundation had not been transparent with the most devoted BLM organizers, many of whom accused Cullors of shutting them out of decisions about how financial resources would be allocated.

YahNé Ndgo, an activist and former organizer with the BLM chapter in Philadelphia, said Cullors reneged on a promise to hand over control of the foundation's resources to grassroots organizers.

"When resources came in, when opportunities came in, (the foundation) alone would be the ones to decide who was going to take advantage of them, without having to take any consideration of the other organizers whose work was giving them the access to these resources and opportunities in the first place," said Ndgo, who organized a group of chapters that confronted the foundation over issues of transparency and accountability.

In a recent interview with the AP, Cullors acknowledged the foundation was ill-prepared to handle the moment. The tax filing lists Cullors as an uncompensated founder and executive director. She resigned last year. The foundation also paid nearly \$140,000 in severance to a former managing director who had been at odds with local BLM chapter organizers, prior to Cullors's tenure as director.

The filing shows Cullors reimbursed the organization \$73,523 for a charter flight for foundation-related travel, which the organization says she took in 2021 out of concern for COVID-19 and security threats. She also paid the foundation \$390 over her uses of the Studio City property for two private events.

During the last fiscal year, Cullors was the foundation board's sole voting director and held no board meetings, according to the filing. Although that is permissible under Delaware law, where the foundation is incorporated, that governance structure gives the appearance that Cullors alone decided who to hire and how to spend donations. That was never the truth, current board members said.

For all the questions raised about its oversight, the BLM foundation's tax filing shows its stewards haven't squandered donations. Instead, it granted tens of millions of dollars to BLM chapters, Black-led grassroots organizations and families of police brutality victims, whose names rallied the larger movement.

"This 990 reveals that (the BLM foundation) is the largest Black abolitionist nonprofit organization that has ever existed in the nation's history. What we're doing has never been done before," said Shalomyah Bowers, who serves as the foundation's board secretary.

"We needed to get dollars out to grassroots organizations doing the work of abolition, doing the work that would shift the moral tide of this world towards one that does not have or believe in police, prisons, jails or violence," he said.

Earlier this month, the foundation announced Bowers as one of three members of its board of directors.

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He serves with board chair Cicley Gay, a communications professional with more than 20 years of experience in nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, and D'Zhane Parker, a member of BLM's Los Angeles chapter whose work focuses on the impact of mass incarceration on families.

"We are decolonizing philanthropy," Gay said. "We, as a board, are charged with disrupting traditional standards of what grant making in philanthropy looks like. It means investing in Black communities, trusting them with their dollars."

The foundation will launch a "transparency and accountability center" on its website to make its financial documents available for public inspection, Bowers said.

FOUNDATION RELIES ON CONSULTANTS

To get here, the foundation has relied on a small grouping of consultants, some of whom have close ties to founders and other BLM organizers. For example, the tax filing shows the foundation paid nearly \$970,000 to Trap Heals LLC, a company founded by Damon Turner, who fathered a child with Cullors. The company was hired to produce live events and provide other creative services, Bowers said.

The foundation paid more than \$840,000 to Cullors Protection LLC, a security firm run by Paul Cullors, Patrisse's brother, according to the tax filing. Because the BLM movement is known for vehemently protesting law enforcement organizations, the foundation felt its protection could not be entrusted to former police professionals who typically run security firms, said Bowers, adding the foundation sought bids for other security contractors.

Bowers, who has previously served as deputy executive director, is founder and president of a firm that received the lion's share of money spent on consultants in the last fiscal year. Bowers Consulting provided much of the foundation's operational support, including staffing, fundraising and other key services and was paid more than \$2.1 million, according to the tax filing.

The foundation's reliance on consultants is not unusual for newer nonprofits, said Mittendorf, the Ohio State accounting professor. But having clear policies around business transactions could reduce any appearance of impropriety, he said.

"It's a best practice not to engage in business transactions with people who have influence inside the organization or with companies affiliated with people who have influence inside the organization," Mittendorf said. "Make sure you have conflict of interest policies and other controls in place, so that those transactions are all being done to benefit the organization and not to benefit the individuals."

The tax filing indicates the foundation has a conflict-of-interest policy. And Bowers said the last BLM board approved the contract with his firm when he was not a board member.

"Our firm stepped in when Black Lives Matter had no structure and no staff," he said. "We filled the gap, when nothing else existed. But let me be crystal clear, there was no conflict of interest."

Controversy surrounding the organization's finances has elicited probes by at least two state attorneys general. Board members said they are cooperating with civil investigations in Indiana and Ohio, and they have turned over relevant documents to those authorities.

Isabelle Leighton, interim executive director of the Donors of Color Network, an organization that promotes racial equity in philanthropy, said discrimination in the nonprofit sector leaves little room for Black-led progressive movement organizations to publicly make mistakes. Such organizations are typically receiving much less financial and operational support than wealthy, white-led nonprofits, but receive much more criticism, she said.

"It's tapping into a deep narrative that people of color do not deserve to have the same resources that those who have already made it get," Leighton said. "It's intended for people to start to doubt and create their own new echo chamber of criticizing who deserves to receive resources."

BLM GRANTS \$16 MILLION TO CHAPTERS AND FAMILIES

The foundation's tax filing rebuts claims that the BLM foundation ignored the larger movement. Nearly \$26 million, or 70% of its expenses, were grants to organizations and families in the last fiscal year.

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Twelve BLM chapters, including those in Boulder, Colorado; Boston; Washington, D.C.; Detroit; Los Angeles; Gary, Indiana; and Philadelphia, received pledges for grants of up to \$500,000. The family foundations created in honor of Floyd and others killed by police and vigilantes — Trayvon Martin and Oscar Grant — each received contributions of \$200,000.

Jacari Harris, executive director of the George Floyd Memorial Foundation, said in a statement the organization was “incredibly grateful” for the grant, “the largest one-time contribution we have received to date within the U.S.” Harris said the funds will help provide college scholarships, mental health support to the Black community and educate “about the dangers of police brutality around the world.”

The Michael O.D. Brown: We Love Our Sons & Daughters Foundation, run by Michael Brown Jr.’s mother, Lezley McSpadden, was approved for a larger multi-year grant of \$1.4 million. A representative of the Brown foundation told the AP that an initial \$500,000 had been received in 2021.

McSpadden is happy to have the BLM foundation’s support, the representative said.

Among its larger grants are \$2.3 million to the Living Through Giving Foundation, a nonprofit charity platform that encourages giving at the local level; and \$1.5 million to Team Blackbird, LLC, a rapid response communications and movement strategy project that increases the visibility of movement organizations.

The tax filing does not reveal the foundation’s largest donors.

“Transparency and accountability is so important to us, but so is trust,” said Gay, the BLM foundation chair. “Presenting (donor) names after the fact, at this point, would likely be a betrayal of that trust.”

Pennsylvania governor race divides Republicans, unites Dems

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — As Pennsylvania Republicans prepare to choose a nominee for governor Tuesday, some party officials are twisted in knots over the possibility of a primary victory by a candidate many see as too far too the right to win statewide this fall.

Doug Mastriano, a retired U.S. Army colonel and state senator since 2019, has led polls while spending a fraction of the money that some of the other eight candidates listed on the Republican primary ballot have spent.

Mastriano recently won the endorsement of Donald Trump after working with the former president to overturn his loss in 2020’s election in the presidential battleground state and helping spread Trump’s lies that widespread voter fraud cost him victory. Many party officials urged Trump not to endorse Mastriano, fearing he cannot win over the moderate voters necessary to prevail in politically divided Pennsylvania.

Democrats, meanwhile, are united behind the state’s two-term elected attorney general, Josh Shapiro. He is uncontested on the primary ballot after wrapping up the endorsement of the state party and its top allies, including the AFL-CIO, and raising more than \$20 million since early 2021.

Shapiro helped cement his reputation with a landmark grand jury investigation into child sexual abuse coverups inside Pennsylvania’s Roman Catholic dioceses and defending Pennsylvania’s 2020 election result against attempts in court to overturn it by Trump and his allies.

They are vying for the right to succeed Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf, who is constitutionally term-limited after entering office in 2015. The winner is likely to share power with a Republican-led Legislature, where entrenched GOP majorities have controlled the floors for nearly all of the past three decades.

Mastriano has insisted to supporters that he is not a far-right candidate and that his platforms — including eliminating mail-in voting, expanding gun rights, banning abortion and banishing school property taxes — enjoy broad support.

Rather, he says Democrats — including President Joe Biden — are far-left radicals while the Republican “swamp” is trying to defeat him. Shapiro’s campaign, meanwhile, is running a TV ad portraying Mastriano as extreme and saying that if Mastriano wins, “it’s a win for what Donald Trump stands for.”

Mastriano represents a heavily Republican state Senate district based in Franklin County on Pennsylvania’s southern border with Maryland.

Republican voters will see nine names on the ballot for governor, even though two — Jake Corman and

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Melissa Hart — say they have ended their campaigns and endorsed former U.S. Rep. Lou Barletta as part of a last-ditch attempt to help defeat Mastriano.

Barletta has picked up a number of endorsements by current and former Republican officeholders, including members of Congress.

Besides Mastriano, Barletta, Corman and Hart, also on the Republican ballot for governor are: Joe Gale, a Montgomery County commissioner; Charlie Gerow, a marketing consultant and longtime conservative activist; Bill McSwain, a lawyer who was the Trump-appointed U.S. attorney in Philadelphia; Dave White, who runs a large plumbing and HVAC firm and is a former Delaware County councilman; and Nche Zama, a retired heart surgeon who has directed units at various hospitals in Pennsylvania.

North Carolina Rep. Cawthorn seeks nomination after missteps

By GARY D. ROBERTSON Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — U.S. Rep. Madison Cawthorn faces seven challengers Tuesday in North Carolina's Republican primary, an early test of whether voters will grant the pro-Donald Trump firebrand another term despite his personal and political stumbles.

Several GOP leaders have turned away from the 26-year-old congressman, with some citing a series of unforced errors, such as calling Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy a "thug" after Russia invaded his country. Cawthorn also infuriated fellow Republicans in Congress when he alleged on a podcast that he had been invited to an orgy in Washington.

Cawthorn has banked on his successful fundraising, social media presence and vocal support for the former president to help him win the 11th Congressional District nomination again.

State Sen. Chuck Edwards, Cawthorn's top rival, received endorsements from U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis and the state's top GOP legislative leaders. A super PAC allied with Tillis ran ads against Cawthorn, one of which called him a "reckless embarrassment" and "dishonest disaster."

The primary is open to Republican and unaffiliated voters. The leading candidate must get above 30% of the votes to avert a July runoff. The ultimate winner will take on Democratic and Libertarian nominees in the fall. Six candidates were in Tuesday's Democratic primary.

Within days of taking office in early 2021, Cawthorn spoke at the "Stop the Steal" rally questioning Joe Biden's presidential election victory that preceded the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection. Cawthorn soon became a leading spokesperson for Trump's "America First" policies and conservatives in the culture wars. Trump has endorsed him.

Cawthorn recently called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy a "thug" after Russia invaded his country.

Besides the remark about being invited to an orgy, Cawthorn said he had seen leaders in the movement to end drug addiction use cocaine. House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy reprimanded him publicly for the remarks.

Cawthorn has been stopped by police on driving citations three times since October and caught with guns at airport checkpoints twice since last year, including last month. And videos released in the campaign's final weeks showed Cawthorn in sexually suggestive poses, which he said were from several years ago — meant to be funny and nothing else.

Cawthorn acknowledged speeding and gun citations as failings, but said the videos were part of a "drip campaign" by his political enemies, of which he has included some Republicans, to flood the district with negative stories.

Cawthorn was seen as a rising star by many conservatives when in 2020 he won a primary runoff for the seat being vacated by Mark Meadows, Trump's chief of staff.

Cawthorn, who uses a wheelchair after being partially paralyzed from a car accident as a teenager, turned 25 — the constitutionally mandated minimum age to serve in the House — during the 2020 campaign.

In an election-eve post on his social media site Truth Social, Trump asked primary voters to back him again: "Recently, he made some foolish mistakes, which I don't believe he'll make again ... let's give Madi-

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son a second chance!"

His biggest political mistake may have occurred last fall, when he decided to run for a different U.S. House seat that could have led to an easier reelection bid, only to return to the 11th District when redistricting litigation shifted the lines again. Edwards and others accuse Cawthorn of trying to walk away from his constituents for political convenience.

Accused Buffalo gunman followed familiar radicalization path

By ERIC TUCKER, MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

The 18-year-old gunman accused of a deadly racist rampage at a Buffalo supermarket seems to fit an all-too-familiar profile: an aggrieved white man steeped in hate-filled conspiracies online, and inspired by other extremist massacres.

Payton Gendron of Conklin, New York, appears to have been driven to action roughly two years from when his radical indoctrination began, showing just how quickly and easily murderous assaults can be spawned on the internet. No tactical training or organizational help required.

While law enforcement officials have grown adept since the Sept. 11 attacks at disrupting well-organized plots, they face a much tougher challenge in intercepting self-radicalized young men who absorb racist screeds on social media and plot violence on their own.

"That's why everyone is so concerned. You just go and you pick your ideology — and then, if you have a weapon, you don't need a big plan," said Christopher Costa, former senior director for counterterrorism in the Trump administration's National Security Council. "What's changed is the internet."

Gendron is accused of fatally shooting 10 Black people and could face federal hate crime charges in the coming days. He purportedly left behind a 180-page diatribe in which he said the rampage was intended to terrorize nonwhite people and get them to leave the country. It parrots ideas left behind by other white killers whose massacres he had extensively researched online.

The evidence so far underscores the evolving threat facing law enforcement.

In the first years after the Sept. 11 attacks, U.S. officials were preoccupied by the possibility of organized terror cells mobilizing followers to launch fresh assaults against the homeland. They later worried about the possibility of self-radicalized Islamic jihadists acting on their own.

Now, white supremacists have emerged as a front-and-center focus. FBI Director Christopher Wray last year described the domestic terrorism threat as "metastasizing." White racially motivated extremists have been responsible for most of the deadliest attacks on U.S. soil in the last five years, including a 2018 shooting inside a Pittsburgh synagogue and a rampage the following year in which a gunman targeting Hispanics inside a Texas Walmart killed 23 people.

An unclassified report from the U.S. intelligence community last year warned that violent extremists motivated by political grievances and racial hatred pose an "elevated" threat to the country.

In recognition of the problem, the White House in March said its latest budget provided the FBI with an increase of \$33 million for domestic terrorism investigations. In 2019, the FBI brought together in a specialized fusion cell agents who specialize in hate crime investigations with those focused on acts of domestic terrorism — a nod to the overlapping nature of the threats.

Federal authorities have in recent years prosecuted members of white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups, including Atomwaffen Division and The Base. These organizations have embraced a fringe philosophy known as "accelerationism," which promotes mass violence to fuel society's collapse, spark a race war or overthrow the U.S. government.

Those defendants' paths to digital indoctrination in some ways appear to mirror that of Gendron. The racist screed that has been attributed to him advanced ideas from the "great replacement" theory — a baseless conspiracy that says there's a plot to diminish the influence of white people — and chronicles his own experiences navigating dark corners of the internet.

A generation ago, indoctrination into extremist groups involved people meeting face to face, talking and swapping books, and as a result harmful ideologies weren't as likely to spread as quickly as they can today,

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said Shannon Foley Martinez, a reformed extremist who mentors people trying to leave supremacist groups. "When I go and talk to middle and high school and university students and I ask them who has seen racist or antisemitic comments or content online, 100% of the hands go up," said Martinez, who cut ties with extremists 28 years ago.

There's long been debate within the criminal justice system about the ability to rehabilitate racially or ethnically motivated extremists, or create so-called "off-ramps," for them before they commit violence. Once charged, several defendants have sought to renounce their ideologies, pointing to mitigating factors in their own lives that they said had warped their judgment and led to a poisoned set of beliefs.

After the Justice Department in 2020 charged four Atomwaffen members in Seattle in a campaign to intimidate journalists and others with threatening posters at their homes, defense attorneys sought to play up the similarities of their clients' backgrounds and radicalization path: They were bullied, friendless, ostracized; craving a community, they found each other on the internet.

Cameron Shea was addicted to opiates and living in his car when he found Atomwaffen.

"I was lost, sad, and (at the risk of sounding dramatic) angry at the world," he wrote in a letter addressed to the judge who sentenced him to three years in prison. "Choosing to lash out and feel angry at everything was easier than addressing the sadness and sense of displacement beneath it all."

Taylor Ashley Parker-Dipeppe, who was 21 at sentencing, is a transgender man who was shunned by his peers and frequently bullied at his New Jersey high school, said his lawyer, Peter Mazzone. After a failed attempt to "connect with the LGBTQ crowd," Parker-Dipeppe gravitated online toward an Atomwaffen cell in Florida led by a 16-year-old boy and became a "total follower," his lawyer said.

"But he also felt he 'passed' as a man, was accepted by a 'manly' club, and was part of a group that would fight for him if necessary, as long as no one found out that he was actually transgender," Mazzone wrote.

The Atomwaffen defendants either pleaded guilty or were convicted by a jury. All four were sentenced to prison terms or time already served behind bars.

While those men bonded on the internet, Gendron's online wanderings may have been a more solo endeavor. However, the statement he apparently posted online indicates he drew inspiration from other racist rampages, like the one by a white man who killed 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 2019.

In the document, Gendron said he was experiencing "extreme boredom" as the COVID-19 pandemic progressed, and that in May 2020 he began browsing 4chan, a lawless messaging board that is popular for anonymous — and often violent or misleading — posts. Gendron said he first browsed the site's gun messaging board.

Soon enough, he had stumbled upon neo-Nazi websites posted to the site and, then, a copy of the livestream video of the New Zealand mosque shootings.

"This document demonstrates a very clear trajectory from radicalization online to domestic terrorism and extremism," said Sophie Bjork-James, an assistant professor at Vanderbilt University who researches the white nationalist movement and hate crimes.

Gendron shared screenshots of memes and conservative news headlines that helped him formulate his extreme beliefs in the document.

"Taking the megaphone away from those people is extremely important and right now that megaphone is on social media," Bjork-James said.

Facebook did not take down the livestream of the New Zealand killing spree until 17 minutes after it was broadcast, leaving copies of the video to circulate indefinitely on seedier sites like 4Chan. Gendron's livestream video also has spread across social media sites and could be used to indoctrinate more users.

Ukraine says mission at Mariupol steel mill is complete

By OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI and CIARAN McQUILLAN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The regiment that doggedly defended a steel mill as Ukraine's last stronghold in the port city of Mariupol completed its mission Monday after more than 260 fighters, including some badly

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wounded, were evacuated and taken to areas under Russia's control, Ukrainian officials said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the evacuation to separatist-controlled territory was done to save the lives of the fighters who endured weeks of Russian assaults in the maze of underground passages below the hulking Azovstal steelworks. He said the "heavily wounded" were getting medical help.

"Ukraine needs Ukrainian heroes to be alive. It's our principle," he said. An unknown number of fighters stayed behind to await other rescue efforts.

The steel mill's defenders got out as Moscow suffered another diplomatic setback in the war, with Sweden joining Finland in deciding to seek NATO membership. And Ukraine made a symbolic gain when its forces reportedly pushed Russian troops back to the Russian border in the Kharkiv region.

Still, Russian forces pounded targets in the industrial heartland of eastern Ukraine known as the Donbas, and the death toll, already many thousands, kept climbing with the war set to enter its 12th week on Wednesday.

Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar said 53 seriously wounded fighters were taken from the Azovstal plant to a hospital in Novoazovsk, east of Mariupol. An additional 211 fighters were evacuated to Olenivka through a humanitarian corridor. She said an exchange would be worked out for their return home.

"Mariupol's defenders have fully accomplished all missions assigned by the command," she said.

Officials also planned to keep trying to save the fighters who remained inside. Military experts generally put the number of fighters at the plant at anywhere from a few hundred to 1,000.

"The work to bring the guys home continues, and it requires delicacy and time," Zelenskyy said.

Before Monday's evacuations from the steelworks began, the Russian Defense Ministry announced an agreement for the wounded to leave the mill for treatment in a town held by pro-Moscow separatists. There was no immediate word on whether the wounded would be considered prisoners of war.

After nightfall Monday, several buses pulled away from the steel mill accompanied by Russian military vehicles. Maliar later confirmed that the evacuation had taken place.

"Thanks to the defenders of Mariupol, Ukraine gained critically important time to form reserves and regroup forces and receive help from partners," she said. "And they fulfilled all their tasks. But it is impossible to unblock Azovstal by military means."

The Ukrainian General Staff also said on Facebook that the Mariupol garrison has completed its mission. The commander of the Azov Regiment, which led the defense of the plant, said in a prerecorded video message released Monday that the regiment's mission had concluded, with as many lives saved as possible.

"Absolutely safe plans and operations don't exist during war," Lt. Col. Denis Prokopenko said, adding that all risks were considered.

Elsewhere in the Donbas, the eastern city of Sievierdonetsk came under heavy shelling that killed at least 10 people, said Serhiy Haidai, the governor of the Luhansk region. In the Donetsk region, Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said on Facebook that nine civilians were killed in shelling.

The western Ukrainian city of Lviv was rocked by loud explosions early Tuesday. Witnesses counted at least eight blasts accompanied by distant booms, and the smell of burning was apparent some time later. An Associated Press team in Lviv, which was under an overnight curfew, said the sky west of the city was lit up by an orange glow.

The chairman of the Lviv Regional Military Administration said the Russians fired on military infrastructure in the Yavoriv district. The city of Yavoriv is less than 10 miles (15 kilometers) from the Polish border.

Ukrainian troops also advanced as Russian forces pulled back from around the northeastern city of Kharkiv in recent days. Zelenskyy thanked the soldiers who reportedly pushed them all the way to the Russian border in the Kharkiv region.

Video showed Ukrainian soldiers carrying a post that resembled a Ukrainian blue-and-yellow-striped border marker. Then they placed it on the ground while a dozen of the soldiers posed next to it, including one with belts of bullets draped over a shoulder.

"I'm very grateful to you, on behalf of all Ukrainians, on my behalf and on behalf of my family," Zelenskyy said in a video message. "I'm very grateful to all the fighters like you."

The Ukrainian border service said the video showing the soldiers was from the border "in the Kharkiv

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region," but would not elaborate, citing security reasons. It was not immediately possible to verify the exact location.

Ukrainian border guards said they also stopped a Russian attempt to send sabotage and reconnaissance troops into the Sumy region, some 90 miles (146 kilometers) northwest of Kharkiv.

Russia has been plagued by setbacks in the war, most glaringly in its failure early on to take the capital of Kyiv. Much of the fighting has shifted to the Donbas but also has turned into a slog, with both sides fighting village-by-village.

Howitzers from the U.S. and other countries have helped Kyiv hold off or gain ground against Russia, a senior U.S. defense official said. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the U.S. military assessment, said Ukraine has pushed Russian forces to within a half-mile to 2.5 miles (1 to 4 kilometers) of Russia's border but could not confirm if it was all the way to the frontier.

Away from the battlefield, Sweden's decision to seek NATO membership followed a similar decision by neighboring Finland in a historic shift for the counties, which were nonaligned for generations.

Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said her country would be in a "vulnerable position" during the application period and urged her fellow citizens to brace themselves.

"Russia has said that that it will take countermeasures if we join NATO," she said. "We cannot rule out that Sweden will be exposed to, for instance, disinformation and attempts to intimidate and divide us."

But President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, a NATO member, ratcheted up his objection to their joining. He accused the countries of failing to take a "clear" stance against Kurdish militants and other groups that Ankara considers terrorists, and of imposing military sanctions on Turkey.

He said Swedish and Finnish officials who are expected in Turkey next week should not bother to come if they intend to try to convince Turkey of dropping its objection.

"How can we trust them?" Erdogan asked at a joint news conference with the visiting Algerian president.

All 30 current NATO members must agree to let the Nordic neighbors join.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Moscow "does not have a problem" with Sweden or Finland as they apply for NATO membership, but that "the expansion of military infrastructure onto this territory will of course give rise to our reaction in response."

Putin launched the invasion on Feb. 24 in what he said was an effort to check NATO's expansion but has seen that strategy backfire. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has said the membership process for both could be quick.

Online diary: Buffalo gunman plotted attack for months

By CAROLYN THOMPSON, MICHAEL R. SISAK and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The white gunman accused of massacring 10 Black people at a Buffalo supermarket wrote as far back as November about staging a livestreamed attack on African Americans, practiced shooting from his car and traveled hours from his home in March to scout out the store, according to detailed diary entries he appears to have posted online.

The author of the diary posted hand-drawn maps of the grocery store along with tallies of the number of Black people he counted there, and recounted how a Black security guard at the supermarket confronted him that day to ask what he was up to. A Black security guard was among the dead in Saturday's shooting rampage.

The diary taken from the chat platform Discord came to light two days after 18-year-old Payton Gendron allegedly opened fire with an AR-15-style rifle at the Tops Friendly Market. He was wearing body armor and used a helmet camera to livestream the bloodbath on the internet, authorities said.

He surrendered inside the supermarket and was arraigned on a murder charge over the weekend. He pleaded not guilty and was jailed under a suicide watch. Federal authorities are contemplating bringing hate crime charges.

Copies of the online materials were shared with The Associated Press by Marc-André Argentino, a research fellow at the London-based International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence.

A transcript of the diary entries was apparently posted publicly sometime ahead of the attack. It was

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not clear how many people might have seen the entries. Experts said it was possible but unlikely the diary could have been altered by someone other than the author.

The FBI's top agent in Buffalo, Stephen Belongia, indicated on a call with other officials Monday that investigators are looking at Gendron's Discord activity, citing posts last summer about body armor and guns and others last month in which he taunted federal authorities. Belongia gave no details in the call, a recording of which the AP obtained.

But in an April 17 post apparently by Gendron, he exhorted readers to kill agents from the FBI and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Messages seeking comment were left with Gendron's lawyers. No one answered the door at his family's home.

The violence spread grief and anger in Buffalo and beyond.

Former Buffalo Fire Commissioner Garnell Whitfield Jr., who lost his 86-year-old mother, Ruth Whitfield, in the shooting, asked how the country could allow its history of racist killings to repeat itself.

"We're not just hurting. We're angry," Whitfield said at a news conference with civil rights attorney Ben Crump and others. "We treat people with decency, and we love even our enemies."

"And you expect us to keep doing this over and over and over again — over again, forgive and forget," he continued. "While people we elect and trust in offices around this country do their best not to protect us, not to consider us equal."

The victims also included a man buying a cake for his grandson; a church deacon helping people get home with their groceries; and a supermarket security guard.

The online diary details a March 8 reconnaissance visit the writer made to Buffalo, about 200 miles (320 kilometers) from Gendron's home in Conklin, New York.

Buffalo Police Commissioner Joseph Gramaglia said at a news conference that there was information indicating Gendron was in Buffalo in March, but Gramaglia declined to say more.

The commissioner said numerous investigators are working to obtain and review Gendron's online postings. "There's a lot of social that's being looked at, or that's being verified, captured," Gramaglia said. "Some of that takes warrants that have to be served on various social media platforms."

The author of the diary talked about checking out targets including the Tops Friendly Market and said a security guard asked what he was doing after his second visit of the day. He gave an excuse about collecting data and soon left — "a close call," he wrote.

A 180-page document purportedly written by Gendron said the attack was intended to terrorize all non-white, non-Christian people and get them to leave the country. Federal authorities said they are working to confirm the document's authenticity.

Gendron had briefly been on authorities' radar last spring, when state police were called to his high school for a report that the then-17-year-old had made threatening statements.

Belongia, the FBI agent, said Gendron had responded to a question about future plans by saying that he wanted to commit a murder-suicide.

A December Discord post that Gendron apparently made said he had given that answer to a question about retirement in an economics class and ended up spending "one of the worst nights of my life" in a hospital.

Gramaglia said Gendron had no further contact with law enforcement after a mental health evaluation that put him in a hospital for a day and a half. On the call with Belongia, Gramaglia said state police "did everything within the confines of the law" at that time.

It was unclear whether officials could have invoked New York's "red flag" regulation, which lets law enforcement, school officials and families ask a court to order the seizure of guns from people considered dangerous.

Federal law bars people from owning guns if a judge has determined they have a "mental defect" or they have been forced into a mental institution. An evaluation alone would not trigger the prohibition.

At the White House, President Joe Biden, who planned a visit Tuesday to Buffalo, paid tribute to the slain

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security guard, retired police officer Aaron Salter.

Salter fired repeatedly at the attacker, striking his armor-plated vest at least once before being shot and killed. Biden said Salter "gave his life trying to save others."

Authorities said that in addition to the 10 Black people killed, three people were wounded: one Black, two white.

Zeneta Everhart said her son, supermarket employee Zaire Goodman, was helping a shopper outside when he saw a man get out of a car in military gear and point a gun at him. Then a bullet hit Goodman in the neck.

"Mom! Mom, get here now, get here now! I got shot!" he told his mother by phone. Goodman, 20, was out of the hospital and doing well Monday, his mother said.

In livestreamed video of the attack circulating online, the gunman trained his weapon on a white person cowering behind a checkout counter, but said, "Sorry!" and didn't shoot. Screenshots purporting to be from the broadcast appear to show a racial slur against Black people scrawled on his rifle.

White House moves to loosen remittance, flight rules on Cuba

By ZEKE MILLER, ANDREA RODRIGUEZ and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration announced Monday that it will expand flights to Cuba, take steps to loosen restrictions on U.S. travelers to the island, and lift Trump-era restrictions on remittances that immigrants can send to people on the island.

The State Department said in a statement that it will remove the current \$1,000-per-quarter limit on family remittances and will allow non-family remittance, which will support independent Cuban entrepreneurs. The U.S. will also allow scheduled and charter flights to locations beyond Havana, according to the State Department.

The administration said it will also move to reinstate the Cuban Family Reunification Parole Program, which has a backlog of more than 20,000 applications, and increase consular services and visa processing.

"With these actions, we aim to support Cubans' aspirations for freedom and for greater economic opportunities so that they can lead successful lives at home," State Department spokesman Ned Price added. "We continue to call on the Cuban government to immediately release political prisoners, to respect the Cuban people's fundamental freedoms and to allow the Cuban people to determine their own futures."

The policy changes come after a review that began soon after a series of widespread protests on the island last July.

Former President Donald Trump had increased sanctions against Cuba, including the cancellation of permits to send remittances and the punishment of oil tankers bound for the island.

These measures and the pandemic contributed to an economic crisis in Cuba, where people suffer from shortages of basic products, power outages and rationing.

The economic situation led thousands of people to the streets across Cuba on July 11, 2021 — the largest such protests in decades on the island. Many people were frustrated with shortages and low salaries, as well with the socialist government. Nongovernmental organizations have reported more than 1,400 arrests and 500 people sentenced to up to 20 years in prison for vandalism or sedition.

In recent weeks, both the U.S. and the Cuban governments have started some conversations, amid a surge of Cubans trying to emigrate illegally to the U.S.

The first week of April, the U.S. Embassy in Havana resumed processing visas for Cubans, though on a limited basis, more than four years after stopping consular services on the island amid a hardening of relations.

Sen. Robert Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat who heads the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the moves send the "wrong message" to Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel's government. Menendez was particularly critical of the administration decision to reinstate travel by groups for educational and cultural exchanges as well as some travel for professional meetings and professional research on the island.

"I am dismayed to learn the Biden administration will begin authorizing group travel to Cuba through

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visits akin to tourism," Menendez said. "To be clear, those who still believe that increasing travel will breed democracy in Cuba are simply in a state of denial."

Two senior administration officials, who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity, noted that the Treasury Department has the authority to audit groups that are organizing travel and will ensure that travel is purposeful and in accordance with U.S. law. The U.S. is restricting American tourism on the island and won't allow individuals to travel there for educational purposes, officials said.

One official defending the move noted that the president has underscored his belief that "Americans are the best ambassadors for democratic values."

Biden said as a presidential candidate that he would revert to Obama-era policies that loosened decades of embargo restrictions on Havana. Meanwhile, Republicans accused him of not being supportive enough of Cuban dissidents.

President Barack Obama's rapprochement was reversed by Trump, who sharply curtailed remittances that Cuban Americans were allowed to send to relatives on the island, barred financial and commercial transactions with most Cuban companies affiliated with the government or military and, in his final days in office, redesignated Cuba a "state sponsor of terrorism," in part for its support of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., said he would put a hold on all relevant Biden nominees requiring Senate confirmation until the decision is reversed.

"Biden can frame this however he wants, but this is the truth: this is nothing but an idiotic attempt to return to Obama's failed appeasement policies and clear sign of support for the evil regime," Scott said.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez said on his Twitter account called the Biden administration move "a limited step in the right direction". He added that the decision doesn't change the embargo nor most of Trump measures against the island.

"To know the real scope of this announcement, we must wait for the publication of the regulation that will determine its application," he said.

In Havana, news of the Biden moves was spreading slowly, first among people with access to the internet.

"Beyond the human significance, because families will reunite and there will be a cultural exchange, there will be a blossom of these entrepreneurs little by little," said Erich Garcia, a programmer and local cryptocurrency expert, referring to the small businesses that opened on the island after some internal political and economic changes, and that got a boost after the historic thaw of relations with Cuba under the Obama administration.

In 2010, then-President Raúl Castro promoted an unprecedented, albeit limited opening to the private sector, allowing hundreds of small businesses to open. Some of them targeted tourists who came in significant numbers at the end of 2014 when Obama announced the new era with the island.

When Trump announced the new restrictions to Cuba, this private sector suffered as tourism declined.

White House officials said the U.S. would also increase its diplomatic presence, which was dramatically scaled back in 2017 in response to a spate of unexplained brain injuries suffered by American diplomats, spies and other government employees posted to the island.

The CIA earlier this year determined that it is unlikely that Russia or another foreign adversary has used microwaves or other forms of directed energy to attack the hundreds of American officials in postings around the globe who have attributed symptoms associated with brain injuries to what's come to be known as "Havana syndrome."

An administration official said it did not yet have a conclusion about the mysterious health incidents. Officials did not offer a timeline for ramping up the U.S. diplomatic presence in Cuba.

Candidate in hospital, others scrambling before Pa. primary

By MARC LEVY and MICHAEL RUBINKAM Associated Press

SCRANTON, Pa. (AP) — The last full day of campaigning in Pennsylvania's hotly contested primaries for governor and U.S. Senate began Monday with a top Senate candidate in the hospital and establishment

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Republicans trying to stave off victories by candidates they worry will be unelectable in the fall.

Lt. Gov. John Fetterman, who is leading in polls and fundraising in the Democratic Party's primary for U.S. Senate, remained in the hospital Monday after suffering a stroke right before the weekend.

His campaign said he won't appear at Tuesday's election night party in Pittsburgh, though Fetterman said Sunday that he is feeling better, expected to make a full recovery and will resume campaigning after getting some rest.

Meanwhile, new attack ads are airing against late-surging Republican U.S. Senate candidate Kathy Barnette as many in the Republican Party establishment have begun trying to consolidate their support to prevent Doug Mastriano from winning the party's gubernatorial nomination in the presidential battleground state.

Some Republicans fear Barnette and Mastriano are too polarizing to beat Democratic opponents in a general election. Barnette and Mastriano have campaigned together, endorsed each other and promoted conspiracy theories, including former President Donald Trump's lies that widespread voter fraud cost him the 2020 election.

They also have spent a fraction of the money that some of their rivals have.

The scrambling reflects the high stakes of Tuesday's elections in Pennsylvania and the uncertainty that has rattled the campaigns in the last week amid news of Fetterman's hospitalization and last-minute jockeying in the Republican primaries.

In the governor's race, an organization that has reported spending about \$13 million to boost Republican candidate Bill McSwain, a lawyer who was Donald Trump's appointee for U.S. attorney in Philadelphia, switched its allegiance to former congressman Lou Barletta barely two days before polls close.

Commonwealth Partners Chamber of Entrepreneurs, a business advocacy group whose political action committees are conduits for cash from billionaire Jeffrey Yass, said it believes Barletta has the best chance to beat Mastriano. The group is now calling on McSwain to drop out and endorse Barletta.

Mastriano, newly endorsed by Trump, belittled efforts by Republicans to defeat him and characterizes Democrats, including President Joe Biden, as far-left radicals.

"The swamp struck back, but they struck and they failed, they missed, and Donald Trump came in in the midst of their conspiring with each other's swamp-like creatures and endorsed me and cut the legs out from underneath them," Mastriano said in an interview Monday with the Light of Liberty podcast.

Meanwhile, in the hard-fought Republican primary for U.S. Senate, Barnette worked to fend off growing attacks from former hedge fund CEO David McCormick and heart surgeon-turned-TV celebrity Mehmet Oz, Trump's endorsed candidate.

Barnette said on conservative Breitbart Radio on Monday that "I'm not a globalist, both of them are" and that they have "very strong ties to the World Economic Forum," an organization that has been the subject of right-wing conspiracy theories.

They are pretending to be "Trump card-carrying members of the patriot party," she said, and she called Oz — he was born in the United States to parents who emigrated from Turkey and holds dual citizenship — "not only an American, but Turkish as well."

"Globalist" is a derogatory term with an antisemitic origin adopted by Trump and others in his orbit to conjure up an elite, international coterie that doesn't serve America's best interests.

Barnette also suggested on Breitbart Radio that she would not support Oz or McCormick if they win the primary, saying, "I have no intentions of supporting globalists."

However, she later seemed to contradict herself, telling reporters in Scranton: "I do believe they are globalists, and I find that very unnerving. But ... I will do everything I can for the GOP in order to make sure we win, and make sure Democrats do not win."

Trump's endorsements of both Mastriano and Oz have twisted Pennsylvania's Republican establishment into contradictions, as some warn that Mastriano is too far to the right to beat Democrat Josh Shapiro in the fall general election.

Trump himself has warned that Barnette cannot win in the fall — yet Mastriano is campaigning with her. In a telephone townhall Monday night with Oz, Trump warned that when Barnette is "vetted, it's going to

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be a catastrophe for the party.”

With polls showing a late surge for Barnette, Trump’s attacks reflected an eleventh-hour behind-the-scenes scramble by Trump allies and rival campaigns to discredit her. If elected, she would be the first Black Republican woman to serve in the Senate.

On Monday, the Oz campaign sent out a 90-second robocall to Republican voters featuring Trump urging them to vote for Oz and attacking McCormick and Barnette as “not candidates who put America First,” Trump’s label for his governing philosophy.

In addition to new attack ads targeting Barnette, she is being asked about a history of incendiary comments, which include disparaging Muslims and gays. She said her Islamophobic tweets were taken out of context.

She is also being asked whether she was involved in the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol after participating in Trump’s “Stop the Steal” rally that day. She was not, she said.

“It’s confusing to understand Kathy Barnette. Every time she answers a question, she raises many more,” Oz said on the “Brian Kilmeade Show” on Fox News Radio.

Barnette, speaking to several dozen supporters at a Scranton hotel Monday evening, said her rivals are lying about her because she is winning.

“Do you really want to hear more smear attacks, more attacks, throwing people under the bus, using leftist-like tactics to try to destroy one of their own?” Barnette questioned.

McCormick, a decorated U.S. Army combat veteran who has strong connections to the party establishment going back to his service in President George W. Bush’s administration, has also been criticized repeatedly by Trump in the last two weeks.

Nevertheless, McCormick is closing the campaign by airing a TV ad showing a video clip of Trump in a private 2020 ceremony congratulating McCormick, saying “you’ve served our country well in so many different ways.”

“You know why he said that,” McCormick says in the TV ad. “Because it’s true. I risked my life for America and I’d do it again in a heartbeat. ... I’m a pro-life, pro-gun, America First conservative and damn proud of it.”

NBC, Fox offer fall television plans, to a point amid change

By DAVID BAUDER and LYNN ELBER AP Entertainment Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Something was missing when Fox announced its plans for the fall television season: a schedule.

It was one of several signs of how the business has changed since networks resumed their annual glitzy presentations for advertisers, which had been suspended because of the pandemic. Both NBC and Fox, which kicked off the week Monday, emphasized how the flagship networks were now part of larger media companies.

Networks still can boast star power. Susan Sarandon, George Lopez, Raymond Lee, Camila Cabello and Trace Adkins will be featured in new contexts. Kelly Clarkson sang to open NBC’s show, and Miley Cyrus performed to end it.

The traditional presentations usually reveal what new shows are coming, what old shows are departing and when they will air during the week and year. While fixed schedules remain they are obsolete for many viewers, who are becoming accustomed to deciding for themselves when they want to watch or stream programs.

That wasn’t part of Fox’s reasoning for not revealing a schedule. Fox Entertainment CEO Charles Collier said the network was trying a “new approach” to give equal weight to its Tubi streaming service.

Holding back gives Fox the flexibility to adjust its schedule depending on what competitors do. It may also have reflected Fox’s unresolved talks with producers of “911” and “The Resident,” but the network announced later on Monday that the dramas have been renewed for the upcoming season.

NBC executives drove home the point that advertisers could work with the broadcast network, the

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Peacock streaming service and cable outlets like Bravo, USA, CNBC and NBC. NBC announced that all its shows will be available on Peacock the day after they air, and that many Universal movies will quickly be available to stream, too.

"This is not an extension of our core business or a pivot," said Jeff Shell, chief executive officer of NBCUniversal. "It is our core business."

In another illustration of changing times, Bravo used its time at Monday's presentation to celebrate the upcoming BravoCon fanfest, as opposed to individual programs.

The core of NBC's programming comes courtesy of veteran producer Dick Wolf. His shows "Chicago Med," "Chicago Fire" and "Chicago P.D." occupy the network's Wednesday night schedule, while "Law & Order," "Law & Order: SVU" and "Law & Order: Organized Crime" fill Thursday's prime time.

NBC is opening the door to more diversity with a new offering, "Lopez vs. Lopez," a sitcom about a working-class family starring Lopez and his real-life daughter, Mayan Lopez.

Lee stars in "Quantum Leap," which NBC described as a "reimagining" of the network's 1989 to 1993 sci-fi drama with Scott Bakula. Lee, whose credits include Fox's "Prodigal Son" and Tom Cruise's upcoming film sequel "Top Gun: Maverick," joins the small number of Asian Americans cast as series leads.

It's not the only offering that will feel familiar. The network is also bringing back John Larroquette to star in a sequel to "Night Court," Wolf has revived the original "Law & Order" and Peacock is airing a remake of "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air."

"I'm pretty confident I'm going to be up here in two years announcing the 'This is Us' reboot," comic Seth Meyers quipped of NBC's drama, which has its series finale next week.

The pandemic was still top of mind. Meyers said to the audience watching at Radio City Music Hall: "What an historic room to tell people you caught COVID in."

Pop star Cabello will join "The Voice" singing contest next season. Meanwhile, Blake Shelton, a fellow star on "The Voice," joined Carson Daly and professional wrestler Nikki Bella to introduce a new USA series, "Barmageddon," in which contestants will play bar games. There was a distinct lack of audience enthusiasm.

"We have no idea when it will air on USA," Bella said.

"Or if," Daly quietly added.

Among the plans Fox did announce Monday, is expanding the empire of celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay. His "MasterChef" keeps rolling along, and Fox announced that Ramsey's series "Next Level Chef" will get the coveted time slot after the Super Bowl next February, which exposes a program to millions of new viewers. Fox will also debut the competition show "Gordon Ramsay's Food Stars" next season.

Fox will also go country with "Monarch," described as a "Texas-sized, multi-generational musical drama about America's first family of country music." Sarandon and musician Adkins are headliners.

Actor Jamie Foxx will be behind the camera for the missing persons drama "Alert." The network will also debut a crime anthology series "Accused" that begins with someone on trial and the audience learns through flashbacks what they've been accused of.

When will the new shows air? Stay tuned.

Turkey objects as Sweden, Finland seek NATO membership

By KARL RITTER Associated Press

STOCKHOLM (AP) — Turkey's president on Monday complicated Sweden and Finland's historic bid to join NATO, saying he cannot allow them to become members of the alliance because of their perceived inaction against exiled Kurdish militants.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan doubled down on comments last week indicating that the two Nordic countries' path to NATO would be anything but smooth. All 30 current NATO countries must agree to open the door to new members.

Erdogan spoke to reporters just hours after Sweden joined Finland in announcing it would seek NATO membership in the wake of Russian's invasion of Ukraine, ending more than 200 years of military nonalignment. He accused the two countries of refusing to extradite "terrorists" wanted by his country.

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"Neither country has an open, clear stance against terrorist organizations," Erdogan said, in an apparent reference to Kurdish militant groups such as the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK.

Swedish officials said they would dispatch a team of diplomats to Ankara to discuss the matter, but Erdogan suggested they were wasting their time.

"Are they coming to try and convince us? Sorry don't wear yourselves out," Erdogan said. "During this process, we cannot say 'yes' to those who impose sanctions on Turkey, on joining NATO, which is a security organization."

Sweden has welcomed hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Middle East in recent decades, including ethnic Kurds from Syria, Iraq and Turkey.

Turkey's objections took many Western officials by surprise and some had the impression Ankara would not let the issue spoil the NATO expansion. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg over the weekend said "Turkey has made it clear that their intention is not to block membership."

In Washington, Swedish Ambassador Karin Olofsdotter was among those who said they were taken aback by Turkey's objections.

"We have a very strong anti-terrorist agenda and a lot of, almost, accusations that are coming out ... are simply not true," she said.

Sweden decided Monday to seek NATO membership a day after the country's governing Social Democratic party endorsed a plan for the country to join the trans-Atlantic alliance and Finland's government announced that it would seek to join NATO.

Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson warned that the Nordic country would be in a "vulnerable position" during the application period and urged her fellow citizens to brace themselves for the Russian response.

"Russia has said that that it will take countermeasures if we join NATO," she said. "We cannot rule out that Sweden will be exposed to, for instance, disinformation and attempts to intimidate and divide us."

Moscow has repeatedly warned Finland, which shares a 1,340-kilometer (830-mile) border with Russia, and Sweden of repercussions should they pursue NATO membership. But Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday seemed to downplay the significance of their move.

Speaking to a Russian-led military alliance of six ex-Soviet states, Putin said Moscow "does not have a problem" with Sweden or Finland applying for NATO membership, but that "the expansion of military infrastructure onto this territory will, of course, give rise to our reaction in response."

Andersson, who leads the center-left Social Democrats, said Sweden would hand in its NATO application jointly with Finland. Flanked by opposition leader Ulf Kristersson, Andersson said her government also was preparing a bill that would allow Sweden to receive military assistance from other nations in case of an attack.

"The Russian leadership thought they could bully Ukraine and deny them and other countries self-determination," Kristersson said. "They thought they could scare Sweden and Finland and drive a wedge between us and our neighbors and allies. They were wrong."

Once a regional military power, Sweden has avoided military alliances since the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Like Finland it remained neutral throughout the Cold War, but formed closer relations with NATO after the 1991 Soviet collapse. They no longer see themselves as neutral after joining the European Union in 1995, but have remained nonaligned militarily until now.

After being firmly against NATO membership for decades, public opinion in both countries shifted following Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine, with record levels of support for joining the alliance. The Swedish and Finnish governments swiftly initiated discussions across political parties about NATO membership and reached out to the U.S., Britain, Germany and other NATO countries for their support.

On Sunday, Andersson's party reversed their long-standing position that Sweden must remain nonaligned, giving NATO membership overwhelming support in Parliament. Only the small Left and Green parties objected when the issue was discussed by lawmakers on Monday.

Left Party leader Nooshi Dadgostar, whose calls for a referendum on the matter were dismissed by the government, said joining NATO would raise tensions in the Baltic Sea region.

"It does not help Ukraine," she said.

Andersson said Sweden would make clear that it doesn't want nuclear weapons or permanent NATO bases on its soil — similar conditions as neighboring Norway and Denmark insisted on when the alliance was formed after World War II.

During a visit to Helsinki on Monday, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said there is "very significant" support in Congress for welcoming Finland and Sweden to the alliance and that he expects ratification before the August recess.

In a joint statement, Nordic NATO members Norway, Denmark and Iceland said they were ready to assist Finland and Sweden "with all necessary means" during the application process.

Buffalo shooting latest example of targeted racial violence

By DEEPTI HAJELA, AARON MORRISON and BRENDAN FARRINGTON Associated Press

Black people going about their daily lives — then dying in a hail of bullets fired by a white man who targeted them because of their skin color.

Substitute a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, with a church in South Carolina, and Malcolm Graham knows the pain and grief the families of those killed Saturday are feeling. He knows their dismay that racial bigotry has torn apart the fabric of their families.

"America's Achilles' heel continues to be ... racism," said Graham, whose sister, Cynthia Graham-Hurd, was among nine parishioners fatally shot by avowed white supremacist Dylann Roof in 2015 during Bible study in Charleston.

"As a country, we need to acknowledge that it exists," Graham said. "There's a lack of acknowledgment that these problems are persistent, are embedded into systems and cost lives."

For many Black Americans, the Buffalo shooting has stirred up the same feelings they faced after Charleston and other attacks: the fear, the vulnerability, the worry that nothing will be done politically or otherwise to prevent the next act of targeted racial violence.

Law enforcement officials said suspected gunman Payton Gendron, 18, drove 200 miles from his hometown of Conklin, New York, to Buffalo after searching out and specifically targeting a predominantly Black neighborhood.

He shot 11 Black people and two white people at the grocery store, authorities said. Ten people died, all of them Black.

A 180-page document, purportedly written by Gendron, gives plans for the attack and makes references to other racist shootings and to Roof. The document also outlines a racist ideology rooted in a belief that the U.S. should belong only to white people. All others, the document said, were "replacers" who should be eliminated by force or terror. The attack was intended to intimidate all non-white, non-Christian people and get them to leave the country, it said.

The idea that those killed at the Tops Friendly Market lost their lives because of the shooter's racism is "sick," said Steve Carlson, 29, who is Black and grew up knowing Katherine Massey, one of the victims.

"It's not right. You don't pick what ethnicity you're born to," Carlson said. "These people were just shopping, they went to go get food for their families."

At State Tabernacle Church of God in Christ, Deacon Heyward Patterson was mourned during services Sunday. Pastor Russell Bell couldn't wrap his mind around the attack and Patterson's death.

"I don't understand what that is, to hate people just because of their color, to hate people because we're different. God made us all different. That's what makes the world go 'round," he said.

But as abhorrent as the shooting was, it was hardly an isolated incident. The history of the United States is filled with white supremacist violence, starting from even before its official origins.

Black people have borne and continue to bear the brunt of much of it, but other groups have also been targeted in attacks because of their race, including Latinos in the 2019 shooting at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, where 22 people were killed.

Gunmen with biases against religion and sexual orientation have also carried out targeted violence: the shootings at a San Diego synagogue in 2019 and a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, in 2016.

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Democratic Florida state Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith, who is gay and of Peruvian descent, immediately had flashbacks to the Pulse nightclub shooting that left 49 victims dead. The shooter targeted gay patrons in what was a largely Latino crowd.

"It's déjà vu all over again in Orlando," said Smith, who represents an Orlando district. "2016 seems like a long time ago, but in 2022 there's a lot more hatred and bigotry out there."

Experiencing violence of any kind is obviously traumatic, but the impact of targeted violence like this has ripples on a broader level.

"To be targeted for these things that you cannot control, it's not only extremely painful emotionally, but it also impacts the way you perceive the world going forward after that," said Michael Edison Hayden, spokesperson for the Southern Poverty Law Center, which advocates for civil rights.

Hate crime laws are on the books in recognition of that reality. The effect of events like these is "you've increased the vulnerability of everyone who looks like the target," said Jeannine Bell, a professor at Indiana University's Maurer School of Law. "This is a different type of crime because it impacts not just the victims, but also the community."

While there's always hand-wringing and dismay after incidents like these, that hasn't translated into a commitment to address the bigotry that underlies them, said Cornell Williams Brooks, a professor at the Harvard Kennedy School and former president and CEO of the NAACP.

He's weary of political leaders' promises to do more about white supremacist threats and gun violence. "Count the number of sympathy cards and flowers, prayers and thoughts that have been extended to the victims of mass shootings, to the victims of racialized violence," he said. "Do we really need (politicians) showing up to our places of worship to help bury our folks and do nothing to stop the carnage?"

In Buffalo on Monday, state Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes, whose district includes the city, demanded a different response after this shooting.

"There are a lot of people in this community who are hurting because they know that 'justice for all' is not specific enough," said Peoples-Stokes, who is Black. "Sometimes people get left out of that justice. This can't happen this time."

Jury sees pics of Heard's swollen face after fight with Depp

By MATTHEW BARAKAT Associated Press

FALLS CHURCH, Va. (AP) — Jurors in Johnny Depp's libel trial against his ex-wife, Amber Heard, saw photos Monday of her with red marks and swelling on her face after their final fight before their divorce, and heard testimony about her expertise in covering up bruises with makeup.

Heard concluded her direct testimony in a Virginia courtroom with a third day that was centered on the final months of her marriage to Depp. His lawyers began their cross-examination later in the afternoon.

The trial is now in its fifth week, and jurors have seen multiple photos of Heard throughout the trial that purport to document the abuse she said she received during her relationship with Depp.

Several of the photos shown Monday, though, had not previously been seen by the jury and showed redness and swelling much more clearly than earlier photos.

Heard said the marks came when Depp threw a phone at her face.

The confrontation in May 2016 prompted Heard to file for divorce two days later. A few days after that, she obtained a temporary restraining order after a courthouse hearing, and was widely photographed leaving the courthouse with a clear red mark on her right cheek.

The final fight has been a key point in the couple's ongoing dispute. Depp is suing Heard in Fairfax County Circuit Court for libel over a December 2018 op-ed she wrote in The Washington Post describing herself as "a public figure representing domestic abuse." His lawyers say he was defamed by the article even though it never mentioned his name.

Depp says he never struck Heard and that she's concocting claims she was abused. Earlier in the trial, jurors heard from police officers who responded to emergency calls during that final fight who said Heard's face looked red from crying but that they saw no visible bruises. Witnesses also testified that they didn't

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see bruises on Heard's face in the immediate days after the fight.

Heard, in her testimony Monday, said she didn't cooperate with officers who responded to the couple's penthouse, and said her face-to-face interactions with officers were very limited.

She also discussed her makeup routine, using a color correction wheel that she called her "bruise kit" to cover up marks on her face. She said she learned over the years to use green shades in the first day of a bruise to cover up redness, and switch more to orange shades as the bruise turned blue and purple.

"I'm not going to walk around L.A. with bruises on my face," she said.

On cross-examination, Depp lawyer Camille Vasquez questioned Heard about multiple photos of her that appeared not to show bruises even they were taken within days of alleged abuse incidents. Heard said she used makeup to cover bruises and ice to reduce swelling.

"You should see what it looked like under the makeup," she said.

Vasquez also questioned Heard about her \$7 million divorce settlement from Depp. Heard pledged to donate the full amount to charity but has so far only donated a portion of it. She testified she's been unable to fulfill her pledge yet because Depp sued her for \$50 million. But on cross-examination she acknowledged that she had received the full \$7 million from Depp months before he filed the lawsuit.

In her direct testimony, Heard testified she did not want to publicly expose Depp as an abuser in her court proceedings, but had to go to the courthouse to provide testimony to obtain the restraining order, and she was taken aback when she left the courthouse surrounded by paparazzi.

"I just wanted to change my locks," she said about why she went to court to get the restraining order. "I just wanted to get a good night's sleep."

During Monday's testimony, Heard also strongly denied an accusation from Depp that she left human fecal matter in the couple's bed after a fight. Heard said it was the couple's teacup Yorkshire terrier that messed the bed and that it had a history of bowel problems ever since it had accidentally ingested Depp's marijuana.

"Absolutely not," she said about the alleged poop prank. "I don't think that's funny. I don't know what grown woman does. I was not in a pranking mood."

Heard said, though, that Depp became obsessed with the idea that someone had pooped in his bed. She said it was all he wanted to talk about during that final fight May 21, 2016, even though Depp's mother had just died and the couple hadn't spoken in a month.

The poop allegation is one of several that Depp's online fans have particularly latched onto in their social media critiques of Heard.

Heard also talked about the op-ed piece itself, saying staffers with the American Civil Liberties Union — for whom she had started work as an ambassador — wrote the first draft. She said she was happy to lend her voice to the debate over domestic violence, and wasn't intending to reference Depp.

"It's not about Johnny," she said. "The only one who thought it was about Johnny was Johnny. It was about me, and my life after Johnny."

Heard concluded her testimony by saying that accusations she receives on a daily basis from Depp supporters that she's lying about the abuse are "torture."

"I want to move on with my life," she said. "I want Johnny to move on. I want him to leave me alone."

US deaths from COVID hit 1 million, less than 2 1/2 years in

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

The U.S. death toll from COVID-19 hit 1 million on Monday, a once-unimaginable figure that only hints at the multitudes of loved ones and friends staggered by grief and frustration.

The confirmed number of dead is equivalent to a 9/11 attack every day for 336 days. It is roughly equal to how many Americans died in the Civil War and World War II combined. It's as if Boston and Pittsburgh were wiped out.

"It is hard to imagine a million people plucked from this earth," said Jennifer Nuzzo, who leads a new pandemic center at the Brown University School of Public Health in Providence, Rhode Island. "It's still happening and we are letting it happen."

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Some of those left behind say they cannot return to normal. They replay their loved ones' voicemail messages. Or watch old videos to see them dance. When other people say they are done with the virus, they bristle with anger or ache in silence.

"Normal." I hate that word," said Julie Wallace, 55, of Elyria, Ohio, who lost her husband to COVID-19 in 2020. "All of us never get to go back to normal."

Three out of every four deaths were people 65 and older. More men died than women. White people made up most of the deaths overall. But Black, Hispanic and Native American people have been roughly twice as likely to die from COVID-19 as their white counterparts.

Most deaths happened in urban areas, but rural places — where opposition to masks and vaccinations tends to run high — paid a heavy price at times.

The death toll less than 2 1/2 years into the outbreak is based on death certificate data compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics. But the real number of lives lost to COVID-19, either directly or indirectly, as a result the disruption of the health care system in the world's richest country, is believed to be far higher.

The U.S. has the highest reported COVID-19 death toll of any country, though health experts have long suspected that the real number of deaths in places such as India, Brazil and Russia is higher than the official figures.

The milestone comes more than three months after the U.S. reached 900,000 dead. The pace has slowed since a harrowing winter surge fueled by the omicron variant.

The U.S. is averaging about 300 COVID-19 deaths per day, compared with a peak of about 3,400 a day in January 2021. New cases are on the rise again, climbing more than 60% in the past two weeks to an average of about 86,000 a day — still well below the all-time high of over 800,000, reached when the omicron variant was raging during the winter.

The largest bell at Washington National Cathedral in the nation's capital tolled 1,000 times a week ago, once for every 1,000 deaths. President Joe Biden on Thursday ordered flags lowered to half-staff and called each life "an irreplaceable loss."

"As a nation, we must not grow numb to such sorrow," he said in a statement. "To heal, we must remember."

More than half the deaths occurred since vaccines became available in December of 2020. Two-thirds of Americans are fully vaccinated, and nearly half of them have had at least one booster dose. But demand for the vaccine has plummeted, and the campaign to put shots in arms has been plagued by misinformation, distrust and political polarization.

Unvaccinated people have a 10 times greater risk of dying of COVID-19 than the fully vaccinated, according to the CDC.

"To me, that is what is just so particularly heartbreaking," Nuzzo said. Vaccines are safe and greatly reduce the likelihood of severe illness, she said. They "largely take the possibility of death off the table."

Angelina Proia, 36, of New York, lost her father to COVID-19 in April 2020. She runs a support group for grieving families on Facebook and has seen it divided over vaccinations. She has booted people from the group for spreading misinformation.

"I don't want to hear conspiracy theories. I don't want to hear anti-science," said Proia, who wishes her father could have been vaccinated.

Sara Atkins, 42, of Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, channels her grief into fighting for global vaccination and better access to health care to honor her father, Andy Rotman-Zaid, who died of COVID-19 in December 2020.

"My father gave me marching orders to end it and make sure it doesn't happen again," Atkins said of the pandemic. "He told me, 'Politicize the hell out of my death if I die of this.'"

Julie Wallace and her husband, Lewis Dunlap, had cellphone numbers one digit apart. She continues paying to keep his number. She calls it just to hear his voice.

"It's just so important to hear that sometimes," she said. "It gives you a little bit of reassurance while also tearing your heart out."

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Some have offered solace in poetry. In Philadelphia, poet and social worker Trapeta Mayson, created a 24-hour poetry hotline called Healing Verse. Traffic to the Academy of American Poets' poets.org website rose during the pandemic.

Brian Sonia-Wallace, poet laureate of West Hollywood, California, has traveled the country writing poems for hire. He imagines a memorial of a million poems, written by people who don't normally write poetry. They would talk to those who are grieving and listen for points of connection.

"What we need as a nation is empathy," said Tanya Alves, 35, of Weston, Florida, who lost her 24-year-old sister to COVID-19 in October. "Over two years into the pandemic, with all the cases and lives lost, we should be more compassionate and respectful when talking about COVID. Thousands of families changed forever. This virus is not just a cold."

In Buffalo, Biden to confront the racism he's vowed to fight

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Joe Biden talks about his decision to run against President Donald Trump in 2020, the story always starts with Charlottesville. He says it was the men with torches shouting bigoted slogans that drove him to join what he calls the "battle for the soul of America."

Now Biden is facing the latest deadly manifestation of hatred after a white supremacist targeted Black people with an assault rifle at a supermarket in Buffalo, the most lethal racist attack since he took office.

The president and first lady Jill Biden are to visit the city on Tuesday.

Biden was the first president to specifically address white supremacy in an inaugural speech, calling it "domestic terrorism that we must confront." However, such beliefs remain an entrenched threat at a time when his administration has been preoccupied with crises involving the pandemic, inflation and the war in Ukraine.

"It's important for him to show up for the families and the community and express his condolences," said Derrick Johnson, the president of the NAACP. "But we're more concerned with preventing this from happening in the future."

It's unclear how Biden will try to do that. Proposals for new gun restrictions have routinely been blocked by Republicans, and the racism that was spouted in Charlottesville, Virginia, appears to have only spread in the five years since.

The White House said the president and first lady will "grieve with the community that lost ten lives in a senseless and horrific mass shooting." Three more people were wounded. Nearly all of the victims were Black.

Biden was briefed about the shooting by his homeland security adviser, Liz Sherwood-Randall, before he attended church services on Saturday near his family home in Wilmington, Delaware, according to the White House. She called again later to tell him that law enforcement had concluded the attack was racially motivated.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, told a Buffalo radio station that she invited Biden to the city.

"I said, 'Mr. President, it would be so powerful if you came here,'" Hochul said. "This community is in such pain, and to see the president of the United States show them the attention that Buffalo doesn't always get."

On Monday, Biden paid particular tribute to one of the victims, retired police officer Aaron Salter, who was working as a security guard at the store.

He said Salter "gave his life trying to save others" by opening fire at the gunman, only to be killed himself.

Payton Gendron, 18, was arrested at the supermarket and charged with murder. He has pleaded not guilty.

Before the shooting, Gendron is reported to have posted online a screed overflowing with racism and anti-Semitism. The writer of the document described himself as a supporter of Dylan Roof, who killed nine Black parishioners at a church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015, and Brenton Tarrant, who targeted mosques in New Zealand in 2019.

Buffalo Police Commissioner Joseph Gramaglia said Gendron is "someone who has hate in their heart,

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soul and mind," and he called the attack on the store "an absolute racist hate crime."

So far investigators are looking at Gendron's connection to what's known as the "great replacement" theory, which baselessly claims white people are being intentionally overrun by other races through immigration or higher birth rates.

The racist ideology is often interwoven with anti-Semitism, with Jews identified as the culprits. During the 2017 "Unite the Right" march in Charlottesville, the white supremacists chanted "Jews will not replace us."

In the years since, replacement theory has moved from the online fringe to mainstream right-wing politics. Tucker Carlson, the prominent Fox News host, accuses Democrats of orchestrating mass migration to consolidate their power.

"The country is being stolen from American citizens," he said Aug. 23, 2021.

He repeated the same theme a month later, saying that "this policy is called the great replacement, the replacement of legacy Americans with more obedient people from faraway countries."

Carlson's show routinely receives the highest ratings in cable news.

His commentary reflects how this conspiratorial view of immigration has spread through the Republican Party ahead of this year's midterm elections, which will determine control of Congress.

Facebook advertisements posted last year by the campaign committee of Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y., said Democrats want a "PERMANENT ELECTION INSURRECTION" by granting amnesty to illegal immigrants. The plan would "overthrow our current electorate and create a permanent liberal majority in Washington."

Alex DeGrasse, a senior advisor to Stefanik's campaign, said Monday she "has never advocated for any racist position or made a racist statement." He criticized "sickening and false reporting" about her advertisements.

Stefanik is the third-ranking leader of the House Republican caucus, replacing Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., who angered the party with her denunciations of Trump after the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol.

Cheney, in a tweet on Monday, said the caucus' leadership "has enabled white nationalism, white supremacy, and anti-Semitism. History has taught us that what begins with words ends in far worse."

Replacement theory rhetoric has also rippled through Republican primary campaigns.

"The Democrats want open borders so they can bring in and amnesty tens of millions of illegal aliens — that's their electoral strategy," Blake Masters, who's running in the Republican Senate primary in Arizona, wrote on Twitter hours after the Buffalo shooting. "Not on my watch."

A spokesperson for Masters did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

A third of U.S. adults believe there is "a group of people in this country who are trying to replace native-born Americans with immigrants who agree with their political views," according to a poll conducted in December by The Associated Press and the NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Although Biden has not spoken directly about replacement theory, his warnings about racism remain a fixture of his public speeches.

Three days before the Buffalo shooting, at a Democratic fundraiser in Chicago, Biden said, "I really do think we're still in the battle for the soul of America."

Biden said he hadn't planned to run for president in 2020 — he had already fallen short in two previous campaigns, served as vice president and then stepped aside as Hillary Clinton consolidated support for the 2016 race — and was content to spend some time as a professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

But he said he was disgusted "when those folks came marching out of the fields in Charlottesville, Virginia, carrying torches" and repeating the "same anti-Semitic bile chanted in the streets of everywhere from Nuremberg to Berlin in the early '30s."

And he recalled how Trump responded to questions about the rally, which resulted in the death of Heather Heyer, a young woman who was there to protest the white supremacists.

"He said there are very good people on both sides," Biden said.

He added, "We can't let this happen, guys."

Johnson, the NAACP president, said the country needs to "finally chart a course so we can as a nation begin to address domestic terrorism as we would foreign terrorism — as aggressively as possible."

He added, "White supremacy and democracy cannot coexist."

Reversing Trump, Biden acts to deploy US troops to Somalia

By BEN FOX and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden signed an order Monday to redeploy hundreds of U.S. troops to Somalia to counter the Islamic extremist rebel group al-Shabab, an effort that American military leaders said had been hampered by President Donald Trump's late-term decision to withdraw forces from the country.

U.S. troops will be repositioned from elsewhere in Africa to train and provide other support to Somali forces in their fight against al-Shabab, which is considered the largest and wealthiest affiliate of the al-Qaida extremist organization.

"Our forces are not now, nor will they be, directly engaged in combat operations," said Pentagon press secretary John Kirby. "The purpose here is to enable a more effective fight against al-Shabab by local forces."

It's a reminder that the U.S. remains engaged in the long fight against Islamic extremists around the world, even if the effort has been eclipsed by the war in Ukraine and other matters.

The decision to station forces again in Somalia, rather than rotate them in and out, is intended "to maximize the safety and effectiveness of our forces and enable them to provide more efficient support to our partners," National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said in announcing the redeployment.

U.S. troops in Somalia will total "under 500" according to a senior Biden administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity to brief journalists on the decision.

In addition to training Somali forces, American troops will also provide security to personnel from the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development as they work with the government to emerge from years of turmoil, the official said.

Trump abruptly ordered the withdrawal of approximately 700 troops from Somalia at the end of his term in January 2021, an extension of a broader policy of seeking to pull the U.S. out of what he derisively referred to as "endless wars" around the world.

But military leaders said that came at a cost, wasting time, money and momentum as troops had to rotate in and out of the country.

Gen. Stephen Townsend, head of U.S. Africa Command, told Congress in March that the rotations, which he called "commuting to work," were not efficient or effective and put American troops at greater risk.

"In my view, we are marching in place at best. We may be backsliding," Townsend told the Senate Armed Forces Committee.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin requested the deployment "to reestablish a persistent U.S. military presence in Somalia to enable a more effective fight against al-Shabaab, which has increased in strength and poses a heightened threat," said an administration official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the plan before the White House announcement.

Biden's decision to sign the order was first reported by The New York Times, which also said the president had approved a Pentagon request for standing authority to target about a dozen suspected leaders of al-Shabab.

The group has killed more than a dozen Americans in East Africa, including three in a January 2020 attack on a base used by U.S. counterterrorism forces in Kenya. Later that year, the U.S. charged a Kenyan who had been taking flight lessons in the Philippines with planning a 9/11-style hijacking attack on behalf of al-Shabab.

The rebel group has made territorial gains against Somalia's federal government in recent months, reversing the gains of African Union peacekeepers who once had pushed the militants into remote areas of the country.

Word of the deployment decision came after Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who served as Somalia's president between 2012 and 2017, was announced on Sunday as the winner of a protracted election.

Somalia began to fall apart in 1991 when warlords ousted dictator Siad Barre and then turned on each other. Years of conflict and al-Shabab attacks, along with famine, have shattered the country which has a

long, strategic coastline by the Indian Ocean.

American soldiers deployed there in 1992 to stave off a national famine on a peacekeeping mission that lasted until their 1994 withdrawal — about five months after the humiliating “Black Hawk Down” debacle in late 1993 when Somali militiamen shot down two U.S. helicopters; 18 servicemen were killed in the crash and subsequent rescue attempt.

Supreme Court rules for Sen. Cruz in campaign finance case

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court’s conservative majority sided Monday with Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas and struck down a provision of federal campaign finance law, a ruling that a dissenting justice said runs the risk of causing “further disrepute” to American politics.

The court, by a 6-3 vote, said the provision Cruz challenged limiting the repayment of personal loans from candidates to their campaigns violates the Constitution. The decision comes just as campaigning for the 2022 midterm elections is intensifying.

Chief Justice John Roberts wrote for the majority that the provision “burdens core political speech without proper justification.”

The Biden administration had defended it as an anti-corruption measure, but Roberts wrote the government had not been able to show that the provision “furthers a permissible anticorruption goal, rather than the impermissible objective of simply limiting the amount of money in politics.”

Justice Elena Kagan disagreed, writing that for two decades the provision checked “crooked exchanges.” Kagan said in a dissent for herself and the court’s two other liberals that the majority, in striking down the provision, “greenlights all the sordid bargains Congress thought right to stop.” She said the decision “can only bring this country’s political system into further disrepute.”

In an emailed statement, Cruz’s attorney, Charles Cooper, said the ruling: “is a victory for the First Amendment’s guarantee of freedom of speech in the political process.”

The case involved a section of the 2002 Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, commonly referred to as the McCain-Feingold campaign-finance law. The provision said that if a candidate lends his or her campaign money before an election, the campaign cannot repay the candidate more than \$250,000 using money raised after Election Day. The provision said loans could still be repaid with money raised before the election.

Cruz, who has served in the Senate since 2013 and ran unsuccessfully for president in 2016, loaned his campaign \$260,000 the day before the 2018 general election for the purpose of challenging the law.

Cruz’s spokesman, Steve Guest, said in an emailed statement that the senator was “gratified” by the decision, which Guest said would “help invigorate our democratic process by making it easier for challengers to take on and defeat career politicians.”

The decision is the latest since Roberts became chief justice in 2005 in which conservatives have struck down congressionally enacted limits on raising and spending money to influence elections. That includes the 2010 Citizens United decision, which opened the door to unlimited independent spending in federal elections.

Kagan, in her dissent, described one result now that the most recent provision has been struck down. A candidate could lend his or her campaign \$500,000 and, after winning, use donor money to pay that back in full, she said. The grateful politician might then respond to donors’ money with “favorable legislation, maybe prized appointments, maybe lucrative contracts,” she wrote. “The politician is happy; the donors are happy. The only loser is the public. It inevitably suffers from government corruption.”

At another point she said: “It takes no political genius to see the heightened risk of corruption — the danger of ‘I’ll make you richer and you’ll make me richer’ arrangements between donors and officeholders.”

Roberts, however, noted in his majority opinion that individual contributions to candidates for federal office, including those made after the candidate has won the election, are capped at \$2,900 per election.

“The dissent’s dire predictions about the impact of today’s decision elide the fact that the contributions at issue remain subject to these requirements,” he wrote. He pointed out that most states “do not impose

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a limit on the use of post-election contributions to repay candidate loans.”

Cruz had argued that the provision made candidates think twice about lending money because it substantially increased the risk that any candidate loan will never be fully repaid. A lower court had agreed the provision was unconstitutional.

The case may be most directly important to candidates for federal office who want to make large loans to their campaigns. But the administration, which declined a request for comment following the ruling, has also said that in the past the great majority of candidate loans were for less than \$250,000 and therefore the provision Cruz challenged did not apply.

The government has said that in the five election cycles before 2020, candidates for Senate made 588 loans to their campaigns, about 80% of them under \$250,000. Candidates for the House of Representatives made 3,444 loans, nearly 90 percent under \$250,000.

The case is Federal Election Commission v. Ted Cruz for Senate, 21-12.

New this week: Harry Styles, 'Angelyne' and 'The Valet'

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's a collection curated by The Associated Press' entertainment journalists of what's arriving on TV, streaming services and music platforms this week.

MOVIES

— The gripping documentary “Hold Your Fire,” directed by Stefan Forbes, chronicles a 1973 Brooklyn robbery that became a turning point in hostage negotiation tactics and de-escalation. The scene, vividly depicted in archival and contemporaneous news footage, captures a classic New York much like the one found in Sidney Lumet’s “Dog Day Afternoon.” When four Black men attempted to rob a sporting good store, they were trapped by police and a 47-hour standoff, with hostages and a killed policeman, ensued. “Hold Your Fire,” which is debuting Friday in theaters and on digital rental, captures how one former traffic cop, with a degree in psychology, flipped an often fatal script and used communication, not violence, to settle a crisis and remake policing.

— You could say that the cartoon-live action reboot “Chip ‘n Dale: Rescue Rangers” is an unlikely project to gather some top “Saturday Night Live” alums. Yet here is a “Chip ‘n Dale” with John Mulaney voicing Chip, Andy Samberg as Dale and Lonely Island auteur Akiva Schaffer directing the new Disney+ release, streaming Friday. In this “Chip ‘n Dale,” the title chipmunks are living in modern-day Los Angeles and long removed from the heyday of their TV series. Chip has resorted to suburban domesticity and Dale is living off his long-gone fame. With KiKi Layne, Will Arnett, Eric Bana and Keegan-Michael Key.

— Fans of the best picture-winning “CODA” may want to check out Hulu’s “The Valet,” starring Eugenio Derbez as a valet attendant hired to act as though he’s dating a movie star (Samara Weaving) to square rumors of an affair with a Los Angeles real estate mogul (Max Greenfield). The film, streaming Friday, is a rom-com platform for the versatile Mexican star Derbez, who memorably played the music teacher in “CODA.”

— AP Film Writer Jake Coyle

MUSIC

— Harries, rejoice! Harry Styles’ third studio album, “Harry’s House,” is on the way. The collection, due out Friday, is the follow-up to his fine album “Fine Line” from 2019. Styles is coming off a two-weekend headlining stint at Coachella, where he was joined by Shania Twain and Lizzo. The first single from the new album is “As It Was,” a melancholy ‘80s-based low burner that spent three weeks atop the Billboard Hot 100 in April. Styles told BBC Radio One that the song is about “embracing change, losing oneself, finding oneself, a shift in perspective.” Some of the new song titles are “Music For a Sushi Restaurant,” “Late Night Talking,” “Grapejuice,” “Daydreaming,” “Keep Driving,” “Satellite,” “Boyfriends” and “Love of My Life.”

— The Who icon Pete Dinklage opens up in a new Audible Original, taking listeners through the period between the 1978 death of band drummer Keith Moon and the 2002 loss of bassist John Entwistle. “Pete Dinklage: Somebody Saved Me” mixes his memories and songs like “Let My Love Open the Door,” “Slit

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Skirts," "You Better You Bet" and "Eminence Front." Townshend joins other iconic musicians telling their stories on Audible, including Eddie Vedder, Billie Joe Armstrong, Tom Morello, James Taylor, Sheryl Crow, Yo-Yo Ma and Gary Clark Jr.

— Two vital American musicians met and jammed together in the summer of 2011 when legendary singer Mavis Staples visited her good friend Levon Helm of The Band in Woodstock, New York. Staples and her band spent five or six days with Helm and his band, playing music and telling stories. It was the last time they would meet; Helm died in 2012. A record of their last meeting together is finally being released Friday — "Carry Me Home." The setlist mixes vintage gospel and soul with timeless folk and blues, including "This Is My Country" by Curtis Mayfield and "The Weight" by Robbie Robertson.

— AP Entertainment Writer Mark Kennedy

TELEVISION

— "Lionel Richie: The Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song" honors the prolific pop star whose hits include "All Night Long," "Endless Love" and "Lady." Anthony Anderson hosts the ceremony that was taped in Washington and includes performances by Gloria Estefan, Boyz II Men, Luke Bryan, Andra Day, Yolanda Adams and Chris Stapleton. Estefan, Stevie Wonder and Paul McCartney are among previous recipients of the award. Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden called Richie an inspiring entertainer who helped "strengthen our global connections." The PBS special airs Tuesday.

— Angelyne didn't have or need the internet to make her a Los Angeles celebrity — billboards scattered around town starting in the 1980s did the trick. Her seductive image brought her surprisingly enduring fame — and now a show based, sort of, on her story. Peacock's limited series "Angelyne," starring Emmy Rossum and debuting Thursday, is billed not as a traditional biography but, as showrunner Allison Miller described it, a "magical story... about becoming the person you were meant to be" and about L.A. and the dreamers it attracts. Martin Freeman, Alex Karpovsky and Hamish Linklater are in the cast.

— Adam Conover, who used comedy to apply the power of critical thinking in "Adam Ruins Everything," takes a similar approach to the workings of government in "The G Word With Adam Conover," debuting Thursday on Netflix. In what's described as a "hybrid comedy-documentary series," Conover explores how crucial — both for good and not-so-good — government is to our lives, from weather to food to money and more. The show is based on "The Fifth Risk: Undoing Democracy" by Michael Lewis ("The Big Short") and includes a cameo by former President Barack Obama that cements his comedy chops.

States hands off when it comes to NCAA, athlete compensation

By JIM VERTUNO AP Sports Writer

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The NCAA waited nearly a year to issue a warning that there are still rules to follow now that college athletes can earn money off their fame, sparking speculation that a crackdown could be coming for schools and boosters that break them.

But the NCAA isn't the only enforcement organization that stayed quiet as millions of dollars started flying around college athletes.

Nearly half the states, 24 in all, have laws regarding athlete compensation, all passed since 2019. Several specifically ban the sort of pay-for-play and recruiting enticement deals the NCAA still outlaws and critics of the new system worry about.

Yet those states have shown no appetite to question or investigate the schools, the contracts or the third-party groups orchestrating them. Even if they did, there is little legal framework for how they would do it.

Texas and Florida, two states with major college football and basketball programs, ban pay-for-play contracts and using deals to lure recruits to campus. But neither state set up mechanisms to investigate or punish a school, organization or agent caught breaking the rules.

"A lot of people are referencing the NCAA not taking action, but the same can be said about states," said Darren Heitner, an attorney who helped craft the Florida law.

The unenforced state bans on pay-for-play and recruiting deals calmed lawmakers who worried that college sports they love were changing, said Heitner, an advocate for athletes' rights to earn money. But

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there has been no indication a state attorney general or local prosecutor will go after a big university, coach and wealthy donors if the team is bringing in top players and winning.

Alabama was one state that did have specific punishment in its law: Anyone providing compensation to an athlete that caused them to lose eligibility faced a potential Class C felony, which carried up to 10 years in prison.

But Alabama lawmakers repealed the state's entire college athlete compensation law earlier this year. The law's original author called for the repeal because he worried it left Alabama schools at a recruiting disadvantage compared with rival schools in other states that didn't have similar restrictions.

Arkansas gives some legal power to the athletes in that state. They can sue their agent or another third party that offers or sets up a deal later deemed improper and they are declared ineligible to play.

Half the states don't have athlete compensation laws. Schools there have been left to navigate the general parameters the NCAA provided in June 2021 on the eve of the NIL era and to wait to see what would be enforced. Pay-for-play and "improper inducements" were still off the table, the NCAA said then, but there were few details and NIL deals were struck by the hundreds in the weeks that followed.

The NCAA finally stepped back into its enforcement role with new guidance that sought to clarify the types of contracts and booster involvement that should be considered improper.

Few expect a massive crackdown and the Division I Board of Governors noted that its focus was on the future. There's simply too many athletes and too many contracts for NCAA enforcement to look at them all.

"The enforcement is going to fall on the NCAA, (but) there's no way they'll try to look at thousands of deals," said Mit Winter, a sports law attorney in Kansas City, Missouri.

The NCAA will more likely look at some of the highly publicized deals set up through prominent business owners and third-party collectives that have popped up around dozens of schools to pool millions of dollars and connect athletes with business deals.

"It's positioned itself where it has no choice but to try to make an example out of a booster or a collective," Heitner said. "Otherwise, what was the point? ... If it doesn't, it's powerless and obsolete. It still has that problem that it knows it is going to be sued."

NCAA officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

At Texas, the nonprofit Horns With Heart raised eyebrows when it announced just before the December football national signing day that it would offer all Longhorns scholarship offensive linemen \$50,000 NIL deals to support charities. A few days later, Texas signed one of the top recruiting classes in the country with a bumper crop of blue-chip offensive linemen.

Horns With Heart co-founder Rob Blair was unconcerned by the warning from the NCAA, saying the nonprofit has played by the rules since it launched.

"We realized at the beginning of the NIL era that this Wild West attitude would eventually lead us to a moment like this, that is why we set out to be different," Blair said in an email. "We have gone above and beyond to ensure we not only follow the letter of the law of NIL regulation, but we feel we also represent the spirit of the NIL laws as they were originally written."

Aside from NCAA enforcement staff, university compliance directors — long the watchdogs over athletes and their eligibility — are trying to navigate a shifting landscape with murky rules.

Lyla Clerry, Iowa's senior associate athletics director for compliance, welcomed the NCAA's renewed guidance on athlete endorsement contracts if it means they will be enforced.

"Honestly, I don't know that I have a lot of faith that I'm going to see that happening," Clerry said, noting the last year has been "frustrating" for compliance officials.

"You don't really know, well, what should we be enforcing, because what is the NCAA going to enforce? So we can't constantly be beating our heads trying to enforce things that nationally aren't getting enforced," Clerry said. "I don't know if I would say it's operating blindly, but we're definitely in the dark."

2022 midterms: What to watch as 5 states hold primaries

By MARC LEVY and GARY D. ROBERTSON Associated Press

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HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Former President Donald Trump's winning streak in U.S. Senate primaries is on the line Tuesday as voters in five states cast their ballots in midterm elections.

Trump made bold endorsements in backing celebrity heart surgeon Mehmet Oz in Pennsylvania and U.S. Rep. Ted Budd in North Carolina. The once little-known Budd is now in a strong position to win the Republican nomination, but Oz is locked in a tight primary against a former hedge fund CEO and a community activist. The primaries follow a resounding win in Ohio's May 3 contest by Trump's Senate candidate, JD Vance.

On the Democratic side, Pennsylvania Senate candidate John Fetterman revealed Sunday that he had suffered a stroke but was on his way to a "full recovery."

Pennsylvania, Oregon and Idaho are holding primaries for governor on Tuesday. In Idaho, Republican Brad Little is fighting back a challenge from his lieutenant governor, a Trump-backed conservative who issued executive orders banning mask mandates during the height of the pandemic when Little was out of state on business.

In Congress, U.S. Rep. Madison Cawthorn is trying to survive a Republican primary in North Carolina after a turbulent first term in office.

What to watch in Tuesday's primaries in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Kentucky, Idaho and Oregon:
PENNSYLVANIA

The race for retiring Republican U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey's seat has been dominated by a huge primary field that has been particularly contested on the GOP side.

But on Sunday, the focus was on the Democrats as Fetterman announced he was recovering from a stroke. The 52-year-old said he went to the hospital on Friday after not feeling well and would remain for a while for observation. He vowed to press forward despite the health setback, saying, "Our campaign isn't slowing down one bit, and we are still on track to win this primary on Tuesday."

Fetterman has led in polls and fundraising in a four-person field that includes U.S. Rep. Conor Lamb and state Rep. Malcolm Kenyatta.

For Republicans, the race looked for much of the campaign like a two-man contest between the Trump-endorsed Oz, best known as the host of daytime TV's "The Dr. Oz Show, and former hedge fund CEO David McCormick.

But several prominent conservative groups have gotten involved in the race's final days, backing lesser-known conservative activist Kathy Barnette as an alternative. A recent Fox News poll shows she is surging, just trailing Oz and McCormick.

In the governor's race, some Republicans are wringing their hands over the prospect that a far-right candidate, state Sen. Doug Mastriano, could emerge as the winner in the crowded field. They fear Mastriano, who has promoted Trump's lies of widespread election fraud in the 2020 election, is unelectable in November and likely to squander an opportunity to replace Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf, who is prevented by term limit laws from running again.

On the Democratic side, the state's two-term attorney general, Josh Shapiro, is unchallenged in his gubernatorial bid.

NORTH CAROLINA

Trump is trying to sway races for U.S. Senate and House in a state he won twice, but narrowly.

Trump endorsed Budd for the Senate seat being vacated by retiring Republican Richard Burr, surprising many at last year's state GOP convention. Budd's top competitors in the 11-way primary are former U.S. Rep. Mark Walker, who had actively sought Trump's support, and former Gov. Pat McCrory, who is considered a moderate in the race but is best known nationally for signing a "bathroom bill" targeting transgender people in 2016 that cost the state billions.

On the Democratic side, Cheri Beasley, the former chief justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court, has appeared to clear her 11-person field of significant rivals. She would be North Carolina's first Black U.S. senator if she wins in November.

In congressional races, Trump's endorsement of Cawthorn in the 11th District didn't stop establishment

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figures from opposing the 26-year-old first-term congressman.

Unforced political and personal errors by Cawthorn — a speaker at the “Stop the Steal” rally before the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol — have made him vulnerable in an eight-candidate GOP primary. U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis has endorsed state legislator Chuck Edwards in the race.

Trump, in a post on his social media site Truth Social overnight Monday, urged voters to give Cawthorn “a second chance,” acknowledging the candidate had recently made some “foolish mistakes.”

In two Democratic-leaning districts, Democrats are holding robust primaries for the nominations to succeed the retiring Rep. David Price in the 4th District and Rep. G.K. Butterfield in the 1st District. Former “American Idol” star Clay Aiken is among the Democratic candidates running for Price’s seat.

In the open 13th District, considered a toss-up in November, the Republican field includes Bo Hines, a former college football player endorsed by Trump.

Tuesday’s primary may not be the final word for would-be nominees: First-place candidates must get more than 30% of the vote to avoid a July 26 runoff.

KENTUCKY

U.S. Rep. John Yarmuth, the chair of the House Budget Committee and the only Democrat in Kentucky’s congressional delegation, is retiring, opening up his seat for the first time in 16 years.

On the Democratic side, state Sen. Morgan McGarvey and state Rep. Attica Scott are playing up their progressive credentials in the Louisville-area 3rd District. Despite their underdog status, several Republicans are also running for the seat, which Yarmuth won in 2006 by ousting a veteran GOP congresswoman.

The Louisville mayor’s race is also getting outside interest this year after someone fired on one of the candidates while he was in his campaign office. Democrat Craig Greenberg escaped with a bullet hole in his sweater in the Feb. 14 shooting, and a local social justice activist was charged with attempted murder.

Greenberg is one of eight candidates running in the Democratic primary. A Republican hasn’t held the mayor’s office in Kentucky’s largest city in several decades.

OREGON

In liberal Oregon, the primary for governor is shaping up as a test between the moderate and progressive wings of the Democratic Party at a time of widespread frustration in the state over the COVID-19 pandemic, the homeless crisis, a lack of affordable housing and growing gun violence.

The two leading Democratic candidates are Tina Kotek, a staunch liberal and former speaker of the state House, versus Tobias Read, the state treasurer who has positioned himself as a moderate.

In the Democratic-leaning 5th Congressional District, U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader — a moderate endorsed by President Joe Biden — is trying to fight off a primary challenge from progressive Jamie McLeod-Skinner.

The state’s new 6th District has drawn national buzz as one of the most expensive Democratic congressional primaries this year. It has attracted 16 candidates, including Democratic newcomer Carrick Flynn, who is backed by a cryptocurrency kingpin.

In the Democratic-leaning 4th District, eight Democrats are vying for the nomination to replace U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, who is retiring after 35 years in office.

IDAHO

Little, the Republican governor, is trying to survive a primary challenge from his lieutenant governor, Janice McGeachin, a far-right conservative who has been backed by Trump.

The relationship between Little and McGeachin has been fraught. On two occasions when Little went out of state last year, McGeachin claimed to be in charge and issued executive orders to block COVID-19 mandates. Little, who had never tried to implement any pandemic-related mandates, rescinded both orders when he returned.

In February, McGeachin delivered a taped speech at a white nationalist gathering in Florida. She later said that she was taking an opportunity to speak about Trump’s “America First” agenda and that the “media wants us to play a guilt-by-association game.”

The establishment and far-right factions of the Republican Party are also vying for control in other races in the state.

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In the attorney general's race, five-term incumbent Lawrence Wasden is facing a primary challenge from former U.S. Rep. Raul Labrador, a tea party favorite. In the secretary of state's race, establishment-backed Phil McGrane is going up against state Sen. Mary Souza and far-right state Rep. Dorothy Moon, both of whom have spread the lie that Trump won the 2020 election.

In US, states struggle to replace fossil fuel tax revenue

By MORGAN LEE and MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — Government budgets are booming in New Mexico: Teacher salaries are up, residents can go to an in-state college tuition-free, moms will get medical care for a year after childbirth, and criminal justice initiatives are being funded to reduce urban violence.

The reason behind the spending spree — oil. New Mexico is the No. 2 crude oil producer among U.S. states and the top recipient of U.S. disbursements for fossil fuel production on federal land. But a budget flush with petroleum cash has a side effect: It also puts the spotlight on how difficult it is to turn state rhetoric on tackling climate change into reality.

State governments in the nation's top regions for producing oil, natural gas and coal have by far the highest per-capita reliance on fossil fuels — led by Wyoming, North Dakota, Alaska and New Mexico. The revenue bankrolls essential public services, from highway maintenance to prisons. In Carlsbad, New Mexico, oil infrastructure property taxes are underwriting a high school performing arts center, expanded sports facilities and elementary school renovations.

None of that would be possible without oil revenue, said schools superintendent Gerry Washburn.

"We can't slow down in that area and what we do to fund schools until we have a legitimate replacement" for oil and natural gas income, he said. "Whether you're in the middle of the oil patch or in an area with no oil and gas drilling going on, those policies are going to impact revenue in every school district in the state."

Federal, state and local governments receive an estimated \$138 billion a year from the fossil fuel industry, according to a study from the Washington-based nonpartisan economics group Resources for the Future, which does not advocate on energy policies. That's equivalent to the annual state spending of New York and Texas combined.

The cashflow is dominated by gasoline and diesel retail taxes in every state, but energy-producing states have the deepest dependence on fossil fuel income through a gamut of taxes, royalties, lease sales and fees. Because that revenue helps pay for government services, they tend to tax residents less, said Daniel Raimi, a fellow at Resources for the Future, and co-author of the study.

"That's a really challenging dynamic if you think about a shift away from fossil fuels," he said. "They're going to be faced with the question: Do we raise our taxes on our residents or do we reduce the level of services we provide?"

In New Mexico, oil and gas account for 42% of state government income, a share that is rising amid the war in Ukraine and record-setting oil production in the Permian Basin that stretches across southeastern New Mexico and western Texas. Additional oil income flows to a new interest-bearing trust for early childhood education.

Soaring fossil fuel industry profits also allowed the Democratic-controlled New Mexico Legislature to try to tackle the highest-in-the-nation unemployment rate and persistently high poverty. Lawmakers provided \$1.1 billion in tax relief and direct payments of up to \$1,500 per household to offset inflation.

At the same time, legislators balked this year at climate initiatives that might restrain petroleum production. They rejected a bill to limit climate-warming pollution in the production and distribution of transportation fuels, a step taken by West Coast states. New Mexico also shunned a state constitutional amendment for the right to clean air.

Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, up for reelection in November, said her administration is working to contain oilfield methane pollution and diversify the economy. New mandates call for electricity production from solar, wind and other renewable sources. But she has cautioned the federal government against significant restrictions on oil exploration and production, still the lifeblood of the state budget.

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"We can work very effectively with oil and gas producers to both meet clean energy standards ... while still managing pretty incredible exploration of fossil fuels to meet the current energy demands of the world," the governor said in April.

Preserving income from oil, natural gas or coal production while acting on climate change can be especially tricky in blue states where Democrats often campaign on tackling global warming.

Colorado's Democratic Gov. Jared Polis is pursuing an ambitious clean-energy plan while trying to preserve \$1 billion in annual oil and gas production tax revenue. To justify air pollution restrictions, Polis has cited real-time evidence of climate change, drought and fire.

But Polis, a wealthy tech entrepreneur, last year threatened to veto a proposal that might impose per-ton emission fees on polluters. William Toor, executive director of the governor's Colorado Energy Office, said the state's not targeting fossil fuel production — only the industry's emissions.

On Colorado's northeastern plains, Weld County Commission Chairman Scott James said state regulations stifle new drilling needed to support production and government revenue, especially for schools. The county is centered on a vast oil field stretching from the Denver area into Wyoming and Nebraska.

"I agree with the overall mission of reducing greenhouse gas, but there's an environment that exists at the state Legislature that we must electrify everything, we must mandate it, we must do it now," James said. "And these technologies are not yet ready for prime time. We simply don't have the capacity to do it."

Rural and economically isolated communities could find it hardest to adapt to a low-carbon economy, said Montana-based Headwaters Economics researcher and economist Kristin Smith, who studies public finances in North Dakota's Bakken oil region. She anticipates "very hard decisions" about cutting areas like public health care and policing.

Some major petroleum producing states are forging ahead with their climate agendas.

Pennsylvania in April became the first major fossil-fuel state to adopt a carbon-pricing policy, joining an 11-state regional consortium that sets a price and declining limits on carbon dioxide emissions from power plants.

Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf's initiative comes without approval from the Republican-controlled Legislature in the nation's No. 2 state for natural gas production — and a major exporter of gas-generated electricity. A per-well drilling fee on the state's booming Marcellus Shale gas industry has rained cash on rural counties and municipalities for nearly a decade.

South of Pittsburgh, Washington County reaped over \$100 million in the past decade. That's equivalent to \$500 per resident — a "game changer," said county board chairwoman Diana Irely Vaughan. The windfall paid for park and bridge improvements, among others.

Democratic state Rep. Greg Vitali, an advocate for stronger climate change action, said local governments relying on gas drilling money will simply have to use traditional tools such as property taxes to get by.

Republican-dominated Wyoming, the top coal production state, has bold goals to reduce greenhouse emissions to less than zero even while fossil fuels account for over half its revenue.

That vision relies on eventually capturing carbon dioxide from coal- and gas-fired power plants and pumping it underground, possibly to increase oil production in aging fields in the middle of the state. Wyoming leaders are also looking to alternative fuels like hydrogen and nuclear power, using reactors that produce less waste.

Meanwhile, a decade of declining coal demand has sapped government income. Republican Gov. Mark Gordon in March signed a coal tax reduction, forgoing about \$9 million annually to help the coal industry stay economically viable.

The state — one of only two with no taxes on individual income, corporate income or gross receipts — must confront its dependence on fossil fuel money eventually, said Jennifer Lowe, executive director of the Equality State Policy Center, a government watchdog group.

"At some point, there's going to have to be a come-to-Jesus moment," Lowe said.

Kim blasts pandemic response as North Korean outbreak surges

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

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un criticized officials over slow medicine deliveries and mobilized the military to respond to a surge in suspected COVID-19 infections, as his nation struggled to contain a fever that has reportedly killed dozens and sickened nearly a million others in a span of three days.

North Korean health authorities said Monday that eight more people died and an additional 392,920 were newly found to have feverish symptoms. That brings the death toll to 50 and illnesses to more than 1.2 million, respectively. It's a sharp jump from six dead and 350,000 sick reported last Friday, a day after the North said that it found that an unspecified number of people in capital Pyongyang tested positive for the omicron variant.

Kim has acknowledged that the fast-spreading fever, highly likely driven by COVID-19, is causing "great upheaval" in the country, and outside experts say the true scale of the outbreak is likely much bigger than what's described in the state-controlled media.

Some suspect that North Korea has understated its fatalities or illnesses to shield Kim's leadership from criticism. The North likely lacks test kits and other tools to detect virus carriers with no or mild symptoms, which means that several million might already have been infected.

"When people die, North Korean authorities will say they've died of overwork or from natural deaths, not because of COVID-19," said Nam Sung-wook, a professor at Korea University in South Korea. Nam said the North is likely understating the death toll to protect "the dignity of its supreme leader."

While neighboring South Korea and China have offered to send medical supplies and other help, experts say it's too late to inoculate the North's 26 million people, and that the only realistic outside help would be offering limited supplies of vaccines to reduce deaths among high-risk groups, including the elderly and people with preexisting conditions.

"With the country yet to initiate COVID-19 vaccination, there is risk that the virus may spread rapidly among the masses unless curtailed with immediate and appropriate measures," Dr. Poonam Khetrpal Singh, the World Health Organization's regional director for South-East Asia, said in a statement. He said WHO is ready to provide North Korea with technical support to increase testing and with essential medicines and medical supplies.

It's unclear whether and how soon Kim would accept outside offers of aid because he has previously rallied for unity at home to guard against the pandemic without resorting to foreign help.

State media didn't specify how many of the fever cases were confirmed as COVID-19. Among the 50 fatalities, North Korea officially identified only one as a COVID-19 case so far.

North Korea is believed to be mostly relying on isolating people with symptoms at shelters. Analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at South Korea's Sejong Institute said the North's limited number of test kits are likely mainly reserved for the ruling elite.

Failing to slow the virus could have dire consequences for North Korea, considering its broken health care system and that its people are believed to be unvaccinated. There's also malnourishment and chronic poverty.

North Korea imposed what it described as maximum preventive measures that restricted travel between cities and counties, and Kim ordered public health officials, teachers and others to identify people with fevers so they could be quarantined. As of Sunday, more than 564,860 people were in quarantine, North Korea's state media reported.

The explosive growth in fever cases may underscore how fast omicron could travel across an unvaccinated population without access to proper health tools, and fatalities will surely jump in coming weeks considering time lags between infections and deaths, said Jung Jae-hun, a professor of preventive medicine at South Korea's Gachon University.

While it's clear COVID-19 is spreading at an alarming speed, there are questions about the accuracy of North Korea's fever tally. Jung said it's unlikely that North Korean health workers are able to make reliable daily updates, considering the lack of tests and other resources, and are possibly adding multiple days of

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cases into their single-day counts following delays.

Cho Han Bum, an analyst at Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification, said North Korea's fever totals seemed an "outright lie."

"North Korea says about 390,000 more fell ill but only eight died in the past day, while South Korea (on Sunday) reported 25,000 new cases and 48 deaths," he said.

Yang Moo-jin, a professor at Seoul's University of North Korean Studies, said that the real number of COVID-19 infections in North Korea is likely at least three times larger than North Korea's tally of fever patients because of underreporting, the bad health care system and poorly computerized administrative networks.

Kim during a ruling party Politburo meeting on Sunday criticized government and health officials over what he portrayed as a botched pandemic response, saying medicine supplies aren't being distributed to pharmacies in time because of their "irresponsible work attitude" and lack of organization.

The Politburo had issued an emergency order to immediately release and quickly distribute state medicine reserves and for pharmacies to open for 24-hour shifts, but Kim said such steps weren't being properly implemented. Kim ordered the medical units of his military to get involved in stabilizing the supply of medicine in Pyongyang, KCNA said.

North Korea's previous claim of a perfect record in keeping out the virus for 2 1/2 years was widely doubted. But its extremely strict border closure, large-scale quarantines and propaganda that stressed anti-virus controls as a matter of "national existence" may have staved off a huge outbreak until now.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol told the National Assembly on Monday that the South was willing to send vaccines, medicine, equipment and health personnel to the North if it's willing to accept.

South Korean officials say Pyongyang so far has made no request for Seoul's help. The North also shunned millions of vaccine doses offered by the U.N.-backed COVAX distribution program, likely because they carried international monitoring requirements.

Kim still stressed the country's economic goals should be met, which likely means huge groups will continue to gather at agricultural, industrial and construction sites.

EXPLAINER: Next steps for Finland, Sweden on NATO membership

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Finland and Sweden have signaled their intention to join NATO over Russia's war in Ukraine and things will move fast once they formally apply for membership in the world's biggest security alliance.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has already made clear that there would be consequences if the two Nordic countries join. So it's important for NATO to bring them swiftly into the fold where they can benefit from the security guarantees that membership provides.

They're off to a quick start. Finland and Sweden are NATO's closest partners. They have functioning democracies, well-funded armed forces and contribute to the alliance's military operations and air policing. Any obstacles they face will merely be of a technical, or possibly political nature.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE FOR FINLAND AND SWEDEN TO JOIN NATO?

NATO officials say the membership procedure could be completed "in a couple of weeks."

But the most time consuming part — ratification of their accession protocols by the alliance's 30 member countries, sometimes involving parliaments — could take months. How many is anyone's guess, although that step has taken eight to 12 months with recent candidates.

Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said Monday that "we think that it could take days for Canada." The fastest were West Germany, Turkey and Greece, whose endorsement took around four months in the 1950s, when NATO was less than half its current size. Still, war on NATO's doorstep is sure to focus minds.

The U.S. and Britain, among others, stand ready to provide security support if needed until the process is complete.

HOW DOES A COUNTRY GO ABOUT JOINING?

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NATO's membership process isn't formalized, and the steps can vary.

First though, a request to join must be submitted. It usually comes in the form of a letter from a government minister or leader.

NATO then assesses that request. That's done in a sitting of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) of the 30 member countries, probably at ambassadorial level.

The NAC decides whether to move toward membership and what steps must be taken to achieve it. This depends on how well aligned the candidate countries are with NATO's political, military and legal standards, and whether they contribute to security in the North Atlantic area. It should pose no problem for Finland and Sweden.

HOW DO MEMBERSHIP TALKS WORK?

If the NAC gives a green light, accession talks are held. These are likely to be completed in just one day. The steps are fairly straight forward.

The candidate is asked to commit to uphold Article 5 — NATO's collective defense clause guaranteeing that an attack on any one ally would be met with a response from them all. It would have to commit to spending obligations concerning the NATO in-house budget, which runs to around \$2.5 billion dollars.

The candidate is made aware of their role in NATO defense planning, and of any other legal or security obligations they might have, like the vetting of personnel and handling of classified information.

NATO staff then write a report informing allies about the outcome of the talks. The report states what issues were raised with the partner and what commitments that country made. At the same time, the candidate sends a letter, usually from a foreign minister, confirming that their country accepts all these obligations.

HOW DO THEY KNOW WHETHER THEY'RE ACCEPTED?

The accession report and candidate's letter are submitted once more to the NAC for a final decision.

The council — which can meet at the level of ambassadors, ministers or leaders — then reviews the application, and decides whether to sign the accession protocol with the candidate.

If yes, a small ceremony is held giving a symbolic and legal form to this part of the membership process. The protocol is then sent to capitals for ratification according to the 30 national procedures, some of which require parliamentary approval.

Once completed, the invitee then ratifies the protocol and deposits it in Washington. They are then officially a member and their national flag is hoisted outside NATO headquarters in Brussels.

ARE THERE ANY OBJECTIONS TO THEM JOINING?

NATO takes all its decisions by consensus, so each country has a de facto veto.

Last week, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan raised concerns about Finland's and Sweden's stance on Kurdish militants, whom Turkey classifies as terrorists.

Erdogan didn't threaten outright to veto membership, and officials and analysts believe he won't stand in their way. No other country has raised serious objections to them joining, either in public at home or at NATO headquarters in Brussels, officials say.

Today in History: May 17, Brown v. Board of Education ruling

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, May 17, the 137th day of 2022. There are 228 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 17, 1954, a unanimous U.S. Supreme Court handed down its Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka decision which held that racially segregated public schools were inherently unequal, and therefore unconstitutional.

On this date:

In 1536, Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer declared the marriage of England's King Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn invalid after she failed to produce a male heir; Boleyn, already condemned for high

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treason, was executed two days later.

In 1940, the Nazis occupied Brussels, Belgium, during World War II.

In 1946, President Harry S. Truman seized control of the nation's railroads, delaying — but not preventing — a threatened strike by engineers and trainmen.

In 1973, a special committee convened by the U.S. Senate began its televised hearings into the Watergate scandal.

In 1980, rioting that claimed 18 lives erupted in Miami's Liberty City after an all-white jury in Tampa acquitted four former Miami police officers of fatally beating Black insurance executive Arthur McDuffie.

In 1987, 37 American sailors were killed when an Iraqi warplane attacked the U.S. Navy frigate Stark in the Persian Gulf. (Iraq apologized for the attack, calling it a mistake, and paid more than \$27 million in compensation.)

In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed a measure requiring neighborhood notification when sex offenders move in. ("Megan's Law," as it's known, was named for Megan Kanka, a 7-year-old New Jersey girl who was raped and murdered in 1994.)

In 2004, Massachusetts became the first state to allow same-sex marriages.

In 2010, the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that young people serving life prison terms should have "a meaningful opportunity to obtain release" provided they didn't kill their victims.

In 2015, a shootout erupted between bikers and police outside a restaurant in Waco, Texas, leaving nine of the bikers dead and 20 people injured.

In 2017, the Justice Department appointed former FBI Director Robert Mueller as a special counsel to oversee a federal investigation into potential coordination between Russia and the 2016 Donald Trump campaign.

In 2020, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo was tested for the coronavirus on live TV as he announced that all people in the state who were experiencing flu-like symptoms were eligible for tests.

Ten years ago: Washington's envoy to Israel, Dan Shapiro, told the Israel Bar Association the U.S. had plans in place to attack Iran if necessary to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons. Donna Summer, 63, the "Queen of Disco," died in Naples, Florida. Frank Edward "Ed" Ray, the California school bus driver hailed as a hero for helping 26 students escape after three kidnappers buried them underground in 1976, died at age 91.

Five years ago: The Justice Department appointed former FBI Director Robert Mueller as a special counsel to oversee a federal investigation into potential coordination between Russia and Donald Trump's campaign during the 2016 presidential election. Pvt. Chelsea Manning, the soldier who was sentenced to 35 years in a military prison for giving classified materials to WikiLeaks, walked free after serving seven years behind bars, her sentence having been commuted by President Barack Obama. Chris Cornell, who was lead singer with rock bands Soundgarden and Audioslave, took his own life in a Detroit hotel room; he was 52.

One year ago: The Supreme Court, with a 6-3 conservative majority, agreed to consider a major rollback of abortion rights by hearing a challenge to a Mississippi abortion law that would ban abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy. (A decision in the case is expected next month.) The White House said President Joe Biden expressed support for a cease-fire in a call to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after eight days of Israeli-Palestinian airstrikes and rocket attacks. AT&T announced a deal to combine its massive media operations, including HBO and CNN, with Discovery, the owner of lifestyle networks including the Food Network and HGTV.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Peter Gerety is 82. Singer Taj Mahal is 80. Rock musician Bill Bruford is 73. TV personality Kathleen Sullivan is 69. Boxing Hall of Famer Sugar Ray Leonard is 66. Sports announcer Jim Nantz is 63. Producer Simon Fuller (TV: "American Idol") is 62. Singer Enya is 61. Actor-comedian Craig Ferguson is 60. Rock singer-musician Page McConnell is 59. Actor David Eigenberg is 58. Singer-musician Trent Reznor (Nine Inch Nails) is 57. Actor Paige Turco is 57. R&B musician O'Dell (Mint Condition) is 57. Actor Hill Harper is 56. TV personality/interior designer Thom Filicia is 53. Singer Jordan Knight is 52. R&B singer Darnell Van Rensalier (Shai) is 52. U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo is 51. Actor Sasha Al-

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exander is 49. Rock singer-musician Josh Homme (HAHM'-ee) is 49. Rock singer Andrea Corr (The Corrs) is 48. Actor Sendhil Ramamurthy (SEN'-dul rah-mah-MURTH'-ee) is 48. Actor Rochelle Aytes is 46. Singer Kandi Burruss is 46. Actor Kat Foster is 44. Actor Ayda Field is 43. Actor Ginger Gonzaga is 39. Folk-rock singer/songwriter Passenger is 38. Dancer-choreographer Derek Hough (huhf) is 37. Actor Tahj Mowry is 36. Actor Nikki Reed is 34. Singer Kree Harrison (TV: "American Idol") is 32. Actor Leven Rambin is 32. Actor Samantha Browne-Walters is 31. Actor Justin Martin is 28.