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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.

Friday, May 20

Senior Menu: Tater tot hot dish, green beans, grape juice, apple pie square, whole wheat bread.

Saturday, May 21

10 a.m.: Emmanuel worship at Rosewood Court
SEAS Confession: 3:45-4:15 p.m., SEAS Mass: 4:30 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.

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

OPEN: **Recycling Trailer in Groton**
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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UN: Droughts increase nearly a third since 2000

(UC) — The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) said droughts are continuing to happen more frequently and last longer, accounting for a 29% increase in number and duration since 2000.

The UNCCD's latest Drought in Numbers report shows that droughts represented 15% of natural disasters from 1970 to 2019 and caused about 650,000 during that period.

"(The) facts and figures of this publication all point in the same direction: An upward trajectory in the duration of droughts and the severity of impacts, not only affecting human societies but also the ecological systems upon which the survival of all life depends, including that of our own species," UNCCD Executive Secretary Ibrahim Thiaw said.

From 1998 to 2017, droughts cost about \$124 billion in economic losses. From 2000 to 2019, droughts impacted about 1.4 billion people through their effects on societies, ecosystems and economies.

This year, more than 2.3 billion people face "water stress" and almost 160 million children are exposed to severe and prolonged droughts, the UN said.

Droughts affect Africa more than any other continent (44% of the global total is in Africa), but no continent is safe from drought. In the United States, droughts have led to crop failures and other economic losses totaling \$249 billion since 1980.

One of the best solutions to droughts is land restoration, Thiaw said, noting that would address underlying factors including degraded water cycles and loss of soil fertility.

"We must build and rebuild our landscapes better, mimicking nature wherever possible and creating functional ecological systems," he said.

Sustainable and efficient agricultural management techniques are needed to grow more food on less land and with less water, and humans must change their relationships with food, fodder and fiber – moving toward plant-based diets and stemming the consumption of animals, according to the brief.

If nothing changes, by 2040, one in four children could live in areas with extreme water shortages, 700 million people risk being displaced by 2030, and droughts could affect more than 75% of the world's population by 2050.



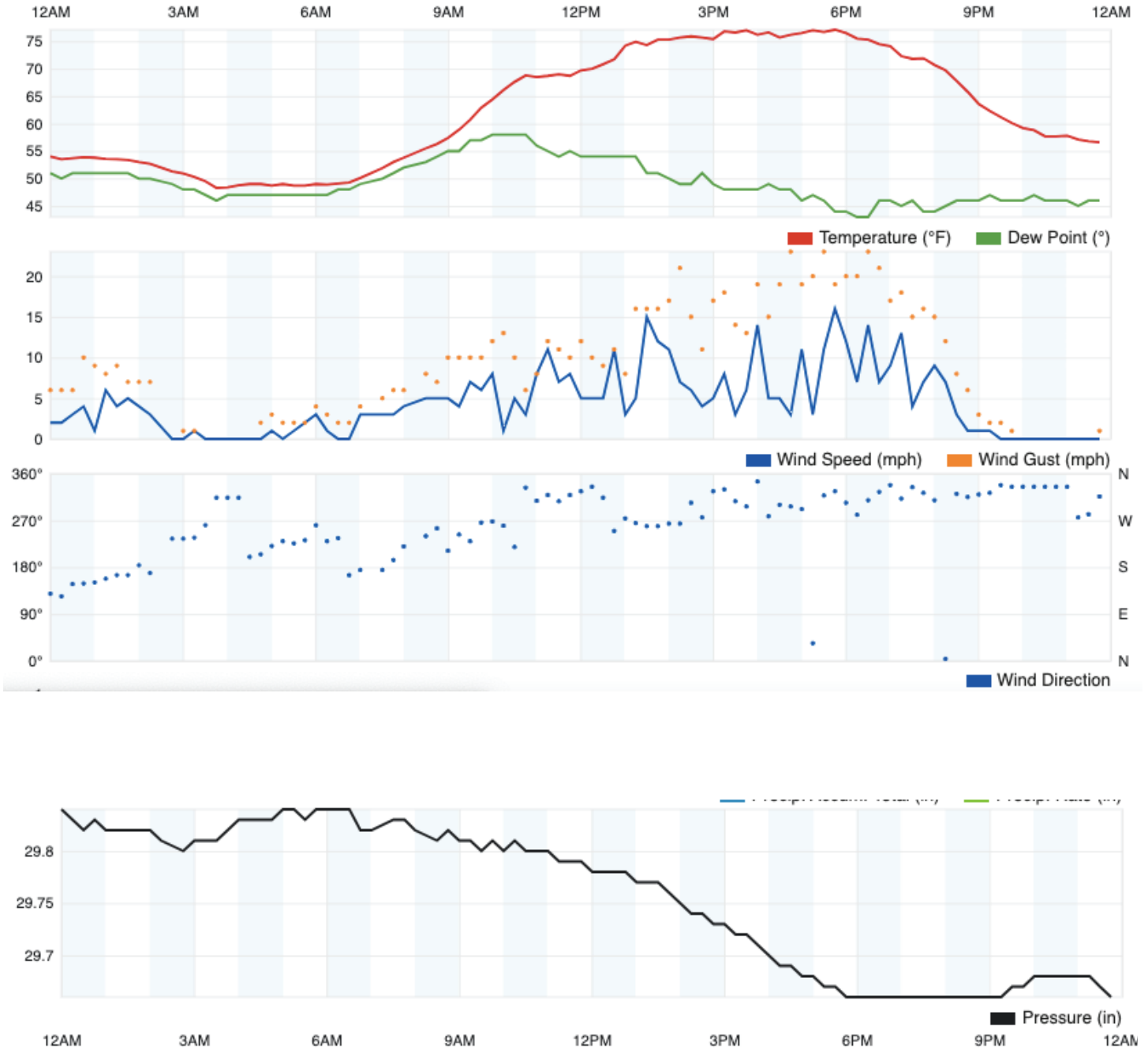


The tile work was completed on Wednesday and will need time to cure. Next week, Go Fred company will come back to put the plaster down which will take about 3-4 days, weather permitting. Once the plaster work is completed, the pool can be filled and then it will take a few days for the chemical balance to be completed and for the water to heat up. Opening date is ranging from June 1 to June 4.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Patchy Fog
then Mostly
Sunny and
Breezy

High: 77 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy

Low: 49 °F

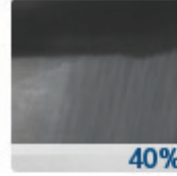
Thursday



Chance
Showers and
Breezy

High: 71 °F

Thursday
Night



Chance
Showers

Low: 44 °F

Friday



Mostly Cloudy
and Breezy

High: 55 °F

Today...

Morning...



Showers/storms moving through from the west.
Timing: ending by late morning.

Afternoon/evening...



Some strong storms possible as cold front passes.
Best chance for severe storms along SD/MN boarder.
Timing: between 4PM and 7PM

Two rounds of storms are expected Thursday. The first round will be just general showers with a few storms thrown in. The second round will be this afternoon as a cold front moves in from the west. Severe storms are not expected at this time but if storms do become severe, the best chance will be between 4 and 7 PM along the SD/MN boarder.

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High and Low Temperature Forecast

May 18, 2022
2:50 PM

	Maximum Temperature Forecast						
	5/19 Thu	5/20 Fri	5/21 Sat	5/22 Sun	5/23 Mon	5/24 Tue	5/25 Wed
Aberdeen	71	51	53	59	60	67	69
Britton	66	50	50	55	59	64	66
Eagle Butte	66	47	52	58	58	68	70
Eureka	65	46	51	57	58	66	68
Gettysburg	70	48	51	58	56	66	69
Kennebec	81	54	56	64	60	71	75
McIntosh	59	46	50	57	58	67	67
Milbank	74	56	51	56	60	64	66
Miller	78	54	55	60	59	68	72
Mobridge	69	51	54	61	61	69	72
Murdo	78	51	56	62	59	71	75
Pierre	76	53	58	64	61	72	75
Redfield	77	55	54	60	60	68	71
Sisseton	70	53	51	56	61	65	67
Watertown	76	54	49	55	57	63	65
Webster	69	50	48	53	56	61	64
Wheaton	68	53	50	55	60	63	65

*Table values in °F

	Minimum Temperature Forecast						
	5/19 Thu	5/20 Fri	5/21 Sat	5/22 Sun	5/23 Mon	5/24 Tue	5/25 Wed
Aberdeen	48	43	36	36	43	46	49
Britton	47	41	36	36	43	46	49
Eagle Butte	47	39	32	33	41	42	48
Eureka	47	39	34	33	41	43	47
Gettysburg	45	38	32	33	41	42	46
Kennebec	49	42	37	36	44	44	48
McIntosh	45	37	31	32	40	42	46
Milbank	47	43	37	38	43	47	50
Miller	50	41	35	35	44	44	49
Mobridge	50	41	35	36	44	45	49
Murdo	47	41	35	35	44	42	48
Pierre	50	44	37	37	46	45	49
Redfield	47	42	37	35	44	45	48
Sisseton	48	42	38	39	43	48	51
Watertown	47	41	36	36	42	45	48
Webster	46	39	35	36	41	46	48
Wheaton	46	41	37	36	41	46	49

*Table values in °F



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

High temperatures will mainly be in the 40s and 40s Friday and Saturday, rebounding into the 50s and 60s for Sunday and Monday. Saturday morning and Sunday morning could be rather cold, with lows in the 30s. This could cause concerns for delicate vegetation.

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Today in Weather History

May 19, 1982: With the ground in the Black Hills already saturated from heavy rains the previous week, developing thunderstorms were not a welcome sight. The thunderstorms produced additional heavy rains including 3.58 inches at Spearfish, 3.32 inches at Cheyenne Crossing, and 0.82 of an inch in twelve minutes at Hot Springs. With Flash Flood Warnings in effect for much of the area water came out of the banks of many streams causing widespread damage in the Hills. A diversion Dam broke at Spearfish causing a mudslide to cover some roads. In Deadwood, the main water line broke leaving the city temporarily without water. Homes were evacuated at Nisland, Hot Springs, and Bridger. Damage throughout the Black Hills included washed out bridges, flooded basements, several breached dams, and roads completely washed away.

1780: The infamous "dark day" in New England tradition. At noon, it was nearly as dark as night. Chickens went to roost, and many persons were fearful of divine wrath. The "dark day" was caused by forest fires to the west of New England.

1915: A spring storm came to an end after producing widespread snow. Total snowfall from the storm included: 17.6 inches in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, 8 inches at Cheyenne, Wyoming, 7 inches at Chadron and 3.9 inches in North Platte, Nebraska.

1955 - Lake Maloya NM received 11.28 inches of rain in 24 hours to establish a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1975 - Thunderstorms produced golf ball size hail and wind gusts to 110 mph in Minnesota, between Fridley and Hugo. Fifty persons were injured. The hail and high winds destroyed fifty mobile homes, and a dozen aircraft, and also destroyed a third of the Brighton Elementary School. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms in Texas produced thirteen inches of rain northwest of Lavernia. The heavy rain, along with golf ball size hail, destroyed eighty percent of the crops in the area, while high winds toppled trees. Golf ball size hail was also reported south of Dallas and around San Antonio. Up to eight inches of rain drenched Guadalupe County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms in southwest Texas produced hail as large as tennis balls around Midland, with the hail accumulating up to a foot deep. Showers and thunderstorms in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region produced 3.5 inches of rain near Schuylkill PA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front spawned ten tornadoes from Illinois to Tennessee during the afternoon and night. Snow, wind and cold prevailed in the Northern Plateau Region and the Northern Rockies. Dixie, ID, was blanketed with nine inches of snow, winds gusted to 87 mph at Choteau MT, and the temperature at Crater Lake, OR, dipped to 11 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms deluged Hot Springs AR with thirteen inches of rain in nine hours resulting in a devastating flood. Two waves of water, four to six feet deep, swept down Central Avenue flooding stores and the famous bathhouses on Bathhouse Row. Water released from Lake Hamilton devastated the area between it and Rammel Dam. The 500 foot Carpenter Dam Bridge across Lake Catherine was completely washed away, as were cabins and mobile homes near the lake, many of which flowed right over the top of Rammel Dam. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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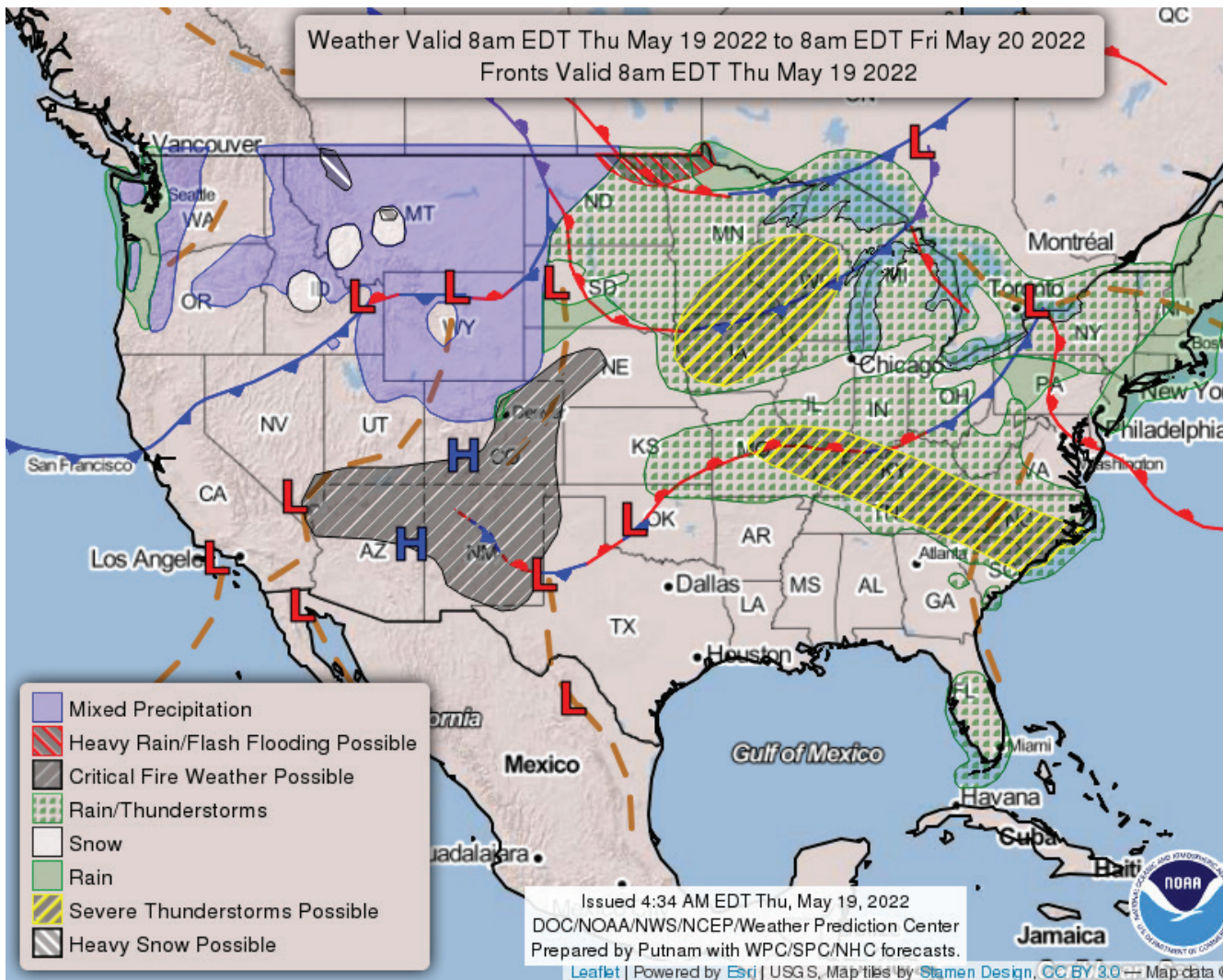
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 77.1 °F at 5:45 PM
Low Temp: 48.3 °F at 3:45 AM
Wind: 23 mph at 4:45 AM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 06 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 97 in 1932
Record Low: 28 in 2002
Average High: 72°F
Average Low: 46°F
Average Precip in May.: 2.11
Precip to date in May.: 2.40
Average Precip to date: 6.08
Precip Year to Date: 8.90
Sunset Tonight: 9:02:18 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:54:29 AM



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NEED HELP IN GETTING UP?

Shortly after spine surgery, I was walking from one room to another with a cup of coffee in one hand and a book in the other. Although I knew my balance had not returned to its pre-surgical state, I would not allow anyone to help me. Suddenly, I tripped, spilled the coffee on myself and my book and was lying flat on my face wondering what happened.

As I lay there, I soon realized that "pride," no doubt, contributed to my fall more than my inadequate balance.

Struggling to get up, my wife asked if she could help me. I said, "No, I can do this by myself!" When I realized how weak I was, and that I could not get up by myself, I finally asked for her help. Sitting in my chair, I realized that this was an example of my pride and unwillingness to ask for help. First, I fell when I refused her help. Then I refused her help a second time when she offered to help lift me.

As I thought about my experience sometime later, Psalm 145:14 came to mind: "The Lord 'lifts' all those who fall; and lifts all who are bowed down." Reflecting on that verse, I came to realize that we often "fall" in our daily spiritual journey because of pride and vanity. Even after we fall, we often refuse to turn to God for His strength, believing we "can do it on our own," without His help.

"I can do all things," Paul said, "through Christ." He was a man of strength and courage, vision, and victory. He realized that what God called him to do was well beyond his strength. He needed Christ's strength to do Christ's work. Are you down? Reach out for God's hand!

Prayer: Lord, we often fail and fall because of our pride and vanity. Help us realize we need You to stay "upright." In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The Lord upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. Psalm 145:14

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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

2 Pine Ridge dams to get repairs from infrastructure deal

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A pair of dams on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota will get safety repairs with part of \$29 million in funding from the federal infrastructure deal, the Department of the Interior announced Wednesday.

Both the Oglala Dam and Allen Dam are high-hazard, meaning lives could be lost if they failed. They have also needed repairs for years. The Oglala Dam was built in the 1940s, while the Allen Dam was completed in 1961.

An Associated Press analysis has tallied more than 2,200 high-hazard dams in poor or unsatisfactory condition across the country.

Two other dams — on the Fort Apache Reservation in Arizona and the Crow Reservation in Montana — will also get a share of the \$29 million. It's part of \$150 million that will be used for repairs to six dams over the next five years.

Last year's \$1 trillion bi-partisan infrastructure deal was a priority for President Joe Biden. It included \$13 billion for Native American communities.

"In addition to the resources we have allocated for irrigation power systems and water sanitation systems in Indian Country, today's announcement will further safeguard Tribal water supplies, supporting families and communities," said Interior Secretary Deb Haaland in a statement.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

03-06-11-24-33

(three, six, eleven, twenty-four, thirty-three)

Estimated jackpot: \$33,000

Lotto America

08-18-24-31-46, Star Ball: 2, ASB: 4

(eight, eighteen, twenty-four, thirty-one, forty-six; Star Ball: two; ASB: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$13,660,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 131,000,000

Powerball

40-41-58-64-65, Powerball: 17, Power Play: 3

(forty, forty-one, fifty-eight, sixty-four, sixty-five; Powerball: seventeen; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$117,000,000

Augustana hockey starting in 2023-24, will play in CCHA

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Augustana University will be a member of the Central Collegiate Hockey Association when it starts its Division I men's program in 2023-24.

The CCHA board of directors voted unanimously Wednesday to bring in the Vikings as the league's ninth member.

Augustana competes in the Division II Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference in its other sports. The school has said it hopes to move all sports to Division I by 2030.

"The CCHA supports the continued growth of college hockey and (is) excited to accept Augustana Univer-

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sity as our ninth member," CCHA Commissioner Don Lucia said. "Sioux Falls is a proven hockey community and the commitment Augustana University is making to Division I hockey is impressive."

Augustana broke ground last fall on a 3,000-seat hockey arena and last month announced the hiring of its head coach, Minnesota assistant Garrett Raboin.

Augustana will play one two-game series against each of the other CCHA members in 2023-24 and 2024-25 before playing a full league schedule beginning in 2025-26.

Current CCHA members are Bemidji State, Bowling Green, Ferris State, Lake Superior State, Michigan Tech, Minnesota State, Northern Michigan, and St. Thomas.

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined
Yankton Press & Dakotan. May 16, 2022.

Editorial: A Powerhouse Storm And The Warning Signs

It did not come without warning.

And the storm that blasted across the region last Thursday — a weather event that has been classified by the National Weather Service as a derecho — did not happen without recent precedent or painful memory.

The powerhouse event smothered the Yankton area with wind and dust — but, alas, little rain — then grew as it rolled north, leaving damage and death in its path. (Among the victims was Sioux Falls teacher Annie Lanning, a native of Yankton and a graduate of Mount Marty.) It was similar to the derechos that devastated a swath of Iowa in August 2020 — a storm that also began forming over the Yankton area — as well as the storm that pummeled Iowa and other states last December.

Thursday's incredible event, which produced (among many things) a single thunderstorm warning that covered numerous counties at once, could be, and should be, considered as the latest in a long line of incidents pointing to a shifting climate, caused in large part by human activity.

It must be noted here again that, in consideration of climate change, no one single event offers evidence one way or the other that we are seeing or not seeing a changing climate. But numerous events over time begin forming an argument that becomes too conspicuous to ignore.

A derecho — described as a large, complex, long-lived, quickly-moving system of storms with straight-line winds — has now occurred in this region three times in the last 21 months. Before that August 2020 incident in Iowa, few people had ever heard the meteorological label, but it's not new terminology: According to the National Weather Service, the word was first used to describe a storm event in Iowa back in 1877.

It's also the latest in a line of powerful hurricanes, bomb cyclones, superstorms, mega droughts and other events that have grown in frequency and intensity the last several years. These things fit the predicted fallout of climate change, which includes extreme weather events and stark cause-and-effect patterns: major droughts in one area caused by (or causing) massive flooding elsewhere, for example.

These events are already producing significant impacts across the globe, from the farmlands of America to the coastal lands and islands of the Atlantic and Pacific. We're seeing an increase of so-called "climate change refugees," people driven from their homes by rising seas caused by melting icecaps or forced from farmlands that have baked away, etc.

The problem should no longer be dismissed as something in the distant future or some warning of what could be. It's impacting us now, and it's something that your children and grandchildren will be coping with — only much more so — for the rest of their lives.

That is, or at least should be, an unacceptable fate.

But until we commit ourselves to addressing the matter head-on, we will continue to fiddle while the fires of Rome grow around us. The longer we wait, the harder that fire will be to contain.

This is not something that cannot be dismissed as "extremist doom-saying" in order to do nothing. We've been there and done that, and we are reaping that whirlwind. It's time to commit to a different path — for the future's sake, if nothing else.

END

Captive medic's bodycam shows firsthand horror of Mariupol

By VASILISA STEPANENKO and LORI HINNANT Associated Press

KHARKIV, Ukraine (AP) — A celebrated Ukrainian medic recorded her time in Mariupol on a data card no bigger than a thumbnail, smuggled out to the world in a tampon. Now she is in Russian hands, at a time when Mariupol itself is on the verge of falling.

Yuliia Paievska is known in Ukraine as Taira, a moniker from the nickname she chose in the World of Warcraft video game. Using a body camera, she recorded 256 gigabytes of her team's frantic efforts over two weeks to bring people back from the brink of death. She got the harrowing clips to an Associated Press team, the last international journalists in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol, as they left in a rare humanitarian convoy.

Russian soldiers captured Taira and her driver the next day, March 16, one of many forced disappearances in areas of Ukraine now held by Russia. Russia has portrayed Taira as working for the nationalist Azov Battalion, in line with Moscow's narrative that it is attempting to "denazify" Ukraine. But the AP found no such evidence, and friends and colleagues said she had no links to Azov.

The military hospital where she led evacuations of the wounded is not affiliated with the battalion, whose members have spent weeks defending a sprawling steel plant in Mariupol. The footage Taira recorded itself testifies to the fact that she tried to save wounded Russian soldiers as well as Ukrainian civilians.

A clip recorded on March 10 shows two Russian soldiers taken roughly out of an ambulance by a Ukrainian soldier. One is in a wheelchair. The other is on his knees, hands bound behind his back, with an obvious leg injury. Their eyes are covered by winter hats, and they wear white armbands.

A Ukrainian soldier curses at one of them. "Calm down, calm down," Taira tells him.

A woman asks her, "Are you going to treat the Russians?"

"They will not be as kind to us," she replies. "But I couldn't do otherwise. They are prisoners of war."

Taira is now a prisoner of the Russians, one of hundreds of prominent Ukrainians who have been kidnapped or captured, including local officials, journalists, activists and human rights defenders.

The U.N. Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine has recorded 204 cases of enforced disappearances. It said some victims may have been tortured, and five were later found dead. The office of Ukraine's ombudswoman said it had received reports of thousands of missing people by late April, 528 of whom had probably been captured.

The Russians also are targeting medics and hospitals even though the Geneva Conventions single out both military and civilian medics for protection "in all circumstance." The World Health Organization has verified more than 100 attacks on health care since the war began, a number likely to rise.

More recently, Russian soldiers pulled a woman off a convoy from Mariupol on May 8, accused her of being a military medic and forced her to choose between letting her 4-year-old daughter accompany her to an unknown fate or continuing on to Ukrainian-controlled territory. The mother and child ended up separated, and the little girl made it to the Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia, U.N. officials said.

"This is not about saving one particular woman," said Oleksandra Chudna, who volunteered as a medic with Taira in 2014. "Taira will represent those medics and women who went to the front."

Taira's situation takes on a new significance as the last defenders in Mariupol are evacuated into Russian territories, in what Russia calls a mass surrender and Ukraine calls a mission accomplished. Russia says more than 1,700 Ukrainian fighters have surrendered this week in Mariupol, bringing new attention to the treatment of prisoners. Ukraine has expressed hope that the fighters can be exchanged for Russian prisoners of war, but a Russian official has said without evidence that they should be not exchanged but put on trial.

Ukraine's government has said it tried to add Taira's name to a prisoner exchange weeks ago. However, Russia denies holding her, despite her appearance on television networks in the separatist Donetsk region of Ukraine and on the Russian NTV network, handcuffed and with her face bruised. The Ukrainian government declined to speak about the case when asked by the AP.

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Taira, 53, is known in Ukraine as a star athlete and the person who trained the country's volunteer medic force. What comes across in her video and in descriptions from her friends is a big, exuberant personality with a telegenic presence, the kind of person to revel in swimming with dolphins.

The video is an intimate record from Feb. 6 to March 10 of a city under siege that has now become a worldwide symbol of the Russian invasion and Ukrainian resistance. In it, Taira is a whirlwind of energy and grief, recording the death of a child and the treatment of wounded soldiers from both sides.

On Feb. 24, the first day of the war, Taira chronicled efforts to bandage a Ukrainian soldier's open head wound.

Two days later, she ordered colleagues to wrap an injured Russian soldier in a blanket. "Cover him because he is shaking," she says in the video. She calls the young man "Sunshine" — a favorite nickname for the many soldiers who passed through her hands — and asks why he came to Ukraine.

"You're taking care of me," he tells her, almost in wonder. Her response: "We treat everyone equally."

Later that night, two children — a brother and sister — arrive gravely wounded from a shootout at a checkpoint. Their parents are dead. By the end of the night, despite Taira's entreaties to "stay with me, little one," so is the little boy.

Taira turns away from his lifeless body and cries. "I hate (this)," she says. She closes his eyes.

Talking to someone in the dark outside as she smokes, she says, "The boy is gone. The boy has died. They are still giving CPR to the girl. Maybe she will survive."

At one point, she stares into a bathroom mirror, a shock of blond hair falling over her forehead in stark contrast to the shaved sides of her head. She cuts the camera.

Throughout the video, she complains about chronic pain from back and hip injuries that left her partially disabled. She embraces doctors. She cracks jokes to cheer up discouraged ambulance drivers and patients alike. And always, she wears a stuffed animal attached to her vest to hand to any children she might treat.

With a husband and teenage daughter, she knew what war can do to a family. At one point, an injured Ukrainian soldier asks her to call his mother. She tells him he'll be able to call her himself, "so don't make her nervous."

On March 15, a police officer handed over the small data card to a team of Associated Press journalists who had been documenting atrocities in Mariupol, including a Russian airstrike on a maternity hospital. The office contacted Taira on a walkie-talkie, and she asked the journalists to take the card safely out of the city. The card was hidden inside a tampon, and the team passed through 15 Russian checkpoints before reaching Ukrainian-controlled territory.

The next day, Taira disappeared with her driver Serhiy. On the same day, a Russian airstrike shattered the Mariupol theater and killed close to 600 people.

A video aired during a March 21 Russian news broadcast announced her capture, accusing her of trying to flee the city in disguise. Taira looks groggy and haggard as she reads a statement positioned below the camera, calling for an end to the fighting. As she talks, a voiceover derides her colleagues as Nazis, using language echoed this week by Russia as it described the fighters from Mariupol.

The broadcast was the last time she was seen.

Both the Russian and Ukrainian governments have publicized interviews with prisoners of war, despite international humanitarian law that describes the practice as inhumane and degrading treatment.

Taira's husband, Vadim Puzanov, said he has received little news about his wife since her disappearance. Choosing his words carefully, he described a constant worry as well as outrage at how she has been portrayed by Russia.

"Accusing a volunteer medic of all mortal sins, including organ trafficking, is already outrageous propaganda — I don't even know who it's for," he said.

Raed Saleh, the head of Syria's White Helmets, compared Taira's situation to what volunteers with his group faced and continue to face in Syria. He said his group also has been accused of organ trafficking and dealing with terrorist groups.

"Tomorrow, they may ask her to make statements and pressure her to say things," Saleh said.

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Taira has outside importance in Ukraine because of her reputation. She taught aikido martial arts and worked as a medic as a sideline.

She took on her name in 2013, when she joined first aid volunteers at the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine that drove out a Russia-backed government. In 2014, Russia seized the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine.

Taira went to the eastern Donbas region, where Moscow-backed separatists fought Ukrainian forces. There, she taught tactical medicine and started a group of medics called Taira's Angels. She also worked as a liaison between the military and civilians in front-line towns where few doctors and hospitals dared operate. In 2019, she left for the Mariupol region, and her medical unit was based there.

Taira was a member of the Ukraine Invictus Games for military veterans, where she was set to compete in archery and swimming. Invictus said she was a military medic from 2018 to 2020 but had since been demobilized.

She received the body camera in 2021 to film for a Netflix documentary series on inspirational figures being produced by Britain's Prince Harry, who founded the Invictus Games. But when Russian forces invaded, she used it to shoot scenes of injured civilians and soldiers instead.

That footage is now especially poignant, with Mariupol on the brink. In one of the last videos Taira shot, she is seated next to the driver who would disappear with her. It is March 9.

"Two weeks of war. Besieged Mariupol," she says quietly. Then she curses at no one in particular, and the screen goes dark.

Tea and infomercials: N. Korea fights COVID with few tools

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

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — On a recent nighttime visit to a drugstore, a double-masked Kim Jong Un lamented the slow delivery of medicine. Separately, the North Korean leader's lieutenants have quarantined hundreds of thousands of suspected COVID-19 patients and urged people with mild symptoms to take willow leaf or honeysuckle tea.

Despite what the North's propaganda is describing as an all-out effort, the fear is palpable among citizens, according to defectors in South Korea with contacts in the North, and some outside observers worry the outbreak may get much worse, with much of an impoverished, unvaccinated population left without enough hospital care and struggling to afford even simple medicine.

"North Koreans know so many people around the world have died because of COVID-19, so they have fear that some of them could die, too," said Kang Mi-jin, a North Korean defector, citing her phone calls with contacts in the northern North Korean city of Hyesan. She said people who can afford it are buying traditional medicine to deal with their anxieties.

Since admitting what it called its first domestic COVID-19 outbreak one week ago, North Korea has been fighting to handle a soaring health crisis that has intensified public anxiety over a virus it previously claimed to have kept at bay.

The country's pandemic response appears largely focused on isolating suspected patients. That may be all it can really do, as it lacks vaccines, antiviral pills, intensive care units and other medical assets that ensured millions of sick people in other countries survived.

North Korean health authorities said Thursday that a fast-spreading fever has killed 63 people and sickened about 2 million others since late April, while about 740,000 remain quarantined. Earlier this week, North Korea said its total COVID-19 caseload stood at 168 despite rising fever cases. Many foreign experts doubt the figures and believe the scale of the outbreak is being underreported to prevent public unrest that could hurt Kim's leadership.

State media said a million public workers were mobilized to identify suspected patients. Kim Jong Un also ordered army medics deployed to support the delivery of medicines to pharmacies, just before he visited drugstores in Pyongyang at dawn Sunday.

North Korea also uses state media outlets — newspapers, state TV and radio — to offer tips on how to deal with the virus to citizens, most of whom have no access to the internet and foreign news.

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"It is crucial that we find every person with fever symptoms so that they can be isolated and treated, to fundamentally block the spaces where the infectious disease could spread," Ryu Yong Chol, an official at Pyongyang's anti-virus headquarters, said on state TV Wednesday.

State TV aired infomercials showing animated characters advising people to see doctors if they have breathing problems, spit up blood or faint. They also explain what medicines patients can take, including home remedies such as honey tea. The country's main newspaper, Rodong Sinmun, advised people with mild symptoms to brew 4 to 5 grams of willow or honeysuckle leaves in hot water and drink that three times a day.

"Their guidelines don't make a sense at all. It's like the government is asking people to contact doctors only if they have breathing difficulties, which means just before they die," said former North Korean agriculture official Cho Chung Hui, who fled to South Korea in 2011. "My heart aches when I think about my brother and sister in North Korea and their suffering."

Kang, who runs a company analyzing the North Korean economy, said her contacts in Hyesan told her that North Korean residents are being asked to thoroughly read Rodong Sinmun's reports on how the country is working to stem the outbreak.

Since May 12, North Korea has banned travel between regions, but it hasn't attempted to impose more severe lockdowns in imitation of China. North Korea's economy is fragile due to pandemic border closures and decades of mismanagement, so the country has encouraged farming, construction and other industrial activities be accelerated. Kang said people in Hyesan still go to work.

The office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed worry this week about the consequences of North Korea's quarantine measures, saying isolation and traveling restrictions will have dire consequences for people already struggling to meet their basic needs, including getting enough food to eat.

"Children, lactating mothers, older people, the homeless and those living in more isolated rural and border areas are especially vulnerable," the office said in a statement.

Defectors in South Korea say they worry about their loved ones in North Korea. They also suspect COVID-19 had already spread to North Korea even before its formal admission of the outbreak.

"My father and sibling are still in North Korea and I'm worrying about them a lot because they weren't inoculated and there aren't many medicines there," said Kang Na-ra, who fled to South Korea in late 2014. She said a sibling told her during recent phone calls that their grandmother died of pneumonia, which she believes was caused by COVID-19, last September.

Defector Choi Song-juk said that when her farmer sister in North Korea last called her in February, she said that her daughter and many neighbors had been sick with coronavirus-like symptoms such as a high fever, coughing and sore throat. Choi said her sister pays brokers to arrange phone calls, but she hasn't called recently, even though it's around the time of year when she runs short of food and needs money transfers via a network of brokers. Choi said the disconnection is likely related to anti-virus restrictions on movements.

"I feel so sad. I must connect with her again because she must be without food and picking wild greens," said Choi, who left North Korea in 2015.

In recent years, Kim Jong Un has built some modern hospitals and improved medical systems, but critics say it's mostly for the country's ruling elite and that the free socialist medical service is in shambles. Recent defectors say there are lots of domestically produced drugs at markets now but they have quality issues so people prefer South Korean, Chinese and Russian medicines. But foreign medications are typically expensive, so poor people, who are a majority of the North's population, cannot afford them.

"If you are sick in North Korea, we often say you will die," Choi said.

Despite the outbreak, North Korea hasn't publicly responded to South Korean and U.S. offers of medical aid. World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Tuesday that the world body "is deeply concerned at the risk of further spread" in North Korea and the lack of information about the outbreak.

Choi Jung Hun, a former North Korean doctor who resettled in South Korea, suspects North Korea is using its pandemic response as a tool to promote Kim's image as a leader who cares about the public

and to solidify internal unity. He says the country's understated fatalities could also be exploited as a propaganda tool.

"One day, they'll say they've contained COVID-19. By comparing its death toll with that of the U.S. and South Korea, they'll say they've done a really good job and their anti-epidemic system is the world's best," said Choi, now a researcher at a Korea University-affiliated institute in South Korea.

Spy agencies urged to fix open secret: A lack of diversity

By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The peril National Security Agency staff wanted to discuss with their director didn't involve terrorists or enemy nations. It was something closer to home: the racism and cultural misunderstandings inside America's largest intelligence service.

The NSA and other intelligence agencies held calls for their staff shortly after the death of George Floyd. As Gen. Paul Nakasone listened, one person described how they would try to speak up in meetings only to have the rest of the group keep talking over them. Another person, a Black man, spoke about how he had been counseled that his voice was too loud and intimidated co-workers. A third described how a co-worker addressed them with a racist slur.

The national reckoning over racial inequality sparked by Floyd's murder two years ago has gone on behind closed doors inside America's intelligence agencies. Publicly available data, published studies of its diversity programs, and interviews with retired officers indicate spy agencies have not lived up to years of commitments made by their top leaders, who often say diversity is a national security imperative.

People of color remain underrepresented across the intelligence community and are less likely to be promoted. Retired officers who spoke to The Associated Press described examples of explicit and implicit bias. People who had served on promotion boards noted non-native English speakers applying for new jobs would sometimes be criticized for being hard to understand — what one person called the "accent card." Some say they believe minorities are funneled into working on countries or regions based on their ethnicity.

Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines, the first woman to serve in her role, has appointed diversity officials who say they need to collect better data to study longstanding questions, from whether the process for obtaining a security clearance disadvantages people of color to the reasons for disparities in advancement. Agencies are also implementing reforms they say will promote diversity.

"It's going to be incremental," said Stephanie La Rue, who was appointed this year to lead the intelligence community's efforts on diversity, equity and inclusion. "We're not going to see immediate change overnight. It's going to take us a while to get to where we need to go."

The NSA call following Floyd's death was described by a participant who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private discussion. The person credited Nakasone for listening to employees and making public and private commitments to diversity. But the person and other former officials said they sometimes felt that their identities as people of color were discounted or not fully appreciated by their employers.

The NSA declined to comment on the call. It said in a statement that agency officials "regularly examine the outcomes of our personnel systems to assess their fairness."

"Beyond the mission imperative, NSA cultivates diversity and promotes inclusion because we care about our people and know it is the right way to proceed," the statement said.

A former NSA contractor alleged this year that racist and misogynistic comments often circulate on classified chatrooms intended for intelligence work. The contractor, Dan Gilmore, wrote in a blog post that he was fired for reporting his complaints to higher-ups. A spokeswoman for Haines, Nicole de Haay, declined to comment on Gilmore's allegations but said employees who "engage in inappropriate conduct are subject to a variety of accountability mechanisms, including disciplinary action."

The U.S. intelligence community has evolved over decades from being almost exclusively run by white men — following a stereotype that Rep. Jim Himes, a Connecticut Democrat, referred to in a hearing on diversity last year as "pale, male, Yale." Intelligence agencies that once denied security clearances to people suspected of being gay now have active resource groups for people of different races and sexual

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orientation.

Testifying at the same hearing as Himes, CIA Director William Burns said, "Simply put, we can't be effective and we're not being true to our nation's ideals if everyone looks like me, talks like me, and thinks like me."

But annual charts published by the Office of Director of National Intelligence show a consistent trend: At rising levels of rank, minority representation goes down.

Latinos make up about 18% of the American population but just 7% of the roughly 100,000-person intelligence community and 3.5% of senior officers. Black officers comprise 12% of the community — the same as the U.S. population — but 6.5% at the most senior level. And while minorities comprise 27% of the total intelligence workforce, just 15% of senior executives are people of color.

A 2015 report commissioned by the CIA said the "underrepresentation of racial/ethnic minority officers and officers with a disability at the senior ranks is not a recent problem and speaks to unresolved cultural, organizational, and unconscious bias issues." Among the report's findings: Progress made between 1984 and 2004 in promoting Black officers to senior roles had been lost in the following decade and recruitment efforts at historically Black colleges and universities "have not been effective."

"Since its founding, the Agency has been unmistakably weak in promoting diverse role models to the executive level," the report said.

Lenora Peters Gant, a former senior human capital officer for the CIA and Office of the Director of National Intelligence, wrote last year that the intelligence community constantly imposes barriers on minorities, women and people with disabilities. Gant, now an adviser at Howard University, called on agencies to release some of their classified data on hiring and retention.

"The bottom line is the decision making leadership levels are void of credible minority participation," Gant said.

ODNI is starting an investigation of the slowest 10% of security clearance applications, reviewing delays in the cases for any possible examples of bias. It also intends to review whether polygraph examiners need additional race and ethnicity training.

The intelligence community currently doesn't report delays in getting a security clearance — required for most agency jobs — based on race, ethnicity or gender. The months or years a clearance can take can push away applicants who can't wait that long.

The office is implementing annual grant monitoring and assigning additional staff to work with universities in the intelligence community's Centers for Academic Excellence program, intended to recruit college students from underrepresented groups. A 2019 audit said it was impossible to judge the program due to poor planning and a lack of clear goals.

The program also got a new logo after ODNI officials heard that the previous "IC CAE" insignia appeared to spell out "ICE," an unintended reference to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Additional quiet changes are taking place across the agencies. Officials say the changes were in process before Floyd's death, though conversations held with employees brought new urgency to diversity issues.

The NSA stopped requiring applicants for internal promotions to disclose the date they were last promoted to the boards considering their application. Officials familiar with the change say it was intended to benefit applicants who take longer to move up the agency ladder, often including working parents or people from underrepresented communities.

The CIA two years ago formally tied yearly bonuses for its senior executives to their performance on diversity goals, measured next to factors such as leadership and intelligence tradecraft. Last year's class of new senior executives was the most diverse in the agency's history.

Said CIA spokesperson Tammy Thorp: "We are proud of the Agency's progress in ensuring our hiring, assignment, and promotion processes do not create barriers to advancement."

La Rue, the chief diversity officer for the intelligence community, has hired several data analysts and plans for her office to issue annual report cards on diversity for each intelligence agency. She acknowledges advocates have to break through enduring skepticism inside and outside government that diversity goals undermine the intelligence mission or require lower standards.

"The narrative that we have to sacrifice excellence for diversity, or that we are somehow compromising national security to achieve our diversity goals, is ridiculous," she said.

Biden has an eye on China as he heads to South Korea, Japan

By AAMER MADHANI and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden departs on a six-day trip to South Korea and Japan aiming to build rapport with the two nations' leaders while also sending an unmistakable message to China: Russia's faltering invasion of Ukraine should give Beijing pause about its own saber-rattling in the Pacific.

Biden departs Thursday and is set to meet newly elected South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. Their talks will touch on trade, increasing resilience in the global supply chain, growing concerns about North Korea's nuclear program and the explosive spread of COVID-19 in that country.

While in Japan, Biden will also meet with fellow leaders of the Indo-Pacific strategic alliance known as the Quad, a group that includes Australia, India and Japan.

The U.S. under Biden has forged a united front with democratic allies that has combined their economic heft to make Russia pay a price for its invasion of Ukraine. That alliance includes South Korea and Japan. But even as Biden is to be feted by Yoon at a state dinner and hold intimate conversations with Kishida, the U.S. president knows those relationships need to be deepened if they're to serve as a counterweight to China's ambitions.

"We think this trip is going to put on full display President Biden's Indo-Pacific strategy and then it will show in living color, the United States can at once lead the free world in responding to Russia's war in Ukraine, and that at the same time chart a course for effective, principled American leadership and engagement in a region that will define much of the future of the 21st century," White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said.

The war in eastern Europe has created a sense of urgency about China among major U.S. allies in the Pacific. Many have come to see the moment as their own existential crisis — one in which it's critical to show China it should not try to seize contested territory through military action.

Biden's overseas travel comes as he faces strong domestic headwinds: an infant formula shortage, budget-busting inflation, a rising number of COVID-19 infections, and increasing impatience among a Democratic base bracing for a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that is likely to result in a roll back of abortion rights.

The conundrums Biden faces in Asia are no less daunting.

China's military assertiveness has grown over the course of Biden's presidency, with its provocative actions frequently putting the region on edge.

Last month, China held military drills around Taiwan after a group of U.S. lawmakers arrived for talks on the self-governed island. Late last year China stepped up sorties into Taiwan's air space. Taiwan considers itself a sovereign state, but Beijing views Taiwan as a breakaway province and has not ruled out the use of force to achieve unification.

Japan has reported frequent intrusions by China's military vessels into Japanese territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. The uninhabited islets are controlled by Japan but claimed by China, which calls them Diaoyu.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Wednesday criticized what he called negative moves by Washington and Tokyo against Beijing during a video call with Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi.

"What arouses attention and vigilance is the fact that, even before the American leader has set out for the meeting, the so-called joint Japan-U.S. anti-China rhetoric is already kicking up dust," Wang said, according to China's Foreign Ministry.

Meanwhile, South Korea could tilt closer to the U.S. under Yoon, who took office last week. The new South Korean president has criticized his predecessor as "subservient" to China by seeking to balance the relationships with Washington and Beijing. To neutralize North Korea's nuclear threats, Yoon has pledged

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to seek a stronger U.S. security commitment.

The Biden administration has warned China against assisting Russia in its war with Ukraine. In March, the U.S. informed Asian and European allies that American intelligence determined that China had signaled to Russia a willingness to provide military support and financial backing to reduce the blow of severe sanctions imposed by the U.S. and its allies.

Biden administration officials say that the Russian invasion has been a clarifying moment for some of the bigger powers in Asia as financial sanctions and export bans have been put in place to check Russia.

U.S. Ambassador Rahm Emanuel, Biden's top envoy to Japan, said the Japanese have stood out by rallying eight of 10 members of Association of Southeast Nations to back a U.N. vote against the Russian invasion.

"Japan has been a pacesetter that has picked up and set the pace for South Korea, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand and others here in the Indo Pacific area," Emanuel said of Tokyo's support of Ukraine following the Russian invasion.

Biden, who is making his first presidential trip to Asia, met Kishida briefly on the sidelines of a U.N. climate conference last year shortly after the Japanese prime minister took office. He has yet to meet with Yoon face-to-face. The South Korean leader, a former prosecutor who came to office without political or foreign policy experience, was elected in a closely fought election.

Biden arrives in the midst of an unfolding crisis in North Korea, where a mass COVID-19 outbreak is spreading through its unvaccinated population. North Korea acknowledged domestic COVID-19 infections for the first time last week, ending a widely doubted claim it had been virus-free.

In recent months, North Korea has test-launched a spate of missiles in what experts see as an attempt to modernize its weapons and pressure its rivals to accept the country as a nuclear state and relax their sanctions.

Sullivan said U.S. intelligence officials have determined there's a "genuine possibility" that North Korea will conduct another ballistic missile test or nuclear test around the time of Biden's visit to Asia.

To be certain, China will also be carefully watching for "cracks in the relationship" during Biden's trip, said Scott Kennedy, a China economic analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

Sullivan confirmed that Biden will use the trip to launch the long-anticipated Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, a proposed pact to set rules for trade and digital standards, ensuring reliable supply chains, worker protections, decarbonization and tax and anticorruption issues. Known as IPEF, it's a planned substitute for the Trans-Pacific Partnership that President Donald Trump left in 2017 and that the Biden administration has not rejoined.

In terms of economic power, the U.S. slightly lags China in the Pacific, according to the Lowy Institute, an Australian think tank. But the institute's analysis shows the possibility that a trade pact could magnify the combined power of the U.S. and its allies relative to China. Biden's challenge is that IPEF would not necessarily cut tariff rates or give allied signatories greater access to U.S. markets, something Asian countries seek.

Biden and his fellow leaders also have their own national interests and differences over what it means to strengthen supply chains that have been rattled by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Democratic president says the U.S. must increase computer chip production on American soil. The shortage has fueled inflation by delaying production of autos, life-saving medical devices, smartphones, video game consoles, laptops and other modern conveniences. Yet allies in Asia are talking about the need to expand their capacity for making semiconductors — a valuable export — in their own countries.

Militant attacks hurt Pakistan relations with Afghan Taliban

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Faced with rising violence, Pakistan is taking a tougher line to pressure Afghanistan's Taliban rulers to crack down on militants hiding on their soil, but so far the Taliban remain reluctant to take action — trying instead to broker a peace.

Last month came a sharp deterioration in relations between the two neighbors when Pakistan carried

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out airstrikes in eastern Afghanistan. Witnesses said the strikes hit a refugee camp and another location, killing at least 40 civilians. UNICEF said 20 children were believed to be among the dead.

Pakistan never confirmed the April 15 strikes, but two days later its Foreign Ministry issued a sharp warning to the Taliban not to shelter militants.

The pressure has put the Taliban in a tight corner. The Taliban have long been close to several militant groups carrying out attacks in Pakistan, particularly the Pakistani Taliban, a separate organization known by the acronym TTP. The TTP and other groups have only got more active on Afghan soil since the Taliban takeover in August.

But the Taliban are wary of cracking down on them, fearful of creating more enemies at a time when they already face an increasingly violent campaign by Afghanistan's Islamic State group affiliate, analysts say.

A series of bombings across Afghanistan in recent weeks, mostly targeting minority Hazaras, has killed dozens. Most are blamed on the Islamic State affiliate, known by the acronym IS-K. The bloodshed has undermined the Taliban's claims to be able to provide the security expected of a governing force.

This week, the Taliban hosted talks between the TTP and a Pakistani government delegation as well as a group of Pakistani tribal leaders, apparently hoping for a compromise that can ease the pressure. On Wednesday, the TTP announced it was extending to May 30 an earlier cease-fire it had called.

The Taliban government's deputy spokesman Bilal Karimi said it "is trying its best for the continuation and success of the negotiations and meanwhile asks both sides to have flexibility."

But past cease-fires with the TTP have failed, and already the current one was shaken by violence last weekend.

Pakistan's frustration appears to be growing as violence on its soil has increased.

The secessionist Baluchistan Liberation Army killed three Chinese nationals in late April. The TTP and the Afghan-based IS have targeted Pakistan's military with increasing regularity.

Militant attacks in Pakistan are up nearly 50% since the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, according to the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies, an independent think tank based in Islamabad that tracks militant activities. The group documented 170 attacks between September and mid-May that killed 170 police, military and paramilitary personnel and more than 110 civilians.

The United Nations estimates that as many as 10,000 TTP militants are hiding in Afghanistan. So far, Afghanistan's rulers have done little to dismantle militant redoubts on their territory.

Prominent Afghans from southern Afghanistan, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, said the Pakistani Taliban and Pakistani Baluch secessionists had established several safe houses in the area during the previous U.S.-backed government's rule and they have remained since the Taliban takeover.

The Pakistani airstrikes in April marked a dramatically tougher stance. They came after a militant ambush killed seven soldiers near the border with Afghanistan. Pakistani and Afghani border forces often exchange rocket fire amid disputes over the frontier — but it is rare for Pakistan to use warplanes on targets inside its neighbor.

The change came after weeks of political turmoil in Pakistan that unseated Imran Khan as prime minister. Khan had been an advocate of negotiations with militants and had campaigned for the world to engage with the Taliban after their takeover in Afghanistan.

Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the U.S.-based Wilson Center said Khan "had a soft spot for the Taliban as well as a principled opposition to the use of force in Afghanistan."

With Khan now out of the picture and TTP attacks continuing, "we can expect a stronger Pakistani readiness to use military operations," he said.

The Afghan Taliban are warning Pakistan against further military action, threatening retaliation.

The airstrikes "are not acceptable," Taliban-appointed Defense Minister Mohammad Yaqoob warned Pakistan in late April. "The only reason we have tolerated this attack is because of our national interest, but it is possible we will not be so tolerant in the future."

The son of the Taliban founder, Mullah Mohammad Omar, Yaqoob is a powerful figure in the Taliban

leadership, which is struggling to stay united amid disagreements about how to govern their war-ravaged nation.

The leadership council seems firmly split between two camps: the pragmatists and hard-liners. Pragmatists have pushed for global engagement and opening of schools to girls of all ages. The hard-liners want to return Afghanistan to the late 1990s Taliban rule when women and girls were denied access to most public spaces and a rigid and unforgiving version of Islam and tribal rule was imposed.

A flurry of repressive edicts of late suggest the hard-liners have the upper hand, including an order that women wear all-encompassing veils that leave only the eyes visible and a decision not to allow girls to attend school past the sixth grade.

Yaqoob falls among the pragmatists, according to several prominent Afghans familiar with the Taliban leadership. Still, there seems no decision among the leaders on either side of the divide to oust militants on their territory.

"I do not see any quick fix to the Pakistan-Afghan situation. The Taliban will continue to provide sanctuary to the TTP and hope they can extend their own influence into Pakistan over time," said Shuja Nawaz, an expert and fellow at the South Asia Center of the U.S.-based Atlantic Council.

"So, expect the situation to deteriorate, especially with the (Pakistan) military calling the shots on Afghan policy," Nawaz said.

Red Cross registers hundreds of Ukrainian POWs from Mariupol

By OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI and CIARAN McQUILLAN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The Russian military said Thursday that more Ukrainian fighters who were making a last stand in Mariupol have surrendered, bringing the total who have left their stronghold to 1,730, while the Red Cross said it had registered hundreds of them as prisoners of war.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said that the registrations of Ukrainian prisoners of war, which included wounded fighters, began Tuesday under an agreement between Russia and Ukraine.

The Geneva-based humanitarian agency, which has experience in dealing with prisoners of war and prisoner exchanges, said however that its team did not transport the fighters to "the places where they are held" — which was not specified.

Ukrainian fighters who emerged from the ruined Azovstal steelworks after being ordered by their military to abandon the last stronghold of resistance in the now-flattened port city face an uncertain fate. Some were taken by the Russians to a former penal colony in territory controlled by Moscow-backed separatists.

While Ukraine said it hopes to get the soldiers back in a prisoner swap, Russia threatened to put some of them on trial for war crimes.

The Red Cross cited rules under the Geneva Conventions that should allow the organization to interview prisoners of war "without witnesses" and that visits with them should not be "unduly restricted."

The organization did not specify how many prisoners of war were involved.

It's also not clear how many fighters are left at the plant. Russia previously estimated that it had been battling some 2,000 troops in the waterside plant.

Denis Pushilin, a senior Russia-backed separatist official in a region that includes Mariupol, said that those Ukrainian soldiers who needed medical assistance were hospitalized while others were put in a detention facility. He also claimed that Red Cross representatives were allowed to inspect the detention facility, but that could not be immediately verified.

Amnesty International said earlier that the Red Cross should be given immediate access to the Mariupol fighters who surrendered. Denis Krivosheev, Amnesty's deputy director for the region, cited lawless executions allegedly carried out by Russian forces in Ukraine and said the Azovstal defenders "must not meet the same fate."

Despite the setback in Mariupol, Ukraine's confidence has been growing after fighting the Russian offensive to an effective standstill and forcing Moscow to withdrawal from around Kyiv and narrow its military goals.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy who was involved in several rounds of

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talks with Russia, said Thursday in a tweet that at this stage “do not offer us a ceasefire — this is impossible without total Russian troops withdrawal.”

“Until Russia is ready to fully liberate occupied territories, our negotiating team is weapons, sanctions and money,” he tweeted.

Ukraine’s military said in its morning briefing Thursday that Russian forces were still pressing their offensive on various sections of the front in the east, but were being successfully repelled.

Ukraine’s military made no mention of Mariupol in its early morning briefing Thursday, saying only that Russian forces were still pressing their offensive on various sections of the front in the east, but were being successfully repelled.

In the eastern Donbas region, which has been the center of recent fighting as Russian forces on the offensive have clashed with staunch Ukrainian resistance, four civilians were killed in the town of Sievierodonetsk in a Russian bombardment, Luhansk Gov. Serhiy Haidai said. Three other civilians were wounded in the attack Wednesday, and the shelling continued into early Thursday, Haidai said.

On the Russian side of the border, the governor of Kursk province said a truck driver was killed and several other civilians wounded by shelling from Ukraine. Separatist authorities in the Donetsk region in eastern Ukraine said two civilians were killed and five wounded also in Ukrainian shelling over the last 24 hours.

Meanwhile, in the first war-crimes trial held by Ukraine, a captured Russian soldier pleaded guilty on Wednesday of killing a civilian and faces a possible life in prison.

The plant was the only thing standing in the way of Russia declaring the full capture of Mariupol. Its fall would make Mariupol the biggest Ukrainian city to be taken by Moscow’s forces, giving a boost to Putin in a war where many of his plans have gone awry.

Military analysts, though, said the city’s capture at this point would hold more symbolic importance than anything else, since Mariupol is already effectively under Moscow’s control and most of the Russian forces that were tied down by the drawn-out fighting have already left.

Video showed the Ukrainian fighters carrying out their wounded on stretchers and undergoing pat-down searches before being taken away on buses escorted by military vehicles bearing the pro-Kremlin “Z” sign.

The U.S. has gathered intelligence that shows some Russian officials have become concerned that Kremlin forces in Mariupol are carrying out abuses, including beating city officials, subjecting them to electric shocks and robbing homes, according to a U.S official familiar with the findings.

The Russian officials are concerned that the abuses will further inspire residents to resist the occupation and that the treatment runs counter to Russia’s claims that its military has liberated Russian speakers, according to the official, who was not authorized to comment.

In the war-crimes case in Kyiv, Russian Sgt. Vadim Shishimarin, a 21-year-old member of a tank unit, pleaded guilty to shooting an unarmed 62-year-old Ukrainian man in the head through a car window in the opening days of the war. Ukraine’s top prosecutor has said some 40 more war-crimes cases are being readied.

On the diplomatic front, Finland and Sweden could become members of NATO in a matter of months, though objections from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threaten to disrupt things. Turkey accuses the two countries of harboring Kurdish militants and others it considers a threat to its security.

Ibrahim Kalin, a foreign policy adviser and spokesman for Erdogan, said there will be “no progress” on the membership applications unless Turkey’s concerns are met. Each of NATO’s 30 countries has an effective veto over new members.

Mariupol’s defenders grimly clung to the steel mill for months and against the odds, preventing Russia from completing its occupation of the city and its port.

Mariupol was a target of the Russians from the outset as Moscow sought to open a land corridor from its territory to the Crimean Peninsula, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014.

The city — its prewar population of about 430,000 now reduced by about three-quarters — has largely been reduced to rubble by relentless bombardment, and Ukraine says over 20,000 civilians have been killed there.

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For Ukraine, the order to the fighters to surrender could leave President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's government open to allegations it abandoned the troops he described as heroes.

"Zelenskyy may face unpleasant questions," said Volodymyr Fesenko, who heads the independent Penta think tank in Kyiv. "There have been voices of discontent and accusations of betraying Ukrainian soldiers."

A hoped-for prisoner swap could also fall through, he cautioned.

Russia's main federal investigative body said it intends to interrogate the surrendering troops to "identify the nationalists" and determine whether they were involved in crimes against civilians.

Also, Russia's top prosecutor asked the country's Supreme Court to designate Ukraine's Azov Regiment — among the troops that made up the Azovstal garrison — as a terrorist organization. The regiment has roots in the far right.

The Russian parliament was scheduled to consider a resolution to ban the exchange of any Azov Regiment fighters but didn't take up the issue Wednesday.

World shares sink after inflation driven retreat on Wall St

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Shares declined in Europe and Asia on Thursday after a broad retreat on Wall Street triggered by worries over the impact of persistent high inflation on corporate profits and consumer spending.

U.S. futures were lower, while oil prices advanced.

Germany's DAX lost 2% to 13,731.64 and the CAC 40 in Paris declined 1.9% to 6,234.78. Britain's FTSE 100 shed 1.7% to 3,537.99. The future for the S&P 500 was 1% lower while the future for the Dow Jones Industrial Average sank 0.9%.

The Dow industrials sank more than 1,100 points, or 3.6% on Wednesday, and the S&P 500 had its biggest drop in nearly two years, shedding 4%. That was its steepest decline since June 2020. The tech-heavy Nasdaq fell 4.7%.

The benchmark index is now down more than 18% from the record high it reached at the beginning of the year. That's just shy of the 20% decline that's considered a bear market.

"The sentiment in the market is highly negative as traders and investors are largely concerned about an economic downturn and soaring inflation," Naeem Aslam of Avatrade said in a commentary.

The Federal Reserve is trying to temper the impact from the highest inflation in four decades by raising interest rates. Many other central banks are on a similar track. But the Bank of Japan has stuck to its low interest rate policy and the gap between those benchmark rates of the world's largest and third-largest economies has pushed the dollar's value up against the Japanese yen.

Japan reported a trade deficit for April as its imports ballooned 28%. The shift reflects surging energy costs amid the war in Ukraine and a weakening of the yen against the U.S. dollar.

Japan's exports grew to 8.076 trillion yen (\$63 billion) last month, up 12.5% from the previous year, according to Ministry of Finance data released Thursday. Imports totaled 8.915 trillion yen (\$70 billion) in April, up from 6.953 trillion yen in April 2021, and the highest since comparable numbers began to be taken in 1979.

The Nikkei 225 in Tokyo lost 1.9% to 26,402.84 and the Hang Seng in Hong Kong dropped 2.5% to 20,120.60. In South Korea, the Kospi shed 1.3% to 2,592.34, while Australia's S&P/ASX 200 gave up 1.7% to 7,064.50.

The Shanghai Composite index reversed earlier losses, gaining 0.4% to 3,096.96.

On Wednesday, retailer Target lost a quarter of its value after reporting earnings that fell far short of analysts' forecasts. Inflation, especially for shipping costs, dragged its operating margin for the first quarter to 5.3%. It had been expecting 8% or higher.

The company warned that its costs for freight this year would be \$1 billion higher than it estimated just three months ago.

The report comes a day after Walmart said its profit took a hit from higher costs. The nation's largest retailer fell 6.8%, adding to its losses from Tuesday.

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Target and Walmart each provided anecdotal evidence that inflation is weighing on consumers, saying they held back on purchasing big-ticket items and changed from national brands to less expensive store brands.

The weak reports stoked concerns that stubbornly rising inflation is putting a tighter squeeze on a wide range of businesses and could cut deeper into their profits.

Other big retailers also have racked up hefty losses.

The data are not entirely consistent. On Tuesday, the market cheered an encouraging report from the Commerce Department that showed retail sales rose in April, driven by higher sales of cars, electronics, and more spending at restaurants.

Investors worry the Fed could trigger a recession if it raises interest rates too high or too quickly. Worries persist about global growth as Russia's invasion of Ukraine puts even more pressure on prices for oil and food while lockdowns in China to stem COVID-19 cases worsens supply chain problems.

In other trading, benchmark U.S. crude oil rose 56 cents to \$110.15 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It dropped \$2.81 to \$109.59 on Wednesday.

Brent crude, the basis for pricing for international trading, climbed \$1.19 to \$110.30 per barrel.

The dollar fell to 128.14 Japanese yen from 128.20 yen late Wednesday. The euro strengthened to \$1.0481 from \$1.0464.

Court considers whether US can seize a Russian yacht in Fiji

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — At Lautoka harbor in the heart of Fiji's sugar cane region, five U.S. federal agents boarded the Russian-owned Amadea, a luxurious superyacht the length of a football field.

"They want to take 20 crew and sail east!" the ship's captain wrote in a frantic May 5 WhatsApp message to lawyer Feizal Haniff, who represents the company that legally owns the superyacht.

"When?" Haniff wrote back, court documents obtained by The Associated Press show. "Please hold. Please hold. Can you hold. I need a judge. I am dialing everyone."

The case highlights the thorny legal ground the U.S. is finding itself on as it tries to seize assets of Russian oligarchs around the world. Those intentions are welcomed by many governments and citizens who oppose the war in Ukraine, but some actions are raising questions about how far U.S. jurisdiction extends.

In Fiji, the agents boarded the vessel after an initial legal victory in which a lower Fijian court granted the registration of a U.S. seizure warrant.

In Washington, the Justice Department rushed out a media release. "\$300 Million Yacht of Sanctioned Russian Oligarch Suleiman Kerimov Seized by Fiji at Request of United States," it read.

But Haniff argued the U.S. had jumped the gun. Whatever evidence or suspicions the FBI had about the ship, Haniff argued, they didn't have the right to take control of it, much less sail it away.

That's because prior to the agents boarding the ship, Haniff had already filed two legal appeals, arguing that the real owner was a different wealthy Russian — a man who didn't face sanctions — and that the U.S. had no jurisdiction under Fiji's mutual assistance laws to seize the vessel, at least until a court sorted out who really owned the Amadea.

Fiji's Court of Appeal decided to take up the case, and heard arguments Wednesday. The Amadea is now back under the watchful eye of the Fijian police.

The FBI had linked the Amadea to the Kerimov family through their alleged use of code names while aboard and the purchase of items like a pizza oven and a spa bed. The ship became a target of Task Force KleptoCapture, launched in March to seize Russian oligarchs' assets to pressure Russia to end the war.

Court documents say the Amadea switched off its transponder soon after Russia invaded Ukraine and sailed from the Caribbean through the Panama Canal to Mexico, arriving with over \$100,000 in cash. It then sailed thousands of miles across the Pacific Ocean to Fiji.

The Justice Department said it didn't believe paperwork showing the Amadea was next headed to the Philippines, arguing it was really destined for Vladivostok or elsewhere in Russia.

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The department said it found a text message on a crew member's phone: "We're not going to Russia" followed by a "shush" emoji.

Court documents show the company Haniff represents, Millemarin Investments, is the legal owner of the Cayman Islands-flagged superyacht and that Millemarin is owned by Eduard Khudainatov, a former chairman and chief executive of Rosneft, the state-controlled Russian oil and gas company. Khudainatov, who doesn't face sanctions, filed an affidavit to say he owns the Amadea.

When the U.S. agents boarded the ship, Haniff worried he might never get to a chance to argue his case in court because the Amadea would have sailed away to the U.S. — maybe to American Samoa, Hawaii, even to San Francisco.

He prepared a fiery draft appeal accusing U.S. authorities of running roughshod over Fiji's sovereignty after encountering a lower court judge who was "star struck" by the American warrant. He said they'd tried to bribe the yacht's young crew members to sail it to the U.S., and had threatened to cancel the crew's U.S. visas.

"The conduct of the U.S. authorities in Fiji relating to the Amadea has been appalling," he wrote in a draft which he never filed because the appeals court took up the case.

A Justice Department official, who was not authorized to discuss the matter by name and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity, said the U.S. agents who boarded the ship did so under a valid warrant, and were accompanied by Fijian authorities throughout.

There were "further proceedings following the initial approval of the warrant," the official acknowledged, adding the U.S. had acted properly under both U.S. and Fijian law.

The official said other claims like bribery were categorically false.

"We are seeking to contract with various service providers for the transport of the ship," the official said. "The characterization of those contract negotiations as anything other than just that is baseless."

In court documents, the FBI claims Kerimov, an economist and former Russian politician, is the real owner of the Amadea, which is 106 meters (348 feet) long and features a live lobster tank, a hand-painted piano, a swimming pool and a large helipad.

Kerimov made a fortune investing in Russian gold producer Polyus, with Forbes magazine putting his net worth at \$15.6 billion.

The U.S. first sanctioned him in 2018 after he'd been detained in France and accused of money laundering there, sometimes arriving with suitcases stuffed with 20 million euros.

The U.S. acknowledges that paperwork appears to show Khudainatov is the owner but says he's also the paper owner of a second and even larger superyacht, the Scheherazade, which has been linked to Russian President Vladimir Putin. The U.S. questions whether Khudainatov could really afford two superyachts worth a total of more than \$1 billion.

"The fact that Khudainatov is being held out as the owner of two of the largest superyachts on record, both linked to sanctioned individuals, suggests that Khudainatov is being used as a clean, unsanctioned straw owner to conceal the true beneficial owners," the FBI wrote in a court affidavit.

The U.S. claims it was Kerimov who secretly bought the Amadea last year through shell companies. The FBI said a search warrant in Fiji turned up messages on the ship's computers that point to Kerimov. Emails showed that Kerimov's children were aboard the ship this year and that the crew used code names — G0 for Kerimov, G1 for his wife, G2 for his daughter and so on.

The Kerimov family's ownership was evident from changes they made to the superyacht, like adding more electric sockets in its bathrooms, and their involvement in approving the new pizza oven and spa bed, the FBI said. Crew members discuss a possible "upcoming G0 guest trip" noting he wants the quickest jet skis available — so they'll need to buy new jet skis.

In his appeal, Haniff argues the U.S. case is based on hearsay and rumors spread by unnamed crew members, and there's no evidence that Khudainatov couldn't afford an investment in two superyachts.

The FBI's evidence only shows Kerimov's family may have been guests on the boat, he said.

"This is thin stuff," Haniff wrote in his appeal. "The super-rich are a tribe who live different lives from

the rest of us: they are given privileges and luxuries in goods and services which are far removed from ordinary experience. This says nothing suggestive of ownership.”

Within a week or two, the appeals court is expected to decide what happens next to the Amadea.

Century-old canal project sparks opposition in South Sudan

By DENG MACHOL Associated Press

JUBA, South Sudan (AP) — A petition to stop the revival of the 118-year-old Jonglei Canal project in South Sudan, started by one of the country’s top academics, is gaining traction in the country, with the waterway touted as a catastrophic environmental and social disaster for the country’s Sudd wetlands.

It follows a series of calls within South Sudan’s government to restart the project in order to prevent flooding and improve the region’s infrastructure. The country’s vice president has already announced plans to conduct a feasibility study in the hopes of getting the defunct canal operational.

The vice chancellor of the University of Juba, professor John Akec, launched the ‘Save the Sudd’ social media petition with the intention to submit it to the country’s president once completed. Akec’s petition has already gained tens of thousands of signatures out of the required 100,000.

Previous research has shown that the canal would have serious repercussions on the delicate ecosystem of the Sudd region, including negative effects on the aquatic, wild and domestic plants and animals, as well as interfere with the farming activities of the people in the region, potentially displacing them.

“We will not have enough water and it will dry up and if it dries up, all the livelihoods that connected to that area, including fishing, resettlement and grazing lands will be lost,” Akec told the Associated Press.

“Water is more valuable than oil, diamonds and gold,” said Akec. “Let’s wake-up from our sleep and stop the theft of water and destruction of our ecosystems and economic future by Egypt.”

The canal, first proposed by a British engineer in Cairo back in 1904, would divert water away from the Sudd wetlands to deliver 10 billion cubic meters (2.6 trillion gallons) from the Nile to downstream Sudan and Egypt. Plans started to take shape in 1954 but the project was halted 30 years later and is now at a stalemate. About 270 kilometers (168 miles) of a total of 340 km (150 miles) of the canal has already been excavated.

Earlier this year, one of South Sudan’s vice presidents, Taban Deng Gai, called for the resumption of the canal project in order to prevent flood disasters in Jonglei and Unity state.

The floods have led to a widespread collapse of livelihoods, severely hindering the ability of households to maintain their livestock. Traditional coping strategies and sources of income are no longer viable for many communities.

“We never lacked food as farmers, but now the floods have destroyed our farms. There is water everywhere,” said Martha Achol, a farmer and mother of six, who recounted the struggles inflicted by the floods in Jonglei state.

Another local farmer, 60-year-old Mayak Deng, agreed. “We had enough food then but today we don’t have enough,” he said.

Meanwhile, Nile basin countries are experiencing water scarcity due to the impacts of rapid population growth and climate change, creating renewed interest in the canal project.

South Sudan’s minister of water resources and irrigation, Manawa Peter Gatkuoth, said that the project would also create avenues for infrastructural development, agriculture, river transport and tourism. Gatkuoth has requested an approval and a budget from the office of vice president Riek Machar to kick-start the canal.

But environmentalists worry about disrupting the Sudd’s delicate balance and life cycle. Deng Majok Chol, a Ph.D. candidate at Oxford University’s Environmental Change Institute, argues that the ongoing increase in flooding events is only a small fluctuation within the longer millennial cycle of the Sudd.

Rainfall caused by the evaporation of water in the Sudd will be largely reduced if the canal project comes to fruition, with green areas at risk of becoming dry and arid. There are concerns that even those living beyond the Sudd region, as well as in downstream Sudan and Egypt, will be negatively impacted.

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An environmental and social impact assessment warned that the canal project would “irreversibly or partially destroy downstream ecosystems”.

“The current calls for the resumption of the Jonglei Canal project demonstrate a failure to observe and learn from the global trend of water management challenges compounded by global warming,” said Majok. “It does not take a rocket scientist to see these moves as baits, strategically calculated toward a more than a century goal of exclusive control over how Nile water is utilized.”

Economic and climate concerns have also stirred opposition to the canal.

“The economic value of the Sudd wetlands is estimated at a billion dollars annually and this will be lost if the wetlands are drained,” Nhial Tiitmamer, director of the Environmental and Natural Resources Program at the Sudd Institute, warned.

Tiitmamer added that the Sudd wetlands are a migratory transition points and corridors for bird species that migrate between Europe and Africa every year and some of these birds are classified both in South Sudan and internationally as endangered species.

He cautioned that the project will lead to an “exacerbation of climate change through reduction of carbon sinks as well as through release of carbon dioxide from the wetlands destruction.”

Dustin Johnson looking to get back on track at PGA

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — Dustin Johnson and Jordan Spieth are examples of how quickly the landscape can change.

Look back one year, and Johnson was the No. 1 player in the world who had been runner-up in the previous two PGA Championships and among the favorites every time he played.

Going into this PGA Championship, which starts Thursday at Southern Hills, he is No. 12. It’s not the end of the world, but it’s his lowest ranking in seven years, and the questions have changed. Instead of when he will add another major, it’s about when he will win again.

Johnson has gone 27 starts over 15 months since winning the Saudi International.

“The thing for me has just been driving,” Johnson said. He thought back to the Masters, where his driver was behaving so badly he switched to a 3-wood. That’s not a bad option for most players, just not Johnson.

“I’ve never done that in my life — 3-wood is the last club in my bag that I’d want to hit,” he said. “I’ve always felt most comfortable with a driver.”

That would be a good club for him at Southern Hills after its acclaimed restoration project. Unlike the last time the PGA was here in 2007 and players were hitting mostly irons off the tee. Now that it’s at 7,556 yards for a par 70, the driver could go a long way.

“Obviously, this is a really good place to drive it straight for me,” Johnson said.

He arrived on Monday, taking those long strides up the hill toward the clubhouse, when Johnson was asked if it was his first time in Oklahoma.

“Yep,” he said. “And after this week, it will be my” He finished the sentence with a smile. At age 38, and with no major on the horizon here for the next eight years, well, he’d like to make the most of his time in the Sooner State.

A year ago, Spieth was No. 28 in the world, a month away from ending a long victory drought but still far away from his game being back to the form that made him a major force in golf at age 21.

Now the 28-year-old from Texas is No. 8 and coming off a particularly good stretch that followed an irritating missed cut at the Masters. Spieth won in Hilton Head the following week and then finished one shot behind in Dallas last week.

The PGA Championship is all that’s keeping him from the career Grand Slam, which is one of the key talking points this week. Spieth brought up the missing leg of the Grand Slam as the “elephant in the room.”

But for the state of golf, it’s starting to feel like a herd of pachyderms.

Where’s Phil Mickelson, the defending PGA champion? And what will he do next when he emerges from this self-imposed exile over his comments on the Saudi-funded golf series that seemingly offended both

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sides?

Tiger Woods still commands all the attention. The gallery was enormous for him playing nine holes on Monday and again on Wednesday in his final tuneup for his return to Southern Hills. Those around him felt it was a victory that he made it through 72 holes at the Masters in his first competitive tournament since his car crash.

"I've gotten stronger since then," Woods said. "It's still going to be sore, and walking is a challenge. I can hit golf balls, but the challenge is walking. It's going to be that way for the foreseeable future, for sure."

Not to be overlooked is the hand-wringing over the Saudi-funded series Greg Norman is orchestrating, set to start in three weeks outside London with still no idea who will be playing, with the PGA Tour denying releases required to play outside the country.

Rory McIlroy said earlier in the week, "It's going to shape the future of professional golf one way or another, so I think we're just going to have to see how it all shakes out."

Spieth could only smile when after a series of questions about the career Grand Slam and his game and Southern Hills, he was asked about Mickelson and the Saudi league.

"Since everyone was lobbing me questions, you just went and threw two bombs," he said with a wry smile. He didn't look bothered, and odds are he wasn't.

Spieth has never expressed interest in going, he no longer is on the PGA Tour policy board and he's happy to mind his own business.

"I'm excited to come here this week and just keep my head down, and none of those distractions weigh on me whatsoever," he said.

And then there's Johnson, who doesn't seem to get distracted by much of anything. He was courted heavily by the Saudi group at the start of the year before declaring he wanted to play against the best on the PGA Tour. He also had no small matter of a wedding to Paulina Gretzky just two weeks after the Masters.

Which was the greater distraction?

"Neither," he said. "Paulina did an unbelievable job with the wedding. I really didn't have to do much. I helped for about half an hour with the seating chart. That was about it. That was my whole contribution."

On Thursday, it's all about major championship golf. And even with the Masters only five weeks removed, it couldn't get here soon enough.

Man charged in Buffalo massacre due back in court

Associated Press undefined

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The white man accused of slaughtering 10 Black people at a Buffalo supermarket was scheduled to appear in court Thursday as authorities including the FBI continue to investigate the possibility of hate crime and terrorism charges.

Payton Gendron, 18, livestreamed the attack from a helmet camera before surrendering to police outside the grocery store. Shortly before the attack last Saturday, he posted hundreds of pages of writings to online discussion groups where he detailed his plans for the assault and his racist motivation.

Investigators have been examining those documents, which included a private diary he kept on the chat platform Discord.

At his initial court appearance last week, Gendron's court-appointed lawyer entered a plea of "not guilty" on his behalf.

The massacre at the Tops supermarket was unsettling even in a nation that has become numb to mass shootings. All but two of the 13 of the people shot during the attack were Black. Gendron's online writings said he planned the assault after becoming infatuated with white supremacist ideology he encountered online.

The diary said Gendron planned his attack in secret, with no outside help, but Discord confirmed Wednesday that an invitation to access his private writings was sent to a small group of people about 30 minutes before the assault began.

Some of them accepted the invitation. It was unclear how many read what he had written or logged on

to view the assault live. It also wasn't clear whether anyone tried to alert law enforcement.

Buffalo Police Commissioner Joseph Gramaglia has said investigators were working to obtain, verify and review Gendron's online postings.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul on Wednesday authorized the state's attorney general, Letitia James, to investigate social media platforms used by Gendron to determine if they were liable for "providing a platform to plan and promote violence."

Gunman targets Taiwanese faith with long pro-democracy link

By DEEPA BHARATH Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The recent deadly shooting at Irvine Taiwanese Presbyterian Church in California didn't just violate a sacred space. Taiwanese Americans across the country say it ripped through their cultural bastion.

It is where the congregation in Laguna Woods worshipped. But it was also where their native language and support for a democratic Taiwan thrived. Sunday's mass shooting by man officials say was motivated by political hate of Taiwan has spotlighted the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan's close connections to the nation's democracy movement.

Jerry Chen, a church member who dialed 911 after fleeing the gunman, calls himself a "proud Presbyterian" and says the congregation, while avoiding politics in church, likes to talk about what is going on in Taiwan.

"We care deeply because we grew up in Taiwan," he said.

Chen, 72, has been a congregant since the church's founding 28 years ago. He is puzzled why a man who has no apparent connection to the church would drive from Las Vegas to Laguna Woods, a town of 16,000 populated mostly by retirees, to carry out such an attack.

Members had gathered on Sunday for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic struck for a luncheon honoring their former pastor, Billy Chang, who was visiting from Taiwan.

Investigators are still piecing together information about the gunman, 68-year-old David Chou, who was born in Taiwan after his family was forced to leave China when the Communists took power. They said they obtained Chou's handwritten notes documenting his hatred of Taiwan. In addition to murder and attempted murder, Chou could also face hate crime charges.

The small, tight-knit congregation was a space where older Taiwanese immigrants supported each other, said Sandy Hsu, whose in-laws made a last-minute decision not to attend the luncheon. The shooting has sowed fear and anxiety in the Taiwanese community nationwide, she said.

"My in-laws are questioning if it's safe to get together in the future," Hsu said. "We're asking ourselves if it's safe any more to talk about politics or freely express our views."

Second-generation Taiwanese Americans like Leona Chen say their churches — Presbyterian or any other denomination — have been a "social haven."

"I have very visceral memories of potlucks where aunties would cook traditional dishes and play matchmaker for the young adults," said Chen, editor of Bay Area-based TaiwaneseAmerican.org, the website and nonprofit serving the Taiwanese American community.

"Uncles who were retired engineers would help kids with calculus and SAT prep. Church was also a place where everyone figured out life in a foreign country together — from jury duty and homeownership to their kids' college applications."

But, she also views the church as "a political space."

"Especially in the (Taiwanese) Presbyterian Church, there is a theological commitment to activism, to fight against injustice," she said. "Churches became sanctuaries for pro-democracy groups."

Taiwan is majority Buddhist and Taoist; Christians make up only 4% of the population.

The Presbyterian Church carved a niche and grew in political stature in the 1950s after the Kuomintang — or KMT party — came into power in Taiwan, said Christine Lin, who published a book in 1999 about the Presbyterian Church as a vital advocate of local autonomy in Taiwan. The party imposed what many

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perceive as an oppressive regime and targeted Presbyterians, even labeling them “terrorists,” she said.

On June 28, 1997 – three days before Hong Kong’s reversion to China – Lin recalls being at a rally with 60,000 people outside Taipei’s World Trade Center. She said nearly a third of those gathered were Presbyterians who arrived by bus from across the country.

Lin, who grew up going to a Taiwanese Presbyterian church in St. Louis, saw a Presbyterian minister leading the crowd in singing phrases in Taiwanese like “Make Taiwan Independent” to the tune of “Glory, Glory Hallelujah.”

Lin’s uncle and aunt, who both attend the Laguna Woods church, stayed home on Sunday, she said. Even though she was left wondering why the attacker chose this particular congregation, Lin said she wasn’t surprised that he chose a Taiwanese Presbyterian church. Her undergraduate thesis as an Asian Studies major in Dartmouth College was centered on this very topic.

“The Presbyterians not only succeeded in Romanizing the spoken Taiwanese language but also provided services such as education and healthcare that other churches did not provide,” she said.

The church distinguished itself as a “native church” that represented Taiwanese, Hakka and Indigenous people, with a political vision rooted in democracy and self-determination – ideals many Taiwanese found attractive, Lin said.

The Presbyterian Church was also instrumental in bringing members of the Democratic Progressive Party into power, said Jufang Tseng, dean of the School of Theology at Charisma University, an online institution based in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Tseng worked in the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan’s media department from 2001 to 2003. Raised in a family that favored Taiwan’s reunification with China, Tseng said her mindset later changed thanks to the Presbyterians.

“The Presbyterian Church has always been more inclusive,” she said, adding that church leaders were adept at navigating secular spaces while not imposing their religious beliefs on others. “Their motivation was faith-based, but they didn’t push Christianity on anyone.”

In the U.S. most Taiwanese Presbyterian churches largely stayed away from politics, Lin said.

“The Presbyterian Church of Taiwan was certainly involved politically especially from the 1970s,” she said. “But, the churches here, while they promoted the Taiwanese language and supported self-determination and democracy in Taiwan, did not make overt political statements or engage in activism.”

It is common to find people with connections to mainland China in many U.S. Taiwanese churches, said Daisy Tsai, associate professor of the Old Testament at Logos Evangelical Seminary in El Monte, California.

The two groups may hold different political beliefs, but their Christian faith binds them, she said.

“People generally mingle and get along,” said Tsai, who is Taiwanese American. “In many churches, there is an unwritten rule that we don’t discuss politics. But sometimes, those discussions could spill over to social media and turn into debates.”

Al Hsu, a second-generation Taiwanese American who lives in the Chicago area, agrees that church is not necessarily a place where people talk politics.

“But it is a place where we foster a sense of our peoplehood, our heritage and national identity,” he said.

Hsu said his mother holds dual citizenship and travels to Taiwan to vote because she cares about the country’s future.

“The church has been a safe place for the older generation to talk with others who share those concerns,” he said. “For someone to come into such a sacred space and target our amahs and agongs (grandmothers and grandfathers) – to attack the elderly whom we hold in such reverence – is an attack on our entire community.”

Biden invokes Defense Production Act for formula shortage

By ZEKE MILLER and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden invoked the Defense Production Act to speed production of infant formula and authorized flights to import supply from overseas, as he faces mounting political

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pressure over a domestic shortage caused by the safety-related closure of the country's largest formula manufacturing plant.

The Defense Production Act order requires suppliers of formula manufacturers to fulfill orders from those companies before other customers, in an effort to eliminate production bottlenecks. Biden is also authorizing the Defense Department to use commercial aircraft to fly formula supplies that meet federal standards from overseas to the U.S., in what the White House is calling "Operation Fly Formula."

Supplies of baby formula across the country have been severely curtailed in recent weeks after a February recall by Abbott Nutrition exacerbated ongoing supply chain disruptions among formula makers, leaving fewer options on store shelves and increasingly anxious parents struggling to find nutrition for their children.

"I know parents across the country are worried about finding enough formula to feed their babies," Biden said in a video statement released Wednesday by the White House. "As a parent and as a grandparent, I know just how stressful that is."

The announcement comes two days after the Food and Drug Administration said it was streamlining its review process to make it easier for foreign manufacturers to begin shipping more formula into the U.S.

In a letter Wednesday to the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Agriculture, Biden directed the agencies to work with the Pentagon to identify overseas supply of formula that meets U.S. standards over the next week, so that chartered Defense Department flights can swiftly fly it to the U.S.

"Imports of baby formula will serve as a bridge to this ramped-up production," Biden wrote.

Regulators said Monday that they'd reached a deal to allow Abbott Nutrition to restart its Sturgis, Michigan, plant, the nation's largest formula plant, which has been closed since February due to contamination issues. The company must overhaul its safety protocols and procedures before resuming production.

After getting the FDA's OK, Abbott said it will take eight to ten weeks before new products begin arriving in stores. The company didn't set a timeline to restart manufacturing.

"I've directed my team to do everything possible to ensure there's enough safe baby formula and that it is quickly reaching families that need it the most," Biden said in the statement, calling it "one of my top priorities."

The White House actions come as the Democratic-led House approved two bills Wednesday addressing the baby formula shortage as lawmakers look to show progress on what has become a frightening development for many families.

One bill with wide bipartisan support passed by a vote of 414-9. It would give the secretary of the Agriculture Department the ability to issue a narrow set of waivers in the event of a supply disruption. The goal is to give participants in an assistance program commonly known as WIC the ability to use vouchers to purchase formula from any producer rather than be limited to one brand that may be unavailable. The WIC program accounts for about half of infant formula sales in the U.S.

"I want to say to the mom struggling that we hear you in Congress and you do not need to handle this on your own. We are working to find you a solution," said the bill's sponsor, Rep. Jahana Hayes, D-Conn.

The other measure, a \$28 million emergency spending bill to boost resources at the Food and Drug Administration, passed by a mostly party-line vote of 231-192, and it's unclear whether the Senate will go along.

"This bill just continues the Democrats' strategy of throwing money at the same bureaucrats who caused the crisis and who have not made its solution a priority," said Rep. Andy Harris, R-Md.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the Democratic chair of the House Appropriations Committee, said the money would increase FDA staffing to boost inspections of domestic and international suppliers, prevent fraudulent products from getting onto store shelves and acquire better data on the marketplace.

"It is essential that we ensure the federal government has the resources it needs to get baby formula back on the shelves," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.

Abbott's voluntary recall was triggered by four illnesses reported in babies who had consumed powdered formula from its plant. All four infants were hospitalized with a rare type of bacterial infection and two died.

After a six-week inspection, FDA investigators published a list of problems in March, including lax safety

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and sanitary standards and a history of bacterial contamination in several parts of the plant. Under Monday's agreement, Abbott must regularly consult with an outside safety expert to restart and maintain production.

Chicago-based Abbott has emphasized that its products have not been directly linked to the bacterial infections in children. Samples of the bacteria found at its plant did not match the strains collected from two babies by federal investigators.

But FDA officials pushed back on that reasoning Monday on a call with reporters — their first time publicly addressing the company's argument. FDA staffers noted they were unable to collect bacterial strains from two of the four patients, limiting their chances of finding a match.

"Right from the get-go we were limited in our ability to determine with a causal link whether the product was linked to these four cases because we only had sequences on two," FDA's food director Susan Mayne said.

Fixing the violations uncovered at Abbott's plant will take time, according to former FDA officials. Companies need to exhaustively clean the facility and equipment, retrain staff, repeatedly test and document there is no contamination.

As part of the FDA's new import policy, regulators said companies would need to provide documentation of their factory's inspections.

US case of monkeypox reported in Massachusetts man

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Massachusetts on Wednesday reported a rare case of monkeypox in a man who recently traveled to Canada, and health officials are looking into whether it is connected to small outbreaks in Europe.

Monkeypox is typically limited to Africa, and rare cases in the U.S. and elsewhere are usually linked to travel there. A small number of confirmed or suspected cases have been reported this month in the United Kingdom, Portugal and Spain.

U.S. health officials said they are in contact with officials in the U.K. and Canada as part of the investigation. But "at this point in time, we don't have any information that links the Massachusetts case to cases in the UK," said Jennifer McQuiston of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Though it's the only U.S. case the CDC is aware of, "I do think we are preparing for the possibility of more cases," she said.

The U.S. case poses no risk to the public, and the Massachusetts resident is hospitalized but in good condition, officials said.

The man traveled to Canada at the end of April to meet friends and returned in early May, McQuiston said. A CDC statement said he used private transportation.

The case is the first in the U.S. this year. Last year, Texas and Maryland each reported a case in people who traveled to Nigeria.

Monkeypox typically begins with a flu-like illness and swelling of the lymph nodes, followed by a rash on the face and body. In Africa, people have been infected through bites from rodents or small animals, and it does not usually spread easily among people.

However, investigators in Europe say most of the cases have been in gay or bisexual men, and officials are looking into the possibility that some infections were spread through close contact during sex.

Monkeypox comes from the same family of viruses as smallpox. Most people recover from monkeypox within weeks, but the disease is fatal for up to 1 in 10 people, according to the World Health Organization.

Asian shares track Wall Street's inflation-fueled retreat

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Shares dropped sharply in Asia on Thursday after a broad retreat on Wall Street triggered by dismal results from major retailer Target that renewed worries over the impact of high inflation.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng led the declines, dropping 3.1%, while Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index was 2.7% lower.

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The Dow Jones Industrial Average sank more than 1,100 points, or 3.6%, and the S&P 500 had its biggest drop in nearly two years Wednesday, shedding 4%. That was its steepest decline since June 2020. The tech-heavy Nasdaq fell 4.7%.

The benchmark index is now down more than 18% from the record high it reached at the beginning of the year. That's shy of the 20% decline that's considered a bear market.

The Federal Reserve is trying to temper the impact from the highest inflation in four decades by raising interest rates. Many other central banks are on a similar track. But the Bank of Japan has stuck to its low interest rate policy and the gap between those benchmark rates of the world's largest and third-largest economies has pushed the dollar's value up against the Japanese yen.

Japan recorded a trade deficit in April as imports ballooned 28% as energy prices soared amid the war in Ukraine and the yen weakened against the dollar.

Japan's exports grew to 8.076 trillion yen (\$63 billion) last month, up 12.5% from the previous year, according to Ministry of Finance data released Thursday. Imports totaled 8.915 trillion yen (\$70 billion) in April, up from 6.953 trillion yen in April 2021, and the highest since comparable numbers began to be taken in 1979.

The Nikkei 225 in Tokyo lost 2.7% to 26,196.50 and the Hang Seng in Hong Kong dropped 3.1% to 20,007.39. In South Korea, the Kospi shed 1.7% to 2,582.35, while Australia's S&P/ASX 200 gave up 1.6% to 7,069.90.

The Shanghai Composite index fell 1.1% to 3,052.34.

On Wednesday, the S&P 500 fell 165.17 points to 3,923.68, while the Dow slid 1,164.52 points to 31,490.07. The Nasdaq slid 566.37 points to 11,418.15.

Smaller company stocks also fell sharply. The Russell 2000 fell 65.45 points, or 3.6%, to 1,774.85.

Target lost a quarter of its value after reporting earnings that fell far short of analysts' forecasts. Inflation, especially for shipping costs, dragged its operating margin for the first quarter to 5.3%. It had been expecting 8% or higher.

Target warned that its costs for freight this year would be \$1 billion higher than it estimated just three months ago. And Target and Walmart each provided anecdotal evidence that inflation is weighing on consumers, saying they held back on purchasing big-ticket items and changed from national brands to less expensive store brands.

The report comes a day after Walmart said its profit took a hit from higher costs. The nation's largest retailer fell 6.8%, adding to its losses from Tuesday.

The weak reports stoked concerns that persistently rising inflation is putting a tighter squeeze on a wide range of businesses and could cut deeper into their profits.

Other big retailers also racked up hefty losses. Dollar Tree fell 14.4% and Dollar General slid 11.1%. Best Buy fell 10.5% and Amazon fell 7.2%.

Technology stocks, which led the market rally a day earlier, were the biggest drag on the S&P 500. Apple lost 5.6%, its biggest decline since September 2020.

Bond yields fell as investors shifted money into lower-risk investments. The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 2.88% from 2.97% late Tuesday.

The disappointing report from Target comes a day after the market cheered an encouraging report from the Commerce Department that showed retail sales rose in April, driven by higher sales of cars, electronics, and more spending at restaurants.

Investors worry the Fed could trigger a recession if it raises interest rates too high or too quickly. Worries persist about global growth as Russia's invasion of Ukraine puts even more pressure on prices for oil and food while lockdowns in China to stem COVID-19 cases worsens supply chain problems.

Such factors led the United Nations to cut its forecast for global economic growth this year from 4% to 3.1%.

In other trading, benchmark U.S. crude oil rose 41 cents to \$110.00 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It dropped \$2.81 to \$109.59 on Wednesday.

Brent crude, the basis for pricing for international trading, climbed 92 cents to \$110.03 per barrel.

The dollar rose to 128.46 Japanese yen from 128.20 yen late Wednesday. The euro strengthened to \$1.0487 from \$1.0464.

US Soccer equalizes pay in milestone with women, men

By ANNE M. PETERSON and RONALD BLUM AP Sports Writers

The U.S. Soccer Federation reached milestone agreements to pay its men's and women's teams equally, making the American national governing body the first in the sport to promise both sexes matching money.

The federation on Wednesday announced separate collective bargaining agreements through December 2028 with the unions for both national teams, ending years of often acrimonious negotiations.

The deals grew partly out of a push by players on the more successful women's team, including stars like Alex Morgan and Megan Rapinoe, who were at the forefront of the gender equity fight while leading the team to a Women's World Cup championship in 2019. The struggle became so much a part of the team's story that chants of "Equal pay! Equal pay!" rose from the crowd as U.S. players celebrated winning the title in France.

Morgan and Rapinoe could still be beneficiaries of the deal, though the next Women's World Cup is in 2023 and the makeup of the team will have changed by then.

"I feel a lot of pride for the girls who are going to see this growing up, and recognize their value rather than having to fight for it. However, my dad always told me that you don't get rewarded for doing what you're supposed to do — and paying men and women equally is what you're supposed to do," U.S. forward Margaret Purce said. "So I'm not giving out any gold stars, but I'm grateful for this accomplishment and for all the people who came together to make it so."

The men have been playing under the terms of a CBA that expired in December 2018. The women's CBA expired at the end of March, but talks continued after the federation and the players agreed to settle a gender discrimination lawsuit brought by some of the players in 2019. The settlement was contingent on the federation reaching labor contracts that equalized pay and bonuses between the two teams.

Perhaps the biggest sticking point was World Cup prize money, which is based on how far a team advances in the tournament. While the U.S. women have been successful on the international stage with back-to-back World Cup titles, differences in FIFA prize money meant they took home far less than the men's winners. American women received a \$110,000 bonus for winning the 2019 World Cup; the U.S. men would have received \$407,000 had they won in 2018.

The unions agreed to pool FIFA's payments for the men's World Cup later this year and next year's Women's World Cup, as well as for the 2026 and 2027 tournaments.

Each player will get matching game appearance fees in what the USSF said makes it the first federation to pool FIFA prize money in this manner.

"We saw it as an opportunity, an opportunity to be leaders in this front and join in with the women's side and U.S. Soccer. So we're just excited that this is how we were able to get the deal done," said Walker Zimmerman, a defender who is part of the U.S. National Team Players Association leadership group.

Women's union projections have compensation for a player who has been under contract to increase 34% from 2018 to this year, from \$245,000 to \$327,000. The 2023-28 average annual pay would be \$450,000 for a player making all rosters, with the possibility of doubling the figure in World Cup years depending on results.

"I'm proud of you for never giving up and I commend U.S. Soccer for agreeing to do the right thing," President Joe Biden tweeted. "Let's keep up the fight until we close the gender pay gap in every industry."

The federation previously based bonuses on payments from FIFA, which earmarked \$400 million for the 2018 men's tournament, including \$38 million to champion France, and \$30 million for the 2019 women's tournament, including \$4 million to the champion United States.

FIFA has increased the total to \$440 million for the 2022 men's World Cup, and its president, Gianni Infantino, has proposed that FIFA double the women's prize money to \$60 million for the 2023 Women's World Cup, in which FIFA has increased the number of teams to 32.

For the current World Cup cycles, the USSF will pool the FIFA funds, taking 10% off the top and then

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splitting the rest equally among 46 players — 23 players on the roster of each team. For the 2026-27 cycle, the USSF's cut increases to 20% before the split.

After missing the 2018 World Cup, the men qualified for this year's World Cup in Qatar starting in November. The women's team will seek to qualify this year for the 2023 World Cup, cohosted by Australia and New Zealand.

"There were moments when I thought it was all going to fall apart and then it came back together and it's a real credit to all the different groups coming together, negotiating at one table," said federation President Cindy Parlow Cone, a former national team player who became head of the governing body in 2020. "I think that's where the turning point really happened. Before, trying to negotiate a CBA with the women and then turn around and negotiate CBA terms with the men and vice versa was really challenging. I think the real turning point was when we finally were all in the same room sitting at the same table, working together and collaborating to reach this goal."

The women ended six years of litigation over equal pay in February in a deal calling for the USSF to pay \$24 million, a deal contingent on reaching new collective bargaining agreements.

As part of the settlement, players will split \$22 million, about one-third of what they had sought in damages. The USSF also agreed to establish a fund with \$2 million to benefit the players in their post-soccer careers and charitable efforts aimed at growing the sport for women.

Crews slow New Mexico fires, brace for dangerous conditions

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — More than 2,000 firefighters battling the largest U.S. wildfire dug back-up fire lines and rearranged fire engines around homes in northeast New Mexico on Wednesday in anticipation of a return to windy, dangerous conditions in the days ahead.

After a break in the weather allowed for significant progress on the ground and from the air in recent days, forecasters issued warnings for high fire danger from southern Nevada through parts of Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado starting Thursday.

"The next three days are going to be the giddy-up days," fire behavior analyst Dennis Burns said Wednesday.

"Crews are out there working as hard as they can to get in line as quickly as possible," he said during an afternoon briefing at the fire east of Santa Fe stretching northeast toward Taos.

Most of the large fires so far this spring have been in Arizona and New Mexico. The largest has raced across more than 471 square miles (1,220 square kilometers) of forest that many fire managers have described as "ripe and ready to burn" due to a megadrought that has spanned decades and warm and windy conditions brought on by climate change.

New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham has said damage estimates for homes and structures could reach more than 1,000 by the time all the assessments are done.

On Wednesday, no new evacuations were ordered and some were relaxed. Burns said the biggest new concern was that thunderstorms packing lightning and strong down-draft winds would fuel the fire again Thursday.

Bulldozers and hand crews were building contingency lines near the town of Angel Fire east of Taos to make sure the flames don't reach U.S. Highway 64 within about 25 miles (40 kilometers) of the Colorado line.

"If we are fortunate enough to dodge that bullet, the cloud cover will actually shade out the fuels and moderate the fire behavior a little bit, which is a good thing," Burns said Wednesday. "But tomorrow will be the day to tell."

While the fire encompasses an area more than 1.5 times the size of New York City, fire managers said there are pockets of green within the perimeter that could still burn.

"We're trying to go all the way around the edge of the fire and we want to keep the fire where it is right now," Jayson Coil, an operations chief assigned to the blaze, said Wednesday of using bulldozers to cut

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wide lines that can block flames.

Fire managers also said not all areas have been burned severely, and crews have been able to protect many homes and structures by clearing out vegetation and using sprinklers and hose lays to knock down the flames as they approach populated areas.

Lujan Grisham spoke with President Joe Biden on Tuesday and underscored the impacts of the fires on communities and the need for ongoing partnership with the federal government as the drought-stricken state recovers and rebuilds from some of the most devastating wildfires on record in New Mexico.

Biden reaffirmed the support of the federal government and said every effort will be made to provide immediate help to people in the impacted communities. He also expressed his gratitude to the first responders, firefighters and other personnel who are battling the blazes and have come to the aid of residents.

Evacuation orders remain in place for residents near a handful of large blazes in New Mexico, Colorado and Texas, where three large fires were reported Tuesday, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

Lujan Grisham has warned that many New Mexico residents, depending on where they live, should be ready for potential evacuations all summer given the likelihood for higher fire danger due to strong winds, warmer temperatures brought on by climate change and forecasts for little to no precipitation.

Another fire burning in the Gila National Forest in southern New Mexico had grown more than 57 square miles (148 square kilometers) overnight Tuesday into Wednesday, causing concern among state officials. Forest roads and trails in the area were closed, but officials said late Wednesday crews made good progress during the day that kept the perimeter from growing.

Interrogation, uncertainty for surrendering Mariupol troops

By OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI and CIARAN McQUILLAN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Nearly 1,000 last-ditch Ukrainian fighters who had held out inside Mariupol's pulverized steel plant have surrendered, Russia said Wednesday, as the battle that turned the city into a worldwide symbol of defiance and suffering drew toward a close.

Meanwhile, the first captured Russian soldier to be put on trial by Ukraine on war-crimes charges pleaded guilty to killing a civilian and could get life in prison. Finland and Sweden applied to join NATO, abandoning generations of neutrality for fear that Russian President Vladimir Putin will not stop with Ukraine.

The Ukrainian fighters who emerged from the ruined Azovstal steelworks after being ordered by their military to abandon the last stronghold of resistance in the now-flattened port city face an uncertain fate. Some were taken by the Russians to a former penal colony in territory controlled by Moscow-backed separatists.

While Ukraine said it hopes to get the soldiers back in a prisoner swap, Russia threatened to put some of them on trial for war crimes.

Amnesty International said the Red Cross should be given immediate access to the fighters. Denis Krivosheev, Amnesty's deputy director for the region, cited lawless executions allegedly carried out by Russian forces in Ukraine and said the Azovstal defenders "must not meet the same fate."

It was unclear how many fighters remained inside the plant's labyrinth of tunnels and bunkers, where 2,000 were believed to be holed up at one point. A separatist leader in the region said no top commanders had emerged from the steelworks.

The plant was the only thing standing in the way of Russia declaring the full capture of Mariupol. Its fall would make Mariupol the biggest Ukrainian city to be taken by Moscow's forces, giving a boost to Putin in a war where many of his plans have gone awry.

Military analysts, though, said the city's capture at this point would hold more symbolic importance than anything else, since Mariupol is already effectively under Moscow's control and most of the Russian forces that were tied down by the drawn-out fighting have already left.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said 959 Ukrainian troops have abandoned the stronghold since they started coming out Monday.

Video showed the fighters carrying out their wounded on stretchers and undergoing pat-down searches

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before being taken away on buses escorted by military vehicles bearing the pro-Kremlin "Z" sign.

The U.S. has gathered intelligence that shows some Russian officials have become concerned that Kremlin forces in Mariupol are carrying out abuses, including beating and electrocuting city officials and robbing homes, according to a U.S. official familiar with the findings.

The Russian officials are concerned that the abuses will further inspire residents to resist the occupation and that the treatment runs counter to Russia's claims that its military has liberated Russian speakers, according to the official, who was not authorized to comment.

Resistance fighting was reported in the occupied southern city of Melitopol, where the regional military administration said Ukrainians killed several high-ranking Russian officers and a Russian armored train carrying troops and ammunition overturned, causing the munitions to detonate.

The administration said on Telegram that the Russian military does not maintain the tracks and overloads the trains, and "with help" from resistance fighters the train derailed. The reports could not be independently confirmed.

In a sign of normalcy returning to Kyiv, the U.S. Embassy reopened on Wednesday, one month after Russian forces abandoned their bid to seize the capital and three months after the outpost was closed. A dozen embassy employees watched solemnly as the American flag was raised.

"The Ukrainian people, with our security assistance, have defended their homeland in the face of Russia's unconscionable invasion, and, as a result, the Stars and Stripes are flying over the Embassy once again," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement. Other Western countries have been reopening their embassies in Kyiv as well.

In the war-crimes case in Kyiv, Russian Sgt. Vadim Shishimarin, a 21-year-old member of a tank unit, pleaded guilty to shooting an unarmed 62-year-old Ukrainian man in the head through a car window in the opening days of the war. Ukraine's top prosecutor has said some 40 more war-crimes cases are being readied.

On the diplomatic front, Finland and Sweden could become members of NATO in a matter of months, though objections from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threaten to disrupt things. Turkey accuses the two countries of harboring Kurdish militants and others it considers a threat to its security.

Ibrahim Kalin, a foreign policy adviser and spokesman for Erdogan, said there will be "no progress" on the membership applications unless Turkey's concerns are met. Each of NATO's 30 countries has an effective veto over new members.

Mariupol's defenders grimly clung to the steel mill for months and against the odds, preventing Russia from completing its occupation of the city and its port.

Its full capture would give Russia an unbroken land bridge to the Crimean Peninsula, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014. It also would allow Russia to focus fully on the larger battle for the Donbas, Ukraine's industrial east.

For Ukraine, the order to the fighters to surrender could leave President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's government open to allegations it abandoned the troops he described as heroes.

"Zelenskyy may face unpleasant questions," said Volodymyr Fesenko, who heads the independent Penta think tank in Kyiv. "There have been voices of discontent and accusations of betraying Ukrainian soldiers."

A hoped-for prisoner swap could also fall through, he cautioned.

Russia's main federal investigative body said it intends to interrogate the surrendering troops to "identify the nationalists" and determine whether they were involved in crimes against civilians.

Also, Russia's top prosecutor asked the country's Supreme Court to designate Ukraine's Azov Regiment — among the troops that made up the Azovstal garrison — as a terrorist organization. The regiment has roots in the far right.

The Russian parliament was scheduled to consider a resolution to ban the exchange of any Azov Regiment fighters but didn't take up the issue Wednesday.

Mariupol was a target of the Russians from the outset. The city — its prewar population of about 430,000 now reduced by about three-quarters — has largely been reduced to rubble by relentless bombardment,

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and Ukraine says over 20,000 civilians have been killed there.

During the siege, Russian forces launched lethal airstrikes on a maternity hospital and a theater where civilians had taken shelter. Close to 600 people may have been killed at the theater.

In other developments, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov said Russia has begun using a prototype new laser weapon in Ukraine that is capable of hitting a target 5 kilometers (3 miles) away, state news agency Tass quoted him as saying on national television. He said it was tested Tuesday against a drone and incinerated it within five seconds.

Borisov said a new generation of laser weapons will eventually allow Russia to conserve its expensive long-range missiles.

Speaking late Wednesday in his nightly video address, Zelenskyy likened the Russian boast to Nazi Germany's claims of Wunderwaffe, or wonder weapons, as the tide began to turn against it during World War II.

A senior U.S. defense official said Wednesday that the U.S. has seen nothing to corroborate the claims. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the U.S. military assessment.

Zelenskyy also said Ukraine is determined to retake Mariupol and Melitopol, as well as the southern cities of Kherson, Berdyansk and Enerhodar.

"All of our cities and communities under occupation ... should know that Ukraine will return," he said.

Biden invokes Defense Production Act for formula shortage

By ZEKE MILLER and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Wednesday invoked the Defense Production Act to speed production of infant formula and authorized flights to import supply from overseas, as he faces mounting political pressure over a domestic shortage caused by the safety-related closure of the country's largest formula manufacturing plant.

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"I know parents across the country are worried about finding enough formula to feed their babies," Biden said in a video statement released by the White House. "As a parent and as a grandparent, I know just how stressful that is."

The announcement comes two days after the Food and Drug Administration said it was streamlining its review process to make it easier for foreign manufacturers to begin shipping more formula into the U.S.

In a letter Wednesday to the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Agriculture, Biden directed the agencies to work with the Pentagon to identify overseas supply of formula that meets U.S. standards over the next week, so that chartered Defense Department flights can swiftly fly it to the U.S.

"Imports of baby formula will serve as a bridge to this ramped-up production," Biden wrote.

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"I've directed my team to do everything possible to ensure there's enough safe baby formula and that it is quickly reaching families that need it the most," Biden said in the statement, calling it "one of my top priorities."

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The White House actions come as the Democratic-led House approved two bills Wednesday addressing the baby formula shortage as lawmakers look to show progress on what has become a frightening development for many families.

One bill with wide bipartisan support passed by a vote of 414-9. It would give the secretary of the Agriculture Department the ability to issue a narrow set of waivers in the event of a supply disruption. The goal is to give participants in an assistance program commonly known as WIC the ability to use vouchers to purchase formula from any producer rather than be limited to one brand that may be unavailable. The WIC program accounts for about half of infant formula sales in the U.S.

"I want to say to the mom struggling that we hear you in Congress and you do not need to handle this on your own. We are working to find you a solution," said the bill's sponsor, Rep. Jahana Hayes, D-Conn.

The other measure, a \$28 million emergency spending bill to boost resources at the Food and Drug Administration, passed by a mostly party-line vote of 231-192, and it's unclear whether the Senate will go along.

"This bill just continues the Democrats' strategy of throwing money at the same bureaucrats who caused the crisis and who have not made its solution a priority," said Rep. Andy Harris, R-Md.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the Democratic chair of the House Appropriations Committee, said the money would increase FDA staffing to boost inspections of domestic and international suppliers, prevent fraudulent products from getting onto store shelves and acquire better data on the marketplace.

"It is essential that we ensure the federal government has the resources it needs to get baby formula back on the shelves," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.

Abbott's voluntary recall was triggered by four illnesses reported in babies who had consumed powdered formula from its plant. All four infants were hospitalized with a rare type of bacterial infection and two died.

After a six-week inspection, FDA investigators published a list of problems in March, including lax safety and sanitary standards and a history of bacterial contamination in several parts of the plant. Under Monday's agreement, Abbott must regularly consult with an outside safety expert to restart and maintain production.

Chicago-based Abbott has emphasized that its products have not been directly linked to the bacterial infections in children. Samples of the bacteria found at its plant did not match the strains collected from two babies by federal investigators.

But FDA officials pushed back on that reasoning Monday on a call with reporters — their first time publicly addressing the company's argument. FDA staffers noted they were unable to collect bacterial strains from two of the four patients, limiting their chances of finding a match.

"Right from the get-go we were limited in our ability to determine with a causal link whether the product was linked to these four cases because we only had sequences on two," FDA's food director Susan Mayne said.

Fixing the violations uncovered at Abbott's plant will take time, according to former FDA officials. Companies need to exhaustively clean the facility and equipment, retrain staff, repeatedly test and document there is no contamination.

As part of the FDA's new import policy, regulators said companies would need to provide documentation of their factory's inspections.

Ex-Minneapolis officer pleads guilty in George Floyd killing

By AMY FORLITI, STEVE KARNOWSKI and MOHAMED IBRAHIM Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A former Minneapolis police officer pleaded guilty Wednesday to a state charge of aiding and abetting second-degree manslaughter in the killing of George Floyd, admitting that he intentionally helped restrain the Black man in a way that created an unreasonable risk and caused his death.

As part of Thomas Lane's plea agreement, a more serious count of aiding and abetting second-degree unintentional murder will be dismissed. Lane and former Officers J. Alexander Kueng and Tou Thao have already been convicted on federal counts of willfully violating Floyd's rights. While they have yet to be sentenced on the federal charges, Lane's change of plea means he will avoid what could have been a

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lengthy state sentence if he was convicted of the murder charge.

The guilty plea comes a week before the two-year anniversary of Floyd's May 25, 2020, killing. Floyd, 46, died after Officer Derek Chauvin, who is white, pinned him to the ground with a knee on Floyd's neck as Floyd repeatedly said he couldn't breathe. The killing, captured on widely viewed bystander video, sparked protests in Minneapolis and around the globe as part of a reckoning over racial injustice.

Lane, who is white, and Kueng, who is Black, helped restrain Floyd, who was handcuffed. Lane held down Floyd's legs and Kueng knelt on Floyd's back. Thao, who is Hmong American, kept bystanders from intervening during the 9 1/2-minute restraint.

All three are free on bond; the state trial scheduled for June is expected to proceed for Kueng and Thao.

Lane is scheduled to be sentenced on the state charge Sept. 21.

In his plea agreement, Lane admitted that he knew from his training that restraining Floyd in that way created a serious risk of death, and that he heard Floyd say he couldn't breathe, knew Floyd fell silent, had no pulse and appeared to have lost consciousness.

The plea agreement says Lane knew Floyd should have been rolled onto his side — and evidence shows he asked twice if that should be done — but he continued to assist in the restraint despite the risk. Lane agreed the restraint was "unreasonable under the circumstances and constituted an unlawful use of force."

The state and Lane's attorneys agreed to a recommended sentence of three years — which is below state sentencing guidelines — and prosecutors agreed to allow him to serve that penalty at the same time as any federal sentence, and in a federal prison. One legal expert said this would appeal to Lane because he would have less chance of being incarcerated with people he had arrested.

Lane, who is white, told Judge Peter Cahill that he understood the agreement. When asked how he would plead, he said: "Guilty, your honor."

Attorney General Keith Ellison, whose office prosecuted the case, issued a statement saying he was pleased that Lane accepted responsibility.

"His acknowledgment he did something wrong is an important step toward healing the wounds of the Floyd family, our community, and the nation," Ellison said. "While accountability is not justice, this is a significant moment in this case and a necessary resolution on our continued journey to justice."

Lane's attorney, Earl Gray, said in a statement that Lane did not want to risk a lengthy prison sentence if convicted of aiding and abetting murder, so he agreed to plead guilty to aiding and abetting manslaughter.

"He has a newborn baby and did not want to risk not being part of the child's life," Gray said.

Wednesday's hearing was streamed over Zoom for Floyd's family members. Their attorneys issued a statement afterward, saying Lane's plea "reflects a certain level of accountability," but that it came only after his federal conviction.

"Hopefully, this plea helps usher in a new era where officers understand that juries will hold them accountable, just as they would any other citizen," family attorneys Ben Crump, Jeff Storms and Antonio Romanucci said. "Perhaps soon, officers will not require families to endure the pain of lengthy court proceedings where their criminal acts are obvious and apparent."

Chauvin pleaded guilty last year to a federal charge of violating Floyd's civil rights and faces a federal sentence ranging from 20 to 25 years. The former officer earlier was convicted of state charges of murder and manslaughter and is currently serving 22 1/2 years in the state case.

Lane's plea comes as the country is focused on the killing of 10 Black people in Buffalo, New York, by an 18-year-old white man, who carried out the racist, livestreamed shooting Saturday in a supermarket.

Lane, Kueng and Thao were convicted of federal charges in February after a monthlong trial that focused on the officers' training and the culture of the police department. All three were convicted of depriving Floyd of his right to medical care and Thao and Kueng were also convicted of failing to intervene to stop Chauvin during the killing.

After their federal conviction, there was a question as to whether the state trial would proceed. At an April hearing in state court, prosecutors revealed that they had offered plea deals to all three men, but they were rejected. At the time, Gray said it was hard for the defense to negotiate when the three still

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don't know what their federal sentences would be.

Rachel Moran, a law professor at the University of St. Thomas, said it's possible Lane received a better offer, though the public doesn't know what happened behind the scenes. As for the other officers, she said Lane's guilty plea has "got to make them think."

"Particularly when I think most people would conceive of Thomas Lane as the least culpable of the three — and he's the one pleading guilty," Moran said. "Now if you are one of the other two left standing, it might change your position. ... They may have less appealing offers to work with, but it still puts pressure on them."

It's still not clear what federal sentence Lane and the others could face. Many factors go into determining a federal sentence; One legal expert told the AP earlier this year that a federal penalty could range anywhere from five to 25 years. Federal sentencing dates have not been set.

Under state sentencing guidelines, a person with no criminal record could face a sentence ranging from just under 3 1/2 years to four years and nine months in prison for second-degree unintentional manslaughter, with the presumptive sentence being four years. Lane's recommended sentence of three years, which still must be approved by the judge, would be five months less than the low range.

If Lane had been convicted of aiding and abetting second-degree murder, he would have faced a presumptive 12 1/2 years in prison. And prosecutors served notice in 2020 that they intended to seek longer sentences for Lane, Kueng and Thao — as they did for Chauvin.

"That's a very sweet deal," John Baker, a former defense attorney who teaches aspiring police officers at St. Cloud State University, said of Lane's agreement.

Baker said a guilty plea makes sense and he would not be surprised if at least one of the other former officers also took a deal.

An attorney for Thao, Robert Paule, was in the courtroom for Lane's plea hearing. When asked if his client would also plead guilty, he replied "No comment."

Kueng's attorney, Tom Plunkett, also declined to comment.

Storms, one of the Floyd family attorneys, said the deal with Lane happened "very quickly." When asked if he knew of any other possible negotiations with Thao or Kueng, he declined to comment on that, but said: "I think the family is hopeful, now that a state and federal jury have spoken, that the other officers will voluntarily be held accountable."

Buffalo shooter let some people see plans just before attack

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

Shortly before he opened fire, the white gunman accused of killing 10 Black people at a Buffalo, New York, supermarket allowed a small group of people to see his detailed plans for the attack, which he had been chronicling for months in a private, online diary.

Discord, the chat platform where 18-year-old Payton Gendron kept the diary, confirmed Wednesday that an invitation to access his private writings was sent to the group about a half-hour before Saturday's attack at Tops Friendly Market, which he live-streamed on another online service. Some of them accepted.

Gendron's diary and its racist, anti-Semitic entries dated to last November included step-by-step descriptions of his assault plans, a detailed account of a reconnaissance trip he made to Buffalo in March, and maps of the store that he drew by hand.

"What we know at this time is that a private, invite-only server was created by the suspect to serve as a personal diary chat log," a Discord spokesperson said in a written statement. "Approximately 30 minutes prior to the attack, however, a small group of people were invited to and joined the server. Before that, our records indicate no other people saw the diary chat log in this private server."

It wasn't clear if any of the people who accessed Gendron's diary or saw his livestream did anything to alert the authorities or attempt to stop the attack. Discord said it removed Gendron's diary as soon as the platform became aware of it, in accordance with the company's policies against violent extremism.

Buffalo Police Commissioner Joseph Gramaglia said Monday that investigators were working to obtain,

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verify and review Gendron's online postings.

Copies of his Discord diary — essentially a transcript of his postings to his private chat log — briefly surfaced elsewhere online after the shooting, along with a 180-page screed attributed to him. Both were laced with white supremacist beliefs echoing a baseless extremist conspiracy theory about a plot to diminish the influence of white people.

President Joe Biden, visiting Buffalo on Tuesday, repudiated such beliefs, saying: "Now's the time for people of all races, from every background, to speak up as a majority ... and reject white supremacy."

Gendron was arraigned over the weekend on a murder charge; a not guilty plea was entered on his behalf and he remains jailed under a suicide watch. He is scheduled to appear in court in Buffalo again Thursday.

Tech companies like Discord and Twitch, which authorities say Gendron used to livestream the supermarket attack, are under scrutiny for their role as vectors of hate speech.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul on Wednesday authorized the state's attorney general, Letitia James, to investigate social media platforms used by Gendron to determine if they have "civil or criminal liability for their role in promoting, facilitating, or providing a platform to plan and promote violence."

Discord said it planned to cooperate with James' probe and is continuing to assist law enforcement in the ongoing investigation into the shooting.

"Our deepest sympathies are with the victims and their families," the company said. "Hate has no place on Discord and we are committed to combating violence and extremism."

Messages seeking comment were left with Twitch. Twitch CEO Emmett Shear told the Harvard Business Review in an interview earlier on Wednesday that the Amazon-owned platform would continue to "invest heavily in ensuring the safety of everyone on Twitch."

"I think this is an example of one of those places where we've done a lot of work, but there is obviously still work to be done," Shear said.

Attempts to reach representatives of two other tech platforms James is investigating, 8kun and 4chan, were unsuccessful. Gendron wrote in his diary that those boards were where he started reading up on the racist ideologies that set him on a path to killing nonwhite, non-Christian people.

When reached for comment, Ron Watkins, the longtime administrator of 8kun and its predecessor, 8chan, said he resigned from the organization last year and has "no idea what's going on with that."

Gendron wrote in his Discord diary that he started reading 4chan a few months into the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and that he was heavily influenced by Brenton Tarrant, who killed 51 people in a shooting rampage at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 2019. Gendron wrote that he originally planned his attack for March 15, the three-year anniversary of Tarrant's attack.

Copies of Gendron's diary postings 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. He said it was possible but unlikely the diary could have been altered by someone other than the author.

Gendron, in the diary, said he specifically targeted a store with a predominantly Black clientele, researching spots in Rochester, Syracuse and on Long Island before settling on Buffalo. Prosecutors say he showed up Saturday wearing body armor and armed with an AR-15-style rifle as a helmet-mounted camera streamed to the internet.

Problems with his gun and then a bout with COVID-19 — which he theorized he contracted from a fast-food chicken sandwich poisoned by government agents — prevented him from attacking earlier, he wrote in the diary.

Gendron wrote that he started thinking about "a personal attack against the replacers" a few weeks prior to an episode in a high school class about a year ago. That episode led to him being taken to a hospital for a psychiatric evaluation.

A few weeks before the attack, Gendron wrote that neither his parents nor his brothers were aware of his plans, but that he feared they would find out.

EXPLAINER: Why is Wall Street close to a bear market?

By STAN CHOE and ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — The bears are rumbling toward Wall Street.

The stock market's skid this year has pulled the S&P 500 close to what's known as a bear market. Rising interest rates, high inflation, the war in Ukraine and a slowdown in China's economy have caused investors to reconsider the prices they're willing to pay for a wide range of stocks, from high-flying tech companies to traditional automakers.

The last bear market happened just two years ago, but this would still be a first for those investors that got their start trading on their phones during the pandemic. For years, thanks in large part to extraordinary actions by the Federal Reserve, stocks often seemed to go in only one direction: up. Now, the familiar rallying cry to "buy the dip" after every market wobble is giving way fear that the dip is turning into a crater.

Here are some common questions asked about bear markets:

WHY IS IT CALLED A BEAR MARKET?

A bear market is a term used by Wall Street when an index like the S&P 500, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, or even an individual stock, has fallen 20% or more from a recent high for a sustained period of time.

Why use a bear to represent a market slump? Bears hibernate, so bears represent a market that's retreating, said Sam Stovall, chief investment strategist at CFRA. In contrast, Wall Street's nickname for a surging stock market is a bull market, because bulls charge, Stovall said.

The S&P 500 index slid 165.17 points Wednesday to 3,923.68. It's now down 18.2% from its high of 4,796.56 on Jan. 3. The Nasdaq is already in a bear market, down 29% from its peak of 16,057.44 on Nov. 19. The Dow Jones Industrial Average is 14.4% below its most recent peak.

The most recent bear market for the S&P 500 ran from February 19, 2020 through March 23, 2020. The index fell 34% in that one-month period. It's the shortest bear market ever.

WHAT'S BOTHERING INVESTORS?

Market enemy No. 1 is interest rates, which are rising quickly as a result of the high inflation battering the economy. Low rates act like steroids for stocks and other investments, and Wall Street is now going through withdrawal.

The Federal Reserve has made an aggressive pivot away from propping up financial markets and the economy with record-low rates and is focused on fighting inflation. The central bank has already raised its key short-term interest rate from its record low near zero, which had encouraged investors to move their money into riskier assets like stocks or cryptocurrencies to get better returns.

Last week, the Fed signaled additional rate increases of double the usual amount are likely in upcoming months. Consumer prices are at the highest level in four decades, and rose 8.3% in April compared with a year ago.

The moves by design will slow the economy by making it more expensive to borrow. The risk is the Fed could cause a recession if it raises rates too high or too quickly.

Russia's war in Ukraine has also put upward pressure on inflation by pushing up commodities prices. And worries about China's economy, the world's second largest, have added to the gloom.

SO, WE JUST NEED TO AVOID A RECESSION?

Even if the Fed can pull off the delicate task of tamping down inflation without triggering a downturn, higher interest rates still put downward pressure on stocks.

If customers are paying more to borrow money, they can't buy as much stuff, so less revenue flows to a company's bottom line. Stocks tend to track profits over time. Higher rates also make investors less willing to pay elevated prices for stocks, which are riskier than bonds, when bonds are suddenly paying more in interest thanks to the Fed.

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Critics said the overall stock market came into the year looking pricey versus history. Big technology stocks and other winners of the pandemic were seen as the most expensive, and those stocks have been the most punished as rates have risen.

Stocks have declined almost 35% on average when a bear market coincides with a recession, compared with a nearly 24% drop when the economy avoids a recession, according to Ryan Detrick, chief market strategist at LPL Financial.

SO I SHOULD SELL EVERYTHING NOW, RIGHT?

If you need the money now or want to lock in the losses, yes. Otherwise, many advisers suggest riding through the ups and downs while remembering the swings are the price of admission for the stronger returns that stocks have provided over the long term.

While dumping stocks would stop the bleeding, it would also prevent any potential gains. Many of the best days for Wall Street have occurred either during a bear market or just after the end of one. That includes two separate days in the middle of the 2007-2009 bear market where the S&P 500 surged roughly 11%, as well as leaps of better than 9% during and shortly after the roughly monthlong 2020 bear market.

Advisers suggest putting money into stocks only if it won't be needed for several years. The S&P 500 has come back from every one of its prior bear markets to eventually rise to another all-time high. The down decade for the stock market following the 2000 bursting of the dot-com bubble was a notoriously brutal stretch, but stocks have often been able to regain their highs within a few years.

HOW LONG DO BEAR MARKETS LAST AND HOW DEEP DO THEY GO?

On average, bear markets have taken 13 months to go from peak to trough and 27 months to get back to breakeven since World War II. The S&P 500 index has fallen an average of 33% during bear markets in that time. The biggest decline since 1945 occurred in the 2007-2009 bear market when the S&P 500 fell 57%.

History shows that the faster an index enters into a bear market, the shallower they tend to be. Historically, stocks have taken 251 days (8.3 months) to fall into a bear market. When the S&P 500 has fallen 20% at a faster clip, the index has averaged a loss of 28%.

The longest bear market lasted 61 months and ended in March 1942 and cut the index by 60%.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN A BEAR MARKET HAS ENDED?

Generally, investors look for a 20% gain from a low point as well as sustained gains over at least a six-month period. It took less than three weeks for stocks to rise 20% from their low in March 2020.

Oops! Jubilant Eritrean cyclist out after wine cork hits eye

JESI, Italy (AP) — An Eritrean cyclist who was celebrating a victory at the Giro d'Italia cycling competition was struck in the eye by a cork popped from a bottle of Italian sparkling wine and forced to withdraw Wednesday from the race.

Biniam Girmay had just become the first Black African to win a stage at a grand tour when he won the sprint to the line in the Italian city of Jesi, the 10th stage of the 3,480-kilometer (2,162-mile) Giro competition on Tuesday. But he was rushed to a hospital after getting hit in the left eye by a prosecco cork he popped open during the podium celebration.

Medical tests revealed a hemorrhage in his eye and the team doctor said it was "strongly recommended" he avoid physical activity.

"The news about the incident felt like a cold shower," said Girmay's team director, Valerio Piva. "It is of course a pity to lose an element like Biniam, but the advice of the medical team is clear and the health of Biniam is our priority."

The 22-year-old Girmay still celebrated the victory over Mathieu van der Poel — one of the top riders in the sport — with his Intermarché-Wanty-Gobert Matériaux teammates when he returned from the hospital.

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"When I arrived after the hospital, the bad moment, I enjoy a bit with my teammates, the staff, everybody," Girmay said in a video on his team's social media channel.

"I'm also happy now. I was a bit sad about what happened with the champagne but when I come back to the hotel they were super happy also," he said.

"They were a bit afraid but when I looked OK we really enjoyed. But today luckily I didn't start the race because still my eyes, I need some rest to give more power to the eye ... I'm OK now, see you soon."

In March, Girmay became the first rider from a sub-Saharan country to win a single-day classic at the Gent-Wevelgem race.

Girmay almost won the Giro's opening stage this year, for which he would have also worn the famous pink jersey of the overall leader. But he was edged by Van der Poel in a chaotic bunch sprint in Hungary.

"From the opening stage, Biniam Girmay showed that we were right to believe in our chances to win a stage," team director Piva said. "It is remarkable to see how his teammates go through fire each day to obtain the best possible result and how happy everyone is to work with him."

A third of US should be considering masks, officials say

By ZEKE MILLER and MIKE STOBBE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — COVID-19 cases are increasing in the United States — and could get even worse over the coming months, federal health officials warned Wednesday in urging areas hardest hit to consider reissuing calls for indoor masking.

Increasing numbers of COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations are putting more of the country under guidelines issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that call for masking and other infection precautions.

Right now, about a third of the U.S. population lives in areas that are considered at higher risk — mostly in the Northeast and Midwest. Those are areas where people should already be considering wearing masks indoors — but Americans elsewhere should also take notice, officials said.

"Prior increases of infections, in different waves of infection, have demonstrated that this travels across the country," said Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the CDC director, said at a White House briefing with reporters.

For an increasing number of areas, "we urge local leaders to encourage use of prevention strategies like masks in public indoor settings and increasing access to testing and treatment," she said.

However, officials were cautious about making concrete predictions, saying how much worse the pandemic gets will depend on several factors, including to what degree previous infections will protect against new variants.

Last week, White House COVID-19 coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha warned in an interview with The Associated Press the U.S. will be increasingly vulnerable to the coronavirus this fall and winter if Congress doesn't swiftly approve new funding for more vaccines and treatments.

Jha warned that without additional funding from Congress for the virus would cause "unnecessary loss of life" in the fall and winter, when the U.S. runs out of treatments.

He added the U.S. was already falling behind other nations in securing supplies of the next generation of COVID-19 vaccines and said that the domestic manufacturing base of at-home tests is already drying up as demand drops off.

Jha said domestic test manufacturers have started shuttering lines and laying off workers, and in the coming weeks will begin to sell off equipment and prepare to exit the business of producing tests entirely unless the U.S. government has money to purchase more tests, like the hundreds of millions it has sent out for free to requesting households this year.

That would leave the U.S. reliant on other countries for testing supplies, risking shortages during a surge, Jha warned. About 8.5 million households placed orders for the latest tranche of 8 free tests since ordering opened on Monday, Jha added.

The pandemic is now 2 1/2 years old. And the U.S. has seen — depending how you count them — five waves of COVID-19 during that time, with the later surges driven by mutated versions of the coronavirus.

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A fifth wave occurred mainly in December and January, caused by the omicron variant.

The omicron variant spread much more easily than earlier versions.

Some experts are worried the country now is seeing signs of a sixth wave, driven by an omicron subvariant. On Wednesday, Walensky noted a steady increase in COVID-19 cases in the past five weeks, including a 26% increase nationally in the last week.

Hospitalizations also are rising, up 19% in the past week, though they remain much lower than during the omicron wave, she said.

In late February, as that wave was ebbing, the CDC released a new set of measures for communities where COVID-19 was easing its grip, with less of a focus on positive test results and more on what's happening at hospitals.

Walensky said more than 32% of the country currently live in an area with medium or high COVID-19 community levels, including more than 9% in the highest level, where CDC recommends that masks and other mitigation efforts be used.

In the last week, an additional 8% of Americans were living in a county in medium or high COVID-19 community levels.

Officials said they are concerned that waning immunity and relaxed mitigation measures across the country may contribute to a continued rise in infections and illnesses across the country. They encouraged people — particularly older adults — to get boosters.

Some health experts say the government should be taking clearer and bolder steps.

The CDC community level guidelines are confusing to the public, and don't give a clear picture of how much virus transmission is occurring in a community, said Dr. Lakshmi Ganapathi, an infectious diseases specialist at Harvard University.

When the government officials make recommendations but do not set rules, "it ultimately rests on every single individual picking and choosing the public health that works for them. But that's not what is effective. If you're talking about stemming hospitalizations and even deaths, all of these interventions work better when people do it collectively," she said.

How Pa. GOP gov pick could turn election lies into action

By STEVE PEOPLES, MARC LEVY and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Doug Mastriano is not the only candidate who won a Republican primary on Tuesday after embracing Donald Trump's lie that the 2020 election was stolen. But no GOP contender did more to subvert that presidential election -- and no one may be better positioned to subvert the next one -- than Mastriano if he's elected Pennsylvania's governor.

In one of the most politically competitive states in the U.S., the newly minted Republican nominee for governor was deeply involved in the former president's efforts to overturn the last election. He was at the U.S. Capitol during the Jan. 6 insurrection.

If he's elected in November, Mastriano has pledged to end no-excuse vote by mail, a process that hundreds of thousands used in this week's primary. He also wants to force millions of registered voters to register again.

While he would have to contend with a Legislature that may not go along with his plans, he would still have significant authority over elections because Pennsylvania is one of the few states where governors have the power to appoint the secretary of state. As Pennsylvania's chief elections official, that official oversees how elections are managed, gives counties guidance on how to conduct elections and, crucially, certifies the final results.

With his far-right brand of politics, Mastriano's victory actually has been seen by some as a gift for Democrats, leaving Republicans with a candidate so out of step with Pennsylvania that he would struggle in a general election campaign. But Pennsylvania was one of the critical states that Trump won in 2016, and he lost it by just over one percentage point in 2020. With that in mind, Democrats made an urgent case for their supporters to take Mastriano seriously.

"People should be terrified," said Jamie Perrapato, executive director of the pro-Democrat group Turn

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PA Blue. "We have literally opened the door to a conspiracy theorist who was at the insurrection."

As the reality of Mastriano's victory settled in on Wednesday, there were early signs that GOP officials may ultimately rally behind their party's new standard bearer, even if the prevailing mood among leading Republicans was dark.

"For the Democrats, it's their dream candidate," said Republican strategist David Urban, a Trump ally who called Mastriano "out of step" with the state's broader electorate. Still, he noted that Mastriano has time to re-focus his message to expand his appeal.

"There's a lot at stake here," Urban said. "The governor controls the presidential election in '24. I hope he can moderate his message."

Speaking on Tuesday night after winning the primary, Mastriano made clear he had no plans to suddenly pivot to the center ahead of a general election campaign against Democrat Josh Shapiro. He denied that he was an extremist.

"They like to call people who stand on the Constitution far right and extreme. I repudiate that. That is crap. That is absolutely not true," Mastriano said, contending it's the Democrats who have "gone extreme."

Mastriano's rhetoric on elections is not the only issue drawing attention.

He has called abortion the "No. 1 issue" in the campaign and has promised to ban all abortions — no exceptions for rape, incest or the life of the mother — if given the chance. He also aligned himself with failed Senate candidate Kathy Barnette, who was under fire for making homophobic and Islamophobic statements several years ago.

State GOP officials spent the final weeks of the primary campaign warning voters that Mastriano was too toxic and too far right to defeat Shapiro. They pushed some competitors to leave the Republican primary to consolidate votes behind Mastriano's nearest rival.

It didn't work. While the final votes are still being counted, Mastriano is likely to win the primary by more than 20 points.

Some Pennsylvania Republicans began moderating their anti-Mastriano tone even before his victory was official, acknowledging that a disastrous showing by their nominee for governor in November would hurt down-ballot Republicans. On Wednesday, they said that, to have a chance against Shapiro, Mastriano must embrace a political strategy focused on issues like President Joe Biden's unpopular leadership, the pandemic and inflation.

"Mastriano has to show that he's able to pivot to a different set of issues," said Christopher Nicholas, a Republican campaign consultant. "In Pennsylvania you want to concentrate on issues where the independents are breaking your way."

Still, Mastriano's focus on transforming Pennsylvania's election laws will not be forgotten.

If he became governor, Mastriano would be the official charged with certifying the winner of his state's 2024 presidential election. Certification clears the way for a victorious candidate's electors to cast their ballots and have the state counted by Congress.

Some question whether Mastriano would certify a Democratic win in Pennsylvania as governor, especially since he's already under investigation for his role in pushing for the losing candidate, Trump, to receive its 20 Electoral College votes in 2020.

Mastriano has been subpoenaed by the House committee investigating the attack on the U.S. Capitol for his role in a plan to arrange for an "alternate" slate of electors from Pennsylvania for Trump after the 2020 election. Those individuals declared themselves the rightful electors and submitted false Electoral College certificates declaring Trump the winner of the presidential election in the state.

Those certificates from the "alternate electors" were then sent to Congress where several of Trump's Republican allies in the House and Senate used them to justify delaying or blocking the certification of the election during the Jan. 6 joint session of Congress.

Members of the investigating committee, comprised of seven Democrats and two Republicans, are also working to unearth details of the nearly three hours it took before Trump told the rioters to go home on the day of the attack.

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Mastriano was in regular communication with the former president that day as he and his allies sought to reverse Trump's 2020 election loss. He used his campaign money to organize buses to Washington on the day of the attack and advertised himself ahead of time as a scheduled speaker on the Capitol steps.

A Senate Judiciary report released late last year alleged that Mastriano and his wife "took part in the January 6 insurrection," citing footage of them passing through breached barricades and police lines at the Capitol. Mastriano has told reporters that he left when things turned violent.

There is no evidence showing he entered the Capitol building, and he has not been charged with any crime related to that day.

Back home, Mastriano is running on a platform to transform Pennsylvania's voting laws.

He wants to repeal the state's vote-by-mail law, end contracts with what he calls "compromised" voting machine companies and require voters to "re-register." Constitutional law scholars say that forcing registered voters to register again is barred by the National Voter Registration Act and likely runs into significant protections under the U.S. Constitution if not the state Constitution.

Meanwhile, the Republican Governors Association attacked Democrat Shapiro in a statement shortly after Mastriano's victory was announced late Tuesday, but declined to offer any praise for their own victor. Instead, the group tasked with electing Republican governors left open the possibility that it may withhold support over the coming months.

"The RGA remains committed to engaging in competitive gubernatorial contests where our support can have an impact in defending our incumbents and expanding our majority this year," the organization's Executive Director Dave Rexrode said, declining to say anything more specific about Pennsylvania.

A spokesman on Wednesday declined to clarify the group's intentions.

NATO talks with Finland, Sweden falter but will continue

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — NATO envoys failed to reach a consensus Wednesday on whether to start membership talks with Finland and Sweden, diplomats said, as Turkey renewed its objections to the two Nordic countries joining.

The envoys met at NATO's headquarters in Brussels after Finland and Sweden's ambassadors submitted written applications to join the military organization, in a move that marks one of the biggest geopolitical ramifications of Russia's war on Ukraine — and which could rewrite Europe's security map.

The diplomats, who did not want to be named because of the sensitive nature of the proceedings, declined to say who or what was holding up the procedure. They pointed to the messages from many of the 30 NATO allies welcoming Finland and Sweden's request.

Lithuanian Ambassador Deividas Matulionis told Swedish and Finnish media that the envoys had exchanged views about their national security. "The discussion was about that, but it is up to Turkey to comment," he said.

NATO officials also refused to provide details. They underlined remarks earlier Wednesday by Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, that "we are determined to work through all issues and reach a rapid conclusion." Meetings and diplomatic outreach aimed at resolving the problem will continue.

U.S. President Joe Biden voiced optimism on the matter Wednesday.

"I think we're going to be OK," he said.

Turkey is the only ally to have clearly voiced its opposition — and while Croatia's president on Wednesday suggested his country could do the same to secure a tradeoff from Western powers, he's unlikely to derail the Croatian government's support for the Nordic pair's NATO accession.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan insists Finland and Sweden must show more respect for Turkish sensitivities about terrorism. He is refusing to budge over what he says is their alleged support for Kurdish militants.

Erdogan accuses the two countries of turning a blind eye to activities of the banned Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, even though the group is on the European Union's anti-terror blacklist.

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"You will not hand over terrorists to us, but you will ask us to allow you to join NATO. NATO is a security entity ... Therefore, we cannot say 'yes' to depriving this security organization of security," he said Wednesday.

Croatian President Zoran Milanovic said his Balkan country should follow suit. Milanovic is feuding with Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic on domestic issues.

"We should follow Turkey's example," Milanovic said. "Turkey will sell its NATO status at a high price."

Before Croatia's lawmakers ratify the Nordic pair's NATO bid, Milanovic — a socialist — wants a change of neighboring Bosnia's electoral law in favor of Bosnian Croats. But Plenkovic's conservative party enjoys a small majority over the socialists in parliament, and would likely carry the vote on Finland and Sweden's NATO bids.

The day had started off on an upbeat note in Brussels. Stoltenberg had said the military alliance stands ready to seize a historic moment and move quickly on allowing Finland and Sweden to join its ranks, after the two countries submitted their membership requests.

The official applications set a security clock ticking. Russia, whose war on Ukraine spurred them to join the alliance, has warned that it wouldn't welcome such a move, and could respond.

"I warmly welcome the requests by Finland and Sweden to join NATO. You are our closest partners," Stoltenberg said. "We all agree that we must stand together, and we all agree that this is an historic moment which we must seize."

"This is a good day at a critical moment for our security," a beaming Stoltenberg said, as he stood alongside the two envoys, with NATO, Finnish and Swedish flags at their backs.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has demanded that the alliance stop expanding toward Russia's borders, and several NATO allies, led by the United States and Britain, have signaled that they stand ready to provide security support to Finland and Sweden should the Kremlin try to provoke or destabilize them during the time it takes to become full members.

The countries will only benefit from NATO's Article 5 security guarantee — the part of the alliance's founding treaty that pledges that any attack on one member would be considered an attack of them all — once the membership ratification process is concluded, probably in a few months.

A senior U.S. defense official said the Pentagon is having ongoing discussions with Sweden and Finland on their security needs to deter Russia as they move toward NATO membership.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private Pentagon discussions, said Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met with Swedish Defense Minister Peter Hultqvist Wednesday and they spoke about the interim period.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Wednesday that the U.S. and European allies are "prepared to send a very clear message ... that we will not tolerate any aggression against Finland or Sweden" until NATO's Article 5 kicks in for them.

Sullivan also said Biden asked his national security team and cabinet principals about the risks and benefits of Finland and Sweden joining NATO, and they "unanimously" supported backing the move as both countries are provenly "highly capable security partners."

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson welcomed the Nordic applications in a tweet and said that "Putin's appalling ambitions have transformed the geopolitical contours of our continent." Germany, Italy, the Baltic states and the Czech Republic all spoke favorably about the candidates.

The membership process usually takes eight to 12 months, but NATO wants to move quickly given the threat from Russia hanging over the Nordic countries' heads.

Public opinion in Finland and Sweden has shifted massively in favor of membership since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Finland and Sweden cooperate closely with NATO. They have functioning democracies, well-funded armed forces and contribute to the alliance's military operations and air policing.

Taylor Swift gets honorary degree from New York University

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By NARDOS HAILE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Taylor Swift has Grammys galore and now she has a new title — “doctor.”

The superstar received an honorary doctorate of fine arts from New York University on Wednesday, blowing kisses as the crowd roared when she walked toward the stage at a packed Yankee Stadium.

Sporting her signature red lipstick and newly awarded honorary robe, Swift joked to the thousands of graduates assembled: “I’m 90% sure the main reason I’m here is because I have a song called 22.

“I never got to have a normal college experience per se. I went to public high school until 10th grade and then finished my education doing home school work on the floor of airport terminals,” Swift said in her commencement speech.

The singer-songwriter, producer and director said that she began her music career at 15, touring different radio stations across the country. She went on to sell more than 100 million albums and won album of the year at the 2021 Grammys for her album “folkore,” making her the first woman to win the category three times. Her previous wins came in 2010 for “Fearless” and 2016 for “1989.”

She winked at the crowd when Jason King of the Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music mentioned her newly rerecorded albums, including “Fearless.”

Swift shared advice with the class of 2022 but offered the warning that, “I in no way feel qualified to tell you what to do. You’ve worked and struggled and sacrificed and studied and dreamed your way here today. I won’t tell you what to do because nobody likes that, but I will however give you life hacks for when I was starting out my dreams as a career.

“Never be ashamed of trying. Effortlessness is a myth,” she said.

Swift concluded her speech by telling graduates that making mistakes is inevitable but “when hard things happen to us, we will recover, we will learn from it, we will grow more resilient because of it. As long as we are fortunate enough to be breathing, we will breathe in, breathe through, breathe deep and breathe out. I am a doctor now so I know how breathing works.

“I hope you know how proud I am to share this day with you,” she said. “We’re doing this together so let’s just keep on dancing like we’re the class of 22.”

Buffalo shooting leaves neighborhood without a grocery store

By PIA SARKAR and NOREEN NASIR Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Tops Friendly Market was more than a place to buy groceries. As the only supermarket for miles, it became a sort of community hub on Buffalo’s East Side — where you chatted with neighbors and caught up on people’s lives.

“It’s where we go to buy bread and stay for 15, 20 minutes because if you just go in for a loaf of bread, you’re going to find four or five people you know, we’re going to have a couple of conversations before you leave,” said Buffalo City Councilman Ulysees O. Wingo, who represents the struggling Black neighborhood, where he grew up. “You just feel good because this is your store.”

Now residents are grieving the deaths of 10 Black people at the hands of an 18-year-old white man who drove three hours to carry out a racist, livestreamed shooting rampage in the crowded supermarket on Saturday.

They’re also grappling with being targeted in a place that has been so vital to the community. Before Tops opened on the East Side in 2003, residents had to travel to other communities to buy nutritious food or settle for snacks and higher-priced staples like milk and eggs from corner stores and gas stations.

The fact that there are no other options lays bare the racial and economic divide that existed in Buffalo long before the shooting.

“People talked about the demographics, the income levels, the crime and other factors,” Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown said. “I felt that the money here was as green as the money anywhere, that there was a lot of money to be spent in this community and there were needs to be served.”

Wingo said it was no accident that the gunman chose the store to carry out the shooting.

“Knowing the density of African Americans on this side of the city and going to that Tops knowing that

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this side of the city is a food desert was intentional, it was deliberate, and it was evil," Wingo said. "And we know that because he did reconnaissance the day before to ensure that there were Black folks there."

Tops said Wednesday its store remains under active police investigation. Once that's done, "we will have a team assess next steps with the intention of rebuilding and repairing the store for the community in as short a period of time as possible," it said.

In the meantime, Tops and others are working to make sure residents don't go without.

A makeshift food bank was set up not far from the supermarket. The Buffalo Community Fridge received enough monetary donations that it will distribute some funds to other local organizations. Tops also arranged for a bus to shuttle East Side residents to and from another of its Buffalo locations.

Pastor James Giles, coordinator of the anti-violence group Buffalo Peacemakers, said he has been juggling calls offering help from area churches and businesses, the Buffalo Bills, competing grocery stores and even the utility company after the shooting.

"I want us to be the City of Good Neighbors. And I do hope that we aspire to live up to that nickname," Giles said. "But I feel like we can't get there until and unless we tell the truth about the white supremacy and racism that is already present in our town."

After decades of neglect and decline, only a handful of stores are along Jefferson Avenue, the East Side's once-thriving main drag, among them a Family Dollar, a deli, a liquor store and a couple of convenience stores, as well as a library and Black-run businesses like Golden Cup Coffee, Zawadi Books and The Challenger News.

Jillian Hanesworth, 29, who was born and raised there, said construction of an expressway contributed to cutting off the neighborhood, with drivers passing underground without ever having to see it. At a recent rally, Hanesworth said she asked the crowd how many needed GPS to get there, and many of the white people raised their hands.

"A lot of people who talk about Buffalo don't live here," said Hanesworth, the city's poet laureate and director of leadership development at Open Buffalo, a nonprofit focused on social justice and community development.

Like many residents, she pauses to think when asked where the next-closest major grocery is located: None is within walking distance, and it takes three different buses to get to the Price Rite.

Before Tops opened on the East Side, residents, lawmakers and other advocates pushed for years for a supermarket after groceries and other stores closed in the neighborhood's Central Park Plaza, Wingo said.

Yvette Mack, 62, remembers when the streets weren't so empty. But when she was around 15 or 16, she noticed places going out of business.

"Everything started fading away as I got older," she said.

Eventually she moved downtown but came back to the East Side in 2020, happy that a supermarket had returned. Mack says she shopped at Tops daily, sometimes three or four times, to buy pop, meat and to play her numbers. She was there Saturday before the shooting.

Now, she's not sure she can go back once the store reopens, but hopes community conversations lead to more businesses on the East Side.

Hanesworth worries that when Tops does reopen, "it's not going to feel like ours anymore."

"And we fought so long for something to feel like ours. And Black communities across the country have been fighting so long just to feel like something belongs to us, like something is safe for us," she said. "Like we can go shopping, we can go to church, we can go to school, we can go to the movies. And that's just continuously being taken from us."

'Pharma Bro' Shkreli freed from prison for halfway house

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Convicted pharmaceutical executive Martin Shkreli was freed Wednesday from prison after serving much of a seven-year prison sentence for lying to hedge fund investors and cheating investors in a drug company.

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His attorney, Ben Brafman, said Shkreli, 39, was released early from a prison in Allenwood, Pennsylvania. The move was confirmed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

"I am pleased to report that Martin Shkreli has been released from Allenwood prison and transferred to a BOP halfway house after completing all programs that allowed for his prison sentence to be shortened," Brafman said.

Shkreli was moved to a halfway house overseen by the Federal Bureau of Prisons' New York Residential Reentry Management Office, the bureau said in a statement.

The Bureau of Prisons said Shkreli's projected release date from federal custody was Sept. 14.

Brafman said he has encouraged Shkreli to make no statements, and the lawyer planned no comments beyond confirming Wednesday's moves.

Shkreli was sentenced to the seven-year term after a 2017 conviction for lying to investors about the performance of two hedge funds he ran, skimming money for himself from those funds, and defrauding investors in a drug company, Retrophin, by hiding his ownership of some of its stock. He was also ordered to forfeit \$7.3 million.

Shkreli was originally due to be released from prison in September 2023.

Dubbed "Pharma Bro," Shkreli gained fame and notoriety after buying rights to Daraprim, a drug used to treat an infection that occurs in some AIDS, malaria and cancer patients and raising its price from \$13.50 to \$750 per pill.

Shkreli defended the decision as capitalism at work, saying insurance and other programs ensured that people who need Daraprim would ultimately get it.

During the campaign for the presidency in 2016, Democrat Hillary Clinton called it price-gouging and future President Donald Trump, a Republican, called Shkreli "a spoiled brat."

Shkreli resigned as chief executive of Turing Pharmaceuticals — later Vyera — in 2015, a day after he was arrested on securities fraud charges.

Earlier this year, he was ordered by U.S. District Judge Denise Cote to return \$64.6 million in profits he and his former company gained by raising the price of the drug. She also barred him from the pharmaceutical industry for life.

He also once regularly attacked critics on social media and once offered a bounty to anyone who could give him one of Hillary Clinton's hairs. He also was known for owning a rare, one-of-a-kind album by the Wu-Tang Clan which was sold to satisfy some of his court debts.

Biden's burdens grow: Sagging global economy adds to US woes

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As President Joe Biden embarks for Asia on Thursday, he's facing a new risk at home for the economy and his Democratic Party: a global slowdown caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the pandemic shutting down Chinese cities and factories.

The world economy can't cast U.S. ballots. But it's a hidden force in this year's midterm elections and could influence whether Democrats retain control of the House and Senate.

It's an additional challenge that highlights the steep climb for Biden, whose approval ratings have plunged as prices for everyday goods in the U.S. have soared.

Several economists said they think the U.S. is insulated from the rising energy costs that threaten Europe and from China's decline in industrial output. But there are clear spillovers as high gasoline prices continue to weigh on voters' minds and bank accounts.

Federal officials acknowledge that global events might make it harder for inflation to fall from near 40-year highs to levels that would assure the American public. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Wednesday in Germany that she believes the strong job market means the U.S. can avoid the downturn being seen around the world.

"We have a great deal of economic momentum in the United States," Yellen said. "But you know, this is an environment that is filled with risks, both with respect to inflation and also potential slowdowns."

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Yellen's successor as chair of the Federal Reserve, Jerome Powell, said in a radio interview for Marketplace last week that the central bank's ability to lower inflation while keeping the economy going could depend on what happens globally.

"There are huge events, geopolitical events going on around the world that are going to play a very important role in the economy in the next year or so," Powell said. "So the question whether we can execute a soft landing or not, it may actually depend on factors that we don't control."

What's clear is that foreign affairs and geopolitics have returned as issues that could shape the opinions of U.S. voters.

Even as the midterm races intensify, Biden is devoting his time to other world leaders — and not just Russian President Vladimir Putin and his attack on Ukraine. Biden's trip to South Korea and Japan follows recent meetings with the heads of Italy, Greece and the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. He is also meeting with the leaders of Finland and Sweden, who are seeking NATO membership, before he departs for Asia.

"Yes, geopolitics will matter for U.S. elections again," said Doug Elmendorf, dean of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and a former director of the Congressional Budget Office. "Terrorists and terrorist states have been potent, China is not becoming that much like us, and Putin has gone to war."

Elmendorf noted that upheavals worldwide are expressing themselves in higher energy costs, efforts to bring home supply chains from abroad and increased spending on national security, all of which can "crowd out social spending and raise government borrowing." That possibility could in some ways challenge Biden's promises to lower inflation, trim the national deficit and boost spending on health care, children and education.

Robin Brooks, chief economist at the Institute for International Finance, has said that the European Union appears headed for recession as energy costs have climbed because of the war in Ukraine. Manufacturing output is stalling in China after coronavirus lockdowns, creating additional supply chain challenges for economies that rely on Chinese goods.

"The U.S. has some major advantages compared to the rest of the world," Brooks said. "The biggest advantage has been the fact that it is a long way from Ukraine, unlike Western Europe where we now forecast recession for the Euro zone."

Brooks added that the U.S. is also a leading oil and agricultural producer, so higher prices that are hurting Europe could actually help parts of the U.S. economy.

That's in no way guaranteed. The aftershocks from Europe could, for instance, limit Biden's ability to deal with inflation.

Fed Chair Powell has said there is little the U.S. central bank can do to address higher oil, food and commodity prices that are tied to geopolitics. Federal Reserve policies such as hiking interest rates or reducing the Fed's balance sheets have little no impact on restarting shuttered factories abroad or generating more natural gas and oil production overseas. That complicates the administration's message about the Fed's ability to contain inflation that has become a leading worry for U.S. voters.

"Our tools don't really work on supply shocks," Powell said this month.

Adam Posen, president of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, said he expects the U.S. to be largely sheltered from Europe's woes, though he sees major risks to growth as coming from U.S. politics.

He said Biden could take steps to improve the U.S. economy and fight inflation by reducing the tariffs imposed during the administration of Donald Trump and by expanding legal immigration. Those are politically controversial moves that Biden has been hesitant to take, actions that could alienate labor unions and some voters.

"We have an unreliable budget process and an inability to raise taxes, which contributes to inflation and volatility," Posen said in an email. "We also have a hostile approach to trade and immigration because the Dems have mistakenly become convinced this is how they will win back Joe Sixpack, and the Republicans actually believe (wrongly) that foreigners and their products are dangerous."

Takeaways: Election denier wins, bad behavior dooms Cawthorn

By JILL COLVIN and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Donald Trump's influence was enough to elevate his Senate candidate to victory in North Carolina on Tuesday, while his pick in Pennsylvania remained in a tough fight in that state's Senate primary.

In a key congressional race, a Republican congressman's bad behavior finally caught up with him.

And in the Pennsylvania governor's race, a Trump-backed candidate who has spread lies about the 2020 vote count won the GOP nomination, putting an election denier within striking distance of running a presidential battleground state in 2024.

Takeaways from Tuesday's primaries in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Kentucky, Idaho and Oregon:

TRUMP'S WINNING STREAK CONTINUES

The former president entered the primary season on a high after JD Vance, his endorsed candidate in Ohio's hypercompetitive GOP Senate contest, shot from third to first. Trump added to his tally Tuesday night in several states.

Trump had shocked party faithful in North Carolina when he endorsed U.S. Rep. Ted Budd, a little-known congressman, last June for the Senate seat being vacated by retiring Republican Richard Burr. But after a rocky start, Budd easily captured his party's nomination, passing a crowded field of GOP rivals that included the state's former governor, Pat McCrory.

And in Pennsylvania's GOP race for governor, Trump's endorsed candidate, the far-right Doug Mastriano, easily won the nomination — though he was already well ahead in the polls when Trump weighed in just days before the primary.

His nod was widely seen as an effort to hedge his bets and guarantee a victory in the state in case his endorsed candidate for Senate, celebrity heart surgeon Mehmet Oz, loses his race. Oz and former hedge fund CEO David McCormick were virtually tied late Tuesday, with more votes left to be counted.

Trump had suffered a loss last week when Charles Herbster, his endorsed candidate in Nebraska's gubernatorial primary, finished second after being accused late in the campaign of groping young women. Trump is facing down another possible defeat in next week's high-stakes governor's primary in Georgia, where his candidate is trailing in both polls and fundraising.

ELECTION DENIALIST WINS KEY REPUBLICAN PRIMARY

Trump has made election denial a key loyalty test in the Republican Party, and that may have kneecapped his party in Pennsylvania with the victory of Mastriano, a vocal election denier.

Mastriano backed baseless reviews of the election results in Pennsylvania, where Democrat Joe Biden won by nearly 100,000 votes. He organized buses to ferry Trump supporters to Washington for the "Stop the Steal" rally that preceded the Jan. 6 U.S. Capitol insurrection. And he says that if he's elected, he'll ferret out fraud partly by making every single voter in the state reregister.

Mastriano was the front-runner even before Trump's endorsement late last week helped cement his victory. All the major statewide Republican hopefuls in one way or another cast doubt on the election results, but Mastriano was by far the loudest and that's what won him Trump's nod.

With Trump prioritizing fealty to his election lies over all else, many Pennsylvania Republicans fear the former president has undermined their chances in the crucial state. That led them to try to coalesce around a last-minute alternative to Mastriano, but the effort failed.

Mastriano will face Democrat Josh Shapiro, the state's attorney general, in the November general election. Shapiro, who was uncontested, has appeared eager to take on Mastriano, running a television ad calling Mastriano "one of Donald Trump's biggest supporters," a move that seemed designed to boost the state senator with GOP voters.

Mastriano has said he wouldn't have certified Biden's victory in Pennsylvania if he'd been governor then. That raises questions about the 2024 presidential election and whether Mastriano, if elected, would follow the will of the voters if a candidate he opposes were to win the state.

In conservative Idaho, Phil McGrane, an establishment-backed Republican, just narrowly defeated an election denialist in their primary for secretary of state. The three-person race included two candidates

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who endorse Trump's election lies — combined, they won over 55% of the vote. That shows the hold that Trump's election lies have on his party.

GOP VOTERS HAVE HAD ENOUGH

Even in Trump's Republican Party, there are limits.

Rep. Madison Cawthorn, the youngest member of Congress, was ousted from office on Tuesday by state Sen. Chuck Edwards after a rocky first term filled with salacious headlines and scandals. The young congressman, who uses a wheelchair after a car accident, became a media sensation when he first won a House seat at age 25, but he may have gotten singed under the spotlight.

Cawthorn last month was cited for carrying a handgun through an airport security checkpoint — his second such citation. In March, he was cited for driving with a revoked license after being stopped for speeding twice. He angered local Republicans by choosing to run in a different district after new congressional maps were drawn this year, then coming back to his original district when litigation shifted the lines again. And, most notoriously, Cawthorn insinuated that Washington Republicans had invited him to at least one cocaine-fueled orgy.

Trump sought to give Cawthorn a boost on Monday, urging voters to keep him in office. "Recently, he made some foolish mistakes, which I don't believe he'll make again," Trump said in a statement. "Let's give Madison a second chance!"

But voters decided not to. Edwards, who was endorsed by Republican Sen. Thom Tillis, inched past Cawthorn in the primary. Still, the big picture wasn't that close — with eight candidates in the contest, Cawthorn won just 3 in 10 voters in the district. That's a warning for other Republicans who may feel that Trump's ability to hold his base's loyalty through repeated scandals makes them bulletproof, too.

Ringling Bros. announces comeback tour without animal acts

By FREIDA FRISARO Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — "The Greatest Show on Earth" is making a comeback featuring extraordinary humans and no animal acts five years after shutting down its three-ring circus, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey announced Wednesday.

Talent teams have already conducted auditions in Argentina, Mongolia, Ethiopia, France and the United States, with more than 1,000 performers applying to join a 50-city North American tour starting in September 2023, and international dates to follow, according to the owner of the historic circus, Feld Entertainment.

"For us, Ringling is about bringing the world's talents to people's hometowns," the chief operating officer, Juliette Feld Grossman, told The Associated Press in an interview. "We are entertainment for everyone and it's important that everyone who comes to the show finds something and someone that they can really connect and relate to."

The company heard from many fans after ending its 146-year run five years ago following intense criticism over its use of circus animals, and has considered their comments while re-imagining how to "keep the franchise fresh and alive," she said.

In the new production, audiences will become "co-collaborators" with the performers, bringing them closer to the action and creating a different experience with every show, she said.

Ringling also wants to "tell the personal stories of the performers," she said.

"Our performers dedicate their lives to doing oftentimes risky, very technically challenging and athletic performances, and they do it because they are passionate about it," she said. "And we want our audience to know more about them to understand how they trained, where they came from, what inspired them to create and develop this particular skill."

The circus took down its tents after years of declining ticket sales as customers became conflicted about its treatment of circus animals. Costly court battles led to the end of elephant acts in 2016. People for Ethical Treatment of Animals praised the "animal-free revamp" in a statement Wednesday.

Since the closure, it became clear that the circus still "holds a special place in people's hearts," Feld Grossman said.

"Any time I meet someone and I tell them something about what I do, they tell me their personal story about Ringling and the first time they went, or the most memorable time that they went. That's something that confirms to us, that validates that we have something special here," she said.

"It's going to be really special for parents to bring their children and to bring the grandparents as well, and to have that continuity across generations of enjoying a kind of entertainment that has been around for so long but still speaks to today."

Black club pro hopes to thrive, inspire at PGA Championship

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — The numbers are not in his favor at Southern Hills, which is nothing Wyatt Worthington II hasn't faced before.

Worthington, who spends his working hours giving lessons at The Golf Depot in central Ohio, is among the 20 club professionals who qualified for the PGA Championship. In five of the last 10 years, no club pro made it to the weekend. Go back to 1994 to find the last club pro to finish in the top 30.

And then there's another set of odds.

Worthington is only the second Black club pro to play in PGA Championship.

When the 35-year-old Worthington first made it to the PGA Championship at Baltusrol in 2016, he was the first Black club pro to play the major in 25 years. Tom Woodard, now in the Colorado Golf Hall of Fame, was the only other, in 1991 at Crooked Stick.

"Did that surprise me? Let me give you a double-sided answer," Worthington said. "Yes, it did surprise me. But the more information I had, it didn't."

The PGA of America counts 28,343 professionals, of whom 194 identify as African-American. From a field of 312 players in the PGA Professional Championship, Worthington was one of three Black club pros, "the most I've ever seen." He tied for fourth to qualify for the PGA.

"For me to even be at the club pro championship, I'm not supposed to be there from a statistical standpoint," he said.

And now he's playing against the strongest field of the four majors, which includes Tiger Woods, the player responsible for him falling in love with golf.

Southern Hills is a course Worthington only would have dreamed of playing when he was hitting golf balls in baseball outfields in Ohio as a teenager, simulating bunkers by scraping up the infield dirt and honing his game on ranges and public courses on the east side of Columbus.

Now it's a chance to show he can play, and hopefully to inspire.

"I'm looking forward to playing really good golf, being in the environment, making change and touching spectators," Worthington said. "It's having the impact on people."

The PGA of America didn't even allow Black professionals until 1961 when its Caucasian-only clause finally was rescinded. It has doubled down efforts to change the look of golf, not just at the elite level but in pro shops and other industries the game touches.

Seth Waugh, the association's CEO, said golf is an \$85 billion industry with 2 million jobs. The mission is to attract people of all backgrounds and to show there's room in the industry inside and outside the ropes. And it's a long road ahead.

"We had Caucasians only until 1961, and that's unimaginable," Waugh said. "But on the other hand, it's been 60 years and we haven't moved the needle enough. This is a very long journey and we're very serious about it. We're not trying to check a box. We're all in."

The association is coming off the 36th edition of the PGA Works Collegiate Championship — formerly the National Minority College Championship — along with spinoff programs aligned with historically black colleges or universities and designed to provide pathways to careers in golf.

The PGA Tour has invested \$100 million toward racial equity and inclusion, including \$10,000 grants to each of the 50-plus HBCU's men's and women's golf programs for travel and recruiting. The tour and PGA of America are making available top golf courses for the Advocates Professional Golf Association tour, which this year had the final round of a 36-hole event at Torrey Pines televised on Golf Channel.

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Worthington tied for fourth in the Billy Horschel APGA Tour Invitational at TPC Sawgrass two weeks ago. Horschel was so inspired by the APGA that he created the largest purse (\$125,000) on the schedule.

And on Monday, he was practicing on the front nine with Worthington ahead of a major championship.

"I think he has a good chance of playing well. He's an impressive kid, an impressive story," Horschel said. "He just needs a break or two with financial support. Corporate sponsors should be looking for people like that."

Worthington still recalls his biggest moment in golf, almost down to the minute. It was July 29, 2001, during a clinic in Columbus hosted by The First Tee and the Tiger Woods Foundation. Woods gave individual instruction to each kid.

"We all had blue hats, a white shirt, black shorts," Worthington said. "When Tiger was coming around, he had that aura. Everyone got silent. You just felt his presence and energy. He spent probably 10 to 20 minutes with me and it felt like over an hour."

Worthington went home that day and told his father he wanted to play on the PGA Tour.

"I said, 'What's your backup plan?'" his father recalled as he stood outside the Southern Hills clubhouse. "He just wanted to be in golf."

Worthington went to Methodist University in North Carolina for the Professional Golf Management program. He has worked at Muirfield Village as an assistant pro and now teaches at The Golf Depot, which has a range, an academy and a Par 3 course.

His hope is for kids to love golf as much as he does. His passion remains rooted in playing. What he lacks is funding, and Worthington feels this is the biggest obstacle in getting more diversity in golf.

"It's moving in the right direction," he said. "Do we have a long way to go? Of course. And Seth has done an outstanding job. But there's an issue. To have exposure at a young age? Most checked that box through Tiger, so that's not it. We need access, we need opportunity and we need funding."

Golf is expensive at its core with equipment. Throw in the travel and fees, and it adds up.

"I'm a First Tee kid from Columbus who went to a PGM program. I'm checking off a lot of boxes. I've played by rules and done everything in my power, and I'm struggling," Worthington said. "This is not about, 'What more do I have to do?' It's just to show how hard it is."

Woods doesn't recall the lessons he gave Worthington two decades ago. He has touched a lot of lives in golf. They remember. But he can appreciate the plight. When he was inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame, Woods told of his parents taking out a second mortgage for him to compete in junior golf tournaments.

Yes, access is improved and golf organizations are doing their part.

"But how do you sustain that?" Woods said. "That's the hard part. How do you keep them in there for years at a time? And then you look at the pyramid effect. The more you go up, the harder the competition and the more kids are going to be dropped."

Worthington keeps plugging along. He's teaching. He caddies on the side. Whatever money he can save goes to tournaments and travel. It led him to another chance in the PGA Championship, which he sees as an opportunity and a platform — for him and the PGA.

"To have Wyatt here and let kids see somebody who looks like them and have an opportunity to do what he's doing, for him it's huge," Waugh said. "For us, it's massive."

With Roe in doubt, some fear tech surveillance of pregnancy

By MARYCLAIRE DALE Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — When Chandler Jones realized she was pregnant during her junior year of college, she turned to a trusted source for information and advice.

Her cellphone.

"I couldn't imagine before the internet, trying to navigate this," said Jones, 26, who graduated Tuesday from the University of Baltimore School of Law. "I didn't know if hospitals did abortions. I knew Planned Parenthood did abortions, but there were none near me. So I kind of just Googled."

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But with each search, Jones was being surreptitiously followed — by the phone apps and browsers that track us as we click away, capturing even our most sensitive health data.

Online searches. Period apps. Fitness trackers. Advice helplines. GPS. The often obscure companies collecting our health history and geolocation data may know more about us than we know ourselves.

For now, the information is mostly used to sell us things, like baby products targeted to pregnant women. But in a post-Roe world — if the Supreme Court upends the 1973 decision that legalized abortion, as a draft opinion suggests it may in the coming weeks — the data would become more valuable, and women more vulnerable.

Privacy experts fear that pregnancies could be surveilled and the data shared with police or sold to vigilantes.

“The value of these tools for law enforcement is for how they really get to peek into the soul,” said Cynthia Conti-Cook, a lawyer and technology fellow at the Ford Foundation. “It gives (them) the mental chatter inside our heads.”

HIPAA, HOTLINES, HEALTH HISTORIES

The digital trail only becomes clearer when we leave home, as location apps, security cameras, license plate readers and facial recognition software track our movements. The development of these tech tools has raced far ahead of the laws and regulations that might govern them.

And it's not just women who should be concerned. The same tactics used to surveil pregnancies can be used by life insurance companies to set premiums, banks to approve loans and employers to weigh hiring decisions, experts said.

Or it could — and sometimes does — send women who experience miscarriages cheery ads on their would-be child's birthday.

It's all possible because HIPAA, the 1996 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, protects medical files at your doctor's office but not the information that third-party apps and tech companies collect about you. Nor does HIPAA cover the health histories collected by non-medical “crisis pregnancy centers,” which are run by anti-abortion groups. That means the information can be shared with, or sold to, almost anyone.

Jones contacted one such facility early in her Google search, before figuring out they did not offer abortions.

“The dangers of unfettered access to Americans' personal data have never been more clear. Researching birth control online, updating a period-tracking app or bringing a phone to the doctor's office could be used to track and prosecute women across the U.S.,” Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said last week.

For myriad reasons, both political and philosophical, data privacy laws in the U.S. have lagged far behind those adopted in Europe in 2018.

Until this month, anyone could buy a weekly trove of data on clients at more than 600 Planned Parenthood sites around the country for as little as \$160, according to a recent Vice investigation that led one data broker to remove family planning centers from the customer “pattern” data it sells. The files included approximate patient addresses (down to the census block, derived from where their cellphones “sleep” at night), income brackets, time spent at the clinic, and the top places people stopped before and after their visits.

While the data did not identify patients by name, experts say that can often be pieced together, or de-anonymized, with a little sleuthing.

In Arkansas, a new law will require women seeking an abortion to first call a state hotline and hear about abortion alternatives. The hotline, set to debut next year, will cost the state nearly \$5 million a year to operate. Critics fear it will be another way to track pregnant women, either by name or through an identifier number. Other states are considering similar legislation.

The widespread surveillance capabilities alarm privacy experts who fear what's to come if Roe v. Wade is overturned. The Supreme Court is expected to issue its opinion by early July.

“A lot of people, where abortion is criminalized — because they have nowhere to go — are going to go

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online, and every step that they take (could) ... be surveilled," Conti-Cook said.

PUNISH WOMEN, DOCTORS OR FRIENDS?

Women of color like Jones, along with poor women and immigrants, could face the most dire consequences if Roe falls since they typically have less power and money to cover their tracks. They also tend to have more abortions, proportionally, perhaps because they have less access to health care, birth control and, in conservative states, schools with good sex education programs.

The leaked draft suggests the Supreme Court could be ready to let states ban or severely restrict abortion through civil or criminal penalties. More than half are poised to do so. Abortion foes have largely promised not to punish women themselves, but instead target their providers or people who help them access services.

"The penalties are for the doctor, not for the woman," Republican state Rep. Jim Olsen of Oklahoma said last month of a new law that makes performing an abortion a felony, punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

But abortion advocates say that remains to be seen.

"When abortion is criminalized, pregnancy outcomes are investigated," said Tara Murtha, the communications director at the Women's Law Project in Philadelphia, who recently co-authored a report on digital surveillance in the abortion sphere.

She wonders where the scrutiny would end. Prosecutors have already taken aim at women who use drugs during pregnancy, an issue Justice Clarence Thomas raised during the Supreme Court arguments in the case in December.

"Any adverse pregnancy outcome can turn the person who was pregnant into a suspect," Murtha said.

STATE LIMITS, TECH STEPS, PERSONAL TIPS

A few states are starting to push back, setting limits on tech tools as the fight over consumer privacy intensifies.

Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey, through a legal settlement, stopped a Boston-based ad company from steering anti-abortion smartphone ads to women inside clinics there that offer abortion services, deeming it harassment. The firm had even proposed using the same "geofencing" tactics to send anti-abortion messages to high school students.

In Michigan, voters amended the state Constitution to prohibit police from searching someone's data without a warrant. And in California, home to Silicon Valley, voters passed a sweeping digital privacy law that lets people see their data profiles and ask to have them deleted. The law took effect in 2020.

The concerns are mounting, and have forced Apple, Google and other tech giants to begin taking steps to rein in the sale of consumer data. That includes Apple's launch last year of its App Tracking Transparency feature, which lets iPhone and iPad users block apps from tracking them.

Abortion rights activists, meanwhile, suggest women in conservative states leave their cellphones, smartwatches and other wearable devices at home when they seek reproductive health care, or at least turn off the location services. They should also closely examine the privacy policies of menstrual trackers and other health apps they use.

"There are things that people can do that can help mitigate their risk. Most people will not do them because they don't know about it or it's inconvenient," said Nathan Freed Wessler, a deputy director with the ACLU's Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project. "There are very, very few people who have the savvy to do everything."

Digital privacy was the last thing on Jones's mind when she found herself pregnant. She was in crisis. She and her partner had ambitious career goals. After several days of searching, she found an appointment for an abortion in nearby Delaware. Fortunately, he had a car.

"When I was going through this, it was just survival mode," said Jones, who took part in a march Saturday in downtown Baltimore to support abortion rights.

Besides, she said, she's grown up in the Internet age, a world in which "all of my information is being sold constantly."

But news of the leaked Supreme Court draft sparked discussions at her law school this month about privacy, including digital privacy in the era of Big Data.

"Literally, because I have my cell phone in my pocket, if I go to a CVS, they know I went to a CVS," the soon-to-be lawyer said. "I think the privacy right is such a deeper issue in America (and one) that is being violated all the time."

Buffalo is latest mass shooting by gunman wearing body armor

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST, GENE JOHNSON and JAMES ANDERSON Associated Press

When a shooter attacked a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, over the weekend, its security guard tried to stop him. At least one of his shots hit the gunman, but it didn't stop the deadly rampage because the gunman was wearing body armor.

Ten Black people died in the racist massacre, including security guard Aaron Salter, a retired Buffalo police officer hailed as a hero. It's the latest mass shooting in which the gunman apparently came prepared for anyone trying to stop him with a gun.

At least 21 mass shooters over the last four decades have worn some kind of body armor — and the majority of those were within the last 10 years, according to a database maintained by The Violence Project, a nonpartisan research group that tracks gun violence.

Among them: A massacre that killed 12 people and injured dozens more at a crowded movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, in 2012, and another in nearby Boulder that left 10 people dead at a supermarket last year. The shooter in Texas's deadliest mass slaying was also wearing protective gear when he killed more than two dozen people at a church in 2017, as was a radicalized Islamic couple who carried out a terror attack in San Bernardino, California, in 2015.

"They're demonstrating this intent that, 'I want to absolutely kill or hurt as many people as I possibly can before I just can't fight anymore,'" said Chris Burbank, the former police chief in Salt Lake City who's now with the Center for Policing Equity.

The Violence Project database doesn't show a clear correlation with body armor and the number of victims. But such gear can enable attackers to shoot longer and is a symbolic way to adhere to societal expectations of what a mass shooting looks like, said James Densley, a criminal justice professor at Metro State University in Minnesota who co-founded The Violence Project.

"A mass shooting is intended to be a final act — you don't get away with a mass shooting," Densley said. "So it's meant to be a big spectacle, and it's meant to have people pay attention and to notice it. One of the ways you do that is you dress up pretending you're in the military."

Police officers are seeing body armor in other types of investigations, like narcotics cases, said former Miami Police Chief Jorge Colina. Body armor is relatively easy to get, especially the soft body armor similar to the bulletproof vests regularly worn by police officers that are effective against handguns.

Getting body armor isn't difficult under U.S. laws. It's illegal under federal law for a convicted felon to buy body armor, but other than that there are few restrictions on purchasing it. Only one state blocks it from being ordered online and shipped to homes: Connecticut, which requires a face-to-face purchase.

Colina would like to see more states consider stricter rules.

"I don't think it's something that is really thought about too much, but we've seen it many times and we've seen it here in south Florida," Colina said. "Somebody commits a crime wearing body armor, and it's terrifying. The idea that you may not be able to stop them if you had to use deadly force is terrifying."

Still, body armor itself isn't inherently dangerous and is in fact aimed at protection — something on the minds of many people amid a spike in gun violence in the U.S., Burbank said. And it's unclear what effective body armor regulation would even look like, given the difficulty of regulating the weapons that are used in the shootings.

"Most of those same laws apply to guns," Burbank said. "Does that prohibit anyone in this nation from having access to a firearm?"

Body armor hasn't been worn in the majority of mass shootings, said James Alan Fox, a criminologist

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at Northeastern University who has been tracking mass killings back to 2006 along with The Associated Press and USA Today.

But it does indicate a level of planning. Body armor was mentioned more than a dozen times in the online writings attributed to the white suspect in the Buffalo shooting, Payton Gendron, who was arrested at the supermarket and has pleaded not guilty to murder.

The Violence Project database also doesn't include slayings that don't meet the definition of a mass shooting because fewer than four people were killed.

In one such shooting at Philadelphia's Thomas Jefferson University Hospital last October, a nursing assistant wearing blue scrubs and a ballistics vest killed a co-worker and then wounded two police officers before being killed himself. In another, this month in Round Rock, Texas, a 31-year-old Marine veteran wounded a neighbor before engaging in a shootout with law enforcement, after which he was found dead, wearing body armor.

In contrast to U.S. laws, four Canadian provinces have enacted severe restrictions on the possession of body armor — Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba and Nova Scotia. Residents must obtain permits to possess body armor, including ballistic vests, and must undergo background checks before getting those permits, which must be renewed on an annual or biannual basis. Violators face hefty fines and jail time.

Alberta adopted its law in 2012 because of spiraling gang violence in which gang members wore vests while committing crimes such as drive-by shootings and even sported them in public, said Ian Roddick, a spokesman with the province's Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General.

Applicants must have no criminal record. Permits generally are granted to those whose jobs, such as security guards, require protection.

Some Australian territories also restrict body armor possession.

EU rushes out \$300 billion roadmap to ditch Russian energy

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union's executive arm moved Wednesday to jump-start plans for the 27-nation bloc to abandon Russian energy amid the Kremlin's war in Ukraine, proposing a nearly 300 billion-euro (\$315 billion) package that includes more efficient use of fuels and faster rollout of renewable power.

The European Commission's investment initiative is meant to help the 27 EU countries start weaning themselves off Russian fossil fuels this year. The goal is to deprive Russia, the EU's main supplier of oil, natural gas and coal, of tens of billions in revenue and strengthen EU climate policies.

"We are taking our ambition to yet another level to make sure that we become independent from Russian fossil fuels as quickly as possible," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in Brussels when announcing the package, dubbed REPowerEU.

With no end in sight to Russia's war in Ukraine and European energy security shaken, the EU is rushing to align its geopolitical and climate interests for the coming decades. It comes amid troubling signs that have raised concerns about energy supplies that the EU relies on and have no quick replacements for, including Russia cutting off member nations Poland and Bulgaria after they refused a demand to pay for natural gas in rubles.

The bloc's dash to ditch Russian energy stems from a combination of voluntary and mandatory actions. Both reflect the political discomfort of helping fund Russia's military campaign in a country that neighbors the EU and wants to join the bloc.

An EU ban on coal from Russia is due to start in August, and the bloc has pledged to try to reduce demand for Russian gas by two-thirds by year's end. Meanwhile, a proposed EU oil embargo has hit a roadblock from Hungary and other landlocked countries that worry about the cost of switching to alternative sources.

In a bid to swing Hungary behind the oil phaseout, the REPowerEU package expects oil investment funding of around 2 billion euros for member nations highly dependent on Russian oil.

Energy savings and renewables form the cornerstones of the package, which would be funded mainly by an economic stimulus program put in place to help member countries overcome the slump triggered by the coronavirus pandemic.

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The European Commission said the price tag for abandoning Russian fossil fuels completely by a 2027 target date is 210 billion euros. Its package includes 56 billion euros for energy efficiency and 86 billion euros for renewables.

Von der Leyen cited a total funding pot of 72 billion euros in grants and 225 billion euros for loans.

The European Commission also proposed ways to streamline the approval processes in EU countries for renewable projects, which can take up to a decade to get through red tape. The commission said approval times need to fall to as little as a year or less.

It put forward a specific plan on solar energy, seeking to double photovoltaic capacity by 2025 and pushing for a phased-in obligation to install solar panels on new buildings.

Simone Tagliapietra, an energy expert at the Bruegel think tank in Brussels, called REPowerEU a "jumbo package" whose success will ultimately depend on political will in the bloc's national capitals.

"Most of the actions entailed in the plan require either national implementation or strong coordination among member states," Tagliapietra said. "The extent to which countries really engage is going to be defining."

The German energy think tank Agora Energiewende said the EU's plan "gives too little attention to concrete initiatives that reduce fossil fuel demand in the short term and thereby misses the opportunity to simultaneously enhance Europe's energy security and meet Europe's climate objectives."

The group's research shows rapidly expanding solar, wind parks and use of heat pumps for low-temperature heat in industry and buildings could be done faster than constructing new liquefied natural gas terminals or gas infrastructure, said Matthias Buck, its director for Europe.

The European Commission's recommendations on short-term national actions to cut demand for Russian energy coincide with deliberations underway in the bloc since last year on setting more ambitious EU energy-efficiency and renewable targets for 2030.

Those targets, being negotiated by the European Parliament and national governments, are part of the bloc's commitments to a 55% cut in greenhouse gases by decade's end, compared with 1990 emissions, and to climate neutrality by 2050.

Von der Leyen urged the European Parliament and national governments to deepen the commission's July proposal for an energy efficiency target of 9% and renewable energy goal of 40% by 2030. She said those objectives should be 13% and 45%, respectively.

Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark plan to build North Sea wind farms to help cut carbon emissions.

Green options transforming a wedding industry prone to waste

By LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The wedding industry remains fraught with waste, but a growing contingent of brides and grooms is pushing for more sustainable changes, from the way they invite guests to the food they serve and the clothes they wear.

The wedding resource The Knot estimates that more than two-thirds of about 15,000 site users did or planned to incorporate eco-conscious touches, including secondhand decor, minimizing food waste and avoiding one-time use products. Nearly 1 in 3 said vendors should be more proactive in leading the way.

After two chaotic years for the wedding industry, searches on Pinterest for thrifted weddings have tripled, and they've doubled for reuse wedding dress ideas, according to the site's 2022 wedding trends report. The online resale giant Poshmark said demand for secondhand wedding dresses is at an all-time high, especially for those costing \$500 or more.

Lauren Kay, executive editor of The Knot, said more venues, caterers and other vendors are taking notice.

"A lot of vendors are really educating themselves on ways to be more sustainable in an effort to meet the demand," she said. "We're seeing across the board much more interest and recognition around sustainability."

For example, Something Borrowed Blooms offers silk florals rather than fresh cut flowers, which often

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travel long distances and are arranged using non-recyclable foam. Nova by Eaura rents bridal veils. Ver-Terra sells bowls and compostable plates made of fallen palm leaves, while Pollyn, a plant shop in Brooklyn, uses biodegradable nursery pots as more couples turn to plants in place of cut flowers.

If paper goods are a must, Paper Culture makes invitations, save the dates and reception cards using 100% post-consumer recycled paper. The company offsets its manufacturing and transportation carbon footprint through credits that put resources back into the planet, and it plants a tree with every order.

For 28-year-old Anna Masiello, getting it right for her May 28 wedding is an extension of a more climate-friendly lifestyle she embraced several years ago after moving from her native Italy to Portugal to earn a master's degree in environmental sustainability.

"I really started to learn about climate change and the real impacts of it. We hear so much about it but sometimes it's so overwhelming that we decide not to learn more or to understand it," she said. "I just said, OK, it's time to act."

She took her journey to social media, using the handle `hero_to_0`, in reference to zero waste, and has amassed more than 70,000 followers on TikTok and nearly 40,000 on Instagram for her regular updates on her life and wedding planning.

Masiello's naturally dyed lavender wedding outfit of a long skirt and matching top is made of deadstock linen (material that factories or stores weren't able to use or sell). The trousers and shirt her fiance will wear are secondhand. The rings they'll exchange belonged to two of their grandparents.

Her fiance carved her engagement ring out of wood from a tree her parents planted when she was born. Her video about it has been viewed more than 12 million times.

The couple's 50 guests at the outdoor ceremony in an uncle's yard will throw confetti punched out of fallen leaves, and the decor will include wood, used glass jars, and plants from the garden. In place of paper goods, they went digital. And no favors will be handed out. To help take the carbon sting out of some guests' plane travel, the couple plans to plant trees.

Not all of Masiello's feedback on social media has been positive. Some have mocked her efforts. But she has embraced that conversation.

"When I started sharing and I saw that it was impacting so many people, and also so many people were having a very negative reaction, I was like, OK, this is really stirring people's emotions. I have to talk more about it, and I'm very glad I'm doing it," she said.

In Los Angeles, 31-year-old Lena Kazer has thought about it, too, for her May 21 wedding in her backyard with 38 guests.

"Both of us are a little disgusted by the extravagance of the wedding industry," she said. "We agreed we would use the resources that we have and avoid buying anything that we won't continue to use."

They are using compostable or recyclable utensils, cups and plates. They're batching cocktails to reduce waste, and are using their own furniture for seating. Kazer's bouquet will be made of real flowers, but she has kept flower purchases to a minimum.

"We're buying almost all decorations at thrift stores, and I'm wearing my sister's wedding dress and my mom's veil," she said. "We told everyone they could wear whatever they wanted after hearing about people spending thousands of dollars on new outfits for weddings."

Other ideas for green weddings include using seed paper, which can be planted by recipients, and serving organic, seasonal, farm-to-table food, with leftovers donated.

Kat Warner, whose T. Warner Artists provides entertainment for weddings along the East Coast, offers options ranging from solar-powered lighting to full solar receptions. She also uses carbon offsets, donating to funds that support such things as reforestation and bird conservation.

Warner said couples are asking more questions, including "what various parts of their weddings can be recycled, composted or reused."

Greater Good Events, which bills itself as "event planners for those who give a damn," takes a holistic approach in Portland, Oregon, and the Tri-State region of New York. Waste in weddings isn't always tangible, said Maryam Mudrick, who bought the company with Justine Broughal in September.

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"If you're working with vendors with bad labor practices that are not reinvesting in communities, you're creating some ancillary waste in that regard as well," Mudrick said.

One of their catering partners, Pinch Food Design, has a zero waste pledge, which includes designing menus to limit food waste, donating used cooking oil for biodiesel, and supporting sustainable and regenerative farming.

Florist Ingrid Carozzi of Tin Can Studios in Brooklyn cited other issues with floral arrangements beyond the use of non-biodegradable foam, such as bleaching and chemically dyeing flowers to achieve unnatural colors.

"It's terrible for the environment, and working with these materials isn't good for you," she said. "Some florists are working towards sustainable methods, doing everything they can. There's a real mix now."

Kate Winick and her fiance had a rule for their May 22 backyard wedding at a home in Northport, New York: If it's destined to get thrown out or be used only once, skip it or buy secondhand.

"I don't think living sustainably means you need a crunchy aesthetic," she said. "It just means using what is already in the world. The most sustainable purchase is something that already exists."

Mozambique declares polio outbreak linked to Pakistan

Associated Press undefined

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Health authorities in Mozambique declared a polio outbreak Wednesday after confirming that a child in the country's northeastern Tete province had been paralyzed by the disease.

The case in Mozambique is the second imported case of polio in southern Africa this year, following a case discovered in Malawi in mid-February. It's the first case of wild polio in Mozambique since 1992, although cases linked to a mutated virus from the oral vaccine were detected in 2019.

The latest case in Mozambique was found in a child who experienced signs of paralysis in late March, according to a statement issued by the World Health Organization.

Sequencing indicates that the case in Mozambique is linked to a strain of polio spreading in Pakistan in 2019, similar to the case reported in Malawi earlier this year.

WHO declared Africa free of the wild polio virus in August 2020 even though numerous countries across the continent have reported outbreaks linked to the vaccine in recent years. There is no difference between the disease caused by the wild virus or the mutated virus from the vaccine.

"The detection of another case of wild poliovirus in Africa is greatly concerning, even if it's unsurprising given the recent outbreak in Malawi. However, it shows how dangerous this virus is and how quickly it can spread," said Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organization's Africa director.

In response to the case in neighboring Malawi, Mozambique recently carried out two mass vaccination campaigns in which 4.2 million children were vaccinated against the disease, said WHO.

Disease surveillance is being strengthened in five countries: Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Vaccination campaigns in the coming weeks are planned to reach 23 million children aged five years and below.

Polio is highly infectious, spread mostly via water and largely affects children younger than five years. There is no cure for polio, and it can only be prevented by immunization. WHO and its partners began an effort to eradicate polio globally in 1988 and have missed numerous deadlines to wipe out the disease.

Colorado, Nebraska jostle over water rights amid drought

By JAMES ANDERSON Associated Press

OVID, Colo. (AP) — Shortly after daybreak on the high plains of northeastern Colorado, Don Schneider tinkers with seed-dispensing gear on a mammoth corn planter. The day's task: Carefully sowing hundreds of acres of seed between long rows of last year's desiccated stalks to ensure the irrigation water he's collected over the winter will last until harvest time.

A two-hour's drive eastward, Steve Hanson, a fifth-generation Nebraska cattle breeder who also pro-

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duces corn and other crops, is preparing to seed, having stored winter water to help ensure his products make it to market. Like Schneider and countless others in this semi-arid region, he wants his children and grandchildren to be able to work the rich soil homesteaded by their ancestors in the 1800s.

Schneider and Hanson find themselves on opposite sides of a looming, politically-fraught dispute over water resembling the kind that until now has been reserved for the parched U.S. states along the Colorado River Basin.

As climate change-fueled megadrought edges eastward, Nebraska's Republican-controlled Legislature this year voted to move forward with a plan that stunned Colorado state leaders. The Cornhusker State wants to divert water in Colorado by invoking an obscure, 99-year-old compact between the states that allows Nebraska to seize Colorado land along the South Platte River to build a canal.

Nebraska's plan underscores an increasing appetite throughout the West to preemptively secure water as winter snows and year-round rainfall diminish, forcing states to reallocate increasingly scarce flows in basins such as the South Platte and its better-known cousin, the Colorado River.

Nebraska's Republican governor, Pete Ricketts, gave precious few details in calling for \$500 million in cash reserves and one-time federal pandemic funds to be spent on the project, other than to say it will benefit agriculture, power generation and municipal drinking water. Ricketts decried proposals in Colorado to either siphon or store more South Platte water, especially in the rapidly-growing Denver metro area, saying they threaten Nebraska's water rights hundreds of miles downstream.

The announcement sent Colorado officials scrambling to dust off the 1923 compact, which both Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court signed off on and still stands as the law of the land. Democratic Gov. Jared Polis vowed to "aggressively assert" Colorado's water rights, and state lawmakers lambasted the proposal. GOP Rep. Richard Holtorf, an area cattleman, declared: "You give Nebraska what they're due but you don't give them much else."

For now, Colorado is not going to legally challenge Nebraska's right to a canal under the compact, said Kevin Rein, Colorado's state engineer and director of the Colorado Division of Water Resources. "The other side of that coin is that we'll make every effort that their operation is in compliance with the compact" and protects Colorado's rights, Rein said.

The South Platte meanders 380 miles from the Rocky Mountains through the Colorado town of Julesburg at the Nebraska line. Depending on the season, it can seemingly disappear in parts, only to re-emerge downstream. It can become a torrent with heavy snowmelt or flooding. Cottonwood trees line its banks and sandbars create the illusion that it consists of multiple creeks in many places.

The compact allows Nebraska to build a canal to claim 500 cubic feet (more than 3,700 gallons) per second between mid-October and April, the non-irrigation season.

Nebraska's Legislature allocated \$53.5 million for an engineering study for the project, which as originally envisioned under the compact would begin somewhere near Schneider's farm in Ovid and run at least 24 miles into Nebraska's Perkins County, where Hanson's operations are headquartered.

Hanson's all for it, saying the more water there is to irrigate his and his neighbors' expansive farms, the better their progeny can carry on that legacy.

"I want my grandsons to be able to have the assurance that they can farm irrigated should they choose," he said.

"When the word came out that the ditch might be coming, let me tell you, our area was elated," said Collin Malmkar, 79, who with his wife Jeanne, 75, and their children grow corn, popcorn and peas on 15,000 acres in the Perkins County seat of Grant. Jeanne's great-grandfather worked on a failed 1898 effort to dig a canal from Ovid.

Schneider, whose son Bradon also works the fields, is worried the project could kill his life's work in a region that's long struggled to keep its younger generations from leaving.

"If we had to convert this to a dryland farm, I'm not sure where we'd start" to downsize, said Schneider, 63. "I'd love to retire in a couple of years. But my 30-year-old son, what's he going to do?"

Schneider and his neighbors take surplus South Platte water in winter to augment the wells they use to

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irrigate their crops in summer. That water, in turn, eventually makes its way back into the South Platte. If Nebraska claims that winter water under the compact, Schneider says the alternative — non-irrigated dryland farming — means reduced crop yields, fewer farms and fewer jobs.

Both Hanson and Schneider — and many others in this region where occasional “Donald Trump 2024” billboards dot two-lane highways — don’t like to use the words “climate change.” The lack of moisture to work with speaks for itself.

“Something’s changing, that’s for sure,” Schneider said. “I’m not sure what’s really driving it. We usually get buried in snow, and we haven’t seen those in years.”

“While I’m not a 100% believer in it, some of the thoughts are that we’re getting short on water because of climate change,” Hanson avers. Scientists have long warned that human-made climate change has made the West warmer and drier in the past 30 years.

Remnants of the 1898 effort to dig a canal can be seen in Julesburg, where grass-lined ditches run into the modern-day Julesburg cemetery, Interstate 76 and even the Colorado Welcome Center at the state line.

Jay Goddard, a banker in Julesburg, walks the abandoned ditch on farmland he owns next to the cemetery and marvels at the effort put into it. His bank provides operating loans to farmers on both sides of the border to keep them running until harvest time.

“If we lose any of our irrigation for our communities up and down the river, whether it’s in the Nebraska side or the Colorado side, we lose farmers,” Goddard said. “We lose kids in schools, our electric companies that serve us, the insurance agencies to the grain elevators, grocery stores to pharmacies. You know if we lose irrigation, the communities continue to dry up. Literally.”

Schneider echoes the same worries in his role as a Sedgewick County commissioner. Tax revenue plummeted after Ovid’s old sugar beet factory closed; the county sheriff recently took a higher-paying job closer to the Front Range in Colorado.

“We can’t buy a deputy,” Schneider says.

Farmers on both sides emphasize they’d like to see a workaround that serves everybody. All agree that a canal project will be years in the making — and that if disputes arise, attorneys specializing in the intricacies of water law or eminent domain could have a field day.

“I don’t think I’ll see it in my lifetime,” says Schneider. But he adds: “(Gov. Pete) Ricketts has confounded everyone.”

Today in History: May 19, Anne Boleyn beheaded

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, May 19, the 139th day of 2022. There are 226 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On May 19, 1536, Anne Boleyn, the second wife of England’s King Henry VIII, was beheaded after being convicted of adultery.

On this date:

In 1780, a mysterious darkness enveloped much of New England and part of Canada in the early afternoon.

In 1913, California Gov. Hiram Johnson signed the Webb-Hartley Law prohibiting “aliens ineligible to citizenship” from owning farm land, a measure targeting Asian immigrants, particularly Japanese.

In 1920, ten people were killed in a gun battle between coal miners, who were led by a local police chief, and a group of private security guards hired to evict them for joining a union in Matewan, a small “company town” in West Virginia.

In 1921, Congress passed, and President Warren G. Harding signed, the Emergency Quota Act, which established national quotas for immigrants.

In 1943, in his second wartime address to the U.S. Congress, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill pledged his country’s full support in the fight against Japan; that evening, Churchill met with President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the White House, where the two leaders agreed on May 1, 1944 as the date for

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the D-Day invasion of France (the operation ended up being launched more than a month later).

In 1962, film star Marilyn Monroe sang "Happy Birthday to You" to President John F. Kennedy during a Democratic fundraiser at New York's Madison Square Garden.

In 1967, the Soviet Union ratified a treaty with the United States and Britain, banning nuclear and other weapons from outer space as well as celestial bodies such as the moon. (The treaty entered into force in October 1967.)

In 1993, the Clinton White House set off a political storm by abruptly firing the entire staff of its travel office; five of the seven staffers were later reinstated and assigned to other duties.

In 1994, former first lady Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis died in New York at age 64.

In 2003, WorldCom Inc. agreed to pay investors \$500 million to settle civil fraud charges.

In 2018, Britain's Prince Harry wed American actress Meghan Markle in a service that reflected Harry's royal heritage and his bride's biracial roots, as well as their shared commitment to put a more diverse, modern face on the monarchy.

In 2020, a Trump administration policy of quickly expelling most migrants stopped along the border because of the COVID-19 pandemic was indefinitely extended.

Ten years ago: Chen Guangcheng (chehn gwahng-chung), a blind Chinese legal activist, was hurriedly taken from a hospital and put on a plane for the United States, closing a nearly monthlong diplomatic tussle that had tested U.S.-China relations.

Five years ago: Sweden dropped a rape investigation of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who remained holed up in Ecuador's embassy in London to avoid arrest and possible extradition to the United States to face charges stemming from the publication of thousands of pages of classified documents. Former U.S. Rep. Anthony Weiner, D-N.Y., whose penchant for sexting strangers ended his political career, pleaded guilty in Manhattan to a sex charge, tearfully apologizing for communications with a 15-year-old girl. (Weiner received a 21-month prison sentence.) Iran's moderate President Hassan Rouhani (hah-SAHN' roh-HAH'nee) trounced a hard-line challenger to secure reelection.

One year ago: The House voted to create an independent commission on the deadly Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, sending the legislation to the Senate. (Senate Republicans would block creation of the panel.) Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to press ahead with a fierce military offensive in the Gaza Strip, pushing back against calls from the United States to wind down the operation.

Today's Birthdays: TV personality David Hartman is 87. Actor James Fox is 83. Actor Nancy Kwan is 83. Rock singer-composer Pete Townshend (The Who) is 77. Concert pianist David Helfgott is 75. College Football Hall of Famer and former NFL player Archie Manning is 73. Singer-actor Grace Jones is 71. Rock musician Phil Rudd is 68. Actor Steven Ford is 66. Actor Toni Lewis is 62. Rock musician Iain Harvie (Del Amitri) is 60. Actor Polly Walker is 56. Actor Jason Gray-Stanford is 52. Gospel singer Israel Houghton is 51. Rock singer Jenny Berggren (Ace of Base) is 50. Former race car driver Dario Franchitti is 49. TV personality Kim Zolciak Biermann (TV: "Real Housewives of Atlanta") is 44. Country/rock singer Shooter Jennings is 43. Actor Drew Fuller is 42. Actor-comedian Michael Che (chay) (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 39. Christian rock musician Tim McTague (Underoath) is 39. Actor Eric Lloyd is 36. Pop singer Sam Smith is 30. Actor Nolan Lyons is 21.