

Groton Daily Independent

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Monday, May 23

Senior Menu: Meat loaf, baked potato with sour cream, creamed peas, fruit, whole wheat bread.
6:30 a.m.: Emmanuel Bible Study
Noon: Senior Citizens potluck meeting at Groton Community Center
8:30 a.m.: St. John's Vacation Bible School

Tuesday, May 24

Senior Menu: Hot pork sandwich, coleslaw, baked beans, fruit, ice cream sundae
8:30 a.m.: St. John's Vacation Bible School
9:30 a.m.: Methodist Bible Study
5:30 p.m.: Jr. Teeners host Milbank, DH

Wednesday, May 25

Senior Menu: Stir fry beef with rice, oriental blend vegetables, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.
Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m., UMYF with bonfire at parsonage and games and food, 7 p.m.
9 a.m. to 1 p.m.: Swimming Lesson Sign-up and Pass Purchase Pre-sale at the Swimming Pool
8:30 a.m.: St. John's Vacation Bible School
5:30 p.m.: Legion hosts Northville, 1 game.
7 p.m.: Jr. Legion hosts Northville, 1 game

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

Thursday, May 26

Senior Menu: Turkey and dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy, corn, carrot bar, whole wheat bread.
State Track Meet in Sioux Falls
8:30 a.m.: St. John's Vacation Bible School
10 a.m.: Region 1A Girls Golf Meet at Madison
5:30 p.m.: Legion at Lake Norden, 1 game.
7 p.m.: Jr. Legion at Lake Norden, 1 game
5:30 p.m.: Jr. Teeners host Sisseton, DH



HELP
WANTED!

Groton
Store

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Is it my thyroid?

Hypothyroidism, the condition of the thyroid gland not making enough thyroid hormone, is a common hormonal disorder. Perhaps because hypothyroidism is common and its symptoms can be widespread and vague, misconceptions abound. Let's cover the facts.

Symptoms of hypothyroidism can include fatigue, dry skin, weight gain, and hair loss. These symptoms can occur for many other reasons, so fortunately a very simple blood test can tell us whether an underactive thyroid is the culprit.

If hypothyroidism is suspected, the best thing to test first is TSH, or Thyroid Stimulating Hormone. TSH is made by the pituitary gland in the brain which physiologically responds to levels of thyroid hormone circulating in the patient's body. Under normal conditions, the pituitary gland signals the thyroid gland to make more thyroid hormone. So, if thyroid hormone levels are low, TSH levels will be high. The pituitary gland is trying to tell the thyroid gland, "wake up and make some more hormone, pal!"

If the TSH level is normal, in short, the thyroid is not the problem and probably no other testing needs to be done along those lines. If the TSH is elevated, another blood test for free T4 should be done. Free T4 is one type of thyroid hormone. Other types of thyroid hormones do exist but testing for them is far less reliable. In hypothyroidism, the TSH will be elevated, and the free T4 will be low.

Okay, so when we find a patient has hypothyroidism, what next? In general, we do not need to dig for a cause. Unless the person has had removal or ablation of the thyroid gland, we can assume they have Hashimoto's thyroiditis, the most common reason for hypothyroidism. Hashimoto's is an autoimmune disease which eventually destroys thyroid producing cells. Antibody testing is possible for Hashimoto's disease, but it generally is not necessary.

Treatment of Hashimoto's thyroiditis and any cause of hypothyroidism is simple...replace the thyroid hormone. This is done with a synthetic version of T4 hormone, the most reliable and standardized form of which is levothyroxine. Other types of thyroid replacement exist, but levothyroxine is universally recommended in all but a small minority of cases. Pretty much all patients can expect to take medicine indefinitely, though repeat TSH testing should be done periodically to make sure the dose is proper.

In summary, hypothyroidism is an easily diagnosed and easily treated condition. If you are having symptoms of this hormonal deficiency, discuss a TSH blood test with your primary care provider to see if a simple intervention might help you feel better.

Kelly Evans-Hullinger, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices internal medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



Kelly Evans-Hullinger, MD

Small town living through rose colored glasses?

It was just another day in a small town, but writers observe more or perhaps are just better able to quantify their experiences. It's what writers do. I wrote about it on Facebook:

"I get a little resentful when I travel and I'm asked, 'Why do you live there?'

"Community. Yesterday, at SuperValu, the owner, Kirk Rueb, stopped to consult me about an audio system he's setting up at the lake. I'm the local audio guru. It will probably be wireless but before the walls are finished I suggested running speaker wires behind them. Just in case. Dylan hustled across the street to grab a roll of the exact wire Kirk needed that I just happened to have on my desk. I'll be paid in beer when we set it up. We ran into a half dozen friends and a relative or two as we stocked up. Greetings in the produce section. Hellos on the way in and out. A dozen smiles."

So far, so good, right? I had no idea that what I thought was an innocuous, feel-good post, would result in some eye-opening blowback, and we'll get to that. But first, the rest of my story...

"Today, I sat in the chair beside the bank president as he got his hair cut by a Wishek School Board member. My stylist, Chellie, seems apolitical but passively combative. I always have to fight her to leave a tip. She tries to run the card without giving me a chance.

"The topics ranged from the economy to kids to graduation, golf, the weather (briefly), lawn mower maintenance, and marital discord during which the bank president, Robert Wishek, goaded his stylist Missy Wolf, into what you know will become an argument with her husband. Geez. Marital counseling from your friendly loan officer. Lots of laughter and insults. Chellie waited patiently for me to shut up so she could get my head tilted down. The haircut took longer than usual.

"It was just a stop at the grocery store. It was just a little off the top at the salon. But they were events. Human events. Easy to take them for granted. So, when I hear that inevitable question when I'm in one of the cities I love to visit, I'll think about these moments and ask them, "Why do you live here?"

To be fair, most responses were positive, but a surprising number thought I was wearing rose-colored glasses:

- "I think small towns can be a little dismissive! Two couples I knew moved from Fargo to my much smaller hometown. After a year, both moved back to Fargo. They found that they were never included or invited to anything no matter how hard they tried. One used the term xenophobic!"

- "I was an outsider the eight years I lived there (after I came back to my hometown). Eight years I'll never get back. Moved to (a city) and made friends all over the place, same experience in California and Fargo. Small towns ... no thanks! If you don't live in the bar, you aren't a part of the community."

- "The racism I witness, feel in my bones, and see (elsewhere) often feels so much less insidious than what I've experienced in the Dakotas."

Ouch. My initial reaction is small-town living is what you make of it. You have to be proactive. You have to have skin on your nose. I've watched many newcomers get involved and make a difference. But, these responses are cause for self-examination. Perhaps we're not as outwardly friendly as we think. In my heart, I still believe in small-town exceptionalism, but we need to do a better job of promoting the best of who and what we are.

Let's end this on a positive note:

- "Moved back to Hillsboro ... locked my keys in my car, called the body shop. Came over and unlocked the car while I was at the grocery store. I call them and asked if they needed a card, he just said drop off a check when you get a chance! The heating guy hooked up my natural gas, I've had to text him twice for him to send me a bill ... love it, and I'll always pay more for (the service)!"

- "One day, my daughter sent me a card at the lake and she just addressed it 'Mom' and the mail lady asked if that was me and I got it."

Until next week...



That's Life

by Tony Bender

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Which Psalm Is This

A N L Z D R

W X T S K Q

R J A O I B E S C

Word Search?

J N N R L O C Q L

W V Y N F I Z B L D R

Q X M V U O P L P Q L

U I L J G H S L E A I S L

F A I T S L N W K K W J A

G M C U M E X S R C L T V B D

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Weekly Vikings Roundup: OTAs By Duane & Jack Kolsrud

The Vikings OTAs (Organized Team Activities) are in full swing, and there is a whole new vibe around this team. Music is playing, players are smiling, competition is happening at all positions, player numbers are changing (get your Dalvin #4 soon), and the new regime of Kevin O'Connell is starting to come together.

One of the great things about the NFL each year is the fans have a legitimate feeling that their favorite team will make a run to the Super Bowl regardless of how they finished the previous season. Last season was a perfect example as the Cincinnati Bengals went from a four win team to winning their division and representing the AFC in the Super Bowl. This same feeling is coming out of Eagan, MN this Spring.

Here's why the experts are predicting the Vikings to win the NFC North in 2022.

Let's take a look at the defense first.

- The Vikings added a veteran defensive lineman in Za'Darius Smith to man the right side while former all-Pro Danielle Hunter returns to lock down the left side. With the new 3-4 defense implemented, it is imperative to be strong up front, and these two guys can bring it on every down.

- The Vikings were able to retain veteran cornerback Patrick Peterson. Peterson may not be the same corner from his HOF years in Arizona, but it will be his veteran presence that could pay dividends for the future. The young defensive backs on this roster cannot believe they get to play alongside their idol and learn from one of the best.

- The biggest question mark on defense will be in the middle. No longer will Anthony Barr be shooting the gap or guarding runningbacks out of the backfield. The Vikings still have veteran Eric Kendricks, but he'll have a lot of new faces around him after many seasons teaming up with his UCLA buddy to be one of the best linebacking duos in the league.

- Finally, the division offensively does not look as potent as in years past. The Packers still have Rodgers but they lost their top two receivers, (but then again, they have Rodgers). The Bears are still trying to figure out the quarterback position and the Lions will always be the Lions.

Now let's take a look at the offense.

- The Vikings had one of the top offenses in the league last year and should be just as high-octane in 2022. Kirk Cousins returns for his 5th season and now has an offensive-minded head coach to help lead the way. As much as people want to blame Cousins for the team's performance the past two years, he couldn't have played much better.

- All of the weapons are in place. Jefferson, Cook, Osborn and Thielen return. They lost their tight end Tyler Conklin to free agency, but he was filling in for what many think is the tight end of the future, Irv Smith, Jr., who has shown flashes of brilliance but needs to stay healthy.

- As always, there are many questions around the offensive line. This season, it is focused mainly around the right-guard position. The Viking's starters at right guard struggled while the highly touted rookie Wyatt Davis never sniffed the field. They have brought in a number of prospects to vie for this position and the feeling is right guard is the missing link to give Cousins the protection he needs to have another Pro Bowl season.

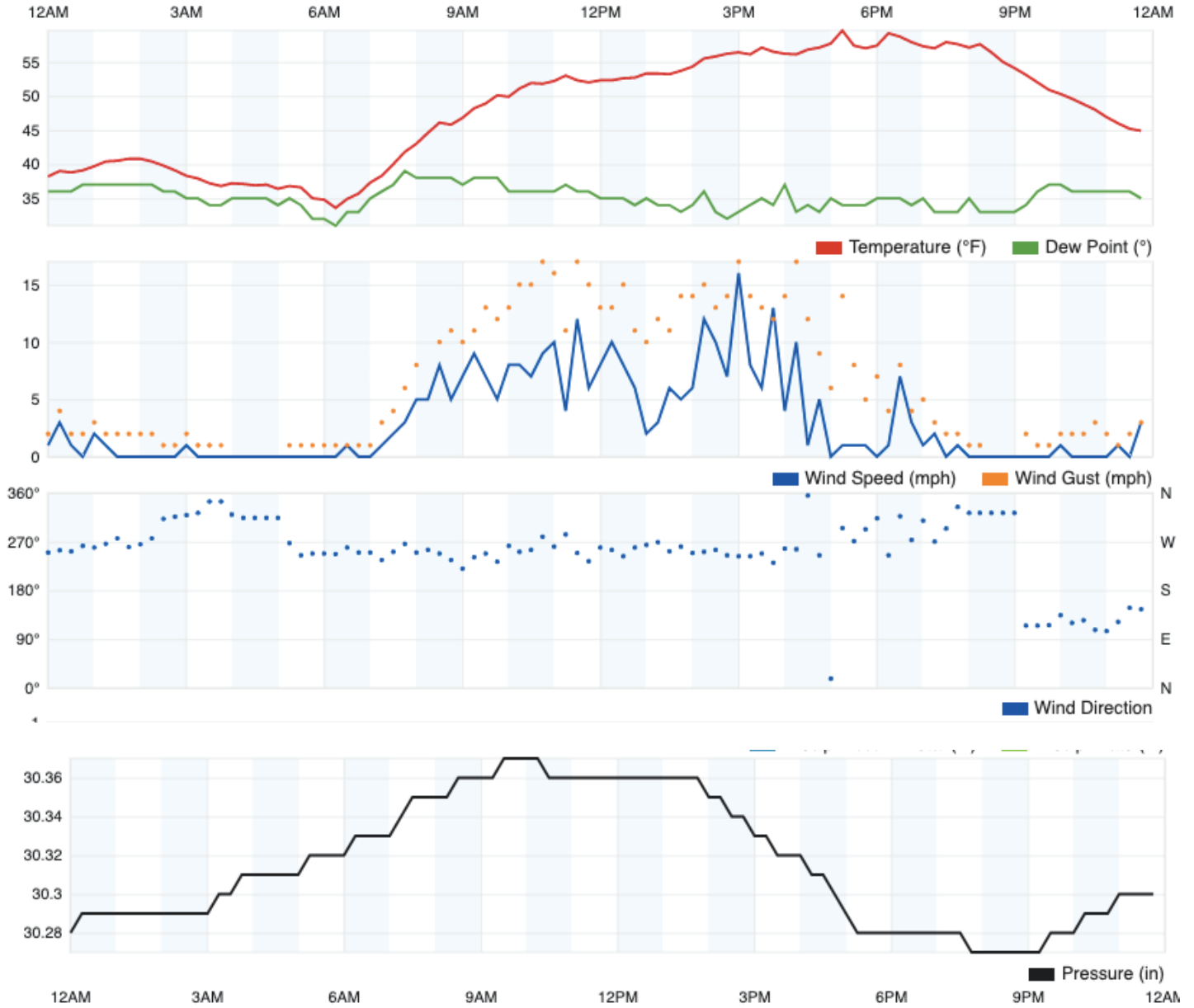
Highlight of the week.

Bud Grant turned 95 years old and had quite the Zoom call. Viking legends like Page, Eller, Marshall and Rashad joined the current staff and sang Happy Birthday to Bud. In true Bud fashion, he told them to "speed it up- it isn't a funeral".

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today in Weather History

May 23, 1989: A complex of thunderstorms moved from southwest Minnesota through Iowa. One small tornado touched down briefly in Lyon County. But the main story with this complex was high winds and hail. Baseball size hail fell north of George in Lyon, County. Also, two-inch hail occurred in Sac County in Schaller and Odebolt, and golf ball size hail fell in Carroll, Iowa. The hail caused a lot of damage to vehicles, trees, and roofs. Thunderstorm winds of 60 miles an hour were also common across all of northwest Iowa with these storms.

1882 - An unusual late season snow blanketed eastern Iowa, with four to six inches reported around Washington. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1953 - The temperature at Hollis OK soared from a morning low of 70 degrees to an afternoon high of 110 degrees to establish a state record for the month of May. (The Weather Channel)

1960: A massive earthquake in Chile the previous day produced a tsunami that killed 61 people in Hilo, Hawaii. An additional 180 people died on the islands of Honshu and Hokkaido in Japan.

1968: One of the costliest hailstorms in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma history pummeled the city on this date. Hail the size of baseballs fell over much of the city, resulting in more than 40,000 insurance claims over the 90,000 square mile path of the storm. The final cost was more than \$20 million. The parent thunderstorm also caused flash flooding that left 2 to 4 feet of water in some underpasses and a lightning strike that started a fire that killed two people.

1987 - It was a busy day for thunderstorms in the central U.S. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 65 mph at Shreveport LA and golf ball size hail at Marfa, TX. Hobart, OK, received 3.55 inches of rain in the morning, and another 4.03 inches of rain that evening. Thunderstorms in Nebraska produced 8.5 inches of rain in two hours north of Potter, and 7.5 inches of rain in ninety minutes north of Minatare. Thunderstorms in Colorado produced five inches of hail at Greeley. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather across much of the eastern U.S. Golf ball size hail was reported in Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina and Ohio. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Severe thunderstorms developing along a cold front resulted in 98 reports of large hail and damaging winds in the Northern Plains and Upper Mississippi Valley. Golf ball size hail caused a million dollars damage around Buffalo City, WI, baseball size hail was reported at Northfield and Randolph, MN, and thunderstorm winds gusted to 95 mph at Dunkerton, IA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Unseasonably hot weather continued in the south central U.S. Pueblo, CO, equalled their May record with a high of 98 degrees, and the high of 106 degrees at Midland, TX, marked a record six straight days of 100 degree heat. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - A cold front crossing the western U.S. produced snow over parts of Oregon, California, Nevada, Idaho and Utah, with five inches reported at Austin NV, and four inches at Crater Lake National Park in Oregon. Strong winds behind the cold front sharply reduced visibilities in blowing dust over central California, and two multi-vehicle accidents resulted in one death and eighteen injuries. In northern Idaho, a cloud-burst washed tons of topsoil, and rocks as large as footballs, into the valley town of Culdesac. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1997: David McWilliams Ludlum was born 1910 in East Orange, NJ - He is responsible for researching and publishing much of the early history of weather at the beginning of America. David died May 23, 1997, in Princeton, New Jersey. He was an American historian, meteorologist, entrepreneur, and author.

2010: A rare tropical cyclone dubbed Bandu brings high winds and heavy rains to Somalia. The storm then moved into the Gulf of Aden where it quickly weakens and dissipates on the 23rd as it passes between Yemen and Somalia.

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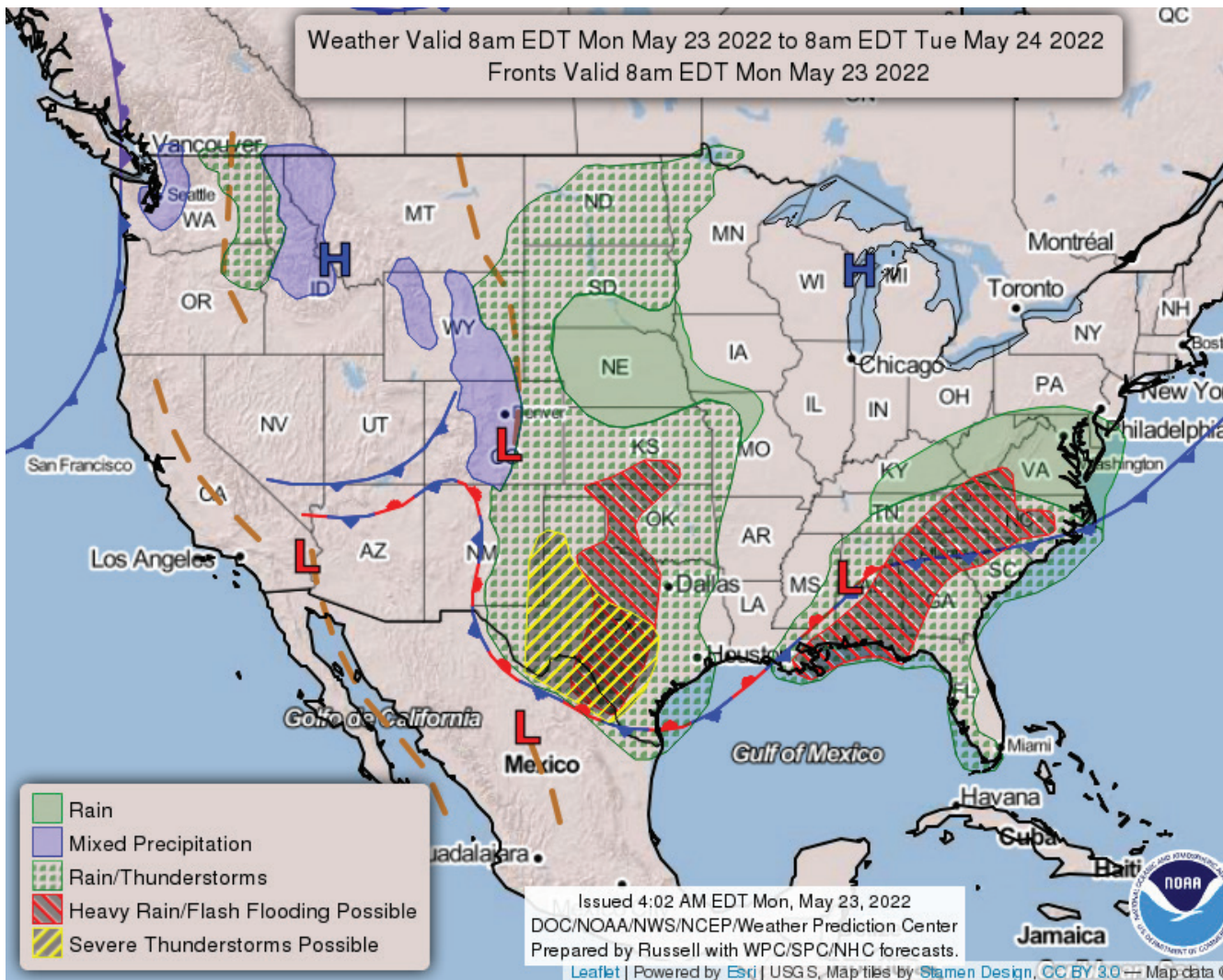
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 60 °F at 5:10 PM
Low Temp: 34 °F at 6:15 AM
Wind: 19 mph at 3:00 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 14 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 94 in 1950
Record Low: 26 in 1897
Average High: 73°F
Average Low: 47°F
Average Precip in May.: 2.51
Precip to date in May.: 2.48
Average Precip to date: 6.48
Precip Year to Date: 8.98
Sunset Tonight: 9:06:39 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:50:50 AM



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Closer Than You Think

Little Harry was saying his prayers before climbing into bed. In a very soft voice, his mother said, "I can't hear you!"

"I wasn't talking to you, Mom," he responded. "I was talking to God. And I don't have to yell because He's closer to me than you are, and I know He's listening!"

The Psalmist reminded us that "The Lord is near to all who call on Him, who call on Him in truth."

Here are three guidelines for our prayers:

Make them simple. Our prayers ought to be as natural as breathing. Think of praying as a conversation with God. When children call on their father for help, they don't use long, drawn-out sentences with words that don't make any difference. They get right to the point.

Make them sincere. We must be genuine when we go to Him in prayer. Included in this part of our prayer life would be honesty and openness. God will not put up with trying to "hide the truth" when we call on Him for help. Trying to say, "It's Your will, Lord," when we know it's "our" wants, won't work. Being open with God means that we must confess our sin and ask for Him to forgive and cleanse us when we pray.

Make them specific. If you order an item online, it has a number to go with it. When we order from a menu, we "specify" what we want. Jesus said, "If you ask for anything" - implying a specific, identifiable item or need - "I will do it or get it for you." Or, "Get to the point!"

God is close, compassionate, considerate, and caring.

Prayer: Father, help us realize the power of prayer and the need to be simple, sincere and specific in our prayers. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The Lord is near to all who call on Him, who call on Him in truth. Psalm 145:18

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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

Zelenskyy urges 'maximum' sanctions on Russia in Davos talk

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

DAVOS, Switzerland (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for "maximum" sanctions against Russia during a virtual speech Monday to corporate executives, government officials and other elites on the first day of the World Economic Economic gathering in Davos.

He said sanctions need to go further to stop Russia's aggression, including an oil embargo, blocking all of its banks and cutting off trade with Russia completely. He said that it's a precedent that would work for decades to come.

"This is what sanctions should be: They should be maximum, so that Russia and every other potential aggressor that wants to wage a brutal war against its neighbor would clearly know the immediate consequences of their actions," Zelenskyy said through a translator.

He also pushed for the complete withdrawal of foreign companies from Russia to prevent supporting its war and said Ukraine needs at least \$5 billion in funding per month.

"The amount of work is enormous: we have more than half a trillion of dollars in losses, tens of thousands of facilities were destroyed. We need to rebuild entire cities and industries," Zelenskyy said, coming days after the Group of Seven leading economies agreed to provide \$19.8 billion in economic aid.

He said that if Ukraine had "received 100% of our needs at once, back in February" in terms of weapons, funding, political support and sanctions against Russia, "the result would be tens of thousands of lives saved."

Zelenskyy's speech is a key focus Monday at Davos, the village in the Swiss Alps that has been transformed into a glitzy venue for the four-day confab ostensibly dedicated to making the world a better place. The event is resuming in person after a two-year hiatus because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which also delayed this year's meeting from its usual winter slot.

For the attendees, there's much to tackle amid soaring food and fuel prices, Russia's war in Ukraine, climate change, inequality and persistent health crises. But it's hard to predict if the high-minded discussions will yield substantial announcements that make headway on the world's most pressing challenges.

"This war is really a turning point of history, and it will reshape our political and our economic landscape in the coming years," said the event's founder, Klaus Schwab.

Zelenskyy, who received a standing ovation after this remarks, reiterated that Russia was blocking critical food supplies, such as wheat and sunflower oil, from leaving its ports.

Ukraine, along with Russia, is a major exporter of wheat, barley and sunflower oil, and the interruption of those supplies is threatening food insecurity in countries in Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia that rely on those affordable supplies.

The head of the U.N.'s World Food Program called for Ukraine's ports to reopen, saying the region's farmers "grow enough food to feed 400 million people."

If such supplies remain off the market, the world could face a food availability problem in the next 10 to 12 months, and "that is going to be hell on earth," WFP Executive Director David Beasley told The Associated Press.

He warned that there are "49 million (people) knocking on famine's door right now in 43 countries," including Yemen, Lebanon, Mali, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Congo, Guatemala and El Salvador.

Beasley called on the world's top mega-billionaires to aid efforts to prevent hunger: "The world is in real serious trouble. This is not rhetoric and B.S. Step up now, because the world needs you."

Besides Zelenskyy's speech, a sizable Ukrainian government delegation is attending in person, making their case for more Western support in the country's fight against Russia.

Russian officials have not been invited to Davos this year, with what was dubbed the "Russia House" having been transformed by critics — including Ukrainian tycoon Victor Pinchuk and the country's Foreign

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Ministry — into what they call the “Russia War Crimes House.”

The venue features photos of crimes and cruelties that Russian forces are accused of perpetuating.

While Ukraine will capture attention on the meeting’s first day, climate and environmental issues will be a constant theme until Thursday’s finale, with panels on extreme weather, efforts to reach “net zero” emissions and finding cleaner sources of energy.

Russian sentenced to life in Ukraine’s 1st war crimes trial

By ELENA BECATOROS, OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI and RICARDO MAZALAN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A Ukrainian court sentenced a 21-year-old Russian soldier to life in prison Monday for killing a civilian, sealing the first conviction for war crimes since Moscow’s invasion three months ago.

Sgt. Vadim Shishimarin pleaded guilty to shooting a 62-year-old man in the head in a village in the north-eastern Sumy region in the early days of the war.

He testified that he shot Oleksandr Shelipov after being ordered to do so. He told the court that an officer insisted that Shelipov, who was speaking on his cellphone, could pinpoint their location to Ukrainian forces.

Ukrainian prosecutors are investigating thousands of potential war crimes, as the world has pushed for Russia to be held accountable for its invasion. Russian forces bombed a theater where civilians were sheltering and struck a maternity hospital. In the wake of Moscow’s withdrawal from towns around Kyiv weeks ago, mass graves were discovered and streets were strewn with bodies in towns such as Bucha.

The war’s effects have also been felt well beyond Ukraine, pushing energy and food prices higher. The United Nations said the conflict has helped push the number of people displaced worldwide to the highest level on record level, with more 100 million people driven from their homes across the globe.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for “maximum” sanctions against Russia on Monday at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

He said by video that sanctions needed to go further to stop Russia’s aggression, including an oil embargo, all of its banks blocked and cutting off trade with Russia completely.

Zelenskyy says his country has slowed Russian advances and his people’s courage has stirred unseen unity of the democratic world.

On the battlefield, Russian forces have stepped up shelling in Ukraine’s eastern industrial heartland as they press their offensive in the region that is now the focus of fighting.

Grinding battles in the Donbas, where Ukrainian and Russian forces are fighting town by town, have forced many civilians to flee their homes.

In Tokyo on Monday, U.S. President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida joined in condemning Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine. Earlier on his trip to Asia, Biden signed legislation granting Ukraine \$40 billion more in U.S. support for its defense against the Russian attack.

Western support — both financial and military — has been key to Ukraine’s defense, helping their outnumbered forces to repel Russia’s attempt to take the capital of Kyiv and fight them to a standstill in other places. In the face of those setbacks, Moscow has outlined more limited goals in Ukraine, with its sights now on trying to expand the territory that Russia-backed separatists have held since 2014.

Ukrainian forces dug in around Sievierodonetsk, the main city under Ukrainian control in the Luhansk province of the Donbas, as Russia intensified efforts to capture it. Gov. Serhiy Haidai accused the Russians of “simply intentionally trying to destroy the city ... engaging in a scorched-earth approach.”

Haidai said Sunday that the Russians had occupied several towns and cities in Luhansk after indiscriminate, 24-hour shelling and concentrating forces and weaponry there, bringing in troops from Kharkiv to the northwest, Mariupol to the south, and from inside Russia.

But the Ukrainian military said that Russian forces were unsuccessful in their attack on Oleksandrivka, a village outside of Sievierodonetsk.

Ukraine’s parliament voted Sunday to extend martial law and mobilize its armed forces for a third time, until Aug. 23. Ukrainian officials have said little since the war began about the extent of their country’s casualties, but Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Sunday that 50 to 100 Ukrainian fighters

were being killed, apparently each day, in the east.

While the east is now the focus of fighting, the conflict is not confined there. Powerful explosions were heard early Monday in Korosten, about 160 kilometers (100 miles) west of Kyiv, the town's deputy mayor said. It was the third straight day of apparent attacks in the Zhytomyr District, Ukrainian news agencies reported.

Expert: Monkeypox likely spread by sex at 2 raves in Europe

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — A leading adviser to the World Health Organization described the unprecedented outbreak of the rare disease monkeypox in developed countries as "a random event" that might be explained by risky sexual behavior at two recent mass events in Europe.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Dr. David Heymann, who formerly headed WHO's emergencies department, said the leading theory to explain the spread of the disease was sexual transmission among gay and bisexual men at two raves held in Spain and Belgium. Monkeypox has not previously triggered widespread outbreaks beyond Africa, where it is endemic in animals.

"We know monkeypox can spread when there is close contact with the lesions of someone who is infected, and it looks like sexual contact has now amplified that transmission," said Heymann.

That marks a significant departure from the disease's typical pattern of spread in central and western Africa, where people are mainly infected by animals like wild rodents and primates and outbreaks have not spilled across borders.

To date, WHO has recorded more than 90 cases of monkeypox in a dozen countries including Britain, Spain, Israel, France, Switzerland, the U.S. and Australia.

Madrid's senior health official said on Monday that the Spanish capital has recorded 30 confirmed cases so far. Enrique Ruiz Escudero said authorities are investigating possible links between a recent Gay Pride event in the Canary Islands, which drew some 80,000 people, and cases at a Madrid sauna.

Heymann chaired an urgent meeting of WHO's advisory group on infectious disease threats on Friday to assess the ongoing epidemic and said there was no evidence to suggest that monkeypox might have mutated into a more infectious form.

Monkeypox typically causes fever, chills, rash, and lesions on the face or genitals. It can be spread through close contact with an infected person or their clothing or bedsheets, but sexual transmission has not yet been documented. Most people recover from the disease within several weeks without requiring hospitalization. Vaccines against smallpox, a related disease, are also effective in preventing monkeypox and some antiviral drugs are being developed.

In recent years, the disease has been fatal in up to 6% of infections, but no deaths have been reported among the current cases. WHO said confirmed cases have so far been the less severe West African group of monkeypox viruses and appeared to be linked to a virus that was first detected in exported cases from Nigeria to Britain, Israel and Singapore in 2018-2019.

The U.N. agency said the outbreak is "a highly unusual event" and said the fact that cases are being seen in so many different countries suggests the disease may have been silently spreading for some time. The agency's Europe director warned that as summer begins across the continent, mass gatherings, festivals and parties could accelerate the spread of monkeypox.

Other scientists have pointed out that it will be difficult to disentangle whether it is sex itself or the close contact related to sex that has driven the recent spread of monkeypox across Europe.

"By nature, sexual activity involves intimate contact, which one would expect to increase the likelihood of transmission, whatever a person's sexual orientation and irrespective of the mode of transmission," said Mike Skinner, a virologist at Imperial College London.

On Sunday, the chief medical adviser of Britain's Health Security Agency, Dr. Susan Hopkins, said she expected more monkeypox cases to be identified in the country "on a daily basis."

U.K. officials have said "a notable proportion" of the cases in Britain and Europe have been in young men

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with no history of travel to Africa and who are gay, bisexual or have sex with men. Authorities in Portugal and Spain also said their cases were in men who mostly had sex with other men and whose infections were picked up when they sought help for lesions at sexual health clinics.

Heymann, who is also a professor of infectious diseases at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said the monkeypox outbreak was likely a random event that might be traceable to a single infection.

"It's very possible there was somebody who got infected, developed lesions on the genitals, hands or somewhere else, and then spread it to others when there was sexual or close, physical contact," Heymann hypothesized. "And then there were these international events that seeded the outbreak around the world, into the U.S. and other European countries."

He emphasized that the disease was unlikely to trigger widespread transmission.

"This is not COVID," he said. "We need to slow it down, but it does not spread in the air and we have vaccines to protect against it." Heymann said studies should be conducted rapidly to determine if monkeypox could be spread by people without symptoms and that populations at risk of the disease should take precautions to protect themselves.

Biden launches Indo-Pacific trade deal, warns over inflation

By JOSH BOAK and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — President Joe Biden launched a new trade deal with 12 Indo-Pacific nations Monday aimed at strengthening their economies as he warned Americans worried about high inflation that it is "going to be a haul" before they feel relief. The president said he does not believe an economic recession is inevitable in the U.S.

Biden, speaking at a news conference after holding talks with Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, acknowledged the U.S. economy has "problems" but said they were "less consequential than the rest of the world has."

He added: "This is going to be a haul. This is going to take some time." In answer to a question, he rejected the idea a recession in the U.S. is inevitable.

His comments came just before Biden's launch of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. His administration says the trade deal is designed to signal U.S. dedication to the contested economic sphere and to address the need for stability in commerce after disruptions caused by the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Nations joining the U.S. in the pact are: Australia, Brunei, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Along with the United States, they represent 40% of world GDP.

The countries said in a joint statement that the pact will help them collectively "prepare our economies for the future" after the fallout from the pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Biden and Kishida were joined for the launch event by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while representatives from the other countries appeared by video. Modi was in Tokyo for Tuesday's meeting of the Quad, a four-country security group that also includes the U.S., Japan and Australia.

The White House said the framework will help the United States and Asian economies work more closely on issues including supply chains, digital trade, clean energy, worker protections and anticorruption efforts. The details still need to be negotiated among the member countries, making it difficult for the administration to say how this agreement would fulfill the promise of helping U.S. workers and businesses while also meeting global needs.

Critics say the framework has gaping shortcomings. It doesn't offer incentives to prospective partners by lowering tariffs or provide signatories with greater access to U.S. markets. Those limitations may not make the U.S. framework an attractive alternative to the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which moved forward without the U.S. after former President Donald Trump pulled out. China, the largest trading partner for many in the region, is also seeking to join TPP.

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"I think a lot of partners are going to look at that list and say: 'That's a good list of issues. I'm happy to be involved,'" said Matthew Goodman, a former director for international economics on the National Security Council during President Barack Obama's administration. But he said they also may ask, "Are we going to get any tangible benefits out of participating in this framework?"

Kishida hosted a formal state welcome for Biden at Akasaka Palace, including a white-clad military honor guard and band in the front plaza. Reviewing the assembled troops, Biden placed his hand over his heart as he passed the American flag and bowed slightly as he passed the Japanese standard.

The Japanese premier took office last fall and is looking to strengthen ties with the U.S. and build a personal relationship with Biden. The two leaders ended their day with dinner at Kochuan, an iconic Tokyo restaurant on the grounds of a Japanese garden.

Kishida said at their meeting that he was "absolutely delighted" to welcome Biden to Tokyo on the first Asia trip of his presidency. Along with Biden, he drove a tough line against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, saying the aggression "undermines the foundation of global order."

Biden, who is in the midst of a five-day visit to South Korea and Japan, called the U.S.-Japanese alliance a "cornerstone of peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific" and thanked Japan for its "strong leadership" in standing up to Russia.

Kishida welcomed the new Biden trade pact but said he still hoped the president would reconsider the United States' position and return it to the Trans-Pacific pact that Trump withdrew from.

"We think it's desirable for the United States to return to the TPP," he said.

The new pact comes at a moment when the administration believes it has the edge in its competition with Beijing. Bloomberg Economics published a report last week projecting U.S. GDP growth at about 2.8% in 2022 compared to 2% for China, which has been trying to contain the coronavirus through strict lockdowns while also dealing with a property bust. The slowdown has undermined assumptions that China would automatically supplant the U.S. as the world's leading economy.

"The fact that the United States will grow faster than China this year, for the first time since 1976, is a quite striking example of how countries in this region should be looking at the question of trends and trajectories," said White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan.

The two leaders also met with families of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea decades ago. The White House said Biden "expressed his deepest condolences for their suffering, and called on North Korea to right this historic wrong and provide a full accounting of the 12 Japanese nationals who remain missing."

The launch of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, also known as IPEF, has been billed by the White House as one of the bigger moments of Biden's Asia trip and of his ongoing effort to bolster ties with Pacific allies. Through it all, administration officials have kept a close eye on China's growing economic and military might in the region.

In September the U.S. announced a new partnership with Australia and Britain called AUKUS that is aimed at deepening security, diplomatic and defense cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

The U.S. president has also devoted great attention to the informal alliance known as the Quad, formed during the response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that killed some 230,000 people. Biden and fellow leaders from the alliance are set to gather Tuesday in Tokyo for their second in-person meeting in less than a year.

And earlier this month, Biden gathered representatives from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Washington for a summit.

Taiwan — which had sought membership in the IPEF framework— isn't among the governments that will be included. Participation of the self-ruled island of Taiwan, which China claims as its own, would have irked Beijing.

Sullivan said the U.S. wants to deepen its economic partnership with Taiwan, including on high technology issues and semiconductor supply on a one-to-one basis.

Biden also issued a stern warning to China over Taiwan, saying the U.S. would respond militarily if China were to invade the self-ruled island. "That's the commitment we made," Biden said.

The U.S. recognizes Beijing as the one government of China and doesn't have diplomatic relations with Taiwan. However, it maintains unofficial contacts with Taiwan, including a de facto embassy in Taipei, the capital, and supplies military equipment to the island for its defense.

Biden's comments drew a sharp response from China, which has claimed Taiwan to be a rogue province. A White House official said Biden's comments did not reflect a policy shift.

Pfizer says 3 COVID shots protect children under 5

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

Three doses of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine offer strong protection for children younger than 5, the company announced Monday. Pfizer plans to give the data to U.S. regulators later this week in a step toward letting the littlest kids get the shots.

The news comes after months of anxious waiting by parents desperate to vaccinate their babies, toddlers and preschoolers, especially as COVID-19 cases once again are rising. The 18 million tots under 5 are the only group in the U.S. not yet eligible for COVID-19 vaccination.

The Food and Drug Administration has begun evaluating data from rival Moderna, which hopes to begin offering two kid-sized shots by summer.

Pfizer has had a bumpier time figuring out its approach. It aims to give tots an even lower dose — just one-tenth of the amount adults receive — but discovered during its trial that two shots didn't seem quite strong enough for preschoolers. So researchers gave a third shot to more than 1,600 youngsters — from age 6 months to 4 years — during the winter surge of the omicron variant.

In a press release, Pfizer and its partner BioNTech said the extra shot did the trick, revving up tots' levels of virus-fighting antibodies enough to meet FDA criteria for emergency use of the vaccine with no safety problems.

Preliminary data suggested the three-dose series is 80% effective in preventing symptomatic COVID-19, the companies said, but they cautioned the calculation is based on just 10 cases diagnosed among study participants by the end of April. The study rules state that at least 21 cases are needed to formally determine effectiveness, and Pfizer promised an update as soon as more data is available.

The companies already had submitted data on the first two doses to the FDA, and BioNTech's CEO, Dr. Ugur Sahin, said the final third-shot data would be submitted this week.

"The study suggests that a low, 3-microgram dose of our vaccine, carefully selected based on tolerability data, provides young children with a high level of protection against the recent COVID-19 strains," he said in a statement.

What's next? FDA vaccine chief Dr. Peter Marks has pledged the agency will "move quickly without sacrificing our standards" in evaluating tot-sized doses from both Pfizer and Moderna.

The agency has set tentative dates next month for its scientific advisers to publicly debate data from each company.

Moderna is seeking to be the first to vaccinate the littlest kids. It submitted data to the FDA saying tots develop high levels of virus-fighting antibodies after two shots that contain a quarter of the dose given to adults. The Moderna study found effectiveness against symptomatic COVID-19 was 40% to 50% during the omicron surge, much like for adults who've only had two vaccine doses.

Complicating Moderna's progress, the FDA so far has allowed its vaccine to be used only in adults.

The FDA is expected to review Moderna's data on both the youngest age group, plus its study of teens and elementary-age children. Other countries already have expanded Moderna's shot to kids as young as 6.

While COVID-19 generally isn't as dangerous to youngsters as to adults, some children do become severely ill or even die. And the omicron variant hit children especially hard, with those under 5 hospitalized at higher rates than at the peak of the previous delta surge.

It's not clear how much demand there will be to vaccinate the youngest kids. Pfizer shots for 5- to 11-year-olds opened in November, but only about 30% of that age group have gotten the recommended initial two doses. Last week, U.S. health authorities said elementary-age children should get a booster shot just like

everyone 12 and older is supposed to get, for the best protection against the latest coronavirus variants.

Court ruling extends uneven treatment for asylum-seekers

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

EAGLE PASS, Texas (AP) — As the sun set over the Rio Grande, about 120 Cubans, Colombians and Venezuelans who waded through waist-deep water stepped into Border Patrol vehicles, soon to be released in the United States to pursue their immigration cases.

Across the border in the Mexican town of Piedras Negras, Honduran families banded together in a section of downtown with cracked sidewalks, narrow streets and few people, unsure where to spend the night because city's only shelter was full.

The opposite fortunes illustrate the dual nature of U.S. border enforcement under pandemic rules, known as Title 42 and named for a 1944 public health law. President Joe Biden wanted to end those rules Monday, but a federal judge in Louisiana issued a nationwide injunction that keeps them intact.

The U.S. government has expelled migrants more than 1.9 million times under Title 42, denying them a chance to seek asylum as permitted under U.S. law and international treaty for purposes of preventing the spread of COVID-19.

But Title 42 is not applied evenly across nationalities. For example, Mexico agrees to take back migrants from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico. For other nationalities, however, high costs, poor diplomatic relations and other considerations make it difficult for the U.S. to fly migrants to their home countries under Title 42. Instead, they are typically freed in the U.S. to seek asylum or other forms of legal status.

Hondurans in Piedras Negras ask Cubans arriving at the bus station for money, knowing Cubans will have no use for pesos because they will go directly across the border. While Mexico agreed in April to take some Cubans and Nicaraguans expelled under Title 42, the vast majority are released in the U.S.

"It was in an out," Javier Fuentes, 20, said of his one-night stay in a rented house in Piedras Negras. On Sunday morning, he and two other Cuban men walked across the Rio Grande and on a paved road for about an hour until they found a Border Patrol vehicle in Eagle Pass, a Texas town of 25,000 people where migrants cross the river to the edge of a public golf course.

Overnight rains had raised water to about neck-level for most adults, a possible explanation for the absence of groups numbering in the dozens, even over 100, that frequent the area many days.

"Slow start to the morning," a Border Patrol agent said as he greeted Texas National Guard troops watching four Peruvians, including a 7-month-old boy who crossed with his parents after several days crammed into a rented room in Piedras Negras with 17 migrants.

As the water dropped again to waist-level, about three dozen migrants gathered at a riverfront public park that also drew local residents in Piedras Negras, which considers itself the birthplace of nachos. Infants and young children joined a largely Honduran crowd to cross. One Honduran woman was eight months' pregnant in obvious pain.

Eagle Pass, a sprawling town of warehouses and decaying houses that many major retailers have overlooked, is one of the busiest spots in the Border Patrol's Del Rio sector, which includes about 250 miles (400 km) of sparsely populated riverfront. Last year, about 15,000 migrants, mostly Haitians, assembled in nearby Del Rio, which isn't much larger than Eagle Pass. Grain fields are about all that separates either town from San Antonio, about a three-hour drive to the east.

The relative ease of crossing — migrants walk across the river within a few minutes, often without paying a smuggler — and a perception that it is relatively safe on the Mexican side has made the remote region a major migration route.

Texas' Rio Grande Valley has long been the busiest of nine Border Patrol sectors on the Mexican border, but Del Rio has surged to a close second this year. Yuma, Arizona, another spot known for relative safety and ease of crossing, has jumped to third-busiest.

Del Rio and Yuma rank sixth and seventh in the number of agents among the nine sectors, a reflection of how Border Patrol staffing has long lagged shifts in migration flows.

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Other parts of the border are less patrolled than Del Rio, a plus for migrants trying to elude capture, but are more rugged and remote, said Jon Anfinsen, president of the National Border Patrol Council's Del Rio sector chapter.

Anfinsen calls the Del Rio sector "sort of a happy medium" for migrants seeking to balance the appeal of remote areas with safety.

Cristian Salgado, who sleeps on streets of Piedras Negras with his wife and 5-year-old son after fleeing Honduras, said the Mexican border town is "one of the few places where you can more or less live in peace."

But his excitement about the Biden administration's plans to lift Title 42 on Monday evaporated with the judge's ruling. "Now there is no hope," he said.

Hondurans were stopped nearly 16,000 times on the border in April, with slightly more than half resulting in expulsion under Title 42. The rest could seek asylum in the U.S. if they expressed fear of returning home.

But Cubans fared far better. They were stopped more than 35,000 times in April, and only 451, or barely 1%, were processed under Title 42.

"Cubans get in automatically," said Joel Gonzalez, 34, of Honduras, who tried eluding agents for three days in Eagle Pass before getting caught and expelled. Agents told him asylum the U.S. was no longer available.

Isis Peña, 45, had turned down an offer from a fellow Honduran woman to cross the river. The woman called from San Antonio, saying she was freed without even being asked if she wanted to claim asylum. The woman now lives in New York.

Peña tried crossing herself the next day, an experience she doesn't want to repeat for fear of drowning. After about four hours in custody, an agent told her, "There is no asylum for Honduras."

'They ruined everything': Fleeing the devastation in Ukraine

By ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

POKROVSK, Ukraine (AP) — Houses on fire. Artillery blasting through thick apartment walls. People hiding in basements without electricity, water or gas as their towns are pulverized above them.

In shock, sometimes fighting off tears, civilians fleeing areas near the eastern front in the war in Ukraine described scenes of devastation as their towns and villages came under sustained attack from Russian forces.

More than 270 people boarded an evacuation train Sunday heading west to safer areas of Ukraine from the town of Pokrovsk, most brought there on buses from areas near the fighting.

"Ashes, ruins. The northern parts, the southern parts, all are ruined," said 83-year-old Lida Chuhay, who fled the hard-hit town of Lyman, near the front line in the eastern Luhansk province. "Literally everything is on fire: houses, buildings, everything."

She and others who fled Lyman said the town was coming under sustained attack and much of it had been reduced to rubble. Those still left there were hiding in shelters. Barely anyone ventures outside as it's too dangerous to walk in the streets.

"They ruined everything," said Olha Medvedeva, sitting opposite Chuhay on the train. "The five-story building where we were living, everything flew away — the windows, the doors."

Everyone now lives in basements, she said, as projectiles fly overhead.

Petro Demidov, sitting opposite her on the train, said they hid in a supermarket while they waited for the bus to pick them up and take them to the train. Above them, the ceiling shook from the force of the explosions outside.

"We got away under heavy fire," he said.

Russia has apparently made slow grinding moves forward against Ukrainian troops in the eastern industrial Donbas area in recent days. It intensified efforts to capture Sieverodonetsk, the main city under Ukrainian control in Luhansk province, which together with the neighboring Donetsk province makes up the Donbas.

"Horror. There's nothing to speak of, especially in the center," 76-year-old Lyubov Chudnyk said of Lyman, the town she has lived in for 42 years. "The schools are damaged, the monuments. Lyman is terrible now."

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She used to support Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Now "I want to strangle him with my own hands," Chudnyk said.

About 30 kilometers (19 miles) southeast of Lyman, the small town of Soledar was also badly hit, said Denys Uperaka, 34. He had already sent his wife and 3-year-old son away earlier in the war. Now he, too, had to leave.

He was lucky, he said, to live in a valley, so "everything was flying over us." But it just got to be too much. On Sunday, the Russians started shelling at 4 a.m.

"It's impossible to be there anymore," he said, adding that Russian forces had taken over the nearby village of Volodymyrivka, just to the east of Soledar.

To the north of Soledar, the village of Yakovlivka was also coming under sustained attack, said 59-year-old Valentina Domanshenko. The village no longer has electricity, running water or gas, she said. People were surviving by cooking on open fires outdoors. She saw people die of shrapnel wounds in the street.

"The shelling is every day, the houses tremble. Many people left, but there are still some there," said Domanshenko, breaking down in tears. "I'm very worried about them."

EXPLAINER: What's in Biden's proposed new Asia trade pact?

By JOSH BOAK and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — President Joe Biden faced a dilemma on trade in Asia: He couldn't just rejoin the Trans-Pacific Partnership that his predecessor had pulled the U.S. out of in 2017. Many related trade deals, regardless of their content, had become politically toxic for U.S. voters, who associated them with job losses.

So Biden came up with a replacement. During Biden's visit to Tokyo, the U.S. on Monday announced the countries that are joining the new Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. In the tradition of trade deals, it's best known by its initials: IPEF. (Pronounced EYE-pef.)

WHO'S IN?

The framework has 13 members, including the U.S., that account for 40% of global gross domestic product: Australia, Brunei, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

WHAT WOULD IPEF DO?

That's still to be figured out. Monday's announcement signals the start of talks among participating countries to decide what will ultimately be in the framework, so the descriptions for now are largely aspirational. In a broad sense, it's a way for the U.S. to lay down a marker signaling its commitment to remain a leading force in Asia.

"We're writing the new rules for the 21st century economy," Biden said at the announcement. "They're going to help all our countries' economies grow faster and fairer. We'll do that by taking on some of the most acute challenges that drag down growth."

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said IPEF is "focused around the further integration of Indo-Pacific economies, setting of standards and rules, particularly in new areas like the digital economy, and also trying to ensure that there are secure and resilient supply chains."

The idea that new standards for world trade are needed isn't just about discontent among U.S. voters. It's a recognition of how the pandemic disrupted the entire scope of supply chains, shuttering factories, delaying cargo ships, clogging ports and causing higher inflation globally. Those vulnerabilities became even clearer in late February after Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine, causing dangerously high jumps in food and energy costs in parts of the world.

WHO'S GOING TO FIRM UP THE DETAILS?

The negotiations with partner countries will revolve around four pillars, or topics, with the work split between the U.S. trade representative and the Commerce Department.

The U.S. trade representative will handle talks on the "fair" trade pillar. This would likely include efforts to shield U.S. workers from job losses as China's entrance into the World Trade Organization in 2001 led to

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severe manufacturing layoffs. Those job losses gutted parts of the U.S., angered voters and helped power the political rise of Donald Trump, who, as president, pulled the U.S. out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership almost as soon as he took the oath of office in 2017.

The Commerce Department will oversee negotiations on the other three pillars: supply chain resiliency, infrastructure and climate change, and tax and anti-corruption. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo flew with Biden on Air Force One to Japan. She was also by the president's side during his time in South Korea, where he highlighted investments in U.S. factories by automaker Hyundai and the electronics behemoth Samsung.

An added wrinkle is that countries can choose which pillars they want to belong to, according to an administration official. They are not required to back all four.

WHO ELSE CAN JOIN THE CLUB?

The White House has said IPEF will be an open platform. But it has faced criticism from the Chinese government that any agreement could be an "exclusive" clique that would lead to greater turmoil in the region.

And there are sensitivities to China, the world's second-largest economy, in setting up IPEF. The self-ruled island of Taiwan, which China claims as its own, is being excluded from the pact. This exclusion is noteworthy since Taiwan is also a leading manufacturer of computer chips, a key element of the digital economy that will be part of IPEF negotiations.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Sunday that any trade talks with Taiwan would be done one to one.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

Once talks start, negotiations are expected to go 12 to 18 months, an aggressive timeline for a global trade deal, according to an administration official. The official insisted on anonymity to discuss plans and added that building consensus inside the U.S. will also be key.

Security concerns, lack of support stall Africa's Green Wall

By WANJOHI KABUKURU and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso (AP) — A series of complex challenges, including a lack of funding and political will as well as rising insecurity linked to extremist groups al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Burkina Faso, are obstructing progress on Africa's Great Green Wall, according to experts involved in the initiative.

There have been some modest gains for the project, which plans to build an 8000-kilometer (4970-mile) long forest through 11 nations across the width of Africa to hold back the ever-growing Sahara Desert and fend off climate change impacts, but many involved with the plan are calling for renewed momentum to combat both insecurity and environmental decline.

Just 4 million hectares (9.9 million acres) of land has been afforested since work on the Green Wall began 15 years ago — a mere 4% of the program's ultimate goal.

Adama Doukomo, the coordinator for the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative in Burkina Faso, said political instability and security issues are significantly stalling progress in nearly 4,000 villages across the country.

"Terrorist attacks in the affected regions have forced populations to disperse. This limits people's movements, making it hard for us to directly monitor field actions which could lead to difficulty in creating improvements in certain areas," Doukomo said.

In the last three years Burkina Faso's Sahel, north and east regions have become inaccessible. Much of the Sahelian region designated for the Green Wall is rife with security issues, with efforts in Sudan, Ethiopia, Mali, Chad, Niger and Nigeria all impacted.

The United Nations desertification agency said the plan has several additional challenges to overcome, such as lukewarm high-level political support, weak organizational structures, insufficient coordination and financing, and not enough consideration in national environmental priorities.

The Great Green Wall featured prominently at the U.N. agency's two-week summit in Abidjan in Ivory

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Coast, which wrapped up Friday. Desertification, which has severe impacts on food production and security, is exacerbated by climate change and agricultural activity.

First proposed in 2005, the program aims to plant a forest all the way from Senegal on the Atlantic Ocean in the west to Eritrea, Ethiopia and Djibouti in the east. It's hoped the initiative will create millions of green jobs in rural Africa, reduce levels of climate-related migration in the region and capture hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Several countries have struggled to keep up with the demands of the project, with Mali, Nigeria, Djibouti and Mauritania in particular lagging behind.

The U.N. desertification agency says up to 45% of Africa's land is impacted by desertification, making it more vulnerable than any other continent. The agency's director, Ibrahim Thiaw, believes that can have multiple negative effects on surrounding communities, including security concerns.

A report released Sunday by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute also noted the link between environmental degradation and conflict. "In the Sahel, social tensions combined with inadequate governance and environmental decline to produce a bigger security risk," it said.

"By restoring land, you reduce conflicts and irregular migration. There is a link between land restoration and irregular migration," said Ibrahim Thiaw. "Land restoration is a no-regrets option in that any effort to recover soil health, replenish natural capital and restore land health will deliver benefits that far exceed the costs."

"What we are calling for now is action to accelerate the implementation of such a program to make sure that farmers, pastoralists, local communities and women are all associated with it," he added.

Despite a multitude of setbacks, those involved in the project remain optimistic. The coordinator of the Great Green Wall, Elvis Tangem, told the Associated Press that while conflict has slowed down the progress of the project, it has also opened up newer opportunities.

"It started as an environmental project but the dynamics of the region have made us look beyond the ecological aspects of the project and to embrace direct community concerns such as conflict resolution, peace building, youth development, women empowerment and rural development especially among pastoralists and farming communities," he said.

Some progress has been made in recent years in the east of the continent, according to the program's coordination office in Addis Ababa.

Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Sudan have all expanded their efforts, with Ethiopia producing 5.5 billion seedlings leading to thousands of hectares of restored land as well as an uptick in job creation. Efforts in Eritrea and Sudan have also resulted in nearly 140,000 hectares (346,000 acres) of afforestation.

Niger is also hailed for making considerable progress.

"In terms of measurable restoration milestones on the ground, Niger can be said to be far ahead of most of the countries with significant citizen awareness and contributing reforestation activities at all levels," said Tabi Joda, a Great Green Wall ambassador. "More communities are embracing the initiative and taking the lead through their own community led solutions."

Joda, who heads up youth mobilization for the project, noted that the scheme has seen strong governmental support in Senegal and Nigeria.

Between \$36 and \$43 billion are needed to realize the Green Wall by 2030, according to estimates by the World Resources Institute. The African Development Bank pledged approximately \$6.5 billion for the wall by 2025 during the U.N.'s climate conference in November last year following an effort led by France in early 2021 which committed \$14.5 billion towards the project, falling significantly short of the WRI's estimate.

The U.N. desertification agency says the current land restoration pace must be ramped up to an average of 8.2 million hectares (20 million acres) per year if the project is to achieve its self-imposed goal of 100 million hectares (247 million acres) restored by 2030.

"Investments must be intentional to deliver opportunities that create the right dose of green jobs needed by the critical mass of youths and communities vulnerable to irregular migration and violence due to competition over scarce resources caused by land degradation," Tabi Joda said.

After 3 months of war, life in Russia has profoundly changed

The Associated Press undefined

When Vladimir Putin announced the invasion of Ukraine, war seemed far away from Russian territory. Yet within days the conflict came home — not with cruise missiles and mortars but in the form of unprecedented and unexpectedly extensive volleys of sanctions by Western governments and economic punishment by corporations.

Three months after the Feb. 24 invasion, many ordinary Russians are reeling from those blows to their livelihoods and emotions. Moscow's vast shopping malls have turned into eerie expanses of shuttered storefronts once occupied by Western retailers.

McDonald's — whose opening in Russia in 1990 was a cultural phenomenon, a shiny modern convenience coming to a dreary country ground down by limited choices — pulled out of Russia entirely in response to its invasion of Ukraine. IKEA, the epitome of affordable modern comforts, suspended operations. Tens of thousands of once-secure jobs are now suddenly in question in a very short time.

Major industrial players including oil giants BP and Shell and automaker Renault walked away, despite their huge investments in Russia. Shell has estimated it will lose about \$5 billion by trying to unload its Russian assets.

While the multinationals were leaving, thousands of Russians who had the economic means to do so were also fleeing, frightened by harsh new government moves connected to the war that they saw as a plunge into full totalitarianism. Some young men may have also fled in fear that the Kremlin would impose a mandatory draft to feed its war machine.

But fleeing had become much harder than it once was — the European Union's 27 nations, along with the United States and Canada had banned flights to and from Russia. The Estonian capital of Tallinn, once an easy long-weekend destination 90 minutes by air from Moscow, suddenly took at least 12 hours to reach on a route through Istanbul.

Even vicarious travel via the Internet and social media has narrowed for Russians. Russia in March banned Facebook and Instagram — although that can be circumvented by using VPNs — and shut access to foreign media websites, including the BBC, the U.S. government-funded Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and the German broadcaster Deutsche Welle.

After Russian authorities passed a law calling for up to 15 years' imprisonment for stories that include "fake news" about the war, many significant independent news media shut down or suspended operations. Those included the Ekho Moskvyy radio station and Novaya Gazeta, the newspaper whose editor Dmitry Muratov shared the most recent Nobel Peace Prize.

The psychological cost of the repressions, restrictions and shrinking opportunities could be high on ordinary Russians, although difficult to measure. Although some public opinion polls in Russia suggest support for the Ukraine war is strong, the results are likely skewed by respondents who stay silent, wary of expressing their genuine views.

Andrei Kolesnikov of the Carnegie Moscow Center wrote in a commentary that Russian society right now is gripped by an "aggressive submission" and that the degradation of social ties could accelerate.

"The discussion gets broader and broader. You can call your compatriot — a fellow citizen, but one who happens to have a different opinion — a "traitor" and consider them an inferior kind of person. You can, like the most senior state officials, speculate freely and quite calmly on the prospects of nuclear war. (That's) something that was certainly never permitted in Soviet times during Pax Atomica, when the two sides understood that the ensuing damage was completely unthinkable," he wrote.

"Now that understanding is waning, and that is yet another sign of the anthropological disaster Russia is facing," he said.

The economic consequences have yet to fully play out.

In the early days of the war, the Russian ruble lost half its value. But government efforts to shore it up have actually raised its value to higher than its level before the invasion.

But in terms of economic activity, "that's a completely different story," said Chris Weafer, a veteran Rus-

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sia economy analyst at Macro-Advisory.

"We see deterioration in the economy now across a broad range of sectors. Companies are warning that they're running out of inventories of spare parts. A lot of companies put their workers on part time work and others are warning to them they have to shut down entirely. So there's a real fear that unemployment will rise during the summer months, that there will be a big drop in consumption and retail sales and investment," he told The Associated Press.

The comparatively strong ruble, however heartening it may seem, also poses problems for the national budget, Weafer said.

"They receive their revenue effectively in its foreign currency from the exporters and their payments are in rubles. So the stronger the ruble, then it means the less money that they actually have to spend," he said. "(That) also makes Russian exporters less competitive, because they're more expensive on the world stage."

If the war drags on, more companies could exit Russia. Weafer suggested that those companies who have only suspended operations might resume them if a cease-fire and peace deal for Ukraine are reached, but he said the window for this could be closing.

"If you walk around shopping malls in Moscow, you can see that many of the fashion stores, Western business groups, have simply pulled down the shutters. Their shelves are still full, the lights are still on. They're simply just not open. So they haven't pulled out yet. They're waiting to see what happens next," he explained.

Those companies will soon be pressed to resolve the limbo that their Russian businesses are in, Weafer said.

"We are now getting to the stage where companies are starting to run out of time, or maybe run out of patience," he said.

Justin Thomas takes PGA from uninspiring to unforgettable

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — Justin Thomas wrapped his arms around the 27-pound Wanamaker Trophy after winning his second PGA Championship, and thousands of fans ringing the 18th green amid the setting sun at Southern Hills showered him in adulation.

Good thing they woke up in time for his Sunday charge.

For nearly four full days, the year's second major had been a major snooze, the cast atop the leaderboard a list mostly made up of also-rans searching for a moment stardom. The golf itself was unspectacular, too, as everyone from Abraham Ancer to Tiger Woods ground their way around a Perry Maxwell classic that was both forbidding and unforgiving.

Heck, even the eventual champ shanked one off the tee on Sunday.

"Just cold shanked it," Thomas said. "Don't really know how else to say it. It was the best bogey I've ever made in my life."

Cameron Young tried to move up the leaderboard during the final round, then left his chances of victory in a fairway bunker on the 16th hole. Will Zalatoris hung on for life as iron shots found creeks and shrubs and very little short grass. Chile's Mito Pereira had a career-changing moment staring him in the face until a fateful shot on the 18th hole.

That's about the time the PGA Championship went from uninspiring to unbelievable.

Pereira's shot into the creek off the tee on the 490-yard finishing hole led to a double bogey, not only robbing him of the most unexpected of major championships — and the \$2.7 million winner's purse, life-time spot in the tournament and all the other baubles — but keeping him out of the three-hole aggregate playoff to decide the thing.

Thomas had rattled off a couple of birdies on the back side before an up-and-down for birdie at the 17th, moving him to 5 under and within a shot of the lead. And he hit a brilliant shot to within 15 feet at the 18th to set up another birdie, only to watch the putt that in the moment he thought he needed for a

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playoff go skating past the hole.

The crowd around the green, now fully invested in the goings-on, let out a collective groan.

"The leaders could have shot 3- or 4-under today, and like, I could have grinded and made a couple more birdies and look at the leaderboard on 18 and I'm four or five back," Thomas said later. "I just was trying to birdie every hole I could."

Coming up behind him, Zalatoris had finally wrangled his renegade irons in time to make birdie at the 17th, getting him back to 5 under. He never gave himself a chance for birdie at 18, instead making a nervy 8-footer to stay there.

"I always felt like I was one, two, three back," Zalatoris said, "and then once I saw Mito hit into the water on 18, I know that putt that I was going to have on 18 was probably to get into a playoff. So I will bottle that putt on 18 for the future."

Thomas and Zalatoris watched Pereira come undone and then headed back out for the playoff.

After the two matched birdies at the 13th hole, Thomas showed the kind of calm that comes with having been in such a situation before, ripping his tee shot onto the green at the 308-yard 17th. He made a two-putt birdie while Zalatoris could only manage par, sending the 2017 PGA champ to the 18th again — this time with a one-shot lead of his own.

With the once-slumbering crowd still jostling for position, Thomas and Zalatoris found the green with their approach shots, and the only drama left was whether the son of a longtime club professional could get down in two for the win.

He did. And what had been a dreary championship had its dramatic ending.

Thomas matched the biggest comeback in PGA Championship history, set by John Mahaffey in 1978 at Oakmont, where he also rallied from seven down before winning in a playoff over Tom Watson and Jerry Pate. And his final-round 67 matched the lowest round of the day, ultimately helping him end a 14-month winless stretch

It also gave Southern Hills another notable major champion — of the seven previous, six are in the Hall of Fame.

"It's funny," Thomas said. "I was asked earlier in the week what lead is safe, and I said, 'No lead.' This place is so tough. But if you hit the fairways you can make birdies, and I stayed so patient. I just couldn't believe I found myself in a playoff."

Albanese sworn in as PM in Australia ahead of Tokyo summit

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australia's new prime minister was sworn in Monday and flew to Tokyo for a summit with President Joe Biden while vote counting continued to determine whether he will control a majority in a Parliament that is demanding tougher action on climate change.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's center-left Labor Party ousted predecessor Scott Morrison's conservative coalition at Saturday's election. The coalition had been in power under three prime ministers for nine years.

"I want to lead a government that has the same sentiment of optimism and hope that I think defines the Australian people," Albanese said in his hometown of Sydney before flying to the national capital Canberra to be sworn in.

Albanese, who describes himself as the first ever candidate for the office of prime minister with a "non-Anglo Celtic name," and Malaysian-born Penny Wong, Australia's first foreign minister to be born overseas, were sworn into office by Governor-General David Hurley before the pair flew to Tokyo for a security summit on Tuesday with Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"We will return (from Japan) on Wednesday and set about implementing our agenda, our agenda that received the endorsement of the Australian people," Albanese said, highlighting items such as climate change, affordable child care and strengthening Medicare.

Biden rang Albanese to congratulate him on his election win and express the president's wish to make

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the countries' alliance stronger, the White House said.

Albanese described their conversation as "very fruitful and positive."

Morrison's decision to resign as prime minister during the early vote counting enabled Hurley, who represents Australia's head of state, British monarch Queen Elizabeth II, to appoint his replacement without evidence that Albanese can control a majority of seats in parliament's lower chamber where governments are formed.

Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles was also sworn in and will act as prime minister while Albanese is in Japan. Katy Gallagher and Jim Chalmers were sworn into economic ministries.

Labor appears assured of 75 seats, one short of the majority in the 151-seat House of Representatives needed to form an administration. The conservative coalition was on track for 58, unaligned lawmakers 12 and six seats were too close to call, the Australian Electoral Commission said.

Albanese said he had the support of five unaligned lawmakers to back his administration if Labor falls short of a majority government.

A vote of no-confidence in Labor in the house could result in the unlikely outcome of the conservative Liberal Party cobbling together a minority administration. If no party was able to govern, another election would be held, an outcome that has never happened in the 121 years of Australia's federation.

"I'm hopeful that we will receive a majority of members of the House of Representatives. At this stage that looks most likely but of course counting continues," Albanese said. "But my expectation is that we have a majority."

Australia's two major parties, Labor and the Liberal Party, bled votes to independents and fringe parties in Saturday's election, continuing a trend of dissatisfaction with the political establishment.

Terri Butler, who would have been the new government's environment minister, was replaced by Max Chandler-Mather, of the climate-focused Greens party that now holds at least three seats in the house — two more than in the last parliament.

Former New South Wales state Premier Kristina Keneally's bid to move from the senate to the house in what was considered a safe Labor seat in Sydney was defeated by Vietnam-born independent candidate Dai Le, who became the first refugee ever elected to parliament.

Greens leader Adam Bandt supported a Labor minority government from 2010 until its election defeat in 2013 and was prepared to negotiate with Albanese again.

Albanese had been the government's chief negotiator with its outside supporters in the house during those three years and was praised for his collegial approach.

"Liberal and Labor's vote went backwards this election. Labor may get over the line with a majority and may not but their vote went backwards," Bandt said.

"The Greens and independents said we need to take action on coal and gas, which are the main causes of the climate crisis, and people agree," Bandt added, referring to Australia's major fossil fuel exports.

"It's the end of the two-party system as we know it," he said.

The conservative former government lost six traditionally safe seats to so-called teal independents, greener versions of the Liberal Party's blue color.

The teals want a more ambitious target than Labor's promise to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 43% below the 2005 level by the end of the decade. The previous government had stuck with the same commitment they made at the Paris Agreement in 2015: 26%-28% below 2005 levels by 2030.

The Greens' 2030 target is 75%.

Russian ties shred German ex-leader Schroeder's standing

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Gerhard Schroeder left the German chancellery after a narrow election defeat in 2005 with every chance of a future as a respected elder statesman.

His ambitious overhaul of the country's welfare state was just beginning to kick in and he had won plaudits among voters for opposing the U.S.-led war in Iraq.

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Fast-forward to last week: German lawmakers agreed to shut down Schroeder's taxpayer-funded office, the European Parliament called for him to be sanctioned, and his own party set a mid-June hearing on applications to have him expelled.

Schroeder's reportedly lucrative involvement with the Russian energy sector and his friendly relationship with President Vladimir Putin have raised eyebrows for years, even as many others in Germany backed business and energy ties.

But it was his stubbornness in sticking to his energy posts and his failure to wholeheartedly distance himself from Putin after Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24 that turned the 78-year-old into a political pariah in Germany and estranged him from his party, the center-left Social Democrats of current Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

"Gerhard Schroeder has been acting for many years now only as a businessman, and we should stop seeing him as an elder statesman, as a former chancellor," party co-leader Saskia Esken said last month.

On Friday, Russian state energy company Rosneft said that Schroeder plans to step down from its board of directors, which he had chaired since 2017. The move appeared unlikely to undo the damage to his standing; the Social Democrats' general secretary, Kevin Kuehnert, said it was "unfortunately much too late."

Scholz said he should quit other Russian energy jobs. The ex-chancellor has for years chaired the shareholders' committee of Nord Stream AG and headed the board of directors of Nord Stream 2, a second pipeline built to bring gas directly from Russia to Germany that Scholz's government halted in February.

Schroeder, who rose from a poor, working-class background to become Germany's leader, was chancellor from 1998 to 2005. He initiated an overhaul of Germany's labor market that was unpopular at the time but was later credited with making Europe's biggest economy more competitive, helping it weather a series of crises.

He also vehemently opposed the U.S.-led war in Iraq, a stance that struck a chord with German voters and helped him secure his second term, but chilled relations with President George W. Bush.

Schroeder bonded with Putin, however. He welcomed the Russian leader to his home in Hannover, while the pair also made a joint appearance on a German television talk show. Asked in 2004 whether he considered Putin a "flawless democrat," the chancellor replied that he did.

Within weeks of leaving office, Schroeder drew criticism for his appointment to a German-Russian consortium building the Nord Stream gas pipeline under the Baltic Sea, which he had championed as chancellor. He said it was "a matter of honor" to help.

In April 2014, he was pictured hugging Putin at a party in St. Petersburg marking his 70th birthday, just as tensions between Russia and the West soared following Russia's annexation of Crimea.

In early February this year, Russian state-owned gas company Gazprom said he had been nominated to join its board of directors — shortly after the ex-chancellor had accused Ukraine of "saber-rattling." It's unclear whether the appointment, which was to be confirmed in June, will go ahead.

When Scholz visited Moscow shortly before Russia's invasion, Putin praised Schroeder as an "independent expert" and "a decent person whom we respect." He said Germans who didn't want to pay much more for gas should be thankful to their former leader.

On the day of the invasion, Schroeder said it was the Russian government's responsibility to end the war as soon as possible, and that Moscow's security interests didn't justify a military intervention. But he didn't address his own energy posts, and said in a LinkedIn post that "there were many mistakes — on both sides" in relations between Russia and the West.

Schroeder's stock plummeted further. He gave up the title of honorary citizen of Hannover, preempting a likely decision by city officials, and had his honorary membership of Germany's soccer federation and leading soccer club Borussia Dortmund withdrawn. Staff resigned in protest. Prominent Social Democrats urged him to leave the party he led from 1999 to 2004; the party's Hannover branch received 14 applications for his expulsion, which it plans to consider on June 15.

Schroeder was defiant in an April interview with The New York Times, declaring that "I don't do mea culpa." And he was quoted as saying that a massacre in Bucha, outside Kyiv, "has to be investigated" but

he didn't think the orders would have come from Putin.

It's not clear what eventually prompted Schroeder to pull out of Rosneft. But the announcement came a day after German lawmakers decided to strip him of his office, while the European Parliament approved a resolution that "strongly demands" he give up his positions with Russian firms and calls for politicians "who continue to receive Russian money" to be sanctioned. Scholz indicated that he doesn't support sanctions against Schroeder at present.

"The public self-destruction of his reputation was as sad to watch as it was unsettling," the Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper commented. "No one could explain how a man who was once marked by outstanding political instinct let the discussion run until his privileges were withdrawn."

Theories emerge for mysterious liver illnesses in children

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Health officials remain perplexed by mysterious cases of severe liver damage in hundreds of young children around the world.

The best available evidence points to a fairly common stomach bug that isn't known to cause liver problems in otherwise healthy kids. That virus was detected in the the blood of stricken children but — oddly — it has not been found in their diseased livers.

"There's a lot of things that don't make sense," said Eric Kremer, a virus researcher at the Institute of Molecular Genetics of Montpellier, in France.

As health officials in more than a dozen countries look into the mystery, they are asking:

— Has there been some surge in the stomach bug — called adenovirus 41 — that is causing more cases of a previously undetected problem?

— Are children more susceptible due to pandemic-related lockdowns that sheltered them from the viruses kids usually experience?

— Is there some mutated version of the adenovirus causing this? Or some other not-yet-identified germ, drug or toxin?

— Is it some kind of haywire immune system reaction set off by a past COVID-19 infection and a later invasion by some other virus?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and investigators around the globe are trying to sort out what's going on.

The illnesses are considered rare. CDC officials last week said they are now looking into 180 possible cases across the U.S. Most of the children were hospitalized, at least 15 required liver transplants and six died.

More than 20 other countries have reported hundreds more cases in total, though the largest numbers have been in the U.K. and U.S.

Symptoms of hepatitis — or inflammation of the liver — include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, light-colored stools, joint pain and jaundice.

The scope of the problem only started to become clear last month, though disease detectives say they have been working on the mystery for months. It's been maddeningly difficult to nail a cause down, experts say.

Conventional causes of liver inflammation in otherwise healthy kids — the viruses known as hepatitis A, B, C, D and E — didn't show up in tests. What's more, the children came from different places and there seemed to be no common exposures.

What did show up was adenovirus 41. More than half of the U.S. cases have tested positive for adenovirus, of which there are dozens of varieties. In a small number of specimens tested to see what kind of adenovirus was present, adenovirus 41 came up every time.

The fact that adenovirus keeps showing up strengthens the case for it playing a role, but it's unclear how, Dr. Jay Butler, the CDC's deputy director for infectious diseases, told The Associated Press.

Many adenoviruses are associated with common cold symptoms, such as fever, sore throat and pink eye. Some versions — including adenovirus 41 — can trigger other problems, including inflammation in

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the stomach and intestines. Adenoviruses previously have been linked to hepatitis in children, but mostly in kids with weakened immune systems.

Recent genetic analysis has turned up no evidence that a single new mutant version of the virus is to blame, said Dr. Umesh Parashar, chief of the CDC group focused on viral gut diseases.

Adenovirus infections are not systematically tracked in the U.S., so it's not clear if there's been some recent surge in virus activity. In fact, adenoviruses are so common that researchers aren't sure what to make of their presence in these cases.

"If we start testing everybody for the adenovirus, they will find so many kids" that have it, said Dr. Heli Bhatt, a pediatric gastroenterologist who treated two Minnesota children with the liver problems.

One was a child who came in nearly five months ago with liver failure. Doctors couldn't figure why. Unfortunately, "not having a cause is something that happens," Bhatt said. Roughly a third of acute liver failure cases go unexplained, experts have estimated.

Bhatt said the second child she saw got sick last month. By that time, health officials had been drawing attention to cases, and she and other doctors began going back and reviewing unexplained illnesses since October.

Indeed, many cases added to the tally in the last few weeks were not recent illnesses but rather earlier ones that were re-evaluated. About 10% of the U.S. cases occurred in May, Butler said. The rate seems to be relatively flat since the fall, he added.

It's possible that doctors are merely discovering a phenomenon that's been going on for years, some scientists said.

Another possible explanation: COVID-19.

The CDC recently estimated that, as of February, 75% of U.S. children had been infected by the coronavirus.

Only 10% to 15% of the children with the mysterious hepatitis had COVID-19, according to nasal swab tests given when they checked into a hospital, health officials say.

But investigators are wondering about previous coronavirus infections. It's possible that coronavirus particles lurking in the gut are playing a role, said Petter Brodin, a pediatric immunologist at Imperial College London.

In a piece earlier this month in the medical journal *Lancet*, Brodin and another scientist suggested that a combination of lingering coronavirus and an adenovirus infection could trigger a liver-damaging immune system reaction.

"I think it's an unfortunate combination of circumstances that could explain this," Brodin told the AP.

Butler said researchers have seen complex reactions like that before, and investigators are discussing ways to better check out the hypothesis.

He said it was "not out of the realm of plausibility, at all."

A Case Western Reserve University preprint study, which has yet to be peer reviewed, suggested children who had COVID-19 had a significantly higher risk of liver damage.

Dr. Markus Buchfellner, a pediatric infectious diseases doctor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, was involved in the identification of the first U.S. cases in the fall.

The illnesses were "weird" and concerning, he said. Six months later, "we don't really know exactly what we're dealing with."

Kim, other N. Koreans attend large funeral amid COVID worry

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A huge number of North Koreans including leader Kim Jong Un attended a funeral for a top official, state media reported Monday, as the country maintained the much-disputed claim that its suspected coronavirus outbreak is subsiding.

Since admitting earlier this month to an outbreak of the highly contagious omicron variant, North Korea has only stated how many people have fevers daily and identified just a fraction of the cases as COVID-19.

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Its state media said Monday that 2.8 million people have fallen ill due to an unidentified fever but only 68 of them died since late April, an extremely low fatality rate if the illness is COVID-19 as suspected.

North Korea has limited testing capability for that many sick people, but some experts say it is also likely underreporting mortalities to protect Kim from political damage.

The official Korean Central News Agency said Kim attended the funeral Sunday of Hyon Chol Hae, a Korean People's Army marshal who played a key role in grooming him as the country's next leader before Kim's father, Kim Jong Il, died in late 2011.

In what was one of the country's biggest state funerals since his father's death, a bare-faced Kim Jong Un carried Hyon's coffin with other top officials who wore masks before he threw earth to his grave with his hands at the national cemetery. Kim and hundreds of masked soldiers and officials also deeply bowed before Hyon's grave, state TV footage showed.

State TV earlier showed thousands of other masked soldiers clad in olive-green uniforms gathered at a Pyongyang plaza taking off their hats and paying a silent tribute before a funeral limousine carrying Hyon's body left for the cemetery. KCNA said "a great many" soldiers and citizens also turned out along streets to express their condolences.

Kim often arranges big funerals for late senior officials loyal to his ruling family and shows a human side in a possible bid to draw the support of the country's ruling elite and boost internal unity.

KCNA quoted Kim as saying that "the name of Hyon Chol Hae would be always remembered along with the august name of Kim Jong Il." He wept when he visited a mourning station established for Hyon last week.

During Sunday's funeral, most people, except for Kim Jong Un and honor guards, wore masks. The North's ongoing outbreak was likely caused by the April 25 military parade and related events that drew large crowds of people who wore no masks.

North Korea maintains a nationwide lockdown and other stringent rules to curb the virus outbreak. Region-to-region movement is banned, but key agricultural, economic and other industrial activities were continuing in an apparent effort to minimize harm to the country's already moribund economy.

KCNA said Monday that 167,650 new fever cases had been detected in the past 24-hour period, a notable drop from the peak of about 390,000 reported about one week ago. It said one more person died and that the fever's fatality rate was 0.002%.

"All the people of (North Korea) maintain the current favorable turn in the anti-epidemic campaign with maximum awareness, in response to the call of the party central committee for defending their precious life and future with confidence in sure victory and redoubled great efforts," KCNA said.

Experts question the North's tally, given North Korea's 26 million people are mostly unvaccinated and about 40% are reportedly undernourished. The public health care system is almost broken and chronically short of medicine and supplies. In South Korea, where most of its 52 million people are fully vaccinated, the fatality rate of COVID-19 was 0.13% as of Monday.

South Korea's spy agency told lawmakers last week that some of the fever cases tallied by North Korea include people suffering from other illnesses like measles, typhoid and pertussis. But some civilian experts believe most of the cases were COVID-19.

Before admitting to the omicron outbreak on May 12, North Korea had insisted it was virus-free throughout the pandemic. It snubbed millions of vaccines offered by the U.N.-backed COVAX distribution program and has not responded to offers of medicine and other aid from South Korea and the United States.

The World Health Organization has also pleaded for more information on the outbreak but not gotten a response.

Some observers say North Korea would only receive assistance from China, its last major ally, because Western aid shipments could hurt Kim's leadership as he's repeatedly called for "a self-reliance" to fight against U.S.-led pressure campaigns.

2022 midterms: What to watch in Georgia, Texas, elsewhere

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By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Georgia takes center stage in Tuesday's primary elections as Gov. Brian Kemp and Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger try to fight back challengers endorsed by former President Donald Trump, who is seeking revenge for his 2020 election defeat in the state.

U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia is testing Republican voters' tolerance for controversy in her primary. On the Democratic side, U.S. Rep. Lucy McBath and U.S. Rep. Carolyn Bourdeaux are facing off after McBath switched districts because of redistricting.

In Alabama, three Republicans are in a tight race for the nomination to replace retiring U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby. In Arkansas, former White House press secretary Sarah Sanders is a front-runner for the Republican nomination for governor.

In Texas, two runoffs are drawing outside attention: Attorney General Ken Paxton is trying to hold off Land Commissioner George P. Bush, while Rep. Henry Cuellar is trying to fend off his progressive challenger in a rematch from 2020.

What to watch in Tuesday's primaries in Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, Texas and Minnesota:

GEORGIA

Trump's desire for vengeance has fueled the primary challenges to Kemp and Raffensperger, both of whom defied his pressure to overturn Georgia's 2020 presidential election results.

Trump recruited former U.S. Sen. David Perdue to take on Kemp for the Republican gubernatorial nomination, but Perdue has lagged in polls and fundraising. Kemp has been increasingly confident the GOP will send him forward to a November rematch with Stacey Abrams, who is unopposed for the Democratic nomination.

Raffensperger, the state's top elections official, is facing a tough challenge from U.S. Rep. Jody Hice, who has promoted Trump's lies that widespread voter fraud or tampering cost him the 2020 election.

Trump's candidate for U.S. Senate, football legend Herschel Walker, appears to be cruising to the Republican nomination despite some GOP leaders warning that Walker will be unelectable in November against Democratic incumbent Raphael Warnock. Walker has been accused of threatening his ex-wife's life, exaggerating his business record and lying about graduating from the University of Georgia.

Greene, a political lightning rod, is trying to stave off multiple Republican challengers. The Trump-backed firebrand was stripped of her committee assignments last year over racist remarks, her embrace of conspiracy theories and a past endorsement of violence. A group of voters tried but failed to knock her off the ballot, accusing her of helping foment the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

In the Atlanta area, an unfavorable new district led Rep. McBath to jump into a Democratic primary against fellow Rep. Bourdeaux. McBath said her push to stay in Congress was about fighting for gun safety on behalf of her son Jordan, who was killed in a shooting 10 years ago.

ALABAMA

Shelby's retirement launched a heated and expensive primary for the GOP nomination for the seat.

U.S. Rep. Mo Brooks faces Katie Britt, the former leader of the Business Council of Alabama and Shelby's former chief of staff, and businessman Mike Durant, best known as the helicopter pilot shot down and held captive in the events chronicled in "Black Hawk Down."

Trump initially endorsed Brooks last year but withdrew the endorsement in March after their relationship soured. Trump has not made another endorsement in the race. The fractured field increases the chances the race will go to a June 21 runoff.

Republican Gov. Kay Ivey is attempting to avoid a runoff as she faces several challengers from her right flank.

Lindy Blanchard, who was Trump's ambassador to Slovenia, and businessman Tim James have criticized Ivey's support of a gas tax increase and her handling of the COVID-19 pandemic that included a temporary mask mandate and appeals for people to get vaccinated. They also criticized Ivey over a charter school that welcomed LGBTQ students.

Ivey has emphasized her conservative record, including signing legislation — now blocked by the courts

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— to make abortion a felony at any stage of pregnancy. In one campaign commercial, the governor pulls a handgun out of her purse to note her support of permitless concealed carry.

ARKANSAS

In Arkansas, two-term U.S. Sen. John Boozman hopes to fend off a challenge from three Republican rivals in a race in which he's had to rely on his endorsement from Trump as well as the state's top GOP figures.

The mild-mannered Boozman has taken a more aggressive tone in his campaign ads, vowing to complete the wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Boozman's rivals include former NFL player Jake Bequette, who has the support of a super PAC that's aired ads attacking Boozman as not conservative enough, and Jan Morgan, a conservative activist and former TV reporter.

Sanders, Trump's former spokesperson, is heavily favored in her Republican primary for governor. She faces a long-shot primary challenge from former talk show radio host Doc Washburn.

Sanders has shattered fundraising records and has focused mainly on national issues, running spots criticizing President Joe Biden on issues like inflation while ignoring her rivals.

Five Democrats are seeking the party's nomination for governor, with nuclear engineer and ordained minister Chris Jones the front-runner.

The candidates are running to succeed Republican Gov. Asa Hutchinson, who is barred by term limits from seeking reelection.

TEXAS

Texas held the first primary of 2022 back in March, but runoffs will finally settle two major races.

One puts the Bush family dynasty on the line: Republican George P. Bush, a son of former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, has spent the past year mounting a primary challenge to Paxton, the two-term attorney general.

George P. Bush is the last of his family still in public office and finished 20 percentage points behind Paxton in a four-way primary. Since then, Bush's efforts to close the gap have centered on emphasizing Paxton's legal troubles, including an ongoing FBI investigation into corruption accusations and a separate 2015 indictment on securities fraud charges.

Paxton, who has denied wrongdoing, has broad party support and Trump's endorsement.

On the Democratic side, Rep. Cuellar's bid for a 10th term has run head-on into a reenergized national battle over abortion rights. His position as one of the last anti-abortion Democrats in Congress has become a central issue in his runoff against Jessica Cisneros, a 28-year-old immigration attorney and abortion rights supporter.

Democratic House leaders have lined up behind Cuellar. Cisneros trailed Cuellar by roughly 1,000 votes in March, but Cuellar didn't hit the 50% threshold to avoid a runoff.

MINNESOTA

A primary Tuesday in southern Minnesota's 1st Congressional District is a first step for replacing Republican U.S. Rep. Jim Hagedorn, who died of cancer in February. A special general election to fill the rest of Hagedorn's term in the Republican-leaning district is scheduled for Aug. 9.

Hagedorn's widow, Jennifer Carnahan, has been making the most overt appeals to Trump's supporters. She was state chair of the Republican Party of Minnesota until being forced out last August after a prominent donor was indicted on sex trafficking charges.

State Rep. Jeremy Munson, a founder of a hard-right faction that broke from the main Minnesota House GOP Caucus, has been endorsed by U.S. Sens. Ted Cruz of Texas and Rand Paul of Kentucky.

Former state Rep. Brad Finstad has the backing of several Minnesota GOP officeholders. He has reminded voters he was Trump's Minnesota director for USDA Rural Development.

On the Democratic side, the candidate endorsed at the party's district convention earlier this month is former Hormel Foods CEO Jeffrey Ettinger. His opponents include University of Minnesota law professor Richard Painter, a former White House ethics lawyer for President George W. Bush.

Russia presses Donbas attacks as Polish leader praises Kyiv

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By ELENA BECATOROS, OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI and RICARDO MAZALAN Associated Press
KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia pressed its offensive in eastern Ukraine on Sunday as Poland's president traveled to Kyiv to support the country's European Union aspirations, becoming the first foreign leader to address the Ukrainian parliament since the start of the war.

Lawmakers gave a standing ovation to President Andrzej Duda, who thanked them for the honor of speaking where "the heart of a free, independent and democratic Ukraine beats." Duda said that to end the conflict, Ukraine did not need to submit to conditions given by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"Unfortunately, in Europe there have also been disturbing voices in recent times demanding that Ukraine yield to Putin's demands," he said. "I want to say clearly: Only Ukraine has the right to decide about its future. Only Ukraine has the right to decide for itself."

Duda's visit, his second to Kyiv since April, came as Russian and Ukrainian forces battled along a 551-kilometer (342-mile) wedge of the country's eastern industrial heartland.

After declaring full control of a sprawling seaside steel plant that was the last defensive holdout in the port city of Mariupol, Russia launched artillery and missile attacks to expand the territory that Moscow-backed separatists have held since 2014 in the region known as the Donbas.

To bolster its defenses, Ukraine's parliament voted Sunday to extend martial law and the mobilization of armed forces for a third time, until Aug. 23.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has stressed that the 27-member EU should expedite his country's request to join the bloc. Ukraine's potential candidacy is set to be discussed at a Brussels summit in late June.

France's European Affairs minister Clement Beaune on Sunday told Radio J it would be a "long time" before Ukraine gains EU membership, perhaps up to two decades.

"We have to be honest," he said. "If you say Ukraine is going to join the EU in six months, or a year or two, you're lying."

But Poland is ramping up efforts to win over EU members who are more hesitant about accepting Ukraine into the bloc. Zelenskyy said Duda's visit represented a "historic union" between Ukraine, which declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, and Poland, which ended communist rule two years earlier.

"This is really a historic opportunity not to lose such strong relations, built through blood, through Russian aggression," Zelenskyy said. "All this not to lose our state, not to lose our people."

Poland has welcomed millions of Ukrainian refugees and become a gateway for Western humanitarian aid and weapons into Ukraine. It is also a transit point for some foreign fighters who have volunteered to fight the Russian forces.

Duda credited the U.S. and President Joe Biden for unifying the West in supporting Ukraine and imposing sanctions against Moscow.

"Kyiv is the place from which one clearly sees that we need more America in Europe, both in the military and in this economic dimension," said Duda, a right-wing populist leader who clearly preferred former President Donald Trump over Biden in the 2020 election.

On the battlefield, Russia appeared to have made slow, grinding advances in the Donbas in recent days. It intensified efforts to capture Sievierodonetsk, the main city under Ukrainian control in Luhansk province, which together with Donetsk province makes up the Donbas. The Ukrainian military said Sunday that Russian forces had mounted an unsuccessful attack on Oleksandrivka, a village outside of Sievierodonetsk.

Sievierodonetsk came under heavy shelling, and Luhansk Gov. Serhii Haidai said the Russians were "simply intentionally trying to destroy the city... engaging in a scorched-earth approach."

Haidai said Moscow was concentrating forces and weaponry there to try to win control of Luhansk, bringing in forces from Kharkiv to the northwest, Mariupol to the south, and from inside Russia.

The sole working hospital in the city has only three doctors and supplies for 10 days, he said.

Ukrainian officials have said little since the war began about the extent of their country's casualties, but Zelenskyy said at a news conference Sunday that 50 to 100 Ukrainian fighters were being killed, apparently each day, in the east.

In a general staff morning report, Russia said it was also preparing to resume its offensive on Slovyansk,

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a city in Donetsk province that saw fierce fighting last month after Moscow's troops backed away from Kyiv.

The conflict was not confined to Ukraine's east. Powerful explosions were heard early Monday, for example, in Korosten, about 160 kilometers (100 miles) west of Kyiv, the town's deputy mayor said. It was the third straight day of apparent attacks in the Zhytomyr District, Ukrainian news agencies reported.

In Enerhodar, a Russian-held city 281 kilometers (174 miles) northwest of Mariupol, an explosion Sunday injured the Moscow-appointed mayor at his residence, Ukrainian and Russian news agencies reported. Ukraine's Unian news agency said a bomb planted by "local partisans" wounded 48-year-old Andrei Shevchuk, who lives near the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, Europe's largest.

With Russia claiming to have taken prisoner nearly 2,500 Ukrainian fighters from the Mariupol steel plant, concerns grew about their fate and that of the remaining residents of the city, now in ruins with more than 20,000 feared dead.

Relatives of the fighters have pleaded for them to be given rights as prisoners of war and eventually returned to Ukraine. Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said Ukraine "will fight for the return" of every one of them.

Denis Pushilin, the pro-Kremlin head of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, vowed that the Ukrainian fighters from the plant would face tribunals.

The complete seizure of the Azovstal steel plant, a symbol of Ukrainian tenacity, gave Putin a badly wanted victory in the war he began nearly three months ago, on Feb. 24. Ukraine's military had told the fighters their mission was complete and they could come out. It described their extraction as an evacuation, not a mass surrender.

Mariupol Mayor Vadim Boychenko warned that the city faces a health and sanitation "catastrophe" from mass burials in shallow pits and the breakdown of sewage systems. An estimated 100,000 of the 450,000 people who lived in Mariupol before the war remain.

Ukrainian authorities have alleged Russian atrocities there, including the bombings of a maternity hospital and a theater where hundreds of civilians had taken cover.

Meanwhile, a Ukrainian court was expected to reach a verdict Monday for a Russian soldier who was the first to go on trial for an alleged war crime. The 21-year-old sergeant, who has admitted to shooting a Ukrainian man in the head in a village in the northeastern Sumy region on Feb. 28, could get life in prison if convicted.

Ukrainian Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova has said her office was prosecuting war crimes cases against 41 Russian soldiers for offenses that included bombing civilian infrastructure, killing civilians, rape and looting.

In other developments, Ukraine's first lady, Olena Zelenska, gave a rare interview to national broadcaster ICTV alongside her husband and said she has hardly seen him since the war began.

"Our family, like all Ukrainian families, is now separated," she said, adding that she speaks to him mostly by phone.

"Unfortunately, we cannot sit together, have dinner with the whole family, talk about everything," she said.

Zelenskyy called the interview itself "a date on air," and the couple, who have two children, joked in front of the journalists.

"We are joking, but we are really waiting, like everyone else, to be reunited, like all families in Ukraine who are separated now, waiting for their relatives and friends who want to be together again," he said.

Thomas wins 2nd PGA title in playoff after 7-shot rally

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — Justin Thomas didn't pay attention to any score but his own Sunday in the PGA Championship, knowing he was seven shots behind but with only six players ahead of him on a Southern Hills course where anything could happen.

He never could have dreamed how it all played out, a chaotic final hour of pressure moments, clutch putts and unimaginable heartache for Mito Pereira.

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Thomas hit a shank on the sixth hole. He made a 65-foot birdie putt that began his record-tying comeback. He missed a 10-foot birdie putt on the final hole that he feared would cost him. He never led until one hole remained in his three-hole aggregate playoff with Will Zalatoris.

And when Thomas tapped in for par to capture another PGA Championship title, he stood erect on the 18th green with a mixture of joy and disbelief.

"I was asked early in the week what lead is safe and I said, 'No lead,'" Thomas said. "I can't believe I found myself in a playoff."

Thomas closed with a 3-under 67 that turned out to be enough for a playoff when Pereira, the 27-year-old from Chile in his first PGA Championship who never trailed all day, drove into a creek and made double bogey on the 18th hole to finish one shot behind.

It was the first time since Phil Mickelson at Winged Foot in the 2006 U.S. Open that a player gave away a one-shot lead on the final hole to lose a major.

"Sad to hit it in the water," Pereira said. "I mean, I wish I could do it again."

Just like his first PGA title at Quail Hollow in 2017, the signature shot for Thomas came on the 17th hole. It was the second hole of the aggregate playoff. He drilled a 3-wood on the 301-yard par 4 to 35 feet for a two-putt birdie, his first lead of the day.

Zalatoris, whose must-make 8-footers for birdie and par on the final two holes of regulation got him into the playoff with a 71, couldn't deliver in overtime. His 8-foot birdie putt on the 17th in the playoff missed, and he couldn't catch Thomas at the end.

Zalatoris looked like he had thrown away his chances for a first major — and first PGA Tour victory — when he three-putted from just outside 20 feet on the 16th hole. But he responded with a birdie from the bunker at the 17th and holed an 8-foot par putt on the 18th for a 71.

He joined Thomas at 5-under 275, and they played on when Pereira faltered.

Thomas, who had gone 14 months since his last victory at The Players Championship last year, now has a PGA Tour win in each of his last eight years and moves to No. 5 in the world.

His second major came when he least expected it.

None of the six players ahead of him had ever won a major. Thomas knew that. He was in the longest drought since his first PGA Tour title. He was aware of that, too.

"I remember how tough it is now to win, so I knew I was going to be nervous and I knew they'd be feeling the exact same thing," Thomas said. "You just don't know what's going to happen."

John Mahaffey in the 1978 PGA Championship at Oakmont was the other player to come from seven shots behind on the final day. He also won in a playoff over Tom Watson and Jerry Pate.

Thomas was still seven shots behind when he made his remarkable run, a mixture of key birdies and keeping mistakes off his card. It started with an improbable birdie putt from just short of the green to a back pin on the par-3 11th. He edged closer with an 18-foot birdie on the next hole.

He was lurking, while the leading pack behind him was leaking oil.

Zalatoris and Cameron Young each caught Pereira, ever so briefly. All of them found trouble in the rough and the sand and the greens.

Pereira was on the cusp of becoming Chile's first major champion, and giving South America the career Grand Slam.

Even after five bogeys, he never lost the lead and delivered clutch par saves from the bunker left of the ninth green and from well behind the 10th green. None was bigger than his 12-foot putt on the 16th to stay one shot ahead.

It all came undone with one swing.

His sawed-off swing with the driver, so effective on the previous hole, peeled to the right and into the creek down the right side of the 18th fairway. After a penalty drop, his approach up the hill started left and never cut back, landing in the rough. His chip rolled off the back edge of the green.

His double bogey gave him a 75, a hard-luck end to such a promising week.

"On Monday, I just wanted to make the cut. On Sunday, I wanted to win," Pereira said. "I'll take this to learn for the future."

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Young, whose father is a longtime PGA professional, also will look back at missed chances. Playing with Zalatoris, a former roommate at Wake Forest, Young was in the mix all day and was briefly tied for the lead. His hopes ended on the 16th when he found a bunker right of the green, blasted out weakly to 30 feet and three-putted for a double bogey. He closed with a 71.

Rory McIlroy made a brief run with four straight birdies on the front nine, putting him at 4-under par for the tournament. He was 2 over the rest of the way and finished eighth.

In eight majors at Southern Hills, it was first time a player rallied from any margin to win, and it was only the second playoff. Retief Goosen won the other in the 2001 U.S. Open after he three-putted from 12 feet on the final hole. At least he got another chance, unlike Pereira.

Six of the seven previous major champions at Southern Hills are in the World Golf Hall of Fame. The 29-year-old Thomas, now with two majors among his 15 career PGA Tour victories, is surely headed there one day.

PGA updates | Justin Thomas wins 2nd PGA title in playoff

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — The Latest on the final round of the PGA Championship (all times local):

Justin Thomas has won his second PGA Championship, rallying from shots seven back on Sunday to force a playoff with Will Zalatoris, then beating him with two birdies and a par in their three-hole aggregate at Southern Hills.

Thomas added a second Wanamaker Trophy to the one he captured in 2017 at Quail Hollow in the first playoff at the PGA Championship since 2011, when Keegan Bradley defeated Jason Dufner at Atlanta Athletic Club.

Thomas began the tournament with back-to-back 67s, despite getting the poor side of the draw. He shot 74 on Saturday to go backward, but he made a back-nine charge on Sunday and birdied the 17th. He closed with a 67 and finished at 5-under 275 over 72 holes.

Zalatoris, who began the day three back of Mito Pereira, finished a rollercoaster round of 71 to match Thomas.

Pereira threw away a one-shot lead on the 18th with a tee shot into the water. He made double bogey to miss the playoff by a shot alongside Cameron Young.

6:25 p.m.

Justin Thomas has birdied the first two holes of a three-hole aggregate playoff with Will Zalatoris to take a one-shot lead to the demanding 18th hole at the PGA Championship.

Both players birdied the par-5 13th before heading to the par-4 17th, which was playing 308 yards Sunday. Thomas hit a high fade that landed on the green, then lagged his eagle putt to about 3 feet.

Zalatoris missed the green to the right and pitched to about 8 feet, but his birdie putt slid by.

The finishing hole at Southern Hills is a 490-yard brute that plays uphill toward the clubhouse.

6:10 p.m.

Justin Thomas and Will Zalatoris have matched birdies on the first of their three-hole aggregate playoff for the PGA Championship.

Thomas did it on the reachable par-5 13th hole by laying up after a drive into the right rough. He hit his short approach to 6 feet and rolled in the putt.

Zalatoris ripped his drive down the middle of the fairway and went for the green in two, setting up a 25-footer for his first eagle of the week. He missed the putt but tapped in for birdie.

The reachable par-4 17th was the next playoff hole, followed by the difficult 18th.

5:50 p.m.

The PGA Championship is headed to a playoff between Justin Thomas and Will Zalatoris after Mito Pereira squandered a one-shot lead on the 18th when he drove into the creek off the tee and made double bogey.

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Thomas and Zalatoris finished at 5-under 275. They will play a three-hole aggregate playoff for the Wanamaker Trophy.

Thomas began the day seven shots back of Pereira and shot a 3-under 67, tied for the best round of the day. He missed a putt inside 15 feet on his final hole that would have gotten him to 6 under, but Pereira's meltdown on 18 gave him a chance.

Zalatoris rode a rollercoaster round full of mishits that included a penalty drop for an unplayable lie. He made birdie at the 17th to reach 5 under, then got up and down for par at the 18th to get into the playoff.

Pereira began the day with a three-shot lead at Southern Hills. He played his last five holes in 3 over.

3 p.m.

Will Zalatoris had just made back-to-back birdies and pulled into a tie for the lead with Mito Pereira during the final round of the PGA Championship when he flew the green at the par-3 sixth and the ball came to rest inside a shrub.

Zalatoris took a penalty stroke for an unplayable lie, then had to get relief from the new spot because a television tower was in his way. He wound up dropping onto the paved cart path and pitched from there onto the green, the shot coming to rest about 8 feet from the hole. He made the putt for a crucial bogey.

While Zalatoris was dropping a shot, Pereira rolled in a short birdie putt at the fifth to take a two-shot lead.

1:45 p.m.

The leaders are off the tee for the final round of the PGA Championship, with Mito Pereira of Chile attempting to become the third major winner from South America and Matt Fitzpatrick trying to track him down from three strokes back.

Pereira has never won on the PGA Tour, let alone won a major. The last full-time tour player who made a major his first victory was Shaun Micheel, who won the 2003 championship at Oak Hill.

The 27-year-old Pereira isn't a total unknown, though. He lost a playoff for the bronze medal at the Tokyo Olympics.

1:15 p.m.

There are plenty of birdies available at Southern Hills during the final round of the PGA Championship, if only someone within shouting distance of the lead is able to string a few of them together.

Rory McIlroy looked as if he might be the guy early on Sunday. He ripped off four in a row to go from even par for the tournament to within five of the lead, only to hit a poor chip shot at the par-3 sixth and drop a shot there.

The back nine in particular should be interesting. The par-5 13th is reachable in two for most of the field, but it presents a quintessential risk-reward situation. The same goes for the 17th, a par-4 reachable off the tee for just about everyone that should present an easy birdie opportunity before the long, challenging uphill 18th.

10:15 a.m.

First-time major winners have been nothing new in golf during this next generation of stars. The PGA Championship is no exception.

Mito Pereira of Chile has a three-shot lead going into the final round at Southern Hills. He is trying to become the first PGA Tour rookie since Keegan Bradley in the 2011 PGA Championship to win a major.

Chasing him are Matt Fitzpatrick of England and Will Zalatoris. Neither has won a major. Fitzpatrick is a two-time Ryder Cup player from England. But he has only one top-10 finish in the 24 previous majors he has played as a pro. Zalatoris was runner-up in the Masters in 2021.

Cameron Young had never made a cut in a major until this week. He's four shots behind.

Eight of the last 13 champions of the PGA had never won a major. That's about the same ratio for the

Masters and U.S. Open.

The closest major champions to the lead are Stewart Cink, Justin Thomas and Bubba Watson. All are seven shots behind.

The final group tees off at 2:35 p.m.

Report: Top Southern Baptists stonewalled sex abuse victims

By DEEPA BHARATH, HOLLY MEYER and DAVID CRARY Associated Press

Leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention, America's largest Protestant denomination, stonewalled and denigrated survivors of clergy sex abuse over almost two decades while seeking to protect their own reputations, according to a scathing 288-page investigative report issued Sunday.

These survivors, and other concerned Southern Baptists, repeatedly shared allegations with the SBC's Executive Committee, "only to be met, time and time again, with resistance, stonewalling, and even outright hostility from some within the EC," said the report.

The seven-month investigation was conducted by Guidepost Solutions, an independent firm contracted by the Executive Committee after delegates to last year's national meeting pressed for a probe by outsiders.

"Our investigation revealed that, for many years, a few senior EC leaders, along with outside counsel, largely controlled the EC's response to these reports of abuse ... and were singularly focused on avoiding liability for the SBC," the report said.

"In service of this goal, survivors and others who reported abuse were ignored, disbelieved, or met with the constant refrain that the SBC could take no action due to its polity regarding church autonomy – even if it meant that convicted molesters continued in ministry with no notice or warning to their current church or congregation," the report added.

The report asserts that an Executive Committee staffer maintained a list of Baptist ministers accused of abuse, but there is no indication anyone "took any action to ensure that the accused ministers were no longer in positions of power at SBC churches."

The most recent list includes the names of hundreds of abusers thought to be affiliated at some point with the SBC. Survivors and advocates have long called for a public database of abusers.

SBC President Ed Litton, in a statement Sunday, said he is "grieved to my core" for the victims and thanked God for their work propelling the SBC to this moment. He called on Southern Baptists to lament and prepare to change the denomination's culture and implement reforms.

"I pray Southern Baptists will begin preparing today to take deliberate action to address these failures and chart a new course when we meet together in Anaheim," Litton said, referring to the California city that will host the SBC's national meeting on June 14-15.

Among the report's key recommendations:

— Form an independent commission and later establish a permanent administrative entity to oversee comprehensive long-term reforms concerning sexual abuse and related misconduct within the SBC.

— Create and maintain an Offender Information System to alert the community to known offenders.

— Provide a comprehensive Resource Toolbox including protocols, training, education, and practical information.

— Restrict the use of nondisclosure agreements and civil settlements which bind survivors to confidentiality in sexual abuse matters, unless requested by the survivor.

The interim leaders of the Executive Committee, Willie McLaurin and Rolland Slade, welcomed the recommendations, and pledged an all-out effort to eliminate sex abuse within the SBC.

"We recognize there are no shortcuts," they said. "We must all meet this challenge through prudent and prayerful application, and we must do so with Christ-like compassion."

The Executive Committee is set to hold a special meeting Tuesday to discuss the report.

The sex abuse scandal was thrust into the spotlight in 2019 by a landmark report from the Houston Chronicle and San Antonio Express-News documenting hundreds of cases in Southern Baptist churches, including several in which alleged perpetrators remained in ministry.

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Last year, thousands of delegates at the national SBC gathering made clear they did not want the Executive Committee to oversee an investigation of its own actions. Instead they voted overwhelmingly to create the task force charged with overseeing the third-party review. Litton, pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Alabama, appointed the panel.

The task force had a week to review the report before it was publicly released. The task force's recommendations based on Guidepost's findings will be presented at the SBC's meeting in Anaheim.

The report offers shocking details on how Johnny Hunt, a Georgia-based pastor and past SBC president, sexually assaulted another pastor's wife during a beach vacation in 2010. In an interview with investigators, Hunt denied any physical contact with the woman, but did admit he had interactions with her.

On May 13, Hunt, who was the senior vice president of evangelism and leadership at the North American Mission Board, the SBC's domestic missions agency, resigned from that post, said Kevin Ezell, the organization's president and CEO. Ezell said, before May 13, he was "not aware of any alleged misconduct" on Hunt's part.

The report details a meeting Hunt arranged a few days after the alleged assault between the woman, her husband, Hunt and a counseling pastor. Hunt admitted to touching the victim inappropriately, but said "thank God I didn't consummate the relationship."

Among those reacting strongly to the Guidepost report was Russell Moore, who formerly headed the SBC's public policy wing but left the denomination after accusing top Executive Committee leaders of stalling efforts to address the sex abuse crisis.

"Crisis is too small a word. It is an apocalypse," Moore wrote for Christianity Today after reading the report. "As dark a view as I had of the SBC Executive Committee, the investigation uncovers a reality far more evil and systemic than I imagined it could be."

According to the report, Guidepost's investigators, who spoke with survivors of varying ages including children, said the survivors were equally traumatized by the way in which churches responded to their reports of sexual abuse.

Survivors "spoke of trauma from the initial abuse, but also told us of the debilitating effects that come from the response of the churches and institutions like the SBC that did not believe them, ignored them, mistreated them, and failed to help them," the report said.

It cited the case of Dave Pittman, who from 2006 to 2011 made phone calls and sent letters and emails to the SBC and Georgia Baptist Convention Board reporting that he had been abused by Frankie Wiley, a youth pastor at Rehoboth Baptist Church when he was 12 to 15 years old.

Pittman and several others have come forward publicly to report that Wiley molested and raped them and Wiley has admitted to abusing "numerous victims" at several Georgia Southern Baptist churches.

According to the report, a Georgia Baptist Convention official told Pittman that the churches were autonomous and there was nothing he could do but pray.

The report also tells the story of Christa Brown, who says she was sexually abused as a teen by the youth and education minister at her SBC church.

When she disclosed the abuse to the music minister after months of abuse, she was told not to talk about it, according to the report, which said her abuser also went on to serve in Southern Baptist churches in multiple states.

Brown, who has been one of the most outspoken survivors, told investigators that during the past 15 years she has received "volumes of hate mail, awful blog comments, and vitriolic phone calls."

After reading through the report, Brown told The Associated Press that it "fundamentally confirms what Southern Baptist clergy sex abuse survivors have been saying for decades."

"I view this investigative report as a beginning, not an end. The work will continue," Brown said. "But no one should ever forget the human cost of what it has taken to even get the SBC to approach this starting line of beginning to deal with clergy sex abuse."

Pennsylvania's Fetterman released from hospital after stroke

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LANCASTER, Pa. (AP) — Pennsylvania Lt. Gov. John Fetterman, the Democratic nominee in the state's high-profile U.S. Senate contest, has been released from the hospital after a stay of more than a week following a stroke, his wife and his campaign said Sunday.

Fetterman, 52, won the Democratic nomination while in the hospital, easily beating U.S. Rep. Conor Lamb, just hours after undergoing surgery to implant a pacemaker with a defibrillator to help him recover. Fetterman has said the stroke was caused by a heart condition called atrial fibrillation.

"João is headed home — time to rest and recover (and annoy me)!" tweeted his wife, Gisele Fetterman, who was born in Brazil and often refers to her husband with the Portuguese translation of John. "I'm so grateful for the amazing staff at Lancaster General for taking such good care of him from start to finish."

Fetterman said in a statement he was returning home to Braddock and "could not be happier to finally be heading home to be with my family."

"I am feeling great, but per my doctor's orders, and Gisele's orders, I am going to continue to rest and recover," he said. "Later this week I will have a follow-up visit with my doctors at Penn Medicine Lancaster General Hospital. I am going to take the time I need now to rest and get to 100% so I can go full speed soon and flip this seat blue."

Fetterman had been hospitalized since May 13. He was scheduled to appear that day at a campaign event at Millersville University, but his wife "noticed that John was not himself, and shortly after he started slurring his speech," a campaign spokesperson said.

Fetterman said in a written statement he had a stroke "that was caused by a clot from my heart being in an A-fib rhythm for too long," but that doctors were able to remove the clot "reversing the stroke," and got his heart under control. Doctors told him that he "didn't suffer any cognitive damage," he said.

As for the Republican race, it remains too close to call and is likely headed for a statewide recount to decide the winner of the contest between heart surgeon-turned-TV celebrity Dr. Mehmet Oz and former hedge fund CEO David McCormick. The incumbent, Republican Sen. Pat Toomey, is retiring after serving two terms.

Former President Donald Trump has endorsed Oz, and takes heightened interest in Pennsylvania because it's one of the most important presidential battlegrounds, and voters are split fairly evenly between Democrats and Republicans.

'A long journey': Volunteers from Belarus fight for Ukraine

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — One is a restaurateur who fled Belarus when he learned he was about to be arrested for criticizing President Alexander Lukashenko. Another was given the choice of either denouncing fellow opposition activists or being jailed. And one is certain his brother was killed by the country's security forces.

What united them is their determination to resist Lukashenko by fighting against Russian forces in Ukraine.

Belarusians are among those who have answered a call by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for foreign fighters to go to Ukraine and join the International Legion for the Territorial Defense of Ukraine, given the high stakes in a conflict which many see as a battle pitting dictatorship against freedom.

For the Belarusians, who consider Ukrainians a brethren nation, the stakes feel especially high.

Russian troops used Belarusian territory to invade Ukraine early in the war, and Lukashenko has publicly stood by longtime ally, Russian President Vladimir Putin, describing him as his "big brother." Russia, for its part, has pumped billions of dollars into shoring up Lukashenko's Soviet-style, state-controlled economy with cheap energy and loans.

Weakening Putin, the Belarusian volunteers believe, would also weaken Lukashenko, who has held power since 1994, and create an opening to topple his oppressive government and bring democratic change to the nation of nearly 10 million.

For many of the Belarusians, their base is Poland, a country on NATO's eastern flank that borders Belarus and Ukraine and which has become a haven for pro-democracy Belarusian dissidents before becoming

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one for war refugees from Ukraine.

Some of the volunteer fighters are already in Poland, and some only pass through briefly on their way to Ukraine.

"We understand that it's a long journey to free Belarus and the journey starts in Ukraine," said Vadim Prokopiev, a 50-year-old businessman who used to run restaurants in Minsk. He fled the country after a rumor spread that he would be arrested for saying publicly that the government wasn't doing enough for small businesses.

"When the Ukraine war will be eventually over, our war will just start. It is impossible to free the country of Belarus without driving Putin's fascist troops out of Ukraine," he said.

Prokopiev heads a unit called "Pahonia" that has been training recruits. The Associated Press interviewed him as he oversaw an exercise involving firing pistols and other weapons into old cars in simulations of war scenarios. They were being trained by a Polish ex-police officer who is now a private shooting instructor.

Prokopiev wants his men to gain critical battle experience, and he hopes that one day soon a window of opportunity will open for democratic change in Belarus. But he says it will require fighters like himself to be prepared, and for members of the security forces in Belarus to turn against Lukashenko.

The 2020 presidential election in Belarus was widely seen as fraudulent, but massive street protests against Lukashenko being awarded a sixth term were met with a brutal government crackdown, leading to Prokopiev's belief that no "velvet revolution" can be expected in Belarus.

"Power from Lukashenko can only be taken by force," he said.

On Saturday, men with another unit, Kastus Kalinouski, gathered in Warsaw in the Belarus House, where sleeping bags, mats and other Ukraine-bound equipment were piled high. They sat together, talking and snacking on chocolate and coffee as they prepared to deploy to Ukraine later in the day. Most didn't want to be interviewed out of concerns for their security and that of family back home.

The regiment, formally part of Ukraine's armed forces, was named after the leader of an anti-Russian insurrection in the 19th century who is viewed as a national hero in Belarus.

Lukashenko has called them "crazy Belarusian citizens," and authorities have put 50 members of Kastus Kalinouski on a wanted list and initiated criminal cases against them.

One willing to describe his motivations was a 19-year-old, Ales, who has lived in Poland since last year. He fled Belarus after the country's security service, which is still called the KGB, detained him and forced him to denounce an anti-Lukashenko resistance group in a video. He was told he would be jailed if he didn't comply.

Dressed all in black from a hooded sweatshirt to his boots, he admitted to feeling nervous as the moment arrived to head into Ukraine. He had never received any military training, but would get it once he arrived in Ukraine. But just how much, and where he would be deployed, he didn't yet know.

He said he was going to fight not only to help Ukraine "but to make Belarus independent." He said it was also important for him that people realize that the Belarusian people are very different from the Lukashenko government.

It is a dangerous mission. At least four volunteers from the Kastus Kalinouski unit have already died. A deputy commander, Aliaksiej Skoblia, was killed in a Russian ambush near Kyiv and was later recognized by Zelenskyy as a Hero of Ukraine.

Still, the fighting in Ukraine can feel less dangerous at times than seeking to resist Lukashenko at home, where many activists are in prison facing harsh conditions.

Organizing the Kastus Kalinouski recruits was Pavel Kukhta, a 24-year-old who already fought in Ukraine's Donbas region in 2016, suffering burns and the loss of most of hearing in one ear.

Kukhta said his half-brother, Nikita Krivtsov, was found dead by hanging in a wooded area outside Minsk in 2020. Police said there was no evidence of foul play but Kukhta says he and the rest of the family are certain Krivtsov was killed for joining the anti-Lukashenko protests.

But he insisted that his support for Ukraine is not about revenge, only about fighting for democratic change.

"If Putin is defeated, Lukashenko will be defeated," he said.

Iran Revolutionary Guard colonel is shot dead in Tehran

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — A senior member of Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard was killed outside his home in Tehran on Sunday by unidentified gunmen on a motorbike, state TV reported.

Although the Guard gave only scant detail about the attack that occurred in broad daylight in the heart of Iran's capital, the group blamed the killing on "global arrogance," typically code for the United States and Israel.

That accusation, as well as the style of the brazen killing, raised the possibility of a link with other motorbike slayings previously attributed to Israel in Iran, such as those targeting the country's nuclear scientists. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack.

The two assailants shot Col. Hassan Sayyad Khodaei five times in his unarmored Iranian-made Kia Pride, state media said, right off a highly secure street home to Iran's parliament.

Reports identified Khodaei only as a "defender of the shrine," a reference to Iranians who fight against the extremist Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq within the Guard's elite Quds force that oversees foreign operations.

Little information was publicly available about Khodaei, as Quds officers tend to be shadowy figures carrying out secretive military missions supporting Hezbollah, the Lebanese militant group, and other militias in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere.

The Tehran prosecutor arrived at the crime scene within hours of the killing to investigate and demanded police urgently arrest the perpetrators. The probe's speed suggested Khodaei's prominence in the murky structure of the Guard's overseas operations.

Those operations have come under repeated Israeli air attack in Syria. An Israeli strike near the Syrian capital of Damascus killed two Guard members in March, prompting Iran to retaliate by firing a missile barrage into northern Iraq.

Security forces were pursuing the suspected assailants, state TV reported, without offering further details or giving a motive for the killing.

Around the same time, state-run media said the Revolutionary Guard's security forces had uncovered and arrested members of an Israeli intelligence network operating in the country, without elaborating on whether they had any connection to Khodaei's slaying.

Rural Texas official arrested, charged with stealing cattle

MENTONE, Texas (AP) — The top elected official in a rural and sparsely populated West Texas county has been arrested after being accused of stealing cattle.

Loving County Judge Skeet Jones, 71, and three other men were arrested on Friday on charges of livestock theft and engaging in organized criminal activity.

All four men were taken to the jail in neighboring Winkler County, where they have since been released on bond. Jones has not returned a call seeking comment on Sunday.

The arrests came after a yearlong investigation, according to a statement from the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association.

The association has commissioned peace officers known as special rangers who investigate agricultural crimes, including the theft of cattle and horses. The rangers also determine the ownership of stray livestock.

The association's special rangers allege that Jones and the others gathered stray cattle and sold them without following procedures set forth in the Texas Agriculture Code. Those procedures include calling the sheriff to report stray livestock and allowing the sheriff to search for the animal's owner.

The association declined to provide additional details about the case, citing the ongoing investigation. The theft of livestock charge carries a sentence of up to 10 years in prison while the organized criminal activity charge carries a sentence of up to 20 years in prison.

Loving County, which is located along the Texas-New Mexico border, is the state's least populated county.

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It has a population of 57 residents, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
Jones has been in office since 2007.

Taliban enforcing face-cover order for female TV anchors

By RAHIM FAIEZ Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Afghanistan's Taliban rulers on Sunday began enforcing an order requiring all female TV news anchors in the country to cover their faces while on-air. The move is part of a hard-line shift drawing condemnation from rights activists.

After the order was announced Thursday, only a handful of news outlets complied. But on Sunday, most female anchors were seen with their faces covered after the Taliban's Vice and Virtue Ministry began enforcing the decree.

The Information and Culture Ministry previously announced that the policy was "final and non-negotiable."

"It is just an outside culture imposed on us forcing us to wear a mask and that can create a problem for us while presenting our programs," said Sonia Niazi, a TV anchor with TOLONews. In an act of solidarity with female colleagues, the channel's male personnel covered their faces with masks, including the main evening news reader.

A local media official confirmed his station had received the order last week but on Sunday it was forced to implement it after being told it was not up for discussion. He spoke on condition he and his station remain anonymous for fear of retribution from Taliban authorities.

During the Taliban's last time in power in Afghanistan from 1996-2001, they imposed overwhelming restrictions on women, requiring them to wear the all-encompassing burqa and barring them from public life and education.

After they seized power again in August, the Taliban initially appeared to have moderated somewhat their restrictions, announcing no dress code for women. But in recent weeks, they have made a sharp, hard-line pivot that has confirmed the worst fears of rights activists and further complicated Taliban dealings with an already distrustful international community.

Earlier this month, the Taliban ordered all women in public to wear head-to-toe clothing that leaves only their eyes visible. The decree said women should leave the home only when necessary and that male relatives would face punishment for women's dress code violations, starting with a summons and escalating to court hearings and jail time.

The Taliban leadership has also barred girls from attending school after the sixth grade, reversing previous promises by Taliban officials that girls of all ages would be allowed an education.

'Triangle of Sadness': Biting social satire delights Cannes

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

CANNES, France (AP) — Fashion models, Instagram influencers and Russian oligarchs collide on a yacht — and some very extreme sickness ensues — in Ruben Östlund's "Triangle of Sadness," a social satire that had viewers at the Cannes Film Festival in hysterics.

The Swedish filmmaker's latest, co-starring Woody Harrelson as a Marxist boat captain, has made one of the biggest splashes at this year's festival. At its premiere Saturday evening, there were such waves of laughter and applause that Östlund on Sunday compared it to a crowd at a soccer match.

Östlund has already found an international audience for movies that take an uproarious, uncomfortable aim at money, masculinity and other big social targets in films like the Alpine marital drama "Force Majeure" (remade as "Downhill," with Julia Louis Dreyfus and Will Ferrell) and the art-world satire "The Square," which won the Palme d'Or top prize at Cannes in 2017.

But in his first English-language film, and with a budget twice that of "The Square," Östlund wanted to go even further with his particular brand of "rollercoaster for adults" cinema.

"I wanted to do something that's worth leaving your home and leaving your screens, leaving the streaming services you have at home," Östlund said ahead of the film's premiere. "I didn't want to get stuck in

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the art house part of cinema-making. I was really looking into that I felt I enjoyed watching myself. And the project I was thinking about had a wild set-up.”

“Triangle of Sadness,” which is playing in competition for this year’s Palme d’Or, is named after a term in the fashion world for a triangle-shaped crease between the eyebrows. The first third of Östlund’s film follows a male model played by Harris Dickinson and his influencer girlfriend portrayed by Charlbi Dean who argue over picking up a check after dinner.

Other riffs on fashion follow, but “Triangle of Sadness” moves into another gear in its second act, when they take a trip on a luxury yacht captained by a drunk socialist (Harrelson). The boat’s uber rich tourists include weapons makers and a Russian fertilizer magnate played by Zlatko Burić.

“Triangle of Sadness” reaches a comic crescendo when the seas turn rough, and an elaborate dinner ends up a farce of vomiting — and worse — while the captain and oligarch debate politics.

“During my upbringing, East and West were hitting their heads against each other,” says Östlund. “All of a sudden, we’re back in that in some way.”

“I was brought up in a home where you talk about society and a lot of the ideas that influenced the politics in the ‘60s,” says Östlund. “Marx has been someone that’s present in discussions in my home. If you talk about human behavior and you have a materialistic viewpoint on why we behave as we behave, then it becomes almost impossible not to talk about class.”

Harrelson has quickly become a great fan of Östlund. On Sunday, he told reporters that making “The Triangle of Sadness” was a “revitalizing” experience and announced that he’ll be in Östlund’s next film, whether the director wants him or not. (The plans are genuine. Östlund said the film will be titled “The Entertainment System Is Down.”)

“He can make you extremely uncomfortable,” Harrelson said. “He makes you think. He can give you a sense of meaning, like there was a purpose to seeing the film — and perhaps more importantly, he makes you laugh throughout. Which is quite a trick.”

Östlund granted that winning the Palme d’Or previously added pressure to making “Triangle of Sadness.” But given the enthusiastic response from festivalgoers, Östlund could find himself in the mix again for Cannes’ top prizes.

“It was a possibility to really try out what you were dreaming about and not limiting yourself,” the director says. “For us, it was a chance to combine the best parts of American cinema with the best parts of European cinema, to do something with intellectual content and do it in an entertaining way.”

‘Triangle of Sadness’: Biting social satire delights Cannes

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Buffalo shooting's wounds need a strong salve, residents say

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Shenaya Ann Washington and a close friend cleared a small patch of grass at the base of a utility pole on Riley Street. They dug a hole there and planted a red rose bush seedling. Next to it, they leaned 10 prayer candles against the pole.

Washington said she chose that spot to memorialize the victims of last weekend's massacre at Tops Friendly Market because it is closest to the store entrance she had always used as a part-time worker for Instacart, the grocery delivery service.

Sometimes when she would exit the store, Aaron Salter Jr., the slain retired police officer who worked security at Tops, would help Washington back to her car with the grocery orders, she said.

The shooter, whose racist attack deeply wounded east Buffalo's Black community, has stolen much more than the neighborhood's only grocery store and the sense of peace many residents felt in the cherished community gathering spot.

"He took away people who did for the community, just because of the color of their skin. It's an eye opener. It's a reality check," Washington said.

During Sunday service, Pastor Russell Bell of the State Tabernacle Church of God in Christ, where shooting victim Heyward Patterson was a deacon, promised his congregation that they would hold a celebration of his life. Bell also encouraged his predominantly Black flock to lean into their faith.

"We're going to be winners if we endure to the end," he said.

Just over a week ago, a white gunman in body armor killed 10 Black shoppers and workers at the super-

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market that has been temporarily closed. Three others were injured in the attack, which federal authorities are investigating as a hate crime.

Long before that 18-year-old avowed white supremacist inflicted terror in this community, Buffalo's Black neighborhoods, like many others around the nation, had been dealing with wounds that are generations old. The attack has scraped off the scab hiding Black trauma and neglect that sit just below the surface in what's called the City of Good Neighbors, residents, business owners and faith leaders said.

Healing will require not only an immediate flood of charity, but also systemic solutions, economic investments and mental health counseling that are long lasting, they said.

"It's been great to see the outpouring of support, I must say that," said Jackie Stover-Stitts, co-owner of Golden Cup Coffee, about a block from the Tops on Jefferson Avenue.

For the past few days, the atmosphere around her shop had been festival-like and, at times, a somber space of mourning. Organizations from across the nation, and even a few global charities, offered food and other essential goods to residents who relied on Tops to meet their basic needs.

"The only concern is that it's not short lived," Stover-Stitts said. "It would mean more if we could see, on Monday, that all those people with funds that came down to say how sorry they were could show it by investing in our area."

Buffalo, with a population of 255,000 that is 47% white, 35% Black, 12% Hispanic and 6% Asian, is one of the nation's most racially segregated cities. The neighborhoods around the Tops market are predominantly Black and impoverished.

Earlier in the week, civil rights leader the Rev. Al Sharpton pointed to racial and socioeconomic inequality that made the Tops a target for the shooter, who officials say drove hundreds of miles to find Black people to gun down.

"If there wasn't but one supermarket in the Black community, he wouldn't have gone to Tops," Sharpton said at a prayer vigil held in Buffalo for the victims' families on Thursday.

"If you can figure out how to get millions of dollars for a stadium, can't you figure out how to get a supermarket," Sharpton added, referring to a new \$1.4 billion home turf planned for the Buffalo Bills that will be funded largely by taxpayers.

La'Tryse Anderson of Buffalo SNUG, a gun violence prevention organization, canvassed the neighborhood around the Tops with other volunteers to get a sense of residents' needs. Some told her they needed groceries, toiletries, replacement appliances and even a utility bill paid.

"I wish I had a magic wand," she said. "There were so many needs out here, before this (shooting) happened."

Without real investments in the areas that surround the Tops, Anderson said, "I don't think we'll ever fully heal from this."

Residents will definitely need the option of another supermarket, as some have vowed to never set foot in that Tops location again, she added. They are too traumatized.

Reshawna Chapple, a Black therapist and associate professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Central Florida, said the shock and grief caused by the supermarket shooting are made worse when people are not tending to their mental health. Systemic racism is part of the reason why too few in the Black community seek mental health counseling, either on a regular basis or in the wake of tragedy, she said.

"Every time something like this happens, it opens up the wounds all over again," Chapple said. "We aren't taught to acknowledge feelings that are negative. The ones who need help the most are definitely not going to ask for it."

Mental health and grief counseling is why several community service organizations have been camped out around the supermarket for several days. With the Tops fenced off, organizations such as Feed Buffalo, Ramp Global Missions and LIFE Camp Inc., lined the surrounding streets with food trucks, mobile food pantries and barbecue grills serving chicken, burgers and hot dogs.

A trio of massage therapists offered neck and back treatments to victims' families and other residents.

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A local Starbucks gave out free coffee to passersby.

An evangelist baptized people in a large galvanized stock tank on the corner of Riley Street and Jefferson Avenue. The local Muslim community offered prayers and chants of "We are with you" near the supermarket.

Gregory Jackson Jr., a Washington-based organizer with the Community Justice Action Fund, said he came to Buffalo to help coordinate relief efforts to victims' families and residents, who were too traumatized to ask for what they need.

"A lot of folks have not even gotten close to going back to normal life yet," he said. "You get local police, cameras and media, from all over the world. But the community is stuck to pick up the pieces without any bigger support."

The supermarket shooting has also drawn support for the activists from around the nation. On Saturday, organizers with Black Lives Matter Grassroots, a national collective of chapters, held a vigil for Buffalo. Organizers from Boston, Detroit, Virginia Beach, Virginia and Minneapolis attended and vowed to be with Buffalo's residents as they continued to heal from the racist attack.

"We cannot have a world that steals the lives of our grandmothers," said Melina Abdullah, who directs the BLM group and founded its Los Angeles chapter. "We are duty bound to shut that down."

WHO chief: The COVID pandemic is 'most certainly not over'

BERLIN (AP) — The COVID-19 pandemic is "most certainly not over," the head of the World Health Organization warned Sunday, despite a decline in reported cases since the peak of the omicron wave. He told governments that "we lower our guard at our peril."

The U.N. health agency's director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, told officials gathered in Geneva for opening of the WHO's annual meeting that "declining testing and sequencing means we are blinding ourselves to the evolution of the virus." He also noted that almost 1 billion people in lower-income countries still haven't been vaccinated.

In a weekly report Thursday on the global situation, WHO said the number of new COVID-19 cases appears to have stabilized after weeks of decline since late March, while the overall number of weekly deaths dropped.

While there has been progress, with 60% of the world's population vaccinated, "it's not over anywhere until it's over everywhere," Tedros said.

"Reported cases are increasing in almost 70 countries in all regions, and this in a world in which testing rates have plummeted," he added.

Reported deaths are rising in Africa, the continent with the lowest vaccination coverage, he said, and only 57 countries — almost all of them wealthy — have vaccinated 70% of their people.

While the world's vaccine supply has improved, there is "insufficient political commitment to roll out vaccines" in some countries, gaps in "operational or financial capacity" in others, he said.

"In all, we see vaccine hesitancy driven by misinformation and disinformation," Tedros said. "The pandemic will not magically disappear, but we can end it."

Tedros is expected to be appointed for a second five-year term this week at the World Health Assembly, the annual meeting of the WHO's member countries.

Gangs strangle Haiti's capital as deaths, kidnappings soar

By EVENS SANON and DANICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — It was about 6 a.m. when Venique Moïse flung open the door of her house and saw dozens of people running — their children in one hand and scant belongings in the other — as gunfire intensified.

Minutes later, she joined the crowd with her own three kids and fled as fires burned nearby, collapsing homes. Over the coming hours and days, the bodies of nearly 200 men, women and children — shot, burned or mutilated with machetes by warring gangs — were found in that part of Haiti's capital.

"That Sunday, when the war started, I felt that I was going to die," Moïse said.

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Gangs are fighting each other and seizing territory in the capital of Port-au-Prince with a new intensity and brutality. The violence has horrified many who feel the country is swiftly unraveling as it tries to recover from the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse and the United Nations prepares to debate the future of its longtime presence in Haiti.

Experts say the scale and duration of gang clashes, the power criminals wield and the amount of territory they control has reached levels not seen before.

Gangs have forced schools, businesses and hospitals to close as they raid new neighborhoods, seize control of the main roads connecting the capital to the rest of the country and kidnap victims daily, including eight Turkish citizens still held captive, authorities say.

Gangs also are recruiting more children than before, arming them with heavy weapons and forming temporary alliances with other gangs in attempts to take over more territory for economic and political gain ahead of the country's general elections, said Jaime Vigil Recinos, the United Nations' police commissioner in Haiti.

"It's astonishing," he told The Associated Press, noting that gang clashes are becoming protracted, ruthless affairs. "We are talking about something that Haiti hasn't experienced before."

At least 92 civilians and 96 suspected gang members were killed between April 24 and May 16, with another 113 injured, 12 missing and 49 kidnapped for ransom, according to the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The office warned that the actual number of people killed "may be much higher."

Gangs also gang-raped children as young as 10 and set fire to at least a dozen homes, forcing some 9,000 people to flee and seek temporary shelter in churches, public parks and shuttered schools, U.N. officials said.

Haiti's National Human Rights Defense Network said some victims were decapitated while others were thrown into wells and latrines. Gangs posted pictures of the gruesome scenes on social media to further terrorize people. The network said that most women and girls were raped before being killed.

"Armed violence has reached unimaginable and intolerable levels in Haiti," Michelle Bachelet, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in a May 17 statement.

Bruno Maes, UNICEF's representative in Haiti, told the AP that one growing concern is the lack of access to basic things like water, food and medicine because people remain trapped in certain areas while gangs continue to fight, noting that malnutrition is on the rise, affecting 1 in 5 children in the Cité Soleil neighborhood alone.

"We are really seeing a strangulation of Port-au-Prince," he said, adding that UNICEF has been forced to use a helicopter and now a boat to try to reach those most in need.

Staff at hospitals and clinics report they're being stretched thin, with Doctors Without Borders noting that it treated nearly 100 people for gunshot wounds from April 24 to May 7, forcing the aid group to reopen a clinic in Cité Soleil it had closed in early April because of the violence.

Prime Minister Ariel Henry has remained largely quiet amid the escalating gang violence, while Frantz Elbé, Haiti's new police chief, said dozens of gang members have been arrested and another 94 killed in clashes with police since he took over the department six months ago. Nearly 5,000 suspects have been accused of crimes including murder and kidnapping, Elbé said.

"I am going to continue to track down the criminals," he pledged in a May 9 news conference, adding that Haiti's understaffed and under-resourced police department of roughly 11,000 officers for a country of more than 11 million people was receiving training and equipment from the international community.

At least 48 killings were reported in the neighborhood of Butte Boyer, which Edna Noël Marie fled with her husband and three children when gunfire erupted in late April.

The 44-year-old is sleeping on the concrete floor of a crowded shelter with no mattresses in increasingly unhygienic conditions while her children stay at a friend's home.

"It's not big enough to shelter all of us," she explained, adding that she fears gangs will recruit her two sons and rape her daughter. "These people have no remorse, and society doesn't really care. ... There is no civil protection. There are no authorities. Police are here today, and they're going to be gone tomorrow."

About 1,700 schools have shuttered amid the spike in gang violence, leaving more than half a million

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children without an education, with the directors of some schools unable to keep paying gangs to ensure students' safety, the U.N. said. Efforts are underway to set up an FM radio station dedicated to broadcasting classes, Maes said.

"It's very saddening for us that children who are willing to learn and teachers willing to teach cannot do so because they feel unsafe," he said.

The ongoing violence and kidnappings have prompted hundreds of Haitians to flee their country, often a deadly move. At least 11 Haitians died and 36 others were rescued when their human smuggling boat overturned near Puerto Rico this month. Dozens of others have died at sea in recent months.

Another concern is the lack of housing not only for the estimated 9,000 families recently forced to flee their homes, but also for the estimated 20,000 others displaced last year who are still living in overcrowded, dirty government shelters. At the same time, the country is struggling to help roughly 20,000 Haitians the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden has deported in recent months amid sharp criticism.

As police try to contain the gang violence, AP journalists visited the Butte Boyer neighborhood, where the smell of charred homes and decaying bodies spread for several blocks. Dogs gnawed on victims' remains.

Several walls and gates were scrawled with "400 Mawozo," a testament to the presence of a gang believed to have kidnapped the Turkish citizens in early May and 17 members of a U.S.-based missionary group last year, demanding \$1 million in ransom and holding most for two months.

Nailed to a wooden post, a picture of a man killed during the recent gang violence flapped in the wind. The sign underneath read, "Thanks to the government of my country."

It was once a quiet neighborhood that Lucitha Gason, 48, knows she won't return to again. She was getting ready for church when the explosion of gunfire in late April forced her to abandon her home. She's been staying at a shuttered school, but the owner recently demanded that she and dozens of other Haitians find another place to sleep.

Gason is now trying to figure out where to go since she can't afford to leave the country.

"We can't count on the government. We can't count on organizations. They're all making promises that aren't coming through," she said. "Here in Haiti, you really have to depend on yourself and what you can do for yourself. There's no such thing as what the country can do for you."

Priceless seeds, sprouts key to US West's post-fire future

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

A New Mexico facility where researchers work to restore forests devastated by fires faced an almost cruelly ironic threat: The largest wildfire burning in the U.S. was fast approaching.

Owen Burney and his team knew they had to save what they could. Atop their list was a priceless bank of millions of ponderosa pine, spruce and other conifer seeds meant to help restore fire-ravaged landscapes across the American West.

Next were tens of thousands of tree sprouts, many of which were sown to make them more drought tolerant, that were loaded onto trailers and trucked to a greenhouse about 100 miles (161 kilometers) away.

New Mexico State University's Forestry Research Center in the mountain community of Mora is one of only a few such nurseries in the country and stands at the forefront of a major undertaking to rebuild more resilient forests as wildfires burn hotter, faster and more often.

Firefighters have managed to keep the flames from reaching the center's greenhouses and there's a chance some of the seedlings left behind could be salvaged. But Burney, superintendent of the center, said the massive fire still churning through New Mexico highlights how far behind land managers are when it comes to preventing such fires through thinning and planned burns.

"The sad truth is we're not going to be able to do that overnight, so we're going to see these catastrophic fires for a decade, two decades, three decades — it depends on how quickly we make this turn," he said, while stuck at home watching live updates of the fire's progression as road blocks remained in place.

This year is the worst start to the wildfire season in the past decade. More than 3,737 square miles (9,679 square kilometers) have burned across the U.S., almost triple the 10-year average.

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With no shortage of burn scars around the West, researchers and private groups such as The Nature Conservancy have been tapping New Mexico State University's center for seedlings to learn how best to restore forests after the flames are extinguished.

The center has provided sprouts for projects in New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Texas and California, but experts said its capacity for turning out as many as 300,000 seedlings annually isn't enough now and certainly won't be in the future as climate change and drought persist.

The newly formed New Mexico Reforestation Center, made up of a number of universities and the state's Forestry Division, submitted a nearly \$80 million proposal to the federal government just last month to jump start a reforestation pipeline that encompasses everything from seed collection to how seedlings are sown in nurseries and where they're ultimately planted.

Matt Hurteau, a biology professor at the University of New Mexico, and his team have been building models to better predict the sweet spot where seedlings will have the best chance of survival as researchers and land managers try to reestablish pockets of forest around the West.

About 10,000 seedlings rescued from the forestry center in Mora will be used for a project focused on growing ponderosa pine at higher elevations. The trouble, Hurteau said, is that past fire footprints chosen for the research are in the line of fire again this year.

He also noted that modeling done last year on the upper Rio Grande watershed that spans Colorado and New Mexico suggested higher elevation forests would see the biggest impacts from wildfire and climate change through the end of the century.

"Here we have the Calf Canyon (Hermits Peak Fire) and it's ripping through those high elevation forests like it's no problem at all," he said of the fire currently burning. "I think we're consistently seeing actual conditions happening sooner than our models would suggest."

Many areas are going to need some attention, said Anne Bradley, the forest program director for The Nature Conservancy in New Mexico. The group has worked with Santa Clara Pueblo to collect seeds and plant thousands of tiny trees sown at the research center over the last few years in hopes of boosting the emerging science of reforestation.

But at this pace, she acknowledges the work will take centuries. Part of the goal, she said, is to find ways to do it cost-effectively.

Researchers also are looking at how the forest naturally regenerates after fire. Experts say mimicking nature by focusing on tree islands rather than dense swaths of timber could act as a hedge against the next wave of wildfires.

"The genetics really matter; it matters how you raise them in the nursery; it matters where you put that hole in the ground, how you harden those trees as seedlings," Bradley said. "Everything we do is an attempt to learn more and to see what our options might be."

Similar work is happening in Colorado, with thousands of seedlings from the center in Mora earmarked for reforestation projects there.

Larissa Yocom, an assistant professor at Utah State University's Wildland Resources Department, has plans for thousands of aspen seedlings that were rescued from the center. She and her team have worked in the footprint of a 2020 wildfire in southwest Utah. She's holding out hope that the large New Mexico fire won't dash plans for the latest experiment in an older burn scar just north of the fire line.

If the West wants to keep its forests, policymakers need to think about it in economic terms that would have significant benefits for water supplies, recreation and the rural and tribal communities that hold these mountain landscapes sacred, said Collin Haffey, forest and watershed health coordinator with the New Mexico Forestry Division.

Haffey said he can see, feel and smell the dryness that's overtaking the mountains.

He has been part of big project to replant areas of the Jemez Mountains in northern New Mexico, where several large blazes have burned over the last two decades, taking hundreds of homes with them. The latest fire still is creeping through some of the old burn scars.

"That's part of why the reforestation component is important to me because it does allow us — us be-

ing our communities — to find ways to start the healing and the recovery process,” he said. “It will take generations after these fires. But planting trees is one small thing we can do to potentially have a large impact further down the road.”

Arkansas governor is odd man out in his own state’s primary

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Based on the barrage of television ads and mailers leading up to Tuesday’s primary election in Arkansas, it’s obvious who the most influential Republicans in the state are.

Tom Cotton’s making the case for fellow Sen. John Boozman, talking up his conservative bona fides while the two-term senator fends off challenges from the right. Donald Trump’s image appears in ads for Boozman and for Sarah Sanders, who served as the former president’s White House press secretary and is now running for governor. Sanders, whose endorsement is almost as sought after as Trump’s, is helping make the closing argument for Boozman in a TV ad.

But conspicuously missing from the ads and the campaign trail is the state’s top elected Republican, Gov. Asa Hutchinson, who is entering the final stretch of his term with strong approval ratings and a raised national profile. Hutchinson’s advisers say that’s because he’s concentrating on helping more Republicans nationally as he looks to the future — which might include a White House bid.

But it’s also a sign of just how much the party that Hutchinson spent decades building here has shifted farther to the right and how much the state’s politics have become nationalized. In competitive primaries where Republicans are trying to out-Trump each other, even a longtime GOP figure in the state like Hutchinson doesn’t provide as much of a bump, especially if he’s not known for being very hard-edged.

“There are other, flashier wagons for them to hitch their horses to,” Janine Parry, a political science professor at the University of Arkansas, said.

And Hutchinson — who tweets Bible verses every Sunday morning and is often flanked by charts and graphs at news conferences — is anything but flashy.

Sanders, who’s widely favored to win the Republican nomination, has been endorsed by Hutchinson but rarely mentions the governor. When asked how she’d govern differently from Hutchinson, Sanders says she’d rather focus on her own approach.

“I’m very much my own person. I don’t like to compare myself to anybody,” Sanders, whose dad served as governor for 10 years, said. “I constantly get asked, ‘will you be more like your dad?’ or ‘will you be like Trump?’ I’m going to be Sarah Sanders.”

Sanders has avoided publicly criticizing Hutchinson, even when her former boss labeled the outgoing governor a “RINO” — Republican in Name Only — for his decision to veto an anti-transgender law. Sanders said she would have signed the measure, which bans gender confirming treatments for transgender youth. She’s running on a promise to phase out the state’s personal income tax following a series of cuts Hutchinson has championed over the years. When Hutchinson endorsed Sanders in November, she praised his work on cutting taxes.

Sanders faces a long-shot challenge in the primary from Doc Washburn, a former talk radio host and podcaster who points to Hutchinson’s endorsement as a disqualifying factor for Sanders. Five Democrats are seeking the party’s nomination for the office, with nuclear engineer and ordained minister Chris Jones the frontrunner.

Sanders has pitched in to help the soft-spoken Boozman adopt a more aggressive tone in tune with the scorched-earth political climate.

“I know John Boozman as a champion of President Trump’s America First agenda,” Sanders says in a TV ad for the senator.

A super PAC supporting one challenger, former NFL player Jake Bequette, has been running ads questioning Boozman’s conservative credentials. Boozman’s other challengers include conservative activist Jan Morgan and pastor Heath Loftis. Three Democrats — Natalie James, Jack Foster and Dan Whitfield — are seeking the party’s nomination for Boozman’s seat.

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Hutchinson, who declined to be interviewed for this story, has endorsed several legislative candidates in Arkansas and given money through his political action committee but advisers say his focus has been more on the national stage. Hutchinson has been donating to candidates elsewhere.

"It's just a little bit of a shift in focus on the political front as he looks to the future and says, 'how do I help candidates across the country?'" Jon Gilmore, chief political strategist for Hutchinson, said.

Hutchinson has raised his profile as chairman of the National Governors Association and has become a frequent guest on Sunday talk shows, often splitting with Trump and warning Republicans to look ahead rather than fixating on the 2020 election. He's said his decision on a 2024 presidential bid won't be affected by whether Trump joins the race.

What's important, he says, is that Republican candidates "run on the future and problem-solving," Hutchinson said Sunday on CNN's "State of the Union." Asked about Trump-backed candidates like Doug Mastriano, who won the Republican nomination for governor in Pennsylvania and has spread election conspiracy theories that the 2020 election was stolen, Hutchinson says "I hope he does" win, but also notes, "let's see how the campaign progresses."

"If you spend your time dealing with the past and election results of the last year, you're not going to be in good position," he said.

Hutchinson has also battled with the right flank of his party, pushing back against Republicans opposing rape and incest exceptions in abortion bans and against those who would bar businesses from requiring COVID-19 vaccinations.

Hutchinson's distancing from Trump has given him a broader appeal among independents and some Democrats that's helped keep his approval numbers strong, political observers say. Sanders has arrived at similar numbers with a much more polarizing approach.

"They built their houses very differently," Republican strategist Robert Coon said.

Climate to conflict, Davos' post-COVID return has full plate

By JAMEY KEATEN and MASHA MACPHERSON Associated Press

DAVOS, Switzerland (AP) — Davos — the hub of an elite annual gathering in the Swiss Alps — is back, more than two years after the coronavirus pandemic kept its business gurus, political leaders and high-minded activists away. There's no shortage of urgent issues for the World Economic Forum's annual meeting to tackle.

With their lofty ambition to help improve the state of the world, forum organizers have their work cut out for them: there are soaring food and fuel prices, Russia's war in Ukraine, climate change, drought and food shortages in Africa, yawning inequality between rich and poor, and autocratic regimes gaining ground in some places — on top of signs that the pandemic is far from over.

It's hard to predict if the high-minded discussions will yield substantial announcements that make headway on the world's most pressing challenges.

The war in Ukraine will be a key theme. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will speak on opening day Monday by video from Kyiv, while the country's foreign minister and a sizable delegation of other top Ukrainian officials will be on hand. They'll be joined this week by leaders like German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, U.S. climate envoy John Kerry, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

"There's no business as usual," forum President Borge Brende told The Associated Press, saying Ukraine is not the only worry. "It is also climate change. It is also that the global growth is slowing, and we have to avoid that this very weak recovery ends with a new recession because we have very limited ammunition to fight a new recession."

"A new recession will lead to increased unemployment, increased poverty," he added. "So much is at stake."

President Vladimir Putin's war means Russian business and political leaders haven't been invited to Davos this year. There will be no traditional "Russia House" social festivities with caviar and vodka spreads for

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the elite attendees of its evening fun.

Instead, critics — notably including Ukrainian tycoon Victor Pinchuk and the country's Foreign Ministry — have seized on some symbolism and vowed to voice their disgust, which is shared by many around the world.

"This year, Russia is not present at Davos, but its crimes will not go unnoticed. The 'Russia War Crimes House' takes place inside the former Russia House," organizers of the rechristened venue said in a press release.

Opening Monday, the venue will feature photos of crimes and cruelties that Russian forces are accused of perpetuating. Some victims will speak out — including Anatoliy Fedoruk, the mayor of Bucha, a town near Kyiv where images of killings of civilians drew outrage worldwide.

"It's important to understand what is really happening in Ukraine," said Bjorn Geldhof, artistic director of PinchukArtCentre, which is helping organize the exhibit. "Part of this exhibition is also to bring back a human face to those people who have become victim of these Russian war crimes."

Brende, the forum president, says scores of CEOs and other business leaders will be looking into ways the private sector can support Ukraine, "in the situation where Russia is breaking international law, international humanitarian law, and not sticking to the U.N. Charter."

Not everyone believe Davos is the place where solutions can be found.

A few dozen anti-capitalist demonstrators marching behind a "Smash WEF" banner clashed Friday with police in Zurich, Switzerland's largest city, a sign of simmering antagonism against economic elites whom they accuse of putting profits over people. Police used rubber bullets and pepper spray to disperse the crowd in what was deemed an unauthorized gathering.

While Ukraine will capture attention on the meeting's first day, climate and environmental issues will be a recurring, constant theme as the forum looks to future challenges as much as the current ones.

One-third of the roughly 270 panel discussions through Thursday's finale will focus on climate change or its effects, with extreme weather, efforts to reach "net zero" emissions and finding new, cleaner sources of energy on the agenda.

Forum managers — who have faced criticism about hosting wealthy executives who sometimes fly in on emissions-spewing corporate jets — have increasingly tried to play their part and inoculate themselves against accusations of hypocrisy: Over the last five years, they say they have offset 100% of the carbon emissions from the organization's activities by supporting environmental projects.

Experts say offsets can be problematic because there's no guarantee they'll deliver on reducing emissions.

Consumers defy inflation to support economy. For how long?

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — With prices across the economy — from food, gas and rent to cars, airfares and hotel rooms — soaring at their fastest pace in decades, you might think Americans would tap the brakes on spending.

Not so far. Consumers as a whole are showing surprising resilience, not only sustaining their spending but increasing it even after adjusting for inflation. In April, the government said, retail sales outpaced inflation for a fourth straight month. It was a reassuring sign that consumers — the primary drivers of America's economy — are still providing vital support and helping allay concerns that a recession might be near.

Yet at the same time, there are signs that some people, especially in lower-income households, are starting to cut back, by shifting to lower-priced or alternative items or by skipping some purchases altogether as inflation shrinks their disposable income.

Last week, for example, Walmart, which caters to price-conscious consumers, reported that more of them were favoring lower-cost store brands of lunch meat over pricier national brands and buying half-gallon cartons of milk rather than full gallons. Likewise, Kohl's, a mid-priced department store, said its customers were spending less on each visit.

All of which has spotlighted a question floating over the economy: How long will consumers as a whole

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continue to spend at healthy levels — even if through gritted teeth — despite the pressures they're feeling from inflation near 40-year highs? The answer will be key to whether the nation can avoid a recession as the Federal Reserve moves to sharply raise borrowing rates.

By most measures, consumers have downshifted from last year's blowout spending, which was fueled by stimulus checks and other government aid after the brutal pandemic recession. This year, noted Michelle Meyer, chief U.S. economist at the MasterCard Economics Institute, steadily surging prices have dimmed Americans' outlook for the economy.

Even so, Meyer said, there is some cause for optimism.

"There's still plenty of reasons to believe in the resilience of the consumer," she said, pointing to America's robust job market and the solid pay increases many people are receiving. "There is a certain amount of frustration as they navigate the environment we're in. But they're still spending."

Consider that even while consumer sentiment as measured by the University of Michigan plunged nearly 30% over the past year, Americans' spending outran inflation during that time. Economists at Michigan noted that there has been a "historic disconnect" between sentiment and actual consumer behavior.

Some economists warn that steady consumer spending won't likely last in the face of the Fed's aggressive credit tightening. And if consumer spending does stay strong, the Fed might eventually have to jack up rates even further to cool the economy and slow inflation. Earlier this month, in its quest to quell inflation, the Fed raised its benchmark rate by a half-percentage point and signaled additional large rate hikes to come. Some fear the economy could slide into recession next year.

Still, several trends are driving Americans' spending, including rising pay, savings amassed during the pandemic and a rebound in credit card use. Those savings and continued wage gains, economists say, could fuel healthy spending throughout this year.

Consumers have been shifting much of their spending away from appliances, electronics and exercise equipment — the kinds of goods many splurged on early in the pandemic while hunkered down at home — to travel, entertainment and other services. The intensity of that shift has caught many retailers off guard and contributed to some negative earnings reports.

Brian Cornell, Target's CEO, said that chain "did not expect to see the dramatic shift" in spending away from TVs, appliances and patio furniture and toward luggage, restaurant gift cards and other items that reflect Americans' increased desire to leave home and spend.

Southwest Airlines has said that surging demand for air travel will keep it profitable through this year. Though average fares jumped 32% in the first quarter from a year earlier, the carrier said it's seen no sign of curtailed demand.

For many people, the opportunity to travel after two years of restrictions is outweighing the financial pressures of higher prices.

Mike and Marsha Dyslin, who live in San Jose, flew to Washington, D.C., last week to visit their daughter, Sarah, a graduate student at Georgetown University.

"She's been out here at school for two years, and we haven't visited the whole time because of COVID," Marsha Dyslin said. "Your priorities change."

To save on gas, Mike Dyslin said they've been driving their Toyota Prius more than their SUV but otherwise haven't made major changes in their spending habits.

Soaring gas and food prices have led other consumers, though, to start pulling back. The national average cost of a gallon of gas has jumped to \$4.59, up a painful 50%-plus from a year earlier, according to AAA.

Walmart has said its shoppers are visiting its gas stations more frequently but filling up less each time. And Kohl's last week reported a drop in the payment rate for its store cards after a year in which customers made sizable payments. Higher levels of card debt raise the risk of increased delinquencies.

Dan Gabel, a musician in Millbury, Massachusetts, has pared his entertainment spending as costs have soared far beyond what he earns. Gabel, a big-band leader and trombonist, is facing soaring prices not just for gas but also for many items he needs for work — from dry cleaning band uniforms to lubricant for maintaining instruments to the cost of paper and ink to print music scores.

To save money, Gabel, 33, and his partner, an opera singer, have dropped HBO and Netflix. Though the

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music gigs have been steady, Gabel now takes the train, if he can, rather than drive when he performs out of town.

"We're feeling the crunch," Gabel said. "It's all these little things that do add up."

Nationally, though, the overall resilience of consumer spending illustrates a trend that can perpetuate inflation: Though people hate higher prices, they often keep paying them if their wages are also rising.

"Inflation doesn't cure itself," said Laura Veldkamp, a finance professor at Columbia University. "If the prices of goods and wages rise together, then that doesn't necessarily bring down demand."

Across the economy, median wages jumped 6% in April from a year earlier, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta. That was the largest increase since 1990, though it was below the inflation rate of 8.3%.

A surprisingly large portion of workers, though, are receiving pay gains that exceed inflation: About 45% did so in March compared with a year earlier, according to research by the Indeed Hiring Lab.

Nick Bunker and AnnElizabeth Konkol, economists at Indeed, called it "remarkable" that that figure was so high given the level of inflation. It shows, they said, how desperate many employers are to find and keep workers with unemployment just 3.6% and posted job openings near record highs.

Many other consumers have had to draw on their savings to keep spending. The national saving rate has fallen to about 6%, below pre-pandemic levels, after having reached 16.6% in 2020, the highest on records dating to 1948, and 12.7% in 2021.

And with more Americans turning to credit cards for spending, household debt rose 8.2% in the first three months of this year compared with a year earlier. It was the biggest such increase since early 2008, when the economy was entering a recession.

Economists say, though, that overall debt hasn't yet reached problematic levels. They estimate that households still have about \$2 trillion in savings beyond what they would have had based on pre-pandemic trends.

And Paul Ashworth, an economist at Capital Economics, notes that household debt is equal to 86% of disposable income, sharply lower than its peak of 116% in 2008.

"Never bet against the U.S. consumer," Ashworth said.

Heard's lawyers try to poke holes in Depp's libel lawsuit

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

Attorneys for actor Amber Heard spent much of last week trying to portray her ex-husband, Johnny Depp, as a jealous and drunken abuser who can only blame himself for his nose-diving Hollywood career.

Since Heard concluded her testimony in a Virginia courtroom Tuesday, her lawyers have presented witness testimony from people who were once close to Depp but shunted from his orbit. They've included Depp's former longtime agent, the actor Ellen Barkin and Heard's sister.

The attorneys' goal: Undermine Depp's libel suit against Heard. The suit claims she falsely portrayed him as a domestic abuser and cost him his lucrative film career, including the "Pirates of the Caribbean" movie franchise.

Depp points to a 2018 Washington Post op-ed in which Heard described herself as "a public figure representing domestic abuse." Depp's lawyers say he was defamed by the article even though it never mentioned his name.

The trial will enter its sixth week when it resumes Monday. Below are snippets of testimony from some of the witnesses called last week by Heard's attorneys in their attempt to poke holes in Depp's case.

DEPP'S HOLLYWOOD CAREER

Depp blames Heard's 2018 op-ed for spinning his career into free fall. But Heard's lawyers claim that only Depp can be responsible for his star dimming in the Hollywood firmament.

Tracey Jacobs, who served as the actor's agent for about 30 years, said that Depp was "showing up late to set consistently on virtually every movie" during their final years working together.

"I was very honest with him and said, 'You've got to stop doing this – this is hurting you,'" Jacobs said

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during a previously taped deposition that was played for jurors. "And it did."

In the years before he fired her in 2016, Jacobs said that Depp became increasingly unprofessional, while his drug and alcohol use rose.

She also said that Depp wore earpieces on movie sets so that lines from the script could be fed to him.

"Initially, crews loved him because he was always so great with the crew. But crews don't love sitting around for hours and hours and hours waiting for the star of the movie to show up," Jacobs said.

"And it also got around town," Jacobs added. "I mean, people talk, it's a small community. And it made people reluctant to use him."

Heard's lawyers also zeroed on the reported loss of Depp's role in the sixth "Pirates of the Caribbean" film. And they played the video deposition of Tina Newman, a Walt Disney Studios production executive.

Lawyers asked her: "Are you aware of any decision maker within Disney who has ever said they are not casting Johnny Depp in 'Pirates 6' — or any other role — because of Amber Heard's op-ed?"

"No," Newman said.

DEPP'S ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

Depp has testified that he never struck Heard and that he was the victim of abuse inflicted by his now ex-wife. Heard's lawyers counter that Depp did abuse her, both physically and sexually, and that he can't deny what happened because he was often too intoxicated to remember.

Jurors heard recorded testimony from a mutual friend of the couple, iO Tillett Wright, who said Depp confided to him that he hated sobriety.

"He wanted to get sober for Amber," Tillett Wright said. "He didn't enjoy being sober. It wasn't fun, and that it was distressing and exhausting and very hard to do. He really, really resented having to be sober."

Tillett Wright said Depp's personality turned mean and paranoid when he was using alcohol or drugs.

Bruce Witkin, a musician who was friends with Depp for nearly 40 years, testified in his deposition that he tried to help Depp with his substance abuse.

"He'd say, 'I'll be all right. I'll be all right,'" Witkin said, recalling a conversation. "Well, you're not all right."

Actor Ellen Barkin, who dated Depp for a few months in in the 1990s, said during her deposition that Depp was "always drinking or smoking a joint" or doing other illegal drugs.

WAS DEPP A JEALOUS LOVER?

To hear Barkin tell it — yes.

Barkin said that Depp was controlling, jealous and angry. She said Depp would often ask her: "Where are you going? Who are you going with? What did you do last night?"

She added: "I had a scratch on my back once that got him very, very angry because he insisted it came from me having sex with a person who wasn't him."

Witkin, the musician and former Depp friend, said the actor displayed signs of jealousy in relationships going back to the 1980s, when Depp was married to Witkin's sister-in-law.

"When he was younger, he was jealous of Nick Cage and jealous of Adam Ant because my sister-in-law knew them," Witkin said.

There also were a few times when Depp became jealous during his relationship with French singer Vanessa Paradis, "which were ridiculous," Witkin said.

"A lot of it was in his head and not really in reality," Witkin said.

Depp's jealousy with Heard emerged when she was off filming a movie "or doing something that he couldn't be around to see what was going on," Witkin said. "I think he would work himself up."

TESTIMONY FROM HEARD'S SISTER

Amber Heard's sister, Whitney Heard Henriquez, said she personally witnessed Depp hitting Heard. Depp has testified he never struck Heard.

Henriquez testified the fight occurred in March 2015 — a month after Depp and Heard's wedding — when Heard found evidence that Depp had already had an extramarital affair.

Henriquez recounted that an inebriated Depp blamed Heard for forcing him into the extramarital encounter.

At one point, she said, she was caught between Depp and Heard as he charged up a staircase to confront

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Heard. Henriquez said she was struck in the back, and Heard became enraged and “landed one” on Depp. One of Depp’s bodyguards intervened, but “by that time Johnny had already grabbed Amber by the hair with one hand and was whacking her repeatedly in the face with the other,” Henriquez said.

It was the only time, Henriquez said, that she personally witnessed a physical assault. But she said she saw the aftermath of other fights, including bruises on Heard.

However, Henriquez acknowledged on cross-examination that she sided with Depp at times in their disputes, and said she worked to keep the couple together even after she watched her sister be physically assaulted.

“If my sister said that she still wanted to be with Johnny and if I could help with that in any way I was going to support her,” she said.

DAVOS DIARY: Train, not plane means scenery, carbon cutting

By KELVIN CHAN Associated Press

DAVOS, Switzerland (AP) — If you’re coming to Davos this year, try to take the train instead of flying, organizers of the World Economic Forum said.

So I did.

That meant a 12-hour journey from London to the exclusive gathering in the Swiss Alps, which I’m helping cover for The Associated Press.

Taking a train is much less convenient than a plane, but the scenery made up for it — the rolling farm fields of England and France gave way to Switzerland’s towering mountains and idyllic valleys dotted with chalets. And my carbon footprint will be a lot lower than a flight.

To many, Davos conjures up images of government leaders, billionaire elites and corporate titans jetting in on carbon-spewing private planes even as the meeting increasingly focuses on climate change.

Organizers have been stung by such criticism, even dedicating a webpage in past years to debunk those claims. Encouraging European attendees to come by train is part of their efforts to burnish the event’s sustainability credentials amid criticism it’s merely a talking shop that doesn’t produce systemic change.

I’m not the first to go by train. Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg famously took a 32-hour train ride to get to the Davos meeting in 2019, where she astonished participants with a fiery speech. I’m also riding a broader wave of traveler interest in train trips over short-haul flights tied to climate guilt.

My journey begins at London’s St. Pancras International train station, where I board the high-speed Eurostar that whisks me through a tunnel under the English Channel to Paris in about two and a half hours. There I take a short metro ride to another train station for the next four-hour leg to Zurich.

By plane, I would have been crammed on a discount flight from London’s Gatwick Airport for the hour and 40-minute flight to Zurich, the closest airport to Davos.

But for those who don’t live in Europe, a plane ride is unavoidable. And to speed up my trip after days of back-to-back speeches from government leaders and sessions about decarbonization, the global economic outlook and the impact of Russia’s war in Ukraine, that’s how I’ll be traveling home.

Aboard the French high-speed TGV train, the first-class seats are comfy and spacious and the upper deck view offers pleasant scenes of the countryside whizzing by at 320 kilometers an hour (about 200 mph).

If I had flown, my 870-kilometer trip would have emitted up to 197 kilograms (434 pounds) of carbon dioxide per passenger into the atmosphere.

The same trip by train would contribute a fraction of that amount — 12.2 kilograms, according to ecopassenger.org.

World Economic Forum officials say climate is a priority for this year’s meeting and tout its green credentials.

“The overwhelming majority of participants arrive by shuttle or by train, and emissions in Davos actually go down during the week of the meeting,” forum Managing Director Adrian Monck told reporters ahead of the event, without elaborating.

Organizers say that since 2017 they have offset 100% of the carbon emissions from the group’s activities

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by supporting environmental projects in Switzerland and elsewhere. Experts say offsets can be problematic because there's no guarantee they'll deliver on reducing emissions.

The forum also can provide sustainable jet fuel at Zurich's airport for those who take private jets.

"It's probably one of the most sustainably organized meetings in the world, if not the most sustainable," Monck said.

High-profile attendees include U.S. climate envoy John Kerry, Ugandan climate activist Vanessa Nakate and Alok Sharma, head of last year's U.N. climate conference, COP26.

Kerry, who has been criticized for his use of a private jet belonging to his wife's family, will be traveling by commercial plane to the Davos meeting, his spokesperson said.

Sharma, a British lawmaker who drew flak last year for his frequent flights, will travel by plane and train.

"Carbon emissions associated with the COP President's travel will be offset for the Presidency year," the U.K. government said, without providing further details.

Nakate declined to comment on her travel.

Aviation accounts for about 2% of global carbon emissions.

The World Economic Forum has acknowledged that "from an environmental perspective, taking a private jet is the worst way to travel to Davos."

Private jets emit about 10 times the carbon dioxide per person that commercial flights do and about 50 times more than an equivalent train journey, said Jo Dardenne, aviation manager at Brussels-based climate policy group Transport & Environment.

Jet engines also spew soot and nitrous oxide, which contributes to pollution around airports and heat-trapping atmospheric contrails, she said.

Sustainable jet fuel is a step in the right direction, depending on the source, but carbon offsetting deserves more skepticism because of concerns such as double counting, she said.

"It's just especially a bit socially and politically unfair for some sectors to continue to rely on offsetting instead of actually reducing their emissions," while others face pressure to reduce their climate impact, Dardenne said.

Eymeric Segard, CEO of Swiss private jet chartering company LunaJets, said some VIPs have no other choice than to fly private.

"Because of their visibility and fact that everybody knows them, they just cannot take a commercial aircraft," he said.

"Some don't have three weeks free to take sailboats to cross the Atlantic like our friend Greta. So what's the alternative?"

Segard declined to discuss how much demand he's seeing for travel to Davos but said his company, which acts like a taxi dispatcher for private jets, tries to reduce carbon emissions by looking for "empty leg flights," which have already been chartered but have extra seats.

Not only is it cheaper but "the planet is happy because anyway the plane was gonna fly, so at least we put someone on it," he said.

From Zurich's main train station, I change again, this time boarding a slower local train. This is where most people can't avoid rail as they head to Davos, which doesn't have an airport, unless they take a shuttle or helicopter from Zurich or two other small nearby airports.

Fashionably dressed people hauling expensive-looking luggage climbed aboard, mentioning to others what panels they're part of in Davos.

The train skirts Lake Zurich and heads into the mountains. After another quick change at a local station, I'm down to my last hour, and the scenery becomes more impressive with each mile.

The narrow-gauge train trundles through steep valleys and alongside whitewater rivers, overshadowed by forested peaks with chalets scattered on grassy lower slopes until arriving in Davos. Here my journey ends but my work for the week begins.

EXPLAINER: What are the key climate themes at Davos?

By PETER PRENGAMAN Associated Press

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DAVOS, Switzerland (AP) — While the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war in Ukraine will be focuses of the World Economic Forum's gathering of business and government leaders, so too will climate change. It's captured the world's attention in unignorable and devastating ways.

The acceleration of rising temperatures, the ferocity and costliness of major weather events, and the impact, particularly on people in developing countries, have pushed the issue from one of science to something that touches every aspect of life, including (or, perhaps especially) business and economics.

Of the roughly 270 panels Monday through Thursday, one-third are about climate change or its direct effects. U.S. climate envoy John Kerry, Ugandan climate activist Vanessa Nakate and Alok Sharma, president of last year's international climate conference COP26, are among the climate leaders expected in the Swiss resort town of Davos.

At the forum's first in-person gathering in two years, the climate panels are as varied as the issue. They range from combating "eco-anxiety" to helping debt-ridden countries finance a renewable transition. Here's a look at some broader themes that are likely to emerge:

ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, GOVERNANCE

Several panels will wrestle with an approach to investing that considers the environment and other key factors. Known by the acronym ESG, it's become a force, with trillions of dollars invested in companies that meet certain criteria.

When it comes to climate change, ESG can be important. For individual investors all the way up to firms and government agencies that analyze how companies operate, disclosures and public declarations are paramount. They can be the basis of evaluating a company's emissions, environmental impact and financial risks tied to climate change.

They are also controversial and raise questions: Should certain declarations be mandatory? Should they be standardized and regulated, and by whom? Or has the ESG movement already gone too far, ultimately hindering investment and doing little to rein in greenhouse gas emissions?

Viewpoints sometimes fall along political lines. In the U.S., many Republicans call them "woke," while many on the left, particularly environmentalists and campaigners, argue that ramping up reporting and transparency could lead to real change.

Many managers of some of the world's largest mutual funds have argued ESG is essential to evaluate risk. Just last week, Tesla CEO Elon Musk said the approach had "been weaponized by phony social justice warriors."

ENERGY TRANSITION AND 'NET ZERO'

The world's top climate scientists have warned that significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions this decade is necessary to minimize warming and avoid the most devastating effects to the planet. That will require major changes in how business is done, from the way products are produced to how they are transported.

Several panels will look at areas where businesses have successfully transitioned much of their energy portfolio to renewables, the role of finance and government to incentivize or mandate changes, and strategies to keep businesses accountable. Despite heightened consciousness and pledges by businesses, emissions are going up worldwide.

"Moving climate debate from ambition to delivery" is a title of one panel that sums up the enormous challenge.

Sessions will look at sectors, like decarbonizing shipping and aviation, renewable transition plans and the challenges of achieving them in countries like China and India. There will be discussion of strategies to ensure major shifts are inclusive and consider people in historically marginalized countries, which are feeling some of the most intense effects of climate change.

An important current through all the discussions will be identifying what "net zero" is — and isn't — when looking at pledges from companies and countries. Moving away from fossil fuels like coal and oil to renewables like solar and wind can reduce emissions and get a company closer to goals of taking an equal amount of emissions out of the atmosphere as it puts in.

But a transition to renewables often makes up only a small part of company plans. Many rely on balanc-

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ing their carbon footprint by investing in forest restoration or other projects. While better than nothing, experts note that depending on carbon offsets doesn't represent a shift in business practices.

WAR IN UKRAINE AND THE FUTURE OF ENERGY

Russia's war in Ukraine will loom large at the conference. When it comes to climate change, the conflict raises two central questions: How should countries respond to energy shocks from reducing or being cut off from Russian oil and gas? And will the war hasten the transition to renewable energies or help fossil fuel companies maintain the status quo?

Since the war began, there has been no shortage of businesses, environmentalists and political leaders trying to influence the answers to those questions, which will carry over to Davos.

"Energy Security and the European Green Deal" is one panel where participants are expected to argue that the way forward is away from fossil fuels. But European countries, some of which are heavily reliant on Russia for energy, also are scrambling to find other sources of natural gas and oil to meet short-term needs.

While no sessions explicitly make the case for a doubling down on reliance on fossil fuels or expanding extraction or exploration, if the last few months are any guide, those points of view will certainly be present.

GOP candidate's security clearance becomes issue in SC

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

SUMMERVILLE, S.C. (AP) — After losing a high-profile bid for a South Carolina congressional seat in 2018, Republican Katie Arrington took a job at the Defense Department, where she focused on securing military supply chains, ensuring thousands of companies that contract with the federal government were implementing cybersecurity protocols.

Arrington's civil servant work as chief information officer for the Acquisition and Sustainment Office was in line with what she characterizes as her longtime passion for cybersecurity and defense. But as she seeks to revive her political career, Arrington's time at the Pentagon is becoming a central issue in her campaign.

Freshman GOP Rep. Nancy Mace, whom Arrington hopes to defeat in South Carolina's June 14 primary, is calling on Arrington to take a lie detector test about why she lost access to classified information. A Mace-funded, anti-Arrington website, meanwhile, has sections labeled "Leaks Classified Information" and "Busted: Loses Her Security Clearance."

The dispute is likely to surface at a debate between the two on Monday.

The episode reflects the intensity of one of the most closely watched GOP congressional primaries this year. Former President Donald Trump, who endorsed Mace in 2020, has backed Arrington's bid to unseat her, infuriated by the incumbent's criticism of him, including his role in inciting the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. The result will be another barometer of Trump's influence within the GOP as he weighs another potential White House bid.

Mace's campaign has argued that Arrington's clearance status is fair game for someone seeking to represent a congressional district with a heavy military population. But in an interview, Arrington insisted Mace was "lying" about the issue. She's stepping up an effort to rebut the attacks, including providing a sworn affidavit to The Associated Press from an unnamed intelligence officer who worked with her and said he never worried about her handling of classified information.

Arrington's security clearance was suspended and she was placed on leave from the Pentagon in May 2021 when officials accused her of an improper disclosure of classified information.

Arrington says the incident centered on her communication with a contractor whose name had been revealed in a top-secret briefing she received — an "unmasking" she said had already happened by the time the information came into her hands.

In the interview, she said that during her daily briefing, an intelligence officer relayed to her information related to a possible problem with the contractor. According to Arrington, both she and the officer were surprised the name of the contractor was included in the information but accepted that a higher-up had made that determination.

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Being told the company had already been notified of the issue, Arrington said she followed protocol, by first briefing a supervisor before calling the company to see if she could be of assistance — a call that Arrington said triggered the probe that resulted in her suspension.

The intelligence officer who passed on the information has come forth to support Arrington. In an April 27 affidavit shared with AP, the officer — who is not being identified due to his continued employment as an intelligence briefer — wrote that he never had concerns about Arrington's access to classified information.

"I never saw her mishandle any classified information or documents from that program," the briefer wrote in a sworn statement. "I am at a complete loss based on my specific knowledge of the matter as to what security infraction was allegedly committed."

In the affidavit, the briefer also noted that superiors told him Arrington "committed a security violation by sharing information with a defense contractor using unsecured means" and asked him "a series of questions" about Arrington's political affiliations, which Arrington argues had already been widely known, given her previous congressional bid.

Arrington also said her politics had come up soon after the Biden administration took over at the Pentagon. In early 2021, Arrington said she asked her new supervisor, Jesse Salazar, how much cybersecurity experience he had, to which she says Salazar responded, "Absolutely none."

"But the part that scared me," Arrington told AP, "was the question he asked me back: 'Why are you still here? I thought we fired all you people.'"

Though Arrington had a political background, she was classified as a civil servant at the Pentagon, making such a comment inappropriate, she said.

"I literally got blacklisted because I was a Republican, because I was associated with Trump," she said.

The Pentagon has declined to comment on Arrington's employment, citing her ongoing Freedom of Information Act lawsuit over communications related to her suspension, and AP has been unable to otherwise confirm her characterization of the political conversations with Pentagon officials.

In its response to that litigation — which includes Arrington's assertion that Pentagon officials did not "want Arrington serving in a senior position within the Biden Administration due to her close previous ties with President Trump" — Defense Department officials repeatedly wrote that the accusations "contain Plaintiff's characterization of alleged background information, not allegations of fact pertinent to the resolution of the claims at issue in this FOIA action to which a response would be required."

According to Arrington, the briefing officer asked that his affidavit be declassified so Arrington could share it while her Freedom of Information Act claim proceeds against the Department of Defense.

The probe into Arrington's clearance dragged on throughout 2021, with Arrington suing the Pentagon in October, accusing officials of failing to take "any significant substantive steps to move their investigation forward." The claim was settled in January, with the Pentagon paying her attorney fees but not providing "any useful meaningful facts to allow Arrington to actually substantively respond to the allegations," according to Arrington's subsequent FOIA lawsuit, filed in April.

At no time, though, was her clearance fully revoked, which Mace has claimed. And according to Arrington, she retained her department-issued laptop, cellphone, secure information access device, and diplomatic passport, all of which were viewed by AP at her home.

The National Security Agency referred comment on her dispute to the Pentagon, which declined to comment on the allegation.

Arrington resigned days after her job was dissolved in February, subsequently launching her campaign against Mace.

School counselors sound cry for help after Buffalo shooting

By JOCELYN GECKER and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

Every school, it seems, has a moment that crystallizes the crisis facing America's youth and the pressure it is putting on educators.

For one middle school counselor in rural California, it came this year after a suicide prevention seminar,

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when 200 students emerged saying they needed help. Many were sixth graders.

Another school counselor in Massachusetts tells of a high school student who spent two weeks in a hospital emergency room before he could get an inpatient bed in a psychiatric unit.

For many schools, last weekend's shooting rampage in Buffalo, carried out by an 18-year-old who had been flagged for making a threatening comment at his high school last year, prompted staff discussions on how they might respond differently.

Robert Bardwell, director of school counseling for Tantasqua Regional High School in Fiskdale, Massachusetts, said the shooting in upstate New York shaped how he handled a threat assessment this week. He told staff, "Dot our i's, cross our t's because I don't want to be on the news in a year, or five years, saying that the school didn't do something that we should have to prevent this."

A surge in student mental health needs, combined with staff shortages and widespread episodes of misbehavior and violence, has put extraordinary strain on school counselors and psychologists. The Buffalo shooting highlights their concerns over their ability to support students and adequately screen those who might show potential for violence.

When the accused shooter in Buffalo, Payton Gendron, was asked in spring 2021 by a teacher at his Binghamton, New York, high school about his plans after graduation, he responded that he wanted to commit a murder-suicide, according to law enforcement. The comment resulted in state police being called and a mental health evaluation at a hospital, where he claimed he was joking and was cleared to attend his graduation.

"I get that schools are still safe. And I believe that," said Bardwell, who is also executive director of the Massachusetts School Counselors Association. "But it also feels like there's more and more kids that are struggling. And some of those kids who struggle might do bad things."

Childhood depression and anxiety were on the rise for years before the pandemic, experts say, and the school closures and broader social lockdowns during the pandemic exacerbated the problems. The return to in-person classes has been accompanied by soaring numbers of school shootings, according to experts who say disputes are ending in gunfire as more students bring weapons to school. Teachers say disrespect and defiance have increased. Tempers are shorter and flaring faster.

"The tagline I would go with is the kids are not all right," said Erich Merkle, a psychologist for Akron Public Schools in Ohio, a district of about 21,000 students that he said is dealing with an increase in student depression, anxiety, suicidality and substance use, as well as aggression and violence, among other behavioral problems. "I can tell you that therapists are struggling."

Many parents had hoped that as classrooms reopened, the troubles of distance learning would fade away. But it quickly became clear that the prolonged isolation and immersion in screens and social media had lasting effects. Schools have become a stage where the pandemic's ripple effects are playing out.

School staff is "100% taxed," said Jennifer Correnti, director of school counseling at Harrison High School in New Jersey, where counselors have been under strain as they help students acclimate after two school years of pandemic learning disruptions. "Everybody. Administrators, staff. Like, there's no one that's escaping. There is no one leaving school feeling amazed every day."

Suicide risk assessments, in particular, are up sharply. The 15-year counselor says she has done as many of them in the past three years as she did in the 12 years prior.

She and Merkle both said that they use mass shootings like the one in Buffalo, and another one in which a 15-year-old shot four classmates in Michigan, to discuss how they would have responded.

At Livingston Middle School in rural central California, counselors have conducted suicide prevention lessons in classrooms for years. Pre-pandemic, the lessons would result in about 30 students saying they wanted to see a counselor, said Alma Lopez, the district's counselor coordinator and one of two counselors at the middle school.

"This year I got 200 kids, which is a quarter of our student population," she said. "That is such a huge number. I can't see 200 kids every week. That is just impossible."

Many of the kids seeking help were sixth graders with issues related to friendships, she said.

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Quickly, school staffers made changes, holding as many one-on-one sessions as they could, providing more group lessons on mental health, and putting flyers in every classroom with the suicide prevention hotline number.

They brought back as many activities, clubs and assemblies as they could to help kids connect. And Lopez said she is constantly reminding her district that more support is needed, a plea echoed by her peers nationwide.

Most states are struggling with mental health support in schools, according to a recent report from the Hopeful Futures Campaign, a coalition of national mental health organizations. In some states, including West Virginia, Missouri, Texas and Georgia, there is only one school psychologist for over 4,000 students, the report says.

Lopez oversees a caseload of about 400 students at her school in Livingston, California — far more than the ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association of one counselor for every 250 students.

"It's a huge strain right now," she said. Many students in her school are the children of farmworkers in a community that was hit hard by COVID-19 infections and deaths. She worries about missing something important.

"I think a lot can get lost," she said. "If we don't intervene in time, the issues that come with grief are going to be compounded in a big way to create additional challenges."

Lopez and other counselors convened a discussion early last week on how to help students process fears related to the Buffalo shooting and whether it was safe to go to the supermarket.

Federal relief money has helped address shortages of mental health professionals at some schools, although some have struggled to find qualified hires or used the aid to train existing staff.

The challenges are compounded by an increase in gun violence on school grounds, said David Riedman, a criminologist and co-founder of the K-12 School Shooting Database, which keeps a national tally of instances when a gun is fired at schools.

According to that tally, there were 249 shootings in K-12 schools in 2021, more than twice the number in any year since 2018, when Riedman began the database. So far this year, there have been 122 shootings.

There is also a notable difference from previous years, he said: Many of the incidents were not planned attacks, but typical disputes that ended in gunfire.

Mental health specialists outside of schools have been feeling the strain, as well, said Bardwell, referring to his student with a history of mental illness and who spent two weeks this year in an ER waiting to be admitted for psychiatric care.

It highlights the country's broken health care system, he said, and shows the state does not have enough residential mental health capacity, especially for adolescents.

Richard Tench, a counselor at St. Albans High School in West Virginia, said it's impossible to refer students who need outside counseling to therapists in his area.

"All our referrals are full. We are wait-listed," he said. "If the referrals are full, where do we turn?"

Today in History: May 23, Bonnie and Clyde shot to death

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, May 23, the 143rd day of 2022. There are 222 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 23, 1984, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop issued a report saying there was "very solid" evidence linking cigarette smoke to lung disease in non-smokers.

On this date:

In 1430, Joan of Arc was captured by the Burgundians, who sold her to the English.

In 1533, the marriage of England's King Henry VIII to Catherine of Aragon was declared null and void by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer.

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In 1915, Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary during World War I.

In 1934, bank robbers Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker were shot to death in a police ambush in Bienville Parish, Louisiana.

In 1937, industrialist and philanthropist John D. Rockefeller, founder of the Standard Oil Co. and the Rockefeller Foundation, died in Ormond Beach, Florida, at age 97.

In 1939, the Navy submarine USS Squalus sank during a test dive off the New England coast. Thirty-two crew members and one civilian were rescued, but 26 others died; the sub was salvaged and recommissioned the USS Sailfish.

In 1944, during World War II, Allied forces bogged down in Anzio began a major breakout offensive.

In 1945, Nazi official Heinrich Himmler committed suicide by biting into a cyanide capsule while in British custody in Luneburg, Germany.

In 1967, Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, an action that helped precipitate war between Israel and its Arab neighbors the following month.

In 1975, comedian Jackie "Moms" Mabley, 81, died in White Plains, New York.

In 2007, President George W. Bush, speaking at the U.S. Coast Guard commencement, portrayed the Iraq war as a battle between the U.S. and al-Qaida and said Osama bin Laden was setting up a terrorist cell in Iraq to strike targets in America.

In 2016, during his visit to Asia, President Barack Obama, eager to banish lingering shadows of the Vietnam War, lifted the U.S. embargo on selling arms to America's former enemy. Prosecutors failed for the second time in their bid to hold Baltimore police accountable for the arrest and death of Freddie Gray, as an officer was acquitted in the racially charged case that triggered riots a year earlier.

Ten years ago: Egypt held the Arab world's first competitive presidential vote. (Islamist Mohammed Morsi was ultimately named the winner following a runoff.)

Five years ago: President Donald Trump made a personal appeal for peace between Israel and the Palestinians as he closed a four-day swing through the Middle East. Roger Moore, the star of seven James Bond films, died in Switzerland at age 89.

One year ago: A cable car taking visitors to a mountaintop view of northern Italy's most picturesque lakes plummeted to the ground and tumbled down a slope, killing 14 people. (The lone survivor, a 6-year-old boy, became the subject of a custody battle between family members in Italy and Israel; the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that he should be returned to his relatives in Italy.) A Ryanair jetliner flying from Greece to Lithuania was forced to land in Belarus so authorities there could arrest a passenger, journalist Raman Pratasevich, a key foe of authoritarian Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. At age 50, Phil Mickelson won the PGA Championship in South Carolina to become the oldest major champion in golf history. Children's author and illustrator Eric Carle, known for the classic "The Very Hungry Caterpillar," died at 91 in Massachusetts.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Barbara Barrie is 91. Actor Joan Collins is 89. Actor Charles Kimbrough is 86. International Tennis Hall of Famer John Newcombe is 78. Actor Lauren Chapin is 77. Country singer Judy Rodman is 71. Chess grandmaster Anatoly Karpov is 71. Singer Luka Bloom is 67. Former baseball manager Buck Showalter is 66. Actor-comedian-game show host Drew Carey is 64. Actor Lea DeLaria is 64. Country singer Shelly West is 64. Author Mitch Albom is 64. Actor Linden Ashby is 62. Actor-model Karen Duffy is 61. Actor Melissa McBride is 57. Rock musician Phil Selway (Radiohead) is 55. Actor Laurel Holloman is 54. Rock musician Matt Flynn (Maroon 5) is 52. Country singer Brian McComas is 50. Actor John Pollono is 50. Singer Maxwell is 49. Singer Jewel is 48. Game show contestant Ken Jennings is 48. Actor LaMonica Garrett is 47. Actor D.J. Cotrona is 42. Actor Lane Garrison is 42. Actor-comedian Tim Robinson is 41. Actor Adam Wylie is 38. Movie writer-director Ryan Coogler is 36. Golfer Morgan Pressel is 34. Actor Alberto Frezza is 33. Folk/pop singer/songwriter Sarah Jarosz (juh-ROHZ') is 31.