

Groton Daily Independent

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"We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future."

-George Bernard Shaw



Saturday, May 28

State Track Meet in Sioux Falls

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

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

Friday, May 27

Senior Menu: Ranch chicken, boiled potatoes, green beans, cake with strawberries, whole wheat bread.

State Track Meet in Sioux Falls

7:30 p.m.: Amateurs at Clark

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

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

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Ken's HELP WANTED! Groton Store

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

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Landon Kokales

Son of Todd Kokales and Paula Kokales of Aberdeen.

Sister: Kiana. Hobbies: video games.

School/community activities: FFA.

Favorite high school memory: State FFA.

Future plans: Pursue education at DSU for Computer Game Design.



**JAMES
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Jace Kroll

Son of Joel and Jessica Kroll of Groton.

Brothers: Ethan and Connor.

Hobbies: Video games, robotics, and FFA.

School/community activities: robotics, soccer, and FFA.

Future plans: go to SDSU.

Awards: SDSU Yellow & Blue Scholarship, SDSU Lohr Scholarship, Principal's 4 year Honor Roll



Weber Landscaping

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Lane Robert Krueger

Son of Jermey and Amy Krueger of Henry township.

Sister-Liza 13.

Hobbies: hunting, sowing cattle and hogs, and livestock judging.

School/community activities: wrestling, trap shooting, FFA, 4-H, underwater basket weaving club.

Future plans: attend Blackhawk college to Livestock Judge and go on for Ag Transfer degree and then go on to a 4 year for Animal Science and then become an Animal Neurolysis.

Awards: South Dakota Beef Boosters, Groton FFA Scholarship



Weber Landscaping

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Best of Luck! Congrats!

Kaden Lee Kurtz

Son of Ryan and Diane Kurtz of Groton.

Brothers and sister: Kasey-27, Courtney-25, Camryn-16

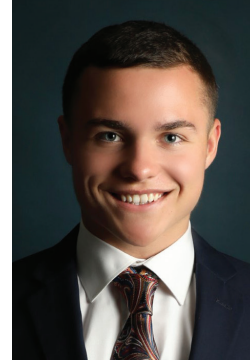
Hobbies: playing/watching sports, hanging with friends, going to the lake.

School/ Community Activities: football, basketball, track and field.

Favorite high school memory: being a participant in the 2022 State A Boys Basketball Tournament.

Future plans: Attend Northern State and get a degree in Exercise Science to hopefully become a Physical Therapist someday. I will also be playing football at NSU.

Awards: NSU Football Athletic Scholarship, Wolfpack Scholarship, Don Bartz Scholarship, Cortland & Lois Kuehnert Athletic Scholarship



Weber Landscaping

Setting Higher Standards

Jeremy Weber • 605/380-7811

Best of Luck! Congrats!

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Kody Jade Lehr

Son of Joan Lehr and Delwain Lehr of Bath.

Sister: Kayla Lehr.

Hobbies: watching football, working on cars, hanging out with friends.

School/community activities: soccer and 4-H.

Favorite high school memory: going to playoffs with the soccer team.

Future plans: Attend Lake Area Technical college for Custom Paint and Fabrication.

Awards: Groton Faith Forever Scholarship, Darlene Raap Scholarship



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Greg Johnson Construction, Inc.

Greg Johnson, Owner

Business: 605/492-3143 ~ Cell: 605/216-3143

Bristol, SD

Best wishes as you begin new adventures!

Riley Kay Leicht

Daughter of Sadie and Nick Leicht of Groton.
Brother and sisters: Regan-19, Sydney-15
Tucker-10.

Hobbies: hanging with friends and family,
shopping, being at the lake, playing soccer.

School/community activities: played soccer for 5 years, captain of soccer team, played volleyball for 5 years, ran track for 2 years, joined yearbook for 1 year, FCCLA member for 2 years, dance team for 2 years.

Favorite high school memory: graduating.

Future plans: attend Northern State University and major in Hsychology.

Award: Edna Bugner Scholarship



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Bristol, SD

Best wishes for a successful future!

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Macine Jo McGannon

Daughter of Sarah Sigdestad and Travis McGannon of Groton.

Brothers and sister: Tanner McGannon-17, Kayliegh McGannon-15, Dylan McGannon-13, Hudson McGannon-8.

Hobbies: Hanging out with friends.

School/Community activities: FCCLA.

Favorite high school memory: freshman year of formal

Future plans: Lake Area- 2 years for Human Services

Award: Lion's Scholarship



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Evin Edwin Nehls

Son of Kevin Nelhs and Shana Schoreder of Fargo.

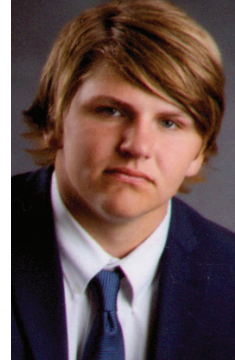
Brother: Garrett Schroeder- 20.

Hobbies: sports, bowling, and video games.

School/community activities: football, baseball, and soccer.

Favorite high school memory: graduating.

Future plans: attend college at NDSU for a major in Pharmacy.



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River Haven Pardick

Son of Jerrid Pardick and Tina Pardick of Conde.

Brothers and Sisters: Nevaeh, Sahara, Destin, Isabella, Noah, and Oliver.

Hobbies: Robotics and video games.

School/community activities: robotics and football.

Favorite high school memory: going to Iowa for Robotics.

Future plans: Undecided.



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Favian Sanchez-Gonzalez

From Rapid City.

Brother and sister: Angel-16, Estella-12.

School/community activities: football.

Favorite high school memory: graduating.

Future plans: work hard and become successful in life and possibly have a family of my own.



	New Construction Remodeling Hoop Barns Shops	13379 Sperry Ln, Bath
	Perry Blocker	605/216-2677 prblocker@hotmail.com

Congrats and Best Wishes!

Cassandra Ann Schultz

Daughter of Shawn and Melissa Schultz of Bath.

Brother: Garrett-14.

Hobbies: archery, dance

School/community activities: FFA, youth group.

Favorite high school memory: graduating.

Future plans: LATI, Physical Therapy Assisting.

Awards: Darlene Raap Scholarship, Groton FFA Scholarship



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Trinity Lyn Smith

Daughter of Missi and Jeremy Smith of Claremont.

Brother: Trey Smith-12.

Hobbies: dance, show choir, cheer, cooking.

School/community activities: show choir, dance, cheer.

Favorite high school memory: State!

Future plans: attend NSU for Psychology.

Awards: Girls State representatives, Sandford Dean's Scholarship, Dennis K. & Shirley R. Larson Family Scholarship



Mike-N-Jo's Body-N-Glass

201 W. Hwy. 12 • 397-2407

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Spencer Travis Sperry

Son of Ginger Conklin and Ty Sperry of Groton.

Sister: Reagan Sperry-14.

Hobbies: hunting and fishing, hanging out with friends.

Future plans: pursue a job in the Hunting Industry.



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State Track Meet Qualifiers

In back, left to right are Jacob Lewandowski, Cole Simon, Teylor Diegel, Kaden Kurtz, Keegen Tracy, Jackson Cogley, Lane Tietz and Andrew Marzahn; in the middle row, left to right, are Kella Tracy, Aspen Johnson, Faith Traphagen, Kennedy Hansen, Jerica Locke, Laila Roberts, Taryn Traphagen and Rylee Dunker; in front are assistant coaches Aaron Helvig and Lynette Grieve and Head Coach Shaun Wanner. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

Groton Track qualifies for state in 10 events

The state track meet will be held May 26-28 in Sioux Falls. Some Groton athletes fell out of the top 24 while some Groton improved their times at the region track meet to stay or move up in the state rankings. Here are the events that Groton Area will participate at the state track meet.

The girls 1600m Relay Team of Jerica Locke, Kennedy Hansen, Kella Tracy and Laila Roberts) qualified for state with a time of 4:18.31 set at the region track meet. They are rated eighth in the state.

The girls 3200m Relay Team of Kella Tracy, Faith Traphagen, Taryn Traphagen and Rylee Dunker qualified for state with a time of 10:31.55 set at the region track meet. They are rated 20th in the state.

The girls Sprint Medley Relay Team of Laila Roberts, Kennedy Hansen, Jerica Locke and Faith Traphagen qualified for state with a time of 4:36.02 set at the region track meet. They are rated 22nd in the state.

Aspen Johnson qualified for state in the triple jump. Her distance of 34-1.75 was set on May 6th. She is rated eighth in the state.

The boys 400m Relay Team of Kaden Kurtz, Keegen Tracy, Andrew Marzahn and Teylor Diegel qualified for state with a time of 45.86 set on May 12th. They are rated 16th in the state.

The boys 800m Relay Team of Andrew Marzahn, Keegen Tracy, Kaden Kurtz and Teylor Diegel qualified for state with a time of 1:35.44 set at the region track meet. They are rated 19th in the state.

The boys 1600m Relay Team of Keegen Tracy, Kaden Kurtz, Andrew Marzahn and Cole Simon qualified for state with a time of 3:37.95 set at the region track meet. They are rated 16th in the state.

The boys 3200m Relay Team of Cole Simon, Keegen Tracy, Jacob Lewandowski and Lane Tietz qualified for state with a time of 8:53.99 set at the region track meet. They are rated 20th in the state.

Jackson Cogley qualified for state in the high jump with a height of 5-9 set May 12th. He is tied for 23rd in the state with seven other athletes.

Andrew Marzahn will be competing in the 200m Dash at the State Track Meet. He was originally listed as 28th place, just outside of the top 24. Coach Shaun Wanner said some athletes will not be running in the 200m Dash and that allowed for Marzahn to move up to the 24th spot.

GROTON LEGION POST #39 CLAIMS VICTORY OVER W.I.N. IN BLOW-OUT FASHION

Groton Legion Post #39 easily dispatched W.I.N. 14-4 on Wednesday

W.I.N. got on the board in the first inning when Quinton Fischbach singled on a 1-1 count, scoring one run.

In the bottom of the first inning, Groton Legion Post #39 tied things up at two when Colby Dunker drew a walk, scoring one run.

Groton Legion Post #39 pulled away for good with one run in the third inning. In the third Bradin Althoff singled on a 0-1 count, scoring one run.

Groton Legion Post #39 tallied three runs in the sixth inning. Dunker and Ryan Groeblichhoff all contributed in the big inning with RBIs.

Pierce Kettering led things off on the mound for Groton Legion Post #39. The righty lasted four innings, allowing four hits and four runs while striking out four.

Fischbach led things off on the pitcher's mound for W.I.N.. Fischbach went three and two-thirds innings, allowing five runs on three hits and striking out eight. Aiden Hoffman threw two innings out of the bullpen.

Groton Legion Post #39 totaled 13 hits. Tate Larson, Evin Nehls, Althoff, and Kettering each managed multiple hits for Groton Legion Post #39. Larson went 3-for-4 at the plate to lead Groton Legion Post #39 in hits. Kettering led Groton Legion Post #39 with four stolen bases, as they ran wild on the base paths with 13 stolen bases.

Fischbach led W.I.N. with two hits in three at bats.

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W.I.N. 4 - 14 Groton Legion Post #39

📍 Home 📅 Wednesday May 25, 2022

	1	2	3	4	5	6	R	H	E
W..N	2	0	0	0	2	0	4	4	4
GRTN	2	0	1	3	3	5	14	13	1

BATTING

W.I.N.	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
H Schipke (CF)	2	1	0	0	2	1
K Stahl (C)	2	1	1	0	1	1
S Nilsson (2B)	3	2	0	0	1	1
Q Fischbach (P)	3	0	2	2	0	0
D Ward (3B)	3	0	0	0	0	1
G Jergoskee (1B,...)	2	0	1	0	1	1
A Hoffman (LF, P)	2	0	0	1	1	0
C Johson (1B)	0	0	0	0	0	0
N Fischbach (SS)	2	0	0	0	1	1
T Hannahs (RF)	1	0	0	0	1	1
D Fischbach (RF)	1	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	21	4	4	3	8	7

2B: Q Fischbach, **TB:** Q Fischbach 3, K Stahl, G Jergoskee, **HBP:** K Stahl, **SB:** Q Fischbach, K Stahl 2, S Nilsson, H Schipke, **LOB:** 8

PITCHING

W.I.N.	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
Q Fischbach	3.2	3	5	5	5	8	0
A Hoffman	2.0	10	9	6	1	0	0
Totals	5.2	13	14	11	6	8	0

L: Q Fischbach, **P-S:** Q Fischbach 88-49, A Hoffman 53-35, **WP:** Q Fischbach 5, **BF:** Q Fischbach 19, A Hoffman 19

Groton Legion Post	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
P Kettering (P, 2B)	3	4	2	1	2	0
D Abeln (CF)	3	1	0	0	2	1
B Althoff (1B)	4	1	2	2	0	0
T Larson (3B)	4	1	3	0	0	0
C Larson (C)	4	0	1	0	0	1
C Dunker (2B, P)	3	1	1	2	1	1
R Groeblichhoff (...)	2	2	1	1	1	1
E Nehls (LF)	4	2	2	0	0	2
D Heminger (RF)	3	1	1	1	0	2
CR: L Ringgingberg	0	1	0	0	0	0
Totals	30	14	13	7	6	8

2B: C Dunker, T Larson, **TB:** B Althoff 2, P Kettering 2, R Groeblichhoff, C Dunker 2, C Larson, E Nehls 2, D Heminger, T Larson 4, **SAC:** D Heminger, **SF:** R Groeblichhoff, **CS:** C Dunker, **SB:** L Ringgingberg 2, D Abeln, P Kettering 4, R Groeblichhoff 3, C Dunker, E Nehls, T Larson, **LOB:** 6

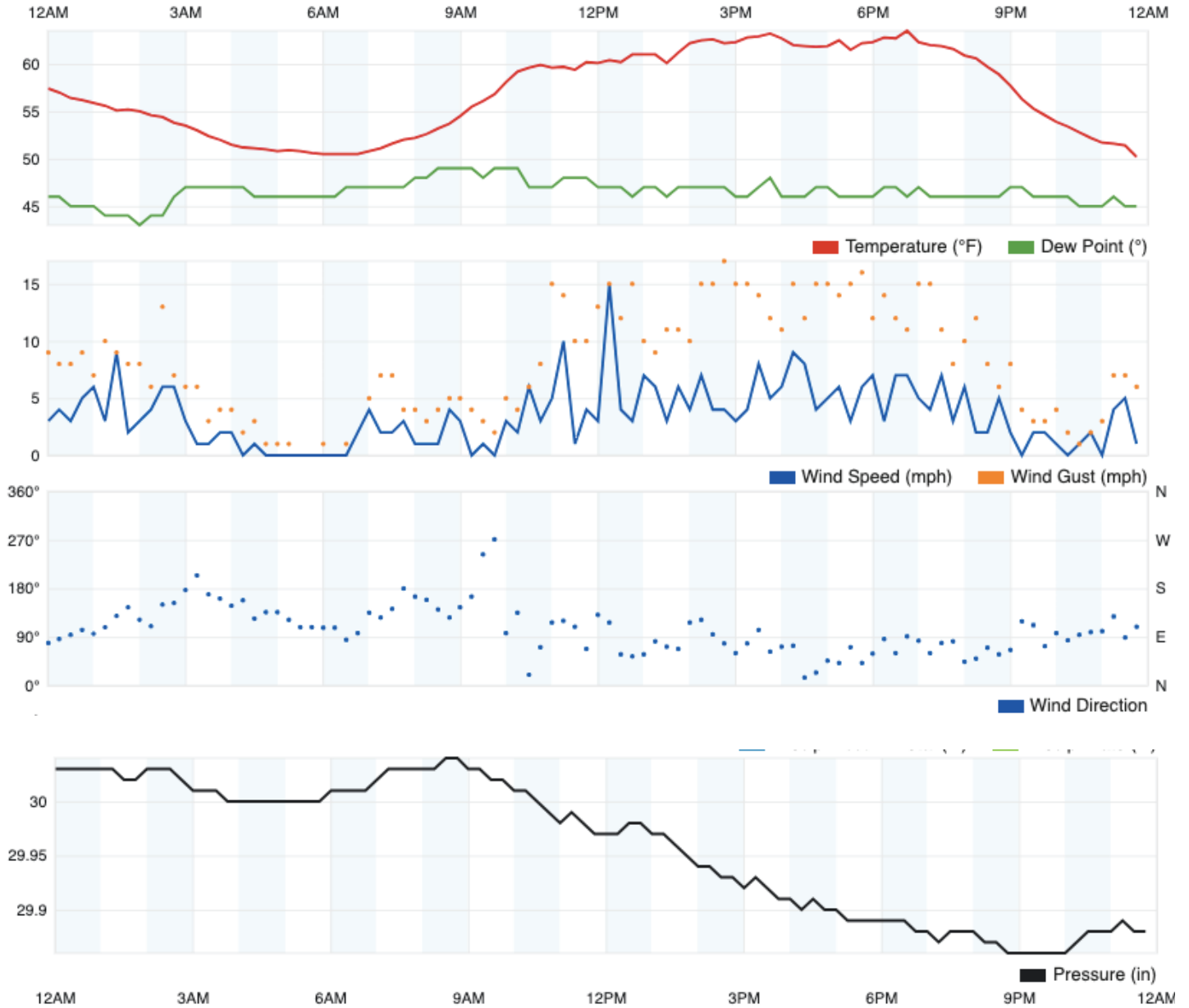
Groton Legion Post	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
P Kettering	4.0	4	4	3	5	4	0
C Dunker	2.0	0	0	0	3	3	0
Totals	6.0	4	4	3	8	7	0

W: P Kettering, **P-S:** P Kettering 83-42, C Dunker 53-35, **WP:** P Kettering, **HBP:** P Kettering, **BF:** P Kettering 22, C Dunker 8

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
				
Areas Fog then Slight Chance Showers	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Chance T-storms	Partly Sunny
High: 73 °F	Low: 49 °F	High: 80 °F	Low: 59 °F	High: 82 °F

Through The Holiday Weekend

Today	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
				
	Breezy West River	Stormy Friday Night & Saturday Night	Stormy	Showers & Storms
HI: 69 to 81	HI: 78 to 89 LO: 48 to 51	HI: 80 to 86 LO: 55 to 60	HI: 76 to 81 LO: 55 to 63	HI: 71 to 82 LO: 54 to 63

Updated: 5/26/2022 4:30 AM Central
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANOGRAPHIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Relatively mild and dry conditions will continue through the day Friday, but we will start to see storms moving across the area Friday night and again Saturday night with continued unsettled conditions through the start of the week. We will also begin to see a touch of heat and humidity as well.

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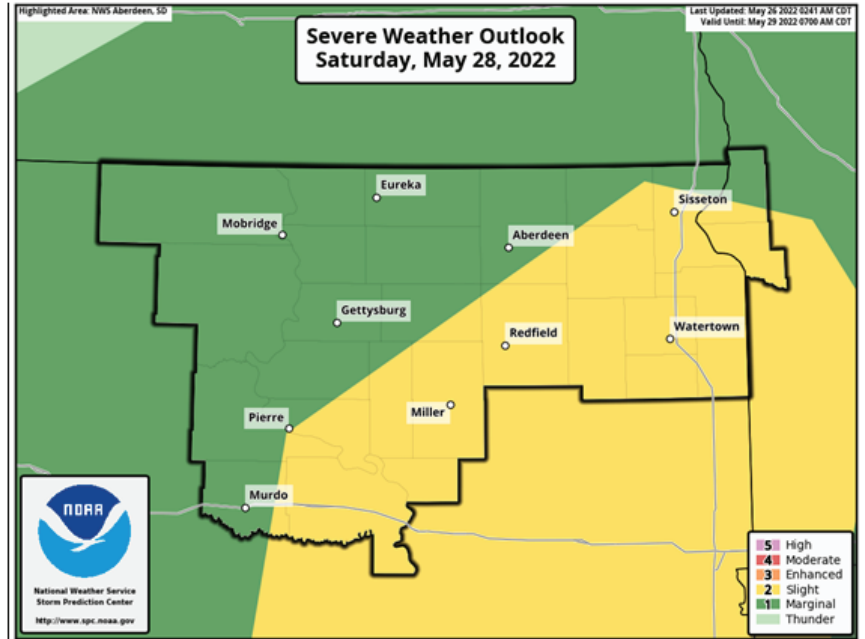
Storm Potential For The Holiday Weekend

Details

- Thunderstorm chances increase Friday night (Low risk severe weather)
- Another round of storms west river moves east river Saturday night
- Severe threat focus Saturday night is Hail & Strong winds
- Continued unsettled Sunday & Monday

Keep In Mind During
Vacation Planning –
Stay Weather Alert
This Holiday!

Saturday Severe Weather Outlook



ISSUED: 4:51 AM - Thursday, May 26, 2022

Tracking severe threats through the weekend, we're primarily focused on Saturday night with a risk of hail and strong winds. More details will follow as the system gets closer to our area.

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Today in Weather History

May 26, 1983: Unofficial rainfall of up to 5 inches caused widespread flooding of basements and streets in and near Aberdeen. Only 1.72 inches of rain was reported at the Aberdeen airport.

May 26, 1985: Hail of unknown diameter was five inches deep, 1 mile north of Rosholt. Some hail remained on the ground until the following morning.

May 26, 1992: A widespread frost and hard freeze hit most of South Dakota except portions of the south-east causing up to \$14 million in potential crop losses to growing corn, soybeans, wheat, and other crops. Some low temperatures include; 23 degrees 12 miles SSW of Harrold; 26 at one mile west of Highmore and 23 north of Highmore; 27 in Kennebec; and 28 degrees 1 NW of Faulkton and at Redfield.

1771: Thomas Jefferson recorded the greatest flood ever known in Virginia. The great Virginia flood occurred as torrential rains in the mountains brought all rivers in the state to record high levels.

1917: A major tornadic thunderstorm took a 293-mile track across parts of central Illinois and Indiana. Once believed to be a single tornado, the later study indicated it was likely at least eight separate tornadoes. The first touchdown was about 50 miles south-southeast of Quincy, Illinois. The tornadic storm tracked due east, before beginning a northeast curve near Charleston; separate tornadic storms then curved southeast from Charleston. The towns of Mattoon and Charleston bore the brunt of the tornado. Damage from this severe tornado in Mattoon was about 2.5 blocks wide and 2.5 miles long, with over 700 houses destroyed, while the Charleston portion was 600 yards wide and 1.5 miles long, with 220 homes damaged. Dozens of farms were hit along the path, and at least three farm homes were swept away between Manhattan and Monee. Another estimated F4 tornado touched down 6 miles south of Crown Point and devastated a dozen farms. A total of 7 people died, and 120 were injured. 53 people were killed in Mattoon, and 38 were killed in Charleston. Overall, 101 people in Illinois were killed during the tornado outbreak, with 638 injured.

1984 - Thunderstorms during the late evening and early morning hours produced 6 to 13 inches of rain at Tulsa OK in six hours (8.63 inches at the airport). Flooding claimed fourteen lives and caused 90 million dollars property damage. 4600 cars, 743 houses, and 387 apartments were destroyed or severely damaged in the flood. (Storm Data) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms in southwest Iowa spawned five tornadoes and produced up to ten inches of rain. Seven inches of rain at Red Oak forced evacuation of nearly 100 persons from the town. Record flooding took place in southwest Iowa the last twelve days of May as up to 17 inches of rain drenched the area. Total damage to crops and property was estimated at 16 million dollars. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - There was "frost on the roses" in the Upper Ohio Valley and the Central Appalachian Mountain Region. Thirteen cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Youngstown OH with a reading of 30 degrees. Evening thunderstorms in North Dakota produced wind gusts to 75 mph at Jamestown. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms in produced large hail in eastern Oklahoma during the pre-dawn hours, and again during the evening and night. Hail two inches in diameter was reported near Prague, and thunderstorm winds gusted to 70 mph near Kenefic. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from eastern Colorado to western Arkansas and north-eastern Texas. Severe thunderstorms spawned three tornadoes, and there were eighty-eight reports of large hail or damaging winds. Evening thunderstorms over central Oklahoma spawned strong tornadoes east of Hinton and east of Binger, produced hail three inches in diameter at Minco, and produced wind gusts to 85 mph at Blanchard. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2003: A BMI Airbus bound for Cyprus from Manchester, England encountered a violent thunderstorm over Germany. The plane bounced and twisted violently as it ran into severe turbulence with huge hailstones pounding the exterior. A football-sized hole was punched in the aircraft's surface. None of the 213 passengers or eight crew members was seriously hurt.

2009: Northeast of Anchorage, Alaska, two hikers climbed a ridge to see a developing storm better. Lightning knocked the couple unconscious. Regaining consciousness, they called emergency services as the woman was unable to walk. The man's shoes looked as though they had melted.

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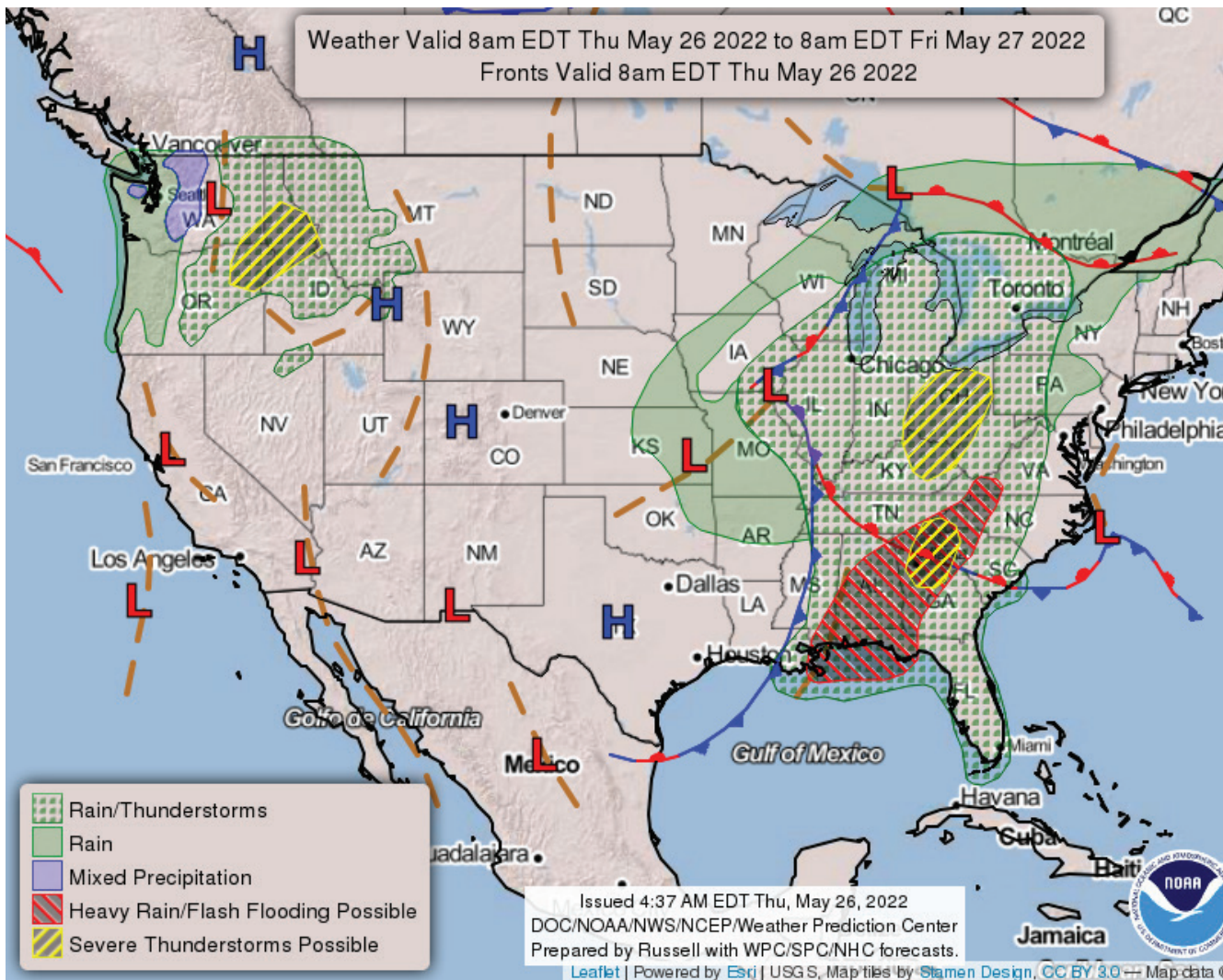
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 64 °F at 6:42 PM
Low Temp: 49 °F at 11:59 PM
Wind: 17 mph at 2:41 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 20 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 97 in 2018
Record Low: 30 in 1992
Average High: 74°F
Average Low: 49°F
Average Precip in May.: 2.79
Precip to date in May.: 2.48
Average Precip to date: 6.76
Precip Year to Date: 8.98
Sunset Tonight: 9:09:43 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:48:28 AM



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To Trust Or Not To Trust

It is more difficult to trust than not to trust. So, many people go through life angry and alone.

A father once said to his young son, "James, climb to the second step of the ladder, turn around and look at me. Now, when I open my arms, I want you to jump, and I'll catch you."

Obediently, James did as his father asked him. However, when he jumped, his father stepped back and allowed him to fall to the ground. Hurting, crying, fearful and afraid, he looked at his father in amazement.

"James," said his father, "I wanted to teach you a lesson. Do not trust anyone. Not even your father."

What a tragic way for a father to teach his son about trust. Though many men and women are not trustworthy, there certainly are those who can be trusted. Many who are Christians strive to be people of integrity and honesty, openness, and trust.

But there is a difference between trusting someone and putting our trust in someone. While it is important to be able to trust others, we must be careful about what we trust them for.

So, God had a Psalmist give us a warning about putting our trust in people. "Do not put your trust in mortal men who cannot save." Our trust must be in God.

Many offer to "save" and protect us from the realities of life. Treaties are written, and policies are produced to assure us that "they" will "save" us from every enemy! But in the end, only God can do that. Only He can save us.

Prayer: Lord, Your Word assures us that we can trust in You for everything we need - salvation and eternal life. You are worthy of our trust. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Do not put your trust in mortal men who cannot save. Psalm 146:3

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2022 Community Events

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

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

07-24-28-32-33

(seven, twenty-four, twenty-eight, thirty-two, thirty-three)

Estimated jackpot: \$40,000

Lotto America

05-11-17-21-49, Star Ball: 5, ASB: 2

(five, eleven, seventeen, twenty-one, forty-nine; Star Ball: five; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$13,960,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 157,000,000

Powerball

19-28-39-42-57, Powerball: 17, Power Play: 3

(nineteen, twenty-eight, thirty-nine, forty-two, fifty-seven; Powerball: seventeen; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$150,000,000

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. May 23, 2022.

Editorial: Mental Health And The LGBTQ Issue

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, a designation that seeks to do just that: to make more people take a harder look at the issue of mental health in their world, their community and in their own lives. And it can be a difficult issue for some people to face or acknowledge.

The Press & Dakotan has thus far published two stories in a three-part series, running on Saturdays, related to the issue. To this point, the first two stories have offered, arguably, major contrasts in the breadth of the mental health topic. The first story, published May 7, dealt with how COVID-19 has impacted mental health in people of all ages. In the last two years, this has been a nearly universal topic, given the disruption created by the pandemic. By contrast, last Saturday's story examined mental health issues being seen in South Dakota (and elsewhere) by people in the LGBTQ community. In a sense, this was quite different from the first story in that it focused on a much smaller segment of the population and delved into what is, more broadly, a controversial subject.

That makes the latter the more difficult issue to discuss, for various reasons.

That also makes it easier to dismiss the issue, which some people unknowingly do — and some actually aggravate it.

The story referred to a HelpAdvisor study done earlier this year that found South Dakota leading the nation in the percentage of LGBTQ residents reporting feelings of depression in the two weeks prior to the survey. Using U.S. Census statistics, it was determined that 87.3%, or an estimated 38,162, of respondents said they had felt feelings of depression. This was far above the national average of 62.7%.

"Some of the difficulties is folks in the LGBTQ community sometimes feel a little isolated anyway, and in rural areas, they feel even more isolated — and with COVID, even more isolated," noted Dr. David Dracy, clinical psychologist with Yankton's Lewis & Clark Behavioral Health Services, in Saturday's Press & Dakotan. "Then we are firmly in the Bible Belt area, too, and there's still some religious beliefs that make it difficult for individuals of the LGBTQ community."

One of the more striking statements in the story was an observation by Dr. Myeshia Price, a senior

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research scientist at The Trevor Project, noting that many of these people feel depressed because they believe their own government is working against them.

For instance, during the recent South Dakota legislative session, several bills were introduced targeting LGBTQ — particularly transgender, or trans — people. Most conspicuous was the heated debate and ultimate passage of Senate Bill 46, which bars trans girls from competing in female sports at the high school level. As we noted at the time, the issue is virtually nonexistent in the state, and the South Dakota High School Activities Association already had an effective policy in place to deal with it. Nevertheless, the bill was passed with great fanfare and was even featured in national commercials by Gov. Kristi Noem.

“The record number of anti-LGBTQ legislation — and anti-trans bills in particular — continue to take a toll on the mental health of these young people,” Price said.

But that toll is not a priority for the architects of such legislation (who likely were not from this state) and those who pushed it as a means to a political end.

History is filled with examples of lawmakers and political movements trying to appeal to majorities by curbing or even persecuting minorities. These laws may be harsh and hurtful, but since they do not directly affect most people, the laws are judged by their political merits and not their personal fallout.

And perhaps that’s a lesson more people can see during this awareness month. Understanding COVID’s impact is fairly easy, since we all likely faced it to some degree, but understanding the issues with the LGBTQ community demands more empathy by opening our minds and hearts to others.

Recreational pot validated for ballot in South Dakota

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota voters are set to vote again on whether they want recreational marijuana legalized for adults after the secretary of state on Wednesday validated the initiated measure for the November ballot.

Secretary of State Steve Barnett announced that a random sample of petition signatures showed that South Dakotans for Better Marijuana Laws, the group campaigning to legalize pot, had easily collected enough valid signatures to surpass the roughly 17,000 needed to place the initiated measure on the November ballot. It will appear as Initiated Measure 27.

The proposed law would allow people 21 years old and over to use and grow pot for personal use. It would place a 1 ounce (28 gram) limit on the amount that people could use or share.

Marijuana legalization has spurred political fights among South Dakota’s dominant Republican party in recent years and tested faith in a form of direct democracy — the ballot measure. A citizen-proposed constitutional amendment to legalize cannabis passed by 54% in 2020, but Gov. Kristi Noem sponsored a lawsuit to challenge it and the state Supreme Court ruled last year that it violated the state Constitution.

The secretary of state’s validation may be challenged within 30 days.

Life in prison for sexually abusing child, witness tampering

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota man has been sentenced to life in prison for sexually abusing a child and witness tampering.

A federal judge this week sent 40-year-old Kimo John Little Bird to prison for life on his conviction of aggravated sexual abuse of a child. An additional 10 years in prison was imposed for committing the crime while he was required to register as a sex offender. Little Bird was sentenced to five years in prison for witness tampering, to be served concurrently with the other counts.

Little Bird was indicted by a federal grand jury in March 2020 and found guilty by a jury last November.

Little Bird was convicted of sexually abusing a minor in 2006 and was required to register as a sex offender. In 2016, Little Bird sexually abused an 11-year-old girl. Prosecutors said prior to his trial, he contacted a number of potential witnesses in an effort to have them pressure the girl into recanting her accusations.

“The criminal actions by this defendant were egregious. The federal penalties for child sexual abuse offenses are severe for a reason, and the district court’s sentence ensures that this defendant will never again have the opportunity to victimize children or otherwise harass vulnerable citizens,” said U.S. Attorney

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Alison Ramsdell.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Justice Services—Standing Rock Agency.

Little Bird was turned over to the custody of the U.S. Marshals Service.

China's foreign minister starts Pacific tour in the Solomons

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi and a 20-strong delegation arrived in the Solomon Islands Thursday at the start of an eight-nation tour that comes amid growing concerns about Beijing's military and financial ambitions in the South Pacific region.

China says the trip builds on a long history of friendly relations between Beijing and the island nations.

But Australia scrambled to counter the move by sending its own Foreign Minister Penny Wong to Fiji to shore up support in the Pacific. Wong had been on the job just five days following an Australian election and had just arrived back Wednesday night from a meeting in Tokyo.

In Fiji, Wong said it was up to each island nation to decide what partnerships they formed and what agreements they signed, but urged them to consider the benefits of sticking with Australia.

"Australia will be a partner that doesn't come with strings attached nor imposing unsustainable financial burdens," Wong said. "We are a partner that won't erode Pacific priorities or Pacific institutions."

Meanwhile, the Media Association of Solomon Islands called on its members to boycott a news conference in the capital, Honiara, held by Wang and his counterpart from the Solomon Islands, Jeremiah Manele, following a meeting between the pair.

That's because only selected media were invited to the event, and the schedule allowed for just a single question to be asked of Wang by China's state-owned broadcaster CCTV.

"It's a tough call to make regarding the media boycott for the press event on Thursday," wrote association president Georgina Kekea on Twitter. "Our protest is for our govt to see our disappointment. They have failed us & they failed to protect #democracy."

According to an official Chinese summary of the meeting, Wang told his counterpart that China would firmly support the Solomon Islands in its efforts to maintain national security and territorial integrity, while Manele described the visit as historic and a "milestone in the relations" between the two countries.

China signed a security pact with the Solomon Islands last month in a move that sent shock waves around the world.

That pact has raised fears that China could send troops to the island nation or even establish a military base there, not far from Australia. The Solomon Islands and China say there are no plans for a base.

In another move by China, a draft document obtained by The Associated Press shows that Wang is hoping to strike a deal with 10 small Pacific nations during his visit. The sweeping agreement covers everything from security to fisheries and is seen by at least one Pacific leader as an attempt by Beijing to wrest control of the region.

Wang is hoping the countries will endorse the pre-written agreement as part of a joint communique after a May 30 meeting in Fiji with the other foreign ministers.

During his 10-day visit, Wang is also planning to make stops in Kiribati, Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and East Timor.

Earlier, Australia's new Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said he'd sent Wong to Fiji because Australia needed to "step up" its efforts in the Pacific.

"We need to respond to this because this is China seeking to increase its influence in the region of the world where Australia has been the security partner of choice since the Second World War," he told the Australian Broadcasting Corp.

But Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said that in recent years, exchanges and cooperation between Beijing and the island nations had been expanding in a development that was welcomed by the Pacific countries.

US moves to make antiviral drug more available against COVID

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House on Thursday announced more steps to make the antiviral treatment Paxlovid more accessible across the U.S. as it projects COVID-19 infections will continue to spread over the summer travel season.

The nation's first federally backed test-to-treat site is opening Thursday in Rhode Island, providing patients with immediate access to the drug once they test positive. More federally supported sites are set to open in the coming weeks in Massachusetts and New York City, both hit by a marked rise in infections.

Next week, the U.S. will send authorized federal prescribers to several Minnesota-run testing sites, turning them into test-to-treat locations. Federal regulators have also sent clearer guidance to physicians to help them determine how to manage Paxlovid's interactions with other drugs, with an eye toward helping prescribers find ways to get the life-saving medication to more patients.

Despite a nationwide surge in COVID-19 cases, deaths from the virus have remained largely stable over the past eight weeks, as vaccine booster shots and widely accessible treatments have helped to delink infections and mortality.

Confirmed infections in the U.S. have quadrupled since late March, from about 25,000 a day to more than 105,000 daily now. But deaths, which have tended to lag infections by three to four weeks over the course of the coronavirus pandemic, have declined steadily and are now plateaued at fewer than 300 per day.

It's the first time in the course of the pandemic that the two have not trended together, said White House COVID-19 coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha. He called it an important development in helping Americans get back to normal life.

"What has been remarkable in the latest increase in infections we're seeing is how steady serious illness and particularly deaths are eight weeks into this," he said. "COVID is no longer the killer that it was even a year ago."

Jha said that given the wider use of at-home rapid tests, whose results often go unreported to public health officials, the true number of daily infections is likely 200,000 or more — double the reported rate — which he said only makes the death rate plateau more significant.

He credited vaccines but also a more than four-fold increase in prescriptions over the last six weeks for the highly effective treatment Paxlovid.

Jha said about 25,000 to 30,000 courses of Paxlovid are being prescribed each day. When administered within five days of symptoms appearing, the drug has been proven to bring about a 90% reduction in hospitalizations and deaths among patients most likely to get severe disease.

Due to a change in the way Paxlovid is allocated to states, the number of pharmacies where it is available has doubled in the last month to almost 40,000.

"We are now at a point where I believe fundamentally most COVID deaths are preventable, that the deaths that are happening out there are mostly unnecessary, and there are a lot of tools we have now to make sure people do not die of this disease," Jha told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

As the summer months approach, Jha said the "number one" thing people need to do is to "go and get boosted" — and if they have a breakthrough infection, they should consult with their doctor about getting Paxlovid. He said gatherings of all sizes can take place more safely because of the tools available — if people make use of them.

"In places in the country where boosting rates are much lower, where the infection is starting to spread more, I am absolutely concerned that we're going to see, unfortunately, we may see more serious illness," he said.

"Being vaccinated and boosted is a huge part of making sure that those kinds of activities are substantially safer," he added. "And then, of course, we want to make Paxlovid as widely available across the entire country, so that if you do end up getting a breakthrough infection, you're still protected against serious illness."

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The U.S. has ordered 20 million courses of Paxlovid from the drugmaker Pfizer, and the country risks running out this winter if the drug continues to be used widely. The White House has been pressing Congress for additional funds for months to support purchasing more Paxlovid and other treatments, as well as additional boosters.

While the administration has started planning for the potential need to ration the federal supply of vaccines if Congress doesn't act, Jha said right now his message to prescribers is that they shouldn't worry about the supply.

"I believe that we should be using as much as it's necessary to protect Americans now," Jha said.

Live updates | Russia reports destroying Ukraine targets

By The Associated Press undefined

MOSCOW — The Russian military says it has destroyed a large Ukrainian unit with equipment at a railway station in the east.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Thursday that the Russian warplanes hit the railway station in Pokrovsk when an assault brigade that arrived to reinforce the Ukrainian forces in the region was unloading there.

Konashenkov also said that the Russian military destroyed Ukraine's electronic intelligence center in Dniprovske in the southern Mykolaiv region, killing 11 Ukrainian soldiers and 15 foreign experts. His claims couldn't be independently confirmed.

Konashenkov stated that the Russian air force has struck 48 troops and weapons concentrations and two ammunition depots over the past 24 hours.

Elsewhere in Ukraine, the Russian artillery hit over 500 Ukrainian targets, including troops concentrations and artillery positions, he said.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR:

- Scars of war seem to be everywhere in Ukraine after 3 months
- Saving the children: War closes in on eastern Ukrainian town

Follow AP's coverage of the war in Ukraine at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

The General Staff of the Ukrainian military said Thursday that the Russian forces have continued attempts to press their offensive in several sections of the frontline in the east and also launched missile and air strikes at infrastructure facilities across the country.

Rodion Miroshnik, a representative of the separatist Luhansk region in Russia, said that about 8,000 Ukrainian soldiers are currently in captivity in the separatist Donetsk and Luhansk regions and their number is growing daily by the "hundreds."

His claims couldn't be independently verified.

LONDON — Britain's military says Russia has suffered substantial losses among its elite units because of "complacency" among commanders and failure to anticipate strong Ukrainian resistance.

The U.K. Ministry of Defense says the airborne VDV has been involved in "several notable tactical failures" since the Feb. 24 invasion, including the attempt to capture and hold Hostomel Airfield near Kyiv early in the war and failed attempts to cross the Siverskyi Donets River in eastern Ukraine.

In its daily intelligence update, the defense ministry said the VDV had been sent on missions "better suited to heavier armoured infantry and has sustained heavy casualties during the campaign. Its mixed performance likely reflects a strategic mismanagement of this capability and Russia's failure to secure air superiority."

It said "the failure to anticipate Ukrainian resistance and the subsequent complacency of Russian com-

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manders has led to significant losses across many of Russia's more elite units."

MOSCOW — The Russian Central Bank has cut its key interest rate to 11% from 14%, citing a slowdown in inflation.

It is the third three-point cut since the Central Bank hiked the rate to 20% in late February after Russian forces entered Ukraine. It said inflation had been at 17.8% in April, but slowed slightly to 17.5% as of an estimate May 20.

"External conditions for the Russian economy are still challenging, considerably constraining economic activity," the Central Bank said in a statement. "Financial stability risks decreased somewhat, enabling a relaxation of some capital control measures."

The Central Bank's next meeting to review the rate is June 10.

MOSCOW — The Russian Defense Ministry is promising to open a safe corridor to allow foreign ships to leave Black Sea ports. A separate corridor will be open to allow ships to leave Mariupol by sailing from the port on the Sea of Azov port to the Black Sea.

Mikhail Mizintsev, who heads the National Defense Control Center under the General Staff, said 70 foreign vessels from 16 countries are now in six ports on the Black Sea including Odesa, Kherson and Mykolaiv.

Mizintsev, whose comments at a briefing in Moscow on Wednesday were reported by the Interfax news agency, said the corridors would be open every day.

Earlier Wednesday, the Russia military said Mariupol's port was functioning again after three months of fighting. The Defense Ministry spokesman said the military first had to clear the port of mines.

The Russian military, which maintains a naval fleet in the Black Sea, has effectively blocked commercial shipping at Ukrainian ports.

The blockade has endangered the world food supply by preventing Ukraine from shipping its agricultural products. Ukraine is one of the world's largest exporters of wheat, corn and sunflower oil.

UNITED NATIONS — The International Committee of the Red Cross said Wednesday that it has been able to give answers to 300 families in Russia and Ukraine about the fate of their loved ones.

ICRC Director-General Robert Mardini told reporters that the organization's work trying to clarify the fate of missing persons "is very much on track." He did not disclose the fate of the 300 Russians and Ukrainians, saying only that their families had provided "very concrete questions about their loved ones."

Mardini said some progress has also been made on the right of the ICRC to visit prisoners of war, which is part of the Geneva conventions.

"There is agreement on both sides" on this right, "which is good news," Mardini said, but the major obstacle in the ICRC carrying out visits is the war itself and the logistical constraints.

Mardini said the ICRC registered all the Ukrainian fighters that held out until last week at the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol before they were taken to Russian-controlled territory. Russia said there were 2,439 Ukrainian fighters.

"Registering prisoners of war or detainees amounts to nothing short of a life insurance," Mardini said.

Davos meeting gabfest to wrap up with German leader

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

DAVOS, Switzerland (AP) — After days of discussions about Russia's war in Ukraine, a global food crisis, climate change and other hot-button issues, the World Economic Forum's annual meeting was set to conclude Thursday with one of the highest-profile guests to journey to Davos: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

The yearly gathering of elites that was suspended twice over the COVID-19 pandemic has been overshadowed by the war in Ukraine, dousing moods among policymakers but not stopping advocacy groups and business leaders from trying to improve fortunes and — as forum organizers hope — the state of the world.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and an array of lawmakers,

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local officials and business leaders captured the spotlight in-person and virtually to drum up support for their country's grueling and uncertain campaign to oust Russian invaders who bombed, blasted and baraged their way to seize control of a widening arc of eastern Ukraine since Feb. 24.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's campaign has drawn international scorn and unsettled his allies, and as a result, Russian envoys from business and government who have been staples at Davos since the end of the Soviet Union weren't invited this year.

Attention was turning to Scholz's near-finale address to cap scores of panel discussions, speeches, coffee chats and other meetings in public and private this week – mostly to see if he might try to answer two of Ukraine's key appeals: for stronger sanctions against Russia and better weapons to help their forces fight.

Kuleba voiced little hope that the war could come to a negotiated end, or even a pause, anytime soon.

"The moment Russia will agree to a cease-fire will be the moment it will be one step away from losing the war," he told reporters late Wednesday. "They (the Russians) will agree to a cease-fire with only one purpose: to save themselves from losing the war. Until then, this war will continue."

Kuleba has pressed for Western powers to supply Ukraine with weapons like multiple-launch rocket systems and pointed to a "saga" about obtaining Gepard tanks from Germany, among other things his government has discussed with Berlin.

"We clearly understand that Germany will not be a country that will lead the process of supplying Ukraine with heavy weapons we need," Kuleba said. "Let's make it clear: If we don't get heavy weapons, we get killed."

The upshot of Ukraine's efforts is to rally countries around a budding democracy with ambitions to join the European Union — the free-world and free-market club — in the face of an onslaught by a Russian regime that clamps down on dissent and centralizes power in one man: Putin.

Meanwhile, a deadly school shooting Tuesday in Texas was on many minds in Davos. More broadly, battles against global warming, soaring costs for food and fuel worldwide, and cyberattacks by hackers from Russia and beyond have exposed how progressive leaders from civil society, corporations and government have struggled to cope in a world facing simultaneous crises.

A key topic has been a food crisis tied to Russia blocking ports in Ukraine, preventing its critical stocks of wheat, barley and sunflower oil from getting to the world and threatening food insecurity in countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. The European Union and United States have accused Russia of using food supplies as a weapon and there have been talks of opening secure shipping corridors.

Russian officials are blaming Western sanctions or Ukrainian mines in the sea.

"This food crisis is real and we must find solutions," WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said on a trade panel.

Davos once again churned up ideas from innovators and officials, but translating those into action could take time — and may not happen at all. The meeting is above all a talkfest, and concrete, high-profile achievements and announcements have been few this year.

Former U.S. Vice President Al Gore, a leading crusader against climate change, briefly railed against failed efforts for gun control in the United States before trumpeting a new system to monitor greenhouse gas emissions by satellite. That will increase needed scrutiny and transparency about the burning of carbon and other planet-warming gases by businesses around the globe, he said.

Gore, who shared a Nobel Peace Prize with the U.N.'s top body on climate science for their work on climate change, pointed to an initiative known as Climate Trace that combines more than 300 satellites with machine learning to create algorithms and zero in on emission hotspots worldwide. It's expected to release results in October from 500 largest sources of emissions.

"We are about to enter an age of radical transparency," he said.

Abrams-Kemp slugfest promises to be pricey, long and ugly

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Georgia voters didn't get much of a break from election talk on the day after the Tues-

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day primary in which Republican Gov. Brian Kemp demolished GOP challenger David Perdue and Democrat Stacey Abrams finally clinched a nomination waiting for her after no other members of her party jumped in.

The Republican Governors Association, a key contributor to Kemp's victory, launched a television ad attacking Abrams Wednesday. And the state Democratic Party announced the launch of its coordinated campaign that seeks to grab victories in November for Abrams, U.S. Sen. Raphael Warnock and others.

Those were opening moves in what will be a brutal slog of a governor's race between Abrams and Kemp, a contest that Republican strategist Ryan Mahoney estimated could cost \$250 million overall after campaigns and other groups finish spending.

Kemp's romp, where he won nearly 75% of the Republican vote despite former President Donald Trump's support of Perdue, made headlines worldwide as proof that Republicans could defy Trump and thrive. And Abrams, once unknown, vaulted to first rank of national Democrats with her 2018 loss to Kemp and subsequent advocacy for voting rights.

Kemp is eager to tie Abrams to President Joe Biden in this year's rematch, seeking to drag her down with the weight of the Democratic president's unpopularity.

"She has embraced the disastrous Biden agenda at every single turn," Kemp told supporters Tuesday in his victory speech.

Abrams, meanwhile, wants to make the campaign all about the shortcomings in Kemp's record, repeating multiple times in a Tuesday news conference that Kemp "doesn't care about the people of Georgia."

Kemp, Perdue, Abrams and their supporters combined to spend more than \$20 million in the primary. A new Georgia state law allows individuals to make unlimited contributions to Kemp and Abrams, which could bring saturate screens with a summer of negativity, as each tries to blacken the other's reputation.

Georgia politics, once sleepy and Republican-dominated, have never settled down since 2018, and the intensity is clearly driving voter interest. More than 1.9 million Georgians cast ballots in the primaries. Republican turnout of nearly 1.2 million topped the previous 2020 record, while Democratic turnout of more than 700,000, despite few compelling races, topped the 2018 midterm record, but not the 2020 record.

Abrams on Tuesday promised to keep expanding what she called "one of the most impressive apparatuses for voter engagement."

"This is going to be an expensive race," Abrams said. "But our investment is not going to be in tit-for-tat politics. It's going to be in making sure that every Georgia voter knows how to vote, knows why to vote and knows where to vote. And we're going to give them a reason to vote."

It's that reason to vote, linking politics to everyday lives, that underlies Abrams' approach to organizing groups of once marginal voters and pushing up their participation.

"When people choose not to vote, it's because they don't feel as though it's important or connected to their lives," said Lauren Groh-Wargo, Abrams' campaign manager, in an interview last week.

Kemp, who won in 2018 by turning out Republicans at unprecedented numbers, also pledges to ratchet up his efforts.

"We got to knock doors like we've never knocked before," Kemp said Tuesday. "We got to make more phone calls. We got to talk to more of our friends and our neighbors."

A messier Republican primary could have further benefitted Abrams. Kemp's easy victory means there won't be an expensive June runoff and that Kemp doesn't appear to bear the mortal wounds that primary challenges sometimes inflict even on the winners. But the primary did force Kemp to spend millions and it drove him further to the right, leading him to push through a bill that repealed the permit that had been required to carry a concealed handgun in public and to embrace a ban of transgender girls from high school athletics.

Kemp's decision to keep pushing in the runoff, even after it became clear he was pulling away from Perdue, was an opportunity to consolidate his own Republican support. Every Republican who voted for Kemp is one who broke with Trump's distaste for the governor, which could make them less likely to stay home in the fall even if Trump continues to attack Kemp.

"You can't win in November without the GOP base fully behind you," said Mahoney, who has worked for Kemp in the past. "Gov. Kemp saw the primary as an opportunity to galvanize the base, publicly prove his

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widespread support, and create undeniable and arguably unstoppable momentum heading into the fall.”

That doesn't mean there still isn't danger. Kemp, for example, needs to bring the more than 250,000 people who voted for Perdue to his side. That number of votes would have been more than enough to decide any statewide election in Georgia in 2018 and 2020. That said could be decisive if a significant share of them decide to sit out, as happened in the 2021 Senate runoffs that elected Warnock and Jon Ossoff, giving Democrats control of the Senate.

“We're in a close race, so anything that even has smaller adverse impacts on Republican turnout is a big deal,” Groh-Wargo said, “just like anything that impacts our turnout.”

EXPLAINER: What's at stake for China on South Pacific visit?

BEIJING (AP) — China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi is visiting the South Pacific with a 20-person delegation this week in a display of Beijing's growing military and diplomatic presence in the region.

The U.S. has traditionally been the area's major power, but China has been pursuing inroads, particularly with the Solomon Islands, a nation less than 2,000 kilometers (1,200 miles) from Australia. In a sign of Australia's concern, new Foreign Minister Penny Wong is heading to Fiji less than a week after her Labor Party won national elections.

Below is a look at Wang's tour and its likely outcomes.

WHERE IS WANG HEADED?

Wang is due to stop in the Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and East Timor on a 10-day trip.

The visits emphasize China's push for engagement with the region, which has traditionally retained close ties with Beijing's major rivals including the United States and Australia. China has also waged a protracted struggle for influence because of Taiwan. China considers the self-governed island its own territory and opposes foreign interactions that treat Taiwan as autonomous and independent, but four South Pacific island nations are among Taiwan's dwindling number of formal diplomatic allies.

A more robust Chinese presence in the South Pacific could enable its naval forces to make port calls and possibly put personnel and equipment at a base in the area. That would complicate U.S. defense strategy, particularly over contingency plans for any Chinese move to take Taiwan that would likely draw in Japan and other allies.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE NEW DIPLOMATIC PUSH?

Under leader Xi Jinping, China has been expanding its foreign economic and diplomatic clout through the Belt and Road Initiative that seeks to link East Asia with Europe and beyond through ports, railways, power plants and other infrastructure.

The results have been mixed, with client states such as Sri Lanka and Pakistan falling deeply in debt and developed nations citing national security grounds in banning Chinese government-backed companies including telecoms giant Huawei. The South Pacific, however, remains relatively open for Chinese advances at low cost and potentially high reward.

China has mostly sat on the sidelines over Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its top leaders haven't left the country in more than two years amid strict anti-COVID measures and deteriorating ties with the U.S., Canada and the EU. With Xi seeking a third five-year term as head of the ruling Communist Party, a foreign policy victory would help cement his authority and fend off criticism of his handling of the pandemic and its economic costs.

WHAT'S IN THE PACT BETWEEN CHINA AND SOLOMON ISLANDS?

The agreement could allow China to send security forces to the Solomons at its government's request for what are described as peacekeeping duties. It would also enable Chinese navy ships to make port calls to resupply and provide recreation for sailors, possibly leading to a permanent presence in the islands.

The United States has said it would take unspecified action against the Solomon Islands if the agreement with China poses a threat to U.S. or allied interests.

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WHAT IS AUSTRALIA'S MAJOR CONCERN?

Apart from worries over Chinese expansion across the vast Pacific, under its new government, Australia has urged Beijing to lift trade sanctions if it wants to reset their bilateral relationship.

The Chinese premier's congratulatory letter to Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on his election victory was widely seen as a relaxation of Beijing's two-year ban on high-level government contact with Australia. Premier Li Keqiang said China was ready to work with Australia to improve ties, which plummeted after Australia passed legislation targeting Chinese influence in its elections and political discourse.

In retaliation, China has created a series of official and unofficial trade barriers in recent years to a range of Australian exports worth billions of dollars including coal, wine, barley, beef and seafood.

WHAT OTHER PLANS DOES CHINA HAVE IN THE REGION?

According to a draft of an agreement obtained by The Associated Press, China wants 10 Pacific nations to enter into an arrangement with it covering everything from security to fisheries.

The draft shows that China wants to expand law enforcement cooperation, jointly develop a fisheries plan, increase cooperation on running the region's internet networks, and set up cultural Confucius Institutes and classrooms.

Wang is hoping the countries will endorse the pre-written agreement as part of a joint communique after a May 30 meeting in Fiji with the other foreign ministers.

In Lebanon, a nascent reform movement faces tough road

By ZEINA KARAM and LUJAIN JO Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Ramy Finge spent two years braving tear gas and rubber bullets, sometimes trying to scale the cement walls surrounding Lebanon's parliament during anti-government protests.

Soon he'll be able to walk in through the front door. The dentist from the northern city of Tripoli is among 13 independent newcomers who won seats in parliament in May 15 elections, building on the protest movement seeking to break the long domination by traditional parties.

The unexpectedly strong showing by civil society activists restored some hope among despairing Lebanese that change in their ailing country is possible.

But the nascent reform movement is fragmented, and faces enormous challenges in fighting an entrenched ruling clique.

Many worry the incoming parliament will exacerbate polarization and paralysis at a time when the country is dealing with one of the worst economic meltdowns in history. It is hobbled by divisions between the old guard and newcomers, as well as between supporters and opponents of the powerful militant group Hezbollah.

In the run-up to the elections, candidates drawn from the protest movement that formed in October 2019 ran on competing lists.

Broadly, they share the view that the decades-old grip on power by civil war-era warlords and sectarian-based political dynasties is the root cause behind rampant corruption, mismanagement, lack of services and lack of accountability that have driven the country into ruin.

But in the details, they are divided on almost everything, from their approach to reforming the economy and restructuring the collapsed banking sector, to their views on Hezbollah's weapons and whether disarming the Iranian-backed group should be prioritized.

Still, it is no small accomplishment that they were able to break through despite an electoral law tailored for a ruling class with enormous power at its disposal. The elections were a setback for the Hezbollah-led coalition, which lost its majority in the 128-seat parliament, though it remains the largest bloc.

"This is the first achievement by the Thawra (Arabic for revolution) because we were able to get in," Finge, 57, told The Associated Press at his modest home in Lebanon's impoverished city of Tripoli this week.

"And from inside we will work with all our strength and courage to ... dismantle this corrupt ruling class, which is destined to fall no matter how long it takes," he said.

Like his colleagues from the protest movement, Finge was subjected to all kinds of pressure and intimi-

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dation in the past two years. He proudly recalled the exuberant protests in Tripoli and Beirut that filled the squares starting in late 2019, when police would fire volleys of tear gas and pellets at demonstrators who often tried to scale the giant security barriers around parliament.

In February 2021, he was summoned by security and questioned about a makeshift kitchen he had set up in Tripoli distributing food to protesters and the needy. He called it Matbakh al Thawra, or the Revolution Kitchen.

The independents who won seats are a motley group of doctors, professors, professionals and activists from across Lebanon and from a variety of religious sects.

Among them is Firas Hamdan, a 35-year-old lawyer and activist who was hit in the chest by a rubber bullet fired by parliament police during a protest. Elias Jaradeh, an eye surgeon, won a seat held for 30 years by a pro-Syrian politician. Najat Aoun, a chemistry professor and environmental activist, was one of four women independents who won, bringing the number of women in parliament from six to eight.

The newcomers say they plan to form a unified bloc to strengthen their influence in parliament, but that won't be easy considering what they are up against.

Their mere presence in parliament is a decent start, but the challenge now is to organize and implement a program, Bilal Saab, senior fellow and founding director of the defense and security program at the Middle East Institute, wrote in an analysis.

"This obviously will be very difficult given the still considerable power of Hezbollah and its allies, and the next presidential race in October will show the immediate impact of these parliamentary elections," he wrote.

The first test will be at parliament's first meeting, expected in the coming days, when lawmakers must elect a speaker. The 84-year-old incumbent, Nabih Berri, has held the position for the past 30 years and is running again for a seventh term, so far uncontested. The powerful head of the Shiite Amal militia is seen by many as the godfather of Lebanon's corrupt sectarian-based and elite-dominated political system.

Independents and some of the Christian parties in parliament have said they will not vote for him, risking his re-election with a much slimmer than usual majority from mainly Shiite parties. Some have speculated Berri may refrain from calling for the inaugural session, which according to the constitution must be held before June 6, if he is not assured of the desired number of votes he will get.

"For us, it's clear that we will not elect any symbol of the ruling class, including Speaker Berri," one of the new independents, 46-year-old architect Ibrahim Mneimneh, told AP. He acknowledged, however, that they have yet to develop a clear alternative course of action.

A bigger test will be formation of a cabinet that can win parliament's confidence on key issues such as an economic recovery plan, finalizing a bailout deal with the IMF, resuming the stalled investigation into the 2020 blast at Beirut port, and how to deal with the longtime Central Bank governor. The top banker is being investigated locally and in several European countries on charges of money laundering and embezzlement. Backed by the ruling class, he remains in his position despite a financial meltdown.

Finally, the new parliament will have to elect a new president when President Michel Aoun's six-year term ends on October 31, with no clear successor.

Analysts fear inability to agree on these milestones will lead to a protracted paralysis with disastrous economic and social consequences.

David Hale, former U.S. under-secretary of state for political affairs and a former ambassador to Lebanon, had a bleak view in a commentary for the Wilson Center headlined "Lebanon's Election Offers no Salvation."

"It is hard to insert a la carte independents into a system favoring fixed price menus, especially if independents don't form coalitions of their own, as they failed to do," he wrote.

Mneimneh said the traditional parties have many powerful tools through which they can pressure and obstruct." The independents' strongest tool is to try to rally the street, he said.

"I think this is the most difficult thing today because there is no equal balance between us and them."

Housekeepers struggle as US hotels ditch daily room cleaning

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By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER and ANITA SNOW Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — After guests checked out of a corner room at the Hilton Hawaiian Village resort on Waikiki beach, housekeeper Luz Espejo collected enough trash, some strewn under beds, to stuff seven large garbage bags.

She stripped the linens from the beds, wiped built-up dust off furniture and scrubbed away layers of grime on the toilet and bathtub. She even got on her hands and knees to pick confetti from the carpet that a heavy-duty vacuum failed to swallow up.

Like many other hotels across the United States, the Hilton Hawaiian Village has done away with daily housekeeping service, making what was already one of the toughest jobs in the hospitality industry even more grueling.

Industry insiders say the move away from daily cleaning, which gained traction during the pandemic, is driven by customer preferences. But others say it has more to do with profit and has allowed hotels to cut the number of housekeepers at a time when many of the mostly immigrant women who take those jobs are still reeling from lost work during coronavirus shutdowns.

Many housekeepers still employed say their hours have been cut and they are being asked to do far more work in that time.

"It's a big change for us," said Espejo, a 60-year-old originally from the Philippines who has cleaned rooms at the world's largest Hilton for 18 years, minus about a year she was laid off during the pandemic. "We are so busy at work now. We cannot finish cleaning our rooms."

Before the pandemic there were 670 housekeepers working at Espejo's resort. More than two years later, 150 of them haven't been hired back or are on-call status, spending each day from 5:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. waiting for a phone call saying there's work for them. The number not hired back or on call stood at 300 just a few weeks ago.

"This is all about more money in the owners' pocket by putting a greater workload on the frontline workers and eliminating jobs," said D. Taylor, president of UNITE HERE, a union representing hotel workers.

While some hotels started experimenting with less frequent cleaning in the name of sustainability, it became far more widespread early in the pandemic, when to promote social distancing and other safety protocols, many hotels switched to offering room cleaning only if a guest requested, and sometimes only after staying a certain number of days. Guests were instructed to leave trash outside their door and call the front desk for clean towels.

But even as safety restrictions fade and demand picks up as the country enters peak travel season, many hotels are keeping their new cleaning policies in place.

A spokesperson for the Hilton Hawaiian Village said no Hilton representative was available for an interview about such policies at any Hilton property. Representatives for several major hotel chains, including Marriott and Caesars Entertainment, either declined to be interviewed or didn't respond to Associated Press requests for comment.

Chip Rogers, president and CEO of the American Hotel & Lodging Association, a trade group whose members include hotel brands, owners and management companies, said it was the demands of guests — not hotel profits — that guided decisions about pandemic housekeeper services.

"A lot of guests, to this day, don't want people coming into their room during their stay," he said. "To force something onto a guest that they don't want is the antithesis of what it means to work in the hospitality industry."

The pandemic changed the standard of most hotel guests wanting daily cleaning, he said, adding it's not yet clear if that will result in a permanent shift.

Housekeeping policies vary based on the type of hotel, Rogers said, with luxury hotels tending to provide daily housekeeping unless guests opt out.

Ben McLeod, of Bend, Oregon, and his family didn't request housekeeping during a four-night stay at the Westin Hapuna Beach Resort on Hawaii's Big Island in March.

"My wife and I just have never really understood why there would be daily housekeeping ... when that's

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not the case at home and it's wasteful," he said.

He said he expects his kids to tidy up after themselves.

"I'm a Type-A, so I get out of bed and I make my bed, so I don't need someone else to make my bed," he said.

Unionized hotel workers are trying get the message out that turning down daily room cleaning is hurting housekeepers and threatening jobs.

Martha Bonilla, who has spent 10 years working at the Caesars Atlantic City Hotel & Casino in New Jersey, said she wants guests to ask for daily cleaning, noting it makes her job less difficult. Even though hotels in New Jersey are required by law to offer daily cleaning, some guests still turn it down.

"When I come home from work now, the only thing I want to do is go to bed," said Bonilla, originally from the Dominican Republic and a single mother of a 6-year-old daughter. "I am physically exhausted."

It's not just partying guests like the ones who threw confetti around in Hawaii that leave behind filthy rooms, housekeepers say. Even with typical use, rooms left uncleaned for days become much harder to restore to the gleaming, pristine rooms guests expect when they check in.

Elvia Angulo, a housekeeper at the Oakland Marriott City Center for 17 years, is the main breadwinner in her family.

For the first year of the pandemic, she worked a day or two a month. She has regained her 40 hours a week, but with rooms no longer cleaned daily the number of people working each shift has been cut in half, from 25 to 12.

"Thank God I have seniority here so I now have my five days again, and my salary is the same," said Angulo, 54, who is from Mexico. "But the work really is now harder. If you don't clean a room for five days you have five days of scum in the bathrooms. It's scum over scum."

Many housekeepers still aren't getting enough hours to qualify for benefits.

Sonia Guevara, who has worked at a Seattle Hilton for seven years, used to really enjoy the benefits at her job. But since returning to work after being laid off for 18 months, she hasn't qualified for health insurance.

"At first I was thinking to get a new job, but I feel like I want to wait," she said. "I want to see if my hours change at the hotel."

She said there are few other job options with hours conducive for having two children in school.

Now politicians are picking up on the issue, including Hawaii state Rep. Sonny Ganaden, who represents Kalihi, a Honolulu neighborhood where many hotel workers live.

"Almost every time I talk to people at their doors, I meet someone who works in a hotel and then we talk about how they are overworked and what is happening and working conditions," he said. "You've got a lot of first- and second-generation immigrant folks that are kind of left high and dry by these non-daily room cleaning requirements."

Ganaden is among the lawmakers who introduced a resolution requesting Hawaii hotels "immediately rehire or recall employees who were laid off or placed on leave" because of the pandemic.

If that's not enough, Ganaden said he would be open to more forceful measures like some other places have taken.

Washington, D.C.'s city council in April passed emergency legislation requiring hotels in the district to service rooms daily unless guests opt-out.

Amal Hligue, an immigrant from Morocco, hopes the rules mean more hours at the Washington Hilton where she has worked for 22 years. She needs them so her husband can get health insurance.

"I hope he has this month because I worked last month," she said.

At 57 years old, she doesn't want to find a new job. "I'm not young, you know," she said. "I have to stay."

Trump ally Zinke fights claim he's too 'liberal' for Montana

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

BUTTE, Mont. (AP) — When Republican Ryan Zinke first ran for Congress, the former Navy SEAL faced

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false accusations amplified by Democrats that his military career had ended in disgrace.

After winning in 2014 and two years later getting picked as President Donald Trump's interior secretary, Zinke is seeking a return to Congress and facing a near-identical smear campaign — this time from the right wing of his own party.

A website allied with one of his opponents accuses Zinke of exaggerating his military service — failing to mention two Bronze Stars that Zinke earned in Iraq — and of being demoted, which his service records refute.

It's part of a broad campaign by some Republicans leading up to the state's June 7 primary to thwart Zinke's bid for a political comeback and advance a more conservative candidate for the general election.

The political dynamics reflect the sharp right turn the GOP has taken since Trump barnstormed across Montana's electoral scene with repeated visits during the 2018 election in a failed attempt to unseat Democratic U.S. Sen. Jon Tester.

Zinke's status as a former Trump Cabinet member is simply not enough anymore for some in his party. They say he's too liberal and too soft on guns and didn't do enough to build Trump's envisioned wall on the U.S.-Mexico border.

Zinke has also been dogged by problems of his own making, including recent revelations that he lied to a federal ethics official before his 2018 resignation from the Department of Interior.

This month came a disclosure from Politico that Zinke's wife, Lolita, designated her family's California home as her primary residence. That boosted long-standing suspicions that Zinke spends most of his time outside Montana.

His opponents see a chance to make inroads with Trump voters, who seemed a lock for Zinke when he entered the race last year and quickly secured the former president's endorsement.

"He quit Montana," said former state Sen. Albert Olszewski, one of Zinke's four primary opponents. "He quit Trump."

Zinke is still acting as the front-runner, referring to himself as the "battleship" and other candidates as "canoes" while speaking to a reporter on the sidelines of a dinner last week hosted by Butte-Silver Bow County Republicans.

"Everybody wants to shoot at the battleship. Nobody shoots at the canoes," he said.

Zinke denies lying. But he doesn't deny that his wife is a California resident, and he acknowledges holding fundraisers there. He said he spends "a couple days a quarter" in Santa Barbara.

The Montana House district that's at stake was created last year to account for the state's growing population and covers half the state — from Yellowstone National Park, north along the spine of the Rocky Mountains, to the Canadian border.

The district had been eliminated in 1993. Montana Democrats lost the state's only other House seat a few years later, and over the last several election cycles, Republicans took control of every statewide office in Montana except Tester's.

Trump won Montana in 2020 with a 16-point advantage. The notion that Zinke quit him could prove hard to sell after Trump held a recent telerally with Zinke supporters reiterating his support. Trump spoke less than four minutes and spent most of the time touting his own accomplishments.

Montana Democrats spent the past six years painting Zinke as extreme, and he suggested the attacks on him in the GOP primary for being too liberal could help if he advances to the November election. It offers a contrast, he said, so moderate voters know he's not "crazy."

Still, he's got much in common with his fellow GOP candidates. He's refused to acknowledge that President Joe Biden was legitimately elected and has called for harsher immigration policies. He's also backed by the NRA.

Democrats and his Republican detractors alike have highlighted the numerous investigations Zinke came under while at the Interior Department and the large paychecks he received when he later worked in the private sector.

The questions surrounding Zinke's conduct haven't put a dent in his fundraising success. Through March 31, Zinke had raised \$2.5 million, almost as much as all other candidates from both parties combined.

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About 80% of Zinke's campaign contributions came from out-of-state donors, Federal Election Commission data shows.

For Republican voter Jennifer Howell, Zinke's outside support "speaks of corruption."

"That means he's bought by outside interests. Money talks," she said before the Republican dinner in Butte, as Zinke spoke with other local members of the party just a few feet away. "To me, that's rude in your face, like saying, "I don't need your money, Montana. I'll get my money elsewhere."

Later, as the dinner drew to a close, 70-year-old Barbara Jones passed a donation envelope to Zinke and thanked him for hosting her at his table.

Despite the attacks on him, Jones said Zinke had behaved "like an honorable man." She also praised him for returning to Montana after linking up with a Washington lobbying firm when he first left the Cabinet.

But Jones hasn't decided whom to support in the primary. She first wanted to learn more about Olszewski and Republican candidate Mary Todd, a pastor from Kalispell who contends her son was killed after refusing to help a Chinese-backed firm steal U.S. technology.

The \$50 for Zinke, Jones said, was because "he paid for my dinner, so I wanted to pay him back."

Goodbye NYC; Estimates show big city losses, Sunbelt gains

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

Ko Im always thought she would live in New York forever. She knew every corner of Manhattan and had worked hard to build a community of friends. Living in a small apartment, she found her attitude shifting early in the pandemic. After her brother accepted a job in Seattle in the summer of 2020, she decided to move there too.

"It was fine until it wasn't," said Im, 36. "The pandemic really changed my mindset about how I wanted to live or how I needed to live."

Eight of the 10 largest cities in the U.S. lost population during the first year of the pandemic, with New York, Los Angeles and Chicago leading the way. Between July 2020 and July 2021, New York lost more than 305,000 people, while Chicago and Los Angeles contracted by 45,000 residents and 40,000 people, respectively.

Although San Francisco's not among the 10 largest cities, almost 55,000 residents left that city, or 6.3% of its 2020 population, the highest percentage of any U.S. city.

Among the 10 largest U.S. cities, only San Antonio and Phoenix gained new residents, but they added only about 13,000 people each, or less than 1% of their populations, according to 2021 vintage population estimates.

Justin Jordan's move to Phoenix a year ago was motivated by a job offer paying him more money than the one in Moundsville, West Virginia, where he had been living. He has had to adjust to 110 degree Fahrenheit (43.3 degree Celsius) temperatures and unwieldy traffic.

"I love the weather, the atmosphere, and all the stuff to do," said Jordan, 33, a senior operations manager for a business services firm.

Austin and Fort Worth in Texas; Jacksonville, Florida; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Columbus, Ohio also registered modest population gains.

In March, the Census Bureau released estimates for metro areas and counties showing changes from mid-2020 to mid-2021. The estimates released Thursday offer a more granular perspective. For instance, the March data showed metro Dallas had the largest population gain of any metro area in the U.S., adding more than 97,000 residents, but Thursday's estimates show the city of Dallas lost almost 15,000 residents. The growth occurred in Dallas suburbs like Frisco, McKinney and Plano.

Reasons for population changes vary from city to city, driven by housing costs, jobs, births and deaths. The pandemic and the lockdown that followed in spring 2020 made living in a crowded city less appealing for a time, and those who could leave -- workers who could do their jobs remotely, for example -- sometimes did.

Brooking Institution demographer William Frey said he believes the population declines in most of the

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largest U.S. cities from 2020 to 2021 are "short-lived and pandemic-related."

When it came to growth rates, as opposed to raw numbers, the fastest-growing cities with populations of at least 50,000 residents were in the suburbs of booming Sunbelt metro areas. They included Georgetown and Leander outside Austin; the town of Queen Creek and the cities of Buckeye, Casa Grande and Maricopa, outside Phoenix; the city of New Braunfels, outside San Antonio; and Fort Myers, Florida. They had growth rates of between 6.1% and 10.5%.

As metro Austin has grown by leaps and bounds, so has Georgetown, located more than 25 miles (40 kilometers) north of the Texas capital, said Keith Hutchinson, the city's communications manager. The city grew by 10.5%, the most in the nation last year, and now has 75,000 residents.

"It's not really a surprise," Hutchinson said. "People are moving here for jobs."

The estimates also showed population declines of 3% to 3.5% in New Jersey cities outside New York, such as Union City, Hoboken and Bayonne. Similar declines occurred outside San Francisco in Daly City, Redwood City and San Mateo, as well as Cupertino in Silicon Valley.

Lake Charles, Louisiana, which was devastated by Hurricane Laura in 2020, lost almost 5% of its residents, the second-highest rate in the U.S. behind San Francisco.

Though the Category 4 storm was the driver there, elsewhere, the pandemic created opportunities to move. Andrew Mazur, 31, had been wanting for some time to leave Philadelphia for South Florida where he grew up, and the chance to work remotely in his job at a large professional services firm arrived in November 2020. He joined almost 25,000 residents who left Philadelphia between 2020 and 2021.

Although he now needs a car to get around, Mazur loves golfing every weekend and going to the beach. He recently moved out of his parents' home, getting his own apartment in Fort Lauderdale. He made the move official three weeks ago by obtaining a Florida driver's license.

"I'm not going back. It has been great," Mazur said. "Philly, New York, Chicago — tons of people from there are moving down here."

States divided on gun controls, even as mass shootings rise

By RACHEL LA CORTE and ANDREW DEMILLO Associated Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. (AP) — Washington Gov. Jay Inslee was quick to react to this week's carnage at a Texas elementary school, sending a tweet listing the gun control measures the Democratic-controlled state has taken. He finished with: "Your turn Congress."

But gun control measures are likely going nowhere in Congress, and they also have become increasingly scarce in most states. Aside from several Democratic-controlled states, the majority have taken no action on gun control in recent years or have moved aggressively to expand gun rights.

That's because they are either controlled politically by Republicans who oppose gun restrictions or are politically divided, leading to stalemate.

"Here I am in a position where I can do something, I can introduce legislation, and yet to know that it almost certainly is not going to go anywhere is a feeling of helplessness," said state Sen. Greg Leding, a Democrat in the GOP-controlled Arkansas Legislature. He has pushed unsuccessfully for red flag laws that would allow authorities to remove firearms from those determined to be a danger to themselves or others.

After Tuesday's massacre at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, that left 19 students and two teachers dead, Democratic governors and lawmakers across the country issued impassioned pleas for Congress and their own legislatures to pass gun restrictions. Republicans have mostly called for more efforts to address mental health and to shore up protections at schools, such as adding security guards.

Among them is Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who has repeatedly talked about mental health struggles among young people and said tougher gun laws in places like New York and California are ineffective. In Tennessee, GOP Rep. Jeremy Faison tweeted that the state needs to have security officers "in all of our schools," but stopped short of promising to introduce legislation during next year's legislative session: "Evil exists and we must protect the innocent from it," Faison said.

Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers has repeatedly clashed with the GOP-controlled Legislature over gun laws.

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He has called for passage of universal background checks and "red flag" laws, only to be ignored by Republicans. Earlier this year, the Democrat vetoed a Republican bill that would have allowed holders of concealed carry permits to have firearms in vehicles on school grounds and in churches located on the grounds of a private school.

"We cannot accept that gun violence just happens," Evers said in a tweet. "We cannot accept that kids might go to school and never come home. We cannot accept the outright refusal of elected officials to act."

On Wednesday, a day after the Texas shooting, legislative Democrats asked that the Wisconsin gun safety bills be taken up again, apparently to no avail. Republican Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu and Assembly Speaker Robin Vos did not return messages seeking their response.

In Pennsylvania, an effort by Democratic lawmakers Wednesday in the GOP-controlled Legislature to ban owning, selling or making high-capacity, semi-automatic firearms failed, as House Republicans displayed their firm opposition to gun restrictions. The GOP-majority Legislature has rejected appeals by Democratic governors over the past two decades to tighten gun control laws, including taking steps such as expanding background checks or limiting the number of handgun purchases one person can make in a month.

The situation is similar in Michigan, which has a Democratic governor and Republican-controlled Legislature. On Wednesday, Democrats in the state Senate were thwarted in their efforts to advance a group of bills that would require gun owners to lock up their firearms and keep them away from minors.

"Every day we don't take action, we are choosing guns over children," said Democratic Sen. Rosemary Bayer, whose district includes a high school where a teen was charged in a shooting that killed four in November and whose parents are charged with involuntary manslaughter, accused of failing to lock up their gun. "Enough is enough. No more prayers, no more thoughts, no more inaction."

Republican state Sen. Ken Horn responded by urging discussion about the other potential causes of gun violence.

"I would just point out that there are political solutions, but there are just as many spiritual solutions," he said. "We don't know what's really happening in this world, what's happening in this country, what's happening to young men."

Florida stands out as a Republican-controlled state that took action. The 2018 shooting at a high school in Parkland that left 14 students and three staff members dead prompted lawmakers there to pass a law with a red flag provision that lets law enforcement officers petition a court to have guns confiscated from a person considered a threat.

Democrats now want that expanded to allow family members or roommates to make the same request of the courts, but there has been little appetite among Republicans to amend the law. Instead, Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis said he wants lawmakers to allow people to carry handguns without a permit. The state currently requires a concealed weapons license.

While Republicans have supported red flag laws in some other states, most legislative action around gun control in recent years has been in states led by Democrats.

In Washington state, the governor earlier this year signed a package of bills related to firearm magazine limits, ghost guns and adding more locations where guns are prohibited, including ballot counting sites.

In California on Wednesday, Gov. Gavin Newsom and top Democratic legislative leaders vowed to fast-track gun legislation, identifying about a dozen bills they plan to pass this year. Newsom highlighted a bill that would let private citizens enforce a ban on assault weapons by filing lawsuits – similar to a law in Texas that bans most abortions through civil enforcement.

Oregon's Democratically controlled Legislature has passed bills that require background checks, prohibit guns on public school grounds, allow firearms to be taken from those who pose a risk and ensure safe storage of firearms. On Wednesday, a group of six Democrats said more must be done after the mass shooting in Texas and the racially motivated massacre in Buffalo, New York. They pledged additional action next year.

"We ran for office to solve big problems and make life better for our constituents — and that includes taking on the gun lobby and politicians that place profits and political power over children's lives," they said in a joint statement.

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But there are limits even in some Democratic-controlled states, underscoring the challenge of gaining consensus to combat the rising frequency of mass shootings in the U.S.

Rhode Island has passed restrictions in recent years that include measures to ban firearms from school grounds and close the "straw purchasing" loophole that had allowed people to buy guns for someone else. But bills that would ban high-capacity ammunition magazines and assault weapons have been bottled up in committee, in part because the overwhelmingly Democratic chamber includes many lawmakers who have opposed the measures, citing their support for the Second Amendment.

In Connecticut, gun violence legislation supported by both parties swiftly followed after 20 children and six staff members were shot and killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012. But additional gun control measures stalled this year in the Democratic-led General Assembly, in large part because of a short legislative session and threats by Republicans to hold up legislation through a filibuster.

Democratic Gov. Ned Lamont said Wednesday he's uncertain whether he will call a special session on the bills. They would put limits on bulk purchases of firearms and require the registration of so-called ghost guns, untraceable firearms that can be assembled at home.

"I think it's become an incredibly partisan argument right now in our society," Lamont said. "It wasn't that way, you know, 30, 40 years ago. So that is disturbing, even in a state like Connecticut, where after Sandy Hook we had strong bipartisan support."

Dispute over mosque becomes religious flashpoint in India

By SHEIKH SAALIQ and KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — For nearly three centuries, Muslims and Hindus in India's northern Varanasi city have prayed to their gods in a mosque and a temple that are separated by one wall. Many see it as an example of religious coexistence in a country where bouts of deadly communal violence are common.

That coexistence is now under threat due to a controversial court case.

A local court earlier this month began hearing a petition filed by a group of Hindus that seeks access to pray inside the Gyanvapi mosque compound, arguing it was built on top of the ruins of a medieval-era temple that was razed by a Mughal emperor. The petitioners say the complex still houses Hindu idols and motifs, a claim that has been contested by the mosque's authorities.

The legal battle is the latest instance of a growing phenomenon in which Hindu groups petition courts demanding land they claim belongs to Hindus. Critics say such cases spark fears over the status of religious places for India's Muslims, a minority community that has come under attack in recent years by Hindu nationalists who seek to turn officially secular India into an avowedly Hindu nation.

"The idea to bombard the courts with so many petitions is to keep the Muslims in check and the communal pot simmering," said Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, a political analyst and commentator. "It is a way to tell Muslims that their public display of faith in India is no more accepted and that the alleged humiliation heaped on them by Muslim rulers of the medieval past should be redressed now."

The court case involving the 17th century Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, one of Hinduism's holiest cities, in many ways embodies India's contemporary religious strife. The widely accepted consensus among historians is that it was built on top of a temple dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva after it was demolished by the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb.

The two communities have in the past stuck to their claims but also made sure the dispute didn't worsen. That changed last week when a local court in Varanasi ordered the mosque to be surveyed after five Hindu women filed a petition seeking permission to offer prayers there.

A video survey found a stone shaft alleged to be a symbol of Shiva inside a reservoir in the mosque used by Muslim devotees for ablution before offering prayers, according to Hari Shankar Jain, a lawyer representing the Hindu women.

"The land on which the mosque is built belongs to Hindus and should be returned to us," Jain said.

Mosque representatives have refuted the claims. Rais Ahmad Ansari, a lawyer for the mosque's committee, said the alleged stone shaft found in the reservoir was the base of a fountain.

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The discovery of the alleged Hindu symbol led the local court in Varanasi to seal the premises, banning large Muslim gatherings inside. India's Supreme Court later overturned that judgment and allowed Muslims to pray in the mosque. But it also ordered local authorities to seal off and protect the area where the stone shaft was found, dispossessing Muslims of a portion of the mosque they had used until this month.

The dispute over the mosque and survey has now been taken up by a higher court in Varanasi, with hearings set to continue Thursday.

Lawyers representing the Muslim side have questioned the legal basis for the survey, arguing that it was against the law and a precedent most recently upheld by the Supreme Court in 2019.

India's Hindu nationalists have long claimed that thousands of medieval-era mosques are built on the sites of prominent temples that were demolished by Mughal rulers. Many historians have said the numbers are exaggerated, arguing that a few dozen temples were indeed razed but largely for political reasons and not religious.

In the late 1980s, Hindu nationalist groups started campaigns to reclaim these mosques. One such campaign culminated in 1992 with the destruction of the 16th century Babri mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya by Hindu mobs.

Hindus believe the site of the mosque was the exact birthplace of their god Ram. Its demolition sparked massive communal violence across India that left more than 2,000 people dead — mostly Muslims — and catapulted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party to national prominence.

A grand Hindu temple is now being constructed on the site after India's Supreme Court handed over the disputed land to Hindus in a controversial 2019 judgement. However, the court assured Muslims that the order would not be used as a precedent or pave the way for more such contentious cases.

The court in its judgment cited the 1991 Places of Worship Act, which forbids the conversion of a place of worship and stipulates that its religious character should be maintained as "it existed" on August 15, 1947, the day India won its independence from British colonialists.

Lawyers representing the Muslim side say the Gyanvapi mosque court case goes against that very judicial commitment.

"The act was seen as sacrosanct, that it was there to not reopen old controversies. But allowing a survey is doing exactly that — you are scraping at old wounds. This is what it was meant to prohibit," said Nizam Pasha, a lawyer representing the mosque's committee.

The Gyanvapi mosque case also fits into a narrative of Modi's party, which has long campaigned to reclaim what it calls India's lost Hindu past. Many party leaders have openly suggested they would take such legal battles head on.

Critics say the party does so by providing support to Hindu nationalist groups that often contest such cases in court. Modi's party has denied this, saying it cannot stop people from going to the courts.

Pasha, the lawyer, said the filing of such court cases was a "very carefully thought out pattern" meant to bolster Hindu nationalists.

He said the cases are brought by ordinary Hindu citizens as plaintiffs who say they are devotees of a deity asking for the right to pray at disputed sites. Once the matter goes to court, the Hindu plaintiffs then push for searches of the sites and present evidence that is used to build a media narrative and galvanize the public, he said.

"It is very difficult to convince a public then, already influenced by the media, that this is not true, that this is a fountain," Pasha said of the Gyanvapi mosque case.

Meanwhile, Hindu nationalists have begun eyeing more such mosques.

Last week, a local court accepted a petition to hear a case on the site of another mosque in Uttar Pradesh's Mathura city, located next to a temple, that some Hindus claim is built on the birthplace of the Hindu god Krishna. Similarly, another court in New Delhi heard arguments this week on restoring a temple that Hindu petitioners say existed under a mosque built at the UNESCO World Heritage site, the Qutub Minar. The court said it will deliver a verdict next month.

Many other cases are expected to take years to resolve, but critics say they will help Modi's party as it

prepares for elections in 2024.

"These cases help Hindu nationalists with a groundswell of support for their divisive politics. And that's what they need," said Mukhopadhyay, the political analyst.

'Horrible' conspiracy theories swirl around Texas shooting

By DAVID KLEPPER and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — By now it's as predictable as the calls for thoughts and prayers: A mass shooting leaves many dead, and wild conspiracy theories and misinformation about the carnage soon follow.

It happened after Sandy Hook, after Parkland, after the Orlando nightclub shooting and after the deadly rampage earlier this month at a Buffalo grocery store. Within hours of Tuesday's school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, another rash began as internet users spread baseless claims about the man named as the gunman and his possible motives.

Unfounded claims that the gunman was an immigrant living in the U.S. illegally, or transgender, quickly emerged on Twitter, Reddit and other social media platforms. They were accompanied by familiar conspiracy theories suggesting the entire shooting was somehow staged.

The claims reflect broader problems with racism and intolerance toward transgender people, and are an effort to blame the shooting on minority groups who already endure higher rates of online harassment and hate crimes, according to disinformation expert Jaime Longoria.

"It's a tactic that serves two purposes: It avoids real conversations about the issue (of gun violence), and it gives people who don't want to face reality a patsy, it gives them someone to blame," said Longoria, director of research at the Disinfo Defense League, a non-profit that works to fight racist misinformation.

In the hours after the shooting, posts falsely claiming the gunman was living in the country illegally went viral, with some users adding embellishments, including that he was "on the run from Border Patrol."

"He was an illegal alien wanted for murder from El Salvador," read one tweet liked and retweeted hundreds of times. "This is blood on Biden's hands and should have never happened."

The man who authorities say carried out the shooting, 18-year-old Salvador Ramos, is a U.S. citizen, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said in a news conference on Tuesday.

Other social media users seized on images of innocent internet users to falsely identify them as the gunman and claim he was transgender. On the online message board 4Chan, users liberally shared the photos and discussed a plan to label the gunman as transgender, without any evidence to back it up.

One post on Twitter, which has since been deleted, featured a photo of a trans woman holding a green bottle to her mouth, looking into the camera, headphones hanging from one ear.

"BREAKING NEWS: THE IDENTITY OF THE SHOOTER HAS BEEN REVEALED," claimed the user, saying the shooter was a "FEMBOY" with a channel on YouTube.

None of that was true. The photo actually depicted a 22-year-old trans woman named Sabrina who lives in New York City. Sabrina, who requested her last name not be published due to privacy concerns, confirmed to The Associated Press that the photo was hers and also said she was not affiliated with the purported YouTube account.

Sabrina said she received harassing responses on social media, particularly messages claiming that she was the shooter. She responded to a number of posts spreading the image with the misidentification, asking for the posts to be deleted.

"This whole ordeal is just horrifying," Sabrina told the AP.

Another photo that circulated widely showed a transgender woman with a Coca-Cola sweatshirt and a black skirt. A second photo showed the same woman wearing a black NASA shirt with a red skirt. These photos didn't show the gunman either — they were of a Reddit user named Sam, who confirmed her identity to the AP on Wednesday. The AP is not using Sam's last name to protect her privacy.

"It's not me, I don't even live in Texas," Sam wrote in a Reddit post.

Authorities have released no information on the gunman's sexuality or gender identification.

Arizona Congressman Paul Gosar fit both unfounded claims about Ramos in a single now-deleted tweet

that also misspelled his name. "It's a transsexual leftist illegal alien named Salvatore Ramos," Gosar tweeted Tuesday night.

Gosar's office did not return a message seeking comment.

In some cases, misinformation about mass shootings or other events are spread by well-intentioned social media users trying to be helpful. In other cases, it can be the work of grifters looking to start fake fundraisers or draw attention to their website or organization.

Then there are the trolls who seemingly do it for fun.

Fringe online communities, including on 4chan, often use mass shootings and other tragedies as opportunities to sow chaos, troll the public and push harmful narratives, according to Ben Decker, founder and CEO of the digital investigations consultancy Memetica.

"It is very intentional and deliberate for them in celebrating these types of incidents to also influence what the mainstream conversations actually are," Decker said. "There's a nihilistic desire to prove oneself in these types of communities by successfully trolling the public. So if you are able to spearhead a campaign that leads to an outcome like this, you're gaining increased sort of in-group credibility."

For the communities bearing the brunt of such vicious online attacks, though, the false blame stirs fears of further discrimination and violence.

Something as seemingly innocuous as a transphobic comment on social media can spark an act of violence against a transgender person, said Jaden Janak, a PhD candidate at the University of Texas and a junior fellow at the Center for Applied Transgender Studies.

"These children and adults who were murdered yesterday were just living their lives," Janak said Wednesday. "They didn't know that yesterday was going to be their last day. And similarly, as trans people, that's a fear that we have all the time."

Onlookers urged police to charge into Texas school

By JAKE BLEIBERG, JIM VERTUNO and ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — Frustrated onlookers urged police officers to charge into the Texas elementary school where a gunman's rampage killed 19 children and two teachers, witnesses said Wednesday, as investigators worked to track the massacre that lasted upwards of 40 minutes and ended when the 18-year-old shooter was killed by a Border Patrol team.

"Go in there! Go in there!" nearby women shouted at the officers soon after the attack began, said Juan Carranza, 24, who saw the scene from outside his house, across the street from Robb Elementary School in the close-knit town of Uvalde. Carranza said the officers did not go in.

Javier Cazares, whose fourth grade daughter, Jacklyn Cazares, was killed in the attack, said he raced to the school when he heard about the shooting, arriving while police were still gathered outside the building.

Upset that police were not moving in, he raised the idea of charging into the school with several other bystanders.

"Let's just rush in because the cops aren't doing anything like they are supposed to," he said. "More could have been done."

"They were unprepared," he added.

Minutes earlier, Carranza had watched as Salvador Ramos crashed his truck into a ditch outside the school, grabbed his AR-15-style semi-automatic rifle and shot at two people outside a nearby funeral home who ran away uninjured.

Officials say he "encountered" a school district security officer outside the school, though there were conflicting reports from authorities on whether the men exchanged gunfire. After running inside, he fired on two arriving Uvalde police officers who were outside the building, said Texas Department of Public Safety spokesperson Travis Considine. The police officers were injured.

After entering the school, Ramos charged into one classroom and began to kill.

He "barricaded himself by locking the door and just started shooting children and teachers that were inside that classroom," Lt. Christopher Olivarez of the Department of Public Safety told CNN. "It just shows

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you the complete evil of the shooter.”

All those killed were in the same classroom, he said.

Department of Public Safety Director Steve McCraw told reporters that 40 minutes to an hour elapsed from when Ramos opened fire on the school security officer to when the tactical team shot him, though a department spokesman said later that they could not give a solid estimate of how long the gunman was in the school or when he was killed.

“The bottom line is law enforcement was there,” McCraw said. “They did engage immediately. They did contain (Ramos) in the classroom.”

Meanwhile, a law enforcement official familiar with the investigation said the Border Patrol agents had trouble breaching the classroom door and had to get a staff member to open the room with a key. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly about the ongoing investigation.

Carranza said the officers should have entered the school sooner.

“There were more of them. There was just one of him,” he said.

Uvalde is a largely Latino town of some 16,000 people about 75 miles (120 kilometers) from the Mexican border. Robb Elementary, which has nearly 600 students in second, third and fourth grades, is a single-story brick structure in a mostly residential neighborhood of modest homes.

Before attacking the school, Ramos shot and wounded his grandmother at the home they shared, authorities said.

Neighbor Gilbert Gallegos, 82, who lives across the street and has known the family for decades, said he was puttering in his yard when he heard the shots.

Ramos ran out the front door and across the small yard to the truck parked in front of the house. He seemed panicked, Gallegos said, and had trouble getting the truck out of park.

Then he raced away: “He spun out, I mean fast,” spraying gravel in the air.

His grandmother emerged covered in blood: “She says, ‘Berto, this is what he did. He shot me.’” She was hospitalized.

Gallegos, whose wife called 911, said he had heard no arguments before or after the shots, and knew of no history of bullying or abuse of Ramos, who he rarely saw.

Investigators also shed no light on Ramos’ motive for the attack, which also left at least 17 people wounded. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said Ramos, a resident of the small town about 85 miles (135 kilometers) west of San Antonio, had no known criminal or mental health history.

“We don’t see a motive or catalyst right now,” said McCraw of the Department of Public Safety.

Ramos legally bought the rifle and a second one like it last week, just after his birthday, authorities said.

About a half-hour before the mass shooting, Ramos sent the first of three online messages warning about his plans, Abbott said.

Ramos wrote that he was going to shoot his grandmother, then that he had shot the woman. In the last note, sent about 15 minutes before he reached Robb Elementary, he said he was going to shoot up an elementary school, according to Abbott. Investigators said Ramos did not specify which school.

Ramos sent the private, one-to-one text messages via Facebook, said company spokesman Andy Stone. It was not clear who received the messages.

Grief engulfed Uvalde as the details emerged.

The dead included Eliahna Garcia, an outgoing 10-year-old who loved to sing, dance and play basketball; a fellow fourth-grader, Xavier Javier Lopez, who had been eagerly awaiting a summer of swimming; and a teacher, Eva Mireles, whose husband is an officer with the school district’s police department.

“You can just tell by their angelic smiles that they were loved,” Uvalde Schools Superintendent Hal Harrell said, fighting back tears as he recalled the children and teachers killed.

The tragedy was the latest in a seemingly unending wave of mass shootings across the U.S. in recent years. Just 10 days earlier, 10 Black people were shot to death in a racist attack at a Buffalo, New York, supermarket.

The attack was the deadliest school shooting in the U.S. since a gunman killed 20 children and six adults

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at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut, in December 2012.

Amid calls for tighter restrictions on firearms, the Republican governor repeatedly talked about mental health struggles among Texas young people and argued that tougher gun laws in Chicago, New York and California are ineffective.

Democrat Beto O'Rourke, who is running against Abbott for governor, interrupted Wednesday's news conference, calling the tragedy "predictable." Pointing his finger at Abbott, he said: "This is on you until you choose to do something different. This will continue to happen." O'Rourke was escorted out as some in the room yelled at him. Uvalde Mayor Don McLaughlin yelled that O'Rourke was a "sick son of a bitch."

Texas has some of the most gun-friendly laws in the nation and has been the site of some of the deadliest shootings in the U.S. over the past five years.

"I just don't know how people can sell that type of a gun to a kid 18 years old," Siria Arizmendi, the aunt of victim Eliahna Garcia, said angrily through tears. "What is he going to use it for but for that purpose?"

President Joe Biden said Wednesday that "the Second Amendment is not absolute" as he called for new limitations on guns in the wake of the massacre.

But the prospects for reform of the nation's gun regulations appeared dim. Repeated attempts over the years to expand background checks and enact other curbs have run into Republican opposition in Congress.

The shooting came days before the National Rifle Association annual convention was set to begin in Houston, with the Texas governor and both of the state's Republican U.S. senators scheduled to speak.

Dillon Silva, whose nephew was in a classroom, said students were watching the Disney movie "Moana" when they heard several loud pops and a bullet shattered a window. Moments later, their teacher saw the attacker stride past.

"Oh, my God, he has a gun!" the teacher shouted twice, according to Silva. "The teacher didn't even have time to lock the door," he said.

The close-knit community, built around a shaded central square, includes many families who have lived there for generations.

Lorena Auguste was substitute teaching at Uvalde High School when she heard about the shooting and began frantically texting her niece, a fourth grader at Robb Elementary. Eventually she found out the girl was OK.

But that night, her niece had a question.

"Why did they do this to us?" the girl asked. "We're good kids. We didn't do anything wrong."

'Trump is in the past': Mounting losses show limits of power

By JILL COLVIN and JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

WOODSTOCK, Ga. (AP) — Donald Trump opened May by lifting a trailing Senate candidate in Ohio to the Republican nomination, seemingly cementing the former president's kingmaker status before another possible White House run. He's ending the month, however, stinging from a string of defeats that suggest a diminishing stature.

Trump faced a series of setbacks in Tuesday's primary elections as voters rejected his efforts to unseat two top targets for retribution: Georgia's Republican governor and secretary of state, both of whom rebuffed Trump's extraordinary pressure to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. But the magnitude of defeat in the governor's race — more than 50 percentage points — was especially stunning and raised questions about whether Republican voters are beginning to move on from Trump.

Nearly seven years after the onetime reality television star launched what seemed to be an improbable campaign for the White House, the "Make America Great Again" movement Trump helmed isn't going anywhere. But voters are increasingly vocal in saying that the party's future is about more than Trump.

"I like Trump a lot, but Trump is in the past," said David Butler of Woodstock, Georgia, who voted for Gov. Brian Kemp on Tuesday and said Trump's endorsements had "no" impact "whatsoever" on his thinking.

It was the same for Will Parbhoo, a 22-year-old dental assistant who also voted for Kemp.

"I'm not really a Trumper," he said after voting. "I didn't like him to begin with. With all the election stuff,

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I was like 'Dude, move on.'"

One thing Parbhoo liked about the current governor? "Kemp is focused on Georgia," he said.

Trump sought to play down the losses by his favored candidates, saying on his social media platform Wednesday that he had a "very big and successful evening of political Endorsements" and insisting some races "were not possible to win."

Still, the pattern of high-profile defeats is hard to ignore.

After JD Vance vaulted from third to first place following Trump's late-stage endorsement in the Ohio Senate primary, the dynamics took a turn. Trump's pick in Nebraska's primary for governor, Charles Herbster, lost his race after allegations surfaced that he had groped women.

In Idaho a week later, the governor beat a Trump-backed challenger. In North Carolina, voters rebuffed Trump's plea to give a scandal-plagued congressman a second chance. And in Pennsylvania, a marquee Senate primary featuring Trump-endorsed celebrity heart surgeon Mehmet Oz remains too close to call.

But his biggest upset was in Georgia, a crucial swing state, where former Sen. David Perdue, whom Trump had lobbied to run and helped clear the field for, lost to Kemp. The governor was among Trump's top targets after he refused to overturn the results of the 2020 White House election in his state.

Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, who defied Trump's call to "find" the votes to change the outcome two years ago — a call that is now under investigation — also won his party's nomination. Attorney General Chris Carr and Insurance Commissioner John King — both opposed by Trump — were also successful in their primaries.

In Alabama, Rep. Mo Brooks, whose Senate endorsement Trump rescinded as he struggled to gain traction, made it to a runoff, having gained support after Trump dropped him.

Trump has endorsed in nearly 200 races, from governor to county commissioner, often inserting himself into contests that aren't particularly competitive and helping bolster his compilation of wins. Some of his work, even in races with multiple candidates, has paid off.

His early support helped football great Herschel Walker and Rep. Ted Budd sail to their respective Senate primary nominations in Georgia and North Carolina. Sarah Huckabee Sanders, Trump's former press secretary, easily won the GOP nomination for governor in Arkansas. And even in Georgia, all of the candidates Trump endorsed in open races won or will head to runoffs.

Some allies say Trump's endorsement tally is a poor measure of his influence, even if Trump constantly promotes that record.

They argue that voters may support the former president and be eager for him to run again, but may not be persuaded by his selections, especially in races with governors such as Kemp who have long histories with voters. And even without Trump on the ballot, the party has been transformed in Trump's image, with candidates adopting his "America First" platform, mimicking his tactics and parroting his lies about a stolen election.

But with Trump out of office and relegated to posting on his own social media platform, other voices are beginning to fill the void. Fox News host Tucker Carlson, the most watched personality on cable television, has become a driving ideological force in the party. Republicans such as the conspiracy-embracing Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, who won her party's nomination for reelection Tuesday, have taken up his mantle in Washington.

Meanwhile, potential presidential rivals to Trump are waiting in the wings for 2024.

Former Vice President Mike Pence, who has been distancing himself from Trump, rallied with Kemp in suburban Atlanta on Monday evening and told the crowd that "elections are about the future" — an implicit knock on his former boss.

Trump has also spawned a new generation of candidates who have channeled his "MAGA" brand, but who have done so independent of his support and see themselves as its next iteration.

"MAGA doesn't belong to him," Kathy Barnette, the Pennsylvania Senate candidate whose late-stage surge stunned party insiders, said in an interview. "Trump coined the word. He does not own it."

While the left, she said, may see the "MAGA movement" as a "cult of Trump voters," she said it goes far beyond one man. She argued that Trump had succeeded in 2016 because he aligned himself with voters'

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concerns and said out loud what people were already thinking, particularly on immigration. She said she tried in her race to do the same.

"I do believe Trump has an important voice still," she added, but "he needs to get better advisers, and in addition to that, he needs to do better himself in remembering why we aligned with him. And it wasn't because we were aligning with his values. It was because he was aligning with our values. And I think he needs to remember that so that his voice can remain relevant."

Other Republicans grouse that precious time and money have been wasted on an ego-driven Trump vengeance campaign, forcing incumbents to defend themselves in primaries rather than focus on general elections. They worry Trump has elevated some candidates who may prove unelectable in the November general election and has exacerbated divisions.

"There's no question unnecessary fights with kind of the extremes of the party, of Trump's grievance party, have made it more difficult for us to win in November," said Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, a potential 2024 GOP presidential candidate who has been working to protect incumbent governors.

Hogan, a Trump critic, said that, so far, the races have "been a bit of a mixed bag,"

"We're in the middle of a battle for the soul of the Republican Party and quite frankly the battle's not over yet," he said. "I don't think we can say exactly what the outcome is yet. And I think we still have many more primaries to go."

Others are more confident in saying Trump's power has diminished over time.

"The Trump endorsement is helpful but it is not something that by itself can put anyone over the top. And that means it's less powerful than it was when he was president and it seemed like a fait accompli when he endorsed," said Mike DuHaime, a longtime GOP strategist.

Still, he acknowledged that Trump is "still the most influential person in the party," even if that influence has waned.

Boeing capsule lands back on Earth after space shakedown

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Boeing's crew taxi returned to Earth from the International Space Station on Wednesday, completing a repeat test flight before NASA astronauts climb aboard.

It was a quick trip back: The Starliner capsule parachuted into the New Mexico desert just four hours after leaving the orbiting lab, with airbags attached to cushion the landing. Only a mannequin was buckled in.

Aside from thruster failures and cooling system snags, Starliner appeared to clinch its high-stakes shakedown cruise, 2 1/2 years after its botched first try. Flight controllers in Houston applauded and cheered the bull's-eye touchdown.

"It's great to have this incredible test flight behind us," said Steve Stich, director of NASA's commercial crew program. He described the demo as "extremely successful," with all objectives met.

Added Boeing's Mark Nappi, a vice president: "On a scale of one to 10, I think I'd give it a 15."

Based on these early results, NASA astronauts will strap in next for a trip to the space station, perhaps by year's end. The space agency has long wanted two competing U.S. companies ferrying astronauts, for added insurance as it drastically reduced its reliance on Russia for rides to and from the space station.

Elon Musk's SpaceX is already the established leader, launching astronauts since 2020 and even tourists. Its crew capsules splash down off the Florida coast, Boeing's Starliner returns to the Army's expansive and desolate White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico.

Boeing scrapped its first attempt to reach the space station in 2019, after software errors left the capsule in the wrong orbit and nearly doomed it. The company fixed the flaws and tried again last summer, but corroded valves halted the countdown. Following more repairs, Starliner finally lifted off from Cape Canaveral last Thursday and docked to the space station Friday.

Station astronauts tested Starliner's communication and computer systems during its five days at the space station. They also unloaded hundreds of pounds (kilograms) of groceries and other supplies that flew up in the Boeing capsule, then filled it with empty air tanks and other discarded gear.

A folded U.S. flag sent up by Boeing stayed behind, to be retrieved by the first Starliner crew.

"We're a little sad to see her go," station astronaut Bob Hines radioed as the capsule flew away. Along for the ride was Starliner's test dummy — Rosie the Rocketeer, a takeoff on World War II's Rosie the Riveter.

The repairs and do-over cost Boeing nearly \$600 million.

China wants 10 Pacific nations to endorse sweeping agreement

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — China wants 10 small Pacific nations to endorse a sweeping agreement covering everything from security to fisheries in what one leader warns is a "game-changing" bid by Beijing to wrest control of the region.

A draft of the agreement obtained by The Associated Press shows that China wants to train Pacific police officers, team up on "traditional and non-traditional security" and expand law enforcement cooperation.

China also wants to jointly develop a marine plan for fisheries — which would include the Pacific's lucrative tuna catch — increase cooperation on running the region's internet networks, and set up cultural Confucius Institutes and classrooms. China also mentions the possibility of setting up a free trade area with the Pacific nations.

China's move comes as Foreign Minister Wang Yi and a 20-person delegation begin a visit to the region this week.

In Washington, U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price expressed concern Wednesday about China's intentions, saying Beijing might use the proposed accords to take advantage of the islands and destabilize the region.

"We are concerned that these reported agreements may be negotiated in a rushed, nontransparent process," Price told reporters. He warned that China "has a pattern of offering shadowy, vague deals with little transparency or regional consultation in areas related to fishing, related to resource management, development, development assistance and more recently even security practices."

Price added that agreements that include sending Chinese security officials to the nations "could only seek to fuel regional international tensions and increase concerns over Beijing's expansion of its internal security apparatus to the Pacific."

Wang is visiting seven of the countries he hopes will endorse the "Common Development Vision" — the Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea.

Wang is also holding virtual meetings with the other three potential signatories — the Cook Islands, Niue and the Federated States of Micronesia. He is hoping the countries will endorse the pre-written agreement as part of a joint communique after a May 30 meeting in Fiji he is holding with the foreign ministers from each of the 10 countries.

Micronesia's president, David Panuelo, has told leaders of the other Pacific nations his nation won't endorse the plan, warning it would needlessly heighten geopolitical tensions and threaten regional stability, according to a letter from Panuelo obtained by the AP.

Among other concerns, Panuelo said, the agreement opens the door for China to own and control the region's fisheries and communications infrastructure. He said China could intercept emails and listen in on phone calls.

Panuelo called the Common Development Vision "the single most game-changing proposed agreement in the Pacific in any of our lifetimes" and said it "threatens to bring a new Cold War era at best, and a World War at worst."

Panuelo declined to comment on the letter or the proposed agreement.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Wednesday he didn't know about Panuelo's letter.

"But I don't agree at all with the argument that cooperation between China and the South Pacific island countries will trigger a new Cold War," he said.

Like some other countries in the Pacific, Micronesia is finding itself increasingly caught between the

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competing interests of Washington and Beijing.

Micronesia has close ties to the U.S. through a Compact of Free Association. But it also has what Panuelo describes in his letter as a "Great Friendship" with China that he hopes will continue despite his opposition to the agreement.

The security aspects of the agreement will be particularly troubling to many in the region and beyond, especially after China signed a separate security pact with the Solomon Islands last month.

That pact has raised fears that China could send troops to the island nation or even establish a military base there, not far from Australia. The Solomon Islands and China say there are no plans for a base.

The May 30 meeting will be the second between Wang and the Pacific islands' foreign ministers after they held a virtual meeting last October.

Those who follow China's role in the Pacific will be scrutinizing the wording of the draft agreement.

Among its provisions: "China will hold intermediate and high-level police training for Pacific Island countries."

The agreement says the countries will strengthen "cooperation in the fields of traditional and non-traditional security" and will "expand law enforcement cooperation, jointly combat transnational crime, and establish a dialog mechanism on law enforcement capacity and police cooperation."

The agreement would also see the nations "expand exchanges between governments, legislatures and political parties."

The draft agreement also stipulates that the Pacific countries "firmly abide" by the one-China principle, under which Taiwan, a self-ruled island democracy, is considered by Beijing to be part of China. It would also uphold the "non-interference" principle that China often cites as a deterrent to other nations speaking out about its human rights record.

The agreement says that China and the Pacific countries would jointly formulate a marine spatial plan "to optimize the layout of the marine economy, and develop and utilize marine resources rationally, so as to promote a sustainable development of blue economy."

China also promises more investment in the region by mobilizing private capital and encouraging "more competitive and reputable Chinese enterprises to participate in direct investment in Pacific Island countries."

China also promised to dispatch Chinese language consultants, teachers and volunteers to the islands.

The AP has also obtained a draft of a five-year action plan that's intended to sit alongside the Common Development Vision, which outlines a number of immediate incentives that China is offering to the Pacific nations.

In the action plan, China says it will fully implement 2,500 government scholarships through 2025.

"In 2022, China will hold the first training program for young diplomats from Pacific Island countries, depending on the pandemic situation," the draft plan states, adding that China will also hold seminars on governance and planning for the Pacific nations.

In the draft action plan, China says it will build criminal investigation laboratories as needed by the Pacific nations that can be used for fingerprint testing, forensic autopsies, and electronic forensics.

China also says it will also spend an additional \$2 million and send 200 medics to the islands to help fight COVID-19 and promote health, and promises to help the countries in their efforts to combat climate change.

An ocean first: Underwater drone tracks CO2 in Alaska gulf

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

SEWARD, Alaska (AP) — In the cold, choppy waters of Alaska's Resurrection Bay, all eyes were on the gray water, looking for one thing only.

It wasn't a spout from humpback whales that power through this scenic fjord, or a sea otter lazing on its back, munching a king crab.

Instead, everyone aboard the Nanuq, a University of Alaska Fairbanks research vessel, was looking where a 5-foot (1.52-meter) long, bright pink underwater sea glider surfaced.

The glider — believed to be the first configured with a large sensor to measure carbon dioxide levels in

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the ocean — had just completed its first overnight mission.

Designed to dive 3,281 feet (1,000 meters) and roam remote parts of the ocean, the autonomous vehicle was deployed in the Gulf of Alaska this spring to provide a deeper understanding of the ocean's chemistry in the era of climate change. The research could be a major step forward in ocean greenhouse gas monitoring, because until now, measuring CO₂ concentrations — a quantifier of ocean acidification — was mostly done from ships, buoys and moorings tethered to the ocean floor.

"Ocean acidification is a process by which humans are emitting carbon dioxide into the atmosphere through their activities of burning fossil fuels and changing land use," said Andrew McDonnell, an oceanographer with the College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences at the University of Alaska Fairbanks

Oceans have done humans a huge favor by taking in some of the CO₂. Otherwise, there would be much more in the atmosphere, trapping the sun's heat and warming the Earth.

"But the problem is now that the ocean is changing its chemistry because of this uptake," said Claudine Hauri, an oceanographer with the International Arctic Research Center at the university.

The enormous amount of data collected is being used to study ocean acidification that can harm and kill certain marine life.

Rising acidity of the oceans is affecting some marine organisms that build shells. This process could kill or make an organism more susceptible to predators.

Over several weeks this spring, Hauri and McDonnell, who are married, worked with engineers from Cyprus Subsea Consulting and Services, which provided the underwater glider, and 4H-Jena, a German company that provided the sensor inserted into the drone.

Most days, researchers took the glider farther and farther into Resurrection Bay from the coastal community of Seward to conduct tests.

After its first nighttime mission, a crew member spotted it bobbing in the water, and the Nanuq — the Inupiat word for polar bear — backed up to let people pull the 130-pound (59-kilogram) glider onto the ship. Then the sensor was removed from the drone and rushed into the ship's cabin to upload its data.

Think of the foot-tall (0.30-meter) sensor with a diameter of 6 inches (15.24 centimeters) as a laboratory in a tube, with pumps, valves and membranes moving to separate the gas from seawater. It analyzes CO₂ and it logs and stores the data inside a temperature-controlled system. Many of these sensor components use battery power.

Since it's the industry standard, the sensor is the same as found on any ship or lab working with CO₂ measurements.

Hauri said using this was "a huge step to be able to accommodate such a big and power hungry sensor, so that's special about this project."

"I think she is one of the first persons to actually utilize (gliders) to measure CO₂ directly, so that's very, very exciting," said Richard Feely, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's senior scientist at the agency's Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory in Seattle. He said Hauri was a graduate student in 2007 when she accompanied him on the first acidification cruise he ever led.

The challenge, Feely said, is to make the measurements on a glider with the same degree of accuracy and precision as tests on board ships.

"We need to get confidence in our measurements and confidence in our models if we are going to make important scientific statements about how the oceans are changing over time and how it's going to impact our important economic systems that are dependent on the food from the sea," he said, noting that acidification impacts are already seen in the Pacific Northwest on oysters, Dungeness crabs and other species.

Researchers in Canada had previously attached a smaller, prototype CO₂ sensor to an underwater drone in the Labrador Sea but found it did not yet meet the targets for ocean acidification observations.

"The tests showed that the glider sensor worked in a remote-harsh environment but needed more development," Nicolai von Oppeln-Bronikowski, the Glider Program Manager with the Ocean Frontier Institute at Memorial University of Newfoundland, said in an email.

The two teams are "just using two different types of sensors to solve the same issue, and it's always

good to have two different options," Hauri said.

There is no GPS unit inside the underwater autonomous drone. Instead, after being programmed, it heads out on its own to cruise the ocean according to the navigation directions — knowing how far to go down in the water column, when to sample, and when to surface and send a locator signal so it can be retrieved.

As the drone tests were underway, the U.S. research vessel Sikuliaq, owned by the National Science Foundation and operated by the university, conducted its own two-week mission in the gulf to take carbon and pH samples as part of ongoing work each spring, summer and fall.

Those methods are limited to collecting samples from a fixed point while the glider will be able to roam all over the ocean and provide researchers with a wealth of data on the ocean's chemical makeup.

The vision is to one day have a fleet of robotic gliders operating in oceans across the globe, providing a real-time glimpse of current conditions and a way to better predict the future.

"We can ... understand much more about what's going on in the ocean than we have been before," McDonnell said.

Oklahoma governor signs the nation's strictest abortion ban

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt on Wednesday signed into law the nation's strictest abortion ban, making the state the first in the nation to effectively end availability of the procedure.

State lawmakers approved the ban enforced by civil lawsuits rather than criminal prosecution, similar to a Texas law that was passed last year. The law takes effect immediately upon Stitt's signature and prohibits all abortions with few exceptions. Abortion providers have said they will stop performing the procedure as soon as the bill is signed.

"I promised Oklahomans that as governor I would sign every piece of pro-life legislation that came across my desk and I am proud to keep that promise today," the first-term Republican said in a statement. "From the moment life begins at conception is when we have a responsibility as human beings to do everything we can to protect that baby's life and the life of the mother. That is what I believe and that is what the majority of Oklahomans believe."

Abortion providers across the country have been bracing for the possibility that the U.S. Supreme Court's new conservative majority might further restrict the practice, and that has especially been the case in Oklahoma and Texas.

"The impact will be disastrous for Oklahomans," said Elizabeth Nash, a state policy analyst for the abortion-rights supporting Guttmacher Institute. "It will also have severe ripple effects, especially for Texas patients who had been traveling to Oklahoma in large numbers after the Texas six-week abortion ban went into effect in September."

The bills are part of an aggressive push in Republican-led states to scale back abortion rights. It comes on the heels of a leaked draft opinion from the nation's high court that suggests justices are considering weakening or overturning the landmark Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion nearly 50 years ago.

The only exceptions in the Oklahoma law are to save the life of a pregnant woman or if the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest that has been reported to law enforcement.

The bill specifically authorizes doctors to remove a "dead unborn child caused by spontaneous abortion," or miscarriage, or to remove an ectopic pregnancy, a potentially life-threatening emergency that occurs when a fertilized egg implants outside the uterus, often in a fallopian tube and early in pregnancy.

The law also does not apply to the use of morning-after pills such as Plan B or any type of contraception.

Two of Oklahoma's four abortion clinics already stopped providing abortions after the governor signed a six-week ban earlier this month.

With the state's two remaining abortion clinics expected to stop offering services, it is unclear what will happen to women who qualify under one of the exceptions. The law's author, State Rep. Wendi Stearman, says doctors will be empowered to decide which women qualify and that those abortions will be performed

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in hospitals. But providers and abortion-rights activists warn that trying to prove qualification could prove difficult and even dangerous in some circumstances.

In addition to the Texas-style bill already signed into law, the measure is one of at least three anti-abortion bills sent this year to Stitt.

Oklahoma's law is styled after a first-of-its-kind Texas law that the U.S. Supreme Court has allowed to remain in place that allows private citizens to sue abortion providers or anyone who helps a woman obtain an abortion. Other Republican-led states sought to copy Texas' ban. Idaho's governor signed the first copycat measure in March, although it has been temporarily blocked by the state's Supreme Court.

The third Oklahoma bill is to take effect this summer and would make it a felony to perform an abortion, punishable by up to 10 years in prison. That bill contains no exceptions for rape or incest.

Officer in Buffalo supermarket attack honored at funeral

By CAROLYN THOMPSON and AARON MORRISON Associated Press

GETZVILLE, N.Y. (AP) — The retired police officer killed while trying to stop the gunman in a racist attack at a Buffalo supermarket was awarded the department's medal of honor at his funeral Wednesday, as the country processed another massacre at a Texas school that killed 19 children and two adults.

Buffalo Police Commissioner Joseph Gramaglia also posthumously promoted Aaron Salter to lieutenant, saying his actions on May 14 — firing multiple times at the shooter, striking his body armor — bought precious time that allowed others in the store to escape.

"Aaron bravely fought evil that day," Gramaglia said at The Chapel in Getzville, where law enforcement officers from U.S. and Canadian departments filled a dozen rows.

Services were also held for Pearl Young, a 77-year-old grandmother, great-grandmother and substitute teacher who was devoted to her church.

Salter and Young were among the 10 Black people killed when a white gunman with a helmet-mounted camera targeted shoppers and workers at Tops Friendly Market, in a predominantly Black neighborhood on a Saturday afternoon. Three others were injured in the attack, which federal authorities are investigating as a hate crime.

The 18-year-old suspect, Payton Gendron, of Conklin, has been charged with murder and is being held without bail.

Gendron was in a Buffalo City courtroom with his attorneys Wednesday to ask a judge to bar Erie County prosecutors from commenting about the case to avoid influencing potential jurors. The judge did not immediately rule but told attorneys to refrain from speaking publicly until prosecutors and defense lawyers meet to discuss guidelines going forward, The Buffalo News reported.

Salter, 55, of Lockport, was working as a security guard at the store in his retirement, a natural move for the community-minded officer with a loud laugh that "would shock your senses" and who chewed bubble gum just as loudly, said retired Deputy Police Commissioner Kimberly Beaty, who worked with Salter.

"Aaron didn't come to work to be entertainment, he came to do his job," Beaty said, "but we enjoyed watching him do it."

Salter retired from the department in 2018 after nearly 30 years. At least one of his bullets struck the suspect's armor-plated vest but didn't pierce it, police said.

Mourners remembered Young as a God-fearing woman and cherished friend. She was a longtime volunteer in her church's soup kitchen and worked as a substitute teacher in Buffalo Public Schools.

"Her name is beautiful, just like a beautiful pearl," Young's oldest sister, Mary Craig of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, said during the service held at Elim Christian Fellowship in Buffalo.

She used these adjectives to describe her late sister: precious, exuberant, adorable, righteous and loving. The first letter of each spells out the name Pearl.

Acting Superintendent Tonja Williams read a letter of condolence to mourners, remembering Young as a long-term, "very active" substitute teacher. The students affectionately called her "Miss Pearl," Williams said.

"She was excited to return to the classroom and enjoyed working with the high school students. Pearl

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was a hard worker and dedicated to the students she served," Williams said, reading from the letter.

Sister-in-law Gloria Anderson told mourners that Young took ministering to nonbelievers seriously. "Everywhere Pearl went she told somebody about Jesus," Anderson said.

Young and Anderson attended a prayer breakfast together the day of the supermarket shooting. Anderson said they felt a "spiritual high" that morning.

"It was one of the most glorious times that I've had in a long time," she said.

After the breakfast, Young asked Anderson to drop her off at Tops Friendly Market so she could pick up a few things. Anderson said she believes just a few minutes passed, after she pulled away to drive home, before the gunman opened fire. Anderson said she felt survivor's guilt but has leaned on her faith to cope.

"I'm going to sorely miss her, but I know that one day, Pearl and Gloria are going to be back together again," Anderson said.

Funerals had been held for barely a few of the Buffalo victims, before yet another mass shooting grabbed headlines. Authorities in Texas say Salvador Ramos, 18, attacked Robb Elementary School in Uvalde on Tuesday, opening fire with an AR-15-style rifle. Nineteen students and two teachers were killed. Police killed Ramos.

In Buffalo, a funeral for 62-year-old Geraldine Talley is scheduled for Friday. Ruth Whitfield, 86, will be laid to rest Saturday. The Rev. Al Sharpton is scheduled to deliver those eulogies.

"It's one thing to experience personal grief," said Salter's childhood friend, Rodney Cunningham, "and quite another to experience personal grief that is part of a national culture war that, to be candid, has been going on for years with no end in sight."

Oz, McCormick race heads into recount in Pa. Senate primary

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Pennsylvania's top election official said Wednesday that the margin between the top two candidates in last week's Republican primary for U.S. Senate is tight enough to trigger a statewide recount, dragging the outcome into June as the candidates fight in court.

The state's acting secretary of state, Leigh Chapman, said the difference in vote totals for the top two finishers — celebrity heart surgeon Dr. Mehmet Oz and former hedge fund CEO David McCormick — fall within the margin in state law for a mandatory recount.

Oz, who is endorsed by former President Donald Trump, led McCormick by 902 votes, or 0.07 percentage points, out of 1,343,643 ballots reported by the state as of Wednesday.

One question for McCormick's campaign is whether there are enough outstanding ballots for him to make up the difference with Oz.

The Department of State estimated that counties had about 10,000 provisional and absentee ballots remaining to count, but it did not know how many were cast by Republican voters.

There are another 860 Republican mail-in ballots without handwritten dates on their envelopes that are the subject of court cases, department officials said.

In a recount, most of the ballots are simply rescanned electronically. Election workers check ballots by hand if a scanner recorded no vote or dismissed it as a double vote, and they may find more voters there, election lawyers say.

The biggest change in votes could come from the discovery of a data entry error, a human mistake — such as transposed numbers when tallying precinct voting data — that could go in either direction, they say.

Under Pennsylvania's recount law, the separation between the candidates must be inside the law's 0.5% margin. The Associated Press will not declare a winner in the race until the recount is complete. That could take until June 8.

The winner will face Democratic Lt. Gov. John Fetterman in November's midterm elections in what Democrats see as their best opportunity to pick up a seat in the closely divided Senate. The incumbent, Republican Sen. Pat Toomey, is retiring after serving two terms.

The deadline for counties to report their unofficial results to the state elections office was Tuesday.

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Even so, counties continued counting thousands of ballots on Wednesday, including provisional, military and overseas absentee ballots.

Chapman's recount order is mandatory — unless the losing candidate requests that it not be carried out. McCormick had no plans to decline a recount and said in a statement that "we look forward to a swift resolution so our party can unite and defeat" Fetterman in the fall.

Counties will begin the recount next week and have until June 7 to finish and another day to report results to the state.

In those cases, McCormick is hoping to get help closing the gap in votes with Oz.

His campaign has asked the Pennsylvania Supreme Court to compel counties to promptly count those ballots. A lower court has ordered a hearing next Tuesday on the matter.

Oz, the Republican National Committee and the state Republican Party oppose McCormick's request. A separate case that affects those same ballots could go to the U.S. Supreme Court.

'I've got to dig deep': Texas shooting tests Newtown parents

By MICHAEL MELIA Associated Press

NEWTOWN, Conn. (AP) — As the mother of a girl killed at Sandy Hook, Michele Gay was devastated by the massacre at a Texas elementary school, with its aching parallels to the 2012 attack in Connecticut.

It was all the more saddening in light of the work she has invested in the years since to promote school safety.

"This one has been particularly devastating for me, for my family, for our community, Sandy Hook. We're just literally transported back in time," said Gay, co-founder of the nonprofit Safe and Sound Schools. "I've got to dig deep. I'm not going to lie."

In the decade since 20 children and six educators were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary, some of their loved ones who channeled grief into advocacy have claimed success, gradually, in areas including gun safety, attitudes around gun violence, and mental health awareness. The attack in Uvalde has tested their resolve like no other.

Like the Newtown gunman, the attacker in Texas was a young man who shot an older family member he lived with before opening fire with an AR-15-style semi-automatic rifle inside a nearby elementary school, slaughtering small and defenseless children.

As details of Tuesday's shooting emerged, Matt Vogl was texting with Jennifer Hensel, whose daughter Avielle was killed in Newtown, and others involved in an advocacy effort named in the girl's honor, the Avielle Initiative, which promotes efforts to make mental health care more widely available through technology.

"We were all just crying and texting. It's brutal because it triggers some of the darkest memories we have," said Vogl, executive director at the National Mental Health Innovation Center in Colorado, where the program is based. The effort was launched after the Newtown attack by Hensel and her husband, Jeremy Richman, who died by suicide in 2019.

"If I can't stay optimistic I need to quit and find something else to do. On days like today it's all you got. The vast majority of people don't go into schools and shoot them up," Vogl said.

In the first months after the Newtown shooting, much of the families' advocacy work centered on gun control, particularly a failed effort in 2013 to get a federal law banning some semi-automatic weapons and expanding criminal and mental background checks for gun purchases.

One of the best known groups, Sandy Hook Promise, pivoted afterward to campaigns that helped pass state laws limiting sales of some guns and, more recently, to community-based prevention programs.

There have been victories. Trainings offered to schools by Sandy Hook groups have been credited with stopping potential suicides and school shootings. Victims' families have prevailed in legal fights with conspiracy theorists and a lawsuit against gun-maker Remington that held the company responsible for its marketing of military-style rifles like those used in the Newtown and Uvalde attacks.

For Mark Barden, a co-founder of Sandy Hook Promise, the Texas shooting was all the more frustrating because of everything that has been learned about how looking out for warning signs can prevent such

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tragedies.

"Today it's hard because my mind is with with these families in that community," said Barden, whose son Daniel was killed in the Sandy Hook shooting. "But I do have to buoy myself from crashing because I know that we have something here that works."

Gay, whose group works with schools around the country, said it was disheartening to hear indications that signs might have been missed in the Texas case.

"Already it appears there were numerous red flags, numerous changes in his behavior over the last year of his life, social media postings that were opportunities to report and then provide intervention," she said. "That's hard."

Survivors of the Newtown shooting were among those expressing outrage.

Mary Ann Jacob, a former Sandy Hook library clerk, was huddled in a closet with 18 children during the 2012 shooting.

"Yesterday, I was right back in that closet, remembering the fear and horror we experienced, trying to be brave for the kids we were with, while we were more frightened than we'd ever been in our lives," she said Wednesday during an appearance with Connecticut's governor in Hartford. "Once again, gun violence has forced its way into our schools, leaving nothing but devastation, trauma and tragedy in its wake."

Schools across Newtown had a stepped-up police presence on Wednesday and Superintendent Lorrie Rodrigue said counselor teams were on alert for students who might be traumatized by the news from Texas, including high school students who survived the Sandy Hook shooting.

"In just visiting today, it was very obvious that staff were right there to support their students, especially those at the high school who were at Sandy Hook," she said.

Although Congress hasn't passed a meaningful gun control law since the Newtown attack, Erica Lafferty, the daughter of Dawn Lafferty Hochsprung, the slain principal of Sandy Hook, pushes back on those who say nothing has changed since Sandy Hook. A program manager at Everytown for Gun Safety and an advocate for universal background checks, she said gains have been made quietly in states around the country.

"That is absolutely not something that I see stopping. I do hope that this is an eye opener, as Sandy Hook was, for a push on the federal level," she said. "But what that's going to be? Your guess is as good as mine."

COVID-19, shootings: Is mass death now tolerated in America?

By MICHELLE R. SMITH Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — As the nation marked 1 million deaths from COVID-19 last week, the milestone was bookended by mass shootings that killed people simply living their lives: grocery shopping, going to church, or attending the fourth grade. The number, once unthinkable, is now an irreversible reality in the United States — just like the persistent reality of gun violence that kills tens of thousands of people every year.

Americans have always tolerated high rates of death and suffering — among certain segments of society. But the sheer numbers of deaths from preventable causes, and the apparent acceptance that no policy change is on the horizon, raises the question: Has mass death become accepted in America?

"I think the evidence is unmistakable and quite clear. We will tolerate an enormous amount of carnage, suffering and death in the U.S., because we have over the past two years. We have over our history," says Gregg Gonsalves, an epidemiologist and professor at Yale who, before that, was a leading member of the AIDS advocacy group ACT UP. He made his comments in an interview last week, before the latest massacre at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, where 21 people were killed on Tuesday, including 19 children.

"If I thought the AIDS epidemic was bad, the American response to COVID-19 has sort of ... it's a form of the American grotesque, right?" Gonsalves says. "Really — a million people are dead? And you're going to talk to me about your need to get back to normal, when for the most part most of us have been living pretty reasonable lives for the past six months?"

Certain communities have always borne the brunt of higher death rates in the United States. There are

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profound racial and class inequalities in the United States, and our tolerance of death is partly based on who is at risk, said Elizabeth Wrigley-Field, a sociology professor at the University of Minnesota who studies mortality.

"Some people's deaths matter a lot more than others," she lamented in an interview last week. "And I think that's what we're seeing in this really brutal way with this coincidence of timing."

In the shooting in Buffalo, New York, on May 14, the alleged shooter was a racist bent on killing as many Black people as he could, according to authorities. The family of 86-year-old Ruth Whitfield, one of 10 people killed there in an attack on a grocery store that served the African American community, channeled the grief and frustration of millions as they demanded action, including passage of a hate crime bill and accountability for those who spread hateful rhetoric.

"You expect us to keep doing this over and over and over again — over again, forgive and forget," her son, former Buffalo Fire Commissioner Garnell Whitfield, Jr., told reporters. "While people we elect and trust in offices around this country do their best not to protect us, not to consider us equal."

In the handful of days after the shooting in Buffalo, a man 1,700 miles away in Texas legally purchased one AR-style rifle, then another, along with 375 rounds of ammunition, according to state senators briefed by law enforcement. He then carried out the attack on Robb Elementary. Just 10 days had passed.

The sense that politicians have done little even as the violence repeats itself is shared by many Americans. It's a dynamic that's encapsulated by the "thoughts and prayers" offered to victims of gun violence by politicians unwilling to make meaningful commitments to ensure there really is no more "never again," according to Martha Lincoln, an anthropology professor at San Francisco State University who studies the cultural politics of public health.

"I don't think that most Americans feel good about it. I think most Americans would like to see real action from their leaders in the culture about these pervasive issues," said Lincoln, who spoke before the attack on the school in Texas, and who adds that there is a similar "political vacuum" around COVID-19.

The high numbers of deaths from COVID-19, guns and other causes are difficult to fathom and can start to feel like background noise, disconnected from the individuals whose lives were lost and the families whose lives were forever altered.

American society has even come to accept the deaths of children from preventable causes.

In a recent guest column published in The Advocate newspaper, pediatrician Dr. Mark W. Kline pointed out that more than 1,500 children have died from COVID-19, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, despite the "myth" that it is harmless for children. Kline wrote that there was a time in pediatrics when "children were not supposed to die."

"There was no acceptable pediatric body count," he wrote. "At least, not before the first pandemic of the social media age, COVID-19, changed everything."

There are many parallels between the U.S. response to COVID-19 and its response to the gun violence epidemic, according to Sonali Rajan, a professor at Columbia University who researches school violence.

"We have long normalized mass death in this country. Gun violence has persisted as a public health crisis for decades," she said last week, noting that an estimated 100,000 people are shot every year and some 40,000 will die.

Gun violence is such a part of life in America now that we organize our lives around its inevitability. Children do lockdown drills at school. And in about half the states, Rajan said, teachers are allowed to carry firearms.

When she looks at the current response to COVID-19, she sees similar dynamics. Americans, she said, "deserve to be able to commute to work without getting sick, or work somewhere without getting sick, or send their kids to school without them getting sick."

"What will happen down the line if more and more people get sick and are disabled?" she asked. "What happens? Do we just kind of live like this for the foreseeable future?"

It's important, she said, to ask what policies are being put forth by elected officials who have the power to "attend to the health and the well-being of their constituents."

"It's remarkable how that responsibility has been sort of abdicated, is how I would describe it," Rajan said.

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The level of concern about deaths often depends on context, says Rajiv Sethi, an economics professor at Barnard College who has written about both gun violence and COVID-19. He points to a rare but dramatic event such as an airplane crash or an accident at a nuclear power plant, which do seem to matter to people.

By contrast, something like traffic deaths gets less attention. The government last week said that nearly 43,000 people had died on the nation's roads last year, the highest level in 16 years. The federal government unveiled a national strategy earlier this year to combat the problem.

Even when talking about gun violence, mass shootings get a lot of attention but represent a small number of the gun deaths that happen in the United States every year, Sethi said in an interview last week. For example, there are more suicides from guns in America than there are homicides, an estimated 24,000 gun suicides compared with 19,000 homicides. But even though there are policy proposals that could help within the bounds of the Second Amendment, he says, the debate on guns is politically entrenched.

"The result is that nothing is done," Sethi said. "The result is paralysis."

Dr. Megan Ranney of Brown University's School of Public Health calls it a frustrating "learned helplessness."

"There's been almost a sustained narrative created by some that tells people that these things are inevitable," said Ranney, an ER doctor who did gun violence research before COVID-19 hit, speaking before Tuesday's Texas school shooting ended 21 lives. "It divides us when people think that there's nothing they can do."

She wonders if people really understand the sheer numbers of people dying from guns, from COVID-19 and from opioids. The CDC said this month that more than 107,000 Americans died of drug overdoses in 2021, setting a record.

Ranney also points to false narratives spread by bad actors, such as denying that the deaths were preventable, or suggesting those who die deserved it. There is an emphasis in the United States on individual responsibility for one's health, Ranney said — and a tension between the individual and the community.

"It's not that we put less value on an individual life, but rather we're coming up against the limits of that approach," she said. "Because the truth is, is that any individual's life, any individual's death or disability, actually affects the larger community."

Similar debates happened in the last century about child labor laws, worker protections and reproductive rights, Ranney said.

An understanding of history is important, said Wrigley-Field, who teaches the history of ACT UP in one of her classes. During the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, the White House press secretary made anti-gay jokes when asked about AIDS, and everyone in the room laughed. Activists were able to mobilize a mass movement that forced people to change the way they thought and forced politicians to change the way they operated, she said.

"I don't think that those things are off the table now. It's just that it's not really clear if they're going to emerge," Wrigley-Field said. "I don't think giving up is a permanent state of affairs. But I do think that's where we're at, right at this moment."

AP sources: Colin Kaepernick to work out for Raiders

By JOSH DUBOW AP Pro Football Writer

Colin Kaepernick is getting his first chance to work out for an NFL team since last playing in the league in 2016 when he started kneeling during the national anthem to protest police brutality and racial inequality.

Two people familiar with the situation said Kaepernick will work out for the Las Vegas Raiders on Wednesday. The people spoke on condition of anonymity because the team hadn't announced the workout plans. ESPN first reported that the Raiders were bringing in Kaepernick.

Kaepernick hasn't played since the end of the 2016 season when he was cut by San Francisco when the new regime led by coach Kyle Shanahan wanted to go a different direction at quarterback.

Kaepernick never got another opportunity even to work out for NFL teams as he alleged he had been blackballed over his protests during the anthem the previous season. He met with Seattle and had informal

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talks with Baltimore but never got a closer look.

He filed a grievance with the NFL in 2017 over his lack of opportunity and settled it in 2019 — but still never got another look.

The Raiders have been at the forefront on diversity over their history, hiring Tom Flores as the second coach of Hispanic descent, Art Shell as the first Black coach in modern history, and Amy Trask as the first female CEO.

Owner Mark Davis has publicly said he would back his coaches if they wanted to take a look at Kaepernick, and first-year coach Josh McDaniels is doing just that.

The Raiders don't have a glaring need at quarterback after signing starter Derek Carr to an extension last month. Las Vegas also signed Nick Mullens as a backup this offseason, traded for Jarrett Stidham and signed Chase Garbers as an undrafted free agent.

But none of those backups has the pedigree of Kaepernick, who emerged as one of the league's young stars when he took over as starter in San Francisco in 2012, and helped the Niners reach the Super Bowl that season.

Kaepernick's play started to regress in 2014 and he got hurt halfway through the next season and lost his starting job. Things changed the next preseason when Kaepernick began protesting during the national anthem, drawing the ire of critics that included then presidential candidate Donald Trump.

Kaepernick regained his starting job in 2016 and threw 16 TD passes and four interceptions in 12 games, while posting a 90.7 passer rating.

Reality TV's Josh Duggar gets 12 years in child porn case

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. (AP) — Former reality TV star Josh Duggar was sentenced Wednesday to about 12 1/2 years in prison after he was convicted of receiving child pornography.

Duggar was also convicted of possessing child pornography in December, but U.S. District Judge Timothy Brooks dismissed that conviction after ruling that, under federal law, it was an included offense in the receiving child pornography count.

Prosecutors had asked U.S. District Judge Timothy Brooks to give the maximum term of 20 years to Duggar, whose large family was the focus of TLC's "19 Kids and Counting." They argued in a pre-sentencing court filing that Duggar has a "deep-seated, pervasive and violent sexual interest in children."

The judge sentenced Duggar to 12 years and seven months in prison, one day after denying a defense motion to overturn the guilty verdict on grounds of insufficient evidence or to order a new trial.

U.S. Attorney David Clay Fowlkes said he was pleased with the sentence.

"While this is not the sentence we asked for, this is a lengthy sentence," Fowlkes said outside the courthouse.

Duggar, whose lawyers sought a five-year sentence, maintains his innocence. Defense attorney Justin Gelfand said he is grateful Brooks declined to impose the full 20-year sentence requested by prosecutors.

"We'll immediately file the notice of appeal within the next 14 days," Gelfand said.

Duggar was arrested in April 2021 after a Little Rock police detective found child porn files were being shared by a computer traced to Duggar. Investigators testified that images depicting the sexual abuse of children, including toddlers, were downloaded in 2019 onto a computer at a car dealership Duggar owned.

TLC canceled "19 Kids and Counting" in 2015 following allegations that Duggar had molested four of his sisters and a babysitter years earlier. Authorities began investigating the abuse in 2006 after receiving a tip from a family friend but concluded that the statute of limitations on any possible charges had expired.

Duggar's parents said he had confessed to the fondling and apologized. After the allegations resurfaced in 2015, Duggar apologized publicly for unspecified behavior and resigned as a lobbyist for the Family Research Council, a conservative Christian group.

Months later, he publicly apologized for cheating on his wife and a pornography addiction, for which he then sought treatment.

In seeking a 20-year sentence, prosecutors cited the graphic images — and the ages of the children

involved — as well as court testimony about the alleged abuse of Duggar's sisters.

Duggar's past behavior "provides an alarming window into the extent of his sexual interest in children that the Court should consider at sentencing," federal prosecutors wrote in their sentencing memorandum.

"This past conduct, when viewed alongside the conduct for which he has been convicted, makes clear that Duggar has a deep-seated, pervasive, and violent sexual interest in children, and a willingness to act on that interest" the court filing said.

Prosecutors also noted that Duggar's computer had been partitioned to evade accountability software that had been installed to report to his wife activity such as porn searches, according to experts.

"There is simply no indication that Duggar will ever take the steps necessary to change this pattern of behavior and address his predilection for minor females," prosecutors wrote.

"Duggar accepts that he is before this Court for sentencing and that this Court must impose a penalty," his attorneys wrote. "That is justice. But Duggar also appeals to this Court's discretion to temper that justice with mercy."

Depp retakes witness stand, calls Heard's allegations insane

By MATTHEW BARAKAT Associated Press

FALLS CHURCH, Va. (AP) — Johnny Depp called his ex-wife's accusations of sexual and physical abuse "insane" Wednesday as he returned to the witness stand in his libel suit against Amber Heard.

"Ridiculous, humiliating, ludicrous, painful, savage, unbelievably brutal, cruel, and all false," Depp said when asked about his reaction to hearing Heard's allegations when she testified earlier in the trial.

Depp was testifying Wednesday as a rebuttal witness — both he and Heard each testified extensively earlier in the trial.

He gave some specific responses to some of the particular allegations levied by Heard and also her sister, Whitney Henriquez, who provided some of Heard's strongest corroborating testimony.

He concluded his testimony with a final denial of the allegations.

"I have never in my life committed sexual battery, physical abuse, all these outlandish, outrageous stories of me committing these things," he said. "And living with it for six years, and waiting to be able to bring the truth out."

He said that "no matter what happens I did get here and I did tell the truth and I have spoken up for what I've been carrying on my back, reluctantly, for six years."

Depp will be cross-examined Wednesday afternoon.

Depp is suing Heard in Fairfax County Circuit Court over a December 2018 op-ed she wrote in The Washington Post describing herself as "a public figure representing domestic abuse." His lawyers say he was defamed by the article even though it never mentioned his name.

Depp has denied he ever struck Heard and says she was the abuser in the relationship. Heard has testified about more than a dozen separate instances of physical abuse she says she suffered at Depp's hands.

Depp also disputed a claim made by Heard that Depp had nothing to do with getting her a role in the superhero blockbuster "Aquaman." When Heard testified, she was clearly offended by a question from Depp's lawyers insinuating Depp got her the role.

Depp, though, said that after Heard auditioned for the role, he talked to the studio on her behalf. He was barred from discussing the details of his conversations when Heard's lawyers objected, but said that "ultimately she did get the job, so hopefully, I suppose, I had curbed their worries to some degree."

Also Wednesday, supermodel Kate Moss, a former girlfriend of Depp, denied that she had ever been pushed or assaulted by Depp during the course of their relationship.

Moss also testified as a rebuttal witness. Heard, in her testimony, made a reference to Moss and a rumor that Depp had pushed Moss down a set of stairs when they dated.

Moss, in testimony provided by video link, said Depp never assaulted her. She said she did once slip down a flight of stairs after a rainstorm at a Jamaican resort, and that Depp came to her aid.

She testified for less than 5 minutes and was not cross-examined.

Depp also addressed the accusation in his testimony, saying it happened just as Moss said. He said he'd

told the story about Moss to Heard years ago and "Ms. Heard took the story and turned it into a very ugly incident, all in her mind."

Both sides are expected to present their final witnesses Thursday, with closing arguments expected Friday.

Fed officials signal rates may head to 'restrictive' levels

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve officials agreed when they met earlier this month that they may have to raise interest rates to levels that would weaken the economy as part of their drive to curb inflation, which is near a four-decade high.

At the same time, many of the policymakers also agreed that after a rapid series of rate increases in the coming months, they could "assess the effects" of their rate hikes and, depending on the economy's health, increase rates at a slower pace.

After their meeting this month, the policymakers raised their benchmark short-term rate by a half-point — double the usual hike. According to minutes from the May 3-4 meeting released Wednesday, most of the officials agreed that half-point hikes also "would likely be appropriate" when they next meet in June and July. Chair Jerome Powell himself had indicated after this month's meeting that half-point increases would be "on the table" at the next two meetings.

All the officials believed that the Fed should "expeditiously" raise its key rate to a level at which it neither stimulates nor restrains growth, which officials have said is a rate of about 2.4%. Some policymakers have said they will likely reach that point by the end of this year.

The minutes suggest, though, that there may be a sharp debate among policymakers about how quickly to tighten credit after the June and July meetings. The economy has shown more signs of slowing, and stock markets have dropped sharply, since the Fed meeting.

Government reports have indicated, for example, that sales of new and existing homes have faltered sharply since this month's Fed meeting, and there are signs that factory output is growing more slowly. Gennadiy Goldberg, senior rates strategist at TD Securities, suggested that the minutes released Wednesday might reflect a more "hawkish" Fed — that is, more focused on rate hikes to restrain inflation — than may actually be the case now.

Some officials, particularly Raphael Bostic, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, have indicated since this month's meeting that the Fed could reconsider its pace of rate hikes in September.

And Loretta Mester, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, has said that if there's "compelling evidence that inflation is moving down," the Fed could slow its rate hikes, likely to a quarter-point pace.

"But if inflation has failed to moderate," she added, "a faster pace of rate increases may be necessary."

The minutes released Wednesday signaled a tentative acknowledgement by some Fed officials that recent inflation data "might suggest that overall price pressures may no longer be worsening." At the same time, those officials — the minutes don't name individual Fed policymakers — stressed that it was "too early to be confident that inflation had peaked."

Fed officials unanimously agreed that the "U.S. economy was very strong, the labor market was extremely tight, and inflation was very high and well above" the Fed's target of 2%. Powell had expressed similar sentiments at his May 4 news conference.

Fed officials are betting that the economy's broad strength will enable it to withstand sharply higher borrowing rates without leading to extended layoffs or a recession.

When Fed officials decided this month to raise their benchmark rate by a half-point to a range of 0.75% to 1%, it was their first increase of that size since 2000. The officials also announced that they would start to shrink their huge \$9 trillion balance sheet, which has more than doubled since the pandemic.

The balance sheet swelled as the Fed bought about \$4.5 trillion in Treasury and mortgage bonds after the pandemic recession struck to try to hold down longer-term rates. On June 1, the Fed plans to let those securities start to mature, without replacing them. That should also heighten the cost of long-term borrowing.

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Powell has said the Fed is determined to raise rates high enough to restrain inflation, leading many economists to expect the sharpest pace of rate hikes in three decades this year. Powell says the central bank is aiming for a "soft landing," in which higher interest rates cool borrowing and spending enough to slow the economy and inflation. But most economists are skeptical that the Fed can achieve such a narrow outcome without causing an economic downturn.

Stock prices have plunged on fears that the Fed's rate hikes will send the economy into recession. The S&P 500 has fallen for seven straight weeks, the longest such stretch since the aftermath of the dot-com bubble in 2001. The stock index nearly fell into bear-market territory last week — defined as a 20% drop from its peak — but rallied Wednesday.

The minutes also showed that some policymakers decided it was appropriate to consider selling some of its holdings of mortgage-backed securities, rather than simply letting them mature. Sales would make it easier for the Fed to transition to a portfolio composed mainly of Treasuries, the minutes said.

The Fed has said that by September it would allow up to \$30 billion of mortgage-backed securities to mature each month, along with \$60 billion in Treasuries. Many analysts doubt that the cap will be reached for mortgage-backed bonds, because mortgage rates have jumped more than 2 percentage points since the start of the year. That means that fewer homeowners will refinance their mortgages because their current loan rates are lower than the rates now available in the mortgage market.

Fewer refinancings would force the Fed to sell mortgage-backed securities to maintain its plans to reduce its balance sheet.

UK's Johnson faulted for lockdown parties but won't quit

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — An investigative report released Wednesday blamed British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and other senior leaders for allowing boozy government parties that broke the U.K.'s COVID-19 lockdown rules, and while Johnson said he took "full responsibility" for the breaches, he insisted he would not resign.

Revelations that Johnson and his staff repeatedly flouted restrictions they imposed on Britain in 2020 and 2021 have fueled outrage in the country and led to calls from opponents for Johnson to step down over the scandal known as "partygate."

Most lawmakers in Johnson's governing Conservative Party have stood by him for now, and it's not yet clear if senior civil servant Sue Gray's report will change that, despite its detailed descriptions of alcohol-fueled bashes in the building where the prime minister both lives and works.

Gray investigated 16 gatherings attended by Johnson and his staff while U.K. residents were barred from socializing, or even from visiting sick and dying relatives, because of coronavirus restrictions.

Gray's report concluded that the "senior leadership team ... must bear responsibility" for a rule-breaking culture. She said there had been "failures of leadership and judgment" in the prime minister's 10 Downing St. office.

"Those in the most junior positions attended gatherings at which their seniors were present, or indeed organized," she said.

A separate police investigation resulted in fines for 83 people — including Johnson — making him the first British prime minister found to have broken the law while in office.

Speaking to lawmakers after the report was published, Johnson said he took "full responsibility for everything that took place" and was sorry — but denied he knowingly break any rules. He said he was "humbled" and had "learned a lesson" but it was now time to "move on" and focus on Britain's battered economy and the war in Ukraine.

Critics, some of them in the Conservative Party, have said Johnson lied to Parliament about the events. Ministers who knowingly mislead Parliament are expected to resign.

Johnson denied lying. He insisted that when he told Parliament last year no rules were broken and there were no parties, "it was what I believed to be true."

Johnson attended several events mentioned in Gray's report, including a June 2020 birthday party for

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which he was fined 50 pounds (\$63). He told a news conference: "I believed that they were work events."

British media and opposition politicians have found that hard to square with staff members' accounts of "bring-your-own-booze" parties and regular "wine time Fridays" in the Downing Street office amid the pandemic.

Keir Starmer, the leader of the opposition Labour Party, said Gray's report was a "catalogue of criminality" and that Johnson's government had "treated the sacrifices of the British people with utter contempt."

Gray's mandate did not allow her to mete out punishment. Much of her 37-page report is devoted to a detailed account of the events, including a May 2020 party in the Downing Street garden to which "the Prime Minister brought cheese and wine from his flat" and a party the next month at which "one individual was sick" and "there was a minor altercation between two other individuals."

At another party held the night before the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II's husband, Prince Philip, revelers in the garden broke a swing belonging to Johnson's toddler son Wilf and partied until 4 a.m.

The report includes emails and WhatsApp messages suggesting that staff members knew they were breaking the rules. One invitation was changed from "Wine and Cheese Evening" to "End of Year Meeting with Wine & Cheese." On another occasion, a staffer warned that journalists would be in the building for a news conference and people should avoid "walking around waving bottles of wine."

In measured civil service language, Gray slammed the behavior of those involved. She said there were "multiple examples of a lack of respect and poor treatment of security and cleaning staff," branding that "unacceptable."

"Many will be dismayed that behavior of this kind took place on this scale at the heart of government," Gray wrote. "The public have a right to expect the very highest standards of behavior in such places and clearly what happened fell well short of this."

Johnson has clung to power despite the scandal, partly because Russia's invasion of Ukraine has diverted public and political attention. Some Conservatives argue would be rash to push Johnson out now, whatever his flaws.

Conservatives also have tried to rebuff criticism by pointing out that Labour's Starmer also faces a police investigation for having a beer and a takeout curry with colleagues in April 2021. He insists the meal was part of a working day and broke no rules but has said he will resign if fined by police.

Now that Gray and the police have finished their investigations, Johnson's fate is in the hands of the Conservative Party, which has a history of throwing out leaders who become liabilities. Tory lawmakers say they have received angry messages from voters, and many are uncomfortable defending serial rule-breaking.

Johnson faces an inquiry by a House of Commons standards committee over whether he lied to Parliament. And Gray's conclusions could revive calls from Conservative lawmakers for a no-confidence vote in the leader who won them a big parliamentary majority in 2019. Under party rules, such a vote is triggered if 15% of party lawmakers — currently 54 — write letters calling for one.

If Johnson lost such a vote, he would be replaced as Conservative leader and prime minister. It's unclear how many letters have been submitted so far, though one more was submitted Wednesday. Conservative lawmaker Julian Sturdy said, "I am now unable to give the Prime Minister the benefit of the doubt and feel it is now in the public interest for him to resign."

Johnson got a warm reception from Tory lawmakers at a private meeting in Parliament Wednesday evening. Attendees described him as solemn and conciliatory.

"He fully gets the mood," said legislator Jonathan Gullis.

But another Conservative, Tobias Ellwood, said in the House of Commons that Johnson had lost his support.

"A question I humbly put to my colleagues is, 'are you willing day in and day out to defend this behavior publicly?'" he said.

Long COVID affects more older adults; shots don't prevent it

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By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

New U.S. research on long COVID-19 provides fresh evidence that it can happen even after breakthrough infections in vaccinated people, and that older adults face higher risks for the long-term effects.

In a study of veterans published Wednesday, about one-third who had breakthrough infections showed signs of long COVID.

A separate report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that up to a year after an initial coronavirus infection, 1 in 4 adults aged 65 and older had at least one potential long COVID health problem, compared with 1 in 5 younger adults.

Long COVID refers to any of more than two dozens symptoms that linger, recur or first appear at least one month after a coronavirus infection. These can affect all parts of the body and may include fatigue, shortness of breath, brain fog and blood clots.

Coronavirus vaccines that help prevent initial infections and serious illnesses provide some protection against long COVID but mounting research shows not as much as scientists had first hoped.

The veterans study published in Nature Medicine reviewed medical records of mostly white male veterans, aged 60, on average. Of the 13 million veterans, almost 3 million had been vaccinated last year, through October.

About 1%, or nearly 34,000, developed breakthrough infections. Lead author Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly noted that the study was done before the highly contagious omicron variant appeared at the end of the year and said the rate of breakthrough infections has likely increased.

Breakthrough infections and long COVID symptoms were more common among those who had received Johnson & Johnson's single-dose shot compared with two doses of either Moderna or Pfizer vaccines. Whether any had received booster shots is not known; the first booster wasn't OK'd in the U.S. until late September.

Overall, 32% had long COVID symptoms up to six months after breakthrough infections. That's compared with 36% of unvaccinated veterans who had been infected and developed long COVID.

Vaccination reduced the chances for any long COVID symptoms by a "modest" 15%," although it cut the risk in half for lingering respiratory or clotting problems, said Al-Aly, a researcher with Washington University and the Veterans Affairs health system in St. Louis. These symptoms included persistent shortness of breath or cough and blood clots in lungs or veins in the legs.

Infectious disease expert Dr. Kristin Englund, who runs a center for long COVID patients at the Cleveland Clinic, said the Nature Medicine study mirrors what she sees at her clinic. Long COVID patients there include people who were vaccinated and received boosters.

"As we have no clear treatments for long COVID, it is important for everyone to get vaccinated and use other proven methods of prevention such as masking and social distancing in order to prevent infections with COVID and thus long COVID," Englund said.

The CDC report, released Tuesday, used medical records for almost 2 million U.S. adults from the start of the pandemic in March 2020 to last November. They included 353,000 who had COVID-19. Patients were tracked for up to a year to determine if they developed any of 26 health conditions that have been attributed to long COVID.

Those who had COVID were much more likely than other adults without COVID to develop at least one of these conditions, and risks were greatest for those aged 65 and older. Information on vaccination, sex and race was not included.

Breathing problems and muscle aches were among the most common conditions.

Older adults' risks were higher for certain conditions, including strokes, brain fog, kidney failure and mental health problems. The findings are worrisome because those conditions can hasten older adults' needs for long-term care, the report authors said.

They stressed that routine assessment of all COVID patients "is critical to reduce the incidence" of long COVID.

School massacre continues Texas' grim run of mass shootings

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Once again, one of America's deadliest mass shootings happened in Texas.

Past shootings targeted worshippers during a Sunday sermon, shoppers at a Walmart, students on a high school campus and drivers on a highway. Among the latest victims were 19 children and two teachers in the small town of Uvalde, west of San Antonio, where on Tuesday a gunman opened fire inside an elementary school in the nation's deadliest school shooting in nearly a decade.

Each of those tragedies in Texas — which resulted in more than 85 dead in all — occurred in the last five years.

But as the horror in Uvalde plunges the U.S. into another debate over gun violence, Texas and the state's Republican-controlled government have by now demonstrated what is likely to happen next: virtually nothing that would restrict gun access.

Lawmakers are unlikely to adopt any significant new limits on guns. Last year, gun laws were actually loosened after a gunman at a Walmart in El Paso killed 23 people in a racist 2019 attack that targeted Hispanics.

"I can't wrap my head around it," said state Sen. Roland Gutierrez, a Democrat whose district includes Uvalde. "It's disturbing to me as a policymaker that we have been able to do little other than create greater access to these militarized weapons to just about anyone who would want them."

Republican Texas Gov. Greg Abbott identified the gunman as 18-year-old Salvador Ramos. The gunman was killed by authorities.

The cycle in Texas — a mass shooting followed by few if any new restrictions on guns — mirrors GOP efforts to block stricter laws in Congress and the ensuing outrage from Democrats and supporters of tougher gun control.

President Joe Biden angrily made a renewed push Tuesday evening after the tragedy in Uvalde. "When in God's name are we going to stand up to the gun lobby?" he asked in an address from the White House.

The shooting in Texas happened days before the National Rifle Association is set to hold its annual meeting in Houston, where Abbott and other Republican leaders are scheduled to speak.

Even as Biden's party has slim control of Congress, gun violence bills have stalled in the face of Republican opposition in the Senate. Last year, the House passed two bills to expand background checks on firearms purchases, but both languished in the 50-50 Senate where Democrats need at least 10 Republican votes to overcome objections from a filibuster.

"It sort of centers around the issue of mental health. It seems like there's consensus in that area," No. 2 Senate GOP leader John Thune said about how Congress should respond to the Uvalde shooting. He did not specify what that would be.

In Texas, any changes to gun access would not come until lawmakers return to the Capitol in 2023. In the past, calls for action have faded.

Abbott, who is up for reelection in November, said the shooting in Uvalde was carried out "horribly, incomprehensibly" on children. He did not immediately say how or whether Texas would respond to this latest mass shooting on a policy level, but since he became governor in 2015, the state has only gotten more relaxed when it comes to gun laws.

Exactly one year before the Uvalde shooting, the GOP-controlled Legislature voted to remove one of the last major gun restrictions in Texas: required licenses, background checks and training for the nearly 1.6 million registered handgun owners in the state at the time.

Abbott signed the measure, which came at the end of what was the Texas Legislature's first chance to act after the Walmart attack.

A year later, a man went on a highway shooting rampage in the West Texas oil patch that left seven people dead, spraying bullets into passing cars and shopping plazas and killing a U.S. Postal Service employee while hijacking her mail truck.

Following a shooting at Santa Fe High School in 2018 that killed 10 people near Houston, Abbott signaled

support for so-called red flag laws, which restrict gun access for people deemed dangerous to themselves or others. But he later retreated amid pushback from gun-rights supporters.

Republican Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, who won the GOP nomination for a third term Tuesday, told Fox News after the Uvalde shooting that the best response would be training teachers and "hardening" schools.

Democrat state Rep. Joe Moody recalled the hope he felt that the Walmart shooting in his border city might finally lead to reforms.

"And the only answer you get when we go to the Capitol is, 'More guns, less restrictions,'" Moody said. "That's it."

Steven Tyler enters treatment, Aerosmith cancels shows

BOSTON (AP) — Aerosmith frontman Steven Tyler has voluntarily entered a rehabilitation program, forcing the Boston-based rock band to cancel the first portion of its upcoming Las Vegas residency.

Tyler, 74, has made no secret of his lifelong struggle with substance abuse disorder.

"As many of you know, our beloved brother Steven has worked on his sobriety for many years," the band posted on social media on Tuesday. "After foot surgery to prepare for the stage and the necessity of pain management during the process, he has recently relapsed and voluntarily entered a treatment program to concentrate on his health and recovery."

The band's June and July shows in Las Vegas have been canceled, and the goal is to start performing again in September, the band posted.

"We are devastated that we have inconvenienced so many of you, especially our most loyal fans who often travel great distances to experience our shows," the band said.

The band promised refunds for the canceled shows.

Brittney Griner's wife tells ABC she wants WNBA star home

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

Brittney Griner's wife, Cherelle, wants President Joe Biden to secure her partner's release, doing whatever is necessary to get the WNBA star home from Russia where she has been detained for more than three months.

"I just keep hearing that, you know, he has the power. She's a political pawn," said Cherelle, who became emotional detailing what little she knows about Griner's detainment during an interview that aired Wednesday on Good Morning America. "So if they're holding her because they want you to do something, then I want you to do it."

The Phoenix Mercury center has been detained since Feb. 17 after vape cartridges containing oil derived from cannabis were allegedly found in her luggage at an airport near Moscow.

The 31-year-old Griner — a two-time Olympic gold medalist for the U.S. — faces drug smuggling charges that carry a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. Earlier this month, the Biden administration said Griner is being wrongfully detained.

Cherelle has talked with Secretary of State Antony Blinken about Griner's case, but not the president.

"I was grateful for the call, you say she's top priority, but I wanna see it. and I feel like to see it would be me seeing BG on U.S. soil," Cherelle said in her first public interview. "At this point I don't even know who I'm getting back when she comes back."

Russian officials have described Griner's case as a criminal offense without making any political associations. But Moscow's war in Ukraine has brought U.S.-Russia relations to the lowest level since the Cold War.

Despite the strain, Russia and the United States carried out an unexpected prisoner exchange last month — trading former Marine Trevor Reed for Konstantin Yaroshenko, a Russian pilot serving a 20-year federal prison sentence for conspiring to smuggle cocaine into the United States.

While the U.S. does not typically embrace such exchanges, it made the deal in part because Yaroshenko had already served a long portion of his sentence.

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The Russians may consider Griner someone who could figure into another such exchange.

Besides Griner, another American regarded as unjustly detained in Russia is Paul Whelan, a corporate security executive from Michigan. Whelan was arrested in December 2018 while visiting for a friend's wedding and was later sentenced to 16 years in prison on espionage-related charges his family has said are bogus.

"Even though they're separate people, separate roles, no connection besides what they're going through in Russia, you know, I obviously want him back too," Cherelle said. "You don't want anybody to be there, going through what they're going through."

Cherelle, who graduated from law school at North Carolina Central University earlier this month, hasn't talked on the phone with Griner since the day she was first detained.

"I first heard the news through Brittney, actually. She started texting me around 2:00 a.m. that morning," Cherelle said. "Babe. Babe. Babe. Wake up. They have me in this room. I don't know what's going on." and so I instantly text back "Who are they and what room?"

Cherelle said Griner responded, texting: "The customs people. They just grabbed me when I was going through, and they have me in this room." Griner then sent a message saying, "They're about to take my phone."

Cherelle said she told Griner to call her when she could. She's still waiting for that call nearly 100 days later.

"The first week I laid on this couch and cried my eyeballs out. I was numb. I couldn't move," Cherelle said. "And then I said, 'You got to get up now.'"

Cherelle and Brittney communicate through letters and her lawyers. The attorneys print out articles to show Griner so she can keep up-to-date with what's going on.

Initially, friends and teammates of Griner were hesitant to talk about her situation for fear of interfering with the ongoing negotiations for her release. However, they began cautiously speaking out before the women's Final Four in early April as her detention gained more national attention.

Cherelle became emotional when talking about the support and how it helps Griner stay strong during the struggle for her release. The WNBA has acknowledged the 6-foot-9 Mercury center's absence by putting a decal with her initials and number on the home floor of all 12 teams.

"It comforts BG," Cherelle said. "It lets her know she's not forgotten and ... when you're sitting over there, your country ... they haven't come ... to your rescue yet. I know that it makes her feel good, because she doesn't want to be forgotten.

"Things like that matter, like, it has her hopeful," Cherelle added. "It lets her know she's not forgotten. Those small moments, I know give her some type of hope."

Cherelle said that prior to the detention, Griner's experience playing in Russia over the past nine years had been great. She was returning to the country after the Russian league took a break for the FIBA World Cup qualifying tournament when she was detained.

"You know you are a GOAT if you can actually play in Russia ... on the team BG plays for," Cherelle said. "They treat them like superstars."

Griner, who won an NCAA championship at Baylor, earns over \$1 million playing for UMMC Ekaterinburg to supplement her WNBA income where she makes the maximum base salary of \$228,000. Elite players like Griner can earn up to \$500,000 with their salaries, bonuses and WNBA marketing contracts.

"BG would wholeheartedly love to not go overseas," Cherelle said. "She has only had one Thanksgiving in the (United) States in nine years since she's been a pro."

The WNBA and U.S. officials have been working toward her release, without visible progress. A U.S. consular officer was able to meet with Griner last week.

"We did note that a consular official from our embassy in Moscow was able to visit with Brittney Griner on the margins of her court hearing in Moscow that day," State Department spokesman Ned Price said Tuesday. "We have made the point that one off consular visits are, in our view, not sufficient.

"But it's not only in our view, it is in the requirements that are put forward by the Vienna Convention and other bilateral agreements that stipulate that we should have regular, sustained access to Americans

who are held in detention around the world, including to those in pretrial detention.”

1.1 million Afghan children could face severe malnutrition

By RAHIM FAIEZ and LEE KEATH Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — In Afghanistan, 1.1 million children under the age of 5 will likely face the most severe form of malnutrition this year, according to the U.N., as increasing numbers of hungry, wasting-away children are brought into hospital wards.

U.N. and other aid agencies were able to stave off outright famine after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan last year, rolling out a massive emergency aid program that fed millions.

But they are struggling to keep pace with relentlessly worsening conditions. Poverty is spiraling and making more Afghans in need of aid, global food prices are mounting from the war in Ukraine and promises of international funding so far are not coming through, according to an assessment report issued this month.

As a result, the vulnerable are falling victim, including children but also mothers struggling to feed themselves along with their families.

Nazia said she had lost four children to malnutrition — two daughters and two sons under 2 years old. “All four died due to financial problems and poverty,” the 30-year-old Nazia said. When her children fell ill, she didn’t have the money to treat them.

Nazia spoke to The Associated Press at Charakar Hospital in the northern province of Parwan, where she and her 7-month-old daughter were both being treated for malnutrition. Her husband is a day laborer but is also a drug addict and rarely brings in an income, she said. Like many Afghans, she uses only one name.

UNICEF, the U.N. children’s agency, said 1.1 million children this year are expected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition, also known as severe wasting, nearly double the number in 2018 and up from just under 1 million last year.

Severe wasting is the most lethal type of malnutrition, in which food is so lacking that a child’s immune system is compromised, according to UNICEF. They become vulnerable to multiple bouts of disease and eventually they become so weak they can’t absorb nutrients.

The numbers of children under 5 being admitted into health facilities with severe acute malnutrition have steadily mounted, from 16,000 in March 2020 to 18,000 in March 2021, then leaping to 28,000 in March 2022, the UNICEF representative in Afghanistan, Mohamed Ag Ayoya, wrote in a tweet last week.

Hit by one of its worst droughts in decades and torn by years of war, Afghanistan was already facing a hunger emergency; but the Taliban takeover in August threw the country into crisis. Many development agencies pulled out and international sanctions cut off billions in finances for the government, collapsing the economy.

Millions were plunged into poverty, struggling to afford food for their families. By the end of last year, half the population of around 38 million lived under the poverty line, according to U.N. figures. As the economy continues to crumble and prices mount, that could rise this year to as high as 97% of the population by mid-2022, according to the U.N. Development Program.

Because of poverty, “mothers do not have proper nutrition during pregnancy, and are not able to eat properly after birth, said Mohammad Sharif, a doctor at Charakar hospital.

At the Mirwais Hospital in southern Kandahar province, 1,100 children with malnutrition have been admitted in the past six months, 30 of whom died, said Dr. Mohammad Sediq, head of the children’s ward.

One mother, Kobra, said she had been unable to breastfeed her 6-month-old child. “He is constantly losing weight and cries a lot, I know it is all because of hunger, but I can’t do anything” she said.

At her home in an impoverished district of Kandahar city, Jamila said her 8-month-old son died last month after being diagnosed with severe malnutrition. If she doesn’t get help, she fears for her other four children, she said.

“The government hasn’t helped us at all, no one has asked us if we are hungry or have something to eat or not,” she said.

U.N. agencies launched a massive, accelerated aid program after the Taliban takeover, ramping up to a point that they now deliver food assistance to 38% of the population.

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The number of people facing acute food insecurity fell slightly from 22.8 million late last year to 19.7 million currently, according to a May report by IPC, a partnership among U.N. and other agencies that assesses food security. From June to November this year, that number is expected to fall a little further, to 18.9 million, IPC said.

But those small reductions "are far from indicating a positive trend," it warned.

The decrease was low compared to the scale of the aid, it said. Moreover, deteriorating conditions threaten to overwhelm the effort. It pointed to the continued crumbling of the economy, higher food and fuel prices and supply disruptions caused by the Ukraine war, and "unprecedented inflation" in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, lack of funding threatens aid's reach. The proportion of the population receiving food aid could plummet to only 8% over the next six months because so far only \$601 million of the \$4.4 billion needed has been received from the world community, the IPC said. Just over \$2 billion has been pledged.

Melanie Galvin, chief of UNICEF's nutrition program in Afghanistan, said the 1.1 million children figure came from the agency's annual assessment, conducted last fall and based on expected conditions.

"Every year, all the factors connected to malnutrition keep going up," she told the AP. It just keeps going up and up in terms of a deteriorating situation.

Drought has been the main driver of food insecurity, she said, compounded by growing poverty, lack of access to clean water and to medical care, need for greater vaccination for diseases like measles that hit malnourished children.

The good news is that agencies have access to the entire country now, she said. UNICEF opened around 1,000 treatment sites in remote locations where parents can bring their malnourished children rather than having to trek to larger urban centers.

But an emergency response is not sustainable in the longer term, she said. "We need all these factors in the external environment to improve."

Biden says 'we have to act' after Texas school shooting

By ZEKE MILLER and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Lamenting a uniquely American tragedy, an anguished and angry President Joe Biden delivered an urgent call for new restrictions on firearms after a gunman shot and killed at least 19 children at a Texas elementary school.

Biden spoke Tuesday night from the White House barely an hour after returning from a five-day trip to Asia that was bracketed by mass shootings in the U.S. He pleaded for action to address gun violence after years of failure — and bitterly blamed firearm manufacturers and their supporters for blocking legislation in Washington.

"When in God's name are we going to stand up to the gun lobby?" Biden said with emotion. "Why are we willing to live with this carnage? Why do we keep letting this happen?"

With first lady Jill Biden standing by his side in the Roosevelt Room, the president, who has suffered the loss of two of his own children — though not to gun violence — spoke in visceral terms about the grief of the loved ones of the victims and the pain that will endure for the students who survived.

"To lose a child is like having a piece of your soul ripped away," Biden said. "There's a hollowness in your chest. You feel like you're being sucked into it and never going to be able to get out."

He called on the nation to hold the victims and families in prayer — but also to work harder to prevent the next tragedy, "It's time we turned this pain into action," he said.

At least 19 students were killed at Robb Elementary School in the heavily Latino town of Uvalde, Texas, according to local officials. The death toll also included two adults. The gunman died after being shot by responding officers, local police said.

It was just a week earlier that Biden, on the eve of his overseas trip, traveled to Buffalo to meet with victims' families after a racist, hate-filled shooter killed 10 Black people at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York.

The back-to-back tragedies served as sobering reminders of the frequency and brutality of an American

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epidemic of mass gun violence.

"These kinds of mass shootings rarely happen anywhere else in the world," Biden said, reflecting that other nations have people filled with hate or with mental health issues but no other industrialized nation experiences gun violence at the level of the U.S.

"Why?" he asked.

It was much too early to tell if the latest violent outbreak could break the political logjam around tightening the nation's gun laws, after so many others — including the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut that killed 26, including 20 children — have failed.

"The idea that an 18-year-old kid can walk into a gun store and buy two assault weapons is just wrong," Biden said. He has previously called for a ban on assault-style weapons, as well as tougher federal background check requirements and "red flag" laws that are meant to keep guns out of the hands of those with mental health problems.

Late Tuesday, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer set in motion possible action on two House-passed bills to expand federally required background checks for gun purchases, but no votes have been scheduled.

Biden was somber when he returned to the White House, having been briefed on the shooting on Air Force One. Shortly before landing in Washington, he spoke with Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and offered "any and all assistance" needed, the White House said. He directed that American flags be flown at half-staff through sunset Saturday in honor of the victims in Texas.

His aides, some of whom had just returned from Asia with the president, gathered to watch Biden's speech on televisions in the West Wing.

"I'd hoped when I became president I would not have to do this, again," he said. "Another massacre."

In a stark reminder of the issue's divisiveness, Biden's call for gun measures was booed at a campaign event in Georgia hosted by Herschel Walker, who won the Republican nomination for U.S. Senate.

Speaking at an Asian Pacific American event that was intended to celebrate Biden's Asia trip, Vice President Kamala Harris said earlier that people normally declare in moments like this, "our hearts break — but our hearts keep getting broken ... and our broken hearts are nothing compared to the broken hearts of those families."

"We have to have the courage to take action ... to ensure something like this never happens again," she said.

Echoing Biden's call, former President Barack Obama, who has called the day of the Sandy Hook shooting the darkest of his administration, said, "It's long past time for action, any kind of action."

"Michelle and I grieve with the families in Uvalde, who are experiencing pain no one should have to bear," he said in a statement. "We're also angry for them. Nearly ten years after Sandy Hook—and ten days after Buffalo—our country is paralyzed, not by fear, but by a gun lobby and a political party that have shown no willingness to act in any way that might help prevent these tragedies."

Congress has been unable to pass substantial gun violence legislation ever since the bipartisan effort to strengthen background checks on firearm purchases collapsed in the aftermath of the 2012 shooting.

Despite months of work, a bill that was backed by a majority of senators, fell to a filibuster — unable to overcome the 60-vote threshold needed to advance.

In impassioned remarks on the Senate floor Tuesday, Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., who represented Newton, Connecticut, in the House at the time of the Sandy Hook massacre, asked his colleagues why they even bother running for office if they're going to stand by and do nothing.

"I'm here on this floor to beg — to literally get down on my hands and knees — to beg my colleagues," he said.

Murphy said he was planning to reach out to Texas Republican Sen. John Cornyn after the two had teamed on an 2021 effort to toughen background check requirements that never became law. He said he would also reach out to Texas' other Republican Sen. Ted Cruz.

"I just don't understand why people here think we're powerless," Murphy said. "We aren't."

Cornyn told reporters he was on his way to Texas and would talk with them later. Cruz issued a state-

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ment calling it "a dark day. We're all completely sickened and heartbroken."

Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., who sponsored gun legislation that failed to overcome a filibuster in the Senate after Sandy Hook, said, "We're just pushing on people who just won't budge on anything."

"It makes no sense at all why we can't do commonsense things and try to prevent some of this from happening," he said.

Today in History: May 26, ABM treaty signed

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, May 26, the 146th day of 2022. There are 219 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 26, 1972, President Richard M. Nixon and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev signed the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in Moscow. (The U.S. withdrew from the treaty in 2002.)

On this date:

In 1864, President Abraham Lincoln signed a measure creating the Montana Territory.

In 1865, Confederate forces west of the Mississippi surrendered in New Orleans.

In 1938, the House Un-American Activities Committee was established by Congress.

In 1940, Operation Dynamo, the evacuation of some 338,000 Allied troops from Dunkirk, France, began during World War II.

In 1954, explosions rocked the aircraft carrier USS Bennington off Rhode Island, killing 103 sailors. (The initial blast was blamed on leaking catapult fluid ignited by the flames of a jet.)

In 1971, Don McLean recorded his song "American Pie" at The Record Plant in New York City (it was released the following November by United Artists Records).

In 1981, 14 people were killed when a Marine jet crashed onto the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz off Florida.

In 1994, Michael Jackson and Lisa Marie Presley were married in the Dominican Republic. (The marriage ended in 1996.)

In 2004, nearly a decade after the Oklahoma City bombing, Terry Nichols was found guilty of 161 state murder charges for helping carry out the attack. (Nichols later received 161 consecutive life sentences.)

In 2009, President Barack Obama nominated federal appeals judge Sonia Sotomayor to the U.S. Supreme Court. California's Supreme Court upheld the Proposition 8 gay marriage ban but said the 18,000 same-sex weddings that had taken place before the prohibition passed were still valid.

In 2011, Ratko Mladic (RAHT'-koh MLAH'-dich), the brutal Bosnian Serb general suspected of leading the massacre of 8,000 Muslim men and boys, was arrested after a 16-year manhunt. (Mladic was extradited to face trial in The Hague, Netherlands; he was convicted in 2017 on genocide and war crimes charges and is serving a life sentence.)

In 2020, Minneapolis police issued a statement saying George Floyd had died after a "medical incident," and that he had physically resisted officers and appeared to be in medical distress; minutes after the statement was released, bystander video was posted online. Protests over Floyd's death began, with tense skirmishes developing between protesters and Minneapolis police. Four police officers who were involved in Floyd's arrest were fired.

Ten years ago: Gruesome video posted online showed rows of dead Syrian children lying in a mosque in Houla, haunting images of what activists called one of the deadliest regime attacks yet in Syria's 14-month-old uprising. International space station astronauts floated into the Dragon, a day after its heralded arrival as the world's first commercial supply ship.

Five years ago: Two men were stabbed to death aboard a light-rail train in Portland, Oregon; police said the victims were trying to protect two women who were the target of a man's anti-Muslim rant. (Jeremy Christian would be convicted of murder and sentenced to two life prison terms without the possibility of parole.) President Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski (ZBIG'-nyef breh-ZHIN'-

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skee), died in Falls Church, Virginia, at age 89. Hall of Fame pitcher and former U.S. senator Jim Bunning, 85, died in Fort Thomas, Kentucky.

One year ago: A gunman killed nine co-workers at a Northern California rail yard before taking his own life as sheriff's deputies raced into the building. President Joe Biden ordered U.S. intelligence officials to "redouble" their efforts to investigate the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, including any possibility that the trail might lead to a Chinese laboratory. Amazon said it was buying the movie studio MGM for \$8.45 billion, with hopes of filling its video streaming service with more viewing options. Kevin Clark, who played drummer Freddy "Spazzy McGee" Jones in the 2003 movie "School of Rock," was killed when he was struck by a car while riding his bicycle along a Chicago street.

Today's Birthdays: Sportscaster Brent Musburger is 83. Rock musician Garry Peterson (Guess Who) is 77. Singer Stevie Nicks is 74. Actor Pam Grier is 73. Actor Philip Michael Thomas is 73. Country singer Hank Williams Jr. is 73. Former British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn is 73. Actor Margaret Colin is 64. Actor Doug Hutchison is 62. Actor Genie Francis is 60. Comedian Bobcat Goldthwait is 60. Singer-actor Lenny Kravitz is 58. Actor Helena Bonham Carter is 56. Distance runner Zola Budd is 56. Rock musician Phillip Rhodes is 54. Actor Joseph Fiennes (FYNZ) is 52. Singer Joey Kibble (Take 6) is 51. Actor-producer-writer Matt Stone is 51. Singer Lauryn Hill is 47. Contemporary Christian musician Nathan Cochran is 44. Actor Elisabeth Harnois is 43. Actor Hrach Titizian is 43.