

# Groton Daily Independent

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## 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

## Saturday, May 28

State Track Meet in Sioux Falls

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

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



**HELP WANTED!**

**Groton Store**

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

## OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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## Michal Elizabeth Tabke

Daughter of Bruce Tabke and Catherine Friesen of Groton.

**Sister and Brother:** Melissa and Matthew.

**Hobbies:** listening to music, barrel racing.

**School/community activities:** 4H and FFA.

**Favorite high school memory:** National FFA convention.

**Future plans:** attending SDSU.

**Awards:** Groton FFA Scholarship, SDSU Jack-rabbit Journey Scholarship



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## Emilie Corrine Thurston

Daughter of Tood Thurston and Debbie Thurston of Groton.

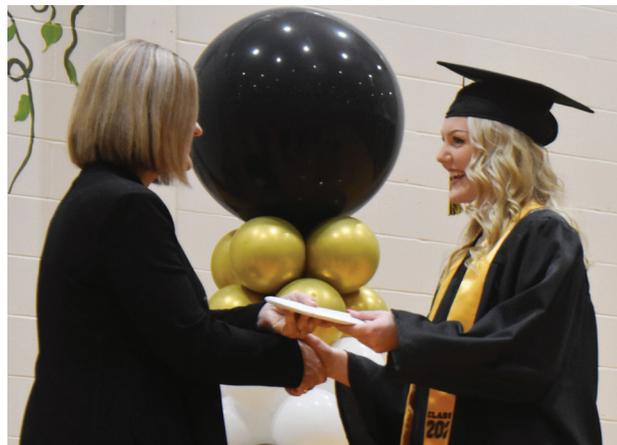
**Brothers:** Mitchel-22, Riley-20, and Drew -15.

**Hobbies:** Track, dance, working out, shopping, creating art, spending time with family and friends, taking care of my pets, outdoor activities.

**School /Community Activities:** FCCLA, track, and dance team.

**Favorite High School Memory:** High school prom memories.

**Future plans:** Attend North Dakota State University and major in Nursing to specialize in Aesthetics.



## Doug Abeln Seed Company

Call Doug at 605/380-0200

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**BECK'S**

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## Torrence Jade Wiseman

Daughter of Kandi and Dustin Wiseman of Aberdeen.

**Brothers and sisters:** Stehpanie, Christine, Nicole, Samantha, Ava, GraceLynn, and Brayson.

**Hobbies:** hunting, fishing, snowboarding, swimming, listening to music, driving, hanging with friends and family, and bowling.

**School/Community Activities:** church group.

**Favorite high school memory:** going to Pierre for a field trip for a full day, prom, graduation.

**Future plans:** college, family, and work.



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## Tatum Nicole Wright

Daughter of Adam and Nikki Wright, Turton.

**Sister:** Talli - 14

**Hobbies:** Listening to music, spending time with family and friends, camping at the lake and watching movies.

**School/Community Activities:** Participating in Special Olympics (bowling, swimming and track).

**Favorite High School Memory:** Going to my senior prom with my friends Maddie Bjerke and Riley Leicht, and attending sporting events cheering on my sister and E (Becky Erickson).

**Future Plans:** Continuing my education.



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**Greg Johnson, Owner**

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Bristol, SD

*Happy Graduation Day!*

## Jayden Michael Zak

Son of Krissi and Jesse Zak of Columbia and moved to Groton in the 1st grade.

**Brothers:** Jacob Zak-16, Karson Zak-13.

**Hobbies:** Playing basketball, working out, hanging out with friends, listening to music.

**School/ Community Activities:** basketball, soccer, baseball, track.

**Favorite high school memory:** playing in the state tournament this year in basketball.

**Future plans:** Playing college basketball and studying Business Marketing at Dakota State University.



**Weber Landscaping**

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*Best of Luck! Congrats!*

## Christina Caroline Zoellner

Daughter of Bill and the late Wanda Zoellner of Groton.

**Sister:** Tia Thompson.

**Hobbies:** shooting, spending time with friends and family, and working on the farm.

**School/community activities:** FFA, dance team, cheerleading, and trap shooting.

**Favorite high school memory:** when I finally shot a 50 straight at trap practice.

**Future plans:** Attend SDSU for Agricultural Sciences and then come home and help run the farm.

**Awards:** Renee McKiver Memorial Scholarship, Principal's 4 year Honor Roll, Dennis K. & Shirley R. Larson Family Scholarship, Groton FFA Scholarship



*Lori's Pharmacy*

Lori Giedt, RPh



1205 N 1st St., Groton • 397-2363

*Congratulations and Best of Luck!*

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**Jordan Bjerke**

**Build Dakota Scholarship**



**Seth Johnson**

**Anthony O'Brokaw Memorial Scholarship**

**Jerald W. Peterson Memorial Scholarship**

**Richard Duerr Memorial Scholarship**

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**Allyssa Locke**

**Dr. T.J. Johnson Memorial Scholarship**

**Doug Doeden Memorial Scholarship**



**Madeline Flihs**

**James Valley Telecommunications  
Bob Peterson Memorial Scholarship**

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**Left**  
**Allyssa Locke**

**Susan Deanne Weismantel Scholarship**

**Right**  
**Alyssa Thaler**

**Shawn**  
**Weismantel Kramer Scholarship**

**Groton Community Fund Scholarship**



**Alyssa Thaler**

**MS/HS PAC Community**  
**Service Scholarship**

**Groton Area FCA 3:16 Scholarship**



## Regents' Scholar Diploma

**Six seniors (Madisen Bjerke, Madeline Flihs, Trista Keith, Allyssa Locke, Alyssa Thaler, Pierce Kettering ) from Groton Area High School are recipients of a Regents' Scholar Diploma awarded by the South Dakota Department of Education and Cultural Affairs and the South Dakota Board of Regents.**

The diplomas recognize students for academic achievement over the course of their high school career. Students earning the award automatically qualify for entry into any of South Dakota's six state-supported universities.

To earn a Regents' Scholar Diploma, students must have at least a 3.0 grade point average, no final grade below a C (2.0) and must complete four units each of English, mathematics and science, three units of social studies, two units of one modern or classical language and one-half unit each of fine arts and computer science.

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**Sammuli Rix Scholarship**

**Left- Jackson Cogley**

**Right- Julianna Kosel**



**Groton Edna Bugner Memorial Scholarship**

**Left: Kelsie Frost**

**Right: Riley Leicht**



**Raap Memorial Scholarship**

**Cassandra Schultz & Kody Lehr**



**Hopps Dow Scholarship**

**Allyssa Locke & Jordan Bjerke**

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**Tom & Barbra Paepke Scholarship  
Kansas Kroll (Ag Scholarship)  
Megan Flihs (Fine Arts Scholarship)**



**Principal Student Service Award**

Three seniors (Madeline Flihs, Trista Keith, Alyssa Thaler) at Groton Area High School, have been nominated for the Principal's Student Service Award. To be eligible for this award the students had to document exemplary community service during high school and complete an application and essay.



**Groton Area Teaching  
Scholarship**

**Madisen Bjerke**



**Don Bartz  
Memorial  
Scholarship**

**Kaden Kurtz**

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**Kennedy Anderson**

**Jack & Helen Walter  
Memorial Scholarship**



**Kansas Kroll and Kennedy Anderson**

**Ruden Family Ag Scholarship**



**Travis Townsend**

**Masonic Lodge  
Scholarship**

**Groton Area STEM  
Scholarship**

**Gwendolyn  
'O Connor Broman  
Scholarship**



## President's Education Awards Program

Twelve students in the Class of 2022 have qualified for the President's Education Awards Program. The awards are an effort by the U.S. Department of Education to recognize outstanding educational achievement and effort. The criteria have been developed to reflect changes occurring in the schools and to provide schools with both clear guidelines and flexibility. They are meant to reflect the state, local and national efforts to raise academic standards as embodied in the National Education goals.

"It is really nice to be able to recognize these seniors. They have worked hard for four years, have exceptional grade point averages, and have performed well on standardized testing," stated Jodi Schwan, Groton Area High School Opportunities Coordinator. The President's Award for Educational Excellence is signed by the President, Secretary of Education, and the school principal. Criteria include a grade point average of 3.5.

**Back Left: Kansas Kroll, Hannah Gustafson, Madisen Bjerke, Julianna Kosel, Madeline Flihs, Seth Johnson, Jordan Bjerke**

**Front Left: Trista Keith, Allyssa Locke, Alyssa Thaler, Pierce Kettering**

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## South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship

The South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship was established for Regents Scholar and CTE recipients with an ACT score of 24 or greater. The scholarship provides \$6,500 over four years to a qualifying student who attends an eligible higher education institution in South Dakota. While in college, students must maintain certain criteria. This scholarship is non-competitive; all students who meet the requirements and complete the application can receive the scholarship.

**Left: Allyssa Locke, Trista Keith, Seth Johnson, Madeline Fliehs, & Madisen Bjerke**  
**Not Pictured: Travis Townsend**

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**FCCLA Service Award**

**Allyssa Locke, Madisen Bjerke, Brooklyn Imrie,  
Kelsie Frost, Kennedy Anderson, Madeline Flihs**



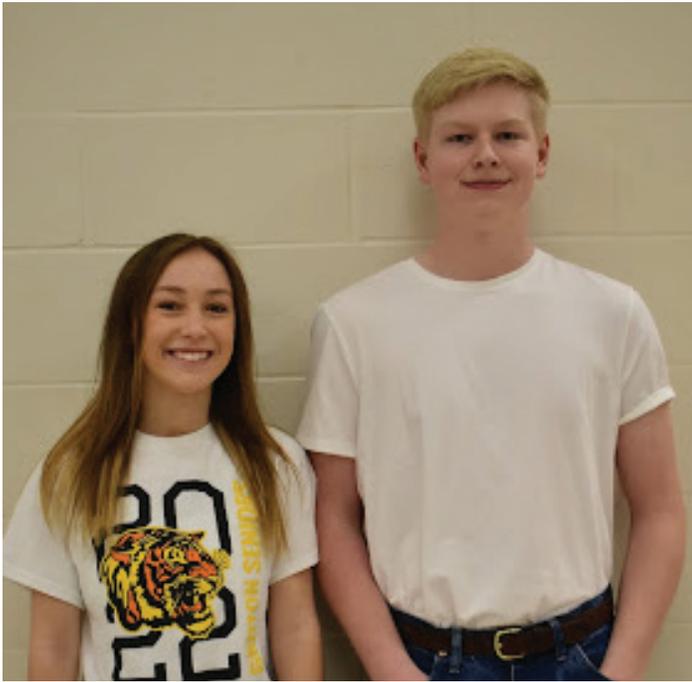
**Principal's Honor Roll**

**These 7 students have been selected for the Principal's Honor Roll at Groton Area High School. To be eligible for this award, the seniors had to be on the honor roll at Groton Area High School every quarter for four years.**

**Back Left: Pierce Kettering, Jace Kroll, Jordan Bjerke, Seth Johnson  
Front Left: Trista Keith, Madeline Flihs, Madisen Bjerke, Trista Keith  
Not Pictured: Travis Townsend**

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**Eastern Star Scholarship  
Alyssa Thaler and Travis Townsend**



**Flihs Family Scholarship  
Loren Flihs & Trista Keith**



**Schuring Memorial Scholarships  
Kansas Kroll (Robert Schuring)  
Kennedy Anderson (Barry Schuring)**

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## Adult Mosquito Control Last Night

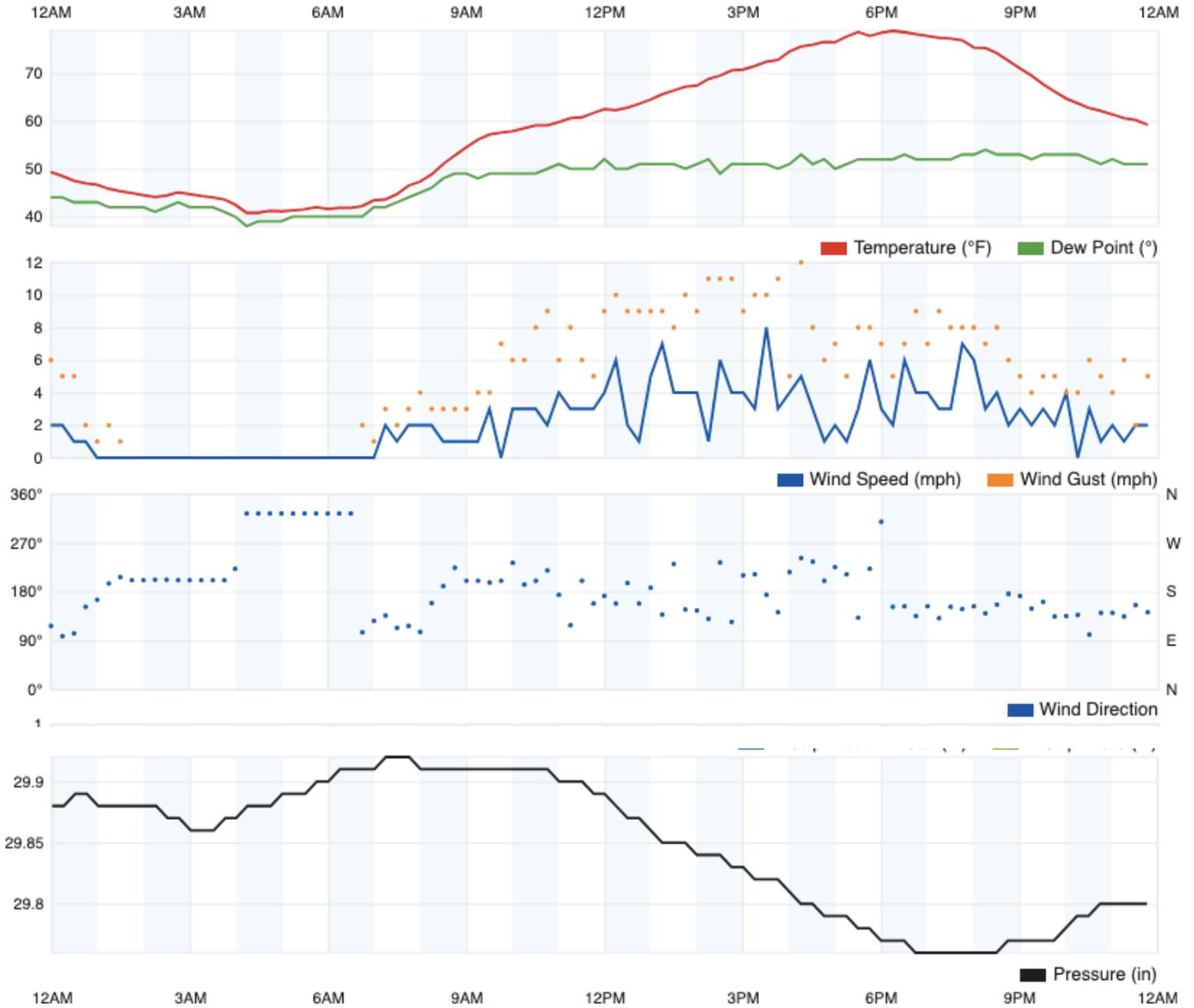


The City of Groton did an adult mosquito control Thursday night. 7.2 gallons of Evolver 4x4 was used. The wind was S-SE at about 5-10 mph and the temperature was in the low 60s.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
Increasing Clouds	Chance T-storms	Mostly Sunny	Showers Likely	Chance T-storms
High: 81 °F	Low: 58 °F	High: 81 °F	Low: 59 °F	High: 80 °F



## Holiday Weekend Severe Outlook

May 27, 2022  
4:49 AM

**Overview:** A series of systems will bring with them the risk of severe weather during the long weekend.



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

We continue to track multiple systems that will present a severe weather threat through the long weekend. Stay tuned for latest updated forecasts and remain weather aware if you are planning outdoor activities.

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## Today in Weather History

May 27, 1942: A short estimated F2 touchdown uprooted 27 trees on the western edge of Bryant in Hamlin County. One barn was destroyed.

May 27, 1996: On May 26th, anywhere from 4 to 6 inches of rain fell in a 24 hour period over the lower Bad River Basin. Also, 3 to 5 inches of rain fell over much of Western South Dakota. This runoff caused the Bad River at Fort Pierre to crest at 26.25 feet or about 5 feet above flood stage late on the 27th before falling back below flood stage on the 30th. The entire length of the Bad River Road from U.S. Highway 83 near Fort Pierre to U.S. Highway 14 near Midland was closed to all except local traffic on the 27th. Twenty-five to 35 volunteers were filling sandbags all day on the 27th around two homes along the river. Most of the damage was associated with flooding of agricultural land and some county roads. One resident along the river said the river was the highest it has been in 32 years.

1771: In Virginia, a wall of water came roaring down the James River Valley following ten to twelve days of intense rain. As water swept through Richmond, buildings, boats, animals, and vegetation were lost. About one hundred fifty people were killed as the River reached a flood stage of forty-five feet above normal. A monument to the flood was inscribed by Ryland Randolph, of Curles, in 1771-72: " ... all the great rivers of this country were swept by inundations never before experienced which changed the face of nature and left traces of violence that will remain for ages."

1896: A massive tornado struck Saint Louis, Missouri killing 306 persons and causing thirteen million dollars damage. The tornado path was short but cut across a densely populated area. It touched down six miles west of Eads Bridge in Saint Louis and widened to a mile as it crossed into East Saint Louis. The tornado was the most destructive of record in the U.S. at that time. It pierced a five-eighths inch thick iron sheet with a two by four-inch pine plank. A brilliant display of lightning accompanied the storm.

1997: An F5 tornado killed 27 people in Jarrell, Texas. Although tornado warnings were issued 30 minutes in advance and local sirens were sounded, there were few places to go for safety. Most homes were on slabs, with no basements. Houses were swept clean off their foundations, with little debris left behind. Total damage was \$20 million. The same thunderstorm complex produced a wind gust to 122 mph at Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio.

1896 - A massive tornado struck Saint Louis, MO, killing 306 persons and causing thirteen million dollars damage. The tornado path was short, but cut across a densely populated area. It touched down six miles west of Eads Bridge in Saint Louis and widened to a mile as it crossed into East Saint Louis. The tornado was the most destructive of record in the U.S. up until that time. It pierced a five-eighths inch thick iron sheet with a two by four inch pine plank. A brilliant display of lightning accompanied the storm. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Severe thunderstorms in West Texas produced baseball size hail at Crane, hail up to three and a half inches in diameter at Post, and grapefruit size hail south of Midland. Five days of flooding commenced in Oklahoma. Thunderstorms produced 7 to 9 inches of rain in central Oklahoma. Oklahoma City reported 4.33 inches of rain in six hours. Up to six inches of rain caused flooding in north central Texas. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Sunny and warm weather prevailed across much of the nation to kick off the Memorial Day weekend. Afternoon thunderstorms in southern Florida caused the mercury at Miami to dip to a record low reading of 69 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Unseasonably hot weather prevailed in the southeastern U.S. Ten cities reported record high temperatures for the date as readings soared into the 90s. Lakeland, FL, reported a record high of 99 degrees, and Biloxi, MS, reported a temperature of 90 degrees along with a relative humidity of 75 percent. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from north central Texas to the Central Gulf Coast Region. Severe thunderstorms spawned four tornadoes, and there were eighty-one reports of large hail or damaging winds. Late afternoon thunderstorms over southeast Louisiana produced high winds which injured twenty-seven persons at an outdoor music concert in Baton Rouge, and high winds which gusted to 78 mph at the Lake Ponchartrain Causeway. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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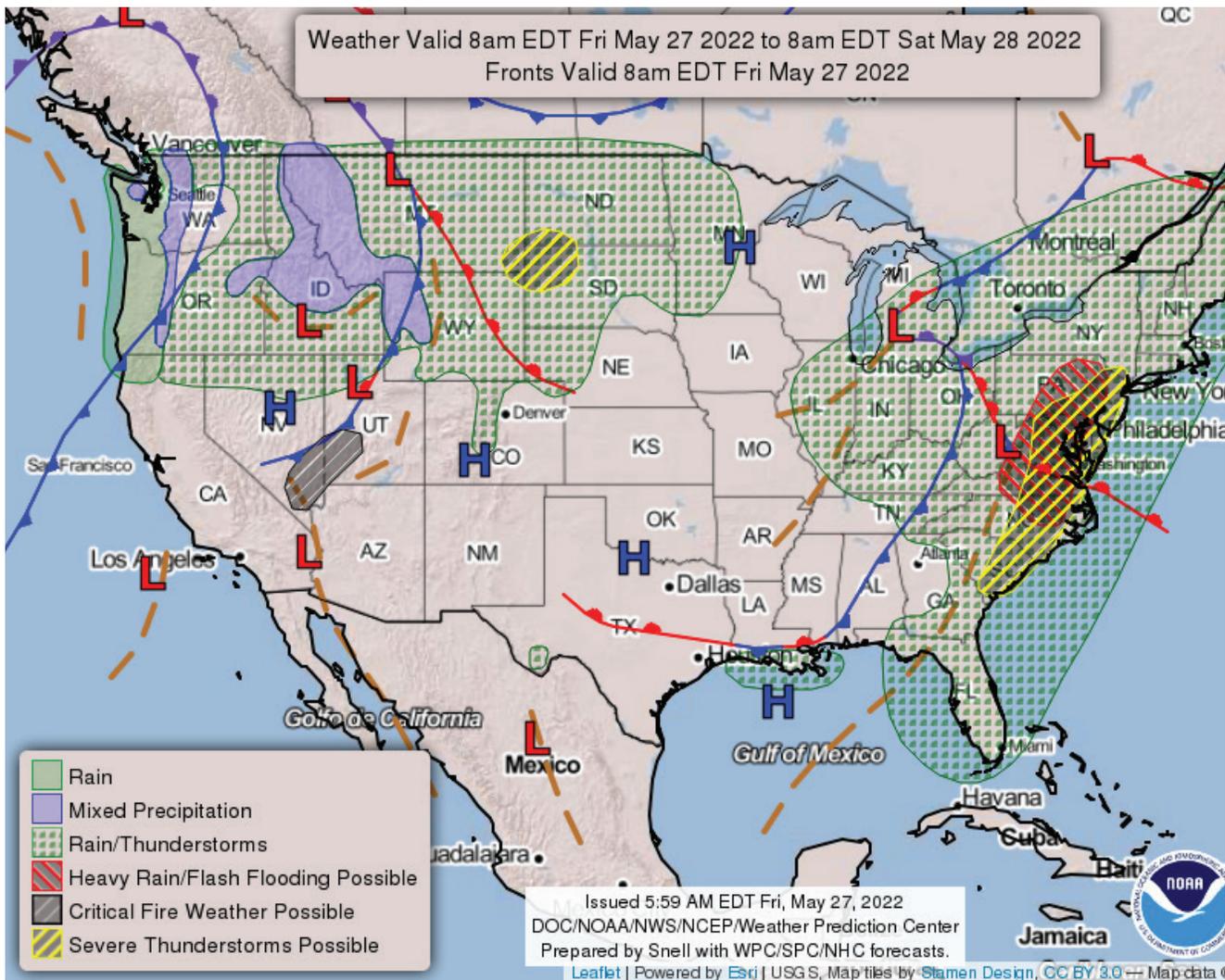
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 79 °F at 6:07 PM**  
**Low Temp: 41 °F at 4:11 AM**  
**Wind: 14 mph at 3:05 PM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

Day length: 15 hours, 22 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 101 in 2018  
Record Low: 28 in 1907  
Average High: 75°F  
Average Low: 49°F  
Average Precip in May.: 2.88  
Precip to date in May.: 2.48  
Average Precip to date: 6.85  
Precip Year to Date: 8.98  
Sunset Tonight: 9:10:43 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:10:43 PM



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## Two In One

Have you ever heard anyone accuse Jacob of being the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde of the Bible? This way of looking at Jacob was brought to my attention recently. A very strange description of one who has such a significant role in Scripture.

Consider these facts: We see a constant struggle of good versus evil. He rises, yet falls short of his goals. His life is one constant battle between two natures: one earthbound and the other filled with divine intentions.

No one can describe his life in a single word. It is certainly appropriate to speak of Abraham as a man of faith or Joseph as a person of purity. But it does not seem possible to summarize Jacob's many-sided life into one word unless it would be the word "inconsistent."

His early years present a vivid picture of these inconsistencies. He was a cheat - having cheated both his father and brother. Yet, he constantly tried to do better.

He might have died as a Jekyll and Hyde, but one night he was forced to face his sins and make a decision about his future. And when he realized that he was at the end of his resources, he finally turned to God to be saved from his sins and self-destructive ways.

After that God-changing event, he went from victory to victory, with hope and help from the Lord.

There is no limit to what God can do for each of us. What He did for Jacob, He can do for us: "Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God." Wrestling with sin? Turn to God now!

Prayer: How foolish we are, Father, to struggle in our own strength when Yours is available. Save us now! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God. Psalm 146:5

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## 2022 Community Events

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

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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

### Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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## Native students exercise right to wear regalia at graduation

By SAM METZ and RICK BOWMER Associated Press

CEDAR CITY, Utah (AP) — She walked up a red carpet and crossed a stage to accept her diploma wearing an eagle feather beaded onto her cap that her mother had gifted her.

Amryn Tom graduated this week from southern Utah's Cedar City High School. Her family cheered.

For the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah and other Native Americans, eagle feathers of the variety Tom wore are sacred items passed down through generations, used at ceremonies to signify achievement and connection with the community.

"This is from your ancestors," Tom said her mother, Charie, told her.

One year ago, students in Tom's school district would have been barred from wearing any form of tribal regalia along with their traditional cardinal-colored caps and gowns.

Not this year.

In March, Utah joined a growing list of states in enshrining Native American students' rights to wear tribal regalia at their graduation ceremonies.

In Iron County, where the school district tried to bar two graduates from wearing regalia at last year's ceremonies, Tom and other Native American students savored the hard-won right.

"It's kind of huge," said Paiute tribal member Brailyn Jake, an eagle feather and beads dangling from her turquoise cap. Her cousin was one of the students stopped from donning beads last year.

"People don't understand our culture, the meaning behind it and how, when you're turned down for something this big, it's kind of like, wow," Jake said.

Students across the U.S. often sport flower leis or flashy sashes at graduation with little controversy. But the rules governing tribal regalia at high school graduations have emerged as a legislative issue in several red and blue states after reports of students being prevented from wearing attire like Jake and Tom's.

Arizona, California, Kansas, Montana, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota and Washington all recently enacted laws that either enshrine students' rights or bar schools from enforcing dress codes banning tribal regalia. After passing through the legislature, a bill with similar provisions is being sent to Alaska Gov. Mike Dunleavy.

In Utah, Paiute Chairwoman Corrina Bow brought the issue to state lawmakers after last year's two Iron County incidents. The district had no formal rules prohibiting Native American students from donning regalia.

Bow noted the graduation rate for Native American and Alaskan Native students was 74% in 2019, the lowest of any demographic group, and told lawmakers that guaranteeing students statewide the right to wear regalia would allow them to "honor their culture, religion and heritage."

Similar controversies have occurred at schools in Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, suburban Chicago and elsewhere, with graduates being barred from wearing everything from beadwork and moccasins to sealskin caps. The incidents pit Native American students and their parents against administrators who say they want to maintain uniformity at graduation ceremonies.

Emalyce Kee, who is Navajo and Rosebud Sioux, was one of the two students told not to wear a beaded cap or plumes to her Cedar City High School graduation ceremony last year. She did it anyway.

Before walking across the stage to accept her diploma, Kee switched out her plain cap for one with a plume and beadwork by her uncle. Half a dozen family members in the front row applauded.

"I hadn't felt that powerful before that moment, standing up with my diploma, with my Native cap on and then shaking my principal's hand," Kee said.

At a high school that used "Redmen" as its mascot until 2019, Kee and her mother, Valerie Glass, said it stuck with them how the principal had argued beaded caps would set a precedent to allow all students to decorate their graduation attire.

"It's not 'decorative' regalia. It's traditional beaded regalia. How can you have the Cedar Redmen for so

long and not honor your Native American students?" Glass said.

Iron County Superintendent Lance Hatch was not available for comment.

Hoksila Lakota gifted his nephew Elijah James Wiggins, who is of Lakota ancestry, an eagle feather in honor of his graduation from Cedar City High School on Wednesday. He said eagle feathers — called wamblii wakan in Lakota — are fundamental to celebrating once-in-a-lifetime achievements, with many believing they hold a connection to God.

"These aren't something you find on the floor and do whatever with," he said. "These are sacred items given from grandfather to son or uncle to nephew."

Metz reported from Salt Lake City.

## Federal judge: South Dakota violating voter registration act

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A judge ruled Thursday that South Dakota is violating federal laws by failing to make it easier to vote.

U.S. District Judge Lawrence Piersol of South Dakota sided with two American Indian tribes, the Rosebud Sioux and the Oglala Sioux. The tribes argued in a 2020 complaint that the South Dakota secretary of state's office was not adhering to the National Voter Registration Act.

The law requires state agencies to help residents register to vote when they interact with government agencies for other services.

Piersol wrote in his opinion that secretary of state's office had not provided adequate information to county auditors and the other state agencies that would help them comply with federal law.

The secretary of state, as the chief elections officer responsible for implementation of National Voting Registration Act, "contributed to these failings through inadequate training and oversight," Piersol wrote.

Secretary of State Steve Barnett did not immediately respond to an email from the Sioux Falls Argus Leader seeking reaction to the ruling.

Licensing and public benefits are managed by the state department of public safety and the state department of social services. Piersol said the secretary of state's office was not providing enough oversight to ensure those offices were fulfilling those duties.

Piersol also found that while the department of public safety was responsible for transmitting voter registrations to the county auditor, numerous errors were stopping that process from happening. He added that the department of social services was not complying with the act because it was not changing voter registration addresses when those who receive food stamps or other aid change their addresses over the phone.

In addition, the judge found that state employees have mistakenly declined to provide registration services to convicted felons who are eligible to vote.

## Planned Parenthood workers in 5 Midwest states seek union

By DAVID PITT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — About 400 workers at Planned Parenthood offices in five states said Thursday they plan to unionize as their employer deals with the potential loss of business in states where abortions may become illegal if the U.S. Supreme Court overturns the landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling.

Workers for Planned Parenthood North Central States in Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota said they have signed cards showing majority support for unionization, and on Thursday they formally filed for a union election with the National Labor Relations Board, said Ashley Schmidt, a training and development specialist for Nebraska and western Iowa.

They plan to join SEIU Healthcare Minnesota & Iowa, an affiliate of the Service Employees International Union that has about 1 million members in 29 states, including doctors, nurses and laboratory technicians. SEIU locals represent Planned Parenthood workers in other regions, including those serving Oregon and Washington, New York, and Washington, D.C.

Union organizing in a variety of fields has gained momentum recently after a decades of decline in union membership in the U.S. The Biden administration has been supportive of efforts to expand unions, and organizers have worked to establish unions at companies including Amazon, Starbucks, outdoors retailer REI and Google parent company Alphabet.

The Planned Parenthood workers seeking to join the union in the Midwest include nurses, education outreach workers, community organizers and other nonmanagement employees at 28 clinics in the five states. They provide services such as reproductive care, cancer screening and abortions.

On a call with reporters Thursday, employees discussed concerns about unequal pay for similar positions in different locations, lower pay than other health care providers, high turnover due to exhaustion and burnout, and a feeling that management doesn't always listen to worker concerns.

"Unfortunately, I have seen many of these people move on after their ideas and concerns went unheard by the executive team for far too long. Across our affiliate both clinical and administrative staff are overworked, underpaid and undervalued," said Sadie Brewer, a registered nurse who provides abortion services at a St. Paul, Minnesota, clinic.

Molly Gage, a human resources vice president for Planned Parenthood North Central States, said the organization prioritizes autonomy and choice in people's personal lives and respects that same right for workers.

"We support our employees, and it's up to them to decide if and how they want to be represented by a union. We look forward to continuing the conversation with staff about how we can best serve patients throughout this pivotal moment for abortion access," Gage said in a statement.

Workers began discussing unionizing last year, before a leaked Supreme Court draft opinion surfaced indicating the court may allow states to ban or strictly limit abortion availability, said April Clark, a registered nurse and a senior training specialist at an eastern Iowa clinic.

Clark said the potential for changes in abortion law makes joining the union more important for workers.

"We know it means we're going to be faced with stress not only for patients but for staff in the upcoming months if Roe does get overturned," she said.

## 14-year-old Dell Rapids boy died of injuries in bike crash

DELL RAPIDS, S.D. (AP) — A 14-year-old Dell Rapids boy has died of injuries he suffered when he was struck by a pickup truck while riding his bike, sheriff's officials said.

The crash happened Wednesday, according to the Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office. The officer first on the scene began life-saving measures and the boy was initially taken to a local hospital, then airlifted to a Sioux Falls hospital where he died of his injuries.

Officials say the driver of the pickup was cooperative and the accident was still being investigated.

The Dell Rapids School District identified the boy as Zander Heathcote.

## Ellsworth Air Force Base prepares for B-21 stealth bomber

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A project years in the making, Ellsworth Air Force Base has broken ground for the first of three dozen major projects that will support the incoming long-range B-21 bomber.

The 95,000-square-foot Low Observable Restoration Facility, or LO, will have "specialized equipment to ensure that the free world's next generation stealth bomber is sustained and maintained," said Gen. Anthony Cotton, Air Force Global Strike Commander.

"We are the only ally in the free world that has bombers," he said at a groundbreaking ceremony Wednesday, emphasizing the global significance of the B-21, and the mission of Air Force Global Strike Command.

28th Bomb Wing Commander Col. Joseph Sheffield called the event not only a great day for South Dakota, but also for the United States.

"We're here because simply, our nation needs us to be here," he said in reference to a new level of violence escalating from nuclear-capable Russia and China, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"And guess what? That's why we're here today," Sheffield said. "Foundational to our nation's strategic

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deterrence is our powerful and ready long-range strike force.”

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson called the B-21 an important part of this nation’s military history.

“China and Russia have the capacity to strike us almost anywhere in the world, almost anytime they want,” Johnson said. “It is important that we have deterrence. It’s important that we have platforms like the B-21 that can project American force across the globe at a moment’s notice.”

## ‘Relentless’: Russia squeezes Ukrainian strongholds in east

By RICARDO MAZALAN and ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces on Friday pounded the last Ukrainian strongholds in a separatist-controlled eastern province of Ukraine, including a city where authorities said 1,500 people have been killed and 60% of residential buildings destroyed since the start of the war.

Ukraine’s foreign minister warned that without a new injection of foreign weapons, Ukrainian forces would not be able to stop Russia from seizing Sievierodonetsk and nearby Lysychansk, locations that are crucial to Russia’s goal of capturing all of Ukraine’s industrial Donbas region.

The cities are the last areas under Ukrainian control in Luhansk, one of two provinces that make up the region. Russian forces have made slow but persistent advances as they bombarded and sought to encircle both Lysychansk and Sievierodonetsk.

“The Russians are pounding residential neighborhoods relentlessly,” regional governor Serhiy Haidai wrote in a Telegram post Friday. “The residents of Sievierodonetsk have forgotten when was the last time there was silence in the city for at least half an hour.”

Russian shelling killed four people in the city over the past 24 hours, he said.

Mayor Oleksandr Stryuk said late Thursday that at least 1,500 people have been killed in Sievierodonetsk since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24. About 12,000 to 13,000 remain in the city – down from a pre-war population of about 100,000 - and 60% of residential buildings have been destroyed, he said.

Stryuk said a Russian reconnaissance and sabotage group entered a city hotel, and that the main road between neighboring Lysychansk and the city of Bakhmut to the southwest remains open, but travel is dangerous. He said only 12 people were able to be evacuated Thursday.

In Donetsk, the Donbas region’s other province, Russia-backed rebels claimed Friday to have taken control of Lyman, a large railway hub north of two more key cities that remained under Ukrainian control. There was no immediate confirmation from Ukrainian officials.

With Ukraine’s hopes of stopping the Russian advance fading, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba pleaded with Western nations to provide his country with more weapons so its defenders were equipped to “push (the Russian forces) back.”

“We need heavy weapons. The only position where Russia is better than us, it’s the amount of heavy weapons they have. Without artillery, without multiple launch rocket systems we won’t be able to push them back,” Kuleba said in a video posted on Twitter Thursday night.

He said the situation in the east was “even worse than people say. ... If you really care for Ukraine, weapons, weapons and weapons again.”

In his nightly address to the nation, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had some harsh words for the European Union, which has not agreed on a sixth round of sanctions that includes an embargo on Russian oil.

“Of course, I am grateful to our friends who are promoting new sanctions,” the Ukrainian leader said. “But where did those who block the sixth package get so much power? Why are they still allowed to have so much power, including in intra-European procedures?”

Zelenskyy said Russia’s offensive in the Donbas could leave its communities in ashes and uninhabitable. He accused Moscow of pursuing “an obvious policy of genocide” through mass deportations and killings of civilians.

On Thursday, Russian shelling of Kharkiv, a northeastern city that has been under assault while Ukrainian forces keep the invading troops out, killed nine people, including a father and his 5-month-old baby, the

president said.

Associated Press reporters saw the bodies of at least two dead men and four wounded at a central subway station, where the victims were taken as shelling continued outside.

Zelenskyy also spoke bluntly about what's at stake in the battle for eastern Ukraine.

"Pressure on Russia is literally a matter of saving lives," he said. "And every day of delay, weakness, various disputes or proposals to 'appease' the aggressor at the expense of the victim is new killed Ukrainians. And new threats to everyone on our continent."

Moscow pressed the West on Thursday to lift sanctions already imposed over the war, seeking to shift the blame for a growing global food crisis that has been worsened by Kyiv's inability to ship millions of tons of grain and other agricultural products while under attack.

Britain immediately accused Russia of "trying to hold the world to ransom," insisting there would be no sanctions relief, and a top U.S. diplomat blasted the "sheer barbarity, sadistic cruelty and lawlessness" of the invasion.

— Becatoros reported from Kramatorsk, Ukraine. Associated Press writers Andres Rosa in Kharkiv, Ukraine, and Lolita C. Baldor in Washington contributed.

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

## Shooter warning signs get lost in sea of social media posts

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

Washington (AP) — The warning signs were there for anyone to stumble upon, days before the 18-year-old gunman entered a Texas elementary school and slaughtered 19 children and two teachers.

There was the Instagram photo of a hand holding a gun magazine, a TikTok profile that warned, "Kids be scared," and the image of two AR-style semi-automatic rifles displayed on a rug, pinned to the top of the killer's Instagram profile.

Shooters are leaving digital trails that hint at what's to come long before they actually pull the trigger.

"When somebody starts posting pictures of guns they started purchasing, they're announcing to the world that they're changing who they are," said Katherine Schweit, a retired FBI agent who spearheaded the agency's active shooter program. "It absolutely is a cry for help. It's a tease: can you catch me?"

The foreboding posts, however, are often lost in an endless grid of Instagram photos that feature semi-automatic rifles, handguns and ammunition. There's even a popular hashtag devoted to encouraging Instagram users to upload daily photos of guns with more than 2 million posts attached to it.

For law enforcement and social media companies, spotting a gun post from a potential mass shooter is like sifting through quicksand, Schweit said. That's why she tells people not to ignore those type of posts, especially from children or young adults. Report it, she advises, to a school counselor, the police or even the FBI tip line.

Increasingly, young men have taken to Instagram, which boasts a thriving gun community, to drop small hints of what's to come with photos of their own weapons just days or weeks before executing a mass killing.

Before shooting 17 students and staff members dead at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018, Nikolas Cruz posted on YouTube that he wanted to be a "professional school shooter" and shared photos of his face covered, posing with guns. The FBI took in a tip about Cruz's YouTube comment but never followed up with Cruz.

In November, 15-year-old Ethan Crumbley shared a photo of a semi-automatic handgun his dad had purchased with the caption, "Just got my new beauty today," days before he went on to kill four students and injure seven others at his high school in Oxford Township, Michigan.

And days before entering a school classroom on Tuesday and killing 19 small children and two teachers, 18-year-old Salvador Ramos left similar clues across Instagram.

On May 20, the day that law enforcement officials say Ramos purchased a second rifle, a picture of two AR-style semi-automatic rifles appeared on his Instagram. He tagged another Instagram user with more than 10,000 followers in the photo. In an exchange, later shared by that user, she asks why he tagged her in the photo.

"I barely know you and u tag me in a picture with some guns," the Instagram user wrote, adding, "It's just scary."

The school district in Uvalde had even spent money on software that, using geofencing technology, monitors for potential threats in the area.

Ramos, however, didn't make a direct threat in posts. Having recently turned 18, he was legally allowed to own the weapons in Texas.

His photos of semi-automatic rifles are one of many on platforms like Instagram, Facebook and YouTube where it's commonplace to post pictures or videos of guns and shooter training videos are prevalent. YouTube prohibits users from posting instructions on how to convert firearms to automatic. But Meta, the parent company of Instagram and Facebook, does not limit photos or hashtags around firearms.

That makes it difficult for platforms to separate people posting gun photos as part of a hobby from those with violent intent, said Sara Aniano, a social media and disinformation researcher, most recently at Monmouth University.

"In a perfect world, there would be some magical algorithm that could detect a worrisome photo of a gun on Instagram," Aniano said. "For a lot of reasons, that's a slippery slope and impossible to do when there are people like gun collectors and gunsmiths who have no plan to use their weapon with ill intent."

Meta said it was working with law enforcement officials Wednesday to investigate Ramos' accounts. The company declined to answer questions about reports it might have received on Ramos' accounts.

More on the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas: <https://apnews.com/hub/school-shootings>.

## 3 more funerals for Buffalo victims in week of goodbyes

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — A mother and sister known for baking decadent pastries. A restaurant worker buying his 3-year-old's birthday cake. A father of six who worked as a school bus aide.

These three victims of the racist attack on a Buffalo supermarket will be laid to rest Friday, in a week filled with goodbyes for family and friends.

Funeral services are scheduled for Geraldine Talley, 62, of Buffalo, Andre Mackniel, 53, of Auburn, and Margus Morrison, 52, of Buffalo.

They're among the 10 people killed and three wounded when a white gunman opened fire on afternoon shoppers and employees at a Tops Friendly Market on May 14. Authorities said he chose the grocery store because it's in a predominantly Black neighborhood.

For many Black Americans, this latest example of targeted racial violence stirred the same feelings they faced after earlier attacks.

"It's like Groundhog's Day. We've seen this over and over again," said Mark Talley, son of Geraldine Talley, at a news conference Thursday. "I constantly think about what could have been done."

Friends and family of Talley say she was an expert baker who treated them to apple crisp, cakes and pastries. She was with her fiancé at Tops when the shooting started. Her fiancé was in a different aisle and made it to safety.

"Gerri will be remembered for her beautiful spirit, her dimpled smile and immense love for her family," her online obituary said. Veteran civil rights activist Rev. Al Sharpton is expected to memorialize Talley on Friday.

Mackniel was picking up a birthday cake for his young son when he was killed. He was a cook and stay-at-home father to his son, his obituary said.

"He loved basketball, playing the guitar, writing poems, listening to music, but most of all Andre was a

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very family oriented man," it said.

Morrison, a father of six, had worked as a security guard and was a bus aide with Buffalo Public Schools since 2019. He was buying snacks for a family movie night, his stepdaughter Cassandra Demps told WIVB.

Frederick Morrison said he'll remember his brother that he often played basketball with as comical and full of energy.

"All his jokes weren't good," Frederick told The Buffalo News, laughing, "but he was funny."

Funerals for store security guard Aaron Salter, 55, of Lockport and Pearl Young, 77, of Buffalo were held Wednesday. In previous days, 32-year-old Roberta Drury, 72-year-old Katherine Massey, 67-year-old Heyward Patterson, and 65-year-old Celestine Chaney, were also laid to rest.

The final victim, Ruth Whitfield, 86, will be laid to rest Sunday.

The country was still mourning the violence in Buffalo when yet another mass shooting left 19 students and two teachers dead inside an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, on May 24. Authorities say the shooters in both attacks were 18-year-old men with semi-automatic rifles.

The suspect in the Buffalo shooting was charged with first-degree murder and is being held without bail. His lawyer, at his initial court appearance, entered a plea of not guilty. In Texas, the alleged gunman was killed by law enforcement.

## Spanish LGBTQ groups wary of monkeypox stigma as Pride nears

By ALICIA LEÓN and IAIN SULLIVAN Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — With one of Europe's largest gay pride celebrations right around the corner, Spain's LGBTQ community is worried that the outbreaks of monkeypox on the continent could lead to an increase in homophobic sentiment based on misunderstandings of the disease.

Spanish health authorities said Thursday that there were now 84 confirmed cases in the country, the highest number in Europe. The tally includes one woman, the region of Madrid said in a statement on Friday without providing any further details.

Health authorities have been centering their investigations on links between a Gay Pride event in the Canary Islands that drew some 80,000 people at the beginning of May, and cases linked to a Madrid sauna.

But some people, particularly gay and bisexual men, believe there is a touch of homophobic hysteria in the wider public's reaction to the rare outbreak of the disease outside of Africa, where it has long been endemic.

Most of the known cases in Europe have been among men who have sex with men, according to authorities in Britain, Spain, Germany and Portugal. A top adviser to the World Health Organization said the outbreak was likely triggered by sexual activity at two recent mass events in Europe.

The outbreak in Spain comes in the run-up to Madrid's Gay Pride celebration, which will happen in early July. It is expected to draw large crowds, unlike the last two years' events, which were scaled down or canceled because of COVID-19 restrictions. Organizers say the city's last pre-pandemic Pride celebration, in 2019, drew roughly 1.6 million revelers, though police put the figure at around 400,000.

"Pride is a huge party, it is a moment to make our voice be heard, that brings lots of people together," Mario Blázquez, coordinator of health programs for the LGBTQ group COGAM in Madrid, told The Associated Press.

Blázquez said he's worried that next month's Pride celebrations could be endangered by overzealous restrictions driven in part by prejudice and in part by the fears of another public health emergency on top of the lingering COVID-19 pandemic.

"We don't know what will happen. We don't know what the level of transmission of the virus will be or what legal measures could be taken. And then what stigma could be generated by these legal measures that sometimes are discriminatory."

So far, Spanish authorities have not mentioned any sweeping public health measures that would impede large gatherings.

But beyond the Pride March, Blázquez said he is worried that society could make the same mistake it

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did at the beginning of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s, when the focus on the disease among gay men obscured its spread among the wider population.

"This is a disease that any member of the population can get," Blázquez said. "We are facing an outbreak that unfortunately once again has hit LGBTQ people, and especially gay and bisexual men. What's happening is somewhat similar to the first cases of HIV."

Health authorities in Europe, North America, Israel and Australia have identified more than 150 cases of the disease in recent weeks. It's a surprising outbreak of a disease that rarely appears outside Africa, where it has remained a serious health threat since the first cases in human were discovered in the 1970s.

Experts say anyone can be infected through close contact with a sick person, their clothing or bedsheets. Most people recover within two to four weeks without needing hospitalization. However, the WHO says that in recent times 3-6% of cases were fatal.

Health officials around the world are keeping watch for more cases because, for the first time, the disease appears to be spreading among people who didn't travel to Africa. They stress, however, that the risk to the general population is low.

As of Thursday, Italy had confirmed 10 cases of Monkeypox, some but not all in people who had traveled to Spain's Canary Islands.

"Regarding the question of sexual transmission, I believe that we cannot yet define this strictly as a sexually transmitted disease," said Dr. Andrea Antinori, Director of Viral Immunodeficiencies at Spallanzani hospital in Rome.

"So I would avoid identifying this disease as a sexually transmitted disease at the moment, and above all, identifying the population — the men who have sex with men — as carriers of this disease because I believe that this is also a problem of responsibility from the point of view of not stigmatizing this situation.

"This disease is still to be understood because we are facing a new wave that is different from how we have historically known it in the previous decades."

Spain's health minister, Carolina Darias, said Wednesday that her government decided to opt into the European Union's collective purchase of monkeypox vaccine, which like the COVID-19 vaccine will be distributed based on each participating country's population. She said government health experts are considering how to use the vaccine once it is more widely available.

Amos García, president of the Spanish Association of Vaccinology, recommended that the vaccine should only be given to people who have had direct contact with an infected person and who are vulnerable to infection, not to the general population.

"We are talking about a disease that does not have a large potential to become an epidemic," García said, adding that most Spaniards over age 40 should be protected by smallpox vaccines that were regularly administered decades ago.

Ciarán Giles in Madrid, Joseph Wilson in Barcelona and Trisha Thomas Rome contributed to this report.

## Senators talk expanded gun background checks, red flag laws

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A bipartisan group of senators is considering how Congress should respond to the horrific shooting of 19 children and two teachers in Uvalde, Texas, restarting gun control talks that have broken down many times before.

Aware of the difficulty of their task, the Democrats and Republicans say they hope to find agreement on legislation that could help reduce the number of mass shootings in the United States. The Uvalde shooting came 10 days after a gunman opened fire in a racist attack killing Black people at a Buffalo, New York, supermarket.

Senators have narrowed the discussion to a few ideas, some of them based on legislation they have been working on for years, such as expanded background checks or red flag laws that keep guns away from people who could do harm. Led by Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut, the group of 10

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is hoping to negotiate a proposal over the Senate's upcoming recess and have it ready for a vote at the beginning of June.

It is uncertain if the group can come to consensus, and even if they do, winning enough votes from Republicans could prove difficult, as most do not want to see changes in the nation's gun laws. Democrats would need 10 Republican votes to overcome a filibuster and get a bill through the 50-50 Senate.

"Odds are against us, but we owe it to parents and kids to try," tweeted Murphy, who has been a lead advocate for stricter gun control since 20 children and six educators were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, in 2012.

A look at the proposals under consideration, and others that are not:

## RED FLAG LAWS

Senators emerging from a bipartisan meeting Thursday were talking about the possibility of incentivizing states to pass red flag laws that take firearms away from people who may do harm to themselves or others.

Many states have adopted red flag laws, including Florida, which passed a law after the Parkland high school shooting in 2018, and Maine, which has a "yellow flag" law that requires a medical professional to sign off before guns were removed. Maine Sen. Susan Collins, a moderate Republican, has pushed for something similar on the federal level.

Republicans are unlikely to get on board with a red flag statute for the entire country. South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, a Republican who is also part of the group, said after the meeting that would be a non-starter, "whatever the color."

As an alternative, they are discussing whether federal grants could coax states into implementing such flag laws, an idea explored in past years by Sens. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., and Marco Rubio, R-Fla. Blumenthal, who is working with Graham on the compromise proposal, said the "complicated and challenging part" will be figuring out what the standards are for removing guns from a person who is flagged.

Still, Blumenthal said "there is a powerful emotional element to the red flag statute that gives it momentum, especially after Uvalde and Buffalo, where the shooter indicated very strong signs that he was dangerous." The shooter in New York had been reported by his school, but the state's red flag law was not triggered.

The House is planning to pass its own version of red flag legislation when it returns from a two-week recess June 6.

## EXPANDED BACKGROUND CHECKS

Sens. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., and Pat Toomey, R-Pa., have been trying for almost a decade to pass expanded background checks for all commercial gun sales, including at gun shows and on the internet. Under current law, background checks are required only when guns are purchased from federally licensed dealers.

The idea has wide public support, even among many gun owners, but the two senators have faced resistance from congressional Republicans who don't want any changes, along with groups like the National Rifle Association. Various versions of the proposal have been repeatedly defeated in the Senate, including in 2013 after the Newtown massacre and in 2016 after a shooting in which 49 people were killed at an Orlando, Florida, nightclub.

The House passed legislation last year that would expand background checks to almost all sales, including private sales. The senators have been in talks since then about crafting a version that could pass their chamber, but they have yet to come to agreement. Manchin says the House version goes too far and could interfere with informal sales between people who know each other.

Manchin and Toomey, who is retiring this year, are part of the Senate working group and are tasked with finding compromise on their proposal — perhaps for the last time. Toomey said Thursday that the measure doesn't have enough support to pass right now, "but I hope we'll get there."

## SCHOOL SECURITY

Republicans who have traditionally opposed gun control have seized on the idea of "hardening" schools, giving money for more resources, law enforcement officers or even arming teachers.

Republican Sen. Mike Rounds of South Dakota suggested this week that Congress "promote direct

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funding for local units, to be able to have the resources available to add additional protections to offer a deterrence for these individuals.”

Murphy said Thursday that he is “open” on adding funds for school security and that the working group is looking at what could be done along those lines. But Democrats have adamantly opposed arming teachers, and they say money for security is not enough.

## ‘CHARLESTON LOOPHOLE’

A second bill passed by the House last year would extend the review period for background checks from three to 10 days. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., introduced the legislation after a shooter killed nine people at a historic Black Charleston, South Carolina, church in 2015.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer started the process of bringing that bill to the Senate floor this week, but it does not appear to be a part of the Senate negotiations.

The FBI said after the Charleston shooting that a background check examiner never saw the shooter’s previous arrest report because the wrong arresting agency was listed in state criminal history records, and the gun dealer was legally permitted to complete the transaction after three days. Clyburn and other supporters of the legislation say it would fix that problem.

Republicans have overwhelmingly opposed the legislation, saying it could delay purchases for lawful gun owners.

## ASSAULT WEAPONS BAN

An assault weapons ban passed in the 1990s expired 10 years later, and Democrats have not been able to muster the votes to pass another one. The Senate rejected a renewed ban in 2013, along with the Manchin-Toomey proposal, after the Newtown shooting. Senators also rejected a ban on high-capacity magazines that year.

Biden last year proposed a ban on assault weapons and many Democrats believe that would be one of the most effective ways to curb mass shootings, since they almost always involve those types of weapons. But a ban has almost no support among Republicans and has not been a part of the discussions so far.

Murphy, who gave an impassioned speech on the Senate floor Tuesday as the news broke of the Texas shooting, has said he wants to start with proposals that are doable.

“There is a common denominator we can find,” Murphy said. “There is a place where we can achieve agreement.”

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More on the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas: <https://apnews.com/hub/school-shootings>.

## **NRA opens gun convention in Texas after school massacre**

By JUAN LOZANO and DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — The National Rifle Association begins its annual convention in Houston on Friday, and leaders of the powerful gun-rights lobbying group are gearing up to “reflect on” — and deflect any blame for — the deadly shooting earlier this week of 19 children and two teachers at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas.

Former President Donald Trump and other leading Republicans are scheduled to address the three-day firearms marketing and advocacy event, which is expected to draw protesters fed up with gun violence.

Some scheduled speakers and performers have backed out, including two Texas lawmakers and “American Pie” singer Don McLean, who said “it would be disrespectful” to go ahead with his act in the aftermath of the country’s latest mass shooting.

While President Joe Biden and Democrats in Congress have renewed calls for stricter gun laws, NRA board member Phil Journey said the focus should be on better mental health care and trying to prevent gun violence. He said he wouldn’t support banning or limiting access to firearms.

The NRA said in an online statement that people attending the gun show will “reflect on” the Uvalde school shooting, “pray for the victims, recognize our patriotic members, and pledge to redouble our commitment to making our schools secure.”

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People planning to attend picked up registration badges Thursday and shopped for NRA souvenirs, such as T-shirts that say "Suns Out Guns Out." Police already had set up metal barriers across the street from the convention center, at a park where protesters are expected to gather Friday.

Gary Francis traveled with his wife and friends from Racine, Wisconsin, to attend the NRA meeting. He said he opposed any gun control regulations in response to the Uvalde shooting.

"What happened there is obviously tragic," he said. "But the NRA had nothing to do with it. The people who come here had nothing to do with it."

Texas has experienced a series of mass shootings in recent years. During that time, the Republican-led Legislature and governor have relaxed gun laws.

There is precedent for the NRA to gather amid local mourning and controversy. The organization went ahead with a shortened version of its 1999 meeting in Denver roughly a week after the deadly shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado. Actor Charlton Heston, the NRA president at that time, told attendees that "horrible acts" shouldn't become opportunities to limit constitutional rights and he denounced critics for casting NRA members as "villains."

Rocky Marshall, a former NRA board member, said that although the tragedy in Uvalde "does put the meeting in a bad light," that's not a reason to cancel it. Marshall said gun-rights advocates and opponents can perhaps reduce gun violence if they focus on factors such as mental illness or school security.

"Throwing rocks at the NRA, that doesn't solve the next mass shooting," he said. "Throwing rocks at the people that hate guns, that doesn't solve the next mass shooting."

But country music singer Larry Gatlin, who pulled out of planned appearance at the event, said he hopes "the NRA will rethink some of its outdated and ill-thought-out positions."

"While I agree with most of the positions held by the NRA, I have come to believe that, while background checks would not stop every madman with a gun, it is at the very least a step in the right direction," Gatlin said.

Country singers Lee Greenwood and Larry Stewart also withdrew, Variety reported.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Thursday that the NRA's leaders "are contributing to the problem of gun violence and not trying to solve it." She accused them of representing the interests of gun manufacturers, "who are marketing weapons of war to young adults."

Two Republican Texas lawmakers who had been scheduled speak Friday — U.S. Sen. John Cornyn and U.S. Rep. Dan Crenshaw — are no longer attending due to what their staffs said were changes in their schedules.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who was slated to attend, will instead address the convention by prerecorded video, his spokesman told The Dallas Morning News.

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, was listed as a speaker, and Trump said Wednesday that he still intends to attend. South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, a Republican, also is sticking to her plans to speak Friday at the NRA event.

Though personal firearms are allowed at the convention, the NRA said guns would not be permitted during the session featuring Trump because of Secret Service security protocols.

Several groups have said they planned to stage protests outside of the convention center.

"This is not the time or the place to have this convention," said Cesar Espinosa, executive director of FIEL, a Houston-based civil rights group that plans to participate in protests. "We must not just have thoughts and prayers from legislators, but rather we need action to address this public health crisis that is affecting our communities."

Democrat Beto O'Rourke, who is challenging Abbott in the 2022 Texas governor's race, said he would be attending a protest outside the convention Friday.

Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, a Democrat, said the city is obligated to host the NRA event, which has been under contract for more than two years. But he urged politicians to skip it.

"You can't pray and send condolences on one day and then be going and championing guns on the next. That's wrong," Turner said.

Shannon Watts, the founder of gun-control group Moms Demand Action, said she was not surprised the

NRA is not canceling its meeting.

"The real question now is which elected officials will choose to side with violence and go kiss the ring in Houston this weekend instead of siding with communities crying out for public safety," Watts said.

David A. Lieb reported from Jefferson City, Missouri.

More on the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas: <https://apnews.com/hub/school-shootings>.

## Stars and royalty watch ABBA's return in digital stage show

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — "ABBA Voyage" is certainly a trip.

Four decades after the Swedish pop supergroup last performed live, audiences can once again see ABBA onstage in an innovative digital concert where past and future collide.

The show opens to the public in London on Friday, the day after a red-carpet premiere attended by superfans, celebrities and Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia. The guests of honor were pop royalty — the four members of ABBA, appearing in public together for the first time in years.

They were in the audience, though. Onstage at the specially built 3,000-seat ABBA Arena next to east London's Olympic Park were a 10-piece live backing band and a digital ABBA, created using motion capture and other technology by Industrial Light and Magic, the special effects firm founded by "Star Wars" director George Lucas.

The voices and movements are the real Agnetha Faltskog, Björn Ulvaeus, Benny Andersson and Anni-Frid Lyngstad — choreographed by Britain's Wayne McGregor — but the performers onstage are digital avatars, inevitably dubbed "ABBA-tars." In unsettlingly realistic detail, they depict the band members as they looked in their 1970s heyday — beards on the men, flowing locks on the women, velour pantsuits all around.

The result is both high tech and high camp, a glittery supernova of stupefying technology, 1970s nostalgia and pop music genius.

For many in the audience, it was almost like being taken back in time to watch ABBA perform classics including "Mamma Mia," "Knowing Me, Knowing You," "SOS" and "Dancing Queen." The peppy 90-minute set also includes tracks from "Voyage," the reunion album the band released last year.

It's a fusion of tribute act and 3D concert movie that transcends that description. At times it was possible to forget this wasn't a live performance, though when the backing singers stepped forward to belt out "Does Your Mother Know," a surge of live-music energy shot through the arena.

The four band members — two married couples during ABBA's heyday, though now long divorced — got a rapturous ovation when they took a bow at the end of Thursday's show, 50 years after they formed ABBA, and 40 years after they stopped performing live.

Watching one's younger self perform must be a strange sensation, but the band members, now in their 70s, said they were delighted by the show.

"I never knew I had such amazing moves," Ulvaeus said.

Lyngstad agreed: "I thought I was quite good, but I'm even better."

Ulvaeus said the audience reaction was the most gratifying part of the experience.

"There's an emotional connection between the avatars and the audience," he said. "That's the fantastic thing."

Producers bill the show as "revolutionary." Time will tell. Like the first audiences to watch a talking motion picture a century ago, attendees may leave wondering whether they are watching a gimmick, or the future.

The Times of London reviewer Will Hodgkinson judged the show "essentially an ABBA singalong with added sound and light show," though he called the effect "captivating." Writing in The Guardian, Alexis Petridis called the concert "jaw-dropping" and said "it's so successful that it's hard not to imagine other artists following suit."

Gimmick or genius, "ABBA Voyage" is booking in London until May 2023, with a world tour planned after that.

The fans who attended Thursday's show are just delighted ABBA is back.

"I'm so excited," said Kristina Hagman, a Swede who has been a fan since the 1970s.

"I was bullied so much because you were not allowed to like ABBA at that time, because it was so commercial," she said. "But now we are taking revenge."

## Widespread disbelief over N. Korea's tiny COVID death rate

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — According to North Korea, its fight against COVID-19 has been impressive: About 3.3 million people have been reported sick with fevers, but only 69 have died.

If all are coronavirus cases, that's a fatality rate of 0.002%, something no other country, including the world's richest, has achieved against a disease that has killed more than 6 million people.

The North's claims, however, are being met with widespread doubt about two weeks after it acknowledged its first domestic COVID-19 outbreak. Experts say the impoverished North should have suffered far greater deaths than reported because there are very few vaccines, a sizable number of undernourished people and a lack of critical care facilities and test kits to detect virus cases in large numbers.

North Korea's secretiveness makes it unlikely outsiders can confirm the true scale of the outbreak. Some observers say North Korea is underreporting fatalities to protect leader Kim Jong Un at all costs. There's also a possibility it might have exaggerated the outbreak in a bid to bolster control of its 26 million people.

"Scientifically, their figures can't be accepted," said Lee Yo Han, a professor at Ajou University Graduate School of Public Health in South Korea, adding that the public data "were likely all controlled (by the authorities) and embedded with their political intentions."

The most likely course is that North Korea soon proclaims victory over COVID-19, maybe during a June political meeting, with all credit given to Kim's leadership. The 38-year-old ruler is desperate, observers say, to win bigger public support as he deals with severe economic difficulties caused by border shutdowns, U.N. sanctions and his own mismanagement.

"Diverse public complaints have accumulated, so it's time to (strengthen) internal control," said Choi Kang, president of Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies. "Kim Jong Un has been taking the lead in the anti-epidemic efforts to show that his campaign is very successful and to reinforce his grip on power."

Before North Korea on May 12 admitted to an omicron outbreak, it had maintained a widely disputed claim that it had zero domestic infections for more than two years. When the North at last publicized the outbreak, many wondered why now.

It was initially seen as an attempt to exploit the outbreak to get foreign humanitarian assistance. There were hopes that possible aid by Seoul and Washington could help resume long-stalled diplomacy on Pyongyang's nuclear program.

Kim has called the outbreak a "great upheaval" and launched what his propaganda teams call an all-out effort to suppress it.

He's held several Politburo meetings to criticize officials, inspected pharmacies at dawn and mobilized troops to support medicine delivery. A health official explained pandemic responses on state TV, while state newspapers have churned out articles on how to deal with fever, including gargling with saltwater and drinking honey or willow leaf tea.

"Honey is a rarity for ordinary North Koreans. They likely felt bad when their government asked them to drink honey tea," said Seo Jae-pyong, a North Korean defector-turned-activist in Seoul. "I have an elder brother left in North Korea and have big worries about him."

Every morning, North Korea releases details about the number of new patients with fever symptoms, but not with COVID-19. Experts believe most cases should be counted as COVID-19 because while North Korean health authorities lack diagnostic kits, they still know how to distinguish the symptoms from fevers caused by the other prevalent infectious diseases.

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North Korea's daily fever tally peaked at nearly 400,000 early last week; it has nosedived to around 100,000 in the past few days. On Friday, it added one more death after claiming no fatalities for three consecutive days.

"Our country set a world record for having no single (COVID-19) infection for the longest period ... and we've now made an achievement of reversing the tide of the abrupt outbreak in a short period," the main Rodong Sinmun newspaper said Thursday. "This evidently proves the scientific nature of our country's emergency anti-epidemic steps."

Medical experts question the validity of North Korea's stated fatality rate of 0.002%. Given that South Korea's mortality rate of unvaccinated people for the omicron variant was 0.6%, North Korea must have similar or higher death rates because of its low capacity to treat patients and its people's poor nutrition, said Shin Young-jeon, a professor of preventive medicine at Seoul's Hanyang University.

In a study published by the Johns Hopkins University last year, North Korea ranked 193 out of 195 countries for its ability to deal with an epidemic. U.N. reports in recent years said about 40% of its people were undernourished. North Korea's free socialist public health care system has been in shambles for decades, and defectors testify that while in the North, they bought medicines at markets or somewhere else.

"North Korea wouldn't really care about fatalities at all," said Choi Jung Hun, a defector who worked as a doctor in North Korea in the 2000s. "Many North Koreans have already died of malaria, measles, chickenpox and typhoid. There are all kind of infectious diseases there."

Choi, now a researcher at a Korea University-affiliated institute in South Korea, said North Korea likely decided to admit to the omicron outbreak because it sees it as less lethal and more manageable. He suspected North Korea set up a scenario to raise up and then bring down fever cases so as to boost Kim's leadership.

Lee, the Ajou professor, said North Korea may have overstated its earlier fever cases to give "a powerful shock" to the public to rally support for the government, but avoided releasing details of too many deaths to stave off public unrest.

The outbreak could eventually kill more than 100,000, if people remain unvaccinated and die at the same death rate as in South Korea, Shin, the Hanyang professor, warned.

The North Korean outbreak will likely last several months, Moon Jin Soo, director of the Institute for Health and Unification Studies at Seoul National University, said. It's urgent to ship anti-viral pills and other essential medications to North Korea, rather than vaccines whose roll out would take at least a couple of months, he said.

"North Korea could spend a couple more months massaging the statistics, but they could also abruptly announce their victory this weekend," said Ahn Kyung-su, head of DPRKHEALTH.ORG, a website focusing on health issues in North Korea. "North Korea always operates beyond your imagination. It's hard to predict what they'll do, but they do have a plan."

## Racism in the ranks: Dutch police film spurs conversation

By MOLLY QUELL Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — A documentary about discrimination within the ranks of Dutch police has sparked a national conversation in the Netherlands about racism, with many officers and others hoping it will finally bring about change.

"The Blue Family," or "De Blauwe Familie" in Dutch, discusses a culture of bullying and fear in the national police force. It premiered on Dutch television Monday, timed around the second anniversary this week of the killing of George Floyd at the hands of Minnesota police.

"There is no way back," Peris Conrad, one of the officers featured in the film, told The Associated Press.

Born in the former Dutch colony Surinam, Conrad dreamed of being a police officer as a child. He moved to the Netherlands when he was 4 years old, and after a stint in the military, became a security guard.

While in that job, he had an encounter with police officers who were looking for information about crime in the Surinamese community. The officers encouraged him to join the force himself, which he did, ulti-

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mately spending 26 years in service.

But Conrad, who is Black, recalled how in his first year at the police academy, colleagues hung a picture of him with cell bars drawn on it. The caption read: "Our monkey in a cage."

Police leaders received an early showing of the film and promised action.

"The personal stories make it painfully clear how great the impact is (of the racism), and how long it will last," Police Chief Henk van Essen said in a statement. "We all have something to do; not just executives, but all 65,000 colleagues. Because safety outside starts with safety inside."

"There is no room for racism and discrimination in our police," Justice Minister Dilan Yesilgöz told Dutch talk show "RTL Boulevard."

The Dutch parliament voted by a large majority this week to place police leaders under stricter supervision, citing the suicides in recent years of three officers who had complained about discrimination.

Last year, a Dutch newspaper published messages from police group chats that showed officers making racial slurs and joking about killing non-white people. "One less Turk" one officer wrote, in response to the slaying of a 16-year-old girl who was shot and killed by her ex-boyfriend in her high school's bicycle shed.

As in other countries, the problems in the Netherlands have a long history. A 1998 report by the Ministry of Internal Affairs said discrimination was driving out police officers with a "migration" background - defined as having at least one parent born abroad.

While 24% of the Dutch population meets that definition, only 14% of the police force does. The National Police Corps employs some 65,000 people, and around 40,000 work as officers.

Margot Snijders has spent 30 years on the national force, including a number of years working on diversity and inclusion efforts. After years of frustration, she took a step back from that role.

"People don't trust us, and they don't want to work for us," Snijders, who also appears in "The Blue Family," told The Associated Press.

George Floyd's death in the U.S. two years ago prompted protests against racial injustice in the Netherlands and around the world. Controle Alt Delete, an advocacy organization that pushes for better law enforcement practices, wanted to highlight problems within the Dutch police force.

The group brought on board filmmakers Maria Mok and Meral Uslu to direct and produce the documentary, which was backed by Dutch public broadcaster KRO-NCRV.

Problems with racism, as well as discrimination against women and members of the LGBTQ community, are widespread and systemic within police ranks, said Jan Struijs, the chairperson of the country's largest police union.

Struijs also took part in the film. "I hope this is a historic turning point," he told the AP.

The first article of the country's constitution, which is displayed on posters in every police station, outlaws discrimination against any group. The Dutch consider themselves to be some of the most open-minded, tolerant people in the world.

There's been no significant criticism of the "The Blue Family," those involved in the documentary welcomed the response to it.

"I have been saying the same things for years, only now do they get a positive reaction," Snijders said.

The Dutch police union is calling for better mental health counseling for officers and more accountability for ones who make racist jokes.

Conrad sees a need for widespread change, both in policy and leadership.

In the meantime, he's forbidden his 20-year-old son from joining the force.

"I don't want him to experience this," he said.

## China's FM visits Kiribati, where fishing ground is at stake

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — China's foreign minister on Friday arrived on the remote Pacific nation of Kiribati, where the future of a vast fishing ground is at stake.

The planned four-hour visit by Wang Yi was his second stop on an eight-nation tour that comes amid

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growing concerns about Beijing's military and financial ambitions in the South Pacific region.

Kiribati closed its borders this year as it tries to stamp out an outbreak of COVID-19. But its government made a rare exception to allow Wang and his 20-strong delegation into the country for face-to-face discussions.

At stake in Kiribati is the future of the Phoenix Islands Protected Area, a stretch of ocean the size of California that has been named a UNESCO World Heritage site.

In November, Kiribati President Taneti Maamau announced the government planned to end the commercial fishing ban that had been in place since 2015 and begin to sustainably fish the area.

Anna Powles, a senior lecturer in security studies at New Zealand's Massey University, said she expected there would be some fisheries agreements between China and Kiribati that would come from Wang's visit.

Powles said China, which already dominates fishing in the region, had offered to upgrade an airport runway and causeway in the Phoenix Islands.

"The worry is that this would essentially obliterate the fish stock," she said. "That it would severely damage fish stocks that are already under pressure."

She said there were also concerns that any kind of base for Chinese commercial fishing fleets in Kiribati could also be used as an additional hub for Beijing's surveillance activities.

Kiribati's president said Wang would visit his residence for bilateral discussions during the visit, and emphasized the health protocols that were in place.

Maamau said in a statement that the Chinese delegation would need to take PCR tests before arriving and stay in a travel bubble while there, and that everybody in Kiribati who came into contact with them would need to quarantine afterward for a week — presumably including himself.

"The high-level state visit is an important milestone for Kiribati-China relations, as it will strengthen and promote partnership and cooperation between our two countries after the resumption of diplomatic ties in 2019," Maamau said.

China says Wang's trip to the region builds on a long history of friendly relations between Beijing and the island nations.

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.

But Australia scrambled to counter the move Thursday by sending its own Foreign Minister Penny Wong to Fiji to shore up support in the Pacific.

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."

On Friday, Wong met with Fiji's Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama.

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.

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

Australia's new Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Thursday 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.

## Ship expands Iran Revolutionary Guard's reach to new waters

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard is building a massive new support ship near the strategic Strait of Hormuz as it tries to expand its naval presence in waters vital to international energy supplies and beyond, satellite photos obtained by The Associated Press show.

The construction of the Shahid Mahdavi provides the Guard a large, floating base from which to run the small fast boats that largely make up its fleet designed to counter the U.S. Navy and other allied forces in the region.

Its arrival, however, comes after a series of setbacks for both the Guard and Iran's regular navy, including the loss of its largest warship less than a year earlier. As negotiations over Iran's nuclear deal with world powers also founder, further confrontations at sea between Tehran and the West also remain a risk.

"They are looking beyond the Persian Gulf and into the blue waters of the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea and the northern Indian Ocean," said Farzin Nadimi, an associate fellow at the Washington Institute for Near-East Policy who studies the Iranian military.

The Shahid Mahdavi appears to be a retrofit of an Iranian cargo ship known as the Sarvin, based off of previous pictures of the vessel which also has a similar curve to its hull.

The Sarvin arrived off Bandar Abbas in late July last year and then switched off its trackers. By Jan. 29, satellite photos from Planet Labs PBC analyzed by the AP showed the vessel at drydock at Shahid Darvishi Marine Industries, a company associated with Iran's Defense Ministry just west of Bandar Abbas.

An image of the Shahid Mahdavi circulated first on social media. The ship appears to have crewed anti-aircraft weapons on its bow and stern, according to H.I. Sutton, a military ship expert who first identified the ship as being near Bandar Abbas. A flag for the Revolutionary Guard, showing its logo of a fist gripping an assault rifle with a Quran underneath and a globe behind it, hangs from the ship's bridge.

A high-resolution Planet image taken of the drydock Saturday on behalf of the AP showed the gun-metal gray Shahid Mahdavi still at the shipyard. Just next to it, one of Iran's Kilo-class, diesel-powered attack submarines appears to be undergoing a major overhaul. Iran is believed to have one Kilo-class sub that's operational while another is also nonfunctional, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

As the image of the Shahid Mahdavi circulated online, the semiofficial Fars news agency ran a story about the ship. Fars, believed to be close to the Guard, described the vessel as a "mobile naval city" capable of "ensuring the security of Iran's trade lines, as well as the rights of Iranian sailors and fishermen in the high seas."

"This range of new defense and combat innovations for the construction of heavy vessels, in line with the mass development of light vessels, and equipping them with various arrays can maintain Iran's authority over the Persian Gulf and the (Gulf) of Oman always in the face of transregional enemies," Fars said.

Such floating bases have been used before in the region, particularly by the U.S. Navy during the 1980s so-called "Tanker War" after Iraq invaded Iran. As Iranian mines detonated against crude oil shippers amid that war, the Navy began escorting ships out of the Persian Gulf through its narrow mouth, the Strait of Hormuz. The strait to this day sees a fifth of all oil traded pass through it.

During the conflict, U.S. special forces operated from commercial barges that served as forward operating bases. The Navy still works with the idea today — the Mideast-based 5th Fleet has been home to the USS Lewis B. Puller, a massive ship designed off an oil tanker that can host troops and attack helicopters.

"The Shahid Mahdavi looks like it will be configured to be an afloat forward staging base, to use the U.S. Navy term," said Michael Connell, an expert on Iran at the Virginia-based Center for Naval Analyses. "The Puller was parked for many years in the Persian Gulf and the Iranian military witnessed its utility as a platform for expeditionary warfare and power projection."

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For years, the Guard patrolled the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf, while Iran's regular navy patrolled the seas and oceans beyond. Building the Shahid Mahdavi likely gives the Guard the ability to expand its presence into those waters once patrolled by the navy.

History also isn't something that has escaped Iran. The choice of the name for the Guard's newest ship — Shahid Mahdavi, or Martyr Mahdavi — comes from Nader Mahdavi, an Iranian Guardsman killed by the U.S. Navy in 1987 during the "Tanker War."

America's killing of Mahdavi, which came after his forces opened fire on U.S. special forces helicopters, still resonates in Iran today. Tehran has alleged without evidence that America captured him alive and tortured him due to the condition of his body after it was returned. The American helicopters had strafed the Iranian vessels Mahdavi oversaw with machine guns, rockets and "fléchette" rounds — small metal darts.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei himself once gave a speech with a portrait of Mahdavi near him in 2019. That was around the time of a series of mine attacks on Mideast shipping that the U.S. Navy blamed on Iran amid the collapse of Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers.

Using Mahdavi's name suggests the Guard views this as a means by which to challenge the U.S. Navy in the Mideast, particularly with the new ship likely able to support the so-called "swarm attacks" Iran can launch against larger American warships.

Cmdr. Timothy Hawkins, a 5th Fleet spokesman, declined to comment specifically about the Shahid Mahdavi as "we're careful not to discuss intelligence-related matters."

"But generally speaking, we pay very close attention to the maritime environment with our international partners in the interest of regional security and stability," Hawkins said.

The arrival of the Shahid Mahdavi, which would be the biggest ship in the Guard's fleet, comes amid a series of naval disasters for Iran. The Kharg, the regular navy's largest warship, sunk last June. In 2020, a missile mistakenly struck a naval vessel during an exercise, killing 19 sailors and wounding 15. An Iranian navy destroyer sank in the Caspian Sea in 2018.

Meanwhile, a cargo ship in the Red Sea believed to be a Guard intelligence base suffered an explosion suspected to be caused by Israel last year. The Shahid Mahdavi could serve a similar role in espionage and sabotage missions by special forces, said Nadimi, the analyst at the Washington Institute. It also could be potentially outfitted with long-range missiles as well.

"Nasty things can happen around this ship," Nadimi warned.

Follow Jon Gambrell on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/jongambrellAP](https://www.twitter.com/jongambrellAP).

## Warriors beat Mavericks 120-110 to return to NBA Finals

By JOSH DUBOW AP Sports Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — As the clock ticked down the final seconds, Klay Thompson began dancing on the sideline before nearly being moved to tears during a celebration with his teammates.

After two major surgeries and two years of grueling rehabilitation, Thompson is rounding back into form and shot the Golden State Warriors back into the NBA Finals.

Thompson shimmied his way to 32 points and the Warriors advanced to their sixth finals in the past eight seasons by beating the Dallas Mavericks 120-110 in Game 5 of the Western Conference finals on Thursday night.

"It's hard to put into words really," Thompson said. "This time last year, I was just starting to jog again and get up and down the court. Now to be feeling like myself, feeling explosive, feeling sure in my movements, I'm just grateful."

Thompson tore his left ACL during a season-ending Game 6 loss in the 2019 NBA Finals against Toronto and then tore his right Achilles' tendon just before the start of the 2020-21 season. After Golden State missed the postseason in both seasons he was sidelined, Thompson finally returned to action in January.

The performance against the Mavericks showed he is getting close to returning to his old level of stardom. Thompson scored 19 points in the first half, including a 3-pointer that he punctuated with teammate

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Stephen Curry's signature shake as the Warriors raced out to a 17-point halftime lead and coasted the rest of the way.

"You could see how much was missing the last couple of years," Draymond Green said. "We're lucky to have the Klay Thompson we know back because we know how good he is."

Andrew Wiggins added 18 points and 10 rebounds, Green scored 17 points and Curry had 15 points and nine assists. He was named the MVP of the series.

Luka Doncic overcame a slow start to score 28 points for the Mavericks. Spencer Dinwiddie added 26.

After missing the playoffs in 2020 and '21 in back-to-back injury-plagued seasons, the Warriors are returning to a familiar stage. They join the Michael Jordan-led Chicago Bulls of the 1990s, Magic Johnson's Lakers in the 1980s and Bill Russell's Celtics in the 1950s and '60s as the only franchises to make it to the NBA Finals at least six times in an eight-year span.

"For our team, our guys, especially the core group, to be part of that six times in eight years, I don't even know what to say," coach Steve Kerr said. "It just takes an enormous amount of skill and determination and work."

Golden State will host the winner of the Eastern Conference finals between Boston and Miami on June 2 in Game 1 of the NBA Finals. The Celtics hold a 3-2 lead heading into Game 6 at home on Friday night.

The Warriors followed their pattern from the first two rounds by bouncing back after squandering a chance to end a series on the road by winning at home. Golden State is now 9-0 at the Chase Center this postseason, tying the 2017 team for the most consecutive home wins in a single postseason in NBA history.

After making just seven 3-pointers in the first four games of the series, Thompson had eight this game for the record-setting fifth time in the playoffs.

The last two have come in clinchers the last two rounds against Memphis and Dallas, prompting the question on whether his nickname should switch from "Game 6 Klay" for his history in that game to "Clinching Klay."

"I'm satisfied with 'Game 6 Klay.' I don't need another nickname," Thompson said with a smile. "It's nice not having to bring him out yet."

Thompson gave the Warriors a 13-point lead in the first half when he hit one from the corner before dancing and added two early in the third quarter for a 23-point lead.

Dallas cut a 25-point deficit down to eight in the final minute of the third quarter but couldn't get over the hump in the fourth.

"I don't like losing, especially not like this," Doncic said. "I played terrible. But if we're talking about our season, I'm really proud of this team. ... Nobody had us here. But I promise we fought until the end."

## SLOW START

Doncic had a rough start, shooting 2 for 10 in the first quarter. His eight misses were tied for the most in the opening quarter of a playoff game since LeBron James missed all nine of his attempts in Game 3 of the Eastern Conference finals against Atlanta in 2015.

Doncic was held to six points in the first half, his lowest opening half of his postseason career, on 2-for-12 shooting before finding his stroke in the third quarter.

"We need Luka to go big a lot of nights just to give us a chance, and unfortunately the ball just didn't go for him tonight," coach Jason Kidd said. "I think he carries the load as well as anyone, and I think for us as an organization, we'll help lighten that load as we go forward."

## MOODY MANIA

With Otto Porter (left foot) sidelined for a second straight game, the Warriors got a big boost in the first half from 19-year-old rookie Moses Moody.

Moody scored all of his seven points in the second quarter with his 3-pointer giving Golden State a 56-38 lead. Moody scored just six points the first three games of this series for the Warriors before scoring 17 the past two games with Porter sidelined.

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More AP NBA: <https://apnews.com/hub/NBA> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## US wins latest legal battle to seize Russian yacht in Fiji

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — The United States on Friday won the latest round of a legal battle to seize a \$325-million Russian-owned superyacht in Fiji, with the case now appearing headed for the Pacific nation's top court.

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

Fiji's Court of Appeal on Friday dismissed an appeal by Feizal Haniff, who represents the company that legally owns the superyacht Amadea. Haniff had argued the U.S. had no jurisdiction under Fiji's mutual assistance laws to seize the vessel, at least until a court sorted out who really owned the Amadea.

Haniff said he now plans to take the case to Fiji's Supreme Court and will apply for a court order to stop U.S. agents sailing the Amadea from Fiji before the appeal is heard.

As part of its ruling, the appeals court ordered that its judgment not take effect for seven days, presumably to give time for any appeals to be filed.

The U.S. argues that its investigation has found that behind various fronts, the Cayman Islands-flagged luxury yacht is really owned by the sanctioned Russian oligarch Suleiman Kerimov, an economist and former Russian politician.

Kerimov made a fortune investing in Russian gold producer Polyus, with Forbes magazine putting his net worth at \$16 billion. The U.S. first sanctioned him in 2018 after he'd been detained in France and accused of money laundering there, sometimes arriving with suitcases stuffed with 20 million euros.

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

The 106-meter (348-foot) long vessel, about the length of a football field, features a live lobster tank, a hand-painted piano, a swimming pool and a large helipad.

Haniff, who represents paper owner Millemarin Investments, argues the owner is another wealthy Russian who doesn't face sanctions, Eduard Khudainatov. He's the former chairman and chief executive of Rosneft, the state-controlled Russian oil and gas company.

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

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

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

The FBI said crew members discuss a possible "upcoming G0 guest trip" noting he wants the quickest jet skis available — so they'll need to buy new jet skis.

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

The yacht remains berthed at Lautoka harbor in the heart of Fiji's sugar cane region.

## On remote US territories, abortion hurdles mount without Roe

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By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Women from the remote U.S. territories of Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands will likely have to travel farther than other Americans to terminate a pregnancy if the Supreme Court overturns a precedent that established a national right to abortion in the United States.

Hawaii is the closest U.S. state where abortion is legal under local law. Even so, Honolulu is 3,800 miles (6,100 kilometers) away — about 50% farther than Boston is from Los Angeles.

“For a lot of people who are seeking abortion care, it might as well be on the moon,” said Vanessa L. Williams, an attorney who is active with the group Guam People for Choice.

It’s already difficult to get an abortion in Guam, a small, heavily Catholic island of about 170,000 people south of Japan.

The last physician who performed surgical abortions there retired in 2018. Two Guam-licensed doctors who live in Hawaii see patients virtually and mail them pills for medication abortions. But this alternative is available only until 11 weeks gestation.

Now there’s a possibility even this limited telehealth option will disappear.

A recently leaked draft opinion indicated the Supreme Court could overturn the landmark Roe v. Wade decision and allow individual states to ban abortion. About half of them would likely do so, abortion rights advocates say. Oklahoma got a head start Wednesday when its governor signed a measure prohibiting all abortions with few exceptions.

All three U.S. territories in the Pacific — Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa — also have the potential to adopt prohibitions, according to a 2019 report by the Center for Reproductive Rights. None have legal protections for abortion, and they could revive old abortion bans or enact new ones, the report said.

Traveling to the nearest states where abortion is allowed — Hawaii or the U.S. West Coast — would be prohibitive for many women.

A nonstop flight from Guam to Honolulu takes nearly eight hours. Only one commercial airline flies the route. A recent online search showed the cheapest tickets going for \$1,500 roundtrip in late May.

Williams said many Guam residents need time off work, a hotel room and a rental car to travel for an abortion, adding more costs.

Hawaii legalized abortion in 1970, three years before Roe. The state today allows abortion until a fetus would be viable outside the womb. After that, it’s legal if a patient’s life or health is in danger.

Flying to a country in Asia that allows abortion would be quicker, but several reproductive rights advocates on Guam said they hadn’t heard of anyone doing that. For one, it would require a passport, which many don’t have, said Kiana Yabut of the group Famalao’an Rights.

Without Roe, Guam could revert to an abortion ban dating to 1990. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled the law unconstitutional in 1992, but it has never been repealed.

James Canto, Guam deputy attorney general, agreed under questioning by a Guam senator this month that existing abortion laws in various states and territories would “be the law of the land” if Roe was overturned.

But Alexa Kolbi-Molinas, deputy director of the reproductive freedom project at the American Civil Liberties Union, said the 9th Circuit permanently enjoined the 1990 law, meaning Guam’s attorney general would have to ask the local U.S. District Court to lift an injunction to begin enforcing it.

The 32-year-old statute made it a felony for a doctor to perform the procedure except to save a woman’s life or prevent grave danger to her health, as certified by two independent physicians, or to end an ectopic pregnancy, which is a dangerous abnormal pregnancy that develops outside the uterus.

It made it a misdemeanor for a woman to have an abortion, or for anyone to ask or advise her to have one.

The 21-member unicameral Legislature unanimously approved the ban after then-Archbishop Anthony Apuron threatened in a television interview to excommunicate any Catholic senator who voted against it. All but one of the senators was Catholic, but most senators said they were unaware of the threat.

Guam’s Legislature has been considering additional measures to restrict abortion. This month it held

hearings on a bill modeled after a new Texas law that bans abortion once cardiac activity is detected, usually around six weeks. The Texas law, which has withstood legal challenges so far, leaves enforcement up to private citizens through lawsuits instead of criminal prosecutions.

Peter Srgo, a Guam attorney who drafted the measure, said enacting it would remove speculation about whether Guam would prohibit abortions if Roe is overturned.

"So take your pick. What do you want? Because for me, either way, I win. Either way, the people win. Either way, the pro-life movement is going to have a major victory no matter what," he said.

The possibility that abortion may become less accessible on Guam has spurred some nonprofits to come together to increase their support for pregnant women in need, said Mona McManus, executive director of the island's Safe Haven Pregnancy Center.

Her organization, which opposes abortion, provides free pregnancy tests, prenatal and parenting classes and information on adoption and abortion. It recently started a "wraparound service group" with other nonprofits that can help secure housing, foster care for teen mothers, adoption and other services.

Jayne Flores, director of the Bureau of Women's Affairs, a Guam government agency, believes residents would still have access to medication abortions from off-island if Roe is overturned. But she wonders whether the Legislature might outlaw that too.

"At what point do you start looking in people's mail?" she said.

In the Atlantic, lawmakers in the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico are considering legislation that would prohibit abortions starting at 22 weeks, or when a doctor determines that a fetus is viable, with the sole exception being if a woman's life is in danger. That is roughly in line with most U.S. state laws, though more limiting than Puerto Rico's current status, which sets no term limit.

## **K-pop sensation BTS to launch new show on Apple Music 1**

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — BTS will reveal their gradual journey to becoming K-pop superstars through a new Apple Music weekly limited series.

The streaming service announced Thursday that BTS will launch their new show "BTS Radio: Past & Present" on Apple Music 1. The three-episode limited series will air weekly, leading up to the release of the band's new album "Proof," which arrives on June 10.

The inaugural episode will air May 28 at 6 am PDT.

The Grammy Award-nominated band will take listeners on their quest to stardom while sharing stories and songs that helped shaped them. The group is known for hit songs such as "Dynamite" and "Butter."

"We wanted to use this radio show to celebrate nine years of BTS with you guys and with our ARMY all over the world," said RM of the seven-member boy band — which also includes J-Hope, Suga, Jungkook, V, Jin and Jimin.

"Every episode is dedicated to you," RM continues. "And we wanted to share the BTS songs that help tell our story."

In the first episode, BTS explains the beginning of the group with songs that inspired their sound and style. The second episode — which airs June 3 — has the band pick some of the BTS ARMY's favorite songs.

BTS shows how the group ultimately achieved fame as global music sensations in the final episode on June 10.

## **Oregon ballot fiasco spotlights clerk's troubled 20-year run**

By GILLIAN FLACCUS and SARA CLINE Associated Press

OREGON CITY, Ore. (AP) — Voters in an Oregon county where a ballot-printing error has delayed primary results for nearly two weeks have elected the same county clerk five times in the past 20 years despite missteps that impacted two previous elections and cost taxpayers at least \$100,000.

Opponents have repeatedly tried to unseat Clackamas County Clerk Sherry Hall, who was first elected in 2002, following elections errors in 2004, 2010 and 2011 and a state vote-tampering investigation in 2012.

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Hall makes \$112,600 a year in the nonpartisan position overseeing elections, recording property transactions, keeping public records and issuing marriage licenses. She is running for a sixth four-year term in November in the suburban county south of Portland.

The latest scandal in Oregon comes against the backdrop of a polarized political landscape in which vote counts are increasingly scrutinized. Races for local elections clerks — who until recently toiled in obscurity and relative anonymity — are getting new attention, particularly from right-wing voters who deny that President Joe Biden won the 2020 election.

Local elections chiefs are the first line of defense for elections integrity, but most voters don't know who their county clerk is, or even what they do, and are likely to skip over the nonpartisan race on Election Day, or simply pick the incumbent. Some county clerks are appointed, but in many counties in Oregon and elsewhere they are beholden to the whims of voters who may not be paying attention, said Christopher McKnight Nichols, an associate professor of history at Oregon State University.

There's a "myopia and invisibility about this sort of office in American public life," he said.

The situation in Oregon's third-largest county underscores the importance of such contests.

In the current election, tens of thousands of ballots sent out with blurry barcodes were rejected by a vote-counting machine. The issue affected Democratic and nonpartisan ballots more than Republican ones, state officials have said. The fiasco forced the county to shift nearly 200 county employees to vote tabulation duties; county officials don't yet know the full cost of the cleanup job.

For days, workers have been transferring each voter's intent from spoiled ballots to fresh ones, by hand using purple markers, in a painstaking process that might not be complete for more than two more weeks. More than 81,000 ballots out of more than 116,000 had been counted by early Friday, and nearly 35,000 spoiled ballots remained to be duplicated, according to county tallies.

"This affects all of us. This is voter integrity," said Janet Bailey, a Republican voter who protested outside the Clackamas County election offices Thursday with about a dozen others. "We, in Oregon, a week ago we had our primary, and we still don't know the results."

Hall knew of the problem with the ballots on May 3, but did not take significant action until after the election on May 17, when it became clear the vote tally was substantially delayed. The Oregon Secretary of State has said Hall refused offers of help from the state; at least one Democratic state lawmaker has demanded a legislative inquiry into the ballot blunder.

Meanwhile, the results of several contests, including the much-watched Democratic primary for Oregon's 5th Congressional District, remain undecided. And some voters are seizing on the county's problems to demand an end to Oregon's trailblazing vote-by-mail system and the use of electronic machinery to count votes.

"Our votes have to count," said Cindy Hise, a Clackamas County voter who wants the entire primary redone. "This has been going on for days. We're past all hope of it being a true vote."

Hall declined a phone or in-person interview with The Associated Press for this story but said in response to emailed questions Thursday that she would cooperate with any investigation. She said she has no comment on calls from some for her resignation.

She also addressed numerous 2020 contributions she made to national Republican causes, saying in a brief email that she "maintains neutrality." The donations to the National Republican Senatorial Committee and to WINRED, a Republican Party fundraising platform, were all \$100 or less.

"I have the right as a private citizen to exercise free speech and association. I do give small contributions to a large number of organizations," she wrote. "I do not accept endorsements of any kind."

Controversy isn't new to Hall, who has overseen the county's elections since she took office in 2003.

— In 2004, the county excluded three annexation questions on ballots mailed to 300 voters and didn't alert the public for 10 days.

— In 2010, a county commission race was listed on the primary ballot when it should not have been. The ballots were reprinted at a cost of more than \$100,000. Hall later filed a complaint with state elections officials saying the episode, including press "leaks" and public criticisms of her by county officials, cost her

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primary votes and forced her into a November runoff.

— In 2012, an elections worker was caught tampering with two ballots and was sentenced to 90 days in jail.

— In 2018, Hall placed her name and the county clerk title on the ballot return envelopes and on voter information pamphlets while also seeking reelection to the post, a decision critics called egregious self-promotion in a tight race.

Hall said in her email that all the elections incidents “did happen under my watch” and that she or those in her office “took appropriate steps as needed.”

Pamela White, who challenged Hall in 2018 and lost by fewer than 6,000 votes, said even with such missteps it seemed impossible to defeat Hall. In that election, more than 52,000 voters skipped the county clerk race altogether despite persistent criticisms of Hall’s elections oversight and White’s endorsement by Hall’s recently retired elections manager.

White spent \$100,000 on the race, including \$25,000 of her own money, and campaigned for two years, she said.

“I worked very hard,” she said. “I knew what I was doing, but that down-ballot thing is an issue even in your own party. It just takes all the air out of the room.”

Steve Kindred, the former elections manager who endorsed White, said his relationship with Hall soured after a 2014 incident in which she asked him to do work on her reelection campaign during office hours without telling him what it was for. She was later fined \$100 by state elections officials for the lapse. Kindred retired early.

Kindred said seeing the ballot fiasco now after experiencing the ballot-tampering probe in 2012 was like a “punch to the gut.”

“We had a couple of hell elections, not nearly as bad as this one,” he said. “It’s almost like she’s frozen, like a deer in the headlights.”

For now, the county is focused on getting the votes counted by June 13, the state’s election certification deadline.

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Cline reported from Portland. Associated Press writer Andrew Selsky in Salem and AP investigative researcher Randy Herschaft in New York contributed to this report.

## **Baby formula shortage highlights racial disparities**

By JACQUELYN MARTIN, ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and TERRY TANG Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Md. (AP) — Capri Isidoro broke down in tears sitting on a chair at the office of a lactation consultant.

The mother of two had been struggling to breastfeed her 1-month-old daughter ever since she was born, when the hospital gave the baby formula first without consulting her on her desire to breastfeed.

Now, with massive safety recall and supply disruptions causing formula shortages across the United States, she also can’t find the specific formula that helps with her baby’s gas pains.

“It is so sad. It shouldn’t be like this,” said Isidoro, who lives in the Baltimore suburb of Ellicott City. “We need formula for our kid, and where is this formula going to come from?”

As parents across the United States struggle to find formula to feed their children, the pain is particularly acute among Black and Hispanic women. Black women have historically faced obstacles to breastfeeding, including a lack of lactation support in the hospital, more pressure to formula feed and cultural roadblocks. It’s one of many inequalities for Black mothers : They are far more likely to die from pregnancy complications, and less likely to have their concerns about pain taken seriously by doctors.

Low-income families also face a particular struggle: They buy the majority of formula in the U.S. Experts fear small neighborhood grocery stores that serve these vulnerable populations are not replenishing as much as the larger retail stores and that some of these families do not have the resources or means to hunt for formula.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 20% of Black women and 23% of Hispanic

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women exclusively breastfeed through six months compared to 29% of white women. The overall rate stands at 26%. Hospitals that encourage breastfeeding and overall lactation support are less prevalent in Black neighborhoods, according to the CDC.

The Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses also says Hispanic and Black women classified as low wage workers had less access to lactation support in their workplaces.

The racial disparities reach far back in America's history. The demands of slave labor prevented mothers from nursing their children, and slave owners separated mothers from their own babies to have them serve as wet nurses, or women who breastfeed other women's children.

In the 1950s, racially targeted commercials falsely advertised formula as a superior source of nutrition for infants. And studies continue to show, Black mothers are more likely to receive in-hospital formula introduction than white mothers, which happened to Isidoro after her emergency cesarean section.

Physicians say introducing formula means the baby will require fewer feedings from his mother, decreasing the milk supply as the breast is not stimulated enough to produce.

Andrea Freeman, author of the book "Skimmed: Breastfeeding, Race and Injustice," said these mothers still aren't getting the support they need when it comes to having the choice of whether to breastfeed or use formula. They also may have jobs that do not accommodate the time and space needed for breastfeeding or pumping milk, Freeman said.

"Nobody's taking responsibility for the fact that they've steered families of color toward formula for so many years and made people rely on it and taken away choice. And then when it falls apart, there's not really any recognition or accountability," Freeman said.

Breastfeeding practices are often influenced by previous generations with some studies suggesting better outcomes for mothers who were breastfed when they were babies.

Kate Bauer, an associate professor of nutritional sciences at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, said she began hearing back in February about Black and Latino families in Detroit and Grand Rapids feeling stuck after finding smaller grocery stores running out of formula.

Some were told to go to the local office of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, better known as WIC, the federal program that supports low-income expectant and new mothers. Between 50% and 65% of the formula in the U.S. is bought through the program.

"Going to the WIC office is like a full day's errand for some moms," Bauer said.

She also said she fears mothers are getting desperate enough to try foods that are not recommended for babies under 6 months.

Yury Navas, a Salvadoran immigrant who works at a restaurant and lives in Laurel, Maryland, says she was not able to produce enough breast milk and struggled to find the right formula for her nearly 3-month-old baby Jose Ismael, after others had caused vomiting, diarrhea and discomfort.

One time they drove half an hour to a store where workers told them they had the type she needed, but it was gone when they got there. Her husband goes out every night to search pharmacies around midnight.

"It's so hard to find this type," she said, saying sometimes they have run out before they can secure more formula. "The baby will cry and cry, so we give him rice water."

On a recent day, she was down to her last container and called an advocacy group that had told her it would try to get her some at an appointment in five days. But the group could not guarantee anything.

Some mothers have turned to social media and even befriended other locals to cast a wider net during shopping trips.

In Miami, Denise Castro, who owns a construction company, started a virtual group to support new moms during the COVID-19 pandemic that has now also started helping moms get the formula they need.

"Most of the moms we have been helping are Black and Latinas," Castro said, adding many of them are back to work. "These moms really don't have the time to visit three to four places in their lunch hour."

Castro said one of the women they have been trying to help is a Hispanic teacher who is back at work and does not have much flexibility between her job and caring for her 2-month-old infant, who has been sensitive to a lot of formula brands.

Lisette Fernandez, a 34-year-old Cuban American first-time mother of twins, has relied on friends and

family members to find the liquid 2-ounce bottles she needs for her boy and girl. Earlier this week, her father had gone to four different pharmacies before he was able to get her some boxes with the tiny bottles, but they run out quickly as the babies are growing.

Fernandez said she wasn't able to initiate breastfeeding, trying with an electric pump but saying she produced very little. Her mother, who arrived in Miami from Cuba as a 7-year-old girl, had chosen not to breastfeed her children, saying she did not want to, and taken medication to suppress lactation.

Some studies have attributed changes in breastfeeding behavior among Hispanics to assimilation, saying Latina immigrants perceive formula feeding as an American practice.

"Over the last three to six weeks it has been insane," Fernandez said. "I am used to everything that COVID has brought. But worrying about my children not having milk? I did not see that coming."

## Prepare for sticker shock if you are traveling this summer

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

DALLAS (AP) — Airlines and tourist destinations are expecting monster crowds this summer as travel restrictions ease and pandemic fatigue overcomes lingering fear of contracting COVID-19 during travel.

Many forecasters believe the number of travelers will match or even exceed levels in the good-old, pre-pandemic days. However, airlines have thousands fewer employees than they did in 2019, and that has at times contributed to widespread flight cancellations.

People who are only now booking travel for the summer are experiencing the sticker shock.

Domestic airline fares for summer are averaging more than \$400 a round trip, 24% higher than this time in 2019, before the pandemic, and a whopping 45% higher than a year ago, according to travel-data firm Hopper.

"The time to have gotten cheap summer flights was probably three or four months ago," says Scott Keyes, who runs the Scott's Cheap Flights site.

Internationally, fares are also up from 2019, but only 10%. Prices to Europe are about 5% cheaper than before the pandemic — \$868 for the average round trip, according to Hopper. Keyes said Europe is the best travel bargain out there.

Steve Nelson of Mansfield, Texas, was standing in line this week at a security checkpoint in Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, ready to board a flight to Nice, France, with plans to attend a Formula One race in Monaco.

"I decided it's time to work on my bucket list," Nelson said. "I hadn't even considered Monaco until this year."

Although many countries have eased rules for travel, there are still restrictions in place that add to the hassle factor. Notably, the United States still requires a negative COVID-19 test within a day of flying to the country.

"We only realized that a couple days before coming here. We kind of panicked to find a place to get tested," said Jonny Dawe, a software engineer from Bath, England, who was in Dallas for a conference — his first major trip since the pandemic started. "You have to check all the testing requirements for the countries you are visiting, and you have to worry about contracting the virus."

Online spending on U.S. flights eased in April after a torrid March, but it's still up 23% from spring 2019 mostly because of higher prices, according to Adobe Analytics.

Airlines blame the steeper fares on jet fuel roughly doubling in price over 2019. It's more than that, however. The number of flights has not returned to pre-pandemic levels even though demand for travel is surging.

"We have more travelers looking to book fewer seats, and each of those seats is going to be more expensive for airlines to fly this summer because of jet fuel," says Hopper economist Hayley Berg.

When travelers reach their destination, they will be greeted with hotel rates that are up about one-third from last year. Hotels are filling up faster, too. Hotel companies blame the higher prices on increasing cost for supplies as well as workers in a tight labor market.

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Rental cars were hard to find and very expensive last summer, but that seems to have eased as the rental companies rebuild their fleets. The nationwide average price is currently around \$70 a day, according to Hopper.

Jonathan Weinberg, founder of a rental car shopping site called AutoSlash, said prices and availability of vehicles will be very uneven. It won't be as bad as last summer, but prices for vehicles will still be "way above average, if you can even find one," in Hawaii, Alaska and near destinations such as national parks.

Even if you drive your own car, it'll still be pricey. The national average for regular gasoline hit \$4.60 a gallon on Thursday — more than \$6 in California. Those prices have some people considering staying home.

"You don't really get used to \$6 gas," said Juliet Ripley of San Diego as she paid \$46.38 to put 7.1 gallons in her Honda Civic. The single mom of two has no summer vacation plans other than an occasional trip to a nearby beach.

For those determined to travel, however, it is an open question whether airlines, airports, hotels and other travel businesses will be able to handle them.

More than 2.1 million people a day on average are boarding planes in the United States, about 90% of 2019 levels and a number that is sure to grow by several hundred thousand a day by July.

The U.S. Transportation Security Administration has tapped nearly 1,000 checkpoint screeners who can move from one airport to another, depending on where they are needed most.

"We are as ready as we possibly can be," says TSA chief David Pekoske.

Airlines that paid employees to quit when travel collapsed in 2020 are now scrambling to hire enough pilots, flight attendants and other workers. The largest four U.S. airlines — American, Delta, United and Southwest — together had roughly 36,000 fewer employees at the start of 2022 than before the pandemic, a drop of nearly 10%, despite aggressive hiring that started last year.

Pilots are in particularly short supply at smaller regional airlines that operate nearly half of all U.S. flights under names like American Eagle, Delta Connection and United Express.

Airlines are trimming summer schedules to avoid overloading their staffs and canceling flights at the last minute. This week, Delta cut about 100 flights a day, or 2%, from its July schedule, and more than 150 flights a day on average, or 3%, in August. Southwest, Alaska and JetBlue previously reduced summer flights.

Cancellations aren't limited to the U.S. In the United Kingdom, easyJet and British Airways scrubbed many flights this spring because of staffing shortages.

Air travel within Europe is expected to recover to pre-pandemic levels this summer, although visitors from outside the region will likely be down 30% from 2019, according to a new report from the European Travel Commission. The group doesn't expect international travel to return to normal until 2025.

Russia's war in Ukraine does not appear to be hurting bookings to most of Europe, according to travel experts, but it will reduce the number of Russian and Ukrainian travelers, whose favorite destinations include Cyprus, Montenegro, Latvia, Finland, Estonia and Lithuania, the commission said. Russian tourists tend to be big spenders, so their absence will hurt tourism economies in those destinations.

Also largely missing: Chinese tourists, the world's largest travel spenders, who remain largely restricted by their government's "zero-COVID" strategy. Some European destinations report that the number of Chinese tourists is down by more than 90% from 2019.

Kelvin Chan in London and Christopher Weber in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

## **Southern Baptist leaders release secret accused abuser list**

By HOLLY MEYER and DEEPA BHARATH Associated Press

In response to an explosive investigation, top Southern Baptists have released a previously secret list of hundreds of pastors and other church-affiliated personnel accused of sexual abuse.

The 205-page database was made public late Thursday. It includes more than 700 entries from cases that largely span from 2000 to 2019.

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Its existence became widely known Sunday when the independent firm, Guidepost Solutions, included it in its bombshell report detailing how the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee mishandled allegations of sex abuse, stonewalled numerous survivors and prioritized protecting the SBC from liability.

Executive Committee leaders Rolland Slade and Willie McLaurin, in a joint statement, called publishing the list "an initial, but important, step towards addressing the scourge of sexual abuse and implementing reform in the Convention."

"Each entry in this list reminds us of the devastation and destruction brought about by sexual abuse," they said. "Our prayer is that the survivors of these heinous acts find hope and healing, and that churches will utilize this list proactively to protect and care for the most vulnerable among us."

The Guidepost report, released after a seven-month investigation, contained several explosive revelations. Among them: D. August Boto, the committee's former vice president and general counsel, and former SBC spokesman Roger Oldham kept their own private list of abusive ministers. Both retired in 2019. The existence of the list was not widely known within the committee and its staff.

"Despite collecting these reports for more than 10 years, there is no indication that (Oldham and Boto) or anyone else, took any action to ensure that the accused ministers were no longer in positions of power at SBC churches," the report said.

The Executive Committee did not make additions to the published list, but their attorneys did redact several entries as well as the names and identifying information of survivors and others unrelated to the accused, Thursday's joint statement said.

They made public "entries that reference an admission, confession, guilty plea, conviction, judgment, sentencing, or inclusion on a sex offender registry," and expect some of the redacted entries on the list to be made public once more research is done. The list also includes Baptist ministers that are not affiliated with the SBC.

Survivors and advocates have long called for a public database of abusers. The creation of an "offender information system" was one of the key recommendations in the report by Guidepost, which was contracted by the Executive Committee after delegates to last year's national meeting pressed for an outside investigation.

Also in the report was a shocking allegation that Johnny Hunt, a Georgia-based pastor and former SBC president, sexually assaulted another pastor's wife during a beach vacation in 2010. Hunt has disputed the allegation, saying in a statement that he has "never abused anybody."

He resigned May 13 as senior vice president of evangelism and leadership at the North American Mission Board, the SBC's domestic missions agency. On Wednesday, NAMB leaders announced changes to address the issue including committing to investigate abuse accusations and creating an Abuse Prevention and Response Committee to assess and strengthen existing policies and procedures.

Also in the wake of the report's release, survivors have been calling in information about abuse allegations to the Executive Committee, Guidepost and members of a task force set up to oversee the firm's investigation, according to a joint statement from the three entities.

A hotline is now open for survivors, or someone on their behalf, to report abuse allegations: 202-864-5578 or SBChotline@guidepostsolutions.com. Callers will be provided with care options and connected with an advocate, the statement said.

Guidepost will maintain the hotline and keep the information confidential, but will not be looking into the allegations. The joint statement described the hotline as a "stopgap measure for survivors" until delegates can pass reforms during this year's national meeting scheduled for June 14-15 in Anaheim, California.

The task force expects to make its formal motions based on the Guidepost report public next week. Those recommendations will then be presented for a vote in Anaheim.

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## Russia slams sanctions, seeks to blame West for food crisis

By RICARDO MAZALAN and ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Moscow pressed the West on Thursday to lift sanctions against Russia over the war in Ukraine, seeking to shift the blame for a growing food crisis that has been worsened by Kyiv's inability to ship millions of tons of grain and other agricultural products while under attack.

Britain immediately accused Russia of "trying to hold the world to ransom," insisting there would be no sanctions relief, and a top U.S. diplomat blasted the "sheer barbarity, sadistic cruelty and lawlessness" of the invasion.

Russian President Vladimir Putin told Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi that Moscow "is ready to make a significant contribution to overcoming the food crisis through the export of grain and fertilizer on the condition that politically motivated restrictions imposed by the West are lifted," according to a Kremlin readout of the call.

Ukraine is one of the world's largest exporters of wheat, corn and sunflower oil, but the war and a Russian blockade of its ports have halted much of that flow, endangering world food supplies. Many of those ports are now also heavily mined.

Russia also is a significant grain exporter, and Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov said the West "must cancel the unlawful decisions that hamper chartering ships and exporting grain." His comments appeared to be an effort to lump the blockade of Ukrainian exports with what Russia says are its difficulties in moving its own goods.

Western officials have dismissed those claims. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken noted last week that food, fertilizer and seeds are exempt from sanctions imposed by the U.S. and many others — and that Washington is working to ensure countries know the flow of those goods should not be affected.

With the war grinding into its fourth month, world leaders have ramped up calls for solutions. World Trade Organization Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said about 25 million tons of Ukrainian grain is in storage and another 25 million tons could be harvested next month.

European countries have tried to ease the crisis by moving grain out of the country by rail — but trains can carry only a small fraction of what Ukraine produces, and ships are needed for the bulk of the exports.

At the same time, the Russian Defense Ministry proposed corridors to allow foreign ships to leave ports along the Black Sea, as well as Mariupol on the Sea of Azov.

Mikhail Mizintsev, who heads Russia's National Defense Control Center, said 70 foreign vessels from 16 countries were in six ports on the Black Sea, including Odesa, Kherson and Mykolaiv. He did not specify how many might be ready to carry food.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said his country was ready to agree on safe corridors in principle, but it was not sure it could trust Russia to allow safe passage and not send its military vessels "sneaking" into the harbor to attack Odesa.

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said Putin was "trying to hold the world to ransom" by demanding some sanctions be lifted before allowing Ukrainian grain shipments to resume.

"He's essentially weaponized hunger and lack of food among the poorest people around the world," Truss said on a visit to Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. "What we cannot have is any lifting of sanctions, any appeasement, which will simply make Putin stronger in the longer term."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for imposing even tougher sanctions on Russia, including for the European Union to ban Russian oil and gas.

"Pressuring Russia is literally a matter of saving lives," he said in his nightly video address. "And every day of delay, weakness, various disputes or proposals to appease the aggressor at the expense of the victim is new Ukrainians killed. And these are new threats to everyone on our continent."

Putin said "it's impossible, utterly unrealistic in the modern world" to isolate Russia. Speaking via video to members of the Eurasian Economic Forum, which is comprised of several ex-Soviet nations, he said those who try would "primarily hurt themselves," citing broken food supply chains.

Michael Carpenter, the U.S. ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, urged

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its members to provide Ukraine with what it needs to defend itself against Putin's "revanchist delusions."

If Russia achieved "success" in Ukraine, "there would be more horrific reports from filtration camps, more forcibly displaced people, more summary executions, more torture, more rape, and more looting," Carpenter said in Vienna.

On the battlefield, Russian forces pressed their offensive in several parts of the eastern Donbas region, Ukraine's military said. That industrial heartland of coal mines and factories is now the focus of fighting after Russia suffered a series of setbacks and shifted to more limited goals.

"The enemy is storming the position of our troops simultaneously in several directions," said Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar. "We have an extremely difficult and long stage of fighting ahead of us."

Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, also came under renewed shelling on Thursday. Zelenskyy said at least nine people were killed and 19 wounded. Among those killed were a five-month-old baby and its father, and the mother was in serious condition.

Military officials said Russian forces continued to try to gain a foothold in the area of Sievierodonetsk, the only part of the Luhansk region in the Donbas under Ukrainian government control.

A senior U.S. defense official said Russia is making incremental progress in the Donbas, with fighting centered on towns and villages as Russian and Ukrainian forces trade control over scraps of land. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the U.S. military assessment, said those smaller artillery duels could be prolonged.

Russia has 110 battalion tactical groups, each with 800 to 1,000 troops, committed to Ukraine, amounting to 80% of Moscow's total force, the official said, adding that it has lost 1,000 tanks and three dozen fighter jets and other fixed-wing aircraft.

Zelenskyy pleaded with the West to send multiple launch rocket systems to Ukraine as soon as possible to give it a fighting chance against the Russian offensive in the Donbas.

In other developments:

— In the northwestern town of Kotelva, two Russian soldiers accused of war crimes pleaded guilty to shelling civilian infrastructure with a multiple rocket launcher. Alexander Ivanov and Alexander Bobykin could face up to 12 years in prison; the defense asked for eight, saying they were following orders. Bobykin said, "I regret the actions our troops committed."

— In the ravaged port city of Mariupol, Russia began broadcasting state television news, about a week after the Russian military declared it had "completely liberated" the city.

— A leader of Russia-backed separatists suggested there might be more Ukrainian fighters hiding in Mariupol's sprawling Azovstal steelworks, which for weeks stood as the city's last bastion of resistance. The Russian military says 2,439 fighters surrendered from the plant last week. The separatist leader, Denis Pushilin, said more may have been hiding or lost or lagged behind, adding "there are already those that have been found" and captured.

— Alexander Lukashenko, the leader of Russian ally Belarus, said he was sending troops to the border with Ukraine, raising the possibility that he may agree to wider participation in the war. Belarus allowed Russian troops to invade Ukraine from its soil but has not taken part in ground operations.

— The Pentagon said one American military officer has gone back to Ukraine as the U.S. reopens its embassy in Kyiv. But Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said the colonel is there for diplomatic work, and no other U.S. troops are going into Ukraine at this point.

Beccatoros reported from Kramatorsk, Ukraine. Associated Press writers Andre Rosa in Kharkiv, Ukraine, and Lolita C. Baldor in Washington contributed.

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

**Grieving husband dies after wife is slain in Texas rampage**

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By STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

Irma Garcia's family was already reeling from her death in the Texas school shooting that targeted her fourth grade classroom and killed her co-teacher and 19 students.

Then, a mere two days after the attack, her grieving husband collapsed and died at home from a heart attack, a family member said.

Joe Garcia, 50, dropped off flowers at his wife's memorial Thursday morning in Uvalde, Texas, and returned home, where he "pretty much just fell over" and died, his nephew John Martinez told The New York Times.

Married for 24 years, the couple had four children.

Martinez told The Detroit Free Press that the family was struggling to grasp that while the couple's oldest son trained for combat in the Marine Corps, it was his mother who was shot to death.

"Stuff like this should not be happening in schools," he told the newspaper.

The Archdiocese of San Antonio and the Rushing-Estes-Knowles Mortuary confirmed Joe Garcia's death to The Associated Press. AP was unable to independently reach members of the Garcia family on Thursday.

The motive for the massacre — the nation's deadliest school shooting since the 2012 attack in Newtown, Connecticut — remained under investigation, with authorities saying the 18-year-old gunman had no known criminal or mental health history.

The rampage rocked a country already weary from gun violence and shattered the community of Uvalde, a largely Latino town of some 16,000 people about 75 miles (120 kilometers) from the Mexican border.

The Garcias loved to barbecue, 48-year-old Irma wrote in an online letter to her students at Robb Elementary School. She enjoyed listening to music and traveling to Concan, a community along the Frio River about 25 miles (40 kilometers) north of Uvalde.

The couple's oldest child, Cristian, is a Marine. The couple's other son, Jose, attends Texas State University. Their eldest daughter, Lylia, is a high school sophomore, while her younger sister is in the seventh grade.

The school year, scheduled to end Thursday, was Garcia's 23rd year of teaching — all of it at Robb. She was previously named the school's teacher of the year and was a 2019 recipient of the Trinity Prize for Excellence in Education from Trinity University.

For five years, Garcia co-taught with Eva Mireles, who also was killed.

The suspect, Salvador Ramos, was inside the classroom for more than an hour before he was killed in a shootout with law enforcement, authorities said.

"Mrs. Irma Garcia was my mentor when I began teaching," her colleague Allison McCullough wrote when Garcia was named teacher of the year. "The wealth of knowledge and patience that she showed me was life changing."

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Associated Press journalist Jamie Stengle in Dallas contributed to this report.

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More on the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas: <https://apnews.com/hub/school-shootings>.

## **Biden to console families in Uvalde, press for action**

By ZEKE MILLER and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden will travel to Uvalde, Texas, on Sunday to console families and honor victims of Tuesday's mass school shooting in which 19 children and two teachers were killed.

The White House said the Bidens would "grieve with the community that lost 21 lives in the horrific" shooting at Robb Elementary School. Press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the president would meet with the community and religious leaders and victims' families.

Jean-Pierre, the parent of an elementary school student, delivered an impassioned plea at the White House for lawmakers to come together to address gun violence.

"These were elementary school kids, they should be losing their first teeth not losing their lives," she said.

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Asked about the propriety of the National Rifle Association going ahead with its planned conference in Houston this weekend, Jean-Pierre, said, "What is inappropriate is that the leadership of the National Rifle Association has proven time and time again, that they are contributing to the problem of gun violence, not trying to solve it."

"It's shameful that the NRA and their allies have stood in the way of every attempt to advance measures that we all know will save lives," she said.

Jean-Pierre echoed Biden, who in remarks Tuesday evening, spoke from personal experience about the pain of losing a child, and called on the country to tighten gun laws in response to the shooting.

"When in God's name are we going to stand up to the gun lobby?" he said. "Why are we willing to live with this carnage? Why do we keep letting this happen?"

More on the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas: <https://apnews.com/hub/school-shootings>

## Live updates | Mayor: Some 1,500 killed in Sievierodonetsk

By The Associated Press undefined

KYIV, Ukraine — The Ukrainian city of Sievierodonetsk is the center of fierce fighting in the east. Mayor Oleksandr Stryuk says it's holding out even though a Russian reconnaissance and sabotage group went into a city hotel.

Stryuk said at least 1,500 people have been killed in Sievierodonetsk and about 12,000 to 13,000 remain in the city, where he said 60% of residential buildings have been destroyed.

Sievierodonetsk is the only part of the Luhansk region in the Donbas under Ukrainian government control, and Russian forces have been trying to cut it off from the rest of Ukrainian-controlled territory.

Stryuk said the main road between the neighboring town of Lysychansk and Bakhmut to the southwest remains open, but travel is dangerous.

He said only 12 people were able to be evacuated Thursday.

### KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR:

- Russia slams sanctions, seeks to blame West for food crisis
- 'This tears my soul apart': A Ukrainian boy and a killing
- West mulls having Russian oligarchs buy way out of sanctions
- US aims to leverage Russia-Ukraine bloc against China
- Russia takes steps to bolster army, offer some Ukrainians citizenship

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

### OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy pleaded with the West on Thursday to send multiple launch rocket systems to Ukraine as soon as possible to give it a chance against the Russian offensive in the eastern Donbas.

"We are fighting for Ukraine to be provided with all the weapons needed to change the nature of the fighting and start moving faster and more confidently toward the expulsion of the occupiers," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address to the nation.

He said Russian forces are wiping some eastern towns from the face of the Earth and the region could end up "uninhabited."

"They want to turn Popasna, Bakhmut, Lyman, Lysychansk and Sievierodonetsk into ashes as they did with Volnovakha and Mariupol," Zelenskyy said.

In the shelling Thursday of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, Zelenskyy said at least nine people were killed and 19 wounded. Among those killed was a five-month-old baby and the infant's father with the child's mother seriously injured.

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Zelenskyy also had harsh words for members of the European Union who are resisting imposing even tougher sanctions on Russia including a ban on the import of Russian oil and gas, the major source of revenue for Moscow.

WASHINGTON — The move to reopen the U.S. embassy in Ukraine has brought one American military officer back into the country as part of the diplomatic team. But the Pentagon said Thursday that no other troops are going into Ukraine at this point.

Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said the defense attache, a colonel, has gone back to Kyiv with other embassy staff. The defense attache, while a military officer, reports to the chief of mission and is there for diplomatic work, not security.

There have been ongoing questions about whether the U.S. will send a Marine security detachment back to the embassy. Kirby said that so far, the State Department is handling embassy protection with diplomatic security personnel and has not asked for Marines.

"Nothing has changed about the president's direction that US troops will not be fighting in this war in Ukraine," Kirby told reporters at the Pentagon. He said active discussions about security are ongoing with the State Department.

KOTELVA, Ukraine — Two Russian soldiers accused of war crimes in Ukraine appeared at a second trial hearing in the northeastern town of Kotelva.

The Russian servicemen, Alexander Alexeevich Ivanov and Alexander Vladimirovich Bobykin, are charged with shelling civilian infrastructure with a multiple rocket launcher. Both soldiers pleaded guilty at the hearing held at the Kotelevsky District Court.

If convicted, the servicemen could face up to 12 years in prison.

Their defense attorney asked for eight years, saying the two were only following their officers' orders.

Asked if they wanted to make any declarations at the end of the hearing, Bobykin said: "I admit what I did, I regret the actions our troops committed, I believe that in the future the war will end and the peace we are all waiting for will come."

Ivanov made no comment.

The trial is adjourned to May 31.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said Thursday he was forming a southern military command and sending battalion tactical groups to the area that borders Ukraine.

Lukashenko did not give details, but battalion tactical groups typically consist of mechanized infantry including tanks. The territory of Belarus was used for rocket attacks on Ukraine, but the military of Belarus did not take part in the Russian ground operation.

Ukrainian authorities have expressed concern that Belarus may agree to a wider participation in the war.

BERLIN — Western allies are considering whether to allow Russian oligarchs to buy their way out of sanctions and using the money to rebuild Ukraine, according to government officials familiar with the matter.

Canadian Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland proposed the idea at a G-7 finance ministers' meeting in Germany last week.

Freeland raised the issue after oligarchs spoke to her about it, one official said. The Canadian minister knows some Russian oligarchs from her time as a journalist in Moscow.

The official said the Ukrainians were aware of the discussions. The official said it's also in the West's interests to have prominent oligarchs dissociate themselves with Russian President Vladimir Putin while at the same time providing funding for Ukraine.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak publicly about internal G-7 discussions.

— By Rob Gillies and Frank Jordans

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**KYIV** — Finland's Prime Minister Sanna Marin has become the latest European leader to visit Ukraine. Marin met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Thursday in Kyiv. Finnish public broadcaster YLE says she also visited the towns of Bucha and Irpin where Russian soldiers are alleged to have killed civilians. Zelenskyy thanked Marin for Finland's weapons deliveries and its support for sanctions against Russia. Jolted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Finland recently broke with its policy of non-alignment and applied for membership in NATO, together with neighboring Sweden.

**MOSCOW** — The head of the Russia-backed separatist region in eastern Ukraine says that there may be more Ukrainian fighters hiding at the sprawling Azovstal steel mill in Mariupol, even after Moscow officially declared the operation of taking control over it successful and completed.

Denis Pushilin of the Donetsk People's Republic said of the Ukrainian fighters on Thursday: "They could be hiding....They could be lost somewhere, lagged behind" the ones who surrendered and were captured.

The Russian military declared Azovstal and all of Mariupol "completely liberated" on May 20 and reported that a total of 2,439 fighters had come out of the last pocket of Ukrainian resistance in the besieged city.

Pushilin says any Ukrainians left behind at the plant don't pose a threat to the Russian forces.

Russian officials have said the vast territory of the steel mill is being demined. Pushilin said it will be possible to say there is no one left there only after that process is completed, the rubble is cleared and the plant is thoroughly inspected,

"Unfortunately, we already have wounded sapper," he said. "There are a lot of traps, booby traps. Technically, they had everything for this. Therefore, mine clearance is very thorough."

**PRAGUE** — The Czech Republic's ambassador to Ukraine has returned to Kyiv as his country seeks to reinforce its embassy before it takes over the rotating presidency of the European Union in July.

Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavsky said Thursday that the work should help fulfill the priorities of the Czech presidency, which include supporting Ukraine with financial, humanitarian and political aid.

The Czech Republic is among the European nations that support a plan for Ukraine to quickly receive the status of a candidate for EU membership.

The government in Prague closed its embassy in Kyiv on Feb 24 after Russia invaded Ukraine. The embassy, which reopened in the middle of April, currently has five diplomats.

Russia has started broadcasting its state television news in the ravaged port city of Mariupol and other locations it controls in eastern Ukraine, Russian and Ukrainian officials said Thursday.

Russia's Ministry for Emergency Situations, or MChS, said it has launched "three mobile complexes for informing and alerting the population" that will be "broadcasting news for two hours in different parts of Mariupol."

Such mobile units also operate in the city of Volnovakha and the Lyman district of Ukraine's Donetsk province, broadcasting state news shows, "practical information" and cartoons for children, Russian state news agency Tass reported Thursday.

Petro Adnryushchenko, an advisor to Mariupol's Ukrainian mayor, posted on his Telegram channel footage of MChS trucks with TV screens broadcasting Russian news shows to crowds of people in the Russian-occupied city.

"Yesterday, the occupiers launched three mobile propaganda cars and additionally installed 12 75-inch TVs in places of mass gathering — humanitarian aid distribution points, paperwork points and water access points," he wrote. "The practice of 'nothing to feed, feed lies' is gaining momentum."

**MOSCOW** — Russian President Vladimir Putin says the West will fail in its attempts to isolate Russia and face growing economic problems.

Speaking Thursday via video link to members of the Eurasian Economic Forum, Putin said Russia wasn't

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going to shut itself off from international cooperation. The forum includes several ex-Soviet nations.

Putin said that trying to isolate Russia is "impossible, utterly unrealistic in the modern world" and "those who try to do it primarily hurt themselves."

The Russian leader cited growing economic challenges in the West, including "inflation unseen in 40 years, growing unemployment, rupture of supply chains and the worsening of global crises in such sensitive spheres as food."

"This is not a joke," he said. "This is a serious thing that will have an impact on the entire system of economic and political relations."

He lambasted the West for seizing Russian reserves, saying that "the theft of others' assets never brought any good."

KYIV, Ukraine — A regional governor in eastern Ukraine says shelling of the city of Kharkiv killed at least four civilians.

Kharkiv Gov. Oleg Synyehubov said that another seven residents of Ukraine's second-largest city were wounded in Thursday's shelling.

He urged people to stay in shelters, warning that the barrage might continue.

KYIV, Ukraine — The Ukrainian governor of the eastern Luhansk region says Russian bombardments killed three people in and around the city of Lysychansk, which is a key focus of fighting.

Serhiy Haidai said Thursday that one person was killed in Lysychansk and two in the nearby village of Ustynivka amid a Russian artillery bombardment on Wednesday. He said strikes in the region had hit various targets including private houses and a humanitarian aid center, without specifying how the people died.

Haidai is the Kyiv-backed governor of the Luhansk region, where the Ukrainian government is holding onto a small area around Lysychansk and Sievierodonetsk in the face of a focused push by Russian forces.

In the northern Kharkiv region, governor Oleh Synyehubov said two men ages 64 and 82 had been killed in shelling of the town of Balakliya and 10 other people were injured, including a 9-year-old girl.

DAVOS, Switzerland — Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov says that not enough strategic steps have been taken in recent years to prevent Europe's growing dependence on Russian gas and to counter hybrid attacks.

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos on Thursday, Petkov said that the war in Ukraine "caused many crises to us because we had allowed ourselves to be dependent on Russia".

Petkov said that after Russia's annexation of Crimea, Europe criticized Moscow but did nothing to reduce its dependence on it.

"While we linked the price of electricity to that of gas, Russia now can not only reduce gas supplies, but also regulate electricity prices in Europe," he said.

DAVOS, Switzerland — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has reiterated his conviction that Russian President Vladimir Putin won't win the war in Ukraine.

"He has already failed to achieve all his strategic goals," Scholz said Thursday in his speech at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland.

The chancellor said that "a capture of all of Ukraine by Russia seems further away today than it did at the beginning of the war. More than ever, Ukraine is emphasizing its European future."

In addition, Scholz said Thursday, the "brutality of the Russian war" has prompted two states to move closer to NATO.

"With Sweden and Finland, two close friends and partners want to join the North Atlantic alliance. They are most welcome!" the chancellor said.

MILAN, Italy — The World Food Program has been pushing to get wheat out of Ukrainian ports to help

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feed the hungry elsewhere in the world and avert growing food insecurity in vulnerable regions, while also making room for the harvest of grain that has recently been planted.

"We are pushing 100% to get the food that is stuck in that port out. It needs to be a continuous flow, it cannot be a few ships full. We need to get what we can out of there, not just for the Ukrainian economy but to get to people who need it in Yemen and Somalia and Afghanistan," said WFP spokesman John Dumont.

Dumont was in Odesa a couple of weeks ago, and says the grain silos are full. "They are planting now. Where are they going to put that wheat when it is harvest time at the end of June and July? There is no place for it to go."

"It needs to get out in a continuous way. It cannot just be a little one-off humanitarian convoy. The Black Sea needs to open."

**MOSCOW** — The Kremlin says it expects Ukraine to see what is happening in the country and to accept Moscow's demands

Asked Thursday if Russia expects Ukraine to make territorial concessions, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov replied: "Moscow expects the acceptance of its demands and the understanding of the real situation that exists de-facto."

Russia has previously demanded recognition of its sovereignty over the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014. It also is seeking acknowledgement of the independence of Russia-backed separatist regions in eastern Ukraine.

Ukrainian officials said in March that the status of Crimea and the separatist regions could be discussed later. In recent weeks, they have toughened their stand and said that Russian troops should pull back to where they were before Moscow launched a military action in Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Speaking in a conference call with reporters on Thursday, Peskov said: "Kyiv must acknowledge the de-facto situation and just have a sober assessment of it."

**SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina** — British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss says Russian President Vladimir Putin is "trying to hold the world to ransom" by demanding that some sanctions be lifted before Russia allowed Ukrainian grain shipments to resume.

"He's essentially weaponized hunger and lack of food among the poorest people around the world," Truss said during a visit Thursday to the Bosnia. "We simply cannot allow this to happen."

Truss vows that "will do all, with our allies and partners, to get the grain out of Ukraine and supply the rest of the world. "

But she says that the sanctions must stay in place to cut off funding for the war in Ukraine.

"We need to ensure Putin loses in Ukraine," Truss says. "What we cannot have is any lifting of sanctions, any appeasement, which will simply make Putin stronger in the longer term."

**MOSCOW** — The Kremlin says that the West needs to lift some of its sanctions against Russia for grain shipments from Ukraine to resume.

Western allies have accused Russia of blocking grain exports from Ukraine in a move that is exacerbating food shortages in Africa and other regions.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that "we categorically reject the accusations and accuse Western countries of taking a series of unlawful actions that has led to the blockade."

Speaking in a conference call with reporters, he added that the West, in particular, "must cancel the unlawful decisions that hamper chartering ships and exporting grain."

**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.

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

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

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 and failed attempts to cross the Siverskyi Donetsk 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 commanders has led to significant losses across many of Russia's more elite units."

## Daughter and her best friends 'are all gone now,' dad says

By ELLIOT SPAGAT and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — Jacklyn Cazares hadn't yet reached her 10th birthday, but she was already a tough-minded "firecracker" always looking to help people in need, her father said. Jacklyn and her second cousin, Annabelle Rodriguez, were especially tight with three other classmates at Robb Elementary School.

"They are all gone now," Javier Cazares said. "All her little best friends were killed too."

The girls were among 19 students killed Tuesday when an 18-year-old gunman barricaded himself in a fourth-grade classroom at the school in the southwestern Texas town of Uvalde and began to kill. Their families can only cling to memories, and each other.

Jacklyn would have turned 10 on June 10. Despite her young age, she was equal parts tough-minded and compassionate.

"She had a voice," her father said. "She didn't like bullies, she didn't like kids being picked on. All in all, full of love. She had a big heart."

"She was a character — a little firecracker."

Cazares drove his daughter to school Tuesday — she had an awards ceremony that morning. About 90 minutes later, the family got a call: An active shooter was in the school.

"I drove like a bat out of hell," he said. "My baby was in trouble."

"There was more than 100 people out there waiting, it was chaotic," he said of the scene at the school. He grew impatient with how the police were responding and even raised the idea of rushing into the school with several other bystanders.

Cazares said his niece followed an ambulance to the hospital and saw Jacklyn taken inside. The entire family soon joined and pressed hospital officials for information for nearly three hours. They begged, cried and showed them photos of their daughter. Finally, a pastor, police officer and a doctor met with them.

"My wife asked the question, 'Is she alive or is she passed?'" Cazares said. "They were like, 'No, she's

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gone.”

Cazares fought back tears as he pondered how long his daughter was in the classroom with the gunman before she was killed. He finds some solace in believing that in her final moments, Jacklyn was doing what came naturally to her — helping her fellow students.

“It kind of comforts our hearts that she would be one of the ones that was brave and tried to help as much as she could,” he said.

Ryan Ramirez also rushed to Robb Elementary when he heard about the shooting, hoping to find his daughter, Alithia, and take her home, KTRK-TV reported. But Alithia, too, was among the victims.

Ramirez’s Facebook page includes a photo, now shown around the world, of the little girl wearing the multi-colored T-shirt that announced she was out of “single digits” after turning 10 years old. The same photo was posted again Wednesday with no words, but with Alithia wearing angel wings.

Maite Rodríguez, 10, got straight Fs when classes went on Zoom during the pandemic, having gotten straight As before. The day she died was supposed to be a day of triumph.

Maite made the honor roll for straight As and Bs this year and was publicly recognized at an assembly on Tuesday, said Ana Rodríguez, her mother.

“She worked hard, I only encouraged her,” Rodríguez said in an interview Thursday at her dining room table, which displayed a bouquet of red roses, the honor roll certificate and photos of Maite.

Maite especially liked physical education. After she died, her teacher texted her mother that she was highly competitive at kickball and ran faster than all the boys.

Maite was “focused, competitive, smart, bright, beautiful, happy,” her mother said.

As a kindergartner, Maite said she wanted to be a marine biologist and held firmly to that goal. She researched a program at Texas A&M University in Corpus Christi and told her mother she was set on studying there.

“She was just so driven. She was definitely special. She was going to be something, she was going to be something very, very special.”

Rodríguez hosted a steady stream of visitors and said she hasn’t started to grieve. She was deeply touched by one of her brother’s friends who recently graduated from Texas A&M and gave her the red cardboard cylinder that held the diploma.

Rodríguez didn’t want to relive Tuesday’s events but was upset by reports that police waited outside the school as shots were fired. She said she advocates stricter gun laws.

The grief only grew Thursday with confirmation that the brokenhearted husband of one of the slain teachers, 48-year-old Irma Garcia, had died on Thursday.

Joe Garcia, 50, had dropped off flowers at his wife’s memorial on Thursday morning, The New York Times reported. He “pretty much just fell over” after returning home and died of a heart attack, his nephew John Martinez told the newspaper.

The Archdiocese of San Antonio and the Rushing-Estes-Knowles Mortuary confirmed Joe Garcia’s death to The Associated Press. AP was unable to independently reach members of the Garcia family on Thursday.

Married for 24 years, the couple shared four children. In a post on the school’s website at the start of the school year introducing herself to her class, Irma Garcia wrote of her love of barbecue, listening to music and taking “country cruises” to the nearby town of Concan.

The school year, scheduled to end Thursday, was Irma’s 23rd year of teaching — all of it at Robb Elementary School. She had been previously named the school’s teacher of the year and was a 2019 recipient of the Trinity Prize for Excellence in Education from Trinity University.

For five years, Irma had co-taught with Eva Mireles, who also was killed.

Mireles also posted on the site as the school year began, noting she had been teaching 17 years. She cited her “supportive, fun, and loving family.”

“Welcome to the 4th grade! We have a wonderful year ahead of us!” she wrote.

Two of the victims had hoped to skip school that day.

Carmelo Quiroz’s grandson, Jayce Luevanos, 10, had begged to go along with his grandmother on

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Tuesday as she accompanied her great-granddaughter's kindergarten class to the San Antonio Zoo. But, he said, the family told Jayce it didn't make sense to skip school so close to the end of the year. Besides, Jayce liked school.

"That's why my wife is hurting so much, because he wanted to go to San Antonio," Quiroz told USA Today. "He was so sad he couldn't go. Maybe if he would have gone, he'd be here."

Jayce's cousin, 10-year-old Jailah Nicole Silguero, also wanted to miss school that day. Jailah's mother, Veronica Luevanos, tearfully told Univision that Jailah seemed to sense something bad was going to happen.

Jailah's friend, Nevaeh Alyssa Bravo, also was killed and her aunt noted Naveah's first name is heaven spelled backward. In a Facebook posting, Yvonne White described Nevaeh and Jailah as "Our Angels."

Two men who responded to the shooting discovered their own children among the victims.

Uvalde County Sheriff's Deputy Felix Rubio and his wife had been at the school Tuesday morning to celebrate with their daughter, 10-year-old Alexandria "Lexi" Aniyah, since the fourth-grader had made honor roll with all A's and received a good citizen award.

In a Facebook post, Kimberly Rubio wrote, "We told her we loved her and would pick her up after school. We had no idea this was goodbye."

Medical assistant Angel Garza also hurried to the school and immediately found a girl covered in blood among the terrified children streaming out of the building.

"I'm not hurt. He shot my best friend," the girl told Garza when he offered help. "She's not breathing. She was just trying to call the cops."

Her friend was Amerie Jo Garza — Angel Garza's stepdaughter.

Amerie was a happy child who made the honor roll and loved to paint, draw and work in clay. "She was very creative," said her grandmother Dora Mendoza. "She was my baby. Whenever she saw flowers she would draw them."

Hillcrest Memorial Funeral Home, which is across the street from Robb Elementary, began posting brief obituaries of some of the victims. It was assisting families of the shooting victims with no cost for funerals. GoFundMe pages were set up for many of the victims, including one on behalf of all victims that has raised more than \$3 million.

— Groves reported from Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Associated Press writer Stefanie Dazio contributed to this report from Los Angeles.

— Find more of the AP's coverage of the Uvalde school shooting at <https://apnews.com/hub/school-shootings>

## Ray Liotta, 'Goodfellas' and 'Field of Dreams' star, dies

By LINDSEY BAHR and MARTIN ADAMES Associated Press

Ray Liotta, the blue-eyed actor best known for playing mobster Henry Hill in "Goodfellas" and baseball player Shoeless Joe Jackson in "Field of Dreams," has died. He was 67.

Liotta's publicist, Jen Allen, said he was in the Dominican Republic shooting a new movie and didn't wake up Thursday morning. Police in the Dominican Republic said they received a call just before 6 a.m. Thursday at a hotel where Liotta was staying with his fiancée and found the actor dead.

Robert De Niro, who co-starred with Liotta in "Goodfellas," said in an emailed statement that he was saddened by Liotta's passing. "He is way too way young to have left us," De Niro said.

Another "Goodfellas" star, Lorraine Bracco, who played Henry's wife Karen Hill, tweeted Thursday that she could be "anywhere in the world & people will come up & tell me their favorite movie is Goodfellas. Then they always ask what was the best part of making that movie. My response has always been the same...Ray Liotta."

Liotta was also mourned by Alessandro Nivola, who recently appeared with him in "The Sopranos" prequel "The Many Saints of Newark," and by the film's writer and producer David Chase. Nivola called Liotta "dangerous, unpredictable, hilarious, and generous with his praise for other actors." Chase said in

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a statement that "We all felt we lucked out having him on that movie."

The Newark, New Jersey, native was born in 1954 and adopted at age six months out of an orphanage by a township clerk and an auto parts owner. Liotta always assumed he was mostly Italian — the movies did too. But later in life while searching for his birth parents, he discovered he's actually Scottish.

Though he grew up focused on playing sports, including baseball, during his senior year of high school, the drama teacher asked him if he wanted to be in a play, which he agreed to on a lark. Whether he knew it or not at the time, it planted a seed, though he still assumed he'd end up working construction. And later, at the University of Miami he picked drama and acting because they had no math requirement attached. He would often say in interviews that he only started auditioning for plays because a pretty girl told him to. But it set him on a course. After graduation, he got an agent and soon he got his first big break on the soap opera "Another World."

It would take a few years for him to land his first big movie role, in Jonathan Demme's "Something Wild" as Melanie Griffith's character's hotheaded ex-convict husband Ray. He was 30 years old at the time and hadn't had a steady job in five years. In an interview in 1993, he told The Associated Press that he wanted to get the part on his own merits even though he knew Griffith. When that didn't work, he "phoned Melanie.

"I hated doing it, because that's politics for me; calling someone to help you out. But I kind of realize that's part of what it's all about," he said.

The turn earned him a Golden Globe nomination. A few years later, he would get the memorable role of the ghost of Shoeless Joe Jackson in "Field of Dreams." Though it moved many to tears, it wasn't without its critics. Liotta remembered hearing a baseball announcer during a Mets game complain that he batted the opposite way Joe Jackson did.

"(Bleep) you! He didn't come back from the dead either!" Liotta recalled thinking.

Liotta's most iconic role, as real life mobster Henry Hill in Martin Scorsese's "Goodfellas" came shortly after. He and Scorsese had to fight for it though, with multiple auditions and pleas to the studio to cast the still relative unknown.

Scorsese said Thursday that Liotta was "so uniquely gifted, so adventurous, so courageous as an actor."

"Playing Henry Hill in Good Fellas was a tall order, because the character had so many different facets, so many complicated layers, and Ray was in almost every scene of a long, tough shoot," the director said in a statement. "He absolutely amazed me, and I'll always be proud of the work we did together on that picture."

Roger Ebert, in his review, wrote that "Goodfellas" solidified Liotta (and Bracco) as "two of our best new movie actors."

"He creates the emotional center for a movie that is not about the experience of being a Mafioso, but about the feeling," Ebert continued.

In a 2012 interview, Liotta said that, "Henry Hill isn't that edgy of a character. It's really the other guys who are doing all the actual killings. The one physical thing he does do, when he goes after the guy who went after Karen — you know, most audiences, they actually like him for that."

In the same interview, he marveled at how "Goodfellas" had a "life of its own" and has only grown over time.

"People watch it over and over, and still respond to it, and different ages come up, even today, teenagers come up to me and they really emotionally connect to it," he said.

It didn't matter the size of the role, or even the genre, Liotta always managed to stand out and steal scenes in both dramas and comedies, whether as Johnny Depp's father in "Blow" or Adam Driver's bullish divorce lawyer in "Marriage Story."

Mafiosos seemed to be his specialty (he even narrated an AMC docu-series called "The Making of the Mob"), though he was wary of being typecast. He turned down the part of Ralphie on "The Sopranos" because of it. But he'd still end up playing a mob type with James Gandolfini in Andrew Dominik's "Killing Them Softly." And later, he would pay his own ticket to audition for "The Many Saints of Newark."

"I'm really not sure what made me so determined," he told The Guardian last year. "But I was and luckily it all worked out."

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Liotta also often played various law enforcement types, from cops and detectives to federal agents in films as diverse as "Unlawful Entry," "Cop Land," "Narc," "The Place Beyond the Pines" and "Observe and Report." Many were corrupt.

He got to be a victim of Hannibal Lecter in the 2001 film "Hannibal" and played Frank Sinatra in the TV movie "The Rat Pack," which got him a Screen Actors Guild nomination. For gamers, he's immortalized as the voice of Tommy Vercetti in the video game "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City." He also starred opposite Jennifer Lopez in the series "Shades of Blue."

His only regret, he once told the Los Angeles Times, was turning down a meeting to talk to Tim Burton about starring in "Batman."

Liotta has one daughter, Karsen, with ex-wife Michelle Grace and was engaged to be married to Jacy Nittolo at the time of his death.

He also had a number of projects recently wrapped and upcoming, including "Cocaine Bear," directed by Elizabeth Banks, which is supposed to come out in February, and the Apple TV+ crime series "Black Bird," developed by Dennis Lehane and starring Taron Egerton and Paul Walter Hauser. He was due to start another film soon too: "The Substance" with Demi Moore and Margaret Qualley.

"The business is rough, no matter where you're at in your career," Liotta said in 2012. "There's always some reason for them to say no to you — that part of it is horrible... But the job itself — making people believe that what they're seeing is really happening—that's still a challenge, putting that puzzle together. You know, what can I say, I still like playing pretend. And it's sure a fun way to make a living."

## Kevin Spacey to face 4 sex assault charges in Britain

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British prosecutors said Thursday they had authorized police to charge actor Kevin Spacey with four counts of sexual assault against three men, an announcement that came as the actor was in court in New York testifying in a different case.

The Crown Prosecution Service said it had "authorized criminal charges" on the four sex assault counts and one of "causing a person to engage in penetrative sexual activity without consent."

The alleged incidents took place in London between March 2005 and August 2008, and one in western England in April 2013. The alleged victims are now in their 30s and 40s.

Rosemary Ainslie, head of the service's Special Crime Division, said the charges followed a review of evidence gathered by London's Metropolitan Police.

Prosecutors initially said Spacey had been charged. However, they later clarified that charges had been authorized, but the formal charging by police had not yet taken place.

The authorization to charge means criminal proceedings against Spacey are underway. The police force said Spacey — who is not currently in Britain — "will be formally charged at a later date."

If Spacey does not return to Britain to face the charges, prosecutors could seek to start extradition proceedings.

Spacey, a 62-year-old double Academy Award winner, was questioned by British police in 2019 about claims by several men that he had assaulted them. The former "House of Cards" star ran London's Old Vic Theatre between 2004 and 2015.

Spacey won a best supporting actor Academy Award for the 1995 film "The Usual Suspects" and a lead actor Oscar for the 1999 movie "American Beauty."

But his celebrated career came to an abrupt halt in 2017 when actor Anthony Rapp accused the star of assaulting him at a party in the 1980s, when Rapp was a teenager. Spacey denies the allegations.

Spacey testified Thursday in a courtroom in New York City in the civil lawsuit filed by Rapp. Spacey didn't respond to reporters as he left the courthouse talking on his mobile phone.

The British charges were mentioned briefly by Rapp's lawyers during the court hearing, and Spacey's lawyers were asked about it by reporters during a break in testimony. They declined to comment.

Another criminal case brought against Spacey, an indecent assault and battery charge stemming from

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the alleged groping of an 18-year-old man at a Nantucket resort, was dismissed by Massachusetts prosecutors in 2019.

Thursday's court session in New York City dealt with a technical issue in the civil lawsuit, whether it was better handled in a federal or state U.S. court. Spacey was called to testify about where he lived, not about the truthfulness of the allegations against him.

Spacey testified that his main residence and domicile is in Baltimore, where he moved for the filming of "House of Cards." He said he was "beguiled by its charm, its beauty." But he also testified about his time living in London as the artistic director of the Old Vic.

"It was extremely important to me that I endear myself to the British public, that I'm not running away," he said, noting that his start there was troubled by a "disastrous production" in 2005 of Arthur Miller's last play.

But, he said, "I'm an American citizen. Once the job was done, I came back to America."

He said he made a trip to London in February 2020 for a possible film, but then the pandemic hit. His U.S. doctor recommended he stay there, where he resided until the following September, when his visa expired and he flew to Los Angeles for an arbitration proceeding.

He said he has not returned to the U.K. since then.

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Associated Press writer Larry Neumeister contributed to this report from New York.

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This story has been corrected to say British prosecutors authorized charges against Spacey and he will be formally charged by police later, not that Spacey has been formally charged, and to reflect that it was Rapp's lawyers, not Spacey's, who brought up the criminal charges in court.

## Ellen DeGeneres ends daytime show with plea for compassion

By LYNN ELBER AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Ellen DeGeneres brought her nearly two-decade daytime talk show to an end Thursday with a celebrity lovefest and a forceful assertion of her achievement as a gay woman daring to be herself.

DeGeneres and guests Jennifer Aniston, Billie Eilish and Pink shared memories and affection as "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" concluded its Emmy-winning, 3,200-plus episode run that began in September 2003.

"Twenty years ago, when we were trying to sell the show, no one thought that this would work. Not because it was a different kind of show, but because I was different," DeGeneres said of the pushback from TV stations.

When the syndicated show went on the air, she was prevented from saying the word "gay" or even the pronoun "we," DeGeneres said, since the latter would imply she had a partner. She didn't specify who imposed the ban.

"Sure couldn't say wife, and that's because it wasn't legal for gay people to get married — and now I say 'wife' all the time," DeGeneres added, with a touch of defiance, as actor Portia de Rossi watched from the studio audience. They wed in 2008.

The host, who became known for encouraging her audience to join her in impromptu dances, shared some last moves with her sidekick and DJ, Stephen "tWitch" Boss, to the tune "Best of My Love."

The dancer-choreographer saluted DeGeneres as someone who inspires others because she has "the courage to step out and be your authentic self."

Aniston, who as the first guest on the show's first episode gave DeGeneres a "Welcome" doormat, arrived with another that read, "Thanks for the memories." DeGeneres noted the "Friends" star has been on the show a total of 20 times.

"You're welcome," Aniston said, teasingly, then turned serious.

"I love you, and I so appreciate you and what you have given to the world over the last 19 years. The contribution is endless," she said. She introduced a career retrospective video that also touted DeGeneres'

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philanthropic efforts, said to include more than \$400 million in donations to charities and “deserving viewers.”

“I love you,” a beaming Eilish told DeGeneres during their chat. “I love you so much, it’s dumb,” said Pink, who performed “What About Us.”

DeGeneres’ daytime reign hit a serious bump in 2020, when the show was alleged to be a toxic workplace and three producers exited amid the claims. On the air that fall, DeGeneres apologized for “things that shouldn’t have happened,” but defended herself as being the same genuine person — if an imperfect one — on- and off-camera.

The talk show represented a second major TV act for DeGeneres. In 1997, she made an indelible mark when she came out as lesbian and brought her character on the ABC sitcom “Ellen” with her. The series was axed the next year.

“Twenty-five years ago, they canceled my sitcom because they didn’t want a lesbian to be in prime-time once a week. And I said, ‘OK, then I’ll be on daytime every day,’” DeGeneres said Thursday.

The comedian, actor and producer has said she’ll take time to consider her next career move, but first she and de Rossi are making a trip to Rwanda. DeGeneres wrapped her daytime show with a plea to her audience, one she said was worth repeating.

“If I’ve done anything in the past 19 years, I hope I’ve inspired you to be yourself, your true authentic self. And if someone is brave enough to tell you who they are, be brave enough to support them, even if you don’t understand,” DeGeneres said. “By opening your heart and your mind you’re going to be that much more compassionate, and compassion is what makes the world a better place.”

## Worry about stagflation, a flashback to ‘70s, begins to grow

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Stagflation. It was the dreaded “S word” of the 1970s.

For Americans of a certain age, it conjures memories of painfully long lines at gas stations, shuttered factories and President Gerald Ford’s much-ridiculed “Whip Inflation Now” buttons.

Stagflation is the bitterest of economic pills: High inflation mixes with a weak job market to cause a toxic brew that punishes consumers and befuddles economists.

For decades, most economists didn’t think such a nasty concoction was even possible. They’d long assumed that inflation would run high only when the economy was strong and unemployment low.

But an unhappy confluence of events has economists reaching back to the days of disco and the bleak high-inflation, high-unemployment economy of nearly a half century ago. Few think stagflation is in sight. But as a longer-term threat, it can no longer be dismissed.

Last week, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen invoked the word in remarks to reporters:

“The economic outlook globally,” Yellen said, “is challenging and uncertain, and higher food and energy prices are having stagflationary effects, namely depressing output and spending and raising inflation all around the world.”

On Thursday, the government estimated that the economy shrank at a 1.5% annual rate from January through March. But the drop was due mostly to two factors that don’t reflect the economy’s underlying strength: A rising trade gap caused by Americans’ appetite for foreign products and a slowdown in the restocking of businesses inventories after a big holiday season buildup.

For now, economists broadly agree that the U.S. economy has enough oomph to avoid a recession. But the problems are piling up. Supply chain bottlenecks and disruptions from Russia’s war against Ukraine have sent consumer prices surging at their fastest pace in decades.

The Federal Reserve and other central banks, blindsided by raging inflation, are scrambling to catch up by aggressively raising interest rates. They hope to cool growth enough to tame inflation without causing a recession.

It’s a notoriously difficult task. The widespread fear, reflected in shrunken stock prices, is that the Fed will end up botching it and will clobber the economy without delivering a knockout blow to inflation.

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This month, former Fed Chair Ben Bernanke told The New York Times that "inflation's still too high but coming down. So there should be a period in the next year or two where growth is low, unemployment is at least up a little bit and inflation is still high."

And then Bernanke summed up his thoughts: "You could call that stagflation."

## WHAT IS STAGFLATION?

There's no formal definition or specific statistical threshold.

Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics, has his own rough guide: Stagflation arrives in the United States, he says, when the unemployment rate reaches at least 5% and consumer prices have surged 5% or more from a year earlier. The U.S. unemployment rate is now just 3.6%.

In the European Union, where joblessness typically runs higher, Zandi's threshold is different: 9% unemployment and 4% year-over-year inflation, in his view, would combine to cause stagflation.

Until about 50 years ago, economists viewed stagflation as a near-impossibility. They hewed to something called the Phillips Curve, named for its creator, economist A.W.H. "Bill" Phillips (1914-1975) of New Zealand. This theory held that inflation and unemployment move in opposite directions.

It sounds like common sense: When the economy is weak and lots of people are out of work, businesses find it hard to raise prices. So inflation should stay low. Likewise, when the economy is hot enough for businesses to pass along big price hikes to their customers, unemployment should stay fairly low.

Somehow, reality hasn't proved so straightforward. What can throw things off is a supply shock — say, a surge in the cost of raw materials that ignites inflation and leaves consumers with less money to spend to fuel the economy.

Which is exactly what happened in the 1970s.

Saudi Arabia and other oil-producing countries imposed an oil embargo on the United States and other countries that supported Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Oil prices jumped and stayed high. The cost of living grew more unaffordable for many. The economy reeled.

Enter stagflation. Each year from 1974 through 1982, inflation and unemployment in the United States both topped 5%. The combination of the two figures, which came to be called the "misery index," peaked at a most miserable 20.6 in 1980.

Stagflation, and especially chronically high inflation, became a defining feature of the 1970s. Political figures struggled in vain to attack the problem. President Richard Nixon resorted, futilely, to wage and price controls. The Ford administration issued "Whip Inflation Now" buttons. The reaction was mainly scorn.

## HAS STAGFLATION ARRIVED?

No. For now, the stagflation glass is only half-full.

There's "flation" for sure: Consumer prices shot up 8.3% in April from a year earlier, just below a 41-year high set the previous month.

Consumer prices are surging largely because the economy rebounded with unexpected vigor from the brief but devastating pandemic recession. Factories, ports and freight yards have been overwhelmed trying to keep up with an unexpected jump in customer orders. The result has been delays, shortages and higher prices.

Critics also blame President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion stimulus plan of March 2021 for overheating an economy that was already hot. The Ukraine war made things worse by disrupting trade in energy and food and sending prices up.

But the "stag" has yet to arrive: Even though the government reported Thursday that economic output shrank from January through March, the nation's job market has kept roaring.

Every month for the past year, employers have added a robust 400,000-plus jobs. At 3.6%, the unemployment rate is just a notch above 50-year lows. This week, the Fed reported that Americans are in solid financial health: Nearly eight in 10 adults said last fall that they were "doing okay or living comfortably" — the highest proportion since the Fed started asking the question in 2013.

Still, the risks are accumulating. And so are concerns about potential stagflation. Fed Chair Jerome Powell acknowledged this month that the central bank might not be able to achieve a soft landing and dodge

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a recession. He told American Public Media's "Marketplace" that he worries about "factors that we don't control" — the Ukraine war, a slowdown in China, the lingering pandemic.

At the same time, inflation has been eroding Americans' purchasing power: Prices have risen faster than hourly pay for 13 straight months. And the nation's savings rate, which soared in 2020 and 2021 as Americans banked government relief checks, has fallen below pre-pandemic levels.

Europe is even more vulnerable to stagflation. Energy prices there have skyrocketed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Unemployment in the 27 EU countries is already 6.2%.

**WHY DID STAGFLATION VANISH FOR SO LONG?**

For four decades, the United States virtually banished inflation. In the early 1980s, Fed Chair Paul Volcker had jacked up interest rates so high to fight inflation — 30-year mortgage rates approached a dizzying 19% in 1981 — that he caused back-to-back recessions in 1980 and 1981-82. Yet Volcker achieved his goal: He managed to rid the economy of high inflation. And it stayed away.

"The Fed has worked hard since the stagflation of the late 1970s and early 1980s," Zandi said, "to keep inflation and inflation expectations closer to its target," which is now around 2%.

Other factors, including the rise of low-cost manufacturing in China and other developing countries, kept a tight lid on prices that consumers and businesses pay.

The United States has endured periods of high unemployment — it reached 10% after the 2007-2009 Great Recession and 14.7% after COVID-19 erupted of 2020. Yet until last year, inflation had remained at bay. In fact, not since 1990 has the nation faced a year of Zandi's 5%-inflation, 5%-unemployment stagflation standard.

AP Writer Fatima Hussein in Washington contributed to this report.

## 'No future for babies:' 842 US-bound Haitians end up in Cuba

By MILEXSY DURÁN and ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ Associated Press

VILLA CLARA, Cuba (AP) — Some of the more than 840 Haitians who tried to reach the United States in a boat but ended up in Cuba said Thursday that they fled violence in their country and were charged thousands of dollars by smugglers who ushered them onto a dilapidated boat and later abandoned them at sea.

It is the largest single arrival of people from Haiti on the Cuban coast amid an increasing exodus caused by gang violence and other problems there.

"They deceived us. In my case (a trafficker) told me that the boat was going to have 200 or 300 people, and on a big boat it is normal. But when you're on board, you don't know how many people are going to appear," said Maximaud Cherizard, a 34-year-old engineer who traveled with a 7-year-old son, his wife and his sister.

"We were ashamed when we arrived" in Cuba, Cherizard said. The boat was so packed that some people were on the vessel's roof, he said.

The 842 people were rescued Tuesday by the Cuban coast guard and other government services in the vicinity of Caibarien in Villa Clara province, about 300 kilometers (185 miles) east of the capital, Havana. They were taken to a temporary center in a former summer camp and were in isolation as a health precaution.

According to the account of at least three migrants with whom the AP spoke, the group left Tortuga Island in northern Haiti after waiting there for almost two months for the trip. News of the supposed opportunity to go to Florida had spread spread by word of mouth and some people said they paid \$4,000 each for a spot on the boat.

They were taken in a small boat to the larger one early Saturday morning and their phones were taken away by smugglers, who alleged the signal would make them detectable by the U.S. Coast Guard, according to the migrants.

Cherizard said he had been shown a picture of a cruise liner that was going to take the migrants, a promise that he realized was false when he saw the dilapidated boat. He and other migrants said they did not see a name on the vessel.

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Cherizard said he and his family were placed in a cabin with others with little access to the rest of the vessel. When the captain abandoned ship at sea early Tuesday morning, they learned that some migrants had tried to take control of the boat in an attempt to reach their destination.

Another migrant, 19-year-old Joyce Paul, said the captain had left in a smaller vessel and the one the migrants were on began to lean. The Haitians signaled with flashlights towards the Cuban coast to be rescued.

In the days at sea, 15 people threw themselves into the water as conditions grew more desperate, according to Paul.

There were 70 children, including infants, among the migrants, Cuban authorities reported.

"In Haiti, there is no future for babies," said Loverie Horat, the 30-year-old mother of a 24-day-old infant. She told The Associated Press that she and her husband boarded the boat after leaving Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital. Her comments in Creole were translated into Spanish by Cherizard.

Migrants said that insecurity and poverty in Haiti forced them to flee. Paul, the 19-year-old, said that gang members had killed his two sisters.

"You can't go out on the street" because of the violence, Cherizard said.

Due to sea currents and winds, some smugglers' vessels aiming to reach the United States end up on Cuban coasts. Not all arrivals are officially reported, although in recent months authorities in Havana have acknowledged an increase in arrivals. Migrants are usually returned to their home countries in accordance with binational agreements.

The Haitians arrived in Cuba at a time when the island itself is suffering from a severe economic crisis with food, medicine and fuel shortages and high emigration to the United States.

"Humanitarian aid has been a real challenge," said Andy Borges, a member of the Civil Protection office of the municipality of Corralillo, where the Haitian camp is based.

U.S. Coast Guard crews have intercepted some 4,500 Haitian migrants since October last year. Many tried to land on the Florida coast in overloaded boats. More than 3,000 of those migrants have been intercepted since mid-March, indicating the pace has quickened this spring.

"We don't want to go back to Haiti," said 30-year-old Leverie Horat one of the Haitian migrants who hoped to reach the United States but ended up in Cuba.

Rodríguez reported from Havana.

## More Memorial Day travel expected, despite high gas prices

By STEFANIE DAZIO, CHRISTOPHER WEBER and TERRY TANG Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — To drive, or not to drive? This Memorial Day weekend, with surging gas prices that are redefining pain at the pump, that is the question for many Americans as a new COVID-19 surge also spreads across the country.

For Marvin Harper, of Phoenix, his family's weekend travel plans are a double punch to the wallet. His college-age son and daughter each have a soccer tournament in Southern California and Colorado, respectively. He and his daughter will fly to Denver, rather than drive, because of the cost of fuel, while his wife and son will go to California in her SUV.

"My mother-in-law's going with my wife and son to split that cost because it's just too much on our household," said Harper, as he filled up the tank of his truck at a Phoenix QuikTrip. "We can't afford both of us to drive. That's the bottom line ... Gas prices are killing our household."

For some, that's exactly what's caused them to rethink their holiday plans, making them opt for a staycation in their backyard to limit the damage to their wallets.

Laura Dena and her sons would typically go to Southern California around Memorial Day weekend to escape Arizona's scorching heat. This year, because it takes at least \$100 to fill up her truck, they're staying home.

"It's really frustrating," said Dena while waiting in line in 90-degree heat for a pump at a Costco in Phoe-

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nix. "It's upsetting, but there's not much we can do. We have to pay the price."

The average gas price in the U.S. on Thursday was \$4.60 per gallon, according to AAA figures. In California, it topped \$6. The high price of oil — largely because many buyers are refusing to purchase Russian oil because of its invasion of Ukraine — is the main cause of the steep gasoline prices.

Americans aren't the only ones weighing their options as the summer travel season begins. Across the European Union's 27 countries, gasoline has risen 40% from a year ago, to the equivalent of \$8.40 a gallon.

Rising prices in the U.S. coincide with a COVID-19 surge that has led to case counts that are as high as they've been since mid-February, and those figures are likely a major undercount because of unreported positive home test results and asymptomatic infections.

Still, 2 1/2 years of pandemic life has many people hitting the road or taking to the skies, despite the surge. AAA estimates that 39.2 million people in the U.S. will travel 50 miles (80 kilometers) or more from home during the holiday weekend.

Those projections — which include travel by car, plane and other modes of transportation like trains or cruise ships — are up 8.3% from 2021 and would bring Memorial Day travel volumes close to 2017 levels. The estimates are still below pre-pandemic 2019 levels, a peak year for travel.

About 88% of those 39.2 million travelers — a record number — are expected to go by car over the long weekend even as gas prices remain high, according to AAA spokesperson Andrew Gross.

In California — despite being home to the nation's highest gas prices — the state's nonprofit tourism agency also predicts a busy summer for the Golden State, beginning this weekend.

Ryan Becker, Visit California's spokesperson, said his agency is seeing a lot of "pent-up demand" because of the pandemic: "I want to get out, I want to travel. I've had to put my anniversary trip on hold, I've had to put my 40th birthday trip on hold."

Outdoorsy, an online rental marketplace for RVs and camper vans, is noticing that its renters have changed their plans over the course of the pandemic. Early on, people would rent an RV to travel cross-country safely to visit family. Now, they're back to using the RVs as a cost-effective way for a vacation tethered to nature.

"I think everyone needs a vacation, I really do," Outdoorsy co-founder Jen Young said. "Have we ever lived through a more stressful, challenging — mentally and physically and spiritually — time in our lives?"

Others shrug off the stress of the added travel costs because it's out of their control. At a Chevron station in the Glassell Park neighborhood of Los Angeles, Ricardo Estrada tried to guess how much the \$6.49 a gallon price would run him in total for his Nissan work van.

"I'll go with between 60 and 70 bucks," the heating and air-conditioning technician speculated, eyeing the display as the price went up and up.

Estrada — just missing his guess when the pump registered \$71.61 for 11 gallons of regular grade — has been forced to raise his business fees for customers to overcome the gas prices. He'll be working over the holiday weekend but has a vacation planned in Arizona next month.

He's flying, but only because of convenience, not cost.

But with airline tickets prices up, too — AAA found that the average lowest airfare for this weekend is 6% higher than last year — that's not a sure bet, either.

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Tang reported from Phoenix. Associated Press video journalist Terry Chea in San Francisco contributed to this report.

## Lawsuit: California transit agency failed to stop gunman

By JULIET WILLIAMS Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — One year after a problem employee shot and killed nine coworkers in a rampage at a light rail yard, the family of one of the victims filed a lawsuit Thursday alleging negligence and wrongful death by the Northern California transportation agency, the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office and a private security firm by failing to address the gunman's history of violent threats or provide adequate security.

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Samuel James Cassidy, 57, shot the men one by one inside a rail yard at the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority after he arrived for work on May 26, 2021 with three 9 mm handguns and 32 high-capacity magazines. He fired a total of 39 bullets, killing nine workers before he turned the gun on himself as deputies closed in.

The agency later released more than 200 pages of emails and other documents that showed Cassidy was the subject of four investigations into his workplace conduct, and after one verbal altercation a colleague worried that Cassidy could "go postal."

The transit agency "knew, and had experienced, Cassidy's repeated pattern of insubordination. They were also aware of numerous verbal altercations Cassidy had with coworkers on at least four separate occasions, in which SCVTA failed to adequately investigate and/or discipline Cassidy for any of these separate incidents," said the lawsuit filed by the family of Lars Kepler Lane, who had worked at the VTA since 2001 and had three children.

After the shooting, coworkers described Cassidy as an outsider who did not talk to others or fit in. His ex-wife told The Associated Press that Cassidy used to come home from work resentful and angry over what he perceived as unfair assignments more than a decade ago and had even talked about killing people at work.

The lawsuit filed in Santa Clara County Circuit Court also names the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office and Universal Protection Service, both of which were contracted with the VTA to provide security at the facility.

Allied Universal, the parent company of Universal Protection Service, declined to comment Thursday. The VTA and sheriff's office did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Under California law, defendants can require that employees injured or killed on the job file a workers' compensation claim, but the lawsuit argues that the VTA shooting doesn't apply because of the employer's "intentional and outrageous misconduct."

Workers' compensation "doesn't include getting shot in a mass shooting. In this case the defendants had an obligation to provide security," said attorney Nicholas Rowley. "It wasn't just inadequate, they had no actual trained security officers or policies or procedures in place. This was preventable."

Rowley said as mass shootings continue to occur but officials make few changes to protect the public, "this is really the only way to make substantive change at this point."

Cassidy had stockpiled weapons and 25,000 rounds of ammunition at his house before setting it on fire to coincide with the bloodshed at the workplace.

## **Palestinians: Israel deliberately killed Al Jazeera reporter**

By IMAD ISSEID Associated Press

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP) — The Palestinian Authority on Thursday announced the results of its investigation into the shooting death of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, saying it had proven she was deliberately killed by Israeli forces as she tried to flee.

The conclusion echoed the results of a preliminary investigation announced nearly two weeks ago and were widely expected. Israel rejected the findings, with Defense Minister Benny Gantz calling them, "a blatant lie."

Abu Akleh, a veteran Palestinian-American reporter for Al Jazeera's Arabic service, was shot in the head on May 11 during an Israeli military raid in the city of Jenin in the occupied West Bank.

Witnesses and Palestinian officials have said she was hit by Israeli fire. Israel says she was shot during a battle between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian militants. It says that only a ballistic analysis of the bullet — which is held by the Palestinian Authority — and the soldiers' guns can determine who fired the fatal shot.

Announcing the results of his probe at a news conference in the West Bank city of Ramallah,, Palestinian Attorney General Akram Al Khateeb said he had determined there were no militants in the immediate area where Abu Akleh was located.

"The only shooting was by the occupation forces, with the aim of killing," he said.

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Abu Akleh was in a group of journalists wearing helmets and protective vests marked "press." Al Khateeb said the army saw the journalists and knew they were journalists.

He accused Israel of shooting Abu Akleh "directly and deliberately" as she tried to escape. He also repeated the Palestinian position that the bullet will not be handed over to the Israelis for study. He said they decided not even to show images of the bullet "to deprive (Israel) of a new lie."

Al Khateeb said his investigation was based on interviews with witnesses, an inspection of the scene and a forensic medical report.

In a speech later Thursday, Lt. Gen. Aviv Kohavi said it was impossible to know who fired the bullet and once again called on the Palestinians to cooperate to "get to the bottom" of what happened.

"But there is one thing that can be determined with certainty," the military chief said. "No soldier fired intentionally at a journalist. We investigated that. We checked it. That is the conclusion. There is no other."

Israel denies targeting journalists and has offered two possible scenarios, saying Abu Akleh was either shot by Palestinian militants who were firing recklessly at an Israeli army convoy or that she was hit by Israeli gunfire aimed at a nearby militant. The military has identified the rifle that may have been used in that scenario, but says it needs to test the bullet to make any final determination.

An AP reconstruction of events has lent support to eyewitnesses who say she was shot by Israeli troops. But a weapons expert interviewed by the AP as part of the reconstruction said that it was impossible to reach a conclusive finding without further forensic analysis.

Palestinian witnesses say there were no militants or clashes anywhere near Abu Akleh. The only known militants in the area were on the other side of the convoy, some 300 meters (yards) from her position. They did not have a direct line of sight, unlike the convoy itself, which was some 200 (meters) away on a long straight road.

Israel has publicly called for a joint investigation with the PA, with U.S. participation, and has asked the PA to hand over the bullet for testing. But the State Department said Wednesday that it had received no formal request for assistance from either side two weeks after her death.

The PA has refused to hand over the bullet to Israel or cooperate with it in any way, saying Israel cannot be trusted to investigate its own conduct. Rights groups say Israel has a poor record of investigating when security forces shoot Palestinians, with cases often languishing for months or years before being quietly closed.

The PA administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Hussein Al Sheikh, a top Palestinian official, said Thursday's report would be shared with the U.S. administration. Copies will also be delivered to Abu Akleh's family and to Al Jazeera, he said.

The Palestinians say they will also share their results with international parties, including the International Criminal Court, which launched an investigation into possible Israeli war crimes last year. Israel has rejected that probe as being biased against it and is not cooperating with it.

The severe distrust means the Israeli and Palestinian investigations into Abu Akleh's death are unfolding separately, with neither likely to accept any conclusions reached by the other.

Each side is in sole possession of potentially crucial evidence. Ballistic analysis could match the bullet to a specific firearm based on a microscopic signature, but only if investigators have access to both. Lt. Col. Amnon Shefler, a military spokesman, told the AP the military has additional footage from that day, but declined to say what it shows or when it would be released, citing the ongoing investigation.

Palestinians are still mourning Abu Akleh, a widely known and respected on-air correspondent who rose to fame two decades ago, during the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising, against Israeli rule. The 51-year-old documented the harsh realities of life under Israeli military rule — now well into its sixth decade with no end in sight — for viewers across the Arab world.

Jenin has long been a bastion of Palestinian militants, and several recent attacks inside Israel have been carried out by young men from in and around the town. Israel has continued to carry out near-daily raids in Jenin since Abu Akleh's death, which it says are aimed at preventing more.

Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 war and has built settlements where nearly 500,000 Israelis live alongside nearly 3 million Palestinians. The Palestinians want the territory to form the main part of

their future state, but peace talks broke down more than a decade ago, and Israel's dominant right-wing parties are opposed to Palestinian statehood.

The PA itself is seen by many Palestinians as a corrupt and authoritarian body that aids the occupation by coordinating with Israel on security matters. Any cooperation with Israel on the Abu Akleh investigation would likely spark a popular backlash among Palestinians, who view her as a martyr to both journalism and their national cause.

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Associated Press writer Joseph Krauss in Jerusalem contributed to this report.

## **For 'lockdown generation' school shootings are their reality**

By COLLIN BINKLEY, ANNIE MA and JOCELYN GECKER Associated Press

A day after the school massacre in Texas, Ohio teacher Renee Coley thought her sixth grade students would need time to process, so she opened class with a video about the news and started a discussion. Some students said they were sad. Some were dismayed the 19 slain children were so young.

After a few minutes, though, the conversation fizzled. Students were ready to move on with their day. To Coley, it was a grim reminder that the students had seen it all before, had grown accustomed to the ever-present threat of guns in school.

"They have no questions because these kids have grown up their entire lives and this has been the reality for them," said Coley, who teaches in Reynoldsburg, outside Columbus. "They've processed this so many times. ... It's just another news day for them."

The interaction highlights how students across America have grown up numb to the violence that has been playing out throughout their lives in schools and communities — and in much greater frequency since the pandemic.

The bloodbath at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas, Tuesday marked the deadliest school shooting in the U.S. since the 2012 massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut. Police say the shooter, an 18-year-old man, was killed by law enforcement at the school. Two teachers were also killed.

Although mass shootings of that magnitude are rare, researchers at the Naval Postgraduate School have recorded 504 cases of gun violence at elementary, middle and high schools since the start of 2020 — a number that eclipses the previous eight years combined.

The database includes a range of cases, including students brandishing guns or opening fire in classrooms, bathrooms, cafeterias or gyms. It counts students who have used guns to take their own lives at school. And it also tracks violence that doesn't involve students, including overnight shootings near school grounds.

An alarming number have involved teens who turned to violence to resolve spur-of-the-moment conflicts, said David Riedman, a criminologist who co-founded the database at the Naval Postgraduate School's Center for Homeland Defense and Security.

"The majority of those incidents are escalations of disputes," Riedman said. "There are more teenagers carrying concealed handguns in school who are getting into fights and shooting people. And that is not something that we were seeing before the pandemic."

Violence and other trauma have become common enough for schoolchildren that Chicago Public Schools developed a 15-page guide called "The Day After," to help teachers and staff coach students through processing painful events.

The proliferation of guns in homes, coupled with an overburdened mental health system that has left many students without the help they need, has fueled the increase in school gun violence, researchers say.

In fact, violent incidents involving guns have increased across all of America since the pandemic started — not just in schools.

"Gun violence is like a flood, and when your community is flooded, all your buildings take on water," said Dewey Cornell, a psychologist and director of the Virginia Youth Violence Project at the University of Virginia.

Schools are still among the safest places for children, Cornell emphasized, with most killings taking place in homes, public streets or other locales. But he also thinks mass shootings in schools will continue unless

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America addresses its longstanding shortage of school mental health workers.

"Some kids get helped, but a small number come away traumatized and scarred, angry and aggrieved," he said. For some of those, "at some crisis point in their life, they are going to commit some type of violent act toward themselves or others."

After every mass school shooting, Laurel Brooks, a high school graphic design and game-art teacher in Charlotte, North Carolina, tries to guide students through conversations and artwork that can help them express their thoughts. After the 2018 shooting in Parkland, Florida, that killed 14 students and three staff members, students worked on a graphic essay that described themselves as "the lockdown generation." The theme has resonated with subsequent classes.

"It is frightening that it is consistent," she said. "They have grown up with it. ... They are still children, and they shouldn't have to be resilient to this kind of trauma."

Los Angeles social studies teacher Nicolle Fefferman started her high school classes Wednesday with questions about how people were feeling after the Uvalde massacre — on the heels of the supermarket killings in Buffalo and the church attack in Orange County, California, the third major shooting she'd processed with them in two weeks.

"What I was hearing was a lot of frustration from the students I teach that this hasn't been fixed. And a lot of anger that we seem to be the only country that these things happen in. And students ask: 'Why?'" she said.

In one of her classes, students began listing all the times they've had to be in lockdowns. Then the students asked Fefferman what it was like when she was young. Her answer stunned them, she said.

"They said, 'You didn't do lockdown drills when you were growing up?'" they asked. "No, guys, this was not a part of my experience," she said she answered.

"This is the generation that has been engaged in these drills the way we used to do earthquake and fire drills," Fefferman said.

Mass shootings in schools have remained a grim presence in America, but their numbers have held relatively even in recent years. Since 2012, a total of 73 students have been killed in school shootings with at least four victims shot and two victims killed, according to research by James Alan Fox, a criminologist at Northeastern University who studies mass killings.

Last year there was one school shooting of that scale, a rampage at an Oxford, Michigan, high school that left four students dead. On Thursday, hundreds of Oxford High School students walked out and formed a 'U' on the football field to show support for students and families in Uvalde, Texas. A school spokeswoman said it was part of a national effort calling for changes in gun laws.

In 2020, with many school buildings closed as part of pandemic precautions, there were no school shootings of that magnitude.

"There really hasn't been an increase in large-scale shootings at schools. When you look at the risks, they are extremely low," he said. Fox described the increased gun violence during the pandemic as an "aberration," saying there's "no reason to think the numbers will continue to rise."

Still, other experts worry heightened school violence could continue. They say students are as stressed as ever after a traumatic two years, and schools lack the resources to help. They also point to factors such as the nation's increasingly divided political and cultural climate.

"There's a lot of forces converging here that are creating a stew of anger, grievance and easy access to firearms," said Daniel Webster, co-director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions.

"It's incredibly alarming," he added. "We should not think of this as normal, we should not think of this as acceptable, and we must act to protect children. We have failed as a society if we don't protect children to be able to come home safely from school."

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Associated Press reporter Kathleen Foody contributed from Chicago.

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## Trump loses appeal, must testify in New York civil probe

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump must answer questions under oath in the New York attorney general's civil investigation into his business practices, a state appeals court ruled Thursday, rejecting his argument that he be excused from testifying because his answers could be used in a parallel criminal probe.

A four-judge panel in the appellate division of the state's trial court upheld Judge Arthur Engoron's Feb. 17 ruling, which enforced subpoenas requiring that Trump and his two eldest children — Ivanka and Donald Jr. — give deposition testimony in Attorney General Letitia James' probe.

"The existence of a criminal investigation does not preclude civil discovery of related facts, at which a party may exercise the privilege against self-incrimination," the appellate panel wrote, citing the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and other legal protections for witnesses.

Lawyers for the Trumps agreed in March that they would sit for depositions within 14 days of an appellate panel decision upholding Engoron's ruling. They could also appeal the decision to the state's highest court, the Court of Appeals, delaying the matter and the Trumps' potential testimony indefinitely.

A message seeking comment was left with lawyers for the Trumps.

James lauded the ruling, which came just two weeks after the appellate panel heard oral arguments in the case. She tweeted that her investigation "will continue undeterred because no one is above the law."

"Once again, the courts have ruled that Donald Trump must comply with our lawful investigation into his financial dealings," James said in a written statement. "We will continue to follow the facts of this case and ensure that no one can evade the law."

James has said her investigation has uncovered evidence Trump's company, the Trump Organization, used "fraudulent or misleading" valuations of assets like golf courses and skyscrapers to get loans and tax benefits. Ivanka and Donald Trump Jr. have both been executives in the Trump Organization and are among their father's most trusted allies.

The appellate panel, in its ruling, described the investigation as focusing on whether the Trumps "committed persistent fraud in their financial practices and disclosures."

Trump, a Republican, denies the allegations and has said James' investigation in part of a politically motivated "witch hunt."

In appealing Engoron's subpoena ruling, his lawyers argued that James, a Democrat, was engaging in "selective prosecution." The appellate panel rejected that, saying the investigation was on solid legal footing and that the Trumps showed no evidence they or their company were "treated differently" than other companies under similar scrutiny.

A lawyer for the Trumps, Alan Futerfas, told the appellate panel in oral arguments on May 11 that James appeared to be using civil subpoenas to get around a New York law that requires immunity for people testifying before a criminal grand jury.

Judith Vale, arguing on behalf of James' office, countered there was ample evidence from the civil investigation to support subpoenas for the Trumps' testimony.

She also cited legal precedent allowing the attorney general's office to do so, and said the Trumps could always invoke their Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination — as Trump's son Eric did hundreds of times in a 2020 deposition.

Appellate Court Judge Rolando T. Acosta appeared to agree with that position, foreshadowing Thursday's ruling as he questioned Futerfas from the bench.

Anything Trump says in a civil deposition in James' investigation could be used against him in the criminal

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probe being overseen by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg.

Last summer, spurred by evidence uncovered by James' office, the DA's office charged the Trump Organization and its longtime finance chief, Allen Weisselberg, with tax fraud, alleging he collected more than \$1.7 million in off-the-books compensation. Weisselberg and the company have pleaded not guilty.

Thursday's appellate court ruling was the latest in a flurry of legal activity involving Trump and the attorney general's investigation in the last few weeks.

Last week, Trump paid \$110,000 in fines and met several other conditions as he seeks to end a contempt of court order Engoron issued on April 25 after he was slow to respond to another subpoena from James seeking documents and other evidence.

On Monday, James' office said it had subpoenaed Trump's longtime executive assistant, Rhona Graff, and planned to question her under oath next week in the probe.

Meanwhile, a federal judge in New York is expected to rule soon in a lawsuit Trump filed against James in December in an attempt to shut down her investigation. Trump's lawyers want an injunction to halt the probe. James' office is seeking to throw out the lawsuit.

At a May 13 hearing in the federal case, a lawyer for James' office said it was "nearing the end" of the probe and that "there's clearly been a substantial amount of evidence" to support a civil enforcement proceeding, although a final determination hasn't been made.

Since James' investigation is civil in nature, she could end up bringing a lawsuit and seeking financial penalties against Trump or his company, or even a ban on them being involved in certain types of businesses.

That's what happened in January when a judge barred ex-drug company CEO Martin Shkreli from the pharmaceutical industry for life.

Follow Michael Sisak on Twitter at [twitter.com/mikesisak](https://twitter.com/mikesisak) and send confidential tips by visiting <https://www.ap.org/tips/>

## 329 years later, last Salem 'witch' who wasn't is pardoned

By WILLIAM J. KOLE Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — It took more than three centuries, but the last Salem "witch" who wasn't has been officially pardoned.

Massachusetts lawmakers on Thursday formally exonerated Elizabeth Johnson Jr., clearing her name 329 years after she was convicted of witchcraft in 1693 and sentenced to death at the height of the Salem Witch Trials.

Johnson was never executed, but neither was she officially pardoned like others wrongly accused of witchcraft.

Lawmakers agreed to reconsider her case last year after a curious eighth-grade civics class at North Andover Middle School took up her cause and researched the legislative steps needed to clear her name.

Subsequent legislation introduced by state Sen. Diana DiZogio, a Democrat from Methuen, was tacked onto a budget bill and approved.

"We will never be able to change what happened to victims like Elizabeth but at the very least can set the record straight," DiZogio said.

In a statement, North Andover teacher Carrie LaPierre — whose students championed the legislation — praised the youngsters for taking on "the long-overlooked issue of justice for this wrongly convicted woman."

"Passing this legislation will be incredibly impactful on their understanding of how important it is to stand up for people who cannot advocate for themselves and how strong of a voice they actually have," she said.

Johnson is the last accused witch to be cleared, according to Witches of Massachusetts Bay, a group devoted to the history and lore of the 17th-century witch hunts.

"For 300 years, Elizabeth Johnson Jr. was without a voice, her story lost to the passages of time," said state Sen. Joan Lovely, of Salem,

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Twenty people from Salem and neighboring towns were killed and hundreds of others accused during a frenzy of Puritan injustice that began in 1692, stoked by superstition, fear of disease and strangers, scapegoating and petty jealousies. Nineteen were hanged, and one man was crushed to death by rocks.

Johnson was 22 when she was caught up in the hysteria of the witch trials and sentenced to hang. That never happened: Then-Gov. William Phips threw out her punishment as the magnitude of the gross miscarriages of justice in Salem sank in.

In the more than three centuries that have ensued, dozens of suspects officially were cleared, including Johnson's own mother, the daughter of a minister whose conviction eventually was reversed.

But for some reason, Johnson's name wasn't included in various legislative attempts to set the record straight. Because she wasn't among those whose convictions were formally set aside, hers still technically stood. Unlike others wrongfully accused, Johnson never had children and thus had no descendants to act on her behalf.

"Elizabeth's story and struggle continue to greatly resonate today," DiZoglio said. "While we've come a long way since the horrors of the witch trials, women today still all too often find their rights challenged and concerns dismissed."

## Texas shooting is new test for Biden's long battle over guns

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joe Biden, then the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, surveyed the collection of black, military-style rifles on display in the middle of the room as he denounced the sale of guns whose "only real function is to kill human beings at a ferocious pace."

That was nearly three decades ago, and Congress was on the verge of passing an assault weapons ban. But the law eventually expired, and guns that were once illegal are now readily available, most recently used in the slaughter at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas.

The tragedy, which came less than two weeks after another mass shooting at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York, has refocused Biden's presidency on one of the greatest political challenges of his career — the long fight for gun control.

Over the years, Biden has been intimately involved in the movement's most notable successes, such as the 1994 assault weapons ban, and its most troubling disappointments, including the failure to pass new legislation after the 2012 massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. Now his White House, which was already trying to chip away at gun violence through executive orders, is organizing calls with activists and experts to plot a path forward.

"He understands the history of the issue. He understands how the politics have shifted," said Christian Heyne, vice president of policy at Brady, the gun control advocacy organization. "He feels a sense of missed opportunities from the past, and he understands that this is his last chance to have an impact on gun violence in America."

Even for a politician known for his passion, Biden's reaction to the latest shooting in Texas has been searing.

"Where's the backbone, where's the courage to stand up to a very powerful lobby?" Biden said Wednesday as he called for Congress to pass new laws.

Stef Feldman, a deputy assistant to the president, said the cascade of deaths — from Buffalo to Uvalde to everyday shootings that don't generate nationwide headlines — only increases the urgency of the administration's efforts.

"Every story that we hear about individuals lost to gun violence provides more energy, more of a drive to continue the work," she said. "If we can save even one life by pushing a little harder on a creative policy idea, it's worth it."

But executive action — such as Biden's order targeting ghost guns, which are privately made firearms without serial numbers — might be the best the White House can do if Republicans in the Senate remain opposed to new restrictions and Democrats are unwilling to circumvent filibusters.

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More challenges could come in the courts, and even the ghost gun rules may become tied up in litigation. "We've got to be clear," said John Feinblatt, president of Everytown for Gun Safety. "This is the Senate's job. It's time for the Senate to actually step up and do something."

The first new try fell far short on Thursday. A measure to take up a domestic terrorism bill, which could have opened debate touching on guns, drew just 47 of the 60 votes needed to break a filibuster.

It's a far different situation than when Sen. Biden was working on gun legislation years ago. Fears about violent crime helped foster bipartisan compromises, and conservative rhetoric about gun ownership was less extreme.

First, Congress passed the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act in 1993, requiring a background check when someone buys a gun from a federally licensed dealer. The measure was named for James Brady, the White House press secretary who was shot and wounded when John Hinckley Jr. attempted to assassinate President Ronald Reagan in 1981.

Next, Congress approved the assault weapons ban as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act in 1994. The law outlawed specific guns, such as the AR-15, and restricted the type of military-style enhancements that firearms could have.

However, the ban contained a sunset provision and it was not renewed in 2004. Although the vast majority of shootings are committed with handguns, military-style semiautomatic rifles are staples of the country's deadliest massacres.

One of these weapons was used at Sandy Hook, where 26 people, including 20 children, were killed.

The violence shocked the nation, and President Barack Obama asked Biden, then the vice president, to lead a new push for gun control. Sens. Joe Manchin, D-W.V., and Pat Toomey, R-Pa., crafted legislation that would have expanded background checks.

In a speech less than three months after the shooting, Biden said "the excuse that it's too politically risky to act is no longer acceptable."

He recalled successfully pushing for the assault weapons ban years earlier even though the National Rifle Association warned that he was going to be "taking your shotgun away."

"That kind of stuff doesn't work anymore," Biden added.

But it did work, and the legislation failed in the U.S. Senate. Biden described the vote as a betrayal of families who lost children at Sandy Hook, saying "I don't know how anybody who looked them in the eye could have voted the way they did today."

Darrell A. H. Miller, a Duke University law professor who is an expert on the Second Amendment, said the political landscape had already changed.

"It's fair to say that the issue of guns has become even more polarized," he said. "And the intensity of gun rights opposition to any kind of gun regulation of any description has become more inflexible."

Two years ago, guns became the leading cause of death among children and teenagers, outpacing car crashes. There are roughly 400 million guns in the country, more than one for every person. Military-style weapons are a staple of some Republican campaign advertisements.

"The reality is, we're not keeping up with the pace of the gun lobby to arm citizens," said Fred Guttenberg, whose daughter was killed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, in 2018.

"It's time to start asking," Guttenberg said, "why are Republicans so diametrically opposed to doing whatever it takes to save lives?"

There have been some successes at the state level, including a recent proliferation of so-called red flag laws, which allow authorities to take guns away from those deemed mentally unstable.

But Adam Winkler, a law professor at the University of California in Los Angeles, said those victories haven't matched efforts to loosen restrictions. He noted that some states allow people to carry guns, even concealed, without permits.

"That's something that was pretty much unheard of when Joe Biden joined the Senate," he said.

When Biden launched his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination, he said he wanted to bring back the assault weapons ban "even stronger."

"And this time," he wrote in a New York Times op-ed in 2019, "we're going to pair it with a buyback program to get as many assault weapons off our streets as possible as quickly as possible."

But there has been no political path forward in the narrowly divided Senate, and Biden's major initial legislative efforts have been focused on coronavirus relief and infrastructure.

A few months after taking office, the president bristled when a reporter asked if he was failing to prioritize gun control.

"I've never not prioritized this," he said. "No one has worked harder to deal with the violence used by individuals using weapons than I have."

On Wednesday, Biden sounded like a president who was preparing one more push to target gun violence.

"I spent my career, as chairman of the Judiciary Committee and as vice president, working for commonsense gun reforms," he said.

"These actions we've taken before, they saved lives. And they can do it again."

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More on the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas: <https://apnews.com/hub/school-shootings>

## At Davos, climate activists say major issues ignored

By PETER PRENGAMAN Associated Press

DAVOS, Switzerland (AP) — At a small plaza in Davos, a picturesque Swiss town in the middle of the Alps, about 50 climate activists gathered on Thursday to bring attention to issues they said were largely ignored during this week's World Economic Forum meeting.

They said more attention needed to be on human suffering, particularly in developing countries experiencing severe weather events like heat waves and floods. They said there was no talk at all of reparations, often referred to as "loss and damage," for poor countries that have contributed little to global warming but are experiencing some of the worst effects. And finally, they said the calls for a transition to renewables were hollow, as they were not joined by talk of plans to phase out fossil fuels.

"Hey, hey! Ho, ho! Fossil fuels have to go!" some chanted at the gathering, about a 10-minute walk from the main convention center, where meetings between politicians, business leaders, scientists, academics, journalists and others took place Monday through Thursday.

The elite forum, the first in person since 2020, was held at a time that the world's top climate scientists have warned that greenhouse gases need to be sharply curbed this decade to keep temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times. Emissions like carbon dioxide warm the planet, which leads to destabilizing weather events and other problems.

Ilyess ElKortbi, a climate activist from Ukraine who fled to Germany after Russia invaded in late February, said before coming to Davos he thought that annual United Nations climate summits were the "worst places with empty words and empty promises." What he saw here was worse.

"People ignored the facts," he said. "People continued to speak as if nothing happened while children and families die every day in Ukraine and lose their future just as I lost my future."

ElKortbi, who said two of his friends had died in the war, argued that the invasion would not have happened had the European Union fully moved away from fossil fuels years ago, as many scientists and activists have long advocated. ElKortbi noted that much oil and gas that Europe uses comes from Russia, so buying that energy essentially helps fund the war.

The forum did include many discussions about climate change and the environment. Of the more than 270 panels, 90 of them, or about one third, were related to climate change, from biodiversity loss to technologies focused on removing carbon dioxide from the air. Those panels also included a handful that featured youth climate activists such as Cassidy Miligrak Kramer from Alaska, Helena Gualinga from Ecuador and Vanessa Nakate from Uganda.

Government officials, such as U.S. Special Envoy for Climate John Kerry and Denmark Environment Minister Lea Wermelin, spoke about the need to transition to green energies and hold companies to account when it came to their emissions. And there was an announcement of the expansion of a large public-

private partnership to buy green energies across supply chains of companies, all aimed at sending market signals to speed up innovation.

But for young activists, who often argue that younger generations will inherit climate change problems not confronted today, the problem wasn't the lack of discussion around climate change, but rather what things were not a focus. There was a lot of talk about economic growth, fears of a recession and even green technologies, but little about how to help people being hurt by climate change, they said.

"Many people here are disconnected from the reality," said Nakate, who spoke to the small group of demonstrators. "They are in a bubble. They are in their own world."

In many ways, Davos is indeed its own world. The town of about 10,000 people, in one of the world's most expensive nations, is a popular for skiing in the winter and for hiking and other outdoor activities in the summer. Boutique shops and hotels line a handful of central streets. Stunning views of the mountains, some with snowcaps even in May, can be taken in from just about anywhere.

Activists who can come, either with sponsorships or on their own, either stay in adjoining towns, where lodging is a little cheaper, or crash in sleeping bags and tents at an area called Arctic Base Camp. They and others, such as scientists, also participate in panels around town that are not part of the World Economic Forum program.

"Was it worth it?" said Gualinga, the Ecuadorean activist who focuses on oil companies operating in the Amazon, reflecting on the week. "I think it is essential" for activists to be here, she said.

"We're not going to be able to find the solutions that we need if the people that are affected by the climate change, by the fossil fuels industry, are not directly active in the decision making."

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Peter Prengaman is The Associated Press' global climate and environmental news director. Follow him here: [twitter.com/peterprengaman](https://twitter.com/peterprengaman)

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Associated Press climate and environmental coverage receives support from several private foundations. See more about AP's climate initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## **CEO pay rose 17% in 2021 as profits soared; workers trailed**

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Even when regular workers win their biggest raises in decades, they look minuscule compared with what CEOs are getting.

The typical compensation package for chief executives who run S&P 500 companies soared 17.1% last year, to a median \$14.5 million, according to data analyzed for The Associated Press by Equilar.

The gain towers over the 4.4% increase in wages and benefits netted by private-sector workers through 2021, which was the fastest on record going back to 2001. The raises for many rank-and-file workers also failed to keep up with inflation, which reached 7% at the end of last year.

CEO pay took off as stock prices and profits rebounded sharply as the economy roared out of its brief 2020 recession. Because much of a CEO's compensation is tied to such performance, their pay packages ballooned after years of mostly moderating growth.

In many of the most eye-popping packages, such as Expedia Group's, valued at \$296.2 million and JPMorgan Chase's \$84.4 million, boards gave particularly big grants of stock or stock options to recently appointed CEOs navigating their companies through the pandemic or to established leaders they wanted to convince to hang around.

The CEOs often can't cash in on such stock or options for years, or possibly ever, unless the company meets performance targets. But companies still must disclose estimates for how much they're worth. Only about a quarter of the typical pay package for all S&P 500 CEOs last year came as actual cash they could pocket.

Whatever its composition, the chasm in pay between CEOs and the rank-and-file workers they oversee keeps widening. At half the companies in this year's pay survey, it would take the worker at the middle

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of the company's pay scale at least 186 years to make what their CEO did last year. That's up from 166 a year earlier.

At Walmart, for example, the company said its median associate made \$25,335 in compensation last year. That means half its workers made more, and half made less.

That's up 21% from \$20,942 a year earlier and came as the company's average hourly wage for U.S. associates rose from \$14.50 in January 2021 to more than \$17 currently. That increase was bigger than the raise CEO Doug McMillon got, on a percentage basis. But his 13.7% raise netted him a total package valued at \$25.7 million.

Anger is growing over such an imbalance. Surveys suggest Americans across political parties see CEO pay as too high, and some investors are pushing back.

Workers are trying to organize unions across the country, and the "Great Resignation" has emboldened millions to quit to find better jobs elsewhere. The U.S. government counted more than 4 million quits during April 2021 alone, the first time that happened. The monthly number has since topped 4.5 million twice.

"That is going to add a huge cost to corporate bottom lines, to have these kind of turnover rates," said Sarah Anderson, director of the global economy project at the progressive Institute for Policy Studies.

"They should be thinking about what kind of message they're sending to those people, about whether they're really valued in their jobs," Anderson said. "When the guy in the corner office is making several hundred if not thousands of times more, that's sending a really demoralizing message."

Gains for CEO pay had been slowing in recent years, with the median rise easing from 8.5% in 2017 to 4.1% in 2019. It ticked back up to 5% in 2020, which was a complicated year because the pandemic shut down the economy and profits at many companies tanked.

For 2020, many companies rejiggered the intricate formulas they created to determine their CEOs' pay. The tweaks made up for losses caused by the pandemic, something many boards said was an extraordinary event outside the CEO's control.

Then came 2021. Thanks to a reopened economy, super-low interest rates from the Federal Reserve and other factors, stock prices soared and the S&P 500 jumped nearly 27%, setting records through the year. Earnings per share soared roughly 50%.

Throughout the year, CEOs had to navigate snarled supply chains and shortages of chips and other key materials that impacted businesses across industries, said Dan Laddin, a partner at Compensation Advisory Partners, a consulting firm that works with boards.

"All this led to a desire to really reward" executives, said Kelly Malafis, also a partner at Compensation Advisory Partners, "because the financial performance was there, and the view was that management teams were exceptional in navigating the situation and delivering results."

Last year's 17.1% leap for median pay of S&P 500 CEOs was the biggest since a 23.9% surge for 2010 compensation packages, according to the data analyzed by Equilar.

Consider Marry Barra, CEO of General Motors. Her industry was particularly hard hit by the shortage of computer chips, which snarled auto production.

Even so, GM's board highlighted how the company still delivered record earnings before interest, taxes and some other items. The automaker also accelerated development of its electric vehicles. Those are two of the factors that influence Barra's pay, and her compensation climbed 25.4% to \$29.1 million.

"I would hope that the corporation making record profits would recognize that the workers doing the work are the ones generating the revenue," said Dave Green, a hot metal driver at a GM facility in Bedford, Indiana. "We're just trying to get by."

He cited in particular temporary workers making roughly \$16 hourly, who have to work years before coming on as full-time employees and don't get many opportunities for days off in the meantime.

"The new people coming in, their kids are not going to be able to have the opportunities my kids had," said Green, who has two daughters and started at GM as a summer helper in 1989.

Closer to the top of the rankings for CEO pay last year was JPMorgan Chase's Jamie Dimon, whose compensation package valued at \$84.4 million was the fifth-highest in the AP survey. That was up 166.7% from a year earlier, and most of it came from an award of stock options valued at \$52.6 million.

The board said it provided the options because of its desire for Dimon, who is 66, to keep leading the company for significantly more years and a "unique inflection point in Mr. Dimon's tenure." It also said the options weren't a part of his regular annual compensation and that he must wait at least five years to begin exercising them.

Even so, only 31% of investors at JPMorgan Chase's annual meeting of shareholders recently gave a thumbs up on Dimon's pay package. The vote is only advisory, though, and doesn't force the company to make changes.

Last year, a median of 92.6% of shareholders approved what's called their "Say On Pay" vote in the AP's survey. That was down just a bit from 93.4% the year before.

The AP's and Equilar's compensation study included pay data for 340 CEOs at S&P 500 companies who have served at least two fiscal years at their companies, which filed proxy statements between Jan. 1 and April 30. Some high-profile CEOs are not included because they don't fit the criteria, such as Amazon's Andy Jassy and Twitter's Parag Agrawal. The survey does not count changes in the value of CEOs' pension benefits and some other items in its totals for compensation.

AP Business Writers Matt Ott, Tom Krisher, Anne D'Innocenzio, Michael Liedtke and Ken Sweet contributed.

## **Dominant coronavirus mutant contains ghost of pandemic past**

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

The coronavirus mutant that is now dominant in the United States is a member of the omicron family but scientists say it spreads faster than its omicron predecessors, is adept at escaping immunity and might possibly cause more serious disease.

Why? Because it combines properties of both omicron and delta, the nation's dominant variant in the middle of last year.

A genetic trait that harkens back to the pandemic's past, known as a "delta mutation," appears to allow the virus "to escape pre-existing immunity from vaccination and prior infection, especially if you were infected in the omicron wave," said Dr. Wesley Long, a pathologist at Houston Methodist in Texas. That's because the original omicron strain that swept the world didn't have the mutation.

The omicron "subvariant" gaining ground in the U.S. — known as BA.2.12.1 and responsible for 58% of U.S. COVID-19 cases last week — isn't the only one affected by the delta mutation. The genetic change is also present in the omicron relatives that together dominate in South Africa, known as BA.4 and BA.5. Those have exactly the same mutation as delta, while BA.2.12.1 has one that's nearly identical.

This genetic change is bad news for people who caught the original omicron and thought that made them unlikely to get COVID-19 again soon. Although most people don't know for sure which variant caused their illness, the original omicron caused a giant wave of cases late last year and early this year.

Long said lab data suggests a prior infection with the original omicron is not very protective against reinfection with the new mutants, though the true risk of being reinfected no matter the variant is unique to every person and situation.

In a twist, however, those sickened by delta previously may have some extra armor to ward off the new mutants. A study released before it was reviewed by other scientists, by researchers at Ohio State University, found that COVID patients in intensive care with delta infections induced antibodies that were better at neutralizing the new mutants than patients who caught the original omicron.

"The omicron infection antibody does not appear to protect well against the subvariants compared to delta," said Dr. Shan-Lu Liu, a study author who co-directs the viruses and emerging pathogens program at Ohio State.

But Liu said the level of protection a delta infection provides depends partly on how long ago someone was ill. That's because immunity wanes over time.

People who got sick with delta shouldn't think of themselves as invulnerable to the new subvariants, especially if they're unvaccinated, Long said. "I wouldn't say anyone is safe."

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One bright spot? Booster shots can provide strong protection against the new mutants, Liu said. In general, vaccines and prior infection can protect people from the worst outcomes of COVID-19. At this point, scientists say, it's too early to know if the new mutant gaining ground in the U.S. will cause a significant uptick in new cases, hospitalizations and deaths.

Scientists are still trying to figure out how virulent these new mutants are. Long said he hasn't seen anything that answers that question for him, but Liu said emerging data points toward more serious illness. Liu said the subvariants have properties suggesting they spread more efficiently cell-to-cell.

The virus "just hides in the cell and spreads through cell-to-cell contact," Liu said. "That's more scary because the virus does not come out for the antibody to work."

Dr. Eric Topol, head of Scripps Research Translational Institute, said the new mutants certainly don't appear less virulent than previous versions of omicron, and whether they are more virulent or not "will become clear in the months ahead."

In the meantime, scientists expect the latest powerhouse mutants to spread quickly, since they are more transmissible than their predecessors.

Though home testing makes it tough to track all U.S. COVID cases, data from Johns Hopkins University shows that cases are averaging nearly 107,000 a day, up from about 87,000 two weeks ago. And new hospital admissions of patients with COVID-19 have been trending upwards since around mid-April, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"I'm hopeful that we don't see a similar increase in hospitalizations that we've had in prior waves," Long said. "But with COVID, any time you have lots of people being infected, it's just a numbers game. Some of those people are going to be severe. Some of those people are going to need hospitalization. Some of them, unfortunately, are going to pass away."

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The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## **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 Tuesday 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

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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 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."

Follow Jeff Amy on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/jeffamy>.

## Cancer patients seek damages from Fukushima nuclear plant

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — A Tokyo court began hearings Thursday in a lawsuit seeking nearly \$5 million in damages for six people who were children in Fukushima at the time of its 2011 nuclear power plant disaster and later developed thyroid cancer.

The plaintiffs are suing the operator of the nuclear plant, saying radiation released in the accident caused their illnesses.

It is the first group lawsuit filed by Fukushima residents over health problems allegedly linked to the

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disaster, their lawyers say.

One plaintiff, identified only as a woman in her 20s, testified from behind a screen that she had to give up plans to attend university because of repeated operations and treatments.

"Because of the treatments, I could not attend university, or continue my studies for my future job, or go to a concert. I had to give up everything," she said. "I want to regain my healthy body, but that's impossible no matter how hard I wish."

She and the five other plaintiffs are seeking a total of 616 million yen (\$4.9 million) in damages from Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings for allegedly causing their cancers.

On March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake and massive tsunami destroyed the Fukushima plant's cooling systems, causing three reactor cores to melt and release large amounts of radiation. Critics say the plant operator should have known that a large tsunami was possible at the site.

The plaintiffs, who were 6 to 16 years old at the time of the accident and lived in different parts of Fukushima, were diagnosed with thyroid cancer between 2012 and 2018, their lawyers said.

The plant operator told the court that they were not exposed to enough radiation to cause cancer, citing tests of 1,080 children from three cities around the plant that showed about 55% were not exposed and none received more than 50 millisieverts, the annual limit for nuclear workers.

An increase in thyroid cancer was found among children following the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Ukraine.

The Fukushima prefectural government tested 380,000 residents aged 18 or younger at the time of the accident for thyroid cancer. About 300 were diagnosed with cancer or suspected cancer.

That occurrence rate, about 77 per 100,000, is significantly higher than the usual 1-2 per million and can only be linked to radiation from the accident, the plaintiffs' lawyers said.

Prefectural officials and experts have said the high level of thyroid cancer found in Fukushima is due to an overdiagnosis, which might have led to unnecessary treatment.

Kenichi Ido, one of the lawyers, said none of the cases involve an overdiagnosis and that the plant operator should be held accountable for radiation exposure unless it can prove otherwise.

The plaintiff who testified Thursday said she walked from home to her high school five days after the tsunami, just as the reactors were undergoing meltdowns.

Three other plaintiffs who attended the hearing were also behind a partition to protect their privacy because of criticism on social media accusing them of fabricating their illnesses and hurting the image of Fukushima, the lawyers said.

Ido said many people with health problems feel intimidated to speak out in Fukushima and that he hopes the lawsuit will prove a correlation between radiation and the plaintiffs' cancers "so that we can have a society in which people can talk freely about their difficulties."

The government was slow in responding to the crisis, and evacuations in many places were delayed due to a lack of disclosure of what was happening at the nuclear plant. Residents who fled in their cars clogged roads and were stranded for hours outside while radiation spread from the damaged reactors. Some residents headed to evacuation centers in the direction of the radiation flow.

## US economy shrank by 1.5% in Q1 but consumers kept spending

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. economy shrank in the first three months of the year even though consumers and businesses kept spending at a solid pace, the government reported Thursday in a slight downgrade of its previous estimate for the January-March quarter.

Last quarter's drop in the U.S. gross domestic product — the broadest gauge of economic output — does not likely signal the start of a recession. The contraction was caused, in part, by a wider trade gap: The nation spent more on imports than other countries did on U.S. exports. The trade gap slashed first-quarter GDP by 3.2 percentage points.

And a slower restocking of goods in stores and warehouses, which had built up their inventories in the

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previous quarter for the 2021 holiday shopping season, knocked nearly 1.1 percentage points off the January-March GDP.

Analysts say the economy has likely resumed growing in the current April-June quarter.

The Commerce Department estimated that the economy contracted at a 1.5% annual pace from January through March, a slight downward revision from its first estimate of 1.4%, which it issued last month. It was the first drop in GDP since the second quarter of 2020 — in the depths of the COVID-19 recession — and followed a robust 6.9% expansion in the final three months of 2021.

The nation remains stuck in the painful grip of high inflation, which has caused particularly severe hardships for lower-income households, many of them people of color. Though many U.S. workers have been receiving sizable pay raises, their wages in most cases haven't kept pace with inflation. In April, consumer prices jumped 8.3% from a year earlier, just below the fastest such rise in four decades, set one month earlier.

High inflation is also posing a political threat to President Joe Biden and Democrats in Congress as mid-term elections draw near. A poll this month by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Research found that Biden's approval rating has reached the lowest point of his presidency — just 39% of adults approve of his performance — with inflation a frequently cited contributing factor.

Still, by most measures, the economy as a whole remains healthy, though likely weakening. Consumer spending — the heart of the economy — is still solid: It grew at a 3.1% annual pace from January through March. Business investment in equipment, software and other items that are intended to improve productivity rose at a healthy 6.8% annual rate last quarter.

And a strong job market is giving people the money and confidence to spend. Employers have added more than 400,000 jobs for 12 straight months, and the unemployment rate is near a half-century low. Businesses are advertising so many jobs that there are now roughly two openings, on average, for every unemployed American.

The economy is widely believed to have resumed its growth in the current quarter: In a survey released this month, 34 economists told the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia that they expect GDP to grow at a 2.3% annual pace from April through June and 2.5% for all of 2022. Still, their forecast marked a sharp drop from the 4.2% growth estimate for the current quarter in the Philadelphia Fed's previous survey in February.

Considerable uncertainties, though, are clouding the outlook for the U.S. and global economies. Russia's war against Ukraine has disrupted trade in energy, grains and other commodities and driven fuel and food prices dramatically higher. China's draconian COVID-19 crackdown has also slowed growth in the world's second-biggest economy and worsened global supply chain bottlenecks. The Federal Reserve has begun aggressively raising interest rates to fight the fastest inflation the United States has suffered since the early 1980s.

The Fed is banking on its ability to engineer a so-called soft landing: Raising borrowing rates enough to slow growth and cool inflation without causing a recession. Many economists, though, are skeptical that the central bank can pull it off. More than half the economists surveyed by the National Association for Business Economics foresee at least a 25% probability that the U.S. economy will sink into recession within a year.

"While we still expect the Fed to steer the economy toward a soft landing, downside risks to the economy and the probability of a recession are increasing," economists Lydia Boussour and Kathy Bostjancic of Oxford Economics cautioned Thursday in a research note.

"A more aggressive pace of Fed rate hikes, a tightening in financial conditions, the ongoing war in Ukraine and China's zero-Covid strategy increase the risk of a hard landing in 2023," they added.

In the meantime, higher borrowing rates appear to be slowing at least one crucial sector of the economy — the housing market. Last month, sales of both existing homes and new homes showed signs of faltering, worsened by sharply higher home prices and a shrunken supply of properties for sale.

## 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 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.

Hundreds packed into bleachers at the town's fairgrounds for a vigil Wednesday and the crowd swelled so big some stood around the speakers on the dirt arena. Some cried. Some closed their eyes tight, mouthing silent prayers. Parents wrapped their arms around their children, as the speakers lead prayers for healing.

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

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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 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."

Bleiberg reported from Dallas. Acacia Coronado, Eugene Garcia and Dario Lopez-Mills in Uvalde; Ben Fox, Michael Balsamo, Amanda Seitz and Eric Tucker in Washington; Paul J. Weber in Austin; Juan Lozano in Houston; Gene Johnson in Seattle; Stephen Groves in Sioux Falls, South Dakota; and Rhonda Shafner in New York contributed to this report.

More on the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas: <https://apnews.com/hub/school-shootings>

## US making COVID antiviral drug more available at test sites

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

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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."

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.

## Today in History: May 27, Queen Mary's maiden voyage

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, May 27, the 147th day of 2022. There are 218 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 27, 1935, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States*, unanimously struck down the National Industrial Recovery Act, a key component of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" legislative program.

On this date:

In 1861, Chief Justice Roger Taney, sitting as a federal circuit court judge in Baltimore, ruled that President Abraham Lincoln lacked the authority to suspend the writ of habeas corpus (Lincoln disregarded the ruling).

In 1896, 255 people were killed when a tornado struck St. Louis, Missouri, and East St. Louis, Illinois.

In 1936, the Cunard liner RMS Queen Mary left England on its maiden voyage to New York.

In 1937, the newly completed Golden Gate Bridge connecting San Francisco and Marin County, California, was opened to pedestrian traffic (vehicles began crossing the next day).

In 1941, the British Royal Navy sank the German battleship Bismarck off France with a loss of some 2,000 lives, three days after the Bismarck sank the HMS Hood with the loss of more than 1,400 lives. Amid rising world tensions, President Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed an "unlimited national emergency" during a radio address from the White House.

In 1942, Doris "Dorie" Miller, a cook aboard the USS West Virginia, became the first African-American to receive the Navy Cross for displaying "extraordinary courage and disregard for his own personal safety" during Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor.

In 1957, the single "That'll Be the Day" by Buddy Holly's group The Crickets was released by Brunswick

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Records.

In 1968, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *United States v. O'Brien*, upheld the conviction of David O'Brien for destroying his draft card outside a Boston courthouse, ruling that the act was not protected by freedom of speech.

In 1993, five people were killed in a bombing at the Uffizi museum of art in Florence, Italy; some three dozen paintings were ruined or damaged.

In 1994, Nobel Prize-winning author Alexander Solzhenitsyn returned to Russia to the emotional cheers of thousands after spending two decades in exile.

In 1998, Michael Fortier (FOR'-tee-ur), the government's star witness in the Oklahoma City bombing case, was sentenced to 12 years in prison after apologizing for not warning anyone about the deadly plot. (Fortier was freed in January 2006.)

In 2020 protests over the death of George Floyd in police custody rocked Minneapolis for a second night, with some people looting stores and setting fires. Protests spread to additional cities; hundreds of people blocked a Los Angeles freeway and shattered windows of California Highway Patrol cruisers. The U.S. surged past a milestone in the coronavirus pandemic, with the confirmed death toll topping 100,000.

Ten years ago: Syria strongly denied allegations that its forces had killed scores of people — including women and children — in Houla, but the U.N. Security Council condemned government forces for shelling residential areas. Dario Franchitti won the Indianapolis 500 for the third time. Johnny Tapia, the five-time boxing champion whose turbulent career was marked by cocaine addiction, alcohol, depression and run-ins with the law, was found dead at his Albuquerque, New Mexico, home; he was 45.

Five years ago: British Airways canceled all flights from London's Heathrow and Gatwick airports as a global IT failure upended the travel plans of tens of thousands of people on a busy U.K. holiday weekend. Music legend Gregg Allman, whose bluesy vocals and soulful touch on the Hammond B-3 organ helped propel The Allman Brothers Band to superstardom and spawn Southern rock, died at his home near Savannah, Georgia; he was 69.

One year ago: The Washington state attorney general charged two Tacoma police officers with murder and another with manslaughter in the death of Manuel Ellis, a Black man who died after repeatedly telling them he couldn't breathe as he was being restrained. (The officers have pleaded not guilty.) Former House Speaker Paul Ryan, in a speech at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in California, urged fellow conservatives to reject the divisive politics of former President Donald Trump as well as those Republican leaders who emulated him.

Today's Birthdays: Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger is 99. Author John Barth is 92. Actor Lee Meriwether is 87. Musician Ramsey Lewis is 87. Actor Louis Gossett Jr. is 86. Actor Bruce Weitz is 79. Former Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) is 78. Singer Bruce Cockburn (KOH'-burn) is 77. South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster is 75. Singer-actor Dee Dee Bridgewater is 72. Actor Richard Schiff is 67. Singer Siouxsie Sioux (The Creatures, Siouxsie and the Banshees) is 65. Rock singer-musician Neil Finn (The Finn Brothers) is 64. Actor Peri Gilpin is 61. Actor Cathy Silvers is 61. Comedian Adam Carolla is 58. Actor Todd Bridges is 57. Rock musician Sean Kinney (Alice In Chains) is 56. Actor Dondré Whitfield is 53. Actor Paul Bettany is 51. Rock singer-musician Brian Desveaux (Nine Days) is 51. Country singer Jace Everett is 50. Actor Jack McBrayer is 49. Rapper Andre 3000 (Outkast) is 47. Rapper Jadakiss is 47. TV chef Jamie Oliver is 47. Alt-country singer-songwriter Shane Nicholson is 46. Actor Ben Feldman is 42. Actor Michael Steger is 42. Actor Darin Brooks is 38. Actor-singer Chris Colfer is 32. Actor Ethan Dampf is 28. Actor Desiree Ross (TV: "Greenleaf") is 23. U.S. Olympic gold-medal-winning gymnast Jade Carey is 22.