

# Groton Daily Independent

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## **Saturday, May 28**

State Track Meet in Sioux Falls

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

## **Sunday, May 29**

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel: Worship with Communion, 9 a.m.

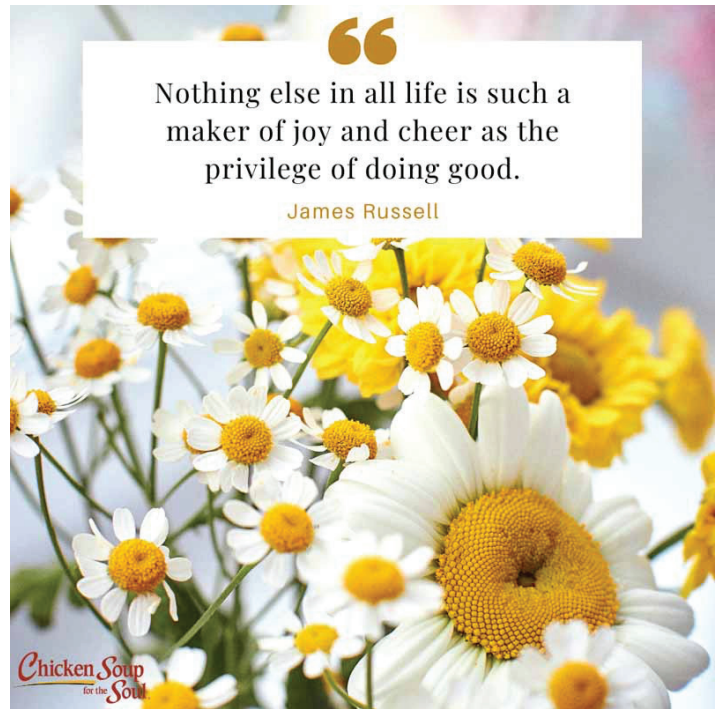
Methodist: Communion Sunday: Conde Worship at 9 a.m., Groton worship at 11 a.m.

St. John's: Bible Study, 8 a.m.; worship, 9 a.m.; Zion worship, 11 a.m.

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

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

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## **30 - MEMORIAL DAY**

Senior Menu: No Meal

Groton Post #39: Huffton at 7:30, James at 8:15, Verdon at 8:45, Bates-Scotland at 9:15, Ferney at 10:00, Andover at 11:00, Groton at Noon with lunch to follow at Legion.

## **Tuesday, May 31**

Elementary Library Open 9-11 (Reading time 10 a.m.)

9:30 a.m.: Methodist Bible Study

5:30 p.m.: Legion hosts Sisseton, 5:30 DH

5 p.m.: Jr. Teeners at Aberdeen, DH

5:30 p.m.: U12 at Britton, DH

6:30 p.m.: U10 hosts Watertown (W/B), 1 game, Nelson Field

5:30 p.m.: U8 hosts Watertown (B/W), 2 game, Nelson Field

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## Groton Lions Scholarship

**Students Left: Pierce Kettering, Travis Townsend, Megan Flihs  
Students Front: Allyssa Locke & Macine McGannon  
Lions Members Karyn Babcock on far left, and  
Topper Tastad and Mike Nehls on the far right.**



## Brenda Harms Memorial

**Left: Mike Harms, Seth Johnson, Jordan Bjerke and Sarah Harms**

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**Kenny Beck Memorial Scholarship**

**Madeline Flihs and Diann Morehouse**



**Wilfred N. Lucille A. Heinz  
Memorial Scholarship**

**Tom Heinz and Trista Keith**



**Class of 1969 Scholarship**

**Students: Travis Townsend, Megan Flihs and Madeline Flihs**

**Members of Class of 1969 are Tom Hienz and Tom Mahan on the left  
and Val Flihs and Jerry Schley on the right.**

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**Rob Luecke Memorial Scholarship  
Becky Hunter and Allyssa Locke**



**Kay & David Donovan  
Memorial Scholarship  
Richard Donovan and Trista Keith**



**Dacotah Grown Scholarship  
from Dacotah Bank  
Katelyn Nehlich and Allyssa Locke**



**Dennis K. & Shirley R. Larson Family  
Scholarships  
Hannah Gustafson, Trinity Smith and  
Christina Zoellner**

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**Richard 'Dick' Voss Memorial Scholarship  
Jesse and Julie Morehouse,  
Kansas Kroll and Allyssa Locke**



**Groton Chamber of Commerce Scholarship  
Students: Trista Keith & Megan Flihs  
Chamber Board Members Katelyn Nehlich and Kellie Locke on the left and  
April Abeln on the right.**

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**Columbia American Legion  
Auxiliary Scholarship  
Kennedy Anderson, Cara Dennert,  
Megan Flihs  
Not Pictured: Ryder Daly**



**Left: Trista Keith  
(Vickie Strom Memorial Scholarship)  
Right: Christina Zoellner  
(Renee McKiver Memorial Scholarship)**



**Faith Forever Scholarship  
Travis Townsend and Kody Lehr**

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## Cortland & Lois Kuehnert Scholarships

**Madeline Flihs Kuehnert science, math, or computer technology Scholarship**

**Kaden Kurtz Kuehnert athletic Scholarship**

**Allyssa Locke Kuehnert valedictorian Scholarship**

**Seth Johnson Kuehnert Top Student Scholarship**

**Travis Townsend Kuehnert Financial need Scholarship**

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## Groton FFA Scholarship

Adam Franken, Kansas Kroll, Michal Tabke, Christina Zoellner, Travis Townsend, Lane Krueger, Cassandra Schultz and Kennedy Anderson



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## Seniors on the move

Northern State Univ.  
Madisen Bjerke  
Kaden Kurtz  
Riley Leicht  
Trinity Smith

SouthEast Tech. College - SF  
Sarah Jacobs

SDSU - Brookings  
Kennedy Anderson  
Jackson Cogley  
Madeline Flihs  
Seth Johnson  
Trista Keith  
Jace Kroll  
Kansas Kroll  
Allyssa Locke  
Michal Tabke  
Travis Townsend  
Christina Zoellner

Univ. North Dakota  
Alyssa Thaler

Paul Mitchell School - Rapid City  
Julianna Kosel

Century Tech. College - Minneapolis  
Brooklyn Imrie

Black Hawk College - Glava, IL  
Lane Krueger

Continued Education  
Tatum Wright

Lake Area Technical College  
Jordan Bjerke  
Jace Craig  
Ryder Daly  
Andrea Davidson  
Kelsie Frost  
Hannah Gustafson  
Brayden Hansen  
Trey Johnson  
Kody Lehr  
Macine McGannon  
Cassandra Schultz

Dakota State University  
Jayden Zak  
Landon Kokales

NDSU - Fargo  
Megan Flihs  
Pierce Kettering  
Evin Nehls  
Emilie Thurston

Air Force - San Antonio, TX  
Rease Jandel

Marines - California  
Marcos Garcia

Employment  
River Pardick  
Spencer Sperry  
Wyatt Hearnen  
Favian Sanchez-Gonzalez

Presentation College  
Torrence Wiseman



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**Kiersten Sombke, MS/HS Principal, announced the special senior awards.**  
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



**School Board President Deborah Gengerke announced the staff recognition Award of Deb Winburn who has retired.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Groton Area Superintendent Joe Schwan gave the welcome to the 129th Annual Commencement.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Julianna Kosel did the student-led prayer.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Allyssa Locke and Kaden Kurtz were the senior speakers.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

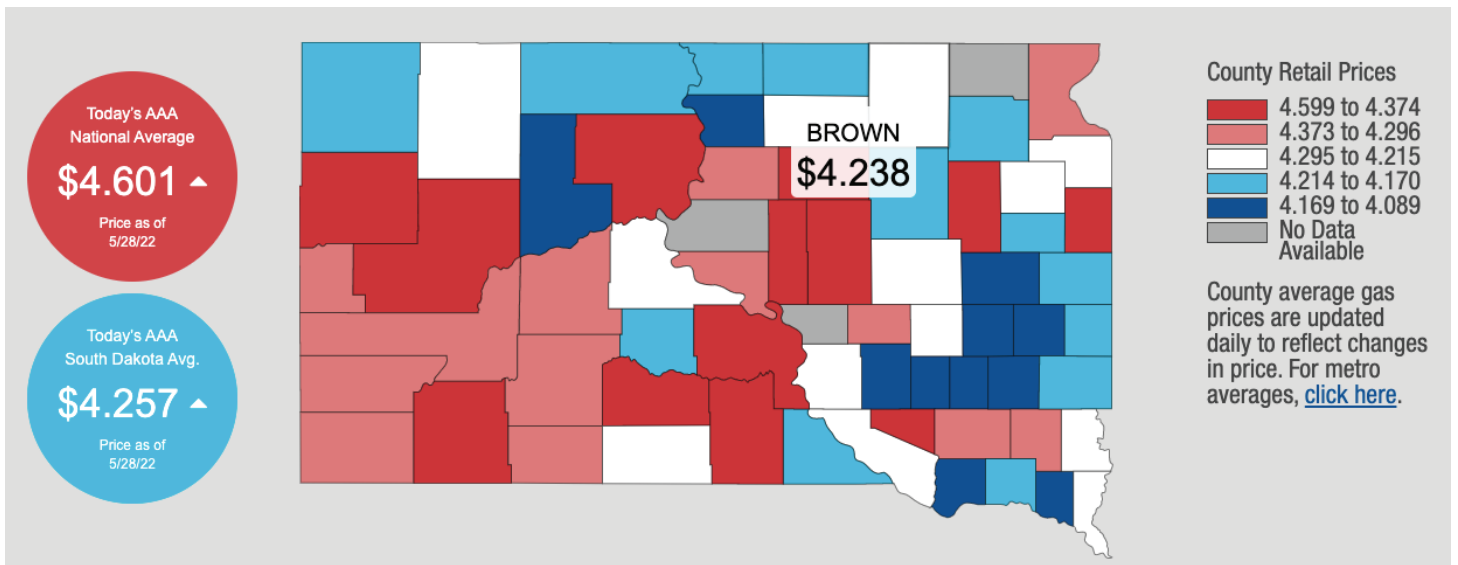
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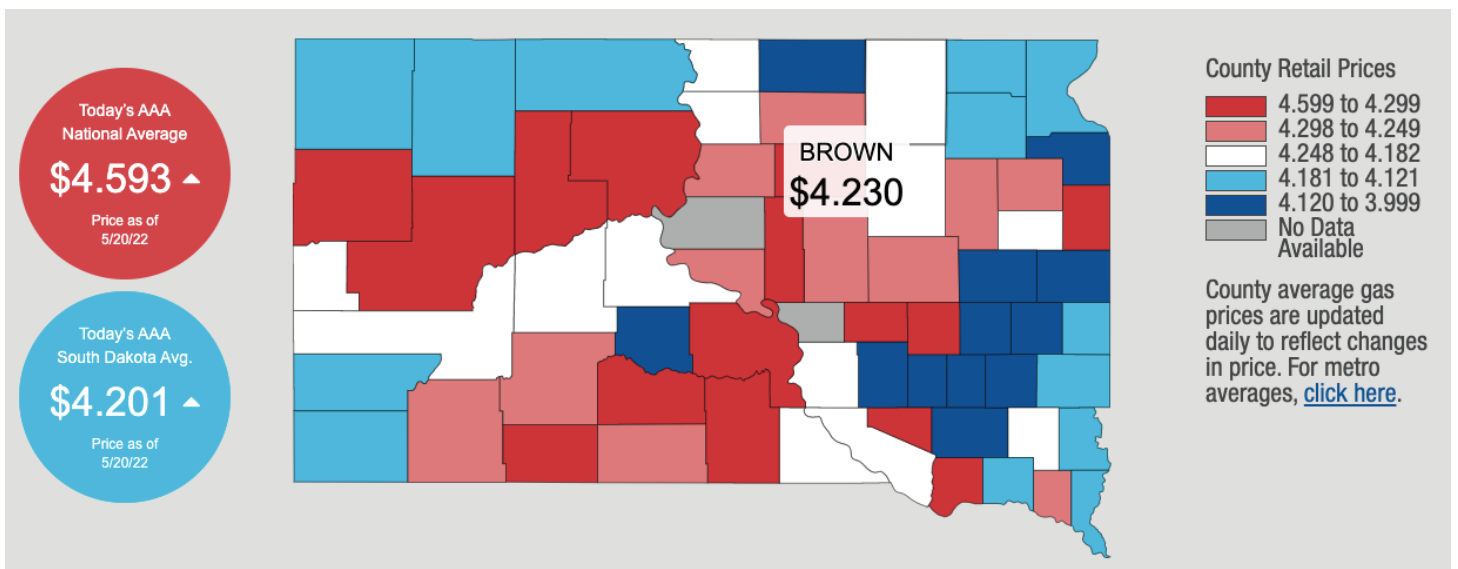
## South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$4.257	\$4.385	\$4.761	\$5.207
Yesterday Avg.	\$4.251	\$4.375	\$4.750	\$5.223
Week Ago Avg.	\$4.207	\$4.320	\$4.698	\$5.291
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.984	\$4.085	\$4.454	\$4.939
Year Ago Avg.	\$2.911	\$3.013	\$3.337	\$3.097

### This Week



### Last Week



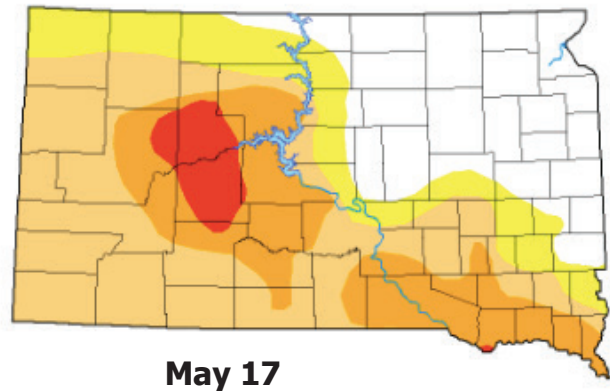
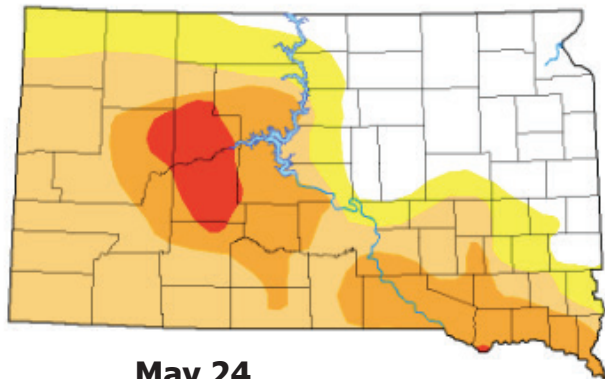
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## Drought Classification



## Drought Monitor

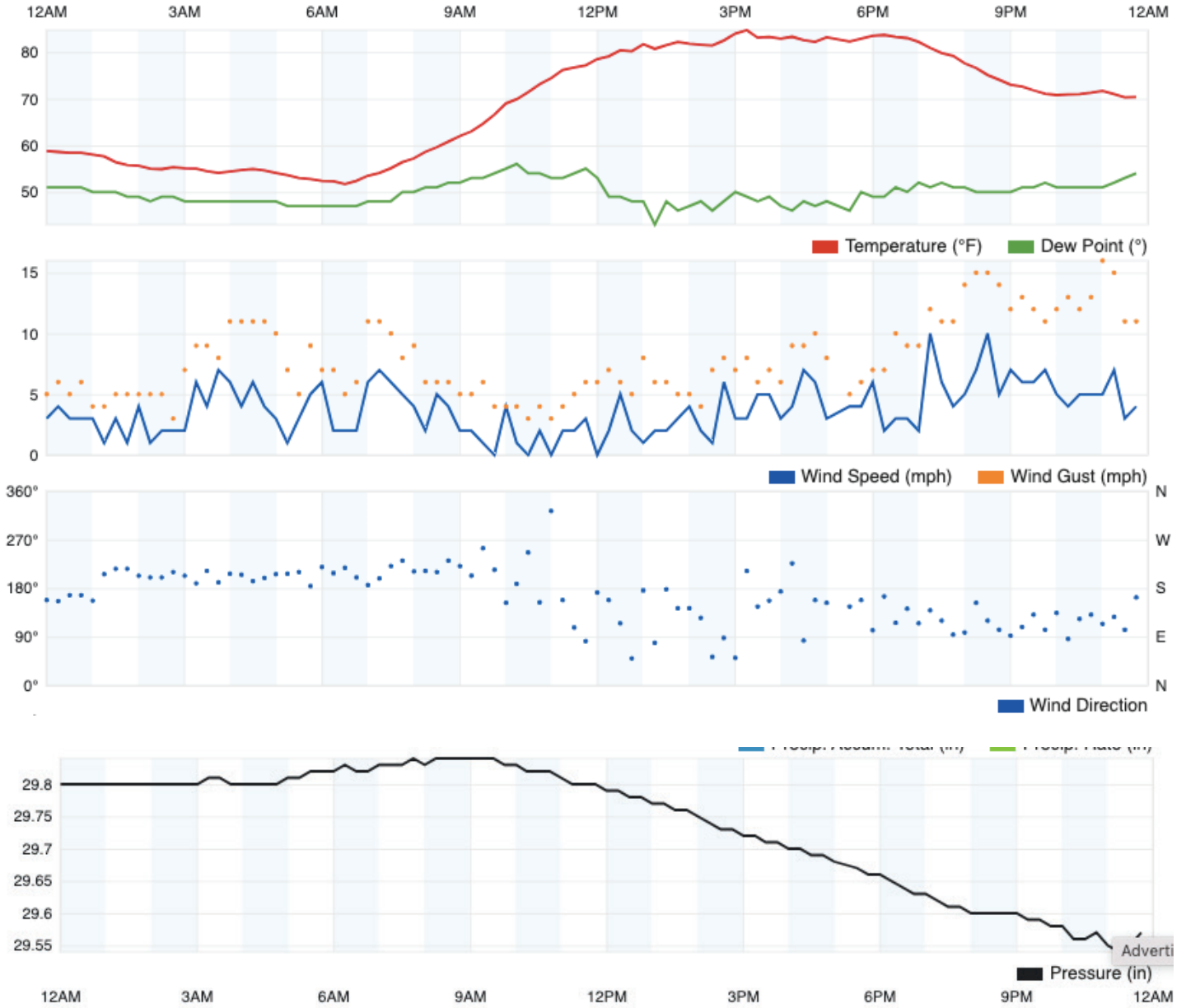


Two inches or more of precipitation fell across southern and eastern parts of Kansas, central Colorado, and northeast Nebraska, while half an inch or more was widespread across North Dakota. Parts of Nebraska, northeast Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, and eastern Montana received less than half an inch of precipitation. In Colorado, moderate to extreme drought contracted where it was wet, while severe and extreme drought expanded where it was dry. Abnormal dryness and moderate to extreme drought shrank in parts of Kansas. The rain ate a hole into severe drought in northeast Nebraska. Abnormal dryness and moderate drought were trimmed in western North Dakota. On the other hand, it was a dry week in western Wyoming with D3 expanding in Teton County.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Adverti

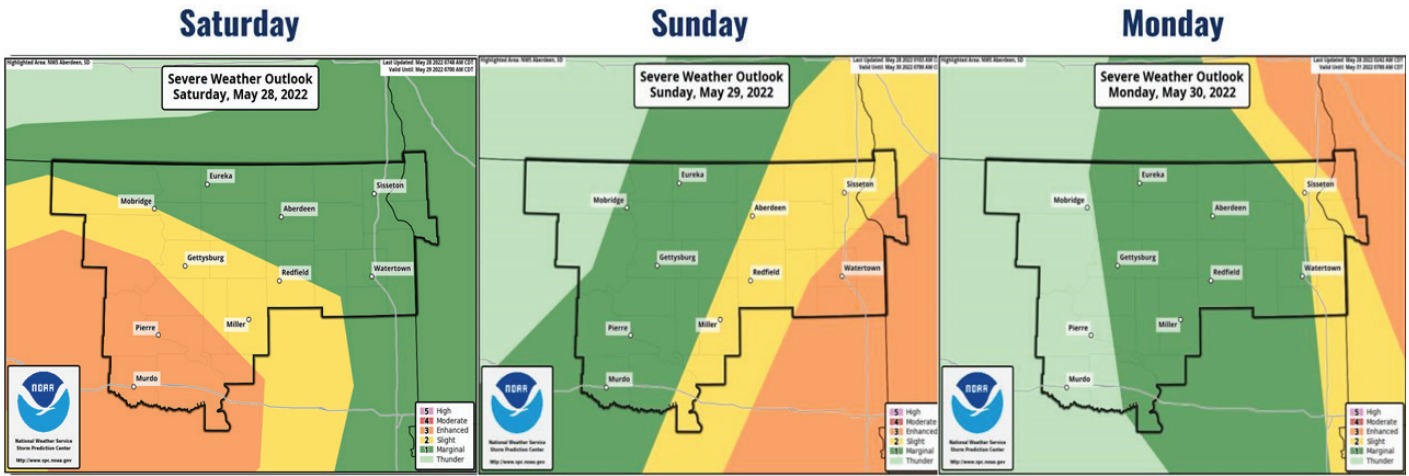
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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Memorial Day
				
Mostly Sunny	50% Chance T-storms	10% Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance T-storms	40% Chance T-storms	60% → 90% Showers Likely then Showers
High: 82 °F	Low: 60 °F	High: 80 °F	Low: 57 °F	High: 72 °F

## Holiday Weekend Severe Outlook May 28, 2022 4:23 AM

**Overview:** A series of disturbances will deliver multiple chances for severe weather through the upcoming long weekend.



The severe weather threat continues through the weekend. Plan outdoor activities with the weather in mind and have a plan if an alert is issued.

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## Today in Weather History

May 28, 1934: Watertown recorded a high temperature of 102 degrees, which is the earliest yearly date when Watertown reached 100 degrees.

May 28, 1965: Low temperatures were mostly for the mid to upper 20s across a broad area. The low temperatures set back some crops and caused light damage to others. Some low temperatures around the area include; 26 degrees in Andover; 27 in Ipswich; 28 in Britton, Leola and McLaughlin; and 29 in Clear Lake, Eureka, Gettysburg, and Pierre.

1880: An estimated F4 tornado hit Savoy, Texas. The storm killed 14 people, and 60 others were injured. It leveled the entire business and northeast residential sections. The tornado was described as "a funnel blazing with balls of fire."

1877 - A "terrific" two day long sandstorm (sand) blasted Yuma, AZ. (28th-29th) (The Weather Channel)

1942 - The latest snowstorm of record for the state of Iowa left ten inches at LeMars, eight inches at Cherokee, and 7.5 inches at Waukon. Afternoon highs were in the lower 30s in parts of northwestern Iowa. (The Weather Channel)

1947 - A storm produced heavy snow across Wisconsin, with ten inches reported at Gay Mills. The snow damaged fruit and other trees, and downed power lines. The storm was followed by the coldest weather of the month for much of the High Plains Region and Missouri Valley. Williston ND reported a low of 21 degrees the morning of the 28th, and the next morning Cheyenne WY reported a morning low of 16 above zero. (David Ludlum)

1973: An F3 tornado moved east and struck the northern portion of Athens, Georgia. Destruction was massive near Athens, with losses estimated at ten million dollars. Damage from the storm included 545 homes and 17 businesses. Hundreds of large trees more than 100 years old were destroyed.

1987 - Thunderstorms produced torrential rains in Oklahoma and northern Texas. Lake Altus, OK, was deluged with nine inches of rain. Up to eight inches drenched northern Texas, and baseball size hail was reported north of Seminole and at Knickerbocker. Ten to 13 inch rains soaked central Oklahoma the last five days of May resulting in an estimated 65 million dollars damage, and forcing several thousand persons to evacuate their homes, many by boat or helicopter. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A sharp cold front began to usher cold, wet and windy weather into the western U.S. Thunderstorms in the Great Plains Region produced wind gusts to 80 mph near Brookings, SD. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Unseasonably hot weather continued in Florida. Five cities reported record high temperatures for the date. The record high of 98 degrees at Lakeland, FL, was their fifth in a row. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in Florida late in the day, with golf ball size hail reported at Kissimmee. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Two to five inches of rain over southeastern Ohio on the 28th and 29th capped an exceptionally wet month of May, and triggered widespread flooding. Flooding which resulted claimed three lives, and caused millions of dollars damage. Numerous roads in southeast Ohio were flooded and impassable, and many other roads were blocked by landslides. (Storm Data)

2015: Some parts of Oklahoma have seen more than a foot of rain during May 2015. Storms killed at least 17 people in Texas and Oklahoma, and more than a dozen are still missing. State climatologist Gary McManus from the Oklahoma Climatological Survey calculated the May rainfall total averaged over all Sooner State reporting stations through midday May 29 - 14.18 inches - was easily outpacing the previous record wet month, set in October 1941 (10.75 inches).

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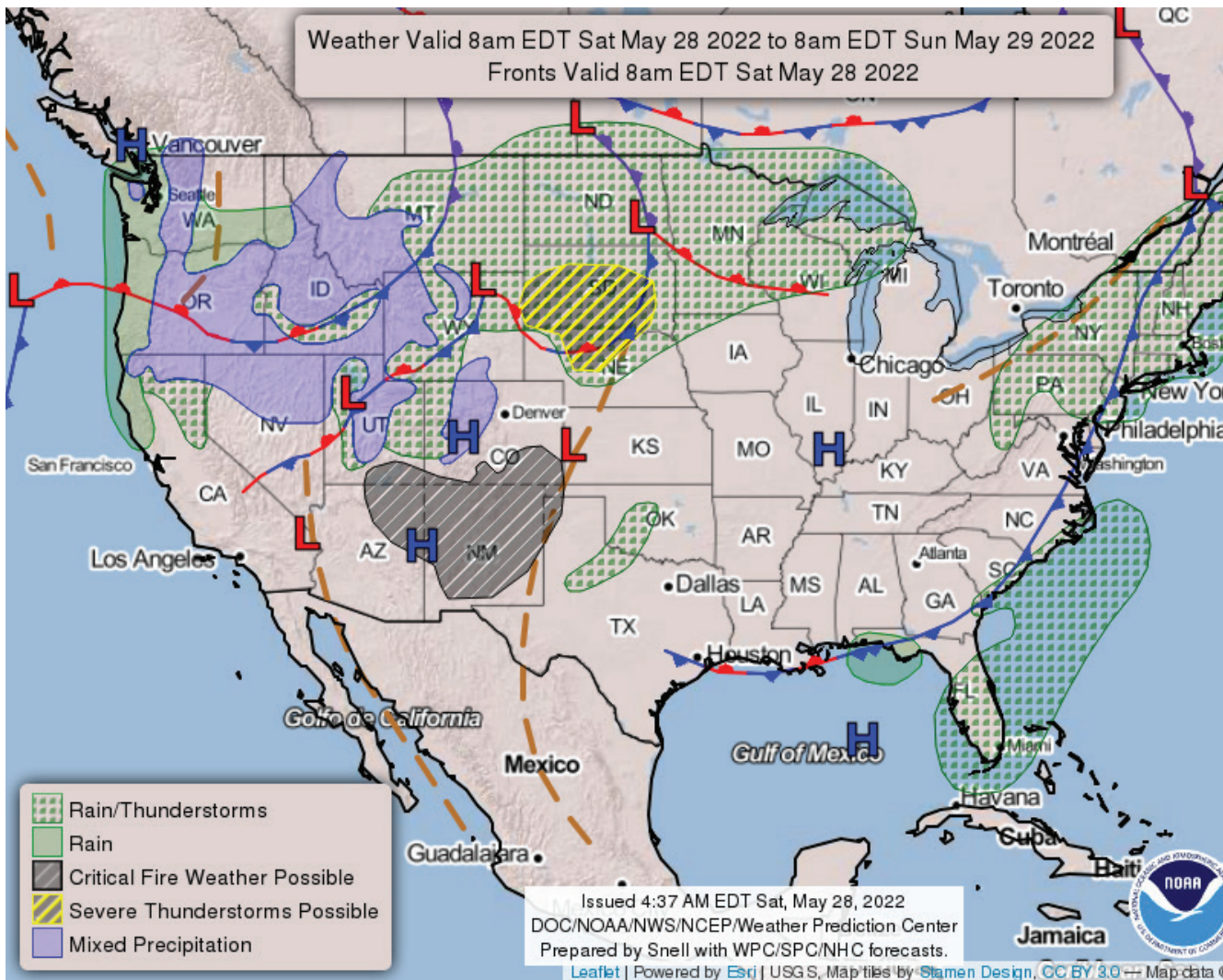
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 84.7 °F at 3:15 PM**  
**Low Temp: 51.7 °F at 6:30 AM**  
**Wind: 16 mph at 11:00 PM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

Day length: 15 hours, 23 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 102 in 1934  
Record Low: 30 in 1965  
Average High: 75°F  
Average Low: 49°F  
Average Precip in May.: 2.98  
Precip to date in May.: 2.48  
Average Precip to date: 6.95  
Precip Year to Date: 8.98  
Sunset Tonight: 9:11:41 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:47:04 AM





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## ONE POWERFUL PROMISE KEEPER

"Promises are like pie crusts," begins an old proverb. "They are made to be broken." Not so God's promises. Read this amazing statement: "The Maker of heaven and earth, the seas and everything in them, the Lord...remains faithful forever."

Behind God's promises are His past performances. He is a God of truth and will not forget or forfeit His Word. Whatever He said He would do, He did. Whatever promise He made, He has kept. If He said it, He meant it, and He will do it!

Behind His promises is His passionate love. He is the very definition of the word, love. Whenever we doubt the fact that God loves us, look at Christ on His cross. Unfortunately, we tend to only look at an empty cross. But never forget that Jesus, our Savior, at one time hung on that cross for three painful, lonely, humiliating hours. How can we ever doubt God's love?

Behind every promise is His power. As the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, all of the laws that govern it are under His control. No one or no thing can stand in the way of the fulfillment of the laws that govern His universe - His creation. And if that is not enough, look once again into the empty tomb. He has the power to do whatever He said He will do.

On a very special occasion, Alexander the Great gave one of his loyal supporters a generous gift. Said the recipient, "This is too much for me to receive." Said the giver, "But it is not too much for me to give."

Prayer: Forgive us, Father, for those times when we have doubted Your promises, passionate love or power. We know that You are always faithful to fulfil Your promises. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them - he remains faithful forever. Psalm 146:6

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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

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All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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## News from the Associated Press

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

03-14-40-53-54, Mega Ball: 8, Megaplier: 3

(three, fourteen, forty, fifty-three, fifty-four; Mega Ball: eight; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$170,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 150,000,000

### No state charge for billionaire Sanford in child porn probe

By STEPHEN GROVES and AMY FORLITI Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota attorney general's office has declined to file charges against billionaire T. Denny Sanford following an investigation into possible possession of child pornography, saying it found no "prosecutable offenses" within the state's jurisdiction, according to a court document filed Friday.

Sanford, a banker turned philanthropist, is the state's richest man and has donated billions to hospitals, universities and charities. South Dakota investigators in 2019 began searching his email account, as well as his cellular and internet service providers, for possible possession of child pornography after his accounts were flagged by a technology firm.

The attorney general's office said in Friday's court filing that the "South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation has completed its investigation ... and has determined that there are no prosecutable offenses within the jurisdiction of the State of South Dakota."

The attorney general's office had no comment beyond the court filing.

"Mr. Sanford appreciates the public acknowledgement by the SD Attorney General's office that the DCI has concluded its investigation and they have found no prosecutable crime," Marty Jackley, Sanford's attorney, said via text.

South Dakota Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg had earlier requested the involvement of federal law enforcement. A state filing in January said both state and federal investigations were continuing at the time. The Department of Justice declined to comment Friday when asked if a federal investigation is ongoing.

Ravnsborg is on leave pending his trial in June on impeachment charges for his conduct after he struck and killed a pedestrian with his car in 2020.

A person briefed on the matter by law enforcement told The Associated Press last year that Sanford's electronic devices came to the attention of state investigators after a technology firm reported that child pornography had either been sent, received or downloaded on his device. The person was not allowed to discuss the case at the time and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The investigation was first reported in 2020 by ProPublica and the Sioux Falls Argus Leader. Both news outlets went to court for access to affidavits for search warrants. As part of arguments in state court over the release of the documents, Jackley said the investigation revealed that his client's email accounts were hacked.

The search warrant affidavits were still not publicly available as of Friday evening. Judge James Power told the Argus Leader he expected to release them on Tuesday, but the newspaper also reported that Sanford attorney Stacy Hegge had moved to delay the unsealing.

The 86-year-old Sanford is worth an estimated \$3.4 billion. He made a fortune as the founder of First Premier Bank in South Dakota, which is known for issuing high-interest credit cards to those with poor credit.

Sanford told the The Associated Press in 2016 that he wanted his fortune to have a positive impact on children after his hardscrabble childhood in St. Paul, Minnesota. His mother died of breast cancer when

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he was 4, and by the time he was 8, Sanford was working in his father's clothing distribution company. He, along with two siblings, lived in a small apartment.

"You can only have so many cars and all of that kind of stuff so put it into something in which you can change people's lives," Sanford said in 2016.

After the investigation into Sanford became public, his financial largesse hardly slowed. In January, he donated \$50 million to a Dakota State University cybersecurity lab while the hospital system that bears his name, Sanford Health, received over \$650 million in donations from him last year.

## Historical Society Press releases 1st graphic novel on pilot

The South Dakota Historical Society Press has released its first graphic novel.

The Argus Leader reported Friday that "American Ace: Joe Foss, Fighter Pilot" was released last month. The novel focuses on Joe Foss, who grew up on a farm outside Sioux Falls and became an ace as a Marine Corps fighter pilot during the Battle of Guadalcanal during World War II.

Foss is credited with shooting down 26 Japanese planes, equaling the number of planes ace Eddie Rickenbacker shot down during World War I.

Foss went on to serve as South Dakota governor after the war and served as a brigadier general in the South Dakota Air Guard. He also spent seven years as the first commissioner of the American Football League.

The novel's artist and author, Hector Curriel of Sioux Falls, says Foss' life transcends generations.

## Police inaction moves to center of Uvalde shooting probe

By STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

The actions — or more notably, the inaction — of a school district police chief and other law enforcement officers moved swiftly to the center of the investigation into this week's shocking school shooting in Uvalde, Texas,

The delay in confronting the shooter — who was inside the school for more than an hour — could lead to discipline, lawsuits and even criminal charges against police.

The attack that left 19 children and two teachers dead in a fourth grade classroom was the nation's deadliest school shooting in nearly a decade, and for three days police offered a confusing and sometimes contradictory timeline that drew public anger and frustration.

By Friday, authorities acknowledged that students and teachers repeatedly begged 911 operators for help while the police chief told more than a dozen officers to wait in a hallway at Robb Elementary School. Officials said he believed that the suspect was barricaded inside adjoining classrooms and that there was no longer an active attack.

The chief's decision — and the officers' apparent willingness to follow his directives against established active-shooter protocols — prompted questions about whether more lives were lost because officers did not act faster to stop the gunman, and who should be held responsible.

"In these cases, I think the court of public opinion is far worse than any court of law or police department administrative trial," said Joe Giacalone, a retired New York police sergeant. "This has been handled so terribly on so many levels, there will be a sacrificial lamb here or there."

As the gunman fired at students, law enforcement officers from other agencies urged the school police chief to let them move in because children were in danger, two law enforcement officials said.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they had not been authorized to talk publicly about the investigation.

One of the officials said audio recordings from the scene capture officers from other agencies telling the school police chief that the shooter was still active and that the priority was to stop him. But it wasn't clear why the school chief ignored their warnings.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who at a news conference earlier in the week lauded the police for saving lives, said he had been misled about the initial response and promised there would be investigations into

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"exactly who knew what, when, who was in charge" and what they did.

"The bottom line would be: Why did they not choose the strategy that would have been best to get in there and to eliminate the killer and to rescue the children?" Abbott said.

Criminal charges are rarely pursued against law enforcement in school shootings. A notable exception was the former school resource officer accused of hiding during the 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, that left 17 people dead.

Potential administrative punishments — meted out by the department itself — could range from a suspension or docked pay to forced resignation or retirement or outright termination.

In terms of civil liability, the legal doctrine called "qualified immunity," which shields police officers from lawsuits unless their actions violate clearly established laws, could also be at play in future litigation.

The Uvalde School District police chief, Pete Arredondo, decided that the group of officers should wait to confront the assailant, on the belief that the active attack was over, according to Steven McCraw, the head of the Texas Department of Public Safety.

The crisis ended shortly after officers used keys from a janitor to open the classroom door, entered the room and shot and killed Ramos.

Arredondo could not be reached for comment Friday, and Uvalde officers were stationed outside his home, but they would not say why.

Prosecutors will have to decide whether Arredondo's decision and the officers' inaction constituted a tragic mistake or criminal negligence, said Laurie Levenson, a former federal prosecutor who is a professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles.

Levenson said prosecutors could bring state felony charges of criminally negligent homicide, though she said federal civil rights charges would be unlikely because they require intent.

"I don't know that we expect every officer to make a perfect decision on the spot," she said. "But waiting this long — given what we know about how shooters act — predictably leads to tragedy."

In the Parkland case, former Broward County Deputy Scot Peterson is scheduled to go to trial in September on charges of child neglect resulting in great bodily harm, culpable negligence and perjury. He has said he did the best he could at the time.

The "unprecedented and irresponsible" decision by Florida prosecutors to bring a criminal case against Peterson might lead to other police elsewhere being "stripped of their liberty" and facing decades in prison "solely because a finding is made after the fact that things could have been handled differently," Mark Eglarsh, the former deputy's attorney, said in an email.

Maria Haberfeld, a professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, said the police department's policies, procedures and training will be scrutinized to see whether the officers on the ground in Uvalde followed them.

If they did, and criminal charges are still brought, she said it would send a chilling message to police nationwide. "If you follow your procedures, you're still brought up on charges. So what's the point of having procedures?" she said.

But Jorge Colina, a former Miami police chief, wants to know more about what was going through the minds of the officers inside the school as the chief told them to wait in the hall.

"Did someone challenge the decision there?" he said. "Did someone raise an objection at least?"

## As US mourns shootings, NRA in turmoil but influence remains

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST, BRIAN SLODYSKO and JUAN LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — For a brief moment in 2012, it seemed like a national stalemate over guns was breaking.

Adam Lanza, a 20-year-old gunman, had forced his way into a Connecticut elementary school and massacred 26 people, mostly children, with an AR-15-style rifle. Flags flew at half-staff. A sporting goods chain suspended sales of similar weapons. And longtime gun-rights supporters from both parties in Congress said they were willing to consider new legislation. The issue was complex, then-President Barack Obama said, but everyone was obligated to try.

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Then, one week after the bloodshed at Sandy Hook elementary, the most powerful gun lobby in the U.S. made its public position known and the effort unraveled.

"The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun," National Rifle Association CEO Wayne LaPierre said in a defiant speech that blamed video games, cowardly lawmakers, the media and a perverted society for the carnage, while calling for armed guards at schools across the U.S.

Nearly a decade later, the nation is at another crossroads. A gunman killed at least 19 children with a similar weapon at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, on Tuesday in the nation's second mass killing this month. This time, however, LaPierre didn't need to address the bloodshed — the organization's Republican allies in Congress did.

"The problem starts with people. Not with guns." Alabama Sen. Tommy Tuberville, who holds an A-rating and an endorsement from the NRA, told reporters Wednesday, bluntly summing up the position of many in the GOP, especially considering the party's recent turn further right. "I'm very sorry it happened. But guns are not the problem, OK. People are the problem. That's where it starts. And we've had guns forever, and we're gonna continue to have guns."

Much has changed since Sandy Hook. The NRA is on the ropes after a series of costly financial scandals and lawsuits. And an ascendant gun control movement has poured tens of millions of dollars into political campaigns to counter their message. The group Moms Demand Action, for example, was founded the day after the Sandy Hook shooting.

"How many more children have to die?" founder Shannon Watts said this week. "How many parents, teachers, shoppers and worshippers, and lives must be taken for our leaders to do something? Any senator who sides with the gun lobby, who blocks life-saving change, is choosing carnage and gun industry profits over the precious lives of our children."

But even as mass shootings continue unabated, in Washington one thing remains the same: Republicans and Democrats both agree there is little chance that legislation tightening gun laws will be passed by a narrowly divided Congress. The gridlock, which remains even as public opinion supports some tighter gun laws, offers testament to the enduring influence of gun rights groups, which have spent \$171 million lobbying the federal government since 1989.

"I want to be more optimistic. But I don't think it will change," said Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del.

The NRA isn't the same powerhouse it once was, and in its wake other, further right gun groups have gained, like the Gun Owners of America, which bills itself as the "no compromise" gun lobby. There are multiple gun rights alliances operating at state levels wielding enormous influence in legislatures as well. But in 40 years of working to loosen gun laws, the NRA has largely set the cultural tone on the right and is still the most prominent.

"You don't need the NRA, really, to take the lead anymore because opposition to gun laws is so much now a litmus test of conservatism and the Republican Party that it has its own momentum," said Robert Spitzer, a political science professor at the State University of New York at Cortland and the author of five books on gun policy.

"As we've seen it stumble in recent years, it's not that gun culture has overall become weakened," adds David Yamane, a sociology professor at Wake Forest University who studies American gun culture. "There's other membership organizations that have arisen or grown to fill some of the gap that the NRA used to serve."

The organization has built a well of goodwill by disbursing more than \$70 million to further the political ambitions of Republicans who currently serve in Congress, often by running ads attacking Democrats, according to an analysis of data from the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics, which tracks political spending. They've spent a comparatively small \$171,000 helping pro-gun Democrats who are currently in the House or Senate, the analysis shows.

The NRA's gold-standard endorsements are also sought after by Republican candidates, particularly in primary elections, where they serve as a cultural shorthand for what it means to be a conservative. Receiving a poor letter grade from the organization can be a major source of concern.

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Still, as the NRA gathered this past week in Houston for its first convention since 2019, current and former board members say the secretive organization must confront a growing crisis.

The New York Attorney General's office filed a lawsuit seeking to dissolve the organization. Court proceedings have revealed how LaPierre and others diverted tens of millions of dollars for lavish personal trips and no-show contracts for associates, among other questionable expenditures.

That led the organization to file for bankruptcy in 2021. But a judge dismissed the case, which was brought by LaPierre without the consent of the NRA board, ruling it was not filed in good faith.

The financial difficulties have led to mass layoffs, a reduction in programs and a sharp drop in political spending, which had reached an apex in 2016 when the organization spent \$54 million, most of it helping Donald Trump win the White House.

NRA contributions, which once earned the goodwill of generations of lawmakers, have dropped sharply in the past two years, according to campaign finance data compiled by the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics, which tracks money in politics.

"The NRA is becoming really a shell of its former self," said former NRA board member Rocky Marshall. "It cannot carry out the mission of the NRA because all the money is being spent on attorneys."

Marshall is backing a push to replace LaPierre with Allen West, the former chairman of the Texas GOP party. Marshall is also hoping to pull back from the culture wars and find common ground with gun-safety advocates. "Instead of being antagonistic or defensive, we need to have a dialogue because we can do a lot more to prevent gun violence like this."

One area where it remains formidable is its lobbying of the federal government. In 2021, the organization nearly tied its past records set in 2017 and 2018, spending over \$4.8 million, records show. Firearms themselves are part of the culture as well. Gun purchases grew enormously during the pandemic, and a 2021 National Firearms Survey found that 81 million Americans are gun owners. While the NRA only claims a fraction of that, about 5 million, as members, they tend to be vocal.

NRA spokesman Andrew Arulanandam said that declarations of the group's demise are "wishful thinking on the part of our detractors."

"The reality is significantly different and the results speak for themselves," he said.

Still, an NRA brand that some view as toxic has presented an opportunity for other gun-rights groups, including some that strike a more measured tone.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation, which represents gun sellers, spent over \$4.8 million on lobbying last year, reaching parity with the NRA. It's avoided heated partisan rhetoric and has a growing influence as the NRA star has waned.

"We are not going to approach those who disagree with our viewpoints or our industry in a denigrating manner," said Mark Oliva, the managing director of public affairs for NSSF.

The gun rights movement also continues to have success at the state level, where it has focused on repealing laws requiring a permit to carry a concealed handgun. Roughly half the states in the U.S. have rolled back such laws, with Texas, Indiana and Tennessee all doing so in the past year.

The Supreme Court, meanwhile, is expected to soon issue its biggest gun ruling in more than a decade, one expected to make it easier to carry guns in public in some of the nation's largest cities.

For gun owners who traveled from around the country for the convention, the NRA remains a lodestar. Barbara Galis, 75, of Racine, Wisconsin, said she is concerned about the allegations of mismanagement but isn't sure another organization "has the influence to support gun rights."

"What other avenue do we have? Where do we go?" she said.

## Russia takes small cities, aims to widen east Ukraine battle

By YURAS KARMANAU and ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

KRAMATORSK, Ukraine (AP) — Russia asserted Saturday that its troops and separatist fighters had captured a key railway junction in eastern Ukraine, the second small city to fall to Moscow's forces this week as they fought to seize all of the country's contested Donbas region.



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Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said the city of Lyman had been "completely liberated" by a joint force of Russian soldiers and the Kremlin-backed separatists, who have waged war in the eastern region bordering Russia for eight years.

Lyman, which had a population of about 20,000 before Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, serves as a regional railway hub. Ukraine's train system has ferried arms and evacuated citizens during the war, and it wasn't immediately clear how the development might affect either capability.

Controlling the city would give the Russian military a foothold for advancing on larger Ukrainian-held cities in Donetsk and Luhansk, the two provinces that make up the Donbas. Since failing to occupy Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, Russia has concentrated on seizing the last parts of the region not controlled by the separatists.

"If Russia did succeed in taking over these areas, it would highly likely be seen by the Kremlin as a substantive political achievement and be portrayed to the Russian people as justifying the invasion," the British Ministry of Defense said in a Saturday assessment.

Fighting continued Saturday around Sievierodonetsk and nearby Lysychansk, twin cities that are last major areas under Ukrainian control in Luhansk province. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reiterated that the situation in the east was "difficult" but expressed confidence his country would prevail with help from Western weapons and sanctions.

"If the occupiers think that Lyman or Sievierodonetsk will be theirs, they are wrong. Donbas will be Ukrainian," he said.

On Tuesday, Russian troops took over Svitlodarsk, a small municipality south of Sievierodonetsk that hosts a thermal power station, while intensifying efforts to encircle and capture the larger city.

The governor of Luhansk had warned that Ukrainian soldiers might have to retreat from Sievierodonetsk to avoid being surrounded, but he said Saturday that they had repelled an attack.

"We managed to push back the Russians to their previous positions," Gov. Serhii Haidai said. "However, they do not abandon their attempts to encircle our troops and disrupt logistics in the Luhansk region."

The advance of Russian forces raised fears that residents would experience the same horrors as people in the southeastern port city Mariupol in the weeks before it fell.

Sieverodonetsk's mayor, Oleksandr Striuk, said Friday that some 1,500 civilians have died there during the war, including from a lack of medicine or because of diseases that could not be treated while the city was under siege.

Before the war, Sievierodonetsk was home to around 100,000 people. About 12,000 to 13,000 remain in the city, where 90% of the buildings are damaged, the mayor told The Associated Press.

Just south of Sievierodonetsk, volunteers worked to evacuate people Friday amid a threatening soundtrack of air raid sirens and booming artillery. AP reporters saw elderly and ill civilians bundled into soft stretchers and slowly carried down apartment building stairs in Bakhmut, a city in northeast Donetsk province.

Svetlana Lvova, the manager of two buildings in Bakhmut, tried to convince reluctant residents to leave but said she and her husband would not evacuate until their son, who was in Sievierodonetsk, returned home.

"I have to know he is alive. That's why I'm staying here," Lvova, 66, said.

A nearly three-month siege of Mariupol ended last week when Russia claimed the city's complete. The city became a symbol of mass destruction and human suffering, as well as of Ukrainian determination to defend the country. More than 20,000 of its civilians are feared dead.

Mariupol's port reportedly resumed operations after Russian forces finished clearing mines in the Azov Sea off the once-vibrant city. Russian state news agency Tass reported that a vessel bound for the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don entered Mariupol's seaport early Saturday.

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian navy said Saturday morning that Russian ships "continue to block civilian navigation in the waters of the Black and Azov seas" along Ukraine's southern coast, "making them a zone of hostilities."

The war in Ukraine has caused global food shortages because the country is a major exporter of grain and other commodities. Moscow and Kyiv have traded blame over which is responsible for keeping shipments tied up, with Russia saying Ukrainian sea mines prevented safe passage.

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The press service of the Ukrainian Naval Forces said in a Facebook post that two Russian missile carriers "capable of carrying up to 16 missiles" were ready for action in the Black Sea. It said that only shipping routes which had been established through multilateral treaties could be considered safe.

Ukrainian officials pressed Western nations for more sophisticated and powerful weapons, especially multiple launch rocket systems. The U.S. Defense Department would not confirm a Friday CNN report saying the Biden administration was preparing to send long-range rocket systems to Ukraine.

Russia's U.S. ambassador on Saturday branded such a move as "unacceptable" called on the Biden administration to "abandon statements about the military victory of Ukraine."

A Telegram post published on the Russian embassy's official channel cited Anatoliy Antonov, Moscow's top diplomat in Washington, as saying that "the unprecedented pumping of weapons into Ukraine significantly increases the risks of an escalation of the conflict."

In Russia on Saturday, President Vladimir Putin signed into law a bill that raises the age limits for Russian army contracts. Contractors can now first enter service until age 50 and work until they reach legal retirement age, which is 65 for men and 60 for women.

Previously, Russian law set an age limit of 40 for Russians and 30 for foreigners to sign an initial contract.

Russia's Defense Ministry said the Russian navy successfully launched a new hypersonic missile from the Barents Sea. The ministry said the recently developed Zircon hypersonic cruise missile had struck its target about 1,000 kilometers away.

If confirmed, the launch could spell trouble for NATO voyages in the Arctic and North Atlantic. Zircon,, described as the world's fastest non-ballistic missile, can be armed with either a conventional or a nuclear warhead, and is said to be impossible to stop with current anti-missile defense systems.

Moscow's claims, which could not be immediately verified, came a week after Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu announced that Russia would form new military units in the west of the country in response to Sweden and Finland's bids to join NATO.

Putin marked the annual Border Guards Day by congratulating the members of the Russian service.

"The tasks you are facing are particularly important now, given the unprecedented political, economic and information pressure on our country and the buildup of NATO military capacity right at Russia's borders," Putin said.

## In Georgia, 2 Black candidates to compete for Senate seat

By SUDHIN THANAWALA and JEFF AMY Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ga. (AP) — Wayne Black was one of the few African Americans in the crowd as about 100 people gathered recently at the Republican Party headquarters near Columbus, Georgia, to hear from U.S. Senate candidate and football legend Herschel Walker.

A member of the Muscogee County Republican Executive Committee, Black said he found a certain promise in Walker's candidacy, a GOP voice who could appeal to African Americans and others in Georgia who have traditionally voted Democratic.

"They identify with him from the standpoint of the American dream," Black said. "You can start from nothing and if you work hard, you can achieve the American dream."

But that optimism ran into headwinds about 100 miles to the north. As she left an Atlanta polling site, Wyvon Carter said her choice in what might be the most competitive Senate race this year was not particularly complicated.

"You know I'm Black, right?" the 84 year-old said. "I'm a Democrat. That's it."

In this Deep South state where the painful history of slavery, segregation and racial injustice is ever-present, voters for the first time have selected two Black candidates to represent the major parties in a Senate race. After handily winning their respective primaries on Tuesday, Walker will take on Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock in a general election campaign that could help decide control of the Senate.

The race will test whether Democratic gains in 2020 were a blip or the start of a political realignment in a rapidly changing state. In November 2020, Joe Biden was the first Democratic presidential candidate to

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carry the state in 28 years, and just two months later, Warnock and fellow Democrat Jon Ossoff flipped two longtime Republican Senate seats, handing their party a narrow majority in the Senate.

Black voters were crucial in helping Democrats secure those victories and will likely be decisive again this year.

The issue is less about whether Walker will break the bond that Black voters have had with Democratic candidates. It is more about whether Black voters, frustrated by a lack of progress in Washington on issues ranging from a policing overhaul to voting rights, simply sit this election out. In a close election, even a small change in voting patterns could be decisive.

Republicans hope Walker's candidacy can at least neutralize the issue of race in the campaign.

"In this race, Black Georgians will not have to contend with the race issue," said Camilla Moore, chair of the Georgia Black Republican Council. "And I really do believe by culture, we're socially conservative. I think Herschel just has to be Herschel and tell his conservative message."

But in interviews in recent weeks, many Black voters said they would not give Walker a second look because of his race. They said they were driven by policy considerations, and Walker, who was backed by former President Donald Trump and is generally in line with GOP orthodoxy, does not address their needs.

Louis Harden, a 58-year-old Black voter in Atlanta, said he is backing Warnock because of the senator's support for Medicaid expansion.

"It doesn't matter about the color," he said. "It's just the issues, who's going to get the job done."

There are only a few modern instances in which two Black people have emerged as the nominees in a Senate race.

Democrat Barack Obama faced Republican radio host and former diplomat Alan Keyes in his 2004 Senate campaign in Illinois. More recently, South Carolina's Tim Scott, the Senate's only Black Republican, was unsuccessfully challenged in 2016 by Thomas Dixon, a North Charleston pastor.

But the Warnock-Walker matchup is unique because it is playing out in a far more competitive state than Illinois, a Democratic stronghold, or South Carolina, where Republicans are dominant. Also, the candidates in Georgia are already well known, representing two institutions that are revered in the South: church and football.

Walker, among Georgia's most well-known sports figures, won a championship and the Heisman Trophy while at the University of Georgia in the 1980s. Warnock is the senior pastor at the Atlanta church where Martin Luther King Jr. preached.

"This is going to be a historic matchup," said Stan Deaton, a scholar at the Georgia Historical Society.

But to make a dent in Warnock's support among Black voters, Walker will need to do more to appeal to the Black community, said Leah Wright Rigueur, a political historian at Johns Hopkins University who has written about efforts by Black Republicans to broaden the party's largely white base.

Republican candidates who do well among African American voters have the ability to craft a political identity that is independent from the party, something she said Walker has not done so far. Black voters also consider how a candidate treats his or her community and may view African American candidates who stick to Republican talking points more harshly than their white counterparts, Wright Rigueur said.

"And the reason why is because it's viewed as a betrayal," she said. "It's viewed as community betrayal."

Walker has largely hewed to Republican messaging about race. He has defended Trump against criticism that Trump was racist, he has accused Black Lives Matter of wanting to destroy the country and he has said "Black-on-Black crime" is far worse than violence by police. Walker has come under scrutiny over allegations that he threatened his ex-wife's life and dramatically inflated his record as a businessman.

Warnock, the pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church, has embraced King's legacy of racial justice and equal rights. After the killing of George Floyd by police in May 2020, Warnock expounded on the country's struggle with a "virus" he called "COVID-1619" for the year when some of the first slaves arrived in what is now the United States. On Capitol Hill, he has attacked Republicans' push for tighter voting rules as "Jim Crow in new clothes."

Warnock "has a record of fighting to improve the lives of all Georgians," Warnock campaign manager Quentin Fulks said in a statement, citing as examples Warnock's efforts to forgive student loan debt and

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address the high rates of maternal mortality.

"The people of Georgia, no matter their race, will make the decision about who is up for the job and best able to represent the people of Georgia," he said.

A spokesperson for Walker's campaign, Mallory Blount, said all Georgians, regardless of race, are facing problems created by Democrats and that Walker is "sick and tired of politicians constantly dividing people based on the color of their skin."

Walker told a House subcommittee last year while testifying against reparations for slavery that "Black power" is used to "create white guilt."

In his memoir, "Breaking Free," Walker said his mother taught him that "color was invisible" and doing right or wrong was what mattered.

"I never really liked the idea that I was to represent my people," he wrote. "My parents raised me to believe that I represented humanity — people — and not black people, white people, yellow people, or any other color or type of person."

Still, Black Republicans in Georgia expect Walker to try hard to woo the African American community during the general election. They also believe his personal story about overcoming obstacles to reach the top ranks of college football and then the NFL will find an audience among Black voters.

"Self-determination has always been a big thing in the Black community since we got out of slavery," said Leonard Massey, who is Black and is chairman of the Chatham County Republican Party in eastern Georgia. "He actually shows how to get to the next level."

## Russia takes small cities, aims to widen east Ukraine battle

By YURAS KARMANAU and ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

KRAMATORSK, Ukraine (AP) — Russia asserted Saturday that its troops and separatist fighters had captured a key railway junction in eastern Ukraine, the second small city to fall to Moscow's forces this week as they fought to seize all of the country's contested Donbas region.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said the city of Lyman had been "completely liberated" by a joint force of Russian soldiers and the Kremlin-backed separatists, who have waged war in the eastern region bordering Russia for eight years.

Lyman, which had a population of about 20,000 before Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, serves as a regional railway hub. Ukraine's train system has ferried arms and evacuated citizens during the war, and it wasn't immediately clear how the development might affect either capability.

Controlling the city would give the Russian military a foothold for advancing on larger Ukrainian-held cities in Donetsk and Luhansk, the two provinces that make up the Donbas. Since failing to occupy Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, Russia has concentrated on seizing the last parts of the region not controlled by the separatists.

"If Russia did succeed in taking over these areas, it would highly likely be seen by the Kremlin as a substantive political achievement and be portrayed to the Russian people as justifying the invasion," the British Ministry of Defense said in a Saturday assessment.

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Sievierodonetsk's mayor, Oleksandr Striuk, said Friday that some 1,500 civilians have died there during the war, including from a lack of medicine or because of diseases that could not be treated while the city was under siege.

Before the war, Sievierodonetsk was home to around 100,000 people. About 12,000 to 13,000 remain in the city, where 90% of the buildings are damaged, the mayor told The Associated Press. Ukraine's police force said Saturday afternoon that the city is "under constant enemy fire" and civilians were wounded, but did not specify the number.

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and information pressure on our country and the buildup of NATO military capacity right at Russia's borders," Putin said.

## Jury's duty in Depp-Heard trial doesn't track public debate

By MATTHEW BARAKAT Associated Press

FAIRFAX, Va. (AP) — A seven-person civil jury in Virginia will resume deliberations Tuesday in Johnny Depp's libel trial against Amber Heard. What the jury considers will be very different from the public debate that has engulfed the high-profile proceedings.

For six weeks, testimony focused on details of alleged abuse that Heard says she suffered at the hands of Depp. Heard has outlined more than a dozen specific instances where she says she was assaulted by Depp.

Depp has denied any physical or sexual abuse, and says Heard concocted the claims to destroy Depp's reputation. Depp's legions of online fans have focused on their belief that Heard has been untruthful, and that that will determine the outcome.

But the case itself is a defamation claim. Depp sued Heard for libel — for \$50 million — in Fairfax County Circuit Court over a December 2018 op-ed she wrote in The Washington Post describing herself as "a public figure representing domestic abuse."

That article never even mentions Depp by name, but his lawyers say he was defamed nonetheless. Most of the article discusses public policy as it relates to domestic violence, and Heard's lawyers say she has a First Amendment right to weigh in.

In closing arguments, though, Depp lawyer Camille Vasquez argued that Heard's free-speech rights have limits.

"The First Amendment doesn't protect lies that hurt and defame people," she said.

Depp's lawyers point to two passages in the article that they say clearly refer to Depp.

In the first passage, Heard writes that "two years ago, I became a public figure representing domestic abuse, and I felt the full force of our culture's wrath." Depp's lawyers call it a clear reference to Depp, given that Heard publicly accused Depp of domestic violence in 2016 — two years before she wrote the article.

In a second passage, she states, "I had the rare vantage point of seeing, in real time, how institutions protect men accused of abuse." (Depp's lawyers are also seeking damages over a headline that appeared above the online version of the article, even though Heard didn't write it.)

The jury, which has to come to a unanimous decision for a verdict, must decide whether those passages in the Post are defamatory. And the verdict form gives them step-by-step instructions on how to determine that.

Heard's lawyers say they have presented a mountain of evidence that Heard was abused. But they say that even if the jury were somehow to believe that she was never abused even a single time, she should still prevail in the lawsuit.

That's because libel law spells out several factors that must be considered. First, the alleged defamatory statements have to be about the plaintiff. Heard's lawyers said the article is not about Depp at all. He's not mentioned, and they say the focus is on Heard's experience about the aftermath of speaking out. Those statements remain objectively true even if she wasn't in fact abused, her lawyers contend.

Depp's lawyers, though, say the two passages are clear references to Depp, given the publicity that surrounded their 2016 divorce proceedings.

In addition, because Depp is a public figure, Heard can only be found guilty of libel if the jury decides that Heard acted with "actual malice," which requires clear and convincing evidence that she either knew what she was writing was false or that she acted with reckless disregard for the truth.

Heard lawyer J. Benjamin Rottenborn said during Friday's closing arguments that Heard carefully reviewed drafts of the article — the first draft was written not by her, but by the American Civil Liberties Union — with her lawyers to make sure that what was written passed legal muster. Rottenborn said that fact alone is sufficient proof that she didn't act with actual malice.

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As for the abuse itself, Depp's lawyers tried to suggest to the jury that if they think Heard is lying or embellishing any of her abuse claims, that she can't be trusted and that all of her abuse claims must be dismissed as untrustworthy.

"You either believe all of it, or none of it," Vasquez said. "Either she is a victim of ugly, horrible abuse, or she is a woman who is willing to say absolutely anything."

In Heard's closing, Rottenborn said the nitpicking over Heard's evidence of abuse ignores the fact there's overwhelming evidence on her behalf and sends a dangerous message to domestic-violence victims.

"If you didn't take pictures, it didn't happen," Rottenborn said. "If you did take pictures, they're fake. If you didn't tell your friends, they're lying. If you did tell your friends, they're part of the hoax."

And he rejected Vasquez's suggestion that if the jury thinks Heard might be embellishing on a single act of abuse that they have to disregard everything she says. He said Depp's libel claim must fail if Heard suffered even a single incident of abuse.

"They're trying to trick you into thinking Amber has to be perfect to win," Rottenborn said.

## Weather's unwanted guest: Nasty La Nina keeps popping up

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Something weird is up with La Nina, the natural but potent weather event linked to more drought and wildfires in the western United States and more Atlantic hurricanes. It's becoming the nation's unwanted weather guest and meteorologists said the West's megadrought won't go away until La Nina does.

The current double-dip La Nina set a record for strength last month and is forecast to likely be around for a rare but not quite unprecedented third straight winter. And it's not just this one. Scientists are noticing that in the past 25 years the world seems to be getting more La Ninas than it used to and that is just the opposite of what their best computer model simulations say should be happening with human-caused climate change.

"They (La Ninas) don't know when to leave," said Michelle L'Heureux, head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration forecast office for La Nina and its more famous flip side, El Nino.

An Associated Press statistical analysis of winter La Ninas show that they used to happen about 28% of the time from 1950 to 1999, but in the past 25 winters, they've been brewing nearly half the time. There's a small chance that this effect could be random, but if the La Nina sticks around this winter, as forecast, that would push the trend over the statistically significant line, which is key in science, said L'Heureux. Her own analysis shows that La Nina-like conditions are occurring more often in the last 40 years. Other new studies are showing similar patterns.

What's bothering many scientists is that their go-to climate simulation models that tend to get conditions right over the rest of the globe predict more El Ninos, not La Ninas, and that's causing contention in the climate community about what to believe, according to Columbia University climate scientist Richard Seager and MIT hurricane scientist Kerry Emanuel.

What Seager and other scientists said is happening is that the eastern equatorial Atlantic is not warming as fast as the western equatorial Atlantic or even the rest of the world with climate change. And it's not the amount of warming that matters but the difference between the west and east. The more the difference, the more likely a La Nina, the less the difference, the more likely an El Nino. Scientists speculate it could be related to another natural cycle, called the Pacific Decadal Oscillation, or it could be caused by human-caused climate change or both.

"At this point we just don't know," L'Heureux said. "Scientists are watching and I know, are actively studying. But it's really important because of regional conditions. We need to get this right."

La Nina is a natural and cyclical cooling of parts of the equatorial Pacific that changes weather patterns worldwide, as opposed to El Nino's warming. Often leading to more Atlantic hurricanes, less rain and more wildfires in the West and agricultural losses in the middle of the country, studies have shown La Nina is more expensive to the United States than the El Nino. Together El Nino, La Nina and the neutral condition are called ENSO, which stands for El Nino Southern Oscillation, and they have one of the largest natural

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effects on climate, at times augmenting and other times dampening the big effects of human-caused climate change from the burning of coal, oil and gas, scientists said.

"They really have a very, very strong" effect, said research scientist Azhar Ehsan, who heads Columbia University's El Nino/La Nina forecasting. "So a third consecutive La Nina is not at all a welcome thing."

He said the dangerous heat in India and Pakistan this month and in April is connected to La Nina.

The current La Nina formed in the late summer of 2020 when the Atlantic set a record for the number of named storms. It strengthened in the winter when the West's drought worsened and in the early summer of 2021 it weakened enough that NOAA said conditions were neutral. But that pause only lasted a few months and by early fall 2021 La Nina was back, making it a double dip.

Normally second years of La Nina tend to be weaker, but in April this La Nina surprised meteorologists by setting a record for intensity in April, which is based on sea surface temperatures, Ehsan said.

"These are very impressive values for April," L'Heureux said. Still, because La Ninas historically weaken over summer and there are slight signs that this one may be easing a bit, there's the small but increasing chance that this La Nina could warm just enough to be considered neutral in late summer.

La Nina has its biggest effect in the winter and that's when it is a problem for the West because it's the rainy season that is supposed to recharge areas reservoirs. But the West is in a 22-year megadrought, about the same time period of increasing La Nina frequency.

Three factors — ENSO, climate change and randomness — are biggest when it comes to the drought, which is itself a huge trigger for massive wildfires, said UCLA climate scientist Daniel Swain. Without climate change, La Nina and bad luck could have made the drought the worst in 300 years but with climate change it's the worst in at least 1,200 years, said UCLA climate hydrologist Park Williams.

La Nina "is a pretty important player; it may be the dominant player," said Swain, who has a blog on Western weather. "It could be responsible for one-third, maybe one-half of the given conditions if it is pronounced enough."

"It's much less likely that the Southwest will see at least even a partial recovery from the megadrought during La Nina," Swain said.

La Nina "amps up your Atlantic storms" but decreases them in the Pacific, said Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach.

It's all about winds 6 to 7 miles (10 to 12 kilometers) above the water surface. One of the key factors in storm development is whether there is wind shear, which are changes in wind from high to low elevations. Wind shear can decapitate or tip over hurricanes, making them hard to strengthen and at times even stick around. Wind shear can also let dry air into hurricanes that chokes them.

When there's an El Nino, there's lots of Atlantic wind shear and it's hard for hurricanes to get going. But La Nina means little wind shear in the Atlantic, making it easier for storms to intensify and do it quickly, said University of Albany hurricane researcher Kristen Corbosiero.

"That's a really huge factor," Corbosiero said.

"Whatever is the cause, the increasing incidence of La Ninas may be behind the increasing hurricanes," MIT's Emanuel said.

Some areas like eastern Australia and the arid Sahel region of Africa do better with more rain during La Nina. India and Pakistan, even though they get extra spring heat, also receive more needed rain in La Ninas, Columbia's Ehsan said.

A 1999 economic study found that drought from La Nina cost the United States agriculture between \$2.2 billion to \$6.5 billion, which is far more than the \$1.5 billion cost of El Nino. A neutral ENSO is best for agriculture.

Columbia's Seager said even though there may be some chance and some natural cycles behind the changes in La Nina, because there's likely a climate change factor he thinks there will probably be more of them.

**Energy secretary: US offshore wind jobs should be union jobs**



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By JENNIFER McDERMOTT Associated Press

NEW LONDON, Conn. (AP) — The growing offshore wind industry is often touted as a boon for job creation, but who will do the work?

The U.S. energy secretary and Danish wind developer Orsted say they want American union workers to build offshore wind farms to dot the U.S. coastlines — the building trades workers who could otherwise be left out of a transition to renewable resources.

A majority of onshore wind and solar farms have been built either with non-union workers or without collective bargaining agreements, except for in California where unions are more involved in the industry, according to North America's Building Trades Unions. Orsted signed a project labor agreement this month with the national union representing 3 million people in the building trades to construct the company's U.S. offshore wind farms with an American union workforce.

"Our recent experience in the last two decades with onshore wind and solar has been that the majority of those projects are not built with us," NABTU Secretary-Treasurer Brent Booker said this week. "So this is groundbreaking in setting the standard for an emerging industry here."

The Biden administration wants to deploy 30 gigawatts of offshore wind energy by 2030, generating enough electricity to power more than 10 million homes. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm visited the New London State Pier facility last week to see how Orsted, energy provider Eversource and the state of Connecticut are transforming it into a hub for the offshore wind industry.

At a press conference after, the Democratic governor and Democratic congressmen spoke about creating American jobs — messaging that will surely play into their reelection campaigns.

Gov. Ned Lamont said there are "hundreds of good paying jobs right here" and "we're just getting started."

U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal thanked the unions, saying "this is the future of energy in the United States of America right here." U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney said they're maximizing every opportunity for the state to grow in a sustainable way.

U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy, the only one not up for reelection, echoed the same message, saying offshore wind is the "holy grail of public policy" because it creates jobs, helps the local economy, makes the country more secure and helps save the planet.

Flanked by building trades members, Granholm said the administration is committed to creating "union jobs in America in this clean energy economy." She said she wants predominantly American union workers to build U.S. offshore wind farms and would like to see project labor agreements in all aspects of the energy transition, drawing cheers from workers at the pier.

"That's what we'd like, all union," she told The Associated Press.

Allison Ziogas, Orsted's U.S. labor relations manager, said one of the reasons they sought the agreement with NABTU was to assure workers, particularly in the fossil fuel industry, that they can have good-paying jobs in offshore wind.

"There is not the same level or quality of jobs with the solar industry, so it's kind of created a false narrative that you can have good jobs or a healthy climate but not both," she said. "And we really recognized that if we didn't have everyone on board, we knew how things would wind up. It would wind up in gridlock."

Orsted currently has six projects in five states. The "National Offshore Wind Agreement" covers contractors working on those projects and future ones, with no termination date on the project labor agreement. It sets the terms and conditions for union workers to build offshore wind farms, with targets to ensure a diverse workforce. It contains provisions for training to ensure they can construct the complex infrastructure.

Ziogas said nearly all of the total work hours on each project will be done with union labor, with a team from abroad with experience installing turbines supporting the offshore work. She said Orsted is committed to "creating an American industry," and hopes the agreement sets the bar for it.

Keith Brothers, head of the building trades in Connecticut, said he briefly spoke with Granholm at the pier about the project labor agreement. Brothers said it's about creating opportunities, not only for a longtime tradesman but also for a new apprentice looking for a career in the emerging U.S. offshore wind industry.

"That's what's exciting about it, it's new. We really don't know what it's going to bring or how many jobs. But we know it's a lot," he said. "We know it's new and there's a lot coming."

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The first U.S. offshore wind farm began operating off Block Island, Rhode Island, in late 2016. Orsted acquired the developer and now operates that five-turbine wind farm. The first commercial-scale project is off the coast of Massachusetts.

The Biden administration has also approved the construction and operations for South Fork Wind, a joint venture between Orsted and Eversource. Its transmission system will connect to the electric grid on Long Island, New York, making it the state's first offshore wind farm and jumpstarting the offshore wind industry there. The onshore construction started in February.

## Algerian dissidents: Victims of crackdown, or outlaws?

By ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Mohamed Benhalima looks wary and frightened as he is led off a plane at Algiers airport, handcuffed with a security officer's arm wrapped around him. A team from Algeria's Rapid Intervention Force then puts him in their vehicle and whisks him to an unknown destination.

The video was posted online on March 24. Three days later, Algerians watched on television as the 32-year-old confessed to involvement with an organization that authorities have listed as an Islamist terrorist group plotting against the Algerian government.

Once a faithful servant of his homeland as a non-commissioned army officer, Benhalima became a supporter of Algeria's pro-democracy movement, then a deserter who fled to Europe. Spain expelled him after Algeria issued a warrant for his arrest.

The confession scene was made public by Algeria's General Directorate of National Security, in what could be seen as a warning to other soldiers or citizens.

Hundreds of Algerian citizens have been jailed for trying to keep alive the Hirak movement that held weekly pro-democracy protests starting in 2019, leading to the downfall of longtime Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The marches were banned last year by the nation's army-backed government.

Authorities then expanded their sweep, linking some Hirak supporters to two groups added to Algeria's terror list last year: Rachad, regarded as Islamist infiltrators whose leaders are in Europe, and MAK, a separatist movement in Kabylie, home of the Berbers.

"For the last two or three years, there have been thousands of legal cases against activists," said well-known lawyer Mustapha Bouchachi. "Their only error is that they expressed their political opinions on social media ... and are fighting for a state of law."

For authorities of the gas-rich North African nation, guaranteeing the stability of the state is at the heart of their actions. For human rights groups, Benhalima and others are victims of an unjust, antiquated system of governance that views dissidents, or any critical voices, as criminals. They say that Algerian authorities use threats to national security to stifle free speech, including among journalists, and justify arrests.

A campaign on social media, with the hashtag #PasUnCrime (not a crime) was launched May 19 by dozens of non-governmental organizations against repression of human rights.

The U.S. State Department's 2021 report on human rights in Algeria cited a long list of problems, including arbitrary arrests and detentions and restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and association. In March, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, asked Algeria to "change direction" to "guarantee the right of its people to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly."

"To be a human rights activist in Algeria has become very difficult," said Zaki Hannache, a Hirak militant recently temporarily released from prison. "To be an activist who refuses the system is complicated. It even means sacrifices."

Hannache, best known for keeping track of Hirak-related arrests, was arrested and jailed in February on a string of charges, including defending terrorist acts.

The alleged confession of Benhalima captures the combination of evils that Algeria claims it is up against. He said that he was under the spell of Rachad and in contact with its London-based leader and his two brothers. The official APS news agency said Benhalima confirmed "the implication of the terrorist organization Rachad in abject plans targeting the stability of Algeria and its institutions by exploiting misguided

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youth.”

Rachad’s website claimed the police video showed the forced confession of a “hostage” in a security services propaganda exercise.

Rachad’s true goals are unclear, but it is a key target of Algeria’s crackdown. In December, Rachad said it had submitted a complaint to a U.N. special rapporteur over Algeria’s “arbitrary” classification of the group as a terrorist organization and asked U.N. authorities to urge Algeria to cease its “illegal practices.”

Spain expelled Benhalima based on national security interests and activities “that may harm Spain’s relations with other countries,” according to Amnesty International. Spain expelled another deserter, Mohamed Abdellah, a dissident gendarme, to Algeria last August. Amnesty International described him as a whistleblower.

Spain has a special interest in remaining on good terms with Algeria, which provides much of its gas needs.

According to the National Committee for Freedom for the Detained, some 300 people are behind bars in Algeria for their political opinions. Up to 70 were given provisional freedom at the the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, but others have since been arrested.

In a case emblematic for Algerian journalists, the man who heads the outspoken Radio M and the online news site Algerie Emergent, Ihsane El-Kadi, risks three years in prison with a five-year ban on working for allegedly attacking national unity, among other things. He had raised the ire of a former communications minister with a column pleading for the protest movement Hirak not to divide itself over Rachad. The verdict is set for next week.

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune recently launched an ill-defined initiative dubbed “outstretched hands,” described as an “internal front” to promote dialogue across all sectors of society. Army chief Said Chen-griha suggested in several speeches that it is also to counter Algeria’s perceived enemies. The initiative precedes the July 5 celebrations of the 60th anniversary of Algerian independence from France, which was won after a brutal seven-year war.

“No one can refuse” to take part in this initiative, said Abou El Fadl Baadji, secretary-general of the National Liberation Front, once Algeria’s sole political party. He was among the officials that Tebboune has recently met with on the subject. People “await with suspense the contents of this initiative ... but we’re for this idea, even before knowing the details.”

Benhalima awaits a verdict of his appeal of a 10-year prison sentence after being convicted in absentia for invasion of privacy and attacks on state interests, linked to his online posts on the Algerian military, including confidential information on senior officers.

## War surges Norway’s oil, gas profit. Now, it’s urged to help

By MARK LEWIS Associated Press

STAVANGER, Norway (AP) — Europe’s frantic search for alternatives to Russian energy has dramatically increased the demand — and price — for Norway’s oil and gas.

As the money pours in, Europe’s second-biggest natural gas supplier is fending off accusations that it’s profiting from the war in Ukraine.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, who is looking to the Scandinavian country to replace some of the gas Poland used to get from Russia, said Norway’s “gigantic” oil and gas profits are “indirectly preying on the war.” He urged Norway to use that windfall to support the hardest-hit countries, mainly Ukraine.

The comments last week touched a nerve, even as some Norwegians wonder whether they’re doing enough to combat Russia’s war by increasing economic aid to Ukraine and helping neighboring countries end their dependence on Russian energy to power industry, generate electricity and fuel vehicles.

Taxes on the windfall profits of oil and gas companies have been common in Europe to help people cope with soaring energy bills, now exacerbated by the war. Spain and Italy both approved them, while the United Kingdom’s government plans to introduce one. Morawiecki is asking Norway to go further by sending oil and profits to other nations.

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Norway, one of Europe's richest countries, committed 1.09% of its national income to overseas development — one of the highest percentages worldwide — including more than \$200 million in aid to Ukraine. With oil and gas coffers bulging, some would like to see even more money earmarked to ease the effects of the war — and not skimmed from the funding for agencies that support people elsewhere.

"Norway has made dramatic cuts into most of the U.N. institutions and support for human rights projects in order to finance the cost of receiving Ukrainian refugees," said Berit Lindeman, policy director of human rights group the Norwegian Helsinki Committee.

She helped organize a protest Wednesday outside Parliament in Oslo, criticizing government priorities and saying the Polish remarks had "some merits."

"It looks really ugly when we know the incomes have skyrocketed this year," Lindeman said.

Oil and gas prices were already high amid an energy crunch and have spiked because of the war. Natural gas is trading at three to four times what it was at the same time last year. International benchmark Brent crude oil burst through \$100 a barrel after the invasion three months ago and has rarely dipped below since.

Norwegian energy giant Equinor, which is majority owned by the state, earned four times more in the first quarter compared with the same period last year.

The bounty led the government to revise its forecast of income from petroleum activities to 933 billion Norwegian kroner (\$97 billion) this year — more than three times what it earned in 2021. The vast bulk will be funneled into Norway's massive sovereign wealth fund — the world's largest — to support the nation when oil runs dry. The government isn't considering diverting it elsewhere.

Norway has "contributed substantial support to Ukraine since the first week of the war, and we are preparing to do more," State Secretary Eivind Vad Petersson said by email.

He said the country has sent financial support, weapons and over 2 billion kroner in humanitarian aid "independently of oil and gas prices."

European countries, meanwhile, have helped inflate Norwegian energy prices by scrambling to diversify their supply away from Russia. They have been accused of helping fund the war by continuing to pay for Russian fossil fuels.

That energy reliance "provides Russia with a tool to intimidate and to use against us, and that has been clearly demonstrated now," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, a former prime minister of Norway, told the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland.

Russia has halted natural gas to Finland, Poland and Bulgaria for refusing a demand to pay in rubles.

The 27-nation European Union is aiming to reduce reliance on Russian natural gas by two-thirds by year's end through conservation, renewable development and alternative supplies.

Europe is pleading with Norway, along with countries like Qatar and Algeria, for help with the shortfall. Norway delivers 20% to 25% of Europe's natural gas, vs. Russia's 40% before the war.

It is important for Norway to "be a stable, long-term provider of oil and gas to the European markets," Deputy Energy Minister Amund Vik said. But companies are selling on volatile energy markets, and "with the high oil and gas prices seen since last fall, the companies have daily produced near maximum of what their fields can deliver," he said.

Even so, Oslo has responded to European calls for more gas by providing permits to operators to produce more this year. Tax incentives mean the companies are investing in new offshore projects, with a new pipeline to Poland opening this fall.

"We are doing whatever we can to be a reliable supplier of gas and energy to Europe in difficult times. It was a tight market last fall and is even more pressing now," said Ola Morten Aanestad, a Equinor spokesman.

The situation is a far cry from June 2020, when prices crashed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and Norway's previous government issued tax incentives for oil companies to spur investment and protect jobs.

Combined with high energy prices, the incentives that run out at the end of the year have prompted companies in Norway to issue a slew of development plans for new oil and gas projects.

Yet those projects will not produce oil and gas until later this decade or even further in the future, when the political situation may be different and many European countries are hoping to have shifted most of their energy use to renewables.

By then, Norway is likely to face the more familiar criticism

## Show's over for famed cabaret show at France's Lido

By JADE LE DELEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — It's the end of an era for the famed Lido cabaret on Paris' Champs-Elysees.

Amid financial troubles and changing times, the venue's new corporate owner is ditching most of the Lido's staff and its high-kicking, high-glamour dance shows — which date back decades and inspired copycats from Las Vegas to Beirut — in favor of more modest musical revues.

Dancers, other employees and union activists are gathering Saturday in front of the Lido to try to save their jobs and the history of the cabaret, known for its dinner theater and its "Bluebell Girls" revue. Artists plan a performance to pay homage to the venue.

"I feel sad. It sounds like the death of the cabaret as a place and a genre in Paris. The cabaret style made Paris what it is," Jeremy Bauchet, an assistant ballet master at the club, told The Associated Press.

"The Lido is the temple of the Parisian cabaret revue in its most elegant, prestigious, and entertaining aspects. An enchanting interlude in a magic world unique in French spectacles."

With onstage waterfalls, an ice rink and a pool, the Lido started wowing audiences before World War II and became an institution of Paris nightlife. It drew in performers, from Josephine Baker, Marlene Dietrich and Elton John to Laurel and Hardy, and famous spectators, too.

French hotels giant Accor recently bought the club and says it plans to lay off 157 of the 184 permanent employees. Artists and technicians will be the most affected. Accor said in a statement it wants to get rid of the costly dinner shows and revue because they "don't attract the public anymore." The group aims to "redesign" the shows, and plans restoration works on the building.

"The Lido will keep its name, but the cabaret will lose its soul. Because of the end of the revue and the layoff of 85% of staff, The Lido will become a basic venue that people rent," said Franck Lafitte, from the National Union of Artistic Activities.

The Lido, alongside the Moulin Rouge, Crazy Horse and the Paradis Latin is one of the last Parisian cabarets. Until now it has offered two shows per night, seven days a week, including performances by dancers, singers, and the Bluebell Girls, a troupe founded by Irish dancer Margaret Kelly in 1932. Kelly, known as Miss Bluebell, toured with her troupe across the world and helped inspire a Las Vegas Lido franchise.

An online petition to save the Bluebell Girls revue has been signed by over 50,000 people.

"When the Lido reopened after World War II, people wanted to have fun. The Clerico brothers who bought the place wanted to make it a high-end venue. They invented the concept of dinner shows, which inspired other venues," said Sonia Rachline, author of a book about the Lido.

"The shows are very French and Parisian, thanks to the sophistication of costumes and the precision of dance moves, but it also has this American madness inspired by musicals," Rachline added.

But while the Moulin Rouge benefited from a revival of interest after Baz Luhrmann's 2001 movie, the Lido has struggled with a drop in attendance and economic troubles aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis. To some, the shows seem increasingly outdated. In 2015, the Lido tried to reinvent itself with a new revue by a Cirque du Soleil director who sought to empower the dancers and show that "women are not objects," but it wasn't as successful as hoped.

Accor said the cabaret has lost 80 million euros (\$85.6 million) over the past decade. Lido employees expect to lose their jobs this summer.

People who have worked at the Lido — from dancers to dressmakers, dressing room staff and backstage technicians — described the club with an unusually personal attachment.

"No other venue had waterfalls, an ice rink, and a pool," retired Lido set designer Yves Valente told the AP. "The Lido has exceptionally fast machinery and special effects."

Many current employees are afraid to speak publicly about the management decision for fear that would jeopardize their attempts to save their jobs. One dancer pleaded, "the Lido can't disappear," and repeated the club's motto: "The Lido is Paris."

## Fleeing the Russians: Evacuations are slow, arduous, fraught

By ELENA BECATOROS and NICOLAE DUMITRACHE Associated Press

BAKHMUT, Ukraine (AP) — To a threatening soundtrack of air raid sirens and booming artillery, civilians are fleeing towns and cities in eastern Ukraine as Russian forces advance.

Negotiating narrow apartment building staircases, volunteers carry the elderly and infirm in their arms, in stretchers or in wheelchairs to waiting minibuses, which then drive them to central staging areas and eventually to evacuation trains in other cities.

"The Russians are right over there, and they're closing in on this location," Mark Poppert, an American volunteer working with British charity RefugEase, said during an evacuation in the town of Bakhmut on Friday.

"Bakhmut is a high-risk area right now," he said. "We're trying to get as many people out as we can in case the Ukrainians have to fall back."

He and other Ukrainian and foreign volunteers working with the Ukrainian charity Vostok SOS, which was coordinating the evacuation effort, were hoping to get about 100 people out of Bakhmut on Friday, Poppert said.

A few hours earlier, the thud of artillery sounded and black smoke rose from the northern fringes of the town, which is in the Donetsk region in Ukraine's industrial east. Donetsk and the neighboring region of Luhansk makes up the Donbas, where Moscow-backed separatists have controlled some territory for eight years.

The evacuation process is painstaking, physically arduous and fraught with emotion.

Many of the evacuees are elderly, ill or have serious mobility problems, meaning volunteers have to bundle them into soft stretchers and slowly negotiate their way through narrow corridors and down flights of stairs in apartment buildings.

Most people have already fled Bakhmut: only around 30,000 remain from a pre-war population of 85,000. And more are leaving each day.

Fighting has raged north of Bakhmut as Russian forces intensify their efforts to seize the key eastern cities of Sieverodonetsk and Lysychansk, 50 kilometers (30 miles) to the northeast. The two cities are the last areas under Ukrainian control in the Luhansk region.

Northwest of Bakhmut in Donetsk, Russia-backed rebels said Friday they had taken over the town of Lyman, a large railway hub near the cities of Slovyansk and Kramatorsk, both which are still under Ukrainian control. On Thursday, smoke rising from the direction of Lyman could be seen clearly from Slovyansk.

But even when faced with shelling, missiles and an advancing Russian army, leaving isn't easy.

Svetlana Lvova, the 66-year-old manager for two apartment buildings in Bakhmut, huffed and rolled her eyes in exasperation upon hearing that yet another one of her residents was refusing to leave.

"I can't convince them to go," she said. "I told them several times if something lands here, I will be carrying them — injured — to the same buses" that have come to evacuate them now.

She's tried to persuade the holdouts every way she can, she says, but nearly two dozen people just won't budge. They're more afraid to leave their homes and belongings for an uncertain future than to stay and face the bombs.

She herself will stay in Bakhmut with her husband, she said. But not because they fear leaving their property. They are waiting for their son, who is still in Sieverodonetsk, to come home.

"I'm not going anywhere," she said. "I have to know he is alive. That's why I'm staying here."

Lvova plays the last video her son sent her, where he tells his mother that he is fine, and that they still have electricity in the city but no longer running water.

"I baked him a big cake," she said, wiping away tears.

Poppert, the American volunteer, said it was not unusual to receive a request to pick people up for evacuation, only for them to change their minds once the van arrives.

"It's an incredibly difficult decision for these people to leave the only world that they know," he said.

He described one man in his late 90s evacuated from the only home he had ever known.

"We were taking this man out of his world," Poppert said. "He was terrified of the bombs and the missiles, and he was terrified to leave."

In nearby Pokrovsk, ambulances pulled up to offload elderly women in stretchers and wheelchairs for the evacuation train heading west, away from the fighting. Families clustered around, dragging suitcases and carrying pets as they boarded the train.

The train slowly pulled out of the station, and a woman drew back the curtain in one of the train carriages. As the familiar landscape slipped away, her face crumpled in grief and the tears began to flow.

## Butler scores 47 points, Heat beat Celtics to force Game 7

By JIMMY GOLEN AP Sports Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Kyle Lowry listened politely while Jimmy Butler shared the credit for Miami's Game 6 victory until his fellow All-Star took the humility too far and called his 47-point, elimination-avoiding performance "decent."

"It's (expletive) incredible," Lowry corrected him, apologizing for his language to the TV cameras in the back of the room and begging not to be fined by the league. "It's incredible to have a guy like him next to me. I've played with some great players, and he's one of the best."

Butler scored 47 points — a career playoff high and one of the best performances by a player facing elimination in NBA history — and the Heat forced the Eastern Conference finals to a decisive seventh game by beating the Boston Celtics 111-103 on Friday night.

Ten years after LeBron James scored 45 points in a Game 6 in Boston en route to the first of the Heat's back-to-back NBA titles, Butler scored 17 points in the fourth quarter to top him and send the series back to Miami.

With a victory at home, the Heat would advance to the NBA Finals for the second time in three years.

"This is the way it should be, with these two teams. It should have gone seven games," Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said. "I'm just really thrilled that our group gets an opportunity to compete in a Game 7 in front of our home crowd."

The winner of Game 7 on Sunday will advance to the NBA Finals against Golden State, which eliminated the Dallas Mavericks in five games Thursday night. Warriors forward Draymond Green said afterward that he expected to play the Celtics.

In the most back-and-forth game of the series, Boston took a 97-94 lead on Derrick White's 3-pointer with under five minutes to play — the first time all series the lead has changed hands in the fourth quarter. Lowry answered with a 3 and then added two free throws as Miami scored 11 of the next 13 points.

Lowry finished with 18 points and 10 assists before fouling out with 2:18 left. Butler made 16 of 29 shots — including 4 of 8 from 3-point range — and all 11 free throws.

"He came out from the jump and kind of put his imprint on the game," White said. "That's just who he's been his whole career, constantly attacking and doing what he does to help his team win. We knew it was coming, and we've got to do a better job in Game 7."

Jayson Tatum had 30 points and nine rebounds for Boston, and White came off the bench to score 11 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter. The Celtics are trying to reach the finals for the first time since 2010, two years after the New Big Three of Kevin Garnett, Paul Pierce and Ray Allen won the franchise's 17th NBA title — a record since tied by the Lakers.

"It's no secret: It's Game 7, trip to the NBA Finals, a lot on the line," Tatum said. "We know what's at stake. We know how much this means to everybody."

Jaylen Brown scored 20 points for Boston, missing a pair of free throws with the game tied at 99 after Lowry fouled out. Brown fouled out himself on a charge offensive that was assessed after a challenge on a missed dunk with 13 seconds left and the Celtics down by four.

### AVOIDING ELIMINATION

Butler's 47 points were the seventh-most in NBA history for a player facing elimination.

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Elgin Baylor had 61 against Boston in Game 5 of the 1962 finals. Wilt Chamberlain topped 50 three times, Sleepy Floyd had 50 against the Lakers in 1987 and Jamal Murray scored 50 against Utah in 2020.

It was also the third-most to stave off elimination against the Celtics. In addition to Baylor, Chamberlain had 50 in Game 5 of the East finals in 1960.

James' 45 against Boston in Game 6 of the 2012 conference finals set the stage for a Game 7 win in Miami. The Heat are hoping Butler's performance can do the same.

"I get it, people can easily draw the comparisons between the two," Spoelstra said. "That's a different era. That's a different team. I want our guys to embrace this moment."

## IN AND OUT

Miami guard Tyler Herro missed his third straight game with a strained groin, costing the team its No. 2 scorer. Kyle Lowry (hamstring), Max Strus (hamstring) and P.J. Tucker (knee) had been listed as questionable but were in the starting lineup.

Boston's Marcus Smart (sprained right ankle) and Robert Williams III (sore knee) tested their injuries pregame and were also in the lineup.

## TIP-INS

Heat: Butler had 14 points, five rebounds and four assists in the first. He scored or assisted on 24 of Miami's 29 points in the quarter.

Celtics: Red Sox slugger David Ortiz, who was inducted into the ballclub's Hall of Fame on Thursday night, was courtside. Ortiz threw out a ceremonial first pitch at Fenway Park earlier in the evening. Red Sox pitcher Pedro Martinez was also at the game, wearing his World Series ring.

## AP FACT CHECK: NRA speakers distort gun and crime statistics

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Speakers at the National Rifle Association annual meeting assailed a Chicago gun ban that doesn't exist, ignored security upgrades at the Texas school where children were slaughtered and roundly distorted national gun and crime statistics as they pushed back against any tightening of gun laws.

A look at some of the claims:

TEXAS SEN. TED CRUZ: "Gun bans do not work. Look at Chicago. If they worked, Chicago wouldn't be the murder hellhole that it has been for far too long."

THE FACTS: Chicago hasn't had a ban on handguns for over a decade. And in 2014, a federal judge overturned the city's ban on gun shops. Big supporters of the NRA, like Cruz, may well know this, given that it was the NRA that sued Chicago over its old handgun ban and argued the case before the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled the ban unconstitutional in 2010.

FORMER PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: "Classroom doors should be hardened to make them lockable from the inside and closed to intruders from the outside."

THE FACTS: As commonsensical as that might sound, it could backfire in a horrific way, experts warn.

A lock on the classroom door is one of the most basic and widely recommended school safety measures. But in Uvalde, it kept victims in and police out.

Nearly 20 officers stood in a hallway outside of the classrooms school for more than 45 minutes before agents used a master key to open the classroom's locked door.

And Trump's proposal doesn't take into account what would happen if class members were trapped behind a locked door and one of the students was the aggressor in future attacks.

CRUZ: "The rate of gun ownership hasn't changed."

THE FACTS: This is misleading. The percentage of U.S. households with at least one gun in the home hasn't significantly changed over the past 50 years. But the number of assault-type rifles, like the one used in the Uvalde school shooting and dozens of other school shootings, has skyrocketed since legislators let a 1994 ban on such weapons expire in 2004.



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In the years leading up to and following that ban, an estimated 8.5 million AR-platform rifles were in circulation in the United States. Since the ban was lifted, the rifles — called “modern sporting rifles” by the industry — have surged in popularity. The National Shooting Sports Foundation estimated there were nearly 20 million in circulation in 2020.

CRUZ: “Had Uvalde gotten a grant to upgrade school security, they might have made changes that would have stopped the shooter and killed him there on the ground, before he hurt any of these innocent kids and teachers.”

THE FACTS: This claim overlooks the fact that Uvalde had doubled its school-security budget and spent years upgrading the protections for schoolchildren. None of that stopped the gunman who killed 19 pupils and two teachers.

Annual district budgets show the school system went from spending \$204,000 in 2017 to \$435,000 for this year. The district had developed a safety plan back in 2019 that included staffing the schools with four officers and four counselors. It had installed a fence and invested in a program that monitors social media for threats and purchased software to screen school visitors.

The grant that Cruz claims would have been life-saving was from a failed 2013 bill that planned to help schools hire more armed officers and install bulletproof doors. Uvalde’s school did have an officer but the person wasn’t on the campus at the time the shooter entered the building. And, Cruz’s call for bulletproof doors might not have worked in this case, given that police were unable to breach the locked door of the classroom where the shooter murdered children and teachers.

## FBI records on search for fabled gold raise more questions

By MICHAEL RUBINKAM Associated Press

A scientific analysis commissioned by the FBI shortly before agents went digging for buried treasure suggested that a huge quantity of gold was below the surface, according to newly released government documents and photos that deepen the mystery of the 2018 excavation in remote western Pennsylvania.

The report, by a geophysicist who performed microgravity testing at the site, hinted at an underground object with a mass of up to 9 tons and a density consistent with gold. The FBI used the consultant’s work to obtain a warrant to seize the gold — if there was any to be found.

The government has long claimed its dig was a bust. But a father-son pair of treasure hunters who spent years hunting for the fabled Civil War-era gold — and who led agents to the woodland site, hoping for a finder’s fee — suspect the FBI double-crossed them and made off with a cache that could be worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

The newly revealed geophysical survey was part of a court-ordered release of government records on the FBI’s treasure hunt at Dent’s Run, about 135 miles (220 kilometers) northeast of Pittsburgh, where legend says an 1863 shipment of Union gold was either lost or stolen on its way to the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia.

Dennis and Kem Parada, who co-own the treasure-hunting outfit Finders Keepers, successfully sued the Justice Department for the records after being stonewalled by the FBI. Finders Keepers provided the FBI records to The Associated Press. The FBI subsequently posted them on its website.

The technical survey data collected by geophysical consulting firm Enviroscan gave credence to the treasure hunters’ own extensive fieldwork at the site — and prompted the FBI to excavate in a massive, secretive operation that lasted for several frigid days in late winter of 2018.

John Louie, a geophysics professor at the University of Nevada, Reno, unconnected to the dig, reviewed Enviroscan’s report at the request of the AP and said the firm’s “methods were very good,” and “their conclusions represent a physically reasonable hypothesis” that gold was buried at the site.

But he cautioned the subsurface gravity anomaly that Enviroscan identified did not definitively establish the presence of gold. There are other technical reasons why Enviroscan’s data could have turned out the way it did, Louie said.

“Thus, it is also entirely reasonable that the FBI did not find anything at the site, because there was not

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really any gold there," he said via email.

Enviroscan co-founder Tim Bechtel declined to comment about his work at Dent's Run, saying the FBI has not given him permission to talk. The FBI would not discuss Bechtel this week but said that after the dig, agents "did not take any subsequent steps to reconcile the geophysical-survey findings with the absence of gold or any other metal."

Other documents in the just-released FBI case file raise still more questions.

A one-paragraph FBI report, dated March 13, 2019 — exactly one year after the dig — asserted agents found nothing at Dent's Run. No "metals, items, and/or other relevant materials were found," the report said. "Due to other priority work ... the FBI will close the captioned case."

Anne Weismann, a lawyer for Finders Keepers, cast doubt on the FBI report's credibility. She cited its brevity, as well as its timing — it was written after Finders Keepers began pressing the government for records.

"It does not read like one would expect," said Weismann, a former Justice Department lawyer. "If that is the official record in the file of what they did and why they did it, it says almost nothing, and it's crazy."

She added that if the government does not produce a fuller, more contemporaneous accounting of its search for the gold, it "will heighten my view that this is not an accurate record and this was created as a cover-up. And I don't say that lightly."

In response, the FBI said the single-page document "is representative of the standard summaries filed when formally closing an FBI investigation."

The agency has consistently denied it found anything.

Agents acted on information that Dent's Run "may have been a cultural heritage site containing gold belonging to the United States government," the FBI said in a statement, but "that possibility was not borne out by the excavation. The FBI continues to unequivocally reject any claims or speculation to the contrary."

The trove of documents turned over to Finders Keepers also included nearly 1,000 photos, in grainy black-and-white, that show some — but certainly not all — of what the FBI was doing at the dig site, according to the treasure hunters.

Residents have previously told of hearing a backhoe and jackhammer overnight between the first and second days of the dig — when the work was supposed to have been paused — and seeing a convoy of FBI vehicles, including large armored trucks.

The FBI denied any work took place at the site after hours, saying the "only nighttime activity was ATV patrols by FBI Police personnel, who secured the site around the clock for the duration of the excavation."

Parada suspects the FBI retrieved the gold in the middle of the night and then showed the treasure hunters an empty hole on the afternoon of the second day.

"It's very curious why the FBI is going to such an extent to misdirect and be so obstructionist on this," said Warren Getler, who has worked closely with the treasure hunters. "They worked that night under cover of darkness to evade, escape our knowledge of something we're supposed to be partners in."

Many of the FBI photos are seemingly irrelevant, including the hundreds of images of random trees and a woodland road leading to the dig site, while others simply don't add up or raise additional questions, assert Parada and Getler, author of "Rebel Gold," a book exploring the possibility of buried Civil War-era caches of gold and silver.

FBI agents are shown standing around the hole in photos that appear earlier in the series, but they are absent from nearly all of the later images at the dig site.

Getler and Parada say the lead FBI agent told them the hole was filled with water the morning of the second day, but the low-quality images released by the government show only a small puddle or perhaps a bit of snow. They said that same agent spent most of the second day at base camp — where Getler and the treasure hunters say they were largely confined to their car — and not at the dig site.

The FBI said it's standard for photos to "document site conditions before, during, and after FBI operations," Parada claims it all points to a clandestine overnight dig and a second-day excavation that was just for show.

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"I think we were expecting a couple hundred photos of the night dig, and I think we were expecting pictures of metal coins or bars," Parada said. "I think there were pictures, but they disappeared."

The FBI records also show that several weeks before the excavation, an agent with the agency's art crime team approached Wells Fargo to ask whether it shipped gold by stagecoach for the U.S. Mint in 1863.

Wells Fargo historians turned up no evidence of it but said records from the era are incomplete. Wells Fargo did ship gold by stagecoach, a corporate archivist wrote in an email to the FBI, but large quantities of the precious metal, as well as gold that had to be carried long distances, were "better transported by ship or train."

Getler said the gold might have been transported by wagon, not stagecoach.

Additional FBI releases are expected over the coming months.

## Cannes to wrap with presentation of Palme d'Or on Saturday

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

CANNES, France (AP) — The 75th Cannes Film Festival wraps Saturday with the presentation of the Palme d'Or and other awards selected by the nine-member jury headed by French actor Vincent Lindon.

The closing ceremony brings to a close a Cannes that has attempted to fully resuscitate the annual France extravaganza which was canceled in 2020 by the pandemic and saw modest crowds last year. This year's festival also unspooled against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, which sparked red-carpet protests and a dialogue about the purpose of cinema in wartime.

The closing ceremony begins at 2:30 p.m. EDT and concludes roughly an hour later. Outside of France, it will be streamed live by Brut.

But what's going to win? The Palme, one of film's most prestigious awards, is famously impossible to handicap — though bookies still try their best. It hinges entirely on the deliberations of the jury which take place in private. Last year, the French body horror thriller "Titane" took the prize, making director Julia Ducournau only the second female filmmaker ever to win the Palme. In 2019, Bong Joon Ho's "Parasite" triumphed in Cannes before doing the same at the Academy Awards.

This year, the biggest Hollywood films at Cannes — "Elvis," "Top Gun: Maverick," "Three Thousand Years of Longing" — played outside Cannes' competition lineup of 21 films.

Arguably — and there is always arguing at Cannes — among the best received films that could win the Palme are Lukas Dhont's Belgian coming-of-age drama "Close," Park Chan-wook's twisty Korean neo-noir "Decision to Leave," Cristian Mungiu's Romanian drama "R.M.N.," Ruben Ostlund's social satire "Triangle of Sadness" and James Gray's semi-autobiographical '80s New York tale "Armageddon Time."

## NRA speakers unshaken on gun rights after school massacre

By JUAN LOZANO and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — One by one, they took the stage at the National Rifle Association's annual convention in Houston and denounced the massacre of 19 students and two teachers at an elementary school across the state. And one by one, they insisted that further restricting access to firearms was not the answer to preventing future tragedies.

"The existence of evil in our world is not a reason to disarm law-abiding citizens," said former President Donald Trump, who was among the Republicans who lined up to speak before the gun rights lobbying group Friday as thousands of protesters angry about gun violence demonstrated outside.

"The existence of evil is one of the very best reasons to arm law-abiding citizens," he said Friday.

The gathering came just three days after the shooting in Uvalde and as the nation grappled with revelations that students trapped inside a classroom with the gunman repeatedly called 911 during the attack — one pleading "Please send the police now" — as officers waited in the hallway for more than 45 minutes.

The NRA had said that convention attendees would "reflect on" the shooting at the event and "pray for the victims, recognize our patriotic members and pledge to redouble our commitment to making our schools secure."

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The meeting was the first for the troubled organization since 2019, following a two-year hiatus because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The organization has been trying to regroup following a period of serious legal and financial turmoil that included a failed bankruptcy effort, a class-action lawsuit and a fraud investigation by New York's attorney general. Once among the most powerful political organizations in the country, the NRA has seen its influence wane following a significant drop in political spending.

Wayne LaPierre, the group's embattled chief executive, opened the program with remarks bemoaning the "21 beautiful lives ruthlessly and indiscriminately extinguished by a criminal monster."

Still, he said that "restricting the fundamental human rights of law-abiding Americans to defend themselves is not the answer. It never has been."

Later, several hundred people in the auditorium stood and bowed their heads in a moment of silence for the victims of the shooting. Several thousand people were inside the auditorium during the speeches, which appeared fewer than the number gathered outside. Many seats were empty.

Trump accused Democrats of trying to exploit the tragedy and demonizing gun owners.

"When Joe Biden blamed the gun lobby he was talking about Americans like you," Trump said, referring to the president's emotional plea in a national address asking, "When in God's name are we going to stand up to the gun lobby?"

Trump called for overhauling school security and the nation's approach to mental health, telling the group every school building should have a single point of entry, strong exterior fencing, metal detectors and hardened classroom doors and every school should have a police officer or armed guard on duty at all times. He also called yet again for trained teachers to be able to carry concealed weapons in the classroom.

He and other speakers overlooked the security upgrades that were already in place at the elementary school and did not stop the gunman, who entered the building through a back door that had been propped open.

According to a district safety plan, Uvalde schools have a wide range of safety measures in place. The district had four police officers and four support counselors, according to the plan, which appears to be dated from the 2019-20 school year. It also had software to monitor social media for threats and software to screen school visitors.

Security experts say the Uvalde case illustrates how fortifying schools can backfire. A lock on the classroom door, for instance — one of the most basic and widely recommended school safety measures — kept victims in and police out.

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, who, like Trump, is considered a potential presidential candidate in 2024, railed against Democrats' calls for universal background checks for gun purchases and bans of assault-style weapons and instead pointed to broken families, declining church attendance, social media bullying and video games as the real problems.

"Tragedies like the event of this week are a mirror forcing us to ask hard questions, demanding that we see where our culture is failing," he said. "We must not react to evil and tragedy by abandoning the Constitution or infringing on the rights of our law-abiding citizens."

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, another potential presidential contender, said calls to further restrict gun access are "all about control and it is garbage. I'm not buying it for a second and you shouldn't, either."

Some scheduled speakers and performers backed out of the event, including several Texas lawmakers and "American Pie" singer Don McLean, who said "it would be disrespectful" to go ahead with his act after the country's latest mass shooting. Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick said Friday morning that he had decided not to speak at an event breakfast after "prayerful consideration and discussion with NRA officials."

"While a strong supporter of the Second Amendment and an NRA member, I would not want my appearance today to bring any additional pain or grief to the families and all those suffering in Uvalde," he wrote in a statement.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who was to attend, addressed the convention by prerecorded video instead.

Outside the convention hall, protesters gathered in a park where police set up metal barriers — some holding crosses with photos of the Uvalde shooting victims.

"Murderers!" some yelled in Spanish. "Shame on you!" others shouted at attendees.

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Among the protesters was singer Little Joe, of the popular Tejano band Little Joe y La Familia, who said in the more than 60 years he's spent touring the world, no other country he's been to has faced as many mass shootings as the U.S.

"Of course, this is the best country in the world," he said. "But what good does it do us if we can't protect lives, especially of our children?"

Democrat Beto O'Rourke, who is challenging Abbott in the governor's race, ticked off a list of previous school shootings and called on those attending the convention to "join us to make sure that this no longer happens in this country."

While Biden and Democrats in Congress have renewed calls for stricter gun laws after the Uvalde shooting, NRA board members and others attending the conference dismissed talk of banning or limiting access to firearms.

Samuel Thornburg, 43, a maintenance worker for Southwest Airlines in Houston who was attending the NRA meeting, said: "Guns are not evil. It's the people that are committing the crime that are evil. Our schools need to be more locked. There need to be more guards."

There is precedent for the NRA to gather during 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.

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

Most U.S. adults think that mass shootings would occur less often if guns were harder to get and believe schools and other public places have become less safe than they were two decades ago, polling finds.

Many specific measures that would curb access to guns or ammunition also get majority support. A May AP-NORC poll found, for instance, that 51% of U.S. adults favor a nationwide ban on the sale of AR-15 rifles and similar semiautomatic weapons. But the numbers are highly partisan, with 75% percent of Democrats agreeing versus just 27% of Republicans.

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

## **Official: Girl told 911 'send the police now' as cops waited**

By JIM VERTUNO and ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — Students trapped inside a classroom with a gunman repeatedly called 911 during this week's attack on a Texas elementary school, including one who pleaded, "Please send the police now," as officers waited more than an hour to breach the classroom after following the gunman into the building, authorities said Friday.

The commander at the scene in Uvalde — the school district's police chief — believed that 18-year-old gunman Salvador Ramos was barricaded inside adjoining classrooms at Robb Elementary School and that children were no longer at risk, Steven McCraw, the head of the Texas Department of Public Safety, said at a contentious news conference.

"It was the wrong decision," he said.

Friday's briefing came after authorities spent three days providing often conflicting and incomplete information about the more than an hour that elapsed between the time Ramos entered the school and when U.S. Border Patrol agents unlocked the classroom door and killed him.

Three police officers followed Ramos into the building within two minutes. In the next half hour, as many as 19 officers piled into the hallway outside. But another 47 minutes passed before the Border Patrol tactical team breached the door, McCraw said.

As the gunman fired at students, law enforcement officers from other agencies urged the school police chief to let them move in because children were in danger, two law enforcement officials said.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they had not been authorized to speak publicly about the investigation.

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One of the officials said audio recordings from the scene capture officers from other agencies telling the school police chief that the shooter was still active and that the priority was to stop him.

Ramos killed 19 children and two teachers inside the room. His motive remained unclear, authorities said.

There was a barrage of gunfire shortly after Ramos entered the classroom where officers eventually killed him, but those shots were "sporadic" for much of the time that officers waited in the hallway, McCraw said. He said investigators do not know if children died during that time.

Throughout the attack, teachers and children repeatedly called 911 asking for help, including the girl who pleaded for the police, McCraw said.

Young survivors of the attack said they pretended to be dead while waiting for help.

Miah Cerrillo, 11, told CNN that she covered herself with a friend's blood to look dead. After the shooter moved into an adjacent room, she could hear screams, more gunfire and music being blared by the gunman. Samuel Salinas, 10, who also played dead, told ABC's "Good Morning America" that the assailant shot teacher Irma Garcia before firing on the kids.

Questions have mounted over the amount of time it took officers to enter the school to confront the gunman.

It was 11:28 a.m. Tuesday when Ramos' Ford pickup slammed into a ditch behind the low-slung Texas school and the driver jumped out carrying an AR-15-style rifle. Five minutes after that, authorities said, Ramos entered the school and found his way to the fourth grade classroom where he killed the 21 victims.

But it was not until around 12:50 p.m. that police killed Ramos, McCraw said, when shots could be heard over a 911 call from a person inside the classroom as officers breached the room.

What happened during that time frame, in a working-class neighborhood near the edge of Uvalde, has fueled mounting public anger and scrutiny over law enforcement's response to Tuesday's rampage.

"They say they rushed in," said Javier Cazares, whose fourth grade daughter, Jacklyn Cazares, was killed in the attack, and who raced to the school as the massacre unfolded. "We didn't see that."

According to the new timeline provided by McCraw, after crashing his truck, Ramos fired on two people coming out of a nearby funeral home, officials said.

Contrary to earlier statements by officials, a school district police officer was not at the school when Ramos arrived. When that officer did respond, he unknowingly drove past Ramos, who was crouched behind a car parked outside and firing at the building, McCraw said.

At 11:33 a.m., Ramos entered the school through a rear door that had been propped open and fired more than 100 rounds into a pair of classrooms, McCraw said. He did not address why the door was propped open.

Two minutes later, three local police officers arrived and entered the building through the same door, followed soon after by four others, McCraw said. Within 15 minutes, officers from different agencies had assembled in the hallway, taking sporadic fire from Ramos, who was holed up in a classroom.

Ramos was still inside at 12:10 p.m. when the first U.S. Marshals Service deputies arrived. They had raced to the school from nearly 70 miles (113 kilometers) away in the border town of Del Rio, the agency said in a tweet Friday.

But the commander inside the building — the school district's police chief, Pete Arredondo — decided the group should wait to confront the gunman, on the belief that the scene was no longer an active attack, McCraw said.

The crisis came to an end at 12:50 p.m., after officers used keys from a janitor to open the classroom door, entered the room and fatally shot Ramos, he said.

Arredondo could not be reached for comment Friday. No one answered the door at his home, and he did not reply to a phone message left at the district's police headquarters.

Gov. Greg Abbott, who at a Wednesday news conference lauded the police response, said Friday that he was "misled," and he's "livid."

In his earlier statements, the governor told reporters, he was repeating what he had been told. "The information that I was given turned out, in part, to be inaccurate," he said.

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Abbott said exactly what happened needs to be “thoroughly, exhaustively” investigated.

The governor previously praised law enforcement for their “amazing courage by running toward gunfire” and their “quick response.”

On Friday, Abbott had been set to attend the annual convention of the National Rifle Association, which is being held across the state in Houston. Instead he addressed the gun-rights group’s convention by recorded video and went to Uvalde.

At the convention, speaker after speaker took the stage to say that changing U.S. gun laws or further restricting access to firearms isn’t the answer.

“What stops armed bad guys is armed good guys,” Texas Sen. Ted Cruz told those gathered in Houston.

Former President Donald Trump was among Republican leaders speaking at the event, where hundreds of protesters angry about gun violence demonstrated outside, including some who held crosses with photos of the Uvalde victims.

The motive for the massacre — the nation’s deadliest school shooting since Newtown, Connecticut, almost a decade ago — remained under investigation. Authorities have said Ramos had no known criminal or mental health history.

During the siege, frustrated onlookers urged police officers to charge into the school, according to witnesses.

“Go in there! Go in there!” women shouted at the officers soon after the attack began, said Juan Caranza, 24, who watched the scene from outside a house across the street.

Cazares said that when he arrived, he saw two officers outside the school and about five others escorting students out of the building. But 15 or 20 minutes passed before the arrival of officers with shields, equipped to confront the gunman, he said.

As more parents flocked to the school, he and others pressed police to act, Cazares said. He heard about four gunshots before he and the others were ordered back to a parking lot.

“A lot of us were arguing with the police, ‘You all need to go in there. You all need to do your jobs.’ Their response was, ‘We can’t do our jobs because you guys are interfering,’” Cazares said.

The many chilling details of the attack were enough to leave parents struggling with dread.

Visiting a downtown memorial to those killed, Kassandra Johnson of the nearby community of Hondo said she was so worried the day after the attack that she kept her twin boys home from school.

Before she sent the 8-year-olds back, she studied the school building, figuring out which windows she would need to break to reach them. And she drew hearts on their hands with marker, so she could identify them if the worst happened, Johnson said, as she put flowers near 21 white crosses honoring the victims.

“Those kids could be my kids,” she said.

## Uvalde school police chief faulted in shooting response

By DAVE COLLINS and MICHAEL MELIA Associated Press

The police official blamed for not sending officers in more quickly to stop the Uvalde, Texas, school shooting is the chief of the school system’s small police force, a unit dedicated ordinarily to building relationships with students and responding to the occasional fight.

Preparing for mass shootings is a small part of what school police officers do, but local experts say the preparation for officers assigned to schools in Texas — including mandatory active shooter training — provides them with as solid a foundation as any.

“The tactical, conceptual mindset is definitely there in Texas,” said Joe McKenna, deputy superintendent for the Comal school district in Texas and a former assistant director at the state’s school safety center.

A gunman killed 19 students and two teachers at Robb Elementary School on Tuesday. As students called 911, officers waited more than an hour to breach the classroom after following the gunman into the building. The district’s police chief, Pete Arredondo, decided officers should wait to confront the gunman on the belief he was barricaded inside adjoining classrooms and children were no longer at risk, officials said Friday.

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"It was the wrong decision," Steven McCraw, the head of the Texas Department of Public Safety, said at a news conference Friday.

A group of Border Patrol tactical officers would later engage in a shootout with the gunman and kill him, officials said. Arredondo could not immediately be reached for comment Friday by the AP.

Across the country, police officers who work in schools are tasked with keeping tabs on who's coming and going, working on building trust so students feel comfortable coming to them with problems, teaching anti-substance abuse programs and, occasionally, making arrests.

The police department for the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District says on its website that its primary goal is "to maintain a safe and secure environment for our future leaders to learn and our current leaders to educate while forming partnerships with students, teachers, parents, and the community while enforcing laws and reducing fears."

The active shooter training was mandated by state lawmakers in 2019 in response to school shootings. Under state law, school districts also are required to have plans to respond to active shooters in their emergency response procedures.

Security can sometimes become lax because school officials and officers may not believe a shooting will ever happen in their building, said Lynelle Sparks, a school police officer in Hillsboro, Texas, and executive director of the Texas Association of School Resource Officers.

"It's always making sure that you are prepared," she said. "People get relaxed. It happens in every district. You can't say that it doesn't. It happens everywhere. We get to the point, 'Oh my gosh. This is horrific. Safety Safety Safety.' The school year goes by, 'Oh, why do I have to lock my door everyday, you know? I wish that every teacher would teach behind a locked door. It doesn't make it a prison system. It's about saving lives."

Under the incident command approach that was widely adopted after 9/11, it is unsurprising that the school police chief would be considered the commander, even following the arrival of officers from other agencies, McKenna said. The designated person would be considered the commander until relieved by a higher-ranking officer, but that doesn't necessarily happen immediately when efforts to save lives are continuing, he said.

"Obviously it's still an ongoing investigation, but it would make sense that a police chief of a school district would be the initial incident commander," McKenna said.

While many schools around the country host school resource officers who report to their municipal police departments, it is not uncommon especially in some Southern states and large cities for school districts to have their own police forces, like Uvalde.

McKenna said his research on school policing indicated that training and other factors mattered more than which agency was managing the officers.

"It doesn't matter if you're in a school police department or an SRO, it's more about the components of any good officer," he said.

## Guilty plea in plot to firebomb California Democratic HQ

By DON THOMPSON Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — A California man pleaded guilty Friday to plotting to blow up the state Democratic Party's headquarters in what prosecutors said was the first in a planned series of politically-motivated attacks after the defeat of former President Donald Trump.

Ian Benjamin Rogers, 46, of Napa, pleaded guilty to conspiring to destroy a building by fire or explosives, possessing an explosive device and possessing a machine gun under a plea agreement that could bring him seven to nine years in federal prison.

U.S. prosecutors in San Francisco charged Rogers and Jarrod Copeland with conspiring to attack targets they associated with Democrats after Trump's defeat in the November 2020 presidential election.

The pair "hoped their attacks would prompt a movement," prosecutors said when they announced the charges in July.



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Copeland, 38, previously pleaded guilty to conspiracy and destruction of records.

"I want to blow up a democrat building bad," Rogers wrote in one of the messaging apps he used to communicate with Copeland, according to the indictment. In a different message he said that after Democratic President Joe Biden was inaugurated, "we go to war."

Their first planned target was the John L. Burton Democratic Headquarters in Sacramento, prosecutors said.

Law enforcement officers who searched Rogers's home in January 2021 seized nearly 50 firearms, thousands of rounds of ammunition and five pipe bombs, prosecutors said.

He was taken into custody then on state charges after the FBI said he sent text messages that agents perceived as threats against the unoccupied Governor's Mansion and social media companies Facebook and Twitter.

Under a universal agreement, the federal sentence will be served concurrently with a 10- to 12-year state sentence on similar Napa County charges of possessing fully automatic weapons and explosive devices, said Rogers' attorney, Colin Cooper.

Rogers "has never been in trouble before," Cooper said.

"He's accepted responsibility and he is desirous of paying his debt to society and resuming a life of productivity, of being a good father and good husband and a good family man" with an 11-year-old son, Cooper said. "He feels awful about what happened and what he's done to his family, and he's a guy I think we'll never see again in the (criminal justice) system."

Rogers remains in custody awaiting his sentencing, set for Sept. 30.

## Iran seizes 2 Greek tankers in Persian Gulf as tensions rise

By JON GAMBRELL and NICHOLAS PAPHITIS Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard seized two Greek oil tankers Friday in helicopter-launched raids in the Persian Gulf, officials said. The action appeared to be retaliation for Athens' assistance in the U.S. seizure of crude oil from an Iranian-flagged tanker this week in the Mediterranean Sea over violating Washington's crushing sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

The raid marks the first major incident at sea in months as tensions remain high between Iran and the West over its tattered nuclear deal with world powers. As Tehran enriches more uranium, closer to weapons-grade levels than ever before, worries mount that negotiators won't find a way back to the accord — raising the risk of a wider war.

The Guard issued a statement announcing the seizures, accusing the tankers of unspecified violations. Nour News, a website close to Iran's Supreme National Security Council, warned a short time earlier that Tehran planned to take "punitive action" over Greece assisting the U.S. in seizing oil days earlier from the Iranian-flagged tanker Lana.

Greece's Foreign Ministry said it made a strong demarche to the Iranian ambassador in Athens over the "violent taking over of two Greek-flagged ships" in the Persian Gulf. "These acts effectively amount to acts of piracy," a ministry statement said.

The ministry called for the immediate release of the vessels and their crews, warning the seizure would have "particularly negative consequences" in bilateral relations and in Iran's relations with the European Union, of which Greece is a member.

An Iranian helicopter landed on the Greek-flagged Delta Poseidon in international waters, some 22 nautical miles off the coast of Iran, the ministry said.

"Armed men then took the crew captive," it said, adding that two Greek nationals were among the crew.

"A similar incident has been reported on another Greek-flagged vessel, that was carrying seven Greek citizens, close to the coast of Iran," the ministry said.

A Greek official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss details of the attack with a journalist, identified the second ship as the Prudent Warrior. Its manager, Polembros Shipping in Greece, earlier said the company was "cooperating with the authorities and making every possible effort to address the

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situation effectively.”

Greek officials did not identify the nationalities of the other crew on board the vessels.

Both vessels had come from Iraq’s Basra oil terminal, loaded with crude, according to tracking data from MarineTraffic.com. Prudent Warrior just before had been off Qatar and likely loaded oil there as well, the data showed.

A U.S. defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters, said it appeared the two ships had come close to — but not into — Iranian territorial waters Friday. After the hijacking, they drifted into Iranian waters. The ships also had turned off their tracking devices — another red flag, the official said. However, neither had issued a mayday or a call for help, the official said.

Iran’s seizure on Friday was the latest in a string of hijackings and explosions to roil a region that includes the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all traded oil passes. The incidents began after then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from Iran’s nuclear deal with world powers, which saw Tehran drastically limit its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

The U.S. Navy blamed Iran for a series of limpet mine attacks on vessels that damaged tankers in 2019, as well as for a fatal drone attack on an Israeli-linked oil tanker that killed two European crew members in 2021.

Iranian hijackers also stormed and briefly captured a Panama-flagged asphalt tanker off the United Arab Emirates last year, and briefly seized and held a Vietnamese tanker in November.

Tehran denies carrying out the attacks, but a wider shadow war between Iran and the West has played out in the region’s volatile waters. Tanker seizures have been a part of it since 2019, when Iran seized the British-flagged Stena Impero after the United Kingdom detained an Iranian oil tanker off Gibraltar. Iran released the tanker months later as London also released the Iranian vessel.

Iran last year also seized and held a South Korean-flagged tanker for months amid a dispute over billions of dollars of frozen assets Seoul holds.

“This incident is assessed to be a retaliatory action in line with a history of Iranian forces detaining vessels in a tit-for-tat manner,” maritime intelligence firm Dryad Global warned. “As a result, Greek-flagged vessels operating within the vicinity of Iran in the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman are currently assessed to be at a heightened risk of interception and it is advised to avoid this area until further notice.”

Underlining that threat, Iran’s semiofficial Tasnim news agency warned in a tweet: “There are still 17 other Greek ships in the Persian Gulf that could be seized.”

Meanwhile, the Guard is building a massive new support ship near the Strait of Hormuz as it tries to expand its naval presence in waters vital to international energy supplies and beyond, according to satellite photos obtained by The Associated Press.

Talks in Vienna over Iran’s tattered nuclear deal have been stalled since April. Since the deal’s collapse, Iran runs advanced centrifuges and has a rapidly growing stockpile of enriched uranium. Nonproliferation experts warn Iran has enriched enough up to 60% purity — a short technical step from weapons-grade levels of 90% — to make one nuclear weapon if it choose.

Iran insists its program is for peaceful purposes, though United Nations experts and Western intelligence agencies say Iran had an organized military nuclear program through 2003.

Building a nuclear bomb would still take Iran more time if it pursued a weapon, analysts say, though they warn Tehran’s advances make the program more dangerous. Israel has threatened in the past it will carry out a preemptive strike to stop Iran — and already is suspected in a series of recent killings targeting Iranian officials.

## AP source: Lakers choose Darvin Ham as next head coach

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A person with knowledge of the decision says Darvin Ham has accepted an offer to be the next head coach of the Los Angeles Lakers.

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The person spoke with The Associated Press on Friday on condition of anonymity because the deal has not been publicly announced.

The 48-year-old Ham is getting his first head coaching job as the 28th coach in Lakers history. He has been an assistant to Mike Budenholzer with the Milwaukee Bucks since 2018, and he played a significant role in their run to the 2021 NBA title.

Ham will be the successor to Frank Vogel, who was fired one day after the Lakers wrapped up one of the most disappointing seasons in NBA history by going 33-49 and missing the playoffs.

The Lakers flopped despite another impressive season from LeBron James, who welcomed his new head coach on social media even before the move was publicly announced.

"So damn EXCITED!!!!!!!!!" James tweeted. "Congrats and welcome Coach DHam!!!"

Ham will be the 15th Black coach currently in the NBA, the most ever at one time.

Ham was a player development assistant coach with Kobe Bryant's Lakers from 2011-13 on the staffs of head coaches Mike Brown and Mike D'Antoni. Ham then had a five-year stint on the Atlanta Hawks' staff under Budenholzer, developing a reputation as an effective communicator with versatile tactical knowledge.

Budenholzer's staffs with the Hawks also included Taylor Jenkins, Quin Snyder and Kenny Atkinson, who all became NBA head coaches.

Vogel led the Lakers to the franchise's 17th title exactly 18 months before his firing. He failed to coax a winning season out of a veteran-laden roster led by James, oft-injured Anthony Davis and newcomer Russell Westbrook, who had a dismal first season with his hometown team. Westbrook is under contract for another season with the Lakers.

Ham played eight seasons in the NBA and won a championship with the Detroit Pistons in 2004 before moving into coaching in 2008. The Michigan native played collegiately at Texas Tech.

## US review traces massive New Mexico fire to planned burns

By MORGAN LEE and CEDAR ATTANACIO Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — Two fires that merged to create the largest wildfire in New Mexico history have both been traced to planned burns set by U.S. forest managers as preventative measures, federal investigators announced Friday.

The findings shift responsibility more squarely toward the U.S. Forest Service for initiating a natural disaster that has destroyed at least 330 homes as flames raged through nearly 500 square miles (1,300 square kilometers) of high-altitude pine forests and meadows. The wildfire also has displaced thousands of residents from rural villages with Spanish-colonial roots and high poverty rates, while unleashing untold environmental damage.

Roughly 3,000 firefighters, along with water-dropping planes and helicopters, continue to fight the blaze as it approaches mountain resorts and Native American communities. Firefighting costs already surpass \$132 million, climbing by \$5 million a day.

Fire and law enforcement officials offered a cautious but hopeful Friday night status report, with fire behavior analyst Stewart Turner noting they need to watch the so-called "red flag" conditions — warm, dry weather with high winds — starting Saturday.

"The weather is a big concern for us," Turner acknowledged, saying even an errant pine cone rolling down a slope and crossing a control line could spread flames. "Red flag warning is a big message for tomorrow."

He said dry conditions are expected through Tuesday, but some moisture and even thunderstorms are possible starting Wednesday.

Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernández described a rising sense of outrage as the fire triggers new evacuations of families and livestock. Fear of flames is giving way to concern about erosion and mudslides in places where superheated fire penetrates soil and roots.

"The destruction these two fires caused is immeasurable and will be felt for generations," said Leger Fernández, sponsor of a bill that would reimburse residents and businesses routed by the fire.

The Forest Service has not yet released detailed planning documents for the original planned burns that

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might indicate whether fire protocols were followed.

Scientists and forest managers are racing to develop new tools to forecast the behavior of planned fires amid climate change and an enduring drought in the American West. The intentionally set blazes, known as prescribed burns, are aimed at limiting the accumulation of timber and underbrush that, if left unattended, can fuel extremely hot and destructive wildfires.

The Biden administration announced in January a \$50 billion plan to stave off catastrophic wildfires that would more than double the use of planned fires and logging to reduce trees and other vegetation that serve as tinder in the most at-risk areas. Prescribed burns often are used in wildland areas that are too vast to thin by hand or machine.

The two fires east of Santa Fe joined in April to form the massive blaze at the southern tip of the Rocky Mountains, in the Sangre de Cristo range.

One of the fires was previously traced to April 6, when a planned burn, set by firefighters to clear out small trees and brush, was declared out of control.

On Friday, investigators said they had tracked the source of the second fire to the remnants of a planned winter fire that lay dormant through several snowstorms only to flare up again last month.

Investigators said the prescribed "pile burn" was initiated in January at Gallinas Canyon in the Santa Fe National Forest outside Las Vegas, New Mexico, and concluded in the final days of that month. Fire was reported again in the same vicinity April 9 and escaped control 10 days later amid dry, hot and windy conditions, Forest Service investigators found.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham in a statement called the investigation results a "first step toward the federal government taking full responsibility" for the New Mexico wildfire. She highlighted her pending request to President Joe Biden to direct the Federal Emergency Management Administration to pay for 100% of costs related to a broad range of recovery efforts.

Forest Service Chief Randy Moore last week announced a 90-day pause and review of protocols for planned fires that limit the buildup of flammable vegetation. He cited extreme fire danger and unfavorable weather and did not specifically link the review to New Mexico's fires.

"It will also ensure the prescribed burn program nationwide is anchored in the most contemporary science, policies, practices and decision-making processes, and that employees, partners and communities have the support they need to continue using this critical tool to confront the wildfire crisis," the agency said in a statement Friday.

Moore said prescribed fires go as planned in more than 99% of cases. Notable exceptions include the 2000 Cerro Grande Fire that swept through national security installations and residential neighborhoods at Los Alamos.

So-called pile burns can often include wildland debris collected over months or even years. Forest managers cut back trees and gather debris into mounds, preferring to burn forest fuels in the winter when planned burns are easier to control.

In January, Santa Fe National Forest workers started burning through a series of piles across an area of 0.6 square miles (1.5 square kilometers), after advising the public of possible smoke hazards.

## Officials: Texas shooter talked about guns in private chats

By KATHLEEN FOODY Associated Press

Texas authorities said Friday that the gunman who killed 19 children and two teachers inside an elementary school discussed his interest in buying a gun in private online conversations, but backed away from earlier descriptions that he made public threats less than an hour before the attack.

Gov. Greg Abbott said Wednesday, a day after the shooting, that "the only information that was known in advance was posted by the gunman on Facebook approximately 30 minutes before reaching the school." Abbott's claim prompted questions about whether technology companies could have provided advance warning.

But on Friday, the head of the Texas Department of Public Safety said the gunman made the threatening

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comments in a private message.

"I want to correct something that was said early on in the investigation, that he posted on Facebook publicly that he was going to kill, that he was going to shoot his grandmother and secondly after that that he was going to, that he had shot her and that third he was going to go shoot up a school," Steven McCraw said. "That did not happen."

Facebook had already noted on Wednesday that the threats were in direct text messages, not a public post.

McCraw did not say to whom 18-year-old Salvador Ramos sent the messages.

McCraw also told reporters Friday that Ramos asked his sister to help him buy a gun in September 2021, but that she "flatly refused." He did not say how authorities learned of that request.

McCraw shared information from four more of Ramos' social media private messages.

In a Feb. 28 four-person chat, McCraw said that "Ramos being a school shooter" was discussed.

In a March 1 four-person chat, he said Ramos discussed buying a gun.

In a March 3 four-person chat, another person said "word on the street is that you're buying a gun." McCraw said Ramos replied, "Just bought something."

On March 14, McCraw said Ramos shared the words "10 more days" in a social media post. Another user asked "Are you going to shoot up a school or something?" McCraw said.

He said Ramos replied, "No and stop asking dumb questions and you'll see."

McCraw did not identify any of the other people included in those chat groups.

The department did not immediately respond to a request Friday for more detail, including screenshots of the communications mentioned during the news conference.

Authorities have said Ramos legally purchased two guns not long before the school attack: an AR-style rifle on May 17 and a second rifle on May 20. He had turned 18 just days earlier, permitting him to buy a rifle under federal law.

Friday's briefing came after authorities spent three days providing often conflicting and incomplete information about the law enforcement response in Uvalde.

## McCarthy, GOP lawmakers escalate standoff with Jan. 6 panel

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy is making it clear that he will likely defy a subpoena from the House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol attack, escalating a standoff with the panel over his and other GOP lawmakers' testimony.

In an 11-page letter to the panel Friday, an attorney for McCarthy argued that the select committee does not have the authority to issue subpoenas to the lawmakers under House rules and demanded answers to a series of questions and documents if his client were to comply.

Attorney Elliot Berke requested a list of "topics that the Select Committee would like to discuss with the Leader, and the constitutional and legal rationale justifying the request."

"I expressly reserve Leader McCarthy's right to assert any other applicable privilege or objection to the Select Committee's subpoena," Berke wrote.

Committee spokesperson Tim Mulvey responded Friday evening, "Leader McCarthy and other Members who have been served subpoenas are hiding behind debunked arguments and baseless requests for special treatment."

He added, "The refusal of these Members to cooperate is a continued assault on the rule of law and sets a dangerous new precedent that could hamper the House's ability to conduct oversight in the future." Mulvey said committee Chairman Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., "will formally respond to these Members in the days ahead."

The House panel believes testimony from the Republican lawmakers is crucial to their investigation as each of the men was in contact with then-President Donald Trump and his allies in the weeks and days leading up to the Capitol insurrection. Some participated in meetings and urged the White House to try

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to overturn the 2020 presidential results.

McCarthy has acknowledged he spoke with Trump on Jan. 6 as Trump's supporters were beating police outside the Capitol and forcing their way into the building. But he has not shared many details. The committee requested information about his conversations with Trump "before, during and after" the riot.

His apparent defiance presents a new challenge for the committee after lawmakers decided to take the extraordinary and politically risky step of subpoenaing their own colleagues.

"For House Republican leaders to agree to participate in this political stunt would change the House forever," the California lawmaker wrote Thursday in an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* with GOP Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio.

The committee now must decide whether to enforce the subpoenas even as it looks to wrap up the investigation and prepare for a series of public hearings in early June. It could refer the lawmakers to the House ethics committee or take steps to hold them in contempt.

The subpoenas were issued to McCarthy, Jordan, and Reps. Scott Perry of Pennsylvania, Andy Biggs of Arizona and Mo Brooks of Alabama in mid-May. The panel has already interviewed more than 1,000 witnesses and collected more than 100,000 documents as it investigates the worst attack on the Capitol in two centuries.

"I have no relevant information that would advance any legitimate legislative purpose," Jordan said in a letter detailing his reasons for not cooperating. The others indicated after the subpoenas were issued that they too would not cooperate.

Perry's lawyer sent the committee a letter earlier this week saying he could "not in good conscience comply" with the subpoena because he does not believe it is valid under House rules.

Requests for comment from Biggs and Brooks were not immediately returned.

The panel had previously asked for voluntary cooperation from the five lawmakers, along with a handful of other GOP members, but all refused to speak with the panel, which debated for months whether to issue the subpoenas.

McCarthy and the others were summoned to testify in front of investigators this week and next week. McCarthy, who aspires to be House speaker if Republicans take over the majority next year, indicated that the committee's decision will have a lasting impact.

"Every representative in the minority would be subject to compelled interrogations by the majority, under oath, without any foundation of fairness, and at the expense of taxpayers," he wrote in the op-ed.

In a separate move, McCarthy and the No. 2 House Republican, Louisiana Rep. Steve Scalise, filed a court brief in support of Donald Trump ally Steve Bannon, who is facing criminal contempt charges for defying a subpoena from the committee. In the brief, lawyers for the two write that the committee does not have the authority to issue subpoenas, an argument that has been dismissed in other court proceedings.

The lawyers also wrote that McCarthy and Scalise filed the brief "out of concern for the potential damage to House institutional" rules and order.

## Deliberations underway in trial linked to Trump-Russia probe

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A lawyer for Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign hid his partisan interests from the FBI as he pushed "pure opposition research" related to Donald Trump and Russia in the weeks before the election, a prosecutor asserted Friday during closing arguments of the attorney's trial.

But Michael Sussmann's legal team denied prosecutors' claims that he lied. And even if jurors believed Sussmann did lie, the defense said the alleged false statement did not matter because he was presenting national security information that the FBI would have looked into no matter the source. At the time of Sussmann's meeting with the FBI in September 2016, the bureau was already investigating whether Russia and the Trump campaign were colluding to sway the election won by Trump that November.

"It was a very contentious time. The Russians had hacked the DNC. They were leaking emails. And there was an ongoing FBI investigation irrespective of this," Sussmann lawyer Sean Berkowitz told jurors,

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referring to the Democratic National Committee. "And that was viewed as incredibly serious."

The case is the first courtroom test of special counsel John Durham's work since his appointment three years ago to search for government misconduct during the investigation into potential ties between Russia and Trump's campaign. Jurors began deliberating Friday afternoon.

A guilty verdict would be cheered by Trump and his supporters, who have looked to the Durham investigation to undercut the original Trump-Russia probe that they have long seen as politically motivated. But the case against Sussmann is narrow in nature, involves a peripheral aspect of that probe and alleges misconduct by a tipster to the government rather than by anyone at the FBI or any other federal agency.

Nonetheless, the two weeks of testimony in federal court in Washington have exposed the extent to which Democratic interests, opposition research, the media and law enforcement all came to be entangled in the run-up to the presidential election.

Prosecutors have portrayed Sussmann as determined to gin up investigations into Trump that could then be disclosed to the media and yield stories negative to his campaign.

"It wasn't about national security," said Jonathan Algor, a Durham team prosecutor. "It was about promoting opposition research against the opposition candidate, Donald Trump."

Sussmann is charged with a single count of making a false statement. That charge carries a maximum five-year prison sentence, though if convicted, Sussmann is likely to get far less — if any — prison time. He did not take the stand during the trial.

The case turns on a Sept. 19, 2016, meeting in which Sussmann presented the FBI's top lawyer, James Baker, with computer data that Sussmann said suggested a secret communications backchannel between a Russia-based bank and the Trump Organization, the candidate's company.

Such a backchannel, if it existed, would have been explosive information at a time when the FBI was examining links between Trump and Russia. But after assessing the data, the FBI quickly determined that there was no suspicious contact at all.

Prosecutors say Sussmann lied to Baker by saying he was not participating in the meeting on behalf of a particular client. They say he was actually there on behalf of the Clinton campaign and another client, a technology executive whom the Durham team says tasked researchers with looking for internet traffic involving Trump associates and Russians.

Sussmann lied about his clients, prosecutors allege, to give the data extra credibility because he figured the information would not be investigated if the FBI thought it was mere opposition research being pushed by the Clinton campaign.

"The defendant knew he had to hide his clients if there was any chance of getting his allegations to the FBI — and that, ladies and gentlemen, is why the defendant lied," Algor said.

To convict, prosecutors need to show not only that Sussmann lied but that the lie was material — namely, that it mattered or at least could have mattered to the FBI's work.

Algor said the fact Sussmann repeatedly billed the Clinton campaign for his work on the Alfa Bank matter is proof he was acting on the campaign's behalf when he met with the FBI. But Berkowitz noted that Sussmann billed his taxi ride to FBI headquarters for the meeting itself to his law firm, rather than to the campaign.

Berkowitz also tried to cast doubt on what exactly was said in the meeting. Prosecutors showed jurors a text message Sussmann sent Baker the night before the meeting in which he requested a sit-down on a sensitive matter and said he would be coming by himself and not on behalf of a client.

But Berkowitz reminded jurors that the only false statement that was charged took place during the following day's meeting, and that no one can be sure exactly what was said because Baker and Sussmann were the only participants and neither took notes.

Berkowitz also suggested it was technically accurate if Sussmann said he was not acting on behalf of a client because Sussmann never asked the FBI do anything with the information he was providing.

"When you go somewhere on behalf of a client, you're advocating for the client, you're asking for something," Berkowitz said. "Mr. Sussmann didn't ask Jim Baker for anything."

The two sides also quibbled over Baker's testimony, with Berkowitz citing dozens of instances in which

Baker said on the stand that he did not recall or could not remember something. Prosecutors, meanwhile, seized on the fact that Baker said he was "100% confident" that Sussmann had told him that he was not acting on behalf of a client and that he probably wouldn't have taken the meeting if he had been told otherwise.

"Ladies and gentlemen, would James Baker come on the stand under oath, a former high-ranking FBI official, and subject himself to the penalty of perjury if it weren't true," another prosecutor, Andrew DeFilippis, told jurors on Friday. "No, he wouldn't do that. None of us would do that, would take that risk."

Durham has so far charged three people. The case against Sussmann is the only one to have reached trial.

## Despite ample school security plan, Texas shooter found gaps

By COLLIN BINKLEY and KANTELE FRANKO Associated Press

Robb Elementary School had measures in place to prevent this kind of violence. A fence lined the school property. Teachers were ordered to keep classroom doors closed and locked. Students faced regular lockdown and evacuation drills.

But when an 18-year-old man arrived Tuesday at the school in Uvalde, Texas, intent on killing children, none of it stopped him.

Security failures allowed the shooter to massacre 19 students and two teachers, school safety experts say. The shooting already has led to calls to fortify schools further, on top of millions spent on equipment and other measures following earlier shootings. But more security offers drawbacks, with no guarantee of an end to mass violence. In the worst case, as in Uvalde, it could backfire.

"You can do the best job you can to prevent a school crisis, but we cannot read the minds of all the criminals who are out there," said Ronald Stephens, executive director of the National School Safety Center, a nonprofit that works with schools across the country. "We cannot prevent all crime."

According to a district safety plan, Uvalde schools had a wide range of measures in place to prevent violence. The district had four police officers and four support counselors, according to the plan, which appears to be dated from the 2019-20 school year. The district had software to monitor social media for threats and software to screen school visitors.

Yet when the gunman arrived at the school, he hopped its fence and easily entered through a back door that had been propped open, officials said. Behind the locked door of a fourth-grade classroom, he gunned down children and teachers.

Amid the attack, nearly 20 officers stood in a hallway because the on-site commander believed the gunman was barricaded in the classroom and children were not at risk, Texas Department of Public Safety Director Steven McCraw said at a Friday news conference, saying "it was the wrong decision."

The case underscores that even the strongest security plans can be undermined by a seemingly simple lapse, said Curtis Lavarello, executive director of the School Safety Advocacy Council, which provides training on school safety. The Texas school appeared to be doing many things right, he said, but none of that mattered once the gunman was able to walk unobstructed into the building and into a classroom.

"All those things on paper mean nothing if they're not followed in practice. And there seemed to be a number of gaps," he said.

In the aftermath of the shooting, some Republicans have been calling for further investments in school safety to prevent more attacks. Some have pushed for more armed police in schools, along with metal detectors and measures to make it harder to enter schools.

Among those promoting physical security measures is Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas. Appearing on Fox News on Wednesday, he brought up 2013 legislation that would have created grants to help schools install bulletproof doors and hire armed police officers among other measures.

If those grants had gone to Robb Elementary, Cruz said, "the armed police officers could have taken him out and we would have 19 children and two teachers still alive."

As the National Rifle Association opened its annual meeting Friday in Houston, the gun rights group called for more security at schools. Former President Donald Trump, who is scheduled to speak at the event, is set to call for "a top-to-bottom security overhaul at schools across this country," while dismissing calls to



disarm gun owners, according to excerpts of his speech.

Security experts say the Uvalde case illustrates how fortifying schools can backfire. A lock on the classroom door — one of the most basic and widely recommended school safety measures — kept victims in and police out.

U.S. Border Patrol agents eventually used a master key to open the locked door of the classroom where they confronted and killed the gunman, McCraw said at the Friday news conference.

Some argue that investments in school security have come at the expense of student welfare. Lockdown drills that have become routine for a generation of American students have traumatized students and added to strains on mental health, educators say.

Schools need more counselors and psychologists to help troubled students, not stronger buildings, said Dewey Cornell, a psychologist and director of the Virginia Youth Violence Project at the University of Virginia.

"We have systemically reduced the number of support staff in our schools, and focused too much on installing metal detectors and surveillance cameras and electronic door locks, which are very short term and reactive and very expensive," he said.

In the wake of the 2012 massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, schools across the country began spending huge sums of money on fortifications including bulletproof glass, metal detectors and armed security.

But such measures can create an atmosphere where students feel uncomfortable and less trusting, and it does not necessarily prevent attacks, said Matthew Mayer, a Rutgers associate professor who works on issues related to school violence.

"You'll go down these sort of endless rabbit holes of how much security is enough. And when it comes to someone who's coming in heavily armed, you're not going to stop them," Mayer said. "So the idea is you need to figure out why people do this in the first place and have ways — multi-level systems of prevention — to prevent it from happening."

He advocates for a multi-faceted prevention approach that also includes steps such as improving mental health services, assessing threats more effectively and building trust so students and families are not afraid to speak up if they're concerned someone has the means or intent to cause harm.

Still, schools can only do so much, he said, and he isn't optimistic that public outrage over Uvalde will lead to significant change.

"The problem is that a lot of this public reaction, you know, sort of rises like a wave and then recedes over time, and the politicians have been accustomed to riding that out. You know, they make speeches and so forth, and sometimes there's a commission that gets appointed, and they issue reports," Mayer said. "But substantive change is lacking."

## Students who survived Texas school attack describe scene

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — A young survivor of the massacre at a Texas elementary school said she covered herself with a friend's blood and pretended to be dead while she waited for help to arrive.

Miah Cerrillo, 11, told CNN that she and a friend called 911 from her dead teacher's phone Tuesday and waited for what felt like, to her, three hours for officers to arrive at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde.

The 18-year-old shooter, Salvador Ramos, was inside the school for more than an hour before he was shot to death by Border Patrol tactical officers. That's according to top law enforcement officials who provided new details Thursday of a confusing and sometimes contradictory timeline that has angered and frustrated the parents and onlookers who had urged police to charge into the school.

Miah said that after the shooter moved from one room into the adjacent one she could hear screams and a lot more gunfire, and that the gunman then started blaring music.

The children who survived the attack, which killed 19 schoolchildren and two teachers, described a festive, end-of-the-school-year day that quickly turned to terror.

Samuel Salinas, 10, told ABC's "Good Morning America" that he and other classmates pretended to be dead after Ramos opened fire on the class. Samuel was struck by shrapnel in his thigh.

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"He shot the teacher and then he shot the kids," said Samuel, who was in Irma Garcia's class. Garcia died in the attack and her husband, Joe Garcia, died Thursday of an apparent heart attack.

Gemma Lopez, 10, was in a classroom down the hall when Ramos entered the building. She told "Good Morning America" that a bullet came through her classroom wall before any lockdown was called.

Her best friend, Amerie Garza, died in the rampage.

## Trump election probe grand jury to hear from Raffensperger

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Georgia's secretary of state is expected to appear next week before a special grand jury in an investigation into whether former President Donald Trump and others illegally tried to meddle in the 2020 election in the state.

Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger has been summoned to appear before the special grand jury Thursday, according to a subpoena obtained by The Associated Press through an open records request. Five other people in his office have received subpoenas to appear in early June and the office has received a subpoena for documents. State Attorney General Chris Carr has received a subpoena to appear June 21.

Trump directed his ire at Raffensperger, a fellow Republican, after the secretary of state refused to bend to pressure to overturn Democrat Joe Biden's narrow presidential election victory in Georgia. On Tuesday, Raffensperger won the Republican primary in his quest for reelection, defeating a Trump-endorsed challenger.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis opened the investigation soon after she took office in January 2021. She made clear when she requested a special grand jury earlier this year that one purpose for doing so would be to issue subpoenas to people who might not cooperate otherwise.

The 23 members of the special grand jury and three alternates were selected May 2 but Fulton County Superior Court Judge Robert McBurney, who's overseeing the panel, said the grand jurors wouldn't begin meeting until June.

Willis has confirmed that her investigation includes looking into a January 2021 phone call in which Trump pushed Raffensperger to "find" the votes needed for him to win the state.

Among the documents the grand jury has asked for is anything that "memorializes the events" surrounding that call, anything that "explains the conduct" of the president during that call, and any logs of telephone calls between anyone in Raffensperger's office and Trump or his representatives.

They also asked for anything showing the results of the audit and hand recount of the results of the 2020 presidential election and a forensic audit of the state's voting equipment, among other documents.

The other people from the secretary of state's office summoned to appear are Gabriel Sterling, chief operating officer; Ryan Germany, general counsel; Chris Harvey, former head of the elections divisions; Frances Watson, former chief investigator; and Victoria Thompson, a former executive assistant who is now a legislative liaison.

Willis has also said her team is looking at a November 2020 phone call between U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham and Raffensperger, the abrupt resignation of the U.S. attorney in Atlanta on Jan. 4, 2021, and comments made during December 2020 Georgia legislative committee hearings on the election.

Trump has said his call with Raffensperger was "perfect" and said he did nothing wrong. Graham has also denied any wrongdoing.

It's not clear exactly what charges Willis could choose to pursue against Trump or anyone else. In a letter she sent to top-ranking state officials last year, she said she was looking into "potential violations of Georgia law prohibiting the solicitation of election fraud, the making of false statements to state and local government bodies, conspiracy, racketeering, violation of oath of office and any involvement in violence or threats related to the election's administration."

**Wall Street breaks 7-week losing streak, longest since 2001**

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By DAMIAN J. TROISE and ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Technology companies led a broad rally for stocks Friday as Wall Street notched its best week in 18 months. The gain broke a seven-week losing streak for the market, the longest such stretch since 2001.

The S&P 500 rose 2.5% and finished 6.6% higher for the week, its best weekly gain since November 2020. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 1.8% and the tech-heavy Nasdaq gained 3.3%.

The strong finish for the week came as investors received potentially encouraging news about inflation. The Commerce Department said that inflation rose 6.3% in April from a year earlier, the first slowdown since November 2020 and a sign that high prices may finally be moderating, at least for now.

The report was released as Wall Street looks for any signal that inflation could be easing, while trying to figure out just how low stocks might sink.

"At this point that's all the market needs," said Ross Mayfield, investment strategy analyst at Baird. "It's definitely one of the signs you would want to see."

The S&P 500 ended 100.40 points higher at 4,158.24. The Nasdaq rose 390.48 points to 12,131.13. It was the third straight gain for both indexes. The Dow rose 575.77 points to 33,212.96, its sixth-straight gain.

Smaller company stocks also gained ground. The Russell 2000 rose 49.66 points, or 2.7%, to 1,887.90.

The broader market has been in a slump for nearly two months as concerns about inflation and rising interest rates pile up. Investors were spooked last week by disappointing reports from key retailers, including Walmart and Target, which stoked fears about rising inflation hitting profit margins and crimping consumer spending.

Trading remained choppy throughout the week, though the market mostly pushed higher, as retailers including Macy's and Dollar General released encouraging earnings reports and financial updates.

Retailers were among the biggest gainers Friday as investors continued reviewing the latest round of earnings to get a better sense of just how much pain rising inflation is inflicting on businesses and consumers. Beauty products company Ulta Beauty surged 12.5% for the biggest gain in the S&P 500 after raising its profit forecast for the year. Amazon rose 3.7%.

Disappointing financial updates and earnings weighed on several companies. Clothing retailer American Eagle fell 6.6% after reported weak first-quarter earnings.

Inflation is at a four-decade high and has been persistently squeezing businesses. Higher costs prompted companies to raise prices on everything from food to clothing to protect their margins and consumers remained resilient. Russia's invasion of Ukraine worsened the inflation picture by pushing global energy and food prices even higher.

U.S. crude oil prices were relatively stable, but are up nearly 60% in 2022. Wheat prices are up about 50% and corn prices are up 30% this year.

Supply chain problems at the heart of rising inflation were worsened in the wake of China's lockdown for several major cities.

The extra inflation squeeze has made it even more difficult for businesses to offset costs and is seemingly prompting a shift in consumer spending away from expensive items and toward necessities. It has also raised concerns that the Federal Reserve may have an even more difficult time trying to temper the impact from inflation.

The Fed is aggressively raising interest rates to fight inflation, but investors are worried that it could potentially push the economy into a recession if it moves too aggressively.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury, which helps set mortgage rates, slipped to 2.74% from 2.75% late Thursday.

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

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

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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.

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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.

## **New law puts NHL great Konstantinov's 24/7 care in jeopardy**

By LARRY LAGE AP Sports Writer

WEST BLOOMFIELD, Mich. (AP) — Vladimir Konstantinov has traded hockey sticks for an Uno deck. Many, in fact. The onetime Soviet and Detroit Red Wings star plays so often that he goes through a pack per week, wearing out cards with the hands that once made him one of the world's best defensemen.

During a recent visit to the Konstantinovs' suburban Detroit condominium, he handily defeated his long-time nurse, Pam Demanuel, and smiled. That's about as good as it gets for him these days.

Since suffering severe brain damage when his drunken limousine driver crashed while Konstantinov was celebrating the first of the Red Wings' back-to-back championships in the late 1990s, the former NHL great and Red Army team captain has had to rebuild his life. Now 55, he needs help walking, eating, drinking and brushing his teeth, and a caregiver stays awake while he sleeps in case he needs to walk to the bathroom. Although he seems to comprehend questions, his answers are limited to a few words and aren't always easy to understand.

Next week, Konstantinov is in danger of losing the round-the-clock care that has enabled him to remain home. Due to the high costs of such care and changes to a Michigan law, he might be moved to an institution where restraints or medication would be necessary to keep him safe.

Konstantinov is the public face of a predicament facing roughly 18,000 Michigan residents who suffered serious traffic-related injuries and have lost their state-funded, unlimited lifetime medical care that every driver used to have to pay into by law. A bipartisan change to the law, which had contributed to Michigan having the country's highest auto insurance rates, took effect last summer and left Konstantinov and the thousands of others who relied on it with worse options.

Faced with the specter of losing his 24/7 care, Konstantinov's family has sought help from the Legislature and public, starting a GoFundMe to help offset their significant expenses and giving reporters a behind-the-scenes look at their lives.

"This is the first time we have let people in to see the struggles he has every day," his wife, Irina Konstantinov, told The Associated Press earlier this month. "Fans see him at a Red Wings game waving to people and think he must be doing great, but he's not."

Konstantinov was 30 years old and coming off a championship season in which he was voted runner-up as the NHL's best defenseman when his limo driver crashed on June 13, 1997, ending his career and changing his life forever. His friend and teammate Slava Fetisov, another member of the Red Wings' vaunted

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Russian Five, was also in the limo but didn't suffer career-threatening injuries.

Konstantinov's wife and daughter, Anastasia, tried to care for him after he emerged from a two-month coma, but they quickly found that they needed constant professional help. After years of round-the-clock professional care, therapy and a lot of determination, Konstantinov learned how to walk and talk again.

But seeking to lower Michigan's highest-in-the-nation auto insurance policies, the Republican-led Legislature and Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in 2019 passed a law that took effect last July allowing drivers to choose their level of personal injury protection and to opt-out of the previous requirement that they buy unlimited lifetime coverage. Among other changes, the new law also scaled back the state fund's reimbursements for health providers that treat accident victims.

Although the law lowered Michigan car insurance premiums to a degree and led the state to issue \$400 per-vehicle refunds during an election year, it left Konstantinov and others like him facing the prospect of losing the constant care they need. Reimbursements for certain post-acute services under the new law were reduced to 55% of 2019 levels, which home care agencies say is financially unsustainable.

"We're carrying approximately \$200,000 in (losses) on Vlad's case alone," said Theresa Ruedisueli, regional director of operations for Arcadia Home Care & Staffing, which provides Konstantinov's home care.

If the company can't care for Konstantinov without losing more money, it plans to discharge him as a client on June 1.

Anastasia Konstantinov started a GoFundMe three years ago to help pay for her father's care, but it has raised less than 10% of its \$250,000 goal. The Red Wings and NHL Players' Association are also exploring ways to help maintain Konstantinov's home care.

"We're actively working with him and his team and plan to organize a fundraising event to help maintain his care and provide more resources for extending it in the future," the Red Wings said in a statement.

The NHLPA has been in contact with the family and is working to determine how to address the matter, according to spokesman Jonathan Weatherdon.

Few if any of the others affected by the change in the law have Konstantinov's notoriety in Michigan, though, and many are also struggling to come up with the money to keep their round-the-clock home care.

Some legislators have said they never intended for the revisions to apply retroactively to crashes that occurred before the new law was signed. But their efforts to amend it have stalled.

"I do not believe it was the intent of the Legislature for the home health care attendants to take this type of a cut," said Republican state Rep. Phil Green, who sponsored a bill that would raise reimbursements for rehabilitative treatment and home-based care. "The statement made was, 'All sides, both the health care side as well as the insurance side, need a hair trim.' The reality is for the home health attendant care as well as the rehab facilities, this was more of a scalping than it was a hair trim."

But the Michigan House's Republican speaker, Jason Wentworth, who supported the current law, said in March that efforts to change the law during this year's session were dead, pointing to the savings it has brought to drivers. He declined an interview request from the AP.

As for Konstantinov, who has met with legislators at the Capitol, he appears to be well aware that his quality of life is at risk.

"I like live here," he said during the AP's visit to his home.

Why?

"My house," he replied.

## Judge dismisses Trump's lawsuit, allowing NY probe to go on

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A federal judge on Friday dismissed Donald Trump's lawsuit against New York Attorney General Letitia James, rejecting the former president's claim that she targeted him out of political animus and allowing her civil investigation into his business practices to continue.

In a 43-page ruling, U.S. District Judge Brenda Sannes wrote that case law bars federal judges from interfering in state-level investigations, with limited exceptions, and that there wasn't evidence to support

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the Republican's contention that James, a Democrat, was proceeding in bad faith because of their differing political views.

Sannes, who was appointed in 2014 by former President Barack Obama, a Democrat, said James had a legitimate basis for investigating Trump and his company, the Trump Organization, and that Trump failed to show that recent court proceedings seeking to enforce subpoenas on him were "commenced for the purpose of retaliation."

James' public statements about Trump "make clear that she disagrees vehemently with Mr. Trump's political views," Sannes wrote, but Trump and his lawyers failed to demonstrate any connection between her opinions and how the investigation has played out.

"The fact that (James') public statements reflect personal and/or political animus toward (Trump) is not, in and of itself, sufficient," Sannes wrote.

James heralded Friday's ruling as a "big victory" over a "frivolous" lawsuit. Sannes' decision came a day after a New York appeals court ruled that Trump must answer questions under oath in James' probe, upholding a lower-court ruling requiring him to sit for a deposition.

"Time and time again, the courts have made clear that Donald J. Trump's baseless legal challenges cannot stop our lawful investigation into his and the Trump Organization's financial dealings," James said in a written statement. "No one in this country can pick and choose how the law applies to them, and Donald Trump is no exception. As we have said all along, we will continue this investigation undeterred."

Trump's lawyer, Alina Habba, questioned Sannes' justification for dismissing the lawsuit — singling out, by name, the legal precedent at issue — and said they would take the matter to the 2nd U.S. Court of Appeals.

"There is no question that we will be appealing this decision," Habba said. "If Ms. James's egregious conduct and harassing investigation does not meet the bad faith exception to the Younger abstention doctrine, then I cannot imagine a scenario that would."

Trump sued James in December, resorting to a familiar but seldom successful strategy of litigation in an attempt to end the three-year investigation, which James has said uncovered evidence Trump's company misstated the value of assets like skyscrapers and golf courses on financial statements for more than a decade.

Trump filed the lawsuit just after James issued subpoenas for him and his two eldest children, Ivanka and Donald Jr., to give deposition testimony in James' probe.

Trump sought an injunction barring James from investigating him and preventing her from being involved in any "civil or criminal" investigations of him and his company, such as a parallel criminal probe being led by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg. Although the civil investigation is separate, James' office has been involved in both. Trump also wanted a judge to declare that James violated his free speech and due process rights.

"We are sitting with our hands tied. We are simply dodging subpoenas at this point," Habba said at a May 13 hearing.

Trump has long contended that the New York investigations are part of a politically motivated "witch hunt." In the lawsuit, his lawyers alleged that James had violated his constitutional rights in a "thinly-veiled effort to publicly malign Trump and his associates."

The lawsuit described James as having "personal disdain" for Trump, pointing to numerous statements she's made about him, including her boast that her office sued his administration 76 times and tweets during her 2018 campaign that she had her "eyes on Trump Tower" and that Trump was "running out of time."

James' office responded that the lawsuit was a "collateral attack" on her investigation and a "complete about-face" after Trump previously agreed to turn over his 2014-2019 income tax returns to her office and his company provided more than 900,000 documents and testimony from more than a dozen current and former employees.

Trump and his company never challenged the underlying legal basis for the investigation or the attorney general's office's legal authority to conduct it until her office issued a subpoena for his testimony, James' office said.

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James' office started investigating Trump in 2019 after his former personal lawyer Michael Cohen told Congress that Trump had a history of misrepresenting the value of assets to gain favorable loan terms and tax benefits.

At a May 13 hearing that precipitated Sannes' ruling Friday, a lawyer for James' office said the probe is winding down and that evidence from it could support legal action against the former president, his company, or both.

The lawyer, Andrew Amer, said "there's clearly been a substantial amount of evidence amassed that could support the filing of an enforcement proceeding," although a final determination on filing such an action has not been made.

All of that, Amer said, "really shuts the door on any argument" by Trump's lawyers that the James' office was proceeding in bad faith.

## **Biden tells Naval Academy grads Putin 'NATO-ized Europe'**

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Maryland (AP) — President Joe Biden told Naval Academy graduates Friday that they will be "representatives and defenders of our democracy," as free societies are under threat from Russia's invasion of Ukraine to China's maritime expansion.

Delivering a commencement address to more than 1,000 newly commissioned ensigns and second lieutenants at Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium, Biden said the Western response to Russian President Vladimir Putin's "brutal" war in Ukraine shows the world is aligning not on geography, "but in terms of values."

He called the invasion, "A direct assault on the fundamental tenets of rules-based international order," adding, "that's the world you're graduating into."

"The actions taken by Putin were an attempt, to use my phrase, to Finland-ize all of Europe, to make it all neutral," Biden said. "Instead, he NATO-ized all of Europe."

Biden told graduates that while they will learn to fly the most advanced planes, staff cutting-edge ships and utilize novel technologies, "The most powerful tool that you'll wield is our unmatched network of global alliances and the strength of our partnerships."

The president told graduates that they will "defend the international rules of the road," particularly in the Indo-Pacific region where they will be called on to "ensure freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and beyond."

"These longstanding maritime principles are the bedrock of a global economy and of global stability," he said. "You're going to help knit together our allies in Europe with our allies in the Indo-Pacific."

Biden did not address two mass shootings in as many weeks in his remarks. He, along with first lady Jill Biden, will visit Uvalde, Texas on Sunday to console grieving families after Tuesday's shooting at an elementary school that killed 19 children and two teachers, the White House said.

Biden's remarks to the Naval Academy marked his first commencement address of the year. He is also set to deliver remarks at Saturday's graduation ceremony at the University of Delaware, his alma mater.

The president opened his speech by paying tribute to the class of 2022's resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and with a customary pardoning of any minor infractions made by midshipmen during their time in the academy.

He also paid tribute for former Republican Sen. John McCain, who is interred on the grounds of the academy, saying, "Being here I can't help think of John and how the naval academy meant so much to him."

## **Surfer helps families honor loved ones with 'one last wave'**

By JENNIFER McDERMOTT Associated Press

NEWPORT, R.I. (AP) — Surfing is no longer a solitary pursuit for Dan Fischer. When he catches a wave along the shores of Rhode Island, he looks down at a surfboard covered with the names of people who have died, and who shared his love of the ocean.



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His father's name is the guiding light at the top.

"It's a very different experience for me than it used to be, when it was just me and the board," he said this month after surfing in Newport. "Now it's sort of me and all these individuals. I feel a commitment to helping their families and honoring them every time I go out."

Fischer, 42, created the One Last Wave Project in January to use the healing power of the ocean to help families coping with a loss, like he was. He etches their loved one's name onto one of his surfboards and takes them out into the ocean, in spirit anyway, for "one last wave," as a way to memorialize them in a place that was meaningful to them.

Many died of cancer. Ashley Sexton, of Cincinnati, contacted Fischer after she saw a post on social media about the project because her daughter loved the ocean so much that she begged her family to move to Florida. Kinley died in 2019 at age 6 of a highly aggressive brain tumor.

Fischer's first two boards were full, with 1,500 names on one and 2,000 names on the other, but he was working on a third.

Fischer added Kinley's name to the third board just before Memorial Day and planned to take her surfing with him over the holiday weekend. Sexton said the timing was so perfect that Kinley must have had a hand in it. The third anniversary of her death is Tuesday.

"It means the world to us and I know she would just think that it's the greatest thing ever. The beach was her spot. That's where she was meant to be," said Sexton, who created a foundation in Kinley's honor to raise awareness and funding for Diffuse Intrinsic Pontine Glioma research.

Fischer continues to accept names through email and social media. He plans to keep making surfboards for as long as it resonates and helps people.

Fischer's father, Karl, grew up in Hungary and became a successful architect in Montreal and New York. He died in March 2019 at his farm in Montgomery, Vermont, after an eight-year battle with pancreatic cancer. He was 70.

A few months later, Fischer's dog, Rudy, whom he got as a 5-week-old puppy, died of cancer at 15. Fischer felt lost and isolated as he grieved during the pandemic. He was living in Newport and working from home for a firm that helps students get into top MBA programs.

On Jan. 4, Fischer wrote his father's name on a sticker and affixed it to his surfboard before he went surfing. They shared a love of the ocean and of adventure, climbing Mount Kilimanjaro and paragliding in Alaska together, playing on the same hockey team, and cycling up Alpe d'Huez, one of the iconic climbs of the Tour de France.

"Having him out there on one last adventure finally made me feel connected to him again in a positive way, not through pain," Fischer said. "It was at the peak of COVID, there was so much isolation. I thought people may be feeling the same way I was."

Fischer made an emotional video on the beach. He shared it on social media, offering to etch other names onto his board as a way to connect and honor the people they had lost. He was inundated with names and stories.

He chose the phrase "one last wave" for the project because surfers often say it. There's always another wave to catch before heading in, much like there's always another opportunity to honor a loved one, Fischer said.

Jonah Raisner learned how to surf after his father's death in 2009 because his father loved surfing. Adam Raisner, of Newton, Massachusetts, died of an aneurysm at age 43, when Jonah was only 7.

The 19-year-old college student met up with Fischer at the beach in Newport on May 17, Adam Raisner's birthday.

Jonah Raisner took the board with his father's name on it and Fischer took the other board. It was the first time anyone other than Fischer had used one of the boards. They paddled away from shore together.

"I thought it was going to be more of a photo op to commemorate my dad. But once I was out there, reading all those names, it really felt like not only just my dad, but everyone else was out there surfing with me," Raisner said. "It felt real. I definitely felt his presence."

Raisner said he thinks One Last Wave is helping many people find closure.

"Dan's board's are very special," Raisner said. "I'm so thankful that I got to bring my dad out into the water. I felt like I really made my dad proud that we did this for him. I felt like we made him happy and gave him a good birthday."

## Governor saw deadly arrest video months before prosecutors

By JIM MUSTIAN and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — With racial tensions still simmering over the killing of George Floyd, Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards and his top lawyers gathered in a state police conference room in October 2020 to prepare for the fallout from a troubling case closer to home: troopers' deadly arrest of Ronald Greene.

There, they privately watched a crucial body-camera video of the Black motorist's violent arrest that showed a bruised and bloody Greene going limp and drawing his final breaths — footage that prosecutors, detectives and medical examiners wouldn't even know existed for another six months.

While the Democratic governor has distanced himself from allegations of a cover-up in the explosive case by contending evidence was promptly turned over to authorities, an Associated Press investigation based on interviews and records found that wasn't the case with the 30-minute video he watched. Neither Edwards, his staff nor the state police he oversees acted urgently to get the crucial footage into the hands of those with the power to charge the white troopers seen stunning, punching and dragging Greene.

That video, which showed critical moments and audio absent from other footage that was turned over, wouldn't reach prosecutors until nearly two years after Greene's May 10, 2019, death on a rural roadside near Monroe. Now three years have passed, and after lengthy, ongoing federal and state probes, still no one has been criminally charged.

"The optics are horrible for the governor. It makes him culpable in this, in delaying justice," said Rafael Goyeneche, a former prosecutor who is president of the Metropolitan Crime Commission, a New Orleans-based watchdog group.

"All it takes for evil to prevail is for good men to do nothing," Goyeneche added. "And that's what the governor did, nothing."

What the governor knew, when he knew it and what he did about an in-custody death that troopers initially blamed on a car crash have become questions that have dogged his administration for months. Edwards and his staff are expected to be called within weeks to testify under oath before a bipartisan legislative committee probing the case and a possible cover-up.

Edwards' attorneys say there was no way for the governor to have known at the time that the video he watched had not already been turned over to prosecutors, and there was no effort to by the governor or his staff to withhold evidence.

Regardless, the governor's attorneys didn't mention seeing the video in a meeting just days later with state prosecutors, who wouldn't receive the footage until a detective discovered it almost by accident six months later. While U.S. Justice Department officials refused to comment, the head of the state police, Col. Lamar Davis, told the AP that his records show that the video was turned over to federal authorities about the same time, mid-April 2021.

Edwards, a lawyer from a long line of Louisiana sheriffs, did not make himself available for an interview. But his chief counsel, Matthew Block, acknowledged to the AP that it was not acceptable for evidence to be available to the governor and not the officials investigating the case. The governor's staff also stressed that state police, not Edwards' office, actually possessed the video.

"I can't go back and fix what was done," Block said. "Everybody would agree that if there would have been some understanding that the district attorney did not have a piece of evidence, whether it was a video or whatever it might be, then, of course, the district attorney should have all the evidence in the case. Of course."

At issue is the 30-minute body-camera footage from Lt. John Clary, the highest-ranking trooper to respond to Greene's arrest. It is one of two videos of the incident, and captured events not seen on the 46-minute clip from Trooper Dakota DeMoss that shows troopers swarming Greene's car after a high-speed chase, repeatedly jolting him with stun guns, beating him in the head and dragging him by his ankle shackles.

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Throughout the frantic scene, Greene is barely resisting, pleading for mercy and wailing, "I'm your brother! I'm scared! I'm scared!"

But Clary's video is perhaps even more significant to the investigations because it is the only footage that shows the moment a handcuffed, bloody Greene moans under the weight of two troopers, twitches and then goes still. It also shows troopers ordering the heavyset, 49-year-old to remain face down on the ground with his hands and feet restrained for more than nine minutes — a tactic use-of-force experts criticized as dangerous and likely to have restricted his breathing.

And unlike the DeMoss video, which goes silent halfway through when the microphone is turned off, Clary's video has sound throughout, picking up a trooper ordering Greene to "lay on your f----- belly like I told you to!" and a sheriff's deputy taunting, "Yeah, yeah, that s--- hurts, doesn't it?"

The state police's own use-of-force expert highlighted the importance of the Clary footage during testimony in which he characterized the troopers' actions as "torture and murder."

"They're pressing on his back at one point and Ronald Greene's foot starts kicking up," Sgt. Scott Davis told lawmakers in March. "The same thing happened in the George Floyd trial. There was a pulmonologist who said that's the moment of his death. The same thing happened with Ronald Greene."

Clary's video reached state police internal affairs officers more than a year after Greene's death when they opened a probe and later showed it to the governor. But it was long unknown to detectives working the criminal case and missing from the initial investigative case file they turned over to prosecutors in August 2019. Its absence has become a focal point in the federal probe, which is looking not only at the actions of the troopers but whether state police brass obstructed justice to protect them.

Detectives say Clary falsely claimed he didn't have any body-camera footage of his own from Greene's arrest and instead gave investigators a thumb drive of other troopers' videos.

State police say Clary properly uploaded his body-camera footage to an online evidence storage system and the then-head of the agency, Col. Kevin Reeves, defended his administration's handling of the Greene case.

"I don't think that there was any cover-up by state police of this matter," Reeves, who has described Greene's death as "awful but lawful," said in recent legislative testimony.

But the detectives investigating Greene's death say they were locked out of the video storage system at the time and had to rely on Clary to provide the footage.

Albert Paxton, the now-retired lead detective on the Greene case, said he didn't learn the video existed until April 2021 when Davis, who had broad access to body-camera video as the agency's use-of-force expert, made a passing reference to it in a conversation.

An internal affairs investigation into whether Clary purposely withheld the footage was inconclusive and details of the probe remain secret. Clary, who didn't respond to requests for comment, avoided discipline and remains in the state police.

In early October 2020, days after AP published audio of Trooper Chris Hollingsworth bragging that he had "beat the ever-living f--- out of" Greene, Edwards and his top attorneys Block and Tina Vanichchagorn went to a state police building in Baton Rouge and watched videos of the arrest, including the Clary video, the governor's office said.

Days later, the governor's lawyers flew with Reeves and other police brass 200 miles north to Ruston to discuss the videos with John Belton, the Union Parish district attorney leading the state investigation.

The Oct. 13 meeting was intended to plan a closed-door event the next day in which Greene's family would meet the governor and view footage of the arrest. Although the meeting was about showing video of the arrest, it never emerged that the governor's lawyers and police commanders were all aware of the Clary footage while prosecutors were in the dark.

"It didn't come up at all," Belton said, adding he only knew at the time of the DeMoss video.

Block agreed, saying, "We didn't go through what happened on the videos."

That agreement falls apart over what happened the next day.

Greene's family says it was not shown the Clary video after meeting Edwards on Oct. 14, a claim Belton and several others who attended the viewing in Baton Rouge affirmed. State police and the governor's

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office, however, disputed that, saying the Clary video was in fact shown.

But state police spokesman Capt. Nick Manale acknowledged, "The department has no proof of what was shown to the family that day."

Lee Merritt, an attorney for the Greene family, recalled the response he received when they asked if there was a Clary video: "We were told it was of no evidentiary value."

"The fact is we never saw it," added Mona Hardin, Greene's mother. "They've tried to have total control of the narrative."

Throughout this process, Edwards had considered making the Greene arrest videos public, records show, but decided against it at the request of federal prosecutors. After they were withheld from the public more than two years, the AP obtained and published both the DeMoss and Clary videos in May 2021.

An AP investigation that followed found Greene's was among at least a dozen cases over the past decade in which state police troopers or their bosses ignored or concealed evidence of beatings, deflected blame and impeded efforts to root out misconduct. Dozens of current and former troopers said the beatings were countenanced by a culture of impunity, nepotism and, in some cases, outright racism.

Edwards was informed of Greene's deadly arrest within hours, when he received a text message from Reeves telling him that troopers engaged in a "violent, lengthy struggle" with a Black motorist, ending in his death. But the governor, who was in the midst of a tight reelection race at the time, kept quiet about the case publicly for two years as police continued to push the narrative that Greene died in a crash.

Edwards has said he first learned of the "serious allegations" surrounding Greene's death in September 2020, months after Greene's family filed a wrongful-death lawsuit and the FBI sent a sweeping subpoena for evidence to state police.

After the videos were published, the governor broke his silence and called the troopers' actions criminal. In recent months, as his role in the Greene case has come under scrutiny, Edwards has gone further to describe them as racist while denying he's interfered with or delayed investigations.

The governor's lawyers now acknowledge prosecutors did not have the Clary video until spring of 2021. But Edwards insisted as recently as February that evidence turned over to prosecutors prior to his November 2019 re-election was proof there was no cover-up.

"The facts are clear that the evidence of what happened that night was presented to prosecutors well before my election, state and federal prosecutors," Edwards said in a news conference.

"So obviously that is not part of a cover-up."

## A good man: Exhibits honor 'Peanuts' creator Schulz on 100th

By ANDREW WELSH-HUGGINS and PATRICK ORSAGOS Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — In a series of "Peanuts" comic strips that ran in mid-April of 1956, Charlie Brown grasps the string of his kite, which was stuck in what came to be known in the long-running strip as the "kite-eating tree."

In one episode that week, a frustrated Charlie Brown declines an offer from nemesis Lucy for her to yell at the tree.

"If I had a kite caught up in a tree, I'd yell at it," Lucy responds in the last panel.

The simplicity of that interaction illustrates how different "Peanuts" was from comics drawn before its 1950 debut, said Lucy Shelton Caswell, founding curator of the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum at Ohio State University in Columbus, the world's largest such museum.

"The idea that you could take a week to talk about this, and it didn't have to be a gag in the sense of somebody hitting somebody else over the head with a bottle or whatever," Caswell said. "This was really revolutionary."

New exhibits on display at the Billy Ireland museum and at the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center in Santa Rosa, California, are celebrating the upcoming centenary of the birth of "Peanuts" cartoonist Schulz, born in Minnesota on Nov. 26, 1922.

Schulz carried the lifelong nickname of Sparky, conferred by a relative after a horse called Sparky in an

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early comic strip, Barney Google.

Schulz was never a fan of the name "Peanuts," chosen by the syndicate because his original title, "Li'l Folks," was too similar to another strip's name. But the Columbus exhibit makes clear through strips, memorabilia and commentary that Schulz's creation was a juggernaut in its day.

At the time of Schulz's retirement in 1999 following a cancer diagnosis, his creation ran in more than 2,600 newspapers, was translated into 21 languages in 75 countries and had an estimated daily readership of 355 million. Schulz personally created and drew 17,897 "Peanuts" strips, even after a tremor affected his hand.

The strip was also the subject of the frequently performed play, "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown," as well as "Snoopy: The Musical," dozens of TV specials and shows, and many book collections.

Bill Watterson, creator of "Calvin and Hobbes," described in a 2007 Wall Street Journal review of a Schultz biography the difficulty of looking at "Peanuts" with fresh eyes because of how revolutionary it was at the time.

Benjamin Clark, curator of the Schulz museum, describes that innovation as Schulz's use of a spare line that maintains its expressiveness.

Schulz "understood technically in drawing that he could strip away what was unnecessary and still pack an emotional punch with the simplest-appearing lines," Clark said. "But that simplicity is deceptive. There's so much in these."

The exhibit in Columbus displays strips featuring 12 "devices" that Schulz thought set Peanuts apart, including episodes involving the kite-eating tree, Snoopy's doghouse, Lucy in her psychiatry booth, Linus' obsession with the Great Pumpkin, the Beethoven-playing Schroeder, and more.

"Celebrating Sparky" also focuses on Schulz's promotion of women's rights through strips about Title IX, the groundbreaking law requiring parity in women's sports; and his introduction of a character of color, Franklin, spurred by a reader's urging following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

In addition, the display includes memorabilia, from branded paper towels to Pez dispensers, part of the massive "Peanuts" licensing world. Some fellow cartoonists disliked the way Schulz commercialized the strip.

He dismissed the criticism, arguing that comic strips had always been commercial, starting with their invention as a way to sell newspapers, Caswell said.

While 1965's "A Charlie Brown Christmas" is one of the most famous cartoon TV specials of all time, the characters have also returned in dozens of animated shows and films, most recently in original shows and specials on Apple TV.

Those Apple programs introduced new viewers to the truth of what Schulz drew, his wife, Jean Schulz, told The Associated Press last year. She described that truth this way:

"A family of characters who live in a neighborhood, get along with each other, have fun with each other, have arguments sometimes with each other, but end up always in a good frame hugging each other or resolving their arguments," she said.

Caswell, who first met Schulz in the 1980s, said one of the exhibit's goals was to surprise people with things they didn't know about the man. In that, "Celebrating Sparky" succeeds admirably.

Who knew, for example, that Schulz, a hockey and ice-skating lover, is in both the U.S. Figure Skating and U.S. Hockey halls of fame? (Perhaps that isn't surprising, given multiple strips that featured a hockey-playing Snoopy or Zambonis driven by the little yellow bird, Woodstock.)

By focusing on Schulz, the exhibit also aims to show he worked hard to perfect his drawing style before "Peanuts" was launched and was intentional about what he wanted the strip to be, Caswell said.

"This was a person of genius who had a very clear, creative focus to his life, and enjoyed making people laugh," she said.

"Celebrating Sparky: Charles M. Schulz and Peanuts" at the Billy Ireland museum runs through November and was mounted in partnership with the Charles M. Schulz Museum.

The Charles M. Schulz Museum has two exhibits commemorating Schulz's birth: "Spark Plug to Snoopy: 100 Years of Schulz," which explores comic strips and artists who influenced Schultz (running through Sept. 18); and "The Spark of Schulz: A Centennial Celebration," exploring cartoonists and artists influenced by

Schulz (from Sept. 25, 2022, through March 12, 2023).

## **WHO: Nearly 200 cases of monkeypox in more than 20 countries**

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — The World Health Organization says nearly 200 cases of monkeypox have been reported in more than 20 countries not usually known to have outbreaks of the unusual disease, but described the epidemic as “containable” and proposed creating a stockpile to equitably share the limited vaccines and drugs available worldwide.

During a public briefing on Friday, the U.N. health agency said there are still many unanswered questions about what triggered the unprecedented outbreak of monkeypox outside of Africa, but there is no evidence that any genetic changes in the virus are responsible.

“The first sequencing of the virus shows that the strain is not different from the strains we can find in endemic countries and (this outbreak) is probably due more to a change in human behaviour,” said Dr. Sylvie Briand, WHO’s director of pandemic and epidemic diseases.

Earlier this week, a top adviser to WHO said the outbreak in Europe, U.S., Israel, Australia and beyond was likely linked to sex at two recent raves in Spain and Belgium. That marks a significant departure from the disease’s typical pattern of spread in central and western Africa, where people are mainly infected by animals like wild rodents and primates, and outbreaks haven’t spilled across borders.

Although WHO said nearly 200 monkeypox cases have been reported, that seemed a likely undercount. On Friday, Spanish authorities said the number of cases there had risen to 98, including one woman, whose infection is “directly related” to a chain of transmission that had been previously limited to men, according to officials in the region of Madrid.

U.K. officials added 16 more cases to their monkeypox tally, making Britain’s total 106, while Portugal said its caseload jumped to 74 cases. And authorities in Argentina on Friday reported a monkeypox case in a man from Buenos Aires, marking Latin America’s first infection. Officials said the man had traveled recently to Spain and now had symptoms consistent with monkeypox, including lesions and a fever.

Doctors in Britain, Spain, Portugal, Canada, the U.S. and elsewhere have noted that the majority of infections to date have been in gay and bisexual men, or men who have sex with men. The disease is no more likely to affect people because of their sexual orientation and scientists warn the virus could infect others if transmission isn’t curbed.

WHO’s Briand said that based on how past outbreaks of the disease in Africa have evolved, the current situation appeared “containable.”

Still, she said WHO expected to see more cases reported in the future, noting “we don’t know if we are just seeing the peak of the iceberg (or) if there are many more cases that are undetected in communities,” she said.

As countries including Britain, Germany, Canada and the U.S. begin evaluating how smallpox vaccines might be used to stem the outbreak, WHO said its expert group was assessing the evidence and would provide guidance soon.

Dr. Rosamund Lewis, head of WHO’s smallpox department, said that “there is no need for mass vaccination,” explaining that monkeypox does not spread easily and typically requires skin-to-skin contact for transmission. No vaccines have been specifically developed against monkeypox, but WHO estimates that smallpox vaccines are about 85% effective.

She said countries with vaccine supplies could consider them for those at high risk of the disease, like close contacts of patients or health workers, but that monkeypox could mostly be controlled by isolating contacts and continued epidemiological investigations.

Given the limited global supply of smallpox vaccines, WHO’s emergencies chief Dr. Mike Ryan said the agency would be working with its member countries to potentially develop a centrally controlled stockpile, similar to the ones it has helped manage to distribute during outbreaks of yellow fever, meningitis, and cholera in countries that can’t afford them.

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"We're talking about providing vaccines for a targeted vaccination campaign, for targeted therapeutics," Ryan said. "So the volumes don't necessarily need to be big, but every country may need access to a small amount of vaccine."

Most monkeypox patients experience only fever, body aches, chills and fatigue. People with more serious illness may develop a rash and lesions on the face and hands that can spread to other parts of the body.

## Ex-rebel frontrunner in Colombian vote, could shake US ties

By MANUEL RUEDA Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Fabian Espinel last year helped organize roadblocks where young people protested against police violence and government plans to increase taxes on lower income Colombians. Now, as his country heads into its presidential election Sunday, he walks the streets of the capital's working-class sectors handing out flyers and painting murals in support of Gustavo Petro, the front-runner candidate who could become Colombia's first leftist head of state.

"Young people in this country are stuck. We hope Petro can change that," said Espinel, who lost his job as an event planner during the pandemic and received no compensation from his company. "We need an economic model that is different than the one that has been failing us for years."

Colombians will pick from six candidates in a ballot being held amid a generalized feeling the country is heading in the wrong direction. The latest opinion polls suggest Petro, a former rebel, could get 40% of the votes, with a 15-point lead over his closest rival. But the senator needs 50% to avoid a runoff election in June against the second-place finisher.

Should Petro win outright Sunday or the possible runoff contest next month, the leftist anti-establishment candidate would usher in a new era of presidential politics in Colombia. The country has always been governed by conservatives or moderates while the left was sidelined due to its perceived association with the nation's armed conflict.

"The left has been quite marginalized due to the weight of the armed conflict in Colombia, to the very recent existence of a guerrilla that claimed to be leftist like the FARC," Yann Basset, a political analyst and professor at the Universidad del Rosario, said referring to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. "The change occurs with the peace agreement, which lifts this mortgage for the left a little and promotes a different agenda with social issues suspended by the conflict."

His main rival through most of the campaign has been Federico Gutierrez, a former mayor of Medellin who is backed by most of Colombia's traditional parties and is running on a pro-business, economic growth platform.

But populist real estate tycoon Rodolfo Hernández has been rising fast in polls and could challenge for the second spot in Sunday's vote. He has few connections to political parties and says he will reduce wasteful government spending and offer rewards for Colombians who denounce corrupt officials.

Petro promises to make significant adjustments to the economy as well as change how Colombia fights drug cartels and other armed groups. His agenda largely centers on fighting inequalities that have affected the South American nation's people for decades and became worse during the COVID-19 pandemic.

He has promised government jobs to people who can't get work, free college tuition for young Colombians and subsidies for farmers who are struggling to grow crops, which he says he will pay for by increasing taxes on wealthy individuals and corporations.

His agenda also touches on issues that could shake up Colombia's tight-knit relationship with the United States.

Adam Isacson, an expert on defense policy at the Washington Office on Latin America, a think tank, said if Petro wins the election "there will be more disagreement and distance" between both countries.

Petro wants to renegotiate a free trade agreement with the U.S. that has boosted imports of American products like powdered milk and corn. and instead favor local producers.

He also promises to change how Colombia fights drug cartels that produce around 90% of cocaine currently sold in the U.S. The senator often criticizes U.S. drug policy in the hemisphere, saying it "has failed"

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because it focuses too much on eradicating illegal crops and arresting kingpins. He wants to boost help for rural areas, to give farmers alternatives to growing coca, the plant used to make cocaine.

Isacson said coca eradication targets could become less of a priority for the Colombian government under a Petro administration, as well as the pace at which drug traffickers who are arrested are sent to the U.S. to face charges,

The election comes as Colombia's economy struggles to recover from the pandemic and frustration grows with political elites.

A Gallup poll conducted earlier this month said 75% of Colombians believe the country is heading in the wrong direction and only 27% approve of conservative President Ivan Duque, who cannot run for re-election. A poll last year by Gallup found 60% of those questioned were finding it hard to get by on their household income.

Sergio Guzmán, a political risk analyst in Bogota, said the pandemic and the 2016 peace deal with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia rebel group have shifted voters' priorities.

"Whereas previous elections centered around issues like how to deal with rebel groups, now the main issue is the economy," Guzmán said. "Voters are concerned about who will tackle issues like inequality or the lack of opportunities for youth."

If Petro or Hernández should win the presidency, they would join a group of leftist leaders and outsiders who have been taking over Latin American governments since the pandemic started in 2020.

In Chile, leftist legislator Gabriel Boric won the presidential election last year, leading a progressive coalition that promised to change the country's constitution and make public services like energy and education more affordable.

In Peru, voters elected rural school teacher Pedro Castillo to the presidency although he had never held office. Castillo defied political parties that have been mired in bribery scandals and presidential impeachment trials and bungled the nation's response to the coronavirus pandemic. Ecuadorians bucked the leftist trend last year, but still elected an outsider opposition candidate, Guillermo Lasso.

In regional affairs, Petro is looking to re-establish diplomatic relations with the socialist government of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. Colombia cut diplomatic ties with Venezuela in 2019 as part of a U.S.-led effort to isolate Maduro and pressure him with sanctions into holding new elections.

Some observers think Petro could be in a position to mend bridges between Maduro and some sectors of Venezuela's opposition.

"Solving Venezuela's political and economic crisis is in Colombia's interest," said Ronal Rodríguez, a professor at Bogotá's Rosario university.

Sandra Borda, a professor of international relations at the University of Los Andes in Bogotá, said Petro may not have enough leverage to make significant changes to Colombia's foreign policy.

Efforts to renegotiate the free trade agreement with the United States could be thwarted by legislators in both countries, she said. And when it comes to security, the Colombian military will be reluctant to give up on cooperation agreements with the U.S. that include joint exercises, intelligence sharing and jobs for Colombian military instructors in U.S.-financed courses in other Latin American countries.

Borda said Petro's ability to change Colombia's foreign policy could hinge on whether he wins the first round outright. If he has to go to a run-off, she said, he will have to make deals with parties in the center, which might support his domestic reforms in exchange for more control over security and international relations.

"His priority will be to carry out domestic reforms aimed at reducing inequality and overcoming poverty," Borda said. "Petro understands that if he does that he has a greater chance of consolidating his political movement."

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Doctors in Britain, Spain, Portugal, Canada, the U.S. and elsewhere have noted that the majority of infections to date have been in gay and bisexual men, or men who have sex with men. The disease is no more likely to affect people because of their sexual orientation and scientists warn the virus could infect others if transmission isn't curbed.

WHO's Briand said that based on how past outbreaks of the disease in Africa have evolved, the current situation appeared "containable."

Still, she said WHO expected to see more cases reported in the future, noting "we don't know if we are just seeing the peak of the iceberg (or) if there are many more cases that are undetected in communities," she said.

As countries including Britain, Germany, Canada and the U.S. begin evaluating how smallpox vaccines might be used to stem the outbreak, WHO said its expert group was assessing the evidence and would provide guidance soon.

Dr. Rosamund Lewis, head of WHO's smallpox department, said that "there is no need for mass vaccination," explaining that monkeypox does not spread easily and typically requires skin-to-skin contact for transmission. No vaccines have been specifically developed against monkeypox, but WHO estimates that smallpox vaccines are about 85% effective.

She said countries with vaccine supplies could consider them for those at high risk of the disease, like close contacts of patients or health workers, but that monkeypox could mostly be controlled by isolating contacts and continued epidemiological investigations.

Given the limited global supply of smallpox vaccines, WHO's emergencies chief Dr. Mike Ryan said the agency would be working with its member countries to potentially develop a centrally controlled stockpile, similar to the ones it has helped manage to distribute during outbreaks of yellow fever, meningitis, and cholera in countries that can't afford them.

"We're talking about providing vaccines for a targeted vaccination campaign, for targeted therapeutics," Ryan said. "So the volumes don't necessarily need to be big, but every country may need access to a small amount of vaccine."

Most monkeypox patients experience only fever, body aches, chills and fatigue. People with more serious illness may develop a rash and lesions on the face and hands that can spread to other parts of the body.

## Key inflation gauge slowed to still-high 6.3% over past year

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

An inflation gauge closely tracked by the Federal Reserve rose 6.3% in April from a year earlier, the first slowdown since November 2020 and a sign that high prices may finally be moderating, at least for now.

The inflation figure the Commerce Department reported Friday was below the four-decade high of 6.6% set in March. While high inflation is still causing hardships for millions of households, any slowing of price increases, if sustained, would provide some modest relief.

The report also showed that consumer spending rose at a healthy 0.9% annual rate from March to April, outpacing the month-to-month inflation rate for a fourth straight time. The ongoing willingness of the nation's consumers to keep spending freely despite inflated prices is helping sustain the economy. Yet all that spending is helping keep prices high and could make the Federal Reserve's goal of taming inflation even harder.

"Inflation is finally slowing, but it's a little early for high-fives," said Bill Adams, chief economist at Comerica Bank.

Adams noted that gas and food prices have risen in May and that Russia's war against Ukraine and COVID-19-related lockdowns in China could further disrupt supply shortages and send prices accelerating again.

Consumers' resilience in the face of sharply higher prices suggests that economic growth is rebounding in the current April-June quarter. The economy shrank at a 1.5% annual rate in the first quarter, mostly because of an increase in the trade deficit. But analysts now project that, on an annual basis, it's growing as much as 3% in the current quarter.

Americans have been able to keep spending, despite higher inflation, because of rising wages, a stockpile of savings built up during the pandemic and a rebound in credit card use. Economists say those factors could bolster spending and support the economy for much of this year.

Incomes rose 0.4% from March to April, Friday's report showed, slightly faster than inflation. Still, high inflation is forcing consumers, on average, to save less. The savings rate fell to 4.4% last month, the lowest level since 2008. Overall, though, Americans have built up an additional \$2.5 trillion in savings since the pandemic, and economists calculate that that pile is eroding only slowly.

Friday's report showed that on a month-to-month basis, prices rose 0.2% from March to April, down from the 0.9% increase from February to March. The April increase was the smallest since November 2020.

Excluding the volatile food and energy categories, so-called core prices rose 0.3% from March to April, matching the previous month's rise. Core prices climbed 4.9% from a year earlier, the first such drop since October 2020.

Still, inflation remains painfully high, and it's inflicting a heavy burden in particular on lower-income households, many of them Black or Hispanic. Surging demand for furniture, appliances and other goods, combined with supply chain snarls, began sending prices surging about a year ago.

Consumers have shifted some of their spending from goods to services, like airline fares and entertainment tickets. That trend could help cool inflation in the months ahead, though it's unclear by how much.

Goods prices, which were the major drivers of inflation last year, fell 0.2% from March to April after having jumped the previous month. Used car prices dropped 2.3% in April, though they're still much more expensive than a year ago. The cost of clothing, appliances, and computers also declined.

And retailers like Target have reported rising stockpiles of televisions, patio furniture and other goods for the home as consumers have shifted their spending more toward travel and services-related goods like luggage and restaurant gift cards.

Those stores will likely have to offer discounts to clear inventory in the coming months. And auto manufacturers have been ramping up production as some supply chain snarls untangle and as they have managed to hire more workers. Both trends could keep reducing the cost of manufactured items.

Yet the cost of such services as restaurant meals, plane tickets and hotel rooms is still rising, offsetting much of the relief from cheaper goods. And the rising prices of gas and food, worsened by Russia's invasion

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of Ukraine, will keep measures of inflation painfully high at least into the summer. The national average price of a gallon of gas has reached \$4.60, according to AAA. A year ago, it was \$3.04.

Chair Jerome Powell has pledged to keep ratcheting up the Fed's key short-term interest rate until inflation is "coming down in a clear and convincing way." Those rate hikes have spurred fears that the Fed, in its drive to slow borrowing and spending, may push the economy into a recession. That concern has caused sharp drops in stock prices in the past two months, though markets have rallied this week.

Powell has signaled that the Fed will likely raise its benchmark rate by a half-point in both June and July — twice the size of the usual rate increase.

Most economists have forecast that inflation, as measured by the Fed's preferred gauge, will still be at about 4% or higher by the end of this year. Price increases at that level would likely mean that the Fed will still raise interest rates to lower inflation to its 2% target.

A better-known inflation gauge, the consumer price index, earlier this month also reported a slowing in price gains. The CPI jumped 8.3% in April from a year earlier, down from a 40-year high in March of 8.5%.

The inflation measure reported Friday, called the personal consumption expenditures price index, differs in several ways from the consumer price index that help explain why it shows a lower inflation level than the CPI does.

The PCE is a broader measure of inflation that includes payments made on behalf of consumers, such as medical services covered by insurance or government programs. The CPI covers only out-of-pocket costs, which in recent years have risen more. Rents, which are steadily rising, are also given less weight in the PCE than in the CPI.

The PCE price index also seeks to account for changes in how people shop when inflation jumps. As a result, it can capture, for example, when consumers switch from pricey national brands to cheaper store brands.

## 'We don't have food': African leaders meet as crises grow

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

DJIBO, Burkina Faso (AP) — African leaders gathered for a summit Friday in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, to address growing humanitarian needs on the continent, which is also facing increased violent extremism, climate change challenges and a run of military coups.

Leaders called for increased mobilization to resolve a humanitarian crisis that has left millions displaced and more than 280 million suffering from malnourishment.

For people in Djibo, a town in northern Burkina Faso near the border with Mali, any help can't come soon enough.

The city in the Sahel region -- the large expanse below the Sahara Desert -- has been besieged since February by jihadis who prevent people and goods from moving in or out and cut water supplies. Few truckers want to run the jihadist gauntlet. Residents are suffering with no food or water, animals are dying and the price of grain has spiked.

"The goods are not arriving anymore here. Animal and agricultural production is not possible because the people cannot go back to their villages," U.N. resident and humanitarian coordinator Barbara Manzi told The Associated Press from Djibo this week. "Unless (a solution) is found, it's going to be really a tragedy for the entire group of people that are here."

Djibo has been at the epicenter of the violence linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group that has killed thousands and displaced nearly 2 million people. While Djibo — and Soum province where the town is located — experienced periods of calm, such as during a makeshift ceasefire between jihadis and the government surrounding the 2020 presidential election, the truce didn't last.

Since November, insecurity in the region has increased. Jihadis have destroyed water infrastructure in the town and lined much of Djibo's perimeter with explosives, blockading the city, say locals.

The town's population has swollen from 60,000 to 300,000 over the last few years as people flee the countryside to escape the violence.

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Blockading cities is a tactic used by jihadis to assert dominance and could also be an attempt to get Burkina Faso's new military junta, which seized power in January, to backtrack on promises to eliminate the jihadis, said Laith Alkhouri, CEO of Intelonyx Intelligence Advisory, a group that provides intelligence analysis.

"Militants resort to blockading when they see an opportunity to gain incentives in negotiating with the government and simultaneously send a message to their base that they are in control. It's a bargaining card and a winning one," he said.

A U.N. team flew in briefly to assess the situation. The AP was the first foreign media to visit the town in more than a year.

"Today there is nothing to buy here. Even if you have cash, there is nothing to buy. We came here with four donkeys and goats and some of them died because of hunger. We were forced to sell the rest of the animals and unfortunately prices of animals have decreased," said cattle owner Mamoudou Oumarou.

The 53-year-old father of 13 fled his village in February and said the blockade in Djibo has prevented people from coming to the market to buy and sell cattle, decreasing demand and lowering prices for the animals by half.

Before the violence, Djibo had one of the biggest and most vital cattle markets in the Sahel and was a bustling economic hub. Some 600 trucks used to enter Djibo monthly, now it's less than 70, said Alpha Ousmane Dao, director of Seracom, a local aid group in Djibo.

Burkina Faso is facing its worst hunger crisis in six years, more than 630,000 people are on the brink of starvation, according to the UN.

As a result of Djibo's blockade, the World Food Program has been unable to deliver food to the town since December and stocks are running out, said Antoine Renard, country director for the World Food Program in Burkina Faso.

Efforts to end the blockade through dialogue have had mixed results. At the end of April, the emir of Djibo met with Burkina Faso's top jihadist, Jafar Dicko, to negotiate lifting the siege. However, little progress has been made since then.

Locals say the jihadis have eased restrictions in some areas allowing freer movement, but that the army is now preventing people from bringing food out of Djibo to the surrounding villages for fear it will go to the jihadis.

The army denied the allegations.

Meanwhile residents in Djibo say they're risking their lives just trying to survive.

Dadou Sadou searches for wood and water in the middle of the night outside of Djibo, when she says the jihadis are not around.

"We no longer have animals, we don't have food to buy in the market ... If you have children, you don't have a choice," she said.

## Senate GOP blocks domestic terrorism bill, gun policy debate

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats' first attempt at responding to the back-to-back mass shootings in Buffalo, New York, and Uvalde, Texas, failed in the Senate as Republicans blocked a domestic terrorism bill that would have opened debate on difficult questions surrounding hate crimes and gun safety.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., tried to nudge Republicans into taking up a domestic terrorism bill that had cleared the House quickly last week after mass shootings at a grocery store in Buffalo and a church in Southern California targeting people of color. He said it could become the basis for negotiation.

But the Thursday vote failed along party lines, raising fresh doubts about the possibility of robust debate, let alone eventual compromise, on gun safety measures. The final vote was 47-47, short of the 60 needed to take up the bill. All Republicans voted against it.

"We're disappointed," said White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre.

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She said it's "shameful" that the National Rifle Association and others have stood in the way of advancing such measures but encouraged Congress to press ahead.

"The president has been very clear that it's time to act," she said.

Rejection of the bill, just two days after the mass shooting at a Texas elementary school that killed 19 children and two teachers, brought into sharp relief Congress' persistent failure to pass legislation to curb the nation's epidemic of gun violence. It also underscored the prevalence of mass shootings in the U.S. as Congress struggled to react to earlier shootings but was confronted by yet another massacre.

Schumer said he will give bipartisan negotiations in the Senate about two weeks, while Congress is away for a break, to try to forge a compromise bill that could pass the 50-50 Senate, where 60 votes will be needed to overcome a filibuster.

"None of us are under any illusions this will be easy," Schumer said ahead of the vote.

A small, bipartisan group of about 10 senators who have sought to negotiate legislation on guns met Thursday afternoon for the second time searching for any compromise that could win approval in Congress.

They narrowed to three topics — background checks for guns purchased online or at gun shows, red-flag laws designed to keep guns away from those who could harm themselves or others, and programs to bolster security at schools and other buildings.

"We have a range of options that we're going to work on," said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., who is leading the negotiations. They broke into groups and will report next week.

Murphy has been working to push gun legislation since the 2012 attack at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, that killed 20 children and six educators. He was joined Thursday by Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., and others. Collins, a veteran of bipartisan talks, called the meeting "constructive."

What is clear, however, is that providing funding for local gun safety efforts may be more politically viable than devising new federal policies.

GOP Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina exited the meeting saying there is no appetite for a federal red flag law or a so-called yellow flag law — which permits temporary firearm confiscation from people in danger of hurting themselves or others, if a medical practitioner signs off.

But Graham said there could be interest in providing money to the states that already have red flag laws or that want to develop them. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., who circulated a draft at the meeting, will work with Graham on a potential compromise.

"These laws save lives," Blumenthal said.

Toomey told reporters that the Manchin-Toomey background check bill — which failed in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook school shooting a decade ago — still does not have enough support. Manchin said he hoped this time would be different.

"I can't get my grandchildren out of my mind. It could have been them," Manchin said.

None of the lawmakers could say definitively if any of the efforts will be able to win all Democrats and have the 10 Republican senators it needs to advance past a GOP-led filibuster.

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, who has said little about gun legislation since the several tragedies have unfolded, told reporters he met with Republican Sen. John Cornyn of Texas earlier and encouraged senators to collaborate across the aisle on workable outcomes.

"I am hopeful that we could come up with a bipartisan solution that's directly related to the facts of this awful massacre," McConnell said.

The domestic terrorism bill that failed Thursday dates back to 2017, when Rep. Brad Schneider, D-Ill., first proposed it after mass shootings in Las Vegas and Southerland Springs, Texas.

The House passed a similar measure by a voice vote in 2020, only to have it languish in the Senate. Since then, Republicans have turned against the legislation, with only one GOP lawmaker supporting passage in the House last week.

"What had broad bipartisan support two years ago, because of the political climate we find ourselves in ... or to be more specific, the political climate Republicans find themselves in, we're not able to stand up against domestic terrorism," Schneider, who came into office in the wake of the Sandy Hook school

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shooting, told The Associated Press.

Republicans say the bill doesn't place enough emphasis on combating domestic terrorism committed by groups on the far left. Under the bill, agencies would be required to produce a joint report every six months that assesses and quantifies domestic terrorism threats nationally, including threats posed by white supremacists and neo-Nazi groups.

Proponents say the bill will fill the gaps in intelligence-sharing among the Justice Department, the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI so that officials can better track and respond to the growing threat of white extremist terrorism.

The efforts would focus on the spread of racist ideology online like the baseless "great replacement" conspiracy theory, which investigators say motivated an 18-year-old white gunman to drive three hours to carry out a racist, livestreamed shooting rampage two weeks ago in a crowded supermarket in Buffalo. Or the animus against Taiwanese parishioners at a church in Laguna Woods, California, that led to the shooting death the following day of one man and the wounding of five others.

While Schneider acknowledged that his legislation may not have stopped those attacks, he said it would ensure that those federal agencies work together to better identify, predict and stop threats.

Under current law, the three federal agencies already work to investigate, prevent and prosecute acts of domestic terrorism. But the bill would require each agency to open offices specifically dedicated to those tasks and create an interagency task force to combat the infiltration of white supremacy in the military.

## 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.

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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.

## UK's Dunblane grieves for Uvalde, fears nothing will change

By JILL LAWLESS and SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — When Mick North's 5-year-old daughter was gunned down at her school, he vowed through his grief that it must never happen again.

And it hasn't — in Britain, at least. The 1996 massacre of 16 elementary school students in Dunblane, Scotland led to a ban on owning handguns in the U.K. While Britain is not immune to gun violence, there have been no school shootings in the quarter century since.

The United States' deep-rooted gun culture makes similar action unlikely in the wake of the killing of 19 students and two teachers by an 18-year-old gunman in Uvalde, Texas.

North, who helped set up Britain's Gun Control Network after his daughter Sophie was killed, said his reaction to the Uvalde killings was "shock, but no surprise." He knows like few others just what the Uvalde families are going through, but says "my sympathy is not going to make them feel better. And it's just dreadful. It's just dreadful."

North's life was shattered on March 13, 1996, when 43-year-old Thomas Hamilton entered the gym at Dunblane Primary School in central Scotland, where a class of 5 and 6-year-olds was assembled. The 43-year-old former Scout leader killed 16 children and a teacher with four handguns before shooting himself. Another 12 children and two teachers were wounded.

Public horror at the slaughter, and campaigning by bereaved families that put pressure on politicians, brought about rapid change to Britain's gun laws.

Soon after the carnage, a small group of local mothers launched what became the "Snowdrop Campaign" — named after the only flower in bloom at that time of spring — and began a petition demanding a ban on the private ownership of handguns.

The movement quickly gained momentum across the country, and campaigners eventually took boxes full of paper signed by some 750,000 people to politicians in London.

"I think our strength was in numbers," said Rosemary Hunter, one of the campaign's founders. Her 3-year-old daughter was at nursery in Dunblane when the shooting occurred. Hunter said "the mood in

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the country was so overwhelmingly in support of the change that it was not difficult to overcome" opposition from gun advocates.

"I don't know how you translate that to a country where there are more guns than people," Hunter said of the United States. "In many ways it's quite overwhelming to think that people are going through what we went through here in our town. And it's happened so, so many times."

Like Uvalde, Dunblane is a small town, where many of the 9,000 residents know one another. For those who lived there in 1996 — including tennis star Andy Murray, then a 9-year-old pupil at Dunblane Primary School — the pain has never completely faded. Murray responded to the Texas shooting with a tweet labelling it "madness."

The year after the shooting, and with the support of both Conservative and Labour politicians, Parliament passed new laws to ban private ownership of almost all handguns in Britain. Gun owners surrendered more than 160,000 weapons under a government buyback program.

Britain had banned semiautomatic weapons a decade earlier after a 1987 shooting rampage in Hungerford, England that left 16 adults dead. People can still own shotguns and rifles with a license.

Other countries have also responded to mass shootings by toughening laws. Canada imposed stricter checks on gun buyers and clamped down on military-style weapons — though did not ban them — after the 1989 slaying of 14 female students by a misogynist killer at L'Ecole Polytechnique engineering school in Montreal.

A month after Dunblane, a gunman armed with two semiautomatic assault rifles killed 35 people and wounded another 23 in Port Arthur, Tasmania. Within two weeks, Australia's federal and state governments had agreed to standardize gun laws with a primary aim of getting rapid-fire weapons out of public hands.

In the decade before the Port Arthur massacre, there had been 11 mass gun homicides in Australia, defined as at least four dead victims. Since then, there have been three such shootings.

But for the pain in Texas to translate into a national reckoning with gun violence would take a major political shift in the United States, where the right to bear arms is embedded in the Constitution and efforts to tighten laws after past massacres have foundered.

"Nothing has happened (in the U.S.) since Columbine and the other school shootings that followed shortly after Dunblane, when we started being asked, 'Well, what would you recommend Americans do?'" North said. "We thought, well, follow our example. Try and change and tighten gun legislation after a tragedy. But it never happened."

While President Joe Biden and Democrats in Congress have renewed calls for stricter gun laws — with Biden stating that "the Second Amendment is not absolute" — Republican politicians and the National Rifle Association say issues such as mental health are the problem, not access to firearms.

Jack Crozier, 28, lost his sister Emma in the Dunblane attack and now campaigns for gun control. He has traveled to the U.S. to meet American activists and thinks change will have to come from young people, like the survivors of a 2018 school shooting that killed 14 students and three staff in Parkland, Florida.

"Kids are not willing to grow up like this and go to school in fear anymore," he said. "The kids in Parkland are now studying in universities and college, and they are the youth campaigners that can change things."

He said the families in Uvalde "have the support of every single family in Dunblane."

"The people of Dunblane stand with you."

## Liberal Los Angeles could take right turn in mayor's race

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD AP Political Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Many voters in heavily Democratic Los Angeles are seething over rising crime and homelessness and that could prompt the city to take a turn to the political right for the first time in decades.

One of the leading candidates for mayor is Rick Caruso, a pro-business billionaire Republican-turned-Democrat who sits on the board of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and is promising to expand spending on police, not defund them.

At another time, the high-end mall and resort developer would seem an unlikely choice to potentially lead



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the nation's second-most populous city, where democratic socialist Bernie Sanders was the runaway winner in the 2020 Democratic presidential primary. A progressive City Hall has embraced so-called sanctuary city protections for people who entered the U.S. illegally and "Green New Deal" climate policies.

But these are fraught times in Los Angeles, with more than 40,000 people living in trash-strewn homeless encampments and rusty RVs, distress over brazen smash-and-grab robberies and home invasions while inflation and taxes are gouging wallets -- gas in a region built on car travel has cracked \$6 a gallon. Rents and home prices have soared.

Caruso is spending millions of his estimated \$4.3 billion fortune to finance a seemingly nonstop display of TV and online ads to tap into voter angst. At issue is whether enough people will embrace his plans to add 1,500 police officers and promises to get unhoused people off the streets, while not recoiling from his vast wealth.

Twelve names are on the ballot for the primary election that ends June 7, though several candidates have dropped out and the race is shaping up as a fight between Caruso and Democratic U.S. Rep. Karen Bass, who was on then-President elect Joe Biden's shortlist for vice president.

If no candidate clears 50% — which is likely with a crowded ballot — the top two finishers advance to a November runoff. Bass could become the first woman to hold the office and the second Black person.

Bass and Caruso are not well known in a city that can be notoriously indifferent to local politics.

"Part of this is going to be how people feel about them as they get to know them better. We don't know the answer to that," said veteran Democratic consultant Bill Carrick, who thinks voters are looking for solutions for homelessness and crime, not obsessing with past political affiliations. The contest is technically nonpartisan.

Bass, 68, is a favorite of the party's progressive wing, while Caruso, 63, is a political shape-shifter who calls himself a "centrist, pro-jobs, pro-public safety Democrat."

According to government records, he was a Republican for over two decades before becoming an independent in 2011. Caruso changed back to Republican in 2016 — a year when he served as California campaign co-chair for Republican John Kasich's presidential bid — and then to independent again in 2019. He became a Democrat shortly before entering the mayor's race in February.

He's donated to candidates in both parties, which has led to criticism from Democrats who point to his financial support for Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, among others. And he's been routinely attacked for an opulent lifestyle, including owning a 9-bedroom yacht.

The mayor's race is one of several competitive contests in the state's primary where political loyalties are being tested by questions about the direction of California's dominant Democratic Party, which holds every statewide office and commanding margins in the Legislature and congressional delegation.

Voters in San Francisco are considering whether to recall District Attorney Chesa Boudin, a Democrat who critics say has failed to prosecute repeat offenders, while Democratic state Attorney General Rob Bonta is facing several challengers who assert he favors criminal justice reform over crime victims, which he disputes.

A looming question in Los Angeles is who will show up. About 80% of voters didn't cast ballots when outgoing Mayor Eric Garcetti was reelected in 2017.

There is a deep dismay with government across Los Angeles. A major challenge for Caruso, Bass and other rivals — including city Councilman Kevin de Leon, a former Democratic leader in the state Senate — will be convincing voters change is possible.

A case in point: Gas station owner Wignesh Kandavel. He says his complaints have gone unheard for years about homeless people setting up campsites around a freeway overpass just steps from his pumps and convenience market.

Sagging tents and trash are cleared from time to time, only to have homeless people return again. He says drug use is rampant, shoplifting a constant problem and panhandling at the freeway exits a daily routine.

The Nigerian immigrant and registered Republican who came to the U.S. in search of a better life has lost interest in the election and doesn't see any candidate as credible.

"The whole system is gone," Kandavel said.

Caruso's ascendancy in the race — polls show him closely matched with Bass — has alarmed longtime Democrats who are attacking him as a poseur trying to buy the job. His campaign has raised about \$30 million, most of it his money.

There is the expected competition over celebrity endorsements — Earvin "Magic" Johnson is backing Bass, while Caruso has Snoop Dogg and Gwyneth Paltrow behind him. Already, the rivalry is taking on a nasty edge, particularly in ads from groups supporting the candidates.

Bass' commercials recall her work as a physician's assistant during the crack epidemic and her time in Congress and the Legislature. But the police union that endorsed Caruso is running ads that attempt to link Bass to a federal corruption case involving her longtime friend, suspended city Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas. She calls the ads lies.

Caruso's advertising touts his immigrant grandparents, philanthropic endeavors and promise to work for \$1 a year. But ads being run by an independent group backing Bass and funded by unions and former Disney studios chief Jeffrey Katzenberg depict Caruso as an L.A. version of former President Donald Trump who is attempting to conceal an "extreme" record.

Retired public defender Paul Enright said he was undecided in the mayor's race but turned off by Caruso's spending spree that totals more than the other candidates combined. A Democrat who supports public financing for campaigns, he is leaning toward Bass or de Leon.

It's a "classic example of how money talks," Enright said.

## 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 Friday there were now 98 confirmed cases in the country, the highest number in Europe. The tally includes one woman, the region of Madrid said Friday. The World Health Organization has reported nearly 200 cases of monkeypox in more than 20 countries not usually known to have outbreaks of the unusual disease.

Health authorities have centered their investigations on links between a Gay Pride event in the Canary Islands that drew 80,000 people earlier this month, 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 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 in 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 is worried that 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," he said.

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But beyond the Pride March, Blázquez is worried that society could make the same mistake it 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 have reported cases in Europe, North America, Israel and Australia. 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 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."

"We are facing a new wave (of monkeypox) that is different from how we have historically known it," Antinori added.

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 40 should be protected by smallpox vaccines that were regularly administered decades ago.

## G-7 pledges put coal on notice, could boost climate aid

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Officials from the Group of Seven wealthy nations announced Friday that they will aim to largely end greenhouse gas emissions from their power sectors by 2035, making it highly unlikely that those countries will burn coal for electricity beyond that date.

Ministers from the G-7 countries meeting in Berlin also announced a target to have a "highly decarbonized road sector by 2030," meaning that electric vehicles would dominate new car sales by the end of the decade.

And in a move aimed at ending the recurring conflict between rich and poor nations during international climate talks, the G-7 recognized for the first time the need to provide developing countries with additional financial aid to cope with the loss and damage caused by global warming.

The agreements, which will be put to leaders next month at the G-7 summit in Elmau, Germany, were largely welcomed by climate activists.

"The 2035 target for power sector decarbonisation is a real breakthrough. In practice, this means countries need to phase out coal by 2030 at the latest," said Luca Bergamaschi, director of Rome-based

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campaign group ECCO.

Coal is a heavily polluting fossil fuel that's responsible for a fifth of global greenhouse gas emissions caused by humans. While there are ways to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide from the burning of coal, experts say it is almost impossible to reduce it to zero, meaning it will likely have to be the first fossil fuel to be phased out.

G-7 members Britain, France and Italy have already set themselves deadlines to stop burning coal for electricity in the next few years. Germany and Canada are aiming for 2030; Japan wants more time; while the Biden administration has set a target of ending fossil fuel use for electricity generation in the United States by 2035.

A common target would put pressure on other major polluters to follow suit and build on the compromise deal reached at last year's U.N. climate summit, where nations committed merely to "phase down" rather than "phase out" coal — with no fixed date.

U.S. climate envoy John Kerry called the agreements reached in Berlin "very comprehensive and forward-leaning."

"I think it will help lay the groundwork for what has to happen at the G-20," he told The Associated Press, referring to a meeting later this year of the broader Group of 20 leading and emerging economies, who are responsible for 80% of global emissions.

Getting all G-20 countries to sign on to the ambitious targets set by some of the most advanced economies will be difficult, as countries such as China, India and Indonesia remain heavily reliant on coal.

Under pressure to step up their financial aid to poor nations, the G-7 ministers in Berlin said they recognized that "action and support for vulnerable countries, populations and vulnerable groups need to be further scaled up."

This includes governments and companies "providing enhanced support regarding averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage associated with the adverse impacts of climate change," they said.

Developing countries have for years demanded a clear commitment that they will receive funds to cope with the destruction wrought by climate change. Wealthy nations have resisted the idea, however, for fear of being held liable for costly disasters linked to their emissions.

"After years of roadblocks, the G-7 finally recognize that they need to financially support poor countries in addressing climate-related losses and damages," said David Ryfisch of the Berlin-based environmental campaign group Germanwatch.

"But that recognition is not enough, they need to put actual money on the table," he added. "It is now up to (German Chancellor Olaf) Scholz to mobilize significant financial commitments by leaders at the Elmau summit."

Germany's energy and climate minister, Robert Habeck, said the 40-page communique couldn't hide the fact that G-7 countries had long been laggards on combating global warming.

"But we're trying to make up for those things that didn't go so well in the past," he said. "Including on climate finance."

Speaking at a former coal depot, later converted into a gas storage facility and now home to clean energy startups, Habeck also highlighted the pledge by G-7 countries to end what he called the "absurdity" of fossil fuel subsidies in the coming years.

Separately, the United States and Germany signed an agreement Friday to deepen their bilateral cooperation on shifting from fossil fuels to renewable energy. The deal will see the two countries work together to develop and deploy technologies that will speed up that clean energy transition, particularly in the area of offshore wind power, zero-emissions vehicles and hydrogen.

The U.S. and Germany pledged to also collaborate on promoting ambitious climate policies and energy security worldwide.

Kerry said both countries aim to reap the benefits of shifting to clean energy early, through the creation of new jobs and opportunities for businesses in the growing market for renewables.

Such markets depend on common standards of what hydrogen can be classified as "green," for example. Officials will now work on reaching a common definition to ensure that hydrogen produced on one side

of the Atlantic can be sold on the other side.

Habeck said the agreement reflected the urgency of tackling global warming. Scientists have said steep emissions cuts need to happen worldwide this decade if the goals set in the 2015 Paris climate accord are to be met.

"Time is literally running out," Habeck said, calling climate change "the challenge of our political generation."

## 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 in 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 buy the majority of formula in the U.S., and face a particular struggle: Experts fear small neighborhood grocery stores that serve these vulnerable populations are not replenishing as much as larger retail stores, leaving some of these families without 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 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 have 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, breastfeeding 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 that the babies of Black mothers are more likely to be introduced to formula in the hospital than the babies of white mothers, which happened to Isidoro after her emergency cesarean section.

Physicians say introducing formula means the baby will require fewer feedings from the 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

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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 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 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. Now it's helping moms get the formula they need as they go back to work. One of them is a Hispanic teacher whose job leaves her with little flexibility to care for her 2-month old infant, who has been sensitive to a lot of formula brands.

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

Lisette Fernandez, a 34-year-old Cuban American first-time mother of twins, has relied on friends and family to find the liquid 2-ounce bottles she needs for her boy and girl. Earlier this week, her father went to four different pharmacies before he was able to get her some boxes with the tiny bottles. They run out quickly as the babies grow.

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

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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.

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

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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.

## Today in History: May 28, Dionne quintuplets are born

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, May 28, the 148th day of 2022. There are 217 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 28, 1863, the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, made up of freed Blacks, left Boston to fight for the Union in the Civil War.

On this date:

In 1892, the Sierra Club was organized in San Francisco.

In 1918, American troops fought their first major battle during World War I as they launched an offensive against the German-held French village of Cantigny (kahn-tee-NYEE'); the Americans succeeded in capturing the village.

In 1934, the Dionne quintuplets — Annette, Cecile, Emilie, Marie and Yvonne — were born to Elzire Dionne at the family farm in Ontario, Canada.

In 1937, Neville Chamberlain became prime minister of Britain.

In 1940, during World War II, the Belgian army surrendered to invading German forces.

In 1959, the U.S. Army launched Able, a rhesus monkey, and Baker, a squirrel monkey, aboard a Jupiter missile for a suborbital flight which both primates survived.

In 1964, the charter of the Palestine Liberation Organization was issued at the start of a meeting of the Palestine National Congress in Jerusalem.

In 1972, Edward, the Duke of Windsor, who had abdicated the English throne to marry Wallis Warfield Simpson, died in Paris at age 77.

In 1977, 165 people were killed when fire raged through the Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate, Kentucky.

In 1987, to the embarrassment of Soviet officials, Mathias Rust (mah-TEE'-uhs rust), a young West German pilot, landed a private plane in Moscow's Red Square without authorization. (Rust was freed by the Soviets the following year.)

In 1998, comic actor Phil Hartman of "Saturday Night Live" and "NewsRadio" fame was shot to death at his home in Encino, California, by his wife, Brynn, who then killed herself.

In 2020, people torched a Minneapolis police station that the department was forced to abandon amid spreading protests over the death of George Floyd. Protesters in New York defied a coronavirus prohibi-



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tion on public gatherings, clashing with police; demonstrators blocked traffic and smashed vehicles in downtown Denver before police used tear gas to disperse the crowd. At least seven people were shot as gunfire erupted during a protest in Louisville, Kentucky, to demand justice for Breonna Taylor, a Black woman who was fatally shot by police in her home in March.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama paid tribute on Memorial Day to the men and women who died defending America; speaking at the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, Obama pointed to Vietnam veterans as an under-appreciated and sometimes maligned group of war heroes.

Five years ago: A series of shootings in rural Mississippi claimed the lives of eight people, including a sheriff's deputy. (Willie Cory Godbolt was convicted in the killings and sentenced to death.) Takuma Sato won the Indianapolis 500 to give owner Michael Andretti a second consecutive victory. Angelique Kerber became the first women's No. 1 seed to be defeated in the French Open's first round in the Open era, losing 6-2, 6-2 to 40th-ranked Ekaterina Makarova of Russia.

One year ago: Officials announced that the remains of more than 200 children, some as young as 3 years old, had been found buried on the site of what was once Canada's largest indigenous residential school. (Unidentified remains would also be found in unmarked graves at other residential schools across Canada.) Senate Republicans blocked creation of an independent, bipartisan panel to investigate the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, displaying continuing party loyalty to former President Donald Trump; the vote meant that questions about who should bear responsibility for the attack would continue to be handled by congressional committees. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said kids at summer camps could skip wearing masks outdoors, with some exceptions.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Carroll Baker is 91. Producer-director Irwin Winkler is 91. Basketball Hall of Famer Jerry West is 84. Former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani is 78. Singer Gladys Knight is 78. Singer Billy Vera is 78. Singer John Fogerty (Creedence Clearwater Revival) is 77. Country musician Jerry Douglas is 66. Actor Louis Mustillo is 64. Former governor and U.S. Rep. Mark Sanford, R-S.C., is 62. Actor Brandon Cruz (TV: "The Courtship of Eddie's Father") is 60. Country singer Phil Vassar is 58. Actor Christa Miller is 58. Singer-musician Chris Ballew (Presidents of the USA) is 57. Rapper Chubb Rock is 54. Singer Kylie Minogue (KY'-lee mihn-OHG') is 54. Actor Justin Kirk is 53. Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., is 51. Olympic gold medal figure skater Ekaterina Gordeeva is 51. Television personality Elisabeth Hasselbeck is 45. R&B singer Jaheim is 45. Actor Jake Johnson is 44. Actor Jesse Bradford is 43. Actor Monica Keena is 43. Actor Alexa Davalos is 40. Actor Megalyn Echikunwoke (eh-cheek-uh-WALK'-ay) is 40. Pop singer Colbie Caillat (kal-LAY') is 37. Actor Carey Mulligan is 37. Actor Joseph Cross is 36. Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Craig Kimbrel is 34.