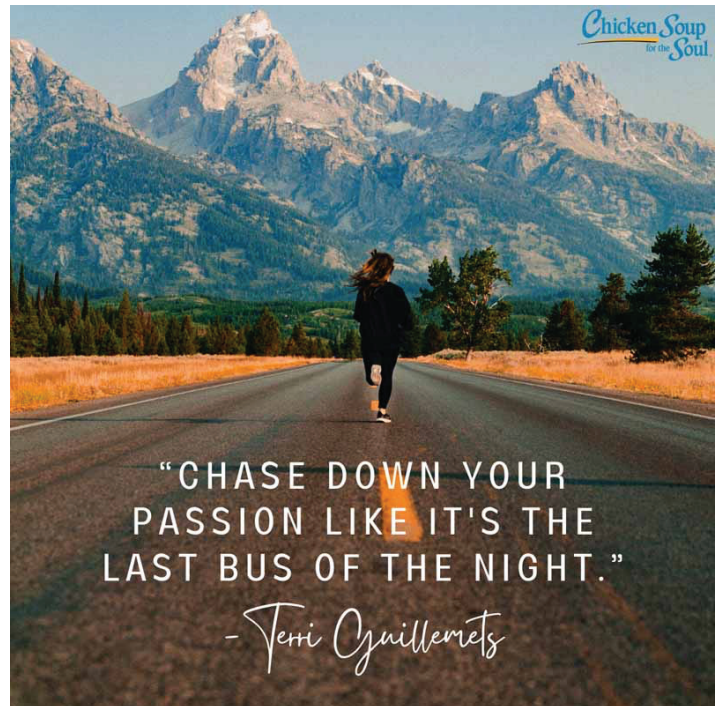


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Saturday, June 4

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

June 5

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.

June 6

Senior Menu: Hamburger on bun, oven-roasted potatoes, cucumber salad, ice cream sundae.

5:30 p.m.: Legion hosts Smithy's DH

6 p.m.: U12 at Webster, DH

5:30 p.m.: U10 hosts Britton, DH, (R/W), Nelson Field

5:30 p.m.: U8 hosts Britton, DH, (R/W), Nelson Field

Thursday, June 2

Senior Menu: Roast beef with potatoes, Carrots, onions; gravy, fruit, whole wheat bread.

10 a.m.: Reading Time at Wage Memorial Library

5 p.m.: Legion at Watertown, 5 p.m. DH

5:30 p.m.: Jr. Teeners host Redfield, DH

5:30 p.m.: U12 vs. Borge at Aberdeen (north complex), DH

5:30 p.m.: U10 vs. Borge at Aberdeen, north complex, (R/B), DH

5:30 p.m.: U8 vs. Borge at Aberdeen, north complex, (R/B), DH

6 p.m.: U12 SB at Warner, DH

Friday, June 3

Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, dill potato, seven layer salad, fruited Jell-O with topping, whole wheat bread.

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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Final stage of pool work begins

The final stages of the work on the Groton Swimming Pool began on Tuesday. The super powerwashing of the basin is being done. After that, the joints are caulked and then the plaster will be applied. Once the plaster is applied, the filling of the pool will begin. It's a long process and the weather has not cooperated this year, but work is progressing. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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SDSU Spring 2022 Dean's List

BROOKINGS, S.D. - The following students have been named to the dean's list for academic excellence after the spring 2022 semester at South Dakota State University. To earn dean's list distinctions in SDSU's colleges, students must have completed a minimum of 12 credits and must have earned at least a 3.5 GPA on a 4.0 scale. Students with an asterisk received a perfect 4.0 GPA.

Overall, more than 3,070 students from 35 states and 22 foreign nations are on the list. Nearly 1,400 students received a 4.0.

Students with F, I, U, RI or RU grades are not eligible regardless of system term GPA attained. Note that this report includes courses that were taken at other South Dakota institutions this term. A minimum of 12 credits within the 100-699 course range must be taken. A student who passes pregeneral education courses may still qualify, if the student has 12 other credits that do fall within the 100-699 range.

College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences: Colin Eugene Frey and Dylan Michael Frey* of Claremont; Tessa Lee Erdmann*, Groton; Holli Jo Jark, Stratford.

College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences: Kaitlyn Ann Anderson, Claremont; AnneMarie Lyn Smith*, Groton.

College of Education and Human Sciences: Allison Lynn Duerre, Bristol; Emily Anne Thompson*, Groton; Summer Rae Scepaniak*, Warner.

College of Natural Sciences: Cassandra Ann Townsend*, Andover; Conner Jeffery Thaler*, Groton.

Jerome J. Lohr College of Engineering: Daniel Ward Sharp* and Travis George Sharp, Bath.

College of Nursing: Georgia Simone Duerre and Alexa Marie Herr, Bristol; Marshall McGregor Lane*, Nicole Mabel Marzahn and Hailey Jo Monson, Groton; Ashley Renae Fischbach, Keeley Marie Fischbach and Sydney Marie Leidholt*, Warner.

College of Pharmacy and Allied Health Professions: Faith Emily Crissman, Groton.

JAMES VALLEY TELECOMMUNICATIONS 65TH ANNUAL MEETING

Thursday, June 2, 2022
Groton Area High School Arena
11:30am Registration & Lunch
12:30pm Meeting

- Membership Gift
- Entertainment by OST kids
- Door Prizes (including a \$500 credit)
- Call 605-397-2323 for a FREE ride

**JAMES
VALLEY**
TELECOMMUNICATIONS



Celebrate 605 Day Across South Dakota South Dakota's One Area Code Brings Cause for Celebration

PIERRE, S.D. – There is one thing that unifies South Dakota and its residents – the state's area code. Only 11 states in the country have a single area code, and South Dakota is one of them.

On Sunday, June 5, 2022, join the South Dakota Department of Tourism in celebrating the seventh annual 605 Day.

"It's no secret that South Dakota is the best state in the nation," said Governor Kristi Noem. "605 Day is the perfect time to showcase all our state has to offer and celebrate this beautiful place that we call home. This 605 Day weekend, take time to enjoy South Dakota's great outdoors and freedom."

In honor of this special day, the Department of Tourism encourages people to tag social media posts with #605Day to inspire, connect, and highlight the "Great Faces, Great Places" of South Dakota. 605 Day bingo cards, South Dakota fun facts and road-trip itinerary ideas can be found at TravelSouthDakota.com/605-Day. The department is encouraging communities and businesses to create their own engaging 605 Day social media posts to promote their Great Place in 'the 605.'

Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Tourism Jim Hagen said he's looking forward to a great 605 Day weekend.

"Since the department initiated the 605 Day celebration in 2016, we have loved seeing South Dakotans consistently rally behind this special day and share their South Dakota pride," said Hagen. "South Dakota is known for many unique qualities but having one area code is a fun way to unite residents."

"We can't wait to see how people celebrate South Dakota and its beautiful places on June 5th," said Hagen.

The South Dakota Department of Tourism is encouraging local businesses, chambers of commerce, and attractions to get involved and plan their own 605 Day events or promotions. For tools on how businesses and organizations can celebrate, please see SDVisit.com/605-Day.

The South Dakota Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism and the South Dakota Arts Council. The department is led by Secretary James Hagen.

Additional child care funding available to providers

PIERRE – Governor Kristi Noem is making available additional grants to assist child care providers licensed and registered with the South Dakota Department of Social Services (DSS).

This is a second round of funding from the \$60 million stabilization grants through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 to help support child care providers and families impacted by COVID-19. Initial funding was provided to 676 child care providers in the amount of \$35.4 million this spring.

“Helping stabilize South Dakota child care providers strengthens our communities,” said DSS Cabinet Secretary Laurie Gill. “Child care is a vital part of keeping our economy strong, but more importantly access to quality providers is crucial for families.”

Grant awards are based on the provider’s average monthly expenses. The funding is being made available to child care providers who previously received grants as well as open to new providers registered and licensed by DSS at the time of application. Applications are being accepted until June 15.

Providers who received previous grants will receive an additional two months of operating expenses up to a cap. Providers who haven’t received a grant will receive five months of operating expenses up to a cap. As with the first round of ARPA Child Care Stabilization Grants, funds must be expended on operating expenses.

Additional information on the ARPA Child Care Stabilization Grants is available at dss.sd.gov.

DSS provides assistance to low-income families who need help with child care costs while parents work or attend school. Additional information including an online application is available at dss.sd.gov/childcare/childcareassistance/apply or by calling Child Care Services at 1.800.227.3020.

DSS also provides oversight, technical assistance, and support in promoting safe, healthy, and caring environments for children through licensing, registration, and quality improvement activities. Information on state child care registration or licensing is available at dss.sd.gov/childcare/licensing or by calling a licensing representative from the Office of Licensing and Accreditation at 1.800.227.3020.

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Miller Central Speedway Results May 28

By Butch Knouse

It was a breezy night at the Miller Central Speedway. There were eighty-four cars in the pits and there was extra money on the line for the WISSOTA Super Stocks and the Pump N Pak Pure Stocks. On Friday the races were canceled due to equipment issues, but volunteers stepped forward with their water tracks and the races were held. Due to the drought and it being opening night there was dust.

There was \$500 to win for the Pump N Pak Pure Stocks. Wyatt Brooker led the first 3 laps before Craig Hoffer took command. Hoffer held on until Curtis Johnson got outside of him on the last lap and won over Hoffer, Brooker, Andy Brooker and McKenzie Kopecky. It was Johnson's sixth feature win at the Miller Central Speedway.

With weather approach they ran the WISSOTA Super Stocks next because of the \$1000 to win. Blake Whitlock led the first two laps before Trevor Nelson went by. Nelson ran away until Whitlock's driveshaft broke with 2 laps to go and there was a debris caution for the several pieces. They did a green, white checker restart, but the second place Austin Arbogast's car quit and Nelson ran away for his 19th feature win in Miller over Corey Roberts, Brad Kopecky, Shawn Schnabel and Nathan Grehl.

The WISSOTA Late Models were next because of 3 out of state cars in the field. Dave Mass grabbed the lead from outside pole and led all 20 laps caution free over Don Shaw, Chad Becker, Josh Skorczewski and Lance Schill. It was Dave's first Late Model feature win and his first win at Miller since 5/12/06.

The WISSOTA Street Stocks were next with Maria Broksieck leading the first 3 laps before a yellow for a spin. Before they could complete a lap there was another spin. With the pack bunched up on the front straight 3 time Track Champion Broc Stout got tapped and turned into the concrete. He was off on the hook and his car was heavily damaged.

On the restart second place Luke Johnson chose the bottom lane with James Hoing on the top side. Coming off of turn two Hoing and Johnson got him and low on Maria and moved her back to third Hoing started to run away, but Maria passed Johnson and ran down Hoing at the white flag, but a yellow put her but in second and Hoing held over off on the restart, winning over Broksieck, Johnson, Jayden Bogh and Jodie Michaelsohn. It was James' eighth feature win at the track.

As the dribbling rain continued the WISSOTA Modifieds were next with 2 cautions in 15 laps. Mike Stearns led all the way over Dale Ames, Trevor Anderson, Garrett Gross and Dave Brooker. It was Mike's 12th feature win, tying him with Tyler McDonald for 2nd all time.

The WISSOTA Midwest Modifieds capped off the night 23 strong with Tommy Nichols taking the lead on the start. His brother Mike eventually got out of traffic and caught hm, but couldn't get by. A yellow flag with 2 laps to go gave Mike his chance and he got a better jump on the restart and beat little brother to the checkered Dawson Zabel, Adam Brotherton and Lane Johnson completing the top five. It was Mike's sixth win at Miller breaking a tie with Kyle Knouse for 5th on the list.

There will be no races next week as Miller gives way to Wheel Jam. The next race will be June 11. The races always start at 7:00 PM.

WISSOTA Late Model main: 1. Dave Mass, Eath Bethel, Minnesota 2. Don Shaw, Ham Lake, MN 3. Chad Becker, Aberdeen 4. Josh Skorczewski, Aberdeen 5. Lance Schill, Langdon, North Dakota 6. Dustin Arthur,

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St. Lawrence 7. David Carlson, Huron 8. Chase Gelling, Aberdeen 9. Brandon Sprinkel, Highmore DNF: Rich Thomas, Aberdeen

Heat 1: Shaw, Schill, Gelling, Carlson, Thomas
Heat 2: Mass, Becker, Skorzewski, Arthur, Sprinkel

WISSOTA Modified main: 1. Mike Stearns, Aberdeen 2. Dale Ames, Huron 3. Trevor Anderson, Watertown 4. Garrett Gross, Aberdeen 5. Dave Brooker, Tulare 6. Nick Schmidt, Baltic

Heat: Ames, Stearns, Anderson, Gross, Brooker, Schmidt

WISSOTA Super Stock main: 1. Trevor Nelson, Warner 2. Corey Roberts, Aberdeen 3. Brad Kopecky, Miller 4. Shawn Schnabel, Aberdeen 5. Nathan Grehl, Hitchcock 6. Doug Van Liere, Madison 7. Dominique Menzia, Aberdeen 8. Derek Zastrow, Gann Valley DNF: Austin Arbogast, Huron; Blake Whitlock, Watertown; Alan Malsam, Mobridge; Luis Chavez, Aberdeen; Jeremy North, Huron DNS: Kyle Elsen, Aberdeen

Heat 1: Arbogast, Van Liere, Malsam, Chavez, Zastrow, Grehl, Elsen
Heat 2: Nelson, Whitlock, North, Roberts, Schnabel, Kopecky, Menzia,

WISSOTA Midwest Modified main: 1. Mike Nichols, Watertown 2. Tommy Nichols, Watertown 3. Dawson Zabel, Selby 4. Adam Brotherton, Huron 5. Lane Johnson, Miller, 6. Lorin Jonnson, Miller 7. Cory Berquist, Huron 8. Jordan Kienow, Miller 9. Jayme Peterson, Highmore 10. Brandon Woodhead, Box Elder 11. Connor Blumhardt, Bath 12. Damon Hoftiezer, Fort Pierre 13. James Reiner, Wessington Springs 14. **Nathan Jager, Groton** 15. Britt Williams, Fort Pierre 16. Trevor Ryan, Highmore 17. Blake Meyer, Huron 18. Chad Kopfmann, Alpena 19. Brandon Hoftiezer, Fort Pierre 20. Joel Reiter, Kimball 21. Jake Richards, Gann Valley DNF: Ryan Franks, Pierre; Lance Schill, Langdon, ND DNS: Jeff Rawstern, Blunt; Paden Scott, Pierre

Heat 1: Zabel, M. Nichols, La. Johnson, B. Hottiezer, Kienow, Williams, Reiter, Richards, Rawstern
Heat 2: Schill, Berquist, Reiners, Woodhead, Blumhardt, Meyer, Ryan, Kopfmann
Heat 3: Brotherton, Lo. Johnson, T. Nichols, D. Hoftiezer, Peterson, Scott

WISSOTA Street Stock main: 1. James Hoing, Kimball 2. Maria Broksieck, Goodwin 3. Luke Johnson, Miller 4. Jayden Bogh, Huron 5. Jodie Michaelsohn, Aberdeen 6. Brandon Hammill, Miller 7. Travis Oxandaburu, Huron 8. Domanick Havard, Wessington Springs 9. Jordan Rawstern, Blunt 10. Clifford Houser, Kimball 11. Casey Carstens, Mitchell 12. Wesley Wulff, Gann Valley DNF: Jace Baloun, Highmore; Andy Rossow, Florence; Broc Stout, Winner; Kyle Bertram, Dallas,; Michael Bogh, Huron

Heat 1: Oxandaburu, Rossow, M. Bogh, Hammill, Michaelsohn, Havard, Baloun, Carstens, Rawstern
Heat 2: Stout, Broksieck, Johnson, Hoing, J. Bogh, Bertram, Houser, Wulff

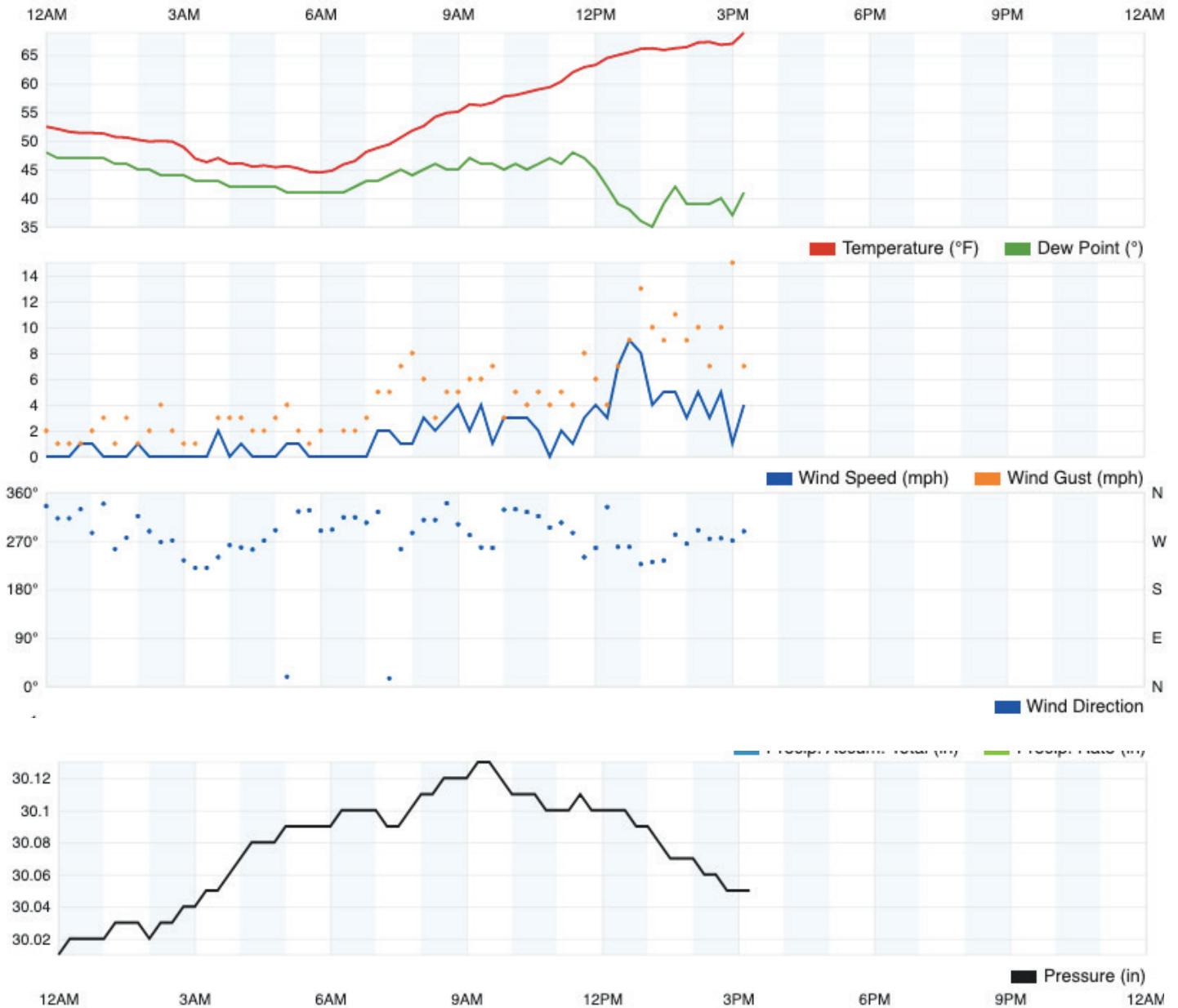
Pump N Pak Pure Stock main: 1. Curtis Johnson, Miller 2. Craig Hoffer, Winner 3. Wyatt Brooker, Tulare 4. Andy Brooker, Tulare 5. McKenzie Kopecky, Miller 6. Cody Songer, Wolsey 7. Shawn Laskarzewski, St. Lawrence 8. Sam Springer, Pierre 9. Camden Rassel, Woonsocket DNF: Mitch Scott, Fort Pierre; Bruce Scott, Pierre DNS: Mike Hammill, Miller

Heat 1: W. Brooker, Songer, Hammill, A. Brooker, B. Scott, Springer
Heat 2: Johnson, Kopecky, Rassel, Hoffer, Laskarzewski, M. Scott

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

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Today



Sunny then
Sunny and
Breezy

High: 71 °F

Tonight



Clear

Low: 42 °F

Friday



Increasing
Clouds

High: 69 °F

Friday
Night



Chance
Showers

Low: 50 °F

Saturday



Slight Chance
Showers

High: 69 °F

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
Updated: 6/2/2022 4:04 AM Central



Breezy Today

Rain Chances Friday into the Weekend

Today

HI: 68 to 76°



Gusty west to
northwest winds

Friday

HI: 66 to 71°



Increasing Clouds,
rain south of US 212

Saturday

HI: 66 to 71°



Rain diminishing
from west to east

Sunday

HI: 62 to 67°



Best Chance in
central SD

West-Northwest winds will increase today and be gusty this afternoon, with gusts of 35 to 45 mph expected over much of the northeast half of South Dakota. After a few dry days, rain chances return on Friday and continue into the weekend.

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Today in Weather History

June 2, 1891: An estimated F3 tornado moved northeast, passing one mile south of Hazel in Hamlin County, where three people were killed in a barn. The farm home was entirely swept away. A horse was seen being carried in the air for 400 yards. The tornado was estimated to be on the ground for about 5 miles. After touching down, an estimated F2 tornado moved northeast along the eastern edge of Watertown, where a barn was destroyed, and debris was scattered for a half mile. Two homes were leveled 5 miles northeast of Watertown. Near Waverly, one person was injured in the destruction of a flour mill. This tornado was estimated to be on the ground for about 15 miles.

June 2, 1964: Some bitter cold temperatures were observed during the early morning hours on the 2nd. Some low temperatures include; 27 degrees 12 miles SSW of Harrold; 28 degrees in Andover and 23 N of Highmore; 29 degrees 4 NW of Gann Valley, Redfield, and 2 NW of Stephan; 30 degrees in Castlewood and 1 W of Highmore; 31 degrees in Britton, 1 NW of Faulkton, and in Kennebec; and 32 degrees in McLaughlin.

June 2, 2008: Several supercell thunderstorms rolled southeast from northwest South Dakota into central South Dakota bringing large hail, damaging winds, and flash flooding during the late afternoon and evening hours. The large hail, up to baseball size, and high winds killed a large number of birds, pheasants, grouse, and rabbits. Thousands of acres of grassland and cropland along with many shelter belts received minor to major damage in Stanley and Hughes County. The large hail also knocked out many windows and damaged the siding of tens of buildings and homes in both Stanley and Hughes counties. Many roads and cropland were also affected by flash flooding throughout Hughes and Stanley counties. Very heavy rain of over 3 inches caused flash flooding in many parts of Pierre into the early morning hours. Many roads were reportedly flooded with 1 to 2 feet of water. Several homes in southeast Pierre received sewer backup. Also, several houses on Grey Goose Road received flood damage. A Federal Disaster Declaration was issued for Hughes and Stanley counties mainly for the flooding. Tennis ball hail broke most of the west side windows out of the house near Mission Ridge in Stanley County. Hail up to the size of baseballs fell in Pierre breaking some windows out of homes and vehicles. Very heavy rains of 2 to 4 inches fell across much of Stanley County causing extensive flash flooding. Seventeen roads also sustained some form of damage from the flooding.

1889: The same storm that caused the historic dam failure in Johnstown, PA, also affected Washington, D.C. The streets and reservations in the center of the city and all the wharves and streets along the riverfront were under water. Pennsylvania Avenue was flooded from 2nd to 10th Streets. The Potomac River crested at the Aqueduct Bridge at 19.5 feet on June 2. Additionally, damage occurred on Rock Creek, with the Woodley Lane Bridge washed away. Considerable damage occurred to machinery plants and material at the Navy Yard.

1917: The temperature at Tribune, Kansas dipped to 30 degrees to establish a state record for June.

1998: Frostburg, Maryland on June 2, 1998, at 9:45 PM - This was part of a killer outbreak of tornadoes that moved southeast from Pennsylvania. The storm entered Garrett County, Maryland striking the town of Finzel. It then moved up and over Big Savage Mountain in Allegany County and ripped through the northern portion of Frostburg. It reached its peak strength as it crossed the ridge. Winds were estimated between 210 and 250 mph (F4 on the Fujita Tornado Damage Scale). This was the first tornado to "officially" be rated an "F4" in the State of Maryland. The National Weather Service adopted the Fujita Damage Scale in 1973. The total damage path of the Frostburg tornado was over 25 miles long (8 miles in Allegany County) and up to a half-mile wide. Along most of its path, it was producing winds over 125 mph (F2 or stronger). The damage path was continuous as it moved up and down over 2000-foot mountain ridges. The fact that no one was killed in Maryland was attributed to 5 to 10 minutes warning that was well communicated to people in Frostburg over television, radio, scanners, telephones, and sirens. People took quick action to move to their basements. A mother and child rode out the storm as it destroyed their house hiding under a table in the basement. They were shaken but unharmed. A jacket from a Frostburg home was found 25 miles away. A diploma was found near Winchester, Virginia, 60 miles away and a bill was found near Sterling Virginia (about 100 miles away).

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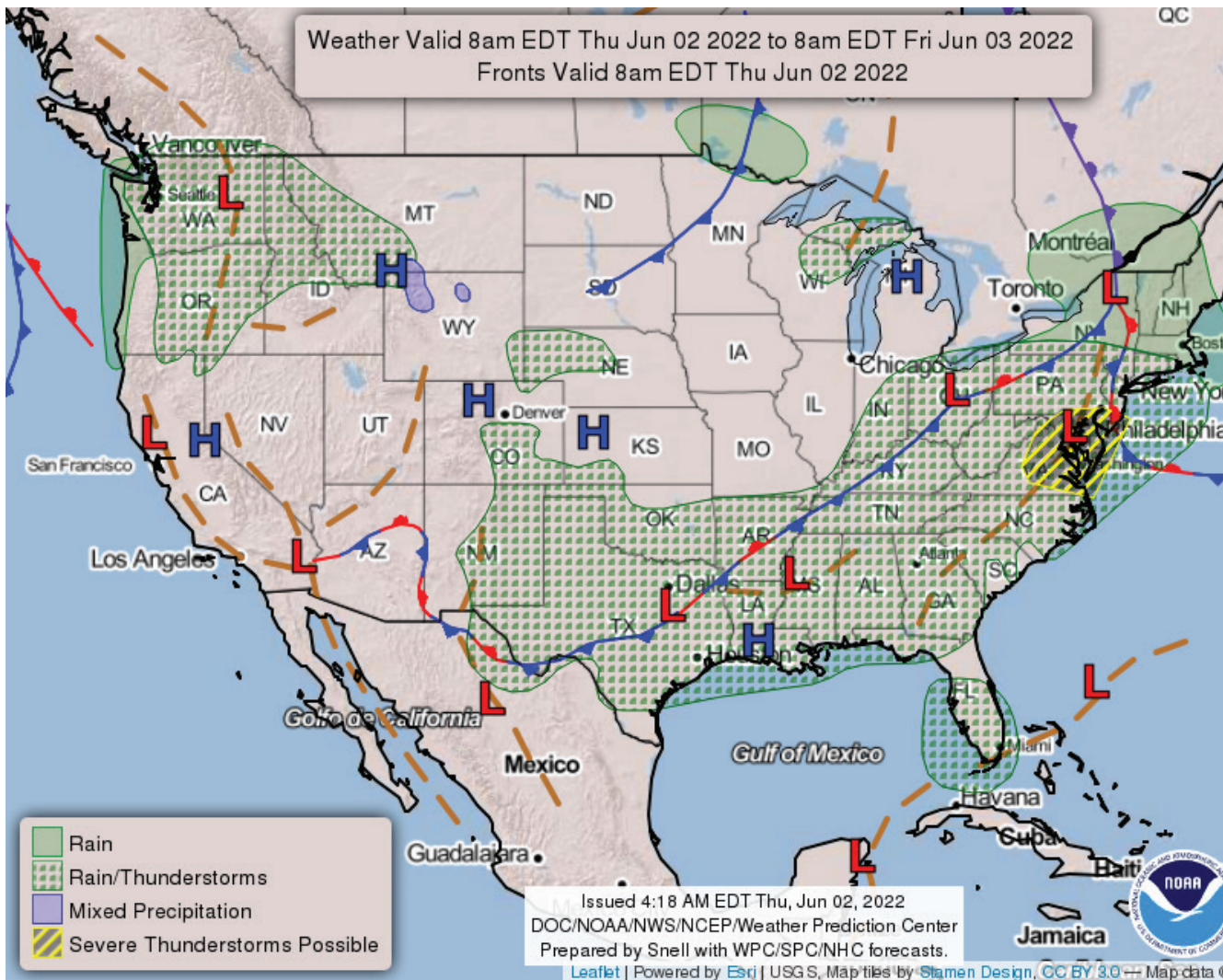
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 72 °F at 5:47 PM
Low Temp: 44 °F at 5:55 AM
Wind: 17 mph at 3:44 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 31 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 100 in 2017
Record Low: 30 in 1946
Average High: 77°F
Average Low: 51°F
Average Precip in June.: 0.21
Precip to date in June.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 7.46
Precip Year to Date: 11.18
Sunset Tonight: 9:16:10 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:44:14 AM



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HEALING HEARTS - BINDING WOUNDS

No matter where we look, we find pain and suffering.

Hospitals are crowded with people who were once healthy but are now waiting to heal. Our prisons are filled with shattered lives and unfulfilled dreams where hope once lived. Mental institutions have waiting lists for troubled minds and broken spirits. Divorce courts are now busier than ever as people "uncouple."

Every home seems to have its share of sadness. Eyes once filled with joy and expectation are filled with blank stares. Hearts that once sang praises are now hushed in silence because doubt and fear have overcome faith. Minds once focused on "things above" are now filled with self-centeredness and greed.

Years ago, there were craftsmen who were "jacks of all trades - masters of none." George placed a sign above the door to his shop that read: "We can mend everything but broken hearts and bodies."

But the Psalmist reminds us of the One who can do just that: "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."

Recently, I sat in the office of my neurosurgeon to review my post-surgery status. As I sat there, I reflected on all who were involved in "restoring" my health: nurses, surgeons, pharmacists, anesthesiologists, dieticians - and the list seemed endless. And then God spoke to me and said, "You're right. They were only involved. It's up to Me and My Father's grace as to what the outcome would be."

"He" - and only "He" - can bind up wounds and bring healing.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to realize what You can do in us, for us, through us and with us because You truly love us. Then we can truly rest in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Bible Verse: He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. Psalm 147:3

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2022 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

02-03-04-25-32

(two, three, four, twenty-five, thirty-two)

Estimated jackpot: \$48,000

Lotto America

04-09-10-15-30, Star Ball: 5, ASB: 5

(four, nine, ten, fifteen, thirty; Star Ball: five; ASB: five)

Estimated jackpot: \$14,150,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 189,000,000

Powerball

11-41-56-57-63, Powerball: 2, Power Play: 2

(eleven, forty-one, fifty-six, fifty-seven, sixty-three; Powerball: two; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$184,000,000

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. May 31, 2022.

Editorial: All SD Voters Have A Stake In June 7 Election

This is a good time to offer a final reminder to all South Dakota voters: Every registered voter has something on the ballot next Tuesday.

Even if you aren't a Republican and there are no contested Democratic races on your ballot.

Even if you are an independent and not covered by any party affiliation.

For every registered voter, Amendment C is on the ballot and warrants as much electoral input as possible.

This measure would, according to the Ballotpedia website, require "a three-fifths (60%) supermajority vote for the approval of ballot measures placed on the ballot through citizen initiative or referred to the ballot by the state Legislature that increase taxes or fees or that would require the state to appropriate \$10 million or more in the first five fiscal years."

Supporters are billing it as a means of keeping costs down.

Critics say the amendment would do away with majority rule.

One big point of contention is the fact that South Dakotans are being asked to vote on a constitutional measure during a June primary, when voter turnout is historically lower and, in this case, will likely be decidedly even more Republican.

Amendment C was put on the June ballot, admitted State Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, as a means of having it in place before the November general election, when Amendment D, which calls for Medicaid expansion, goes to the voters. If Amendment C is enacted, the Medicaid expansion would require 60% of the vote to pass.

As we've noted here before, Amendment C appears to be a means of preemptively gaming the system to make it more difficult for the November legislation to pass. (This could also potentially include the recreational marijuana initiative, which was officially approved for the November ballot last week.)

However, that argument isn't really what this piece is about today.

Instead, the notion of putting a constitutional amendment on the primary ballot is an unfortunate one, for it is a clear effort to potentially remove some of the resistance to it.

That's why it's important for all voters to get involved in this high-stakes decision.

(And while we're at it, we might also add that it would be a prudent course for someone to investigate the possibility of adding a constitutional amendment which requires any public vote on a constitutional issue to be held during the general election whenever possible. This current approach looks too much like political tampering with the governing process.)

No matter your opinion on the issue, do your part to weigh in on Amendment C, either by voting early or by heading to the polls on June 7. Voting takes place from 7 a.m.-7 p.m. local time.

South Dakota won't seek death penalty in triple homicide

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Prosecutors won't seek the death penalty for a New York man charged with killing three people in Rapid City.

Pennington County State's Attorney Mark Vargo told a judge Tuesday that he wasn't aware the 45-day deadline for making a decision had passed four days earlier, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Thirty-seven-year-old Arnson Absolu faces three counts of premeditated first-degree murder in connection with the August 2020 deaths of Charles Red Willow and Dakota Zaiser, both of Rapid City, and Ashley Nagy of Greeley, Colorado.

Red Willow and Nagy were found shot to death in a vehicle at a park on Aug. 24, 2020. Zasier's body was discovered Sept. 24 near Sheridan Lake. According to court documents, he had been killed sometime between Aug. 24 and Aug. 25, 2020. He was initially identified as possible witness in Red Willow and Nagy's deaths.

About 20 people attended the court hearing on Tuesday, including two of Nagy's nieces, Amarri Hiermeier and Allyson Hiermeier. Amarri said she was upset about the state not pursuing the death penalty and said, "We didn't get the news we wanted."

Allyson said it was hard to see Absolu in person for the first time. She had been to a hearing where he appeared virtually.

"Actually seeing him, and him looking back at us. I never saw him that close, so that gives you a very hard feeling," she said, adding that she was friends with the other two victims as well.

Another military plane rolls off Sioux Falls runway

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota National Guard is investigating how another of its planes rolled off a Sioux Falls runway.

The Argus Leader reported Tuesday that the F-16C assigned to the 114th Fighter Wing ran off an airport runway that afternoon after returning from a training mission. Emergency responders released the pilot from the scene.

An F-16 from the same fighter wing overran a runway at the airport on May 11. The crew escaped injury. The fighter wing has formed an interim safety board to investigate the incidents.

Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee kicks off with pomp

By DANICA KIRKA and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Four days of celebrations honoring Queen Elizabeth II's 70 years on the throne got underway Thursday with a display of British military traditions stretching from the days of horse and cannon to the jet age.

Formal celebrations for the Platinum Jubilee began with Trooping the Color, an annual military review that has marked the sovereign's official birthday since 1760. The queen took a salute on the balcony of Buckingham Palace and is expected to join the working members of her family again there at the end of the event, when 70 aircraft are set to roar overhead.

The jubilee is being commemorated with a four-day holiday weekend. The celebration of Elizabeth's reign includes a service of thanksgiving Friday at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, a concert at Buckingham

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Palace on Saturday and a pageant staged by thousands of performers drawn from schools and community groups around the country on Sunday afternoon.

Throughout the weekend, neighborhood organizations and individuals are expected to hold thousands of street parties around the country, repeating a tradition that began with the queen's coronation in 1953.

The 96-year-old queen is Britain's longest-reigning monarch and the first to reach the milestone of seven decades on the throne. The jubilee is giving many people — even those often indifferent to the monarchy — a chance to reflect on the state of the nation and the huge changes that have taken place during her reign.

Former Prime Minister John Major — one of the 14 prime ministers of the queen's reign — said the monarch's stoic presence had helped steer the country over the decades,

"The queen has represented our better selves for over 70 years," he told the BBC.

In a written jubilee message, the queen thanked people in Britain and across the Commonwealth involved in organizing the celebrations. For many, the occasion is the first opportunity for a big bash since the start of the coronavirus pandemic more than two years ago.

"I know that many happy memories will be created at these festive occasions," Elizabeth said.

"I continue to be inspired by the goodwill shown to me, and hope that the coming days will provide an opportunity to reflect on all that has been achieved during the last 70 years, as we look to the future with confidence and enthusiasm," she said.

Congratulations arrived from world leaders. French President Emmanuel Macron called Elizabeth "the golden thread that binds our two countries" and one of "very few constants" on the international stage.

"You are our friend, such a close ally, our example of service to others," Macron told the queen in an English-language video message.

The name of the long weekend's first event, Trooping the Color, refers to a regimental flag, or "color," that is trooped through the ranks. Britain's annual tradition for the queen's birthday is a ceremonial reenactment of the way battle flags were once shown to soldiers to make sure they would recognize a crucial rallying point if they became disoriented in combat.

The troops taking part come from the army's Household Division, composed of the seven regiments that perform ceremonial duties for the queen. Their members are fully trained soldiers and often deployed overseas when not on ceremonial duty.

Each year a different unit has the honor of trooping its color. The 1st Battalion of the Irish Guards will have the spotlight during the Platinum Jubilee.

Thousands of people, some of whom camped overnight, lined the parade route -- many of them sporting Union Jack flags, party hats or plastic tiaras.

Carly Martin, who caught a late-night bus from south London with her daughter, said she had come "to make memories."

"You're never going to see this again in your lifetime," she said. "At least not in mine, maybe not in my daughter's. ... Seventy years -- it is all I have ever known."

Several protesters were arrested after getting past barriers and onto the parade route. The group Animal Rebellion claimed responsibility, saying the protesters were "demanding that royal land is reclaimed."

Cheers and the clop of hooves rang out as horse-drawn carriages carried members of the royal family, including Prince William's wife, Kate, and their children Prince George, Princess Charlotte and Prince Louis, from Buckingham Palace to Horse Guards Parade, a ceremonial parade ground about 1 kilometer (0.6 miles) away.

The queen is expected to appear twice on the balcony of Buckingham Palace, but Prince Charles played a key role during the event. Mounted on horseback, he also took a salute, from ranks of scarlet-clad Guards, on his mother's behalf, along with his sister, Princess Anne, and his son Prince William.

Elizabeth has had trouble getting around of late, and her courtiers have been careful to keep make things as simple for her as possible.

Senior royals including Prince Charles' wife, Camilla, traveled in carriages to watch the ceremony from

a building overlooking the parade ground.

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex will join other royals to watch the spectacle. Harry and Meghan have traveled from their home in California to take part in the celebrations.

As gas prices soar, Biden leans toward visiting Saudi Arabia

By AMER MADHANI and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is leaning towards making a visit to Saudi Arabia — a trip that would likely bring him face-to-face with the Saudi crown prince he once shunned as a killer.

The White House is weighing a visit that would also include a meeting of the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates) as well as Egypt, Iraq and Jordan, according to a person familiar with White House planning, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the yet-to-be finalized plans.

It comes as overriding U.S. strategic interests in oil and security have pushed the administration to rethink the arms-length stance that Biden pledged to take with the Saudis as a candidate for the White House.

Any meeting between Biden and de facto Saudi ruler Prince Mohammed bin Salman during a Biden visit to the Middle East could offer hope of some relief for U.S. gasoline consumers, who are wincing as a squeaky-tight global oil supply drives up prices. Biden would be expected to meet with Prince Mohammed if the Saudi visit happens, according to the person familiar with the deliberations.

Such a meeting could also ease a fraught and uncertain period in the partnership between Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, and the United States, the world's top economic and military power, that has stood for more than three-quarters of a century.

But it also risks a public humbling for the U.S. leader, who in 2019 pledged to make a "pariah" of the Saudi royal family over the 2018 killing and dismemberment of U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi, a critic of Prince Mohammed's brutal ways.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre on Wednesday declined to comment on whether Biden will travel to Saudi Arabia. He is expected to travel to Europe at the end of June and could tack on a stop in Saudi Arabia to meet with Prince Mohammed, Saudi King Salman and other leaders. If he does, Biden would also likely visit Israel.

Last week, the White House confirmed that Brett McGurk, the National Security Council Middle East coordinator, and Amos Hochstein, a senior adviser for energy security at the State Department, were recently in the region. Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke by phone Monday with his Saudi counterpart.

McGurk and Hochstein, as well as Tim Lenderking, the U.S. special envoy for Yemen, have repeatedly visited Saudi Arabia for talks with Saudi officials about energy supplies, Biden administration efforts to revive the Iran nuclear deal and Saudi's war in Yemen, recently calmed by a cease-fire.

For Biden, the political dangers of offering his hand to Prince Mohammed include the potential for an embarrassing last-minute public rebuff from a still-offended crown prince known for imperious, harsh actions. Since Prince Mohammed became crown prince in 2017, that has included detaining his own royal uncles and cousins as well as Saudi rights advocates, and, according to the U.S. intelligence community, directing Khashoggi's killing. Saudi Arabia denies his involvement.

Still, Biden stood ready to greet the prince at last October's meeting of leading rich and developing nations in Rome, but Prince Mohammed did not attend.

And any Biden climbdown from his passionate human-rights pledge during his campaign — that Saudi rulers would "pay the price" for Khashoggi's killing — risks more disillusionment for Democratic voters. They have watched Biden struggle to accomplish his domestic agenda in the face of a strong GOP minority in the Senate.

Democrats appear less vocal now in demands that the U.S. take a hard line with Saudi Arabia's crown prince. Near-record gas prices are endangering their prospects in the November midterm election.

A leading congressional critic of the Saudi government, Rep. Gerald Connolly of Virginia, said in an email the United States "should reassess its unconditional support for Saudi Arabia." But he and other Democrats

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are not publicly telling Biden he shouldn't meet with Prince Mohammed.

Lawmakers point especially to Saudi Arabia's refusal despite months of Western appeals to veer from an oil production cap brokered largely between the Saudi kingdom and oil-producer Russia. The production cap is adding to oil supply shortfalls stemming from Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

At the same time, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and French President Emmanuel Macron have privately urged Biden to work to soothe U.S.-Saudi relations as has Israel, which sees the kingdom as an essential player in countering Iran.

Besides helping to keep gas prices high for consumers globally, the tight supply helps Russia get better prices for the oil and gas it is selling to fund its invasion of Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited the Saudi kingdom Tuesday.

Frequent, warm visits among Saudi, Russian and Chinese officials during the freeze between Biden and the Saudi crown prince have heightened Western concern that Saudi Arabia is breaking from Western strategic interests.

The United States for decades has ensured U.S. or allied aircraft carriers, troops and trainers and missile batteries remain deployed in defense of Saudi Arabia and its oil fields, and in defense of other Gulf states. The military commitment recognizes that a stable global oil market and a Gulf counterbalance to Iran are in U.S. strategic interests.

From Saudi Arabia, the United States is looking "for real assurances that it is going to be firmly aligned with the United States internationally, and not drift toward or hedge by trying to have comparable relationships with Russia and China. That goes beyond just oil," said Dan Shapiro, a former U.S. ambassador to Israel. Shapiro is an advocate of bilateral Abraham accords that have helped establish closer ties between some Arab states and Israel.

"The United States needs to have some assurance that it's going to provide those security guarantees and it has a real partner that's going to be like a partner," said Shapiro, now a distinguished fellow at the Atlantic Council.

Officials in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, for their part, often see Biden as the latest of several U.S. presidents to neglect the U.S. military's longstanding protector role in the Gulf, as Washington tries to extricate itself from Middle East conflicts to focus on China.

Those Gulf security worries may be eased by the U.S. move last year bringing control of its forces in Israel under U.S. Central Command. That effectively increases interaction between Israel's U.S.-equipped military and Arab forces under the U.S. military umbrella, Shapiro said.

Deputy Saudi Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman visited CENTCOM headquarters in Florida last month. Regional coordination was one of the main topics, including, Shapiro said, the possibility of such steps as coordinating the Middle East's air defense capabilities.

Blinken and White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan also met last month with the Saudi defense official. Sullivan said he talked energy. CIA Director William Burns visited Prince Mohammed in Saudi Arabia in April.

Biden administration officials bristle at the notion that a stepped-up engagement is simply about getting the Saudis to help ease gas prices. Jean-Pierre said that's "a misunderstanding of both the complexity of that issue, as well as our multifaceted discussions with the Saudis."

"The president's words still stand," she added Wednesday, of Biden's pledge that the Saudis would "pay a price."

Afghan Taliban launch campaign to eradicate poppy crop

By ABDUL KHALIQ Associated Press

WASHIR, Afghanistan (AP) — Afghanistan's Taliban rulers have begun a campaign to eradicate poppy cultivation, aiming to wipe out the country's massive production of opium and heroin, even as farmers fear their livelihoods will be ruined at a time of growing poverty.

On a recent day in Washir district in southern Helmand province, armed Taliban fighters stood guard as

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a tractor tore up a field of poppies. The field's owner stood nearby, watching.

The Taliban, who took power in Afghanistan more than nine months ago, issued an edict in early April banning poppy cultivation throughout the country.

Those violating the ban "will be arrested and tried according to Sharia laws in relevant courts," the Taliban deputy interior minister for counternarcotics, Mullah Abdul Haq Akhund, told The Associated Press in Helmand's provincial capital, Lashkar Gah.

Afghanistan is the world's biggest opium producer and a major source for heroin in Europe and Asia. Production spiraled over the past 20 years despite billions of dollars spent by the U.S. trying to stop poppy cultivation.

But the ban will likely strike a heavy blow to millions of impoverished farmers and day laborers who rely on proceeds from the crop to survive. The ban comes as Afghanistan's economy has collapsed, cut off from international funding in the wake of the Taliban takeover. Most of the population struggles to afford food, and the country has been suffering under its worst drought in years.

Noor Mohammed, who owns one poppy field in Washir that was torn apart by Taliban tractors, said his plot of land is small and lacks water, so he can't survive by growing less profitable crops.

"If we are not allowed to cultivate this crop, we will not earn anything," he said of his poppies.

Day laborers can earn upwards of \$300 a month harvesting opium from the poppies. Villagers often rely on the promise of the upcoming poppy harvest to borrow money for staples such as flour, sugar, cooking oil and heating oil.

Helmand is the heartland of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. It appeared the new eradication campaign was targeting mainly those who planted their crops after the ban was announced. Many others who had planted earlier succeeded in harvesting, going from plant to plant, slicing the poppy's bulb, then scooping up the sap that oozes out, the raw material for opium.

Akhund, the deputy interior minister, said the Taliban were in touch with other governments and non-governmental organizations to work out alternative crops for farmers.

Interior Ministry spokesman Abdul Nafi Takor said the eradication campaign will take place across the country. "We are committed to bringing poppy cultivation to zero," he told the AP.

It's not known how many poppies were planted this season, how much was harvested and how many fields the Taliban have eradicated so far.

But Afghanistan's production has steadily risen, reaching new heights every year in recent years. In 2021, 177,000 hectares (438,000 acres) were planted with poppies, yielding enough opium to produce up to 650 tons of heroin, according to estimates by the U.N.'s Office on Drugs and Crime. That was an increase from up to 590 tons of heroin in 2020.

The total value of Afghanistan's opiates production in 2021 was \$1.8-\$2.7 billion, up to 14% of the country's GDP, exceeding the value of its legal exports, the UNODC said in its most recent report.

During their first time in power in the late 1990s, the Taliban also banned poppy cultivation and with a fierce campaign of destroying croplands nearly eradicated production within two years, according to the United Nations.

However, after the U.S.-led invasion that ousted the Taliban in 2001, many farmers returned to growing poppies.

Over the next nearly 20 years, Washington spent more than \$8 billion trying to eradicate Afghan poppy production. Instead, it only steadily increased: In 2002, around 75,000 hectares were planted with poppies, producing some 3,400 tons of opium. Last year, production was double that.

During the years-long Taliban insurgency, the movement reportedly made millions of dollars taxing farmers and middlemen to move their drugs outside Afghanistan. Senior officials of the U.S.-backed government also reportedly made millions on the flourishing drug trade.

Today, Afghanistan's opium output is greater than all other opium-producing countries combined. Nearly 80% of the heroin produced from Afghan opium reaches Europe through Central Asia and Pakistan.

As natural gas expands in Gulf, residents fear rising damage

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ and MARTHA IRVINE Associated Press

LAKE CHARLES, Louisiana (AP) — The front lawn of Lydia Larce's home is strewn with debris: Remnants of cabinets and chunks of pink shower marble lie between dumpsters. She lives in a FEMA trailer out back, her home in shambles more than a year after Hurricane Laura tore through Lake Charles.

Larce, like many in Southwest Louisiana, has what she calls "storm PTSD." Tornado warnings trigger anxiety. She fidgets and struggles to sleep.

"The fear and the unknown — it has me on an edge," Larce said. "I'm scared."

A string of devastating hurricanes has torn through this region in recent years. Nationally, too, there have been more Category 4 and 5 hurricane landfalls in the past five years than in the previous 50 years combined. Larce and her neighbors know they are on the front lines of climate change.

Her region is now the epicenter of a trend that she fears will make those disasters even more destructive.

Developers plan to build a series of liquefied natural gas export facilities across Southwest Louisiana, already the heart of the industry. Even in a state with a heavy industrial base, these facilities are among the largest emitters of greenhouse gases in Louisiana.

"They're an absolute powerhouse for greenhouse gas emissions," said Naomi Yoder, a staff scientist at Healthy Gulf, a nonprofit that advocates for clean energy. That's because these export facilities tend to burn off, or flare, natural gas.

Greenhouse gases are raising global temperatures and fueling extreme weather, from wildfires to violent storms like the ones that have pummeled Larce's hometown.

"We all are living in chaos," Larce said.

For a while, it looked as though an era of steadily expanding fossil fuel facilities might be ending. Last year, after taking office, President Joseph Biden announced his intention to fight climate change by eliminating fossil fuels from electricity generation by 2035 and by sharply reducing emissions from the rest of the economy.

Yet since Biden became president, the U.S. has become the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas as demand for the fuel, known as LNG, has escalated.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine suddenly intensified the push. It heightened demand for natural gas, especially for countries in Europe that relied on Russian energy but now need to cut those ties.

Seizing the opportunity, the natural gas industry promoted U.S.-produced LNG as a way to fill the gaps, and prices for the fuel have skyrocketed. American terminals are now exporting gas at full capacity, which is why the expansion of the terminals has accelerated.

It is along the Gulf Coast, in a line from Louisiana to Texas, where the new and proposed export terminals are clustered. Talk to some locals and government officials and you'll hear unqualified support for the facilities in this battered region.

"It's a significant boon to our economy, because it provides good, high-paying jobs," said Eric Tarver, a member of the Calcasieu Parish School Board and chief financial officer of Lake Charles Toyota. "More than that, it's a tremendous amount of tax revenue that just dwarfs what we've had from any other industry."

But some long-time residents — often the ones who've lost the most to the storms — dispute those claims, saying that few of those coveted jobs end up going to people who grew up in the region.

REGION IN DISTRESS

Scattered across the neighborhoods of Lake Charles, blue tarps cover dozens of dilapidated roofs. Bungalows, pockmarked by gaping holes, are marred by broken siding and boarded-up windows — evidence of the damage inflicted by Hurricanes Laura and Delta more than a year ago. Yet with few other options, some residents are living here under the tarps.

"I feel Southwest Louisiana has been made a sacrificial lamb," said Roishetta Ozane, a single mother of six and an organizer for Healthy Gulf.

An outspoken critic of the expansion of LNG facilities, Ozane warns her neighbors that the emissions worsen global warming and violent storms and impair their community's air quality. She has raised money,

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organized food drives and helped neighbors navigate government agencies to obtain relief after disasters hit. "Now is the time to get people's attention, to open their eyes that climate change is real," Ozane said. "They're going to continue to bring these facilities here. We've already had these major hurricanes here. Where are we going to live?"

As she drives around a predominantly Black area of Lake Charles, past shuttered businesses and crumbling homes, Ozane's phone buzzes with requests for help.

"Are you living in a FEMA trailer?" she asks one caller. "Text me what you need."

There are other helpers here. Cindy Robertson is one of them. In her front yard bursting with daisies and ferns, she refills a pantry box that she stocks each morning to help feed homeless neighbors. By mid-afternoon, it's nearly empty.

Her neighborhood has endured seven federally declared disasters in two years, and she's grown increasingly concerned, even though her family worked in coal mining. Robertson, 62, runs a nonprofit to help vulnerable people recover.

From her house, with its seascape paintings and tapestries, she provides water, sleeping bags and tents. With a succession of LNG terminals opening around her, she worries that her region hasn't yet seen the worst.

"The more we have more pollution from greenhouse gases," she fears, "the worse our storms are going to get."

A few miles away, Cameron LNG began exporting LNG in 2019. Further south, Venture Global Calcasieu Pass is shipping its first loads.

Still another LNG company, Driftwood, recently broke ground to build an export facility. That's on top of more than a dozen oil, gas and chemical processing plants surrounding her community.

Robertson would much prefer increased investment in renewable energy, in line with Biden's stated priorities when he took office.

"Instead of focusing on LNG, expanding what they already have... we need to take all that brainpower and all that money and put it into expanding our renewable resources," Robertson said.

EXPORTS SURGING

The use of wind, solar and other renewable energy has grown as prices of solar components and wind turbines have plunged. But so has the world's thirst for natural gas. In February, the U.S. exported 317 billion cubic feet of liquefied natural gas — six times the amount five years earlier.

Investment in LNG terminals catapulted from nothing in 2011, before the U.S. export industry existed, to \$63 billion over the next decade, according to Rystad Energy. The firm projects that investment could swell an additional \$100 billion over the next two decades.

That's despite warnings from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that emissions from existing fossil fuel infrastructure alone would cause global warming to exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) — a level that scientists say would bring dangerous consequences.

Of the eight terminals now exporting LNG, five lie on the coast of Louisiana and Texas. At least 16 more plus four expansions are proposed or under construction, nearly all along that same stretch of Gulf coastline.

The projects are backed by Exxon Mobil, Qatar Energy, Total Energies and numerous other global energy giants. Financing for several proposed plants comes from BlackRock, Vanguard and Mitsubishi, according to Global Energy Monitor.

At Cameron LNG in Hackberry, Louisiana, storage tanks loom over the wetlands next to rows of intersecting pipes. There, gas is treated to remove impurities. Then it's cooled to a liquid at minus 260 degrees Fahrenheit to flow onto ships. In a narrow channel, a huge French vessel called LNG Endeavor, escorted by tug boats, heads for the facility, dwarfing the homes it passes.

"We're delivering a cleaner, more environmentally friendly fuel," said Charlie Riedl, executive director of the Center for LNG, the industry's lobbying group. "The U.S. can use that to help defuse some of the geopolitical issues around the world by delivering a reliable fuel source."

Initially, Biden's administration held off on approving requests that would expand the LNG industry. But after the war in Ukraine began, the Energy Department allowed some facilities to upgrade, increasing

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how much they could produce.

"The U.S. is exporting every molecule of liquefied natural gas that we can to alleviate supply issues in Europe," Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said in March, urging the oil and gas industry to ramp up production.

Asked whether boosting fossil fuel exports contradicts Biden's climate goals, Granholm told The Associated Press "we have got to do both." She said she believes the United States can help its allies, reduce the cost of fuel and transition to more sustainable options.

Since the war increased the need for alternatives to Russian gas, some European LNG import projects that had stalled are being revived, said Emily McClain, a vice president at Rystad.

"It's really showing we're not quite ready to table gas and move to cleaner or greener energies," McClain said.

Riedl said he would like the administration to do even more, by approving any of the proposed LNG export terminals.

Louisiana offers a property tax break of up to 10 years to companies that build LNG terminals. Even with those tax breaks, the increased property tax income provides a windfall for the area, said Tarver, the school board member.

With Driftwood LNG beginning construction of a facility, the expected jobs are a "shot in the arm after a devastating series of disasters," Tarver said. That the world is looking to the Gulf Coast as an energy supplier is, he said, a source of pride.

"That's a very powerful thing to us locally, just because we're big Pro-America, proud American people here," Tarver said.

Others, like Ozane, argue that the tax breaks give away too much.

"We have a big homelessness problem," Ozane said. "Our schools look horrible. If LNG is doing so much for the state, why is it like that?"

CLEANER THAN COAL?

Down the road from Cameron LNG, a new export terminal has opened about a mile from John Allaire's beachfront home. His property, where he's lived in an RV for 17 years since Hurricane Rita washed away his bunk house, is a refuge for spawning shrimp and diving sea birds. When his children were young, Allaire brought them fishing and hunting there.

At sunrise, the dark sky begins to crack into shades of orange and gray. A bright orb on the horizon looks like the rising sun. It's not. It's a flare from Venture Global's Calcasieu Pass LNG, the latest export terminal to open. The flare, a mixture of flames and smoke that pours out when the facility burns natural gas, had been burning non-stop for a week, Allaire said.

"That's pure profit and pollution going up the stack," he said.

Allaire, 66, a retired environmental engineer for an oil company, doesn't oppose oil and gas use. His property sits on a former oilfield.

But he fears the destruction of the wetlands he loves: The soft waving cordgrass where black rails hide, the pelicans diving down over the lapping water to catch fish.

Commonwealth LNG has proposed another export terminal, sandwiched between Allaire's yard and the LNG terminal that just opened. It would cover about half the ponds that are packed with blue crabs and mud minnows.

"I'm glad there's still places like this left — I really don't want to see it paved over," Allaire said.

The wetlands he loves play a beneficial role for climate, too. They absorb carbon dioxide. And they provide a buffer from storm surges.

Together, the four LNG export terminals on the Gulf Coast emitted nearly 10 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent in 2020 — comparable to all of Costa Rica, according to the Global Carbon Project.

The LNG plants are tied to climate change in another way, too. Along the whole pathway to export, from the wells where companies drill to the ships getting loaded with LNG, methane — the powerful greenhouse gas that's the primary ingredient of natural gas — can escape.

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And it does, from leaky wells, pipelines, compressors and storage tanks. In the Permian Basin, one of the world's richest oil and gas fields, well heads and pipelines are leaking far more methane than previously thought, according to a study that concluded that 9% of the gas produced in New Mexico's side of the basin is leaking.

"That's a shocking leakage estimate," Rob Jackson, a professor of earth system science at Stanford University and chairman of the Global Carbon Project, an international research group, said about natural gas.

At that that rate, he said, the leaking methane alone is warming the climate more than the carbon dioxide that would be released if all the produced natural gas were burned.

Natural gas proponents say it's better for the climate than burning coal, because it releases fewer emissions when burned. But gas isn't substituting for coal in most places, Jackson noted. Instead, as energy demand grows globally, natural gas is being used in addition to coal and other sources.

According to projections by the Energy Information Administration, natural gas use will drive an overall increase in greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S. from 2037 to 2050 as the nation's population and its reliance on gas grow.

To show it's trying to limit its environmental impact, Cameron LNG reduced its emissions by 10% from 2020 to 2021. It's also built 500 acres of tidal marsh, using material it digs up when dredging the canal.

But residents who are enduring the trauma of relentless storms know any facility that adds emissions to the atmosphere magnifies the likelihood of destruction in vulnerable communities.

"In building more LNG export terminals," Jackson said, "we're locking in emissions for decades to come."

Live updates | German official: Time working against Russia

By The Associated Press undefined

BERLIN — Germany's vice chancellor says Russia's continued income from high fuel prices "hurts" but the Russian economy is collapsing and "time is working against Russia."

Robert Habeck, who is also Germany's economy minister and responsible for energy, told parliament Thursday that "the income that (Russian President Vladimir) Putin has obtained in recent months because of high prices hurts, and we can only be ashamed that we haven't yet managed to reduce this dependence more significantly."

But he argued that looking at Russia's gas and oil income doesn't tell the whole story. Habeck said that "Putin is still getting money, but he can hardly spend it any more" because of Western sanctions. He pointed to big drops in exports to Russia, including from Germany.

Habeck said that "time is not working for Russia. It is working against Russia, it is working against the Russian economy." He added that "no one wants to invest in Russia any more."

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR:

- Photo Gallery: 100 days of extraordinary images from Ukraine
- US, Germany agree to supply Ukraine advanced weapons
- Ukraine's quest to qualify for the World Cup surges on during war
- Ukrainian stabs Ukrainian at New York bar, thinking he's Russian

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

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Danish Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod said Thursday that he expects Denmark to join the European Union's common defense on July 1.

In a referendum on Wednesday, two-third of voters decided to abandon a 30-year-old waiver that kept the Scandinavian EU country out. With 100% of the votes counted, 66.9% voted in favor of abandoning the 30-year opt-out and 33.1% against.

The move is the latest example of a country in Europe seeking closer defense links with allies after

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Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The referendum follows historic bids by fellow Nordic countries Sweden and Finland to join NATO.

LONDON — Britain says it will send sophisticated medium-range rocket systems to Ukraine, in a move coordinated with the United States.

Defense Secretary Ben Wallace says the U.K. will send an unspecified number of M270 launchers, which can send precision-guided rockets up to 80 kilometers (50 miles).

Britain says the decision has been coordinated closely with a U.S. decision to send Ukraine High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems. The two missile systems are similar, though the American one has wheels while the British one -- also U.S.-built -- runs on tracks.

Britain says Ukrainian troops will be trained in the U.K. to use the equipment.

Ukraine has implored its Western allies to send longer-range missiles to help it counter Russian artillery assaults in the eastern Donbas region, the focus of Moscow's offensive.

The U.S. said Ukraine has promised not to launch the weapons into Russia. But Russia accused Washington of "pouring fuel on the fire" of the conflict.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's emergency officials said Russian shelling overnight set a school in the city of Kharkiv on fire and that a woman died in the blaze.

Another man sustained injuries, Ukrainian officials said Thursday. Fires from the shelling also occurred in other areas of the Kharkiv region.

Russian forces overnight also shelled the Dnipropetrovsk region, its governor, Valentyn Reznichenko, said on Telegram. He said the shelling took place on the border with the Kherson region, much of which is under Moscow's control.

In the Sumy region that borders Russia, three people were wounded as a result of overnight missile strikes, governor Dmytro Zhyvytskyi said.

In the east, according to Ukraine's General Staff, Russian troops continued storming the key city of Sievierodonetsk. Moscow's forces also stormed the town of Komyshevukha in the southeastern Zaporizhzhia region, large parts of which are under Russian control, the General Staff's morning update said.

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia — Slovakia has signed a deal to deliver eight Slovak-made Zuzana howitzers to Ukraine.

The Slovak Defense Ministry announced the deal between the state-run Konstrukta Defense company and the Ukrainian side on Thursday.

Unlike previous arms supplies from Slovakia to Ukraine, this is a commercial deal. Defense Minister Jaroslav Nad says it's worth more than 40 million euros (\$43 million).

Among other arms, Slovakia previously donated a Soviet-era S-300 air defense system at the request of the Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

LVIV, Ukraine — A Russian missile hit rail lines in the western Lviv region, a key conduit for supplies of Western weapons and other supplies, officials said.

Lviv region Gov. Maksym Kozytskyy said five people were wounded in the strike, adding that more information would be available Thursday.

Anton Gerashchenko, an adviser to the country's interior minister, said the Russians hit the Beskid railway tunnel in the Carpathian Mountains in an apparent effort to cut a key railway link and disrupt shipments of weapons and fuel.

However, the head of Ukrainian railways said the damage to the railroad was still being assessed but the tunnel was spared.

The strike reportedly delayed three passenger trains, but all later resumed their journeys.

Former Corinthian students get federal student debt erased

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of students who attended the for-profit Corinthian Colleges chain will automatically get their federal student loans canceled, the Biden administration announced, a move that aims to bring closure to one of the most notorious cases of fraud in American higher education.

Under the new action, anyone who attended the now-defunct chain from its founding in 1995 to its collapse in 2015 will get their federal student debt wiped clean. It will erase \$5.8 billion in debt for more than 560,000 borrowers, the largest single loan discharge in Education Department history, according to the agency.

"As of today, every student deceived, defrauded and driven into debt by Corinthian Colleges can rest assured that the Biden-Harris Administration has their back and will discharge their federal student loans," Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said Wednesday. "For far too long, Corinthian engaged in the wholesale financial exploitation of students, misleading them into taking on more and more debt to pay for promises they would never keep."

Tens of thousands of former Corinthian students were already eligible for debt cancellation, but they had to file paperwork and navigate an application process that advocates say is confusing and not widely known about. Now, the relief will be made automatic and extended to additional borrowers.

Those who have a remaining balance on their Corinthian debt will also get refunds on payments they have already made, Education Department officials said. But the action does not apply to loans that have already been paid off in full.

At its peak, Corinthian was one of the nation's largest for-profit college companies, with more than 100 campuses across the country and more than 110,000 students at its Everest, WyoTech and Heald schools.

But the company shut down in 2015 amid widespread findings of fraud. The Obama administration — working with Kamala Harris, who was then California attorney general and later became vice president — found that scores of campuses were falsifying data on the success of their graduates. In some cases, the schools reported that students had found jobs in their fields of study even though they were working at grocery stores or fast food chains.

Hundreds of students told investigators they were pressured to enroll with promises of lucrative employment, only to end up with huge sums of debt and few job prospects. Federal officials also found that the company falsely told students their course credits could be transferred to other colleges.

The case inspired a federal crackdown on for-profit colleges, and the Obama administration promised to forgive loans for Corinthian students whose programs lied about job placement rates. The administration went on to expand a process known as borrower defense to repayment, which allows any defrauded student to apply for debt cancellation.

But an explosion in applications for debt forgiveness, along with political battles over the process, created a years-long backlog in the process, leaving many former Corinthian students still awaiting relief.

As of December, the Education Department reported it had more than 109,000 pending applications from students alleging fraud by their colleges, including many Corinthian students. Borrowers and their advocates have been urging the government to erase all Corinthian debt, saying evidence of misconduct was so widespread that all the chain's students were the victims of fraud.

The administration announced the action as President Joe Biden considers broader student loan forgiveness for millions of Americans. As a candidate, Biden said he supports forgiving \$10,000 in student loans for all borrowers. He later indicated that such action should come through Congress, but the White House has said he is considering whether to pursue it through executive action.

Advocates said the Biden administration's decision brings long-delayed justice.

"This is a tremendous student victory, and it belongs to the tens of thousands of borrowers who were cheated and abused by Corinthian Colleges," said Eileen Connor, director of the Project on Predatory Student Lending, which has represented Corinthian students in lawsuits. "They never stopped fighting — over three administrations — for the justice they deserve under the law."

Libby DeBlasio Webster, senior counsel for the advocacy group Student Defense, said the news gives a "fresh start" to former Corinthian students, but she noted that many defrauded students from other for-profit colleges are still awaiting help.

"We also hope today's news is a sign that other decisions are on the horizon for thousands of similarly situated students who are waiting for this kind of relief," she said.

Journalist detained in China denied calls, partner says

SYDNEY (AP) — The Australian partner of a journalist who has been detained in China for nearly two years said Thursday she is being denied the chance to speak with her family and consular staff, and her health is declining due to a poor prison diet.

Journalist Cheng Lei, an Australian who was born in China, was detained in August 2020 on charges of suspicion of sharing state secrets. In March, she was tried in Beijing, but Australian diplomats weren't allowed inside the courtroom.

Since the trial, Chinese authorities have deferred announcing a verdict. Cheng, 46, had worked as a business journalist for Chinese state broadcaster China Global Television Network.

Speaking about the case publicly for the first time in an interview with Australia's Sky News, Cheng's partner Nick Coyle said he was worried "big time" for her health and about the lack of access she was getting to her family and Australian consular staff.

Coyle told Sky News that her regular 30-minute consular video meetings have been suspended indefinitely, apparently due to China's tough coronavirus restrictions.

"I find that just totally unacceptable," Coyle said. "These monthly consular visits have literally been what's kept her going for 20 months."

"She's been able to make no phone calls with anybody. She's had maybe three visits from her lawyer, just to prepare for the trial," Coyle said. "She's had not one phone call with family, with her children. Nothing. Nada."

Cheng is the mother of two children who live in Australia, and her parents also live in Australia.

Coyle worked as chief executive of the China-Australia Chamber of Commerce in Beijing before leaving China due to fears he had for his safety.

Coyle said Cheng had some health issues and her condition had declined since she had been detained and fed a poor and inadequate diet. He said she once joked with him that his Starbucks coffee cost more than a week's worth of her food.

"Fortunately, we're dealing with about the strongest person I know, mentally, emotionally, but there have been really difficult health challenges along the way," Coyle told Sky News.

Coyle said he still has no idea what Cheng is supposed to have done wrong. He said she wasn't even that interested in politics, instead focusing on business.

"It doesn't make any sense to me," he said. "It never has."

Her detention came during a time of deteriorating diplomatic relations between China and Australia.

At Cheng's trial in March, Australian Ambassador to China Graham Fletcher told reporters outside the court that he'd been told he couldn't attend because the trial involved state secrets.

"This is deeply concerning, unsatisfactory and very regrettable," Fletcher said at the time. "We can have no confidence in the validity of the process which is conducted in secret."

Australia would continue to advocate for Cheng's rights and interests in accordance with the consular agreement between China and Australia, Fletcher said at the time.

After the trial, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said the verdict would be announced at an unspecified later date. Wang said that because the trial involved state secrets it was held in closed session, but Cheng and her defense lawyer had been present.

China does not recognize dual citizenship and Chinese-born defendants are often not afforded the same treatment as other foreign nationals, particularly when facing espionage charges.

Born in China, Cheng graduated from the University of Queensland. She worked as an accountant and

financial analyst in Australia before moving to China in 2001, where she has worked since as a journalist.

Divided again, Libya slides back toward violence, chaos

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — For many Libyans, clashes that erupted in the capital of Tripoli last month were all too familiar — a déjà vu of street fighting, reverberating gunfire and people cowering inside their homes. A video circulated online on the day, showing a man shouting from a mosque loudspeaker “Enough war, we want our young generation!”

The fighting underscored the fragility of Libya’s relative peace that has prevailed for more than a year but it also looked like history was repeating itself. Now, observers say that momentum to reunify the country has been lost and that its future is looking grim.

Once again, there are two competing governments vying for control in Libya, already torn by more than a decade of civil war. The clashes in the capital broke out after one of Libya’s two prime ministers challenged the other by coming to Tripoli, his rival’s seat.

Libya has for years been split between rival administrations in the east and the west, each supported by rogue militias and foreign governments. The Mediterranean nation has been in a state of upheaval since the 2011 NATO-backed uprising toppled and later killed longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

But a plan had emerged in the past two years that was meant to put the country on the path toward elections. A U.N.-brokered process installed an interim government in early 2021 to shepherd Libyans to elections that were due late last year.

That government, led by Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, briefly unified the political factions under heavy international pressure. But the voting never took place, and since then, the plan has unraveled and left the country in crisis.

Lawmakers in Libya’s east-based parliament, headed by influential speaker Aguila Saleh, argued that Dbeibah’s mandate ended when the interim government failed to hold elections.

They went ahead and chose Fathi Bashagha, a powerful former interior minister from the western city of Misrata, as new prime minister. Their position gained the endorsement of powerful commander Khalifa Hifter whose forces control the country’s east and most of the south, including major oil facilities.

Dbeibah has refused to step down, and factions allied with him in western Libya deeply oppose Hifter. They maintain that Dbeibah, who is also from Misrata with ties to its powerful militias, is working toward holding elections.

Analysts are skeptical.

Claudia Gazzini, a Libya expert at the International Crisis Group, described the Bashagha-Dbeibah rivalry as “a feud over legitimacy,” with “both governments claiming they are legitimate.”

“I don’t think they will be able to hold elections this year,” she said, and also expressed doubts that U.N. attempts to get Libyan parties to reach a constitutional consensus on the elections will make any progress.

The power struggle came to a head on May 17, when Bashagha entered Tripoli and attempted to install his government there. He had help from the powerful Nawasi Brigade militia, led by Mustafa Qaddur, deputy head of Libya’s intelligence agency.

But Bashagha faced stiff resistance from militias loyal to Dbeibah, leading to hourslong clashes that rocked the city until Bashagha withdrew and a day later set up his government headquarters in the coastal city of Sirte, half way between Libya’s power centers in the east and the west.

The withdrawal emboldened Dbeibah, who promptly sacked Qaddur and another military official, Osama Juwaili, who heads the military intelligence agency. The dismissal of Qaddur was subsequently reversed by the presidential council — an apparent crack within Dbeibah’s camp.

According to an official close to Dbeibah, the Tripoli-based prime minister is convinced Bashagha could not have entered the Libyan capital without “approval or coordination” with Juwaili, a powerful figure from the western city of Zintan, and also Qaddur.

Juwaili’s forces, the official said, manned checkpoints and control areas near Gharyan, a town south of

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Tripoli, where Bashagha's convoy passed on its way to the capital. The official spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence details.

Even after Bashagha's withdrawal, tensions remain high in Tripoli.

Some, like Libya researcher Jalel Harchaoui, believe Bashagha could make another move on Tripoli — or at least attempt to galvanize more support in the area.

"Given the scars that are now out in the open, such a scenario" is entirely possible, he said.

Meanwhile, Libya's prized light crude is again being used as a tool in the power struggle. Tribal leaders have shut down crucial oil facilities, including the country's largest oil field in the south controlled by fighters loyal to Hifter, who supports Bashagha.

The oil blockade — which comes as oil prices are skyrocketing because of the war in Ukraine — was likely meant to deprive Debeibah's government of funds and empower his rival. Bashagha and Saleh have said the facilities would be reopened on condition that oil revenues be temporarily frozen until rival factions agree on a mechanism to distribute oil funds.

The war in Ukraine has distracted the international community but its ripples have been felt in Libya, where Russia has long played an outsized role.

Russia has recognized Bashagha's government, which Gazzini of the International Crisis Group says makes it difficult for Western countries to also do — so as not to be seen as being on the same side as Russia.

For ordinary Libyans, last month's deadly violence — one person was killed in the fighting — was a stark reminder of how fragile the relative peace had been.

"Chaos and conflict are their feeding ground," said Mohammed Abu Salim, in his 30s and a civil servant from Tripoli, referring to Libya's rival factions.

"If you really believe that those people will allow free and fair elections, then you are delusional."

A frank exchange of views: French diplomats on rare strike

By ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Members of the French diplomatic corps are dropping their traditional reserve to go on a rare strike Thursday, angered by a planned reform they worry will hurt their careers and France's standing in the world.

Some ambassadors and numerous diplomats, in posts ranging from Tokyo to the Middle East and Washington, have said they would honor the day-long strike. They want President Emmanuel Macron to scrap a plan to merge career diplomats with a larger body of civil servants, starting in January.

The action, announced by Macron in an April decree, will reportedly affect about 800 diplomats. Opponents claim that's just the beginning.

"We risk the disappearance of our professional diplomacy," a group of 500 diplomats, wrote in a commentary published last week in Le Monde newspaper. "Today, (diplomatic) agents ... are convinced it is the very existence of the ministry that is now being put into question."

Union leaders said Thursday's job action is only the second strike by French diplomats in 20 years. A protest is planned near the imposing French foreign ministry complex known as the Quai d'Orsay, on the River Seine.

The government reform is meant to modernize and diversify France's diplomatic corps, which was created in the 16th century, and to bring down the walls of what some in the government see as an elite institution turned in on itself.

It will put diplomats into a large pool from all branches of public service, encouraging switches to other ministries and forcing personnel to compete with outsiders for prized diplomatic posts.

Diplomats contend their job requires specialization and expertise acquired over years in posts around the world — and has no room for amateurs.

The planned change comes amid the war in Ukraine and complex negotiations over Iran's nuclear program, and while France holds the European Union's rotating presidency. Newly-appointed Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna has not commented.

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Dominique de Villepin, a former prime minister and foreign minister known for an eloquent 2003 speech at the United Nations in which he declared French opposition to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, labeled the pending reform in a tweet last month "A historic fault."

For France, the loss of diplomats' separate status in the civil service means "a loss of independence, a loss of competence, a loss of memory that will weigh heavily on the years ahead," Villepin tweeted.

Even before Macron's decree, anger and frustration had festered in the foreign ministry's halls over cuts in funding, personnel and outsourcing. The group commentary in *Le Monde* deplored "decades of marginalization of the ministry's role within the (French) state" as well as "a vertiginous reduction" in personnel — down by 30% in 10 years, the diplomats claim. Funding, they said, is but 0.7% of the state budget.

The Twitter hashtag, #diplo2metier, shows a number of ambassadors and diplomats around the world joining in or supporting Thursday's strike.

"I will be on strike ... to protest the reform of the diplomatic corps and the continued reduction of means for our diplomacy," French Ambassador to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher tweeted on her personal account.

Romain Rideau, a counselor at the French Embassy in Tokyo, tweeted that he would be among the strikers "because diplomacy is not a gala dinner where all you have to do is put your feet under the table."

Nightclub needle attacks puzzle European authorities

By JADE LE DELEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Across France, more than 300 people have reported being pricked out of the blue with needles at nightclubs or concerts in recent months. Doctors and multiple prosecutors are on the case, but no one knows who's doing it or why, and whether the victims have been injected with drugs — or indeed any substance at all.

Club owners and police are trying to raise awareness, and a rapper even interrupted his recent show to warn concert-goers about the risk of surprise needle attacks.

It's not just France: Britain's government is studying a spate of "needle spiking" there, and police in Belgium and the Netherlands are investigating scattered cases too.

On May 4, 18-year-old Tomas Laux attended a rap concert in Lille in northern France, where he smoked a bit of marijuana and drank some alcohol during the show. When he came home, he told *The Associated Press*, he was feeling dizzy and had a headache — and he spotted a strange little skin puncture on his arm and a bruise.

The next morning, the symptoms didn't disappear and Laux went to his doctor, who advised him to go to the emergency room. Medics confirmed evidence of a needle prick, and Laux was tested for HIV and hepatitis. His results came out negative, like other victims' so far.

"I've given up going to concerts since it happened," Laux said.

Hundreds of kilometers (miles) away, Leanne Desnos recounted a similar experience after going to a club in the southwest city of Bordeaux in April. Desnos, also 18, passed out the next day, and felt dizzy and had hot flashes while at a fast food restaurant. When she got home, she realized she had an injection mark on her arm. After having seen testimony on social media about the mystery pricks, she went to a clinic to get tested for infections. She is still awaiting results.

People from Paris, Toulouse, Nantes, Nancy, Rennes, and other cities around France have reported being pricked with a needle without their knowledge or permission. The targeted individuals, who are mostly women, show visible marks of injection, often bruises, and report symptoms like feeling groggy.

France's national police agency says 302 people have filed formal complaints about such needle pricks. Several police investigations are ongoing in different regions, but no suspect has been arrested yet, no needle has been found and the motive remains unclear.

No victims have reported sexual assault; one said he was robbed, in Grenoble in April, according to *Le Monde* newspaper.

Two people tested positive for GHB, and they might have ingested the drug in a drink, according to an official with the national police agency. GHB, a powerful anesthetic used by predators seeking to sexually

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abuse or assault victims, can be detected in the urine only for 12 hours, the police official said.

The official and a doctor who is taking a leading role in dealing with the phenomenon expressed doubt that the nightclub pricks contained GHB, noting that to penetrate via needle, the drug needs to be injected for several seconds, which most victims would notice.

"We didn't find any drugs or substances or objective proof which attest to ... administration of a substance with wrongful or criminal intent. What we fear the most is people contracting HIV, hepatitis or any infectious disease" from the jabs, said Dr. Emmanuel Puskarczyk, head of the poison control center of the eastern French city of Nancy.

In the Nancy hospital, a special procedure has been created to optimize care of victims. Patients who show symptoms like grogginess are treated, and blood and urine samples are kept for five days in case any want to press charges.

"Each case is different. We see injection marks, but some people don't have symptoms. When potential victims have symptoms like discomfort or black holes (in their memory), they are not specific," Puskarczyk said.

The police official, who was not authorized to be publicly named according to national police policy, said: "At this stage, we can't talk about a specific modus operandi. There aren't any similarities between the cases. The only thing similar is that people are being injected with a needle in a festive context in different places in France."

With club-goers expressing fear on social networks and media coverage fueling anxiety, the French Interior Ministry launched a national awareness campaign this month. Police are handing out leaflets to clubbers and discussing prevention measures with club owners.

In the U.K., Parliament issued a report in April on drink and needle spiking in pubs and nightclubs after a sudden surge in such incidents last year. It said police reported about 1,000 cases of needle injection across the country around October 2021, when droves of students returned to campuses after coronavirus restrictions eased.

However, the parliament report said there was a lack of data to judge how serious the issue is. It's not clear whether anyone has been prosecuted for needle spiking, or how many victims were injected with a drug or other substance.

"No-one knows how prevalent spiking is, whether by drink, drug or needle, and no-one knows what causes perpetrators to do it. Anecdotal evidence suggests the practice is widespread and dangerous," it said.

A series of similar incidents involving people pricked with needles at nightclubs, a soccer game and during the Belgian Pride parade have been reported in neighboring Belgium. Last month, the Brussels prosecutor's office opened two investigations following complaints from women who said they were jabbed during the pride parade in downtown Brussels. Organizers of the march said in a statement they were informed of several cases and urged potential victims to get checked at hospitals.

Back in France, as investigations continue with no perpetrators found, rapper Dinos interrupted his concert in Strasbourg this week to warn his fans about the risks, and insisted: "This has to stop."

Limits on early abortion drive more women to get them later

By BARBARA ORTUTAY Associated Press

An 18-year-old was undergoing treatment for an eating disorder when she learned she was pregnant, already in the second trimester. A mom of two found out at 20 weeks that her much-wanted baby had no kidneys or bladder. A young woman was raped and couldn't fathom continuing a pregnancy.

Abortions later in pregnancy are relatively rare, even more so now with the availability of medications to terminate early pregnancies.

Across large parts of the United States, they are also increasingly difficult to obtain.

Now, if the U.S. Supreme Court overturns its 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion, women will face even more hurdles in some parts of the country, and may have to travel to another state to get an abortion.

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That means more women could end up having the procedure later than they wish, and the burden falls more heavily on some groups, such as teens, poor, Black, Latino and Native American women and those who live in states where access to any abortion is limited.

"It's not because people don't want to have them sooner," said Dr. Diane Horvath, an OB-GYN in Baltimore, Maryland, who has performed abortions for 16 years. "It's because barriers and new information cause them to have to push it back to later in pregnancy."

The Associated Press interviewed three women who had abortions later in their pregnancy. While their backgrounds and reasons for terminating their pregnancies were varied, none expressed doubt about their decision — or said they were traumatized by it — and all said they were grateful that they were able to do it.

WANTED BABY, MISSING ORGANS

Christina Taylor already had two kids when she became pregnant with her third. Everything was going well at the start and she was looking forward to welcoming a new baby into the family.

When she was 20 weeks pregnant, Taylor went for an ultrasound and basic anatomy scan that is normally done at this stage. For most people, this is a time to find out the baby's sex. For some, it's also when fetal abnormalities are detected.

"I laid down and the ultrasound tech was doing her thing and she was getting really quiet and was taking a really long time," she recalled. "She left the room at one point, 'I need to talk to the doctor.'"

When the tech returned, Taylor could see from the look on her face that something was wrong. When the doctor arrived, he told the couple that there was no amniotic fluid. There were also no kidneys. The baby would likely not survive the pregnancy, or if by some miracle made it to full term, he would die shortly after birth.

"I told the doctor, look, I'm not sure ... I don't buy the age of viability thing, but for my own mental health and for the health of my family I want to terminate my pregnancy as soon as possible," Taylor recalled.

She got a second doctor's opinion and an MRI, which not only confirmed that there were no kidneys present, but also no bladder.

Fortunately, in Colorado, abortion is legal, as it was at the time, with no gestational limits. In the U.S., nearly all abortions take place in the first trimester of pregnancy. Just over 6% of abortions were performed at 14 to 20 weeks' gestation, the second trimester, in 2019 according to the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention. Less than 1% took place at 21 weeks or later, in the third, based on the most recent data available.

Taylor's story shows what getting an abortion with access to good health care, health insurance and no legal obstacles can look like.

"I had the option to wait it out and see when he passed and then, you know, you'd have a stillbirth. But I knew I couldn't do that. Like, I couldn't put my kids through that," Taylor said.

On the way home from the MRI she called her insurance company and found that they covered both types of abortion procedures, dilation and evacuation, D&E, and induction and dilation, or I&D. She chose the latter, which essentially would mean inducing labor and going through delivery. This way, she could have the procedure in a maternity ward, with a team of midwives.

"There was a small chance that he could have been born still alive and we would have been able to hold him and say goodbye when he passed," Taylor said.

She labored for a day and a half. Given the circumstances, she recalled it as an overall positive experience, knowing "how much worse it could have been" had they still lived in Texas, where even in 2017 the procedure would not have been legal. The state's current ban of all abortions after 6 weeks makes no exceptions — Taylor would have had to travel out of state to receive care, or possibly wait until her baby died in her womb, putting her at increased risk of infections and even death.

Only eight states allow abortions at any time during a pregnancy. Twenty states have no specific time limits but prohibit abortions at the time of "fetal viability," which is generally considered to be around 23 or 24 weeks but depends on a host of other factors besides gestational age.

"I still grieve to this day for the loss of my son and my husband does too," Taylor, who has been sharing

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her abortion story to bring attention to experiences such as hers, said. "But you know, we accept that that's something that happens sometimes. And especially because of the context of knowing how lucky we were to just not have laws in the way of just doing what felt right."

'I WAS FEELING SUICIDAL'

"Everyone thinks you present pregnancies the same way. You miss a period, you throw up, you take a test and at five weeks, you know you're pregnant. And that is just not how life shakes out for a lot of people," said Erika Christensen, founder of PatientForward, a nonprofit that helps people access later abortions.

Jenn Chalifoux, now 30 and studying law at the University of Colorado in Boulder, became pregnant in 2010, when she was 18 years old and receiving inpatient care for an eating disorder in New York. Her story touches on popular myths — that women always know they are pregnant and that women in liberal states with laws that only ban rare late abortions can easily get them.

Chalifoux returned home from college in the summer before her sophomore year to receive treatment for restrictive eating. A common symptom of such eating disorders is the loss of one's period. A common — though by no means fail-safe — sign of being pregnant is also the loss of one's period.

"I had a medical team of doctors and psychiatrists and stuff that I was working with. And at no point did any of us think that the fact that I hadn't gotten my period was because of a pregnancy," Chalifoux said.

As she was starting to recover from the eating disorder, though, her period still hadn't returned. She was on birth control, but just to rule it out, she took a home pregnancy test, which was positive. After confirming the pregnancy through a blood test, she reached out to Planned Parenthood, where she was told that it was too late for a medical abortion and she would need a surgical procedure.

"I spent probably at least two weeks thinking about the financials, going through the money that I had," Chalifoux said. "And a week makes a difference."

The cost of an abortion increases significantly as time goes on, from a few hundred dollars to thousands in the second trimester and even tens of thousands later on. For many women, financial barriers to abortion serve to push the procedure later, because it can take time to come up with money. Medicaid, which provides health care coverage to low-income Americans, does not pay for abortions except in the case of rape, incest or when the mother's life is in danger.

"It's really hard to get an abortion in this country," Christensen said. "And the idea that people are able to seek care by a certain date is kind of based on the myths that we get all the information we need by a certain time and that we live in equitable environments with equal access to resources and health care. Neither of those are true."

Realizing that she could not handle it alone, Chalifoux told her parents, who embraced her with support. By this point, weeks had passed since she learned she was pregnant and she started to experience physical symptoms of pregnancy. The experience of not having control over her body as it changed horrified her and she said she getting intrusive thoughts of performing an abortion on herself.

"I just remember feeling like I wanted to cut myself open or die. The experience of not having control over my body and feeling my body, feeling it change, noticing the changes and knowing that I was getting more pregnant every day was just ... I mean, it was like horror," she recalled.

After going for an initial appointment at a hospital to prepare for the procedure, another ultrasound revealed that she was further along than first thought. In all, Chalifoux said it took about a month from the time she learned she was pregnant until she was able to receive an abortion, a few days after she turned 19.

"It was such a long time ago that I've healed from a lot of it, but I'm able to recognize that where I used to think that my abortion was traumatic for me, I can realize now that it was the pregnancy that was traumatic. And that the abortion was actually very healing," she said.

Today, Chalifoux is studying law, hoping to become a public defender or find work fighting against mass incarceration and speaks publicly about her abortion as part of her reproductive rights activism. Looking back, she says, she does not think she would have survived if she were forced to carry the pregnancy to

term.

"I can remember having this fear that I would be forced to give birth," she said. "And I can remember thinking that I would rather die."

RAPE AND A DOCTOR'S MISCALCULATION

It was July 2020. The young woman decided to check out her friend's stand-up comedy show in a downtown Houston comedy club. She wouldn't know anyone in the audience, but that didn't matter. Working in the service industry and being a social, responsible person who had lived on her own since she turned 18, she wasn't worried. She met what seemed like "a group of really cool people." She had some drinks with them and had a good time, she recalled. Looking back, she doesn't recall any women being part of the group. But she trusted herself.

"Everything kind of happened really fast," said the woman, 31, whom the AP is not identifying because she is the victim of sexual assault. "I'm pretty sure, pretty sure someone slipped something in one of my drinks. I ended up waking up the next morning in a rundown motel room somewhere in southwest Houston."

She had nothing on her except her clothes and shoes. Her phone, wallet and underwear were missing. It was about 10:30 a.m. and the motel's management was banging on her door. Instead of offering help, she recalled, they yelled at her and kicked her out. The woman, who is Black, thinks they might have thought she was a prostitute. She walked along the side of the highway until she found a gas station where she could call a family member to pick her up.

Time went on, and she didn't tell anyone what happened except one close friend. She started dating someone.

In late October, early November of that year, she, took a home pregnancy test. She was on birth control, but she figured maybe it had failed. She was pregnant.

After an initial appointment with a doctor who gave her an incorrect gestational age, she followed up at a women's clinic, where she learned that she was actually further along. She did the math, and traced back the start of her pregnancy to the time she was raped back in July.

"And that was just something that I was not ... I would not have been able to live with," she said.

The young woman said it took her more than a week to absorb the shock of learning that she became pregnant from a sexual assault. More time passed as she searched for an abortion provider, encountering crisis pregnancy centers that tried to steer her away from terminating the pregnancy. One of the centers, she said, was calling her daily at one point. The woman said she felt harassed.

There was also the cost. According to medical bills the woman provided to the AP, the cost of her procedure increased by \$2,500 between the time she was examined in Austin before her abortion and the time she arrived in New Mexico for the procedure. PatientForward helped cover her costs.

She was in her third trimester by the time she got on an airplane, alone, to fly to New Mexico and terminate her pregnancy at 27 weeks of gestation. She hasn't told her family what happened, or any other friends, still coping with feelings of shame and guilt from both the rape and the abortion. She does not know who raped her.

"I have no idea who did it. No idea," she said. "I never went back and pursued it."

House panel taking up gun bill in wake of mass shootings

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House is beginning to put its stamp on gun legislation in response to mass shootings in Texas and New York by 18-year-old assailants who used semi-automatic rifles to kill 31 people, including 19 children.

The House Judiciary Committee will hold a hearing Thursday to advance legislation that would raise the age limit for purchasing a semi-automatic centerfire rifle from 18 to 21. The bill would make it a federal offense to import, manufacture or possess large-capacity magazines and would create a grant program

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to buy back such magazines. It also builds on the executive branch's ban on bump-stock devices and so-called ghost guns that are privately made without serial numbers.

The Democratic legislation, called the Protecting Our Kids Act, was quickly added to the legislative docket after last week's school shooting in Uvalde, Texas. A vote by the full House could come as early as next week.

With Republicans nearly in lockstep in their opposition, the House action will mostly be symbolic, serving to put lawmakers on record about gun control ahead of this year's elections. The Senate is taking a different course, with a bipartisan group striving toward a compromise on gun safety legislation that can win enough GOP support to become law.

But Rep. Jerrold Nadler of New York, the Democratic chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, defends the proposals as being popular with Americans. He says it's time for Congress to act.

"You say that it is too soon to take action? That we are 'politicizing' these tragedies to enact new policies?" Nadler said in prepared remarks for Thursday's hearing obtained by The Associated Press. "It has been 23 years since Columbine. Fifteen years since Virginia Tech. Ten years since Sandy Hook. Seven years since Charleston. Four years since Parkland and Santa Fe and Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh."

He added: "Too soon? My friends, what the hell are you waiting for?"

Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio, the ranking Republican on the committee, told Fox News he'll press his GOP colleagues to oppose the bill.

"I'm going to do everything I can to encourage my colleagues to oppose this ... hodgepodge of bills that I don't think would have made one difference in tragedies that we've seen recently," Jordan said.

Any legislative response to the Uvalde and Buffalo, New York, shootings will have to get through the evenly divided Senate, where support from at least 10 Republicans would be needed to advance the measure to a final vote. A group of senators has been working behind the scenes this week in hopes of finding a consensus.

Ideas under discussion include expanded background checks for gun purchases and incentivizing red-flag laws that allow family members, school officials and others to go into court and secure an order requiring the police to seize guns from people considered a threat to themselves or others.

The broader bipartisan group of almost 10 senators met again Wednesday — "a very productive call," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., in an interview.

"There's a tenor and tone, as well as real substantive discussion that seems different," he said.

Blumenthal has been working with a Republican member of the group, Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, on a proposal to send resources to the states for red-flag laws. He said he was "excited and encouraged" by the response from the group.

"It really is time for our Republican colleagues to put up or shut up," Blumenthal said. "We've been down this road before."

President Joe Biden was asked Wednesday if he was confident Congress would take action on gun legislation.

"I served in Congress for 36 years. I'm never confident, totally," Biden said. "It depends, and I don't know. I've not been in on the negotiations as they're going on right now."

Depp and Heard face uncertain career prospects after trial

By DENISE LAVOIE AP Legal Affairs Writer

FAIRFAX, Va. (AP) — A jury's finding that both Johnny Depp and his ex-wife, Amber Heard, were defamed in a long-running public dispute capped a lurid six-week trial that also raised questions about whether the two actors can overcome tarnished reputations.

The verdict handed down Wednesday in Virginia found that Depp had been defamed by three statements in an op-ed written by Heard in which she said she was an abuse victim. The jury awarded him more than \$10 million. But jurors also concluded that Heard was defamed by a lawyer for Depp who accused her of creating a detailed hoax surrounding the abuse allegations. She was awarded \$2 million.

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Depp had hoped the libel lawsuit would help restore his reputation. However, legal and entertainment experts said that both actors' reputations have been damaged by ugly details about their brief marriage that came out during the televised trial watched by millions.

"Both of them will work again, but I think it will be a while before a major studio will consider them 'safe' enough to bet on," said former entertainment lawyer Matthew Belloni, who writes about the business of Hollywood for the newsletter Puck. "The personal baggage that was revealed in this trial was just too icky for a studio to want to deal with."

The case captivated viewers who watched gavel-to-gavel television coverage, including impassioned followers on social media who dissected the actors' mannerisms, their wardrobe choices and their use of alcohol and drugs.

Both performers emerge with unclear prospects for their careers. Depp, a three-time best actor Oscar nominee, was a bankable star until recent years, with credits including playing Capt. Jack Sparrow in the "Pirates of the Caribbean" films. However, he lost that role and was replaced in a "Fantastic Beasts" spinoff.

Heard's acting career has been more modest, and her only two upcoming roles are in a small film and the upcoming "Aquaman" sequel due out next year.

Eric Rose, a crisis management and communications expert in Los Angeles, called the trial a "classic murder-suicide," in terms of damage to both careers.

"From a reputation-management perspective, there can be no winners," he said. "They've bloodied each other up. It becomes more difficult now for studios to hire either actor because you're potentially alienating a large segment of your audience who may not like the fact that you have retained either Johnny or Amber for a specific project because feelings are so strong now."

Heard, who attended court Wednesday and was stoic while the verdict was read, said she was heartbroken by what she described as a setback for women in general.

"I'm even more disappointed with what this verdict means for other women. It's a setback. It sets back the clock to a time when a woman who spoke up and spoke out could be publicly humiliated. It sets back the idea that violence against women is to be taken seriously," she said in a statement posted on her Twitter account.

Depp, who was not in court Wednesday, said "the jury gave me my life back. I am truly humbled."

"I hope that my quest to have the truth be told will have helped others, men or women, who have found themselves in my situation, and that those supporting them never give up," he said in a statement posted to Instagram.

Depp sued Heard for libel 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." The essay never mentioned his name.

The jury found in Depp's favor on all three of his claims relating to specific statements in the piece.

In evaluating Heard's counterclaims, jurors considered three statements by a lawyer for Depp who called her allegations a hoax. They found she was defamed by one of them, in which the lawyer claimed that she and friends "spilled a little wine and roughed the place up, got their stories straight," and called police.

While the case was ostensibly about libel, most of the testimony focused on whether Heard had been physically and sexually abused, as she claimed. Heard enumerated more than a dozen alleged assaults, including a fight in Australia — where Depp was shooting a "Pirates of the Caribbean" sequel — in which Depp lost the tip of his middle finger and Heard said she was sexually assaulted with a liquor bottle.

Depp said he never hit Heard and that she was the abuser, though Heard's attorneys highlighted years-old text messages Depp sent apologizing to Heard for his behavior as well as profane texts he sent to a friend in which Depp said he wanted to kill Heard and defile her dead body.

Brett Ward, a family law attorney in New York, said Depp made himself a more believable witness by admitting to drug and alcohol use and that he could be a difficult person. But he said Depp also ran the risk of making those moments more memorable to the public than his film work.

"He says he did this for his children. Having watched the whole trial, I don't think that he did any service to his children by airing all of this dirty laundry," Ward said in an interview.

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"But whether this was worthwhile for Johnny Depp, we will know in five years if he reestablishes himself as an A-list Hollywood actor. And if he doesn't? I think he's made a terrible mistake because most people aren't going to remember his rather distinguished Hollywood career. They're going to remember this trial."

US and Germany agree to supply advanced weapons to Ukraine

By JOHN LEICESTER and FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The U.S. and Germany pledged Wednesday to equip Ukraine with some of the advanced weapons it has long desired for shooting down aircraft and knocking out artillery, as Russian forces closed in on capturing a key city in the east.

Germany said it will supply Ukraine with up-to-date anti-aircraft missiles and radar systems, while the U.S. announced it will provide four sophisticated, medium-range rocket systems and ammunition.

The U.S. is trying to help Ukraine fend off the Russians without triggering a wider war in Europe. The Pentagon said it received assurances that Ukraine will not fire the new rockets into Russian territory.

The Kremlin accused the U.S. of "pouring fuel on the fire."

Western arms have been critical to Ukraine's success in stymieing Russia's much larger and better-equipped military, thwarting its effort to storm the capital and forcing Moscow to shift its focus to the industrial Donbas region in the east.

But as Russia bombards towns in its inching advance in the east, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has repeatedly pleaded for more and better weapons and accused the West of moving too slowly.

Andriy Yermak, the head of the Ukrainian president's office, hailed the new Western weapons.

"I'm sure that if we receive all the necessary weapons and strengthen the efficient sanctions regime we will win," he said.

The new arms could help Ukraine set up and hold new lines of defense in the east by hitting back at Russian artillery pieces that have been battering towns and cities and by limiting Russian airstrikes, said retired French Gen. Dominique Trinquand, a former head of France's military mission at the United Nations.

"The NATO countries — the European nations and the Americans — have progressively escalated the means that they are putting at Ukraine's disposal, and this escalation, in my opinion, has had the aim of testing Russian limits," he said. "Each time, they measure the Russian reaction, and since there is no reaction, they keep supplying increasingly effective and sophisticated weaponry."

Military analysts say Russia is hoping to overrun the Donbas before any weapons that might turn the tide arrive. It will take at least three weeks to get the precision U.S. weapons and trained troops onto the battlefield, the Pentagon said. But Defense Undersecretary Colin Kahl said he believes they will arrive in time to make a difference in the fight.

The rocket systems are part of a new \$700 million package of security assistance for Ukraine from the U.S. that also includes helicopters, Javelin anti-tank weapon systems, radars, tactical vehicles, spare parts and more.

The rockets have a range of about 50 miles (80 kilometers) and are highly mobile. Ukraine had pushed unsuccessfully for rockets with a range of up to 186 miles (300 kilometers).

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow does not trust assurances that Ukraine will not fire on Russian territory. "We believe that the U.S. is deliberately and diligently pouring fuel on the fire," he said.

Col. Gen. Mikhail Mizintzev later went further, directly accusing Ukraine of planning to fire U.S.-provided missiles from the northeastern Sumy region at border areas in Russia. The claim, which he said was based on radio intercepts, couldn't be independently confirmed.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Ukraine's push for more weapons is a "direct provocation intended to draw the West into the fighting." He warned that the multiple rocket launchers would raise the risk of an expanded conflict.

"Sane Western politicians understand those risks well," he said.

As the new weapons shipments were announced, a Russian missile hit rail lines in the western Lviv region, a key conduit for supplies of Western weapons and other supplies, officials said. Regional Gov. Maksym

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Kozytskyy said five people were wounded in Wednesday's strike, and the head of Ukrainian railways said the damage was still being assessed.

Germany's promise of IRIS-T air defense systems would mark the first delivery of long-range air defense weapons to Ukraine since the start of the war. Earlier deliveries of portable, shoulder-fired air defense missiles have bolstered the Ukrainian military's ability to take down helicopters and other low-flying aircraft but didn't give it enough range to challenge Russia's air superiority.

Germany has come under particular criticism, both at home and from allies abroad, that it isn't doing enough. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told lawmakers that the IRIS-T's surface-to-air missiles are the most modern air defense system the country has.

"With this, we will enable Ukraine to defend an entire city from Russian air attacks," he said. The radar systems will also help Ukraine locate enemy artillery.

A regional governor said Russian forces now control 80% of Sievierodonetsk, a city that is key to Moscow's efforts to complete its capture of the Donbas, where Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed separatists have fought for years and where the separatists held swaths of territory even before the invasion.

Luhansk Gov. Serhiy Haidai said Russian troops were advancing in the city during fierce street battles with Ukrainian forces, though he noted that in some districts the Ukrainian troops managed to push them back.

The only other city in Luhansk that the Russians have not yet captured, Lysychansk, is still fully under Ukrainian control, he said, but is likely to be the next target. The two cities are separated by a river.

"If the Russians manage to take full control over Sievierodonetsk within two to three days, they will start installing artillery and mortars and will shell Lysychansk more intensively," Haidai said.

Zelenskyy, meanwhile, said the country is losing between 60 and 100 soldiers a day in the fighting.

He turned the focus to children in his nightly video address, saying 243 of them have been killed in the war, 446 have been wounded and 139 are missing. The real numbers could be higher, he added, as his government doesn't have a full picture of areas under Russian occupation.

Zelenskyy also said 200,000 children are among the Ukrainians who have been forcefully taken to Russia and dispersed across that vast country: "The purpose of this criminal policy is not just to steal people but to make those who are deported forget about Ukraine and unable to return."

In southern Ukraine, a regional governor sounded a more positive note, saying Russian troops were retreating and blowing up bridges behind them.

"They are afraid of a counterattack by the Ukrainian army," Vitaliy Kim, governor of the Mykolayiv region, said on the Telegram messaging app.

Jury sides with Johnny Depp in libel case, awards him \$10M

By DENISE LAVOIE AP Legal Affairs Writer

FAIRFAX, Va. (AP) — A jury sided Wednesday with Johnny Depp in his libel lawsuit against ex-wife Amber Heard, awarding the "Pirates of the Caribbean" actor more than \$10 million and vindicating his allegations that Heard lied about Depp abusing her before and during their brief marriage.

But in a split decision, the jury also found that Heard was defamed by one of Depp's lawyers, who accused her of creating a detailed hoax that included roughing up the couple's apartment to look worse for police. The jury awarded her \$2 million.

The verdicts bring an end to a televised trial that Depp had hoped would help restore his reputation, though it turned into a spectacle that offered a window into a vicious marriage.

Heard, who was stoic in the courtroom as the verdict was read, said she was heartbroken.

"I'm even more disappointed with what this verdict means for other women. It's a setback. It sets back the clock to a time when a woman who spoke up and spoke out could be publicly humiliated. It sets back the idea that violence against women is to be taken seriously," she said in a statement posted on her Twitter account.

Depp, who was not in court Wednesday, said "the jury gave me my life back. I am truly humbled."

"I hope that my quest to have the truth be told will have helped others, men or women, who have found themselves in my situation, and that those supporting them never give up," he said in a statement posted

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to Instagram.

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

The jury found in Depp’s favor on all three of his claims relating to specific statements in the 2018 piece. Throughout the proceedings, fans who were overwhelmingly on Depp’s side lined up overnight for coveted courtroom seats. Spectators who couldn’t get in gathered on the street to cheer Depp and jeer Heard whenever they appeared outside.

A crowd of about 200 people cheered when Depp’s lawyers came out after the verdict. “Johnny for president!” one man yelled repeatedly.

Greg McCandless, 51, a retired private detective from Reston, Virginia, stood outside the courthouse wearing a pirate hat and red head scarf, a nod to Depp’s famous role as Capt. Jack Sparrow in the “Pirates of the Caribbean” series.

“I do believe that there was defamation, and I do believe that it did hurt his career,” McCandless said. “I think the jury heard the evidence, and the verdict was just.”

In evaluating Heard’s counterclaims, jurors considered three statements by a lawyer for Depp who called her allegations a hoax. They found she was defamed by one of them, in which the lawyer claimed that she and friends “spilled a little wine and roughed the place up, got their stories straight,” and called police.

Sydni Porter, 30, drove an hour from her home in Maryland to show support for Heard. She said the verdict was disappointing, but not surprising, and sends a message to women that “as much evidence as you have (of abuse), it’s never going to be enough.”

The jury found Depp should receive \$10 million in compensatory damages and \$5 million in punitive damages, but the judge said state law caps punitive damages at \$350,000, meaning Depp was awarded \$10.35 million.

While the case was ostensibly about libel, most of the testimony focused on whether Heard had been physically and sexually abused, as she claimed. Heard enumerated more than a dozen alleged assaults, including a fight in Australia — where Depp was shooting a “Pirates of the Caribbean” sequel — in which Depp lost the tip of his middle finger and Heard said she was sexually assaulted with a liquor bottle.

Depp said he never hit Heard and that she was the abuser, though Heard’s attorneys highlighted years-old text messages Depp sent apologizing to Heard for his behavior as well as profane texts he sent to a friend in which Depp said he wanted to kill Heard and defile her dead body.

In some ways, the trial was a replay of a lawsuit Depp filed in the United Kingdom against a British tabloid after he was described as a “wife beater.” The judge in that case ruled in the newspaper’s favor after finding that Heard was telling the truth in her descriptions of abuse.

In the Virginia case, Depp had to prove not only that he never assaulted Heard, but that Heard’s article — which focused primarily on public policy related to domestic violence — defamed him. He also had to prove that Heard wrote the article with actual malice.

And to claim damages, he had to prove that her article caused the damage to his reputation as opposed to any number of articles before and after Heard’s piece that detailed the allegations against him.

The case captivated millions through its gavel-to-gavel television coverage, including impassioned followers on social media who dissected everything from the actors’ mannerisms to the possible symbolism of what they were wearing. Both performers emerge from the trial with reputations in tatters with unclear prospects for their careers.

Eric Rose, a crisis management and communications expert in Los Angeles, called the trial a “classic murder-suicide.”

“From a reputation-management perspective, there can be no winners,” he said. “They’ve bloodied each other up. It becomes more difficult now for studios to hire either actor because you’re potentially alienating a large segment of your audience who may not like the fact that you have retained either Johnny or Amber for a specific project because feelings are so strong now.”

Depp, a three-time best actor Oscar nominee, had until recent years been a bankable star. His turn as

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Sparrow helped turn the "Pirates of the Caribbean" into a global franchise, but he's lost that role. He was also replaced in the third "Fantastic Beasts" spin-off film, "The Secrets of Dumbledore."

Despite testimony at the trial that he could be violent, abusive and out of control, Depp received a standing ovation Tuesday night in London after performing for about 40 minutes with Jeff Beck at the Royal Albert Hall.

Heard's acting career has been more modest, and her only two upcoming roles are in a small film and the upcoming "Aquaman" sequel due out next year.

Depp's lawyers fought to keep the case in Virginia, in part because state law provided some legal advantages compared with California, where the two reside. A judge ruled that Virginia was an acceptable forum for the case because The Washington Post's printing presses and online servers are in the county.

Uvalde school police chief says he's still cooperating

By JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

The school district police chief who served as on-site commander during last week's deadly shooting in Uvalde, Texas, said Wednesday that he's talking daily with investigators, contradicting claims from state law enforcement that he has stopped cooperating.

In a brief interview, Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District Police Chief Pete Arredondo told CNN that he's speaking regularly with Texas Department of Public Safety investigators.

"I've been on the phone with them every day," Arredondo said. The chief has been the focus of ire in the community and beyond over allegations that he delayed sending officers into the school on May 24, believing that the gunman was barricaded inside adjoining classrooms and the shooting had morphed into a hostage situation.

Nineteen children and two teachers died in the attack at Robb Elementary School, the deadliest school shooting in nearly a decade. Funerals began this week, and U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona attended Wednesday's services for teacher Irma Garcia, who was killed in the attack, and her husband, Joe Garcia, who died of a heart attack two days later.

The district announced Wednesday that students and staff would not return to that campus, though plans were still being finalized on where the less than 600 students would attend classes in the fall.

Texas state Sen. Roland Gutierrez said Wednesday that his office is working with state and federal agencies to request upwards of \$45 million in federal funding for the school.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, its School Emergency Response to Violence, known as Project SERV, "funds short-term education-related services" to help educational facilities "recover from a violent or traumatic event in which the learning environment has been disrupted."

Gutierrez said he is unaware of any plans to tear down Robb Elementary but that funds obtained through the program by other schools have traditionally been used to rebuild.

State officials have said police waited for more than an hour outside the classroom where Salvador Ramos, 18, opened fire, despite repeated pleas from children calling 911 for help. At one point there were as many as 19 officers in the hallway, Steven McCraw, the head of the Texas Department of Public Safety, said.

Uvalde Mayor Don McLaughlin told media outlets in a Wednesday interview that he'd arrived at the funeral home across the street from the school about 15 minutes after "the first call" came that Ramos had crashed his truck nearby. McLaughlin said that while at the funeral home, he was standing near an official he identified only as "the negotiator." He said that person unsuccessfully tried to reach the gunman via cellphone.

"His main goal was to try to get this person on the phone," McLaughlin said in the interview with *Telamundo San Antonio* and *The Washington Post*. "They tried every number they could find," but the gunman did not pick up the phone.

Travis Considine, chief communications officer for the Texas Department of Public Safety, said Tuesday that Arredondo had not responded to DPS requests for two days, while other officers in the Uvalde city and schools police departments continue to sit for interviews and provide statements.

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Arredondo has not responded to multiple requests for comment from The Associated Press. Considine told AP Wednesday that Arredondo had not responded to Texas Rangers' requests for follow-up interviews as of Tuesday. The Texas Rangers — the investigative arm of the Department of Public Safety that focuses on major crimes — have not commented on Arredondo's insistence he was in regular touch with DPS.

The Combined Law Enforcement Association of Texas, which represents police officers, has urged its members to cooperate with "all government investigations" into the shooting and police response, and endorsed a federal probe by the Justice Department.

The confusing and sometimes contradictory information released in the week since the deadly shooting continued Tuesday with the revelation that the exterior door used by the gunman was not left propped open by a teacher, as police previously said.

They have now determined that the teacher, who has not been identified, propped the door open with a rock, but then removed the rock and closed the door when she realized there was a shooter on campus, Considine said. But, Considine said, the door that was designed to lock when shut did not lock.

Since the shooting, law enforcement and state officials have struggled to present an accurate timeline and details of the event and how police responded, sometimes providing conflicting information or withdrawing statements hours later. State police have said some accounts were preliminary and could change as more witnesses are interviewed.

On Wednesday, Gov. Greg Abbott ordered the state to conduct in-person school district security audits, including random, unannounced "intruder detection" visits to campuses "to find weak points and how quickly they can penetrate buildings without being stopped."

"This will improve accountability and ensure school districts are following the plans they create," Abbott said in a letter to the head of the Texas School Safety Center at Texas State University. Texas has more than 1,200 school districts, according to the Texas Education Agency.

Abbott also asked top lawmakers to convene a legislative committee to examine and make recommendations on "school safety, mental health, social media, police training, firearm safety and more." The next Texas legislative session is scheduled for January 2023, although some lawmakers have urged Abbott to call a special session in response to the shooting.

After previous mass shootings at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Santa Fe High School and a Walmart in El Paso, Abbott convened "roundtable" discussions, sometimes involving survivors and victims' families.

After the 2018 shooting at Santa Fe High School, lawmakers in 2019 approved \$100 million for schools to improve campus safety with metal detectors, vehicle barriers, shooter alarms systems and other safety measures. They also allowed more teachers to carry guns on campus and be trained in campus shooter response.

But Abbott and state lawmakers resisted calls for stricter gun ownership measures. In 2021, Abbott signed into law a measure that allows people 21 and older to carry handguns without a license or training. In Uvalde on Wednesday, Ramos' mother was denied service at the drive-thru. Adriana Reyes then walked into an adjacent convenience store where the cashier said she would not be served.

She declined to speak with an Associated Press reporter on the scene, saying: "I don't want to be rude but I don't want to say anything."

Vocab questions reduce spelling bee to 3 letters: A, B or C

By BEN NUCKOLS Associated Press

OXON HILL, Md. (AP) — The Scripps National Spelling Bee was rolling smoothly through the second day of its first fully in-person competition in three years. Then it transformed into the SAT.

An onstage vocabulary round during Wednesday's semifinals introduced an element of randomness into the venerable bee, forcing spellers to demonstrate a different skill set and knocking out some of the bee's most accomplished competitors.

Vivinsha Veduru and Roy Seligman, who tied for fourth place in last year's bee: gone. Deetya Vuppala

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and Yash Shelar, the co-champions of this year's expert-level SpellPundit online bee: also gone. All denied a shot at Thursday's finals without spelling a word incorrectly.

"I thought it was tragic," said Grace Walters, a coach to multiple previous Scripps champions.

Walters' only pupil this year, four-time bee participant Harini Logan, made it through the vocabulary round and was one of a dozen finalists. She'll be joined on stage Thursday night by Sahasrad Satish, Ekansh Rastogi, Vikram Raju, Aliyah Alpert, Abhilash Patel, Sahana Sripath, Kirsten Santos, Nitya Kathiravan, Vihaan Sibal, Shijay Sivakumar and Saharsh Vuppala — Deetya's twin brother.

For many spellers, the multiple-choice vocabulary questions took away their opportunity to use the skills they've honed over years of study: asking questions of the judges to help piece a word together; identifying roots; deducing which vowel makes the dreaded "uh" sound known as a schwa.

"The words that are sometimes asked may not necessarily be based on roots or easily decipherable, and so in that case it becomes a case of which kids are natural readers and have a lot of cultural capital, and which kids aren't as culturally sophisticated," said Scott Remer, a former speller who coached 21 competitors this year, including Saharsh and Deetya. "Some words you're only going to pick up by reading newspapers, by reading certain books, and are not necessarily guessable."

Yash was knocked out on "Stockholm syndrome," a phrase that can't be parsed via a speller's expert knowledge of how sounds are constructed in various languages. Vivinsha didn't know "ragout" was a sauce. Deetya was given "ergogenic," and Roy's bid to become the first champion from The Bahamas ended when he was asked to define "rumbustical."

"With the word meaning, it's a crapshoot," said Arthur Seligman, Roy's father. "You and I know what 'Stockholm syndrome' means, but an 11- or 12-year-old?"

Chris Dominick, an excitable 14-year-old from Struthers, Ohio, illustrated the grab-bag quality of the vocabulary round when he was given "leitmotif" and exclaimed, "I know what this is!"

A reliable narrator, Chris didn't make it through the next spelling round. He was given "sirtaki" — a Greek dance — and said, "OK, I think I'm going to get out on this one." And he did, after guessing the word started with a "c."

"Goodbye, cruel world," Chris said after hearing the bell.

Vocabulary has long been part of the bee, but only on written tests. The bee's new executive director, J. Michael Durnil, who took over in 2021, added it to the live spelling rounds when a test became impractical during last year's mostly virtual, pandemic-altered competition.

"This is Scripps' way of ensuring that the competition does not become about memorizing words like code," Walters said. "Putting in a vocab segment, it almost forces intimacy with language because you have to know what those words mean."

Although spellers had to answer a vocabulary question during Tuesday's preliminary rounds, it was sandwiched between two words they had to spell. The semifinals, then, were the first time that so many spellers — 31 at the start of the vocabulary round — had to stand in front of the microphone and pick one of three possible answers on a screen in front of them.

Some knew the answers right away. Some didn't, and had to guess — A, B or C. And that was that.

Vihaan, a 13-year-old from McGregor, Texas, who's in the finals for the second time, was asked to define "vermillion" and noted that every multiple-choice option he was given was a color. He was shocked to see Roy knocked out.

"I know he's a really strong speller. Probably stronger than me," Vihaan said.

Harini, a 14-year-old from San Antonio, Texas, was one speller who kept her cool throughout, even when pronouncer Jacques Bailly made a rare flub, initially leaving a syllable out of "quinquefoliate," the word that got her into the finals.

Much like her mastery of language, Harini puts plenty of work into her onstage sangfroid.

"Even though I am stressed in the moments leading up to getting my word, as soon as I get my word, I just try to put myself into a thinking process where I can really feel calm," she said.

Uvalde shooting highlights role of doors in security plans

By KATHLEEN FOODY and CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

Doors – both the one the gunman entered and the one police did not open for over an hour – have been at the center of the investigation into the killing of 19 students and two teachers in Uvalde, Texas, and the police response to the massacre.

School officials under pressure to balance accessibility and safety confront a variety of decisions about the seemingly mundane act of going in and out of a building or classroom. But as the attack on Robb Elementary School showed, such choices can sometimes spell the difference between life and death.

State police initially said the gunman entered through an exterior door that had been propped open by a teacher. But a spokesman for the Texas Department of Public Safety said Tuesday that the teacher closed the door after realizing a shooter was on campus, but it did not lock as it should have.

Inside the school, officers waited for more than an hour to breach the classroom, and state authorities have blamed the head of the school district's small police department for wrongly believing children were no longer at risk. Officials said a U.S. Border Patrol tactical team used a janitor's key to unlock the classroom door and kill the gunman.

State and federal panels charged with reviewing individual mass shootings have repeatedly advised limiting access to school buildings by locking exterior doors, forcing visitors to enter through a secure door and requiring teachers to lock classrooms while classes are in session.

The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency tells districts that they may be able to delay an intruder by keeping exterior doors locked when they are not being monitored by staff. But schools will still need to ensure that employees "adhere to policies mandating that all exterior doors remain closed outside of student arrival and dismissal times."

In its latest guidance, updated in February, the agency also wrote that districts should consider whether measures such as automatic locks on classroom doors could hinder emergency responders.

"If a school installs automatic locks on classroom doors, they should provide emergency responders with a means of accessing all locked down areas; the office might therefore place master keys or key fobs in a safe but easily accessible location, or provide local authorities with a copy of these devices when first installing any new lock systems."

But there are no federal standards or requirements on these points, leaving the decision up to state or local authorities. Those officials must also balance how to keep people safe in case of a fire or natural disaster and the expense of renovating and maintaining schools.

Each killing at a U.S. school increases pressure on school authorities to act, nudged on by security companies claiming new products will "harden" schools and prevent the next tragedy.

"I've had people suggest bulletproof glass everywhere or gunshot-detection systems, and it's like 'How far do you go?'" said Ronald Stephens, director of the National School Safety Center. "Would you rather have your resources invested in a great teacher or a school that looks like Fort Knox?"

After the 2018 shooting that left 10 dead at Santa Fe High School outside Houston, Texas lawmakers approved \$100 million for school campus "hardening" projects.

According to a governor's school safety report in 2019, that money could be used on older buildings for metal detectors, vehicle barriers, alarm systems, security fences, bullet-resistant glass, door-locking systems and other measures.

A state-run survey taken during the 2015 school year reported that 96.1% of administrators reported locking campus doors to limit access to the school. Almost 88% of districts used cameras and 79% had a sign-in process for visitors.

It's not clear if Uvalde schools sought or received any of that money before last week's shooting. A Uvalde school district spokesperson declined to answer emailed questions about school security.

It's also unclear why it took so long for police to retrieve a key from a school official that allowed a U.S. Border Patrol tactical team to finally get inside the classroom.

Stephens said ensuring that law enforcement can get into locked classrooms is a crucial part of a school

safety plan. He encourages schools to designate that responsibility to multiple people.

Security experts warn that physical barriers can only do so much. Human error, faulty equipment or an attacker's determination can overcome security measures.

Locked doors certainly aren't insurmountable. The gunman who killed 20 children and six adults in 2012 at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, shot out a window next to the school's locked entrance doors and opened fire again once he entered.

Most research backs a more comprehensive approach focused on training educators to spot warning signs in at-risk kids paired with a rigorous safety plan, training for all staff and partnership with law enforcement and other community groups.

Chuck Wilson is the co-founder of the Partner Alliance for Safer Schools, a collection of security-focused companies and other school-safety advocates that developed their own set of guidelines for schools. They recommend schools "at a minimum" lock exterior doors while classrooms are in session and lock classroom doors too.

"It's a lot less convenient, but it's a lot safer in today's world," Wilson said. People who are intent on harming others, "they are creative. They have a lot of time to think, to watch, to observe the ingress and egress, the class changes, before school and after school activities."

Gridlock could delay COVID funds until fall — or longer

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. is headed for "a lot of unnecessary loss of life," the Biden administration says, if Congress fails to provide billions more dollars to brace for the pandemic's next wave. Yet the quest for that money is in limbo, the latest victim of election-year gridlock that's stalled or killed a host of Democratic priorities.

President Joe Biden's appeal for funds for vaccines, testing and treatments has hit opposition from Republicans, who've fused the fight with the precarious politics of immigration. Congress is in recess, and the next steps are uncertain, despite admonitions from White House COVID-19 coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha of damaging consequences from "every day we wait."

Administration officials say they're running low on money to stock up on, or even begin to order, the latest vaccines, tests and treatments. Also lacking are funds to reimburse doctors treating uninsured patients and to help poor countries control the pandemic.

House and Senate Democrats have been wrangling over how to resolve the stalemate and even over which chamber should vote first. It's an open question whether they'll ever get the GOP votes they'll need to pull the legislation through the 50-50 Senate, and prospects in the narrowly divided House are unclear as well.

"There is still an urgency to pass a COVID relief package," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said last week. "It's very, very much needed."

Optimists hope the measure could start rolling once Congress returns next week. Pessimists say without quick resolution, Democrats may not have enough leverage to push the money to passage until early fall. That's when they could stuff it into legislation that will probably be needed to finance government — a bill that would avert a federal shutdown, a pre-election distraction Republicans will be desperate to avoid.

The heap of sidelined Democratic initiatives has grown this year, a victim of GOP opposition and rebellions by centrists like Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va. Casualties include bills on voting rights, health care, environment, taxes, gun curbs, abortion rights, policing tactics and an investigation of the 2021 Capitol storming by then-President Donald Trump's supporters.

While lawmakers have approved massive packages financing federal agencies through September and helping Ukraine counter Russia's invasion, other priorities are dead or drifting, even as Democrats' days running Congress are likely dwindling. Republicans are favored to win House control in November's elections and could grab the Senate as well, and Democrats' frustration is clear.

"So far it hasn't moved," Sen. Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii, said of Biden's latest \$22.5 billion request for

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COVID-19, which he initially sent Congress three months ago. "But then neither has sensible gun legislation, neither has voting rights."

"The 50-50 Senate sucks," she said.

The COVID money is needed quickly, officials say. Their warnings have come with over 1 million U.S. deaths from the disease and a fresh variant that daily is hospitalizing over 100,000 Americans and killing more than 300. Both numbers are rising.

Officials say that lacking fresh funds, the U.S. is falling behind other countries that are already lining up for supplies needed for fall and winter. That's prompted Jha to plan for the chance that Congress provides no new money at all, threatening painful choices about what to do if there aren't enough vaccines or therapeutics for all who need them.

"It would be terrible," Jha told reporters recently. "I think we would see a lot of unnecessary loss of life if that were to happen."

Congress has provided \$370 billion for purchasing supplies, for research and other public health initiatives to combat the pandemic, according to administration tallies obtained by The Associated Press. Around \$14 billion of it was unspent or not committed to contracts as of April 5, the documents show, serious money but an amount the administration says falls below the ultimate need.

Most Republicans are skeptical about added pandemic funding. "I have a hard time believing that there's not enough money and not enough flexibility already" to use it, said Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D.

Counterintuitively but unsurprisingly for the always perplexing Senate, one intractable puzzle stymying Democrats is immigration.

Senate Republicans are demanding a vote on amending the pandemic legislation with language retaining Trump-era curbs that, citing COVID-19, have made it easier to bar migrants from entering the U.S.

A federal judge has blocked Biden from ending those restrictions. Liberals want Congress to eliminate the clampdown, but moderate Democrats in both chambers facing tough reelections want to vote to retain it.

The result: Testy divisions between the Democrats' two ideological factions, and knotty questions for party leaders about how to resolve them and push a pandemic package to passage.

Their task is compounded by disputes between House and Senate Democrats over why the COVID-19 battle remains unresolved.

Senate Democrats note a bipartisan \$15.6 billion pandemic compromise was on the cusp of House passage in March until that chamber's progressive Democrats rebelled against spending cuts to pay for it, derailing the money. "We're waiting for the House to send us something," Schumer said last week.

House Democrats say even if they do, the biggest hurdle will still be the Senate, where 10 GOP votes will be required to reach that chamber's usual 60-vote threshold for passage. They note that an April deal between Schumer and Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, for \$10 billion in COVID-19 money collapsed after Republicans demanded the immigration vote.

"We want to get COVID-19 done, but the only impediment right now is the United States Senate," House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., told reporters recently.

That's left Republicans waiting for Democrats' next move.

"I would imagine at this point way over half of our members will vote against this, no matter what. So the question is what do you do to get it acceptable to 10 or 12" Republican senators, said Sen. Roy Blunt of Missouri, a member of GOP leadership. "And I don't know."

Louisiana governor agrees to testify in Ronald Greene probe

By JIM MUSTIAN and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

Gov. John Bel Edwards agreed on Wednesday to a request from Louisiana lawmakers that he and his top attorneys testify before a bipartisan committee investigating allegations of a cover-up in the deadly 2019 arrest of Black motorist Ronald Greene.

The request came just days after The Associated Press reported that Edwards and his lawyers privately watched a long-withheld video showing Greene taking his final breaths during his fatal arrest — yet did

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not act urgently to get the crucial footage into the hands of those with the power to charge the white Louisiana State Police troopers seen stunning, punching and dragging the man.

The video, which showed critical moments and audio absent from other footage that was turned over, didn't reach prosecutors until nearly two years after Greene's May 10, 2019, death on a rural roadside near Monroe. Prosecutors and detectives have said they were not even aware the 30-minute clip existed until six months after the governor viewed it in October 2020.

State Rep. Clay Schexnayder, the Republican House speaker, cited "serious questions that can only be answered by" the Democratic governor and his staff.

"This committee will do its job and see this through no matter where the evidence leads," Schexnayder said in a statement asking the governor to appear before the committee June 16.

Edwards' top lawyer, Matthew Block, wrote in a public letter to the committee that he, another lawyer and the governor will all appear to testify.

"We are confident that this testimony will demonstrate that neither the governor nor anyone on his staff had any role in any attempt to cover up the facts related to Mr. Greene's death," Block wrote to Rep. Tanner Magee, the Republican who chairs the panel.

Block previously had told the AP that 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 by the governor or his staff to withhold evidence.

The legislative committee for weeks has sought to reconstruct the state's response to Greene's death, interviewing a long list of law enforcement officials and even subpoenaing the handwritten journals of a former state police superintendent.

Lawmakers are now pivoting to 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. The legislative inquiry comes amid ongoing federal and state investigations that have not resulted in any charges.

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.

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 heavysset, 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.

The governor's attorneys didn't mention seeing the Clary video in a meeting days later with state prosecutors, who wouldn't receive the footage until a detective discovered it almost by accident six months later. But state police say they showed the Clary video to Greene's family days after the governor viewed it.

Several members of Greene's family denied they had seen the video, but one of their attorneys wrote lawmakers an email this week confirming they had, in fact, seen Clary's video, citing contemporaneous notes.

Former Corinthian students get federal student debt erased

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of students who attended the for-profit Corinthian Colleges chain will automatically get their federal student loans canceled, the Biden administration announced Wednesday, a move that aims to bring closure to one of the most notorious cases of fraud in American higher education.

Under the new action, anyone who attended the now-defunct chain from its founding in 1995 to its collapse in 2015 will get their federal student debt wiped clean. It will erase \$5.8 billion in debt for more than 560,000 borrowers, the largest single loan discharge in Education Department history, according to

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the agency.

"As of today, every student deceived, defrauded and driven into debt by Corinthian Colleges can rest assured that the Biden-Harris Administration has their back and will discharge their federal student loans," Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said. "For far too long, Corinthian engaged in the wholesale financial exploitation of students, misleading them into taking on more and more debt to pay for promises they would never keep."

Tens of thousands of former Corinthian students were already eligible for debt cancellation, but they had to file paperwork and navigate an application process that advocates say is confusing and not widely known about. Now, the relief will be made automatic and extended to additional borrowers.

Those who have a remaining balance on their Corinthian debt will also get refunds on payments they have already made, Education Department officials said. But the action does not apply to loans that have already been paid off in full.

At its peak, Corinthian was one of the nation's largest for-profit college companies, with more than 100 campuses across the country and more than 110,000 students at its Everest, WyoTech and Heald schools.

But the company shut down in 2015 amid widespread findings of fraud. The Obama administration — working with Kamala Harris, who was then California attorney general and later became vice president — found that scores of campuses were falsifying data on the success of their graduates. In some cases, the schools reported that students had found jobs in their fields of study even though they were working at grocery stores or fast food chains.

Hundreds of students told investigators they were pressured to enroll with promises of lucrative employment, only to end up with huge sums of debt and few job prospects. Federal officials also found that the company falsely told students their course credits could be transferred to other colleges.

The case inspired a federal crackdown on for-profit colleges, and the Obama administration promised to forgive loans for Corinthian students whose programs lied about job placement rates. The administration went on to expand a process known as borrower defense to repayment, which allows any defrauded student to apply for debt cancellation.

But an explosion in applications for debt forgiveness, along with political battles over the process, created a years-long backlog in the process, leaving many former Corinthian students still awaiting relief.

As of December, the Education Department reported it had more than 109,000 pending applications from students alleging fraud by their colleges, including many Corinthian students. Borrowers and their advocates have been urging the government to erase all Corinthian debt, saying evidence of misconduct was so widespread that all the chain's students were the victims of fraud.

The administration announced the action Wednesday as President Joe Biden considers broader student loan forgiveness for millions of Americans. As a candidate, Biden said he supports forgiving \$10,000 in student loans for all borrowers. He later indicated that such action should come through Congress, but the White House has said he is considering whether to pursue it through executive action.

Advocates said the Biden administration's decision brings long-delayed justice.

"This is a tremendous student victory, and it belongs to the tens of thousands of borrowers who were cheated and abused by Corinthian Colleges," said Eileen Connor, director of the Project on Predatory Student Lending, which has represented Corinthian students in lawsuits. "They never stopped fighting — over three administrations — for the justice they deserve under the law."

Libby DeBlasio Webster, senior counsel for the advocacy group Student Defense, said the news gives a "fresh start" to former Corinthian students, but she noted that many defrauded students from other for-profit colleges are still awaiting help.

"We also hope today's news is a sign that other decisions are on the horizon for thousands of similarly situated students who are waiting for this kind of relief," she said.

Slave reparations advocates hail historic California report

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

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SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The slavery reparations movement hit a watershed moment Wednesday with the release of an exhaustive report detailing California's role in perpetuating discrimination against African Americans, a major step toward educating the public and setting the stage for an official government apology and case for financial restitution.

The 500-page document lays out the harm suffered by descendants of enslaved people even today, long after slavery was abolished in the 19th century, through discriminatory laws and actions in all facets of life, from housing and education to employment and the legal system.

Longtime reparations advocate Justin Hansford, who is a law professor at Howard University and director of the Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center in Washington called the moment exciting and monumental.

"To have an official detail of these histories coming from the state is important," he said. "I know a lot of people say we don't need to keep doing studies, but the reality is until it comes from some source that people think is objective, then it is going to be harder to convince everybody of some of the inequalities described."

The report comes at a time when school boards and states across the U.S. are banning books or restricting what can be taught in classrooms, with parents and lawmakers largely opposed to topics of sexuality, gender identity or race. State lawmakers have tried to bar schools from teaching the "1619 Project," a New York Times Pulitzer Prize-winning report that reframes American history with enslaved people at its heart.

California is headed in the opposite direction, said Adam Laats, a historian at Binghamton University who called the document remarkable in its unflinching account, including detailing how police officers and district attorneys in the Los Angeles of a century ago were members of or had ties to the Ku Klux Klan.

"Who children should learn are the main actors in the story of us as a nation has always been a real lightning rod," he said.

Gov. Gavin Newsom signed legislation creating the two-year task force in 2020, making California the only state to move ahead with a study and plan. Cities and universities have taken up the cause, with the Chicago suburb of Evanston, Illinois, becoming the first city to make reparations available to Black residents last year.

On Wednesday, Newsom issued a statement praising California for leading the country on a long overdue discussion of racial justice and equity. The state's Attorney General Rob Bonta, whose office is assisting the task force, said, "California was not a passive actor in perpetuating these harms."

A similar effort is underway to delve into what Newsom has called California's dark history of violence, mistreatment and neglect of Native Americans. The report by the Truth and Healing Council, due in 2025, could include recommendations for reparations. Many tribes across the country have sought to acquire their ancestral land and co-manage public land.

The African American reparations task force, which began meeting in June 2021, will release a comprehensive reparations plan next year. The committee voted in March to limit reparations to the descendants of African Americans living in the U.S. in the 19th century, overruling advocates who wanted to expand compensation to all Black people in the U.S.

"Four hundred years of discrimination has resulted in an enormous and persistent wealth gap between Black and white Americans," said the report by the California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans.

"These effects of slavery continue to be embedded in American society today and have never been sufficiently remedied. The governments of the United States and the State of California have never apologized to or compensated African Americans for these harms."

California is home to the fifth-largest Black population in the U.S., after Texas, Florida, Georgia and New York, the report said. An estimated 2.8 million Black people live in California, although it is unclear how many are eligible for direct compensation.

African Americans make up less than 6% of California's population yet they are overrepresented in jails, youth detention centers and prisons. About 28% of people imprisoned in California are Black and in 2019, 36% of minors ordered into state juvenile detention facilities were African Americans, according to the report.

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Black Californians earn less and are more likely to be poor than white residents. In 2018, Black residents earned on average just under \$54,000 compared to \$87,000 for white Californians.

"We don't own homes and if you look at why there's such a huge disparity between African Americans and white Americans and our ability to hold onto and sustain wealth, it's because we don't own homes," said Assembly member Reggie Jones-Sawyer, a task force member.

The task force's sweeping initial recommendations include prison system reforms. Inmates should not be forced to work and if they do, they must be paid fair market wages. Inmates should also be allowed to vote and people with felony convictions should serve on juries.

The group recommends creating a state-subsidized mortgage program to guarantee low rates for qualifying African American applicants, free health care, free tuition to California colleges and universities and scholarships to African American high school graduates to cover four years of undergraduate education.

The committee also calls for a Cabinet-level secretary position to oversee an African American Affairs agency with branches for civic engagement, education, social services, cultural affairs and legal affairs. It would help people research and document their lineage to a 19th-century ancestor so they could qualify for financial restitution.

People opposed to paying reparations argue that California did not have plantations or Jim Crow era laws as in the South.

But the interim report spells out how California, despite being "free," perpetuated harms that have compounded over generations.

It noted that Missouri native Basil Campbell was purchased for \$1,200 and forced to move to California's Yolo County in 1854, leaving behind his wife and two sons. Campbell eventually paid off his purchase price, married and became a landowner. But when his sons petitioned for a portion of his estate after his death, a California judge ruled that marriage between two enslaved people "is not a marriage relation."

More recently, it said, the home of Paul Austin and Tenisha Tate-Austin was assessed at a much lower price because it was located in a primarily Black part of upscale Marin County, where African Americans were forced to live starting in World War II.

The report should offer other cities and states — and ultimately the federal government — a blueprint for seeking reparations, members said. Over the next year, the task force will take on the difficult task of crafting an apology and creating a reparations plan to compensate for and stop the harm.

"The big question is: What are they going to do with it? The danger here is that everyone reads it and nods their heads and waits on the task force to initiate the response," said Hansford, the law professor. "We need to have universities, local governments, businesses and others working together to do their part to address ... the recommendations offered in the report."

Mourners say goodbye to Uvalde teacher and her husband

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and JAY REEVES Associated Press

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — Mourners gathered Wednesday at a Catholic church to say goodbye to Robb Elementary School teacher Irma Garcia — who died in the shooting at the Uvalde, Texas, grade school — and her husband, Joe — who died two days later from a heart attack.

Nineteen children and two teachers — Garcia and her co-teacher, 44-year-old Eva Mireles — were killed May 24 when an 18-year-old gunman burst into their classroom. The litany of visitations, funerals and burials began Monday and will continue into mid-June.

At Sacred Heart Catholic Church on Wednesday, twin black hearses carrying the coffins of the Garcias arrived in a procession led by police and civilian motorcycle riders. Covered by flowers, the two closed caskets were borne by pallbearers past a phalanx of police in uniforms and priests in white robes.

Some sobbed throughout the service in which Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller offered thanks for Irma Garcia's dedication. He listed the names of the slain schoolchildren several times throughout the homily.

"Because you were there with them," he said. "You did what you would have done with your own children. You took care of them until your last breath."

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Irma, 48, was finishing up her 23rd year as a teacher at Robb Elementary. In a letter posted on the school's website at the beginning of the school year, Garcia told her students that she and Joe had four children — a Marine, a college student, a high school student and a seventh grader.

Most of the readings during Wednesday's service and the homily were in English, with García-Siller offering some words in Spanish.

"We are all hurting," he said. "In the midst of so much, please, please people need comfort, people need you. ... Let us all foster a culture of peace."

Joe, 50, collapsed and died after dropping off flowers at his wife's memorial. The couple would have been married 25 years on June 28. His obituary noted that he and Irma "began their relationship in high school and it flourished into a love that was beautiful and kind."

U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, who attended the Garcias' funeral, said in a statement that America "must unite as a country against this senseless cycle of violence, act immediately to protect our children, and make sure that every child and every educator feels safe in our schools."

Another funeral Wednesday was for 10-year-old Jose Flores Jr., also at Sacred Heart. He made the honor roll and received a certificate on May 24, hours before the shooting. His father told CNN that his son loved baseball and video games and "was always full of energy."

On Tuesday afternoon, hundreds turned out to remember Amerie Jo Garza, a smiling fourth-grader whose funeral Mass was the first since the massacre. The funeral for 10-year-old Maite Rodriguez was Tuesday night.

At Amerie's funeral, mourner Erika Santiago, her husband and their two children wore purple shirts adorned with images of the victims. She described Amerie as "a nice little girl who smiled a lot," and who was "so humble and charismatic but full of life."

Investigators continue to seek answers about how police responded to the shooting, and the U.S. Department of Justice is reviewing law enforcement actions.

The blame for an excruciating delay in killing the gunman — even as parents outside begged police to rush in and panicked children called 911 from inside — was placed on the school district's police chief, Pete Arredondo. The director of state police last week said Arredondo made the "wrong decision" not to breach the classroom, believing the gunman was barricaded inside and children weren't at risk.

On Wednesday, Arredondo told CNN that he's talking regularly with investigators from the Texas Department of Public Safety, contradicting claims from state law enforcement that he's stopped cooperating.

Authorities have said the gunman, Salvador Ramos, legally purchased two guns not long before the school attack: an AR-15-style rifle on May 17 and a second rifle on May 20. He had just turned 18, permitting him to buy the weapons under federal law. Ramos was killed by law enforcement.

Buffalo supermarket gunman indicted on terror, hate charge

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The white man accused of killing 10 Black people in a racist attack on a Buffalo supermarket was indicted by a grand jury Wednesday on a state domestic terrorism and hate crime charge that would carry a mandatory sentence of life in prison.

Payton Gendron is scheduled to be arraigned Thursday on the new, 25-count indictment, which builds on a previous murder charge hastily prepared in the hours after the May 14 shooting.

The 18-year-old has now also been charged with the attempted murders of three people who were shot during the attack, but survived, and with using a weapon while committing a felony.

He has pleaded not guilty. Prosecutors had told a judge May 20 the grand jury had voted to indict Gendron but did not disclose charges, saying proceedings were ongoing.

Gendron's attorney, Brian Parker, said he had not seen the indictment and could not comment, adding that prosecution and defense attorneys have been barred by a judge from discussing the case publicly.

The horrific nature of the crime and number of victims was likely to already guarantee a life sentence if Gendron is convicted. New York has no death penalty. But adding a state terrorism charge could carry

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additional emotional resonance and help authorities send a message about violent extremism.

The domestic terrorism charge — Domestic Acts of Terrorism Motivated by Hate in the First Degree — accuses Gendron of killing “because of the perceived race and/or color” of his victims.

“This man was motivated by hate against people he never met for no reason other than the color of their skin,” said Buffalo lawyer John Elmore, who represents the families of victims Katherine “Kat” Massey, 72, and Andre Mackniel, 53. Elmore said he hoped for a conviction on every count.

Former Gov. Andrew Cuomo proposed the domestic terrorism hate crime law in August 2019, in the wake of a mass shooting targeting Mexicans at a Walmart store in El Paso, Texas. The measure, dubbed the “Josef Neumann Hate Crimes Domestic Terrorism Act” after an attack at a rabbi’s home in Munsey, New York, was signed into law on April 3, 2020, and took effect Nov. 1, 2020.

The law expanded on a previous domestic terrorism statute passed after the 9/11 terrorist attack that was largely envisioned as a way to go after international extremism.

Prosecutors said Gendron drove about three hours to Buffalo from his home in Conklin, New York, intending to kill as many Black people as possible. Shortly before the attack he posted documents that outlined his white supremacist views and revealed he had been planning the attack for months.

The gunman, carrying an AR-15-style rifle he had recently purchased, opened fire on Saturday afternoon shoppers at a Tops supermarket in Buffalo.

Murder charges were filed for each of the victims, who ranged in age from 32 to 86 and included eight customers, the store security guard and a church deacon who drove shoppers to and from the store with their groceries.

The shooting, followed 10 days later by a mass shooting that killed 19 children and two teachers inside a Uvalde, Texas, elementary school, has renewed a national debate about gun control.

Mackniel was in the store to buy a birthday cake for his 3-year-old. Massey was a community activist who had championed gun control and fought against racism, Elmore said.

“To have her life taken away by a white supremacist extremist at the hands of a weapon of mass destruction is extremely upsetting to me,” he said. He is part of a team of attorneys exploring potential legal action against the manufacturers of the weapon and body armor used by the gunman, as well as social media platforms.

The attack was livestreamed from a helmet-mounted camera.

“Somehow we’re going to find justice for the Massey family, for the Mackniel family and all those others that were affected by this tragedy,” Elmore said.

Federal authorities also are investigating the possibility of hate crime charges against Gendron, who apparently detailed his plans and his racist motivation in hundreds of pages of writings he posted online shortly before the shooting.

Amanda Drury, who lost her 32-year-old sister, Roberta Drury, said she is leaving it to the legal system to say what charges are appropriate in the case.

“I’m going to continue with my trust in the justice system,” she said.

US Open’s \$10M purse offers hope for gender pay equality

By STEVE REED AP Sports Writer

SOUTHERN PINES, N.C. (AP) — Dottie Pepper recalls being paired with Meg Mallon for the final round of the 1991 U.S. Women’s Open with what she viewed as an impressive \$110,000 first-place prize on the line.

Things have changed, but Lydia Ko says not enough.

Mallon would win that tournament and earn the record-breaking payday.

“It was the first time a winning check was six figures,” Pepper said. “That was a big deal.”

Pepper has a hard time believing that a little more than three decades later, the top female golfers in the world will be competing for a record \$10 million purse, including a winner’s share of \$1.8 million at the U.S. Women’s Open that begins Thursday at Pine Needles, after the USGA secured a major sponsorship from ProMedica.

Ko, the No. 3-ranked women’s golfer in the world, said players should be grateful for steps toward equal

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pay but added "there's still a ways to go."

There is.

Even with the prize purse increasing \$4.5 million from a year ago, the women still lag behind the men.

The men's 2021 U.S. Open purse was \$12.5 million, with \$2.25 million going to champion Jon Rahm. The prize money for this year's tournament is expected to increase substantially when it is announced next month. The Masters' purse went from \$11.5 million to \$15 million this year and the men's PGA Championship increased from \$12 million to \$15 million.

It is a gender pay discrepancy that is reflective in many professional sports.

In basketball, the average NBA player made \$5.3 million per season, according to Basketball Reference, while WNBA stars Diana Taurasi, Jewell Loyd and Breanna Stewart earned a league-maximum \$228,094. That's a mere drop in the bucket for Golden State's Stephen Curry, whose annual salary is \$45.7 million.

Women's basketball players including Brittney Griner, who the U.S. government says is being wrongfully detained in Russia, take their games overseas during the offseason to supplement their incomes.

Professional female athletes' paychecks are smaller across various sports, according to a study by Adelphi University published in 2021:

— The average salary of a Major League Baseball player was \$4 million, compared with \$6,000 for those with Women's Professional Fastpitch.

— Major League Soccer players earned an average of \$410,730, compared with \$35,000 for their female counterparts in the National Women's Soccer League.

— Male tennis players made on average \$335,946 last year while the women earned \$283,635.

— Male golfers averaged \$1.25 million versus \$48,993 for their female counterparts.

Of Forbes' top 50 highest-paid athletes in 2022, tennis player Naomi Osaka was the only woman to make the list at \$59.2 million — the vast majority of that coming from endorsement deals.

But strides are being made.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Soccer Federation reached a milestone agreement to pay its men's and women's teams equally, making the American national governing body the first in the sport to promise both sexes equal salaries. That came after fans chanted "Equal pay!" following the women's team's 2019 World Cup win and the team filed a discrimination lawsuit.

In tennis, there have been equal payouts for men and women at all four Grand Slam events — Wimbledon, the French Open, U.S. Open and Australian Open — since 2007, the result of Billie Jean King's threat of a boycott back in 1973. However, men earn more than women at other, smaller tennis tournaments.

"I think women have not been paid as much because male executives, overwhelmingly white, saw less value in women's sports," said Richard Lapchick, the director of The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports. "Also sport is a reflection of society where women are underpaid compared to men.

"Now attendance at women's games and viewers on TV are increasing dramatically. That coupled with a better climate for social justice in the last two years is finally ramping up the discussions for equal pay. On the 50th anniversary of Title IX, I hope sports can help lead the way for equal pay for women everywhere."

Female golfers are working hard to bridge the pay gap.

Australian Minjee Lee said gaining the confidence and backing of a major sponsor like ProMedica is "a huge step in the right direction" for women's golf. And female pro athletes in general.

"I think it's only going to get better and better," Lee added.

When Annika Sorenstam won this event in 1996 at Pine Needles, she took home \$212,500 and became the first female golfer to surpass \$1 million in career earnings.

On Sunday, the champion will earn nearly twice that for winning one tournament.

"I think it's fantastic," Sorenstam said. "That is a massive change. It's a massive boost. It gives the women a lot more credibility and respect. ... I hope other tournaments will follow suit, and let's keep working this direction for other women."

With ProMedica's backing, the U.S. Women's Open purse is set to increase annually to \$12 million in the next five years.

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"Seeing the sponsors that we have out here on the LPGA Tour, seeing the purse increases, the TV coverage, that's what we want," said American Lexi Thompson, the world's No. 6-ranked golfer. "We want to grow the game and leave it in a better place."

Karen Stupples started playing on the LPGA Tour in an era when women struggled to make a living.

Her first career tournament paycheck was for \$1,306 in 1999 when she finished tied for 58th at the Phillips Invitational.

"I just can't wrap my head around what a difference this could possibly make for somebody," said Stupples, now a commentator for NBC covering this week's U.S. Open. "I can't even properly speak about it. I mean, my goodness, what a move this is."

Jin Young Ko, the world's No. 1 female player, said it's a lot of money at stake — and she plans to donate some of it back if she wins.

"I want to help children that want to be LPGA players," Ko said. "I want to help them. If I win, I will do that."

2 candidates for Michigan governor lose key ballot ruling

By ED WHITE Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — The Michigan Court of Appeals kept two Republican candidates off the Aug. 2 primary ballot Wednesday, declaring that election officials suspecting signature fraud had no obligation to examine campaign petitions line by line.

The court first ruled against Perry Johnson, a wealthy businessman considered to be a leading candidate for the Republican nomination, and then applied the 12-page decision to investment adviser Michael Markey.

The opinion would seem to doom the chances of former Detroit Police Chief James Craig and entrepreneur Donna Brandenburg, who were also barred from the ballot last week.

There appears to be no dispute that fraudulent signatures were turned in by paid circulators, though there's no evidence that the candidates were aware of the scam. In a court filing, attorneys representing the Board of State Canvassers called it an "unprecedented situation."

The candidates were declared ineligible as the result of a tie vote by the board. State election staff said Johnson, Craig, Markey and Brandenburg didn't meet the 15,000-signature threshold because of fraudulent signatures.

In Johnson's case, about 7,000 were put in the scam column. Election staff found dead voters on his petitions, misspelled names and some signatures with first names but only a last initial.

Johnson asked the appeals court to overrule the canvassers and put him on the ballot. He said he would meet the signature threshold if the state election bureau would examine each line. Only 20% of the 7,000 signatures were compared to signatures in the qualified voter file.

"The board ... had a clear legal duty to investigate, but it did not have a clear legal duty to conduct a comparison of each fraudulent signature against the qualified voter file," the appeals court said in a 3-0 opinion.

Five other Republican candidates landed a ballot spot, including Tudor Dixon, a former conservative TV news host who has the backing of Betsy DeVos, who was head of the U.S. Education Department during the Trump administration.

The winner will face Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in the fall.

Pinkett Smith talks hair-loss 'shame,' outcome of Oscar slap

By LYNN ELBER AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Jada Pinkett Smith turned her husband's Oscar-night blowup into a teachable moment about alopecia areata, the hair-loss disorder affecting her and millions of others that, in some cases, can impact a person's sense of identity.

"Considering what I've been through with my own health and what happened at the Oscars, thousands

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have reached out to me with their stories," Pinkett Smith said on Wednesday's episode of "Red Table Talk."

The actor said she chose to use "this moment to give our alopecia family an opportunity to talk about what it's like to have this condition" and what it is. Her guests included the mother of a 12-year-old girl, Rio Allred, who was bullied over her hair loss and died by suicide, and a physician who explained the different types of the disorder.

Before tackling the subject, Pinkett Smith addressed events at the March 27 Academy Awards. She and husband Will Smith, a best-actor nominee, were in the audience as presenter Chris Rock cracked a joke at Pinkett Smith's expense.

"Jada, I love you. 'G.I. Jane 2,' can't wait to see it," Rock said. Pinkett Smith, who has spoken publicly about her alopecia, had a closely shaved head similar to that of Demi Moore in the 1997 movie.

Smith strode from his front-row seat to the stage and slapped Rock, shocking the comedian and the audience. Smith, who returned to his seat and later accepted the Oscar for "King Richard," subsequently apologized to Rock but was banned from the ceremony for 10 years by the film academy.

"Now, about Oscar night, my deepest hope is that these two intelligent, capable men have an opportunity to heal, talk this out, and reconcile," Pinkett Smith said on "Red Table Talk" in an indirect reference to Smith and Rock. "The state of the world today, we need them both, and we all actually need one another more than ever.

"Until then, Will and I are continuing to do what we have done for the last 28 years, and that's keep figuring out this thing called life together," said Pinkett Smith, who previously had addressed the incident in a brief Instagram post that read "'This is a season for healing and I'm here for it.'"

The actor ("Girls Trip," "Matrix" films), who hosts the Facebook Watch talk show with her daughter, Willow, and Adrienne Banfield Norris, her mother, said that millions of people are living with alopecia and what she called the "shame" that surrounds it. The condition, particularly for Black women, can affect a person's perception of themselves and force them to frequently confront others' perceptions about beauty, hair and race and culture.

Rio's mother, Nicole Ball, recounted the impact of the Oscar incident, which took place less than two weeks after her daughter's death.

"What is the universe doing right now? This is crazy,'" Ball recalled thinking. "People are going to be Googling, 'What is alopecia....What is this that we've never heard of?' It's not a joke."

According to the National Alopecia Areata Foundation, the disorder affects as many as 6.8 million people in the United States of any age, sex and ethnic group, and the symptoms can vary.

"I think the part that makes it most difficult for me is that it comes and goes. You're going through a spell of something, and you got to shave your head," Pinkett Smith said.

EXPLAINER: Alopecia affects millions, including kids

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

Millions of people around the world are affected by alopecia areata, an autoimmune disorder that causes hair loss and was thrown into the spotlight after actor Will Smith slapped comedian Chris Rock at the Oscars.

The slap stunned millions, drew widespread condemnation and earned Smith a 10-year ban from the ceremony after he apologized. It came after Rock threw a pointed joke that some felt was insensitive at Jada Pinkett Smith about her hair loss.

Advocates said at the time that increased awareness about the condition, which is fairly common but little discussed, could be a small bit of good to come out of the blowup. Wednesday, Jada Pinkett Smith, dedicated an episode of "Red Table Talk" to the disorder.

Here's a look at the disorder, and how hair is tied up with beauty and race, culture and self-identity:

WHAT CAUSES ALOPECIA?

Alopecia areata can make hair fall out of the scalp in patches and also affect other parts of the body, like eyebrows and nose hair.

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Alopecia can come on quickly, is unpredictable and can be incredibly tough to deal with mentally, said Brett King, a hair loss expert at Yale Medicine, told The Associated Press in March.

"Imagine if you woke up today missing half of an eyebrow," he said. "That unpredictability is one of the things that's so mentally treacherous and awful because you have no control of it ... it's a disease that strips people of their identity."

While seldom discussed, it's actually fairly common: the second biggest cause of hair loss, after male or female pattern balding. About 2% of people have it. It's not physically painful, in some cases it spontaneously goes away and it can be treated.

HOW DOES IT AFFECT WOMEN? WHAT ABOUT KIDS?

While it's unclear if Rock was aware of Pinkett Smith's diagnosis, hair is a large part of anyone's appearance, and for women it's bound up with cultural concepts about what makes them look feminine.

"Most women are expected to have good hair," said William Yates, a Chicago-based certified hair loss surgeon. "They're well aware that men lose their hair and 'bald gracefully,' so to speak, but a female losing their hair is devastating."

The condition also tends to hit people when they are relatively young. Most are diagnosed before age 40, and about half of them are children when the disorder first appears, said Christopher English, a board-certified dermatologist for Intermountain Healthcare in Salt Lake City.

Having the condition is especially tough for teenagers, for whom appearance anxiety and peer pressure are often already at an all-time high, said Gary Sherwood, communications director at the National Alopecia Areata Foundation.

Rio Allred, a 12-year-old girl with the disorder, took her own life after being bullied at school in Indiana. Her mother appeared on "Red Table Talk" to talk about the loss less than two weeks before the Oscars.

Some studies have also pointed to the disease being more prevalent among Black and Latino people, Sherwood and Yates said. The National Institutes of Health states it affects all racial and ethnic groups, men and women.

Rock's joke was "not unusual," Sherwood said. "This has been around as long as there have been humans on Earth ... for centuries people would not talk about it."

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO HAVE ALOPECIA?

Rock's joke was tough to hear for New York interior designer Sheila Bridges.

She spoke to Rock for his 2009 documentary "Good Hair" about the importance of hair in Black culture.

For many Black Americans, grooming and styling choices are intertwined with a desire to buck what is considered normal or acceptable by wider society. From Afros and cornrows to wigs and hair extensions, Black hair can be more than just style statements.

In her interview, Bridges talked about the shame and humiliation of losing her hair to the disease, how her hairstyle is intertwined with her racial identity and how the loss of her hair affected her sense of femininity and social currency.

The Oscars slap left Bridges with conflicting emotions: She condemned Smith's assault on Rock, sympathized with Pinkett Smith and was deeply disappointed in Rock.

"It is not easy as a woman to navigate life without any hair and a society that is obsessed with hair," Bridges said.

She doesn't wear wigs because she doesn't want to, and also hopes to normalize and de-stigmatize the appearance of bald women.

But even a decade after she decided to go bald in public, Bridges said it's still difficult for some to accept: "I rarely make it through the week without someone saying something that's very, very insensitive."

Hair in general can already be a fraught landscape for Black women, who have been expected for generations to alter their natural hair texture to fit a white standard of beauty. Black women are 80% more likely to change their natural hair to meet social norms at work, according to a 2019 study by the Dove

personal care division of the Unilever USA company.

Black students are also far more likely than other students to be suspended for dress code or hair violations, according to the research that helped convince the U.S. House to vote to prohibit discrimination based on natural hairstyles in March.

"The only good thing that can come out of all this is that alopecia is front and center," Bridges said about the Oscars slap.

Leader of now-defunct Colombian drug cartel dies in US jail

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela, an elderly leader of the former Cali cartel that smuggled vast amounts of cocaine from Colombia to the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, has died in a U.S. prison, his lawyer said Wednesday.

In 2020, a judge had denied Rodríguez Orejuela, who was in his 80s, early release on compassionate grounds from a prison in Butner, North Carolina. His attorney, David O. Markus, had said at the time that the former drug kingpin was suffering a range of health problems.

"We were very sad to learn about his passing last night. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family at this time," Markus said Wednesday.

"God has a new chess partner," the lawyer said, referring to Rodríguez Orejuela's reputation for outsmarting his enemies and rivals, for which he earned the nickname "the chess player."

Rodríguez Orejuela and his brother, Miguel, built a huge criminal enterprise that succeeded the Medellín cartel once run by drug lord Pablo Escobar. Both operations used violence and killings extensively for intimidation and enforcement.

The Rodríguez Orejuela brothers were captured in 1995 and imprisoned in Colombia. At that point, Colombian law prohibited the extradition of its nationals. But under pressure from the U.S., Colombia lifted that ban in 1997.

The brothers were found to have been continuing to traffic from prison and criminal charges were filed in Miami and New York. In 2004, Gilberto was extradited; Miguel was extradited the next year.

Under a 2006 plea deal that the brothers reached with federal prosecutors in Miami, more than two dozen family members were removed from a U.S. Treasury Department list designating them as part of the Cali cartel. That spared some of them from prosecution for obstruction of justice or money laundering and also allowed legitimate family businesses in Colombia to continue operating.

Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela's prison release date had been scheduled for Feb. 9 2030. His younger brother, is serving his sentence at a Pennsylvania prison.

Perhaps the biggest legacy of the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers was their ability to quietly corrupt Colombian politics, delivering shoeboxes of cash to Ernesto Samper's campaign prior to his 1994 election as president and buying off much of Congress. While painted in the popular press as less violent than Pablo Escobar and the Medellín cartel, the Rodríguez Orejuelas brothers were later accused of paying off journalists to suppress news of Cali cartel-related killings.

New ranks of narcos quickly replaced the Cali cartel leaders after their arrest and extradition. Many of those successors became leaders of far-right military bands that the U.S. placed on its international terror group list in 2001.

Pressure growing to remove PFAS from fast food wrappers

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Brenda Hampton first came across the toxic industrial compound PFAS after finding it was part of the cocktail of contaminants that tainted the drinking water in her North Alabama community.

Hampton, who believes the contaminated water contributed to kidney problems she and other residents suffer, soon learned the chemicals were found in another source that hit close to home — fast food wrappers, boxes and plates.

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Knowing her three daughters and eight grandchildren ate their share of burgers and fries, she joined the national fight in 2020 to ban PFAS in food packaging.

"Everybody is eating fast food. Fast food is selling everywhere. No one has time to cook anymore," said Hampton who teamed with the environmental health advocacy group Toxic-Free Future to spearhead a petition drive last year that collected nearly 75,000 signatures. McDonald's later announced it would remove PFAS from all its packaging.

Environmental and health groups are pushing dozens of fast food companies, supermarkets chains and other retail outlets to remove PFAS chemicals from their packaging. Known as "forever chemicals" for their persistence in the environment, they have been used for decades to prevent grease, water and other liquids from soaking through wrappers, boxes and bags.

Opponents of the practice argue the packaging poses a danger to consumers as well as the environment, since the waste ends up in landfills. In compost or is incinerated where the chemicals can leach into groundwater or soil. They contend there are safer alternatives.

Several groups have maintained that many major brands use packaging with PFAS and that testing at times showed extremely high levels.

A 2017 study by the Massachusetts-based nonprofit research organization Silent Spring Institute found PFAS in almost half of paper wrappers and 20% of boxes from 27 fast food outlets. Tests by Toxic-Free Future in 2018 produced similar results. And, this year, Consumer Reports found eight restaurants, including McDonald's, Burger King and Cava, had packaging that had more than 100 parts per million of fluorine, which indicates likely presence of PFAS.

"One of the concerns is that, especially with the pandemic, we've seen just this huge increase in food packaging, delivery, takeout," said Sheela Sathyanarayana, a professor of pediatrics at the University of Washington and Seattle Children's Research Institute whose 2021 study found 16 different PFAS chemicals in the breast milk of mothers.

"We have much, much higher potential for exposure to these kinds of chemicals to everybody in the population, not just certain segments of the population," she said. "Basically eating or drinking is one of the biggest sources of exposure."

Tom Flanagan, a spokesman for the American Chemistry Council, said his group supports the Food and Drug Administration's agreement with several manufacturers to voluntarily phase out some PFAS chemicals used in substances applied to food packaging. But his group opposes what he described as "unscientific, 'one-size-fits-all' restrictions on the entire class of PFAS chemistries."

"The mere presence of PFAS does not indicate a health risk," Flanagan said. "All PFAS are not the same. Individual chemistries have different uses, as well as environmental and health profiles."

Studies have linked PFAS exposure to increased cancer risk, developmental delays in children, damage to organs such as the liver and thyroid, increased cholesterol levels and reduced immune functions, especially among young children, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Less studied are health hazards from PFAS in packaging, where the chemicals give material a reflective sheen.

A 2019 study by Silent Spring Institute found people who ate at home had on average lower PFAS levels in their blood than those who ate fast food or ate more frequently at restaurants including pizza places. FDA studies of rodents also found that some PFAS chemicals in grease-resistant paper can bioaccumulate in the body.

However, there are few guidelines about what levels of PFAS in food packaging, if any, are potentially harmful.

The EPA only sets a voluntary health advisory level of 70 parts per trillion for two PFAS chemicals in drinking water. The FDA, which regulates use of certain PFAS chemicals in food packaging, came out in 2020 with a three-year, voluntary phase-out program. The agency is reviewing a petition from environmental groups calling for a PFAS ban in food packaging.

In the U.S., only California sets a limit of 100 parts per million of total fluorine in food packaging.

The absence of federal standards has shifted the fight over PFAS in food packaging to state legislatures.

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California, Washington, Vermont, Connecticut, Maryland, Maine, Minnesota and New York have passed bills banning PFAS from being purposely added to food packaging, according to the advocacy group Safer States.

Seven other states are considering similar legislation. Federal legislation has also been introduced.

In Vermont, the push to ban PFAS in packaging was inspired by findings that the chemicals had contaminated some of the state's drinking water. As a result, the legislature passed a bill last year banning PFAS and other chemicals including bisphenols and phthalates in food packaging as well as in carpeting, ski wax and firefighting foam.

"Most people just look at the tissue paper around their sandwich and they think I got my sandwich. But the reality is that the coating on that sandwich paper is PFAS," said the bill's author, Democratic state Sen. Ginny Lyons. "It's not very much chemical but if you eat a lot of wrapped sandwich and use a lot of paper plates over time that chemical accumulates in the body and can cause cancer or other disorders."

The regulations have coincided with bans announced by some of the largest restaurants and retailers.

Fourteen fast-food and fast-casual restaurant chains with a total of nearly 124,000 stores and over \$203.2 billion in annual sales have committed to removing PFAS from their food packaging, according the Toxic-Free Future. Among them are McDonald's, Starbucks and Whole Foods. Restaurant Brands International, which owns Burger King, Popeyes and Tim Horton, also plans to eliminate PFAS.

"If there are harmful chemicals in food packaging, people get that those chemicals can migrate into food," said Mike Schade, who directs Toxic-Free Future's market transformation work. "This is something that really resonates with consumers."

None of the companies have referenced health concerns in announcing their PFAS bans. Instead, most stated a desire to use sustainable packaging or said a ban was the right thing to do. A spokesperson for Whole Foods said many factors went into its decision, including that PFAS was a "persistent environmental contaminant."

The challenge now will be for these companies to find safer alternatives. Environmental groups are urging companies to switch to safer alternatives such as uncoated paper, bamboo or plastic derived from corn starch or sugar cane — and alternative coatings including bio-wax or clay.

Washington must first find safer alternatives exist before the state's ban takes effect in the next two years. Its assessments found there are alternatives for all takeout containers.

"Manufacturers can replace PFAS in their food packaging, which will protect people and the environment from these harmful chemicals," said Lauren Tamboer, a spokesperson for the Washington Department of Ecology.

Africans see inequity in monkeypox response elsewhere

By MARIA CHENG and CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

OSUN, Nigeria (AP) — As health authorities in Europe and elsewhere roll out vaccines and drugs to stamp out the biggest monkeypox outbreak beyond Africa, some doctors acknowledge an ugly reality: The resources to slow the disease's spread have long been available, just not to the Africans who have dealt with it for decades.

Countries including Britain, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Switzerland, the United States, Israel and Australia have reported more than 500 monkeypox cases, many apparently tied to sexual activity at two recent raves in Europe. No deaths have been reported.

Authorities in numerous European countries and the U.S. are offering to immunize people and considering the use of antivirals. On Thursday, the World Health Organization will convene a special meeting to discuss monkeypox research priorities and related issues.

Meanwhile, the African continent has reported about three times as many cases this year.

There have been more than 1,400 monkeypox cases and 63 deaths in four countries where the disease is endemic — Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo and Nigeria — according to the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. So far, sequencing has not yet shown any direct link to the outbreak

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outside Africa, health officials say.

Monkeypox is in the same family of viruses as smallpox, and smallpox vaccines are estimated to be about 85% effective against monkeypox, according to WHO.

Since identifying cases earlier this month, Britain has vaccinated more than 1,000 people at risk of contracting the virus and bought 20,000 more doses. European Union officials are in talks to buy more smallpox vaccine from Bavarian Nordic, the maker of the only such vaccine licensed in Europe.

U.S. government officials have released about 700 doses of vaccine to states where cases were reported.

Such measures aren't routinely employed in Africa.

Dr. Adesola Yinka-Ogunleye, who leads Nigeria's monkeypox working group, said there are currently no vaccines or antivirals being used against monkeypox in her country. People suspected of having monkeypox are isolated and treated conservatively, while their contacts are monitored, she said.

Generally, Africa has only had "small stockpiles" of smallpox vaccine to offer health workers when monkeypox outbreaks happen, said Ahmed Ogbwell, acting director of the Africa CDC.

Limited vaccine supply and competing health priorities have meant that immunization against monkeypox hasn't been widely pursued in Africa, said Dr. Jimmy Whitworth, a professor of international public health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

"It's a bit uncomfortable that we have a different attitude to the kinds of resources we deploy depending on where cases are," he said. "It exposes a moral failing when those interventions aren't available for the millions of people in Africa who need them."

WHO has 31 million doses of smallpox vaccines, mostly kept in donor countries and intended as a rapid response to any re-emergence of the disease, which was declared eradicated in 1980. Doses from the U.N. health agency's stockpile have never been released for any monkeypox outbreaks in central or western Africa.

Dr. Mike Ryan, WHO's emergencies chief, said the agency was considering allowing rich countries to use the smallpox vaccines to try to limit the spread of monkeypox. WHO manages similar mechanisms to help poor countries get vaccines for diseases like yellow fever and meningitis, but such efforts have not been previously used for countries that can otherwise afford shots.

Oyewale Tomori, a Nigerian virologist who sits on several WHO advisory boards, said releasing smallpox vaccines from the agency's stockpile to stop monkeypox from becoming endemic in richer countries might be warranted, but he noted a discrepancy in WHO's strategy.

"A similar approach should have been adopted a long time ago to deal with the situation in Africa," he said. "This is another example of where some countries are more equal than others."

Some doctors pointed out that stalled efforts to understand monkeypox were now complicating efforts to treat patients. Most people experience symptoms including fever, chills and fatigue. But those with more serious disease often develop a rash on their face or hands that spreads elsewhere.

Dr. Hugh Adler and colleagues recently published a paper suggesting the antiviral drug tecovirimat could help fight monkeypox. The drug, approved in the U.S. to treat smallpox, was used in seven people infected with monkeypox in the U.K. from 2018 to 2021, but more details are needed for regulatory approval.

"If we had thought about getting this data before, we wouldn't be in this situation now where we have a potential treatment without enough evidence," said Adler, a research fellow at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.

Many diseases only attracted significant money after infecting people from rich countries, he noted.

For example, it was only after the catastrophic Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014-2016 — when several Americans were sickened by the disease among the more than 28,000 cases in Africa — that authorities finally sped up the research and protocols to license an Ebola vaccine, capping a decades-long effort.

At a press briefing on Wednesday, WHO's Ryan said the agency was worried about the continued spread of monkeypox in rich countries and was evaluating how it could help stem the disease's transmission there.

"I certainly didn't hear that same level of concern over the last five or ten years," he said, referring to the repeated epidemics of monkeypox in Africa, when thousands of people in the continent's central and western parts were sickened by the disease.

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Jay Chudi, a development expert who lives in the Nigerian state of Enugu, which has reported monkeypox cases since 2017, hopes the increased attention might finally help address the problem. But he nevertheless lamented that it took infections in rich countries for it to seem possible.

"You would think the new cases are deadlier and more dangerous than what we have in Africa," he said. "We are now seeing it can end once and for all, but because it is no longer just in Africa. It's now everybody is worried."

Biden's ex daughter-in-law opens up about marriage to Hunter

WASHINGTON (AP) — Kathleen Buhle, the ex-wife of President Joe Biden's son Hunter, says she has "total control over my life now," five years after her divorce, as she opens up about her marriage in a new memoir.

Buhle describes her ex-husband's drug addiction, her response to his infidelity — including an affair with her widowed sister-in-law — and her challenges integrating into the Biden family. Excerpts of "If We Break" were published Wednesday by People magazine.

In the book, Buhle describes the pain she felt watching Hunter spiral into addiction, even as he denied it, and how "it became my own addiction" to document it. She writes that the couple separated not long after Beau Biden's 2015 death from brain cancer, when Buhle found a crack pipe in their ashtray.

Buhle said she found out about Hunter Biden's affair with Hallie Biden, Beau's widow, in Nov. 2016, after her daughters asked the family's therapist to tell her.

"I was shocked, but not heartbroken. Heartbreak has already flatted my self-esteem that past year," she writes. She says her daughters discovered the relationship when searching through texts on Hunter's phone.

Buhle told People that she and Hunter "come together in our shared love for our daughters," as they prepare for their eldest daughter Naomi's wedding at the White House this November.

While Hunter's finances are under investigation by the Justice Department, Buhle told People that "I couldn't be of any help," adding, "I kept my head so deeply buried in the sand on our finances."

After Biden became President Barack Obama's vice president in 2008, Buhle writes experiencing "one frequent reminder I wasn't a true Biden," when a Secret Service agent informed the family that her then-husband and daughters would receive round-the-clock protection, but not her.

Buhle, in 2019, legally reclaimed her maiden name, which she said once felt like a "crown and shield to me."

"I was no longer a Biden," she writes. "I'd handed in my crown and shield because I no longer needed them. Maybe I never had."

Today in History: June 2, Timothy McVeigh convicted

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, June 2, the 153rd day of 2022. There are 212 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 2, 1997, Timothy McVeigh was convicted of murder and conspiracy in the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City that killed 168 people. (McVeigh was executed in June 2001.)

On this date:

In 1924, Congress passed, and President Calvin Coolidge signed, a measure guaranteeing full American citizenship for all Native Americans born within U.S. territorial limits.

In 1941, baseball's "Iron Horse," Lou Gehrig, died in New York of a degenerative disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis; he was 37.

In 1953, the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II took place in London's Westminster Abbey, 16 months after the death of her father, King George VI.

In 1961, playwright and director George S. Kaufman, 71, died in New York.

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In 1962, Soviet forces opened fire on striking workers in the Russian city of Novocherkassk; a retired general in 1989 put the death toll at 22 to 24.

In 1966, U.S. space probe Surveyor 1 landed on the moon and began transmitting detailed photographs of the lunar surface.

In 1979, Pope John Paul II arrived in his native Poland on the first visit by a pope to a Communist country.

In 1981, the Japanese video arcade game "Donkey Kong" was released by Nintendo.

In 1999, South Africans went to the polls in their second post-apartheid election, giving the African National Congress a decisive victory; retiring president Nelson Mandela was succeeded by Thabo Mbeki (TAH'-boh um-BEH'-kee).

In 2011, a judge in Placerville, California, sentenced serial sex offender Phillip Garrido to life in prison for kidnapping and raping Jaycee Dugard; Garrido's wife, Nancy, received a decades-long sentence.

In 2016, autopsy results showed superstar musician Prince died of an accidental overdose of fentanyl, a powerful opioid painkiller.

In 2020, defying curfews, protesters streamed back into the nation's streets, hours after President Donald Trump urged governors to put down the violence set off by the death of George Floyd. Police said four officers were hit by gunfire after protests in St. Louis that began peacefully became violent. The bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington sharply criticized Trump for staging a visit to St. John's Church across from the White House after authorities had cleared the area of peaceful protesters. Mayors and governors from both parties rejected Trump's threat to use the military against protesters.

Ten years ago: Ousted Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was sentenced to life in prison after a court convicted him on charges of complicity in the killing of protesters during the 2011 uprising that forced him from power (Mubarak was later acquitted and freed in March 2017; he died in February 2020). Richard Dawson, 79, a British-born entertainer who made his mark in the 1960s television sitcom "Hogan's Heroes" and later became a popular TV game show host, died in Los Angeles.

Five years ago: Environmental campaigners protested President Donald Trump's decision to pull the United States out of the Paris climate accord, while nations around the world pledged to double down on their efforts to curb global warming. Three former Penn State administrators were handed jail and house-arrest sentences ranging up to nearly two years for burying child sexual abuse allegations against Jerry Sandusky.

One year ago: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's opponents announced that they had reached a deal to form a new governing coalition, paving the way for the ouster of the longtime Israeli leader. The NFL pledged to stop the use of "race-norming" in a \$1 billion settlement of brain injury claims; the practice had made it harder for Black players to show a deficit and qualify for an award. Trainer Bob Baffert was suspended for two years by the Churchill Downs racetrack in Louisville, Kentucky, after an additional drug test of Kentucky Derby winner Medina Spirit confirmed the presence of a steroid. (Medina Spirit was later disqualified from his Derby victory; the colt collapsed and died in December 2021 following a training run at Santa Anita.) Duke University basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski (shuh-SHEF'-skee) announced that the next season would be his last with the Blue Devils.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Ron Ely (EE'-lee) is 84. Filmmaker and movie historian Kevin Brownlow is 84. Actor Stacy Keach is 81. Actor Charles Haid is 79. R&B singer Chubby Tavares (Tavares) is 78. Movie director Lasse (LAH'-suh) Hallstrom is 76. Actor Jerry Mathers is 74. Actor Joanna Gleason is 72. NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman is 70. Actor Dennis Haysbert is 68. Comedian Dana Carvey is 67. Actor Gary Grimes is 67. Pop musician Michael Steele is 67. Rock singer Tony Hadley (Spandau Ballet) is 62. Actor Liam Cunningham is 61. Actor Navid Negahban is 58. Singer Merrill Bainbridge is 54. TV personality-producer Andy Cohen ("The Real Housewives" TV franchise) is 54. Rapper B-Real (Cypress Hill) is 52. Actor Paula Cale is 52. Actor Anthony Montgomery is 51. Actor-comedian Wayne Brady is 50. Actor Wentworth Miller is 50. Rock musician Tim Rice-Oxley (Keane) is 46. Actor Zachary Quinto is 45. Actor Dominic Cooper is 44. Actor Nikki Cox is 44. Actor Justin Long is 44. Actor Deon Richmond is 44. Actor Morena Baccarin is 43. R&B singer Irish Grinstead (702) is 42. Rock musician Fabrizio Moretti (The Strokes) is 42. Olympic gold medal soccer player Abby Wambach is 42. Singer-songwriter ZZ Ward is 36. Rapper/actor Awkwafina is 34. Actor Brittany Curran is 32. Actor Sterling Beaumon is 27.