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Friday, June 3

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

Saturday, June 4

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

Aberdeen U10 Tournament

Saturday

8:00 Groton vs Bath

10:00 Pheasants vs Jamestown

12:00 Groton vs Huron

2:00 Pheasants vs West Fargo

4:00 Huron vs Bath

6:00 Jamestown vs West Fargo

Sunday, 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.

Aberdeen U10 Tournament

8:00 #3 pool A vs #3 Pool B

10:00 #1 pool A vs #2 pool B

12:00 #1 pool B vs #2 pool A

2:00 championship game

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



Monday, 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

Tuesday, June 7

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

Senior Menu: Breaded codfish, parsley buttered potatoes, creamy coleslaw, fruit, whole wheat bread.

5:30 p.m.: Jr. Legion hosts Milbank, DH

5:30 p.m.: U12 vs. Hannigan in Aberdeen (north complex), DH

5:30 p.m.: U10 vs. Hannigan in Aberdeen (north complex), DH (W/B)

5:30 p.m.: U8 vs. Hannigan in Aberdeen (north complex), DH (W/B)

6 p.m.: U12 SB hosts Britton, Falk Field, DH

6 p.m.: T-Ball practice

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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SOCIAL SECURITY ANNUAL UPDATE

The Social Security Board of Trustees today released its annual report on the financial status of the Social Security Trust Funds. The combined asset reserves of the Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Disability Insurance (OASI and DI) Trust Funds are projected to become depleted in 2035, one year later than projected last year, with 80 percent of benefits payable at that time.

The OASI Trust Fund is projected to become depleted in 2034, one year later than last year's estimate, with 77 percent of benefits payable at that time. The DI Trust Fund asset reserves are not projected to become depleted during the 75-year projection period.

In the 2022 Annual Report to Congress, the Trustees announced:

- The asset reserves of the combined OASI and DI Trust Funds declined by \$56 billion in 2021 to a total of \$2.852 trillion.
- The total annual cost of the program is projected to exceed total annual income in 2022 and remain higher throughout the 75-year projection period. Total cost began to be higher than total income in 2021. Social Security's cost has exceeded its non-interest income since 2010.
- The year when the combined trust fund reserves are projected to become depleted, if Congress does not act before then, is 2035 – one year later than last year's projection. At that time, there would be sufficient income coming in to pay 80 percent of scheduled benefits.

"It is important to strengthen Social Security for future generations. The Trustees recommend that lawmakers address the projected trust fund shortfalls in a timely way in order to phase in necessary changes gradually," said Kilolo Kijakazi, Acting Commissioner of Social Security. "Social Security will continue to be a vital part of the lives of 66 million beneficiaries and 182 million workers and their families during 2022."

Other highlights of the Trustees Report include:

- Total income, including interest, to the combined OASI and DI Trust Funds amounted to \$1.088 trillion in 2021. (\$980.6 billion from net payroll tax contributions, \$37.6 billion from taxation of benefits, and \$70.1 billion in interest)
- Total expenditures from the combined OASI and DI Trust Funds amounted to nearly \$1.145 trillion in 2021.
- Social Security paid benefits of \$1.133 trillion in calendar year 2021. There were about 65 million beneficiaries at the end of the calendar year.
- The projected actuarial deficit over the 75-year long-range period is 3.42 percent of taxable payroll – lower than the 3.54 percent projected in last year's report.
- During 2021, an estimated 179 million people had earnings covered by Social Security and paid payroll taxes.
- The cost of \$6.5 billion to administer the Social Security program in 2021 was a very low 0.6 percent of total expenditures.
- The combined Trust Fund asset reserves earned interest at an effective annual rate of 2.5 percent in 2021.

The Board of Trustees usually comprises six members. Four serve by virtue of their positions with the federal government: Janet Yellen, Secretary of the Treasury and Managing Trustee; Kilolo Kijakazi, Acting Commissioner of Social Security; Xavier Becerra, Secretary of Health and Human Services; and Martin J. Walsh, Secretary of Labor. The two public trustee positions are currently vacant.

View the 2022 Trustees Report at www.socialsecurity.gov/OACT/TR/2022/.



Teachers in S.D. endure new stress as politics and culture war seep into classrooms

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch



Jason Connelly

Jason Connelly is exactly the kind of young educator the South Dakota public school system would love to add to its depleted teacher workforce.

Connelly grew up in Sioux Falls and attended Catholic schools before pursuing a history and teaching degree at Augustana University, which he obtained this year.

Connelly did his student teaching at Roosevelt High School in Sioux Falls, and said he “loved every second of it.” He was welcomed by teachers at Roosevelt and felt supported by the principal. The Augustana professor who oversaw Connelly’s student teaching tenure said he did a great job in the classroom and was loved by his students.

And yet, Connelly recently told News Watch that “South Dakota is not on my radar for teaching positions.”

The 22-year-old is undeterred by issues that have plagued South Dakota’s K-12 system for years: comparatively low teacher salaries, large class sizes, low state funding levels and mediocre academic achievement by many students.

Instead, Connelly is turned off by a new assault on public education in South Dakota — an increasing politicization of education, heightened criticism of what is taught and how, and the influence of the ongoing culture wars. The scrutiny has created a new source of stress and disillusionment among new and veteran classroom teachers.

Teachers across the state have watched as lawmakers have tried to regulate how transgender students are treated in sports and their use of bathrooms. They have seen Republican Gov. Kristi Noem ban the teaching of critical race theory, even though it is not taught in South Dakota public schools and rarely if ever in state universities.

They saw the state Department of Education make last-minute changes that removed references to Native American culture and history in social studies standards that were developed over several months by a group of nearly 50 interested citizens. They noted how the second-largest school district in the state sought to ban and destroy books that some administrators found offensive. And they have felt increased pressure from parents, administrators and school boards to influence how and what they teach or even how their classrooms are decorated.

Connelly and some education experts in South Dakota say teachers have increasingly felt the pull of politics and government interference in the classroom, and it has made a challenging job almost unbearable for many.

With each passing week, Connelly said discussions in the teacher’s lounge at Roosevelt turned away from sharing ideas and highlighting classroom successes and shifted more to worry and stress about what teachers felt safe to teach and how to avoid criticism or chastisement.

During his time at the school, Connelly said he saw increasing concern among teachers that they weren’t trusted — or that they were even seen as trying to influence students in negative ways.

That increasing stress is being fueled by political rhetoric at both the state and local levels that questions the intentions and even the morals of classroom teachers, Connelly said.

"I definitely do think it is political, and I think that their fears are unwarranted," Connelly said. "No teacher is trying to indoctrinate students one way or the other. If we were going to indoctrinate them, it would be to get their homework done first and foremost."

Simply put, the current political and cultural landscape in South Dakota public education has turned Connelly away from considering teaching jobs in his home state.

"My girlfriend and I have discussed it, and we don't want to go to a state or live in a state that is going to limit my ability to teach," he said. "I do feel sad because every teacher, we do this for the kids, and unfortunately it's an entire state of kids who are being left to the wind. They're going to suffer as far as their education goes because they're missing out on good teachers."

Connelly is far from alone in his sentiments, and his sadness.

In fact, some experts in the South Dakota education system say that if the criticism and micromanaging of teachers continues, and K-12 education continues to be politicized, the very fabric of public education in the state, and indeed across the nation, may begin to unravel.

"At this point, I fear for all of public education," said Rob Monson, executive director of the School Administrators of South Dakota, an umbrella association of public school leaders. "The continual attacks we're seeing are a detriment to our profession and what we can provide to students. In my humble opinion, this country was built on public education and we're a successful country because of public education. If we ever lose that, we've lost it all."

'What are people so afraid of?'

Some recent estimates put the number of open teaching positions in South Dakota at more than 500, well above previous years and a clear indicator of an extreme shortage that is affecting school districts in urban areas and small towns.

South Dakota Secretary of Education Tiffany Sanderson said in an email to News Watch that, "I deeply appreciate and admire South Dakota teachers. They devote their professional lives to instructing, encouraging, and inspiring our young people to be their best."

Sanderson added that the state is taking steps to recruit and retain teachers through programs that encourage high school students to take an interest in teaching. The state, she said, is also offering flexibility in how teachers are certified and reciprocity that allows teachers from other states to easily transition into South Dakota.

And yet, such efforts may fall short if teachers continue to feel as though they are under attack and must endure increasing stress from outside the classroom.

After more than 40 years working in public education in South Dakota, Sharon Andrews has never seen such a hard time to be a teacher.

Andrews was a public school teacher early in her career, and has spent the last 33 years at Augustana



Lead-Deadwood Elementary School counselor Amanda Bender holds up a "Safe Space" sign during a recent school board meeting. The sign led to a proposed policy in the Lead-Deadwood schools that would regulate how teachers can decorate or adorn their classrooms. Photo: Courtesy Jaci Conrad Pearson, Black Hills Pioneer

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Sharon Andrews

University, where she is an associate professor of education and director of the Teacher Education Program. Her parents were both educators and her stepdaughter is a teacher in Rapid City.

At Augustana, Andrews teaches prospective teachers but also helps students prepare for the classroom by overseeing their student-teaching experiences.

South Dakota has long faced challenges in attracting new teachers, Andrews said, mainly due to low pay compared with neighboring states, the high number of rural districts and large class sizes. Upheaval during the COVID-19 pandemic and remote teaching added new stresses, and now some teachers are feeling less safe in schools due to shootings and other violence targeted at schools, teachers and students.

But the recent criticism of public education and political rhetoric regarding curriculum has added a new, additional deterrent to those considering teaching.

"It's almost a culture of fear on some level, and I guess I really don't know what people are so afraid of."

-- Sharon Andrews,
education professor at Augustana University

Andrews said the politicization of public education and the near-constant drumbeat of criticism and lack of trust of teachers is pushing some prospective teachers away from the profession and prompting some veteran educators to leave the classroom.

"It seems like the focus is so far off where it should be," Andrews said. "We should be more focused on good pedagogy and class size and learning, but yet it seems like we're focused on these peripheral issues."

Andrews said every time lawmakers or state officials debate which bathrooms transgender students should use, attempt to influence whether Native American history should be taught, or try to prevent students from being exposed to potentially divisive issues, it puts fear and worry into teachers who are on the front lines of education and they become less willing to push students to think critically.

"We talk a lot about helping our high school students learn how to learn, but how do you analyze texts, look at both sides of an issue and come to an informed position or stance without discussing touchy topics? It's almost a culture of fear on some level, and I guess I really don't know what people are so afraid of."

Andrews said every spring and summer she gets calls from school districts asking for help hiring new teachers from Augustana. But recently, the requests that used to come once a month are coming several times a week due to the growing shortage of teachers in South Dakota.

"It's really troubling," she said. "We're seeing veteran teachers getting their resumes updated because they're questioning the whole idea of what's going on, that if I say something in the classroom that someone doesn't like, that this might play out in a different way."

The recent negativity in South Dakota has cast a pall over the entire public education system, she said.

"It breaks my heart when I see students who finish our program and decide that they're going to do something else because they can make more money or they don't want to deal with oversized classrooms or are feeling like they have no autonomy in the classroom to make decisions they've been trained in or to do things they've dreamed of doing in their careers," she said.

Andrews said current and prospective teachers are also feeling uneasy about what seems to be a sea change toward top-down oversight in a state that has long prided itself on promoting local control of schools.

"It doesn't help when people are feeling like, 'Why would I want to be a teacher if everyone is going to be looking at everything I say or do?'" she said. "We seem to be trying to remove some things from our schools or to filter them in some way. When you add these oppressive issues or forces, people are just saying that's not something I want to get into as a profession."

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Andrews said the turmoil in public education in South Dakota and across America sometimes prompts her to recall her study of public education in Finland, where teachers are given great autonomy in the classroom and where students are taught to develop critical thinking skills.

"There's an old saying that basically goes, 'You can't be free and civilized if you're illiterate,'" Andrews said.



Jacqueline Sly

The loss of local control, or even the perception of that loss, has been a growing factor in education since the early 2000s when the federal government enacted the No Child Left Behind standards and has continued ever since, according to longtime educator Jacqueline Sly of Rapid City.

Sly, 74, spent 37 years as a classroom teacher before retiring and serving four terms as a Republican member of the state House of Representatives and almost five years on the South Dakota Board of Education Standards. Sly was chair of the standards commission until this spring when Gov. Noem declined to reappoint her to another term. Sly said she never spoke to Noem about the change and was not given an explanation for her removal.

The interference of state and federal officials in local school districts creates uncertainty that makes it harder to be a teacher, Sly said. She is also well aware of the increasing attacks on teachers and schools and is concerned over the potential long-term consequences.

"I think that's how teachers are feeling right now, uncertain and worried, because they don't know what they can do or what they can't do without fear of someone coming after them or suing them," Sly said. "It makes the job very difficult and

that is why people are leaving, the uncertainty and questioning, 'Can I make it five more years, or one more year, or do I have to find another profession?'"

Sly said the situation is reaching a crisis level in South Dakota because fewer students are studying to be teachers and many who enter the field do not stay long.

"I think that the undermining of public education is a great fear," she said. "In the long run, I'm thinking about my own grandchildren; who's going to teach them?"

Teacher shortage worsening

South Dakota has faced a shortage of qualified teachers for at least the past decade. Teacher openings rose in the mid-2010s in part because the state was consistently last or near the bottom in average teacher pay. A half-cent sales tax hike implemented in 2016 boosted average teacher pay and hiring picked up.

But the past two years have seen the state fall again in average teacher-salary rankings. Meanwhile, many education experts say the introduction of politics and cultural issues into public education have made the profession less attractive and has also led to more early retirements or shifting to other career fields.

In April 2021, the Association of Schools Board teacher placement center listed about 550 openings for teachers, about 200 more openings than were listed in April 2017. In May 2022, about 520 open teaching positions were listed by the placement center.

According to a survey of teachers in late 2021, conducted by the South Dakota Education Association, roughly a third of the 1,000 respondents said state and local political issues were adding to their job stress.

"This is the first time we have seen politics really register as a concern for educators," said Sandra Waltman, spokeswoman for the SDEA, in an email to News Watch. "Unfortunately, the culture-war issues are causing division in some communities and schools. When educators are already overwhelmed because they are taking on more due to a lack of staff, strife over these issues certainly doesn't help the situation."

Waltman added that the political and cultural rhetoric surrounding public education in South Dakota is taking the focus away from the primary goals of education: teaching, inspiring and preparing the next generation of South Dakotans.

"At a time when parents, communities and educators should be working together to make sure our schools have the necessary resources and staff to meet the needs of students, many are focusing on non-issues that only lead to more division," Waltman wrote.

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Increased stress is affecting teachers across the country and exacerbating a nationwide teacher shortage, according to a National Education Association poll in February 2022. The poll showed that 90% of responding teachers saw burnout as a serious problem, and that 55% said they expected to leave the education profession sooner than they had planned.

Local incidents fuel statewide concerns

Several incidents have made news in South Dakota recently regarding freedom of expression by classroom teachers or criticism of what takes place within public schools.

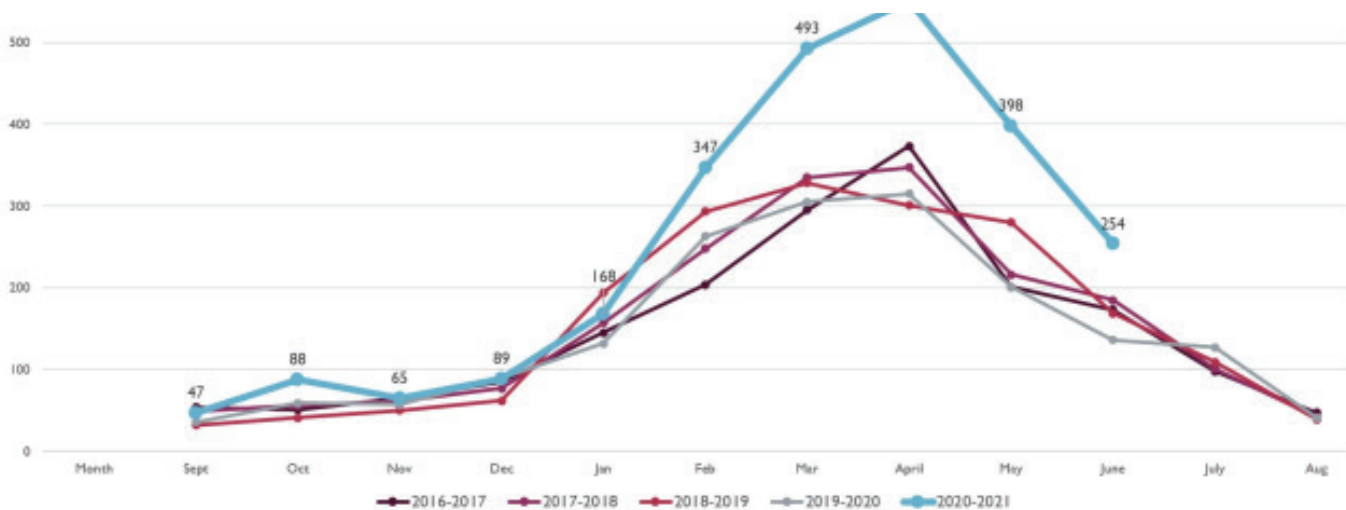
In May, a school board candidate in Rapid City sent out a four-page letter referring to "woke" teachers as "tyrants of the teacher's lounge" who forced students to wear masks and espouse "anti-American leftist propaganda."

Janyce Hockenbary sent the letter to potential voters, saying she was running for school board because "our schools have become sex education centers with a side of communism to boot." Hockenbary told the Rapid City Journal that she signed but did not write the letter in which she said she wants to protect students "from anyone that may want to harm them, whether physically or by stealing their hearts, minds and souls as they turn our schools into indoctrination centers."

The letter came out around the same time the incumbent school board in Rapid City considered removal of several books from use in classrooms that some administrators found objectionable. The books were targeted for destruction rather than for reuse elsewhere. The board delayed action on the books after local news reports uncovered the proposal and strong public reaction against the proposal followed.

In Wessington Springs, the school board has seen controversy arise over a math teacher who placed an "ally" magnet with rainbow colors on it in her classroom. The magnet was intended to indicate to students that they were welcomed and accepted regardless of their gender identity or sexuality. The teacher was forced to remove the magnet, which spurred a discussion on inclusivity and the rules regarding classroom decoration, according to the True Dakotan newspaper.

In Deadwood, the school board has begun consideration of new rules to determine what, if any, decorations should be allowed in classrooms. The proposal was prompted by display of so-called "safe space" signs, not unlike the magnet in Wessington Springs. The decoration proposal led to a crowded public hearing with 100 in attendance and 27 speakers, according to the Black Hills Pioneer (the policy remains



Source: Associated School Boards of South Dakota Teacher Placement Center

This chart shows the number of teacher openings listed by the Associated School Boards of South Dakota over the past five years. The blue line at the top is from 2020-21 and indicates about 550 teacher openings in April of 2021.

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under consideration).

Meanwhile, Gov. Noem and the South Dakota Legislature have enacted rules and laws banning the teaching of critical race theory, arguing that divisive concepts should not be taught to K-12 students or those in public colleges. Noem also signed an executive order in July 2021 banning the state DOE from applying for federal civics or history teaching grants that Noem said could be loosely tied to CRT.



Tiffany Sanderson

DOE Secretary Sanderson pointed out that the DOE develops education standards but does not set curriculum for individual K-12 schools or districts.

Sanderson added that the state will be inclusive when it comes to setting social studies standards, a process that was derailed in 2021 by protests over last-minute removal of language related to instruction of Native American history and culture. After the standards were approved by a working group of nearly 50 citizens, they were submitted to the state but were altered at that point to remove several references to continued teaching of Native American history and culture in public schools. After media attention and protests by Native groups, Noem halted the standards-approval process and started it anew in late 2021.

Some members of the original working group said the changes made by the state appeared political in nature, and were made to more closely align the standards with Noem's views that teaching of history should focus on the framers of the Constitution.

Paul Harens, a retired teacher who was a member of the social studies working group, told the Associated Press that the DOE changes seemed to align with "a political agenda" and that they would likely cause division within school boards across the state.

"The new document takes sides," Harens said. "They have turned it into a political football."

Sanderson wrote to News Watch that the second attempt at revising the standards will allow for significant public input.

"The Social Studies Content Standards Commission will work throughout the summer, and ultimately every voice in South Dakota who wishes to have a say in the setting of state social studies standards will get their chance through public hearings, and a public comment period, that will start later this year."

CRT: Real concern or just political rhetoric?

The debate over critical race theory — a somewhat complex and formerly obscure educational postulate — has taken on major significance in South Dakota and across the country over the past couple of years.

Gov. Noem did not answer questions submitted by News Watch for this article, but her spokesman, Ian Fury, did respond by sending an email with several press releases from the governor's office regarding her opposition to teaching of critical race theory in the state. Noem signed an executive order in April 2022 banning teaching of CRT in public schools, and in March 2022 signed a law banning CRT from being required teaching of college students.

"College should remain a place where freedom of thought and expression are encouraged, not stifled



Stanna Olinger, special education teacher at Wessington Spring Elementary School, spoke at a recent school board meeting in favor of greater inclusivity in schools after debate arose about what teachers can display in classrooms to welcome students of all backgrounds. "Human acceptance is what brings me here today," Olinger said. Photo: Courtesy of True

Dakotan newspaper

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by political agendas," Noem wrote at the time.

In announcing her executive order, Noem wrote that, "Our schools should teach our children our nation's true and honest history. They should teach about our successes in establishing a country that is a beacon of freedom to the world and our mistakes along the way. Our children should not, however, be taught the false and divisive message that they are responsible for the shortcomings of past generations and other members of our respective races."

The governor's focus on CRT mirrors the talking points of conservative leaders from across the country in opposition to CRT, even though there's little to no evidence CRT is being taught in K-12 schools or in college courses in South Dakota.

Before the past couple of years, and the conservative movement's demonization of critical race theory, CRT was a relatively little-known and somewhat hard-to-define academic construct that encourages the use of critical thinking in the examination of the intersection of identity and inequality from the perspective of historical racial injustice. CRT notes that racism can be embedded in America's legal and political systems.

Some educators in South Dakota say the rhetoric around CRT has done exactly the opposite of what the governor said in her statements — that in fact, the continued focus on CRT has stoked division in education at the local level and society as a whole by focusing on a problem that does not exist. Nationally, CRT is sometimes taught in high-level college courses but is almost nonexistent in K-12 teaching, including in South Dakota, according to education experts.

Barry Dunn, president of South Dakota State University, told the Argus Leader that when discussions of CRT first arose in South Dakota, he had to go online to Wikipedia to read about the theory because he was unfamiliar with it. Dunn told the newspaper that CRT is not the basis for teaching in public universities in South Dakota.

Monson, of the school administrators group, lobbied against anti-CRT legislation during the legislative session, pointing out that the educators he represents don't view "inherently divisive" curriculum or action civics as problems in their districts.

"People are trying to make this a crisis even though it's not," said Monson. "Our first question was: What are we trying to fix? Please tell us where this is happening. You end up with an issue that's 30,000 miles wide and only an inch deep."

For some education leaders, political debates about CRT take emphasis away from more pressing concerns in public education, including faltering standardized test scores during the COVID-19 pandemic or supplying enough teachers to fill classrooms and inspire students.

"It's a distraction," said Waltman of the South Dakota Education Association. "What our members really want politicians to focus on is ensuring that schools have the resources to make sure they have teachers in all the classrooms. It's been a tough couple of years with the pandemic and a shortage of educators. A lot of teachers are pulling double duty, which makes it harder to focus on what they want to do, which is teach kids."

She worries that finding qualified young educators who want to live and work in South Dakota could become more challenging if teachers are worried about restrictive laws or lesson plans.

"We need to create an environment where teachers explore the things that excite or interest their



The Rapid City Area Schools system has seen controversy arise over a proposal to ban and destroy some books and due to a school board candidate's inflammatory claims about teachers in a campaign flyer. Photo: Bart Pfankuch, South

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students, who have the freedom to learn and ask questions," said Waltman. "That's how you connect with kids and get them excited about learning. Unfortunately, Waltman said, some politicians want to create controversy, and in some cases, teachers are going to look at this and say, 'We're not going to touch on these subjects because it might be misconstrued as controversial.'"

Teaching still seen as worthy profession

Despite the sometimes-negative spotlight shone upon public education in recent years, Andrews said teaching can be a rewarding career, and that she is impressed with the attitudes and behaviors of both teachers and students each time she sits in on a classroom.

"There's a lot of good things going on in schools, and sometimes it's easy to ignore that," she said. "For the most part, kids are well behaved, and you've got really good teachers in schools who bend over every which way to care for and help their students. I just think there's a lot of mixed messages out there right now."

Sly said the recent attacks on education and educators in South Dakota is mostly coming from the extreme members of political parties or spectrum of political ideologies, in this case from the GOP, which has an ironclad majority across state government.

Sly remains hopeful that more-moderate legislators and politicians will ultimately prevail in the decision-making process and that "This too shall pass."

In the meantime, she urged people who are concerned about education to get involved in the political or legislative process, to run for school board, write letters to elected officials and make their voices heard. Parents can play a large role in improving the education of their children, she said.

"As parents, they are the vital ones who can really take a stand and go to their schools and share their concerns about what is happening or not happening," she said. "Not in a mean way, or by confronting, but just by sharing their concerns to come to an understanding."

Despite her concerns, Sly said she would still encourage young people to enter the teaching field.

"The reason I would recommend they go into education is because we need smart, strong people to go into education, or public education will not survive in South Dakota," she said. "If we don't have people who can navigate through this, and we get kind of leftover people, the quality of education goes down and the quality of our students goes down, and really the future of South Dakota is at stake if we don't have good teachers in our schools."

— This article was produced by South Dakota News Watch, a non-profit news organization online at sdnewswatch.org. Reporter Stu Whitney contributed to this report.



More than 100 people attended a Lead-Deadwood School Board meeting in May where a policy was discussed that would limit the use of displays and decorations in schools. The policy was prompted by a teacher who displayed a "safe spaces" sign in a classroom. Photo: Courtesy of Jaci Conrad Pearson, Black Hills Pioneer

Photo: Courtesy of Jaci Conrad Pearson, Black Hills Pioneer



ABOUT BART PFANKUCH
Bart Pfankuch, Rapid City, S.D., is the content director for South Dakota News Watch. A Wisconsin native, he is a former editor of the Rapid City Journal and also worked at newspapers in Florida. Bart has spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and writing coach.

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Groton Jr. Teeners clinches lead in third inning for win over Redfield

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U snatched the lead late in the game in a 19-3 victory over Redfield 14U on Thursday. The game was tied at two with Groton Jr. Teeners 14U batting in the bottom of the third when Groton Jr. Teeners 14U scored on a stolen base during Nicholas Morris's at bat. Then Morris doubled , driving in one.

Morris collected four hits in four at bats to help lead Groton Jr. Teeners 14U to victory. Morris doubled in the first, doubled in the third, doubled in the fourth, and singled in the fourth.

Redfield 14U got things moving in the first inning, when Ethan Falk drew a walk, scoring one run.

In the bottom of the first inning, Groton Jr. Teeners 14U tied things up at two when Kellen Antonsen lined out, driving in a run.

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U notched 11 runs in the fourth inning. The offensive onslaught by Groton Jr. Teeners 14U was led by Antonsen, Nick Groeblichhoff, Gavin Kroll, Karsten Flihs, Morris, and Antonsen, all knocking in runs in the inning.

Jarrett Erdmann took the win for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. The lefthander went four innings, allowing three runs on two hits and striking out nine.

Jackson Rude took the loss for Redfield 14U. Rude went three innings, allowing 12 runs on 14 hits and striking out two.

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U totaled 19 hits. Morris, Flihs, Groeblichhoff, Erdmann, Tristin McGannon, Gavin Englund, and Antonsen all collected multiple hits for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. Morris led Groton Jr. Teeners 14U with four hits in four at bats. Groton Jr. Teeners 14U didn't commit a single error in the field. Morris had the most chances in the field with eight. Groton Jr. Teeners 14U tore up the base paths, as four players stole at least two bases. Flihs led the way with three.

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Redfield 14U 3 - 19 Groton Jr. Teeners 14U

📍 Home 📅 Thursday June 02, 2022

	1	2	3	4	R	H	E
RDFL	2	0	0	1	3	2	1
GRTN	2	0	6	11	19	19	0

BATTING

Redfield 14U	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
J Boothe (LF)	3	0	1	0	0	2
Riley (2B)	0	0	0	0	0	0
H Binger (2B, 3B)	1	1	0	0	1	1
M Zastrow (1B)	0	1	0	0	2	0
N Johnson (C)	2	0	0	0	0	2
J Schmitt (SS)	2	0	0	0	0	1
E Falk	0	1	0	0	2	0
I Hague (3B, P)	2	0	0	0	0	1
J Ethridge (RF)	0	0	0	0	1	0
I Jungwirth	2	0	0	0	0	2
K Hansen (CF)	2	0	1	1	0	0
Totals	14	3	2	1	6	9

TB: K Hansen, J Boothe, **CS:** E Falk, **HBP:** J Ethridge, **SB:** J Schmitt, E Falk, K Hansen, J Boothe, H Binger, M Zastrow, **LOB:** 6

Groton Jr. Teeners	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
T McGannon (CF)	3	1	2	1	1	0
K Fliehs (LF)	4	3	3	2	0	0
C Simon (3B)	2	3	1	0	2	1
N Morris (C)	4	4	4	4	0	0
G Englund (1B)	2	2	2	1	2	0
K Antonsen (2B)	3	2	2	3	1	0
N Groeblinghoff (...)	3	2	2	3	1	0
R Jangula (RF)	2	0	0	0	0	1
G Kroll (RF)	1	1	1	1	0	0
J Erdmann (P)	2	1	2	0	1	0
Totals	26	19	19	15	8	2

2B: K Fliehs, N Groeblinghoff, K Antonsen, N Morris 3, **TB:** C Simon, T McGannon 2, K Fliehs 4, G Kroll, G Englund 2, J Erdmann 2, N Groeblinghoff 3, K Antonsen 3, N Morris 7, **SB:** C Simon 2, K Fliehs 3, G Kroll, G Englund 2, J Erdmann, N Groeblinghoff, K Antonsen, N Morris 2, **LOB:** 3

PITCHING

Redfield 14U	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
J Rude	3.0	14	12	11	3	2	0
I Hague	0.0	5	7	7	5	0	0
Totals	3.0	19	19	18	8	2	0

L: J Rude, **P-S:** J Rude 73-40, I Hague 31-11, **BF:** J Rude 24, I Hague 10

Groton Jr. Teeners	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
J Erdmann	4.0	2	3	1	6	9	0
Totals	4.0	2	3	1	6	9	0

W: J Erdmann, **P-S:** J Erdmann 86-45, **WP:** J Erdmann 2, **HBP:** J Erdmann, **BF:** J Erdmann 21

Groton Jr. Teeners Defeats Redfield in Blow Out Victory Thanks to First Inning Boost

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U scored seven runs in the first on its way to a 13-2 victory over Redfield 14U on Friday. Nicholas Morris, Lincoln Krause, and Gavin Kroll all contributed in the big inning with RBIs.

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U got things started in the first inning when Groton Jr. Teeners 14U scored on a stolen base during Morris's at bat. Then Morris tripled , driving in two.

Carter Simon led the Groton Jr. Teeners 14U to victory on the pitcher's mound. Simon lasted one and two-thirds innings, allowing zero hits and zero runs while striking out two.

Noah Johnson took the loss for Redfield 14U. The hurler lasted two innings, allowing one hit and zero runs while striking out three and walking one.

Micah Zastrow started the game for Redfield 14U. The pitcher surrendered 13 runs on eight hits over one inning, striking out one Ryder Jangula started the game for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. The righty surrendered two runs on six hits over two innings, striking out one

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U saw the ball well today, racking up nine hits in the game. Morris and Krause all had multiple hits for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. Krause and Morris all had two hits to lead Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. Groton Jr. Teeners 14U didn't commit a single error in the field. Karsten Flihs had the most chances in the field with four. Groton Jr. Teeners 14U tore up the base paths, as two players stole at least two bases. Simon led the way with two.

Johnson went 2-for-2 at the plate to lead Redfield 14U in hits. Redfield 14U was sure-handed in the field and didn't commit a single error. Johnson had the most chances in the field with two.

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Redfield 14U 2 - 13 Groton Jr. Teeners 14U

📍 Home 📅 Thursday June 02, 2022

	1	2	3	4	R	H	E
RDFL	0	1	1	0	2	6	0
GRTN	7	6	0	X	13	9	0

BATTING

Redfield 14U	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
H Binger (3B)	0	0	0	0	3	0
J Rude (2B)	3	0	1	0	0	0
M Zastrow (P)	1	0	0	0	0	1
Riley	0	1	0	0	1	0
M L	0	0	0	0	0	0
N Johnson (C, P)	2	0	2	0	1	0
J Schmitt (SS)	2	0	1	0	0	0
E Falk (1B)	1	1	1	0	1	0
I Hague	0	0	0	0	0	0
M Ock	0	0	0	0	1	0
J Ethridge (LF)	1	0	0	0	1	1
C Olsen (RF)	2	0	1	1	0	1
J Boothe (CF)	2	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	14	2	6	1	8	3

TB: E Falk, N Johnson 2, J Rude, J Schmitt, C Olsen,
CS: H Binger, **HBP:** Riley, I Hague, **SB:** Riley, I Hague, E Falk, N Johnson, J Rude, **LOB:** 8

PITCHING

Redfield 14U	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
M Zastrow	1.0	8	13	13	5	1	0
N Johnson	2.0	1	0	0	1	3	0
Totals	3.0	9	13	13	6	4	0

L: N Johnson, **P-S:** N Johnson 32-21, M Zastrow 62-29,
WP: N Johnson, **HBP:** M Zastrow, **BF:** N Johnson 8, M Zastrow 17

Groton Jr. Teeners	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
J Erdmann	2	0	1	1	0	0
T McGannon (CF)	2	1	0	0	1	1
K Antonsen (SS)	1	1	1	0	0	0
N Groeblinghoff...	1	1	0	0	0	0
K Fliehs (C)	2	2	1	0	1	0
N Morris (3B)	3	2	2	2	0	1
C Simon (RF, P)	2	2	1	1	1	0
K Moody (1B)	1	2	1	2	1	0
L Krause (2B)	2	2	2	3	0	0
G Kroll (LF)	1	0	0	0	1	1
R Jangula (P, RF)	1	0	0	0	1	1
Totals	18	13	9	9	6	4

2B: L Krause 2, K Moody, **3B:** N Morris, **TB:** K Fliehs, J Erdmann, L Krause 4, K Moody 2, N Morris 4, K Antonsen, C Simon, **HBP:** K Antonsen, **SB:** K Fliehs, L Krause 2, K Moody, T McGannon, N Morris, C Simon 2, **LOB:** 3

Groton Jr. Te	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
R Jangula	2.0	6	2	2	4	1	0
C Simon	1.2	0	0	0	4	2	0
Totals	3.2	6	2	2	8	3	0

W: C Simon, **P-S:** R Jangula 48-22, C Simon 35-15,
HBP: R Jangula, C Simon, **BF:** R Jangula 15, C Simon 9

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Late score costs Groton Legion Post #39 against Watertown Legion

Groton Legion Post #39 stayed in it until the end, but Watertown Post 17 Legion pulled away late in a 16-6 victory on Thursday. Watertown Post 17 Legion was down 6-5 in the bottom of the fourth inning when Andrew Czech doubled on a 0-2 count, scoring two runs.

Groton Legion Post #39 collected eight hits and Watertown Post 17 Legion had 18 in the high-scoring affair.

Watertown Post 17 Legion got on the board in the first inning. Czech grounded out, scoring one run.

Watertown Post 17 Legion evened things up at five in the bottom of the third inning. Watertown Post 17 Legion scored two runs when Ben Althoff homered.

Watertown Post 17 Legion pulled away for good with two runs in the fourth inning.

Groton Legion Post #39 notched four runs in the second inning. Groton Legion Post #39's big bats in the inning were led by a walk by Tate Larson, a fielder's choice by Cole Simon, and a double by Cade Larson.

Watertown Post 17 Legion scored eight runs in the fifth inning. Watertown Post 17 Legion's big inning was driven by singles by Jerod Cyrus, Thacher Roth, and Bryce Hult, a fielder's choice by Will Engstrom, and a double by Kolby Lacher.

Chase Christianson was the winning pitcher for Watertown Post 17 Legion. Christianson surrendered one run on three hits over three innings, striking out one. Jack Heesch threw one inning in relief out of the bullpen.

Dillon Abeln took the loss for Groton Legion Post #39. The pitcher allowed 12 hits and 12 runs over four and a third innings, striking out two.

Marcus Rabine started the game for Watertown Post 17 Legion. The bulldog allowed three hits and five runs over two innings, striking out two.

Groton Legion Post #39 smacked one home run on the day. Bradin Althoff had a four bagger in the fourth inning.

Althoff led Groton Legion Post #39 with two hits in three at bats. Jackson Cogley led Groton Legion Post #39 with two stolen bases, as they ran wild on the base paths with six stolen bases. Groton Legion Post #39 didn't commit a single error in the field. Cogley had the most chances in the field with three.

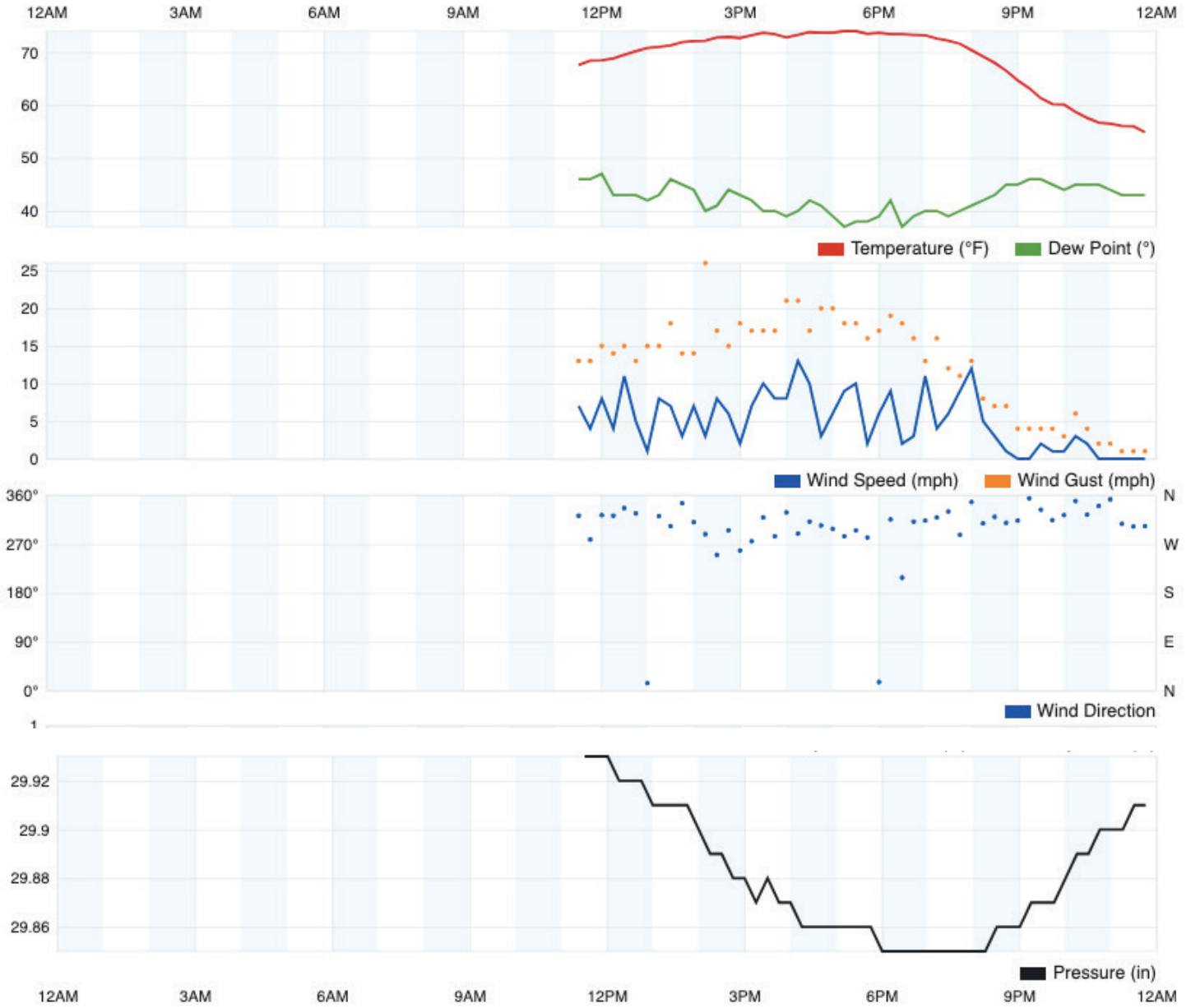
Watertown Post 17 Legion racked up 18 hits in the game. Ryan Roby, Cyrus, Czech, Hult, Lacher, and Althoff each had multiple hits for Watertown Post 17 Legion. Watertown Post 17 Legion was sure-handed and didn't commit a single error. Engstrom made the most plays with six.

Watertown won the second game, 18-3.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Increasing
Clouds

High: 72 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy
then Slight
Chance
Showers

Low: 50 °F

Saturday



Slight Chance
Showers

High: 72 °F

Saturday
Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 48 °F

Sunday



Chance
Showers

High: 66 °F

Weekend Forecast:

Cool. Scattered to isolated showers, particularly over central SD

Today
low 70s



Chance of afternoon Showers over s central SD, expanding to areas mainly south of U.S. highway 12 tonight. A few thunderstorms possible over s central SD.

Sat
low 70s



Slight Chance of Showers mainly south of U.S. highway 12 during the daytime hours. A few thunderstorms possible over s central SD.

Sun
60s



Chance of Showers, becoming likely with a few thunderstorms over mainly south central SD.

Mon
low 60s



Chance of Showers.

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD
www.weather.gov/abr



Weekend Forecast: Cool. Scattered to isolated showers, particularly over central South Dakota. The main focus for any precipitation today will be over south central South Dakota this afternoon, which will expand to areas mainly south of U.S. highway 12 tonight. While showers and a few thunderstorms will again be possible Saturday, the focus will again be over south central South Dakota. The highest chance of precipitation will be Sunday over central South Dakota, where over 0.25" of precipitation will be possible.

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Today in Weather History

June 3, 1898: A violent windstorm passed over Aberdeen between 1 AM and 2 AM. Damage was confined to awnings, roofs of buildings, and plate glass windows.

June 3, 1933: This estimated F2 tornado moved ENE from 6 miles southwest of Wilmot, passing 3 miles south of town and dissipating at Big Stone Lake. A child was killed in a barn. Roof, barn, and church debris was scattered for miles, and over a dozen farms were heavily damaged. This tornado was estimated to be on the ground for about 15 miles.

June 3, 1975: Severe thunderstorms erupted across central sections of South Dakota. During the evening hours, the storms stretched from the southern border to the North Dakota state line and were packing high winds and large hail. In several areas, including Mobridge, hail as large as baseballs did damage to crops, homes, and vehicles and in some regions piled up to two feet deep. Strong thunderstorm winds also uprooted trees and damaged numerous farm buildings. Multiple funnels and small tornadoes were observed, including three in Charles Mix County.

June 3, 1997: Heavy rains of 2 to 4 inches through the early morning hours resulted in the flooding of some roads, fields, and creeks across parts of Jones and Lyman counties. In particular, the KOA campgrounds near Presho were heavily flooded. The KOA office and home had three and a half feet of water in them. Also, several homes near or in Presho received water and were heavily damaged. The Medicine and Stoney Butte creeks set record highs.

1860: Iowa's infamous Camanche Tornado, likely an F5 storm, kills 92 and injures 200. Every home and business were destroyed. It was one of the most damaging families of tornadoes ever to strike the US and resulted in more farm fatalities than any other tornado except for the Tri-State tornado.

1921 - A cloudburst near Pikes Peak CO killed 120 people. Pueblo CO was flooded by a twenty-five foot crest of the Arkansas River, killing 70 persons. Fourteen inches of rain was reported at Boggs Flat, where a hard surface road through nearly level country was washed out to a depth of seven feet. (The Weather Channel)

1959 - Thunderstorms in northwestern Kansas produced up to eighteen inches of hail near Salden during the early evening. Crops were completely destroyed, and total damage from the storm was about half a million dollars. Hail fell for a record eighty-five minutes. The temperature dropped from near 80 degrees prior to the storm to 38 degrees at the height of the storm. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Six days of flooding in South Texas culminated with five to six inch rains from Bexar County to Bandera County, and five to nine inches rains in Gonzalez and Wilson Counties. Total crop damage was estimated at 500 million dollars. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Early morning thunderstorms in southern Texas produced wind gusts to 86 mph at Port Isabel, and wind gusts to 83 mph at South Padre Island. Unseasonably hot weather prevailed from the Southern Plateau Region to the Northern High Plains. Fourteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing over the Southern Plains Region during the afternoon hours produced severe weather into the night. Thunderstorms spawned eleven tornadoes, and there were 169 reports of large hail and damaging winds. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 80 mph at Newcastle, OK, and Wilson, OK. Softball size hail was reported at Monahans, Childress and Groesbeck TX. Monahans TX reported six million dollars damage. Five inches of rain deluged Geronimo OK. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1993: Early morning severe thunderstorms dumped huge hailstones across northern Oklahoma. Hail, up to 6 inches in diameter in Enid, went through roofs of homes, damaged three jets at Vance Air Force Base, and did \$500,000 in damage at a car dealership. Winds gusts reached 70 mph at Vance Air Force Base as well. Hail damage to the wheat crop was estimated at 70 million dollars.

1997: It was a chilly day in the East. The high temperature at Philadelphia International Airport was only 59 degrees, tying a record-low maximum for the date set back in 1881. The temperature at Middletown, Pennsylvania rose to 58 degrees, breaking the record-low maximum for the date of 59 degrees set back in 1915. Washington, DC only reached 58 degrees, breaking the old record-low maximum of 59 set back in 1915. Central Park in New York City only reached 61 degrees.

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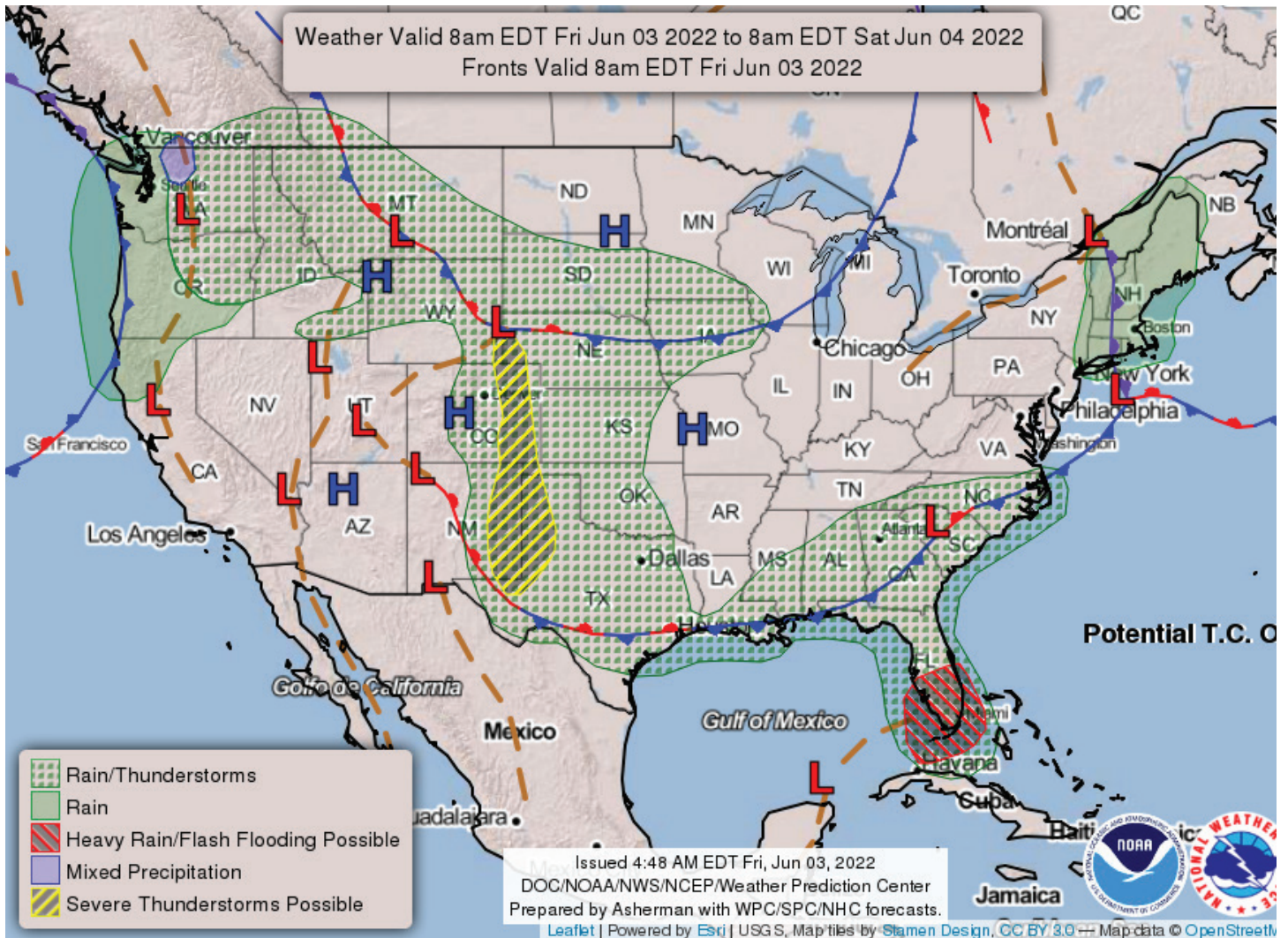
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 74 °F
Low Temp: 55 °F
Wind: 26 mph
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 32 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 100 in 1933
Record Low: 34 in 1964
Average High: 77°F
Average Low: 52°F
Average Precip in June.: 0.32
Precip to date in June.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 7.57
Precip Year to Date: 11.18
Sunset Tonight: 9:16:59 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:43:47 AM



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Just Try!

Mrs. Burrell, my fourth-grade science teacher, often visited the students in her class at night to teach them how to identify the various constellations. Now and then she would ask, "Well, how many stars can you count tonight?" No one was ever able to give an accurate accounting. But we would giggle and make up some unreasonable number just to humor her.

However, on a clear night, it is possible to see about two thousand stars. With some of the large telescopes now used to research the universe, astronomers can take a photograph and count about thirty billion. Even so, there are still many more billions that are beyond the power of the eye of the telescope.

Sir James Jeans once suggested that there are as many stars as there are grains of sand on all the beaches of the planet. So, there's a good reason why no one has been able to number them.

Except One. "He determines the number of stars and calls each by name." Now, that may be difficult to believe. But, when we realize His power and might and majesty, it fits right into His character.

Numbers, however, are not as important as His love. However, our great God, Who created and named the stars and hung them in orbit, is more interested in us than He is in His stars. In fact, He loved us so much that He gave His only Son for our salvation. This God of measureless might is also a God of limitless love. And this very God extends an invitation to us to become one of His children.

Prayer: How blessed we are, Lord, that we are of such value to You that You willingly gave Your Son to save us. You know the stars, and us, by name. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Bible Verse: He determines the number of stars and calls each by name. Psalm 147:4

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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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Noem threatens suit over Biden's LGBTQ discrimination policy

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Thursday threatened to sue the Biden administration over a Department of Agriculture school meal program that defines discrimination as based on sexual orientation and gender identity, while the department said it is working to get voluntary compliance before referring violations to the Department of Justice.

The Republican governor earlier this year pushed the state to become one of more than a dozen states to ban transgender athletes from girls' school sports leagues. At the time, some opponents to the proposal argued that South Dakota's law, which is set to take effect July 1, could imperil federal funding for the state's public schools.

Noem on Thursday claimed that the USDA was poised to withhold funds for school meal programs and issued a combative statement: "President Biden is holding lunch money for poor Americans hostage in pursuit of his radical agenda."

The USDA announced earlier this month it would include discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity as a violation to Title IX, a sweeping 1972 law that guarantees equity between the sexes in "any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." But it was not clear whether the federal government would hold back funding for school meal programs as part of its enforcement.

The USDA responded to a question about whether it would withhold the funding by issuing a statement that said it is "rooting out discrimination in any form" and it will handle any discrimination of LGBTQ people as sex discrimination.

"Program operators who fail to comply will be in violation of civil rights laws and in breach of the agreements they signed in order to receive federal funds," the department said. "At that time, USDA will interpret the prohibition through traditional compliance and discrimination complaint mechanisms, which could include up to referring the case to the U.S. Department of Justice."

Noem's spokesman Ian Fury said the state would not file litigation at least until the USDA's final rule is published.

Meanwhile, other states that have passed laws banning transgender athletes have been challenged in court. Lawsuits have been filed against bans in Utah, Idaho, West Virginia and Indiana.

Ravnsborg not expected to testify in his impeachment trial

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg is not expected to take the stand for his impeachment trial, not is anyone else for the defense.

Defense attorneys did not turn in a list of witnesses as required by rules for the June 20-21 trial over Ravnsborg's actions surrounding a 2020 fatal car crash, the Argus Leader reported.

The parameters set by the Senate in April required both defense attorney Mike Butler and prosecutor Mark Vargo to submit the list by Wednesday. Butler will present his case through cross examination of the prosecution evidence, oral argument and perhaps some exhibits.

Ravnsborg, a Republican, was impeached by the House over the crash in which he killed a pedestrian but initially said he may have struck a deer or other large animal. Ravnsborg is the first official to be impeached in South Dakota.

Vargo, the Pennington County State's Attorney, plans to call to the stand crash investigators, three of whom from the North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation, as well as former South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation agents who worked under Ravnsborg.

The trial format allows both the impeachment prosecutors and Ravnsborg's defense attorney one hour for an opening statement, four hours to present evidence and one hour to close their arguments. Senators may take more time to ask additional questions and debate the articles of impeachment.

Ravnsborg last year pleaded no contest to two misdemeanors. The 45-year-old Republican, who took office in 2019, struck and killed Joseph Boever, who was walking along a rural highway.

State Supreme Court reverses pit bull conviction

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Supreme Court says a man convicted of owning dangerous dogs wasn't afforded due process.

The Argus Leader reported the court reversed Christopher Alexander's conviction on Thursday.

The newspaper reported that Alexander's neighbor pointed a firearm at two of Alexander's pit bulls after the dogs confronted him in March 2020. He didn't fire and Alexander's girlfriend called the dogs back.

Sheriff's deputies impounded the dogs and Alexander was charged with having a potentially dangerous animal. A judge found Alexander guilty.

The justices found there wasn't enough evidence to support the conviction and Alexander wasn't afforded due process because the judge relied only upon a police officer's determination that an animal was dangerous.

Sioux Falls man arrested after allegedly attacking 2 women

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Police have arrested a 40-year-old Sioux Falls man after he allegedly attacked two women.

The Argus Leader reported Thursday that police received a call around 1:45 p.m. Tuesday from a 65-year-old woman who said she saw the man by a vehicle and he was acting strange.

Police spokesman Sam Clemens said the man started choking the woman before a 58-year-old woman intervened. Clemens said the man pulled out a knife and stabbed the second woman in the chest and arms. Police arrived and took the man into custody.

Clemens said the woman who was stabbed was taken to the hospital with life-threatening injuries. He said Wednesday that the woman was improving. The woman who was choked didn't require medical attention.

Police fatally shoot Texas fugitive after family of 5 killed

By TERRY WALLACE Associated Press

A convicted murderer on the run since escaping a prison bus after stabbing its driver last month was fatally shot by law enforcement late Thursday after he killed a family of five and stole their truck from a rural weekend cabin, a Texas prison system spokesman said.

Gonzalo Lopez, 46, was killed about 10:30 p.m. Thursday in Jourdanton, Texas, about 35 miles (55 kilometers) south of San Antonio, said Jason Clark, spokesman for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

"Law enforcement in Atascosa County located the stolen vehicle, disabled it with spike strips, and gunfire ensued," Clark said in a statement. No officers were injured, he said.

Lopez was killed in an exchange of gunfire about 220 miles (354 kilometers) southeast of Centerville, Texas, where Clark earlier said Lopez had killed a Houston family of five at their cabin and stole their pickup truck.

Lopez was thought to be hiding in the vicinity of the cabin when officers received a call from someone concerned after not hearing from an elderly relative, Clark said.

Officers went to the family's cabin along Texas Route 7 west of Centerville about 6 p.m. Thursday and found the bodies of one adult and four minors. Identities were not released, but gone was their white pickup truck, Clark said. Lopez was believed to have driven the truck from the search area, he said. Lopez was a former member of the Mexican Mafia prison gang and had ties to South Texas, he said.

The family was thought to have arrived Thursday morning at the cabin, which they owned, Clark said. The five are believed to have been killed Thursday afternoon and had no link to Lopez, he said.

Lopez, 46, had been the subject of an intensive search since his May 12 escape from the prison bus. He was being transported in a caged area of the bus from a prison in Gatesville, more than 100 miles (160

kilometers) west of the place where he escaped, to one in Huntsville for a medical appointment when he escaped in Leon County, a rural area between Dallas and Houston, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice has said.

Centerville is the county seat of Leon County, which has roughly 16,000 residents and is about 50 miles (80 kilometers) north of the state's Huntsville prison headquarters.

The department has said Lopez somehow freed himself from his hand and leg restraints, cut through the expanded metal of the cage and crawled from the bottom. He then attacked the driver, who stopped the bus and got into an altercation with Lopez, and they both eventually got off the bus.

A second officer at the rear of the bus then exited and approached Lopez, who got back on the bus and started driving down the road, the department said.

The officers fired at Lopez and disabled the bus by shooting the rear tire, the department said. The bus then traveled a short distance before leaving the roadway, where Lopez got out and ran into the woods.

At some point during the escape, Lopez stabbed the driver, whose wounds weren't life-threatening, the department said.

Lopez was serving a life prison sentence for a 2006 conviction of murdering a man along the Texas-Mexico border.

Security concerns leave Afghan evacuees stuck in Balkan camp

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For some Afghans who were evacuated as their country fell to the Taliban last summer, the journey to the United States has stalled, and perhaps ended, at a sun-baked cluster of tents and temporary housing on an American base in the Balkans.

While more than 78,000 Afghans have arrived in the U.S. for resettlement since August, the future for those who have been flagged for additional security vetting and diverted to Camp Bondsteel, in the small nation of Kosovo, remains up in the air. The U.S. won't force the dozens there to return to Afghanistan, where they could face reprisals.

Their frustration is growing. Some Afghans at the base, which has been shrouded in secrecy, took the unusual step this week of staging a protest, holding up signs with messages such as "we want justice," according to photos sent to The Associated Press.

"They just keep repeating the same things, that it takes time and we must be patient," one of the Afghans, Muhammad Arif Sarwari, said in a text message from the base.

Their complaints open a window into an aspect of the evacuation and resettlement of Afghans that has gotten little attention because U.S. authorities, and the government of Kosovo, have been reluctant to say much about the people sent to Bondsteel.

The base houses a mix of adults and children, because some of the people who have so far failed to get a visa to the U.S. are traveling with family. Sarwari, a former senior intelligence official with the Afghan government, said there are about 45 people there, representing about 20 or so individual visa cases, after a flight to the U.S. left with 27 of the refugees on Wednesday.

The Biden administration won't provide details, but acknowledges that some of the evacuees did not make it through what it calls a "a multi-layered, rigorous screening and vetting process" and won't be permitted to enter the U.S.

"While the vast majority of Afghan evacuees have been cleared through this process, the small number of individuals who have been denied are examples of the system working exactly as it should," said Sean Savett, a spokesman for the National Security Council.

In all, about 600 Afghans have passed through Bondsteel, according to the government of Kosovo, which initially authorized use of the base for evacuees for a year but recently agreed to extend that until August 2023.

Kosovo, which gained independence from Serbia in 2008 with U.S. support, has also provided little information about the Afghans at Bondsteel, citing the privacy of the refugees. Prime Minister Albin Kurti said

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in a statement that the government is proud of its role providing temporary shelter to them.

Afghans are housed in a section of Bondsteel called Camp Liya, named for an Afghan child handed to the U.S. Marines over a fence at the Hamid Karzai International Airport during the evacuation, according to a U.S. military publication.

It was the chaotic nature of that evacuation that led to the need for an overseas facility in the first place. As the Afghan government collapsed, thousands of people made it onto military transport planes with minimal screening before they arrived at one of several overseas transit points.

The people sent to Bondsteel were stopped and diverted for a host of reasons, including missing or flawed documents or security concerns that emerged during overseas vetting by the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security, officials have said.

At the same time, some in Congress have criticized the administration for what they say has been inadequate vetting of Afghan refugees.

Sarwari made it to Kuwait from Afghanistan in early September with his wife and two of his daughters and says he doesn't know why he's been held up. He was a prominent figure in Afghanistan, serving as the former director of intelligence after the U.S. invasion in 2001. Before that, he was a top official with the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance.

Both positions would make him a target of the Taliban if he were to return.

"The vetting team keeps telling us sorry, Washington is just deciding some political issues," he said.

Sarwari has applied for a special immigrant visa, which is issued to people who worked for the U.S. government or its allies during the war. He has not received a response, according to his lawyer, Julie Sirrs.

"In theory, he is free to leave but it's not clear where he could go," Sirrs said. "He obviously cannot return to Afghanistan. He's clearly in danger if he returns."

He and others live a circumscribed existence on Bondsteel. Although technically not detained, they cannot leave the arid, rocky base and have spent months in tents, which were adorned with handwritten signs during this week's protest. One said "unfair decision," while another said "children are suffering."

The Biden administration says authorities have determined that some — it won't say how many — simply cannot be allowed to enter the U.S. It is working to find other countries that don't harbor the same security concerns and are willing to accept them for resettlement. No one will be forcibly returned to Afghanistan, the NSC spokesperson said.

Democrats, Republicans fight to a redistricting stalemate

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

After nearly a year of partisan battles, number-crunching and lawsuits, the once-a-decade congressional redistricting cycle is ending in a draw.

That leaves Republicans positioned to win control of the House of Representatives even if they come up just short of winning a majority of the national vote. That frustrates Democrats, who hoped to shift the dynamic so their success with the popular vote would better be reflected by political power in Washington. Some Republicans, meanwhile, hoped to cement an even larger advantage this time.

But both parties ultimately fought each other to a standstill. The new congressional maps have a total of 226 House districts won by Democrat Joe Biden in the last presidential election and 209 won by Republican Donald Trump — only one more Biden district than in 2020. Likewise, the typical congressional district voted for Biden by about 2 percentage points, also almost identical to 2020.

"It's almost perfect stasis," said Nicholas Stephanopoulos, a Harvard law professor who follows congressional redistricting. "If you compare the maps we had in 2020 to the maps we're going to have in 2022, they're almost identical" in terms of partisan advantage, he added.

The specific lines of congressional districts have, of course, changed, as some states added new ones — or lost old ones — to match population shifts recorded by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2020.

Redistricting is the once-a-decade adjustment of legislative lines to match the Census' findings. It is typically an extraordinarily partisan process, with each major party trying to scoop up enough of its vot-

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ers to guarantee wins in the largest number of districts. This cycle was no different, but the end result is virtually no change to the overall partisan orientation of the congressional map.

That leaves the map tilted slightly to the right of the national electorate, since Biden won the presidency by more than 4 percentage points. In a typical year, Democrats would have to win the national popular vote by about 2 percentage points to win a House majority, while the GOP could capture it, theoretically, with just under 50%.

Republicans pointed to that as a victory.

"If we're fighting to a draw on a map that everyone agrees is good for Republicans, that's good for Republicans," said Adam Kincaid, executive director of the National Republican Redistricting Trust, which coordinates redistricting for the party.

Democrats noted that's still a far better place than where they were after the last round of redistricting in 2011, fresh off a GOP sweep of statehouses that allowed them to draw a far more slanted series of congressional maps.

"We are in a stronger position than in 2020 and in a way stronger position than in 2012," said Kelly Ward Burton, executive director of the National Democratic Redistricting Committee.

The assessment became possible this week, after New Hampshire became the final state to adopt a congressional map on Tuesday. On Thursday, Florida's Supreme Court ruled it wouldn't consider a Democratic challenge to a map pushed by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis before the November election, ending the last significant legal uncertainty over the maps this year.

The odds are the national map will improve for the GOP after November, however.

If Republicans do well in the election — as is widely expected — they could capture seats on state supreme courts in North Carolina or Ohio that'd allow them to redraw more slanted maps previous courts rejected. Similarly, if the GOP seizes power in some other state legislatures or governor's mansions, the party could redraw new maps in those states in 2023 that would be implemented for the coming decade.

And the U.S. Supreme Court's conservative majority has indicated it will reconsider some of the guidelines that govern legislative line-drawing nationally next year, which could open the door to even further Republican gains.

It's a reversal from earlier this year, when Democrats were poised to lessen the partisan bias of the congressional map, at least in 2022.

But the centerpiece of that effort — an intensely pro-Democratic map in New York state — was ruled an illegal partisan gerrymander by the state's Democrat-appointed top court, and the court's redrawn map favored the party less. A similarly pro-Democratic map in Maryland was replaced by a more equitable map. But Florida's strongly pro-GOP map, which DeSantis pushed the Republican-controlled legislature into adopting, was not overturned by its majority-GOP-appointed high court, bringing the national partisan pendulum back to the center.

Democrats were already fighting on an uneven playing field during this round of redistricting. They only controlled the drawing of maps in states representing 75 House districts, while Republicans held the pen in ones with 187 districts. That's partly because of GOP statehouse gains in 2010 lingering, partly because many Democratic-controlled states like California, Colorado and New Jersey ceded their power to draw lines to independent commissions to take partisan politics out of redistricting.

The Democratic Party has embraced that approach nationally, pushing for it in all 50 states as part of its voting overhaul that floundered in the Senate earlier this year amid unanimous GOP opposition. But some members of the party have questioned whether it amounts to unilateral disarmament in the partisan cage match of redistricting.

After this cycle, Stephanopoulos said, there's no longer much debate. "If all the blue states reform and all the red states run wild, that's not a good outcome," he said.

Though the map's partisan lean didn't change, the number of competitive House seats diminished. That's partly because Republicans, who maximized their gains in the post-2010 redistricting cycle, focused on packing as many GOP voters as possible into the districts of some of their incumbents who had tough

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re-election campaigns.

The number of House seats decided by a 10-point margin or less dropped from 89 to 76, largely by the GOP changing 14 of its competitive seats into safe ones, Kincaid said.

Advocates of sweeping changes in redistricting warn the loss of competition is dangerous for democracy. "Partisan balance is one thing, but it's much more important to think about how gridlock and extremism is driven by the fact that the only competition is in primaries," said Joshua Graham Lynn, founder of the group RepresentUS, which pushes for changes in redistricting.

Currently, 10 states have independent commissions that draw lines for congressional districts. Some reformers fear there are few places left to push new ones, because it can almost only be done through ballot measures rather than asking legislators to write laws to give up their own power. Only Ohio and Florida, two states that already have voter-backed prohibitions against partisan redistricting, remain as possible targets for ballot measures to create new commissions.

But Stephanopoulos noted that redistricting changes are now a durable part of the Democratic Party's agenda after their sweeping voting overhaul bill died during a Republican filibuster in the Senate. He compared it to former President Bill Clinton's botched effort to implement national health care reform in 1992, which lit the fire for Democratic activists to pass the Affordable Care Act once they again had control of congress and the presidency under President Barack Obama.

"At some point, Democrats will have partisan control again," Stephanopoulos said. "It may be 2025, or 2035. Until then, we're going to have more incremental change."

Deadly secret: Electronic warfare shapes Russia-Ukraine war

By OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI and FRANK BAJAK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — On Ukraine's battlefields, the simple act of powering up a cellphone can beckon a rain of deathly skyfall. Artillery radar and remote controls for unmanned aerial vehicles may also invite fiery shrapnel showers.

This is electronic warfare, a critical but largely invisible aspect of Russia's war against Ukraine. Military commanders largely shun discussing it, fearing they'll jeopardize operations by revealing secrets.

Electronic warfare technology targets communications, navigation and guidance systems to locate, blind and deceive the enemy and direct lethal blows. It is used against artillery, fighter jets, cruise missiles, drones and more. Militaries also use it to protect their forces.

It's an area where Russia was thought to have a clear advantage going into the war. Yet, for reasons not entirely clear, its much-touted electronic warfare prowess was barely seen in the war's early stages in the chaotic failure to seize the Ukrainian capitol of Kyiv.

It has become far more of a factor in fierce fighting in eastern Ukraine, where shorter, easier-to-defend supply lines let Russia move electronic warfare gear closer to the battlefield.

"They are jamming everything their systems can reach," said an official of Aerorozvidka, a reconnaissance team of Ukrainian unmanned aerial vehicle tinkerers, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of safety concerns. "We can't say they dominate, but they hinder us greatly."

A Ukrainian intelligence official called the Russian threat "pretty severe" when it comes to disrupting reconnaissance efforts and commanders' communications with troops. Russian jamming of GPS receivers on drones that Ukraine uses to locate the enemy and direct artillery fire is particularly intense "on the line of contact," he said.

Ukraine has scored some successes in countering Russia's electronic warfare efforts. It has captured important pieces of hardware — a significant intelligence coup — and destroyed at least two multi-vehicle mobile electronic warfare units.

Its own electronic warfare capability is hard to assess. Analysts say it has markedly improved since 2014, when Russia seized Crimea and instigated a separatist revolt in eastern Ukraine. But there are setbacks. Last week, Russia claimed it destroyed a Ukrainian electronic intelligence center in the southeastern town of Dniprovske. The claim could not be independently confirmed, and Ukrainian officials did not respond

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to a request for comment.

Ukraine has also made effective use of technology and intelligence from the United States and other NATO members. Such information helped Ukraine sink the battle cruiser Moskva. Allied satellites and surveillance aircraft help from nearby skies, as does billionaire Elon Musk's Starlink satellite communications network.

Electronic war has three basic elements: probe, attack and protect. First, intelligence is gathered by locating enemy electronic signals. On attack, "white noise" jamming disables and degrades enemy systems, including radio and cellphone communications, air defense and artillery radars. Then there is spoofing, which confuses and deceives. When it works, munitions miss their targets.

"Operating on a modern battlefield without data is really hard," said retired Col. Laurie Buckhout, a former U.S. Army electronic warfare chief. Jamming "can blind and deafen an aircraft very quickly and very dangerously, especially if you lose GPS and radar and you're a jet flying at 600 miles an hour."

All of which explains the secrecy around electronic warfare.

"It is an incredibly classified field because it is highly dependent on evolving, bleeding-edge technologies where gains can be copied and erased very quickly," said James Stidham, a communications security expert who has consulted for the U.S. State and Homeland Security departments.

Ukraine learned hard lessons about electronic warfare in 2014 and 2015, when Russia overwhelmed its forces with it. The Russians knocked drones out of the sky and disabled warheads, penetrated cellphone networks for psychological ops and zeroed in on Ukrainian armor.

One Ukrainian officer told Christian Brose, an aide to the late U.S. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., how Russian info warriors tricked a commander into returning a wireless call from his mother. When he did, they geolocated him in mid-call and killed him with precision rockets, Brose wrote in the book "The Kill Chain."

The U.S. also experienced Russia's electronic warfare in action in Syria, where the adversaries have backed opposing sides in the civil war. In 2018, U.S. Special Operations chief Gen. Raymond Thomas described how U.S. pilots' communications were regularly "knocked down" in Syria in the "most aggressive" electronic warfare environment on the planet. Russia's advanced systems are designed to blind U.S. Airborne Warning and Control Systems, or AWACS, aircraft — the eyes and ears of battlefield commanders — as well as cruise missiles and spy satellites.

In the current war, electronic warfare has become a furious theater of contention.

Aerorozvidka has modified camera-equipped drones to pinpoint enemy positions and drop mortars and grenades. Hacking is also used to poison or disable enemy electronics and collect intelligence.

Ukrainian officials say their electronic warfare capabilities have improved radically since 2015. They include the use of encrypted U.S. and Turkish communications gear for a tactical edge. Ukraine has advanced so much it exports some of its technology.

Russia has engaged in GPS jamming in areas from Finland to the Black Sea, said Lt. Col. Tyson Wetzel, an Air Force fellow at the Atlantic Council. One regional Finnish carrier, Transaviabaltica, had to cancel flights on one route for a week as a result. Russian jamming has also disrupted Ukrainian television broadcasting, said Frank Backes, an executive with California-based Kratos Defense, which has satellite ground stations in the region.

Yet in the war's early days, Russia's use of electronic warfare was less effective and extensive than anticipated. That may have contributed to its failure to destroy enough radar and anti-aircraft units to gain air superiority.

Russia's defense ministry did not respond to a request for comment for this article.

Some analysts believe Russian commanders held back units fearing the units would be captured. At least two were seized. One was a Krasukha-4, which a U.S. Army database says is designed to jam satellite signals as well as surveillance radar and radar-guided weapons from more than 100 miles (160 kilometers) away. The other: the more advanced Borisoglebsk-2, which can jam drone guidance systems and radio-controlled land mines.

Russia may have also limited the use of electronic warfare early in the conflict because of concerns that ill-trained or poorly motivated technicians might not operate it properly.

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"What we're learning now is that the Russians eventually turned it off because it was interfering with their own communications so much," said retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, a former U.S. Army commander for Europe.

The communications problems were evident with many Russian troops talking on insecure open radio channels, easily monitored by outsiders.

It's unclear how much of an edge Russia's electronic assets may now offer. Ukraine's forces are now more concentrated than early in the war, which could make them easier to target.

Much depends on whether Russia's battalion tactical groups "are configured in reality as they are on paper," said James Rands, of the Jane's military intelligence think tank. Each group, comprised of roughly 1,000 troops, is supposed to have an electronic warfare unit. The Pentagon says 110 such groups are in Ukraine.

The Kremlin also claims to have more than 1,000 small, versatile Orlan-10 unmanned aerial vehicles it uses for reconnaissance, targeting, jamming and cellphone interception.

Russia has lost about 50 of its Orlan-10s in the war, but "whatever they lost could be a small portion of what's flying," said researcher Samuel Bendett, of the Center for Naval Analyses think tank.

Ukraine's relative UAV strength is unclear, but Ukrainians have adapted such technologies as software-defined radio and 3D printing to stay nimble.

The U.S. and Britain also supply jamming gear, but how much it helps is unclear. Neither country has offered details. The ability of both sides to disable the other's drones is crucial with the artillery they scout now so decisive in battles.

Musk's Starlink is a proven asset. Its more than 2,200 low-orbiting satellites provide broadband internet to more than 150,000 Ukrainian ground stations. Severing those connections is a challenge for Russia. It is far more difficult to jam low-earth orbiting satellites than geostationary ones.

Musk has won plaudits from the Pentagon for at least temporarily defeating Russian jamming of Ukrainian satellite uplinks with a quick software fix. But he has warned Ukrainians to keep those terminals powered down when possible — they are vulnerable to geolocation — and recently worried on Twitter about re-doubled Russian interference efforts.

"I'm sure that the Russians are getting smarter about that now," said Wetzel, the Air Force lieutenant colonel.

EXPLAINER: At 100 days, Russia-Ukraine war by the numbers

By JAMEY KEATEN and YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — One hundred days into Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the war has brought the world a near-daily drumbeat of gut wrenching scenes: Civilian corpses in the streets of Bucha; a blown-up theater in Mariupol; the chaos at a Kramatorsk train station in the wake of a Russian missile strike.

Those images tell just a part of the overall picture of Europe's worst armed conflict in decades. Here's a look at some numbers and statistics that — while in flux and at times uncertain — shed further light on the death, destruction, displacement and economic havoc wrought by the war as it reaches this milestone with no end in sight.

THE HUMAN TOLL

Nobody really knows how many combatants or civilians have died, and claims of casualties by government officials — who may sometimes be exaggerating or lowballing their figures for public relations reasons — are all but impossible to verify.

Government officials, U.N. agencies and others who carry out the grim task of counting the dead don't always get access to places where people were killed.

And Moscow has released scant information about casualties among its forces and allies, and given no accounting of civilian deaths in areas under its control. In some places — such as the long-besieged city of Mariupol, potentially the war's biggest killing field — Russian forces are accused of trying to cover up deaths and dumping bodies into mass graves, clouding the overall toll.

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With all those caveats, “at least tens of thousands” of Ukrainian civilians have died so far, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Thursday in comments to Luxembourg’s parliament.

In Mariupol alone, officials have reported over 21,000 civilian dead. Sievierodonetsk, a city in the eastern region of Luhansk that has become the focus of Russia’s offensive, has seen roughly 1,500 casualties, according to the mayor.

Such estimates comprise both those killed by Russian strikes or troops and those who succumbed to secondary effects such as hunger and sickness as food supplies and health services collapsed.

Zelenskyy said this week that 60 to 100 Ukrainian soldiers are dying in combat every day, with about 500 more wounded.

Russia’s last publicly released figures for its own forces came March 25, when a general told state media that 1,351 soldiers had been killed and 3,825 wounded.

Ukraine and Western observers say the real number is much higher: Zelenskyy said Thursday that more than 30,000 Russian servicemen have died — “more than the Soviet Union lost in 10 years of the war in Afghanistan”; in late April, the British government estimated Russian losses at 15,000.

Speaking on condition of anonymity Wednesday to discuss intelligence matters, a Western official said Russia is “still taking casualties, but ... in smaller numbers.” The official estimated that some 40,000 Russian troops have been wounded.

In Moscow-backed separatist enclaves in eastern Ukraine, authorities have reported over 1,300 fighters lost and nearly 7,500 wounded in the Donetsk region, along with 477 dead civilians and nearly 2,400 wounded; plus 29 civilians killed and 60 wounded in Luhansk.

THE DEVASTATION

Relentless shelling, bombing and airstrikes have reduced large swaths of many cities and towns to rubble.

Ukraine’s parliamentary commission on human rights says Russia’s military has destroyed almost 38,000 residential buildings, rendering about 220,000 people homeless.

Nearly 1,900 educational facilities from kindergartens to grade schools to universities have been damaged, including 180 completely ruined.

Other infrastructure losses include 300 car and 50 rail bridges, 500 factories and about 500 damaged hospitals, according to Ukrainian officials.

The World Health Organization has tallied 296 attacks on hospitals, ambulances and medical workers in Ukraine this year.

FLEEING HOME

The U.N. refugee agency UNHCR estimates that about 6.8 million people have been driven out of Ukraine at some point during the conflict.

But since fighting subsided in the area near Kyiv and elsewhere, and Russian forces redeployed to the east and south, about 2.2 million have returned to the country, it says.

The U.N.’s International Organization for Migration estimates that as of May 23 there were more than 7.1 million internally displaced people — that is, those who fled their homes but remain in the country. That’s down from over 8 million in an earlier count.

LAND SEIZED

Ukrainian officials say that before the February invasion, Russia controlled some 7% of Ukrainian territory including Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014, and areas held by the separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk. On Thursday, Zelenskyy said Russian forces now held 20% of the country.

While the front lines are constantly shifting, that amounts to an additional 58,000 square kilometers (22,000 square miles) under Russian control, a total area slightly larger than Croatia or a little smaller than the U.S. state of West Virginia.

THE ECONOMIC FALLOUT IN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE ...

The West has levied a host of retaliatory sanctions against Moscow including on the crucial oil and gas sectors, and Europe is beginning to wean itself from its dependence on Russian energy.

Evgeny Gontmakher, academic director of European Dialogue, wrote in a paper this week that Russia

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currently faces over 5,000 targeted sanctions, more than any other country. Some \$300 billion of Russian gold and foreign exchange reserves in the West have been frozen, he added, and air traffic in the country dropped from 8.1 million to 5.2 million passengers between January and March.

Additionally, the Kyiv School of Economics has reported that more than 1,000 "self-sanctioning" companies have curtailed their operations in Russia.

The MOEX Russia stock index has plunged by about a quarter since just before the invasion and is down nearly 40 percent from the start of the year. And the Russian Central Bank said last week that annualized inflation came in at 17.8 percent in April.

Ukraine, meanwhile, has reported suffering a staggering economic blow: 35% of GDP wiped out by the war.

"Our direct losses today exceed \$600 billion," Andriy Yermak, the head of Zelenskyy's office, said recently.

Ukraine, a major agricultural producer, says it has been unable to export some 22 million tons of grain. It blames a backlog of shipments on Russian blockades or capture of key ports. Zelenskyy accused Russia this week of stealing at least a half-million tons of grain during the invasion.

... AND THE WORLD

The fallout has rippled around the globe, further driving up costs for basic goods on top of inflation that was already in full swing in many places before the invasion. Developing countries are being squeezed particularly hard by higher costs of food, fuel and financing.

Crude oil prices in London and New York have risen by 20 to 25 percent, resulting in higher prices at the pump and for an array of petroleum-based products.

Wheat supplies have been disrupted in African nations, which imported 44% of their wheat from Russia and Ukraine in the years immediately before the invasion. The African Development Bank has reported a 45% increase in continental prices for the grain, affecting everything from Mauritanian couscous to the fried donuts sold in Congo.

Amin Awad, the U.N. crisis coordinator in Ukraine, said 1.4 billion people worldwide could be affected by shortages of grain and fertilizer from the country.

"This war's toll on civilians is unacceptable. This war has no winner," he told reporters in Geneva via video from Kyiv on Friday. "Today we mark a tragic milestone. And we know what is needed the most: An end to this war."

Envoy says US, allies preparing for N. Korean nuclear test

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — President Joe Biden's special envoy for North Korea said Friday the United States is "preparing for all contingencies" in close coordination with its South Korean and Japanese allies as it monitors North Korean arrangements for a possible nuclear test explosion that outside officials say could be imminent.

South Korean and U.S. intelligence officials have said they detected North Korean efforts to prepare its northeastern testing ground for another nuclear test, which would be its seventh since 2006 and the first since September 2017, when it claimed to have detonated a thermonuclear bomb to fit on its intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Sung Kim, the U.S. special representative for North Korea, was in Seoul for a trilateral meeting with his South Korean and Japanese counterparts to discuss the growing threat posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons and missiles programs.

"The U.S. assesses that the DPRK is preparing at its Punggye-ri test site for what would be its seventh nuclear test. This assessment is consistent with the DPRK's own recent public statements," said Kim, using the initials of North Korea's formal name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Aside from coordinating with Seoul and Tokyo over contingency planning, Washington is also prepared to make "both short- and longer-term adjustments to our military posture as appropriate and responding to any DPRK provocation and as necessary to strengthen both defense and deterrence to protect our al-

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lies in the region," Kim said.

Funakoshi Takehiro, Japan's director-general for Asian and Oceanian Affairs, said the North's spate of ballistic tests this year and possible nuclear test preparations underscore the need for a more robust international response and lamented the United Nations Security Council's inaction over the North's recent tests.

Kim Gunn, South Korea's representative at the nuclear envoy, said North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile development would only strengthen the security cooperation between the United States and its Asian allies and deepen the North's isolation and economic woes.

"That is why it is so important to steer North Korea back towards the paths of dialogue and diplomacy," he said.

Nuclear negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang have stalled since 2019 over disagreements in exchanging the release of crippling U.S.-led sanctions against North Korea and the North's disarmament steps.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has expanded his ballistic missile program amid the diplomatic pause and a nuclear test would escalate his brinkmanship aimed at cementing the North's status as a nuclear power and negotiating economic and security concessions from a position of strength.

North Korea has already conducted missile tests 17 different times in 2022, including its first ICBM demonstrations in nearly five years, exploiting a favorable environment to push forward weapons development as the U.N. Security Council remains divided over Russia's war on Ukraine.

Russia and China last week vetoed a U.S.-sponsored resolution that would have imposed additional sanctions on North Korea over its latest ballistic tests on May 25, which South Korea's military said involved an ICBM flown on medium-range trajectory and two short-range weapons. Those tests came as Biden wrapped up his trip to South Korea and Japan, where he reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to defend both allies in the face of the North's nuclear threat.

Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., said Washington will still push for additional sanctions if North Korea conducts a new nuclear test.

Kim Jong Un's pressure campaign is unlikely to be impeded by a deadly coronavirus outbreak in his largely unvaccinated autocracy.

Dr. Mike Ryan, the World Health Organization's emergencies chief, said Wednesday that the U.N. health agency assumes the virus situation in North Korea is "getting worse, not better," considering the lack of public health tools, despite Pyongyang's recent claims that COVID-19 is slowing there.

While North Korea has so far ignored U.S. and South Korean offers of vaccines and other COVID-19 supplies, the country appears to be receiving help from China, its main ally and economic lifeline.

GAVI, the nonprofit that runs the U.N.-backed COVAX distribution program, said it understands that North Korea has accepted an offer of vaccines from China and has started to administer doses. It isn't immediately clear how many doses of which vaccines the North received or how the country was rolling them out.

Some experts say North Korea, with its supplies limited, would prioritize inoculating certain groups based on economic needs, including workers and soldiers involved in cross-border trade or major construction projects Kim Jong Un considers crucial to his rule.

The North had previously shunned millions of doses offered by COVAX, possibly because of international monitoring requirements attached to those shots.

"COVAX has allocated doses to DPRK in several prior allocation rounds, and has always been ready to support Pyongyang should it request our assistance, but so far we have received no formal requests for COVID-19 vaccine support," GAVI said Friday in an email to The Associated Press.

Sung Kim, the U.S. envoy, said Washington would continue to support humanitarian efforts to supply the North with COVID-19-related relief.

North Korea says it has so far found 3.9 million people with feverish symptoms, but health officials have confirmed only a handful of cases as COVID-19, likely because of shortages in testing supplies.

EXPLAINER: What is behind Turkey's Syria incursion threats?

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By BASSEM MROUE and ZEYNEP BILGINSOY Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — In northern Syria, residents are bracing for a new fight. With the world's attention focused on the war in Ukraine, Turkey's leader says he's planning a major military operation to push back Syrian Kurdish fighters and create a long sought-after buffer zone in the border area.

Tensions are high. Hardly a day passes by without an exchange of fire and shelling between the U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish fighters, and Turkish forces and Turkey-backed Syrian opposition gunmen.

Analysts say Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is taking advantage of the war in Ukraine to push his own goals in neighboring Syria — even using Turkey's ability as a NATO member to veto alliance membership by Finland and Sweden as potential leverage.

But a major incursion by Ankara comes with risks and complications, threatening to upset Turkey's ties with both the United States and Russia. It also risks creating a new wave of displacement in a war-ravaged region where the Islamic State group still lurks in the shadows.

Here's a look at the situation on the ground and some of the key issues:

TURKISH AMBITIONS

Erdogan last month outlined plans to resume Turkish efforts to create a 30-kilometer (19 mile) deep buffer zone in Syria, along its southern border through a cross-border incursion against U.S.-allied Syrian Kurdish fighters. Erdogan wanted to create that zone in 2019 but a military operation fell short of achieving it.

"We'll come down on them suddenly one night. And we must," Erdogan said, without giving a specific timeline.

Since 2016, Turkey has launched three major operations inside Syria, targeting Syria's main Kurdish militia — the People's Protection Units or YPG — which Turkey considers to be a terrorist organization and an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK. The PKK has for decades waged an insurgency within Turkey against the government in Ankara.

The YPG, however, forms the backbone of U.S.-led forces in the fight against Islamic State militants and has been a proven top U.S. ally in Syria.

Turkey, through the three previous military operations in Syria, already has control over a large chunk of Syrian territory, including the towns of Afrin, Tel Abyad and Jarablus. Ankara plans to build thousands of housing units in those areas, to ensure what it says will be the "voluntary return" of 1 million out of the 3.7 million Syrian refugees currently in Turkey.

Erdogan said Wednesday that Turkish troops now aim to take new areas, including the towns of Tel Rifaat and Manbij, which sits on a major intersection of roads on Syria's west-east highway known as the M4. Turkey says the Syrian Kurdish fighters use Tel Rifaat as a base to attack areas held by Turkey-backed Syrian opposition fighters.

There have been also reports that Turkish troops might enter the strategic border town of Kobani, where the U.S. military and Kurdish fighters first united to defeat IS in 2015. The town holds powerful symbolism for Syrian Kurds and their ambitions of self-rule in this part of Syria.

WHY NOW?

Analysts say Erdogan likely sees a confluence of circumstances, both international and domestic, that make an operation in Syria timely. The Russians are preoccupied with the war in Ukraine, and the Americans need Erdogan to drop his objections to the expansion of NATO to include Finland and Sweden.

"They (Turks) sense an opportunity to try and get concessions from the West," said Aaron Stein, head of research at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia.

A Syria offensive could also be used to rally Turkish nationalist voters at a time when their economy is in decline, with inflation running at 73.5%. Turkey is set to hold presidential and parliamentary elections next year, and previous incursions into Syria to drive out the YPG have bolstered support for Erdogan in past balloting.

So far, there are no signs of mobilization pointing to an imminent invasion, although the Turkish military could be called upon fairly quickly. Syrian Kurdish fighters, however, say they are taking Turkey's latest threat seriously and have been preparing for a possible attack.

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They warn that an incursion would affect their ongoing fight against IS and their ability to protect prisons in northern Syria where thousands of extremists, many of them foreign nationals, have been locked up since IS was defeated territorially three years ago.

TURKEY'S US AND RUSSIA TIES

A large-scale military operation carries high risks and is likely to anger both the U.S and Russia, who also have a military presence in northern Syria.

Turkey and Russia support rival sides in Syria's 11-year conflict but have been closely coordinating in the country's north. While Russia has not officially commented, it has in recent days sent fighter jets and helicopter gunships to a base close to the border with Turkey, according to Syrian opposition activists.

As one of Damascus' closest allies, Russia's role in Syria has been paramount in turning the tide of the conflict in Syria — which started amid Arab Spring uprisings in 2011 — in favor of Syrian President Bashar Assad. The Syrian opposition fighters were relegated to an enclave in the northwest and Turkey's sphere of influence.

But with Moscow focused on Ukraine, it's unlikely Vladimir Putin will stand in Erdogan's way over what is essentially just a strip of land along Turkey's southern border.

Washington has made clear its opposition to a Turkish military incursion, saying it would put at risk hard-won gains in the campaign against IS.

"We recognize Turkey's legitimate security concerns on its border. But again, we are concerned that any new offensive would further undermine regional stability," said State Department spokesman Ned Price.

Stein, the analyst, said any operation would be complicated because of Russian presence in both potential hotspots, Kobani and Tel Rifaat.

Whether an operation takes place boils down to the question on how far Erdogan is prepared to go in Syria, particularly in and around the Kobani area — and whether he would be unchallenged by Moscow and Washington.

"How much risk does he want to take? The evidence that we have is that he takes a lot of risk," Stein said.

Celtics have huge 4th, beat Warriors in Game 1 of NBA Finals

By JANIE McCAULEY AP Sports Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Once Boston's balanced roster of NBA Finals first-timers found a groove from long range, the determined Celtics delivered a memorable comeback and rallied past Stephen Curry and the Golden State old guard.

Jaylen Brown fueled the late charge and scored 24 points, Al Horford hit six 3-pointers, and the Celtics rode the most lopsided fourth quarter in NBA Finals history to a 120-108 victory over the Warriors in Game 1 on Thursday night.

Horford finished with 26 points and the Celtics outscored the Warriors 40-16 in the final 12 minutes after trailing by 15 points late in the third quarter. The 15th-year big man, who turns 36 Friday, played in 141 previous postseason games, most ever before playing in the NBA Finals.

"I felt like the guys kept finding me time after time. Also Derrick White hit some tough shots there, too," Horford said. "I was just getting the looks, knocking them down. That's that."

Boston made its first seven tries from long distance in the fourth and wound up 9 of 12 beyond the arc in the period as almost everybody got involved in the 3-point flurry. Jayson Tatum was the lone Celtics regular who struggled offensively, finishing 3 for 17, though he did have 13 assists.

Curry scored 34 points in his return to the NBA's big stage for the first time in three years, but the Warriors couldn't sustain momentum from a 38-point third quarter that put them ahead 92-80.

"It's not ideal but I believe in who we are and how we deal with adversity, how we responded all year, how we respond in the playoffs after a loss," Curry said. "So learn a lot from that fourth quarter, obviously they made a lot of shots. It seemed like they didn't miss 'til deep into the fourth. When you have a team that just finds a little bit of momentum like they did and they keep making shots, it's tough to kind of regain that momentum."

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Game 2 is Sunday night back at Chase Center.

The Celtics were the first team to trail a finals game by 10 or more points after three quarters and win by 10 or more, according to Sportradar. They are 8-2 on the road in these playoffs.

"It's an unbelievable feeling just to be here and competing at this level against such a dynamic franchise the last couple years," Boston guard Payton Pritchard said. "I think we're all just looking forward to the challenge to go through the series and try to get it done."

White's 3-pointer over Curry with 5:40 remaining tied the game at 103, then Horford hit from deep the next time down as the Celtics took their first lead since halftime.

Boston is looking to capture its record-breaking 18th title, which would move the Celtics past the Lakers — and now is just three wins away from doing it.

Brown, who starred at nearby California for one college season, made consecutive baskets that tied the game at 47 with 5:03 left before halftime and the Celtics led 56-54 at the break. Golden State then used a signature third-quarter spurt, pouring in 38 points to build a big lead.

Brown scored five quick points early in the fourth and assisted on an alley-oop dunk to Robert Williams III as the Celtics pulled back within 92-87 with 9:35 remaining. The lead was four midway through the fourth before Boston blew past Golden State with a 20-2 run that made it 117-103.

Andrew Wiggins scored 20 points in his finals debut and Draymond Green grabbed 11 rebounds before fouling out with 48.3 seconds left. Klay Thompson contributed 15 points as the Warriors began their sixth finals in eight years after making five straight trips from 2015-19 and winning three championships.

They'll have to win this one from behind after going 21-2 in their previous Game 1s under Steve Kerr.

"It's a different feeling. You obviously go into Game 2 with more of a sense of desperation. That's all part of this stuff. We've been in this position before," Kerr said. "Boston played a brilliant quarter. They came in and earned the win."

Curry scored a smooth 21 points in the opening period on 7-for-8 shooting, including 6 of 8 made 3s — missing a half-court heave at the buzzer. And Boston struggled to keep up with the Warriors' snappy ball movement and shooters at every spot on the floor.

Otto Porter Jr. returned from a two-game absence to score 12 points off the bench for the well-rested Warriors. Golden State ended its Western Conference final in Game 5 against Dallas a week earlier at home, while Boston was pushed to the limit with a Game 7 victory at Miami last Sunday.

Golden State dropped to 9-1 this postseason at home, where a sellout crowd in yellow finals T-shirts chanted "M-V-P!" for Curry at every chance.

Marcus Smart scored 18 points with four 3s for Boston. The Celtics star took criticism from Kerr for what the Golden State coach called "a dangerous play" lunging at Curry's left foot on March 16 in a 110-88 Boston rout that sidelined the 2021 scoring champion for a month before his return in Game 1 of the first round facing Denver.

CURRY'S FIRST QUARTER

Curry's six 3s in the opening 12 minutes were the most ever in any quarter of the NBA Finals. In addition, the 21 points were most since Michael Jordan's 22 in the fourth quarter of Game 4 vs. Phoenix in 1993.

The Celtics and Warriors combined for 20 3s by halftime, an NBA Finals first-half record.

TIP-INS

Celtics: Williams started after being listed as questionable with soreness in his surgically repaired left knee and finished with eight points and four blocks while playing 24 minutes. Coach Ime Udoka expected him to be limited to about 20 minutes as has been the recent pattern. ... Boston and the Warriors were even on the boards at 39. ... Tatum scored 12 points.

Warriors: F Andre Iguodala (injured disc in neck), G Gary Payton II (broken left elbow) and Porter (left foot soreness) all were back though Payton didn't play. 2015 NBA Finals MVP Iguodala checked in with 2:36 left in the first to huge cheers after he missed 12 games. ... Golden State is 21-3 in postseason Game 1s dating to the 2014-15 season when the Warriors captured the franchise's first championship in 40 years — and they had won 13 straight playoff series openers at home, third-longest streak in NBA history, before this.

A long-dead Muslim emperor vexes India's Hindu nationalists

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Narendra Modi rose from his chair and walked briskly towards the podium to deliver another nighttime address to the nation. It was expected the speech would include a rare message of interfaith harmony in the country where religious tensions have risen under his rule.

The Indian prime minister was speaking from the historic Mughal-era Red Fort in New Delhi, and the event marked the 400th birth anniversary celebrations of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh guru who is remembered for championing religious freedoms for all.

The occasion and the venue, in many ways, were appropriate.

Instead, Modi chose the April event to turn back the clock and remind people of India's most despised Muslim ruler who has been dead for more than 300 years.

"Aurangzeb severed many heads, but he could not shake our faith," Modi said during his address.

His invocation of the 17th century Mughal emperor was not a mere blip.

Aurangzeb Alamgir remained buried deep in the annals of India's complex history. The country's modern rulers are now resurrecting him as a brutal oppressor of Hindus and a rallying cry for Hindu nationalists who believe India must be salvaged from the taint of the so-called Muslim invaders.

As tensions between Hindus and Muslims have mounted, the scorn for Aurangzeb has grown, and politicians from India's right have invoked him like never before. It often comes with a cautionary warning: India's Muslims should disassociate themselves from him as retribution for his alleged crimes.

"For today's Hindu nationalists, Aurangzeb is a dog whistle for hating all Indian Muslims," said Audrey Truschke, historian and author of the book "Aurangzeb: The Man and the Myth."

Hating and disparaging Muslim rulers, particularly Mughals, is distinctive to India's Hindu nationalists, who for decades have strived to recreate officially secular India into a Hindu nation.

They argue that Muslim rulers like Aurangzeb destroyed Hindu culture, forced religious conversions, desecrated temples and imposed harsh taxes on non-Muslims, even though some historians say such stories are exaggerated. Popular thought among nationalists traces the origin of Hindu-Muslim tensions back to medieval times, when seven successive Muslim dynasties made India their home, until each were swept aside when their time passed.

This belief had led them on a quest to redeem India's Hindu past, to right the perceived wrongs suffered over centuries. And Aurangzeb is central to this sentiment.

Aurangzeb was the last powerful Mughal emperor who ascended to the throne in the mid-17th century after imprisoning his father and having his older brother killed. Unlike other Mughals, who ruled over a vast empire in South Asia for more than 300 years and enjoy a relatively uncontested legacy, Aurangzeb is, almost undoubtedly, one of the most hated men in Indian history.

Richard Eaton, a professor at the University of Arizona, who is widely regarded as an authority on pre-modern India, said that even though Aurangzeb destroyed temples, available records show it was a little more than a dozen and not thousands, as has been widely believed. This was done for political, not religious reasons, Eaton said, adding that the Muslim emperor also extended safety and security to people from all religions.

"In a word, he was a man of his own time, not of ours," said Eaton, adding that the Mughal emperor has been reduced to "a comic book villain."

But for Aurangzeb's detractors, he embodied evil and was nothing but a religious bigot.

Right-wing historian Makkhan Lal, whose books on Indian history have been read by millions of high school students, said ascribing political motives alone to Aurangzeb's acts is akin to the "betrayal of India's glorious past."

It is a claim made by many historians who support Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party, also known as the BJP, or its ideological mothership, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a radical Hindu movement that has been widely accused of stoking religious hatred with aggressively anti-Muslim views. They say India's history has been systematically whitewashed by far-left distortionists, mainly to cut off Indians — mostly

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Hindus — from their civilizational past.

“Aurangzeb razed down temples and it only shows his hate for Hindus and Hinduism,” said Lal.

The debate has spilled over from academia to angry social media posts and noisy TV shows, where India’s modern Muslims have often been insulted and called the “progeny of Aurangzeb.”

Last month, when a Muslim lawmaker visited Aurangzeb’s tomb to offer prayers, a senior leader from Modi’s party questioned his parentage.

“Why would you visit the grave of Aurangzeb who destroyed this country,” Hemanta Biswa Sarma, northeastern Assam state’s top elected official, thundered during a television interview. Referring to the lawmaker, he said: “If Aurangzeb is your father, then I won’t object.”

The insults have led to more anxieties among the country’s significant Muslim minority who in recent years have been at the receiving end of violence from Hindu nationalists, emboldened by a prime minister who has mostly stayed mum on such attacks since he was first elected in 2014.

Modi’s party denies using the Mughal emperor’s name to denigrate Muslims. It also says it is merely trying to out the truth.

“India’s history has been manipulated and distorted to appease minorities. We are dismantling that ecosystem of lies,” said Gopal Krishna Agarwal, a spokesman of the BJP.

The dislike for Aurangzeb extends far beyond Hindu nationalists. Many Sikhs remember him as a man who ordered the execution of their ninth guru in 1675. The commonly held belief is that the religious leader was executed for not converting to Islam.

Some argue that Modi’s invocation of Aurangzeb’s name at the Sikh guru’s birth anniversary in April serves only one purpose: to further widen anti-Muslim sentiments.

“In so doing, the Hindu right advances one of their key goals, namely maligning India’s Muslim minority population in order to try to justify majoritarian oppression and violence against them,” said Truschke, the historian.

Despite referencing Aurangzeb routinely, Hindu nationalists have simultaneously tried to erase him from the public sphere.

In 2015, New Delhi’s famous Aurangzeb Road was renamed after protests from Modi’s party leaders. Since then, some Indian state governments have rewritten school textbooks to deemphasize him. Last month, the mayor of northern Agra city described Aurangzeb as a “terrorist,” whose traces should be expunged from all public places. A politician called for his tomb to be levelled, prompting authorities to shut it to the public.

A senior administration official, who didn’t want to be named because of government policy, compared efforts to erase Aurangzeb’s name to the removal of Confederate symbols and statues — viewed as racist relics — in the United States.

“What is wrong if people want to talk about the past and right historical wrongs? In fact, why should there be places named after a zealot who left behind a bitter legacy?” the official asked.

This sentiment, fast resonating across India, has already touched a raw nerve.

A 17th-century mosque in Varanasi, Hinduism’s holiest city, has emerged as the latest flashpoint between Hindus and Muslims. A court case will decide whether the site would be given to Hindus, who claim it was built on a temple destroyed on the orders of Aurangzeb.

For decades, Hindu nationalists have laid claim to several famous mosques, arguing they are built on the ruins of prominent temples. Many such cases are pending in courts.

Critics say it could lead to long legal battles, like that of the Babri mosque, which was ripped apart by Hindu mobs with spades, crowbars and bare hands in 1992. The demolition set off massive violence across India and left more than 2,000 people, mostly Muslims, dead. In 2019, India’s Supreme Court gave the site of the mosque to Hindus.

Such worries are also felt by historians like Truschke.

She said the “demonization” of Aurangzeb and India’s Muslim kings is in “bad faith” and promotes “historical revisionism,” which is often backed by threats and violence.

"Hindu nationalists do not think about the real historical Aurangzeb," said Truschke. "Rather, they invent the villain that they want to hate."

Biden appeals for tougher gun laws: 'How much more carnage?'

By ZEKE MILLER and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — "Enough, enough," President Joe Biden exclaimed over and over as he delivered an impassioned address to the nation imploring Congress to take action against gun violence after mass shootings he said had turned schools, supermarkets and other everyday places into "killing fields."

If legislators fail to act, he warned, voters should use their "outrage" to turn it into a central issue in November's midterm elections.

Speaking at the White House on Thursday night, Biden acknowledged the stiff political headwinds as he sought to drive up pressure on Congress to pass stricter gun limits after such efforts failed following past attacks.

He repeated calls to restore a ban on the sale of assault-style weapons and high-capacity magazines — and said if Congress won't embrace all of his proposals, it must at least find compromises like keeping firearms from those with mental health issues or raising the age to buy assault-style weapons from 18 to 21.

"How much more carnage are we willing to accept?" Biden asked after last week's shootings by an 18-year-old gunman, who killed 19 students and two teachers at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, and another attack Wednesday in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where a gunman shot and killed four people and himself at a medical office. "Don't tell me raising the age won't make a difference," he said.

The most recent shootings came close on the heels of the May 14 assault in Buffalo, New York, where a white 18-year-old wearing military gear and livestreaming with a helmet camera opened fire with a rifle at a supermarket in a predominantly Black neighborhood, killing 10 people and wounding three others in what authorities described as "racially motivated violent extremism."

"This time we have to take the time to do something," Biden said, calling out the Senate, where 10 Republican votes would be needed to pass legislation.

For all the passion of Biden's address, and for all his big asks and smaller fallback alternatives, any major action by Congress is still a long shot.

"I know how hard it is, but I'll never give up, and if Congress fails, I believe this time a majority of the American people won't give up either," he added. "I believe the majority of you will act to turn your outrage into making this issue central to your vote."

Adding a stark perspective to young people's deaths, he noted that Centers for Disease Control data shows "guns are the number one killer of children in the United States of America," ahead of car crashes.

"Over the last two decades, more school-age children have died from guns than on-duty police officers and active-duty military — combined," he said.

Aware of persistent criticism from gun-rights advocates, Biden insisted his appeal wasn't about "vilifying gun owners" or "taking away anybody's guns."

"We should be treating responsible gun owners as an example of how every gun owner should behave," Biden said. "This isn't about taking away anyone's rights, it's about protecting children, it's about protecting families."

He called on Congress to end "outrageous" protections for gun manufacturers, which severely limit their liability over how their firearms are used, comparing it to the tobacco industry, which has faced repeated litigation over its products' role in causing cancer and other diseases.

"Imagine if the tobacco industry had been immune from being sued, where we'd be today," Biden said.

All major broadcast networks broke away from regular programming to carry Biden's remarks at 7:30 p.m. EDT, before the start of prime-time shows.

Biden has given major speeches on the coronavirus pandemic and the chaotic withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan. But the president has used such addresses sparingly during his nearly 18 months in office, especially during evening hours.

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Earlier Thursday, Vice President Kamala Harris spoke about the Oklahoma shooting, saying, "All of us hold the people of Tulsa in our hearts, but we also reaffirm our commitment to passing commonsense gun safety laws."

"No more excuses. Thoughts and prayers are important, but not enough," Harris said. "We need Congress to act."

Visiting Uvalde on Sunday, Biden mourned privately for three-plus hours with anguished families. Faced with chants of "do something" as he departed a church service, the president pledged, "We will." In his address, he spoke of being passed a note by a woman in a Uvalde church grieving the loss of her grandchild, calling on people to come together and act.

His Thursday night address coincided with bipartisan talks that are intensifying among a core group of senators discussing modest gun policy changes. Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine said the group is "making rapid progress," and Biden has spoken to Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, among those leading Democrats' efforts on the issue.

Democrats are hoping Biden's remarks encourage the bipartisan Senate talks and build pressure on the Republicans to strike an agreement. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Biden is "encouraged" by congressional negotiations but the president wants to give lawmakers "some space" to keep talking.

The private discussions in the Senate, which is split 50-50 between Democrats and Republicans, are not expected to produce the kinds of sweeping reforms being considered by the Democratic-led House — which has approved expansive background checks legislation and will next turn to an assault weapons ban.

A House package debated Thursday — and approved by a committee, 25-19 — is less sweeping but includes a provision raising the required age for buying semi-automatic firearms to 21. It still faces slim chances in the Senate.

Instead, the bipartisan senators are likely to come up with a more incremental package that would increase federal funding to support state gun safety efforts — with incentives for bolstering school security and mental health resources. The package may also encourage "red-flag laws" to keep firearms away from those who would do harm.

While the Senate approved a modest measure to encourage compliance with background checks after a 2017 church mass shooting in Texas and one in Parkland, Florida, the following year, no major legislation cleared the chamber following the devastating massacre of 20 children at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012.

Tulsa shooting highlights vulnerability of hospitals

By MICHAEL TARM and DON BABWIN Associated Press

Hospitals, like schools, are not typically designed to guard against the threat of a determined gunman entering the building to take lives.

The vulnerability of health care facilities was highlighted by a shooter who killed four people and then himself Wednesday at a hospital in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The assailant got inside a building on the Saint Francis Hospital campus with little trouble, just hours after buying an AR-style rifle, authorities said.

Here's a look at what's known about security at the Tulsa facility and other American hospitals:

DID THE GUNMAN HAVE TO PASS THROUGH SECURITY?

No, the 45-year-old man identified as the shooter, Michael Louis, of Muskogee, Oklahoma, parked his car in an adjoining garage, then went through unlocked doors into the medical building, authorities said.

"It is an entry that is open to the public," Tulsa Police Chief Wendell Franklin told reporters Thursday. "He was able to walk in without any type of challenge."

It was a short walk from that entrance to the office area where Louis fatally shot his primary target, Dr. Preston Phillips. Police said Phillips recently performed surgery on Louis and that Louis blamed the doctor for chronic pain he still suffered.

Once Louis got in, "he began firing at anyone who was in his way," Franklin said. At least one person

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holding a door open for others to escape was killed.

COULD BETTER SECURITY HAVE STOPPED THE SHOOTER?

The president and CEO of Saint Francis Health System said nothing can stop somebody with guns "hell-bent on causing harm."

Dr. Cliff Robertson did not provide details about hospital security. He said the facility has procedures to deal with "difficult, unhappy patients," though he did not elaborate.

Hospital officials planned to review their security procedures in the days ahead. There "will be a thousand questions" to answer regarding the shooting, Robertson said.

From official accounts, the reaction time of officers could not have been much better. Wendell said officers responded to the shooting within minutes and that the shooter apparently killed himself as police approached.

IS IT STANDARD FOR HOSPITALS TO LEAVE SOME ENTRYWAYS OPEN?

Yes, because some urgent medical situations require patients to be moved quickly. But some hospitals, especially ones that have dealt with violence on their grounds, have upgraded security in recent years.

Mercy Hospital in Chicago beefed up security after a 2019 attack in which a man fatally shot an attending physician who was his ex-fiance in the parking lot. He then entered the hospital, where he shot and killed a pharmacy resident and a police officer before he was fatally shot himself.

Now security officers are stationed at every entrance, and the hospital has a system that electronically notifies employees of any armed intruders.

HOW COMMON ARE SHOOTINGS AT HOSPITALS?

From 2000 to 2011, there were 154 hospital-related shootings, according to a 2017 guide from the International Association of Emergency Medical Services Chiefs that cited the Annals of Emergency Medicine.

Nearly 60 percent of those shootings were inside hospitals, and around 40 were outside on hospital grounds, the guide said.

The attacks resulted in 235 people wounded or killed, according to the guide, which also cited data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics that indicated violence is four times more likely in health care than in other industries.

WHAT ARE SOME UNIQUE CHALLENGES FOR HOSPITALS?

Some patients have limited mobility, and many staff members are obligated to stay with them in dangerous situations, sometimes making quick evacuations impossible.

Also, hospital buildings are often labyrinths, with many doors that lead to more doors. The Tulsa police chief said that was the case in the shooting on Wednesday, when the building's vastness created echoes, which made it harder for officers and others inside to know precisely where the gunshots were coming from.

WHAT ELSE HAVE HOSPITALS DONE TO IMPROVE SECURITY?

Even before the 2019 shooting at Chicago Mercy, the hospital had begun training employees about what to do during an active gunman situation. That included instructions on retreating into rooms, locking doors and turning out lights.

Training sessions at the hospital that were held annually before the 2019 shooting are now held four times a year, said Paul Stewart, a spokesman for the hospital, which is now called Insight Hospital and Medical Center.

Out of concern about people entering with guns, some hospitals have also installed metal detectors. At Chicago's UI Health, which is affiliated with the University of Illinois, metal detectors were installed in the emergency room, though not nearly as many as nurses and other health care workers asked for.

Nurses complain that patients entering with guns are far too common.

"They did that after someone brought in a semi-automatic weapon and was actually making a video on his phone about how he was going to kill nurses," said Paul Pater, a nurse at the hospital.

NY passes bill raising age to buy, own semi-automatic rifles

By MARINA VILLENEUVE Associated Press

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ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — New York's legislature voted Thursday to ban anyone under age 21 from buying or possessing a semi-automatic rifle, a major change to state firearm laws pushed through less than three weeks after an 18-year-old used one of the guns to kill 10 people at a supermarket in Buffalo.

The bill raising the age limit is the most significant part of a package of gun control measures announced earlier this week by Democratic legislative leaders and Gov. Kathy Hochul.

Other new legislation will restrict civilian purchases of bullet-resistant armor, which was worn by the killer in Buffalo, and require new guns to be equipped with microstamping technology that can help law enforcement investigators trace bullets to particular firearms.

The age limit bill passed the Senate along party lines, 43-20, and in the Assembly 102-47, and will now head to Hochul's desk for her signature.

New York already requires people to be 21 to possess a handgun. Younger people would still be allowed to have other types of rifles and shotguns under the new law, but would be unable to buy the type of fast-firing rifles used by the 18-year-old gunmen in the mass shootings in Buffalo and at a Texas elementary school.

Besides raising the legal purchase age to 21, the bill would also require anyone buying a semi-automatic rifle to get a license — something now only required for handguns.

Many Republicans opposed the new gun limitations, arguing they would inconvenience law-abiding firearms owners and could be easily circumvented by people determined to get weapons.

Sen. Gustavo Rivera, a Bronx Democrat, said he had no problem putting up obstacles.

"It is meant to be a hassle to those folks who might want to get their hands quickly on something with which they could mass murder people," he said.

The age limit change would largely impact areas outside New York City, which already requires permits to possess, carry and purchase any type of firearm and prohibits most applicants under 21.

New York would join a handful of states — including Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Vermont and Washington — that require buyers to be at least 21 instead of 18 to purchase some types of long guns. Similar legislation has been proposed in Utah.

Legal fights over the legislation are expected. New York's law limiting who can get a handgun license is already the subject of a lawsuit now before the U.S. Supreme Court.

California's attempt to raise the legal buying age for semi-automatic weapons has also been challenged.

On May 11, a U.S. appeals court panel in northern California ruled 2-1 that the state's ban on the sale of semi-automatic weapons to adults under 21 is unconstitutional. The two judges who ruled in the majority were part of Republican President Donald Trump's wave of conservative-approved nominees that reshaped the famously liberal court.

The National Rifle Association is also challenging Florida's ban on the sale of rifles and other firearms to adults under age 21, which was passed in the wake of a 2018 shooting that killed 17 students and staff at a high school in Parkland.

Semi-automatic rifles automatically load each bullet after firing, although firing requires pulling the trigger for each round. That makes it possible for mass murderers to kill more people in a short amount of time.

Previously, people as young as 16 could possess long guns like rifles and shotguns without a license in New York, although they had to be 18 to buy one from a federally licensed firearms dealer.

Sen. Alexis Weik, a Republican of Long Island, pointed out that an 18 year old could still travel to another state and buy a semi-automatic rifle.

Sen. Kevin Thomas, a Long Island Democrat and one of the bill's sponsors, replied, "Are you advocating for federal gun control? Because that what's needed."

New York lawmakers were also passing legislation expanding the list of people who can apply for an extreme risk protection order, a court order that can temporarily prohibit someone from purchasing or possessing a firearm if they are believed to be a danger to themselves or others.

"Even as we take action to protect New Yorkers, we recognize that this is a nationwide problem. I once again urge Congress to seize this moment and pass meaningful gun violence prevention measures. We

have no time to waste," Hochul said in a statement.

Queen Elizabeth II to miss Jubilee service amid 'discomfort'

By DANICA KIRKA and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Queen Elizabeth II stepped gingerly onto the Buckingham Palace balcony Thursday, drawing wild cheers from the tens of thousands who came to join her at the start of four days of celebrations of her 70 years on the throne.

Her fans sported Union Jack flags, party hats or plastic tiaras. Some had camped overnight in hopes of glimpsing the 96-year-old queen, whose appearances are becoming rare, and a chance to watch the Trooping the Color — a military parade that has marked each sovereign's official birthday since 1760.

It was an explosion of joy in the massive crowd, one of the first big gatherings in the U.K. since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

"Everybody has got the same mission," said Hillary Mathews, 70, who had come from Hertfordshire, outside London. "All the horrors that's been going on in the world and in England at the moment are put behind us for a day, and we can just enjoy really celebrating the queen."

Elizabeth, who became queen at 25, is Britain's longest-reigning monarch and the first to reach the milestone of seven decades on the throne.

Yet after a lifetime of good health, age has begun to catch up with her. Buckingham Palace announced late Thursday that the queen would not attend a thanksgiving church service Friday after experiencing "some discomfort" at events on Thursday. The palace said with "great reluctance" the monarch has decided to skip the service at St. Paul's Cathedral.

The queen has had trouble moving around in recent months, and has pulled out of many public events. But Elizabeth took part Thursday night in lighting a chain of ceremonial beacons at Windsor Castle as planned.

The Jubilee celebrations go on for a long weekend, and it was not immediately known how the news would affect Jubilee events on Saturday and Sunday.

The palace says "the queen greatly enjoyed" Thursday's events — and it showed.

She basked in her moment. Smiling, she chatted with her great-grandson Prince Louis, 4, who occasionally covered his ears as 70 military aircraft old and new swooped low over the palace to salute the queen. The six-minute display included a formation of Typhoon fighter jets flying in the shape of the number 70.

The queen, wearing a dusky dove blue dress designed by Angela Kelly, was joined on the balcony by more than a dozen royals — though not Prince Harry and his wife Meghan, who gave up front-line royal duties two years ago. The couple traveled to London from their home in California with their two young children to take a low-key part in the celebrations, and watched Thursday's Trooping the Color with other members of the family.

They did not appear on the palace balcony, because the monarch decided that only working members of the royal family should have that honor. The decision also, handily, excluded Prince Andrew, who stepped away from public duties amid controversy over his links with the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Andrew will also miss Friday's service of thanksgiving after testing positive for COVID-19.

The jubilee is being commemorated with a four-day holiday extravaganza and events including a concert at Buckingham Palace on Saturday and a pageant staged by thousands of performers drawn from schools and community groups around the country on Sunday. Thousands of street parties are planned nationwide, repeating a tradition that began with the queen's coronation in 1953.

Not everyone in Britain is celebrating. Many people have taken advantage of the long weekend to go on vacation. And 12 protesters were arrested Thursday 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."

Yet the jubilee is giving many people — even those indifferent to the monarchy — a chance to reflect on the state of the nation and the huge changes that have taken place during Elizabeth's reign.

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Former Prime Minister John Major, one of the 14 prime ministers during 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. This country does like a good party.

"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."

Congratulations arrived from world leaders, including U.S. President Joe Biden and Pope Francis. French President Emmanuel Macron called Elizabeth "the golden thread that binds our two countries" and former President Barack Obama recalled the queen's "grace and generosity" during his first visit to the palace.

"Your life has been a gift, not just to the United Kingdom but to the world," Obama told the BBC "May the light of your crown continue to reign supreme."

Cheers and the clop of hooves rang out Thursday as horse-drawn carriages carried members of the royal family, including Prince William's wife, Kate, and their children Prince George, 8, Princess Charlotte, 7, and 4-year-old Prince Louis, from Buckingham Palace to Horse Guards Parade, a ceremonial parade ground about 1 kilometer (0.6 miles) away, for the Trooping the Color ceremony.

The annual tradition is a ceremonial reenactment of the way battle flags, or colors, were once displayed for soldiers to make sure they would recognize a crucial rallying point if they became disoriented in combat.

Prince Charles, the 73-year-old heir to the throne, played a key role during the event Thursday as he stood in for his mother — as he has more and more of late.

Clad in his ceremonial military uniform, Charles rode onto the parade ground on horseback and took the salute of the passing troops in their scarlet tunics and bearskin hats. He was flanked by his sister, Princess Anne, and oldest son Prince William.

Tens of thousands of locals and tourists lined the route between palace and parade ground to take in the spectacle and the atmosphere.

"I was right at the front ... I'm very proud of the queen," said Celia Lourd, 60. "She's been my queen all my life and I think we owe her an awful lot for the service she's given to the country. So I wanted to come to show my support today and say thank you."

Immersed in crisis, Peru neglects Amazon's destruction

By FABIANO MAISONNAVE Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Peru has descended into one of the worst political crises in its history and protection of its Amazon rainforest is failing, according to a report published Thursday. Peru is home to the second-largest portion of the Amazon rainforest after Brazil. The country had pledged to stop deforestation by 2021.

The South American country has been immersed in political turbulence since 2016. Corruption scandals and disputes between the executive and legislative branches of government have led to intense turnover — four presidents in five years. Peru's current President, leftist outsider Pedro Castillo, has already survived two impeachment attempts since he took office in July 2021.

The Peruvian Amazon is massive — larger than Ukraine, some 68 million hectares (168 million acres). It holds the headwaters of the Amazon river as well as Manú National Park, one of the most biologically diverse areas in the world. It's a transition zone between the Andes mountains and the rainforest lowlands, rich in microclimates and ecology.

But the Monitoring of the Andean Amazon Project (MAAP), an initiative of the nonprofit Amazon Conservation Association, reports that deforestation in the Peruvian Amazon has hit six historical highs in the past ten years. The analysis is based on data from the University of Maryland, which has kept records since 2002.

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The worst year ever was 2020 when Peru lost around 170,000 hectares (420,000 acres) of Amazon rainforest. Last year, that number declined, but still ranked as the sixth highest on record. Peruvian official data, which only goes through 2020, agrees.

Corrupt actors who benefit from environmental crime, together with the political crisis have resulted in a lack of government ability to fight environmental crime, the report said. "What's more, the Peruvian government continues to prioritize economic development over the protection of the Amazon rainforest." The Igarapé Institute commissioned the report from InSight Crime, a non-profit organization focused on investigating crime in Latin America.

As in Brazil's Amazon, cattle ranching and agriculture are the main drivers of deforestation. Agribusiness companies and poor migrants from other parts of Peru seize land illegally. Other illegal activities that harm the forest are gold mining, logging and coca plantations.

"Agriculture is now firmly established," as the leading driver of deforestation, concentrated in the central and southern Peruvian Amazon, said MAAP director Matt Finan. "This includes both widespread small-scale agriculture as well recent large-scale activities from new Mennonite colonies."

The report, titled *The Roots of Environmental Crime in the Peruvian Amazon*, identifies three actors behind deforestation: big businesses, such as palm oil companies; entrepreneurial criminal networks, which profit from the trade in timber, land or drugs, and cheap labor — poorly paid workers who cut down trees and plant coca crops.

The products of these illegal activities end up in other parts of the world. Most of the gold exports go to Switzerland, the United States, India and Canada. Peru's domestic market absorbs most of the timber; what is exported goes mainly to China. Around 28 percent of Peru's gold production is illegal, according to the InSightCrime investigation, which also estimates that most timber extraction is done without permits.

"The political crisis has distracted us a lot from environmental problems," said former minister of Environment Manuel Pulgar-Vidal in an interview with The Associated Press in Rio de Janeiro, on the sidelines of a meeting on climate change hosted by the Brazilian Center for International Relations, a think-tank. The pandemic and the war in Ukraine have magnified these problems, he said.

The current government also promotes activities like illegal mining and illegal logging, he said. The former minister tied this to the unprosecuted deaths of numerous environmental advocates.

Contacted Monday by phone and email, Peru's Ministry of Environment didn't respond to requests for comment about the current situation in the Amazon.

The Amazon is the world's largest tropical rainforest and an enormous carbon sink. There is widespread concern that its destruction will not only release massive amounts of carbon into the atmosphere, further complicating hopes of slowing down climate change, but also push it past a tipping point, after which much of the forest will begin an irreversible process of degradation into tropical savannah.

Transformative year: Black coaches now lead 50% of NBA teams

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — It's an annual occurrence in the NBA. Teams change head coaches and the roster of candidates who should get those jobs starts getting bandied about, and especially in recent years those lists almost always included Black candidates.

Case in point: Ime Udoka, who is of Nigerian descent.

For five years, he was one of those can't-miss candidates but never got hired. That is, until the Boston Celtics gave him the opportunity. And all Udoka did in Year 1 was reach the NBA Finals.

"I don't understand what took so long, to be honest," Celtics guard Jaylen Brown said.

Udoka's hiring by the Eastern Conference champion Celtics, who open the NBA Finals on Thursday night against the Golden State Warriors, was part of a transformative year for the league when it comes to diversity within the coaching ranks. In the last 12 months, eight coaching jobs have been filled by Black candidates — and for the first time, half the league's franchises, 15 of the 30, have Black head coaches.

"It means a lot," said Golden State assistant Mike Brown, one of the eight recent Black hires; he's taking

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over the Sacramento Kings when this series ends. "When my son, and my oldest son's about to have his first son, when they turn on the TV and they see people that look like them leading an NBA team on the sidelines, it can be inspiring.

"For me, carrying the torch and then passing it to the next generation is something that I think about often — not just for my family, but for others out there."

Detroit's Dwane Casey, Phoenix's Monty Williams, Cleveland's J.B. Bickerstaff, Philadelphia's Doc Rivers, the Los Angeles Clippers' Tyronn Lue, Houston's Stephen Silas and Atlanta's Nate McMillan are the seven Black coaches who had their current jobs last season. They've been joined in the last year by Udoka, Brown, Portland's Chauncey Billups, Dallas' Jason Kidd, Orlando's Jamahl Mosley, Washington's Wes Unseld Jr., New Orleans' Willie Green and last week, the Los Angeles Lakers hired Darvin Ham.

Mosley interviewed for nine jobs before getting hired in Orlando. Ham, like Udoka, had been a can't-miss name for years, but never got a chance until now.

"Darvin is about as good a guy as you're going to see, a big competitor," Boston's Al Horford said. "Extreme competitor. The Lakers are really lucky to have a guy like him. He's the kind of guy that you want."

It's been nearly 60 years since Bill Russell broke the NBA coaching color barrier when he became the first Black man to coach a team; he accepted the role as player-coach of the Celtics starting with the 1966-67 season and won a championship in his second season.

Al Attles and Lenny Wilkens were the next two Black coaches to get opportunities; they would eventually become champions as well. There have been roughly 260 different coaches in the NBA, excluding short-term interim fill-ins, since Russell was hired, and 1 out of 3 of those coaches have been Black. But most of those Black coaches have either lasted in their first job no more than three years or not gotten a second chance at leading a team.

Players wanted that to change. Evidently, so did other coaches.

"For many years qualified young coaches of color like Ime Udoka, Jamahl Mosley, Willie Green, Wes Unseld Jr., Darvin Ham and Stephen Silas, to name just a few, were not getting consistent opportunities to interview for NBA head coaching positions," said Indiana coach Rick Carlisle, the president of the National Basketball Coaches Association. "The last two years changed everything. The league office has tirelessly made franchises more aware of the qualifications and journeys of these talented young coaches. This increased awareness has led to qualified coaches of all backgrounds having greater opportunity to interview and the numbers speak for themselves."

Part of that awareness came from a meeting that three league officials — Commissioner Adam Silver, chief people and inclusion officer Oris Stuart and president of social responsibility and player programs Kathy Behrens — had with Carlisle, representing the NBCA, in February 2019.

Out of that meeting, the NBA Coaches Equality Initiative was born. The NBCA worked with the league in many ways to get it started, including the building of a database; in a couple of clicks, teams in need of coaches could get information, including qualifications, experience and even an on-camera interview in some cases, on every available candidate.

"You have to talk about these issues all the time," Silver said Thursday. "If you care about diversity and inclusion in your workplace ... it has to become a focus."

There are still areas where the NBA can improve in terms of diversity. Most front-office positions are not held by people of color and Michael Jordan is the lone Black principal owner of a franchise; Jordan leads the Charlotte Hornets, the only team that has a coaching vacancy right now.

It's an issue, and while there has been improvement in some areas, Silver wants more.

"There's more work to be done," Silver said.

That said, the numbers in the NBA wildly exceed the other major U.S. pro leagues.

There are three Black coaches in the NFL: Pittsburgh's Mike Tomlin, Houston's Lovie Smith and Tampa Bay's Todd Bowles. That does not include Miami's Mike McDaniels; his father is Black, but McDaniels identifies as biracial. The person McDaniels replaced in Miami, former coach Brian Flores, is suing the Dolphins and the NFL for what he says is racial discrimination in hiring practices.

"Our league leads the charge," Mike Brown said. "Hopefully other leagues will follow suit."

But he also points out that he longs for a day when 50% of the coaches in a league being Black won't seem like a milestone, saying that's "the dream." And Silver echoed those sentiments.

"I'm particularly proud of numbers and roughly 50% of our head coaches are Black now, the goal is that that's not newsworthy," Silver said. "And when people are hired, the first reaction isn't the color of their skin."

Police: Tulsa gunman targeted surgeon he blamed for pain

By SEAN MURPHY, JILL BLEED and KATHLEEN FOODY Associated Press

A gunman who killed his surgeon and three other people at a Tulsa medical office blamed the doctor for his continuing pain after a recent back operation and bought an AR-style rifle just hours before the rampage, police said Thursday.

The patient called the clinic repeatedly complaining of pain and specifically targeted the doctor who performed the surgery, then killed himself as police arrived, Tulsa Police Chief Wendell Franklin said.

That physician, Dr. Preston Phillips, was killed Wednesday, along with Dr. Stephanie Husen, receptionist Amanda Glenn and visitor William Love, police said. The attack occurred on the campus of Saint Francis Health System in Tulsa. The chief identified the shooter as Michael Louis, 45, of Muskogee, Oklahoma.

It was the latest in a series of mass shootings in the United States including the deadly school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, and an attack on a supermarket in Buffalo, New York. The recent Memorial Day weekend saw multiple mass shootings nationwide, including at an outdoor festival in Taft, Oklahoma, 45 miles from Tulsa, even as single-death incidents accounted for most gun fatalities.

President Joe Biden addressed the carnage in recent years from mass shootings with AR-style rifles in an address Thursday night.

Since the mass shooting at a Uvalde elementary school killed 21 people, including 19 children, "just over a week ago, there have been 20 mass shootings in America, each with four or more people killed or injured," he said. After describing the Tulsa shooting as one of those 20 mass shootings, the president said, "That doesn't count the carnage we see every single day that doesn't make the headlines."

Louis carried a letter that said he was targeting Phillips, Franklin said. The letter "made it clear that he came in with the intent to kill Dr. Phillips and anyone who got in his way," Franklin said. "He blamed Dr. Phillips for the ongoing pain following the surgery."

Franklin said Phillips performed the surgery on May 19 and Louis was released from the hospital on May 24.

He said Louis called the doctor's office "several times over several days" reporting he was still in pain and saw Phillips on Tuesday for "additional treatment." Louis called the office again Wednesday "complaining of back pain and wanting additional assistance," he said.

A phone number listed for an address for a Michael Louis in Muskogee was not working Thursday.

Phillips, 59, was an orthopedic surgeon with an interest in spinal surgery and joint reconstruction, according to a profile on the clinic's website. He once served as lead physician for Tulsa's WNBA team before the franchise moved out of state, according to the Tulsa World.

Dr. Cliff Robertson, president and CEO of Saint Francis Health System, called Phillips a "consummate gentleman" and "a man that we should all strive to emulate." He said the three employees who were killed were "the three best people in the entire world" and that they "didn't deserve to die this way."

Husen was 48 and Glenn was 40, officials said.

Love, a 73-year-old retired Army sergeant, was a patient at the clinic but that day he was accompanying his wife, Deborah, for her six-month checkup, said their daughter, Karen Denise Love.

Police have received reports that Love held a door shut in hopes of allowing others to flee from the gunman through another door, Franklin said in response to reporters' questions.

Karen Love said her parents were in an examination room with one of Phillips' assistants when the couple heard the commotion outside. When they realized it was gunshots, Karen Love said her father grabbed the door handle from inside the room.

"As they heard this guy going up and down the hall, they knew it was gunfire," Karen Love said. "They

thought it was someone just shooting people. My dad was trying to hold the door the best he could."

Police believe Louis bought his weapons legally, Franklin said. Louis bought an AR-style semi-automatic rifle on the afternoon of the shooting and a handgun on Sunday, the police chief said.

Franklin praised the law enforcement officers, 911 operators and emergency for their "immediate response" to the attack Wednesday. Police responded to the call about three minutes after dispatchers received the report at 4:52 p.m. and made contact with the gunman at 5:01 p.m., authorities said Wednesday.

Franklin said police believe Louis shot himself about 39 seconds after the first officers entered the building. "Our training led us to take immediate action without hesitation," he said. "That's exactly what officers do and that's what they did in this instance."

The length of time it took police officers in Uvalde, Texas, to engage the gunman during last week's deadly school shooting at Robb Elementary School has become a key focus of that investigation. Officers waited over an hour to breach the classroom where the 18-year-old gunman attacked with an AR-style semi-automatic rifle, killing 19 children and two teachers.

Democratic leaders have amplified their calls for greater restrictions on guns since the Uvalde shooting, while Republicans are emphasizing more security at schools. The divide mirrors a partisan split that has stymied action in Congress and many state capitols over how best to respond to a record-high number of gun-related deaths in the U.S.

Oklahoma House Democrats on Thursday called for a special session to consider gun safety legislation, but that's unlikely to happen in a GOP-controlled Legislature that has been pushing for years to loosen firearms restrictions.

Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt, who is running for reelection, said last week after the Texas shooting that it was too soon to talk about firearms policy. A pro-firearms group, the Oklahoma 2nd Amendment Association, is an influential force at the state Capitol, and the first bill Stitt signed into law after taking office in 2019 was a measure that allows most adults to openly carry firearms without the previously required background check or training.

Since January, there have been 12 shootings where four or more people have been killed, according to The Associated Press/USA TODAY/Northeastern University mass killing database. Those shootings have left 76 dead, including 35 adults and children in Buffalo, Uvalde and Tulsa, the database says. The death toll does not include the suspects in the shootings.

2 doctors, receptionist and visitor killed in Tulsa shooting

By KATHLEEN FOODY, COREY WILLIAMS and ADRIAN SAINZ Associated Press

Two doctors, a receptionist and a former soldier accompanying his wife during a checkup were killed in a mass shooting inside a Tulsa medical building, authorities said Thursday.

Police, officials at Saint Francis Health System and others provided details about the victims of Wednesday's shooting.

One of the doctors once worked for a pro basketball team, and the other was a huge college football fan. The receptionist supervisor cheered on her sons' high school baseball team, and police said the fourth victim was an Army veteran who sacrificed his life for his wife during the shooting.

DR. PRESTON PHILLIPS

Tulsa Police Chief Wendell Franklin said Phillips performed back surgery on the gunman last month and was the primary target of the shooting. Phillips, 59, was found dead in a second-floor exam room.

Phillips was an orthopedic surgeon with an interest in spinal surgery and joint reconstruction, according to a profile on the hospital system's website. He had served as lead physician for Tulsa's WNBA team before the franchise moved out of state, according to the Tulsa World.

In addition to his medical degree, Phillips had advanced degrees in organic chemistry, pharmacology and theology.

Dr. Cliff Robertson, president and CEO of Saint Francis Health System, said Phillips was a dedicated caregiver who considered medicine his calling. Robertson said Phillips was a "consummate gentleman."

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"He was — he is — a man that we should all strive to emulate," Robertson said. "The fact that some individual would go after Dr. Phillips is mind-blowing. He's one of those folks that, you know, his clinic can not always be on time because he will spend every minute with patients that they need."

Phillips graduated in 1990 from Harvard Medical School and completed his fellowship at the university-affiliated Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston.

"Tragically, this incident is the latest in a seemingly unending series of devastating shootings that serve as painful and recurring reminders that gun violence is a medical and public health crisis in this country," Harvard Medical School Dean George Q. Daley said Thursday in a statement.

In a statement, the J. Robert Gladden Orthopaedic Society said Phillips was one of its members. The Towson, Maryland-based group said its mission is to increase diversity within the orthopedic profession "and promote the highest quality musculoskeletal care for all people."

The group called the shooting a "despicable act."

DR. STEPHANIE HUSEN

According to the hospital system's website, Husen, 48, focused on sports medicine. She graduated medical school in 2000 from Oklahoma State University and further trained at Greenville Memorial Hospital and the Steadman Hawkins Clinic of the Carolinas in South Carolina.

Robertson said Husen was "an incredible person."

Husen's ex-husband, John Reckenbeil, said Husen was a physical therapist when she broke her foot in a car accident in the late 1990s. As she was rehabilitating her injury, Husen made the decision to go to medical school and study orthopedics, Reckenbeil told The Associated Press.

Husen, who had two brothers, loved her family and enjoyed being a doctor, Reckenbeil said.

"That's what is just so unacceptable," Reckenbeil said. "She's there doing her job ... She loved helping people and she's ripped from this planet doing what she loved to do."

Husen grew up in Ponca City, Oklahoma, and was a big fan of Oklahoma Sooners football, Reckenbeil said.

"She was the greatest woman ever," he said. "She was the best doctor, she was the best person, she was the best wife."

Husen was cleaning out her house recently and sent him photos from their wedding of his late mother "out of the blue," Reckenbeil said.

"That's the type of woman she was," Reckenbeil said.

Reckenbeil said Husen was often "the smartest person in the room, but she never let you know about it."

AMANDA GLENN

Robertson said Glenn, 40, was a receptionist and served in a supervisory role.

The three employees were "the three best people in the entire world, the most committed to doing what they do every day and taking care of others. They didn't deserve to die like that," Robertson said.

The Charles Page High School baseball team said in a Facebook post that Glenn was a devoted wife, mother and friend.

"She was on our Booster Club Board and served the baseball boys and coaches selflessly. She was the biggest cheerleader for both of her sons and all of our boys!" the statement said. "Our baseball family is at a loss."

WILLIAM LOVE

Franklin, the police chief, said Love, 73, was found wounded in a second-floor exam room and taken to the hospital's emergency room for treatment. He died there.

Although Love was a patient at the clinic where the shooting happened, he didn't have an appointment that day but was instead accompanying another patient, said Tulsa Police Capt. Richard Meulenberg.

Love was a retired Army sergeant with 27 years of service, including one tour in the Vietnam War, the Tulsa Police Department said in a statement posted on Facebook. Love enjoyed traveling and spending time with his family, which included eight grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

Love had taken his wife, Deborah, to the clinic the day of the shooting for her six-month checkup, said their daughter, Karen Denise Love. Deborah Love had back surgery in December.

They were in an examination room with one of Phillips' assistants when the couple heard the commotion outside. When they realized it was gunshots, Karen Love said her father grabbed the door handle from inside the room.

"As they heard this guy going up and down the hall, they knew it was gunfire," Karen Love said. "They thought it was someone just shooting people. My dad was trying to hold the door the best he could."

The shooter walked past their room, but they heard him come back. He then started shooting through the sheetrock walls and through the door, striking William Love, she said.

Karen Love said her father was born in Georgia, a "poor, sharecroppers' boy."

"He was a red, white and blue guy, my daddy," she said. "He was a good, stable human being."

Before he was killed, Love had planned to travel with his wife, his daughter said. They enjoyed California, Wyoming and Georgia, Karen Love said.

White House: 1st shots for kids under 5 possible by June 21

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration said Thursday that children under 5 may be able to get their first COVID-19 vaccination doses as soon as June 21, if federal regulators authorize shots for the age group, as expected.

White House COVID-19 coordinator Ashish Jha outlined the administration's planning for the last remaining ineligible age group to get shots. He said the Food and Drug Administration's outside panel of advisers will meet on June 14-15 to evaluate the Pfizer and Moderna shots for younger kids. Shipments to doctors' offices and pediatric care facilities would begin soon after FDA authorization, with the first shots possible the following week.

Jha said states can begin placing orders for pediatric vaccines on Friday, and said the administration has an initial supply of 10 million doses available. He said it may take a few days for the vaccines to arrive across the country and vaccine appointments to be widespread.

"Our expectation is that within weeks every parent who wants their child to get vaccinated will be able to get an appointment," Jha said.

The timeline would provide parents with the opportunity to get their children fully vaccinated in time for the beginning of the next school year.

The Biden administration is pressing states to prioritize large-volume sites like children's hospitals, and to make appointments available outside regular work hours to make it easier for parents to get their kids vaccinated.

In the view of the White House, eliminating the last significant cohort not yet eligible for vaccines will go a long way in building confidence among some Americans who have been wary to return to many of their pre-pandemic activities, helping the country emerge from the pandemic.

Jha acknowledged the "frustration" of parents of young children who have been waiting more than a year for shots for their kids.

"At the end of the day we all want to move fast, but we've got to get it right," he said.

Jan. 6 committee sets prime-time hearing date for findings

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol will go public with its findings in a prime-time hearing next week, the start of what lawmakers hope will be a high-profile airing of the causes and consequences of the domestic attack on the U.S. government.

Lawmakers plan to hold a series of hearings in June that they promise will lay out, step-by-step, how former President Donald Trump and his allies worked feverishly to overturn his loss in the 2020 presidential election, spreading lies about widespread voter fraud — widely debunked by judges and his own administration — that fueled a violent assault on the seat of democracy.

The six hearings, set to begin June 9 and expected to last until late June, will be the first time the com-

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mittee discloses “previously unseen material” about what it has discovered in the course of a sprawling 10-month investigation that has touched nearly every aspect of the insurrection.

The committee, which has called Jan. 6 “one of the darkest days of our democracy,” was formed in the aftermath to “investigate the facts, circumstances, and causes relating to the domestic terrorist attack on the Capitol.”

Unlike any other congressional committee in recent times, the panel’s work has been both highly anticipated by Democrats and routinely criticized by Trump and the former president’s allies, including some Republicans in Congress, who complain it is partisan.

More than 1,000 people have been interviewed by the panel, and only brief snippets of that testimony have been revealed to the public, mostly through court filings. The hearings are expected to showcase a series of witnesses but the committee has not yet publicly released the names.

The investigation has focused on every aspect of the insurrection, including the efforts by Trump and his allies to cast doubt on the election and halt the certification of President Joe Biden’s victory; the financing and organizing of rallies in Washington that took place before the attack; security failures by Capitol Police and federal agencies; and the actions of the rioters themselves.

The hearings are expected to be exhaustive, but not the final word from the committee, which plans to release subsequent reports on its findings, including recommendations on legislative reforms, ahead of the midterm elections.

Texas senator: School police chief didn’t know of 911 calls

By JAY REEVES and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — The commander overseeing police during a shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, was not informed of panicked 911 calls coming from students trapped inside and it’s unclear who at the scene was aware of the calls as the massacre unfolded, a Texas state senator said Thursday.

Sen. Roland Gutierrez said it was a “system failure” that school district police Chief Pete Arredondo received no word of the pleas for help from people inside Robb Elementary School on May 24.

“I want to know specifically who was receiving the 911 calls,” Gutierrez said during a news conference.

His voice often cracking with emotion, the Democrat who represents Uvalde said no single person or entity was fully to blame for the massacre. But, Gutierrez said, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott should accept some of the responsibility for failures in the police response.

“There was error at every level, including the legislative level. Greg Abbott has plenty of blame in all of this,” Gutierrez said.

Nineteen children and two teachers died in the attack at Robb Elementary School, the deadliest school shooting in nearly a decade. Seventeen more were injured. Funerals for those slain began this week.

Earlier this week, Abbott ordered the state to conduct in-person school district security audits and asked top lawmakers to convene a legislative committee to make recommendations on school and firearm safety, mental health and other issues.

The next Texas legislative session is scheduled for January 2023. Gutierrez is among several lawmakers who have urged Abbott, who is running for reelection, to call a special session in response to the shooting.

On Thursday, the governor also directed the state education agency to estimate how much new school safety measures would cost, have schools inspect exterior doors weekly, and “develop strategies to encourage school districts to increase the presence of trained law enforcement officers and school marshals on campuses.”

Many districts, including Uvalde’s, have dedicated police forces and Texas created the state School Marshall Program in 2013 to train teachers and school staff how to react in the case of a shooter, even carrying guns and firing back. In 2019, Texas lifted a cap on the number of school marshals per campus.

The gunman in Uvalde, 18-year-old Salvador Ramos, spent roughly 80 minutes inside the school, and more than an hour passed from when the first officers followed him into the building and when he was killed by law enforcement, according to an official timeline.

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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 some statements hours later. State police have said some accounts were preliminary and may change as more witnesses are interviewed.

Much of the focus turned to Arredondo in recent days after Steven McCraw, the head of the Texas Department of Public Safety, said the chief believed the active shooting had turned into a hostage situation, and that he made the “wrong decision” to not order officers to breach the classroom as 911 calls were being made to the outside.

Gutierrez said it’s unclear if any details from the 911 calls were being shared with law enforcement officers from multiple agencies on the scene.

“Uvalde PD was the one receiving the 911 calls for 45 minutes while officers were sitting in a hallway, while 19 officers were sitting in a hallway for 45 minutes” Gutierrez said. “We don’t know if it was being communicated to those people or not.”

But, the senator said, the Commission on State Emergency Communications told him the school district police chief did not know. Officials at the commission have not responded to a telephone message seeking comment.

“He’s the incident commander. He did not receive (the) 911 calls,” Gutierrez said.

Arredondo has not responded to interview requests from The Associated Press since the attack. A telephone message left at the school police headquarters on Thursday was not returned.

Uvalde Police Chief Daniel Rodriguez and a department spokesman have not replied to AP phone messages and emails seeking comment Thursday.

Since Wednesday, the Department of Public Safety has referred all questions about the investigation to the Uvalde-area district attorney, Christina Mitchell Busbee. She did not immediately respond to voicemail and text messages on Thursday.

There have been communication breakdowns during other mass shootings in Texas, and experts say smaller, regional dispatch centers are often inundated with calls during a major emergency.

Police communications were a problem in 2019 when a gunman shot and killed seven people and wounded more than two dozen during a rampage in Odessa, Texas. Authorities said 36-year-old Seth Aaron Ator called 911 before and after the shootings but a failure in communication between agencies — they were not all operating on the same radio channel — slowed the response. Ator was able to cover some 10 miles before officers shot and killed him. Fritz Reber, a 27-year veteran and former captain with the Chula Vista Police Department who has studied 911 dispatch systems, said a 911 center typically relays information from callers in writing to a dispatcher, who passes it along to officers in the field over the radio. The process can be slow.

“If you listen to all the 911 calls contemporaneous to all the radio traffic, it will be shocking when someone calls 911 how long it takes for that same information to come out over the radio and how different it is than listening to the call,” Reber said.

Debt wiped for Corinthian students as bigger decisions loom

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As college graduates wait to see whether President Joe Biden will wipe out some of their student loan debt, his administration is taking a more limited step to address a fraud scandal at Corinthian Colleges, a for-profit chain that collapsed nearly a decade ago.

Anyone who enrolled in the company’s schools will have his or her federal student debt erased, clearing away \$5.8 billion for more than 560,000 borrowers — the largest single loan discharge ever, according to the Education Department.

Vice President Kamala Harris on Thursday called it a milestone in “a journey for justice for everyone who was defrauded” and will “put real money in the pockets of real people.” She made only a brief reference to lingering questions about the next steps on student loan debt. “As a nation, we have a lot more work

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to do on these issues," she said.

Biden, as a candidate, promised to address the matter if elected, and he has expressed interest in canceling \$10,000 per borrower. There's been no word on how Biden will handle the issue, even with pressure building on him. The White House has suggested there would be some kind of income criteria that would prevent high earners from benefiting.

Debt payments were paused by President Donald Trump near the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, and Biden has kept the freeze in place while considering a more permanent solution.

Any decision carries political risks. Republicans accuse Biden of plotting an election-year giveaway. Activists are pushing him to cancel at least \$50,000 per borrower, and anything less could disappoint them.

"President Biden, canceling \$10,000 in student debt is like pouring a bucket of ice water on a forest fire," NAACP President Derrick Johnson said in a statement. Black students and other students of color are more likely to take out loans to pay for college.

The announcement about Corinthian, which operated from 1995 to 2015, seeks to close the books on one of the most notorious cases of fraud in American higher education. At its peak, Corinthian was one of the largest for-profit college companies, with more than 100 campuses and more than 110,000 students at its Everest, WyoTech and Heald schools.

When Harris was California's attorney general, she worked with the Obama administration to uncover how campuses were falsifying data on the success of their graduates. In some cases, schools reported that students had found jobs in their fields of study even though they were working at grocery stores or fast food chains.

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

Harris said Corinthian tried to attract students who were single parents or unemployed and looking to improve their lives.

"The company believed they could get away with it because, as predators are wont to do, they targeted people who they assumed wouldn't fight back," she said.

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. Now, the relief will be made automatic and extended to additional borrowers.

Those with a remaining balance on their Corinthian debt will also get refunds on payments already made, department officials said. But the action does not apply to loans paid in full. A spokesperson for the Education Department did not respond to a question about why that decision was made.

The Corinthian scandal led to 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. That administration went on to expand a process known as borrower defense to repayment, which allows any defrauded student to apply for debt cancellation.

The Trump administration drew criticism when it started granting only partial loan cancellation to defrauded students, giving lower levels of relief to those with higher incomes. Former Corinthian students sued, and a federal judge halted the policy and ordered the Education Department to stop collecting payments on Corinthian debt.

The Biden administration later announced full cancellation for all Corinthian students who had been given only partial forgiveness, but thousands of others were left waiting for the department to process their relief applications.

As of December, the department reported it had more than 109,000 pending applications from students alleging fraud by their colleges, mostly in the for-profit industry.

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

She said she hopes the 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."

Former Corinthian student Nathan Hornes had his debt forgiven in 2017 through the borrower defense process, but his sister Natasha is among the 560,000 former Corinthian students now getting cancellation.

"My sister and all the others who went through the same experience of being cheated by Corinthian finally get to experience the same relief of having the financial burden lifted," he said in a statement. "They deserve that too, and I'm so glad that today they finally get to feel that freedom."

A for-profit college trade group said students who are deceived by their colleges deserve relief, but that Corinthian's actions "do not represent all private career schools."

"The (Education) Department and others should not conflate the actions of one organization with an entire sector that has provided opportunities for millions of students and contributed to our nation's workforce," said Jason Altmire, president and CEO of Career Education Colleges and Universities.

Johnny Depp and Amber Heard: Uphill battle to rebuild images

By LEANNE ITALIE AP Entertainment Writer

After an explosive six-week libel trial followed by millions on social media and live TV, Johnny Depp and Amber Heard each face an uphill battle: trying to rebuild their images and careers.

Depp already has a head start, with a jury verdict Wednesday largely favoring his narrative, that his ex-wife defamed him by accusing him of abusing her.

"Depp has a hill to climb. Heard has a mountain to climb," said Eric Dezenhall, a crisis mitigator in Washington with no involvement in the case. "If Depp keeps his expectations proportional and understands that he's unlikely to hit his former heights, he can have a solid career if he takes things slowly. After all, he was vindicated in court, not declared a saint."

The challenge for Heard, Dezenhall said, is that rightly or wrongly, some believe she abused and perhaps even tarnished a worthy movement, #MeToo.

With a he said-she said edge to the drawn-out trial, the verdict handed down in Fairfax County, Virginia, found that Depp had been defamed by three statements in a 2018 op-ed piece written by Heard, who identified herself as an abuse victim. The jury awarded the "Pirates of the Caribbean" star more than \$10 million. Jurors also concluded Heard was defamed, by a lawyer for Depp who accused her of creating a hoax surrounding the abuse allegations. She was awarded \$2 million.

Given that such cases are notoriously hard to win, was the defamation route the way to go? Some observers with experience in high-profile cases believe Depp's decision to sue — even though it meant dragging his and Heard's personal lives through the mud — was a last-ditch attempt to bolster his star power after his failed London libel lawsuit against The Sun for describing him as a "wife beater."

"I think the defamation case was a Hail Mary," said David Glass, a Los Angeles family law attorney with a Ph.D in psychology.

Married just 15 months, Depp sued Heard for \$50 million over the op-ed for The Washington Post in which she called herself "a public figure representing domestic abuse." She didn't identify Depp by name and it was published two years after she began making public accusations against him.

Heard countersued for \$100 million, accusing the star of defaming her via the hoax accusations of attorney Adam Waldman. Many of the waning days of the trial focused on the aftereffects of both claims, with Depp testifying: "I lost nothing less than everything" and Heard accusing him of trying to erase her ability to work.

"Now as I stand here today, I can't have a career," Heard testified at the close of the trial. "I hope to get my voice back. That's all I want."

But does a verdict of any kind hold the power to reverse the courtroom accusations: of Depp as a physically and sexually abusive aging drunk and drug addict, and Heard as unhinged and capable of faking bruises allegedly inflicted by the man she said she stayed with out of love?

Despite it all, Depp's fan base remains solid. Fans often camped out overnight for the chance to attend

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proceedings. But unlike rockers and stand-up comedians ensnared in #MeToo moments who can still earn through live shows, Depp and Heard need the crisis-averse studio machines to make big money.

Rehabilitation is necessary for both, whether it's dueling traditional sit-down interviews or another secret weapon in their PR teams' arsenals.

Heard, who was in the room for Wednesday's verdict, plans to appeal. Depp, who wasn't in court, said "the jury gave me my life back. I am truly humbled."

Danny Deraney, who's done crisis PR for some of Hollywood's #MeToo accusers, said men in general are more likely than women to find new work in the entertainment industry "when it comes to forgiveness and when it comes to the things that they've done."

He added: "I think it's going to be easier for Johnny. For Amber, whether she's innocent or guilty or whatever it is, it's going to be difficult. I don't think her career is necessarily over. But I'm sure it's going to take a nice hit because I think everyone now is going to look at her as a difficult woman to work with, seeing her emotions the way they've been, whether wrong or right. I think they're going to look at that and say, 'Do we want this on our set?'"

Danielle Lindemann, a Lehigh University associate professor of sociology who researches gender, sexuality and culture, said Depp's ability to earn big had already been affected, whether due to his own self-destruction or fallout from Heard's accusations.

"But I don't think he's 'canceled,'" said Lindemann, author of "True Story: What Reality Says About Us."

The damage to his career is also likely to be a lot less severe in Asian and European markets, where his popularity remains strong. And he is likely to still get work on indie productions like those that helped along his 38-year run.

Since the former couple began slinging allegations, Heard has faced intense backlash on social media. She said Depp fueled campaigns to get her fired as an ambassador for L'Oreal and cut as the character Mera from an "Aquaman" sequel, though a production executive testified she remains in the film due out next year.

Mads Mikkelsen replaced Depp as Gellert Grindelwald for "Fantastic Beasts 3." Depp's future is also uncertain in the "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise, something he blamed on Heard's allegations. Producer Jerry Bruckheimer has revealed that two more "Pirates" scripts are in development, but neither will include Depp's Capt. Jack Sparrow, a role that earned the actor an Oscar nomination. His last appearance in the Disney-owned franchise was in 2017's "Dead Men Tell No Tales."

Dior has long used Depp to promote a men's fragrance, Sauvage. The fashion house has been silent on the abuse allegations and is still using him in ads.

Attorney Brett Ward, a family law specialist in New York, said it could take years to know whether Depp's case will eventually lead to his return as an A-list 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. It's like O.J. Simpson. People know him more for what happened in that trial than they did for his football career."

Dezenhall disagreed. He said the case that captured the world's attention might just be a bellwether for people and corporations facing existential threats to their reputations and livelihoods. The old logic that bringing defamation suits was riskier than any benefits no longer necessarily applies, he said. They're too hard to win because proving malice is so tricky, traditional thinking went. Why publicly recycle the negative when people are likely to forget?

Today, he said, the stakes have become too high to avoid such defamation court fights. He wrote on Substack, "If you're already covered in muck that is suspended online forever, what's a little more muck if your life has been ruined?"

Lawyer: Heard was 'demonized' by Depp team, social media

By DENISE LAVOIE AP Legal Affairs Writer

FAIRFAX, Va. (AP) — Amber Heard was "demonized" by ex-husband Johnny Depp's legal team and ex-

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coriated on social media during a sensational defamation trial that ended with a jury ordering her to pay Depp \$15 million, Heard's lawyer said Thursday.

Elaine Bredehoft, one of Heard's lead attorneys during the trial, said she believes the jury was influenced by a relentless barrage of social media posts condemning her and supporting Depp. She said Heard plans to appeal.

"These people were giving her death threats. They threatened to microwave her baby. This is the kind of social media she was getting," Bredehoft said on "CBS Mornings."

"It was like a Roman coliseum is the best way to describe the atmosphere here. And I have to believe that the jury, even though they're told not to go and look at anything, you know, they have weekends, they have families, they have social media," she said.

Bredehoft also said some evidence that was allowed in a similar defamation lawsuit that Depp lost in the U.K. was suppressed in the lawsuit he filed in Virginia. In the U.K. case, the judge found that Depp assaulted Heard on a dozen occasions.

"We weren't allowed to tell the jury this," Bredehoft said on NBC's "Today" show. "So what did Depp's team learn from this? Demonize Amber. And suppress the evidence."

The verdict handed down Wednesday in Fairfax County Circuit Court found that Depp had been defamed by three statements in a 2018 op-ed written by Heard in which she said she was an abuse victim. The jury awarded him \$10 million in compensatory damages and \$5 million in punitive damages, but the judge reduced the punitive damages award to \$350,000 under a state cap.

Depp attorney Camille Vasquez said Wednesday that the verdict "confirms what we have said from the beginning, that the claims against Johnny Depp are defamatory and unsupported by any evidence."

When asked on "Today" whether Heard has the money to pay the \$10.35 million, Bredehoft said, "Oh, no, absolutely not."

The jury also awarded Heard \$2 million in her countersuit, concluding that she was defamed by a lawyer for Depp who accused her of creating a detailed hoax surrounding the abuse allegations.

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.

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.

Both performers emerge with unclear prospects. 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.

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.

Avenatti gets 4 years in prison for cheating Stormy Daniels

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Michael Avenatti was sentenced Thursday to four years in prison for stealing book

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proceeds from Stormy Daniels, the porn actress who catapulted him to fame as he represented her in courtrooms and cable news programs during her legal battles with then-President Donald Trump.

The California lawyer, currently incarcerated, learned his fate in Manhattan federal court, where Judge Jesse M. Furman said the sentence will mean that Avenatti will spend another 2 1/2 years in prison on top of the 2 1/2 years he is already serving after another fraud conviction.

The judge said Avenatti's crime against Daniels was made "out of desperation" when his law firm was struggling. He called Avenatti's behavior "craven and egregious" and blamed it on "blind ambition." He also required Avenatti to pay \$148,000 in restitution and forfeit the roughly \$297,000 that prosecutors say he stole from Daniels.

The judge said he believed the sentence "will send a message to lawyers" that, if they go astray, they will lose their profession and their liberty.

Avenatti wearing a drab beige prison uniform, choked up several times as he delivered a lengthy statement before the sentence was announced, saying he had "disappointed scores of people and failed in a cataclysmic way."

"I have destroyed my career, my relationships and my reputation and have done collateral damage to my family and my life," he said. "There is serious doubt as to how or if I will ever recover any semblance of a normal life."

Avenatti, 51, said he chose to represent Daniels beginning in February 2018 because she was an underdog and no one else would.

"Nobody could have predicted the success we would have and the notoriety that would follow," he said.

After the sentencing, Avenatti, shackled at the feet, hugged his lawyers and then shuffled out of court.

At trial earlier this year, Avenatti represented himself, cross-examining his former client for hours about their experiences in early 2018, when she signed a book deal that provided an \$800,000 payout. Prosecutors said he illegally pocketed about \$300,000 of her advance on "Full Disclosure," published in fall 2018.

The book's publication came at a time when Avenatti's law practice was failing financially even as he appeared regularly on cable television news channels, attacking Trump. Avenatti represented Daniels in lawsuits meant to free her from a \$130,000 hush payment she received shortly before the 2016 presidential election to remain silent about a tryst she said she had with Trump a decade earlier. Trump denied it.

Daniels was not in court. Her current attorney, Clark Brewster, spoke on her behalf, saying it was "truly shocking" that Avenatti tried to portray himself as a champion of his clients during his statement.

In a statement after the sentencing, U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said Avenatti violated the duty of lawyers to be loyal advocates for their clients when he "stole his client's identity and her money in order to line his own pockets."

His conviction for aggravated identity theft required a mandatory two-year prison sentence. He was also convicted of wire fraud. He's already serving a 2 1/2-year sentence for trying to extort Nike. Avenatti was convicted in 2020 of threatening to ruin the shoemaker's reputation if it did not pay him up to \$25 million.

And he faces a retrial in California on charges that he cheated clients and others of millions of dollars there.

In a presentence submission, Avenatti's lawyers cited an apology letter Avenatti recently wrote to Daniels in which he said: "I am truly sorry."

But prosecutors in a sentencing submission last week urged that that he should face "substantial" additional time in prison for a wire fraud conviction and criticized his apology letter, saying Avenatti failed to apologize for his actual crime.

And they recalled that during "an extremely lengthy" cross-examination, he "berated his victim for lewd language and being a difficult client, questioned her invasively about marital and familial difficulties, and sought to cast her as crazy, much as he did during the course of his fraud to prevent her own agent and publisher from responding to her pleas for help."

"The defendant certainly had every right to defend himself at trial. But he is not entitled to a benefit for showing remorse, having done so only when convenient and only after seeking to humiliate his victim at a

public trial, and denigrating and insulting her for months to her agent and publisher while holding himself out as taking up her cause against the powerful who might have taken advantage of her," prosecutors wrote.

On Thursday, the judge agreed that the apology letter was "too little, too late," and said its intentions remained unclear.

Melatonin poisoning reports are up in kids, study says

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Researchers are drawing attention to a rise in poisonings in children involving the sleep aid melatonin — including a big jump during the pandemic.

Last year, U.S. poison control centers received more than 52,000 calls about children consuming worrisome amounts of the dietary supplement — a six-fold increase from about a decade earlier. Most such calls are about young children who accidentally got into bottles of melatonin, some of which come in the form of gummies for kids.

Parents may think of melatonin as the equivalent of a vitamin and leave it on a nightstand, said Dr. Karima Lelak, an emergency physician at Children's Hospital of Michigan and the lead author of the study published Thursday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "But really it's a medication that has the potential to cause harm, and should be put away in the medicine cabinet," Lelak said.

WHAT IS MELATONIN?

Melatonin is a hormone that helps control the body's sleep cycle. It has become a popular over-the-counter sleeping aid, with sales increasing 150% between 2016 and 2020, the authors said.

In the U.S., melatonin is sold as a supplement, not regulated as a drug. Because melatonin is unregulated, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration doesn't have oversight over the purity of ingredients or the accuracy of dosage claims.

Other researchers have found that what's on the label may not match what's actually in the bottle, and some countries have banned the sale of over-the-counter melatonin.

HOW ARE MELATONIN OVERDOSES TREATED?

Many people can tolerate even relatively large doses of melatonin without significant harm, experts say. But there is no antidote for an overdose. In cases of a child accidentally ingesting melatonin, experts often ask a reliable adult to monitor them at home.

But slowed breathing or other worrisome signs can mean a child should be taken to a hospital.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

Lelak and her colleagues looked at reports to poison control centers from 2012 to 2021, counting more than 260,000 calls about kids taking too much melatonin. They represented 0.6% of all poison control calls in 2012 and about 5% in 2021.

In about 83% of those calls, the children did not show any symptoms. But other children endured vomiting, had altered breathing or showed other symptoms. Over the 10 years studied, more than 4,000 kids were hospitalized, five needed to be put on machines to help them breathe, and two — both younger than 2 — died.

Most of the hospitalized children were teenagers, and many of those were believed to be suicide attempts.

WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE PANDEMIC?

Reported melatonin poisonings have been increasing for at least a decade, but the largest increases happened after the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States in 2020. Between 2019 and 2020, the count shot up 38%.

There may be several reasons, Lelak said. Because of lockdowns and virtual learning, more children were at home all day, meaning there were more opportunities for kids to access melatonin. Also, the pandemic caused sleep-disrupting stress and anxiety that may have caused more families to consider melatonin.

"Children were upset about being home, teenagers were closed off from friends. And on top of all that everyone's looking at screens for hours and hours a day," Lelak said.

Speller reinstated into National Spelling Bee after appeal

By BEN NUCKOLS Associated Press

OXON HILL, Md. (AP) — A speller has been reinstated into the Scripps National Spelling Bee field after successfully appealing that he was denied relevant root information about a word.

Surya Kapu, a 13-year-old from South Jordan, Utah, misspelled "leucovorin" — a medicine used to counteract the side effects of a cancer drug — during Wednesday night's last semifinal round, appearing to end his run in the bee just short of the finals.

Surya's family appealed, arguing that Scripps omitted details when he asked a question about the word's roots. Spellers are permitted to ask questions about roots, and judges answer in the affirmative if a speller can identify a relevant root and its meaning.

Scripps said in a statement that its judges met for roughly two hours before deciding late Wednesday night to reinstate Surya.

"The judges' decision to reinstate is backed by a belief in the bee's mission to inspire the exploration of words and celebrate academic achievement," the statement said. "Upon further review, it was determined that there was more directly relevant information available in the dictionary to one of the speller's questions. Based on this, Surya will be provided a chance to participate in Round 7 with a new word."

What that means in practice: Surya will get his new word at the beginning of Thursday night's finals. If he spells that word correctly, he will join the 12 finalists who have already advanced to compete for more than \$50,000 in cash and prizes.

Surya has an accomplished spelling resume and is a pupil of Cole Shafer-Ray, the 2015 runner-up who coached last year's champion, Zaila Avant-garde.

Reinstatements are rare but not unprecedented. The last happened in 2018 when a competitor spelled a word's homonym correctly without having been given the definition or told that a homonym existed.

Perhaps the most consequential reinstatement occurred in 2006, when Saryn Hooks was eliminated during the finals even though she had spelled "hechsher" correctly. A brother of another speller was the first to notice the error, and Saryn was reinstated, eventually finishing third.

A crackdown in El Salvador, and fears of arbitrary arrests

By MARCOS ALEMAN and CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press

LA LIMONERA, El Salvador (AP) — Esmeralda Domínguez was about 100 yards from home when soldiers and police blocked her on a small bridge. The authorities had waited there for hours. Dominguez, neighbors said, was the only person they stopped.

Her aunt, who lived nearby, protested. Dominguez was no criminal, she insisted, rattling off the community organizations her niece led or was involved in. It didn't matter.

"We know what we're doing," a soldier told the aunt before loading the young woman into a truck. It rumbled off, leaving her black motorcycle beside the road.

That was April 19. No one in her family has seen her since.

Over the past 10 weeks, El Salvador's security forces have arrested more than 36,000 people since the congress granted President Nayib Bukele the power to suspend some civil liberties to pursue powerful street gangs. Lawmakers extended those powers by another 30 days last week as public opinion polls showed broad popular support.

However, a growing number of the arrests — like Dominguez's — appear arbitrary or unjustified, human rights groups allege.

Cristosal, a nongovernmental organization, has documented more than 500 cases of arbitrary arrests since the state of exception was imposed March 27, according to its director Noah Bullock. Amnesty International said Thursday that its investigators found that thousands of people had been arrested without legal requirements being met.

Bukele sought the expanded powers after El Salvador's street gangs killed dozens of people in late March. Two weeks into the mass detentions, the president acknowledged that there could be an "error" of 1% of

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those arrested not having any ties to the gangs. Even that seemingly small number suggests authorities are not making arrests based on investigations, critics say. His office declined to comment.

Now, under the new powers, authorities do not have to give a reason to those being arrested. Detainees can be held 15 days without seeing a judge and without access to lawyers.

When those arrested do finally get a lawyer, the public defender's office is overwhelmed. Tens of thousands of new cases have piled atop the existing caseloads of only about 250 public defenders nationwide.

Domínguez's family and some 50 others in the area appear to be among the first to organize in an effort to free their relatives. The families have made filings with the courts known as habeas corpus, which order that someone in custody be brought before a court and places the burden of proof on the government. Cristosal has been helping with many of those cases, including Domínguez's.

The most common crime attributed to those arrested, including Domínguez, is illegal association for allegedly belonging to a gang. Judges have been practically automatic in ordering arrestees held for six months at the request of prosecutors despite little or no supporting evidence, according to a Cristosal report. Judges have ordered nearly 26,000 people held in jail, prosecutors say.

In April, a police union said that some commanders under pressure to meet arrest quotas were pushing their officers to do anything necessary to make arrests, including giving false statements tying people to gangs. And last month, three police agents were arrested when they went to collect money they had demanded in exchange for not arresting someone.

Just hours before Domínguez was detained, Bukele wrote on Twitter — above photos of shirtless gang members with faces and torsos blanketed in tattoos — that authorities had arrested more than 13,000 "terrorists." Those following the president's social media feed would not imagine Domínguez — a mother of two, including a 4-month-old daughter — would soon figure in the soaring arrest tally.

José Lazo Romero, a lawyer with the Brother Mercedes Ruíz Foundation, a Christian social justice organization with which Domínguez worked, said he knew of at least 15 cases similar to hers in the area, including three young men arrested on their way home after playing soccer and a disabled person taken away by authorities.

"It's said that he who has nothing to hide has nothing to fear," Lazo said. "Now people who precisely have nothing to hide fear being arrested, fear being taken to jail, being sent to prison."

The region is known as Bajo Lempa, the alluvial plains southeast of the capital near where the Lempa river empties into the Pacific Ocean. These lowlands flood almost annually when the Lempa overflows and spills across agrarian communities like the one where Domínguez grew up.

Many of the people here have fled conflict before during the civil war in the 1980s — to Panama, to Nicaragua, to other parts of El Salvador. After the 1992 peace accord, many sympathizers of the leftist Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, or FMLN, were resettled here. María Dolores García, Domínguez's 55-year-old mother and an FMLN supporter to this day, was one of them.

García was a childhood survivor of the Quesera Massacre. In October 1981, El Salvador's military forces, including an elite unit trained by the United States, swept through communities in the area. Several hundred people, many women and children, were killed.

"I experienced all of the suffering of the war," she said, adding: "Today again to be persecuted, it's not easy."

Advocates say the vast majority of those arrested come from poor, marginalized communities. The pain is doubly felt by their families, because those arrested were often the breadwinners.

Domínguez was not the first member of her household arrested. Sergio Santos, a farm laborer, her longtime partner and the father of her 4-month-old daughter, was arrested April 9 by police who came to the family's home and asked García how many men and women lived there. They told her to wake Santos. She said they had a list of names, looked at his ID, said, "that's you," and handcuffed him."

Domínguez began daily rounds to the police, to the jail, trying to get information. She was well known in the community and had worked alongside officers at the local police station on a youth program to

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prevent violence. Her mother said her work hadn't put her in contact with gang members.

The day she ran into the police, Domínguez had tried to deliver food to Santos and found he'd been transferred to a prison in the capital. Then she, too, was gone.

Years ago, the gangs were present here. They recruited the children and grandchildren of former guerilla fighters.

"Against your will you had to coexist with them here," said Ricardo Hernández, a 68-year-old neighbor of Domínguez and her family. "They asked for water, you had to give it to them. They asked for anything, you had to give it to them. Even food and money."

That changed when the government installed two police stations in the area several years ago. The gangs moved into the mangrove swamps closer to the coast, and the police became — and remain — more visible. Now there are no signs of gang graffiti.

With the congress extending the state of exception for another month, more questions have arisen about what led to March's surge in killings.

Last month, the investigative news site El Faro published phone conversations apparently between gang leaders and a member of Bukele's government. The recordings indicated the killings — 62 in one day — came in response to the breakdown of a secret deal with the government. Last year, the U.S. Treasury sanctioned two officials, including the one captured in the recordings, saying Bukele's administration had bought the gangs' support with privileges for their imprisoned leaders.

Bukele has previously denied negotiating with the gangs, but his only public response to the latest evidence implicating his administration has been a laugh-until-you-cry emoji on Twitter.

Security Minister Gustavo Villatoro said, requesting the extension, that the government wants to eradicate the gangs. "This war," he said, "is going to continue for as long as necessary and to the extent that the public continues to demand it."

On a recent morning, García pulled a sheaf of stamped, signed letters from a plastic bag. All of them attest to Dominguez's community activism — from organizations she'd led or worked for, organizations that advocated for women, promoted community development and pushed for chemical-free farming.

In a court hearing on May 2, where dozens of detainees were arraigned en masse. The judge ordered Domínguez to six more months of pre-trial detention. Garcia had given the letters to a public defender, but the judge never saw them.

In the arraignments that Cristosal has witnessed, judges face anywhere from 50 to more than 500 detainees at once. The judges are also, generally, not admitting documents like those García collected that speak to the character of those facing charges.

"The evidence being brought against these people are what we would describe as general statistics, not necessarily any information that links individuals to criminal activity," said Bullock, Cristosal's director.

In another case, a woman arrested in 2019 on an illegal association charge after a gang member mentioned her name in a tapped phone conversation was arrested again under the state of exception. Cristosal, which is helping her, contends that she was arrested and charged for a second time for the same circumstances in her 2019 case. Her family said there was no evidence of wrongdoing.

Other stories have emerged of people who just completed or nearly completed a prison sentence being picked up again on the same charges. Such arrests suggest that the government is using lists of people who have had contact with the criminal justice system, even if absolved, in making detentions.

In La Limonera, about 200 yards from the family's home, across a clearing, Domínguez farmed a plot to help feed the household. On a recent day, weeds were crowding out the neat rows of tomatoes and pineapples.

García says suddenly finding herself the primary caretaker for two children, including an infant who had been breastfeeding, turned her life upside down. Domínguez and her partner are in jail, as is the father of Domínguez's 12-year-old daughter, who had been lending some financial support.

García has relied on donations to keep the children fed. She frets about the plants dying in her daughter's unattended garden. "It has impacted everyone here in the community because everyone knows her," García said. "She was the head of the family."

And what will become of people like Dominguez? Under the current rules, there's no way to know. Said Bullock: "There is a very uncertain future for people who are in this black hole of a justice system."

Smiles, unicorns, softball: Young shooting victims recalled

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — One girl made other people smile. Another was a creative child who loved mermaids, unicorns and the color purple. A third loved playing softball and worked on her batting swing in her front yard.

The families of Nevaeh Bravo, Maranda Mathis and Eliahna Torres were holding funerals for them Thursday, part of more than two weeks of mourning for the 19 children and two teachers who were the victims of a May 24 mass shooting inside Robb Elementary School in Uvalde.

Nevaeh Bravo

A cousin told The Washington Post that the 10-year-old "put a smile on everyone's faces" and described her death as "a nightmare that we cannot wake up from."

She and another 10-year-old who was killed, Jailah Silguero, were friends, and an aunt described them in a Facebook posting as "Our Angels." A cousin told USA Today that the two girls were caring, loving and supportive of their siblings. Both families had their funerals at the Sacred Heart Catholic Church, with Jailah's set for Friday.

The aunt noted that Nevaeh's first name is heaven spelled backward.

Maranda Mathis

Her family said in an obituary on the funeral home's website that the 11-year-old "had a huge loving heart" and described her as sweet, smart and "a shy tom boy" who enjoyed spending time outdoors. She had a great imagination and often expressed love for unicorns and mermaids, especially if they were her favorite color, purple, the family said.

Her mother told The New York Times that while Maranda was shy when she started school, she opened up and made friends as the year continued. She was a creative girl who loved music, running on school field days, swimming in the river and showing her mother rocks she found.

A friend of Maranda's mother told The Washington Post she was "fun," "spunky" and "very smart."

Eliahna Torres

The 10-year-old had "the most beautiful smile that could light up your soul," her family said in her obituary on the funeral home's website.

"She was a loving and compassionate person who loved to be silly," the obituary said. "Eliahna was a master of jests and loved making people laugh."

Her family said she would spend hours watching TikTok videos, but she'd found a new passion — softball. She was hoping to make an all-star roster.

She worked to improve her hitting, practicing her swing with a ball hung in her front yard by her grandfather outside the home she shared with her mother, aunt and grandparents, The New York Times reported. She responded to calls for her to come in for bed with, "One more."

Her family jokingly called her "enfermerita," or the little nurse. Her grandfather told The Times that after he had heart surgery a few years ago, Eliahna accompanied him on his doctor-prescribed walks, helping him to scoop up pecans that fell from the trees shading their neighborhood. She made sure her grandparents took their medications.

Novavax hopes its COVID shot wins over FDA, vaccine holdouts

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

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GAITHERSBURG, Md. (AP) — Americans may soon get a new COVID-19 vaccine option -- shots made with a more tried-and-true technology than today's versions. The big question: Why should they care?

After long delays, the Food and Drug Administration is expected to decide within weeks whether to authorize Novavax's vaccine. It's late in the pandemic for a new choice, with about three-quarters of U.S. adults already vaccinated.

But the company is hoping to find a niche among some of the unvaccinated millions who might agree to a more traditional kind of shot -- a protein vaccine — and also to become a top choice for boosters, regardless of which type people got first. Only about half of vaccinated adults have gotten a booster.

The Novavax vaccine already is used in parts of Europe and multiple other countries, but FDA clearance is a key hurdle. And health experts are closely watching to see if a new tool offers advantages, either in enticing vaccine holdouts or maybe even offering somewhat broader immunity.

"What I've seen of the Novavax data so far is it's a really impressive protein vaccine," said University of Pennsylvania immunologist E. John Wherry.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT?

The Novavax vaccine trains the body to fight the coronavirus by delivering copies of its outer coating, the spike protein. Those spike copies are grown in insect cells, purified and packaged into nanoparticles that to the immune system resemble a virus, said Novavax research chief Dr. Gregory Glenn.

Then an immune-boosting ingredient, or adjuvant, that's made from the bark of a South American tree is added that acts as a red flag to ensure those particles look suspicious enough to spark a strong response.

"It's basically a soap bubble. It's made of stuff that you find in root beer," Glenn said. "When an immune cell sees that, it becomes quite activated. ... We supercharge the immune response."

Protein vaccines have been used for years to prevent hepatitis B, shingles and other diseases.

It's a very different approach than the Pfizer and Moderna shots. Those so-called mRNA vaccines have saved countless lives and changed the course of the pandemic but still, some people are uncomfortable with the new technology that delivers genetic instructions for the body to make its own spike copies. A third U.S. option, from Johnson & Johnson, isn't as widely used.

WHY SO LATE?

Manufacturing problems held up the vaccine globally, but Novavax CEO Stanley Erck said those problems have been resolved and "are well behind us." The company said more than 40 million doses had been distributed by March to countries in Asia, Europe and elsewhere.

Novavax, a small biotech company, created the vaccine in its research lab, but the Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine maker and other factories produce the shots.

Erck said the Serum Institute recently passed an FDA inspection, clearing the way for the agency to finish evaluating the vaccine.

HOW WELL DO THE SHOTS WORK?

Earlier in the pandemic, large studies in the U.S., Mexico and Britain found two doses of the Novavax vaccine were safe and about 90% effective at preventing symptomatic COVID-19. When the delta variant emerged last summer, Novavax reported a booster dose revved up virus-fighting antibodies that could tackle that mutant.

Now an even more contagious branch of the coronavirus family tree is dominant, the omicron mutant and its relatives. While none of the world's COVID-19 vaccines have proved as strong against omicron, Glenn said lab tests show Novavax shots do trigger cross-protective antibodies.

Like other vaccine makers, Novavax is brewing shots updated to better target omicron. It opened a study in Australia to test how well an omicron-targeted booster revs up immunity in people who initially got Pfizer or Moderna doses.

And in flasks full of insect cells in the company's Maryland-based research lab, scientists are designing spike proteins to match even newer omicron siblings, in case they're needed.

WHAT'S NEXT?

On June 7, the FDA's scientific advisers will publicly evaluate evidence backing the Novavax vaccine for

adults -- and almost certainly will debate when and how it might be used as a booster. If the FDA authorizes the vaccine, the next step would be recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on how to use it.

European regulators are considering expanding Novavax shots to teenagers based on a U.S. study of those as young as 12 during last summer's delta wave. The company plans further tests in younger children soon.

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.

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

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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 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."

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Horvath, a fellow with Physicians for Reproductive Health, said she's already seeing patients from other states in her Maryland practice who have found themselves too far into the pregnancy to be able to have abortions in their state.

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

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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."

Local governments turn away \$73M of federal pandemic aid

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — From small towns to big cities, every government across the U.S. was offered a slice of \$350 billion in federal coronavirus relief funds to help shore up their finances, cover pandemic-related costs and invest in community projects.

Officials in 1,468 local governments effectively said "no," turning away a potential total of \$73 million, according to an Associated Press analysis of data compiled from every state. The declined money ranged from \$177 for the one-person village of Monowi, Nebraska, to \$3.9 million for DeWitt County, Texas, population about 20,000.

The city of West Alton, Missouri — a community of more than 500 at the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers — turned down a potential \$106,341 in federal aid. Though the rejected amount was almost half the size of the city's budget, there wasn't much discussion about accepting it during a city council meeting.

"The conversation probably lasted 15 seconds. Without having really any need for it, it wasn't something we felt like we wanted to get in the middle of," Mayor Willie Richter said.

Other small-town mayors and village administrators provided a variety of reasons for rejecting the federal money. Some thought they had no eligible uses for it. Others didn't want the hassle of dealing with the federal bureaucracy, or were politically opposed to the financial aid approved last year by the Democratic-led Congress and President Joe Biden.

The AP's analysis identified 1,460 small cities, towns, villages or townships that declined a potential allocation of \$61 million. That amounts to about 5% of the nation's roughly 28,000 small local governments, but just 0.3% of the total dollars allotted for those entities. Eight counties also have forgone a total of \$12 million. No states or territories declined funds.

The U.S. Treasury Department said it was pleased with the overall response to the American Rescue Plan, which marked the first time it had distributed money to such a broad swath of governments across the U.S.

The program "was born out of an understanding that the economic effect of the crisis was being felt by jurisdictions of all sizes," said Jacob Leibenluft, the Treasury's chief recovery officer. He added: "The vast, vast, vast majority of recipients saw a need to use these funds."

The pandemic relief money began flowing to governments one year ago.

Data released by the Treasury show that, as of the end of 2021, a total of 1,756 states, territories and larger cities and counties had budgeted about \$106 billion of the initial \$208 billion they received. That money helped expand high-speed internet, assist residents with housing costs, provide aid to small businesses, shore up depleted unemployment funds and pay for public health initiatives and government services, among other things.

The Treasury hasn't released data yet on how smaller governments used the money.

A second payment for local governments could come from the Treasury as soon as this month. But smaller governments that rejected the initial payment aren't eligible for the second round — a source of regret among at least some local officials.

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The Village of the Branch, on New York's Long Island, probably could have used the federal aid to improve the village hall, pave streets or repair water drainage systems, Mayor Mark Delaney said. But that wasn't clear to Delaney and other village board members when they declined the funds before New York's decision deadline in August. At that time, the eligible uses seemed limited and the federal reporting burdensome, Delaney said.

Under a final Treasury rule issued in January, the village could have used its entire \$183,149 allotment for almost any government services. But by then, the village's share already had been reallocated among other local New York governments.

"Because you did the right thing and you responded quickly, you basically lost out on an opportunity," Delaney said.

The Treasury Department said it worked with states and associations for local governments to simplify the application process, clarify the rules and encourage participation.

Larger governments that got paid directly by the federal government had no deadline to accept the money. Among smaller communities, some had more time to make decisions than others.

States were in charge of passing along funds to so-called "non-entitlement units" of government — generally cities with fewer than 50,000 residents. Once a state received that money, it had 30 days to distribute it. But some states requested as many as eight monthly extensions from the Treasury, pushing their deadlines into 2022.

The board of Algoma Township, Michigan, voted last July to decline its \$1.3 million allotment.

"We're very liberty-oriented, and we didn't want to be stuck as a township with any kind of strings attached or mandates," said township Supervisor Kevin Green, who considers the federal aid a waste.

But as Michigan kept extending the response deadline — and township officials learned that their share would be redistributed to others — Green and some of his colleagues had a change of heart. They ultimately accepted the money. Though they haven't spent it yet, it could help offset the rising costs — due to inflation — of planned park improvements, he said.

"As conservative as we are, we're also practical," Green said.

Minnesota, which has a more extensive township form of government than most states, had the greatest number of governments declining to apply for the federal aid. More than 500 local governments — about one-fifth of its "non-entitlement units" — turned away a potential total of \$11.8 million.

"We did everything we could to publicize this. We made a huge effort," said Steve Fenske, general counsel of the Minnesota Association of Townships. But "we certainly don't have full engagement. So some of them didn't know it was going on."

The Treasury's online procedures posed a hurdle to some smaller governments, said Irma Esparza Diggs, senior executive and director of federal advocacy for the National League of Cities.

"If you're unfamiliar with the federal grant process and what the reporting requirements are, the assumption is that it's all going to be too complicated, and it's always easier to give the funding back than to figure it out," she said.

The chief executive of DeWitt County, located between Houston and San Antonio, said he turned down the federal aid because the county already had enough cash for its budget. He also raised concerns about the federal program.

"It seemed pretty selfish to manufacture a need to apply for federal dollars that are borrowed on the backs of the children and grandchildren of our county constituents," DeWitt County Judge Daryl L. Fowler, a Republican, said in an email to the AP.

The upscale community of Brier, Washington — with fewer than 7,000 residents — turned down the largest amount among cities, at more than \$1.9 million. The city north of Seattle has a small staff that includes a police force and public works crew. But it has no sewage treatment plant, mental health facilities, cultural centers or low-income housing.

"We just don't have a lot of the things that ordinarily cities would have to use the funds for," Mayor Dale Kaemingk said.

As the lone resident of the northern Nebraska village of Monowi, Elsie Eiler runs both the town tavern

and town government. She didn't want the "mess" of dealing with the federal government.

"The town is doing fine," she said. "If it comes down to it and it needs some funds, I'll put some in myself."

'Day by day:' Uvalde survivors recover from wounds, trauma

By STEPHEN GROVES and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — Bullet fragments lodged in the children's arms and legs. Traumatic flashbacks flooding their nightmares. For the 17 people injured during a mass shooting last week in Uvalde, Texas, healing will be slow in a community mourning the deaths of 21 others.

As the tight-knit town of 16,000 holds funeral after funeral and investigators examine how police responded to the shooting at Robb Elementary School, several of the victims are still in hospitals over an hour's drive away in San Antonio, undergoing treatment for bullet wounds.

Uvalde Memorial Hospital, which treated 11 children and four adults in the hours after the shooting, discharged 10 of those patients the same day and transferred five to San Antonio hospitals. The grandmother of the shooter, who was shot in the face before the 18-year-old gunman entered the school, was also hospitalized. On Wednesday, the San Antonio hospitals were still treating five patients, with one 10-year-old girl in serious condition and the rest deemed to be in good condition.

Among the injured were several fourth-grade students whose classmates and teachers were shot to death. One young survivor, 11-year-old Miah Cerrillo, told CNN that she and a friend used her dead teacher's cellphone to call 911 and waited for what felt like hours for officers to arrive. Miah, who suffered a bullet fragment to her back, said she covered herself with a friend's blood and pretended to be dead.

"We're just taking it day by day," the girl's father, Miguel Cerrillo, told The Associated Press in a brief phone interview Wednesday.

The family is raising money for Miah's medical expenses to treat both injuries caused by the bullet fragment and the mental trauma of surviving the shooting. Cerrillo said that while his daughter is now at home, she has not opened up to him about what happened in the classroom.

The long-term devastation of the shooting on those who were closest to it hung heavily on their family members this week as they put together fundraising campaigns to help pay for their treatment.

Noah Orona, 10, was "trying to comprehend not only his wounds, but witnessing the suffering of his friends, classmates, and his beloved teachers," his older sister Laura Holcek wrote on a GoFundMe page for his treatment.

Orona had been struck in the shoulder blade by a bullet that exited his back and left shrapnel in his arm, the Washington Post reported.

Family members of 9-year-old Kendall Olivarez posted in another fundraising campaign that she would need several surgeries after she was shot in the left shoulder and hit by fragments of bullets on her right leg and tailbone.

Her uncle Jimmy Olivarez said Wednesday that Kendall was doing "OK."

Yet the mental wounds from the shooting rippled out far beyond the hospital beds to a community where parents have held children with racing hearts, where local police face mounting questions about how quickly they acted to stop the shooter and where mental health experts say the scars of trauma will be indelibly etched.

"They are holding onto this terrible, horrific memory," said Dr. Amanda Wetegrove-Romine, a San Antonio psychologist who attended high school in Uvalde and assisted in community counseling services in the days after the May 24 shooting.

Children were having nightmares and clinging to their parents, she said.

One third-grader, 8-year-old Jeremiah Lennon, feared he would be killed if he went back to school after surviving the shooting in a classroom next to the room where three of his friends were slain. He was changed by the shooting, his grandmother Brenda Morales said, now sitting quietly, not eating much and just staring into space.

"He's changed. Everything's changed," she said.

As Erika Santiago attended the funeral this week for 10-year-old Amerie Jo Garza, she recounted how her

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10-year-old son, Adriel, watched in horror when the first images came out on the news and he recognized two of his friends from kindergarten: Amerie and Maite Rodriguez.

Although the Santiago family has moved and now lives in San Antonio, Adriel did not want to go back to his school: "He told me, "Mom, I just don't feel safe."

Mental health experts said that because most of the victims were children, trauma can have a particularly long-lasting impact.

"They are in an important stage of development. Their worldview is forming and they are learning whether the world is safe or unsafe," said Dr. Arash Javanbakht, who directs the Stress, Trauma, and Anxiety Research Clinic at Wayne State University.

"Trauma stays with children the rest of their lives," he said, adding that childhood trauma has been linked to a host of health problems later in life.

In the communities across the country shaken by school shootings over the years — Columbine High School in Colorado, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida, Santa Fe High School in Texas and Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut — trauma has manifested for years. Survivors of Columbine, now adults, spoke out in recent days to say news of the shooting reopened the wounds of their trauma.

"I spent the formative part of my career in a Connecticut elementary school. I will never forget the ripple effect of fear and heartbreak that spread among students and teachers in the aftermath of the horrific Sandy Hook shooting," U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona said in a statement Wednesday as he announced a federal program would be set up to offer mental health support in Uvalde.

Mental health experts said a range of support will be needed for the survivors, beginning with what is known as "psychological first aid" in the immediate aftermath to counseling sessions to address trauma symptoms that can last for months and even years. The ability of the community to come together to heal will also be crucial, with parents playing an important role in discussing emotions with their children.

"Support and connectedness with community members and fellow survivors can be a powerful source of resilience, collective remembering, collective healing and purpose," said Nicole Nugent, an expert in treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder who works as a professor of psychiatry and human behavior at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University.

Wetegrove-Romine, the psychologist, said Uvalde was a "close-knit" community where "everyone is connected," yet the intense scrutiny of the speed of the police response has also prompted a "conflicted grief."

She worried that in the small Texas community, where mental health resources are thin and what she described as a culture of stoicism that prevails among many, people won't get help when they need it. She has begun collecting specialized journals to send to adults in Uvalde to help them process their grief.

"I worry about the long-term resources — there will likely be another shooting like this and resources will need to leave" to treat survivors of that tragedy, she said. "What happens to the people of Uvalde?"

Unsparring images from Ukraine show war at the 100-day mark

By The Associated Press undefined

How many buildings have been obliterated in Ukraine? How many limbs lost, children brutalized, refugees put to flight? How many mothers and fathers, sons and daughters killed?

How many dreams have been destroyed?

There is no accounting of a war that launched in late winter, continued through spring, reaches the 100-day mark on Friday and is likely to drag on for seasons to come. The conflict unleashed by Russian President Vladimir Putin defies statistics. It is a story best told in unsparring images of human suffering and resilience.

Associated Press photographers have captured the terror -- people diving to the floor of a Mariupol hospital as bombs fall around them; a mob of refugees, huddled under a bridge. They have captured the tears of grieving survivors, and of families separated by the war.

They have shown us the playfulness of a soldier, lightheartedly kicking a ball amid the carnage; of another soldier, leading an impromptu chorale. They have shown us a chilling view of a car driving down a

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highway, through the sight of a Ukrainian sniper. They have shown us a landscape littered with buildings in ruins and the carcasses of Russian tanks.

And so many bodies. Bodies in trenches and half-buried in hillsides and arrayed on pavements and lying in pools of blood and carried in coffins. A soldier spread out like a statue in a Christ-like pose on a metal barrier. An arm extended in the dirt.

This is a country that has been transformed in the blink of an eye. A hundred days ago, a bathtub was for bathing; now, it is a place where a little girl and her dog hide from bombs.

What will it be like, 100 days from now?

South Africa court to rule on Shell offshore oil exploration

By MOGOMOTSI MAGOME Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — A South African court is to rule on efforts to stop British oil giant Shell from conducting any further seismic surveys in the country's Indian Ocean waters to explore for offshore oil and gas deposits.

Environmental and community groups in South Africa's Eastern Cape province won an urgent interdict to stop the surveys in December last year and are now asking the court to permanently halt the operations.

This week lawyers representing the Xolobeni community in the Eastern Cape argued that they were not properly consulted by Shell and the government before permission was granted to conduct the survey. Environmental groups Sustaining the Wild Coast and Greenpeace Africa are also part of the lawsuit.

Seismic testing is the blasting of sound waves into the sea to determine the size of oil and gas deposits beneath the ocean floor. Environmental groups in South Africa, particularly in the Cape Town area, have demonstrated against the seismic surveys.

Experts testified that seismic surveys could harm animals in the ocean, including whales and dolphins, contrary to Shell's submission that the surveys were not harmful to marine life.

Shell conceded that its seismic surveys would not economically benefit the Xolobeni community.

"Why should we endanger these animals in circumstances where we have been told by Shell that there will be no economic spinoffs during the survey itself?" advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, representing the Xolobeni community, told the court.

Shell failed to conduct proper consultations with the community as required by law, said Ngcukaitobi.

"There is no evidence that the views of the community were taken into account, as they should have," he said. The original decision to allow the surveys was "unreasonable," said Ngcukaitobi.

The Xolobeni community regards the ocean as sacred and is part of their traditional rituals to communicate with their ancestors, he said. The seismic testing would interfere with their culture, he said.

Shell and government lawyers argued in court that seismic surveys have been conducted for many years and no harm had been recorded.

They also argued that the government had taken all factors into account when initially granting Shell approval to conduct the surveys.

The Eastern Cape High Court will consider the arguments before ruling on whether Shell should be allowed to continue the surveys or if they should be completely halted.

Brittney Griner receiving, answering WNBA players' emails

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

Brittney Griner can't play with her WNBA colleagues. She can't call them, either.

But she can write.

In one small bit of normalcy, Griner has been able to receive emails and letters from WNBA players during her detainment in Russia. Hundreds of emails have been sent by players to an account Griner's agent set up to allow them to communicate with her.

It's not easy: The emails are printed out and delivered sporadically in bunches to Griner by her lawyer after they are vetted by Russian officials. Griner doesn't have access to the email account; she'll either

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write a response on paper and her lawyers will take a photo of it or she'll dictate a response if she doesn't have any paper.

Los Angeles Sparks forward Amanda Zahui B. never thought she'd hear back from Griner when she sent an email to the Phoenix Mercury center a few months ago.

"When she responded to my second letter it blew me away," Zahui B. said. "I was like she responded!! In my third letter, I was like 'hey best friend, we are officially best friends now.'"

Like so many WNBA players, Zahui B. wanted Griner to know she was thinking about her as the two-time Olympic gold medalist remains, in the view of U.S. officials, wrongfully detained in Russia.

Griner has been detained for 105 days after vape cartridges containing oil derived from cannabis were allegedly found in her luggage at an airport near Moscow.

When Zahui B. got her first response from Griner it made her smile and she promised herself she would send more notes. And she has, sending them every few weeks. So have many other players.

"We just don't want her to think she's forgotten," Liberty center Stefanie Dolson said.

It's not just emails being sent to Griner; Diana Taurasi actually sent a hand-written letter to her Mercury and Olympic teammate.

Griner's agent Lindsay Kagawa Colas said the letters have been a way for the 6-foot-9 center to stay connected to her WNBA family.

Some players just offer hopes and prayers for Griner's release and say they are thinking about her. Others send Sudoku puzzles or more personal notes.

"She jokes in her letters. I don't know how she does it with what she's going through. She's an amazing soul," Zahui B. said. "She brings light in a situation like this. I don't think a lot of people could manage to do that."

Zahui B., who jokingly admitted she tends to ramble, sent Griner updates on her daily activities describing such mundane things as getting her nails done or what she ate for lunch.

She wasn't extremely close with Griner when they both played in the WNBA and in Europe, but got to know her better over time. Griner sent a video to Zahui B.'s mom offering support when she was battling breast cancer and another one for her 60th birthday a few years ago.

Griner, who last responded to the Sparks player last week, signed it "From 42 to 42" when Zahui B. told her she was switching her number to 42 in honor of the center.

While writing letters has come naturally to Zahui B., other players says it is tough to find the words to put pen to paper.

Griner faces drug smuggling charges that carry a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. Another American regarded as unjustly detained in Russia is Paul Whelan, a corporate security executive from Michigan. Whelan was arrested in December 2018 while visiting for a friend's wedding and was later sentenced to 16 years in prison on espionage-related charges his family has said are unfounded.

Marine veteran Trevor Reed, who also had been jailed in Russia for nearly three years, was released in late April as part of an unexpected prisoner exchange involving a convicted Russian drug trafficker serving a long prison sentence in America.

Last month, the Biden administration said Griner, 31, is being wrongfully detained. In May, her detention was extended another month until at least the middle of June.

"It's hard. It's like so sensitive and you don't want to say the wrong thing," said Mystics forward Elizabeth Williams. "It's also a sad situation and you don't want to remind her it's a sad situation. I think at the end of the day she's happy to hear anything from anybody."

Williams said the union has sent out texts every couple of weeks to remind WNBA players they can reach out to Griner through the email account. For now, the account isn't open to the public in an effort to keep it manageable.

New York Liberty's Sandy Brondello, who coached Griner in Phoenix for nine seasons, just found out about the chance to email her former player a few days ago.

"I'm going to tell her that I love her and that I'm thinking about her," said an emotional Brondello. "That's my girl, it's terrible. She's been there too long."

Oregon dropping AI tool used in child abuse cases

By SALLY HO AND GARANCE BURKE Associated Press

Child welfare officials in Oregon will stop using an algorithm to help decide which families are investigated by social workers, opting instead for a new process that officials say will make better, more racially equitable decisions.

The move comes weeks after an Associated Press review of a separate algorithmic tool in Pennsylvania that had originally inspired Oregon officials to develop their model, and was found to have flagged a disproportionate number of Black children for "mandatory" neglect investigations when it first was in place.

Oregon's Department of Human Services announced to staff via email last month that after "extensive analysis" the agency's hotline workers would stop using the algorithm at the end of June to reduce disparities concerning which families are investigated for child abuse and neglect by child protective services.

"We are committed to continuous quality improvement and equity," Lacey Andresen, the agency's deputy director, said in the May 19 email.

Jake Sunderland, a department spokesman, said the existing algorithm would "no longer be necessary," since it can't be used with the state's new screening process. He declined to provide further details about why Oregon decided to replace the algorithm and would not elaborate on any related disparities that influenced the policy change.

This story, supported by the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting, is part of an ongoing Associated Press series, "Tracked," that investigates the power and consequences of decisions driven by algorithms on people's everyday lives.

Hotline workers' decisions about reports of child abuse and neglect mark a critical moment in the investigations process, when social workers first decide if families should face state intervention. The stakes are high – not attending to an allegation could end with a child's death, but scrutinizing a family's life could set them up for separation.

From California to Colorado and Pennsylvania, as child welfare agencies use or consider implementing algorithms, an AP review identified concerns about transparency, reliability and racial disparities in the use of the technology, including their potential to harden bias in the child welfare system.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, said he had long been concerned about the algorithms used by his state's child welfare system and reached out to the department again following the AP story to ask questions about racial bias – a prevailing concern with the growing use of artificial intelligence tools in child protective services.

"Making decisions about what should happen to children and families is far too important a task to give untested algorithms," Wyden said in a statement. "I'm glad the Oregon Department of Human Services is taking the concerns I raised about racial bias seriously and is pausing the use of its screening tool."

Sunderland said Oregon child welfare officials had long been considering changing their investigations process before making the announcement last month.

He added that the state decided recently that the algorithm would be completely replaced by its new program, called the Structured Decision Making model, which aligns with many other child welfare jurisdictions across the country.

Oregon's Safety at Screening Tool was inspired by the influential Allegheny Family Screening Tool, which is named for the county surrounding Pittsburgh, and is aimed at predicting the risk that children face of winding up in foster care or being investigated in the future. It was first implemented in 2018. Social workers view the numerical risk scores the algorithm generates – the higher the number, the greater the risk – as they decide if a different social worker should go out to investigate the family.

But Oregon officials tweaked their original algorithm to only draw from internal child welfare data in calculating a family's risk, and tried to deliberately address racial bias in its design with a "fairness correction."

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In response to Carnegie Mellon University researchers' findings that Allegheny County's algorithm initially flagged a disproportionate number of Black families for "mandatory" child neglect investigations, county officials called the research "hypothetical," and noted that social workers can always override the tool, which was never intended to be used on its own.

Wyden is a chief sponsor of a bill that seeks to establish transparency and national oversight of software, algorithms and other automated systems.

"With the livelihoods and safety of children and families at stake, technology used by the state must be equitable -- and I will continue to watchdog," Wyden said.

The second tool that Oregon developed -- an algorithm to help decide when foster care children can be reunified with their families -- remains on hiatus as researchers rework the model. Sunderland said the pilot was paused months ago due to inadequate data but that there is "no expectation that it will be unpaused soon."

In recent years while under scrutiny by a crisis oversight board ordered by the governor, the state agency -- currently preparing to hire its eighth new child welfare director in six years -- considered three additional algorithms, including predictive models that sought to assess a child's risk for death and severe injury, whether children should be placed in foster care, and if so, where. Sunderland said the child welfare department never built those tools, however.

Fewer Americans apply for unemployment benefits last week

By MATT OTT AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fewer Americans applied for jobless aid last week with the number of Americans collecting unemployment at historically low levels.

Applications for unemployment benefits fell by 11,000 to 200,000 for the week ending May 28, the Labor Department reported Thursday. First-time applications generally track the number of layoffs.

The four-week average for claims, which evens out some of the weekly volatility, dipped by 500 from the previous week to 206,500.

The total number of Americans collecting jobless benefits for the week ending May 21 fell from the previous week, to 1,309,000, the fewest since Dec. 27, 1969.

American workers are enjoying historically strong job security two years after the coronavirus pandemic plunged the economy into a short but devastating recession. Weekly applications for unemployment aid have been consistently below the pre-pandemic level of 225,000 for most of 2022, even as the overall economy contracted in the first quarter and concerns over inflation persist.

Last month, the government reported America's employers added 428,000 jobs in April, leaving the unemployment rate at 3.6%, just above the lowest level in a half-century. Hiring gains have been strikingly consistent in the face of the worst inflation in four decades, with employers adding at least 400,000 jobs for 12 straight months.

The government's May jobs report will be released Friday, with many expecting that 400,000 jobs added streak to be broken. Economists surveyed by FactSet project that the U.S. added 323,000 jobs in May, which would be the fewest in about a year-and-a-half.

On Wednesday, a separate government employment report said that the number of job openings across the economy ticked a bit lower in April but remains much higher, at 11.4 million, than the number of unemployed people.

The healthy level of open jobs shows that companies are still trying to add staff and grow, even as inflation hovers near a 40-year high and the Federal Reserve has embarked on what could be its fastest pace of interest rate hikes since the 1980s.

Last month, the government reported that U.S. producer prices soared 11% in April from a year earlier, a hefty gain that indicates high inflation will remain a burden for consumers and businesses in the months ahead.

Inflation at the consumer level eased slightly in April after months of relentless increases but remained

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near a four-decade high. Consumer prices jumped 8.3% last month from a year ago, just below the 8.5% year-over-year surge in March, which was the highest since 1981.

Earlier in May, the Federal Reserve intensified its fight against inflation by raising its benchmark short-term interest rate by a half-percentage point, signaling further large rate hikes to come.

There had been some speculation that the Fed may consider a rate hike pause at its September meeting, but such hopes diminished after a report Wednesday from the Institute for Supply Management showing that manufacturing growth accelerated last month, contrary to economists' expectations for a slowdown.

As gas prices soar, Biden leans toward visiting Saudi Arabia

By AAMER 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.

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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 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."

Today in History: June 3, Barack Obama claims nomination

By The Associated Press undefined

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Today in History

Today is Friday, June 3, the 154th day of 2022. There are 211 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 3, 1989, Chinese army troops began their sweep of Beijing to crush student-led pro-democracy demonstrations.

On this date:

In 1621, the Dutch West India Co. received its charter for a trade monopoly in parts of the Americas and Africa.

In 1888, the poem "Casey at the Bat" by Ernest Lawrence Thayer was first published in the San Francisco Daily Examiner.

In 1935, the French liner Normandie set a record on its maiden voyage, arriving in New York after crossing the Atlantic in just four days.

In 1937, Edward, The Duke of Windsor, who had abdicated the British throne, married Wallis Simpson in a private ceremony in Monts, France.

In 1962, Air France Flight 007, a U.S.-bound Boeing 707, crashed while attempting to take off from Orly Airport near Paris; all but two of the 132 people aboard were killed.

In 1965, astronaut Edward H. White became the first American to "walk" in space during the flight of Gemini 4.

In 1977, the United States and Cuba agreed to set up diplomatic interests sections in each other's countries; Cuba also announced the immediate release of 10 Americans jailed on drug charges.

In 1989, Iran's spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, died.

In 2008, Barack Obama claimed the Democratic presidential nomination, speaking in the same St. Paul, Minnesota, arena where Republicans would be holding their national convention in September 2008.

In 2011, physician-assisted suicide advocate Dr. Jack Kevorkian died at a Michigan hospital at 83. Actor James Arness (TV: "Gunsmoke"), 88, died in Brentwood, California.

In 2016, heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali died at a hospital in Scottsdale, Arizona, at age 74.

In 2020, prosecutors charged three more police officers in the death of George Floyd and filed a new, tougher charge of second-degree murder against Derek Chauvin, the officer who was caught on video pressing his knee to Floyd's neck. (Chauvin would be convicted on all charges.) Defense Secretary Mark Esper took issue with President Donald Trump's threats to use the full force of the military to quell street protests. Enforcing a curfew, police in New York City moved in on crowds of demonstrators, at times blasting people with pepper spray.

Ten years ago: A Dana Air MD-83 jetliner carrying 153 people crashed on the outskirts of Lagos, Nigeria, killing everyone on board and at least 10 people on the ground. The River Thames became a royal highway as Queen Elizabeth II led a motley but majestic flotilla of more than 1,000 vessels to mark her Diamond Jubilee. Tiger Woods birdied three of his last four holes to win the Memorial, closing with a 5-under 67.

Five years ago: A white van slammed into pedestrians on London Bridge, killing eight people; the three attackers were shot and killed by police. SpaceX launched its first recycled cargo ship to the International Space Station. Former major leaguer Jimmy Piersall, who bared his soul about his struggles with mental illness in his book "Fear Strikes Out," died in Wheaton, Illinois, at age 87. Albert Pujols (POO'-hohlz) of the Angels hit a grand slam for his 600th homer during the fourth inning of Los Angeles' 7-2 victory over the Minnesota Twins.

One year ago: California workplace regulators approved controversial rules that allowed workers to go maskless only if every employee in a room was fully vaccinated against the coronavirus. United Airlines said it was hoping to bring back supersonic travel before the end of the decade; the airline announced plans to buy 15 jets from Boom Supersonic. A former colleague confirmed the death of celebrity attorney F. Lee Bailey, who had defended O.J. Simpson, Patricia Hearst and the alleged Boston Strangler; Bailey was 87.

Today's Birthdays: The former president of Cuba, Raul Castro, is 91. Actor Irma P. Hall is 87. Rock singer Ian Hunter (Mott The Hoople) is 83. World Golf Hall of Famer Hale Irwin is 77. Actor Penelope Wilton is 76.

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Singer Eddie Holman is 76. Actor Tristan Rogers is 76. Musician Too Slim (Riders in the Sky) is 74. Singer Suzi Quatro is 72. Singer Deneice Williams is 72. Singer Dan Hill is 68. Actor Suzie Plakson is 64. Actor Scott Valentine is 64. Rock musician Kerry King (Slayer) is 58. Actor James Purefoy is 58. Rock singer-musician Mike Gordon is 57. TV host Anderson Cooper is 55. Country singer Jamie O'Neal is 54. Writer-director Tate Taylor is 43. Singers Gabriel and Ariel Hernandez (No Mercy) are 51. Actor Vik Sahay is 51. R&B singer Lyfe Jennings is 49. Actor Arianne Zucker is 48. Actor Nikki M. James is 41. Tennis player Rafael Nadal is 36. Actor Josh Segarra is 36. Actor-singer Lalaine is 35. Actor Sean Berdy is 29. Actor Anne Winters is 28.