

Groton Daily Independent

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Carly Guthmiller shot a 46 on the front and 46 on the back and is in 19th place after the first day of the State Golf Meet.

Tuesday, June 7

ELECTION DAY!

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

Wednesday, June 8

Senior Menu: Taco salad, Mexican rice, fresh fruit, bread stick

10 a.m.: Little Free Library reading time (south Methodist Church)

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

5:30 p.m.: U12 hosts Jacobson, DH

6 p.m.: U8 SB at Doland, 1 game

7 p.m.: U10 SB at Doland, 1 game

5 p.m.: T-Ball Black at Doland

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



Thursday, June 9

Senior Menu: Oven-Fried chicken, mashed potatoes, mixed vegetables, buttermilk biscuits, banana pudding with bananas.

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

5 p.m.: Legion hosts Moberg, 1 game

7 p.m.: Jr. Legion hosts Moberg, 1 game

PP to June 22: Jr. Teeners at Britton, DH

6 p.m.: U12 SB hosts Webster, DH, Nelson Field

6 p.m.: U8 SB hosts Webster, 1 game, Nelson Field

7 p.m.: U10 SB hosts Webster, 1 game, Nelson Field

June 10

Senior Menu: Turkey sub sandwich, potato salad, broccoli, fruit, cookie.

6 p.m.: U10 hosts Renegades, DH, (R/B), Nelson Field

6 p.m.: T-Ball Scrimmage

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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4-Hit Day for Frey As Locke Electric Skirts Past Northville Merchants

Dylan Frey would not be denied at the plate on Sunday, picking up four hits and leading Locke Electric to a 16-5 win over Northville Merchants. Frey singled in the fourth, singled in the fourth, singled in the sixth, and singled in the eighth.

Locke Electric secured the victory thanks to nine runs in the fourth inning. Locke Electric big bats were led by Spencer Locke, Jonny Israel, Garret Knebel, Wilson Bonet, Colin Frey, and Frey, all knocking in runs in the inning.

In the first inning, Northville Merchants got their offense started when Bauer grounded out, scoring one run.

Locke Electric pulled away for good with nine runs in the fourth inning. In the fourth Locke's sac fly scored one run for Locke Electric, Israel singled on a 3-2 count, scoring one run, Knebel singled on a 0-1 count, scoring one run, Bonet singled on a 2-1 count, scoring one run, Frey drew a walk, scoring one run, Frey singled on a 1-1 count, scoring two runs, and an error scored two runs for Locke Electric.

Austin Jones was the winning pitcher for Locke Electric. The righthander surrendered three runs on five hits over four innings, striking out four. Israel threw four innings in relief out of the bullpen.

Waltman took the loss for Northville Merchants. The hurler lasted three innings, allowing four hits and eight runs while striking out five.

Locke Electric totaled 19 hits in the game. Frey, Evan Erickson, Knebel, Bonet, Frey, and Jones each collected multiple hits for Locke Electric. Frey went 4-for-6 at the plate to lead Locke Electric in hits.

Northville Merchants totaled 14 hits. Simes, McQuarie, Paulsen, Solheim, and Noah Fischbach each had multiple hits for Northville Merchants. Northville Merchants tore up the base paths, as two players stole at least two bases. Simes led the way with two.

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Locke Electric 16 - 5 Northville Merchants

📍 Away 📅 Sunday June 05, 2022

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	R	H	E
LCKL	0	0	0	9	1	0	1	5	16	19	1
NRTH	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	5	14	3

BATTING

Locke Electric	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
C Frey (CF, RF, CF)	5	2	2	3	1	2
D Frey (SS)	6	2	4	3	0	0
E Erickson (RF, 2B...	5	1	3	0	1	1
H Giedt (1B, 2B)	4	1	1	0	1	0
S Locke (C)	1	0	0	1	1	0
B Peterson (1B)	2	1	1	0	0	0
J Israel (3B, P)	3	2	1	1	1	2
A Jones (P, LF, RF)	4	3	2	1	1	1
G Knebel (2B, 3B)	5	2	3	1	0	0
C Furney (LF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
W Bonet (LF, CF,...	3	2	2	3	0	1
Totals	39	16	19	13	6	8

2B: C Frey, G Knebel, **TB:** E Erickson 3, J Israel, B Peterson, W Bonet 2, C Frey 3, D Frey 4, A Jones 2, H Giedt, G Knebel 4, **SF:** W Bonet, S Locke, **CS:** W Bonet, **HBP:** J Israel, **SB:** E Erickson, J Israel, W Bonet, C Frey 2, D Frey, **LOB:** 8

PITCHING

Locke Electric	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
A Jones	4.0	5	3	2	5	4	0
J Israel	4.0	9	2	2	0	5	0
Totals	8.0	14	5	4	5	9	0

W: A Jones, **P-S:** J Israel 47-37, A Jones 84-45, **WP:** A Jones, **BF:** J Israel 18, A Jones 21

Northville Merchan	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
Simes (SS)	3	1	3	2	2	0
Fischbach (3B, P)	4	1	1	0	1	3
Bauer (CF)	4	0	0	1	1	2
Paulsen (1B)	4	0	2	0	0	1
Lefforge (C)	4	0	0	0	0	1
Solheim (2B)	4	0	2	0	0	0
McQuarie (LF)	4	0	3	0	0	1
Waltman (P, 3B)	3	1	1	0	1	0
N Fischbach (RF)	4	2	2	0	0	1
Totals	34	5	14	3	5	9

2B: Waltman, **3B:** Simes, McQuarie, **TB:** Simes 5, Solheim 2, Waltman 2, Fischbach, Paulsen 2, N Fischbach 2, McQuarie 5, **SB:** Simes 2, N Fischbach 2, **LOB:** 10

Northville Me	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
Waltman	3.0	4	8	7	5	5	0
Fischbach	4.2	15	8	7	1	2	0
Totals	8.0	19	16	14	6	8	0

L: Waltman, **P-S:** Waltman 70-35, Fischbach 101-63, **WP:** Waltman 2, Fischbach, **HBP:** Fischbach, **BF:** Waltman 18, Fischbach 29

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Groton Legion Post #39 Loses Lead Early in Defeat

Groton Legion Post #39 fell behind early and couldn't come back in a 12-1 loss to Smittys Legion 2022 on Monday. Smittys Legion 2022 took the lead on a single in the first inning.

The Groton Legion Post #39 struggled to contain the high-powered offense of Smittys Legion 2022, giving up 12 runs.

Smittys Legion 2022 got on the board in the first inning when Casey Vining singled on a 3-1 count, scoring one run.

Smittys Legion 2022 scored four runs in the fourth inning. The big inning for Smittys Legion 2022 came thanks to a single by Andrew Richardson and a double by Vining.

Brock Martin pitched Smittys Legion 2022 to victory. The pitcher surrendered zero runs on zero hits over three innings, striking out five. Jaïden Smith threw two innings in relief out of the bullpen.

Bradin Althoff took the loss for Groton Legion Post #39. The lefty allowed nine hits and eight runs over three and a third innings, striking out one.

Jackson Cogley went 1-for-1 at the plate to lead Groton Legion Post #39 in hits.

Smittys Legion 2022 tallied 13 hits in the game. Vining, Josh Steinwandt, Drew Salfrank, and Richardson each had multiple hits for Smittys Legion 2022. Vining led Smittys Legion 2022 with three hits in three at bats.

Groton Legion Post #39 Outdone by Smittys Legion 2022, 7-5

Brian Holmstrom got the win for Smittys Legion 2022. Holmstrom allowed one hit and one run over one and one-third innings, striking out two and walking zero. Nick Clemens threw two innings in relief out of the bullpen.

Ryan Groeblichhoff took the loss for Groton Legion Post #39. The pitcher went six and a third innings, allowing six runs on eight hits and striking out three.

Casey Vining started the game for Smittys Legion 2022. The pitcher surrendered two runs on three hits over three and two-thirds innings, striking out one.

Bradin Althoff led Groton Legion Post #39 with two hits in three at bats.

Smittys Legion 2022 scattered ten hits in the game. Holmstrom, Ethan Kjenstad, and Vining all collected multiple hits for Smittys Legion 2022. Smittys Legion 2022 didn't commit a single error in the field. Josh Steinwandt had the most chances in the field with seven.

South Dakota Legislature updates name change law, fixing last year's mistake

By Hannah Haksgaard

A year ago, the South Dakota Legislature prohibited middle name changes at the time of marriage, taking away a popular choice for brides who wanted to share their husband's last name but keep their maiden name as a middle name. Thankfully in the 2022 session and with unanimous and bipartisan support, the South Dakota Legislature and Governor Noem fixed last year's mistake.

Starting on July 1, 2022, when someone gets married in South Dakota, they once again can change their middle name. First names cannot be changed on the marriage license, but South Dakota Codified Law § 25-1-10.1 will soon allow middle names to be changed "if an applicant is changing the applicant's surname to become a middle name." Additionally, a surname can be changed "to adopt the spouse's surname or the applicants' hyphenated surnames."

Under the new law, a bride can take her husband's surname and move her maiden name to her middle name. Imagine a woman named Sadie Marie Smith who wants to take her husband's name at marriage but does not want to entirely drop her maiden name of Smith. Under the new law, Sadie Marie Smith can marry Paul Johnson and she can become either Sadie Marie Smith Johnson (with two middle names) or she can become Sadie Smith Johnson (dropping her original middle name and replacing it with her maiden name).

Although having more name options available would be better, I appreciate that our Legislature and Governor at least restored the right of a bride to keep her maiden name as a middle name, an option that has been popular for many decades. For couples wanting a wider variety of name options, a destination wedding in our neighboring states of Iowa, Minnesota, and North Dakota will come with laws granting more name options.

Not every legislative mistake is easily fixed, and sometimes bad laws stick around because no one will admit mistakes. In this instance, however, a bipartisan effort quickly fixed a needless problem, and for that I am appreciative.

Hannah Haksgaard, Vermillion, is a Professor of Law at the University of South Dakota Knudson School of Law. Statements and opinions set forth by Professor Haksgaard are her views as an individual and do not reflect the views of the South Dakota Board of Regents, the University of South Dakota, or the Knudson School of Law.

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Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

June 7, 2022 – 7:00pm
City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
2. Minutes
3. Bills
4. Department Reports
5. Discussion and Possible Approval of a Farmer's Market on Main Street
6. Approval of Electricity Installation at Airport
7. Approval for the City of Groton to provide Mosquito Control services to the City of Bristol
8. Approval for Library Board Appointment of Andrea Eisenbeisz for another 1-year term
9. Approval of Painted Art/Activities on Sidewalk outside of City Hall
10. Approval of Harrison First Addition Plat
11. Update on "The Pantry"
12. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
13. Request for Wage Increase for Public Works Laborer
14. Hiring of Summer Baseball Employees
15. Resignation of Groton PD Officer
16. Adjournment

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2022 AMERICAN LEGION BOYS STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA ANNOUNCES ELECTION RESULTS AND AWARDS

The 177 high school boys, both juniors and seniors, who were delegates to the 79th Annual Session of The American Legion Boys State of South Dakota, held their general election for state officers on Thursday, June 2nd. After lunch, election results were announced by Boys State Director, Chris VanDelist, and are as follows.

Jason Lenning of Harrisburg, who will be a senior this year at Sioux Falls Christian, was elected as Governor. Elected as Lt. Governor was Evan Gran of Sioux Falls, who is a student at Harrisburg High School.

Jason Lenning of Sioux Falls and Dustin Hermansen of Aberdeen were selected as the two delegates to represent South Dakota at The American Legion Boys Nation in Washington, D.C. in July. Ben Lust of Rapid City and Zachary Wrightsman of Sioux Falls were selected as Alternate Delegates.

Maxwell Lightfield of Milbank was selected as the 2022 recipient of the Samsung, American Legion Scholarship award. Maxwell's application has been forwarded to the National American Legion Selection Committee. The committee will award ten, \$10,000 scholarships to the National Finalists.

Other election results were James Park of Brookings for Attorney General; Jack Hinrichs of Sioux Falls for Secretary of State; Shane Rist of Centerville as State Auditor; **Jacob Lewandowski of Groton as State Treasurer**; and Josiah Sabrowski-Johnson of Rapid City as Commissioner of School and Public Lands. Elected as members of the Public Utilities Commission were Ethan Boekelheide of Northville, Jacob Shelstad of Ortonville, MN, and Aidan Foell of Milbank.

In non-political elections, the delegates also elected four justices to serve on the Supreme Court. Elected as Supreme Court Justices were Ethan Fergel of Aberdeen, Joe Osmundson of Sioux Falls, Christopher Gaikowski of Webster, and Tice Mursu of Big Stone City. Maxell Lightfield of Milbank was elected the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Matthew Mork of Pierpont was selected as the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Zachary Wrightsman of Sioux Falls was elected as the President Pro-Tem. Jack Hinrichs of Sioux Falls was selected as the Nationalist Party Chairman and Joel Tramp of Custer was the Nationalist Party Keynote Speaker. The Federalist Party chose Isaiah Hoekman of Hartford as their Party Chairman, and Brody Riggs of Mitchell as their Keynote Speaker. Jack Hinrichs of Sioux Falls captured the honors of Outstanding Speaker.

Preston Rosane of Martin was selected as the Outstanding Boys State Citizen and Quenton Walls of Huron received the Spirit of Boys State Award, which recognizes the Boys State Delegate who best exemplifies the purpose of American Legion Boys State of South Dakota. The Outstanding Journalist was Maxwell Kelsey of Oacoma.

American Legion Boys State of South Dakota was held on the campus of Northern State University in Aberdeen, May 30 - June 3, 2022.

THIS IS IT!

**Weber Landscaping Greenhouse
final sale of the season!**

15% off all annuals.

Veggies buy 1 get 1.

10% off planters.

Hours this week

Monday-Thursday 10-6

Final Day is Thursday

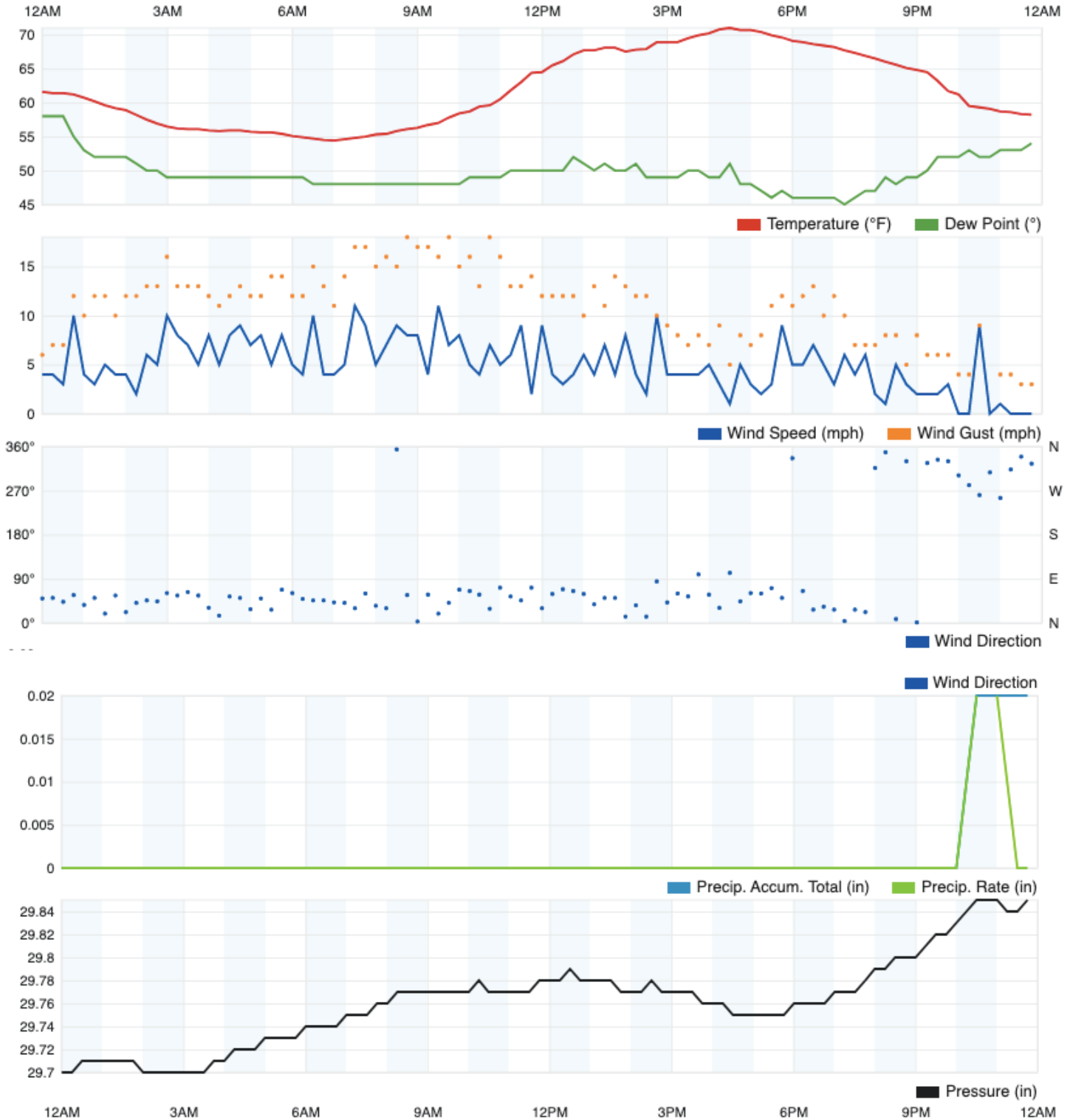
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204 N. State St, Groton, SD

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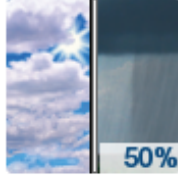
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
Chance Showers then Partly Sunny	Slight Chance Showers	Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Partly Sunny then Chance Showers
High: 67 °F	Low: 50 °F	High: 71 °F	Low: 51 °F	High: 73 °F

NWS ABERDEEN

WEATHER.GOV/ABR

Showers Today & Thursday

Today

upper 60s



off and on Showers over e SD & w central MN
Showers and Thunderstorms over central SD from mid afternoon through the evening

Wednesday

low 70s



Mainly Dry

Thursday

low to mid 70s



Showers and a few Thunderstorms, especially over south central SD

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



Off and on showers will continue over eastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota. Expect showers and thunderstorms to move into central South Dakota from mid afternoon through the evening hours. A couple of storms over south central South Dakota could become strong or severe with hail or strong gusty winds. Mainly dry weather, and a partly cloudy sky, will return Wednesday. Additional showers and thunderstorms will be possible Thursday.

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Today in Weather History

June 7, 1982: Lightning struck a house in Sunshine Acres, north of Pierre, and the ensuing fire destroyed the interior. One person received minor burns. Over two inches of rain fell in Pierre causing Capital Lake to rise four feet. Water and mud flooded the State Maintenance Building.

June 7, 1993: A large F3 tornado destroyed a farmstead 9 miles southwest of Tulare. The tornado twisted the house on its foundation, virtually destroying it. This storm also destroyed a barn, three steel bins, three granaries, and two hog houses. Ten hogs were killed.

At least three more tornadoes damaged several farms in the Tulare and Redfield areas. A tornado hit one farm northwest of Tulare causing about 65,000 dollars in damage. Another tornado damaged a farm 5 miles west of Redfield.

1692: A massive earthquake strikes Port Royal in Jamaica, killing some 3,000 people.

1816: The following is found on page 31, from the book, "History of the American Clock Business for the Past Sixty Year, and Life of Chauncey Jerome," written by Chauncey Jerome. The book was published in 1860. "The next summer was a cold one of 1816, which none of the old people will ever forget, and which many of the young have heard a great deal about. There was ice and snow in every month of the year. I well remember on the seventh of June, while on my way to work, about a mile from home, dressed throughout with thick woolen clothes and an overcoat on, my hands got so cold that I was obliged to lay down my tools and put on a pair of mittens which I had in my pocket. It snowed about an hour that day." This bitter cold event occurred in Plymouth, Connecticut.

1972 - Richmond VA experienced its worst flood of record as rains from Hurricane Agnes pushed the water level at the city locks to a height of 36.5 feet, easily topping the previous record of thirty feet set in 1771. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms in the Laramie Mountains of eastern Wyoming produced golf ball size hail, and up to five inches of rain in just one hour. Half a dozen cities in the Upper Mississippi Valley reported record high temperatures for the date, including La Crosse, WI, with a reading of 97 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)(Storm Data)

1988 - Snow whitened some of the mountains of northern California and northwestern Nevada. Twenty-six cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Rapid City SD with a reading of 104 degrees, and Miles City, MT, with a high of 106 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from southern Oklahoma and eastern Texas to northwestern Florida through the day and night. Thunderstorms spawned 22 tornadoes, including a dozen in Louisiana, and there were 119 reports of large hail and damaging winds. A strong (F-2) tornado at Gross Tete LA killed two persons, injured thirty others, and another strong (F-2) tornado injured 60 persons at Lobdell LA. Softball size hail was reported at Hillsboro TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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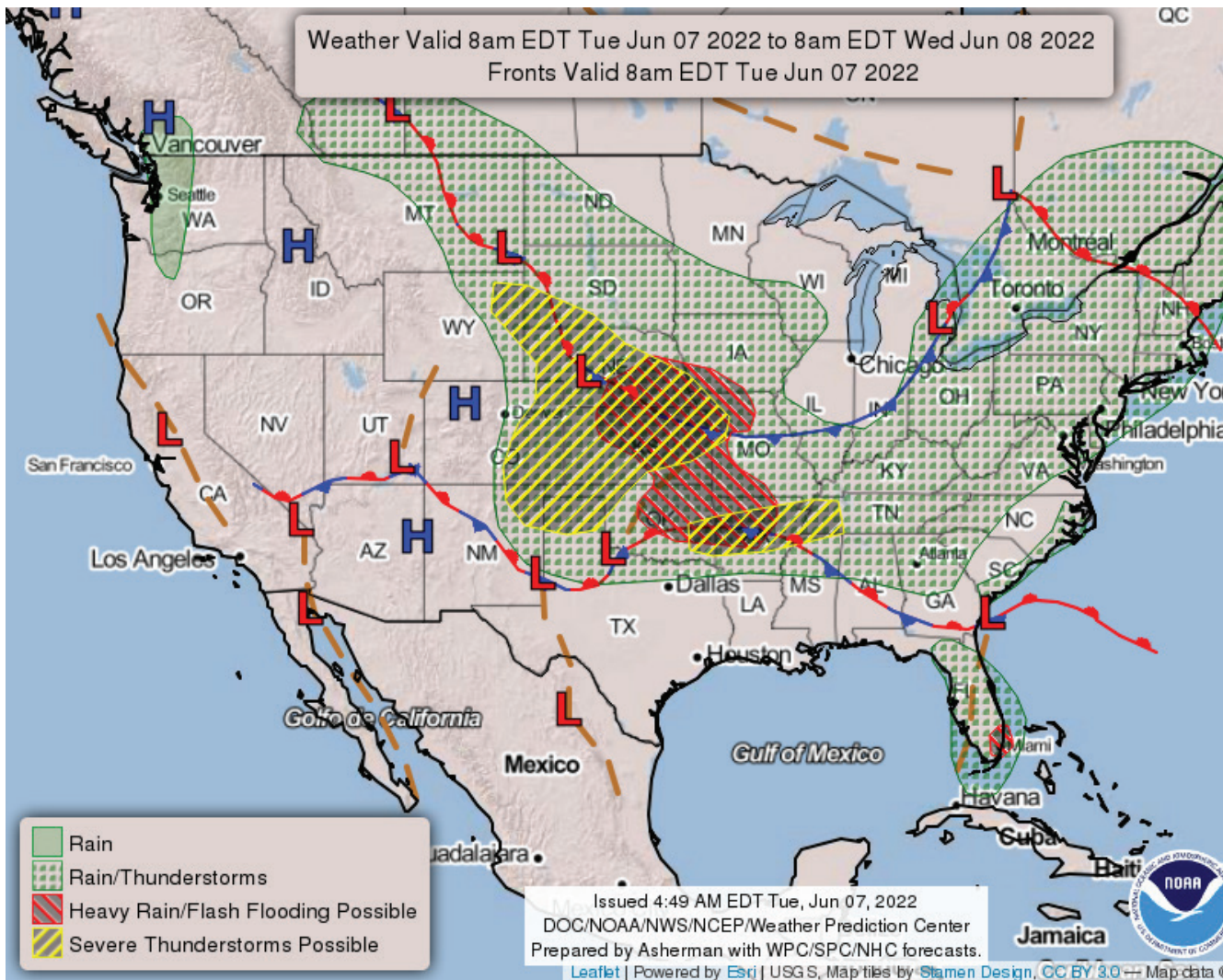
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 71 °F at 4:32 PM
Low Temp: 54 °F at 6:55 AM
Wind: 19 mph at 8:33 AM
Precip: 0.02

Day length: 15 hours, 37 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 99 in 2021
Record Low: 28 in 1901
Average High: 78°F
Average Low: 53°F
Average Precip in June.: 0.78
Precip to date in June.: 0.02
Average Precip to date: 8.03
Precip Year to Date: 11.18
Sunset Tonight: 9:19:59 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:42:22 AM



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God's Attitude About Strength

What Americans spend on nutritional supplements and bodybuilding is staggering. Consider these facts:

Sixty billion dollars were spent in January to lose weight.

One and one-half billion dollars are spent on food supplements each month.

There are over 32,000 health clubs in America.

The average cost per month of a gym membership is \$55.00.

The total amount of money spent on gym memberships in 2020 was over \$32 billion.

The number of gym memberships in 2019 was over 64 million.

"Looking good" for many is much more important than "being good." Taking pride in bulging muscles and well-toned bodies have become a way of life for many who worship themselves rather than God. It is difficult to watch TV without seeing commercials on how to "get ripped" or pills to lose weight or products that will extend life. The "beautiful body" has become an end for many.

However, the Psalmist staked our God's position on all of this: "He takes no pleasure...in human might."

Now, there's nothing wrong with being physically fit. We are indebted to God to avoid doing anything to our body that would put it at risk for any disease that we can avoid. Why? We are obligated to Him to honor this "gift" and use it for His glory by serving Him. But, we cross a line when we worship our bodies and not the God who created them.

Prayer: Lord, convict our hearts to care deeply about the gift of life and wellness You have given us. Then, would You teach us to use it to honor You? In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Bible Verse: He takes no pleasure in the strength of a horse or in human might. Psalm 147:10b

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2022 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

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News from the Associated Press

GOP incumbents face House primaries in Democratic California

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD AP Political Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A slate of Republican U.S. House members in heavily Democratic California are facing primary challengers on Tuesday in races that will help determine control of Congress.

No incumbents appear at risk of losing their primary, but the districts will be among the country's marquee races in November. Two of the House members are trying to surmount challenges tied to former President Donald Trump: One voted to support the former president's impeachment after the U.S. Capitol insurrection, while the other fought against it.

Elsewhere on Tuesday, former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke is competing against several other Republicans for a chance to capture a new U.S. House district in western Montana. In Iowa, a trio of Republicans is jockeying to take on the state's lone Democratic U.S. House member in a newly drawn district with a stronger GOP tilt. And in Mississippi, Republican U.S. Rep. Steven Palazzo is running for reelection after a congressional ethics watchdog raised questions about his campaign spending.

A look at key U.S. House races:

TRUMP FACTORS INTO GOP RACES IN HEAVILY DEMOCRATIC CALIFORNIA

Two Republican congressmen are facing challenges tied to Trump, but for different reasons.

In a Democratic-tilting district in the state's Central Valley farm belt, Republican Rep. David Valadao is highlighting an independent streak while contending with GOP fallout for his vote to impeach Trump over the Jan. 6 insurrection. Republican Chris Mathys has made Valadao's vote a centerpiece in his campaign to oust him.

In a Democratic-leaning district north of Los Angeles, three Democrats are vying for the chance to take on Republican Rep. Mike Garcia, who captured the seat in 2020. Garcia, a former Navy fighter pilot who was endorsed by Trump in 2020, joined House Republicans who rejected electoral votes from Arizona and Pennsylvania and opposed Trump's impeachment after the Capitol insurrection. Two other Republicans are also on the ballot.

California uses a top-two election format in which only the top two vote-getters advance to the November general election, regardless of party.

FORMER TRUMP CABINET MEMBER SEEKS RETURN TRIP TO WASHINGTON

Montana gained a second congressional district this year thanks to its growing population, and Zinke, an Interior Department secretary under Trump, is one of five Republicans on the primary ballot for the open seat.

Zinke's rivals have been drawing attention to his troubled tenure at the agency, which was marked by multiple ethics investigations. One investigation determined Zinke lied to an agency ethics official about his continued involvement in a commercial real estate deal in his hometown. He's faced a smear campaign over his military service from the extreme right wing of his party and questions about his residency following revelations that his wife declared a house in California as her primary residence.

Zinke, a former Navy SEAL, is widely considered the de facto incumbent, since he twice won elections for the state's other House seat before stepping down in 2017 to join the Trump administration.

His primary opponents include former state Sen. Al "Doc" Olszewski, an orthopedic surgeon and hard-line conservative who has tried to paint Zinke as a "liberal insider." Three Democrats are vying for their party's nomination: public health advocate Cora Neumann, Olympic rower and attorney Monica Tranel and former state Rep. Tom Winter.

IOWA'S SOLE DEMOCRATIC HOUSE MEMBER FACES A TOUGH FIGHT

Three Republicans are competing for a chance to run against two-term Democratic Rep. Cindy Axne in a newly drawn Iowa district that could be more favorable for the GOP.

In previous elections, Axne was elevated by her strong support in the Des Moines area, even as she

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struggled in rural counties that typically lean Republican. The new district includes several counties in southern Iowa known to turn out strongly for Republicans, increasing the pressure on Axne to drive up her numbers in Democratic-friendly Des Moines and its suburbs.

Among the Republicans, state Sen. Zach Nunn is the best known of her challengers. He's an Air Force pilot who has served in the Legislature since 2014 and has worked to cut taxes. He's running against Nicole Hasso, a financial services worker, and Gary Leffler, who works in the construction industry.

MISSISSIPPI CONGRESSMAN WITH ETHICS TROUBLE DRAWS A CROWD

First elected in 2010, Republican Rep. Steven Palazzo of Mississippi is facing his largest-ever primary field after a congressional ethics watchdog raised questions about his campaign spending.

A 2021 report by the Office of Congressional Ethics found "substantial reason to believe" Palazzo, a military veteran who serves on the Appropriations and Homeland Security committees, abused his office by misspending campaign funds, doing favors for his brother and enlisting staff for political and personal errands. His then-spokesperson, Colleen Kennedy, said the probe was based on politically motivated "false allegations."

His six opponents include a sheriff, Mike Ezell, and a state senator, Brice Wiggins. If no candidate wins a majority of votes, a runoff will be June 28.

A REPUBLICAN MATCHUP FOR SOUTH DAKOTA'S ONLY HOUSE SEAT

Trump also is playing into the fight for South Dakota's lone House seat.

GOP Rep. Dusty Johnson, a member of the bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus, is facing a challenge from his political right from Republican state lawmaker Taffy Howard. She has echoed Trump's discredited claims of widespread voter fraud and criticized Johnson for voting to certify the results of the 2020 presidential election.

Johnson, however, has maintained a wide fundraising edge. No Democrats are running, so the winner of the GOP primary will likely take the seat.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 207,000,000

Powerball

02-10-35-44-46, Powerball: 4, Power Play: 2

(two, ten, thirty-five, forty-four, forty-six; Powerball: four; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$210,000,000

South Dakota's Noem, Thune face challengers running to right

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem has parlayed popularity with Republicans for her hands-off approach to pandemic restrictions into national prominence. But that hasn't insulated her from criticism — and a primary challenger — from the right in the reliably conservative state.

Noem will look to show her strength with Republican voters in Tuesday's primary against state Rep. Steve Haugaard, a former state House speaker who has accused Noem of using the governor's office to mount a 2024 White House bid.

Noem has used this election fundraising cycle to collect a record amount of money for a South Dakota gubernatorial candidate — bringing in more than \$15 million from a series of fundraisers all over the country.

The first-term governor will be hoping for a big primary victory before heading into a general election contest against Democratic state Rep. Jamie Smith, who did not face a primary challenger.

U.S. Sen. John Thune, the No. 2 Republican in the chamber, is facing two primary challengers who joined the race after Thune drew the ire of former President Donald Trump. Trump speculated the senator's ca-

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reer was "over" after he made public statements dismissing the former president's lies about widespread voter fraud in the 2020 election.

One candidate, Mark Mowry, was among the crowd that demonstrated near the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6. The other challenger, Bruce Whalen, ran for Congress in 2006 but lost the general election in a landslide.

Neither of the challengers is well-funded or well-known in the state, and in a sign that Thune could be positioned for victory, Trump has steered clear of South Dakota.

Thune is a longtime fixture as the state GOP's elder statesman, and if he wins reelection to a fourth term, he is a likely pick to succeed Mitch McConnell as Senate Republican leader.

Republican U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson is facing a primary challenge from state lawmaker Taffy Howard for the state's lone House spot. The \$300,000 her campaign has raised has been dwarfed by Johnson's \$1.8 million.

The congressman has taken a measured approach on most issues and has touted his work with a bipartisan group of lawmakers called the Problem Solvers Caucus. Howard has tried to challenge him from the right, creating a primary race that will show just how strong the more extreme wing of the Republican Party has grown in South Dakota.

That intraparty conflict has been fought across a slate of legislative primary races where Republicans have launched attack ads against each other. Establishment Republicans are trying to weed out a group of contrarian lawmakers who have pushed the Legislature further right.

Primary voters will also decide on an amendment to the state constitution, proposed by Republican lawmakers, that would make it more difficult to pass ballot initiatives that raise taxes or spend public funds. The proposal would place a 60% vote threshold on ballot measures to raise taxes or spend more than \$10 million within five years of enactment.

Court upholds 'terrorism' sentencing of pipeline saboteur

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A federal appeals court on Monday upheld an eight-year prison sentence for an environmental activist who tried to sabotage the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

Jessica Reznicek pleaded guilty in June 2021 to a charge of conspiracy to damage an energy facility for vandalizing construction sites on the 1,200-mile (1,930-kilometer) pipeline in 2016 and 2017.

Iowa U.S. District Judge Rebecca Goodgame Ebinger included a terrorism-related enhancement in her sentencing, finding that the crime was "calculated to influence or affect the conduct of government." Reznicek appealed that enhancement, arguing that she was acting against a private company.

But the appeals court found that "any error was harmless" in Ebinger's sentencing because the judge had noted she would have imposed the eight-year sentence regardless of the terrorism enhancement, the Des Moines Register reported.

An attorney for Reznicek declined to comment on the court's decision.

Ruby Montoya, another activist who acted with Reznicek, has pleaded guilty to a charge in the incident. But she has attempted to withdraw that plea, arguing she was unfairly pressured into entering it.

Three indicted for allegedly kidnapping FBI specialist

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A federal grand jury has indicted three people for allegedly kidnapping an FBI victim specialist last week. Online court records indicate Juan Francisco Alvarez-Soto, Deyvin Morales and Lourdes Alondra Bonilla were indicted on May 19 on charges of kidnapping, carjacking and brandishing a firearm during a crime of violence.

The indictment was unsealed Thursday.

According to the indictment, the trio kidnapped FBI Victim Specialist Curt Lauinger while he was engaged in his official duties in Red Shirt on May 6. The indictment offers no other details on the circumstances except to say a rifle was brandished during the incident.

U.S. Attorney Alison J. Ramsdell said through a spokeswoman that no additional information was available to the public.

Online court records did not list an attorney for Alvarez-Soto, Morarles or Bonilla.

South Dakota voters weigh future of ballot measures, taxes

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Primary voters will decide Tuesday whether to add a provision to South Dakota's constitution making it more difficult to pass ballot measures that raise taxes or significantly expand government funds, a showdown over direct democracy in the state that pioneered voter-initiated laws.

The proposed constitutional amendment, which will appear as Amendment C on ballots, would place a 60% vote threshold on citizen-initiated ballot measures that raise taxes or spend more than \$10 million within five years of enactment.

As Republicans have come to dominate politics in the state where the initiative and referendum processes were first enacted in 1898, the Legislature has tussled in recent years with voter-initiated measures. Supporters say they are necessary to pass popular law proposals that lawmakers are unwilling to take up. But lawmakers who proposed the constitutional amendment say it would protect from new citizen-proposed taxes by instituting a similar vote threshold the Legislature faces to levy a new tax.

"Taxes are kind of like constitutional amendments, they last a long, long time," said Grover Norquist, the president of Americans for Tax Reform, an organization supporting the campaign for Amendment C. "They are such a big deal they should command a super-majority."

The Amendment C proposal was sparked by a separate citizen-proposed constitutional amendment to expand federal Medicaid eligibility, which will appear on ballots in November's general election. Republican lawmakers, anticipating the Medicaid expansion fight, pushed Amendment C to the primary ballot, even though fewer voters will almost certainly decide on it than if it had also been placed on the general election ballot.

During the 2020 election cycle, for example, the number of primary ballots cast was roughly one-third of the general election. Turnout also skewed Republican, with GOP-registered voters casting 63% of primary ballots despite making up 48% of registered voters.

"Changing the constitution shouldn't be taken lightly," said Amy Scott-Stolz, the former president of the League of Women Voters, which joined the opposition campaign under her leadership. "Letting the people decide on the issues is a South Dakota tradition and should be kept the way it is."

The vote on the constitutional amendment has drawn some of the state's most powerful political groups, with the state Republican party actively campaigning for it and the Democratic party hosting phone bank events to try to dissuade people from approving it.

The National Education Association and hospital systems — which are among the state's largest employers — have funded a \$1.5 million opposition campaign called South Dakotans for Fair Elections; while Americans for Prosperity, a fiscally conservative organization, has spearheaded a \$500,000 campaign called South Dakotans Against Higher Taxes.

It will take a simple majority of Tuesday's vote to enshrine the requirement in the state constitution.

US wins case to seize Russian superyacht in Fiji, sails away

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — The United States won a legal battle on Tuesday to seize a Russian-owned superyacht in Fiji and wasted no time in taking command of the \$325 million vessel and sailing it away from the South Pacific nation.

The court ruling represented a significant victory for the U.S. as it encounters obstacles in its attempts to seize the assets of Russian oligarchs around the world. While those efforts are welcomed by many who oppose the war in Ukraine, some actions have tested the limits of American jurisdiction abroad.

In Fiji, the nation's Supreme Court lifted a stay order which had prevented the U.S. from seizing the superyacht Amadea.

Chief Justice Kamal Kumar ruled that based on the evidence, the chances of defense lawyers mounting

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an appeal that the top court would hear were “nil to very slim.”

Kumar said he accepted arguments that keeping the superyacht berthed in Fiji at Lautoka harbor was “costing the Fijian government dearly.”

“The fact that U.S. authorities have undertaken to pay costs incurred by the Fijian government is totally irrelevant,” the judge found. He said the Amadea “sailed into Fiji waters without any permit and most probably to evade prosecution by the United States of America.”

The U.S. removed the motorized vessel within an hour or two of the court’s ruling, possibly to ensure the yacht didn’t get entangled in any further legal action.

A U.S. Justice Department spokesperson did not immediately return an email seeking comment.

In early May, the Justice Department issued a statement saying the Amadea had been seized in Fiji, but that turned out to be premature after lawyers appealed.

It wasn’t immediately clear where the U.S. intended to take the Amadea, which the FBI has linked to the Russian oligarch Suleiman Kerimov.

Fiji Director of Public Prosecutions Christopher Pryde said unresolved questions of money laundering and the ownership of the Amadea need to be decided in the U.S.

“The decision acknowledges Fiji’s commitment to respecting international mutual assistance requests and Fiji’s international obligations,” Pryde said.

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

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

Lawyer Feizal Haniff, who represented paper owner Millemarin Investments, had argued the owner was another wealthy Russian who, unlike Kerimov, doesn’t face sanctions.

The U.S. acknowledged that paperwork appeared to show Eduard Khudainatov was the owner but said he was also the paper owner of a second and even larger superyacht, the Scheherazade, which has been linked to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The U.S. questioned whether Khudainatov could really afford two superyachts worth a total of more than \$1 billion.

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

Court documents say the Amadea switched off its transponder soon after Russia invaded Ukraine and sailed from the Caribbean through the Panama Canal to Mexico, arriving with over \$100,000 in cash. It then sailed thousands of miles (kilometers) across the Pacific Ocean to Fiji.

The Justice Department said it didn’t believe paperwork showing the Amadea was next headed to the Philippines, arguing it was really destined for Vladivostok or elsewhere in Russia.

The department said it found a text message on a crew member’s phone saying, “We’re not going to Russia” followed by a “shush” emoji.

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

Kerimov made a fortune investing in Russian gold producer Polyus, with Forbes magazine putting his net worth at \$14.5 billion. The U.S. first sanctioned him in 2018 after he was detained in France and accused of money laundering there, sometimes arriving with suitcases stuffed with 20 million euros.

Khudainatov is the former chairman and chief executive of Rosneft, the state-controlled Russian oil and gas company.

US, S. Korea fly 20 fighter jets amid N. Korea tensions

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea and the United States flew fighter jets in formation over South Korea's western sea Tuesday in a show of force amid signs that a North Korean nuclear test explosion could be imminent.

The flight came as U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman traveled to Seoul for discussions with South Korea and Japanese allies over the gathering North Korean threat and warned of a "swift and forceful" response if the North proceeds with a nuclear test, which would be its first in nearly five years.

If staged, the test would possibly mark another leap forward in North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's goals to build an arsenal that could viably threaten regional U.S. allies and the American homeland. That would escalate a pressure campaign aimed at forcing the United States to accept the idea of the North as a nuclear power and negotiating economic and security concessions from a position of strength.

While the Biden administration has vowed to push for additional international sanctions if North Korea conducts a nuclear test, the prospects for robust punitive measures are unclear considering a division between permanent United Nations Security Council members.

"Any nuclear test would be in complete violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions. There would be a swift and forceful response to such a test," Sherman said, following a meeting with South Korea Vice Foreign Minister Cho Hyun-dong. "We continue to urge Pyongyang to cease its destabilizing and provocative activities and choose the path of diplomacy," she said.

Sherman and Cho are planning a trilateral meeting with Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Mori Takeo on Wednesday over the North Korean nuclear issue.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said Tuesday's air demonstration involved 16 South Korean planes — including F-35A stealth fighters — and four U.S. F-16 fighter jets and was aimed at demonstrating their ability to swiftly respond to North Korean provocations.

The flight came a day after the allies fired eight surface-to-surface missiles into South Korea's eastern waters to match a weekend missile display by North Korea, which fired the same number of weapons from multiple locations Sunday in what was likely its biggest single-day testing event.

North Korea has conducted 18 rounds of missile launches in 2022 alone — including its first demonstrations of intercontinental ballistic missiles since 2017 — exploiting a favorable environment to push forward weapons development, with the Security Council effectively paralyzed over Russia's war on Ukraine.

North Korea may soon up the ante as U.S. and South Korean officials say the country is all but ready to conduct another detonation at its nuclear testing ground in the northeastern town of Punggye-ri. Its last such test and sixth overall was in September 2017, when it claimed to have detonated a thermonuclear bomb designed for its ICBMs.

Since taking power in 2011, Kim has accelerated his weapons development despite limited resources and has shown no willingness to fully surrender an arsenal he sees as his strongest guarantee of survival.

Experts say with its next nuclear test, North Korea could claim an ability to build small bombs that could be clustered on a multiwarhead ICBM or fit on short-range missiles that could reach South Korea and Japan.

Rafael Mariano Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said Monday there are indications that one of the passages at the Punggye-ri testing ground has been reopened, possibly in preparations for a nuclear test.

Hours before Sherman's meeting in Seoul, State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters in Washington that the United States believes North Korea could seek its seventh test "in the coming days."

The Biden administration's punitive actions over North Korea's weapons tests in recent months have been limited to largely symbolic unilateral sanctions. Russia and China vetoed a U.S.-sponsored resolution in the Security Council that would have imposed additional sanctions on North Korea over its previous ballistic tests on May 25.

"We have called on members of the international community, certainly members of the UN Security

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Council's permanent five, to be responsible stakeholders in the U.N. Security Council as a preeminent forum for addressing threats to international peace and security," Price said.

"Unilateral actions are never going to be the most attractive or even the most effective response, and that is especially the case because we are gratified that we have close allies in the form of Japan and the ROK," he said, referring to South Korea's formal name, the Republic of Korea.

North Korea's state media have yet to comment on Sunday's launches. They came after the U.S. aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan concluded a three-day naval drill with South Korea in the Philippine Sea on Saturday, apparently their first joint drill involving a carrier since November 2017, as the countries move to upgrade their defense exercises in face of growing North Korean threats.

North Korea has long condemned the allies' combined military exercises as invasion rehearsals and often countered with its own missile drills, including launches in 2016 and 2017 that simulated nuclear attacks on South Korean ports and U.S. military facilities in Japan.

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

Kim's government has so far rejected the Biden administration's offers for open-ended talks, and is clearly intent on converting the dormant denuclearization negotiations into a mutual arms-reduction process, experts say.

Kim's pressure campaign hasn't been slowed by a COVID-19 outbreak spreading across his largely unvaccinated populace of 26 million amid a lack of public health tools. The North has so far rejected U.S. and South Korean offers for help, but there are indications that it received at least some supplies of vaccines from ally China.

South Korean activist Park Sang-hak, a North Korean defector who for years have launched anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets by balloon across the border, said his group on Tuesday flew 20 balloons carrying medicine, masks and vitamin pills to help North Korean civilians.

Doubts hang over UK's Johnson though bid to oust him fails

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson tried to patch up his tattered authority on Tuesday after surviving a no-confidence vote that laid bare deep divisions in his Conservative Party and raised serious doubts about how long he can stay in office.

Under party rules, Johnson is now free from another challenge for a year. But previous Conservative prime ministers who have faced no-confidence votes have been terminally damaged — and a growing number of Conservative lawmakers worry that the famously people-pleasing Johnson could now be a liability with voters.

Johnson nevertheless vowed to "get on with the job" and focus on "what matters to the British people" — defined by him as the economy, health care and crime — after Conservative lawmakers voted by 211 to 148 to support him as leader.

"We are able now to draw a line under the issues that our opponents want to talk about" and "take the country forward," Johnson told Cabinet colleagues.

But the scale of the rebellion raised serious questions about his ability to govern at a time of increasing economic and social strain. Former Conservative leader William Hague called on Johnson to step down, saying "the damage done to his premiership is severe."

"Words have been said that cannot be retracted, reports published that cannot be erased, and votes have been cast that show a greater level of rejection than any Tory leader has ever endured and survived," Hague wrote in a Times of London article whose words were splashed across the British media.

"This is not over," echoed Philip Dunne, a Conservative lawmaker who voted against Johnson in Monday's no-confidence ballot.

The no-confidence vote was triggered because at least 54 Tory legislators, 15% of the party's parliamentary caucus, called for a challenge to Johnson.

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Johnson needed the backing of 180 of the 359 Conservative lawmakers to stay in power. He got more than that — but although he described the win as “convincing,” the rebellion was larger than some of his supporters had predicted.

The margin was narrower than the one his predecessor, Theresa May, got in a 2018 no-confidence vote. She was forced to resign six months later.

“It will come as a big blow. And I think they will worry that this story isn’t over yet,” said Tim Bale, professor of politics at Queen Mary University of London. “The reality is that these contests have a habit of exposing quite how weak the authority of a prime minister is.”

The rebellion was also a sign of deep Conservative divisions, less than three years after Johnson led the party to its biggest election victory in decades. Most British newspapers were in little doubt that it was bad news for a leader who has always before shown an uncommon ability to shrug off scandals.

The Conservative-supporting Daily Telegraph announced: “Hollow victory tears Tories apart.” The left-leaning Daily Mirror said bluntly: “Party’s over, Boris.”

But some staunch supporters tried to move past the vote on Tuesday. Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab said the party should “draw a line in the sand after this vote.”

“It was clearly and decisively won,” he said.

The vote followed months of brewing discontent over the prime minister’s ethics and judgment that centered on revelations of lawbreaking parties in the prime minister’s office when Britain was under lockdowns during the coronavirus pandemic.

In a report last month on the “partygate” scandal, civil service investigator Sue Gray described alcohol-fueled bashes held by Downing Street staff members in 2020 and 2021, when pandemic restrictions prevented U.K. residents from socializing or even visiting dying relatives. Gray said Johnson and senior officials must bear responsibility for “failures of leadership and judgment” that created a culture of rule-breaking in government.

Johnson also was fined 50 pounds (\$63) by police for attending one party, making him the first prime minister sanctioned for breaking the law while in office.

The prime minister said he was “humbled” and took “full responsibility” — but went on to defend his attendance at parties as necessary for staff morale and call some of the “partygate” criticism unfair.

Johnson still faces a parliamentary ethics probe over “partygate,” and his government is also under intense pressure to ease the pain of skyrocketing energy and food bills, while managing the fallout from Britain’s exit from the European Union.

Polls give the left-of-center opposition Labour Party a lead nationally, and Johnson will face more pressure if the Conservatives lose special elections later this month for two parliamentary districts, called when incumbent Tory lawmakers were forced out by sex scandals.

Bale said Johnson would likely fight back with tax cuts and other policies designed to appeal to his party’s right-leaning base.

“The problem with that is that it’s proposing, if you like, policy solutions to a personality problem,” he said. “It looks from opinion polls that the public have turned against Boris Johnson in particular, and that’s in part what’s dragging the Conservative Party down.”

Russia sends in more troops amid barrage of eastern Ukraine

By JOHN LEICESTER and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia is deploying troop reinforcements in eastern Ukraine to help capture a key city, a Ukrainian official said Tuesday, as Moscow’s artillery kept up a barrage aimed at grinding down Ukrainian defenses.

Luhansk governor Serhiy Haidai told The Associated Press that Russian forces control the industrial outskirts of Sievierodonetsk, one of two cities in the Luhansk region still in Ukrainian hands.

“Toughest street battles continue, with varying degrees of success,” Haidai said. “The situation constantly changes, but the Ukrainians are repelling attacks.”

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Russia appears bent on capturing the entire eastern Donbas part of Ukraine, which is made up of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Though while the Kremlin's forces have superior firepower, the Ukrainians defenders — among them the country's most well-trained forces — are entrenched and have the capability to counterattack.

Moscow's strategy has suffered numerous setbacks, however, since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, including a failed attempt to take Kyiv, the capital.

Moscow's forces also kept up an artillery barrage of Lysychansk, a city close to Sievierodonetsk which is almost fully controlled by Russian troops.

Haidai said Russian troops shelled a local market, a school and a college building, destroying the latter. Three wounded people were sent to hospitals in other parts of Ukraine, he said.

"A total destruction of the city is underway, Russian shelling has intensified significantly over the past 24 hours. Russians are using scorched earth tactics," Haidai said.

In all, Ukrainian forces had repelled 10 Russian attacks over the previous 24 hours, according to Haidai. His report couldn't be independently verified.

Ukraine is receiving weapons and ammunition from the West to help fend off relentless Russian attacks. That assistance has become a target for Russian artillery and warplanes.

Russia claimed Tuesday its forces took out two artillery systems given by the United States and a howitzer supplied by Norway.

Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said the Russian artillery barrage destroyed other Ukrainian equipment in the country's east while the Russian air force hit Ukrainian troops and equipment concentrations and artillery positions.

Konashenkov's claims couldn't be independently confirmed.

In Kyiv, meanwhile, autopsies were planned on dozens of Ukrainian fighters killed at the Azovstal steelworks.

The bodies were returned to Ukraine by the Russian occupiers of the fortress-like plant in the destroyed city of Mariupol, where their last-ditch stand became a symbol of resistance against Moscow's invasion.

The Azov Regiment was among the Ukrainian units that defended the steelworks for nearly three months before surrendering in May under relentless Russian attacks from the ground, sea and air.

It was unclear how many bodies might remain at the plant.

Amid crypto turmoil, senators propose sweeping oversight

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A bipartisan pair of senators has unveiled what would be the most wide-ranging legislative proposal to regulate cryptocurrencies and other digital assets, following a series of high-profile busts and failures.

It's unclear, though, whether the bill proposed by Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., and Cynthia Lummis, R-Wyo., can clear the hurdles of Congress, especially at a time of heightened partisanship ahead of midterm elections. The bill also comes as advocates for cryptocurrency have become bigger — and more free-spending — players in Washington.

The bill unveiled Tuesday, called the Responsible Financial Innovation Act, proposes legal definitions of digital assets and virtual currencies; would require the IRS to adopt guidance on merchant acceptance of digital assets and charitable contributions; and would make a distinction between digital assets that are commodities or securities, which has not been done.

The bill "creates regulatory clarity for agencies charged with supervising digital asset markets, provides a strong, tailored regulatory framework for stablecoins, and integrates digital assets into our existing tax and banking laws," Lummis said in an emailed statement. Stablecoins are a type of cryptocurrency pegged to a specific value, usually the U.S. dollar, another currency or gold.

Lummis has been a vocal advocate for cryptocurrency development and has invested between \$150,002

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and \$350,000 in bitcoin, according to her financial disclosure.

The legislation imposes disclosure requirements on digital asset firms to ensure that consumers can make informed decisions, delineates agency responsibilities over various digital assets — such as Commodity Futures Trading Commission jurisdiction over bitcoin — and requires a study on digital asset energy consumption, among many other proposals.

The bill comes at a tumultuous time for cryptocurrencies, including the May meltdown of the terraUSD stablecoin and luna, the coin meant to buy and sell assets, which traded at a value of less than one thousandth of 1 cent.

Gillibrand said the bill establishes “a regulatory framework that spurs innovation, develops clear standards, defines appropriate jurisdictional boundaries and protects consumers.”

These developments have prompted lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to support legislation that more closely scrutinizes digital assets.

And crypto lobbying has followed suit. This year, for the first time, industry executives have flooded money into congressional races, spending \$20 million, according to records and interviews.

Cryptocurrencies have their supporters in Congress. Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., said at the DC Blockchain Summit in Washington last month that he is drawn to “the exciting potential democratizing effect that can come from creating wider pathways of opportunity for marginalized communities.”

Despite the risks, surveys show that roughly 16% of adult Americans, or 40 million people, have invested in cryptocurrencies. And 43% of men age 18-29 have put money into cryptocurrency.

African Americans are also more likely to invest in cryptocurrencies than white consumers.

President Joe Biden signed an executive order in March, urging the Federal Reserve to explore whether the central bank should create its own digital currency and directed federal agencies, including the Treasury Department, to study the impact of cryptocurrency on financial stability and national security.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in an April speech at American University that more government regulation is needed to police the proliferation of cryptocurrency and ward off fraudulent or illicit transactions.

“We have a strong interest in ensuring that innovation does not lead to a fragmentation in international payment architectures,” she said, adding that the Treasury Department will work with the White House and other agencies to develop reports and recommendations on digital currencies.

Dubai arrests 2 Gupta brothers over South African fraud case

By MALAK HARB and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Dubai police said Tuesday they arrested two brothers from the Gupta family, wanted over allegedly looting state money with former South African President Jacob Zuma.

The arrest of Atul and Rajesh Gupta, who had lived for years in the sheikhdom, was the latest major extradition arrest by authorities in the United Arab Emirates. Dubai in particular has long welcomed the wealthy with little question into its luxury neighborhoods.

With the UAE now heading the international policing body Interpol, the country has faced renewed questioning over its lax checks on money laundering and reluctance to extradite suspects. That has only increased as Russian money flows into the Arabian Peninsula nation amid Moscow’s war on Ukraine.

Police issued a statement saying they arrested the brothers “in connection with money laundering and criminal charges in South Africa.”

The two, as well as their brother Ajay, had been suspected of hiding out in Dubai since fleeing South Africa around the same time Zuma resigned in 2018 amid allegations he had overseen massive levels of corruption at state-owned companies.

The family has denied the allegations previously. It wasn’t immediately clear if the two had a local lawyer.

South Africa’s City Press newspaper reported in 2016 that the Gupta family had purchased a \$30 million residence in Dubai’s Emirates Hills neighborhood, which had 10 bedrooms, 13 bathrooms, nine reception rooms, a double grand staircase, a hand-painted dome, space for 11 cars, and chandeliers in virtually

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every room.

Dubai police said they made the arrest after receiving an Interpol "red notice" warrant for the two. "The arrest reflects the continuous efforts of the UAE in combating money laundering crimes through local cooperation among the competent authorities," police said.

Dubai police did not immediately acknowledge Ajay Gupta's whereabouts. The Gupta family is originally from India.

Authorities in South Africa late Monday said the two brothers had been arrested after discussions between them and Dubai officials. However, Emirati authorities did not confirm the arrests until Tuesday.

South Africa's National Prosecuting Authority said Tuesday it had assigned "an experienced team of internal and external experts" who were working to extradite the two men to South Africa.

The arrests come nearly one year after the UAE ratified the extradition treaty with South Africa. It came into effect in June 2021, just as Interpol issued the red notice against the two Gupta brothers and their accomplices.

The Guptas are accused of using their association with Zuma to cash in on huge government contracts and kickbacks, and were believed to be so influential they had a say in Zuma's appointment of Cabinet ministers. Their names burst into public view in 2016, when an official said the Guptas allegedly offered him a \$44 million bribe to become the finance minister in exchange for favors.

The U.S. Treasury Department placed the three Gupta brothers on a sanctions list in 2019, accusing them of being "members of a significant corruption network." That forbids U.S. entities from conducting business with them or handling their assets.

"Until they are in front of a South African court, we need to be cautious but what has happened to date should be applauded," said Karam Singh, the executive director of the activist group Corruption Watch.

Zuma, 80, was president from 2009 until he was forced to step down by his African National Congress Party in 2018 amid the graft scandal. He faces corruption charges over a state arms purchase and went to prison in July 2021 for refusing a court order to testify before a judicial inquiry.

Zuma's incarceration sparked weekslong riots in parts of South Africa that killed over 300 people and saw 25,000 soldiers deployed in the worst violence since the end of the apartheid era. Zuma has been out of prison on a medical parole that was later revoked, a decision now being challenged in the courts.

Dubai's boom-and-bust real estate market, open to foreigners, has attracted investors and those fleeing conflicts from years. Just as long, war profiteers, terror financiers and drug traffickers sanctioned by the U.S. have used Dubai's real-estate market as a haven for their assets.

Scrutiny also has increased after the Financial Action Task Force, a global anti-money-laundering body, placed the UAE on its "grey list" earlier this year, escalating its monitoring of the country's efforts to crack down on illicit financial flows.

Over the last year, Dubai police have announced several major extradition-related arrests, typically involving suspected drug dealers and gangsters. The extraditions now appear to have stepped up into other crimes. Last week, Dubai police similarly arrested a British man wanted in Denmark over an alleged \$1.7 billion tax fraud case. Sanjay Shah, who maintains his innocence, similarly had been living in Dubai for years amid court cases targeting him over allegedly masterminding the scam.

However, there's a renewed focus on Russian money flowing in as Moscow faces Western sanctions over the Ukraine war. In the northern emirate of Ras al-Khaimah, a sanctioned Russian oligarch's megayacht now hides from possible Western seizure. That vessel, the Motor Yacht A, is owned by Andrey Melnichenko, a European Union-sanctioned oligarch worth some \$23.5 billion, according to Forbes. Melnichenko has rejected the sanctions and denied being close to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

VP Harris looks to show her clout at Summit of the Americas

By AMY TAXIN, CHRIS MEGERIAN and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris will have an opportunity to connect with leaders from Latin America and the Caribbean as she welcomes them to her home state this week for the Summit of

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the Americas. But whether she can demonstrate her clout at the hemisphere's premier gathering — being held on U.S. soil for the first time since 1994 — remains an open question.

Since Joe Biden's days crisscrossing Latin America as vice president, the region's leaders have come to expect direct access to powerful interlocutors inside the White House. However, other than Harris taking on the thankless task of addressing the root causes of migration, for which progress has been slow, the region has seen little of her — a symptom, experts say, of larger U.S. neglect of the region.

In recent days, she and the president have been working the phones to shore up attendance among leftist leaders who have been critical of the U.S. decision to exclude the authoritarian governments of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela from the Los Angeles summit.

But the effort has yielded few results. Among those staying home are the presidents of Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras — the only three leaders Harris has met in her two quick trips to the region.

Brian Winter, vice president of the Council of the Americas, said Harris got off on the wrong foot as Biden's point person assigned to address the root social and economic causes driving migrants to the U.S. In a May 2021 policy speech delivered to Winter's international business group from Washington, Harris, a former California prosecutor, mentioned corruption no fewer than 10 times, stirring resentment in a region where leaders are sensitive to taking lectures from U.S. policymakers.

"Corruption is a huge problem, but clearly there are more delicate ways to handle this," said Winter. "A lot of doors closed even before she got on the ground."

Harris' biggest achievement in the region to date is having helped secure commitments from U.S. companies to invest \$1.2 billion in Central America, from where every year hundreds of thousands of mostly young adults flee gang violence and crushing poverty.

At the summit, she's expected to announce another \$1.9 billion in commitments, according to a senior Biden administration official who declined to be identified before the announcements. The commitments reflect Harris' belief in the private sector's ability to create jobs that foster economic growth and discourage young adults from abandoning their homes.

New initiatives being announced include a \$700 million expansion of cellular networks in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador by Miami-based Millicom; a \$270 million commitment by Visa to promote digital payments; and a \$150 million nearshoring investment by the Gap. Inc. that could see as many as 5,000 jobs created closer to the U.S.

But the Biden administration's biggest policy proposal in the region — a \$4 billion aid package for Central America — has stalled in Congress with little apparent effort to revive it. Meanwhile, the number of migrants at the U.S. border with Mexico has surged to its highest levels in decades, even as the Biden administration has little to show for the Democratic president's promise as a candidate to introduce a "humane" asylum system that would break with Trump-era restrictions.

One challenge is finding partners in a region where institutions are weak, gang violence is prolific and corruption is rampant.

It's possible that none of the countries that Harris is tasked with working with will be represented at the summit by its president. In recent months, the U.S. has taken a strident tone against El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele, whom it accuses of using his popularity to amass power and ride roughshod over democratic checks and balances.

Meanwhile, Guatemala President Alejandro Giammettei said last month that he would not attend after the U.S. criticized his decision to reappoint an attorney general it alleged was involved in corruption.

Perhaps the biggest disappointment was Honduras' President Xiomara Castro, who has won praise from U.S. officials for her decision to extradite her predecessor, Juan Orlando Hernández, to the U.S. to face federal drug charges. Harris, who attended Castro's inauguration in January, in recent days spoke with Honduras' first female president in a last ditch effort to persuade her to travel to Los Angeles.

But in the end Castro sided with fellow leftist Andrés Manuel López Obrador of Mexico in boycotting the summit. Surely weighing on her decision was the U.S.' quick recognition of a new government after Honduras' military removed her husband, President Manuel Zelaya, from office in 2009.

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"It's a far tougher set of actors that the U.S. has to deal with even compared to what the Obama administration faced," said Rebecca Bill Chavez, president of the Inter-American Dialogue.

Chavez, who advised Harris on foreign policy during her brief presidential run, welcomed the vice president's focus on gender-based violence and female migrants, something that was missing from past administrations. She's also hopeful that Harris' familial ties to Jamaica — her immigrant father's birthplace — could help her connect to leaders in the Caribbean who are overlooked even in Latin America policy circles.

But Biden's record is tough to top. As vice president he made 16 trips to Latin America and his presence in the region has loomed large since his days as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, when he helped craft Plan Colombia, by far the U.S.' biggest military and economic aid package in the region.

Chavez said that on issues of climate change, migration and inclusive economic growth, the Biden administration has the opportunity to lay out a vision with appeal to all countries no matter their ideological bent or bilateral agenda with the U.S.

"To succeed she and the Biden administration really needs to broaden their scope," said Chavez. "Los Angeles is the perfect opportunity for them to show they are so. But it can't be a one and done event. It requires follow through to become reality."

Vatican's Pius XII archives begin to shed light on WWII pope

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican has long defended its World War II-era pope, Pius XII, against criticism that he remained silent as the Holocaust unfolded, insisting that he worked quietly behind the scenes to save lives. A new book, citing recently opened Vatican archives, suggests the lives the Vatican worked hardest to save were Jews who had converted to Catholicism or were children of Catholic-Jewish "mixed marriages."

Documents attesting to frantic searches for baptismal certificates, lists of names of converts handed over by the Vatican to the German ambassador and heartfelt pleas from Catholics for the pope to find relatives of Jewish descent are contained in David Kertzer's "The Pope at War," being published Tuesday in the United States.

The book follows on the heels of Kertzer's Pulitzer Prize-winning "The Pope and Mussolini," about Pius' predecessor, Pius XI. It uses the millions of recently released documents from the Vatican archives as well as the state archives of Italy, France, Germany, the U.S., and Britain to craft a history of World War II through the prism of the Pius XII papacy and its extensive diplomatic network with both Axis and Allied nations.

"The amount of material in these archives about searching for baptismal records for Jews that could save them is really pretty stunning," Kertzer said in a telephone interview ahead of the release.

The 484-page book, and its nearly 100 pages of endnotes, portrays a timid pontiff who wasn't driven by antisemitism, but rather a conviction that Vatican neutrality was the best and only way to protect the interests of the Catholic Church as the war raged on.

Kertzer, a professor of anthropology and Italian studies at Brown University, suggests Pius' primary motivation was fear: fear for the church and Catholics in German-occupied territories if, as he believed until the very end, the Axis won; and fear of atheist Communism spreading across Christian Europe if the Axis lost.

To assuage that fear, Kertzer writes, Pius charted a paralyzingly cautious course to avoid conflict at all costs with the Nazis. Direct orders went to the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* not to write about German atrocities — and to ensure seamless cooperation with the Fascist dictatorship of Benito Mussolini in the Vatican's backyard.

That meant never saying a word in public to explicitly denounce SS massacres, even when Jews were being rounded up right outside the Vatican walls, as they were on Oct. 16, 1943, and put on trains bound for Auschwitz.

Kertzer concludes that Pius was no "Hitler's Pope" — the provocative title of the last Pius-era blockbuster

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by John Cornwell. But neither was he the champion of Jews that Pius' supporters contend.

Marla Stone, professor of humanities at the American Academy of Rome, said the book "takes a position between the previous poles of historical interpretation."

"Previously, the choices were either Pius XII was 'Hitler's Pope,' deeply sympathetic to the Nazis, eager for a Nazi-Fascist victory, obsessed with the defeat of the Soviets at all costs, and a dedicated antisemite," she told a panel at the academy last month. "The other historiographic position held that Pius XII did everything within his power to help those suffering under Nazi and Fascist oppression and that he was merely constrained by circumstances."

"The Pope at War" is one of several books starting to roll out two years after Pope Francis opened the Pius XII archives ahead of schedule. That gave scholars access to the full set of documentation to resolve the outstanding questions about Pius and what he did or didn't do as the Holocaust unfolded.

One of the first out of the gate was written in-house, by the archivist of the Vatican's secretariat of state, Johan Ickx. Perhaps understandably, it praised Pius and the humanitarian efforts of the Vatican to care for Jews and people fleeing the war, recounting the hundreds of files of Jews who turned to him, begging for help.

"For the Jews it was obvious and clear that Pius XII was on their side and both he and his staff would have done everything in their possibility to save them," Ickx told Vatican News.

The Rev. Peter Gumpel, the German investigator who promoted Pius' now-stalled cause for sainthood, has argued that Pius couldn't speak out more publicly because he knew it would enrage Adolf Hitler and result in more Jews being killed. He cites the case of a Catholic bishops in the Netherlands who spoke out against the deportation of Jews and the Gestapo's response: deporting Jews who had converted to Catholicism.

The Vatican had already taken the extraordinary step, between 1965 and 1981, of publishing an 11-volume set of documentation, curated by a team of Jesuits, to try to rebut criticism of Pius' silence that erupted following the 1963 play "The Deputy," which alleged he turned a blind eye to Nazi atrocities.

But even the Vatican's own prefect of the archives, Monsignor Sergio Pagano, said recently that the initiative, while "worthy" at the time, now needs to be revised.

During a panel discussion hosted by a Spanish research institute in Rome, Pagano acknowledged that the Jesuits "sometimes looked at half of one document, and the other half no," and that he had learned of some "strange omissions" that are now becoming evident. But he insisted there was no attempt at the time to hide inconvenient truths, just a lack of full access to all the files and the chaos of working quickly with a disorganized archive.

Kertzer identifies two major omissions in his book: The first was the transcripts of a series of secret meetings between Pius and a personal envoy of Hitler, Prince Philipp von Hessen, that began shortly after Pius was elected and continued for two years. The secret channel gave Pius a direct line to Hitler that was previously unknown, even to high-ranking Vatican officials at the time.

The second was the full contents of the note from Pius' top diplomatic adviser on Jewish issues, Monsignor Angelo Dell'Acqua, responding to pleas for Pius to finally say something about the roundup of Italy's Jews that accelerated in the autumn and winter of 1943. While Dell'Acqua's opinion — that Pius should not say anything — was previously known, Kertzer says the antisemitic slurs he used to describe Jews had been excised from the Jesuits' 11-volume text.

L'Osservatore Romano has already come out swinging against Kertzer's scholarship, blasting a 2020 essay he published in The Atlantic on some preliminary findings from the archives as "strong affirmations, but unproven."

A key example of the Vatican's priorities, Kertzer says, came during the Oct. 16, 1943, roundup of Rome's Jews. That cold morning, 1,259 Jews were arrested and brought to a military barracks near the Vatican, bound for deportation to Auschwitz.

The day after their capture, the Vatican's secretariat of state received permission from German authorities to send an envoy to the barracks, who ascertained that those inside "included people who had already been baptized, confirmed and celebrated a church wedding," according to the envoy's notes.

Over the following days, the secretariat of state drew up lists of people the church deemed Catholic and gave the names to the German ambassador asking for his intervention. In all, of the 1,259 people originally arrested, some 250 were spared deportation.

"For me, what this means, and I think this is also a novelty in the book, is that the Vatican participates in the selection of Jews," Kertzer said in the interview. "Who is going to live and who is going to die."

Spain's Rocío pilgrimage party returns after COVID hiatus

By JOAN MATEU PARRA Associated Press

El ROCÍO, Spain (AP) — After a two-year hiatus forced by the pandemic, tens of thousands of pilgrims — many of them outfitted in tiered flamenco dresses, crisp riding suits and wide-brimmed Cordoba hats — descended on the tiny Spanish village of El Rocío to take part in riotously colorful and ancient festival, la Romería del Rocío, or the Rocío virgin pilgrimage.

For several days, droves of people — entire families or groups of friends — wind their way across different country paths and roads, many of them on foot while others go by horse or in elaborately decorated horse-drawn wagons or caravans, kicking up clouds of dust in the sun-baked countryside of southern Andalucía as they go.

The pilgrimage, organized by dozens of "brotherhoods" is a veritable explosion of colour and revelry. A heady mix of religion and raucous celebration, the style of dress, food, drink and song are as much a part of the festival as devotion to the virgin. The pilgrims eat out in the countryside and often camp out there, too.

The pilgrimage attracts young and old, and the pervading feeling this year was one of joy at being able to once again celebrate a pilgrimage that is iconic to Andalusian culture.

"The Rocío is something that cannot be explained. You have to come here and feel it," said 15-year-old Antonio Carlos Martín Duque, who rode a horse.

Antonio Molina Sánchez, 47, from nearby Huelva city, described his family's delight in making the pilgrimage after two years of cancellations. "For a family like ours that live for it — a 'Rociera' family — it's joy."

Even so, the shadow of the COVID virus lingered. "We are afraid; we have masks in our pockets (but) often the emotions do not let you think, and you go into the crowds without realizing it," he said. "We hope that with three vaccines, and the protection of the virgin, we'll be safe."

After several days of traveling, the pilgrims converge on the tiny, white-washed hamlet of El Rocío, whose name means morning dew and whose only reason for existing is the sanctuary of the virgin.

There, on the eve of each Whit or Pentecost Monday, they take a huge ornate float carrying the effigy of the virgin known as the Blanca Paloma (white dove) and parade it around the town, visiting the main brotherhoods at each of their grand meeting places that line the entrance into the town. Thousands of people pack the boulevards to take in the procession along with its sideline competitions and spontaneous parties.

This year's procession was cut short by several hours after the float developed a structural problem, forcing officials to bring back the virgin to its chapel, or shrine.

The roots of the Romería del Rocío pilgrimage stretch back centuries when, as the legend has it, a statue of the Virgin Mary was stumbled upon in a hollowed-out tree trunk near the town of Almonte, which the village of Rocío belongs to.

EXPLAINER: Hundreds charged with crimes in Capitol attack

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

More than 800 people across the U.S. have been charged in the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol, which left officers bloodied and sent lawmakers into hiding, and federal authorities continue to make new arrests practically every week.

The charges against members of the angry pro-Trump mob range from low-level misdemeanors for those

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who only entered the Capitol to felony seditious conspiracy charges against far-right extremists.

It's the largest prosecution in the history of the Justice Department, whose leader, Attorney General Merrick Garland, has vowed to hold accountable "all January 6th perpetrators, at any level."

As the U.S. House committee investigating the attack prepares to hold a series of public hearings to detail its findings, here's a look at where the criminal cases stand:

WHO HAS BEEN CHARGED?

Authorities have arrested people in practically all 50 states in connection with the riot. They include former police officers and U.S. military veterans, a five-time Olympic swimming medalist and the son of a New York City judge.

Hundreds of people who went inside but didn't take part in any destruction or violence are facing only misdemeanor crimes like picketing in the Capitol and disorderly conduct that call for up to six months behind bars.

More than 250 people have been charged with assaulting or impeding law enforcement who were trying to protect the Capitol, including more than 85 accused of using a deadly or dangerous weapon or causing serious bodily injury to an officer. Others have been accused of assaulting members of the media — one an Associated Press photographer — or destroying media equipment.

The most serious cases have been brought against members of two far-right extremist groups, the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys.

The leaders of both groups have been arrested and remain locked up while they await trial later this year for seditious conspiracy, which alleges a plot to forcibly oppose the lawful transfer of presidential power. The rarely used Civil War-era charge calls for up to 20 years in prison.

WHO HAS BEEN CONVICTED?

More than 300 people have pleaded guilty to a slew of crimes, including conspiracy and assault. Among them are three Oath Keepers who have admitted to seditious conspiracy, are cooperating with investigators and could testify against their fellow extremists at trial.

There have been seven trials so far in the District of Columbia's federal court. The first five juries convicted the riot defendants of all charges.

The convicted include Thomas Webster, a 20-year New York Police Department veteran who attacked an officer during the riot. Webster claimed he was defending himself when he tackled the officer and grabbed his gas mask.

Jurors also rejected the defense of an Ohio man who claimed he was only "following presidential orders" from former President Donald Trump when he stormed the Capitol. Dustin Byron Thompson was convicted of obstructing Congress from certifying the electoral vote and other charges.

A judge decided two other cases without a jury, acquitting one of the defendants and partially acquitting the other.

U.S. District Court Judge Trevor McFadden, who was appointed by Trump, convicted Otero County, New Mexico, Commissioner Couy Griffin of illegally entering restricted Capitol grounds, but acquitted him of engaging in disorderly conduct.

In the other misdemeanor case, McFadden found Matthew Martin of New Mexico not guilty of charges that he illegally entered the Capitol and engaged in disorderly conduct, saying it was reasonable for Martin to believe that outnumbered police officers allowed him and others to enter through the Rotunda doors.

WHAT ABOUT THE PUNISHMENTS?

Nearly 200 people have been sentenced so far. The punishments have ranged from probation to more than five years behind bars. About 100 people who were charged with lower level crimes have avoided going to prison, although some of those received time in home detention.

The longest sentence — more than five years — was given to Robert Palmer of Largo, Florida, who threw a wooden plank and sprayed a fire extinguisher at officers before hurling the fire extinguisher at them.

Others who received lengthy sentences include Jacob Chansley, the spear-carrying rioter whose horned

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fur hat, bare chest and face paint made him one of the more recognizable figures in the attack. Chansley, who called himself "QAnon Shaman," got about 31/2 years behind bars after admitting to entering the Senate chamber and writing a note to Vice President Mike Pence that said: "It's only a matter of time, justice is coming."

WHAT'S NEXT?

The two most high-profile trials — involving the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys — are expected to take place this summer and fall.

Henry "Enrique" Tarrío, who was once the Proud Boys' top boss, and four others linked to the group were charged on Monday with seditious conspiracy after previously facing other conspiracy counts. They are scheduled to stand trial beginning Aug. 9.

Tarrío, who has since stepped down from his post as the group's chairman, was arrested in a separate case two days before the riot and was not at the Capitol on Jan. 6. But he is accused of helping put into motion the violent attack.

The trial for the Oath Keepers leader, Stewart Rhodes, and four other members and associates the group is scheduled to start Sept. 26. Prosecutors say the Oath Keepers plotted for weeks to try to overturn the election results and prepared for a siege by purchasing weapons and setting up battle plans.

Authorities are still searching for many suspects, including the person who planted two pipe bombs outside the offices of the Republican and Democratic national committees the night before the melee.

Jan. 6 insurrection: A viewer's guide to 1st public hearing

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nearly a year since its inception, the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol will go public with its findings starting this week as lawmakers hope to show the American public how democracy came to the brink of disaster.

The series of hearings that will take place over the next several weeks begin with a prime-time session Thursday night in which the nine-member panel plans to give an overview of its 11-month investigation. More than 1,000 people have been interviewed by the panel, and only snippets of that testimony have been revealed to the public, mostly through court filings.

What you need to know ahead of the hearing:

WHEN WILL THE HEARING TAKE PLACE?

The first of six hearings is set to go live at 8 p.m. EDT on Thursday. It will take place in a large House office building in the U.S. Capitol complex. Lawmakers plan to have witnesses testify and to display a series of never-before-seen images and exhibits relating to the lead-up to the insurrection and the attack itself.

HOW TO WATCH THE HEARING

Several major networks and cable news programs are expected to carry the first hearing live in its prime-time slot. The committee is also expected to live-stream it on C-SPAN and on its YouTube page.

WHO IS EXPECTED TO TESTIFY?

The select committee has yet to release details about who is expected to testify Thursday. But the public hearing, unlike other committee hearings, will be a mixture of traditional testimony as well as a multimedia presentation.

WHAT WILL THE HEARING ENTAIL?

The first hearing is expected to be a table-setter for the rest of the subsequent hearings. The committee, comprised of seven Democrats and two Republicans, plans to lay out several areas of information it has gathered throughout its investigation.

The panel's probe has so far been divided into a series of focus areas, including the efforts by former President 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.

WILL THERE BE NEW DETAILS ABOUT THE INSURRECTION?

Several members of the committee have promised new and explosive information to arise from the public hearings, but it remains unclear what that will entail.

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

Proud Boys charged with seditious conspiracy in Capitol riot

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The former top leader of the far-right Proud Boys extremist group and other members were charged with seditious conspiracy for what federal prosecutors say was a coordinated attack on the U.S. Capitol to stop Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's 2020 electoral victory.

The latest indictment against Henry "Enrique" Tarrío, the former Proud Boys chairman, and four others linked to the group comes as the U.S. House committee investigating the Jan. 6 riot prepares to begin public hearings this week to lay out its findings.

The indictment Monday alleges that the Proud Boys conspired to forcibly oppose the lawful transfer of presidential power. Tarrío and the others — Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs, Zachary Rehl and Dominic Pezola — were previously charged with different conspiracy counts.

They are scheduled to stand trial in August in Washington, D.C.'s federal court.

The seditious conspiracy charges are among the most serious filed so far, but aren't the first of their kind. Eleven members or associates of the anti-government Oath Keepers militia group, including its founder and leader Stewart Rhodes, were indicted in January on seditious conspiracy charges in a serious escalation in the largest investigation in the Justice Department's history.

Three Oath Keepers have already pleaded guilty to the rarely used Civil War-era charge that calls for up to 20 years in prison. The indictment alleges that the Oath Keepers and their associates prepared in the weeks leading up to Jan. 6 as if they were going to war, discussing things like weapons and training.

Tarrío, the group's top leader, wasn't in Washington, D.C., when the riot erupted on Jan. 6, 2021, but authorities say he helped put into motion the violence that day.

Police arrested Tarrío in Washington two days before the riot and charged him with vandalizing a Black Lives Matter banner at a historic Black church during a protest in December 2020. Tarrío was released from jail on Jan. 14 after serving his five-month sentence for that case.

An attorney for Tarrío said his client "is going to have his day in court."

"And we intend to vigorously represent him through that process," said Nayib Hassan.

Defense attorney Carmen Hernandez, who represents Rehl, said her client is "as innocent of these charges as the ones that had already been pending against him."

"Seditious conspiracy requires the use of force, and he never used any force nor thought about using any force," Hernandez said.

More than three dozen people charged in the Capitol siege have been identified by federal authorities as leaders, members or associates of the Proud Boys, whose members describe it as a politically incorrect men's club for "Western chauvinists."

They have brawled with antifascist activists at rallies and protests. Vice Media co-founder Gavin McInnes, who founded the Proud Boys in 2016, sued the Southern Poverty Law Center for labeling it as a hate group.

The indictment alleges that the Proud Boys held meetings and communicated over encrypted messages to plan for the attack in the days leading up to Jan. 6. On the day of the riot, authorities say Proud Boys dismantled metal barricades set up to protect the Capitol and mobilized, directed and led members of the crowd into the building.

Prosecutors have said the Proud Boys arranged for members to communicate using specific frequencies on Baofeng radios. The Chinese-made devices can be programmed for use on hundreds of frequencies, making it difficult for outsiders to eavesdrop.

Shortly before the riot, authorities say Tarrío posted on social media that the group planned to turn out

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in "record numbers" on Jan. 6, but would be "incognito" instead of donning their traditional clothing colors of black and yellow.

Around the same time, an unnamed person sent Tarrío a document that laid out plans for occupying a few "crucial buildings" in Washington on Jan. 6, including House and Senate office buildings around the Capitol, the indictment says. The nine-page document was entitled "1776 Returns" and called for having as "many people as possible" to "show our politicians We the People are in charge," according to the indictment.

Nordean, of Auburn, Washington, was a Proud Boys chapter president and a member of the group's national "Elders Council." Biggs, of Ormond Beach, Florida, is a self-described Proud Boys organizer. Rehl was president of the Proud Boys chapter in Philadelphia. Pezzola is a Proud Boy member from Rochester, New York.

A New York man pleaded guilty in December to storming the U.S. Capitol with fellow Proud Boys members. Matthew Greene was the first Proud Boys member to publicly plead guilty to conspiring with other members to stop Congress from certifying the Electoral College vote. Greene agreed to cooperate with authorities investigating the attack.

Another Proud Boy, Charles Donohoe, of Kernersville, North Carolina, pleaded guilty in April to conspiracy and assault charges and also agreed to cooperate in the Justice Department's cases against other members of the extremist group.

In December, a federal judge refused to dismiss an earlier indictment charging alleged leaders of the Proud Boys with conspiring to block the certification of Biden's electoral college win. U.S. District Judge Timothy Kelly rejected defense attorneys' arguments that the men were charged with conduct that is protected by the First Amendment right to free speech.

British writer, Brazil Indigenous official missing in Amazon

By FABIANO MAISONNAVE and DAVID BILLER Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — A British journalist and an Indigenous affairs official are still missing in a remote part of Brazil's Amazon as authorities say they are expanding search efforts in the area, which has seen violent conflicts between fishermen, poachers and government agents.

Dom Phillips, who has been a regular contributor to the British newspaper the Guardian, and Bruno Araújo Pereira were last seen early Sunday in the Sao Rafael community, reported the Univaja association of people in the Vale do Javari Indigenous territory, for which Pereira has been an adviser.

The pair was returning by boat from the Vale do Javari and bound for the city of Atalaia do Norte, about an hour away, but never showed up.

Pereira is one of the Brazilian Indigenous affairs agency's most experienced employees operating in the Vale do Javari area. He oversaw the agency's regional office and the coordination of isolated Indigenous groups before going on his current leave. He has received a stream of threats from illegal fishermen and poachers, and usually carries a gun.

Univaja said the two had been threatened during their reporting trip. On Saturday, while they were camped out, two men traveled by river to the Indigenous territory's boundary and brandished a firearm at a Unijava patrol, the association's president, Paulo Marubo, told The Associated Press.

Phillips, who has reported from Brazil for more than a decade, has been working on a book about preservation of the Amazon with support from the Alicia Patterson Foundation, which gave him a yearlong fellowship for environmental reporting that ran through January.

The pair disappeared while returning from a two-day trip to the Jaburu Lake region, where Phillips interviewed local Indigenous people, Univaja said. Only the two were on the boat.

The place where they went missing is the primary access route to and from the Vale do Javari, Brazil's second-largest Indigenous territory that is bigger than Maine, and where several thousand Indigenous people live in dozens of villages. People from the area say that it is highly unlikely the men would have gotten lost in that sector.

"He is a cautious journalist, with impressive knowledge of the complexities of the Brazilian environmental

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crisis," Margaret Engel, the Alicia Patterson Foundation's executive director, wrote in an email. "And he is a beautiful writer and a lovely person. The best of our business."

Brazil's federal public prosecutors said in a statement Monday that they had opened an investigation and that the Federal Police, Amazonas state's civil police, the national guard and navy had been mobilized. The navy, which prosecutors described as coordinating the search, said it sent a search-and-rescue team of seven and would deploy a helicopter Tuesday.

The army's footprint and manpower is far greater than the navy's in the region, and there was no indication from officials on why it wasn't included in the initial search efforts. But late Monday, a spokesperson for the army's Amazon division told AP it had since received orders to deploy a search mission.

Phillips has also contributed to the Washington Post and New York Times. He currently resides in Salvador, a city in Brazil's Bahia state, with his wife, Alessandra Sampaio, who shared a series of messages on Twitter through a friend.

"I can only pray that Dom and Bruno are well, somewhere, prevented from continuing on for some mechanical reason, and that all of this becomes just one more story in a life replete with them," Sampaio wrote. "I know, however, the moment the Amazon is going through and I know the risks that Dom always denounced."

The Vale do Javari region has experienced repeated shootouts between hunters, fishermen and official security agents, who have a permanent base in the area, which has the world's largest population of uncontacted Indigenous people. It is also a major route for cocaine produced on the Peruvian side of the border, then smuggled into Brazil to supply local cities or to be shipped to Europe.

In September 2019, an employee of the Indigenous affairs agency was shot dead in Tabatinga, the largest city in the region. The crime was never solved.

"It is extremely important that Brazilian authorities dedicate all available and necessary resources to the immediate realization of searches, in order to guarantee, as soon as possible, the safety of the two men," Maria Laura Canineau, the director of Human Rights Watch in Brazil, said in a statement Monday.

Journalists working for regional media outlets in the Amazon have been slain in recent years, though there have been no such cases among journalists from national media nor foreign media. However, there have been several reports of threats, and the press has limited access to several areas dominated by criminal activity, including illegal mining, landgrabbing and drug trafficking.

"I hope they are found soon, that they are well and safe," former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva posted on Twitter. President Jair Bolsonaro had not commented by late Monday.

Mickelson the last to sign up for Saudi-funded golf league

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

Phil Mickelson, a chief recruiter for a Saudi-funded rival league to the PGA Tour, is ending his four-month hiatus by adding his name to the 48-man field for the LIV Golf Invitational that starts Thursday outside London.

Mickelson will be joining Dustin Johnson, Sergio Garcia and three other former major champions in a 54-hole tournament at Centurion Golf Club with \$25 million in prize money and \$4 million going to the individual winner.

"I am ready to come back to play the game I love but after 32 years this new path is a fresh start, one that is exciting for me at this stage of my career," Mickelson said in a statement posted on social media.

Mickelson also said he would be playing the last two majors, starting June 16 in the U.S. Open at The Country Club outside Boston.

He said the "transformative" new league would allow him to focus on a healthier approach to life on and off the course. Mickelson did not mention the signing fee, which is likely to be every bit of the \$125 million or more reportedly paid to Johnson.

It will be Mickelson's first time playing since Feb. 6 at the Saudi International, where he first began to draw attention to how he was leaning when he accused the PGA Tour of "obnoxious greed" in an inter-

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view with Golf Digest.

Two weeks later, Alan Shipnuck published excerpts from his unauthorized biography on Mickelson in which the six-time major champion acknowledged Saudi Arabia's human rights atrocities, including the killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi, but said it was worth getting involved if it meant gaining leverage to make changes on the PGA Tour.

Mickelson also said he and three other top players paid attorneys to write the operating agreement of the new league. He later apologized for what he said were reckless comments, without mentioning the PGA Tour.

But then he was out of view for four months, skipping the Masters and the PGA Championship, which he had won the year before at age 50 to become the oldest major champion in history.

Mickelson apologized again in Monday's statement, adding that he "empathizes" with those who disagree with his decision to leave the PGA Tour for a league funded primarily by the Public Investment Fund in Saudi Arabia.

"His contributions to the sport and connection to fans around the globe cannot be overstated and we are grateful to have him," said Greg Norman, the CEO and commissioner of LIV Golf Investments. "He strengthens an exciting field for London where we're proud to launch a new era for golf."

The PGA Tour did not grant releases for any of its 14 members who have signed up for the rival series, a list that also includes Louis Oosthuizen, Martin Kaymer and Charl Schwartzel.

Five other players from the Asian Tour were added as exemptions.

Even as Mickelson was the leader in trying to get players to join, his name was left off the original field list that was released on Tuesday. The Daily Telegraph reported Johnson, at No. 15 the highest-ranked player in the world, received upward of \$125 million to join.

The decision could mean the end of Mickelson's career on the PGA Tour because players who defect are likely to face suspensions for violating tour regulations by playing overseas without a release.

Mickelson has 45 career PGA Tour victories and has amassed nearly \$100 million in career earnings on the PGA Tour and PGA Tour Champions. He won his first tour event in 1991 when he was an amateur at Arizona State and his most recent title last year at the PGA.

The LIV Golf Invitational is the first of eight such tournaments, with five of them scheduled for the United States, two of them on courses owned by former President Donald Trump.

At least six players in the field already have resigned their PGA Tour memberships. Kevin Na announced his decision on social media. The manager for Garcia, Oosthuizen, Schwartzel and Branden Grace said they have resigned, too.

As much as he was promoting a new concept, Mickelson appeared to be the one who caused the Saudi league to lose momentum with his interviews in February that disparaged the Saudis ("scary mother-expletives") and the PGA Tour ("A dictatorship. They divide and conquer.")

All the top players — including Johnson — initially pledged their support for the PGA Tour. Johnson later changed his mind.

AP Exclusive: Ukraine recovers bodies from steel-plant siege

By JOHN LEICESTER and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia has begun turning over the bodies of Ukrainian fighters killed at the Azovstal steelworks, the fortress-like plant in the destroyed city of Mariupol where their last-ditch stand became a symbol of resistance against Moscow's invasion.

Dozens of the dead taken from the bombed-out mill's now Russian-occupied ruins have been transferred to the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, where DNA testing is underway to identify the remains, according to both a military leader and a spokeswoman for the Azov Regiment.

The Azov Regiment was among the Ukrainian units that defended the steelworks for nearly three months before surrendering in May under relentless Russian attacks from the ground, sea and air.

It was unclear how many bodies might remain at the plant.

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Meanwhile, Russian forces continued to fight for control of Sievierodonetsk, an eastern Ukrainian city that is key to Moscow's goal of completing the capture of the industrial Donbas region.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukrainian forces were holding their positions in the city amid fierce fighting in the streets as Russia tries to deploy more forces.

"But it is the 103rd day, and the Ukrainian Donbas stands. It stands firmly," he said in his nightly address to the nation.

Zelenskyy also said Moscow's forces intend to take the southeastern city of Zaporizhzhia, home to more than 700,000 people, a move that could severely weaken Ukraine's standing and allow the Russian military to advance closer to the center of the country.

"In the Zaporizhzhia region ... there is the most threatening situation there," Zelenskyy said.

The Ukrainian fighters' dogged defense of the steel mill frustrated the Kremlin's objective of quickly capturing Mariupol and tied down Russian forces in the strategic port city.

The defenders' fate in Russian hands is shrouded in uncertainty. Zelenskyy said more than 2,500 fighters from the plant are being held prisoner, and Ukraine is working to win their release.

The recovery of their remains from the Azovstal ruins has not been announced by the Ukrainian government, and Russian officials have not commented. But relatives of soldiers killed at the plant discussed the process with The Associated Press.

Ukraine on Saturday announced the first officially confirmed swap of its military dead since the war began. It said the two sides exchanged 320 bodies in all, each getting back 160 sets of remains. The swap took place Thursday on the front line in the Zaporizhzhia region.

Anna Holovko, a spokeswoman for the Azov Regiment, said all 160 of the Ukrainian bodies turned over by the Russians were from the Azovstal ruins. She said that at least 52 of those bodies are thought to be the remains of Azov Regiment soldiers.

Maksym Zhorin, a former Azov Regiment leader now co-commanding a Kyiv-based military unit, confirmed that bodies from the steel plant were among those exchanged.

The brother of an Azov fighter missing and feared dead in the steelworks told the AP that at least two trucks of bodies from Azovstal were transferred to a military hospital in Kyiv for identification.

Viacheslav Drofa said the remains of his elder brother, Dmitry Lisen, did not appear to be among those recovered so far. He added that some of the dead were severely burned.

The mother of a soldier killed in an airstrike on the plant said the Azov Regiment telephoned her and said her son's body might be among those transferred to Kyiv. The mother did not want her or her son to be identified by name, saying she feared that discussing the recovery process might disrupt it.

She tearfully referred to her son as a hero. "It's important for me to bury him in our Ukrainian land," she said.

In other developments Monday, Ukraine's efforts to fight off Russia's invasion loomed large over D-Day commemorations in France, where the 78th anniversary of the Normandy invasion was marked.

"The fight in Ukraine is about honoring these veterans of World War II," Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, said at the American Cemetery of Colleville-sur-Mer, overlooking Omaha Beach in Normandy.

He added: "It's about maintaining the so-called global rules-based international order that was established by the dead who are buried here at this cemetery."

American D-Day veteran Charles Shay, 97, was at Omaha Beach to mark the anniversary of the June 6, 1944, landings and pay tribute to those who fell that day. Asked about the war raging on the European continent, Shay said, "It is a very sad situation."

"In 1944 I landed on these beaches, and we thought we'd bring peace to the world. But it's not possible," he added.

Meanwhile, the president of Ukraine's separatist Donetsk People's Republic said that the pro-Moscow region is putting on trial three British men alleged to have been mercenaries for Ukraine. If convicted on the charges, including of trying to seize power, the men could get the death penalty.

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree granting lump-sum payments of 5 million rubles (\$81,000)

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to families of Russian National Guard members who die in Ukraine. Guard members have taken part in such operations as the seizure of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. The lump sum is roughly six times the average annual Russian salary.

On the battlefield, Russian warplanes fired long-range missiles to destroy a plant on the edge of the town of Lozova in the northeastern Kharkiv region that was repairing armored vehicles, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said.

Russian aircraft hit 73 areas of concentration of Ukrainian troops and equipment, while Russian artillery struck 431 military targets, Konashenkov said. His claims could not be independently verified.

Ukrainian forces put up resistance in Sievierodonetsk and other areas.

"There are more of them, they are more powerful, but we have every chance to fight on this direction," Zelenskyy said.

Ukrainian artillery fire could be heard outside the city of Bakhmut, southwest of Sievierodonetsk.

Ukrainian tanks moved back and forth from the front line, carefully hiding under trees after firing at Russian positions. One of the tanks was a T-80 captured from Russian forces. Its crew hacked bushes with hatchets and covered the vehicle and its main gun with branches.

Judge blocks Louisiana Congress map with one Black district

By KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Louisiana's Democratic governor said Monday he will call the Republican-dominated Legislature into special session soon to draw up new congressional district boundaries, now that a federal judge has blocked use of maps that have only one majority-Black district.

Gov. John Bel Edwards announced his plan at a news conference at the Capitol in Baton Rouge. He spoke to reporters minutes after the 2022 regular legislative session ended, and a few hours after U.S. District Judge Shelly Dick, also in Baton Rouge, blocked the use of the new maps. Her ruling included an order that the Legislature draw up with a remedial plan by June 20.

Edwards, whose veto of the maps was overridden by lawmakers earlier this year, said there should have been a second majority-Black district among the six districts that were approved, noting that the state's population is almost one-third Black.

Edwards said redrawing the district lines is required by the court order, the Voting Rights Act and by "basic fairness and basic math."

But, lawyers for Republican Secretary of State Kyle Ardoin, the state's top elected official, swiftly filed a notice of appeal of Dick's order.

Dick's June 20 deadline for drawing new district lines is one month before the sign-up period for the Nov. 8 congressional election.

"If the Legislature is unable to pass a remedial plan by that date, the Court will issue additional orders to enact a remedial plan compliant with the laws and Constitution of the United States," the judge wrote.

The district map was drawn up in a special session earlier this year during a legislative special session called to redraw government district lines to account for population shifts shown in the 2020 census. Edwards vetoed the maps but his veto was overridden. That led to a lawsuit by voting rights advocates.

Ardoin filed a notice of appeal with the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans. Ultimately, the case could wind up before the Supreme Court, which earlier this year put on hold a lower court ruling that Alabama must draw new congressional districts before the 2022 elections to increase Black voting power.

Ardoin's office declined comment on the litigation.

In blocking the use of the map pending further elections, Dick said those filing the lawsuit were likely to prevail with their argument that the new districts violate the federal Voting Rights Act. She blocked Ardoin from conducting any elections using the new map.

Cabinet minister in Dominican Republic slain in his office

By MARTÍN ADAMES Associated Press

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SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic (AP) — The Dominican Republic's minister of the environment and natural resources — the son of a former president — was shot to death in his office by a close friend Monday, the office of the president said in a statement.

Authorities said Orlando Jorge Mera was shot by Fausto Miguel de Jesús Cruz de la Mota, who was later arrested at a church dozens of blocks away after telling a priest he committed a crime and handed over a gun to him.

Officials gave no motive for the shooting, and it wasn't immediately clear if Cruz, 56, had an attorney.

"We express our deepest condolences," the office of President Luis Abinader said.

As shots rang out late Monday morning, people on the street yelled and took cover as those fleeing the building climbed over a tall fence after first throwing over purses, backpacks and even a pair of shoes because the building's main gates were locked.

Authorities said that in a phone conversation with Cruz while he was at the church, he promised to turn himself in if they guaranteed he wouldn't be killed.

Heavily armed police officers took him into custody at the church, which is about a 15-minute drive from the office where Jorge was shot.

When he was brought out, Cruz was wearing a helmet and bulletproof vest and kept his head mostly down as the glasses he wore slid slightly down his nose. One bystander yelled: "You killed a good man! Murderer!"

The victim came from a powerful political family. Jorge was the son of former Dominican President Salvador Jorge Blanco and his sister is a vice minister in Abinader's administration. Jorge's son is a lawmaker for the Modern Revolutionary Party, of which Jorge was a founding member.

The family issued a statement saying that Cruz had been Jorge's friend since childhood and that Jorge was shot multiple times.

"Our family forgives the person who did this. One of Orlando's greatest legacies was to not hold grudges," it said.

Police and emergency officials swarmed the office of Environment and Natural Resources Ministry in the capital of Santo Domingo and barred entry as mourners gathered nearby. Jorge's office was on the fourth floor of a building that also houses the Ministry of Tourism.

"We are troubled by the situation," Jorge's ministry said in a brief statement.

Bartolomé Pujals, executive director of the government's Cabinet of Innovation, wrote that he lamented the killing.

"His death is a tragedy," Pujals said. "We Dominicans have to come together to achieve a pact for peace and peaceful coexistence. No more violence."

Jorge, a lawyer, was appointed minister of the environment and natural resources in August 2020.

\$3M settlement reached in lawsuit over Black man's death

By TOM FOREMAN Jr. Associated Press

A North Carolina sheriff's office announced a \$3 million settlement on Monday in a lawsuit filed by the family of an unarmed Black man who was shot and killed in his car by sheriff's deputies more than a year ago.

The family of Andrew Brown Jr. had filed a \$30 million civil rights lawsuit in 2021, saying the man died because officers showed "intentional and reckless disregard of his life."

Brown was killed on April 21 of last year by Pasquotank County sheriff's deputies while they were serving drug-related warrants at his Elizabeth City home. Several deputies surrounded Brown in his BMW before his car backed up and moved forward. They fired several shots at and into his vehicle. He was killed by a bullet to the back of his head.

District Attorney Andrew Womble had said at a news conference last year that Brown used his car as a "deadly weapon," causing deputies to believe it was necessary to use deadly force. But lawyers for the Brown family said the shooting was unjustified because Brown was trying to drive away — not toward the deputies and that he posed no threat. After viewing body camera footage of the shooting, they said Brown

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was sitting in his stationary car with his hands on the wheel when the first of numerous shots was fired.

The settlement was approved by the Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners. It includes a special \$1 million appropriation to go along with \$2 million from the county's insurance policy, which was supplied by the North Carolina Counties Liabilities Pool, according to a statement from the sheriff's office provided to The Associated Press. That amount is at the limit of the policy.

The settlement was reached over several weeks last month in the case overseen by a federal magistrate in U.S. District Court in Raleigh, the news release said.

The county's payment resolves potential liability against the defendants and any individual officers who were either named or could be named as defendants in the lawsuit, the news release said. The family also entered into a stipulation in which it dismisses all claims against the defendants, namely Pasquotank County Sheriff Tommy Wooten II and three sheriff's deputies, as well as other potential claims arising from Brown's death, the news release said.

Brown's children will share in the proceeds of the settlement as heirs of his estate, the sheriff's office said.

"Andrew Brown Jr. was a devoted father who wanted his children to have the things he didn't," said a statement from the five attorneys representing his family. "While no settlement could ever fill the hole his death left in their hearts, this agreement is about providing for those children's futures, securing their education and ensuring their dreams didn't die with their father."

At the time, the lawsuit filed by the Brown family was the latest in a string of federal civil rights lawsuits following high-profile police shootings of Black and brown people. Many ended in settlements that often included money but specified no admission of guilt. Some of the lawsuits end up in court where a jury can award massive settlements that are reduced on appeal.

An independent autopsy commissioned by the family said Brown was shot five times, including once in the back of the head. Family members who were privately shown a portion of the body camera video afterward said Brown was trying to drive away when he was shot. The shooting sparked days of protests in the city in rural northeastern North Carolina.

NY governor signs law raising age to own semiautomatic rifle

By MAYSOON KHAN Associated Press/Report for America

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — New Yorkers under age 21 will be prohibited from buying semiautomatic rifles under a new law signed Monday by Gov. Kathy Hochul, making the state among the first to enact a major gun control initiative following a wave of deadly mass shootings.

Hochul, a Democrat, signed 10 public safety-related bills, including one that will require microstamping in new firearms, which could help law enforcement solve gun-related crimes.

Another revised the state's "red flag" law, which allows courts to temporarily take away guns from people who might be a threat to themselves or others.

"In New York, we are taking bold, strong action. We're tightening red flag laws to keep guns away from dangerous people," Hochul said at a press conference in the Bronx.

New York's Legislature passed the bills last week, pushing the changes through after a pair of mass shootings involving 18-year-old gunmen using semiautomatic rifles. Ten Black people died in a racist attack on a Buffalo supermarket May 14. A Texas school shooting took the lives of 19 children and two teachers 10 days later.

The quick action in New York further illustrated the sharp divide between Republican and Democratic leaders on how to respond to gun violence.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said after the massacre of children in Uvalde that government should increase security in schools and resources for mental health, but the Republican says stricter gun laws are ineffective. Fellow Republican Gov. Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee echoed similar sentiments Monday, a day after gunfire near a Chattanooga nightclub left three people dead and multiple people wounded.

In New York, most people under age 21 had already been banned from owning handguns. People age 18 and over will still be allowed to own other types of long guns, including shotguns and bolt-action rifles.

Part of New York's new law will also require all purchasers of semiautomatic rifles to get a license, some-

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thing now required only for handguns.

Proposed federal legislation that would require buyers of semiautomatic weapons to be 21 is advancing in the U.S. House, but is seen as facing long odds in the Senate.

A handful of states require people to be 21 to purchase any firearms, including Florida, which raised the age for legally purchasing a rifle after a 19-year-old gunman killed 17 people at a high school.

Hochul also signed a bill Monday that will restrict sales of bullet-resistant vests and armor only to people in certain professions.

The governor said New York will continue to invest in prevention of gun-related crimes by partnering with local communities and continuing to strengthen laws by putting pressure on Congress.

"Today is the start, and it's not the end," said Hochul. "Thoughts and prayers won't fix this, but taking strong action will. We will do that in the name of the lives that have been lost, for the parents who will no longer see their children stepping off the school bus."

On Broadway, more visibility, yes, but also an unseen threat

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — At a lunch for Tony Award nominees last month, veteran theater producer Ron Simons looked around and smiled. It seemed appropriate that the gathering was held at The Rainbow Room.

"I can guarantee you I have not seen this many people of color represented across all categories of the Tony Awards," he recalled. "It was a diverse room. I was so uplifted and impressed by that."

For the first full season since the death of George Floyd reignited a conversation about race and representation in America, Broadway responded with one of its most diverse Tony slates yet.

Multiple Black artists were nominated in every single performance category, including three of five featured actors in a musical, four of six featured actresses in a play, two of seven leading actors in a play and three of five leading actresses in a play. There are 16 Black performance nods out of 33 slots — a very healthy 48%.

By comparison, at the 2016 Tonys — the breakout season that included the diverse "Hamilton," "Eclipsed" and "The Color Purple" revival — 14 of the 40 acting nominees for plays and musicals or 35% were actors of color.

"Let's hope that the diversity that we saw in the season continues to be the norm for Broadway, that this isn't just an anomaly or a blip in reaction to what we've been through, but just a reset," said Lynn Nottage, the first writer to be nominated for both a play ("Clyde's") and musical ("MJ") in a single season.

The new crop of nominees also boasts more women and people of color in design categories, such as first-time nominees Palmer Hefferan for sound design of a play ("The Skin of Our Teeth"), Yi Zhao for lighting design of a play ("The Skin of Our Teeth") and Sarafina Bush for costume design of a play ("for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf").

Other firsts this season included L Morgan Lee of "A Strange Loop" becoming the first out trans performer to be nominated for a Tony. Adam Rigg, scenic designer of "The Skin of Our Teeth," became the first out agender designer nominated and Toby Marlow, "Six" co-creator is the first out nonbinary composer-lyricist nominated.

Eleven performers — including Jaquel Spivey from "A Strange Loop," Myles Frost in "MJ" and Kara Young from "Clyde's" — received a nod for their Broadway debut performances and 10 designers received nominations for their Broadway debuts, as did creators like "A Strange Loop" playwright Michael R. Jackson and "Paradise Square" co-book writer Christina Anderson.

"I'm very, very excited about all the new voices we're hearing, all the new new writers who are represented on Broadway for the first time," said A.J. Shively, an actor nominated for "Paradise Square." "I really hope that trend continues."

Perhaps nowhere is the diversity more apparent than in the oldest play currently on Broadway. "Macbeth," directed by Sam Gold, has a Black Lady Macbeth in Ruth Negga, a woman taking on a traditional male role (Amber Gray plays Banquo), a non-binary actor (Asia Kate Dillon) and disability representation

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(Michael Patrick Thornton).

"If all the world's a stage, our stage certainly is the world. I'm really proud to be up there with all the actors," says Thornton, who uses his wheelchair as a cunning asset to play the savvy nobleman Lennox.

But while representation was seen across Broadway this season so was an invisible virus that didn't care. The various mutations of COVID-19 sickened actors in waves and starved many box offices of critical funds. Skittish theater-goers who returned often had an appetite for only established, comfort shows.

Several of the Black-led productions came up short, including "Thoughts of a Colored Man," "Chicken and Biscuits," and "Pass Over." They debuted in the fall, just as Broadway was slowly restarting and audiences were most fearful. "Thoughts of a Colored Man" closed early because it didn't have enough healthy actors, at one point enlisting the playwright himself to get onstage and play a role.

One of the most painful blows was a revival of Ntozake Shange's "for colored girls," which struggled to find an audience. The cast of seven Black women included deaf actor Alexandria Wailes and, until recently, a pregnant Kenita R. Miller. It earned strong notices and a whopping seven Tony nominations. But it will close this week.

"In past seasons, had there been a play with seven Tony nominations and this bevy of glowing reviews, the show would have gone on for quite a while," says Simons, the lead producer. "There's an audience for this show. That's not the problem. The problem is getting the audience into the theater to see the show."

Despite a glut in inventory and not enough consumers, there were clear game-changers, like "A Strange Loop," a musical about a gay Black playwright, that captured a leading 11 nominations, besting establishment options like a Hugh Jackman-led "The Music Man." Broadway veterans agree that extraordinary storytelling was available for those hardy souls who bought tickets.

"I'm really proud to be a part of one of the voices of Broadway this year," said Anna D. Shapiro, who directed Tracy Letts' Tony-nominated play "The Minutes," which exposes delusions at the dark heart of American history. "I am so impressed by the vitality and the dynamism."

Broadway data often suggest improvements one year, then a drop off the next. Take the 2013-14 season, which was rich with roles for African Americans, including "A Raisin in the Sun" starring Denzel Washington, Audra McDonald channeling Billie Holiday in "Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill" and the dance show "After Midnight."

There were also African-Americans in nontraditional roles, like James Monroe Iglehart as the Genie in "Aladdin," Nikki M. James and Kyle Scatliffe in "Les Miserables," and Norm Lewis becoming the first Black Phantom on Broadway in "The Phantom of the Opera."

That season, Black actors represented 21% of all roles. But the next season, the number fell to 9%.

Camille A. Brown, who this season together with Lileana Blain-Cruz became only the second and third Black women to be nominated for best direction of a play, has weathered the ups and downs.

"My thing is, let's see what the next year and the year after that and the year after that look like?" she says. "I think the landscape was definitely a challenge, especially after George Floyd and the events that happened after that. But this is only the first season out after all of that stuff happened. So let's see if it keeps going, and keeps evolving and keeps progressing."

Simons is optimistic the gains this year will last and celebrates that, at the very least, a group of diverse actors got their Broadway credits this season. He predicts more Tony winners of color than ever before.

"Even though the box office hurt all of our feelings, it really is a celebration because never have we seen this kind of diversity happen on Broadway," he says. "It is a rare year and it is a rare year for both the good and the bad."

Israeli coalition suffers loss, faces uncertain prospects

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's government on Monday failed to pass a bill extending legal protections for settlers in the occupied West Bank, marking a major setback for the fragile coalition that could hasten its demise and send the country to new elections.

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The failure to renew the bill also highlighted the separate legal systems in the West Bank, where nearly 500,000 Jewish settlers enjoy the benefits of Israeli citizenship while some 3 million Palestinians live under military rule that is now well into its sixth decade. Three major human rights groups have said the situation amounts to apartheid, an allegation Israel rejects as an assault on its legitimacy.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's coalition remains in power. But Monday's vote underscored the weaknesses and divisions in the fragile alliance and raised questions about how long it can survive.

Emergency regulations in place for decades have created a separate legal system for Jewish settlers in the West Bank, applying parts of Israeli law to them — even though they live in occupied territory and not within sovereign Israeli land.

These regulations expire at the end of the month and if they are not renewed, that legal system, which Israel has cultivated for its settlers in the West Bank since it captured the territory in 1967, will be thrown into question. It could also change the legal status of the 500,000 settlers living there.

Proponents of extending the law say they are merely seeking to maintain a status quo and preserve the government's shelf life. Opponents say extending the regulations would deepen an unfair system.

However, Monday's vote — defeated by a 58-52 margin — went far beyond the contours of the legal debate. Instead, it served as a key test of the government's prospects for survival, creating a paradoxical situation where some of the settlements' biggest opponents in the government voted for the bill, while hard-line parties that support the settlements voted against it in order to weaken the government.

The coalition, made up of eight ideologically distinct parties that include both supporters and opponents of the settlements, came together last year and pledged to sidestep divisive issues that could threaten its survival. Monday's vote showed just how difficult that mission has been.

The vote did not immediately topple the government, and it is still possible for the coalition to present a modified version of the legislation.

"As always after we lose, we will return stronger and win in the next round," said Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, the chief architect of the governing alliance, in a statement on Twitter.

But the setback indicated the government's days could be numbered. One of the coalition's members, the nationalist New Hope, has already threatened to bolt if the coalition cannot pass the measure. If New Hope leaves, it could give the opposition the votes it needs to trigger new elections or form a new government.

"Any coalition member who doesn't vote for this law that is so central is an active participant in its demise," Justice Minister Gideon Saar, leader of New Hope, said before the vote.

He also warned that defeating the bill would create "legal chaos" in the West Bank and harm Israeli settlers.

The votes of certain lawmakers, including renegade hard-liners in the coalition as well as Ra'am, an Arab Islamist group that made history as the first Arab party to join an Israeli coalition, were closely watched. In many cases, these lawmakers did not attend the vote.

The opposition meanwhile, made up mainly of nationalist parties led by former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, showed its willingness to forsake its pro-settlement ideology in order to bring down the coalition.

Bennett's Yamina party issued a statement accusing Netanyahu and his Likud party of banding together with leftist settlement opponents to serve the former prime minister's personal interests. "The Likud will burn the state for Netanyahu's needs," it said, vowing to find a way to pass the required legislation.

Bennett has faced hurdles before. Idit Silman, the coalition whip from Bennett's small, nationalist party, quit the coalition earlier this year, leaving the government with 60 seats in the 120-seat Knesset — surviving immediate defeat but struggling to govern. Ghaida Rinawie Zoabi, another legislator from Meretz also quit, but later rejoined after being promised a raft of benefits for her constituents, Palestinian citizens of Israel.

In the end, Silman skipped Monday's vote, while Zoabi bucked her coalition partners and voted against the bill, giving a thumbs-down as she cast her vote.

Bennett's government came together last year after two years of political mayhem, with four elections producing no clear winner. The eight coalition members were united by their goal of ousting Netanyahu — the longtime prime minister who now heads the opposition, from where he is battling corruption charges

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— and have sought to work around their issues to keep him out of power.

Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war. It later annexed east Jerusalem in a move that is not recognized internationally and pulled out troops and settlers from Gaza in 2005. But hundreds of thousands of Israelis reside in over 120 settlements dotting the West Bank, along with more than 2.5 million Palestinians.

Since Israel has never annexed the territory, it technically remains under military rule, creating a bewildering legal reality. For Jewish settlers in the West Bank, most of Israel's criminal and civilian laws apply. They vote in Israeli elections, enlist for compulsory military service and pay their taxes to the state.

Palestinians, meanwhile, are subject to a different set of laws, adding to the confusion — and often inequality.

If the government does not find a new solution in the coming weeks, settlers will automatically fall under military rule, like Palestinians in the West Bank, according to Emmanuel Gross, an Israeli expert on criminal and international law and a former military judge.

Basic, everyday relations between settlers and the state will crumble: Israel won't be able to levy taxes and police won't be able to investigate criminal offences, among other things, Gross said. The status of Palestinian inmates being held in Israeli prisons will also be challenged, as Israel uses this same set of emergency regulations to hold prisoners outside of occupied land.

"The entire legal basis of what happens with the settlers today will be cancelled. This can cause chaos," he said, adding that he expected the government would find a way to ensure the regulations are extended.

In blow to Biden, Mexico president to skip Americas Summit

By ELLIOT SPAGAT, JOSHUA GOODMAN and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador confirmed Monday that he will skip the Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles, dealing a blow to the U.S.' efforts to rally governments to work together to address surging migration in the hemisphere.

López Obrador had been leading a chorus of mostly leftist leaders pushing the U.S. to invite Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela to the gathering taking place on U.S. soil for the first time since 1994. Other leaders, including from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador — three big drivers of migration to the U.S. — have indicated they'll stay away too.

"There cannot be an Americas Summit if not all of the continent's countries participate," López Obrador said Monday, indicating that Mexico would instead be represented by his foreign affairs secretary, Marcelo Ebrard, "Or there can be one, but that is to continue with the old politics of interventionism."

The White House defended its decision to exclude certain countries, while also confirming López Obrador will visit Washington in July to meet with Biden. Press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said there was "candid engagement" with the Mexican leader about the summit.

"We do not believe that dictators should be invited," Jean-Pierre said.

With so many no-shows, critics say the event risks turning into an embarrassment for President Joe Biden, who has struggled to reassert U.S. leadership in a region where mistrust of the U.S. runs deep and China has been made major inroads the past two decades as the U.S. foreign policy has been dominated by wars in the Middle East and now Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Even some leaders who are attending drew differences with the U.S.

"In respect to Cuba we have always been there to support and defend human rights," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in Ottawa at a news conference with visiting Chilean President Gabriel Boric. "We've also pushed for greater democracy. Canada has always had a different position on Cuba than the United States."

Boric, a 36-year-old leftist millennial, said attendees will have an opportunity to make statements if the United States intends to exclude countries.

Robert Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and is a strong critic of the Cuban government, applauded the exclusion of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela and

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took a swipe at López Obrador, saying his decision to skip Los Angeles would set back bilateral relations.

Menendez said the Mexican leader was siding with “dictators and despots over representing the interests of the Mexican people in a summit with his partners from across the hemisphere.”

The Biden administration said it would not include autocratic governments that jail opponents and rig elections, pointing to a declaration from the 2001 summit in Quebec City, when the region’s governments committed to barring any government that breaks with democratic order from future gatherings.

However, many critics, including some progressive Democrats, have criticized the administration for bowing to pressure from exiles in the swing state of Florida to bar communist Cuba, which attended the last two summits.

Adding to the sense of last minute improvisation, Biden since taking office has reversed many of the Trump-era policies tightening a decades-old U.S. embargo on Cuba. He also sent a senior level delegation to meet with Venezuela President Nicolás Maduro to offer possible relief from crippling oil sanctions in exchange for a commitment to resume negotiations with the U.S.-backed opposition.

“The real question is why the Biden administration didn’t do its homework,” said Jorge Castañeda, a former Mexican foreign minister who now teaches at New York University.

While the Biden administration insists the president in Los Angeles will outline his vision for a “sustainable, resilient, and equitable future” for the hemisphere, Castañeda said it’s clear from the last-minute wrangling over the guest list that Latin America is not a priority for the U.S. president.

The Summit of the Americas was launched by President Bill Clinton as part of an effort to galvanize support for a free trade agreement stretching from Alaska to Argentina.

But that goal was abandoned more than 15 years ago amid a rise in leftist politics in the region. With China’s influence expanding, most nations have come to expect — and need — less from Washington.

As a result, the premier forum for regional cooperation has languished, at times turning into a stage for airing historical grievances, like when the late Venezuelan leader Hugo Chávez at the 2009 summit in Trinidad & Tobago gave President Barack Obama a copy of Eduardo Galeano’s classic tract, “The Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent.”

The U.S. opening to former Cold War adversary Cuba, which was sealed with Obama’s handshake with Raul Castro at the 2015 summit in Panama, lowered some of the ideological tensions.

To bolster turnout, Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris worked the phones in recent days, speaking with the leaders of Argentina and Honduras, both of whom initially expressed support for Mexico’s boycott.

The office of Argentine President Alberto Fernández indicated Monday he will attend.

Former Sen. Christopher Dodd crisscrossed the region as a special adviser for the summit, persuading far-right Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who was a staunch ally of President Donald Trump and hasn’t once spoken to Biden, to belatedly confirm his attendance.

Trump didn’t even bother to attend the last summit in Peru in 2018 and many predicted there was no future for the regional gathering.

In response to Trump’s pullout, only 17 of the region’s 35 heads of state attended. Few saw value in bringing together for a photo op leaders from such dissimilar places as aid-dependent Haiti, industrial powerhouses Mexico and Brazil and violence-plagued Central America — each with their own unique challenges and bilateral agenda with Washington.

To the surprise of many, the U.S. in early 2019 offered to host the summit. At the time, the Trump administration was enjoying something of a leadership renaissance in Latin America, albeit among mostly similar-minded conservative governments around the narrow issue of restoring democracy in Venezuela.

But that goodwill unraveled as Trump floated the idea of invading Venezuela to remove Nicolás Maduro — a threat recalling the worst excesses of the Cold War. Then the pandemic hit, taking a devastating human and economic toll on a region that accounted for more than a quarter of the world’s COVID-19 deaths despite making up only 8% of the population. The region’s politics were upended.

The election of Biden, who was Obama’s point man for Latin America and had decades of hands-on experience in the region from his time on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, set expectations for

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a relaunch.

But as popular angst spread during the pandemic, the Biden administration was slow to match the vaccine diplomacy of Russia and China, although it did eventually provide 70 million doses to the hemisphere. Biden also maintained the Trump-era restrictions on migration, reinforcing the view that it was neglecting its own neighbors.

Since then, Biden's hallmark policy in the region — a \$4 billion aid package to attack the root causes of migration in Central America — has stalled in Congress with no apparent effort to revive it. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also diverted attention from the region, something experts say could come back to bite Biden if rising interest rates in the U.S. trigger a stampede of capital outflows and debt defaults in emerging markets.

Weakened UK leader Boris Johnson survives no-confidence vote

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson survived a no-confidence vote on Monday, securing enough support from his Conservative Party to remain in office despite a substantial rebellion that leaves him a weakened leader with an uncertain future.

Known for his ability to shrug off scandals, the charismatic leader has struggled to turn the page on revelations that he and his staff repeatedly held boozy parties that flouted the COVID-19 restrictions they imposed on others. Support among his fellow Conservative lawmakers has weakened as some see a leader renowned for his ability to connect with voters increasingly as a liability rather than an asset in elections.

Johnson won the backing of 211 out of 359 Conservative lawmakers in a secret ballot, more than the simple majority needed to remain in power, but still a significant rebellion of 148 MPs.

Johnson called it a "convincing" win and said the party should now "come together."

"What it means is that as a government we can move on and focus on stuff that I think really matters to people," he said.

With no clear front-runner to succeed him, most political observers had predicted Johnson would defeat the challenge. But the rebellion could still be a watershed moment for him — and is a sign of deep Conservative divisions, less than three years after he led the party to its biggest election victory in decades.

Johnson's winning margin is less than that secured by his predecessor Theresa May in a similar vote in December 2018. She was forced to resign six months later.

Since replacing May as prime minister in 2019, Johnson has led Britain out of the European Union and through a pandemic, both of which have shaken the U.K. socially and economically. The vote comes as Johnson's government is under intense pressure to ease the pain of skyrocketing energy and food bills.

But the main blow to his leadership has been revelations that he and his staff repeatedly held illegal parties during lockdowns. That caused anger in the country, and unease among many Conservatives.

Discontent that has been building for months erupted after a 10-day parliamentary break that included a long weekend of celebrations of Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee. For many, the four-day holiday was a chance to relax — but there was no respite for Johnson, who was booed by some onlookers as he arrived for a service in the queen's honor at St. Paul's Cathedral on Friday.

Conservative Party official Graham Brady announced Monday that he had received letters calling for a no-confidence vote from at least 54 Tory legislators, enough to trigger the measure under party rules. Hours later, party lawmakers lined up by the dozen in a corridor at Parliament to cast their ballots in a wood-paneled room, handing over their phones as they entered to ensure secrecy.

Johnson addressed dozens of Conservative lawmakers in a House of Commons room before the vote as he tried to shore up support, vowing: "I will lead you to victory again."

Johnson's allies had insisted he would stay in office if he won by even a single vote.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said Johnson had won the vote "handsomely," and urged the party to "draw a line under this now."

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, one of the favorites to succeed Johnson if he is ousted, tweeted: "Pleased

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that colleagues have backed the Prime Minister. I support him 100%. Now's the time to get on with the job."

But previous prime ministers who survived no-confidence votes emerged severely weakened.

Johnson became prime minister in July 2019, capping a rollercoaster journey to the top. He had held major offices, including London mayor and U.K. foreign secretary, but also spent periods on the political sidelines after self-inflicted gaffes. He kept bouncing back, showing an uncommon ability to shrug off scandal and connect with voters that, for many Conservatives, overshadowed doubts about his ethics or judgment.

But concerns came to a head after an investigator's report late last month that slammed a culture of rule-breaking inside the prime minister's office in a scandal known as "partygate."

Civil service investigator Sue Gray described alcohol-fueled bashes held by Downing Street staff members in 2020 and 2021, when pandemic restrictions prevented U.K. residents from socializing or even visiting dying relatives.

Gray said Johnson and senior officials must bear responsibility for "failures of leadership and judgment."

Johnson also was fined 50 pounds (\$63) by police for attending one party, making him the first prime minister sanctioned for breaking the law while in office.

The prime minister said he was "humbled" and took "full responsibility" — but insisted he would not resign.

But a growing number of Conservatives feel that Johnson is now a liability who will doom them to defeat at the next election, which must be held by 2024.

"Today's decision is change or lose," said Jeremy Hunt, who ran against Johnson for the Conservative leadership in 2019 but has largely refrained from criticizing him since. "I will be voting for change."

Lawmaker Jesse Norman, a longtime Johnson supporter, said the prime minister had "presided over a culture of casual law-breaking" and had left the government "adrift and distracted."

Despite his victory, Johnson is likely to face more pressure. The war in Ukraine, a simmering post-Brexit feud with the EU and soaring inflation are all weighing on the government.

Polls give the left-of-center opposition Labour Party a lead nationally, and the Conservatives could lose special elections later this month for two parliamentary districts, called when incumbent Tory lawmakers were forced out by sex scandals.

Johnson tried to focus on broader issues, promising colleagues he would cut taxes — a policy popular with Tories — and noting that he spoke Monday to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. He has been a vocal supporter of Ukraine's cause, a stance shared by his possible successors.

Cabinet minister Steve Barclay, a Johnson ally, said toppling the leader now would be "indefensible."

But Steve Baker, a strong Brexit supporter whose opposition to May helped Johnson take power, said he was voting for Johnson to go because the prime minister had broken the law.

He predicted before the vote that Johnson would likely "formally win" but said that would not settle the matter.

"What that means over the months ahead, I don't know," Baker said.

EXPLAINER: Is Elon Musk's deal to buy Twitter falling apart?

By TOM KRISHER and MATT O'BRIEN AP Business Reporters

Elon Musk on Monday threatened to walk away from his \$44 billion bid to buy Twitter, the latest sign that his plan to overhaul the social media platform may really be starting to fray.

Lawyers for the Tesla and SpaceX CEO made the threat in a letter to Twitter accusing the company of refusing to give him information about "spam bot" accounts. Such bots have become a major public pre-occupation for the volatile billionaire despite the fact that he declined an opportunity to examine Twitter's internal data a few months ago.

DID ELON MUSK BUY TWITTER?

Not yet. In April, Musk signed an agreement with Twitter to buy the company for \$44 billion and take it private. But the deal hasn't closed. And as the weeks have passed, Musk has increasingly signaled discomfort with it, suggesting that he wants to negotiate a cheaper price or even to walk away entirely.

IS MUSK GETTING COLD FEET?

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There are several reasons that Musk's Twitter deal might have lost its luster since he signed it in April. Twitter is standing firm on Musk's agreed price of \$54.20 per share — but since early May, the stock has fallen more than 25% below that figure. The gap between the deal price and the actual share price suggests that many investors don't think the deal will go through.

Much of Musk's initial \$46 billion plan to finance the deal used stock in Tesla, his electric vehicle company, as collateral for loans he would use to purchase Twitter shares in the deal. He's since adjusted the plan so that more investors may be involved, including those with Twitter shares. But it's not clear exactly who those investors might be.

Tesla's stock price has also fallen dramatically since April 4, the day Musk disclosed that he was Twitter's largest stakeholder. Its 35% decline has cut deeply into Musk's wealth, even though he remains the world's richest person. Tesla's falling share price also reduces the amount Musk can borrow against his Tesla holdings. Company rules limit Musk to borrowing no more than 25% of the value of his Tesla stake, which means Musk can now raise roughly \$13.5 billion against his shares. The figure doesn't include stock options Musk has exercised or loans he may have repaid.

Musk now owns about 163 million Tesla shares valued at \$114.7 billion, according to FactSet.

CAN MUSK CALL THE WHOLE THING OFF?

Experts say Musk can't unilaterally place the deal on hold, although that hasn't stopped him from acting as though he can. If he walks away, he could be on the hook for a \$1 billion breakup fee. Twitter could also sue to force him to complete the acquisition on the agreed terms.

The Twitter sale agreement does allow Musk to get out of the deal if Twitter causes a "material adverse effect," defined as a change that negatively affects Twitter's business or financial conditions. That's one reason Musk may be focusing on the spam bot problem — though he waived many of his rights to peek under Twitter's hood when he signed the deal.

WHAT ARE SPAM BOTS AGAIN?

Bots are basically programs that post automated tweets, either for information — like the U.S. government's "quakebot," which tweets the details of seismic events — or entertainment. Musk, however, has focused his ire on the "spam bots" used to blast out sales pitches or to inflate the influence of a person or cause.

That problem is highly visible to Musk, one of Twitter's most active celebrity users, whose name and likeness are often mimicked by fake accounts promoting cryptocurrency scams. Musk says it's also a problem for advertisers who take out ads on the platform based on how many real people they expect to reach.

So now such bots — and the way Twitter counts them — have become a sticking point in the deal. Twitter has long disclosed it has a "number of false or spam accounts" but estimates that they comprise fewer than 5% of its more than 200 million daily active users.

Musk insists the company has been undercounting them and has demanded that Twitter turn over its internal data for him to examine. It's not clear whether he can legally demand such information after declining his right to conduct "due diligence" on Twitter's internal accounting and operations. Some experts say a court will have to decide that.

Biden orders emergency steps to boost U.S. solar production

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden ordered emergency measures Monday to boost crucial supplies to U.S. solar manufacturers and declared a two-year tariff exemption on solar panels from Southeast Asia as he attempted to jumpstart progress toward his climate change-fighting goals.

His invoking of the Defense Production Act and his other executive actions come amid complaints by industry groups that the solar sector is being slowed by supply chain problems due to a Commerce Department inquiry into possible trade violations involving Chinese products. Word of the White House's actions caused solar energy companies to gain ground on Wall Street.

The Commerce Department announced in March that it was scrutinizing imports of solar panels from

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Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia, concerned that products from those countries are skirting U.S. anti-dumping rules that limit imports from China.

Asked at the White House if Biden's pause in tariffs was not a gift to China, press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said he was invoking the Defense Production Act, "to make sure that he's delivering for the American people."

"He is putting the full force of the federal government behind supporting American clean energy producers," Jean-Pierre said.

White House officials said Biden's actions aim to increase domestic production of solar panel parts, building installation materials, high-efficiency heat pumps and other components including cells used for clean-energy generated fuels. They called the tariff suspension affecting imports from Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia a bridge measure while other efforts increase domestic solar power production — even as the administration remains supportive of U.S. trade laws and the Commerce Department investigation.

Commerce Department Secretary Gina Raimondo told a Senate panel in May that the solar inquiry is following a process set by law that doesn't allow consideration of climate change, supply chains or other factors. She said Monday that she remains "committed to upholding our trade laws and ensuring American workers have a chance to compete on a level playing field."

"The president's emergency declaration ensures America's families have access to reliable and clean electricity while also ensuring we have the ability to hold our trading partners accountable to their commitments," Raimondo said in a statement.

Clean energy leaders have long warned that the investigation — which could result in retroactive tariffs of up to 240% — would severely hinder the U.S. solar industry, leading to thousands of layoffs and imperiling up to 80% of planned solar projects around the country.

The department counters that rates exceeding 200% for solar products would not apply to the vast majority of imports. They instead typically apply to uncooperative companies that cannot differentiate themselves from China's government or Communist Party.

Still, any possible punishment might have jeopardized one of Biden's top clean energy goals and run counter to his administration's push for renewable energy such as wind and solar power, advocates argue.

"The president's announcement will rejuvenate the construction and domestic manufacturing of solar power by restoring predictability and business certainty that the Department of Commerce's flawed inquiry has disrupted," Heather Zichal, CEO of the American Clean Power Association and a former Obama administration official, said in a statement Monday.

Abigail Ross Hopper, president and CEO of the Solar Energy Industries Association, cheered Biden's "thoughtful approach to addressing the current crisis of the paralyzed solar supply chain."

"Today's actions protect existing solar jobs, will lead to increased employment in the solar industry and foster a robust solar manufacturing base here at home," Ross Hopper said in a statement.

But not everyone in the industry was supportive.

First Solar Inc., a major solar panel manufacturer, said that freezing tariffs would grant "unfettered access to China's state-subsidized solar companies for the next two years" and that using the Defense Production Act is "an ineffective use of taxpayer dollars and falls well short of a durable solar industrial policy."

"The administration cannot stick a Band-Aid on the issue and hope that it goes away," Samantha Sloan, the company's vice president of policy, said in a statement.

The use of executive action comes as the Biden administration's clean energy tax cuts, and other major proposals meant to encourage domestic green energy production, have stalled in Congress.

The Defense Production Act lets the federal government direct manufacturing production for national defense and has become a tool used more commonly by presidents in recent years. The Trump administration used it to produce medical equipment and supplies during the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic.

Biden invoked its authority in April to boost production of lithium and other minerals used to power electric vehicles. Last month, he used it again to prioritize boosting the nation's supplies of baby formula amid a domestic shortage caused by the safety-related closure of the country's largest formula factory.

Jean Su, director of the Center for Biological Diversity's energy justice program, said in a statement that

Biden's announcement can "give critical momentum to the needed transition to solar energy."

"We hope this use of the Defense Production Act is a turning point for the president, who must use all his executive powers to confront the climate emergency head on," Su said.

New panels want to talk ethics, rules of climate tinkering

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Tinkering with the planet's air to cool Earth's ever-warming climate is inching closer to reality enough so that two different high-powered groups — one of scientists and one of former world leaders — are trying to come up with ethics and governing guidelines.

On Thursday, the newly formed Climate Overshoot Commission — which includes the former presidents of Mexico, Niger and Kiribati, a former Canadian prime minister, the ex-chief of World Trade Organization and other national minister level officials — will have its first meeting in Italy in a 15-month process to come up with governance strategy on pulling carbon dioxide out of the air, lowering temperatures by reflecting sunlight with artificial methods and adapting to climate change. This month, the American Geophysical Union, the largest society of scientists who work on climate issues, announced it was forming an ethics framework for "climate intervention" that would be ready for debate during the major international climate negotiations in November in Egypt.

This shows the idea of "solar geoengineering is finally getting serious," said Harvard University climate scientist David Keith, a leader in the field.

Both groups said they aren't quite advocating geoengineering, which includes putting particles in the air to reflect sunlight or whiten clouds, or the less-disputed carbon dioxide removal, such as technology to suck carbon out of the air but also more nature-based solutions such as more trees and getting oceans to sponge up more carbon.

But the two groups say the ideas need to be discussed with global warming nearing and likely shooting past the international goal of limiting temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since preindustrial times. The world has already warmed 1.1 degrees Celsius (2 degrees Fahrenheit) since the mid-1800s and scientists say the world likely to pass the 1.5-degree mark in the 2030s.

"The climate change problem is at a point where even extreme options need to be thought about seriously," Climate Overshoot Commission Executive Secretary Jesse Reynolds said in a Monday interview. "Now, to be clear, thinking about them includes the possibility of rejecting them. But not thinking about them does not seem to be a responsible path forward."

What's needed are ethical guidelines before anything is done to get the public trust, much like the scientific community did with the possibility of human cloning, said AGU Executive Director Randy Fiser said. If this doesn't happen the public will have a giant backlash and won't trust the community, said National Academy of Sciences President Marcia McNutt, who has studied the issue but declined a spot on the AGU ethics panel because of other commitments.

An earlier report by the academy "spoke to the double moral hazard of climate intervention: damned if you do, damned if you don't," McNutt said.

Opponents of geoengineering — such as Pennsylvania State University climate scientist Michael Mann — worry that just talking about guidelines will make the tinkering more likely to occur in the real world.

"I see it as a potentially cynical maneuver to buy the ostensible moral license to move forward with dangerous geoengineering prescriptions," Mann said in an email. He said not only could there be harmful side effects, but it takes the pressure off of cutting fossil fuel emissions, which is what's really needed.

Mann also said no one can enforce ethics or governance rules, citing efforts to prevent Russia from invading Ukraine, but McNutt pointed to rules governing international oceans.

With or without guidelines, some of these high-tech ideas are going to happen, leaders of the two groups said. However, last year the Swedish government canceled an early but politically charged test of a device designed to put particles in the air that eventually, if fully implanted, could create what some would call an artificial volcano cooling the globe temporarily like 1991's Mt. Pinatubo's eruption in the Philippines.

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"The work of looking at climate strategies continues to go on in labs, both in the for-profit and non-profit sectors," said AGU's Fiser, who said investors are funneling money into such projects.

Ethicists Nancy Tuana of Penn State and Christopher Preston of the University of Montana said if anything talking about the ethics of the tinkering with the atmosphere will put the brakes on efforts a bit more.

"It will slow it and this is a good thing," Preston said in an email. "Ethical thresholds placed within frameworks are typically challenging to satisfy... An ethical framework can lead to paralysis. Ethics is not like maths. Ethical problems don't often get 'solved'."

But not doing anything — no cuts in carbon dioxide emissions, no carbon dioxide removal and no solar geoengineering — "that's the worst outcome and also the path of least resistance," said Stanford University ethics expert Hank Greely.

"I view climate intervention in the same way I view the 'Hail Mary' pass in football," said Colorado University ice scientist Waleed Abdalati, a former NASA chief scientist, referring to a last ditch desperation effort in a seemingly losing cause. "There is a chance it could get us to where we need to be, but just as no team wants to be in a position where that is the play they have to make, scientists recognize that we as a society would never want to be in a situation that we have to use such an approach to address the challenge we face."

Nigerian forces hunt for gunmen who killed 50 at church

By CHINEDU ASADU and LEKAN OYEKANMI Associated Press

OWO, Nigeria (AP) — The gunmen who killed at least 50 people at a Catholic church in southwestern Nigeria opened fire on worshippers both inside and outside the building in a coordinated attack before escaping the scene, authorities and witnesses said Monday.

Although Nigerian security forces have not yet identified who carried out Sunday's attack on St. Francis Church in the town of Owo in relatively peaceful Ondo state, analysts suggested they came from elsewhere in the West African nation, which is plagued by violence from various armed groups, kidnapers and extremists.

No one has claimed responsibility for the church killings, in which children were among the dead and the gunmen detonated some kind of explosive, according to witnesses. A state lawmaker from the region said the death toll was at least 50, and scores of people were wounded, although an exact number was not released by overwhelmed hospital workers.

"The attack is undoubtedly terrorist in nature, and the scale and brutality suggests it was carefully planned rather than impulsive," said Eric Humphery-Smith, senior Africa analyst at Verisk Maplecroft risk intelligence company, in an interview with The Associated Press.

State Police Commissioner Oyeyemi Oyediran said security forces, including the military, pursued the attackers, "but unfortunately, we could not catch up with them."

Vice President Yemi Osinbajo and other government officials visited the church Monday. A day earlier, he pledged that "we will keep standing against evil, and Nigeria will win."

Nigeria, which is Africa's most populous country with 206 million people, has grappled for over a decade with an insurgency in the northeast by Islamic extremist rebels of Boko Haram and its offshoot, the Islamic State West Africa Province. The extremists, who have killed more than 35,000 people by a U.N. count, are fighting to establish Shariah law and to stop Western education.

Ondo, however, has long been considered one of the safer states in the country.

Sunday Adewale, who works in the palace of the local chief, said the gunmen used the element of surprise to their advantage.

"Everybody felt relaxed and had gone to church," he said. "Within 30 minutes, they did what they wanted and went away."

The attack came as worshippers were celebrating the feast of Pentecost, an important Catholic post-Easter holiday. Bishop Jude Arogundade said some gunmen entered the church while others stayed outside to shoot anyone who fled.

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The priest celebrating the Mass was giving the blessing to end the service when the attackers came in and opened fire, said John Nwovo, 35, who added that he narrowly escaped with his five children by running and hiding in the church's sacristy, along with more than 30 people.

"We had to pack ourselves inside that place to take refuge from the storm," he told AP.

After emerging from hiding, Nwovo said they saw "so many" bodies lying in their own blood.

Florence Obi said her sister, Stella Nzelu, fled the church after the shooting and the explosion, only to run into one of the outside gunmen, "who shot her in the stomach at close range." Obi said her sister underwent surgery to remove the bullet and "she is feeling better now."

Steven Omotayo, who lives nearby, heard the gunshots and rushed to the scene.

"I saw a lot of dead bodies — both young and old, even children," he said. "The people came in and started shooting from the gate."

He said the church has three entrances and the main entrance was said to have been locked, making it difficult for many to escape.

"They were just shooting. If they see anyone trying to escape or stand up, they will just shoot the person," he said. "Everybody standing was bombarded with bullets."

The Rev. Vincent Anadi, who was away from his church at the time, said the gunmen also set off some kind of explosive or grenade.

He said he was making his way back to the church when he saw people running away chaotically, including two altar servers that he knew.

They "stopped me and said, 'Father, father, father, stop, stop! Don't go to the parish. They are killing people in the parish!'" Anadi recounted.

Many Nigerians expressed shock and anger over the attack in Owo, a small town of traders and government workers located 50 kilometers (31 miles) from the Ondo state capital of Akure. The central location of the church raised questions as to how the gunmen got there unnoticed.

Rahaman Yusuf said many people tried to find out the fate of their relatives after the attack. "Some came only to realize they are dead," he said, adding that they also went to hospitals to see if their loved ones were among the wounded.

Olalekan Agboola was in Lagos when he learned his 70-year-old mother, Caroline, was killed, and he rushed to Ondo. In a telephone interview from the town, he grew emotional as he recalled talking to her by phone on Saturday and how "she used to call us and pray for us."

Workers at the Federal Medical Center in Owo struggled to treat scores of wounded from the attack. The Nigeria Medical Association directed all available doctors in the region to help.

Some of the wounded were in a "very bad state" and needed surgery, according to a doctor there who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to journalists.

"I have attended to a good number of casualties, but what I saw yesterday was far beyond whatever I have seen before in my life," the doctor said. "This calamity befell all age grades, from toddlers to the old ones."

Blood supplies at the hospital ran out, and a plea for more has gone out, the doctor added.

Mahamat Saleh Annadif, head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, said he hopes "the perpetrators of this horrific terrorist act against a church will be swiftly apprehended and brought to justice."

Pope Francis decried "this act of unspeakable violence" in a condolence telegram sent by the Vatican's secretary of state on his behalf to the Ondo bishop.

"His Holiness prays for the conversion of those blinded by hatred and violence so that they will choose instead the path of peace and righteousness," it said.

UN: Climate shocks, war fuel multiple looming food crises

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Two U.N. food agencies issued stark warnings Monday about multiple, looming food crises on the planet, driven by climate "shocks" like drought and worsened by the impacts of the COVID-19

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pandemic and the war in Ukraine that have sent fuel and food prices soaring.

The glum assessment came in a report by two Rome-based food agencies: the World Food Program (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

WFP Executive Director David Beasley said besides hurting "the poorest of the poor" the global food crises threaten to overwhelm millions of families who are just getting by.

"Conditions now are much worse than during the Arab Spring in 2011 and 2007-2008 food price crisis, when 48 countries were rocked by political unrest, riots and protests," Beasley said in a statement. He cited as "just the tip of the iceberg" food crises now in Indonesia, Pakistan, Peru and Sri Lanka.

The report calls for urgent humanitarian action to help "hunger hotspots" where acute hunger is expected to worsen over the next few months.

The U.N. agencies are also warning that war in Ukraine, which was invaded by Russia in February, has exacerbated already steadily rising food and energy prices worldwide.

"The effects are expected to be particularly acute where economic instability and spiraling prices combine with drops in food production due to climate shocks such as recurrent droughts or flooding," the joint statement from the U.N. agencies said.

Among critical areas cited is East Africa, where the United Nations said an "unprecedented" drought is afflicting Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya. South Sudan, meanwhile, faces a fourth straight year of large-scale flooding.

The report cited other sobering climate impacts: above-average rain and a risk of localized flooding in the Sahel, a vast swath of Africa stretching south of the Sahara Desert.

It also cited a more intense hurricane season in the Caribbean and below-average rainfall in Afghanistan. That Asian country is already suffering through multiple seasons of drought, violence and political upheaval, including after the return of Taliban rule last summer.

The report tagged six nations as "highest alert" hot spots facing catastrophic conditions: Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan, Yemen, Afghanistan and Somalia. It said as many as 750,000 people are facing starvation and death in those countries. Of those, 400,000 are in Ethiopia's embattled Tigray region — the highest number on record in any one country since the 2011 famine in Somalia, the U.N. agencies said.

In April, according to a study by regional health officials that was seen by The Associated Press, at least 1,900 children under 5 died from malnutrition in the Tigray region. Western Tigray, which is under the control of forces from the neighboring Amhara region, was not included in that survey.

The U.N. food agencies report Monday said Congo, Haiti, the Sahel region, Sudan and Syria remain "of very high concern" and noted that Kenya was a new entry to that list.

Joining the list of hot spot countries were Sri Lanka, Benin, Cape Verde, Guinea, Ukraine and Zimbabwe, while areas that faced continuing food scarcities included Angola, Lebanon, Madagascar and Mozambique.

Federal judge OKs Oklahoma's lethal injection method

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press Writer

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — A federal judge in Oklahoma on Monday ruled the state's three-drug lethal injection method is constitutional, paving the way for the state to request execution dates for more than two dozen death row inmates who were plaintiffs in the case.

Judge Stephen Friot's ruling followed a six-day federal trial earlier this year in which attorneys for 28 death row inmates argued the first of the three drugs, the sedative midazolam, is not adequate to render an inmate unable to feel pain and creates a risk of severe pain and suffering that violates the U.S. Constitution's Eighth Amendment prohibiting cruel and unusual punishment.

"The prerequisites of a successful lethal injection challenge under the Eighth Amendment have been made clear by the Supreme Court," Friot wrote, citing three earlier rulings on the death penalty.

He continued: "The plaintiff inmates have fallen well short of clearing the bar set by the Supreme Court."

Jennifer Moreno, one of the attorneys for the death row inmates, said they are still assessing their options for an appeal to the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver.

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"The district court's decision ignores the overwhelming evidence presented at trial that Oklahoma's execution protocol, both as written and as implemented, creates an unacceptable risk that prisoners will experience severe pain and suffering," Moreno said in a statement.

Oklahoma Attorney General John O'Connor said in a statement that the state effectively proved that both the lethal injection drugs and the state's execution protocols are constitutional.

"The Court's ruling is definitive: The plaintiffs in this case 'have fallen well short' of making their case, and midazolam, as the State has repeatedly shown, 'can be relied upon ... to render the inmate insensate to pain,'" O'Connor said. "My team is reviewing the U.S. District Court's order further and will make a decision regarding when to request execution dates from the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals."

During the trial, each side presented experts in anesthesiology and pharmacology who offered differing opinions on the effectiveness of midazolam in rendering an inmate unable to feel pain.

James Stronski, an attorney for the inmates, told Friot that if inmates aren't properly anesthetized, they would be paralyzed and unable to move or speak after the second drug is administered and then feel excruciating pain as the final drug, potassium chloride is injected to stop the heart.

"If this is allowed to continue ... this is a 21st century burning at the stake," Stronski told the judge.

Attorneys for the state rejected that argument and maintained that a 500-milligram dose of the sedative was more than enough to ensure that inmates are unable to feel pain.

The state has carried out four lethal injections since October that Oklahoma's former Solicitor General Mithun Mansinghani said during closing arguments "are definitive proof that the protocol works as intended."

Oklahoma resumed lethal injections in October with the execution of John Grant, who convulsed on the gurney and vomited before being declared dead. Since then, three more executions were carried out without noticeable complications.

Oklahoma had one of the nation's busiest death chambers until problems in 2014 and 2015 led to a de facto moratorium. Richard Glossip was just hours away from being executed in September 2015 when prison officials realized they received the wrong lethal drug. It was later learned the same wrong drug had been used to execute an inmate in January 2015.

The drug mix-ups followed a botched execution in April 2014 in which inmate Clayton Lockett struggled on a gurney before dying 43 minutes into his lethal injection — and after the state's prisons chief ordered executioners to stop.

Poland, with near-total abortion ban, to record pregnancies

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — The government of Poland, where a near-total abortion ban is in place, faced accusations Monday of creating a "pregnancy register" as the country expands the amount of medical data being digitally saved on patients.

Women's rights advocates and opposition politicians fear women face unprecedented surveillance given the conservative views of a ruling party that has already tightened what was one of Europe's most restrictive abortion laws.

They fear the new data could be used by police and prosecutors against women whose pregnancies end, even in cases of miscarriage, or that women could be tracked by the state if they order abortion pills or travel abroad for an abortion.

"A pregnancy registry in a country with an almost complete ban on abortion is terrifying," said Agnieszka Dziemianowicz-Bąk, a left-wing lawmaker.

The matter gained attention Monday after Health Minister Adam Niedzielski signed an ordinance Friday expanding the amount of information to be saved in a central database on patients, including information on allergies, blood type and pregnancies.

The health ministry spokesman, Wojciech Andrusiewicz, sought to allay concerns, saying only medical professionals will have access to the data, and that the changes are being made at the recommendation of the European Union.

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The effort, he said, is meant to improve the medical treatment of patients, including if they seek treatment elsewhere in the 27-member EU. In the case of pregnant women, he said this will help doctors immediately know which women should not get X-rays or certain medicines.

"Nobody is creating a pregnancy register in Poland," he told the TVN24 all-news station.

But Marta Lempart, the leader of a women's rights group, Women's Strike, said she does not trust the government to keep information on women's pregnancies from the police and prosecutors. She told The Associated Press that police in Poland are already questioning women on how their pregnancies end, tipped off by disgruntled partners.

"Being pregnant means that police can come to you any time and prosecutors can come to you to ask you questions about your pregnancy," Lempart said.

The new system means many Polish women will now avoid the state medical system during their pregnancies, with wealthier women seeking private treatment or traveling abroad, even for prenatal care.

Meanwhile, poorer women in Poland will face an increased risk of medical problems or even death by avoiding prenatal care, Lempart fears.

Lempart also worries that information gained by police could be shared with state media to harm people's reputations.

She already knows how that can happen. In 2020, Lempart tested positive for COVID-19, and the information was reported by state television even before she got her results.

Poland — a predominantly Catholic country — bans abortion in almost all cases, with exceptions only when a woman's life or health is endangered or if the pregnancy results from rape or incest.

For years, abortion was allowed in the case of fetuses with congenital defects. That exception was struck down by the constitutional court in 2020.

In practice, Polish women seeking to terminate their pregnancies order abortions pills or travel to Germany, the Czech Republic and other countries where the procedure is allowed. While self-administering abortion pills is legal, helping someone else is not.

Activist Justyna Wydrzyńska is facing up to three years in prison for helping a victim of domestic violence access abortion pills. Amnesty International says it is the first such case in Europe.

Can journalists and grieving communities coexist in tragedy?

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — As a knot of journalists stood across from a mortuary witnessing a funeral for a child killed in the Uvalde school massacre, some people passing by didn't disguise their anger.

"Y'all are the scum of the Earth," said one woman, surveying the cameras.

When tragedy comes to town in the 21st century, the media follows, focusing the world's eyes on a community during its most difficult hours. Columbine, Sandy Hook, now Uvalde, Texas — the list of places synonymous with horrible mass killings keeps growing.

Journalists are called upon to explain what happened, and sometimes to ask uncomfortable questions in places where many people want to be left alone to grieve. Is it possible to do it better, to co-exist within a moment no one wants to be part of?

Tempers have flared in Uvalde. One female journalist was told, "I hope your entire family dies in a massacre." Some are threatened with arrest for trespassing while on public property. A group called "Guardians of the Children" blocked camera views, often with the encouragement of police.

Yet there are also people like Ben Gonzalez, who approached reporters near the mortuary after hearing the woman lash out to say that she doesn't speak for everyone. "Thank you for documenting this tragedy," he said. "We'll look back at the photos you take and appreciate it."

The shady courthouse square in Uvalde has been dotted by canopies erected by TV news crews. Journalists have been stationed at Robb Elementary School, where the shooting took place, near a makeshift memorial piled with flowers, stuffed animals and messages. At the local Starbucks, where many journalists go to work, tables are set aside for Uvalde residents.

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These are the typical signs of the invasion of journalists that accompany such events.

"I respect the wishes of people if they want me to leave," said Guillermo Contreras, a senior writer at the San Antonio Express-News. "By the second day (after the shooting), the people were overwhelmed. The town has been overrun by reporters. There was pretty much nowhere you could go without running into the media."

Like most colleagues, Contreras tries to be sensitive to what Uvalde's people are enduring. He has a 10-year-old daughter at home.

"When you are at the epicenter of a situation like that, you really do need protection," said Michele Gay, who lost her daughter Josephine in the Newtown school shooting a decade ago. "You are really not in a state of mind to be offering your feelings in front of the camera."

Gay said she had no idea of the extent of attention given to the story until the state trooper assigned to protect her family drove them around town to see the memorials.

"At first, I was angry," said Gay, co-founder and executive director of Safe and Sound Schools, an advocacy group. "It felt invasive. It felt hurtful ... At the same time, there were members of the media who were so thoughtful, caring and compassionate."

The sensitivity that most journalists try to bring to such assignments can be undermined by those who stick cameras in the faces of people crying, or ask a grieving parent how it feels. One parent who lost a child in Newtown saw someone outside her home with a camera peering into a window, said Monsignor Robert Weiss of the town's St. Rose of Lima Parish.

In general, journalists do a poor job explaining what they do and a poor job putting themselves in the shoes of the people they are interviewing, many on the worst day of their lives, said Joy Mayer, a former journalism professor.

"It's really valid for people in that community to feel overwhelmed and resentful," said Mayer, the director of Trusting News, which helps members of the media improve their relationship with the public.

Kelly McBride, an expert on journalism ethics at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, advises news organizations to better prepare when assigned to these stories. Most interviews on the street indicate this work hasn't been done; people in shock and trauma, she said, shouldn't have to make an on-the-spot decision about dealing with a reporter.

She praised CNN for sensitively handling the interview of a young survivor of the shooting who smeared herself in the blood of a dead classmate to appear dead. CNN reported on what the girl said, but didn't show her or play her voice.

Ana Rodriguez, who lost her daughter Maite in the shooting, sat at her dining room table to tell The Associated Press about how the girl aspired to become a marine biologist. She didn't want her face to appear on camera to divert attention from her daughter.

Sometimes there's little time to prepare. Tony Dokoupil of CBS News was told to get on a plane to Texas. Fast. Dokoupil said he tried to get away from the pack and knock on doors; in one case, he came upon someone close to a child who died who helped arrange an interview with her parents.

He found residents polite and respectful even when they didn't want to talk. He was thanked by some people for being there and telling the stories.

Gay recommends journalists focus their attention on people who have lost their lives, not perpetrators. There has been a marked effort on the part of news organizations to minimize mentions of shooters, although Gay was concerned that she had seen more after Uvalde.

In Uvalde, questions raised about the police response to the shooting have lengthened the time the shooting has lingered in the news and increased hostility toward journalists. CNN used a tag team to stake out Pete Arredondo, the schools police chief who directed operations, and get an ambush interview.

"You have people who are supportive of law enforcement," Contreras said. "It's a small town; people know each other. All of a sudden people are pointing fingers at the officers you know, so there's a division."

For people in communities like Newtown and Uvalde in the immediate aftermath of these stories, the sheer repetitiveness is often wearing.

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"If there's been one interview out here there's been 150," said one downtown shopkeeper who, like many in Uvalde, didn't want his name in a news story. "I mean, how many times can you interview people who don't know nothing?"

There are some suggestions of what is known in the industry as a pool — where a handful of reporters ask questions of officials and report answers to a larger group. This is used most famously at the White House.

But McBride said this inevitably leads to less aggressive journalism. Most reporters are driven by the impulse to get things their competitors don't. It was tried in a few instances in Uvalde and proved unsatisfying, Contreras said.

Things grew quieter in Uvalde by this past weekend. Only a television satellite truck remained at the Robb school, and just a handful of journalists were at the courthouse square Saturday as a Hawaiian group presented a giant lei and sang songs.

There's no avoiding the shock an influx of journalists brings to a quiet community. Weiss recalls being swarmed by reporters after emerging from a meeting with parents. He didn't know what to say. But in general, the Catholic monsignor said he found the press respectful and has come to understand the importance of its role.

"We needed to get the story out there and we needed to keep this story out there," Weiss said. "Because in 10 years, what has changed? If anything, it has gotten worse."

Joy, sadness intertwine at Normandy's D-Day commemorations

By SYLVIE CORBET and JEFF SCHAEFFER The Associated Press

COLLEVILLE-SUR-MER, France (AP) — Joy and sadness in acute doses poured out Monday on the beaches of Normandy.

As several dozen D-Day veterans — now all in their 90s — set foot on the sands that claimed so many colleagues, they are thankful for the gratitude and friendliness of the French toward those who landed here on June 6, 1944. The sadness comes as they think of their fallen comrades and of another battle now being waged in Europe: the war in Ukraine.

As a bright sun rose Monday over the wide band of sand at Omaha Beach, U.S. D-Day veteran Charles Shay expressed thoughts for his comrades who died here 78 years ago.

"I have never forgotten them and I know that their spirits are here," he told The Associated Press.

The 98-year-old Penobscot Native American from Indian Island, Maine, took part in a sage-burning ceremony near the beach in Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer. Shay, who now lives in Normandy, was a 19-year-old U.S. Army medic when he landed on Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944.

He said he was especially sad to see war in Europe once again, so many years later.

"Ukraine is a very sad situation. I feel sorry for the people there and I don't know why this war had to come, but I think the human beings like to, I think they like to fight. I don't know," he said. "In 1944, I landed on these beaches and we thought we'd bring peace to the world. But it's not possible."

This year, Shay handed over the remembrance task to another Native American, Julia Kelly, a Gulf War veteran from the Crow tribe, who performed the sage ritual. "Never forget, never forget," she said. "In this time, in any time, war is not good."

Shay's message to young generations would be "to be ever vigilant."

"Of course I have to say that they should protect their freedom that they have now," he said.

For the past two years, D-Day ceremonies were reduced to a minimum amid COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. But this year, crowds of French and international visitors — including veterans in their 90s — were back in Normandy to pay tribute to the nearly 160,000 troops from Britain, the U.S., Canada and elsewhere who landed there to bring freedom.

Several thousand people attended a ceremony at the American Cemetery overlooking Omaha Beach in the French town of Colleville-sur-Mer. They applauded more than 20 WWII veterans who were present at the commemoration.

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Amid them was Ray Wallace, 97, a former paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne Division.

On D-Day, his plane was hit and caught fire, forcing him to jump earlier than expected. He landed 20 miles (32 kilometers) away from the town of Sainte-Mere-Eglise, the first French village to be liberated from Nazi occupation.

"We all got a little scared then. And then whenever the guy dropped us out, we were away from where the rest of the group was. That was scary," Wallace told the AP.

Less than a month later, he was taken prisoner by the Germans. He was ultimately liberated after 10 months and returned to the U.S. Still, Wallace thinks he was lucky.

"I remember the good friends that I lost there. So it's a little emotional," he said, with sadness in his voice. "I guess you can say I'm proud of what I did but I didn't do that much."

He was asked about the secret to his longevity. "Calvados!" he joked, in reference to Normandy's local alcohol.

On D-Day, Allied troops landed on the beaches code-named Omaha, Utah, Juno, Sword and Gold, carried by 7,000 boats. On that single day, 4,414 Allied soldiers lost their lives, 2,501 of them Americans. More than 5,000 were wounded.

On the German side, several thousand were killed or wounded.

Wallace, who is using a wheelchair, was among about 20 WWII veterans who opened Saturday's parade of military vehicles in Sainte-Mere-Eglise to great applause from thousands of people, in a joyful atmosphere. He did not hide his pleasure, happily waving to the crowd as parents explained the achievements of World War II heroes to their children.

Many history buffs, wearing military and civilian clothes from the period, also came to stage a reenactment of the events.

In Colleville-sur-Mer on Monday, U.S. Air Force aircraft flew over the American Cemetery during the commemoration ceremony, in the presence of Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The place is home to the gravesites of 9,386 people who died fighting on D-Day and in the operations that followed.

Milley had strong words about Ukraine at the American Cemetery ceremony, vowing that the U.S. and its allies would keep up their "significant" support to Ukraine.

"Kiev may be 2,000 kilometers away from here, they too, right now, today, are experiencing the same horrors as the French citizens experienced in World War II at the hands of the Nazi invader," Milley said in a speech. "Let's not those only here be the last witnesses to a time when our Allies come together to defeat tyranny."

For 82-year-old Dale Thompson, visiting the site over the weekend was a first.

Thompson, who traveled from Florida with his wife, served in the 101st Airborne Division of the U.S. military in the early 1960s. He was stateside and saw no combat.

Walking amid the thousands of marble headstones, Thompson wondered how he would have reacted if he landed at D-Day.

"I try to put myself in their place," he said. "Could I be as heroic as these people?"

US general: Ukraine will keep getting 'significant' support

By SYLVIE CORBET and JEFFREY SCHAEFFER Associated Press

COLLEVILLE-SUR-MER, France (AP) — The United States and its allies will keep providing "significant" support to Ukraine out of respect for the legacy of D-Day soldiers, whose victory over the Nazis helped lead to a new world order and a "better peace," Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Monday.

In an interview with The Associated Press overlooking Omaha Beach in Normandy, Milley said Russia's war on Ukraine undermines the rules established by Allied countries after the end of World War II. He spoke on the 78th anniversary of the D-Day invasion of Allied troops onto the beaches of France, which led to the overthrow of Nazi Germany's occupation.

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One fundamental rule of the "global rules-based order" is that "countries cannot attack other countries with their military forces in acts of aggression unless it's an act of pure self-defense," he stressed. "But that's not what's happened here in Ukraine. What's happened here is an open, unambiguous act of aggression."

"It is widely considered to undermine the rules that these dead — here at Omaha Beach and at the cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer — have died for. They died for something. They died for that order to be put in place so that we would have a better peace," Milley said, speaking at the American Cemetery overlooking the shore in the northwestern French village at Colleville-sur-Mer.

That's why "the nations of Europe, the nations of NATO, are supporting Ukraine with lethal and nonlethal support in order to make sure that that rule set is underwritten and supported," Milley explained.

Dozens of veterans — now all in their 90s, from the U.S., Britain, Canada and elsewhere — were taking part in poignant D-Day ceremonies Monday.

On June 6, 1944, Allied troops landed on French beaches code-named Omaha, Utah, Juno, Sword and Gold, carried by 7,000 boats. On that single day, 4,414 Allied soldiers lost their lives, 2,501 of them Americans. More than 5,000 were wounded. On the German side, several thousand were killed or wounded. The massive invasion helped lead to Hitler's defeat and the end of World War II.

Asked about whether Ukraine gets enough support, Milley noted "there's a very, very significant battle going on in the Donbas," in reference to Ukraine's heavily contested eastern industrial region bordering Russia. "But Kyiv (the capital) was protected and successfully defended against. The Russians had to shift their forces to the south in the Donbas. And we'll see how this plays out."

"I think that the United States and the allied countries are providing a significant amount of support to Ukraine, and that will continue," he said. He didn't elaborate.

Milley also had strong words about Ukraine at the ceremony at the American Cemetery, attended by over 20 World War II veterans and several thousand spectators.

"Kiev may be 2,000 kilometers away from here, they too, right now, today, are experiencing the same horrors as the French citizens experienced in World War II at the hands of the Nazi invader," Milley said in his speech. "Let's not those only here be the last witnesses to a time when our Allies come together to defeat tyranny."

Milley's parents served during World War II and his uncle was in the Navy off Normandy's coast on D-Day as part of Operation Overlord.

That generation of soldiers "fought and sacrificed for all of us... And I have a very, very special bond with them. And I'm very respectful of what they've done. And I think we all — all of us today — need to carry on the legacy that they fought and died for," Milley said.

Africa needs better weather warning systems, urge experts

By WANJOHI KABUKURU Associated Press

MOMBASA, Kenya (AP) — Better climate-related research and early warning systems are needed as extreme weather — from cyclones to drought — continues to inflict the African continent, said Sudanese billionaire and philanthropist Mo Ibrahim, who heads up his own foundation.

"We don't have a voice on global climate discussions as we lack strong research capabilities," Ibrahim told The Associated Press. Ibrahim said that Africa must help "shape the agenda" at the upcoming United Nations climate conference in Egypt in November, known as COP27.

He added that weather stations across the country were sparse and unevenly distributed, leading to "critical" gaps in climate data.

Experts say having a greater frequency of reliable data can help predict and plan for future extreme weather events, mitigating their impact on human life.

Earlier this year a U.N. report by leading climate scientists said that determining climate change risks on the continent currently "relies on evidence from global studies that use data largely from outside of Africa." The panel said global data, while good at estimating averages across the world, lacks the specifics African nations need to determine how vulnerable they are and how best they can adapt.

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Central and north African regions have been singled out by the U.N.'s weather agency as the worst affected by the absence of weather data, which it says leads to significant margins of error in predicting rainfall trends.

This year, Africa has been experiencing a severe drought in the Horn and eastern Africa, extreme heat in the northern parts of the continent, while the southern African region has been pummeled by intense cyclones.

The Mo Ibrahim foundation estimates that some of countries most vulnerable to extreme weather globally are in Africa, with 20% of the continent's population the most at risk. A report released by the foundation also estimates that around 10 million people across the continent are already displaced, at least in part, because of climate change.

Earlier this year the U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres tasked the World Meteorological Organization to ensure that "every person on earth is protected by early warning systems" within five years. Currently, only 22% of weather stations in Africa meet the global climate observing system reporting requirements. The U.N. weather agency is expected to present an action plan of how to achieve their five-year goal at COP27.

Evans Mukolwe, a former U.N. weather scientist, says besides weather stations installations and ocean observations there's also an urgent need to rescue historical data for African countries to inform future predictions. Mukolwe, who's now a climate and drought monitoring advisor with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, said Kenya still "holds 20 million analogue weather cards going back to 1896" containing valuable climate information.

"It is in Africa's and the world's interest to invest more on climate research and integrate weather information services for effective adaptation and mitigation strategies," he added.

Mo Ibrahim said that despite a lack of investment in weather services, the continent has already made headway in other areas when it comes to combatting climate change.

"Africa has a great record on climate adaptation. We have over 22 countries in the continent where the main sources of energies are renewables, a feat that is unmatched by any other continent, and vast forests that are efficient in carbon capture," he said.

Stocks climb on Wall Street, led by more gains in tech

NEW YORK (AP) — Stocks are off to a higher start on Wall Street Monday led by more gains in big tech companies. The S&P 500 was up 0.8%. The benchmark index is coming off its eighth losing week in the last nine. The Nasdaq rose 1.2% and the Dow rose 0.5%. Twitter fell 4% after Tesla CEO Elon Musk threatened to call of his deal to buy the company, saying Twitter was refusing to hand over data. Spirit Airlines rose 2% after JetBlue raised its offer to buy the rival carrier, and Amazon rose 3% after executing a 20-for-1 stock split.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below.

NEW YORK (AP) — Wall Street futures jumped Monday after the downturn in China's service industries eased and reports that the Biden administration may lift U.S. tariffs on some Chinese imports like solar panels.

Futures for the Dow climbed 0.9% and are up 1.1% on the S&P 500.

Oil prices are hovering close to \$120 per barrel.

A survey showed activity in Chinese retailing and other service industries shrank in May but at a slower rate than the previous month. Meanwhile, The Wall Street Journal reported Washington plans to lift tariffs on Chinese-made solar panels and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said President Joe Biden was "looking at" ending other duties.

Shares of Canadian Solar, Sunrun and SunPower rose between 8% and 13%. First Solar rose about 3%.

Wall Street traders have been uneasy about the possibility Federal Reserve interest rates aimed at cooling inflation that is running at a four-decade high might tip the U.S. economy into a recession.

On Friday, the S&P 500 lost 1.6% for its eighth weekly decline in the past nine weeks. The Dow fell 1% and the Nasdaq fell 2.5%.

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In midday trading Monday, the FTSE 100 in London rose 1.2%, the DAX in Frankfurt gained 1% and the CAC 40 in Paris advanced 1.1%.

In Asia, the Shanghai Composite Index rose 1.3% to 3,236.37 after the business news magazine Caixin said its monthly purchasing managers' index for services rose to 41.4 from April's 36.2 on a 100-point scale on which numbers below 50 show activity contracting.

"Some pockets of optimism may come from further easing of virus restrictions in Beijing," Yeap Jun Rong of IG said in a report.

The Hang Seng in Hong Kong gained 1.8% to 21,470.94 and the Nikkei 225 in Tokyo added 0.6% to 27,915.89. Korean markets were closed for a holiday.

Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 shed 0.5% to 7,206.30. New Zealand markets were closed for a holiday.

India's Sensex lost less than 0.1% to 55,716.30. Southeast Asian markets declined.

Benchmark U.S. crude rose 47 cents to \$119.34 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract gained \$2 on Friday to \$118.87. Brent crude, the price basis for international oil trading, advanced 53 cents to \$120.25 per barrel in London.

The dollar declined to 130.63 yen from Friday's 130.85 yen. The euro rose to \$1.0728 from \$1.0720.

Axon halts plans for Taser drone as 9 on ethics board resign

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Axon, the company best known for developing the Taser, said Monday it was halting plans to develop a Taser-equipped drone after a majority of its ethics board resigned over the controversial project.

Axon's founder and CEO Rick Smith said the company's announcement last week — which drew a rebuke from its artificial intelligence ethics board — was intended to "initiate a conversation on this as a potential solution." Smith said the ensuing discussion "provided us with a deeper appreciation of the complex and important considerations" around the issue.

As a result, "we are pausing work on this project and refocusing to further engage with key constituencies to fully explore the best path forward," he said. The development was first reported by Reuters.

The board had voted 8-4 a few weeks ago to recommend Axon not proceed with a pilot of the Taser drone and had concerns about introducing weaponizing drones in over-policed communities of color.

But after the mass shooting at an Uvalde, Texas elementary school, the company announced it was beginning development of the drone. Smith told The Associated Press last week he made the idea public in part because he was "catastrophically disappointed" in the response by police who didn't move in to kill the suspect for more than an hour.

The board issued a rare public rebuke of the project, saying it was a dangerous idea that went far beyond the initial proposal the board had reviewed for a Taser-equipped police drone. It said it had "pleaded with the company to pull back" before the announcement and that many of them believed it was "trading on the tragedy of the Uvalde and Buffalo shootings."

Smith had rejected that idea in an interview with the AP last week and said he was pressing ahead because he believed the Taser drone could be a viable solution to save lives. He contended the idea needed to be shared as part of the public conversation about school safety and effective ways for police to safely confront attackers.

On Monday, nine members of the ethics board, a group of well-respected experts in technology, policing and privacy, announced resignations, saying they had "lost faith in Axon's ability to be a responsible partner."

"We wish it had not come to this," the statement said. "Each of us joined this Board in the belief that we could influence the direction of the company in ways that would help to mitigate the harms that policing technology can sow and better capture any benefits."

"We tried from the start to get Axon to understand that its customer has to be the community that a policing agency serves, not the policing agency itself," one of the board's members, Barry Friedman, a

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New York University law professor, said in an interview. "It has been a painful struggle to try to change the calculus there."

Friedman said a major concern was Smith's decision to move forward with the plan and announce it publicly without adequately hearing the concerns of the board members.

"What's the emergency? School shootings are a crisis. I agree," Friedman said. "But Axon, on its own best timeline, isn't going to come up with anything for a couple of years. Why was it necessary to jump ahead like this?"

"What Rick is suggesting is a necessary public dialogue was really just jumping over the head of the board," Friedman said.

In his statement, Smith said it was "unfortunate that some members of Axon's ethics advisory panel have chosen to withdraw from directly engaging on these issues before we heard or had a chance to address their technical questions."

"We respect their choice and will continue to seek diverse perspectives to challenge our thinking and help guide other technology options," Smith said.

An infamous day. A search for answers. Will America tune in?

By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans are processing the nightmare of the slaughter of children in Texas, the racist murders in Buffalo, New York, and the other numbingly repeated scenes of carnage in the United States.

They're contending with what feels like highway robbery at the gas pump, they're nagged by a virus that the world can't shake, and they're split into two hostile camps over politics and culture — the twin pillars of the nation's foundation.

They've already been through two set-piece dramas of presidential impeachment — indeed, through the wringer on all things Donald Trump.

Now, beginning in prime time on Thursday, the House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol is setting out to establish the historical record of an event damaging not only to a community or individual families but to the collective idea of democracy itself.

After more than 100 subpoenas, 1,000 interviews and 100,000 documents, the committee has a story to tell in hearings that open this week. A story for the ages, it's been said.

The open question: How much will the country care?

The committee's examination of the actions of Trump and all the president's men and women, more aggressive than any inquiry before it, has produced a multitude of plot lines that together will tell the tale of a violent uprising fueled by the venom and lies of a defeated president.

Many Republicans, even those who condemned Trump and the violence in the moment, have adopted a "nothing more to see here" posture since, even rejecting calls for an independent Sept. 11-style commission to investigate.

An entire disinformation ecosystem sprung up with utterly false claims about the nature and character of the attack. Rather than condemn the attack, Trump continues to insist his defeat by 7 million votes should be overturned, in effect validating the rioters' cause.

Dozens of the insurrectionists have been brought to justice, many of them being convicted or pleading guilty to serious crimes. But the committee's goal is larger: Who in a position of power should also be held to account?

There are endless ribbons of inquiry.

Did Vice President Mike Pence refuse to leave the besieged Capitol because he suspected the Secret Service, at the behest of Trump, was trying to take him away to stop him from certifying Democrat Joe Biden's victory? Did Trump flush incriminating papers down the White House toilet?

How to explain the gap of more than seven hours in White House telephone logs of Trump's calls during the insurrection? Will it stand in history alongside the infamous 18 1/2-minute hole in President Richard Nixon's secret White House recording system in 1972?

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The Watergate affair, which exposed Nixon's cover-up of politically motivated criminal acts and destroyed his presidency, centered on a question posed by a Republican senator, Howard Baker, in a Tennessee drawl: "What did the president know, and when did he know it?"

For the Jan. 6 committee, the key question about Trump's involvement in the insurrection is: What did the president do, and when did he do it?

One aim is to establish whether Trump's acts are criminal, as one judge has mused they may be, and whether that would prompt a politically fraught Justice Department prosecution of an ex-president.

More broadly, the effort addresses who might be punished in the large circle of Trump enablers. Some of them are members of Congress who helped him plot how to try to overturn an honest election only to huddle in fear with everyone else in a Capitol hideout when the rioters — in service of that plot — swarmed the marbled corridors of power Jan. 6, 2021.

The prime-time setting for the committee hearing is a rarity and something of a throwback to an era when people gathered en masse at their televisions in the evening before video streaming atomized viewership.

Rep. Jamie Raskin, a Maryland Democrat on the committee, set expectations that may be hard to live up to as the committee tries to renew the interest of this short-attention-span country in machinations that are nearly 18 months in the rearview mirror.

The hazards in that mirror are closer than they appear, as committee members see it.

"The hearings will tell a story that will really blow the roof off the House," Raskin said in April. "Because it is a story of the most heinous and dastardly political offense ever organized by a president and his followers and his entourage in the history of the United States."

That offense? In short, he told a Washington forum, "an inside coup" coupled with a violent attack by "neo-fascists."

Trump is not expected at any of the hearings, but his words and actions will hang heavy over the proceedings as lawmakers look to place him at the center of the chaos. It seems highly plausible that he will find a way to rail against them that does not involve being under oath.

The committee almost certainly will look to draw a tight connection between Trump's vociferous rejections of the election results and his Jan. 6 rally outside the White House sending the angry crowd off to Capitol Hill.

Free from the burden of proof beyond a reasonable doubt, committee members are likely to try to show that the riot that ravaged the Capitol was not a spontaneous gathering but part of a broader conspiracy and a natural outgrowth of weeks of denunciations of democratic processes.

Biden framed Jan. 6 and its aftermath in existential terms about the threat posed to democracy. It's a "battle for the soul of America," he said. But a president can only have one No. 1 priority at a time, and this isn't his. Time and again, he's said it's inflation.

Whatever revelations the hearings may produce, much is already known because the attack played out on screens large and small in real time, and Trump exhorted supporters to "fight like hell" in shouts for the world to hear.

"In quieter times, the hearings would have a stronger hold on public attention," said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania and an authority on political communications. "But, as is, they will be competing for attention with topics with greater immediate relevance in our lives."

Hungry babies lacking formula. Soaring prices for gas and groceries. Rising COVID-19 hospitalization among the vaccinated. The scenes of destruction in Ukraine and the threat that the Russian invasion will escalate to include use of nuclear weapons. And there's monkeypox.

"To say nothing of summer vacation," Jamieson added.

"If the hearings are to do anything other than reinforce our existing political biases," she said, "they will have to reveal previously covered-up goings-on that threatened something that Democrats, independents and most Republicans can agree should be sacrosanct."

Some of the inquiry's juicy bits are out already. Text messages and emails, thought to be private when sent, have become public, including from chief of staff Mark Meadows.

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But the committee has been sitting on much more information and will have tens of thousands of exhibits and hundreds of witnesses, said Democratic Rep. Bennie Thompson of Mississippi, the committee chairman.

Seven Democrats and two Republicans — both shunned by their party — make up the committee. Among them the stakes are surely highest for Rep. Liz Cheney, the deeply conservative but fiercely independent Wyoming lawmaker who is practically alone in the GOP in assailing Trump while also seeking reelection to Congress.

Daughter of a vice president and once an embodiment of the Republican establishment, she is now a renegade in a new order dominated by Trump, who wants her unseated in her primary in August.

That new order became ever clearer in February, when the Republican Party censured Cheney and the committee's other Republican, Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger, who's not seeking reelection, for taking part in the inquiry. The party adopted a resolution saying the witnesses summoned by the committee for their actions on and around Jan. 6 had only been engaging in "legitimate political discourse."

Matthew Delmont, a Dartmouth College history professor specializing in Black history, said Jan. 6 cast such an ominous shadow that he expects people in the United States, for all of their other pressing pre-occupations, to be drawn to the inquiry.

"I think people will watch the Jan. 6 hearings because they want to understand how our democracy reached this precipice," he said. "I don't know how many people will be willing to hear the evidence that will be presented, but I think it is important for the findings to be shared openly so people today and in the future can appreciate what happened."

Jan. 6 shares certain distinctions with other past agonies. As with 9/11, you can shorthand the date, Jan. 6, and people know. Like Watergate, it speaks to corrupt acts in the highest office. As with the Challenger space shuttle explosion and 9/11 and more, the scene brought so much visceral shock that many people remember where they were and what they were doing when they saw it.

As far as the far right is concerned, the historical analogy is the Boston Tea Party, with liberals, Democrats and the Washington establishment as the redcoats.

Trump-friendly Republicans sanitized what happened that day, once the shock that nearly all felt on Jan. 6 subsided. In measurements of public opinion, Republican voters in the main said they believe the 2020 election was rigged, when by absolutely all measures — the courts, nonpartisan and even Republican state officials, and the Trump administration's own election monitors, including his attorney general — the election was purely fair.

A year later, the patently violent uprising was remembered as very or extremely violent by fewer than 4 in 10 Republicans polled, compared with almost 9 in 10 Democrats.

Even so, there were signs in the latest Republican primaries for the 2022 midterms that Trump's obsession about getting fired by the voters all those months ago is wearing thin even with them.

Trump won the 2016 election with a minority of voters, lost the House to the Democrats in 2018 and lost in 2020 by a decisive margin — not a glowing electoral record.

Still he holds sway over his party, thanks to supporters whose loyalty seems immovable. Unswayed by facts throughout the fight to discredit and upend Biden's election, they won't be easily dislodged by a congressional committee's revelations.

Through Trump's presidency, audacious falsehoods and elaborate exaggerations were the order of the day. But Trump, at times, had a knack for speaking a larger truth that penetrated his fog of hyperbole and misinformation.

So it was with his comment in Iowa in January 2016, en route to the Republican nomination. The comment foretells that even if the Jan. 6 committee manages to "blow the roof off the House," Trump may remain golden with millions who love him.

"I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn't lose any voters, OK?" Trump said then. "It's, like, incredible."

Doctor named in abortion case has nothing to do with lawsuit

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By EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS and MIKE STOBBE Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Dr. Thomas Dobbs has never gotten involved in political fights over reproductive health, but his name has become shorthand for a legal case that could end abortion rights in the United States. If he has feelings about the situation, he pretty much keeps those to himself.

Mississippi's top public health official is named in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, a dispute over a state law that would ban most abortions after the 15th week but that could be used to overturn Roe v. Wade.

A leaked draft of a U.S. Supreme Court opinion shows a conservative majority of justices are ready to use the case to topple the court's landmark 1973 ruling that established abortion rights nationwide.

Dobbs, 52, is a physician in charge of the state health department, which regulates Mississippi's only abortion clinic. As the state's chief health officer, he is the person who must be named in any lawsuit related to abortion or other health issues, he explained recently in a post on Twitter.

So, while the name at the center of the abortion debate could eventually change from "Roe" to "Dobbs," it is not the health officer but the state attorney general's office that is handling the state's case.

"I had no direct involvement in any component of this legal action," he wrote in the post.

Liz Sharlot, communications director for the state health department, confirmed Dobbs' strictly nominal role and denied a request from The Associated Press to interview him because, she said, he "did not personally initiate this case."

"The Mississippi State Department of Health's only role regarding abortion facilities is the regulations to support the law, the inspection and the licensing of that facility," Sharlot wrote in an email.

Dobbs is a former state epidemiologist who became head of the health department in 2018, months after Mississippi's Republican-controlled Legislature passed the abortion-restriction law that's now at the center of the court case.

He has spent his public health career focused not on abortion, but on pushing for better outcomes in a state plagued by high rates of infant mortality and other poor health statistics.

The legal fight over abortion started when Mississippi's only abortion clinic sued over the 15-week ban. The suit was originally called Jackson Women's Health Organization v. Currier et al. The main defendant was the state health officer at the time, Dr. Mary Currier. After she left, a judge removed Currier's name from the case and replaced it with Dobbs.

A federal district judge blocked the law from taking effect. When the state appealed to the Supreme Court, the name of the case was flipped, to Dobbs versus the clinic.

During an online briefing hosted by the Mississippi State Medical Association in June 2021, Dobbs was asked about his name being on the abortion case. He quickly noted that Dr. Kenneth Cleveland also was named in the lawsuit in his capacity as head of the Mississippi State Board of Medical Licensure.

"He didn't make the headline," the medical association president at the time, Dr. Mark Horne, said in a good-natured jab at Dobbs.

"I'm trying to get him to swap with me," Dobbs quipped.

Until now, the name most associated with the abortion debate has been Jane Roe, a pseudonym for a Dallas woman named Norma McCorvey, who was the plaintiff in the famous Roe v. Wade case. Wade was Henry Wade, the Dallas County district attorney at the time.

In 1969, the 22-year-old McCorvey became pregnant for the third time and wanted to have an abortion. McCorvey and her attorneys ultimately won the legal battle, but not until she gave birth and gave the girl up for adoption. She later became an anti-abortion activist. McCorvey was 69 when she died in 2017.

Another name that often arises in the debate is that of is Robert P. Casey, a former Democratic governor of Pennsylvania who was an anti-abortion advocate. In 1989, he worked with the state's legislature to enact a law that placed several limitations on abortion. Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania challenged the law. In 1992, the Supreme Court upheld most of the restrictions, but also affirmed a woman's right to an abortion. Casey died in 2000. The name of the case was Planned Parenthood v. Casey.

While Dobbs has not been involved in the abortion debates, he has spent the past two years engulfed in a different contentious health issue: the COVID-19 pandemic. At dozens of news conferences and other

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public appearances, he has implored people to get vaccinated, wear masks and maintain social distancing. He persisted even as many people, including some public officials, resisted.

In August, Dobbs said he had received threats from people who believed false conspiracy theories about him and his family as he promoted vaccination against COVID-19. Dobbs said one lie is that his son, who is also a physician, receives a World Bank-funded kickback when Dobbs urges people to get vaccinated.

"I get zero \$ from promoting vaccination," Dobbs wrote on Twitter.

Before COVID-19 vaccinations were available, the usually even-tempered Dobbs expressed frustration at people's insistence on attending social events and extracurricular school activities, including sports competitions.

"Our hierarchy of prioritization is extremely stupid," Dobbs said in November 2020. "We're prioritizing youth sports, not only over academics. We're actually prioritizing it over community health, just to be honest."

While in the thick of the stressful pandemic fight, Dobbs said he turned to exercise and listening to music — jazz and The Rolling Stones — as ways to disconnect from work. He announced in March that he will retire at the end of July.

Dr. Georges Benjamin is executive director of the American Public Health Association, one of several public health and research groups that have filed a legal brief critical of Mississippi's 15-week abortion ban.

Benjamin said he does not know Dobbs' personal opinion about abortion and the legal issues involved in the case, and expressed doubt that Dobbs would state them publicly.

"Your name may get associated with a legal case when you're in these jobs," Benjamin said. "But your name being associated may not align with your own views. You are the public official, and unfortunately that's what happens when you take these jobs."

Benjamin said Dobbs has done an "incredible" job as Mississippi's health officer during the pandemic, including remarkable work addressing issues of inequity. He called him a "trusted figure who follows scientific principles."

Benjamin's hope, he said, is that Dobbs' reputation "does not get tarnished" by having his name on the abortion case.

Today in History: June 7, court rejects contraceptive ban

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, June 7, the 158th day of 2022. There are 207 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 7, 1965, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Griswold v. Connecticut*, struck down, 7-2, a Connecticut law used to prosecute a Planned Parenthood clinic in New Haven for providing contraceptives to married couples.

On this date:

In 1712, Pennsylvania's colonial assembly voted to ban the further importation of slaves.

In 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia offered a resolution to the Continental Congress stating "That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States."

In 1848, French painter and sculptor Paul Gauguin was born in Paris.

In 1892, Homer Plessy, a "Creole of color," was arrested for refusing to leave a whites-only car of the East Louisiana Railroad. (Ruling on his case, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld "separate but equal" racial segregation, a concept it renounced in 1954.)

In 1929, the sovereign state of Vatican City came into existence as copies of the Lateran Treaty were exchanged in Rome.

In 1942, the Battle of Midway ended in a decisive victory for American naval forces over Imperial Japan, marking a turning point in the Pacific War.

In 1967, author-critic Dorothy Parker, famed for her caustic wit, died in New York at age 73.

In 1981, Israeli military planes destroyed a nuclear power plant in Iraq, a facility the Israelis charged

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could have been used to make nuclear weapons.

In 1993, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that religious groups could sometimes meet on school property after hours. Ground was broken for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland.

In 1998, in a crime that shocked the nation, James Byrd Jr., a 49-year-old Black man, was hooked by a chain to a pickup truck and dragged to his death in Jasper, Texas. (Two white men were later sentenced to death; one of them, Lawrence Russell Brewer, was executed in 2011 and the other, John William King, was executed in April 2019. A third defendant received life with the possibility of parole.)

In 2006, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (AH'-boo MOO'-sahb ahl-zahr-KOW'-ee), the founder of al-Qaida in Iraq, was killed by a U.S. airstrike on his safe house. The U.S. Senate rejected a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage.

In 2016, Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump claimed their parties' presidential nominations following contests in New Jersey, California, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Ten years ago: Attorney General Eric Holder clashed with Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee seeking more information about a flawed gun-trafficking investigation in Arizona known as "Operation Fast and Furious." Bob Welch, a former member of Fleetwood Mac who went on to write songs and record several hits during a solo career, died in Nashville.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump announced his choice to replace James Comey a day ahead of the ousted FBI director's congressional testimony, tapping Christopher Wray, a white-collar defense lawyer with a strong law enforcement background. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for a stunning pair of deadly attacks on Iran's parliament and the tomb of its revolutionary leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Keith Urban picked up four CMT Music Awards in Nashville, including video of the year.

One year ago: A unanimous Supreme Court ruled that thousands of people living in the U.S. for humanitarian reasons were ineligible to apply to become permanent residents. Maggie Murdaugh, 52, and her son Paul Murdaugh, 22, from a prominent South Carolina legal family, were found shot and killed on their family's land. (In the aftermath of the deaths, Maggie Murdaugh's husband, Alex Murdaugh, would be jailed on dozens of charges, including the theft of millions of dollars in legal settlements.) An express train barreled into another train that had derailed minutes earlier in southern Pakistan, killing more than 60 people.

Today's Birthdays: Movie director James Ivory is 94. Actor Virginia McKenna is 91. Singer Tom Jones is 82. Poet Nikki Giovanni is 79. Former talk show host Jenny Jones is 76. Americana singer-songwriter Willie Nile is 74. Actor Anne Twomey is 71. Actor Liam Neeson is 70. Actor Colleen Camp is 69. Author Louise Erdrich (UR'-drihk) is 68. Actor William Forsythe is 67. Record producer L.A. Reid is 66. Latin pop singer Juan Luis Guerra is 65. Former Vice President Mike Pence is 63. Rock singer-musician Gordon Gano (The Violent Femmes) is 59. Rock musician Eric Kretz (Stone Temple Pilots) is 56. Rock musician Dave Navarro is 55. Actor Helen Baxendale is 52. Sen. Ben Ray Lujan, D-N.M., is 50. Actor Karl Urban is 50. TV personality Bear Grylls is 48. Rock musician Eric Johnson (The Shins) is 46. Actor Adrienne Frantz is 44. Actor-comedian Bill Hader is 44. Actor Anna Torv is 43. Actor Larisa Oleynik (oh-LAY'-nihk) is 41. Former tennis player Anna Kournikova is 41. Actor Michael Cera is 34. Actor Shelley Buckner is 33. Rapper Iggy Azalea is 32. Actor-model Emily Ratajkowski is 31. Rapper Fetty Wap is 31.