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June 15

Senior Menu: Chicken Tetrazzini, peas, honey fruit salad, vanilla pudding, whole wheat bread.

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

5 p.m.: Jr. Teeners host Selby, DH

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

June 16

Senior Menu: Beef tips in gravy over noodles, Peas, lettuce salad, fruit, whole wheat bread.

4-7 p.m.: Groton Transit Fundraiser at Groton Community Center

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

5:30 p.m.: U120 vs. Rattlers in Watertown, Foundation Fields, (R/W), DH

6 p.m.: U8 SB hosts Mellette, 1 game

7 p.m.: U10 SB hosts Mellette, 1 game

8 p.m.: U12 SB hosts Mellette, 1 game

June 17

Senior Menu: Bratwurst with bun, mashed potatoes, sauerkraut, green beans, fruit.

SDSU Alumni Golf Tournament

5:30 p.m.: Jr. Legion at Selby, DH

5:30 p.m.: U12 hosts Doland, 1 game

June 18

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

"It's not the load that
breaks you down it's the way
you carry it."

LENA HORNE



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

10 a.m.: Firemen's Triathlon (Trap shoot, golf, bowling)

U12 at Webster

At 10:30 Clark vs Groton

At 12 Groton vs Webster

June 18-19

Jr. Legion at Milbank Tourney

Jr. Teeners at Milbank Tourney

June 19 - FATHER'S DAY

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

June 20 - JUNETEENTH HOLIDAY

Senior Menu: Goulash, green beans, apple crisp, whole wheat bread.

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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Fliehs receives Ms. Lacrosse

Madeline Fliehs received Ms. Lacrosse and All State Lacrosse Midfielder

Madeline plays lacrosse with the Aberdeen Cobras. The tournament and awards were in Watertown this past weekend. (Photo by Bridget Fliehs)

Lacrosse is a team sport played with a lacrosse stick and a lacrosse ball. It is the oldest organized sport in North America, with its origins with the indigenous people of North America as early as the 12th century.



Groton Transit Fundraiser



When: Thursday, June 16, 2022

Time: 4:00 pm-7:00 pm

Where: Groton Community Center

*** Groton Transit Fundraiser will be held at the Groton Community Center-
109 N 3rd Street- One block East of Groton Transit***

*Food*Fun*Door Prizes*

FREE WILL OFFERING

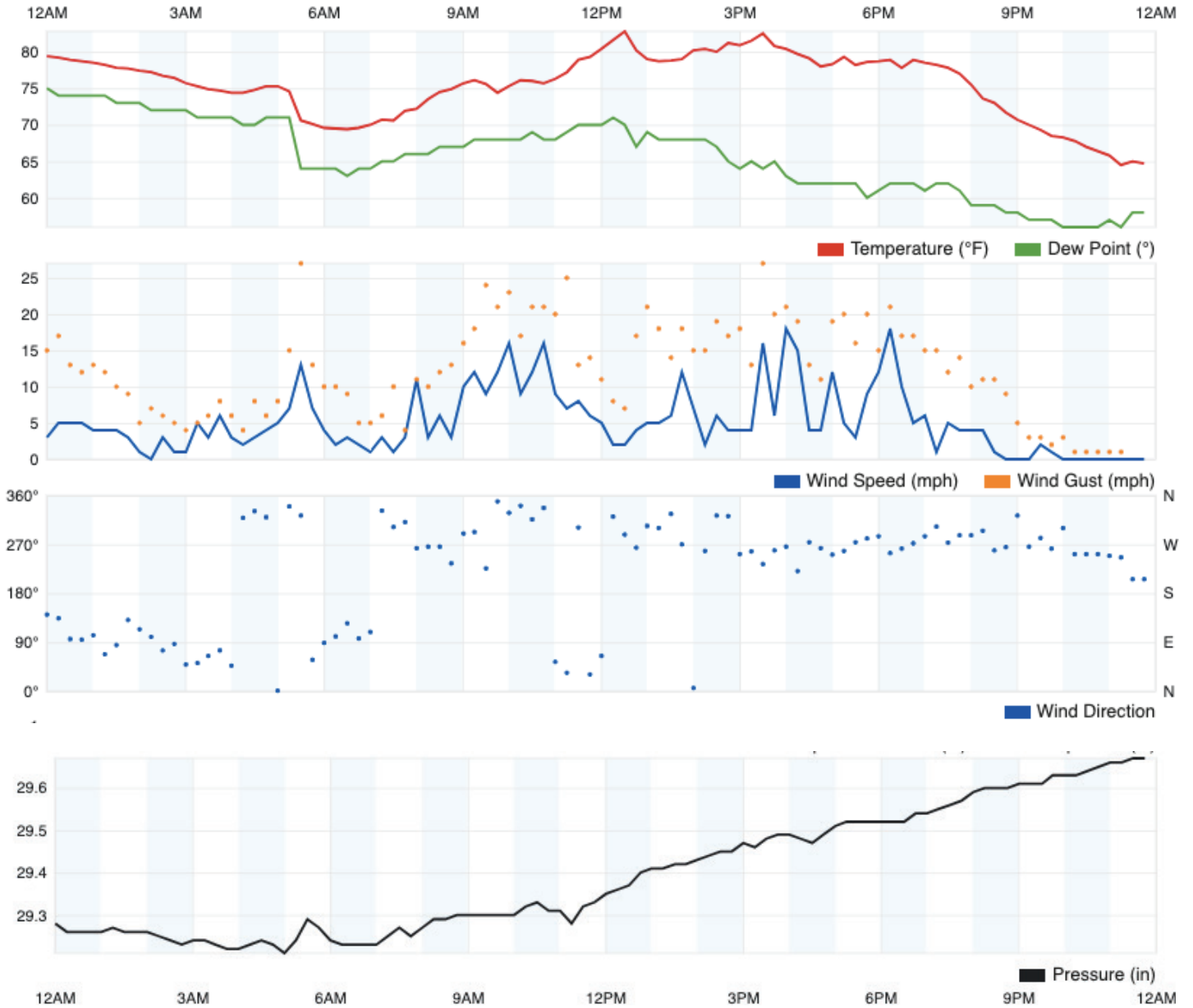
Please join us & Help support Groton Transit!

Serving State Fair Mini Donuts!!!!

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



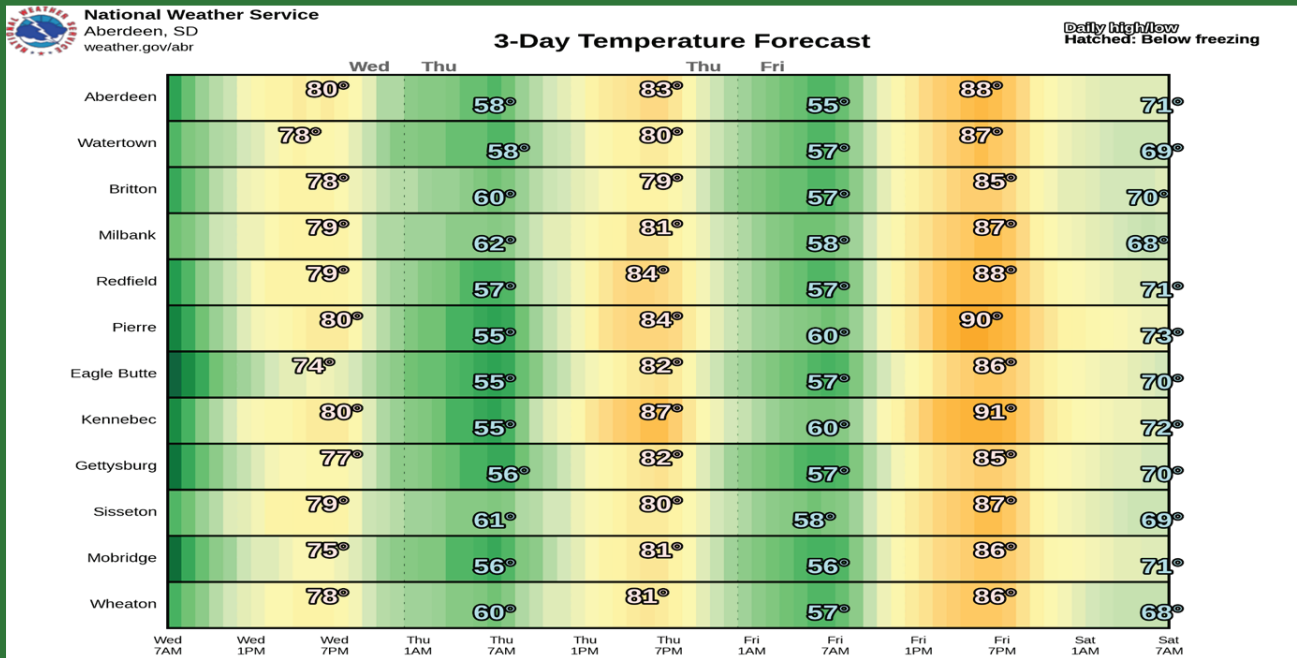
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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
				
Mostly Sunny then Sunny and Breezy	Partly Cloudy and Breezy	Sunny and Breezy	Clear	Sunny
High: 79 °F	Low: 58 °F	High: 82 °F	Low: 56 °F	High: 88 °F

Mild and Windy/Breezy Today

June 15, 2022
3:32 AM



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

The rest of the work week will see gradually increasing temperatures. It will turn down right HOT this weekend. Meanwhile, winds will be gusty this afternoon over the area. #sdwx #mnwx

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Today in Weather History

June 15, 1935: This estimated F3 tornado moved east from 17 miles southwest of Onida. There was near F4 damage to one farm about 9 miles SSW of Onida. The house was destroyed, 60 cattle were killed, and five people were injured. At another farm, the home shifted over the storm cellar, trapping a family.

June 15, 1977: There were thunderstorms with heavy rain and some hail which began on the 15th and continued into the 16th. At Watertown, almost 6.9 inches of rain fell during this two day period. In Deuel County, Gary received 6 inches, Altamont 5.5 and Brandt, 4.5 inches in Goodwin, and 3.70 inches in Clear Lake. Other amounts include; 4.85 inches at 3NE of Raymond; 4.57 inches in Clark; 4.21 at 1NE of Bryant; and 3.97 inches in Castlewood.

June 15, 1978: Numerous severe thunderstorms developed over all of central South Dakota. Tornadoes, funnel clouds, hail up to baseball size, and wind gusts to near 80 mph caused widespread destruction. Estimated loss was between 20-25 million dollars. The Governor declared some counties disaster areas. Six trailers were destroyed, and a home was unroofed northwest of Aberdeen. Fifteen people were injured from these storms.

June 15, 1978: Torrential rains began during the evening hours and continued into the morning hours on the 16th. Heavy rains were estimated between 5 to 6 inches, causing flash flooding south of Watertown. Some rainfall amounts include; 2.43 inches in Watertown; 2.07 in Castlewood; and 2.05 inches in Clear Lake. Hail caused severe crop damage in Hughes County.

1662 - A fast was held at Salem MA with prayers for rain, and the Lord gave a speedy answer. (David Ludlum)

1879 - McKinney ND received 7.7 inches of rain in 24 hours, a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1896 - The temperature at Fort Mojave, CA, soared to 127 degrees, the hottest reading of record for June for the U.S. The low that day was 97 degrees. Morning lows of 100 degrees were reported on the 12th, 14th and 16th of the month. (The Weather Channel)

1953 - Dust devils are usually rather benign weather phenomena, however, two boys were injured by one near Prescott AZ. One of the boys suffered a black eye, and the other boy had two vertebrae fractured by wind-blown debris. (The Weather Channel)

1957 - East Saint Louis was deluged with 16.54 inches of rain in 24 hours, a record for the state of Illinois. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather in the northwestern U.S. A tornado damaged five homes and destroyed a barn near Salmon ID. It lifted a metal shed 100 feet into the air, and deposited it 100 yards away. Hail an inch and a half in diameter caused ten million dollars damage to automobiles at Nampa ID. (The National Weather Channel) (Storm Data)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms in the Central High Plains Region spawned five tornadoes around Denver, CO, in just one hour. A strong (F-3) tornado in southern Denver injured seven persons and caused ten million dollars damage. Twenty-six cities in the eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. The high of 97 degrees at Portland ME was a record for June. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather over the Southern and Middle Atlantic Coast States. The thunderstorms spawned eight tornadoes, including strong (F-3) tornadoes which injured three persons at Mountville PA and four persons at Columbia, PA. There were 111 reports of large hail and damaging winds, including wind gusts to 80 mph at Norfolk, VA, and Hogback Mountain, SC. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1991: The second largest volcanic eruption of the 20th Century began as Mt. Pinatubo injected 15 to 30 million tons of sulfur dioxide 100,000 feet into the atmosphere. 343 people were killed in the Philippines as a result of the eruptions, and 200,000 were left homeless. Material from the explosion would spread around the globe, leading to climate changes worldwide as the sun's energy was blocked out and global temperatures cooled by as much as one degree Fahrenheit. 1992 was globally one of the coldest since the 1970s.

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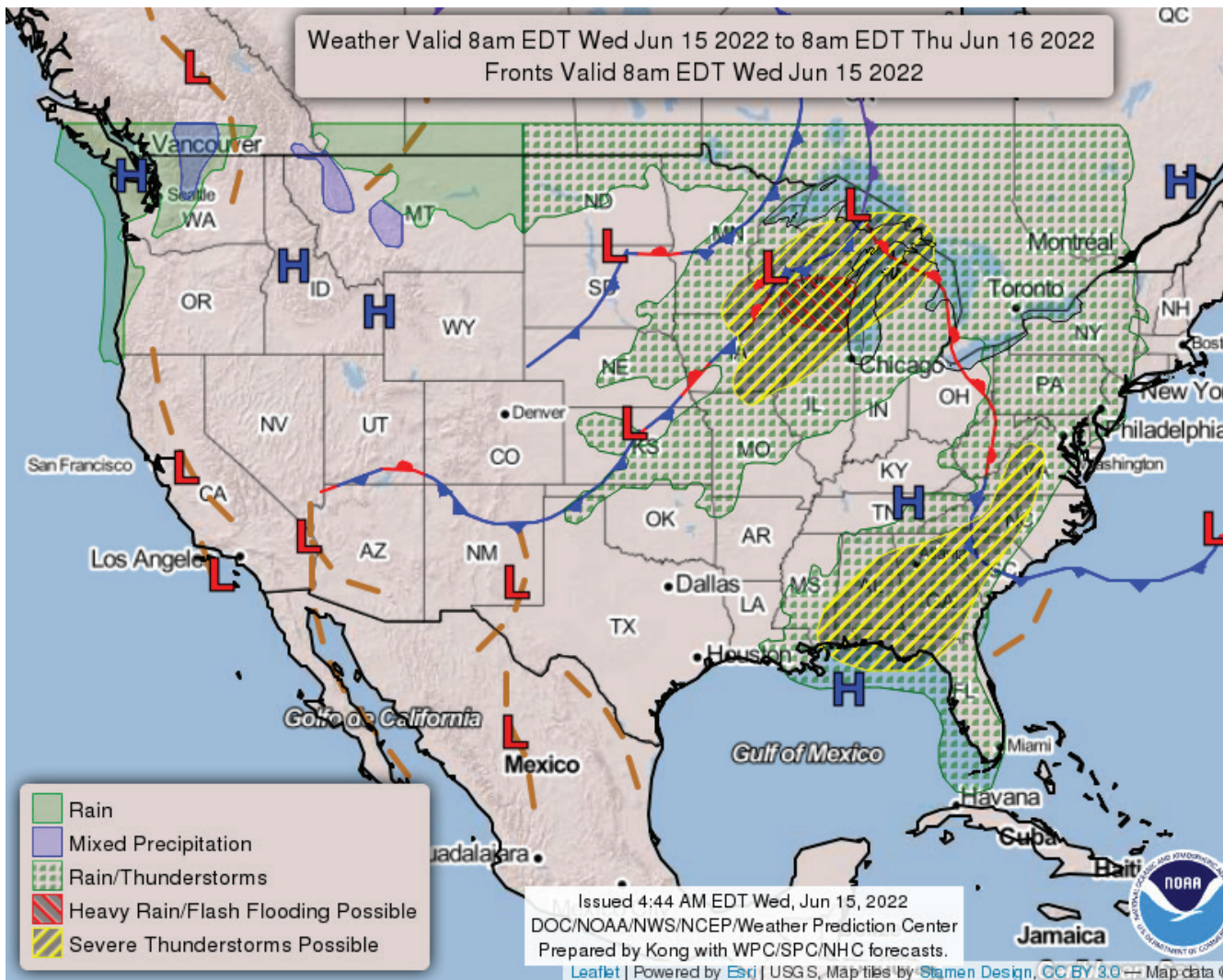
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 84 °F at 12:37 PM
Low Temp: 64 °F at 11:13 PM
Wind: 27 mph at 5:25 AM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 43 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 105 in 1933
Record Low: 36 in 1968
Average High: 80°F
Average Low: 55°F
Average Precip in June.: 1.77
Precip to date in June.: 0.10
Average Precip to date: 9.02
Precip Year to Date: 11.26
Sunset Tonight: 9:24:30 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:41:26 AM





Finding Beauty

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," is a very familiar saying. If we think about that saying for just a moment, it seems to suggest that there are two parts to beauty: the ones trying to make themselves beautiful and the ones who judge the outcome.

The latest information on the amount of money that is spent on beauty enhancing items is staggering:

Total cost of products worldwide: \$426 billion.

Total cost in America: \$33.3 billion.

Total cost per person in America: \$15,000.

Some might say, "What a complete waste." Someone else would probably say, "They should have spent much more." And a third might say, "It didn't make any difference no matter what they spent, so what's the reason for spending the money to look better? Why the effort?"

But the Psalmist said, "He crowns, and beautifies the humble with salvation."

God can take a heart that is stained and soiled with sin and cleanse it from all impurities and make it beautiful. "Wash me," cried one Psalmist, "and I will be whiter than snow."

God can take the damage caused by sin, and the marks left from discouragement and depression and erase their marks, remove every tear and bring hope to our eyes, erase lines of guilt and put the joy of salvation on our faces. Jesus made an important promise when He said, "My peace I give unto you - not as the world gives peace" through false promises and praise.

God can take a sin-scarred life and fill it with His glory and radiance. "Set me free from my prison," said the Psalmist. And we respond, "Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me!"

Prayer: Only You, Father, can save us from sin, ourselves, and the insanity of this world. Come quickly and help us. In Jesus' Name, Amen

Today's Bible Verse: For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation. Psalm 149:4b

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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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

30-37-38-42-58, Mega Ball: 22, Megaplier: 2

(thirty, thirty-seven, thirty-eight, forty-two, fifty-eight; Mega Ball: twenty-two; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$273,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 258,000,000

Great Plains Zoo vaccinating animals for the coronavirus

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Great Plains Zoo in Sioux Falls is in the process of vaccinating its most susceptible animals against the coronavirus.

A global animal health company, Zoetis, has developed an experimental vaccine for COVID-19 and is working with zoos across the country to distribute its limited supply to vaccinate the most at-risk species as soon as possible.

Great Plains veterinary staff worked closely with zookeepers to deliver the first dose of the vaccine to many of the species considered at risk, including primates and large cats. Zoo officials have administered 57 vaccine shots in just over a week. All animals that received the first dose, will get a second dose in about three weeks, KSFY-TV reported.

Because the vaccine is experimental, zoo staff will report on its use and any adverse effects to Zoetis. No significant side effects were found in the first round of inoculations, officials said.

"It is a real relief to get our most sensitive animals vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2," said zoo veterinarian, Dr. Loudon Wright. "Data has shown that vaccination drastically reduces the severity of COVID-19 in humans, and we are optimistic that the same will be true in our zoo animals. Anything we can do to help protect these animals under our care is absolutely worth trying."

Additional barriers will remain in place around the Amur tiger enclosure, due to their heightened sensitivity to COVID-19.

Avera Health data breach affects 700 patients

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The private information of hundreds of patients at a Sioux Falls-based health care system have been compromised, according to the provider.

Avera Health says a data breach allowed someone to obtain the personal information of about 700 patients who received care at Avera McKennan Hospital and University Health Center in Sioux Falls.

The information includes names, Social Security numbers, phone numbers, addresses, birth dates and email addresses.

Avera Health was alerted to the breach by one of its vendors, MCG Health, which was also affected. MCG provides patient care guidelines to health care providers and health plans.

MCG will notify those patients whose information was compromised.

Affected individuals are entitled to one free credit report annually from each of the three nationwide consumer reporting agencies.

Laxalt's Nevada win sets up fierce race for Senate control

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and KEN RITTER Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Adam Laxalt, a former state attorney general who has embraced lies about the 2020

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election, won the Republican nomination for a pivotal Nevada Senate seat, fending off a challenge from a political newcomer and setting up what will likely be a fierce and costly race against incumbent Catherine Cortez Masto, one of the most endangered Democrats in an evenly divided Senate.

Laxalt enjoyed the backing of the Republican Party's most influential figures, ranging from former President Donald Trump to Senate GOP Leader Mitch McConnell and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis. But a late-stage challenge from political newcomer Sam Brown forced Laxalt to spend heavily in the final weeks of the primary campaign and tap into the support of some of his high-profile backers, particularly those with ties to Trump.

The matchup against Cortez Masto comes at a difficult moment for Democrats, weighed down by President Joe Biden's low approval ratings and seeking to maintain control of Congress as people throughout the U.S. grapple with rising prices of everyday goods and gasoline. Republicans see the race as their best opportunity to flip a Senate seat and regain the majority, but are also watching for longer-term signal that Nevada is swinging back in their direction after rejecting every GOP presidential candidate since 2004.

"Together we have taken an important step tonight," Laxalt said at an election night party in Reno, Nevada. "An important step in taking our country back, an important step in taking our great state of Nevada."

Beyond the Senate race, Republicans in Nevada also picked Joe Lombardo as their nominee to challenge incumbent Democratic Gov. Steve Sisolak in what could be one of the most competitive governor's races this year. And the GOP backed Jim Marchant as their candidate for secretary of state. A former state lawmaker, he has repeated false claims about the presidential campaign and, if elected, would be in charge of elections in a state that could be critical in determining the winner of the White House in 2024.

Nevada was one of several states that held elections Tuesday, about midway through a primary season that could reshape American politics. The results offered warnings for both parties.

In south Texas, Democrats lost a long-held seat in the U.S. House. They are likely to regain it in November, but Tuesday's results were a reminder that the party's standing is at risk of slipping among Latinos.

Trump, meanwhile, helped a South Carolina state lawmaker take out five-term incumbent Rep. Tom Rice, who backed the former president's second impeachment last year. While the win could help Trump regain momentum after setbacks in a series of races last month, it happened in a rural, solidly Republican congressional district. Another incumbent that the former president sought to defeat in a neighboring district, Rep. Nancy Mace, held back the challenger, attracting some of the suburban moderates who bolted from the GOP during the Trump era.

Speaking to reporters after the results came in, Mace sought to strike a tone of consensus, pledging to "work with anyone who's willing to work with me, full stop."

For his part, Trump posted a statement on his social media platform saying Mace's challenger, Katie Arrington, was a "long shot" who ran a "great race." He offered his congratulations to Mace, who he said should easily prevail over a Democrat in the fall.

Still, much of the attention Tuesday was on Nevada.

Laxalt entered the primary with strong name recognition after serving for four years as Nevada's attorney general. The grandson of former U.S. Sen. Paul Laxalt, he campaigned unsuccessfully for governor in 2018.

But perhaps most importantly in GOP circles, he's got ties to Trump. Laxalt worked on Trump's reelection campaign and promoted his lies about election fraud in the state after the 2020 election, including spearheading legal challenges to the vote-counting process. Trump in turn hosted Laxalt for a fundraiser at his Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida, and appeared in a campaign ad for Laxalt.

Trump's false claims of fraud in the 2020 election were laced throughout the campaign. Last fall, Laxalt began raising fears of voter fraud in 2022 and talked about preemptively mounting legal challenges "to try to tighten up the election."

Laxalt had insisted in 2020 that ineligible and dead voters cast ballots in the presidential election in Nevada, despite the state's Republican secretary of state insisting that the results showing Biden's victory were accurate and reliable.

Brown, to the surprise of many in the state, won the endorsement of the Nevada Republican Party at

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a convention vote in late April and a straw poll of the Las Vegas-area GOP at a May gathering. Recent polls showed him closing in on Laxalt, though the state, with a transient population and many late-shift workers due to the state's tourism and casino industry, is considered fickle for pollsters.

Laxalt is now focused on trying to defeat Cortez Masto, the first Latina elected to the Senate and successor of the late Sen. Harry Reid. She is making her first reelection bid as Democrats broadly are facing headwinds this year, particularly when it comes to the economy. In Nevada, high prices for gas are acutely felt by residents of Las Vegas' sprawling suburbs or those commuting from far-flung rural areas.

Those same factors could imperil the reelection of Nevada's Democratic governor, Sisolak. He will face Lombardo, the sheriff of Clark County, who also earned a coveted endorsement from Trump.

Election 2022 Takeaways: Big Trump win, Nev. Senate race set

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump notched a significant victory in South Carolina, where his preferred candidate easily ousted five-term Rep. Tom Rice, the first Republican to be booted from office after voting to impeach the former president last year. But another high-profile GOP target of Trump in the state, Rep. Nancy Mace, managed to hold back a challenger.

Meanwhile, in Nevada on Tuesday, Trump's pick, Adam Laxalt, won his U.S. Senate primary, defeating a populist candidate who is arguably more representative of the Trump base.

Takeaways from the latest round of primary elections:

SPLIT DECISION IN SOUTH CAROLINA

Rice and Mace have been objects of Trump's anger ever since a mob of his supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol to stop the certification of Joe Biden's presidential election win.

Their transgressions? Mace stated on national TV that Trump's "entire legacy was wiped out" by the attack, while Rice became an apostate for joining a small group of Republicans who voted with Democrats in favor of Trump's second impeachment.

"He threw a temper tantrum that culminated with the sacking of the United States Capitol," Rice told NBC News on Monday. "It's a direct attack on the Constitution, and he should be held accountable."

Voters ultimately rendered different judgments on the duo, reflecting a split within the GOP about how to move forward from the Trump era. Rice's largely rural district is representative of Trump's America, where crossing the former president carries a steep cost. Even as Trump railed against both lawmakers, he chose to hold a rally in Rice's district earlier this year.

That's because Mace's district, which centers on Charleston, is full of the type of moderate suburban voters who fled the GOP under Trump. It is one of the few districts in an overall red state where Democrats have been even moderately competitive in congressional races.

The results demonstrate that the Trump factor can't be underestimated in solidly Republican territory, a potential warning sign for other Republicans, including Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, who also voted to impeach Trump and has helped lead the House panel investigating the Jan. 6 attack. She's facing a competitive primary in August from a Trump-backed challenger.

Another notable factor in the Mace contest: It amounted to a proxy battle between Trump, who is contemplating a 2024 White House campaign, and former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, who is also considering a run.

Trump backed former state Rep. Katie Arrington in the race, while Haley, a former South Carolina governor, effectively challenged Trump by campaigning with Mace.

TRUMP, MCCONNELL ALIGN ON LAXALT IN NEVADA

Trump and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell don't agree on much. One rare exception is Laxalt, who won Nevada's Republican Senate primary.

The two Republican leaders haven't been on speaking terms since December 2020, when McConnell acknowledged that Biden defeated Trump. But they both endorsed Laxalt, who defeated retired Army Capt. Sam Brown, a West Point graduate and Purple Heart recipient who ran an unexpectedly strong

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campaign as a conservative outsider.

The mutual support, which brought together the Trump and establishment wings of the party, demonstrates the intense focus Republicans have placed on flipping the seat held by first-term Democratic Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, who is considered among the most vulnerable senators.

TEXAS HOUSE SEAT FLIPS

A once solidly Democratic district in South Texas will now be represented by a Republican after Mayra Flores won a special primary election to finish the term of former Democratic Rep. Filemon Vela, who resigned this year to become a lobbyist.

Flores, a GOP organizer who is the daughter of migrant workers, will only hold the seat for several months before the district is redrawn to be more favorable to Democrats. But her victory in the heavily Hispanic Rio Grande Valley is an ominous sign for Democrats.

They are not only losing ground in a region they long dominated, but Flores' success as a candidate also demonstrates that Republicans are making inroads with Hispanic voters.

Her win also has implications for Democrats' ambitions in Congress, denying House Speaker Nancy Pelosi an opportunity to add to her slim two-vote margin to pass legislation.

FROM SOUTH CAROLINA TO THE WHITE HOUSE?

Also in South Carolina, Republican Tim Scott coasted to an easy and unopposed primary win Tuesday for what he says will be his last term in the Senate. But another state is also on his mind — the presidential proving ground of Iowa.

It's become an article of faith that there are no "accidental" trips to Iowa by ambitious politicians. And Scott, the Senate's sole Black Republican, has made several visits, including one last week.

He certainly has the money to contend. As he campaigned for reelection to the Senate, Scott amassed a jaw-dropping \$42 million. That's more than double the \$15.7 million average cost of a winning Senate campaign in the 2018 midterms. It's also more than enough to launch a Republican presidential campaign in 2024.

Even before his recent appearance at an Iowa Republican Party event, Scott has been raising his profile. He spoke at the 2020 Republican National Convention and delivered the Republican response to President Joe Biden's first joint congressional address. He's also visited New Hampshire, another early-voting presidential state, and delivered a speech at the Reagan Presidential Library, another frequent stop for Republicans eyeing the White House.

A LEPAGE COMEBACK?

Governor's races are often overlooked. But the general election contest in Maine is among a handful of governor's races that are likely to be competitive this year, along with Georgia, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin and Arizona.

Tuesday's gubernatorial primaries were a mere formality, since the races were uncontested. But they locked in what promises to be a doozy of a general election between two longtime foes.

Democratic incumbent Janet Mills is seeking a second term. She's a former district attorney, state lawmaker and Maine attorney general who frequently clashed with Republican Paul LePage when he was governor. Now LePage, who has described himself as "Trump before there was Trump," is challenging her.

The contest will test the appeal of Trumpian candidates in New England. The Democratic Governors Association has already booked \$5 million in TV ad time.

That Mills and LePage are even competing against each other is somewhat of a surprise.

LePage moved to Florida and swore off politics when he left office in 2019 following two raucous terms that often drew national attention for his indecorous remarks.

But the draw of elected office was apparently too great. By 2020, he was back in Maine pledging to challenge his old nemesis.

In Ukraine, mines take lives even after fighting moves on

By JOHN LEICESTER and YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

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MAKARIV, Ukraine (AP) — The truck driver had the radio on, his daughter's stuffed toy keeping him company, and was bouncing his lumbering vehicle down one of the innumerable dirt tracks in Ukraine that are vital thoroughfares in the country's vast agricultural heartlands.

Then the right rear wheel hit a Soviet-era TM-62 anti-tank mine. The explosion blew Vadym Schvydchenko and his daughter's toy clean out of the cabin. The truck, and his livelihood, went up in flames.

Astoundingly, the 40-year-old escaped with just minor leg and head wounds. Others haven't been so lucky. Russia's war in Ukraine is spreading a deadly litter of mines, bombs and other explosives. They are killing civilians, disrupting planting, complicating the rebuilding of homes and villages, and will continue taking lives and limbs long after the fighting stops.

Often, blast victims are farmers and other rural workers with little choice but to use mined roads and plow mined fields, in a country relied on for grain and other crops that feed the world.

Schvydchenko said he'll steer clear of dirt tracks for the foreseeable future, although they're sometimes the only route to fields and rural settlements. Mushroom-picking in the woods has also lost its appeal to him.

"I'm afraid something like this can happen again," he said.

Ukraine is now one of the most mined countries in Europe. The east of the country, fought over with Russia-backed separatists since 2014, was already contaminated by mines even before the Feb. 24 invasion multiplied the scale and complexity of the dangers both there and elsewhere.

Ukraine's State Emergency Service said last week that 300,000 square kilometers (115,000 square miles) — the size of Arizona or Italy — need to be cleared. The ongoing fighting will only expand the area.

The war's deadly remnants will "continue to be a hidden threat for many years to come," said Mairi Cunningham, who leads clearance efforts in Ukraine for The Halo Trust, a demining NGO that got \$4 million in U.S. government funding in May for its work in the country.

There's no complete government count of mine deaths since the invasion, but every week authorities have reported cases of civilians killed and wounded. Cunningham said her group has counted 52 civilian deaths and 65 injuries since February and "that's likely under-reported." The majority were from anti-tank mines, in agricultural areas, she said.

On a mobile app called "Demining Ukraine" that officials launched last month, people can send photos, video and the geolocation of explosive objects they come across, for subsequent removal. The app got more than 2,000 tip-offs in its first week.

The track where Schvydchenko had his brush with death is still used, despite now being marked with bright red warning signs bearing a white skull and crossbones. It scythes through corn fields on the outskirts of Makariv — a once comely town west of Kyiv that bears the battle scars of Russia's failed assault on the capital in the war's early weeks.

Even with the Russian soldiers gone, danger lurks amid the surrounding poppy meadows, fields and woodlands. Deminers found another explosive charge — undetonated — just meters (feet) away from Schvydchenko's blown-up truck. On another track outside the nearby village of Andriivka, three people were killed in March by a mine that ripped open their minivan, spewing its cargo of food jars and tin cans now rusting in the dirt.

In a field close by, a tractor driver was wounded in May by an anti-tank mine that hurled the wreckage onto another mine, which also detonated. Halo Trust workers are now methodically scouring that site — where Russian troops dug foxholes — for any other devices.

Cunningham said the chaotic way the battle for Kyiv unfolded complicates the task of finding mines. Russian forces thrust toward the capital but were repelled by Ukrainian defenders.

"Often it was Russians held an area, put some anti-vehicle mines nearby — a few in and around their position — and then left," she said. "It's scattered."

Mines are still being laid on the battlefields, now concentrated to the east and south where Russia has focused its offensive since its soldiers withdrew from around Kyiv and the north, badly bloodied.

A Ukrainian unit that buried TM-62 mines on a forest track in the eastern Donbas region this week, in

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holes scooped out with spades, told The Associated Press that the aim was to prevent Russian troops from advancing toward their trenches.

Russian booby-trapping has sometimes had no clear military rhyme or reason, Ukrainian officials say. In towns around Kyiv, explosive experts found devices in unpredictable places.

When Tetiana Kutsenko, 71, got back her home near Makariv that Russian troops had occupied, she found bloodstains and an apparent bullet hole on the bathroom floor and tripwires in her back yard.

The thin strands of copper wire had been rigged to explosive detonators.

"I'm afraid to go to the woods now," she said. "Now, I'm looking down every time I take a step."

Europe stocks up, Asia mixed ahead of Fed rate hike decision

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Asian stock markets were mixed while Europe opened higher Wednesday ahead of a Federal Reserve decision on how sharply to raise interest rates to cool U.S. inflation.

London, Frankfurt and Shanghai advanced. Tokyo and Sydney declined. Oil prices edged lower.

Wall Street futures were higher after the benchmark S&P 500 index lost 0.4% on Tuesday.

Traders expect the Fed rate hike to be three-quarters of a percentage point, or triple the usual margin. They worry aggressive action to cool inflation that is running at a four-decade high might tip the biggest global economy into recession.

A "hawkish surprise" from the Fed could be a "further shock to risk assets," Anderson Alves of ActivTrades said in a report. "Money markets are already pricing around 90% possibility of such action."

In early trading, the FTSE 100 in London rose 1.1% to 7,262.53 and Frankfurt's DAX gained 1.4% to 13,498.03. The CAC 40 in Paris advanced 1.4% to 6,033.15.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 future gained 0.8% and that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was up 0.7%.

On Tuesday, the S&P 500 lost 0.4%. It closed Monday at 21.8% below its Jan. 3 peak. That puts it in a bear market, or a drop of 20% from the last market top.

The Dow fell 0.5% and the Nasdaq composite rose 0.2%.

The Shanghai Composite Index gained 0.5% Wednesday to 3,305.41 after government data showed Chinese factory activity rebounded in May as anti-virus controls that shut down businesses in Shanghai and other industrial centers eased.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng gained 1.1% to 21,308.21 while the Nikkei 225 in Tokyo lost 1.1% to 26,326.16.

The Kospi in Seoul shed 1.8% to 2,447.538 after South Korea's unemployment rate in May ticked up 0.1 percentage point to 2.8%.

Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 sank 1.3% to 6,601.00.

India's Sensex gained less than 0.1% at 52,728.02. New Zealand, Jakarta and Bangkok declined while Singapore advanced.

Expectations of an unusually big Fed rate hike increased after government data Friday showed consumer inflation accelerated in May instead of easing as hoped.

The Fed is scrambling to get prices under control after being criticized earlier for reacting too slowly to inflation pressures.

Britain's central bank also has raised rates. The European Central Bank says it will do so next month.

Japan's central bank has kept rates near record lows. That has caused the yen to fall to two-decade lows below 135 to the dollar as traders shift capital in search of higher returns.

Markets also have been jolted by Russia's attack on Ukraine, which has pushed oil prices to history-making highs above \$120 per barrel, and by virus outbreaks in China that led to the closure of factories and disrupted supply chains.

In energy markets, benchmark U.S. crude lost 50 cents to \$118.43 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract lost \$2 on Tuesday to \$118.93. Brent crude, the price basis for international oil trading, shed 41 cents to \$120.76 per barrel in London. It fell \$1.10 the previous

session to \$121.17.

The dollar declined to 134.61 yen from Tuesday's 135.30 yen. The euro gained to \$1.0498 from \$1.0411.

UK vows more Rwanda deportation flights after legal setback

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The British government vowed Wednesday to organize more flights to deport asylum-seekers to Rwanda, after a last-minute court judgment grounded the first plane due to take off under the contentious policy.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said "preparation for the next flight begins now" despite legal rulings that none of the migrants earmarked for deportation could be sent to the East African country.

Under a deal signed in April between Britain and Rwanda, the U.K. government plans to send some migrants who arrive in the U.K. as stowaways or in small boats to Rwanda, where their asylum claims will be processed. If successful, they will stay in the African country, rather than returning to Britain.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government says the plan is a legitimate way to protect lives and thwart the criminal gangs that send migrants on risky journeys across the English Channel.

Human rights groups argue that the plan rides roughshod over the protections afforded to refugees under rules set up after World War II. They have called the idea unworkable, inhumane and a waste of money — Britain paid Rwanda 120 million pounds (\$150 million) up front for the deal.

Critics include leaders of the Church of England and — according to British news reports — heir to the throne Prince Charles, who is due to visit Rwanda next week as representative of his mother Queen Elizabeth II.

U.K. courts refused last week to ground the first flight, scheduled for Tuesday, but the number due to be aboard was whittled down by appeals and legal challenges. The European Court of Human Rights — an international tribunal supported by 46 countries including the U.K. — ruled late Tuesday that an Iraqi man due to be on the plane shouldn't fly, saying he faced "a real risk of irreversible harm." That allowed the final few migrants on the plane to win reprieve.

U.K. Cabinet minister Therese Coffey said the government was "surprised and disappointed" by the ruling.

"I think the public will be surprised at European judges overruling British judges," she told Sky News.

Some lawmakers from the governing Conservative Party say Britain should withdraw from the Strasbourg-based European human rights court, which the U.K. helped to set up.

The European court's judgment on Tuesday didn't overrule British decisions, which declined to ground the flight as a whole. The ECHR dealt with the cases of an individual due to be aboard.

A full trial of the legality of the U.K. government plan is due to be heard in the British courts by the end of July.

Human rights lawyer Frances Swaine, who represents one of the people due to be sent to Rwanda, urged the government to wait for that decision before organizing any more deportation flights.

"I would be sitting back and thinking was it worth it, either from a financial or a legal perspective, to organize one of these very expensive flights again when they've been so unsuccessful this time around on legal grounds," she said.

The British government says it welcomes refugees who come by approved immigration routes, but wants to put the criminal smuggling gangs who operate dangerous Channel crossings out of business.

Migration and refugee groups point out that there are no approved legal routes for most people, with the exception of those fleeing Afghanistan and Ukraine. The U.K. receives fewer asylum applications than comparably sized European countries such as France and Germany.

There are also concerns about the migrants' treatment in Rwanda, the most densely populated country in Africa. While Rwanda was the site of a genocide that killed hundreds of thousands of people in 1994, the country has built a reputation for stability and economic progress since then, the British government argues.

Critics say that stability comes at the cost of political repression.

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More than 28,000 migrants entered the U.K. across the Channel last year, up from 8,500 in 2020, and about 10,000 have arrived so far this year. Dozens have died, including 27 people in November when a single boat capsized.

Johnson, fighting for his political life amid concerns about his leadership and ethics, has promised to stop the criminal gangs behind the perilous journeys — a “tough on immigration” message that plays well with the Conservative grassroots.

Migration groups say the Rwanda plan is unlikely to deter desperate people making risky journeys to Britain. More than 440 people were brought ashore by in southern England from small boats on Tuesday, including a heavily pregnant woman and parents with children.

Biden tells oil refiners: Produce more gas, fewer profits

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

President Joe Biden on Wednesday called on U.S. oil refiners to produce more gasoline and diesel, saying their profits have tripled during a time of war between Russia and Ukraine as Americans struggle with record high prices at the pump.

“The crunch that families are facing deserves immediate action,” Biden wrote in the draft of a letter to oil refiners obtained by The Associated Press. “Your companies need to work with my Administration to bring forward concrete, near-term solutions that address the crisis.”

Gas prices nationwide are averaging roughly \$5 a gallon, an economic burden for many Americans and a political threat for the president’s fellow Democrats going into the midterm elections. Broader inflation began to rise last year as the U.S. economy recovered from the coronavirus pandemic, but it accelerated in recent months as energy and food prices climbed after Russia invaded Ukraine in February and disrupted global commodity markets.

The government reported on Friday that consumer prices had jumped 8.6% from a year ago, the worst increase in more than 40 years.

The draft letter notes that gas prices were averaging \$4.25 a gallon when oil was last near the current price of \$120 a barrel in March. That 75-cent difference in average gas prices in a matter of just a few months reflects both a shortage of refinery capacity and profits that “are currently at their highest levels ever recorded,” the letter states.

As Biden sees it, refineries are capitalizing on the uncertainties caused by “a time of war.” His message that corporate greed is contributing to higher prices has been controversial among many economists, yet the claim may have some resonance with voters.

Some liberal lawmakers have proposed cracking down on corporate profits amid the higher inflation. Sen. Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent, in March proposed a 95% tax on profits in excess of companies’ pre-pandemic averages.

The president has harshly criticized what he views as profiteering amid a global crisis that could potentially push Europe and other parts of the world into a recession, saying after a speech Friday that ExxonMobil “made more money than God this year.” ExxonMobil responded by saying it has already informed the administration of its planned investments to increase oil production and refining capacity.

“There is no question that (Russian President) Vladimir Putin is principally responsible for the intense financial pain the American people and their families are bearing,” Biden’s draft letter says. “But amid a war that has raised gasoline prices more than \$1.70 per gallon, historically high refinery profit margins are worsening that pain.”

The letter says the administration is ready to “use all reasonable and appropriate Federal Government tools and emergency authorities to increase refinery capacity and output in the near term, and to ensure that every region of this country is appropriately supplied.” It notes that Biden has already released oil from the U.S. strategic reserve and increased ethanol blending standards, though neither action put a lasting downward pressure on prices.

The president is sending the letter to Marathon Petroleum, Valero Energy, ExxonMobil, Phillips 66,

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Chevron, BP and Shell.

He also has directed Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm to convene an emergency meeting and consult with the National Petroleum Council, a federal advisory group that is drawn from the energy sector.

Biden is asking each company to explain to Granholm any drop in refining capacity since 2020, when the pandemic began. He also wants the companies to provide "any concrete ideas that would address the immediate inventory, price, and refining capacity issues in the coming months -- including transportation measures to get refined product to market."

There may be limits on how much more capacity can be added. The U.S. Energy Information Administration on Friday released estimates that "refinery utilization will reach a monthly average level of 96% twice this summer, near the upper limits of what refiners can consistently maintain."

The draft letter notes that roughly 3 million barrels a day of refining capacity around the world have gone offline since the pandemic began. In the U.S., refining capacity fell by more than 800,000 barrels a day in 2020.

Russia's economic forum to be far smaller but moves forward

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Organizers of Russia's showpiece investment gathering are telling foreign participants to be sure to bring cash — not necessarily for making investments, but for spending money.

With Russia under wide sanctions after sending troops into Ukraine, most foreign bank cards don't work in the country. The advice for those at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, which starts Wednesday and runs through Saturday, is a quiet acknowledgment of the economic difficulties Russia faces as it tries to promote itself to international businesses.

The attendance list is another sign of Russia's uncertain economic prospects. As of early June, about 2,700 business representatives from 90 countries were expected to attend — far below the 13,500 participants from 140 countries reported last year.

Organizers did not provide a list of foreign businesses attending, but the program for the more than 100 panel discussions showed few speakers from outside Russia. Some were from China, and the trade minister of the United Arab Emirates is scheduled.

The forum, often characterized as Russia's analogue of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, aims to portray the country as orderly and full of attractive opportunities for clever and adventurous investors. This year's program carries the theme to an extent that is overly optimistic for Russia's straitened circumstances.

Several sessions focus on developing Russia's tourist potential, despite the difficulty of foreigners even getting to the country amid flight bans by Western countries. Another session proclaims Russia as "The Land of Opportunity" but its introduction complains that "the policy of 'abolishing Russian culture' abroad, closing borders and interruption of banking services makes it difficult to choose Russia as a place to study or work."

Less than four months after wide-ranging sanctions were imposed and hundreds of foreign companies pulled out of Russia, the full effect on the Russian economy is unclear.

Shuttered storefronts give Moscow's shopping malls a foreboding atmosphere, but officials claim Russian entrepreneurs can step in to revive the consumer economy — as shown over the weekend when a Russian tycoon opened the first of the restaurants he bought from McDonald's.

The ruble, after losing half its value in the early days of the Ukraine conflict, has strengthened to levels not seen in several years after Russia imposed strict financial measures like capital controls, a heartening image for Russians but possibly a long-term problem making exports more expensive.

One of the most closely watched sessions at the forum is likely to be Thursday's panel on Russia's economic prospects featuring heavyweights including Finance Minister Anton Siluanov and Elvira Nabiullina, head of Russia's central bank.

Nabiullina so far has given ambiguous assessments, saying recently that "the effects of the sanctions are less acute than we feared ... but it is premature to say that the full effect of the sanctions has manifested itself."

One of the forum's most popular events won't be held: President Vladimir Putin's question-and-answer session with executives of major international news organizations. Instead, he will meet with the heads of Russian news media and "front-line reporters" from Russia's military operation in Ukraine, according to Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

Denis Pushilin, leader of the Ukrainian separatist Donetsk People's Republic, has announced he plans to attend the forum. A representative of the Taliban also is expected, although Russia formally designates the Taliban as a terrorist group.

Study: Facebook fails to catch East Africa extremist content

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — A new study has found that Facebook has failed to catch Islamic State group and al-Shabab extremist content in posts aimed at East Africa as the region remains under threat from violent attacks and Kenya prepares to vote in a closely contested national election.

An Associated Press series last year, drawing on leaked documents shared by a Facebook whistleblower, showed how the platform repeatedly failed to act on sensitive content including hate speech in many places around the world.

The new and unrelated two-year study by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue found Facebook posts that openly supported IS or the Somalia-based al-Shabab — even ones carrying al-Shabab branding and calling for violence in languages including Swahili, Somali and Arabic — were allowed to be widely shared.

The report expresses particular concern with narratives linked to the extremist groups that accuse Kenyan government officials and politicians of being enemies of Muslims, who make up a significant part of the East African nation's population. The report notes that "xenophobia toward Somali communities in Kenya has long been rife."

The al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab has been described as the deadliest extremist group in Africa, and it has carried out high-profile attacks in recent years in Kenya far from its base in neighboring Somalia.

The new study found no evidence of Facebook posts that planned specific attacks, but its authors and Kenyan experts warn that allowing even general calls to violence is a threat to the closely contested August presidential election. Already, concerns about hate speech around the vote, both online and off, are growing.

"They chip away at that trust in democratic institutions," report researcher Moustafa Ayad told the AP of the extremist posts.

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue found 445 public profiles, some with duplicate accounts, sharing content linked to the two extremist groups and tagging more than 17,000 other accounts. Among the narratives shared were accusations that Kenya and the United States are enemies of Islam, and among the posted content was praise by al-Shabab's official media arm for the killing of Kenyan soldiers.

Even when Facebook took down pages, they would quickly be reconstituted under different names, Ayad said, describing serious lapses by both artificial intelligence and human moderators.

"Why are they not acting on rampant content put up by al-Shabab?" he asked. "You'd think that after 20 years of dealing with al-Qaida, they'd have a good understanding of the language they use, the symbolism."

He said the authors have discussed their findings with Facebook and some of the accounts have been taken down. He said the authors also plan to share the findings with Kenya's government.

Ayad said both civil society and government bodies such as Kenya's national counterterrorism center should be aware of the problem and encourage Facebook to do more.

Asked for comment, Facebook requested a copy of the report before its publication, which was refused. The company then responded with an emailed statement.

"We've already removed a number of these pages and profiles and will continue to investigate once we

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have access to the full findings," Facebook wrote Tuesday, not giving any name, citing security concerns. "We don't allow terrorist groups to use Facebook, and we remove content praising or supporting these organizations when we become aware of it. We have specialized teams — which include native Arabic, Somali and Swahili speakers — dedicated to this effort."

Concerns about Facebook's monitoring of content are global, say critics.

"As we have seen in India, the United States, the Philippines, Eastern Europe and elsewhere, the consequences of failing to moderate content posted by extremist groups and supporters can be deadly, and can push democracy past the brink," the watchdog The Real Facebook Oversight Board said of the new report, adding that Kenya at the moment is a "microcosm of everything that's wrong" with Facebook owner Meta.

"The question is, who should ask Facebook to step up and do its work?" asked Leah Kimathi, a Kenyan consultant in governance, peace and security, who suggested that government bodies, civil society and consumers all can play a role. "Facebook is a business. The least they can do is ensure that something they're selling to us is not going to kill us."

Rice loses House seat after impeaching Trump; Mace holds on

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — U.S. Rep. Tom Rice of South Carolina has been ousted from Congress in his Republican primary after voting to impeach Donald Trump over the Jan. 6 insurrection. He is the first of the 10 House Republicans who voted to impeach Trump to lose a reelection bid.

Rice, a five-term congressman, was defeated Tuesday by state Rep. Russell Fry, who was endorsed by Trump. Rice was a strong supporter of Trump's policies in Washington but said he was left no choice but to impeach Trump over his failure to calm the mob that violently sought to stop the certification of Joe Biden's victory.

U.S. Rep. Nancy Mace of South Carolina also angered Trump, but she sought to make amends and won her GOP primary over her own Trump-backed challenger.

In other races Tuesday, Democratic Rep. Dina Titus in Nevada handily defeated her progressive challenger, while Republican Rep. Mark Amodei won his primary against a son of one of the state's most famous sports figures. In Maine, a former Republican congressman is hoping to reclaim his seat in November in a rematch with the Democrat who defeated him four years ago.

In Texas, Republican Mayra Flores narrowed Nancy Pelosi's Democratic majority in the House by winning a special primary election to serve the remaining months of former Democratic Rep. Filemon Vela's term.

Key congressional races in Tuesday's primary elections in Maine, Nevada, South Carolina and Texas:

TWO SOUTH CAROLINA REPUBLICANS WHO CROSSED TRUMP HAVE DIFFERENT FATES

Rice, who attracted a half-dozen GOP challengers after his vote to impeach Trump, had stood by his decision, acknowledging that it could lead to his ouster but saying he followed his conscience.

Fry, the House majority whip, has served in the South Carolina state House since 2015. Trump had campaigned with Fry earlier this year in the 7th Congressional District, a Republican stronghold that includes the tourist hotspot of Myrtle Beach and a number of inland, rural areas.

Trump had vowed revenge against the 10 House Republicans who crossed party lines to impeach him. Four of the 10 decided against seeking reelection. A fifth, Rep. David Valadao of California, is still waiting to hear the results of his primary election from last week; he is fighting for the second spot in a race where the top two finishers advance to the general election in November.

Trump had less luck in his quest to oust Mace, who managed to hold off a primary challenge Tuesday from former state Rep. Katie Arrington in South Carolina's 1st Congressional District, which includes Charleston. Despite his anger toward Mace for criticizing him over his role in the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection, he congratulated her Tuesday and predicted she would win in November.

In her victory speech, Mace thanked her high-profile endorsers, including former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley and former White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney.

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Asked how she would work to keep the district, which has changed political hands in the last two election cycles, Mace seemed to commit to the same bipartisan outreach for which Arrington had criticized her.

"I am willing to work with anyone who's willing to work with me, full stop," Mace told reporters.

Unlike Rice, Mace sought to make amends for angering Trump. Earlier this year, she filmed a video in New York outside Trump Tower to remind her constituents that she was one of the former president's earliest supporters.

Mace will face Democrat Annie Andrews in the general election.

REPUBLICANS FLIP US HOUSE SEAT IN TEXAS

Republicans have gained an additional House seat for the rest of the year in a special election victory that they see as a sign of things to come along Texas' heavily Hispanic southern border.

Flores will finish the final months of former Democratic Rep. Vela's term. He left Congress earlier this year for the private sector.

Her victory Tuesday over three other challengers — including two Democrats — is a symbolically important win for Republicans, who have spent the past two years aggressively trying to make new inroads with Hispanic voters in South Texas.

Flores is the daughter of migrant workers and a local GOP organizer. She will also be the GOP nominee for the seat in November, but that election will be under a new district map that is more favorable to Democrats.

Her opponent will be Democratic Rep. Vicente Gonzalez, who moved from a neighboring district because of redistricting.

NEVADA REPUBLICAN DEFEATS CANDIDATE WITH FAMOUS LAST NAME

Rep. Mark Amodei won his primary challenge against Danny Tarkanian, a son of legendary University of Nevada, Las Vegas basketball coach Jerry Tarkanian. The younger Tarkanian failed to knock off the six-term incumbent in the sprawling, rural northern district that no Democrat has won in its 40 years.

Over the years, Tarkanian has launched two Senate campaigns and lost numerous congressional bids in two other districts. But he created enough of a stir in 2018 in a primary challenge to Sen. Dean Heller that Trump intervened to persuade him to drop out and run again for the House.

Amodei won a special election for the seat in 2011 after Heller was appointed to fill an unexpired Senate term.

NEVADA DEMOCRAT CRUISES TO VICTORY IN STATE'S BLUEST DISTRICT

Titus, the dean of Nevada's congressional delegation, easily beat back a progressive challenge from Amy Vilela in the state's most liberal district.

Vilela, who lost a primary bid in a neighboring district to Rep. Steven Horsford in 2018, had been endorsed by Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Rep. Cori Bush of Missouri.

Titus, who has one of the most liberal voting records in Congress, was a leading advocate for Biden during his 2020 presidential campaign. She has served six House terms and chairs a transportation subcommittee.

She has complained about how Nevada redrew its congressional districts after the 2020 census, turning her safely Democratic district into one where the party's registered voters have only a single-digit margin.

FORMER MAINE CONGRESSMAN FACES 2018 REMATCH IN NOVEMBER

A former congressman who is bidding to return to his old seat in Maine held off a challenge from a fellow Republican.

Bruce Poliquin represented Maine's 2nd Congressional District from 2015 to 2019 until losing to the current seat holder, Democratic Rep. Jared Golden. Golden's victory over Poliquin was the first congressional election decided by ranked-choice voting in U.S. history.

This year, Poliquin is hoping to win a rematch over Golden in one of the most closely watched races of the 2022 midterm elections. He staved off a challenge from Liz Caruso, the first selectwoman of the tiny town of Caratunk, in Tuesday's primary.

So long, Internet Explorer. The browser retires today

By RICHARD JACOBSEN Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Internet Explorer is finally headed out to pasture.

As of Wednesday, Microsoft will no longer support the once-dominant browser that legions of web surfers loved to hate — and a few still claim to adore. The 27-year-old application now joins BlackBerry phones, dial-up modems and Palm Pilots in the dustbin of tech history.

IE's demise was not a surprise. A year ago, Microsoft said that it was putting an end to Internet Explorer on June 15, 2022, pushing users to its Edge browser, which was launched in 2015.

The company made clear then it was time to move on.

"Not only is Microsoft Edge a faster, more secure and more modern browsing experience than Internet Explorer, but it is also able to address a key concern: compatibility for older, legacy websites and applications," Sean Lyndersay, general manager of Microsoft Edge Enterprise, wrote in a May 2021 blog post.

Users marked Explorer's passing on Twitter, with some referring to it as a "bug-ridden, insecure POS" or the "top browser for installing other browsers." For others it was a moment for 90's nostalgia memes, while The Wall Street Journal quoted a 22-year-old who was sad to see IE go.

Microsoft released the first version of Internet Explorer in 1995, the antediluvian era of web surfing dominated by the first widely popular browser, Netscape Navigator. Its launch signaled the beginning of the end of Navigator: Microsoft went on to tie IE and its ubiquitous Windows operating system together so tightly that many people simply used it by default instead of Navigator.

The Justice Department sued Microsoft in 1997, saying it violated an earlier consent decree by requiring computer makers to use its browser as a condition of using Windows. It eventually agreed to settle the antitrust battle in 2002 over its use of its Windows monopoly to squash competitors. It also tangled with European regulators who said that tying Internet Explorer to Windows gave it an unfair advantage over rivals such as Mozilla's Firefox, Opera and Google's Chrome.

Users, meanwhile, complained that IE was slow, prone to crashing and vulnerable to hacks. IE's market share, which in the early 2000s was over 90%, began to fade as users found more appealing alternatives.

Today, the Chrome browser dominates with roughly a 65% share of the worldwide browser market, followed by Apple's Safari with 19%, according to internet analytics company Statcounter. IE's heir, Edge, lags with about about 4%, just ahead of Firefox.

Spy agencies' focus on China could snare Chinese Americans

By NOMAAN MERCHANT and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As U.S. intelligence agencies ramp up their efforts against China, top officials acknowledge they may also end up collecting more phone calls and emails from Chinese Americans, raising new concerns about spying affecting civil liberties.

A new report from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence makes several recommendations, including expanding unconscious bias training and reiterating internally that federal law bans targeting someone solely due to their ethnicity.

U.S. intelligence agencies are under constant pressure to better understand China's decision-making on issues including nuclear weapons, geopolitics and the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic — and have responded with new centers and programs focusing on Beijing. While there's bipartisan support for a tougher U.S. approach to China, civil rights groups and advocates are concerned about the disparate effect of enhanced surveillance on people of Chinese descent.

As one example, people who speak to relatives or contacts in China could be more likely to have their communications swept up, though intelligence agencies can't quantify how often due in part to civil liberties concerns.

There's a long history of U.S. government discrimination against groups of citizens in the name of national security. Japanese Americans were forced into internment camps during World War II, Black leaders were spied upon during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and mosques were surveilled after the

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Sept. 11 attacks. Chinese Americans have faced discrimination going back to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first law to explicitly ban immigration from a specific ethnic community.

Aryani Ong, co-founder of the advocacy group Asian American Federal Employees for Non-Discrimination, noted that people of Asian descent are sometimes "not fully trusted as loyal Americans." She said the report, published May 31, would be useful to conversations about what she described as the conflation of civil rights and national defense.

Ong and other advocates pointed to the Justice Department's "China Initiative," created to target economic espionage and hacking operations by Beijing. DOJ dropped the name of the program after it had come to be associated with faltering prosecutions of Asian American professors at U.S. college campuses.

"Often we hear responses that we cannot weaken our national security, as if protecting constitutional rights of Asian Americans (is) contrary to our defense," said Ong, who is Indonesian and Chinese American.

But in trying to produce demographic data on the impact of surveillance, the intelligence agencies say there's a paradox: Examining the backgrounds of U.S. citizens whose data is collected requires more intrusion into those people's lives.

"To try to find out that type of information would require additional collection that would absolutely not be authorized because it isn't for the foreign intelligence purpose for which the intelligence community gets its authorities," Ben Huebner, the chief civil liberties officer for Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines, said in an interview.

But, Huebner added, "I think the fact that we can't analytically get to those types of metrics doesn't mean that we get to sort of drop the ball on this."

One potential disparity highlighted by the report is what's known as "incidental collection."

In surveilling a foreign target, intelligence agencies can obtain the target's communications with a U.S. citizen who isn't under investigation. The agencies also collect phone calls or emails of U.S. citizens as they sweep for foreign communications.

The National Security Agency has vast powers to surveil domestic and foreign communications, as revealed in part by documents leaked by Edward Snowden. Under NSA rules, two people have to sign off on putting any new foreign target under surveillance. The NSA masks the identities of U.S. citizens under federal law and intelligence guidelines and turns over potential domestic leads to the FBI.

The FBI can access some of the NSA's collection without a warrant. Civil rights advocates have long argued that searches under what's known as Section 702 disproportionately target minority communities.

The ODNI report notes that Chinese Americans "may be an increased risk of such incidental collection," as are Americans not of Chinese ancestry who have business or personal ties to China. The report recommends a review of artificial intelligence programs to ensure they "avoid perpetuating historical biases and discrimination." It also suggests agencies across the intelligence community expand unconscious bias training for people who handle information from incidental collection.

ODNI is also studying delays in granting security clearances and whether people of Chinese or Asian descent face longer or more invasive background investigations. While there is no publicly available data on clearances, some applicants from minority communities have questioned whether they undergo extra scrutiny due to their race or ethnicity. According to the report, U.S. intelligence assesses that "neither race nor ethnicity is the primary criterion utilized by the PRC's intelligence services in their recruitment of intelligence assets."

Sen. Mark Warner, a Virginia Democrat who chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee, said in a statement that he welcomed the recommendations "to increase awareness of existing non-discrimination prohibitions and improve transparency around the security clearance process."

But Sen. Marco Rubio, a Florida Republican who is the committee's vice chairman, said requiring new training on unconscious bias and cultural competency was a distraction.

"The Chinese Communist Party likes nothing more than when we are distracted by divisive, internal politics," Rubio said in a statement.

The ODNI report highlights FBI training on race and ethnicity as a "best practice" in the intelligence community. In a statement, the FBI said that there was "no place for bias and prejudice in our communi-

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ties" and that law enforcement "must work to eliminate these flawed beliefs in our agencies to best serve those we are sworn to protect. The FBI said its agents are trained in "obedience to the Constitution" and in "treating everyone with dignity, empathy and respect."

A senior NSA official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive intelligence matters, said the agency currently requires unconscious bias training for managers and hiring officials, but not all employees. The NSA does train intelligence analysts on rules that prohibit the collection of intelligence for suppressing dissent or disadvantaging people based on their race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, and is reviewing ODNI's recommendations.

The CIA late last year issued new instructions to officers discouraging the use of the word "Chinese" to describe China's government. The guidance suggests referring to the leadership as "China," "the People's Republic of China" or "PRC," or "Beijing," while using "Chinese" to refer to the people, language or culture.

"It's important to be clear that our concern is about the threat posed by the People's Republic of China, the PRC — not about the people of China, let alone fellow Americans of Chinese or Asian descent," CIA Director William Burns said in a recent speech at the Georgia Institute of Technology. "It is a profound mistake to conflate the two."

Men, women split on equity gains since Title IX, poll shows

By COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

Ask a man about gender equality, and you're likely to hear the U.S. has made great strides in the 50 years since the landmark anti-discrimination law Title IX was passed. Ask a woman, and the answer probably will be quite different.

According to a new poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and the National Women's History Museum, most U.S. adults believe the country has made at least some progress toward equality for women since 1972. That's the year Congress passed Title IX, a one-sentence law that forbids discrimination based on sex in education. But there are sharp differences in opinion over just how much headway has been made and in what facets of life.

Some of the widest divisions are, perhaps unsurprisingly, between men and women: 61% of men say the country has made a great deal or a lot of progress toward gender equality, while 37% of women said the same, according to the poll.

Women were more likely to point to only some progress — 50% held that view — while 13% said the country has made just a little or no progress.

"We've fought a lot, we've gained a little bit, but we haven't really gained equality," said Brenda Theiss, 68, a retired optician in Vinemont, Alabama. Progress that started in the '70s seems to have stalled, she said, with continued wage gaps and battles over women's reproductive rights.

Passed in the wake of other seminal civil rights laws, Title IX was intended to expand protections for women into the sphere of education. Today it's often known for its impact on women's sports and the fight against sexual harassment and assault.

As the nation approaches the law's 50th anniversary, most Americans have positive views about it. Sixty-three percent said they approve of the law, including majorities of men and women. Only 5% did not approve of it, while the rest said they were neutral or not sure.

But Americans are split along several faults when it comes to assessing advancements.

Along with men, Republicans are also more likely to see a great deal or a lot of progress, with 65% holding that view. Among Democrats, 39% said the same.

Among women, those 50 and older are more likely than their younger peers to see a great deal or a lot of progress in specific facets of life, such as in leadership, employment and education opportunities.

Milan Ramsey, 29, said it's "remarkable how far we have come considering how unequal it still feels."

She says sexism is hard to avoid in today's society, whether it's in unequal access to health care or in everyday slights like getting catcalled. But she knows it has been worse. Once, looking at her mom's childhood photos, her mom pointed out a pair of pants that she said was her first pair ever.

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"She remembers that because they weren't allowed to wear pants until she was like 7 in public school," said Ramsey, of Santa Monica, California.

As a young girl growing up in the '70s, Karen Dunlap says she benefited from Title IX right away. Soccer leagues for girls started springing up for the first time, she said. Her mom rushed to sign her up.

"I really felt the immediate difference as a kid," said Dunlap, of Vancouver, Washington. "But at the same time, it didn't stay that way."

Dunlap went on to compete in swimming and water polo at Pomona College in California, and she credits Title IX for the opportunity. It also ensured the school gave enough money for racing swimsuits and a team van, she said. But in the classroom, some male professors referred to her as a "coed," and some seemed to look down on female students, she said.

Later, when her daughters went to college, Dunlap was disappointed to see them fighting familiar battles. When one of her daughters applied for a job at a campus dorm, she was told she was too much of a "typical cheery girl" for the position. She ended up leaving the school and graduating elsewhere.

"The push for equality has been around long enough that it should have worked," Dunlap said. "There should be some difference."

According to the poll, Americans think the impact of Title IX has been stronger in some areas than others. More than half said it has had a positive impact on female students' opportunities in sports, and about as many said that about opportunities in education overall.

But just 36% said it had a positive impact on addressing sexual harassment in schools, and 31% said it had a positive impact on protecting LGBTQ students from discrimination.

At the same time, there's evidence that not all Americans clearly understand the law. About a third said they were unsure whether Title IX has had an impact on them personally, and about a quarter or more were unsure of its impact in other areas.

The law is commonly misunderstood in part because its application is so broad, said Shiwali Patel, senior counsel at the National Women's Law Center. In addition to its role in sports, it also has been used to protect against discrimination and harassment in college admissions, financial aid, campus housing and employment, among other areas.

"I don't think people really understand the full breadth and scope of Title IX," she said. "It's only 37 words long, but it's extremely broad. It covers so much."

Patel said it's important to acknowledge Title IX has brought meaningful advancements. More women are getting scholarships, participating in college sports and landing faculty jobs. But there has also been resistance to continued improvement, especially in the fight against sexual harassment and violence, she said.

"We are at a moment of real challenge, and we still haven't gone far enough," Patel said.

The law's anniversary approaches as the Biden administration prepares new rules detailing how schools and colleges must respond to sexual harassment. The regulation, which would serve as an extension of the 1972 law, is expected to roll back a set of Trump-era rules and expand the rights of victims of sexual harassment and assault.

Among other findings, the poll also revealed Americans don't think all women have felt progress equally. About half of respondents said white women have seen a great deal of progress, but only about a third said the same for women of color or LGBTQ women. Only about a quarter said there's been great progress for low-income women.

Still, to 67-year-old David Picatti, it feels like the push for gender equality has largely succeeded. When he was an engineering student in college, he remembers his program "clamoring" to recruit women, who are underrepresented in many science fields. More recently, he has had female cousins receive full scholarships to play college sports.

"I think there have been a lot of strides and it's a fairly equal playing field," said Picatti, of Yakima, Washington.

Sarah Brown says it's far from equal. The 70-year-old in New Orleans acknowledged some progress —

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her daughter earned a master's in business from Harvard University in the 1980s as the program was recruiting more women — but she still sees discrimination.

A retired accountant, Brown has been discouraged by recent battles over abortion rights, and she has been appalled by sexual assault scandals at Louisiana State University and other colleges across the country. It seems like progress made in the past is being eroded, she said.

Still, Brown isn't surprised that men see it differently.

"Of course not," she said. "Women know how it really is to be a woman and men don't. Men think that women have it better than they truly do."

The poll of 1,172 adults was conducted May 12-16 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.0 percentage points.

Asian stocks mixed ahead of Fed rate hike decision

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Asian stock markets were mixed Wednesday ahead of the Federal Reserve's announcement of how sharply it will raise interest rates to cool U.S. inflation.

Shanghai and Hong Kong advanced. Tokyo and Sydney declined. Oil prices edged higher.

Wall Street's benchmark S&P 500 index lost 0.4% on Tuesday as traders waited for a Fed rate hike they expect to be three-quarters of a percentage point, or triple the usual margin. They worry that aggressive Fed action to cool inflation that is running at a four-decade high might tip the biggest global economy into recession.

A "hawkish surprise" from the Fed could be a "further shock to risk assets," said Anderson Alves of ActivTrades in a report. "Money markets are already pricing around 90% possibility of such action."

The Shanghai Composite Index gained 1.1% to 3,323.64 after the Chinese government reported factory output rebounded into positive territory in May as anti-virus controls that shut down businesses in Shanghai and other industrial centers eased.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng gained 1.2% to 21,312.67 while the Nikkei 225 in Tokyo shed 0.7% to 26,435.01.

The Kospi in Seoul shed 1.2% to 2,463.45 after the government reported South Korea's unemployment rate ticked up 0.1% to 2.8% in May.

Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 shed 0.4% to 6,658.40. New Zealand and Singapore advanced while Jakarta declined.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 declined to 3,735.48, putting it 21.8% below its Jan. 3 peak. That puts it in a bear market, or a drop of 20% from the last market top.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.5% to 30,364.83 and the Nasdaq composite rose 0.2% to 10,828.35.

Expectations of an unusually big Fed rate hike increased after government data Friday showed consumer inflation accelerated in May instead of easing as hoped.

The Fed is scrambling to get prices under control after being criticized earlier for reacting to slowly to inflation pressures.

Britain's central bank also has raised rates, and the European Central Bank says it will do so next month.

Japan's central bank has kept rates near record lows. That has caused the yen to fall to two-decade lows around 135 to the dollar as traders shift capital in search of higher returns.

Markets also have been jolted by Russia's attack on Ukraine, which has pushed oil prices to history-making highs above \$120 per barrel, and by virus outbreaks in China that led to the closure of factories and disrupted supply chains.

In energy markets, benchmark U.S. crude rose 13 cents to \$119.06 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract lost \$2 on Tuesday to \$118.93. Brent crude, the price basis for international oil trading, added 14 cents to \$121.31 per barrel in London. It fell \$1.10 the previ-

ous session to \$121.17.

The dollar declined to 135.13 yen from Tuesday's 135.30 yen. The euro gained to \$1.0446 from \$1.0411.

UK cancels first flight to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain canceled a flight that was scheduled to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda late Tuesday after the European Court of Human Rights intervened, saying the plan carried “a real risk of irreversible harm.”

The decision to scrap the flight capped three days of frantic court challenges from immigrant rights lawyers who launched a flurry of case-by-case appeals seeking to block the deportation of everyone on the government's list.

British government officials had said earlier in the day that the plane would take off no matter how many people were on board. But after the appeals, no one remained. British media reported that the number of potential deportees had been more than 30 on Friday.

After the flight was canceled, Home Secretary Priti Patel said she was disappointed but would not be “deterred from doing the right thing.” She added: “Our legal team are reviewing every decision made on this flight and preparation for the next flight begins now.”

Prime Minister Boris Johnson had emphatically defended Britain's plan, arguing that it is a legitimate way to protect lives and thwart the criminal gangs that smuggle migrants across the English Channel in small boats. Britain in recent years has seen an illegal influx of migrants from such places as Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Sudan, Iraq and Yemen.

Johnson announced an agreement with Rwanda in April in which people who enter Britain illegally will be deported to the East African country. In exchange for accepting them, Rwanda will receive millions of pounds (dollars) in development aid. The deportees will be allowed to apply for asylum in Rwanda, not Britain.

Opponents have argued that it is illegal and inhumane to send people thousands of miles to a country they don't want to live in. The leaders of the Church of England joined the opposition, calling the government's policy “immoral.” Prince Charles was among those opposed, according to British news reports.

Activists have denounced the policy as an attack on the rights of refugees that most countries have recognized since the end of World War II.

Refugee Council chief executive Enver Solomon said the British government's deportation threat would not serve as a deterrent to those seeking safety in the U.K.

“The government must immediately rethink by having a grown-up conversation with France and the (European Union) about sharing responsibility and look to operating an orderly, humane, and fair asylum system,” Solomon said.

The U.N. refugee agency condemned the plan out of concern that other countries will follow suit as war, repression and natural disasters force a growing number of people from their homes.

Politicians in Denmark and Austria are considering similar proposals. Australia has operated an asylum-processing center in the Pacific island nation of Nauru since 2012.

“At a global level, this unapologetically punitive deal further condones the evisceration of the right to seek asylum in wealthy countries,” said Maurizio Albahari, a migration expert at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana as he described the UK policy.

Many millions of people around the globe have been displaced over the past two decades, putting the international consensus on refugees under strain. The world had more than 26 million refugees in the middle of last year, more that double the number two decades ago, according to the U.N. refugee agency. Millions more have left their homes voluntarily, seeking economic opportunities in developed nations.

In Britain, those pressures have led to a surge in the number of people crossing the English Channel in leaky inflatable boats, sometimes with disastrous consequences. Last November, 27 people died when their boat sank in the waters between France and England.

Johnson, fighting for his political life amid concerns about his leadership and ethics, responded by promising to stop such risky journeys.

While Rwanda was the site of a genocide that killed hundreds of thousands of people in 1994, the country has built a reputation for stability and economic progress since then, the British government argues. Critics say that stability comes at the cost of political repression.

Filippo Grandi, the U.N. high commissioner for refugees, attacked the policy as "all wrong."

If the British government is truly interested in protecting lives, it should work with other countries to target the smugglers and provide safe routes for asylum-seekers, not simply shunt migrants to other countries, Grandi said.

"The precedent that this creates is catastrophic for a concept that needs to be shared, like asylum," Grandi said Monday.

The Archbishop of Canterbury and 24 other bishops from the Church of England joined the chorus of voices asking the government to reconsider an "immoral policy that shames Britain."

"Our Christian heritage should inspire us to treat asylum-seekers with compassion, fairness and justice, as we have for centuries," the bishops wrote in a letter to the Times of London.

Britain's Supreme Court refused to hear one last-ditch appeal Tuesday, a day after two lower courts refused to block the deportations. Legal challenges continued, however, as lawyers filed case-by-case appeals on behalf of individual migrants.

Many migrants favor Britain as a destination for reasons of language or family ties, or because it is seen as an open economy with more opportunities than other European nations.

When Britain was a member of the European Union, it was part of a system that required refugees to seek asylum in the first safe country they entered. Those who reached Britain could be sent back to the EU countries they traveled from. Britain lost that option when it withdrew from the EU two years ago.

Since then, the British and French governments have worked to stop the journeys, with a great deal of bickering and not much success. More than 28,000 migrants entered Britain in small boats last year, up from 8,500 in 2020.

Nando Sigona, a migration expert at the University of Birmingham, said large principles are at stake if the Rwanda policy stands.

"How can we establish any kind of moral high ground where we intervene in other countries if we are not signatory to providing protection to those fleeing war and persecution?" Sigona asked.

US abortions rise: 1 in 5 pregnancies terminated in 2020

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

The number and rate of U.S. abortions increased from 2017 to 2020 after a long decline, according to figures released Wednesday.

The report from the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights, counted more than 930,000 abortions in the U.S. in 2020. That's up from about 862,000 abortions in 2017, when national abortion figures reached their lowest point since the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that legalized the procedure nationwide.

About one in five pregnancies ended in abortion in 2020, according to the report, which comes as the Supreme Court appears ready to overturn that decision.

The number of women obtaining abortions illustrates a need and "underscores just how devastating a Supreme Court decision is going to be for access to an absolutely vital service," said Sara Rosenbaum, a George Washington University health law and policy professor.

Medication abortions, the two-drug combination sometimes called the "abortion pill," accounted for 54% of U.S. abortions in 2020, the first time they made up more than half of abortions, Guttmacher said.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have pushed down the numbers in some states, according to the report. In New York, abortions increased from 2017 to 2019, then fell 6% between 2019 and 2020. One in 10 clinics in New York paused or stopped abortion care in 2020.

Texas saw a 2% decrease between 2019 and 2020, coinciding with pandemic-related abortion restrictions in the state.

Elsewhere, the pandemic may have limited access to contraception, some experts said, or discouraged women from undertaking all the health care visits involved in a pregnancy.

Yet, abortions already were inching upward before the coronavirus upended people's lives. One contributing factor: Some states expanded Medicaid access to abortion.

Illinois, for example, began allowing state Medicaid funds to pay for abortions starting in January 2018. The state saw abortions increase 25% between 2017 and 2020.

In neighboring Missouri, abortions decreased substantially, but the number of Missouri residents traveling to Illinois for abortions increased to more than 6,500.

"If states are paying for abortions I hope they are also looking at how to support childbirth, so a woman doesn't think abortion is the best or only option," said Carol Tobias, president of the National Right to Life Committee, which opposes abortion.

Guttmacher conducts the nation's most comprehensive survey of abortion providers every three years. The tally is considered more complete than data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that omits several states including California, the nation's most populous state.

In 2020, fewer women were getting pregnant and a larger share of them chose abortion, the researchers found. There were 3.6 million births, a decline since 2017.

The abortion rate in 2020 was 14.4 per 1,000 women aged 15-44, an increase from 13.5 per 1,000 women in 2017.

Abortions increased by 12% in the West, 10% in the Midwest, 8% in the South and 2% in the Northeast.

Floods leave Yellowstone landscape 'dramatically changed'

By MATTHEW BROWN and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

RED LODGE, Mont. (AP) — The forces of fire and ice shaped Yellowstone National Park over thousands of years. It took decades longer for humans to tame it enough for tourists to visit, often from the comfort of their cars.

In just days, heavy rain and rapid snowmelt caused a dramatic flood that may forever alter the human footprint on the park's terrain and the communities that have grown around it.

The historic floodwaters that raged through Yellowstone this week, tearing out bridges and pouring into nearby homes, pushed a popular fishing river off course — possibly permanently — and may force roadways nearly torn away by torrents of water to be rebuilt in new places.

"The landscape literally and figuratively has changed dramatically in the last 36 hours," said Bill Berg, a commissioner in nearby Park County. "A little bit ironic that this spectacular landscape was created by violent geologic and hydrologic events, and it's just not very handy when it happens while we're all here settled on it."

The unprecedented flooding drove more than 10,000 visitors out of the nation's oldest national park and damaged hundreds of homes in nearby communities, though remarkably no one was reported hurt or killed. The only visitors left in the massive park straddling three states were a dozen campers still making their way out of the backcountry.

The park could remain closed as long as a week, and northern entrances may not reopen this summer, Superintendent Cam Sholly said.

"I've heard this is a 1,000-year event, whatever that means these days. They seem to be happening more and more frequently," he said.

Sholly noted some weather forecasts include the possibility of additional flooding this weekend.

Days of rain and rapid snowmelt wrought havoc across parts of southern Montana and northern Wyoming, where it washed away cabins, swamped small towns and knocked out power. It hit the park as a summer tourist season that draws millions of visitors was ramping up during its 150th anniversary year.

Businesses in hard-hit Gardiner had just started really recovering from the tourism contraction brought

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by the coronavirus pandemic, and were hoping for a good year, Berg said.

"It's a Yellowstone town, and it lives and dies by tourism, and this is going to be a pretty big hit," he said. "They're looking to try to figure out how to hold things together."

Some of the worst damage happened in the northern part of the park and Yellowstone's gateway communities in southern Montana. National Park Service photos of northern Yellowstone showed a mudslide, washed out bridges and roads undercut by churning floodwaters of the Gardner and Lamar rivers.

In Red Lodge, a town of 2,100 that's a popular jumping-off point for a scenic route into the Yellowstone high country, a creek running through town jumped its banks and swamped the main thoroughfare, leaving trout swimming in the street a day later under sunny skies.

Residents described a harrowing scene where the water went from a trickle to a torrent over just a few hours.

The water toppled telephone poles, knocked over fences and carved deep fissures in the ground through a neighborhood of hundreds of houses. Electricity was restored by Tuesday, but there was still no running water in the affected neighborhood.

Heidi Hoffman left early Monday to buy a sump pump in Billings, but by the time she returned her basement was full of water.

"We lost all our belongings in the basement," Hoffman said as the pump removed a steady stream of water into her muddy backyard. "Yearbooks, pictures, clothes, furniture. Were going to be cleaning up for a long time."

At least 200 homes were flooded in Red Lodge and the town of Fromberg.

The flooding came as the Midwest and East Coast sizzle from a heat wave and other parts of the West burn from an early wildfire season amid a persistent drought that has increased the frequency and intensity of fires. Smoke from a fire in the mountains of Flagstaff, Arizona, could be seen in Colorado.

While the flooding hasn't been directly attributed to climate change, Rick Thoman, a climate specialist at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, said a warming environment makes extreme weather events more likely than they would have been "without the warming that human activity has caused."

"Will Yellowstone have a repeat of this in five or even 50 years? Maybe not, but somewhere will have something equivalent or even more extreme," he said.

Heavy rain on top of melting mountain snow pushed the Yellowstone, Stillwater and Clarks Fork rivers to record levels Monday and triggered rock and mudslides, according to the National Weather Service. The Yellowstone River at Corwin Springs topped a record set in 1918.

Yellowstone's northern roads may remain impassable for a substantial length of time. The flooding affected the rest of the park, too, with park officials warning of yet higher flooding and potential problems with water supplies and wastewater systems at developed areas.

The rains hit just as area hotels filled up in recent weeks with summer tourists. More than 4 million visitors were tallied by the park last year. The wave of tourists doesn't abate until fall, and June is typically one of Yellowstone's busiest months.

Mark Taylor, owner and chief pilot of Rocky Mountain Rotors, said his company had airlifted about 40 paying customers over the past two days from Gardiner, including two women who were "very pregnant."

Taylor spoke as he ferried a family of four adults from Texas, who wanted to do some more sightseeing before heading home.

"I imagine they're going to rent a car and they're going to go check out some other parts of Montana — somewhere drier," he said.

At a cabin in Gardiner, Parker Manning of Terre Haute, Indiana, got an up-close view of the roiling Yellowstone River floodwaters just outside his door. Entire trees and even a lone kayaker streamed by.

In early evening, he shot video as the waters ate away at the opposite bank where a large brown house that had been home to park employees before they were evacuated was precariously perched.

In a large cracking sound heard over the river's roar, the house tipped into the waters and was pulled into the current. Sholly said it floated 5 miles (8 kilometers) before sinking.

The towns of Cooke City and Silvergate, just east of the park, were also isolated by floodwaters, which

also made drinking water unsafe. People left a hospital and low-lying areas in Livingston.

In south-central Montana, 68 people at a campground were rescued by raft after flooding on the Stillwater River. Some roads in the area were closed and residents were evacuated.

In the hamlet of Nye, at least four cabins washed into the Stillwater River, said Shelley Blazina, including one she owned.

"It was my sanctuary," she said Tuesday. "Yesterday I was in shock. Today I'm just in intense sadness."

Southern Baptists agree to keep list of accused sex abusers

By DEEPA BHARATH and PETER SMITH Associated Press

ANAHEIM, California (AP) — The Southern Baptist Convention voted overwhelmingly Tuesday to create a way to track pastors and other church workers credibly accused of sex abuse and launch a new task force to oversee further reforms in the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

The vote came three weeks after the release of a blockbuster report by an outside consultant on the long-simmering scandal, revealing that Southern Baptist leaders mishandled abuse cases and stonewalled victims for years.

Thousands of Southern Baptists are here in Anaheim for their big national meeting.

They elected a new SBC president, Texas pastor Bart Barber, who is a staunch proponent of Southern Baptists' conservative views but who says he has a track record of dialogue with those who disagree.

He has called for an "army of peacemakers" amid bitter political battles in the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

He defeated three other candidates and ultimately prevailed in a run-off vote at the SBC's national meeting in Anaheim. His closest rival, Tom Ascol, had complained of too much "wokeness" in the denomination and sought to move it further to the right.

Also Tuesday, the delegates debated but didn't vote on whether to kick out one of its biggest and best-known churches — Saddleback Church, the California megachurch headed by Rick Warren, author of the blockbuster bestseller "The Purpose Driven Life" — because it ordained women pastors. The denomination's statement of faith says the office of pastor is for men only.

Warren himself spoke briefly late in the day, alluding indirectly to the controversy by saying Baptists should unite on ambitious missionary goals.

"Are we going to keep bickering over secondary issues, or are we going to keep the main thing the main thing?" he said.

The vote on sex-abuse reforms fell short of what some survivors of abuse in Southern Baptist churches sought, such as a compensation fund for victims and a more robust and independent commission to monitor its churches' handling — and mishandling — of abuse. And it also met opposition from some who contended the crisis was overhyped and that it interfered with Baptist churches' independence.

But Bruce Frank, who led the task force that recommended the reforms, made an emotional plea for church representatives to accept them as their two-day annual gathering got underway. He called the steps the "bare minimum," adding it will take time to change the SBC's culture.

He challenged those who would say these steps interfere with Baptists' focus on missions, saying that "protecting the sheep from the wolves" is essential to mission.

"How are you going to tell a watching world that Jesus died for them ... when his church won't even do its very best to protect them?" Frank asked.

He acknowledged the high cost of executing these recommendations. "But it's not going to cost nearly as much as survivors have paid," he added.

Abuse survivors Tiffany Thigpen and Jules Woodson, shedding tears, said they were overwhelmed to see the messengers' hands go up in support of the task force's recommendations. "It's not perfect, but a small step and a healthy, healing step in the right direction," Woodson said.

But Christa Brown, who has advocated for more than a decade on behalf of fellow survivors of abuse in Southern Baptist settings, called the reforms disappointing. She and other survivors had sought a perma-

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ment commission to oversee compliance, whereas Tuesday's vote created a one-year term for a task force, with option to renew. She also called for a more "survivor-centric" handling of the list of accused clergy.

"I know people like happy endings, but I'm not feeling it," Brown tweeted afterward. "... I feel grief. It's better than nothing but that's such a low bar."

During debate, some members opposed even the reforms that were proposed. They noted that the consulting firm that conducted the report, Guidepost Solutions, tweeted in support of Pride month, which goes against the SBC's view that homosexuality is sinful.

"We have a group that celebrates sexual sin, advising us on how to handle sexual sin of abuse," said Indiana pastor Tim Overton. "That is a problem."

Frank replied that he didn't like the Guidepost tweet, either: "The issue is not, what does Guidepost think of LGBT? The issue is what do Southern Baptists think of sexual abuse."

The Guidepost report, focused on how the denomination's Executive Committee handled abuse cases, also revealed that it had secretly maintained a list of clergy and other church workers accused of abuse, even after long claiming it couldn't do so without violating congregations' autonomy. The committee later apologized and released the list, which had hundreds of accused workers on it.

Frank said a database has been discussed by the SBC for more than a decade, adding it is crucial to ensure abusers are not going from church to church, hurting more vulnerable people.

Brad Eubank, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Petal, Mississippi, urged messengers to approve the recommendations. Eubank, who is included in the Guidepost report, was sexually abused as a child by a minister of music at a Southern Baptist church in Mississippi.

"As a pastor I've talked to countless survivors and victims," he said. "This is not everything that needs to be done, but it's a starting spot."

The Saddleback debate, which has simmered for a year, followed its ordination of three women pastors in 2021 and the recent announcement that the retiring Warren would be succeeded as lead pastor later this year by Andy Wood. His wife, Stacie Wood, would become teaching pastor.

"Saddleback has ordained women, they celebrated it," Florida pastor Tom Ascol said.

The SBC's Credentials Committee initially recommended having another panel study how to interpret the denomination's doctrine on who can serve as a pastor. After pushback, the committee ultimately decided Tuesday to further study the matter itself. Most Southern Baptists agree senior pastors must be men, but disagree if the ban applies to other ministry roles, it said.

Saddleback has long been seen as a model for the Southern Baptist ideals of church growth and evangelism, growing from a small start-up in 1980 to drawing more than 24,000 per week across multiple campuses as of 2019, according to Baptist Press.

Later in the day, Warren delivered an emotional address. He is set to retire after more than four decades of leading Saddleback Church.

"It's customary for a guy who is about to be hung to say his dying words," he said as the large gathering exploded into laughter. But Warren insisted he was not there to mount a defense, but to point out that the "gift of pastoring is different from the office of pastoring."

He profusely thanked the SBC for allowing him an opportunity to build a church that includes to multiple campuses and thousands of home Bible studies across Southern California.

"Southern Baptists taught me how to honor and love the local church," he said as his voice cracked. "I owe you all so much."

Jan. 6 hearings: What we've learned, and what's next

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House investigators are trying to make a methodical case that President Donald Trump's lies about the 2020 election led directly to his supporters' insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

The House panel investigating the attack has held the first two in a series of hearings providing its initial

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findings after a yearlong probe and more than 1,000 interviews. The committee has shown clips not only from the violent attack on the Capitol, but also from its own closed-door interviews with Trump aides and associates who were trying to dissuade him from spreading falsehoods about an election he lost.

A rundown of what we've learned so far from the public hearings of the select Jan. 6 committee — and what's next:

REBUFFED ON ELECTION NIGHT

One after one, video excerpts have been played of Trump's aides describing their conversations with the just-defeated president as returns came in on election night and in the days afterward, as it became increasingly obvious that he had lost to Democrat Joe Biden. The committee is trying to establish that Trump pushed lies about widespread election fraud despite hearing clear evidence that it didn't happen.

As the aides tried to be realistic with the president, Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani took the opposite approach, telling him on election night that he should declare victory right away, according to the testimony. It was four more days until Biden was declared the winner.

Trump's daughter, Ivanka Trump, said she knew it was clear that the results would not be final on election night. Campaign aide Jason Miller said a better sense of the numbers was needed before making any declarations. Campaign manager Bill Stepien said he advised Trump to tell reporters that the race was too early to call, that he was proud of the campaign he ran and that he was in a good position to win.

But Trump didn't listen. Miller said that Trump told the room that anyone who didn't agree with Giuliani was being "weak." He went out and publicly declared the election "a fraud on the American public."

"Frankly, we did win this election," Trump said.

FRAUD INVESTIGATIONS COME UP EMPTY

In the weeks after the election, the Department of Justice investigated Trump's claims of widespread fraud. States and localities that had counted the votes did their own checks. None found evidence to support the claims that Trump and Giuliani were pushing.

Attorney General Bill Barr, who resigned from office after publicly declaring there was no evidence of widespread fraud, described his interactions with the president as he tried to convince him of the facts. Not only was Trump angry, but he was becoming "detached from reality," Barr said in a videotaped deposition.

Barr said that when he would tell Trump "how crazy some of these allegations were, there was never, there was never an indication of interest in what the actual facts were."

Two in-person witnesses at the committee's hearing on Monday talked about Trump and Giuliani's pressure to try and overturn the results in their states. BJay Pak, a former U.S. attorney in Atlanta who resigned as Trump pressured Georgia officials, said his office investigated Giuliani's "reckless" claims about fraud in the state and found them to be "simply untrue."

Philadelphia City Commissioner Al Schmidt, the only Republican on the city's election board, said Trump's claims about fraud in his city were "fantastical" and thorough investigations turned up nothing of the sort.

FUNDRAISING USING FALSE CLAIMS

The panel detailed Trump's fundraising off his own falsehoods. He and his allies raised hundreds of millions after the election, the committee said, and broadly misled donors as to where some of the money was going. Some of the dollars that were advertised as going to an "election defense fund" actually benefitted groups and entities connected to Trump's family and friends.

"Not only was there the Big Lie, there was the Big Ripoff," said Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif., a member of the panel.

After the hearing Monday, Lofgren said on CNN that Donald Trump Jr.'s girlfriend, Kimberly Guilfoyle, was paid \$60,000 for a short speech at Trump's rally ahead of the insurrection.

A REMINDER OF THE VIOLENCE

While some of the committee's findings are new, some of the evidence they are presenting is not. But the seven Democrats and two Republicans on the panel want to remind the public of what happened that January day — not only how violent it was, but the lies that led up to it.

At the initial hearing on June 9, the panel showed new video of police officers being beaten as Trump's supporters broke into the Capitol and interrupted the certification of Biden's victory. Images from body

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cameras and security video showed the huge and angry crowd as it surged toward the entrances and shattered windows and doors, repeating Trump's claims about fraud.

Capitol Police officer Caroline Edwards described a bloody "war scene" and hours of hand to hand combat. She was one of the first officers injured, thrown to ground as the first rioters pushed past bike racks. She suffered a head injury and still hasn't yet returned to the same unit.

"It was carnage," she said. "It was chaos."

WHAT'S NEXT

While the schedule is fluid, the committee plans up to five additional hearings to lay out its findings. While the first two hearings showed the violence of the siege and documented Trump's resistance as his aides and allies initially tried to present the facts of his November loss, future hearings will describe how he continued to push the lies and eventually set his sights on the congressional certification of Jan. 6.

On Thursday, the panel will describe Trump's efforts to persuade Vice President Mike Pence to illegally delay the electoral count or to object to Biden's win as he presided over the congressional certification. In a video posted to Twitter on Tuesday, Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, the committee's Republican co-chair, said the panel will examine Trump's "relentless effort on Jan. 6, and in the days beforehand, to pressure Vice President Pence to refuse to count lawful electoral votes."

Rep. Cheney also included a preview clip: former White House lawyer Eric Herschmann telling the committee in a video interview that he had told John Eastman, a lawyer who was working with Trump to push the false fraud claims, that he needed to "get a great effing criminal defense lawyer. You're gonna need it."

Other hearings will review Trump's pressure on Justice Department officials and what was happening in the White House as the violence unfolded at the Capitol.

"The Trump campaign legal team knew there was no legitimate argument — fraud, irregularities or anything — to overturn the election," Cheney said at Monday's hearing. "And yet President Trump went ahead with his plans for Jan. 6 anyway."

A CRIMINAL REFERRAL?

After the hearings, the committee says its investigation will continue. And panel members will ultimately have to make a decision about whether they have found criminal activity and, if so, whether they should refer it to the Justice Department. The department, which is conducting its own investigation, could take or leave the recommendation.

Committee members have been debating that issue, but have emphasized a referral is not their main goal.

"We're making a report to the American people about what happened, why it happened and how we need to protect ourselves in the future," said Maryland Rep. Jamie Raskin, a Democrat on the committee.

Brazil police arrest 2nd suspect for Amazon's missing pair

By FABIANO MAISONNAVE Associated Press

ATALAIA DO NORTE, Brazil (AP) — Brazil's federal police said Tuesday they arrested a second suspect in connection with the disappearance of an Indigenous expert and a British journalist in a remote area of the Amazon.

The suspect, Oseney da Costa de Oliveira, 41, is a fisherman and a brother of the man so far considered by police as the main suspect in the case, Amarildo da Costa de Oliveira, also 41, nicknamed Pelado.

Federal police also said in a statement that they seized ammunition and an oar, but did not say why the items were confiscated, who they belonged to or where they were found.

De Oliveira told The Associated Press on Friday that he had visited Pelado in jail and was told that local police had tortured Pelado on his own boat, which was also seized by authorities.

Federal police did not immediately respond to an AP request asking why Oseney da Costa de Oliveira was named in its statement, which is not a standard procedure of the force.

Indigenous people who were with expert Bruno Pereira and British journalist Dom Phillips have said that Pelado brandished a rifle at them on the day before the two men disappeared.

He has denied any wrongdoing and claims police tortured him to try to get a confession, his family told

the AP.

The search for the missing men continued Tuesday, following the discovery of a backpack, laptop and other personal belongings submerged in a river Sunday.

Pereira, 41, and Phillips, 57, were last seen June 5 near the entrance of the Javari Valley Indigenous Territory, which borders Peru and Colombia.

Federal police issued a statement Monday denying media reports that the two men's bodies had been found.

Search teams are focusing their efforts around a spot in the Itaquai river, near the city of Atalaia do Norte, where volunteers from the Matis Indigenous group say on Saturday they found a tarp from the boat used by the missing men.

The Javari Valley has seven known Indigenous groups — some only recently contacted, such as the Matis. The valley also has at least 11 uncontacted groups, making the region the largest concentration of isolated tribes in the world.

That area has seen violent conflicts between fishermen, poachers and government agents. Violence has grown as drug trafficking gangs battle for control of waterways to ship cocaine, although the Itaquai river is not a known drug trafficking route.

FDA advisers back Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine for older kids

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A government advisory panel Tuesday endorsed a second brand of COVID-19 vaccine for school-age children and teens.

The Food and Drug Administration's outside experts voted unanimously that Moderna's vaccine is safe and effective enough to give kids ages 6 to 17. If the FDA agrees, it would become the second option for those children, joining Pfizer's vaccine.

The same FDA expert panel will meet Wednesday to consider tot-sized shots from Moderna and Pfizer for the littlest kids, those under 5.

Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine has long been available for adults in the U.S. and elsewhere and more than three dozen countries offer it to older children, too. If the FDA authorizes Moderna's vaccine for teens and younger children, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will next decide whether to formally recommend the shots.

The Massachusetts company is seeking clearance for two doses, and plans to later offer a booster. Tuesday's vote was only for two doses — full-strength for 12-17 and half-sized doses for those 6-11.

"The data do support that the benefits outweigh the risks for both of these doses, in both of these age groups," said the CDC's Dr. Melinda Wharton, a member of the panel.

"I believe that this will provide families an important option" and may be particularly important for families who live in areas where coronavirus spread is increasing, said another panel member, Dr. Ofer Levy of Boston Children's Hospital.

The FDA held up Moderna's teen vaccine for months while it investigated a rare side effect, heart inflammation. That's mostly a risk for teen boys and young men, and also can occur with the Pfizer vaccine. Moderna got extra scrutiny because its shots are a far higher dose.

In their review, FDA scientists said there were no confirmed cases of the heart inflammation in Moderna's kid studies. But experts say the studies may have had too few participants for a rare side effect like that to appear.

"That clearly needs to be watched closely going forward as we expand the use of the vaccine," said Dr. Mark Sawyer, a panel member from the University of California, San Diego's medical school.

As for other side effects, FDA officials said nothing worrisome was reported — mainly sore arms, headache and fatigue.

The FDA analysis concluded that two doses of Moderna are effective in preventing symptomatic COVID-19 illness in teens and younger kids, with the levels of virus-fighting antibodies comparable to those

developed in young adults.

Vaccine effectiveness was estimated at 93% for the teens, and 77% for the younger children, according to the FDA analysis. However, the research was done when earlier versions of the coronavirus were causing most U.S. infections, before more contagious versions emerged. It's also based on a limited number of COVID-19 cases, making the estimates a bit rough.

A booster shot was added to the studies, and data is expected in about the next month, Moderna officials said. Booster shots are now recommended for children vaccinated with Pfizer's shots, as well as for all adults.

One panel member, Dr. Paul Offit, noted that vaccine effectiveness has declined against newer variants of the coronavirus. Offit, of Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, said he supported Moderna's proposals only because he expects a third dose will be offered, which he says is needed before someone should be considered fully vaccinated.

How much demand there will be for even two Moderna shots isn't clear. Teens became eligible a year ago for Pfizer's vaccine, which uses the same technology, and only 60% have gotten two doses. Shots for younger kids started in November; about 29% have been fully vaccinated, according to the CDC.

If the FDA authorizes Moderna shots for teens and schoolchildren, a CDC spokesperson said the agency is not expected to review the vaccine until later this month.

Biden focuses on workers as high inflation remains a risk

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — President Joe Biden told the largest federation of labor unions on Tuesday that he's working to rebuild the U.S. economy around workers, an attempt to draw a contrast with Republicans who have increasingly attracted blue-collar votes.

"We should encourage unions," Biden said. "I'm not just saying that to be pro-union. I'm saying it because I'm pro-American."

The speech before the AFL-CIO convention in Philadelphia was the president's attempt to reset the terms of the debate on the economy as the president's own approval ratings have slid while consumer prices and the cost of gasoline have surged.

Inflation at a more than 40-year high has caused voters to sour on the economy, despite a recovery after the pandemic-induced downturn that has led to robust hiring and a healthy 3.6% unemployment rate. The president on Tuesday tried to remind his audience of the food lines and layoffs during the coronavirus pandemic that preceded his presidency, contrasting that with the improvements in household balance sheets under his watch.

But even as the economy has quickly amassed jobs, inflation has left many workers feeling worse off as wages have not kept up with the costs of living. The Labor Department said Friday that average hourly earnings, after adjusting for inflation, have fallen 3% over the past year.

Inflation has left Biden and Democrats' control of the House and Senate vulnerable in the upcoming midterm elections. Republican lawmakers have blamed the president's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package for causing inflation to start rising last year. GOP lawmakers also say the Biden administration has been too restrictive on domestic oil production.

"Working families' budgets took a back seat to the far-left's wish list," Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said in a Monday speech.

Biden says the GOP is focused on cutting taxes for companies and the wealthy. Republicans argue that their 2017 tax overhaul created a firmer base for growth by reducing corporate tax rates, making U.S. companies more competitive. They say enabling companies and individuals to hold on to more of what they earn will boost growth, while Biden counters that laws enabling unionization and boosting child care benefits for families will lead to growth through a stronger middle class.

Biden has tried to take specific aim at a proposal by Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., that suggests all Americans should owe federal income taxes. Many Republican lawmakers have either disowned the proposal or of-

ferred caveats, since tax credits are a means of financial support for poorer and middle class U.S. families.

"Republicans have it all backwards: Their plan literally calls for increasing taxes on middle class and working people and cutting taxes on corporations and wealthy Americans," Biden said. "I believe in bipartisanship, but I have no illusions about this Republican Party, the MAGA party."

The president faces an uphill battle in restoring union membership, which has declined for decades as it became harder to organize workers and many factory jobs moved away from communities with a history of unionization. Only 10.3% of U.S. workers belonged to a union last year, down from 20.1% in 1983, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The nature of who belongs to unions has also changed over time as nearly half of union members work for the government. Just 7.7% of manufacturing workers and 12.6% of construction workers hold a union card, as the movement's blue-collar roots have diversified into white-collar professions.

Despite the decline in unionization, the movement still generates value. Government figures show that the median unionized worker earns about \$10,000 more annually than a worker without a union.

Russians control 80% of key Ukraine city, cut escape routes

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian troops control about 80% of the fiercely contested eastern city of Sievierodonetsk and have destroyed all three bridges leading out of it but Ukrainians were still trying to evacuate the wounded, a regional official said Tuesday.

Serhiy Haidai, governor of the eastern Luhansk region, acknowledged that a mass evacuation of civilians from Sievierodonetsk now was "simply not possible" due to the relentless shelling and fighting. Ukrainian forces have been pushed to the industrial outskirts of the city because of "the scorched earth method and heavy artillery the Russians are using," he said.

"There is still an opportunity for the evacuation of the wounded, communication with the Ukrainian military and local residents," he told The Associated Press by telephone, adding that Russian soldiers have not yet completely blocked off the strategic city.

About 12,000 people remain in Sievierodonetsk, from a pre-war population of 100,000. More than 500 civilians are sheltering in the Azot chemical plant, which is being pounded by the Russians, according to Haidai.

In all, 70 civilians were evacuated from the Luhansk region in the last day, the governor said.

A Russian general, meanwhile, said a humanitarian corridor will be opened Wednesday to evacuate civilians from the Azot plant. Col. Gen. Mikhail Mizintsev said evacuees would be taken to the town of Svatovo, 60 kilometers (35 miles) to the north in territory under the control of Russian and separatist forces.

He said the plan was made after Ukraine called for an evacuation corridor leading to territory it controls.

Mizintsev, head of the National Defense Management Center, is accused by Ukraine of human rights violations while commanding troops during the long siege of Mariupol, Ukraine's key port on the Sea of Azov, which has been taken over by the Russians.

Russian forces in the past few weeks have pressed hard to capture Ukraine's eastern industrial Donbas area, which borders Russia and is made up of the regions of Luhansk and Donetsk.

"The losses, unfortunately, are painful, but we have to hold out," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said late Tuesday in his nightly video address. "The more losses the enemy suffers there, the less strength it will have to continue the aggression. Therefore, the Donbas is key to determining who will dominate in the coming weeks."

As he does almost every day, Zelenskyy pleaded for more and faster deliveries of Western arms, this time specifically asking for anti-missile defense systems.

Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar said Tuesday the military had only received around 10% of the Western weapons it had requested "to create parity with the Russian army."

"No matter how much effort Ukraine makes, no matter how professional our army, without the help of Western partners we will not be able to win this war," Malyar said in a televised news conference.

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She said Ukraine uses 5,000 to 6,000 artillery rounds a day, while Russia uses 10 times more.

In recent days, Ukrainian officials have spoken of the heavy human cost of the war, with the fierce fighting in the east becoming an artillery battle that has seen Kyiv's forces outgunned and outnumbered.

Malyar said every day of delay means the loss of lives of more Ukrainian soldiers and civilians. "And therefore, unfortunately, we cannot wait very long, because the situation is very difficult," she added.

With the conflict now in its fourth month, the battle of Donbas could dictate the course of the war.

If Russia prevails, Ukraine will lose not only land but perhaps the bulk of its most capable military forces, opening the way for Moscow to grab more territory and dictate its terms to Kyiv.

A Russian failure, however, could lay the grounds for a Ukrainian counteroffensive — and possible political upheaval for the Kremlin.

Jan Egeland, the secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, one of the aid organizations supplying food to civilians in the Donbas, said fighting in the past few weeks has made regular food distributions impossible. Now, he said, the remaining civilians in Sievierodonetsk "are almost entirely cut off from aid supplies after the destruction of the last bridge."

In the northeastern Kharkiv region, the Russian army is trying to strengthen its positions and Ukrainian forces there also are suffering painful losses, Zelenskyy said. "And we still need to fight, to fight hard for the complete security of Kharkiv and the region," he said.

According to an intelligence update Tuesday by the U.K. Defense Ministry, Russian forces appear to have made small advances in the Kharkiv region for the first time in several weeks.

Elsewhere, a regional Ukrainian military official said the country's air defense shot down two Russian cruise missiles targeting the region around Odesa, Ukraine's main port on the Black Sea.

MORE STORIES ON THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR:

- Ukrainians use humor to cope with the trauma of war
- Bucolic Ukraine forest is site of mass grave exhumation
- Russia lowers gas flows to Europe through pipeline
- Pope blasts Russian 'cruelty,' lauds Ukrainian 'heroism'

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

U.S. President Joe Biden says he's working closely with European partners to get 20 million tons of Ukrainian grain, currently blocked from leaving Black Sea ports due to Russia's invasion, onto international markets.

He said Tuesday the plan would involve building temporary storage silos on Ukraine's borders to deal with the problem of the different rail gauges that Ukrainian and European railway systems use.

"Ukraine has a system, like Russia has, a rail gauge that is different than the gauge of the rest of the tracks in Europe," Biden said. "So we're going to build silos, temporary silos, in the borders of Ukraine, including in Poland. So we can transfer it from those cars into those silos, into cars in Europe and get it out to the ocean and get it across the world. But it's taking time."

Ukraine is one of the world's biggest exporters of wheat, corn and sunflower oil. The lack of Ukrainian grain on world markets is threatening to exacerbate food shortages and inflation across the world. Many African and Middle Eastern countries rely heavily on Ukrainian grain and could face problems feeding their people without it.

Nearly two-thirds of the children in Ukraine have been uprooted during the war, according to a U.N. official who visited the country last week.

"The war in Ukraine is a child rights crisis," Afshan Khan told a news briefing Tuesday. She's the Europe and Central Asia director for UNICEF, the U.N. children's agency.

Khan said 277 children in Ukraine have been killed and 456 injured, mostly due to explosives used in urban areas. She said the number of damaged schools is likely in the thousands, and only about 25% of

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schools in Ukraine are even operational.

Millions of Ukrainian women and children have fled the country since the Russian invasion in February.

French President Emmanuel Macron visited Romania on Tuesday to hold talks and meet with French troops stationed there as part of NATO's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Macron's visit to Romania, a European Union member since 2007 and a NATO member since 2004, was the beginning of a regional tour that includes a visit Wednesday to non-NATO Moldova. Both countries share long borders with Ukraine.

"Nobody knows what is in store for us in the coming weeks and months, but we will do all we can to put an end to the Russian invasion, to help Ukrainians and continue with negotiations," Macron said at the eastern Mihail Kogalniceanu air base, where he was greeted by Romanian Prime Minister Nicolae Ciuca.

The Kremlin says Russia would be ready to consider a U.K. appeal over the fate of two Britons sentenced to death for fighting for Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said neither Moscow nor the pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine who passed the sentence had heard from London on the issue.

"You need to apply ... to the authorities of the country whose court passed the verdict, and that is not the Russian Federation," Peskov said. "But, of course, everything will depend on appeals from London. And I am sure that the Russian side will be ready to listen."

Britons Aiden Aslin and Sean Pinner, and Moroccan national Brahim Saadoun, were accused of fighting as mercenaries for Ukraine in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic.

Separatist authorities said all three had a month to appeal their sentence. Kyiv has pledged to try to secure their release through a prisoner swap with Russia.

Russian natural gas deliveries through a major pipeline to Europe will drop by around 40% this year, state-controlled energy giant Gazprom said Tuesday, after Canadian sanctions over the war in Ukraine prevented German partner Siemens Energy from delivering overhauled equipment.

Germany's utility network agency said it did not see gas supplies as endangered and that reduced flows through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline under the Baltic Sea aligned with commercial behavior and Russia's previously announced cutoff of gas to Denmark and the Netherlands, the German news agency dpa reported. The Federal Network Agency said it was monitoring the situation.

Spot gas prices rose in Europe, a sign of jitters over possible further effects of the war on supplies of Russian gas, which powers industry and generates electricity on the continent.

The European Union has outlined plans to reduce dependence on Russian gas by two-thirds by year's end. Economists say a complete cutoff would deal a severe blow to the economy, consumers and gas-intensive industries.

Russia's foreign ministry says it has banned dozens of British media and defense figures from entering the country.

A statement on the ministry website Tuesday said the ban on 29 journalists and commentators was a response to what it claimed was the British media's "deliberate dissemination of false and one-sided information" on Russia and its war in Ukraine.

The list included senior editors and correspondents for the BBC and the Times and Guardian newspapers. Also banned were 20 other people including Britain's navy chief, a junior defense minister, and senior executives at defense and aerospace firms Thales UK and BAE Systems.

The prime ministers of NATO members Albania and Montenegro are heading for Kyiv after an invitation from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Albania's Edi Rama announced the trip on social media, with a photo of him boarding a plane Tuesday

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accompanied by Montenegro's Dritan Abazovic.

Both Balkan countries have denounced Russia's invasion of Ukraine and joined the sanctions against Moscow.

Ukrainian authorities said Tuesday they had received the remains of 64 defenders of the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol in the latest body swap with Russia.

The statement by the Ministry for Reintegration of Occupied Territories said the exchange took place in the Zaporizhzhia region, but didn't clarify how many bodies were returned to Russia.

It was one of the several swaps the warring sides have conducted. Earlier this month Moscow and Kyiv exchanged 160 bodies each. There was no immediate confirmation from Moscow on the swap reported by Ukraine on Tuesday.

In a boost, McConnell backs Senate bipartisan gun deal

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell announced his support Tuesday for his chamber's emerging bipartisan gun agreement, boosting momentum for modest but notable election-year action by Congress on an issue that's deadlocked lawmakers for three decades.

The Kentucky Republican said he hoped an outline of the accord, released Sunday by 10 Democrats and 10 Republicans, would be translated into legislation and enacted. McConnell's backing was the latest indication that last month's gun massacres in Buffalo, New York, and Uvalde, Texas, had reconfigured the political calculations for some in the GOP after years of steadfastly opposing even incremental tightening of firearms curbs.

"If this framework becomes the actual piece of legislation, it's a step forward, a step forward on a bipartisan basis," McConnell told reporters. He said the proposal "further demonstrates to the American people" that lawmakers can work together on significant issues "to make progress for the country."

McConnell's comments were striking, coming five months before midterm elections in which Republicans hope to win control of the Senate and seem likely to win a majority in the House. For years, GOP candidates could risk their careers by defying the views of the party's loyal gun-owning and rural voters, who oppose moves seen as threatening their ownership and use of firearms.

McConnell seemed to suggest that backing this gun measure might even help some Republicans' prospects in November. While he said senators should take a position "based upon the views of their states," he said Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, a chief architect of the deal, presented GOP polling data at a closed-door senators' lunch saying support among gun owners for the agreement's provisions is "off the charts, overwhelming."

The plan would for the first time make the juvenile records of gun buyers under age 21 part of required background checks. Money would be sent to states for mental health and school security programs and for incentives to enforce or enact local "red flag" laws that let authorities win court approval to temporarily remove guns from people considered dangerous.

Senators and aides hope to translate their broad agreement into legislation in days, in hopes that Congress could approve it before leaving for its July 4 recess. Both sides acknowledge that is a difficult process that could encounter disputes and delays.

Some Republicans expressed unhappiness with the plan Tuesday, with much criticism aimed at its encouragement of "red flag" laws. Nineteen states mostly dominated by Democrats and the District of Columbia have them, but Republicans have blocked efforts in Congress to pass federal legislation on the subject.

"If we're not going to pass a federal red flag law, and we shouldn't, why would we incentivize states to do something that we think is a bad idea?" said Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D.

"I don't know what we can do in view of the Constitution," Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala., said of the overall agreement, citing the Second Amendment right to bear arms.

Cornyn defended the plan's "red flag" proposal, saying it would create no national requirements for

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such laws. He said it gives "every state regardless of whether it has a 'red flag' law or not" money for programs aimed at improving public safety and helping troubled people get assistance. Texas does not have a "red flag" law.

McConnell made clear he would only go so far in restricting firearms.

Asked by a reporter why the federal minimum age is 21 for tobacco sales but 18 to buy rifles, he answered, "Good try." He added that including state and local juvenile records in background checks for the youngest guy buyers was "a step in the right direction."

The alleged shooters in Buffalo, where 10 people were killed, and Uvalde, where 19 school children and two teachers were slain, were both 18 years old, a common profile for many mass shooters.

A final agreement on overall legislation would be expected to receive solid support from Democrats. But it would need at least 10 GOP votes to reach the Senate's usual 60 vote threshold, and McConnell's plaudits raised hopes that Republican backing would grow beyond that.

The framework also broadens the type of domestic abusers who'd be prohibited from buying guns, require more firearms sellers to conduct background checks and impose tougher penalties on gun traffickers.

The National Rifle Association said Sunday it wouldn't take a position on the proposal until full legislation is produced. It warned it would oppose "gun control policies" or infringements on people's "fundamental right to protect themselves."

The pro-gun lobby still has political muscle from its millions of dedicated members, who vote heavily on firearms issues. But GOP support for the new package is the latest threat to its power following recent financial scandals and lawsuits.

Approval seems likely by the Democratic-run House, where Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has praised the measure as a first step toward strong restrictions in the future.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said he would schedule votes on the legislation as soon as it is ready. He contrasted recent days' progress with Congress' failure to act after a parade of mass shootings in recent decades.

"After Uvalde and Buffalo, perhaps this time could be different. To many senators on both sides, this debate certainly feels different," Schumer said.

Congress' last major gun measure was an assault weapons ban that took effect in 1994 but expired 10 years later.

Abortion foes, accustomed to small wins, ready for a big one

By MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — The first of them arrived outside the clinic past 4 a.m., before a steady rain fell and a scalding sun rose, and all along, they had prayed for a moment like this.

It's abortion day at Planned Parenthood and, try as they might, those who lined the street hadn't had much luck changing any minds.

Now, a patient pushes out of the center's doors, limply drags her feet across the parking lot, and heads straight into the arms of an anti-abortion counselor who, a short while earlier, asked her not to do what she came here for.

One of the clinic's rainbow-vested workers, Allison Terracio, sees what's unfolding and cries, "They got one!"

A majority of Americans backs abortion rights, and Terracio believes the anti-abortion group's sidewalk coterie uses trickery, empty promises and manipulation in the guise of kindness to sway women from something they've already carefully thought through.

She is as alarmed as her opponents are hopeful.

As the patient walks away with the counselor, it feels as if every eye on the block has followed. The circle of praying Catholics, the smattering of evangelicals at every clinic driveway, even the lone protester here, Steven Lefemine, who stands by himself with a sign with a graphic photo of an aborted fetus, all seem riveted by the apparent change of heart.

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"This is a glorious thing that's happening here!" 66-year-old Lefemine exclaims.

For tens of millions of Americans who see abortion as wrong, it's gone this way for a half-century: One woman swayed to reconsider as dozens of others follow through. One clinic's doors closed only to see desperate patients go elsewhere. One law passed, another overturned.

A movement built of tiny steps and endless setbacks, though, now seems poised for a massive leap.

The possibility of looming success, perhaps undoing the constitutional right to abortion found in Roe v. Wade, isn't talked about much here, though. That's left to others entrenched in this fight. Those here on the front lines of the battle are focused on the task at hand: To change a single mind and, in their eyes, save a single life.

When that happens, Valerie Berry, the 27-year-old program manager for the biggest of the groups here, A Moment of Hope, says she'll feel the tingle of goosebumps or the well of tears. Sometimes, she has burst into a joyous dance.

On this day, she's not there yet with the patient who exited the clinic. But the woman is here beside her, sharing her story and openly discussing if there's some way she can have another baby.

"It's a miracle every time it happens," Berry says. "In some ways, even a conversation is a miracle."

Berry and a colleague lead the woman across the street from the clinic to their group's idling RV, where she says she's about seven weeks pregnant. She tells of a tough upbringing in foster care, an abusive partner who's now out of the picture, the struggles of raising a 3-year-old, the problems with money, the hope of finding a new home and starting a career in music, all the things that seemed impossible even before her period failed to arrive and morning sickness started sapping her will.

Yet for all the reasons the woman lists to end her pregnancy, Berry feels encouraged that she's reaching her. When she suggests the woman come see a doctor allied with her group who can prescribe something for the nausea while she weighs her decision, she is receptive. And when a colleague floats considering adoption, the flat rejection of the idea assures them.

"No," they say the woman told them. "My child will be with me and we'll just tough it out."

The goosebumps return. Berry is tingling. Something miraculous is happening.

Talk to someone who's been immersed in opposing abortion long enough and they'll tell you the disbelief they felt when news of Roe broke and the naïve certainty they had that it would be overturned in a couple of years. They'll tell you about the politicians who collected their votes and never delivered, and the judges seen as allies who went on to disappoint. They'll tell you how the issue ended friendships or landed them in handcuffs or brought them heartache again and again and again.

And yet, here they are, all these years later, in the fight so long some have grandchildren at their side.

They made arguments about biology and fetal development that rarely swayed, then shifted to pleas rooted in civil rights and religion. They lobbied for laws on parental notification and waiting periods and licensing, really anything that might jeopardize an abortion facility's operation, down to the width of its hallways. And, as a raging faction grew restless, some formed human blockades outside clinics or were driven, in the most extreme acts of anti-abortion radicalism, to plant a bomb, set a fire or draw a gun.

The image of an abortion opponent cemented in some Americans' minds became a rabid protester shouting condemnation and clutching a gory sign, who would do anything to advance their cause, down to committing the very crime of murder they believe abortion to be.

Mark Baumgartner, the softspoken founder of A Moment of Hope, knows the caricature many have of anti-abortion figures like him. He shudders when noisy protesters show up here and wishes Lefemine didn't bring his big foam signs. He knows a woman arriving here may see everyone on the street the same, but if he could just have her ear for a moment, he thinks he can convince her.

"They're expecting to get yelled at that they're going to hell," says 53-year-old Baumgartner, who left behind his job as a pilot to create the organization. "We're here to be different."

This day, megaphone-toting protesters haven't come and, at times, you hear little more than the hum of the idling RV, where A Moment of Hope has a sonogram suite. Mostly, it's the sound of passing traffic

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punctuated by the occasional last-ditch call to a woman before she enters the doors of the clinic, set in an office park and barely recognizable save for the throng of foes it attracts.

"We have a lot of help available!" "It's not safe in there!" "You can help save a life today!"

At the start, in 2012, it was a one-man crusade. Now, Baumgartner leads a group of employees and volunteers big enough to stand outside Planned Parenthood every minute it's open.

The first woman that Baumgartner approached a decade ago changed her mind, giving birth to a little girl whose picture hangs beside his office desk. It became the first of what the group regards as a "save," when someone they've interacted with who planned to have an abortion changes their mind.

Last year, they estimate about 1,600 women had an abortion at the clinic. They logged 66 saves.

They were the work of the group's "sidewalk counselors" who are positioned at nine checkpoints stretched across the entirety of this sprawling city block. In a synchronized routine, each of them dons a neon vest and a Motorola radio earpiece on which they pause for a morning prayer, then use it to spread word of arriving clinic patients.

If their outstretched hand manages to stop a motorist headed to Planned Parenthood, they'll try to start a conversation and offer a gift bag with a loofah, Lifesavers, granola bars and a 2-inch-long plastic model of a fetus 12 weeks into its development. Pamphlets cite Bible passages, have one of the gory photos the group says it frowns upon, and include the false assertion that abortion is riskier than giving birth. A handwritten note, with cell numbers for Baumgartner and Berry, pleads with the reader.

"It is not too late to change your mind," it says. "There are caring people who want to help you."

Inside the group's RV, the woman who emerged from the clinic is deep in conversation with Berry and one of the A Moment of Hope interns, who bonded with the woman over their shared childhoods in foster care. The woman is in her early 20s, dressed in a tie-dye hoodie and carrying a Seagram's ginger ale.

After about 10 minutes, she agrees to go with Berry across town to the OB-GYN's office.

The woman walks back across to Planned Parenthood's lot and Berry stops at the driveway, careful not to pass the invisible line between public and private that could yield a call to police.

As she nears her blue sedan, though, she encounters Terracio. The A Moment for Hope team is alarmed.

They try calling out to her and get no response. Berry sprints to and from the parking lot next door trying to find a better vantage, then furiously texts her.

"You don't have to go back in there!" Baumgartner calls.

Under South Carolina law, a woman arriving for an abortion would have already undergone a waiting period and advised to read a lengthy document detailing fetal development, from when a heartbeat is detected to when fingernails grow to when the unborn can hiccup for the first time.

Terracio, a 45-year-old who also serves as a county councilwoman, says those due in to take an abortion pill or undergo a brief surgery have already thought through what they wanted. Nothing Baumgartner and his crew can offer, she says, will change the circumstances of the prospective mother's life.

"I'm not in the business of convincing anybody of anything," Terracio says.

At the property's edge, no one can hear what Terracio is saying to the woman, but she is now turned away from her car toward the clinic's doors. Baumgartner is growing pessimistic, talking of the "spiritual battle" that is underway and how "powers of darkness" are at work.

"It's like the jaws of hell," he says. "She's trying to snatch this one"

Berry begins doubting her decision to have the woman follow her to the doctor's office instead of just driving her. She says she always wants to be sure not to overstep and make someone feel uncomfortable. She wanted to give the woman space, she said, and in the moment and yards that now separated them, it seemed everything they'd talked through suddenly dissipated.

The door of her blue sedan never opens and, with a few steps of her Crocs, it's clear she is headed back inside. But if she came out before, Berry rationalizes, surely she could again. The last sentence she musters before the woman disappears through the clinic's doorway feels tinged with hurt and concern and desperation.

"Whenever you're ready, we'll be right here, OK?" she calls.

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Inside the buildings where abortions are offered, workers say women who pass a throng of protesters will say: "They don't know my life. They don't know what I'm going through." Outside, the sidewalk counselors say the arriving women often tell them: "Thank you for stopping me. I was hoping I would see some sort of sign not to go through with this."

Inside, this is seen as a fundamental woman's right, a type of healthcare that deserves no stigma attached. Outside, those who oppose abortion see it as pure evil that must be stopped.

Both sides see the truth as plain.

For so many who have been drawn to the anti-abortion cause, it's baffling and frustrating how often their appeals feel unheard. It's not 1973 anymore: They wonder how anyone could deny the scientific leaps, the advances in fetal viability, the way a heartbeat from inside the uterus can be heard and an image seen. To those with whom they disagree, they ask: Where is the line? When they hear talk of a fetus, an embryo, a clump of cells, they wonder, at what point will someone acknowledge it's a baby?

So they return, time and again, to the pews where they pray for change, to the statehouses where they lobby, to the marches and protests where they chant. And they return here, to Middleburg Drive in South Carolina's capital, beneath the magnolias and atop sunbaked swaths of asphalt, to plead their case.

The clinic door has shut and the woman with the blue sedan, the one who seemed to take to heart what the A Moment of Hope team told her as she sat in their RV, is inside.

At the foot of the closest driveway to Planned Parenthood, tension is high. Baumgartner is scratching his beard. An intern is frozen and pensive. Berry is tapping off a string of last-ditch messages to the woman.

"I promise we're not gonna force you to do anything ... Even if they can make it possible for you to have an abortion today, would you let us talk more? I can see you're really hurting ... Would you be willing to wait to do it for a couple days or a week to let us help you? I actually saw a 7-week baby on an ultrasound this week. The heartbeat, head, etc. were clearly visible. It's not nothing ... I can tell you're a caring person. Because of that, the guilt on your conscience will hang heavy ... Praying right now you'll be overwhelmed by God's love and know we love you and can help you every step of the way."

No reply comes. Berry's teammates are spread across hundreds of yards and most only know morsels about the woman from a group text. They heard she exited the clinic and went on the RV. Now, Berry texts again with a bleak update. "Please pray," she writes, and up and down the block, they silently do.

"Lord, change her mind." "Give her the courage to leave." "God, save her from the evil of this."

When the woman exits about two hours later, she gets in her blue sedan and stops at the edge of the driveway. She tells the sidewalk crew she gagged trying to swallow pills to induce abortion. She had the pregnancy ended by surgery instead, and when she says it out loud, she begins to sob.

Shonda Johnson, a 48-year-old housekeeper at a veterinary hospital who volunteers for A Moment of Hope, rubs the woman's back and listens as she said she felt guilty. Thirty-two years ago, Johnson came to this very site for the very same reason, a decision she later came to see as wrong.

"When I saw those tears rolling, I knew exactly where she was," she says.

When word reaches Berry, she chokes up. She grieves the baby that won't be born. She prays for the woman's healing. She second-guesses the choices she made. She keeps texting the woman in the weeks to come, and plans are made to meet, though it never happens. She used to feel beaten up for days after a moment like this, but she now believes it still may lead the woman closer to God.

In the long fight against abortion, there have been many days like this one. But they'll return when the clinic reopens. They'll return even if Roe falls. Many expect the fight to continue to their grave.

They've never felt more hopeful. A change, they are sure, is coming.

Title IX: Icons warn of complacency amid law's success

By TERESA M. WALKER AP Sports Writer

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Some of the giants of women's basketball say if not for Title IX, doors would not have been open for them to blaze trails to Hall of Fame careers on and off the court, but sound complacency alarms when it comes to the future of the law.

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Coach Marsha Sharp takes it a step farther when talking about the significance of Title IX.

"I think the Title IX legislation, you could say is the most impactful piece of information in the 20th century," said Sharp, who guided Sheryl Swoopes and Texas Tech to the 1993 national championship. "And I know the Civil Rights piece was really huge, but you impacted half our population.

"With Title IX, you gave opportunities across the board to women. And it was really an amazing time to watch the growth in sports."

A 2003 inductee, Sharp joined 2008 Hall of Famer Debbie Ryan and a pair of recent inductees — Debbie Antonelli and Carol Stiff — in speaking with The Associated Press about the 50th anniversary of the landmark legislation. Stiff, a basketball player/coach turned TV executive, called Title IX priceless.

"I don't know where we would be today without Title IX," Stiff said.

The icons of the game also agree more work remains even after 50 years.

"There's a lot of battles, but we're not fighting them," said Ryan, who coached Virginia to three straight Final Fours. "And that's one of the problems. I think because of the money that's come into the game, it becomes harder for a coach to kind of put themselves out there. And I think even though they know who's going to win, they just don't do it as much."

At least one of Ryan's former players has been outspoken. Dawn Staley, now the highest-paid coach in the Southeastern Conference, is front and center helping fight for equity while leading South Carolina to two national championships.

For Sharp and Ryan, they worked their way through the nascent days of Title IX to the heights of women's basketball.

Sharp played at Wayland Baptist, a Texas program giving scholarships in the 1950s with a local company flying the team to games. So while most women's programs could only dream of flying to road games, it was nothing new for Sharp when she became coach at Texas Tech in 1982. Sharp's Red Raiders played a national schedule with flights to Tennessee and Stanford.

At Virginia, Ryan had to stay awake to drive the van home from road games. Virginia started with one scholarship for basketball with the first player leaving after a year to care for her sick father. In 1978, Dori Gamble shared that scholarship with Hall of Famer Val Ackerman, currently commissioner of the Big East and the first president of the WNBA.

Using Title IX meant picking battles to get more athletic gear, equipment and facilities for female athletes.

One of Ryan's biggest battles was for athletic bras.

Virginia cited a price of \$32 apiece to avoid buying them for all women's sports until Ryan pushed back with studies about women's health along with a petition backed by all coaches, including football coach George Welsh. After she won, Pat Summitt, Kay Yow, Jody Conradt and Tara VanDerveer all called for guidance to help wage their own fights.

And probably surprising to many, the fight for athletic bras continues.

"Still today women athletes are not provided in their regular gear athletic bras," Ryan said. "They're not provided it at all, which is ridiculous. And it's crazy that they're not provided enough funding to be able to buy them."

Antonelli, who played basketball for Yow at North Carolina State, started the first TV broadcasts of women's games at Ohio State as director of marketing in the 1990s that boosted her own 30-plus year career as a broadcaster. She sees plenty of room for women's sports to grow — as long as the money for diversity, equity and inclusion is used appropriately.

"It should go to women's sports," Antonelli said. "There's more opportunities for girls to play now than they've ever played then there's ever been now. They're not all playing my sport, but they are playing. And that's important because we know what value sport brings, what it teaches."

Stiff said growing the TV audience is one of the next steps for women's sports, and time slots are important to that growth.

"If you build it, they will come," said Stiff, who spent more than 30 years at ESPN and got the Tennessee-UConn rivalry started, broadcasting the schools' first meeting in 1995. "And you can point to the NCAA women's semifinals that got moved from ESPN2 to ESPN. Why was that? It out-rated the NBA in that

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window for two years. Two years. We out-rated the NBA regular season, Friday night games. So we move it over, and look at the ratings.”

A 2021 Hall of Fame inductee, Stiff currently is involved with the Demand IX campaign with the Women’s Sports Foundation in an effort to educate people and and get help to protect and support Title IX.

Sharp said education remains vital to Title IX because the law is almost a victim of its own success. The coach said just go into any university or high school and ask students about Title IX, and many won’t know what it means.

“Is that a good thing? Sharp said. “In some ways, yes, because they haven’t had to fight those battles. It means that they have felt equity probably in their lives. But on the other hand, if you get too far away from it, then there are going to be some opportunities for people not to stay on course with what is the right thing to do.”

WNBA star Griner’s Russia detention extended for third time

MOSCOW (AP) — WNBA star Brittney Griner will remain in Russian custody through at least July 2, Russian state-run news agency Tass reported Tuesday.

The 31-year-old American basketball player has been held in Russia since February when she was detained at a Moscow airport after authorities there claimed she was carrying vape cartridges containing cannabis oil. The U.S. Department of State last month reclassified her as wrongfully detained.

The Khimki district court of the Moscow region extended Griner’s detention for a third time, according to the Tass report, which also cited a top Russian diplomat as saying that Moscow will not consider including Griner in a detainee swap “until a court investigation into her case is completed.”

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, according to Tass, was responding to US media reports that the Biden administration had offered to exchange convicted arms trader Viktor Bout for Griner. Ryabkov gave no timeline for the proceedings in the player’s case.

Griner’s supporters continue to advocate for her release, with some raising concerns that Moscow might use her as a bargaining chip amid tensions over the war in Ukraine.

Griner, a two-time Olympic gold medalist who plays in Russia during the WNBA offseason, was accused of “smuggling significant amounts of a narcotic substance,” an offense punishable by up to 10 years in prison in Russia.

The Houston native plays for the Phoenix Mercury.

State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters Tuesday that it was his understanding that department officials learned of the extension in her detention only through Tass, which he said was problematic.

“This case is problematic from top to bottom,” he said. “It is precisely why we have characterized Brittney Griner as an unlawful detainee. It’s precisely why we are doing everything we can to seek and to affect her prompt release from Russian detention.”

1/6 panel postpones hearing with ex-Justice Dept. officials

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021 riot at the U.S. Capitol has postponed a hearing that was to feature dramatic testimony from former Justice Department officials who were pressured by then-President Donald Trump to pursue his false election fraud theories.

The hearing had been scheduled for Wednesday, but the committee on Tuesday morning said that it had been delayed. A spokesman for the panel attributed the postponement to “a number of scheduling factors, including production timeline and availability of members and witnesses.”

Rep. Adam Kinzinger, a Republican member of the committee, said on Twitter that the hearing had been moved to next week as a way to “space out” the testimony surrounding the insurrection, when crowds of Trump supporters stormed the Capitol and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden’s victory.

The committee has already held two hearings, including a primetime one last week that featured never-before-seen video of extremists leading the deadly siege. Another hearing is set to take place on Thursday.

The witnesses at Wednesday’s hearing were to include Jeffrey Rosen, who was the acting attorney

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general at the time of the Capitol insurrection, as well as two other former top officials at the Justice Department, Richard Donoghue and Steven Engel. Lawyers for all three men did not immediately return messages seeking comment.

The witnesses, all of whom have since left the Justice Department, are expected to testify about how Trump sought to bend the department to his political will during the final days of his administration by urging officials to declare the election as corrupt and to aid in his efforts to challenge the results of the race won by Democrat Joe Biden.

Though the lawyers' accounts have been documented by the news media, the hearing will give the American public its most detailed glimpse of a near-revolt inside the Justice Department as Trump contemplated replacing the agency's top official with a lower-level lawyer seen as more willing to advance the president's false claims that the election was stolen. Several other senior officials warned Trump in a White House meeting that they'd resign if the leadership change occurred.

Rosen took over the department following the December 2020 departure of William Barr, who angered Trump by saying the department had not found fraud that could have affected the results of the election. Trump quickly soured on Rosen, too, after the then-acting attorney general rejected entreaties from the president and the White House to challenge the election results.

Around that time, the president was introduced by Rep. Scott Perry, a Pennsylvania Republican and ardent Trump backer, to Jeffrey Clark, a little-known assistant attorney general who postured himself as willing to advance Trump's baseless voting fraud claims.

At one point, according to testimony provided to lawmakers, Clark presented colleagues with a draft letter pushing Georgia officials to convene a special legislative session on the election results. Clark wanted the letter sent, but superiors at the Justice Department refused.

A lawyer for Clark did not immediately return a phone message on Wednesday.

Clark's support led Trump to openly contemplate naming him as acting attorney general in place of Rosen.

The situation came to a head during a tense, hours-long Jan. 3, 2021 meeting at the White House in which Engel and Donoghue told Trump that they would resign from the Justice Department if Trump proceeded with his plan to fire Rosen and replace him with Clark.

Trump ultimately relented, and Rosen remained on as acting attorney general through the end of the administration.

US failed to stop fraud in COVID loan program, Clyburn says

By JENNIFER McDERMOTT and GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

The U.S. failed to take basic steps at the start of the coronavirus pandemic to prevent fraud in a federal aid program intended to help small businesses, depleting the funds and making people more vulnerable to identity theft, the chairman of a House panel examining the payouts said Tuesday.

Democratic Rep. James Clyburn blamed the Trump administration for the problems in the COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan program, overseen by the U.S. Small Business Administration, amid revelations that as much as 20% of the money — tens of billions of dollars — may have been awarded to fraudsters.

Clyburn said the Biden administration has implemented measures to identify potential fraud and directed loan officers to address indications of fraud before approving loans, while Congress has invested in fraud prevention and accountability.

Rep. Steve Scalise, the No. 2 House Republican, said the Trump administration and Congress worked together at the beginning of the pandemic, when uncertainty was rampant and much of the economy was locked down, to deliver "much needed relief as fast as we could to help save as many jobs as we could" and prevent the economy from crashing.

Scalise, R-La., said Democrats are undermining the successes, and he asked why the House coronavirus panel Clyburn chairs wasn't looking into the enhanced unemployment insurance program that was plagued by "egregious and unprecedented fraud" and is a "leading contributor" to the high inflation rates.

"I hope that in our oversight of pandemic programs, my Democratic colleagues will be able to recognize

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the difference between what was needed to save the economy during an unprecedented pandemic versus pushing a partisan, inflation-inducing agenda," he said.

Clyburn, of South Carolina, said the subcommittee will determine what more must be done to bring perpetrators of fraud to justice and how to protect future emergency programs.

Clyburn said he supports extending the statute of limitations for this kind of fraud case to give investigators more time to untangle complex potential crimes. Witnesses at the hearing suggested standardizing the data collected by states to make it easier for federal authorities to spot possibly fraudulent patterns.

The SBA's Office of the Inspector General has estimated that at least \$80 billion distributed from the \$400 billion EIDL program could have been fraudulent, much of it in scams using stolen identities. Separately, staff for the select subcommittee on Tuesday issued a report that found that some 1.6 million applications for the loans may have been approved without being evaluated.

The subcommittee's staff found that those loans were approved in batches of up to 500 applications at a time. Applications were allowed to move through even if they had certain red flags for fraud — such as international client locations or phone numbers not associated with the business or the owner — so long as they weren't too many of them. The process meant that while software analyzed the applications, they were not even opened by officials before being greenlighted for funding.

The SBA's inspector general, Hannibal "Mike" Ware, said initially there was a huge struggle at the agency about the "need for speed versus the need for controls." He said he was "screaming" about the need for fraud controls. He said the most concerning thing was self-certification, which meant applicants could say they had a business or a certain number of employees and get money.

The subcommittee hearing also tackled broader fraud concerns with the flood of pandemic aid from multiple federal government programs for states, local governments, businesses and the unemployed. The \$5 trillion in total aid, delivered in a series of bills signed by Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden, have come with numerous complications.

Fraud overwhelmed enhanced unemployment insurance programs funded by the federal government and administered by the states. There was so much aid to governments that many struggled to find a way to spend it all under the original regulations. And there have been questions about whether the Paycheck Protection Program to keep employees working was worth it.

The Secret Service said in December that nearly \$100 billion has been stolen from COVID-19 relief programs, basing that estimate on its cases and data from the Labor Department and the Small Business Administration. The White House downplayed the estimate, saying it was based on old reports.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency may have been double-billed for the funerals of hundreds of people who died of COVID-19, the Government Accountability Office said in April. States and cities continue to be slow to spend their pandemic relief money.

The select subcommittee said Tuesday that more than \$10 billion allocated under two massive business loan programs has been returned because of investigations and bank actions. Federal prosecutors have charged nearly 1,500 people with crimes related to fraud against the government over the business loans and enhanced unemployment insurance programs.

The government's Pandemic Response Accountability Committee says inspectors general for various federal agencies have at least 1,150 ongoing investigations into fraud from the different aid funds. Officials say it could take years to untangle all the problems.

K-pop supergroup BTS says it's making time for solo projects

By The Associated Press

Global superstars BTS said they are taking time to focus on solo projects, but the company behind the groundbreaking K-pop group said they are not taking a hiatus.

The seven-member group with hits like "Butter" and "Dynamite" talked about their future in a video posted Tuesday celebrating the nine year anniversary of their debut release. They just released a three-disc anthology album, "Proof," last week.

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Band member Suga asked the group if they should talk about why they were going into a hiatus as they sat down for a group dinner. They discussed having to deal with COVID-19 interrupting their touring plans and music releases, as well as what each one thought about their individual artistic goals.

The group spoke in Korean, and the word "hiatus" was used on English subtitles included on the video. But a statement from Hybe, the South Korean entertainment company behind BTS, said they'll still be working on projects as a group, as well as individually. "BTS are not taking a hiatus. Members will be focusing more on solo projects at this time," the statement said.

No details about future BTS collaborations or the solo projects were announced Tuesday. BTS has a global fanbase that follows the group and members online and in recent years the group's profile has rose overseas. The group recently address the UN General Assembly and went to the White House to discuss with President Joe Biden ways to curb violence against Asian Americans.

The band members — J-Hope, RM, Suga, Jungkook, V, Jin and Jimin — opened up about the struggle to develop as individual artists within the K-pop genre.

"The problem with K-pop and the whole idol system is that don't give you time to mature," said RM. Some of the group members appeared to be crying during the conversation.

Band member V recalled a conversation he had with J-Hope in which they discussed how working on solo projects would improve their "synergy" as a band. Suga described an interest in trying out new genres.

"We're each going to take some time to have fun and experience a lot of things," said Jung Kook to their fans. "We promise we will return someday even more mature than we are now."

War isn't funny but humor helps Ukrainians cope with trauma

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Because he'll shortly be deployed as a soldier on the battlefields of Ukraine, Serhiy Lipko and Anastasia Zukhvala chose to marry first, like a growing number of couples being torn asunder by war with Russia.

Like others, their nuptials were rushed and smaller than they would have been during peacetime, with just a few dozen close friends and family. She wore a simple crown of blue flowers in her hair. And then, because laughter can be medicinal and because Lipko was building a career as a comic before the defense of his country called, they headed to a stand-up comedy club in Ukraine's capital, Kyiv.

There, with his new wife watching from the wings, he took the stage in olive-green fatigues and soon had the crowd in stitches with close-to-the-bone humor about army and married life. He joked that military training with NATO instructors had been a great opportunity for him to practice his English, and how nervous he'd been about handling expensive military gear, for fear of breaking it.

The war isn't remotely funny, but Ukrainians are learning to laugh about the awfulness of it all. Not necessarily because they want to, but because they have to — to stay sane in the brutality that has killed tens of thousands of people, is upending Ukraine, millions of lives and the world order as it rages on front lines in the east and south of the country.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his troops, especially dead and wounded ones, are favorite targets of dark Ukrainian wartime humor. But there are red lines: Ukrainian dead aren't laughed about and the grimmest battles, among them the brutal siege of Mariupol and the port city's Azovstal steelworks, are far too raw for jokes. The same is true of atrocities in Bucha and elsewhere.

"Tragedies cannot and will never be the object of humor," said Zukhvala, who also works as a stand-up comic, as she and Lipko hugged with the tenderness of newlyweds after his show and scooped up armfuls of bouquets, wondering aloud how they'd find space for them at home.

"This is an absolutely crazy time, beyond ordinary experience," she said. "Our life now is made of paradoxes, and it can even be funny."

Ukraine's most famous comedian is Volodymyr Zelenskyy, now the country's president, elected in 2019. In the TV comedy series "Servant of the People," the former stand-up comic and actor played a lovable high school teacher who accidentally becomes president — before he later actually became one for real.

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But Zelenskyy hasn't had much cause for comedy since the Feb. 24 invasion thrust him into the role of wartime leader. His daily video addresses to the nation are often grim and forceful.

But while he works to rally international support and soldiers fight with tanks, artillery and tons of Western-supplied armaments, Ukrainians away from the front are using jokes and humor as weapons — against war-time anxiety and moroseness, against Russia and to feel as one, both laughing and crying together in their sorrow and anger.

Yuliia Shytko, 29, said she felt in far higher spirits after chortling loudly with the rest of the crowd through Lipko and other comedians' routines in the basement comedy club, the vast majority of their jokes revolving around war-related themes.

"Laughing and stuff, that's how you cope," Shytko said.

Lipko and Zelenskyy crossed paths in comedy before war utterly altered their trajectories. The future president, then still an entertainer, was a juror in 2016 on the TV game show, "Make a comedian laugh." Lipko was a contestant. He wore camouflage fatigues because he was in the midst of military service and rattled off jokes about his army experiences. He made Zelenskyy laugh by quipping that he'd buy a PlayStation if he won the top prize — which he eventually did. They spoke in Russian then; they both stick to Ukrainian in public now.

Lipko is still riffing off army life, even as he prepares within days to leave behind his bride to fight. The army gave him a day off to tie the knot, a quick in-and-out of a marriage office where their comedian friends ruffled the registrar's feathers by joking around.

"We laughed a lot," said stand-up comic Anton Tymoshenko, who attended and also performed later that night at the club.

Lipko's nickname in the army is "the comedian." During his routine, he joked that some things his fellow soldiers say and do are so funny he can't help but use them as fodder for his stand-up, despite having told them he wouldn't. Afterward, he said his comic outlook should help him endure in battle.

"I am a comedian who temporarily became a serviceman," he said. "I have plans and creative projects for after the war. There are things to live for."

Zukhvala said she tells herself that "we will win and everything will be fine." She wants a big wedding celebration when peace returns.

Tymoshenko said he and their other comedian friends will look after her while Lipko is away.

But he has worries of his own: He has been trying to persuade his parents to leave their village in the south that he feels is too close to the Russian advance, but to his dismay they're laughing off the danger. His mother quipped that should Russian missiles churn up her potato plot, that would spare her the spade work.

"My mother never joked before the war," he said. "They use my weapons against me ... and that's unfair."

US-expelled Haitians fuel charter business to Latin America

By JULIE WATSON, GISELA PEREZ de ACHA, KATIE LICARI, TRENTON DANIEL and PATRICIA LUNA
Associated Press

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — With jokes, upbeat Caribbean music and vacation scenes of sun-kissed beaches and palm trees, Haitian influencers on YouTube and TikTok advertise charter flights to South America.

But they are not targeting tourists.

Instead, they are touts for a thriving, little-known shadow industry that is profiting from the U.S. government sending people back to Haiti, a country besieged by gang violence.

More than a dozen South American travel agencies have rented planes from low-budget Latin American airlines — some of them as large as 238-seat Airbuses — and then sold tickets at premium prices. Many of the customers are Haitians who had been living in Chile and Brazil before they made their way to the Texas border in September, only to be expelled by the Biden administration and prevented from seeking asylum. They are using the charter flights to flee Haiti again and return to South America.

Some, clearly, plan to make another try to enter the United States.

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Rodolfo Noriega of the National Coordinator of Immigrants in Chile said Haitians are being exploited by businesses taking advantage of their desperation. They “are at the end of a chain of powerful businesses making money from this circuit of Haitian migration,” he said.

The airlines and travel agencies say they work within the legal norms of the countries where they are operating from and are simply providing a service to the Haitian diaspora in South America.

The thriving business model was revealed in an eight-month investigation by The Associated Press in partnership with the University of California, Berkeley’s Human Rights Center and its Investigative Reporting Program.

This story is part of an ongoing Associated Press series, “Migration Inc.,” which investigates individuals and companies that profit from the movement of people who flee violence and civil strife in their homelands.

Haitians sick of the deprivations of their island home resettled in Chile or Brazil, many after Haiti’s catastrophic 2010 earthquake. Then, last fall, struggling as the pandemic hit local economies and beset by racism, thousands decided to make their way to the Texas border town of Del Rio. There, they ran afoul of a public health order, invoked by the Trump administration and continued under the Biden administration, that blocks migrants from requesting asylum.

Authorities returned them not to South America, where some of their children were born, but to their original homeland — Haiti.

Some interviewed by the AP said they feared for their lives there and wanted to return to South America. But airlines had stopped direct commercial flights from Haiti to Chile and Brazil during the pandemic; their remaining option was the charters.

The flights from Haiti became a lucrative business as restrictions aimed at controlling the spread of the coronavirus decimated tourism, according to the travel agents. Planes arrive empty to Haiti but return to South America full.

From November 2020 until this May, at least 128 charters were rented by travel agencies in Chile and Brazil for flights from Haiti, according to flight tracking information, online advertisements matching the flights to agencies and other independent verification by the AP and Berkeley.

Since taking office in January 2021, the Biden administration has sent more than 25,000 Haitians back to Haiti despite warnings from human rights groups that the expulsions would only contribute to Haiti’s travails and feed more Haitian migration to Latin America and the U.S.

Not all of the passengers on the charters had tried to immigrate to the U.S., but based on interviews with dozens of travel agents, Haitian migrants and advocates, and an analysis of flight data using the Swedish service Flightradar24, it is clear that the charters have become a major means to flee Haiti.

Some who took charter flights back to South America have headed north again on the network of underground routes that wind through Central America and Mexico and that ultimately lead to the United States, according to immigration attorneys, advocates and interviews with dozens of Haitians.

Many of the Haitians go back to Chile and Brazil, rather than places close to the U.S. like Mexico, because they have visas and other legal paperwork to get into those countries. And having lived there, they can find jobs quickly to make money for the trip north.

Some, like Armstrong Jean-Baptiste, also have children who were born in South America. The 33-year-old father of two said he spent \$6,000 on a harrowing trip from Chile to Texas, only to be sent back to Haiti.

He said he had knives pulled on him, forged rivers that carried others away to their deaths and encountered highway robbers. In the end, he said the Haitians were handcuffed and “treated like animals” by U.S. immigration authorities. He said his son caught pneumonia in the immigration detention center.

As he waited in Port-au-Prince for a charter flight back to Santiago, news from northern Chile underscored why he wanted to go to the United States in the first place: A demonstration against immigrants drew thousands of protesters who turned violent and destroyed the belongings of migrants living in a camp.

Would he try to go to the U.S. again? He did not rule it out.

“The risks are so numerous that this shouldn’t be an experience to repeat,” he said. “However, one

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should never say never.”

Ana Darcelin, a travel agent with Travel VIP, a Santiago-based agency that rents planes for flights from Haiti to Chile, said Haitians who migrated north from the South American country, only to be sent back to Haiti, are scrambling to leave Haiti and get back to Chile again.

“Everyone is offering charter flights. There is a lot of demand,” she said.

Travel agencies in Brazil and Chile said in interviews that they pay anywhere from \$100,000 to \$200,000 to rent an aircraft. At that rate, the three airlines that rented planes for 128 charter flights between Haiti and either Brazil or Chile would have been paid a total of anywhere from \$12 million to \$25 million. Meanwhile, some prices for one-way tickets from Haiti to Chile have more than doubled in eight months, from \$625 to more than \$1,600.

In Brazil, many agencies offering flights from Haiti rented from the low-cost Azul S.A. airlines, which was started by JetBlue founder David Neeleman.

Most of the charters to Chile are on planes rented from SKY Airline, owned by the Chilean Paulmann family, which is worth billions.

Neither Neeleman nor Holger Paulmann, chairman of SKY, responded to emails and LinkedIn messages requesting comment.

SKY also signed a \$1.8 million contract in April with the previous administration of Chilean President Sebastián Piñera to fly Latin American immigrants, mostly Venezuelans and Colombians expelled from Chile, back to their homelands. SKY earned about \$670 for each expelled immigrant it flies to Central and South America. Under the contract obtained by the AP and Berkeley, the carrier must complete at least 15 flights carrying 180 passengers each.

John Paul Spode, who has worked 35 years in the travel industry and manages NewStilo, which rents planes from SKY for the flights, said Haiti is not the only place in crisis that offers an attractive market for the charter flight business.

His agency also offers charter flights between Venezuela and Chile. But there are few places with the demand for charter flights like Haiti, though he said it’s not an easy place to do business. In March, protesters stormed the tarmac at an airport in the countryside and set a small plane on fire. Gangs also operate in and around the airport, he said.

“Unfortunately, we have had many passengers who have not been able to board because there are people who stand outside (the airport) with some kind of a list and some kind of uniform and they started charging, saying ‘You are not on the list, sir, but for \$250 you can be added,’ and then they let them enter the airport,” Spode said.

Some passengers said once inside the airport they were blocked again by so-called airport business employees and told that their names were still not on the list, and they must pay again, Spode said. Many do before they reach the ticket counter where they finally are checked in by a legitimate employee with the flight.

But would-be passengers brave all that. “It’s tough to sell tickets from Santiago to Port-au-Prince. The plane leaves usually almost empty,” Spode said. “But we know that on the return trip it’s going to be full, literally, like people practically hanging from the plane, so to speak.”

The demand has been so great that a second low-cost airline based in Ecuador, Aeroregional, entered the Chilean market for the first time and started offering charter flights from Haiti to Chile. At least 11 Aeroregional charters have arrived from Haiti to Chile since December.

Dan Foote, a former U.S. envoy to Haiti who resigned over the Biden administration’s handling of Haitians at the Texas border, said he is not surprised to hear Haitians expelled from the U.S. are making their way back to South America, and that businesses are lining up to help them.

“Until the root causes of instability are truly attacked in a patient, systematic, holistic way, it’s going to keep going,” Foote said.

The travel agencies and airlines denied they are facilitating Haitian migration.

Aeroregional’s managing director, Luis Manuel Rodriguez, said in a statement via LinkedIn that the air-

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line's role is simply to transport people. He said that the immigration status of its passengers is checked by immigration authorities of the countries involved.

Azul confirmed by email that it has provided charter flights between Haiti and Brazil, but said those contracts have confidentiality clauses. The company did not respond to a follow-up request for more information.

Carmen Gloria Serrat, the business manager of SKY, said in a statement that the company offers safe, legal transportation "for whoever wants it and needs it." She said airlines are responsible for validating the paperwork of passengers and must eat the costs of returning anyone who is denied entry to a country.

She said the flights run four times monthly on average and represent a minuscule part of SKY's business. "The act of providing safe and legal transportation is a guarantee to avoid the possibility of abuses," Serrat said. "It's important to point out that in SKY we operate within the established norms for entering a country and always in coordination and under the supervision of immigration authorities."

At least one travel agency is open about offering to help those who hope to reach the United States.

Alta Tour Turismo Travel Agency rents planes for charter flights between Haiti and Chile.

A TikTok account with the handle @altatourtravelagency posted a video on June 14, 2021, discussing how to avoid the Darien Gap, a treacherous, roadless area of thick jungle between Colombia and Panama traversed by migrants from South America heading north.

In the video, two men are talking about different routes north as they show a big boat at sea.

"Considering the level of mistreatment Haitians endured from the Colombians in the jungle, I will never go through the jungle," says one as the camera zooms in on the boat on the horizon.

It was unclear if the video was meant to connect people to boats or was a marketing tool to attract customers in need of flights to South America who intended to then take the migrant route north.

Alta Tour Turismo started with a video on Facebook at the start of 2021 that informed viewers that Bolivia was not deporting people. The agency incorporated a month later.

The slogan of the Santiago-based agency is "travel with joy." Reservations for flights are largely done through WhatsApp. The agency's social media accounts have nearly 40,000 followers; they promote travel from Haiti to such countries as Brazil, Guyana, Suriname, Chile and Mexico.

Ezechias Revanget said he started the agency with three other Haitian immigrants in Chile to rent planes so fellow Haitians in Chile could go back home to see family. His agency has leased 186-seat Airbus planes from SKY airlines.

"Our objective is to work with our compatriots, and there are also other people — such as Chileans, Bolivians, Dominicans, anyone, any nationality can buy tickets at our agency," he said.

Alta Tour Turismo also advertised flights to Suriname. In an April 2021 post, the agency posted on its Facebook page that Haitians who had only a passport and wanted to leave Haiti should not miss this opportunity, asserting: "you know if you arrive in Suriname you can go to other places too," followed by three smiling emoji and the agency's numbers.

Revanget, who also uses the name Dave Elmyr, refused to answer more questions.

"They should be investigating these flights — they should," said Carolina Rudnick Vizcarra, an attorney and director of LIBERA, a Santiago-based nonprofit combatting human trafficking. "And by now, everyone knows that Haitians are vulnerable — they don't have the money" or places to stay.

U.S. officials told the AP they were unaware of the charter flights from Haiti. Some South American nations have taken action to prevent their use by migrants and smugglers. Last year, Suriname stopped charter flights from Haiti and issuing visas to Haitians, according to Suriname's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

That same year, neighboring French Guiana complained about Haitians coming across its border.

"What was strange was that in the middle of a pandemic, so many flights were arriving from Haiti ... there were unaccompanied minors on the flight, as well as several Haitians without visas," Antoine Joly, the former French ambassador in Suriname told the French Guiana TV station, Guyane la 1ere in a video posted May 4.

Shortly after that, Guyana, which also borders Suriname, canceled an earlier order allowing Haitians in

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without a visa, contending the country was being used as a destination for human smugglers who were taking migrants into neighboring Brazil where they would stay briefly before heading north to Mexico and the U.S.

Giuseppe Loprete, chief of mission in Haiti of the International Organization of Migration, said the United Nations agency learned about charter flights from Haiti to Chile in interviews with migrants who had been sent back from the United States and Mexico.

"We tried to find out more, but we don't have the means to investigate these flights," he wrote in an email to the AP on April 22. "Our assumption was that from Chile they move on to other countries heading (to) the Mexican-USA border, if not right away, after some time. Probably when they have collected enough money and information to move forward."

The Azul charter flights started on Nov. 14, 2020, from Port-au-Prince to Manaus, Brazil. The city of 2.2 million boasts one of Brazil's biggest airports, is the capital of the Amazon region with a Haitian immigrant population and is also a well-known jumping-off point for Haitian migrants who travel by boats from there along a river connecting the Colombian, Peruvian and Guyanese borders before continuing north.

Flight data showed that 54 Azul planes flew charter flights from Port-au-Prince to Manaus. The flights stopped in October. That same month, the Brazilian embassy in Haiti stopped issuing all visas to Haitians, according to a document from the Brazilian ambassador in Haiti obtained by AP and Berkeley.

Jean Robert Jean Baptiste, 49, said he bought a \$1,400 ticket for an Azul flight in December 2020 to Brazil. He spent a month in Haiti after he was deported from Louisiana, where he was held at an immigration detention center following his arrest on a DUI charge. Back in Haiti, he said an enemy threatened to kill him and had the backing of the police.

He said he decided to fly to Brazil because he had a visa to get into the country after living there from 2011 to 2012 before making his way to the United States in 2016 and settled in Alabama.

In 2021, he made his way from Brazil by bus and on foot. He walked for a week, most of it in the rain, through the Darien Gap, where he said he saw dead bodies of those who didn't make it. He said he had to pay bandits who blocked his path; robbers stole his phone and \$500 from him.

All told, he said it cost him about \$7,000 to return to Tijuana, where he was trying to find a way back to the U.S. He's driven, he said, by a determination to "have a good life" for his children.

The Paulmann family's SKY, meanwhile, is the charter of choice between Haiti and Chile; of 71 such flights since 2020 that AP and Berkeley tracked, 60 were on SKY. The Paulmanns run one of Latin America's biggest retail companies, Cencosud, and have a net worth of \$3.3 billion, according to Forbes magazine. SKY charter planes also flew three flights between Haiti and Brazil in 2021.

Etienne Ilienses said she was sent back to Haiti from Texas on Dec. 14. She talked to the AP before flying to Santiago with her three children on a Jan. 30 charter flight on SKY. "To get to the USA, I braved hell," she said. Still, she did not dismiss the possibility of doing it again "because Haiti offers nothing to its children. We are forced to suffer humiliations, affronts everywhere."

But just because Haitians fly to Chile, it doesn't mean they can stay. Dozens have been held by immigration officials after arriving in Santiago in recent months. One group spent weeks sleeping at the airport before Chile's Supreme Court on Jan. 31 ordered police to release them and allow them to request asylum.

Others were sent back to Haiti within hours of landing.

SKY's Serrat said the airline works closely with immigration officials to avoid that situation, while the marketing aimed at passengers is the responsibility of the travel operators. (Aeroregional's manager did not respond to questions about flying in Haitians who were later expelled.)

Theleon Marckenson, 31, was sent back to Haiti from Texas last fall. He said he spent \$1,650 for a charter flight on Aeroregional to return to Chile, where he had lived since 2017.

After Marckenson landed in Santiago, Chilean authorities told him the application he had submitted for permanent residency before he left for the U.S. border had expired. Hours later he was put on another Aeroregional flight to Haiti with six others.

"I don't have any more money," Marckenson said by phone after landing back in Port-au-Prince. "I don't

know what I am going to do. But I can't stay here. There is only hunger. There is no life."

Former Kurdish rebel has key role in Sweden's NATO bid

By KARL RITTER Associated Press

STOCKHOLM (AP) — When Turkey's president rails against "terrorists" in the Swedish Parliament, Amineh Kakabaveh is convinced he is talking about her.

The former Kurdish rebel fighter turned Swedish lawmaker has emerged as a central figure in the drama surrounding Sweden and Finland's historic bid to join NATO. Turkey opposes NATO membership for the two Nordic countries, accusing them of harboring Kurdish militants.

Kakabaveh, a strong advocate for Kurdish self-determination in the Middle East and a fierce critic of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, holds extraordinary leverage because the Swedish government depends on her vote for its one-seat majority in Parliament.

"He cannot decide over us," she says of Erdogan. "I stand up for Sweden's values and Sweden's sovereignty."

Despite a long history of non-alignment, Sweden and Finland rushed to apply for NATO membership after Russia's invasion of Ukraine but were stunned by opposition from Erdogan.

To allow the Nordic countries into NATO, a decision that requires unanimity among the alliance's members, Turkey demanded they lift arms embargoes on Turkey, extradite alleged Kurdish terrorists and stop supporting Kurdish fighters in Syria. Turkey says those fighters are closely linked to PKK, a domestic Kurdish group that Ankara and the West consider a terrorist organization.

Meeting those demands would have been difficult for the Swedes and Finns in any case, but with Sweden's government dependent on Kakabaveh's support for its survival, there is little room to negotiate a compromise.

"We are not used to single members of Parliament having such influence," says Svante Cornell, director of the Institute for Security and Development Policy in Stockholm. "It's maximal bad luck for the government's side, you could say."

Kakabaveh's backing allowed Social Democratic leader Magdalena Andersson to become Sweden's first female prime minister last year. In return, the center-left Social Democrats agreed to deepen cooperation with Kurdish authorities in northern Syria.

The minority government survived a no-confidence vote last week thanks to Kakabaveh and will need her support again on Wednesday to push its spring budget proposal through Parliament.

Kakabaveh, an independent lawmaker, says she has not yet decided how to vote and is waiting for the government to show its plans on issues close to her heart, including efforts to fight honor-based violence and oppression against women and girls in immigrant communities and how it will deal with Turkey's demands.

"I don't want them to retreat," she says.

The prime minister's office declined to comment.

The unusual situation has raised Kakabaveh's political profile in Sweden and internationally. It has also exposed her to criticism that she is holding Sweden's NATO bid hostage to advance her own agenda. Kakabaveh says she has received threats from both Turkish nationalists and Sweden's far-right fringe.

"It is a terrible situation," says Kakabaveh, 48. "But I don't want to sit in a corner and say, 'I'm scared.' I left my family, my childhood, everything I had, to stand up for what I believe in."

Kakabaveh, who grew up in a poor Kurdish home in western Iran, says she was just 13 in the late 1980s when she joined peshmerga fighters rebelling against the Islamic regime of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

In her parliamentary office in Stockholm, she showed pictures of her teenage self in the rugged mountains between Iran and Iraq, a Kalashnikov slung over her shoulder.

The rebels fought against the Iranian regime and that of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, who used chemical weapons against Kurdish villages.

Kakabaveh says many of her comrades and some relatives were killed. She breaks down in tears as she

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recalls the contrast between her life in Sweden and the hardship she left behind. For years after she arrived in Sweden as a refugee in 1992, the whirr of helicopters made her instinctively want to run for cover.

A socialist, Kakabaveh continued her political activism in Sweden, joining the Left Party and campaigning for gender equality in immigrant communities. Her activism against "honor culture" soon put her at odds with party colleagues who worried her work stigmatized Muslims. After years of tension, she left the party in 2019 and since then serves as an independent lawmaker in the 349-seat Parliament.

The governing Social Democrats in November struck a deal with Kakabaveh to work more closely with Kurdish autonomous authorities in northern Syria, led by the PYD political party. The PYD's military arm, the YPG, with U.S. support played a key role in the fight against Islamic State militants.

Turkey makes no distinction between the Kurdish groups in Syria and the PKK, or Kurdistan Workers Party, which has led an armed insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984. Tens of thousands of people have been killed in the conflict. The group is considered a terrorist organization in Turkey, Europe and the U.S.

Kakabaveh has called for taking PKK off terror lists, which hasn't gone unnoticed in Turkey.

"As you know, Sweden at the moment is a country that terror organizations like the PKK, PYD and YPG use as a playground," Erdogan said in a speech last week. "In fact, there are terrorists even in this country's parliament."

Though he didn't mention her by name, Kakabaveh says he is referring to her.

"For sure," she says, adding, "I've never been a PKK member. I have even criticized them. But on the other hand, I think they have paid a price."

Kakabaveh says she believes the NATO memberships stalemate will be resolved with a backroom deal between the U.S. and Turkey. If it isn't, and Sweden is unable to join NATO because of her, Kakabaveh won't have any regrets. She is against NATO membership anyway, saying it would undermine Sweden's ability to be a voice for peace in the world.

"I am for disarmament," she says. "The world needs more peace and diplomacy."

Serena Williams gets wild-card entry for Wimbledon singles

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

Serena Williams is going to play at Wimbledon, after all. The All England Club announced on Tuesday that Williams was awarded a wild-card entry for singles, marking her return to Grand Slam action after a year away.

The owner of a professional era-record 23 Grand Slam singles trophies, and as big a star as tennis ever has seen, is going to tune up by playing doubles at a smaller grass-court event first, teaming with Ons Jabeur at Eastbourne, England, next week.

Main-draw play at Wimbledon begins on June 27.

Williams has not competed anywhere since getting injured during the first set of her first-round match at the All England Club in 2021. And her name did not appear on the women's singles entry list released by the grass-court Grand Slam tournament earlier this month.

But Williams was among a half-dozen women given a spot in the singles draw on Tuesday, along with five British players: Katie Boulter, Jodie Burrage, Sonay Kartal, Yuriko Miyazaki and Katie Swan.

Two other women will get invitations "in due course," the All England Club said.

Seven of the eight men's wild-card berths were also announced, including one for three-time major champion Stan Wawrinka.

Earlier in the day, Williams posted a photo of her white shoes on what appears to be a grass court and the message: "SW and SW19. It's a date. 2022. See you there. Let's Go."

"SW" are her initials, of course, and "SW19" is the postal code for Wimbledon.

The 40-year-old American has won seven of her singles trophies at Wimbledon, the first in 2002 and most recently in 2016. Williams was the runner-up there in 2018 and 2019 (the tournament was canceled in 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic).

In 2021, Williams lost her footing on the slick grass and then her right leg buckled, leading to just the

second mid-match retirement at any Grand Slam tournament of her career and first since 1998.

With the lack of activity since then, Williams — who first reached No. 1 in July 2002 — is 1,208th in the WTA rankings this week. That is why she was not automatically placed in the Wimbledon field.

While Williams has been sidelined, first Ash Barty and then Iga Swiatek stepped into the opening left by her extended absence. Barty won Wimbledon last year and the Australian Open this January to solidify her hold on the No. 1 ranking, but then abruptly retired at age 25 in March.

That allowed Swiatek to rise to No. 1, and she has backed up that new status with an ongoing 35-match winning streak that included claiming a second French Open trophy this month.

That unbeaten stretch exceeds by one a 34-match run Williams put together in 2013 and equals one by Williams' older sister, Venus, for the longest since 2000.

Adding Williams to the bracket at the All England Club adds quite a story line for this year's tournament, which as things stood was going to be filled with them, including the ban on players from Russia and Belarus because of the invasion of Ukraine, the subsequent removal of rankings points by the WTA and ATP tours, the 100th anniversary of the opening of Centre Court and the addition of scheduled play on the fortnight's middle Sunday for the first time.

How gardeners can control pests and also protect pollinators

By JESSICA DAMIANO Associated Press

Picture this: You've planted some milkweed, bee balm or California lilac, and you're delighted to see bees and butterflies fluttering about your garden. You feel good about nourishing pollinators and love the life those plants attract to your yard.

As you stroll past your beds to check on your tomatoes, you notice they're covered in black dots. Upon closer inspection, it becomes apparent your plants are infested with aphids.

If your instinct is to reach for a chemical pesticide — stop. Although it might eliminate your aphid problem, it will also threaten beneficial insects, which pollinate plants and keep pests under control. Instead, apply the principles of integrated pest management, or IPM.

The practice starts with accepting that a certain pest presence is tolerable. Only when that threshold is exceeded should a control be considered. Your first defense should always be the most benign method available. This is where common sense prevails, and it should apply inside the home as well as in the garden.

Take my basement: Every spring, the ants come marching in, but instead of spraying the perimeter of my house with a pesticide, I place ant traps wherever I see activity. After a few days, the colony collapses, and the problem is solved.

All butterflies start out as caterpillars, and all caterpillars chew on plants. So I consider any plant that doesn't have at least some holes in its leaves useless to the ecosystem. Tolerate some leaf munching and let nature run its course.

Back to your tomatoes: IPM would dictate washing aphids off with a strong stream of hose water. It usually works. But if they continue to return after several attempts, and you believe you need to escalate, take baby steps.

In this case, the next step would be insecticidal soap, a nontoxic pesticide that's safe for people, beneficial insects (when dry) and most plants (read the label to ensure your plant isn't one of the few that are sensitive to the product).

As a rule, prevention is the best treatment. Inspect plants — including under their leaves -- before bringing them home from the nursery. Reject any that show signs of disease or infestation.

Forego instant gratification and space plants appropriately to allow for their mature sizes. Crowded plants retain moisture and foster mold, mildew and fungal diseases.

Practice good sanitation by regularly clearing away the plant's fallen leaves, fruit and debris, which invite insects, rodents and pathogens if allowed to remain on the ground.

When you do see pests like aphids, wash them away. Dab scale insects with a cotton swab dipped in

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rubbing alcohol. Pick off tomato hornworms and cabbage worms by hand (unless they're covered with the white eggs of braconid wasps, which are little parasite hitmen that will do the killing for you).

Traps can be used to capture slugs. Set shallow containers of beer around affected plants or place small wooden boards on the soil surface overnight. You'll likely have a jar full of drowned slugs — or a congregation of live ones under the boards — to dispose of in the morning.

If you decide a pesticide is necessary, select it carefully and follow the directions and precautions on the label. Avoid using any pesticides in extreme heat, on windy days or when plants are damp, and apply them only early in the morning or at night, when pollinators are inactive. It might hurt, but consider removing flowers from the plant to lessen the risk to beneficial insects foraging for pollen and nectar. In most cases, more blooms will come.

These pesticides are generally considered safe for pollinators when applied correctly:

Insecticidal soap is a nontoxic option that kills aphids, adelgids, lace bugs, leafhoppers, mealybugs, thrips, scale, sawfly larvae, spider mites and whiteflies by suffocation rather than poisoning. It must be sprayed directly on the insects and loses its effectiveness once it dries.

Horticultural oil, another suffocator, is effective against adelgids, aphids, leafhoppers, mealybugs, mites, scale, spider mites, thrips and whiteflies. The product must come into direct contact with insects while it's wet and becomes safe for beneficial insects (and ineffective against pests) once it dries.

Neem oil, a pesticide derived from the seeds of the neem tree, is effective against aphids, adelgids, beetles, borers, leafhoppers, leafminers, mealybugs, scale, tent caterpillars, thrips, webworms, weevils and whiteflies.

Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt) is a naturally occurring soil bacteria used as a pesticide. Several strains are available, each targeting different pests, so read the label to ensure the product you buy is appropriate for your needs. Some strains are toxic to monarch butterfly caterpillars, so don't apply them on or near milkweed, which is their only food source.

'Everywhere. Everything. Everyone': Drugs are back in the EU

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Drug trafficking and use across the European Union are returning to pre-pandemic levels, according to the latest report published by the bloc's drug agency on Tuesday.

As COVID-19 restrictions and increased border controls have been relaxed on the continent, the EMCDDA said drugs are available in large quantities in the region, and in some cases above pre-pandemic levels.

Hundreds of drug production laboratories are being dismantled, and new psychoactive substances are appearing in the bloc every week. In 2021, 52 new drugs were reported for the first time, the agency said.

"For me, the take-home message that stands out from our analysis of drug trends in 2022 can be summarized as 'Everywhere. Everything. Everyone,'" said the agency director, Alexis Goosdeel.

About 83.4 million people aged 15-64 in the EU, or 29% of that population, are estimated to have ever used an illicit drug, with more men than women reporting use.

The agency said cannabis remains the most popular substance, with over 22 million people reporting its use in 2021, ahead of cocaine, MDMA and amphetamines. Some 1 million Europeans used heroin or another illicit opioid. An estimated 5,800 overdose deaths occurred in the EU in 2020, the most recent year for which that figure was provided.

The report pointed to an increased use of social media applications and encrypted messaging services to get access to products during the pandemic, a model that is likely to persist.

The agency said last month that record amounts of cocaine are being seized in Europe while manufacturing of the drug is now taking place inside the the EU.

While the agency said it's too early to assess the impact on heroin trafficking of the return to power of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the agency noted it could lead to an increase. According to the report, poppy cultivation continues in the country despite a ban on production and sale.

"The country's current financial problems might make drug revenues a more important source of in-

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come," the report said.

The report also looked at the war in Ukraine, noting that the conflict could have consequences for smuggling routes.

Today in History: June 15, deadly steamboat fire

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, June 15, the 166th day of 2022. There are 199 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 15, 1775, the Second Continental Congress voted unanimously to appoint George Washington head of the Continental Army.

On this date:

In 1215, England's King John put his seal to Magna Carta ("the Great Charter") at Runnymede.

In 1864, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton signed an order establishing a military burial ground which became Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

In 1904, more than 1,000 people died when fire erupted aboard the steamboat General Slocum in New York's East River.

In 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an act making the National Guard part of the U.S. Army in the event of war or national emergency.

In 1938, Johnny Vander Meer pitched his second consecutive no-hitter, leading the Cincinnati Reds to a 6-0 victory over the Brooklyn Dodgers in the first night game at Ebbets Field, four days after leaving the Boston Bees hitless by a score of 3-0.

In 1944, American forces began their successful invasion of Saipan (sy-PAN') during World War II. B-29 Superfortresses carried out their first raids on Japan.

In 1960, the Billy Wilder movie "The Apartment," starring Jack Lemmon and Shirley MaLaine, premiered in New York.

In 1985, the Shiite Muslim hijackers of a TWA Boeing 727 beat and shot one of their hostages, U.S. Navy diver Robert Stethem (STEE'-them), 23, throwing him out of the plane to die on the tarmac at Beirut airport.

In 1991, Mount Pinatubo in the northern Philippines exploded in one of the biggest volcanic eruptions of the 20th century, killing about 800 people.

In 1996, Ella Fitzgerald, the "first lady of song," died in Beverly Hills, California, at age 79.

In 2002, an asteroid with a diameter of between 50 and 120 yards narrowly missed the Earth by 75,000 miles — less than a third of the distance to the moon.

In 2020, the Supreme Court, in a 6-3 decision, ruled that a landmark civil rights law protects gay, lesbian and transgender people from discrimination in employment. U.S. regulators revoked emergency authorization for malaria drugs promoted by President Donald Trump for treating COVID-19 amid evidence that they didn't work and could cause serious side effects. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said death rates for coronavirus patients with chronic illnesses were 12 times higher than for others who became infected.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama eased enforcement of immigration laws as he announced a new policy, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA. An armored car heist at the University of Alberta in Canada left three armed guards dead; fellow guard Travis Baumgartner later pleaded guilty to murder charges and was sentenced to life in prison with no chance of parole for 40 years.

Five years ago: Two escaped inmates sought in the killings of two guards on a Georgia prison bus were captured after being held at gunpoint by a rural Tennessee homeowner whose vehicle they were trying to steal.

One year ago: Fresh off a trio of European summits, President Joe Biden arrived in Geneva for a highly anticipated faceoff with Russia's Vladimir Putin. California, which had been the first state in the country

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to order a coronavirus lockdown in March 2020, became one of the last to fully reopen; the state lifted most of its pandemic restrictions. A New York judge approved the extradition of former movie mogul Harvey Weinstein to California, where Weinstein – already serving a 23-year sentence for a rape conviction – faced additional sexual assault charges. Major League Baseball said pitchers would be ejected and suspended for 10 games for using illegal foreign substances to doctor baseballs; umpires would begin regular checks of all pitchers.

Today's Birthdays: R&B singer Ruby Nash Garnett (Ruby and the Romantics) is 88. Funk musician Leo Nocentelli (The Meters) is 76. Actor Simon Callow is 73. Singer Russell Hitchcock (Air Supply) is 73. Rock singer Steve Walsh is 71. Chinese President Xi Jinping (shee jihn-peeng) is 69. Actor-comedian Jim Belushi is 68. Country singer Terri Gibbs is 68. Actor Julie Hagerty is 67. Actor Polly Draper is 67. Rock musician Brad Gillis (Night Ranger) is 65. Baseball Hall of Famer Wade Boggs is 64. Actor Eileen Davidson is 63. Actor Helen Hunt is 59. Rock musician Scott Rockenfield (Queensryche) is 59. Actor Courteney Cox is 58. Country musician Tony Ardoin is 58. Country musician Michael Britt (Lonestar) is 56. Actor-rapper Ice Cube is 53. Actor Leah Remini is 52. Actor Jake Busey is 51. Actor Neil Patrick Harris is 49. Actor Greg Vaughan is 49. Actor Elizabeth Reaser is 47. Rock singer Dryden Mitchell (Alien Ant Farm) is 46. Former child actor Christopher Castile is 42. Rock musician Billy Martin (Good Charlotte) is 41. Actor Jordi Vilasuso is 41. Rock musician Wayne Sermon (Imagine Dragons) is 38. Actor Denzel Whitaker is 32. Olympic gold medal gymnast Madison Kocian is 25. Actor Sterling Jerins is 18.