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June 24

Senior Menu: BBQ beef sandwich, potato salad, carrots and peas, seasonal fresh fruit.
6 p.m.: U8 SB hosts Clark, DH
6 p.m.: T-Ball Scrimmage

June 25

SEAS Confession: 3:45-4:15 p.m., SEAS Mass: 4:30 p.m.
U10 Tourney in Groton

June 26

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.
U12 Tourney in Groton
U8 Tourney in Milbank
10:15 a.m.: Groton vs. Watertown Yellow Finals begin at 12:45

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



June 27

Senior Menu: Chicken Alfredo, broccoli, spinach salad, Mandarin oranges, bread stick.
Noon.: Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, potluck dinner
5:30 p.m.: Jr. Teeners host Britton, DH
5:30 p.m.: U10 at Webster, DH (R/B)
6 p.m.: U8 at Webster, DH (R/W)
6 p.m.: U10 SB hosts Britton, DH
6 p.m.: U8 SB hosts Britton, DH
5:30 p.m.: Jr. Legion at Milbank, DH

June 28

Elementary Library Open 9-11 (Reading time 10 a.m.)
Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potatoes, stewed tomatoes, apricots, whole wheat bread.
5:30 p.m.: Legion at Sisseton, DH
5:30 p.m.: U12 hosts Borge, Nelson Field, DH
6:30 p.m.: U10 hosts Borge, Falk Field, 1 game (R/W)
5:30 p.m.: U8 hosts Borge, Falk Field, 1 game

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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2022 Brown county 4-H Horse show

Lydia Blachford 02: Junior Western Showmanship Purple
Lydia Blachford 19: Junior Ranch Riding Red
Lydia Blachford 10: Junior Western Horsemanship Blue
Lydia Blachford 05: Junior English Showmanship Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Lydia Blachford 28: Junior Barrel Racing Red
Lydia Blachford 31: Junior Pole Bending Red
Lydia Blachford 13: Junior Hunt Seat Equitation Blue
Eldin Alsleben 01: Beginner Western Showmanship Blue
Eldin Alsleben 31: Junior Pole Bending Blue
Joeseph Dutenhoffer 31: Junior Pole Bending Red
Joeseph Dutenhoffer 28: Junior Barrel Racing White
Joeseph Dutenhoffer 01: Beginner Western Showmanship Blue
Joeseph Dutenhoffer 09: Beginner Western Horsemanship Red
Rayven Dutenhoffer 28: Junior Barrel Racing Blue
Rayven Dutenhoffer 31: Junior Pole Bending Red
Rayven Dutenhoffer 02: Junior Western Showmanship Purple
Jazmine Hart-Crissman 03: Senior Western Showmanship Purple
Jazmine Hart-Crissman 33: Senior Pole Bending White
Jazmine Hart-Crissman 14: Senior Hunt Seat Equitation Blue
Jazmine Hart-Crissman 23: Senior Trail Red
Jazmine Hart-Crissman 06: Senior English Showmanship Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Jazmine Hart-Crissman 30: Senior Barrel Racing White
Jazmine Hart-Crissman 11: Senior Western Horsemanship Red
Jazmine Hart-Crissman 20: Senior Ranch Riding Red
Kylie Johannsen 11: Senior Western Horsemanship Blue
Kylie Johannsen 23: Senior Trail Red
Kylie Johannsen 14: Senior Hunt Seat Equitation Blue
Kylie Johannsen 03: Senior Western Showmanship Blue
Anna Johnson 03: Senior Western Showmanship Purple RESERVE CHAMPION
Anna Johnson 18: Senior Reining Red
Anna Johnson 11: Senior Western Horsemanship Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Anna Johnson 20: Senior Ranch Riding Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Maria Kiesz 01: Beginner Western Showmanship Purple RESERVE CHAMPION
Maria Kiesz 21: Beginner Trail Red
Maria Kiesz 09: Beginner Western Horsemanship Purple RESERVE CHAMPION
Maria Kiesz 19: Junior Ranch Riding Red
Emily Malsam 06: Senior English Showmanship Blue
Emily Malsam 14: Senior Hunt Seat Equitation Blue
Emily Malsam 23: Senior Trail Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Emily Malsam 33: Senior Pole Bending Purple RESERVE CHAMPION
Emily Malsam 03: Senior Western Showmanship Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Emily Malsam 20: Senior Ranch Riding Red
Emily Malsam 11: Senior Western Horsemanship Purple RESERVE CHAMPION
Emily Malsam 30: Senior Barrel Racing Blue

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Hanna Miller 30: Senior Barrel Racing Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Hanna Miller 11: Senior Western Horsemanship Red
Hanna Miller 03: Senior Western Showmanship Blue
Hanna Miller 33: Senior Pole Bending Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Hanna Miller 23: Senior Trail Red
Blake Pauli 03: Senior Western Showmanship Purple
Hailey Pauli 02: Junior Western Showmanship Purple RESERVE CHAMPION
Hailey Pauli 19: Junior Ranch Riding Red
Hailey Pauli 10: Junior Western Horsemanship Blue
Hailey Pauli 31: Junior Pole Bending Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Hailey Pauli 28: Junior Barrel Racing Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Hailey Pauli 22: Junior Trail Red
Parker Zoellner 21: Beginner Trail Blue
Parker Zoellner 01: Beginner Western Showmanship Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Parker Zoellner 09: Beginner Western Horsemanship Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Parker Zoellner 31: Junior Pole Bending Red
Parker Zoellner 28: Junior Barrel Racing White
Parker Zoellner 19: Junior Ranch Riding Red
Riley Zoellner 02: Junior Western Showmanship Purple
Riley Zoellner 28: Junior Barrel Racing White
Riley Zoellner 31: Junior Pole Bending Red
Riley Zoellner 22: Junior Trail Red
Walker Zoellner 22: Junior Trail Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Walker Zoellner 32: Junior Pony Pole Bending Blue
Walker Zoellner 02: Junior Western Showmanship Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Walker Zoellner 19: Junior Ranch Riding Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Walker Zoellner 10: Junior Western Horsemanship Purple GRAND CHAMPION
Walker Zoellner 29: Junior Pony Barrel Racing Purple GRAND CHAMPION

DANR Announces More Than \$243.7 Million for South Dakota Environmental Projects

PIERRE, S.D. – Thursday, the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) announced the Board of Water and Natural Resources has approved \$243,789,728 in grants and loans for drinking water, wastewater, and solid waste projects in South Dakota.

The \$243,789,728 total includes \$118,691,165 in grants and \$125,098,563 in low-interest loans to be administered by the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

"I am pleased to announce this financial assistance is available," said DANR Secretary Hunter Roberts. "This funding will result in upgraded drinking water and wastewater infrastructure and support solid waste cleanup projects which will benefit the system users and the environment."

The grants and loans were awarded from DANR's Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Program, Clean Water State Revolving Fund Program, Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program, Solid Waste Management Program, and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to the following:

Brandon received a \$1,345,005 ARPA grant for sanitary sewer trunk main to support the growth on the west side of the city. The alignment will allow for sanitary sewer service on the north and south side of the Ellis & Eastern Railroad tracks. These funds and local funds will cover the project costs.

Bridgewater received a \$666,119 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$3,851,442 ARPA grant to replace storm sewer outfall line from the southern city limits to the discharge point. Sanitary and storm sewer pipe replacement will occur in various locations throughout the community. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years. These funds and local ARPA funds will cover the project costs.

Black Hawk Water User District received a \$1,181,600 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$506,400 ARPA grant to install 12-inch water main to increase system pressure and capacity and improve water quality to services east of Interstate 90. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years.

Canova received a \$25,114 ARPA grant to make improvements to its water tower, install water meters, and replace media in its water treatment plant. Funding for this project was originally awarded by the board in June 2021.

Chamberlain received a \$1,190,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$910,000 ARPA grant to install sewer and storm sewer in the city's new Smokey Groves development and to replace sewer line on Main Street. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years. These funds and local ARPA funds will cover the project costs.

Chamberlain also received a \$529,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$271,000 ARPA grant to improve its water system. Improvements include water main replacement and looping, replacing the recarbonation system, and installing a rotameter and vaporization chamber at the water treatment plant. The terms of the loan are 1.875 percent for 30 years. These funds and local funds will cover the project costs.

Colman received a \$758,100 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$1,236,900 ARPA grant for replacing and relining of sewer mains, manholes, and service lines in various areas of the community. This project will address sewer lines that need repair. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years.

Colman also received a \$230,400 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$249,600 ARPA grant to furnish and install PVC water mains, valves, fittings, hydrants, and service lines in a section of the system adjacent to SD Highway 34. The current water distribution system is beyond its design life. The terms of the loan are 1.875 percent for 30 years.

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Dakota Dunes Community Improvement District received a \$411,708 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$247,025 ARPA grant to replace the ductile force main to transport wastewater to Sioux City for treatment. The terms of the loan are 2 percent for 20 years. These funds and other local funds will cover project costs.

Dakota Dunes Community Improvement District also received a \$260,014 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and \$155,766 ARPA grant to install a parallel line to the north lift station to provide a redundant crossing under Interstate 29. The terms of the loan are 2 percent for 20 years. These funds and local funds will cover the project costs.

Dakota Dunes Community Improvement District also received a \$429,300 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and \$257,100 ARPA grant to install a water line under Interstate-29 to loop the system, and provide a second line to connect the east and west distribution systems. This will improve pressure in critical segments of the distribution system while providing redundancy between the east and west side. The terms of the loan are 2 percent for 20 years. These funds and local funds will cover the project costs.

De Smet received a \$1,196,650 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$703,100 ARPA grant to replace sewer mains, service lines, manholes, curb and gutter, and televise sanitary sewer. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years.

De Smet also received a \$2,272,500 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$2,777,500 ARPA grant to replace water mains, service lines, fire hydrants, and valves. The project will also include water tower rehabilitation. The terms of the loan are 1.875 percent for 30 years.

Dupree received a \$1,314,452 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$1,924,110 ARPA grant to televise and clean the entire collection system, with replacement or relining of the system to follow, replacement of a force main, and wastewater treatment lagoon rehabilitation. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years. These funds and other local funds will cover the cost of the project.

Fall River Water User District received a \$2,915,450 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$7,091,550 ARPA grant to make numerous improvements to the districts' water system. The major improvements include construction of a 150,000-gallon ground storage reservoir at the Fairburn well site to improve chlorine contact time and approximately 20 miles of 8-inch pipeline and other miscellaneous improvements to the Fairburn well pumping and control facilities. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years.

Flandreau received a \$2,776,087 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$1,396,832 ARPA grant to replace sewer mains, service lines, manholes, and curb and gutter. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years. These funds and local ARPA funds will cover the project costs.

Flandreau also received a \$2,818,087 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$1,414,832 ARPA grant for improvements in the water distribution system in the southeast portion of the community. This includes replacement of water mains, service lines, fire hydrants, and valves. The terms of the loan are 1.875 percent for 30 years. These funds and local ARPA funds will cover the project costs.

Gayville received an amendment to an existing funding package for an additional \$500,000 of Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan funds. The project to replace sanitary and storm sewer along Kingsbury Street, construct a new lift station, and make improvements at the wastewater treatment facility was originally funded in April 2022. The additional funds were needed to address higher project costs than expected.

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Hermosa received a \$2,861,956 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Loan and a \$163,044 ARPA grant to drill a new well to provide additional water, install a main to connect the well to a new treatment system, and expand the distribution system to "Gumbo Lily" Area. The terms of the loan are 1.625 percent for 30 years. These funds and other local funds will cover the project costs.

Howard received a \$2,472,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$2,665,864 ARPA grant to reline more than 29,600 feet of sanitary sewer pipe. This will address infiltration and inflow concerns which stress the collection system and reduces the capacity of its treatment system. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years.

Huron received a \$720,000 ARPA grant to upgrade storm sewer systems due to the Dakota Events Complex project. This will improve storm water management and provide a better experience for fair goers. These funds and local funds will cover the cost of the project.

Huron also received a \$1,903,500 ARPA grant to make sanitary sewer collection improvements, replace lift stations, and improve SCADA systems. These funds and other local funds will cover the cost of the project.

Huron also received a \$4,872,084 ARPA grant to replace water lines, replace water meters, and improve water supply and SCADA systems. These funds and other local funding will cover the cost of the project.

Ipswich received a \$814,112 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$1,770,370 ARPA grant to construct a storm sewer system to help alleviate the storm water issues throughout the city. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years.

Isabel received a \$828,204 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$418,835 ARPA grant to clean and televise sanitary sewer, then reline or replace sewer line as necessary. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years. These funds and other local funds will cover the project costs.

James River Water Development District received a \$5,000,000 ARPA grant to assist landowners with installing best management practices to improve water quality within the watershed by preventing nutrient and sediment run-off. Best management practices may include items like animal waste management systems, fencing, alternative water sources, purchase of easements for seasonal riparian area management, and other proven practices. These funds and other state, local, federal, and private landowner funds will be utilized to complete the work throughout the watershed.

Keystone received a \$102,200 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program loan and a \$92,800 ARPA grant to drill an additional well to increase capacity during high-use summer tourism season. The project includes a well, pump house, and water main to loop two dead end lines. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years.

Lead received \$130,469 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant and a \$142,163 ARPA grant a to install new sanitary sewer lines and storm sewer infrastructure including new sewer lines and manholes. These funds and other local funds will cover the project costs.

Lead also received a \$109,133 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant and a \$78,154 ARPA grant to install new water main and related water system distribution improvements such as curb stops, gate valves, and fire hydrants. This will address aging utility infrastructure. The terms of the loan are 1.875 percent for 30 years. These funds and other local funds will cover the project costs.

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Lead Deadwood Sanitary District received a \$634,900 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$272,100 ARPA grant to improve reliability and efficiency by installing modern aeration system components. The project will include replacing of five aeration blowers and installing fine bubble diffusersm aeration piping, and a blower control system monitor. The terms of the loan are 2 percent for 20 years.

Lead-Deadwood Sanitary District also received a \$2,604,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$1,116,000 ARPA grant to repair system deficiencies and improve reliability. The project includes pipe and transmission line repairs and replacement, rehabilitation of an existing tunnel, intake, and trestle bridge, and purchase of a backup generator. The terms of the loan are 1.875 percent for 30 years.

Marion received a \$134,655 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$124,027 ARPA grant to address cracked and bulging storm sewer pipe. The pipe will be replaced with PVC pipe. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years. These funds along with a prior DANR grant and loan funding package and local funds will cover the project costs.

Marion also received a \$134,655 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$124,027 ARPA grant to replace old cast iron pipes that have outlived their useful life. The terms of the loan are 1.875 percent for 30 years. These funds along with a prior DANR grant and loan funding package and local funds will cover the project costs.

Mitchell received a \$17,675,902 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$2,846,472 ARPA grant to make improvements to its wastewater treatment facility. Mitchell originally received funding for this project in January 2022. Based on increased project costs the city requested additional funding for the project. The loan includes \$1,733,374 of nonpoint source incentive funding for the continued installation of best management practices in the Firesteel Creek watershed basin. The terms of the loan are 1.375 percent for 30 years.

Mobridge received a \$7,123,072 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$3,554,779 ARPA grant to replace the intake system in the Missouri River, replace water lines, and either move the north water tower or install a ground storage tank with a booster pump station to increase water pressure. The terms of the loan are 1.875 percent for 30 years. These funds and local funds will cover the project costs.

Newell received a \$347,900 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$255,100 APRA grant to expand its wastewater collection system to serve areas of the community not currently sewered and in need of utilities. The project includes new sanitary sewer, manholes, lift station, force main, necessary sewer main replacements and other related improvements. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years. These funds and local ARPA funds will cover the cost of the project.

Newell also received a \$649,400 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$342,600 ARPA grant to replace portions of its aged and unreliable water distribution system. New water line will be installed, and a new water booster station will be constructed. The terms of the loan are 1.625 percent for 30 years. These funds and local funds will cover the project costs.

Northdale Sanitary District received a \$132,000 ARPA grant to replace an existing force main that could be compromised by further expansion of a collapsed abandoned mine. Funding for this project was originally awarded by the board in March 2021.

Peever received a \$1,663,173 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$914,000 ARPA grant to replace sanitary sewer pipe that is in poor condition. The project will also replace a lift station that is nearing the end of its useful life and make improvements to the wastewater treatment ponds. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years.

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Presho received a \$105,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program loan and a \$45,000 ARPA grant to replace the city's water meters and include an automated reading system with compatible billing software to monitor water sales and evaluate potential water losses. The terms of the loan are 1.875 percent for 10 years.

Randall Community Water District received a \$38,734,175 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$11,256,825 ARPA grant to construct the first phase of a connection to the city of Mitchell for additional water capacity. This project will also accommodate growth with upgraded water lines, treatment facilities, booster stations, and storage, and extend pipe from the storage facility south of Platte to the existing elevated tank south of Stickney. The terms of the loan are 1.875 percent for 30 years.

Rapid City received a \$3,400,000 ARPA grant for improvements to the Water Reclamation Facility. The project includes replacing process, mechanical, and electrical equipment and architectural items that are outdated. Additionally, the entrance access gates will be relocated, and a new chain link fence will be constructed.

Rapid City also received a \$350,000 ARPA grant to make improvements to the Robbinsdale Water Booster Station and various water storage facilities. The project includes replacing the old electrical distribution gear and motor starters, installing a flow meter and SCADA upgrades, constructing a chain-link fence, and upgrading gate access.

Rosholt received a \$1,397,500 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$752,500 ARPA grant to replace its existing water tower with a new 75,000-gallon water tower. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years.

Spearfish received a \$5,964,700 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$2,556,300 ARPA grant to expand treatment capacity and replace aging infrastructure. This includes sanitary sewer replacement and upsizing mains. Work at the wastewater treatment facility includes storage for peak flow equalization, screen replacement, return flow automation, and perimeter fencing. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years.

Spearfish also received a \$3,234,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$1,386,000 ARPA grant for a new water supply well and a 750,000-gallon water storage tank to be constructed northwest of I90 Exit 17. The area has experienced significant growth and requires additional drinking water infrastructure with additional water storage to improve system resiliency. The terms of the loan are 1.625 percent for 30 years.

South Dakota Ellsworth Development Authority received a \$300,000 ARPA grant to undertake a study to determine the critical water supply needs of the regional area served by multiple entities. This study will assist in optimizing planned and future water infrastructure improvements in the region.

Timber Lake received a \$2,229,066 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$464,334 ARPA grant to clean and televise all unlined sewer mains in town and replace existing sewer mains. Sewer main will be extended to the north and southwest and a lift station constructed to convey flows. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years. These funds and local funds will cover project costs.

Tri-County Landfill Association received a \$660,000 Solid Waste Management Program loan and a \$440,000 Solid Waste Management Program grant to construct a new cell at the Tri-County Landfill near Pukwana. The terms of the loan are 1.875 percent for 7 years.

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Tulare received a \$1,449,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$1,053,267 ARPA grant to increase treatment capacity, upgrade and repair its sanitary sewer collection system, and extend the life of the current system. The town plans to replace the sanitary sewer, lift station, and force mains to the ponds. The project will also upgrade treatment ponds to a three-cell system and install new pond piping. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years. These funds and local ARPA funds will cover the project costs.

Valley Springs received a \$521,168 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$3,018,560 ARPA grant to construct new well houses with new equipment and separate chemical rooms, as the current houses have reached the end of their useful life and do not meet current code. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years. These funds and local ARPA funds will cover the cost of this project.

Vermillion received a \$502,500 ARPA grant to replace the Tom Street lift station with a new larger capacity and safer facility. These funds and local ARPA funds will cover the project costs.

Watertown received a \$1,428,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$212,000 ARPA grant for a new landfill cell and to complete phased construction of various storm water improvements adjacent at the landfill. The terms of the loan are 2 percent for 20 years. These funds and a prior Solid Waste Management Program grant will cover the costs of the project.

Watertown received a \$699,748 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$299,892 ARPA grant to replace or upgrade the lime slaker, SCADA system, and chlorine generator equipment due to increased breakdown and maintenance. The terms of the loan are 1.875 percent for 20 years.

Watertown received \$4,857,300 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$2,081,700 ARPA grant to develop a new well field starting with four wells, control building, and raw water lines connected to the existing Sioux Conifer Well Field raw water line. The terms of the loan are 1.875 percent for 30 years.

Watertown received \$3,403,610 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$1,458,690 ARPA grant to replace outdated water mains and loop them to improve water quality and flows. The terms of the loan are 1.875 percent for 30 years.

Watertown received \$2,339,050 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$1,002,450 ARPA grant to replace a 130-year-old water main on 3rd Avenue NW to meet current and future water demands. The terms of the loan are 1.875 percent for 30 years.

WEB Water Development Association received a \$32,710,000 ARPA grant to upsize its parallel water line from the water treatment plant to the intersection of Highway 83 and Highway 12. This project is meant to meet the growing water needs of the region.

Weston Heights Homeowners Association received \$580,650 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$3,290,350 ARPA grant to construct a new spheroid water storage tank and dismantle the existing storage take. Other project improvements include a new well pump, drop pipe, upgrades to the wellhouse piping, meters and pressure gauges, installation of a backup generator for the well house, and an updated SCADA system. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years.

The American Rescue Plan Act provides grants for eligible water, wastewater, storm water, and nonpoint source projects. The state of South Dakota is making a historic investment in infrastructure by dedicating \$600 million of American Rescue Plan Act funding for local water and wastewater infrastructure grants.

The Solid Waste Management Program provides grants and loans for solid waste disposal, recycling, and waste tire projects. The Legislature annually appropriates dedicated funding for the Solid Waste Management Program through the Governor's Omnibus Water Funding Bill.

The State of South Dakota and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency fund the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Program, which provides low-interest loans for public drinking water system projects. The program is funded through a combination of federal appropriations, loan repayments, and bonds.

The State of South Dakota and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency fund the Clean Water State Revolving Fund Program, which provides low-interest loans for wastewater, storm water, water conservation, and nonpoint source projects. The program is funded through a combination of federal appropriations, loan repayments, and bonds.

The Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program, funded in part by revenues from the Petroleum Release Compensation Tank Inspection fee and the sale of lotto tickets, provides grants and loans for water, wastewater, and watershed projects.

The board approved the funding at Thursday's meeting in Pierre.

EXPANDED ALCOHOL SALES APPROVED BY SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS

VERMILLION, S.D. – During their June board meeting, the South Dakota Board of Regents (BOR) unanimously approved an expanded alcohol sales policy for South Dakota public universities. The policy allows the six universities governed by the Board of Regents to extend the sale of alcoholic beverages into general admission areas of performing arts and athletic events.

The student-led effort to expand alcohol sales to general admission areas began with a South Dakota Student Federation letter urging the Board of Regents to change the current alcohol sales policy, which limited alcohol sales to specially designated box seats or loge areas. The Student Federation includes leadership from each of the college's student governments.

"This change came from a request from South Dakota public university students," said BOR Executive Director Dr. Brian Maher. "We're seeing a move towards general admission alcohol sales at collegiate events across the country; it seemed like a good time to revisit South Dakota's policy as well."

While the updated policy provides institutions with the flexibility to expand alcohol sales, events must meet specific criteria. Events with authorized general admission alcohol sales must have a defined start and end for alcohol purchases. Alcohol sales must be separate from general concessions, and each event must include at least one alcohol-free zone. Anyone engaged in selling or serving alcoholic beverages at these events must be trained to recognize fake IDs, prevent service to minors, identify signs of intoxication, and how to handle disorderly customers.

The new policy will be in effect at the start of the 2022-2023 school year. South Dakota public universities are not required to implement general admission alcohol sales at campus events. To view the full policy guidelines, visit sdbor.edu.



High diesel fuel costs hurting truckers and farmers in South Dakota

Kylie Carlson and Stu Whitney
South Dakota News Watch

Record high prices for unleaded gasoline are getting much of the attention from the public and politicians across the country right now, but an even bigger financial impact is being felt by truckers and farmers in South Dakota who are paying far more at the pump than usual for diesel fuel.

Employees and business owners in both industries rely heavily on diesel fuel to do their jobs, and the high prices are pinching their incomes and profits. Industry experts say that higher fuel prices in trucking and farming are often passed on to consumers, who are already paying more for a wide range of goods and foods at a time when inflation is pushing up prices.

As diesel prices continue to shoot up, both trucking industry associations are calling for national legislation to help reduce the financial toll on truckers, and farmers are looking for ways to keep costs down and minimize their financial risk. Operators in both industries are seeking ways to reduce spending on fuel and to cut back on fuel use when possible.

As of June 21, the average diesel price in South Dakota was \$5.39 per gallon, below the national average but up almost 42% compared to a year ago, according to the American Automobile Association. The highest recent national average price was \$5.81 on June 19.

A mid-June report from the U.S. Energy Information Administration showed on-highway diesel prices ranging from a low of \$5.37 in the Gulf Coast region to a high of \$6.88 in California. The Midwest average price was in the middle at \$5.63.

High costs for diesel fuel are also adding to growing financial uncertainty for South Dakota farmers, who already faced delayed planting from storm damage in some portions of the state and drought conditions elsewhere that continue to threaten crops and livestock.

Off-road diesel, which is not taxed and is used for agricultural and industrial purposes, has also topped



Diesel fuel cost \$5.89 per gallon at a truck stop outside Rapid City on June 22, 2022. The high prices are hurting some South Dakota truckers and farmers who rely on diesel fuel to make a living. Photo: Bart Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch

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\$5 a gallon, meaning farmers are paying more than ever to run tractors, combines and sprayers and to transport equipment or goods.

"I've been farming for about 36 years, and I don't remember fuel ever being this expensive," said Scott VanderWal, president of the South Dakota Farm Bureau.

Tough financial road for truckers

The average 18-wheel tractor-trailer's fuel tank holds between 120 and 150 gallons, and some rigs have two tanks. With today's inflated prices, truck drivers are paying about \$700 to \$900 per tank to fill up from empty, forcing some to spend almost \$2,000 for one day of driving.

Corey Stabnow, a 23-year veteran of the trucking industry and owner of Thunderfoot Xpress in Britton, S.D., drove in mid-June to California to pick up a load of honeybees to transport to North Dakota.

"This trip I'm running right now will probably be close to \$6,000 in fuel. A year ago, I could do this route for a little over [\$3,000]," said Stabnow.

Stabnow started his business in 2011, and recalled that diesel prices then were in the upper \$3 per-gallon range, a fraction of the current prices at the pumps "This is the highest I've ever seen in the industry," he said.

Stabnow said he tries to combat the higher costs by finding the lowest prices along his routes beforehand, and he tries to avoid fueling up in where he knows costs are high. He said he's trying to avoid the pumps in California, where diesel is currently averaging \$6.99 per gallon, according to the American Automobile Association.

With more money being spent on shipping and delivery and inflation sitting at 8.6% as of May, some of the higher transportation costs may be transferred to consumers, the American Trucking Association said in a June 2 blog post. According to the ATA, inflation and costs will continue to rise unless the price of diesel fuel falls.

Fuel surcharges added to delivery costs aim to help cover unforeseen price increases, though many truckers don't receive payment until 30 days or more after delivery, leaving them to cover costs with reserve funds or operate on lines of credit. Additionally, these charges often don't fully cover the increases, only around 60% to 70% of the increase.

The increased costs have the potential to be devastating to small trucking companies. The American Trucking Association reported that 97% of trucking companies run 20 or fewer trucks, and many in South Dakota are locally owned and operated.

Logan Schaunaman is one of these owner/operators. He began his business, Schaunaman Trucking, out of Sisseton in November 2021 as a solo operator. Fuel prices have gone up around \$1.50 since he started, leaving him with at least a \$1,000 bill each time he fills up. Lately, he's had to fill up twice a week for the loads he carries.

"Without diesel, I can't move," said Schaunaman. "Rates have gone up too, so it compensates for higher fuel prices, too."

Drivers at larger firms are somewhat protected from higher fuel costs, Schaunaman said.

"Owner/operators are probably a little more difficult to keep running at this time, whereas bigger companies probably have contracted fuel, so they contract fuel at a price that isn't going to move, where

DIESEL PRICES VARY ACROSS COUNTRY, BUT ARE HIGH EVERYWHERE

Here is a look at average per-gallon diesel fuel prices around the region and in the highest and lowest U.S. states as of June 22, 2022.

State.....	Per-gallon price
California (highest).....	\$6.99
Montana	\$5.88
National average.....	\$5.81
Wyoming.....	\$5.68
North Dakota.....	\$5.60
Minnesota	\$5.55
Iowa	\$5.44
South Dakota	\$5.39
Nebraska.....	\$5.35
Texas (lowest)	\$5.31

Note: Prices per gallon as of June 22 according to AAA

owner/operators have to fluctuate with the prices going up and down," he said.

Farmers strategize to keep fuel costs down

During the harvest of 2020, it cost VanderWal about \$585 to fill the tank of his diesel combine at his farm in Volga, eight miles west of Brookings. At the current price of diesel, it would cost him nearly double that amount this year – more than \$1,000 – and the tank lasts about one day.

Jack Davis, a South Dakota State University extension agent who specializes in crop business management, said corn farmers spent about \$26 an acre in fuel to plant and harvest crops in 2021, and the record going back to 2008 was \$35 an acre in 2012. Under current market conditions, farmers could pay more than \$50 an acre for diesel.

"For a thousand-acre farm, that's about \$25,000 more a year if it stays this high," said Davis.

Fertilizer is also more expensive under inflationary conditions, with less oil being imported and refined since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February. High costs and supply concerns are felt by other industries, but agriculture has less market flexibility to mitigate the damage, according to VanderWal.

"We're price-takers," said the third-generation family farmer, who raises soybeans and does custom cattle feeding. "We don't have the ability to pass on our costs. When the price for diesel and fertilizer go up, we just have to absorb that and hope that the crop markets are high enough to make up for it."

One silver lining for farmers is that commodity prices are soaring, with corn selling at \$7.85 a bushel on June 20, up from \$6.15 on the same date last year. Soybeans remain strong at \$17.02 a bushel, the highest price since 2012.

For Walt Bones, a former state secretary of agriculture who runs a diversified crop and livestock operation in Parker, just southwest of Sioux Falls, seeing a vibrant market on the back end means less gloom and doom, even with an operation that uses more than a thousand gallons of diesel a day during spring planting and fall harvest.

"I've always said that in ag, our margin is pretty fixed," said Bones, this year's recipient of the Governor's Ag Ambassador Award. "Some years we might handle a lot more money to make the same amount of money. This year, it appears that even with all the costs and inflation out there, some of that can be transferred to what we're getting paid for our stuff."

Taking advantage of the market means forecasting what commodities will be worth at harvest time and, in some cases, locking in prices in advance. The problem is that as input costs such as fuel prices shift, even the best planning becomes speculative.

"There are external things you can't predict," said Heather Gessner, an extension field specialist at SDSU. "When is Ukraine going back into the world market and exporting all the things they used to export? If I knew, I would pull out my crystal ball and share it with everybody. The best farmers and ranchers can do is figure out their break-even price and use marketing tools that are available to manage their risk."

Bones, a fourth-generation producer, points to the negative aspects of market volatility, such as a sinking stock market, but also notes that farmers can use price trends and cycles to their advantage.

"There are opportunities to potentially lock in a higher price for what they sell and lower for what we



A farmer sprays his corn crop on the outskirts of Lennox, just southwest of Sioux Falls, on June 20. Rising diesel fuel prices have added to a series of challenges for South Dakota farmers this spring. Photo: Stu Whitney, South Dakota News Watch

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use for inputs," Bones said. "Volatility does present people with opportunities if you know your costs and play it to your advantage. There's an old saying: You never go broke making a profit."

For many farmers, though, the challenges of this spring go beyond market numbers. Radical weather swings made normal operations a problem, including a derecho that struck eastern South Dakota on May 12 with winds that exceeded 100 mph.

On VanderWal's property in Volga, the roof flew off the bale barn and one of the damaged trees fell on a house. Sporadic rain showers also caused delays with spring planting, and partially flooded crops were an issue in the northeast part of the state.

"It's been a rough spring," said VanderWal. "We finished planting corn just before Memorial Day and beans seven or eight days later. We usually like to be done with everything between the 15th and 20th of May."

VanderWal, who also serves as vice president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, blames policy stances from President Joe Biden's administration as partly to blame for rising fuel costs. He'd like to see less restrictions and more impetus for American oil and gas companies to activate their permits to perform onshore drilling.

"It's not a good thing to rely on other countries for energy supplies, especially countries that might turn out to be your enemies," said VanderWal. "It would be nice if the administration would reach out to energy producers and let them do what they do best."

Biden sent a June 15 letter to U.S. oil refining companies asking them to increase production, saying that "historically high refinery profit margins being passed directly onto American families are not acceptable." Still, most forecasts call for gas prices to keep rising this summer. In late June, Biden also asked Congress to suspend imposition of federal taxes on gasoline and diesel fuel until September to lower fuel costs for drivers.

The president's push for renewable energy to phase out fossil fuels makes it difficult to persuade oil and gas producers to ramp up production, said Bones. While ethanol and biodiesel are positive steps, a shift to electric vehicles seems a long way off from the perspective of corn farmers or cattle producers in the Upper Midwest, he added.

"When you have a big job to do, whether it's harvesting or planting or transportation, it helps to run on gas," said Bones. "It seems that electric vehicles have a place, but I don't think it's out here in flyover country."

ABOUT KYLIE CARLSON AND STU WHITNEY

Kylie Carlson is a 2022 summer reporting intern for South Dakota News Watch; Stu Whitney is a staff writer at News Watch.

— This article was produced by South Dakota News Watch, a non-profit news organization online at sdnewswatch.org.

DIESEL FUEL PRICES ACROSS SOUTH DAKOTA

Here is a look at per-gallon prices for diesel fuel in several South Dakota cities as of June 22, 2022.

Aberdeen	\$5.29
Huron	\$5.19
Rapid City	\$5.49
Sioux Falls	\$5.34
Spearfish.....	\$5.49
Vermillion	\$5.39
Yankton	\$5.19

Note: Prices as of June 22 from Gasbuddy.com

REGENTS UPDATE TRANSFER POLICY FOR SEAMLESS ACADEMIC TRANSITION

VERMILLION, S.D. – The South Dakota Board of Regents (BOR) began the process of revising its transfer policy to improve students' ability to seamlessly move their earned credits between the state's public universities and technical colleges. The efforts to revise the existing policy stems from the BOR's newly adopted strategic plan objective of increasing transfer enrollment through improved access.

"The overall goal of these proposed changes is to make our transfer policies and guideline more student-centered," said South Dakota BOR System Vice President for Academic Policy and Planning Dr. Janice Minder.

The review and reconstruction of the current transfer policies have been in process over the past several months. A subcommittee of campus representatives from South Dakota university registrars, enrollment services, academic affairs, and enrollment offices collaborated on these changes.

The policy revisions include credit hours earned through the South Dakota Regental system, external accredited universities or colleges, and non-accredited universities or colleges. Also included in the proposed revisions is the prior learning and validated credit policy transfer, which reflects test scores or Military experience.

"Right now, transferring within our Regental system is pretty accessible, but we needed to expand the conversation," said South Dakota BOR Executive Director Dr. Brian Maher. "By identifying a strategic partnership with the Board of Technical Education, we can continue improving higher education opportunities in our state."

The June Board of Regents meeting was the first reading for the proposed seamless transfer of credit policy. Additional stakeholder meetings will take place in July, and a second and final reading will occur during the August Board of Regents meeting in Yankton.

To access the revised policy, visit sdbor.edu.

REGENTS APPROVE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA-SIOUX FALLS PROPOSAL

VERMILLION, S.D. – Today, the South Dakota Board of Regents formally approved the proposal for the University of South Dakota - Sioux Falls (USD-SF). The effort to transform the Community College of Sioux Falls into the University of South Dakota - Sioux Falls has been in development for nearly a year. The plan builds upon the University of South Dakota's (USD) strong presence in the Sioux Falls marketplace, where the campus continues to serve as a local option for health sciences, business, and education.

With the approval, USD plans to relocate all nursing classes and a clinical skills lab from the Sanford USD Medical Center campus, creating a health science hub in the state's largest city. The Master of Public Health and Master of Social Work programs will also be relocated to the new site, along with the Center for the Prevention of Child Maltreatment and the Center for Rural Health Improvement. USD's new Doctor of Nurse Anesthesia program will also be based out of the Sioux Falls campus and will begin accepting students in the spring of 2023.

"With this development, the University of South Dakota will assume a strong position in the Sioux Falls marketplace and establish itself as a local option with unmatched strengths in health sciences and business," said University of South Dakota President Sheila K. Gestring. "Our programs will provide opportunities for key audiences who strive to better themselves and our state."

This migration will allow USD to consolidate academic paths for health sciences careers while continuing to focus on additional programs like business, general studies, and education. The established Teacher Pathway program currently seeks to recruit and place teachers in Sioux Falls schools and will remain as a prominent program on the USD-SF campus. The campus will also continue its mission of providing opportunities for a four-year degree through programs like the Associate of Arts in General Studies.

Through Board approval, the USD-SF rollout establishes USD as the primary provider for academic offerings at the site moving forward. The South Dakota State University (SDSU) pharmacy program will continue to operate out of its current space on the USD-SF campus.

For more information on the approved transition, visit usd.edu/Academics/USD-Sioux-Falls.

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Groton Jr. Teeners 14U Stays Scrappy In Loss To Warner 14

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U fought back after falling down by four runs in the fourth inning. The comeback fell just short though, in a 7-6 defeat to Warner 14 on Friday. Groton Jr. Teeners 14U scored two runs in the failed comeback on a groundout by Ryder Jangula and a groundout by Jarrett Erdmann.

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U fell behind early in the loss. Warner 14 took the lead on a single in the first inning.

Warner 14 fired up the offense in the first inning. #25 singled on a 1-0 count, scoring two runs.

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U scored three runs in the fifth inning. Jangula and Erdmann all moved runners across the plate with RBIs in the inning.

Warner 14 scored three runs in the fourth inning. Warner 14's big inning was driven by singles by #23 and #26.

#1 was credited with the victory for Warner 14. The hurler went four and a third innings, allowing six runs on six hits and striking out two. #10 threw two-thirds of an inning in relief out of the bullpen.

Nicholas Morris took the loss for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. Morris lasted four innings, allowing 12 hits and seven runs while striking out five.

Gavin Englund, Tristin McGannon, Carter Simon, Nick Groeblinghoff, Karter Moody, and Morris all had one hit to lead Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. Morris led Groton Jr. Teeners 14U with two stolen bases, as they ran wild on the base paths with nine stolen bases. Groton Jr. Teeners 14U didn't commit a single error in the field. Erdmann had the most chances in the field with six.

Warner 14 racked up 12 hits on the day. #26, #23, #25, and #37 all managed multiple hits for Warner 14. Warner 14 tore up the base paths, as two players stole at least two bases. #37 led the way with two. Warner 14 didn't commit a single error in the field. #26 had five chances in the field, the most on the team.

In Walk-off, Groton Jr. Teeners 14U Loses To Warner 14

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U fell to Warner 14 7-6 on Thursday on the final play of the game. The game was tied at six with Warner 14 batting in the bottom of the sixth when #1 singled on the first pitch of the at bat, scoring one run.

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U trailed by four runs in the second inning, but then fought back to lower the final margin. Groton Jr. Teeners 14U scored six runs in the failed comeback on a single by Nicholas Morris in the fourth, a single by Kellen Antonsen in the fifth, a double by Karsten Fliehs in the fifth, and a single by Nick Groeblinghoff in the fifth.

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U tallied five runs in the fifth inning. The offensive onslaught came from singles by Antonsen and Groeblinghoff and a double by Fliehs.

#26 led the Warner 14 to victory on the mound. The ace lasted four and two-thirds innings, allowing three hits and four runs while striking out three. #23 threw one and one-third innings in relief out of the bullpen.

Antonsen took the loss for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. Antonsen allowed 15 hits and seven runs over five and two-thirds innings, striking out two and walking zero.

Lincoln Krause went 2-for-3 at the plate to lead Groton Jr. Teeners 14U in hits. Groton Jr. Teeners 14U was sure-handed and didn't commit a single error. Gavin Englund made the most plays with seven.

Warner 14 collected 15 hits. #37, #45, #1, #10, and #35 all had multiple hits for Warner 14. #37 led Warner 14 with three hits in three at bats. Warner 14 didn't commit a single error in the field. #23 had six chances in the field, the most on the team.

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Groton Jr. Teeners 14U 6 - 7 Warner 14

📍 Away 📅 Thursday June 23, 2022

	1	2	3	4	5	R	H	E
GRTN	0	1	0	2	3	6	6	0
WRNR	2	1	1	3	X	7	12	0

BATTING

Groton Jr. Teeners	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
J Erdmann (C)	3	0	0	1	0	0
N Morris (P)	2	1	1	0	1	0
C Simon (SS, 3B)	1	1	1	1	2	0
K Flihs (LF)	3	0	0	0	0	1
G Englund (3B)	1	0	1	1	0	0
N Groeblichhoff (...)	2	1	1	0	0	0
K Antonsen (2B)	1	0	0	0	0	0
K Moody (1B)	1	1	1	1	1	0
T McGannon (CF)	2	1	1	0	0	0
G Kroll (RF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
R Jangula (RF)	1	0	0	1	0	0
L Krause	1	1	0	0	1	1
Totals	19	6	6	5	5	3

2B: C Simon, **TB:** N Morris, K Moody, N Groeblichhoff, G Englund, T McGannon, C Simon 2, **SAC:** K Antonsen, **HBP:** G Englund, **SB:** N Morris 2, K Moody, N Groeblichhoff, L Krause, G Englund, T McGannon, C Simon 2, **LOB:** 5

PITCHING

Groton Jr. Te	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
N Morris	4.0	12	7	7	4	5	0
Totals	4.0	12	7	7	4	5	0

L: N Morris, **P-S:** N Morris 81-47, R Jangula 0-0, **WP:** N Morris, **HBP:** N Morris, **BF:** N Morris 26

Warner 14	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
#37 (C)	2	2	2	0	1	0
#23 (2B)	2	2	2	2	1	0
#2 (CF)	3	1	1	0	0	2
#11 (SS)	2	2	1	0	1	1
#26 (1B)	2	0	2	2	0	0
#25 (3B)	3	0	2	2	0	0
#35 (LF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
#45	2	0	1	0	0	1
#10 (RF, P)	2	0	1	0	0	0
#1 (P, RF)	1	0	0	0	1	0
Totals	20	7	12	6	4	5

TB: #11, #37 2, #26 2, #23 2, #10, #25 2, #45, #2, **SAC:** #26, **CS:** #37, #1, **HBP:** #35, **SB:** #11 2, #37 2, #23, #1, **LOB:** 7

Warner 14	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
#1	4.1	6	6	6	3	2	0
#10	0.2	0	0	0	2	1	0
Totals	5.0	6	6	6	5	3	0

W: #1, **P-S:** #10 21-10, #1 67-42, **HBP:** #1, **BF:** #10 4, #1 22

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Groton Jr. Teeners 14U 6 - 7 Warner 14

📍 Away 📅 Thursday June 23, 2022

	1	2	3	4	5	6	R	H	E
GRTN	0	0	0	1	5	0	6	8	0
WRNR	0	4	0	0	1	2	7	15	0

BATTING

Groton Jr. Teeners	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
T McGannon (CF)	2	1	0	0	1	0
K Antonsen (P)	3	1	1	1	0	0
K Flihs (C)	3	1	1	2	0	0
J Erdmann (LF)	1	0	0	0	0	0
N Groeblichhoff...	1	1	1	2	0	0
N Morris (3B)	3	0	1	1	0	0
C Simon (SS)	3	0	0	0	0	2
G Englund (1B)	2	1	1	0	1	0
R Jangula (RF)	1	0	0	0	1	1
G Kroll (RF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
L Krause (2B)	3	0	2	0	0	1
K Moody	1	1	1	0	1	0
Totals	24	6	8	6	4	5

2B: K Flihs, **TB:** N Morris, K Flihs 2, N Groeblichhoff, K Moody, G Englund, K Antonsen, L Krause 2, **HBP:** N Groeblichhoff, **SB:** N Groeblichhoff, G Englund, **LOB:** 5

PITCHING

Groton Jr. Te	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
K Antonsen	5.2	15	7	7	0	2	0
Totals	5.2	15	7	7	0	2	0

L: K Antonsen, **P-S:** K Antonsen 76-52, **WP:** K Antonsen, **BF:** K Antonsen 30

Warner 14	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
#37 (3B)	3	1	3	0	0	0
#11 (2B)	3	0	1	0	0	0
#2 (CF)	3	0	0	0	0	0
#23 (SS, P)	3	0	1	1	0	2
#26 (P, SS)	3	0	1	0	0	0
#25 (1B)	3	1	1	0	0	0
#35 (LF)	3	2	2	0	0	0
#45 (C)	3	1	2	1	0	0
#10	3	2	2	2	0	0
#1 (RF)	3	0	2	3	0	0
Totals	30	7	15	7	0	2

2B: #1, #10, **3B:** #45, **TB:** #1 3, #35 2, #26, #45 4, #37 3, #11, #23, #10 3, #25, **SB:** #26, #37, #11, #23, #10, #25, **LOB:** 5

Warner 14	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
#26	4.2	3	4	4	4	3	0
#23	1.1	5	2	2	0	2	0
Totals	6.0	8	6	6	4	5	0

W: #26, **P-S:** #26 74-40, #23 22-15, **WP:** #26, **HBP:** #26, **BF:** #26 21, #23 8

Groton Legion Post #39 Loses Lead Early in Defeat

Groton Legion Post #39 fell behind early and couldn't come back in a 13-4 loss to Lake Norden on Thursday. Lake Norden scored on a triple by Jackson Noem in the first inning, a walk by George Jenson in the first inning, a single by Carson Pederson in the first inning, a single by Luke Steffenson in the first inning, a fielder's choice during Cristhian Rodriguez's at bat in the first inning, an error during Cameron Thue's at bat in the second inning, a walk by Kady Swenson in the second inning, a double by Rodriguez in the second inning, and a triple by Noem in the second inning.

The Groton Legion Post #39 struggled to contain the high-powered offense of Lake Norden, giving up 13 runs.

Lake Norden got things started in the first inning. Noem tripled on a 1-1 count, scoring one run.

Lake Norden scored seven runs in the second inning. The big inning for Lake Norden came thanks to a walk by Swenson, a triple by Noem, an error on a ball put in play by Thue, and a double by Rodriguez.

Tyson Stevensen earned the victory on the mound for Lake Norden. The fireballer went four innings, allowing two runs on one hit and striking out six. Swenson threw three innings in relief out of the bullpen.

Evin Nehls took the loss for Groton Legion Post #39. The righty went one and one-third innings, allowing 11 runs on five hits and striking out three.

Bradin Althoff went 2-for-2 at the plate to lead Groton Legion Post #39 in hits.

Lake Norden racked up 12 hits on the day. Rodriguez, Pederson, Noem, and Thue each collected multiple hits for Lake Norden.

Kucker's Walk-off Picture Perfect Ending In Groton Post 39 Jr Legion's Victory Over Lake Norden

It came down to the wire on Friday, with Groton Post 39 Jr Legion taking victory on a dramatic walk-off single in the late innings that sealed their victory over Lake Norden. The game was tied at five with Groton Post 39 Jr Legion batting in the bottom of the seventh when Korbin Kucker singled on a 2-2 count, scoring one run.

Groton Post 39 Jr Legion earned the victory despite allowing Lake Norden to score four runs in the third inning. Christian Rodriguez, Aiden Abraham, and Jackson Wadsworth all moved runners across the plate with RBIs in the inning.

Lake Norden got on the board in the first inning when Turner Stevenson grounded out, scoring one run.

In the bottom of the fourth inning, Groton Post 39 Jr Legion tied things up at five when Caden McInerney singled on a 1-0 count, scoring one run.

Groton Post 39 Jr Legion notched five runs in the fourth inning. The offensive firepower by Groton Post 39 Jr Legion was led by Ryan Groeblichhoff, Braxton Imrie, and McInerney, who all drove in runs.

Bradin Althoff was credited with the victory for Groton Post 39 Jr Legion. Althoff surrendered zero runs on zero hits over two-thirds of an inning, striking out one and walking one.

Rylen Thue took the loss for Lake Norden. Thue lasted one and two-thirds innings, allowing one hit and one run while striking out two.

Ryker Warrington started the game for Lake Norden. The bulldog allowed five hits and five runs over five innings, striking out seven. Dillon Abeln started the game for Groton Post 39 Jr Legion. The righthander lasted six and a third innings, allowing six hits and five runs while striking out 13 and walking one.

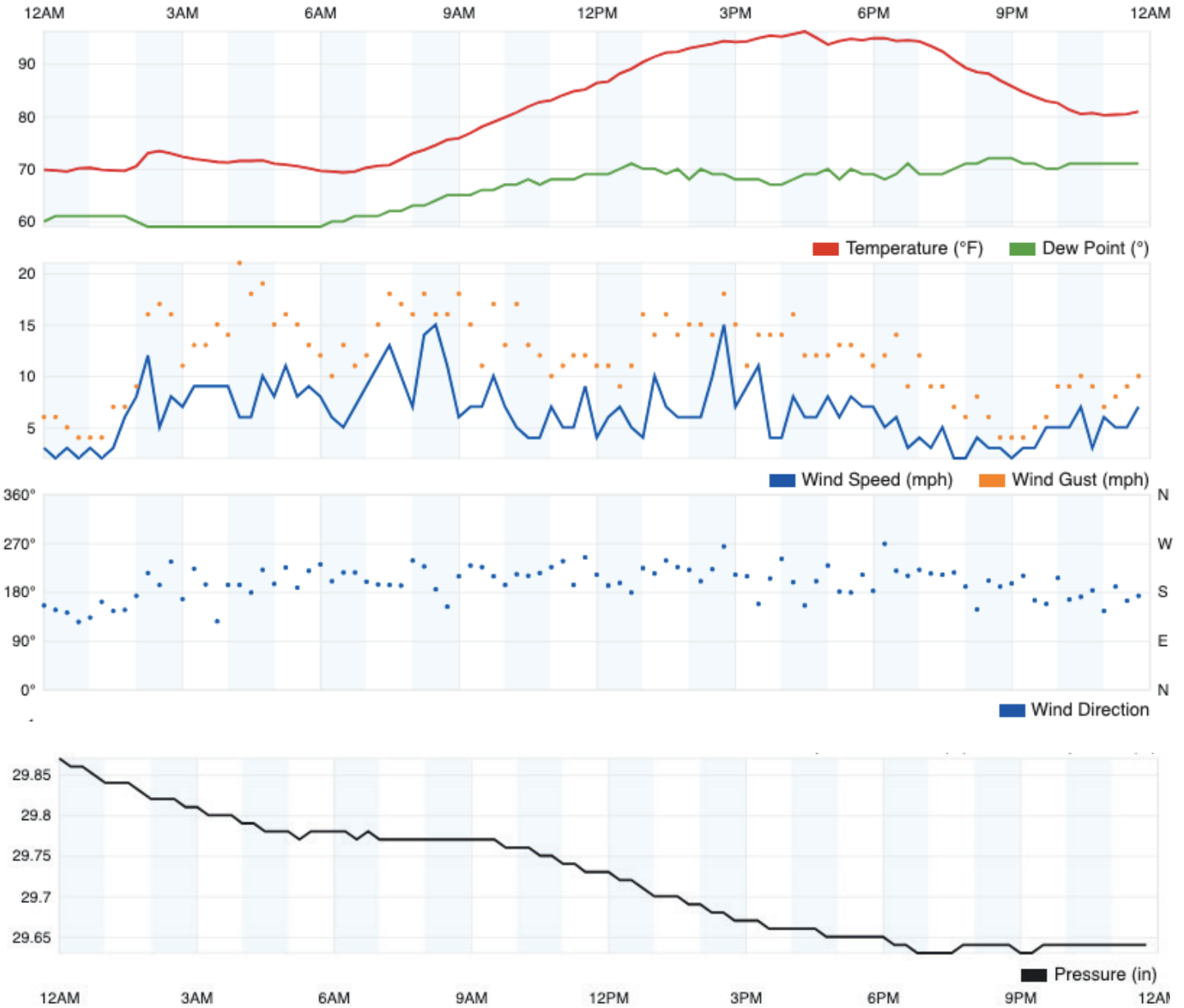
Althoff led Groton Post 39 Jr Legion with two hits in two at bats.

Wadsworth went 2-for-3 at the plate to lead Lake Norden in hits.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Friday



Chance T-storms

High: 92 °F

Friday Night



Severe Thunderstorms

Low: 64 °F

Saturday



Decreasing Clouds and Breezy

High: 76 °F

Saturday Night



Mostly Clear and Breezy then Mostly Clear

Low: 53 °F

Sunday

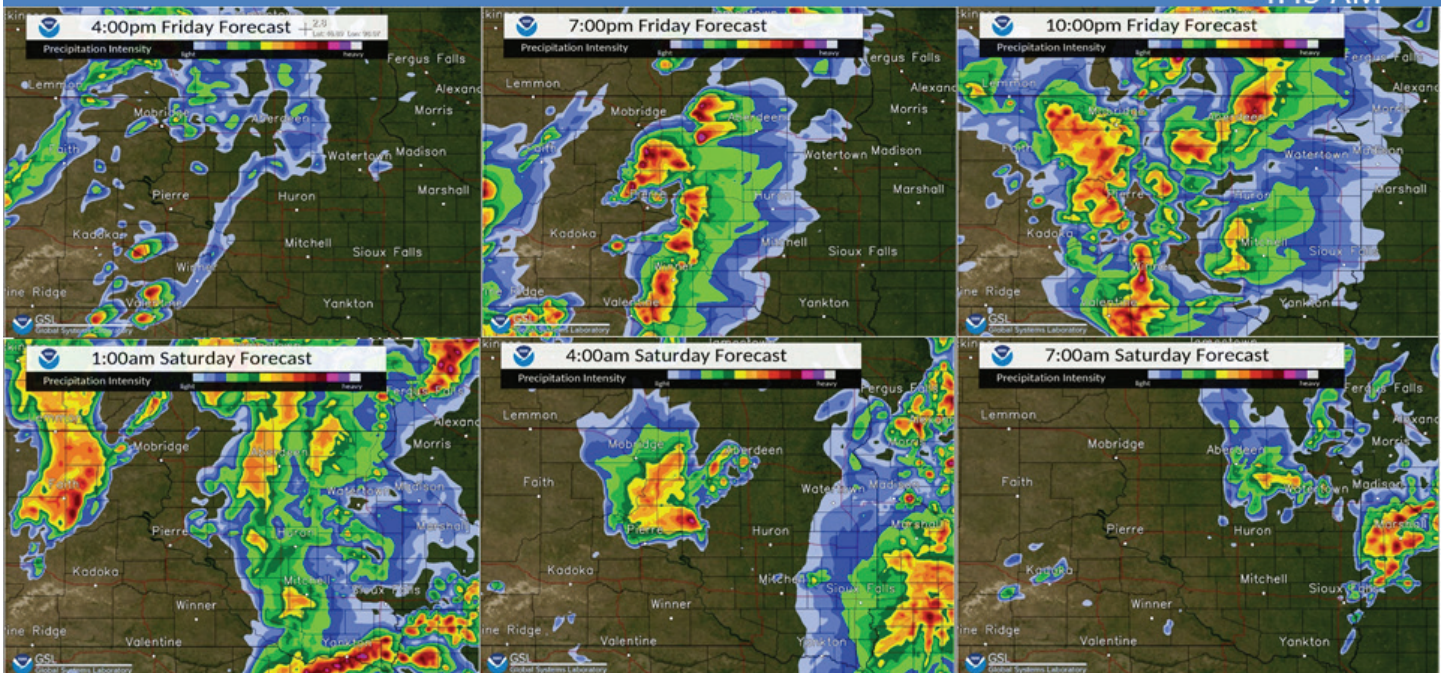


Sunny

High: 77 °F

Potential Thunderstorm Timing This Afternoon Through Tonight

June 24, 2022
4:45 AM



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Strong to severe thunderstorms are forecast to develop by late this afternoon across portions of western and central South Dakota and spread into western Minnesota overnight. Especially with thunderstorms, there can be many potential outcomes. What is displayed here is one solution from one forecast model. It's not meant to be taken verbatim. Instead, view this as an attempt to help answer the general question of where storms might be and when. Large hail and damaging winds hold the highest probability of occurring with any severe thunderstorms during this upcoming event. Although, localized flash flooding and an isolated tornado or two are not out of the question.

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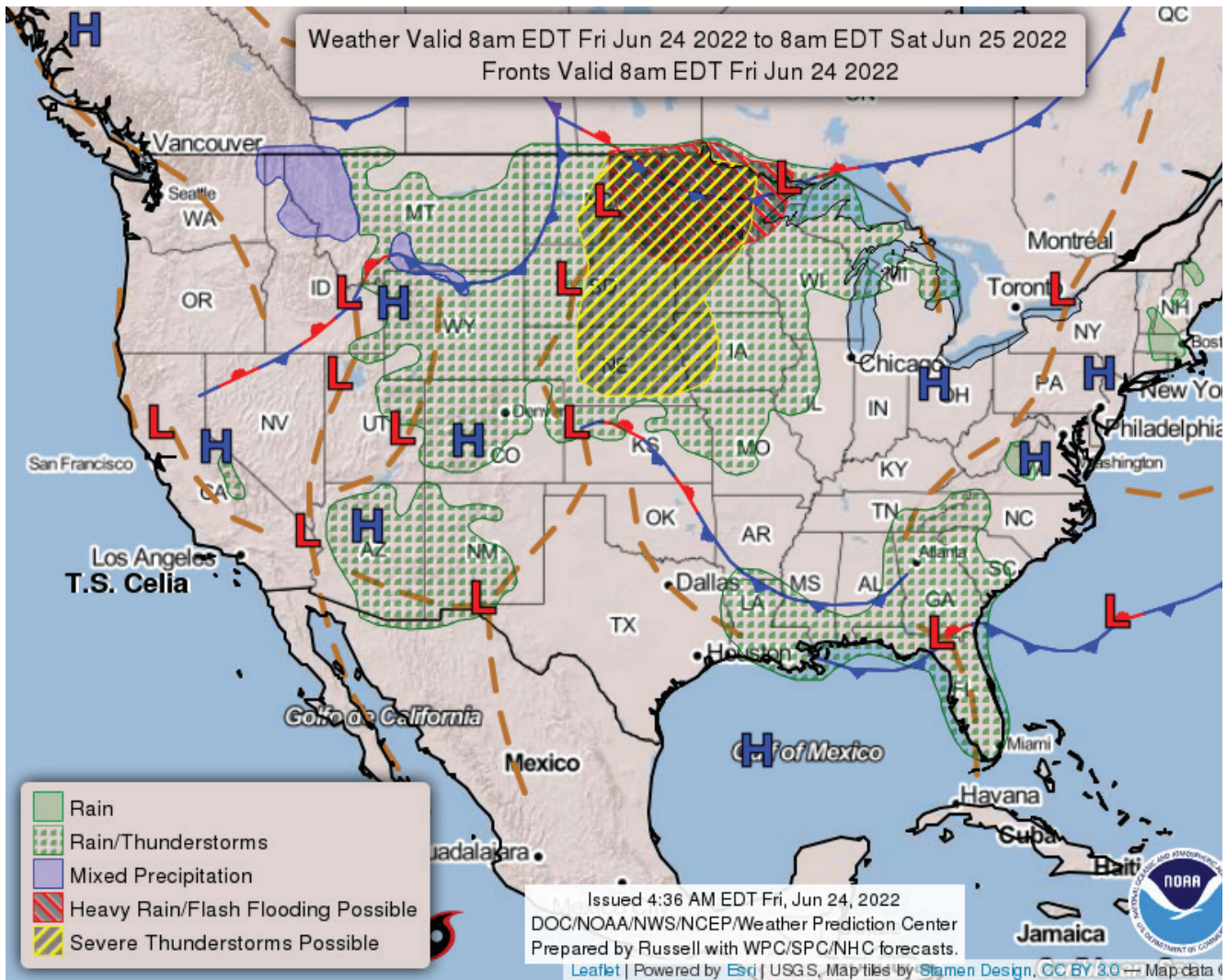
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 96 °F at 4:36 PM
Low Temp: 69 °F at 6:26 AM
Wind: 21 mph at 4:11 AM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 43 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 108 in 1988
Record Low: 39 in 2017
Average High: 82°F
Average Low: 57°F
Average Precip in June.: 2.96
Precip to date in June.: 0.22
Average Precip to date: 10.21
Precip Year to Date: 11.38
Sunset Tonight: 9:26:50 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:43:21 AM



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Today in Weather History

June 24, 1902: Very strong winds occurred during the evening hours over portions of Hand and Stanley, to Turner and Lincoln Counties. Heavy losses occurred to barns and other farm outbuildings, trees, and windmills. One person was killed, and several were injured. A peak wind gust of 67 mph was recorded in Pierre.

June 24, 2003: An F4 tornado destroyed or heavily damaged all buildings, other structures, and vehicles in the small town of Manchester, in Kingsbury County. Propane and fuel oil tanks were destroyed. Many homes were stripped to the foundation. Of the six residents of the town, four were injured and were transported to hospitals. Three were deemed to be seriously injured, but none of the injuries were listed as life-threatening. One of the injured was in a basement, one was blown out of the home on the way to the same basement, and two were in a mobile home which was destroyed. The tornado damaged crops, trees, and power lines south of Manchester before reaching the town. The tornado also heavily damaged several farms north of Manchester, including two farms on which several buildings, including the houses, were destroyed. About 12 cattle were killed and others injured. The amount of crop damage was not known. Throughout the path, the tornado was observed to have multiple vortices. The tornado was seen and videotaped by numerous storm chasers and researchers. Researchers also deployed weather sensors around the town of Manchester. One of these sensors recorded a 100 millibar pressure drop as the tornado passed.

1816 - The cold weather of early June finally gave way to several days of 90 degree heat in Massachusetts, including a reading of 99 degrees at Salem. (David Ludlum)

1924 - Six men at a rock quarry south of Winston-Salem, NC, sought shelter from a thunderstorm. The structure chosen contained a quantity of dynamite. Lightning struck a near-by tree causing the dynamite to explode. The men were killed instantly. (The Weather Channel)

1929: In Durban, South Africa, a storm drops hailstones the size of baseballs. The rattle produced by the storm is described as sounding like "machine gun fire."

1951 - Twelve inches of hail broke windows and roofs, and dented automobiles, causing more than fourteen million dollars damage. The storm plowed 200 miles from Kingman County KS into Missouri, with the Wichita area hardest hit. It was the most disastrous hailstorm of record for the state of Kansas. (David Ludlum)

1952 - Thunderstorms produced a swath of hail 60 miles long and 3.5 miles wide through parts of Hand, Beadle, Kingsbury, Miner and Jerauld counties in South Dakota. Poultry and livestock were killed, and many persons were injured. Hail ten inches in circumference was reported at Huron SD. (The Weather Channel)

1975: An Eastern Airlines Boeing 727 crashed at JFK airport in New York City. 113 of the 124 people on board the aircraft died. Researcher Theodore Fujita studied the incident and discovered that a microburst caused the crash. His research led to improved air safety. The tower never experienced the microburst, which was held back by a sea-breeze front. The plane crashed 2,400 feet short of the runway.

1987 - Thunderstorms spawned six tornadoes in eastern Colorado. Baseball size hail was reported near Yoder, CO, and thunderstorm winds gusting to 92 mph derailed a train near Pratt, KS. The town of Gould, OK, was soaked with nearly an inch and a half of rain in just ten minutes. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Forty-three cities reported record high temperatures for the date. Valentine NE reported an all-time record high of 110 degrees, and highs of 102 degrees at Casper, WY, 103 degrees at Reno, NV, and 106 degrees at Winnemucca, NV, were records for the month of June. Highs of 98 degrees at Logan, UT, and 109 degrees at Rapid City, SD, equalled June records. Lightning killed twenty-one cows near Conway, SC. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing along a warm front produced severe weather from Colorado and New Mexico to Kansas and Nebraska. Thunderstorms spawned seven tornadoes, and produced wind gusts to 80 mph at Wood River, NE, and hail three inches in diameter at Wheeler, KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Looking Deeper

Advice only has value if it achieves its goals. Often, we follow the advice we get if it agrees with what we want to hear or if it comes from a trusted friend. When we need sound, reliable, and timely advice, we need assurance that our source is wise. Certainly, advice coming from David, a "man after God's own heart," would be worth following. So, when he gave advice to his son, it was a tipping point in his career as a king, husband, father, teacher, and warrior.

And, his advice was simple, and can be summed up in a few words: "Be strong and obedient to God." But, what does this mean?

First and foremost, Solomon, if he chose to succeed, needed a deep, personal relationship with God. As he grew up in David's household, he saw his father reading the law and prophets, worshipping and praying, writing the psalms and following God faithfully. David proved what obedience was. And, when he failed, he repented, and returned to obeying God's teachings!

However, he had to know God's laws to obey them. To know them, he had to study them before he could apply them. This would take time from other things - but would be time well invested and keep him from failing in life by being disobedient to God.

He also was given advice to worship God wholeheartedly, surrender to Him completely and serve Him willingly and faithfully. Sadly, history shows us that he refused to do that.

As the story of Solomon unfolds in the Bible, we read of "what might have been" if he had surrendered to God completely. His lack of surrender destroyed the plan God had for him.

The same is true for us. We must study God's Word and, surrender to Him, or fail.

Prayer: Father, may we willingly study and obey Your Word, and then surrender our lives to You and bring honor to Your Name and peace to our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Bible Verse: When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son. "I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, act like a man and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go." 1 Kings 2:1-3

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2022 Community Events

- 01/30/2022 84th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
01/30/2022 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am – 1pm, Groton Community Center, 109 N 3rd St, Groton,
04/07/2022 Groton CDE
04/09/2022 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
04/09/2022 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
04/23/2022 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/24/2022 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/07/2022 Lions Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
St John's Lutheran Church VBS 9-11am
05/30/2022 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
Transit Fundraiser at the Community Center 4-7pm (Thursday Mid-June)
06/17/2022 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm Start
06/18/2022 Groton Triathlon
-6/20/2022 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
10/01/2022 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
10/07/2022 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
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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News from the Associated Press

Sioux Falls police: Officer shoots at armed suspect

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A Sioux Falls police officer is on standard administrative leave after firing shots at an armed suspect, according to officials.

Assistant Police Chief Nick Cook says officers were called to the parking lot of a business about 7 p.m. Wednesday on a report of a stolen vehicle.

After officers arrived, Cook says a 31-year-old Sioux Falls man ran from the vehicle while holding a knife, discarded that weapon, then produced a handgun.

Because of a perceived threat, Cook says an officer fired an undetermined number of shots. The officer was not identified.

The suspect then discarded his firearm and continued to flee on foot and was arrested after struggling with police in the street where an officer used a stun gun to bring him under control, according to Cook. The man had not fired any shots at officers that police were aware of, he added.

Authorities said there were no injuries or damage to nearby structures or vehicles, the Argus Leader reported. Police spokesman Sam Clemens says investigators used a drone to help process the scene afterward.

A woman in the vehicle with the suspect was also arrested, but police did not say why.

Clemens said later that night as officers were collecting evidence, a man in a vehicle drove through the crime tape meant to secure the scene and was arrested.

The driver was booked into the Minnehaha County Jail on possible charges of driving while intoxicated, reckless driving, being a fugitive from justice and several other counts.

EXPLAINER: Is North Korea moving nukes to its border?

By HYUNG-JIN KIM AND KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Is North Korea preparing to deploy tactical nuclear weapons along its tense border with rival South Korea, which is only a short drive from the 26 million people living around Seoul, its capital?

That's how it looks to many experts paying close attention to a high-profile North Korean military meeting this week. The possible deployment, just two months after a veiled threat by leader Kim Jong Un to preemptively use nuclear weapons, would be a major development in the decades-long standoff on the Korean Peninsula.

North Korea already has thousands of conventional weapons aimed at South Korea and the nearly 30,000 U.S. forces stationed there, but moving its short-range nuclear missiles to the border would be the clearest sign yet that Kim is looking to use his nuclear weapons to both threaten South Korea and wrest concessions from outside nuclear negotiators.

Together with North Korea's apparent preparations for its first nuclear test in five years, there's deep skepticism among observers that diplomacy can convince the country to abandon its nukes. Critics are calling on Seoul and Washington to formulate a new approach to deal with North Korea's fast improving nuclear program.

Here's a look at Kim's latest nuclear moves.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS ON THE BORDER?

During a military meeting that ended Thursday, Kim and other senior officials confirmed additional "operation duties" and "modified operation plans" for military units near the border with South Korea.

State media dispatches didn't mention nuclear weapons directly. But outside experts believe North Korea's vague language signals its intention to forward-deploy tactical nuclear weapons systems. They base their assessment in part on recent public comments from North Korea about such plans, and on a slew of

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tests of short-range nuclear-capable missiles designed to attack strategic facilities in South Korea, including U.S. military bases there.

One big hint came in April, when North Korea test-fired a newly developed guided weapon that it said would improve the efficient operation of "tactical nukes" and boost the firepower of front-line artillery units. Later that month, Kim said he could use his nuclear program preemptively if provoked.

North Korea now has a "much higher chance to use its tactical nuclear weapons on a battlefield" if a war breaks out on the Korean Peninsula, said Kim Yeol Soo, an expert at South Korea's Korea Institute for Military Affairs.

The weapons likely to be deployed at the border are some of the more mobile, solid-fueled, short-range missiles that North Korea has test-launched since nuclear diplomacy with the United States collapsed in 2019. North Korea has called those missiles -- which foreign experts say are potentially capable of evading South Korean and U.S. missile defenses -- "tactical" weapons, implying its intent to arm them with lower-yield nuclear weapons.

North Korea has likely already acquired the technology to arm its missiles with nuclear warheads, so its deployment of tactical nuclear weapons could happen any time, said Kim Taewoo, former head of the state-funded Korean Institute for National Unification in Seoul.

Some experts, however, said North Korea might not deploy nuclear-armed missiles because of possible problems maintaining them.

WILL SOUTH KOREA RESPOND BY DEPLOYING NUCLEAR WEAPONS?

North Korea's apparent push to deploy tactical nuclear weapons may be part of Kim's recent vow to counter the United States "strength for strength" amid stalled nuclear diplomacy. It also comes as Washington and Seoul work to strengthen their combined defense capabilities to cope with North Korean nuclear threats.

South Korea's new conservative government, which took office last month, has said it will expand its conventional arms capabilities and strengthen its defenses in conjunction with the United States.

While the Koreas have avoided major conflict since the end of the 1950-53 Korean War, there have been deadly skirmishes and attacks in recent years that have killed dozens.

North Korea has a history of escalating threats and provocations when a new government is inaugurated in South Korea or the United States to create a potentially favorable environment for future negotiations. The country has often then dialed down its rhetoric and launched charm offensives.

That may happen this time.

But nuclear weapons on the front lines would complicate how South Korea responds to any future North Korean provocation.

New South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, during a summit with U.S. President Joe Biden last month, secured a U.S. commitment on the regional deployment of U.S. strategic assets such as long-range bombers and aircraft carriers in response to provocations by North Korea.

The allies may also conduct their largest combined military training in years in August.

But Yoon has said he won't pursue nuclear development or ask the United States to redeploy nuclear weapons in South Korea as a deterrence against potential aggression by North Korea.

The South Korean military said it's closely monitoring North Korean activities over the possible move to deploy tactical nuclear weapons, but didn't elaborate.

Some experts say North Korea's expansion of tactical nuclear weapons and pursuit of long-range missiles capable of reaching the U.S. mainland have reduced the credibility of America's "nuclear umbrella," though the Biden administration has repeatedly reaffirmed a U.S. commitment to defend South Korea with its full range of military capabilities.

There are also calls for the reintroduction of U.S. nuclear weapons in South Korea.

"We should switch to a strategy of terminating North Korea's nuke threats through a nuclear balance," said Kim Taewoo, the former head of the Korean Institute for National Unification. "The deployment of tactical nuclear weapons means that North Korea's nuclear threat would be right in front of us."

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WHAT'S NEXT?

Tactical nuclear weapons were part of a five-year arms development plan Kim Jong Un announced last year. He has ramped up ballistic missile testing to an unprecedented pace this year to boost his country's ability to attack both the U.S. mainland and South Korea.

For weeks, U.S. and South Korean officials have noted signs of an imminent nuclear test by North Korea, which would be its first since 2017 and seventh in total. Such a test could be part of an attempt to build a warhead that could fit on tactical missiles or multi-warhead missiles.

But North Korea hasn't carried out such a test yet, possibly because of its continuing COVID-19 outbreak and opposition from China, its last major ally and biggest aid provider.

North Korea has so far rejected the Biden administration's offers of open-ended talks, calling for Washington to first abandon its "hostile policy," a term it uses in reference to U.S.-led economic sanctions and joint U.S.-South Korean military drills.

Experts say it's only a matter of time before North Korea conducts a nuclear test, which is seen as an essential step in enlarging its nuclear arsenal under Kim's five-year plan. Such a test would likely further complicate a push to resume nuclear diplomacy.

Aftershock in Afghanistan as quake toll rises to 1,150 dead

By EBRAHIM NOROOZI Associated Press

GAYAN, Afghanistan (AP) — An aftershock shook a hard-hit area of eastern Afghanistan on Friday, two days after a quake rattled the region, razing hundreds of mud-brick homes and killing 1,150 people, according to state media.

Pakistan's Meteorological Department reported a 4.2 magnitude quake in southeastern Afghanistan that state-run Bakhtar News Agency reported took five more lives in hard-hit Gayan District and injured 11 people.

The country of 38 million people was already in the midst of a spiraling economic crisis that had plunged millions deep into poverty with over a million children at risk of severe malnutrition.

The magnitude 6 quake on Wednesday that struck in the night as people were sleeping left thousands without shelter and brought into sharp focus the compounding needs of the country. Afghanistan remains cut off from the international monetary system, and aid groups lament having to pay local staff with bags of cash delivered by hand as nations refuse to deal directly with the Taliban.

Aid organizations like the local Red Crescent and World Food Program have stepped in to assist the most vulnerable families with food and other emergency needs like tents and sleeping mats in Paktika province, the epicenter of the earthquake, and neighboring Khost province.

Still, residents appeared to be largely on their own to deal with the aftermath as their new Taliban-led government and the international aid community struggle to bring in help. The shoddy mountain roads leading to the affected areas were made worse by damage and rain. Villagers have been burying their dead and digging through the rubble by hand in search of survivors.

The Taliban director of the Bakhtar agency said Friday the death toll had risen to 1,150 people from previous reports of 1,000 killed. Abdul Wahid Rayan said at least 1,600 people were injured.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has put the death toll at 770 people.

It's not clear how death toll counts are being reached, given the difficulties of accessing and communicating with the impacted villages. Either grim toll would make the quake Afghanistan's deadliest in two decades.

State media reported that close to 3,000 homes were destroyed or badly damaged. In the district of Gayan, at least 1,000 homes were damaged by the earthquake. Another 800 homes in the Spera district of Khost province were also damaged.

While modern buildings withstand magnitude 6 earthquakes elsewhere, Afghanistan's mud-brick homes and landslide-prone mountains make such quakes more dangerous.

Roads in the area are so poorly paved and difficult to navigate that some villages in Gayan District take a full day to reach from Kabul, though it is only 175 kilometers (110 miles away.)

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In villages across Gayan district, toured by Associated Press journalists for hours Thursday, families who had spent the previous rainy night out in the open lifted pieces of timber of collapsed roofs and pulled away stones by hand, looking for missing loved ones. Taliban fighters circulated in vehicles in the area, but only a few were seen helping dig through the rubble.

There was little sign of heavy equipment — only one bulldozer was spotted being transported. Ambulances circulated, but little other help to the living was evident. One 6-year-old boy in Gayan wept as he said his parents, two sisters and a brother were all dead. He had fled the ruins of his own home and took refuge with the neighbors.

Many international aid agencies withdrew from Afghanistan when the Taliban seized power last August. Those that remain are scrambling to get medical supplies, food and tents to the remote quake-struck area. U.N. agencies are also facing a \$3 billion funding shortfall for Afghanistan this year.

Germany, Norway and several other countries announced they were sending aid for the quake, but underscored that they would work only through U.N. agencies, not with the Taliban, which no government has officially recognized as of yet. Nations have called on the Taliban to first address human rights concerns, chief among them the rights and freedoms of Afghan women and girls.

The International Rescue Committee has emergency health teams in the two provinces to deliver essential first aid and said it is providing cash support to families who have lost their homes and livelihoods in the earthquake. The organization, which has been operating in Afghanistan since 1988, is calling for an international roadmap to ultimately release Afghanistan's foreign exchange reserves.

The Taliban's takeover of the country last year as the U.S. was preparing to withdraw its troops prompted the Biden administration to freeze around \$9.5 billion that the Afghan central bank has in U.S. banks, hampering the new rulers' efforts to pay civil servants and import goods.

Trucks of food and other necessities arrived from Pakistan, and planes full of humanitarian aid landed from Iran and Qatar. India humanitarian relief and a technical team to the capital, Kabul, to coordinate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. India says its aid will be handed over to a U.N. agency on the ground and the Afghan Red Crescent Society.

In Paktika province, the quake shook a region of deep poverty, where residents scrape out in a living in the few fertile areas among the rough mountains.

There are projections, quoted by the U.N. and others, that poverty rates may climb as high as 97% of the population and unemployment to 40% this year.

Climate, malaria highlighted as Commonwealth leaders meet

By IGNATIUS SSUUNA Associated Press

KIGALI, Rwanda (AP) — Leaders of Commonwealth nations were meeting in Rwanda's capital Friday to tackle climate change, tropical diseases and other challenges deepened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The summit for Commonwealth heads of state in Kigali is the culmination of a series of meetings this week that officials said yielded some success in efforts to improve the lives of people in the 54-nation association that is home to 2.5 billion people.

The Commonwealth's member states range from vast India to tiny Tuvalu. The African nations of Togo and Gabon have asked to join the Commonwealth despite having no colonial history with Britain.

The group of nations comprises mostly former British colonies, and its titular head is Queen Elizabeth II. But countries such as Mozambique and Rwanda — a former Belgian colony with an Anglophile leader — previously launched successful bids to join.

Prince Charles is representing his mother, who at 96 is restricting her official duties. The summit is taking place at an uncertain time for the British monarchy as well as the Commonwealth, whose relevance is sometimes questioned.

The bloc faces a new challenge as some member nations discuss removing the queen as their head of state. She is the head of state of 14 Commonwealth realms, but Barbados cut ties with the monarchy in November, and several other Caribbean countries, including Jamaica, say they plan to follow suit.

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In his remarks Friday, Charles said "free" nations can make such decisions "calmly and without rancor." The heir to the throne also spoke of slavery and its legacy for Indigenous communities and others, saying the Commonwealth "must find ways, new ways, to acknowledge our past."

"Quite simply, this is a conversation whose time has come," he said.

Rwanda's hosting of the summit is contentious to some who cite the East African country's poor human rights record under Paul Kagame, an authoritarian leader who has been de facto leader or president since a 1994 genocide.

Other critics are unhappy with what they see as an illegal and cruel deal with Britain to transfer migrants thousands of miles to Rwanda. That agreement faces legal hurdles, and the first group of migrants has yet to arrive in Africa.

World leaders attending the summit range from Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, whose leadership of the Conservative party suffered a heavy blow overnight as voters rejected the party's candidates in two special parliamentary elections, is also in Rwanda.

Some meetings on the margins of the summit reported successes in efforts to address pressing issues such as managing climate change and deadly diseases.

More than \$4 billion was pledged Thursday toward global efforts to accelerate the fight against malaria and other neglected tropical diseases. The money will come from governments, philanthropists and others in the private sector. In addition, pharmaceutical companies donated 18 billion tablets to prevent and treat those diseases.

Observers said the fundraising marks a significant breakthrough as malaria is a leading killer in Africa.

Dr. Francisca Olamiju, the head of a non-governmental organization in Nigeria that advocates for the poor, told The Associated Press of her high expectations for such a big gathering to bolster campaigns against tropical diseases.

World leaders must "walk the talk" and mobilize more resources for the cause, she said.

Summit participants also are urging increased action to curb global warming ahead of a United Nations climate change summit scheduled to take place in Egypt in November. Commonwealth governments have been asked to submit their targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by Sept. 23.

At the summit, Commonwealth leaders are expected to adopt a plan to address climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss. The Living Lands Charter aims to achieve climate goals through a mixture of policy influence, financing, technical assistance, governance and sharing knowledge across nations.

Some 32 of the Commonwealth's members are small states, with 25 of them small islands and developing states classified as vulnerable to climate change.

UK Conservatives lose 2 elections in blow to Boris Johnson

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson suffered a double blow as voters rejected his Conservative Party in two special elections dominated by questions about his leadership and ethics.

He was further wounded when the party's chairman quit after the results came out early Friday, saying Conservatives "cannot carry on with business as usual."

The centrist Liberal Democrats overturned a big Conservative majority to win the rural southwest England seat of Tiverton and Honiton, while the main opposition Labour Party reclaimed Wakefield in northern England from Johnson's Tories.

The contests, triggered by the resignations of Conservative lawmakers hit by sex scandals, offered voters the chance to give their verdict on the prime minister just weeks after 41% of his own MPs voted to oust him.

"The people of Tiverton and Honiton have spoken for Britain," said the area's newly elected Liberal Democrat lawmaker, Richard Foord. "They sent a loud and clear message: It's time for Boris Johnson to

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go, and go now.”

Defeat in either district would have been a setback for the prime minister’s party. Losing both increases jitters among restive Conservatives who already worry the ebullient but erratic and divisive Johnson is no longer an electoral asset.

Party chairman Oliver Dowden resigned, saying “our supporters are distressed and disappointed by recent events, and I share their feelings.”

“We cannot carry on with business as usual,” said Dowden, previously a staunch Johnson loyalist. “Somebody must take responsibility and I have concluded that, in these circumstances, it would not be right for me to remain in office.”

“I will, as always, remain loyal to the Conservative Party,” he said, without offering an endorsement of Johnson.

The prime minister was 4,000 miles (6,400 kilometers) away at a Commonwealth summit in Rwanda as the results were announced.

The electoral tests came as Britain faces the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation, with Russia’s war in Ukraine squeezing supplies of energy and food staples at a time of soaring consumer demand while the coronavirus pandemic recedes.

Speaking in Kigali, Johnson acknowledged the results had been “tough,” and said he would “listen to what people are saying, in particular to the difficulties people are facing over the cost of living.”

Johnson won a big majority in a 2019 general election by keeping the Conservatives’ traditional voters — affluent, older and concentrated in southern England — and winning new ones in poorer, post-industrial northern towns where many residents felt overlooked by governments for decades.

Thursday’s elections brought defeat on both fronts. Rural Tiverton and Honiton has voted Conservative for generations, while Wakefield is a northern district that the Tories won in 2019 from Labour.

Labour’s widely expected victory in Wakefield — whose previous Conservative legislator resigned after being convicted of sexual assault — is a boost to a party that has been out of office nationally since 2010.

Labour leader Keir Starmer said it showed the party “is back on the side of working people, winning seats where we lost before, and ready for government.”

Pollsters had said the Tiverton and Honiton race was tight, but the Liberal Democrats overturned a 24,000-vote Conservative majority to win by more than 6,000 votes. The election was called when the district’s Conservative lawmaker resigned after being caught looking at pornography in the House of Commons chamber.

Even with the defeats, which erode his already shaky authority among his own lawmakers, Johnson his party holds a large majority in Parliament. But Conservatives are increasingly concerned that the qualities that led them to make Johnson their leader — including a populist ability to bend the rules and get away with it — may now be a liability.

Ethics allegations have buffeted the prime minister for months, culminating in a scandal over parties held in government buildings while millions of others were banned from meeting friends and family during coronavirus lockdowns.

Johnson was one of 83 people fined by police for attending the parties, making him the first prime minister found to have broken the law while in office. A civil servant’s report on the “partygate” scandal said Johnson must bear responsibility for “failures of leadership and judgment” that created a culture of rule-breaking in government.

He survived a no-confidence vote by his own party this month but was left weakened after 41% of Conservative lawmakers voted to remove him.

Under party rules, Johnson can’t face another such vote for a year, but Friday’s defeats will increase pressure to change that.

“These are pretty dire results,” said Conservative lawmaker Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, a senior member of the committee that oversees party no-confidence votes.

“Serious discussions will be had in the next few days and weeks and then we will all have to make difficult decisions,” he said.

Johnson also faces a parliamentary ethics probe that could conclude he deliberately misled Parliament over “partygate” — traditionally a resigning offense.

Conservative lawmaker Roger Gale, a long-time Johnson critic, reiterated his calls for the prime minister to quit now.

“The soul of our party is at stake,” he said.

EU leaders tackle inflation, energy shocks from Russia’s war

BRUSSELS (AP) — A day after endorsing Ukraine’s candidacy to join the European Union, the bloc’s leaders turned their attention Friday to the severe economic turbulence looming over the coming months as the full impact of Russia’s war sinks in and the threat of recession rises.

The EU’s 27 leaders gathered in Brussels to grapple with surging inflation, energy shocks, dwindling business and consumer confidence, and growing budget pressures.

The leaders also will have to contend with higher borrowing costs as the European Central Bank prepares to raise interest rates for the first time in 11 years to counter runaway price increases. ECB President Christine Lagarde, who plans to raise rates next month and again in September, joined the EU summit to discuss the darkening economic outlook.

“We are in a difficult situation,” Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said on her way into the summit. “It’s very important that we have this discussion.”

The EU has spent the previous decade battling a series of crises, ranging from Greece’s financial woes and transatlantic trade disruptions under former U.S. President Donald Trump to Britain’s departure from the bloc and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, with no end in sight to the war in Ukraine and the EU committed to stepping up sanctions against Russia as punishment, the bloc must battle economic threats on multiple fronts.

Energy poses a major challenge for the EU, which for years has relied heavily on Russian oil, natural gas and coal to help power cars, factories, heating systems and electricity plants.

Under pressure to keep pace with American and British penalties against Russia, the EU since April has expanded what were already unprecedented sanctions by targeting Russian fuels. A ban on imports of Russian coal will start in August and an embargo on most oil from Russia will be phased in over the coming eight months.

Meanwhile, Moscow itself is disrupting natural gas deliveries, which the EU didn’t include in its own sanctions for fear of seriously harming the European economy. Before the war, the bloc got about 40% of its gas from Russia.

“It’s very likely that Russia will use gas and energy as a blackmail toward European Union countries,” Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin said. “Russia will use it as a tool, as a weapon against us, so we have to help each other.”

Moscow has reduced gas supplies to five EU countries, including heavy importers Germany and Italy, and cut off deliveries to six member states, such as Finland.

Germany on Thursday triggered the second phase of a three-stage emergency plan for gas supplies, saying the country faces a “crisis.” Weaknesses in Germany, Europe’s largest economy, risk having a broad spillover effect and making the EU’s latest economic growth forecasts look too rosy.

“The impact will be enormous for Germany but also for all the other European countries,” Belgian Premier Alexander De Croo said.

In May, the European Commission said the EU’s economic output would expand 2.7% this year and 2.3% in 2023 after 5.4% growth in 2021. Other forecasts have already downgraded growth prospects. As this year began, the bloc was still facing effects — including higher budget deficits — from the pandemic, which caused the economy to shrink 5.9% in 2020.

The ECB has pledged to create a market backstop to protect the 19 countries that share the euro currency from market turmoil as it tackles record inflation of 8.1%. A selloff in the bonds of some euro nations was a central feature of the debt crisis a decade ago.

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"The next few months will be very difficult," said European Parliament President Roberta Metsola, who attended the first day of the summit Thursday.

Setting gridlock aside, Congress set to OK gun violence bill

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A bipartisan gun violence bill that seemed unimaginable a month ago is on the verge of winning final congressional approval, a vote that will produce lawmakers' most sweeping answer in decades to brutal mass shootings that have come to shock yet not surprise Americans.

The House was set to vote on the \$13 billion package Friday, a month after a gunman massacred 19 students and two teachers at a Uvalde, Texas, elementary school. Just days before that, a white man motivated by racism allegedly killed 10 Black grocery shoppers in Buffalo, New York.

The two slaughters — days apart and victimizing helpless people for whom the public felt immediate empathy — prompted both parties to conclude that Congress had to act, especially in an election year. After weeks of closed-door talks, Senate bargainers from both parties produced a compromise taking mild but impactful steps toward making such mayhem less likely.

"Families in Uvalde and Buffalo, and too many tragic shootings before, have demanded action. And tonight, we acted," President Joe Biden said after passage. He said the House should send it to him quickly, adding, "Kids in schools and communities will be safer because of it."

The legislation would toughen background checks for the youngest gun buyers, keep firearms from more domestic violence offenders and help states put in place red flag laws that make it easier for authorities to take weapons from people adjudged dangerous. It would also fund local programs for school safety, mental health and violence prevention.

The Senate approved the measure Thursday by 65-33. Fifteen Republicans — a remarkably high number for a party that has derailed gun curbs for years — joined all 50 Democrats, including their two independent allies, in approving the bill.

Still, that meant that fewer than one-third of GOP senators backed the measure. And with Republicans in the House expected to solidly oppose it, the fate of future congressional action on guns seems dubious, even as the GOP is expected to win House and possibly Senate control in the November elections.

Top House Republicans urged a "no" vote in an email from the No. 2 GOP leader, Rep. Steve Scalise of Louisiana. He called the bill "an effort to slowly chip away at law-abiding citizens' 2nd Amendment rights."

While the bill was noteworthy for its contrast with years of stalemate in Washington, it falls far short of more robust gun restrictions Democrats have sought and Republicans have thwarted for years. Those included bans on the assault-type weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines used in the slayings in Buffalo and Uvalde.

Yet the accord let both parties' Senate leaders declare victory and demonstrate to voters that they know how to compromise and make government work, while also leaving room for each side to appeal to its core supporters.

"This is not a cure-all for all the ways gun violence affects our nation," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., whose party has made gun restrictions a goal for decades. "But it is a long overdue step in the right direction."

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., in a nod to the Second Amendment right to bear arms that drives many conservative voters, said "the American people want their constitutional rights protected and their kids to be safe in school."

The day proved bittersweet for advocates of curtailing gun violence. Underscoring the enduring potency of conservative clout, the right-leaning Supreme Court issued a decision expanding the right of Americans to carry arms in public by striking down a New York law requiring people to prove a need for carrying a weapon before they get a license to do so.

Hours before final passage, the Senate voted 65-34 to end a filibuster by conservative GOP senators aimed at killing the legislation. That was five more than the 60-vote threshold needed.

Yet the Senate votes highlighted the wariness most Republicans feel about defying the party's pro-gun voters and firearms groups like the National Rifle Association. Sens. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Todd Young of Indiana were the only two of the 15 up for reelection this fall. Of the rest, four are retiring and eight don't face voters until 2026.

Tellingly, GOP senators voting "no" included potential 2024 presidential contenders like Ted Cruz of Texas, Josh Hawley of Missouri and Tim Scott of South Carolina. Cruz said the legislation would "disarm law-abiding citizens rather than take serious measures to protect our children."

The talks that produced the bill were led by Sens. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., John Cornyn, R-Texas, and Thom Tillis, R-N.C. Murphy represented Newtown, Connecticut, when an assailant killed 20 students and six staffers at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, while Cornyn has been involved in past gun talks following mass shootings in his state and is close to McConnell.

The bill would make the local juvenile records of people age 18 to 20 available during required federal background checks when they attempt to buy guns. Those examinations, currently limited to three days, would last up to a maximum of 10 days to give federal and local officials time to search records.

People convicted of domestic abuse who are current or former romantic partners of the victim would be prohibited from acquiring firearms, closing the so-called "boyfriend loophole."

That ban currently only applies to people married to, living with or who have had children with the victim.

There would be money to help states enforce red flag laws and for other states without them that for violence prevention programs. Nineteen states and the District of Columbia have such laws.

The measure expands the use of background checks by rewriting the definition of the federally licensed gun dealers required to conduct them. Penalties for gun trafficking are strengthened, billions of dollars are provided for behavioral health clinics and school mental health programs and there's money for school safety initiatives, though not for personnel to use a "dangerous weapon."

Ukrainian army to leave battered city to avoid encirclement

By DAVID KEYTON and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — After weeks of ferocious fighting, Ukrainian forces will retreat from a besieged city in the country's east to avoid encirclement, a regional governor said Friday.

The city of Sievierodonetsk, the administrative center of the Luhansk region, has faced relentless Russian bombardment. Ukrainian troops fought the Russians in house-to-house battles before retreating to a huge chemical factory on the city's edge, where they holed up in its sprawling underground structures.

In recent days, Russian forces have made gains around Sievierodonetsk and the neighboring city of Lysychansk, on a steep bank across the river, in a bid to encircle Ukrainian forces.

Luhansk Gov. Serhiy Haidai said that the Ukrainian troops have been given the order to leave Sievierodonetsk to prevent that.

"We will have to pull back our guys," he said. "It makes no sense to stay at the destroyed positions, because the number of casualties in poorly fortified areas will grow every day."

Haidai said the Ukrainian forces have "received the order to retreat to new positions and continue fighting there" but didn't give further details.

He said the Russians were also advancing toward Lysychansk from Zolote and Toshkivka, adding that Russian reconnaissance units conducted forays on the city edges but were driven out by its defenders.

The governor added that a bridge on a highway leading to Lysychansk was badly damaged in a Russian airstrike and became unusable for trucks. The claim couldn't be independently verified.

The Russian Defense Ministry declared Friday that four Ukrainian battalions and a unit of "foreign mercenaries" totaling about 2,000 soldiers have been "fully blocked" near Hirske and Zolote, south of Lysychansk.

Following a botched attempt to capture Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, in the early stage of the invasion that started Feb. 24, Russian forces have shifted focus to the Donbas region, where the Ukrainian forces have fought Moscow-backed separatists since 2014.

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The Russian military controls about 95% of Luhansk province and about half of neighboring Donetsk province, the two areas that make up the Donbas.

After repeated requests to its Western allies for heavier weaponry to counter Russia's edge in firepower, Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said a response had arrived in the form of medium-range American rocket launchers.

A U.S. defense official confirmed Wednesday that all four of the promised High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, were in the hands of Ukrainian forces but said it was not clear if they have been used yet.

The U.S. approved providing the precision-guided systems at the end of May, and once they were in the region, Ukraine's forces needed about three weeks of training to operate them. The rockets can travel about 45 miles (70 kilometers).

The U.S. will send an addition \$450 million in military aid to Ukraine, including four more of the medium-range rocket systems, ammunition and other supplies, U.S. officials announced Thursday.

IN OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

An official with the pro-Moscow administration in the southern city of Kherson that was captured by Russian troops early in the invasion was killed in an explosion Friday.

The pro-Russian regional administration in Kherson said that Dmitry Savlyuchenko died when his vehicle exploded in what it described as a "terror attack."

There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

Romanian port struggles to handle flow of Ukrainian grain

By VADIM GHIRDA Associated Press

CONSTANTA, Romania (AP) — With Ukraine's seaports blockaded or captured by Russian forces, neighboring Romania's Black Sea port of Constanta has emerged as a main conduit for the war-torn country's grain exports amid a growing world food crisis.

It's Romania's biggest port, home to Europe's fastest-loading grain terminal, and has processed nearly a million tons of grain from Ukraine — one of the world's biggest exporters of wheat and corn — since the Feb. 24 invasion.

But port operators say that maintaining, let alone increasing, the volume they handle could soon be impossible without concerted European Union support and investment.

"If we want to keep helping Ukrainian farmers, we need help to increase our handling capacities," said Dan Dolghin, director of cereal operations at the Black Sea port's main Comvex operator.

"No single operator can invest in infrastructure that will become redundant once the war ends," he added.

Comvex can process up to 72,000 tonnes of cereals per day. That and Constanta's proximity by land to Ukraine, and by sea to the Suez Canal, make it the best current route for Ukrainian agricultural exports. Other alternatives include road and rail shipments across Ukraine's western border into Poland and its Baltic Sea ports.

Efforts to lift the Russian blockade have got nowhere, and the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization projects up to 181 million people in 41 countries could face food crisis or worse levels of hunger this year in connection with the Ukraine war.

Just days into the Russian invasion, Comvex invested in a new unloading facility, anticipating that the neighboring country would have to reroute its agricultural exports.

This enabled the port over the past four months to ship close to a million tons of Ukrainian grain, most of it arriving by barge down the Danube River. But with 20 times that amount still blocked in Ukraine and the summer harvest season fast approaching in Romania itself and other countries that use Constanta for their exports, Dolghin said it's likely the pace of Ukrainian grain shipping through his port will slow.

"As the summer harvest in Romania gathers momentum, all port operators will turn to Romanian cereals," he warned.

Ukraine's deputy agricultural minister, Markian Dmytrasevych, is also worried.

In an address to the European Parliament earlier this month, Dmytrasevych said that when Constanta operators turn to European grain suppliers in the summer "it will further complicate the export of Ukrainian products."

Romanian and other EU officials have also voiced concern, lining up in recent weeks to pledge support.

On a recent visit to Kyiv with the leaders of France, Germany and Italy, Romanian president Klaus Iohannis said his country was seeking possible ways of overcoming the "weaponization of grain exports by Russia."

"As a relevant part of the solution to the food insecurity generated by Russia, Romania is actively involved in facilitating the transit of Ukraine exports and in serving as a hub for grain," to reach traditional markets in the Middle East, North Africa and parts of Asia, he said.

The solutions discussed in Kyiv, Iohannis said, included speeding up Danube barge shipments, increasing the speed of their unloading at Romanian ports, new border crossings for trucks with Ukrainian grain and reopening a decommissioned railway linking Romania with Ukraine and Moldova.

A Romanian analyst said finding alternative routes for Ukraine's grain exports goes beyond private logistics companies or any single country, echoing Iohannis's call in Kyiv for an international "coalition of the willing" to tackle the problem.

"The situation in Ukraine will not be solved soon; the conflict may end tomorrow but tensions will last. ... That is why new transport routes must be considered and consolidated," said George Vulcanescu.

He said that in that sense there are just three financially viable routes for Ukrainian exports — via Romania, Poland or the Baltic states.

However, he added, "port operators need financial support from Romanian authorities, but the funding should come from the European Union."

Vulcanescu said a combination of fast and "minimal, not maximal" investment is needed.

"Big investment cannot be done quickly — we need to look for fast solutions for expanding the (existing) storage and handling capacities of Romanian ports," he added. "If we want to help Ukraine now, we need to look for smaller investment to improve the infrastructure we already have."

Comvex's Dolghin said the operator wants to help as much as possible, but added: "We hope to see concrete action, not only statements in support of the port operators."

US envoy to Israel lives in a luxe rental, a Trump legacy

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — There's no plaque on the gate of the U.S. ambassador's new residence in Jerusalem, no Stars and Stripes visible, no official listing as a notable overseas property.

The official residence of the American envoy is a rental and temporary, officials said, secured after two years of house-hunting in the wake of then-President Donald Trump's controversial decision to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Ambassador Tom Nides moved into the sleekly renovated villa in west Jerusalem's leafy German Colony sometime last spring. Local real estate agents estimate its value at around \$23 million, and its owner and the embassy confirmed it is being leased as the U.S. envoy's official residence.

Emek Refaim Street is the latest stop for the American ambassador's home on a more than three-year migration from the seaside cliffs north of Tel Aviv to tension-filled Jerusalem. The journey reflects the Trump administration's divisive legacy and the reluctance of President Joe Biden — who will visit the region next month — to roil relations with Israel over the issue.

Trump upended decades of U.S. policy by recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017, drawing plaudits from many Israelis and infuriating the Palestinians.

Israel captured east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war and annexed it in a move not recognized internationally. The Palestinians want east Jerusalem to be the capital of their future state. Most countries maintain embassies in Tel Aviv because of the long-running dispute.

Trump moved the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv, and with it the storied residence of the U.S. ambassador. Under various presidents, the envoy had previously been housed in a sprawling, five-bedroom seaside

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compound built on an acre (nearly one-half hectare) of land, which Israel gave the United States soon after independence in 1948.

The previous residence was a social hub for relations between the two close allies. It was known for its July Fourth blowouts, when thousands of specially invited guests would watch the sunset and fireworks over the Mediterranean Sea.

Trump's move put an end to all that. The United States sold the property for more than \$67 million, according to official Israeli records. The State Department refused to release key details of the sale, but the Israeli business newspaper Globes identified the buyer as one of Trump's biggest contributors: U.S. casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, who died in 2021.

The cliffside compound appeared little changed from outside the walls on a recent day. Two Israeli flags waved from the flagpoles in the sea breeze. A spokesman for the Adelson family declined to comment.

The decision to sell the residence appears to have been aimed at preventing any future president from reversing the embassy move, something Biden has long ruled out.

But it also forced U.S. diplomats stationed in the region — most of whom continued working in Tel Aviv — to embark on a difficult search for new digs.

When Nides arrived last December, the plight of the "homeless ambassador" was the talk of diplomatic circles. There simply weren't many options in crowded Jerusalem for a compound large and secure enough to serve as a U.S. ambassador's official residence.

In most countries, the official residence is not only the ambassador's home, but a place for official ceremonies and social gatherings. A cramped apartment simply won't do.

Nides initially moved into the Waldorf Astoria in Jerusalem, a tony enough address but not living quarters suited for entertaining. Sometime this past spring, he moved to the property in the German Colony, one of the most sought-after neighborhoods in Jerusalem.

The U.S. is leasing it and has notified Israel that the property will be the official residence for the American envoy, according to the embassy. Other terms of the arrangement have not been made public, but there are no plans to move the ambassador to another site. Officials from both countries, as well as the owner, declined to comment on the property's value or its monthly rent.

If the intent was to keep the residence low-profile, that's over too. On June 8, Nides tweeted a photo from his "new neighborhood coffee shop in the German colony." His residence is surrounded by a tall white fence and dotted with security cameras. Guards can often be seen, according to local shop owners. When a gate opens, looky-loos can catch glimpses of a parking area and courtyard.

Arielle Cohen, legal counsel for the owner, Blue Marble Ltd., doesn't dispute local reports that the company spent 50 million shekels (about \$14.5 million) on the historic restoration. Her father, Avi Ruimi, grew up in the German Colony and founded the company, which specializes in historic restorations and owns several other addresses on the street.

Blue Marble bought the property in 2004. Construction lasted six years and finished in 2020, as it became clear that the U.S. ambassador would need a new home.

"We knew it was a possibility," Cohen said in an interview. She declined to comment on the signing process but called the contract a "wonderful milestone." She said the residence itself is about 570 square meters (about 6,000 square feet) with a second building that roughly doubles the size.

A gallery on the company's website says one building includes two apartments and commercial space. The second is "a beautiful private villa." A portfolio on Blue Marble's web site shows a sleekly renovated interior, with a modern kitchen, fixtures and high ceilings.

Local media have reported that the property dates to 1930 and was built by a wealthy Palestinian family. West Jerusalem was home to a number of upscale Palestinian neighborhoods known for their stone villas before the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation, when most Palestinians on that side of the city fled or were driven out.

The residence housed unmarried British police officers during the British mandate prior to 1948, and has also been used as a fire station, school and flower shop over the years.

It's unclear whether Biden will visit the residence during his brief stopover in Israel next month. His discussions with Israeli and Palestinian leaders are likely to focus on another consequence of Trump's embassy move — the shuttering of a U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem that served Palestinians.

The Palestinians have called on the Biden administration to deliver on its pledge to reopen the consulate, which would reinforce their claim to part of the city and help mend U.S.-Palestinian ties ruptured during the Trump years.

Israel is staunchly opposed to any reopening of the consulate for the same reason — another real-estate dispute in a region where they seem to multiply with every passing year.

A year on, Surfside remembers 98 victims of condo collapse

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and CURT ANDERSON The Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — A year ago in the middle of the night, a 12-story oceanfront condo building in Surfside, Florida, came down with a thunderous roar, leaving a giant pile of rubble and claiming 98 lives — one of the deadliest collapses in U.S. history.

The disaster at Champlain Towers South also turned into the largest emergency response that didn't involve a hurricane in Florida history.

Its victims were being honored Friday at events on the ground where, for two weeks last June and July, rescue crews descended from elsewhere in Florida and from as far away as Mexico and Israel to help local teams dig through the pile and search for victims.

Friday's agenda includes a private overnight gathering for families to light a torch. First Lady Jill Biden is expected to speak at a public event organized by the town of Surfside.

Only two teenagers and a woman survived the fall and were pulled from the rubble, while others escaped from the portion of the building that initially remained standing.

Images of one survivor's rescue traveled widely, offering a glimmer of hope right after the collapse, but the long, grueling search produced mostly devastating results as families torturously waited only to learn about the remains of their loved ones.

Those missing in the collapse included the 7-year-old daughter of a firefighter who helped in the search, later found dead with her mother, aunt and grandparents; a woman whose cries for help were heard in the early hours but suddenly stopped; and two sisters, 4 and 11, pulled from the rubble, who were so tiny they were buried in the same casket. A 12-year-old girl sat down to pray across the rubble for her physician father, who was ultimately found dead.

The victims included local residents as well as visitors who were Orthodox Jews, Latin Americans, Israelis, Europeans and snowbirds from the Northeast.

The cause of the collapse remains under investigation by the National Institute of Standards and Technology, with the probe entering a new phase this month to cut and drill into concrete and steel. Champlain Towers South had a long history of maintenance problems, and shoddy construction techniques were used in the early 1980s. Other possible factors include sea level rise caused by climate change and damage caused by salt water intrusion.

Pablo Langesfeld, the father of a 26-year-old lawyer who had married and moved to the building a few months before the collapse, said that for him closure will not come until that investigation is completed.

"This is a nightmare that never ends," Langesfeld told The Associated Press.

The site where the building stood has been swept flat.

Although the investigation is expected to take years, a judge approved a compensation settlement topping \$1 billion Thursday for the victims.

Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Michael Hanzman praised the dozens of lawyers involved, and a woman who lost her daughter called them heroes in black robes and business suits.

Hanzman said the compensation deal was extraordinary in its scope and speed.

"This settlement is the best we can do. It's a remarkable result," he said.

At Pride, celebrations amid a darker national environment

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — LGBTQ Pride commemorations that sometimes felt like victory parties for civil rights advances are grappling this year with a darker atmosphere, a national environment of ramped-up legislative and rhetorical battles over sexual orientation and gender identity.

Big crowds are expected Sunday at Pride events in New York City and a range of other places including San Francisco, Chicago, Denver and Toronto, in a return to large, in-person events after two years of pandemic-induced restrictions.

Like every year, the celebrations are expected to be exuberant and festive. But for many, they will also carry a renewed sense of urgency.

In March, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a law barring teaching on sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade, which critics decried as an effort to marginalize LGBTQ people and lambasted as the “Don’t Say Gay” law.

In Texas, Gov. Greg Abbott, like DeSantis a Republican, sent a letter to state health agencies in February saying that it would be child abuse under state law for transgender youth to get gender-affirming medical care. A judge has halted full implementation of any parental prosecutions.

“There are so many anti-LGBTQ attacks going on around the country and a lot of them are really about trying to erase our existence and to make us invisible, and to make our young people invisible and our elders invisible,” said Michael Adams, CEO of SAGE, which advocates for LGBTQ elders.

“This year’s Pride is especially important and it is more powerful than ever because it is about people stepping up and stepping out and saying, ‘We refuse to be invisible. We refuse to be erased.’”

Protest has always been an element of New York City’s Pride Parade, which roughly coincides with the anniversary of the beginning of the June 28, 1969, Stonewall uprising — days of angry demonstrations sparked by a police raid on a gay bar in Manhattan.

Marchers in the 1980s protested a lack of government attention to the AIDS epidemic.

In recent years, though, they’ve often been celebrations of major victories for LGBTQ communities to celebrate, like in 2015 when the Supreme Court issued the Obergefell v. Hodges decision recognizing same-sex marriage.

That’s not this year, though.

“This year, we have seen an onslaught of aggressively hostile anti-LGBTQ+ bills in many state legislatures, and more of them have passed than last year,” said Jennifer Pizer, law and policy director for Lambda Legal.

There’s also concern over a potential Supreme Court ruling overturning a nationwide right to abortion — an upending of a long-established legal standard that has people wondering whether same-sex marriage might be next.

It brings home a reality that in addition to celebration, there’s still a need for activism, said Joe Negrelli, 70, a longtime NYC Pride attendee.

“Could it be overturned? Yes, I do believe that. It is a conceivability,” he said of the court’s decision legalizing same-sex marriage nationwide. It “makes me want to put more energy into engaging in marching.”

Anyone who might have been “lulled into a false sense of security” by previous civil rights victories “has been woken up now,” Adams said. “I think a lot of us who understand the history of the struggle for equality and equity and social justice in this country know that the fight is never over.”

It’s not just legislation. Those who track hate speech say anti-LGBTQ language has increased online, which raises the fear that extremists will take it as a call to engage in action, like the rash of protests and physical interruptions that have taken place at Drag Queen Story Hours, where adults in drag read books to children.

Earlier this month, 31 members of a white supremacist group, carrying riot gear, were arrested over accusations that they were plotting a major disruption at a Pride event in Idaho.

That doesn’t mean the celebration’s over, advocates said.

“There can be celebration and joy, and also purpose in protest,” Pizer said.

Ellen Ensig-Brodsky, 89, has embraced both those roles in her decades of attending Pride as a LGBTQ

rights activist.

"The parade is the display, publicly, of my identity and my group that I have been part of for at least 40 or more years," she said, adding that she will be marching again Sunday. "I certainly would not want to miss it."

After all this time, the animosity and hostility she's seeing around the country aren't unfamiliar to her. "The intent to increase anti-LGBTQ existence is a return to what I started out with" decades ago, she said. Back then, "we didn't come out. We hid."

Not now, she said, "I think we need to show that love can persist and continue and spread."

States brace for fight over gun laws after high court ruling

By JENNIFER McDERMOTT Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — The Supreme Court's decision overturning a gun-permitting law in New York has states with robust firearms restrictions scrambling to respond on two fronts — to figure out what concealed-carry measures they might be allowed to impose while also preparing to defend a wide range of other gun control policies.

The language in the court's majority opinion heightened concern that other state laws, from setting an age limit on gun purchases to banning high-capacity ammunition magazines, may now be in jeopardy.

"The court has basically invited open season on our gun laws, and so I expect litigation across the board," said New Jersey acting Attorney General Matt Platkin, a Democrat. "We're going to defend our gun laws tooth-and-nail because these gun laws save lives."

The court ruling issued Thursday specifically overturned a New York law that had been in place since 1913 and required that people applying for a concealed carry permit demonstrate a specific need to have a gun in public, such as showing an imminent threat to their safety. The court's conservative majority said that violated the Second Amendment, which they interpreted as protecting people's right to carry a gun for self-defense outside the home.

While the ruling does not address any other laws, the majority opinion opens the door for gun rights advocates to challenge them in the future, said Alex McCourt, the director of legal research for the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions.

Pro-firearms groups in several states said they plan to do just that.

Attorney Chuck Michel, president of the California Rifle and Pistol Association, said the group is preparing to expand its legal challenges based on the high court changing the legal standard used to assess whether gun control laws are constitutional.

Courts must now consider only whether a gun control regulation is consistent with the Second Amendment's actual text and its historical understanding, according to Thursday's ruling. Before that, judges also could consider a state's social justification for passing a gun control law.

Michel said the standard will affect three prominent California laws. Legal challenges to the state's limits on assault weapons, its requirement for background checks for buying ammunition and its ban on online ammunition sales are pending before a federal appellate court.

"All of these laws should be struck down under this new Supreme Court standard," he said.

The Supreme Court also is considering whether to take up California's law banning ammunition magazines that hold more than 10 bullets, as well as a similar law in New Jersey. He expects the court may consider those laws under the new standard.

The new restrictive landscape for gun laws outlined in Thursday's majority opinion is not without escape routes for states, especially those that may want to impose some limits on concealed carry permits.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh, joined by Chief Justice John Roberts, said states still can require people to get a license to carry a gun and condition that on such things as background checks and mental health records. They also can limit where guns are allowed, suggesting that states can prohibit firearms in "sensitive places" such as schools, courthouses or polling places.

That leaves an opening for governors and state lawmakers in New York and the six other states with

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similar concealed carry laws: California, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island.

In California, lawmakers are amending legislation to expand the qualifications people must have to obtain a concealed carry permit and to define the places where guns would be off-limits. The revised bill will get its first hearing Tuesday, and lawmakers hope to send it quickly to Gov. Gavin Newsom, who called Thursday's Supreme Court decision shameful.

Other Democratic governors, lawmakers and state attorneys general also vowed to defend or amend their gun laws.

Most state legislatures are finishing their sessions or have already ended for the year, so any response would likely have to wait until next year. Rhode Island Democratic state Rep. Robert Craven, an attorney, said he would study the opinion in the New York case to determine whether or not it creates a concern that Rhode Island's requirements could be challenged, and whether that can be remedied by legislation.

He questioned whether the high court will now employ a strict interpretation of the Second Amendment — that the right to bear arms is absolute — and apply it to other laws, such as those banning military-style weapons.

"I see the court headed in that direction," Craven said.

In Hawaii, Democratic state Sen. Chris Lee said lawmakers will try to determine how else they can ensure public safety and will look at screening, training requirements and ways to keep guns out of certain public spaces — provisions the justices said would be permitted.

"Bottom line is Hawaii is about to become a more dangerous place," said state Sen. Karl Rhoads, a Democrat. "Hawaii will go from a place where the right to carry in public is the exception to a place where not having the right to carry on the street is an exception. I see no restriction on the type of firearm."

Gun rights groups in Hawaii and elsewhere applauded the ruling. In Maryland, Mark Pennak, president of a gun rights group challenging that state's concealed carry law, said he's "absolutely ecstatic" about the high court's decision because there's "simply no way" the law can be defended any longer.

The Democratic leaders of the Maryland General Assembly said that if necessary, they will pass legislation that complies with the new precedent but still protects residents.

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat, criticized the court's opinion for limiting how states can address the proliferation of firearms in public, but vowed to protect the state's gun control measures. He said his administration believes the state can still regulate who can carry concealed weapons and where they can take them.

He vowed that his administration "will do everything in our power to protect our residents."

A new leader in the Philippines, and a family's old wounds

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — He was the uncle I never met. But in my family's origin story, Emmanuel "Manny" Yap always loomed large.

The life of great potential cut short. The cautionary tale. But also the reminder of doing what was right, no matter the cost.

A rising leader in the youth-led opposition to President Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, Manny Yap joined his parents and siblings for lunch at his mother's favorite Chinese restaurant in their hometown of Quezon City.

It was Valentine's Day in 1976, a few years into martial law, the moment in the country's history when Marcos Sr. suspended civil government and effectively ruled as a dictator. After the meal, the 23-year-old grad student went off to meet a friend.

Days later, an anonymous caller delivered the news his family had dreaded: Manny had been picked up by the military and detained.

My uncle was never seen again.

Now his story is flooding back: The son of the man my family has held responsible for his death all those decades ago is set to become president of the Philippines.

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"We were on the good side, the honor side," Janette Marcelo, my mother and Manny's younger sister, says to me by phone recently. Her voice is trembling but resolute. "You need to know that."

Even now, nearly a half century later, her memories are vivid when she recalls her parents' anguish as the days after his disappearance rolled into weeks, months, years.

Her mother, desperately trying to pass messages along to the nuns and priests granted entry to the notorious prison camp where they believed he was being held. Her father, eying each arriving and departing bus, hoping he might catch a glimpse of his eldest son.

But Manny's body was never recovered. His heartbroken parents were never able to properly lay him to rest. The only markers of their loss are the monuments scattered across Metro Manila where his name is etched along with the more than 2,300 killed or disappeared during Marcos' two-decade reign.

My mother is emphatic as she recounts the story my siblings and I heard countless times growing up.

"You had an uncle who believed so much in something that he was willing to die for it, and it was a great loss," she says. "Not just for us, but for the country and the world. He could have done so much. I truly believe that."

Next week, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. will be inaugurated following his landslide victory in May's Philippine presidential election, completing a stunning return to power for the Marcos clan, which ruled the country for more than two decades until being ousted by the largely peaceful "People Power" uprising in 1986.

The moment has been a reckoning for my family, our painful past and the values we forged. But given everything else going on in the world, I've wondered how much it truly resonated among other Filipino Americans.

So I decided to ask.

In conversations with Filipinos across the country in recent weeks, I found outlooks ranging from my mom's simmering fury to unbridled excitement about the future.

It's not entirely surprising. In the U.S. — where more than 4 million Filipinos represent the third largest Asian group, after Chinese and Indians — Marcos Jr.'s victory was much narrower than in the Philippines.

He claimed nearly 47% of the more than 75,000 ballots cast by dual citizens and other Philippine nationals in the U.S., compared to 43% by his main opponent, outgoing Philippine Vice President Maria Leonor "Leni" Robredo, according to election results.

One of the first people I spoke with was Rochelle Solanoy, a 53-year-old state worker in Juneau, Alaska. She voted for Marcos Jr., because she believes he can bring a return to the "golden years" when the country was a rising force in Asia and its charismatic first family was the envy of rivals.

Solanoy, who left the Philippines in 1981, said she marched as a youth against the Marcos dictatorship but now feels like she was lied to.

"When the revolution ousted Marcos, that's when things went downhill. That's when the corruption happened," she said by phone. "Now, I'm learning these things that I didn't know when I was younger. Our minds had been poisoned the whole time."

In California, Susan Tagle, 62, of Sacramento, said the election made her question everything she went through as a young university activist, when she was imprisoned for months by the Marcos regime.

Marcos Sr. died in exile in Hawaii in 1989. His widow, Imelda, whose vast shoe collection became the symbol of the family's excess during the dictatorship, has served for years in the Philippine Congress while her children have served as governors and senators.

"We basked in the idea of ousting a dictator," said Tagle, who voted for Robredo. "Then we went about our lives. We went back to school, started families, built careers and thought the worst was over."

Constantino "Coco" Alinsug, who earlier this year became the first Filipino American elected city councilor in New England, says he's willing to give Marcos Jr. a chance, even if he has strong reservations.

The 50-year-old Lynn, Massachusetts resident, who came to the U.S. in his 20s, marched against the Marcos dictatorship as a youth. But he's also an ardent supporter of outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte,

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whose bloody crackdown on illegal drugs has sparked its own international human rights concerns. Duterte's daughter, Sara, will serve as Marcos Jr.'s vice president.

"I want to give this guy a chance, but I honestly have no idea what he's about," said Alinsug, who wasn't able to vote because he isn't a dual citizen. "He didn't debate. He didn't campaign. He just let his machine and money do the work."

Brendan Flores, chairman and president of the National Federation of Filipino American Associations, was similarly guarded.

"I'm well aware of what the history books say. There's lots of baggage, no doubt," said the 37-year-old Sarasota, Florida resident. "The key difference this time is that the world is watching. We're not going to sit idly by if things go wrong."

I wish I could say my mom is as hopeful.

For her, there's new urgency in the lessons she has tried to impart for all these years. As she sees it, the past has been rewritten to cast the villains of her childhood as today's saviors.

After the elder Marcos was deposed, my grandfather, Pedro Yap, joined the Philippine government commission tasked with recouping the ill-gotten assets of the former first family.

He worked to freeze Swiss bank accounts and seize properties in Los Angeles, New York City and elsewhere in order to repatriate wealth back to his impoverished nation. The family, still reeling from the loss of our uncle and fearing Marcos retribution, begged him to quit.

Grandpa, who also served on the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, eventually did — when he was appointed to the nation's Supreme Court and briefly served as chief justice until retirement.

I ask my mom: Does seeing the Marcos family back in power mean grandpa's work and Uncle Manny's death were in vain? She doesn't hesitate.

"All I can say is there were good people who tried and there still are good people who will continue to try," she says. "But it's futile. It's never going to change."

Magic take Banchemo 1st, Holmgren, Smith follow in NBA draft

By BRIAN MAHONEY AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The question for weeks leading into the NBA draft was whether the first pick would be Paolo Banchemo, Chet Holmgren or Jabari Smith Jr.

The answer finally came Thursday night — and even Banchemo didn't know it until moments before the announcement of the Orlando Magic's selection.

"I had a feeling from the information I was being told is that it was just kind of up in the air," Banchemo said. "Orlando wasn't really sure yet, and just to be ready for whatever."

"I didn't find out, though, that I was actually getting picked until about 20 seconds before the commissioner got on the stage. I didn't even have time to really think about it or anything. It just kind of happened. I can't believe it, but I'm ready. I'm ready."

After leading the Blue Devils to the Final Four in coach Mike Krzyzewski's final season, the 6-foot-10 forward was called first by NBA Commissioner Adam Silver to begin the draft, beating out fellow first-year forwards Smith and Holmgren.

The order had been debated throughout the process, with Smith often considered the player who would go No. 1.

Instead, he wasn't even second, falling behind Holmgren to Houston at No. 3.

"Definitely added a chip, but God makes no mistakes, so I'm happy to be here," Smith said. "I'm happy to be where I'm wanted. I'm happy to get to Houston and just show them, give them what they picked. Just happy to be here."

All the players picked looked thrilled, with Banchemo among those crying or coming close as they hugged friends and family.

Wearing a purple suit full of bling, he received a loud ovation inside Barclays Center, where Duke lost in

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the ACC Tournament final. He came the fourth Duke player taken No. 1 since 1966, when the NBA did away with territorial draft rights, and was followed by Blue Devils teammates Mark Williams (No. 15, Charlotte), A.J. Griffin (No. 16, Atlanta) and Wendell Moore Jr. (No. 26, Dallas).

The Magic were picking first for the fourth time and they've done well with their previous choices. They took Shaquille O'Neal in 1992, traded the rights to Chris Webber for Penny Hardaway the next year, and went with Dwight Howard in 2004.

All eventually reached the NBA Finals with the Magic.

Holmgren went second to the Oklahoma City Thunder after the 7-footer led the West Coast Conference in blocked shots, rebounding and shooting percentage at Gonzaga. He looked sharp in his black suit but may need it to eventually be a bigger size for success in the NBA, as he's listed at just 195 pounds.

He's not worried about that talk.

"I wake up every day with a plan on how to make myself a better person, better basketball player," Holmgren said. "I put so much effort into executing that, that it doesn't really leave room to put effort into things that, one, I can't control, and two, don't help make me better."

The Rockets were happy to end up in Smith who has the skills to go higher. The 6-10 forward from Auburn is a natural fit in the current NBA game, able to defend all three frontcourt positions and with a shooting stroke that allowed him to hit 42% behind the arc.

Forward Keegan Murray, after a huge leap in his second season in Iowa, jumped all the way to the No. 4 pick by the Sacramento Kings. The Detroit Pistons, a year after taking Cade Cunningham with the No. 1 pick, took athletic Purdue guard Jaden Ivey fifth.

Before the selections began, Silver congratulated the Golden State Warriors on their recent NBA championship and reminded fans that their core of Stephen Curry, Klay Thompson and Draymond Green was built through the draft.

All the teams at the top of this draft need help and have recent high picks already on their rosters, so will hope the Warriors way works for them as well.

Benedict Mathurin, a Canadian who played at Arizona, went to Indiana with the No. 6 pick. The Portland Trail Blazers followed with Kentucky's Shaedon Sharpe, Dyson Daniels of the G League Ignite was taken eighth by New Orleans, Baylor's Jeremy Sochan stayed in Texas with San Antonio at No. 9, and Washington rounded out the top 10 with Wisconsin's Johnny Davis.

Then the trades began, with the New York Knicks moving picks to amass more of them. They dealt the rights to No. 11 pick Ousmane Dieng to Oklahoma City for four first-round selections, then used one of them to acquire the rights to No. 13 pick Jalen Duren from Charlotte and deal him along with Kemba Walker to Detroit for another pick, a person with knowledge of the details told The Associated Press. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because that trade would not become official Thursday.

Walker spent one season with the Knicks but wasn't with the team after the All-Star break after battling knee problems.

The Warriors made Patrick Baldwin Jr. of Wisconsin-Milwaukee their pick at No. 28 and the first round ended with Oklahoma City taking UCLA's Peyton Watson and agreeing to trade his rights to Denver.

Notable names in the second round included Gonzaga guard Andrew Nembhard (No. 31, Indiana), Ohio State's EJ Liddell (No. 41, New Orleans) and Southern California's Isaiah Mobley (No. 49, Cleveland, where brother Evan plays).

Giffords documentary comes as gun debates stay center stage

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

In the two years documentary filmmakers shadowed former Congresswoman Gabby Giffords, the most jarring moment for them was in the kitchen of her Tucson, Arizona, home.

As cameras were rolling, she and her husband, Sen. Mark Kelly, nonchalantly opened the freezer. Kelly grabbed a plastic container and revealed it holds the piece of Giffords' skull that had to be removed after she was shot.

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"This stays in here next to the empanadas and the sliced mango," Kelly said.

Giffords' response was "Sera, sera," referencing the song "Que sera, sera" or "What will be, will be."

The scene from the film is emblematic of Giffords' openness to reflect on but not languish in the 2011 shooting that changed her life. That desire is what led her to allow cameras into her life for two years — all as a pandemic was progressing.

"For me it has been really important to move ahead, to not look back," Giffords told The Associated Press while in Los Angeles to promote the film. "I hope others are inspired to keep moving forward no matter what."

From the filmmakers behind Academy Award-nominated Ruth Bader Ginsburg documentary "RBG," the film "Gabby Giffords Won't Back Down" is partly an intimate look at Giffords' recovery after the January 2011 shooting that left six people dead and 13 others wounded outside a Tucson supermarket. But the movie, which arrives in theaters July 15, is also an insider view of how she and Kelly navigated gun control campaigns and later a Senate campaign. The movie could not be any timelier with gun reform being debated in government, schools and the U.S. Supreme Court.

"It's just a fascinating story about how Gabby came back from an injury that so many people just don't even survive," said Betsy West, a co-director. "After meeting Gabby on Zoom, we saw just what a great communicator she is. And we had a sense that we might have a lot of fun despite the very difficult subject of gun violence."

At the same time, they wanted to strike the right balance of how much to look back at the shooting.

"We certainly didn't want to shy away from January 8. Obviously, that's something that changed her life," said Julie Cohen, the film's other director. "But Gabby is defined ultimately by everything that she's achieved before and after that. We wanted it to show that achievement."

The film also doesn't avoid discussing Jared Lee Loughner, the gunman in the Tucson shooting. Interviews with law enforcement, journalists and a video made by Loughner lay out how he was able to buy a semiautomatic weapon despite a history of mental illness. He was sentenced in 2012 to life in federal prison without parole.

"We did not want to dwell on the shooter but we also wanted to explain what had happened," West said. "Gabby and Mark did not shy away from going to the sentencing hearing to make a very impassioned plea for life imprisonment. That was a very important part of the film."

Recent mass shootings including the deaths of 19 schoolchildren and two teachers in Uvalde, Texas, and 10 supermarket shoppers — all Black — in Buffalo, New York, have put gun violence back at the forefront. The U.S. Supreme Court on Thursday struck down a New York gun permitting law. The case involves a state law that makes it difficult for people to get a permit to carry a gun outside the home. The justices said that requirement violates the Second Amendment right to "keep and bear arms."

Also on Thursday, the U.S. Senate easily passed a bipartisan gun violence bill. Weeks of closed-door talks resulted in an incremental but landmark package in response to mass shootings. The House will vote Friday.

Much like after Uvalde, the documentary recaps how gun control debates reached a fever pitch after 26 children and two teachers were shot to death by a gunman at a Newtown, Connecticut, school. Giffords and other advocates, including some Newtown parents, were called "props" by National Rifle Association officials. Having spent time with Giffords and others impacted by gun violence, the film's directors say their voices are central to the discourse.

"To say that somehow Gabby shouldn't be speaking about gun violence because she's experienced violence? It just doesn't make any sense," Cohen said.

A crucial element of the documentary came from videos Kelly had of Giffords in the Tucson hospital and at a rehab facility in Houston. These included then-President Barack Obama — who is interviewed in the film — and Michelle Obama's visit to an unconscious Giffords' bedside. They also include the first few months of speech therapy.

The bullet penetrated the left hemisphere of Giffords' brain that services language ability, causing her

to suffer from aphasia. You see in old videos Giffords sob out of frustration as she struggles to read and get stuck on saying "chicken."

Giffords said watching those videos can make her sad, but she is determined to be upbeat.

"I'm getting better. I'm getting (better) slowly but I'm getting (better) surely," Giffords said.

Giffords is the third movie West and Cohen have produced on a female icon. Last year, they released "Julia," a documentary on the influence of TV chef and author Julia Child. "RBG" was a critical and commercial hit when it came out four years ago. The filmmakers say while Giffords and Supreme Court Justice Ginsburg, who died in 2020 at age 87, are very different personalities, they think viewers will see a lot of similarities. They both have toughness, persistence, optimism and are at the heart of "feminist love stories."

Giffords often has to remind people that she still has a voice even if speaking doesn't come easily — whether it's on gun safety or other issues. She said she genuinely feels the climate is different now but people have to be patient because change is "slow," and Washington, D.C., is "really slow."

She plans to refocus on making tougher federal background checks a reality through her Gun Owners for Safety coalition. The bill the Senate approved would only strengthen background checks for buyers age 18 to 20.

If there's one message she wants viewers to take from the documentary, it's "fight, fight, fight every day," Giffords said.

After Supreme Court gun decision, what's next?

By JESSICA GRESKO and MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court has issued its biggest gun rights ruling in more than a decade. Here are some questions and answers about what the Thursday decision does and does not do:

WHAT EXACTLY WAS THE SUPREME COURT RULING ON GUNS?

The Supreme Court said that Americans have a right to carry firearms in public for self-defense. That's important because about half a dozen states have conditioned getting a license to carry a gun in public on the person demonstrating an actual need — sometimes called "good cause" or "proper cause" — to carry the weapon. That limits who can carry a weapon in those states.

In its decision, the Supreme Court struck down New York's "proper cause" requirement, but other states' laws are expected to face quick challenges. About one-quarter of the U.S. population lives in states expected to be affected by the ruling.

The last time the court issued major gun decisions was in 2008 and 2010. In those decisions the justices established a nationwide right to keep a gun for self-defense in a person's home. The question for the court this time was just about carrying a gun outside the home.

Justice Clarence Thomas wrote in the court's majority opinion that the right extended outside the home as well: "Nothing in the Second Amendment's text draws a home/public distinction with respect to the right to keep and bear arms."

HOW DID THE JUSTICES RULE?

The gun ruling split the court 6-3, with the court's conservative justices in the majority and its liberals in dissent. In addition to Thomas, the majority opinion was joined by Chief Justice John Roberts and justices Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett. The court's three liberals who dissented are justices Stephen Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan.

ARE NEW YORKERS NOW FREE TO CARRY A GUN IN PUBLIC?

Not exactly. The justices didn't touch other parts of New York's gun law, so other requirements to get a license remain. The court made it clear that the state can continue to make people apply for a license to carry a handgun, and can put limitations on who qualifies for a permit and where a weapon can be carried. In the future, however, New Yorkers will no longer be required to give a specific reason why they want to be able to carry a gun in public.

The decision also doesn't take effect immediately and state lawmakers said Thursday that they were planning to overhaul the licensing rules this summer. They have yet to detail their plans. Some options

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under discussion include requiring firearms training and a clean criminal record. The state might also prohibit handguns from being carried in certain places, like near schools or on public transit.

In addition, the decision does not address the law that recently passed in New York in response to the Buffalo grocery store massacre that among things, banned anyone under age 21 from buying or possessing a semi-automatic rifle.

WHAT OTHER STATES ARE LIKELY TO BE IMPACTED?

A handful of states have laws similar to New York's. The Biden administration has counted California, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island as all having laws similar to New York's. Connecticut and Delaware are also sometimes mentioned as states with similar laws.

WHAT CAN STATES DO TO REGULATE GUNS AFTER THE DECISION?

Justice Brett Kavanaugh, joined by Chief Justice John Roberts, noted the limits of the decision. States can still require people to get a license to carry a gun, Kavanaugh wrote, and condition that license on "fingerprinting, a background check, a mental health records check, and training in firearms handling and in laws regarding the use of force, among other possible requirements." Gun control groups said states could revisit and perhaps increase those requirements. States can also say those with a license to carry a gun must not do so openly but must conceal their weapon.

Justice Samuel Alito noted that the decision said "nothing about who may lawfully possess a firearm or the requirements that must be met to buy a gun." States have long prohibited felons and the mentally ill from possessing weapons, for example. The decision also said nothing "about the kinds of weapons that people may possess," Alito noted, so states might also try to limit the availability of specific weapons.

The justices also suggested that states can prohibit the carrying of guns altogether in certain "sensitive places." A previous Supreme Court decision mentioned schools and government buildings as being places where guns could be off limits. Thomas said that the historical record shows legislative assemblies, polling places and courthouses could also be sensitive places. Thomas said courts can "use analogies to those historical regulations of 'sensitive places' to determine that modern regulations prohibiting the carry of firearms in new and analogous sensitive places are constitutionally permissible."

HOW DO COURTS ASSESS GUN RESTRICTIONS GOING FORWARD?

The court made it harder to justify gun restrictions, although it's hard to know what the new test the court announced will mean for any specific regulation.

Thomas wrote that the nation's appeals courts have been applying an incorrect standard for assessing whether such laws are impermissible. Courts have generally taken a two-step approach, first looking at the constitutional text and history to see whether a regulation comes under the Second Amendment and then, if it does, looking at the government's justification for the restriction.

"Despite the popularity of this two-step approach, it is one step too many," Thomas wrote.

From now on, Thomas wrote, courts can uphold regulations only if the government can prove that they fall within traditionally accepted limits.

Among state and local restrictions already being challenged in federal court are bans on the sale of certain semi-automatic weapons, called assault rifles by opponents, and large-capacity ammunition magazines, as well as minimum age requirements to buy semi-automatic firearms.

WHAT OTHER BIG RULINGS ARE IN THE WORKS?

The Supreme Court heard arguments in the guns case back in November and a decision had been expected before the court begins its summer recess. The court has nine more opinions to issue before it goes on break and plans to release more Friday. Still waiting is a major abortion decision.

A world apart, Lebanon and Sri Lanka share economic collapse

By ZEINA KARAM and DAVID RISING Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Lebanon and Sri Lanka may be a world apart, but they share a history of political turmoil and violence that led to the collapse of once-prosperous economies bedeviled by corruption, patronage, nepotism and incompetence.

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The toxic combinations led to disaster for both: Currency collapse, shortages, triple-digit inflation and growing hunger. Snaking queues for gas. A decimated middle class. An exodus of professionals who might have helped rebuild.

There usually isn't one moment that marks the catastrophic breaking point of an economic collapse, although telltale signs can be there for months — if not years.

When it happens, the hardship unleashed is all-consuming, transforming everyday life so profoundly that the country may never return to what it was.

Experts say a dozen countries — including Egypt, Tunisia, Sudan, Afghanistan and Pakistan — could suffer the same fate as Lebanon and Sri Lanka, as the post-pandemic recovery and war in Ukraine spark global food shortages and a surge in prices.

ROOTS OF CRISIS

The crises in Lebanon and Sri Lanka are rooted in decades of greed, corruption and conflict.

Both countries suffered a long civil war followed by a tenuous and rocky recovery, all the while dominated by corrupt warlords and family cliques that amassed enormous foreign debt and stubbornly held on to power.

Various popular uprisings in Lebanon have been unable to shake off a political class that has long used the country's sectarian power-sharing system to perpetuate corruption and nepotism. Key decisions remain in the hands of political dynasties that gained power because of immense wealth or by commanding militias during the war.

Amid the factional rivalries, political paralysis and government dysfunction has worsened. As a result, Lebanon is one of the most backward Middle East countries in infrastructure and development, including extensive power cuts which persist 32 years after the civil war ended.

In Sri Lanka, the Rajapaksa family has monopolized politics in the island nation for decades. Even now, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa is still clinging to power, although the family dynasty around him has crumbled amid protests since April.

Experts say the current crises in both countries is of their own making, including a high level of foreign debt and little invested in development.

Moreover, both countries have suffered repeated bouts of instability and terrorist attacks that upended tourism, a mainstay of their economies. In Sri Lanka, Easter suicide bombings at churches and hotels killed more than 260 people in 2019.

Lebanon has suffered the consequences of neighboring Syria's civil war, which flooded the country of 5 million with about 1 million refugees.

Both economies were then hit again with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

TIPPING POINTS

Lebanon's crisis began in late 2019, after the government announced new proposed taxes, including a \$6 monthly fee for using Whatsapp voice calls. The measures set a spark to long smoldering anger against the ruling class and months of mass protests. Irregular capital controls were put in place, cutting people off from their savings as the currency began to spiral.

In March 2020, Lebanon defaulted on paying back its massive debt, worth at the time about \$90 billion or 170% of GDP — one of the highest in the world. In June 2021, with the currency having lost nearly 90% of its value, the World Bank said the crisis ranked as one of the worst the world has seen in more than 150 years.

In Sri Lanka, with the economy still fragile after the 2019 Easter bombings, Gotabaya pushed through the largest tax cuts in the country's history. That sparked a quick backlash, with creditors downgrading the country's ratings, blocking it from borrowing more money as foreign exchange reserves nosedived.

On the brink of bankruptcy, it has suspended payments on its foreign loans and introduced capital controls amid a severe shortage of foreign currency. The tax cuts recently were reversed.

Meanwhile the Sri Lankan rupee has weakened by nearly 80% to about 360 to \$1, making the costs of imports even more prohibitive.

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"Our economy has completely collapsed," the prime minister said Wednesday.

UPENDED LIVES

Before this latest descent, both Lebanon and Sri Lanka had a middle-income population that allowed most people to live somewhat comfortably.

During the 1980s and 1990s, many Sri Lankans took jobs as domestic workers in Lebanese households. As Sri Lanka began its postwar recovery, they have been replaced by workers from Ethiopia, Nepal and the Philippines.

The recent crisis forced most Lebanese to give up that luxury, among others. Almost overnight, people found themselves with almost no access to their money, evaporated savings and worthless salaries. A month's salary at minimum wage isn't enough to buy 20 liters (5 1/4 gallons) of gasoline, or cover the bill for private generators that provide homes with a few hours of electricity a day.

At one point, severe shortages of fuel, cooking gas and oil led to fights over limited supplies – scenes now replicated in Sri Lanka. Cancer drugs are often out of stock. Earlier this year, the government even ran out of paper for new passports.

Tens of thousands of professionals, including doctors, nurses and pharmacists, have left the country in search of jobs.

Similarly, Sri Lanka is now almost without gasoline and faces an acute shortage of other fuels. Authorities have announced nationwide power cuts of up to four hours a day and asked state employees not to work on Fridays, except for those needed for essential services.

The U.N. World Food Program says nearly nine of 10 Sri Lankan families are skipping meals or otherwise skimping to stretch their food, while 3 million are getting emergency humanitarian aid.

Doctors have resorted to social media to seek critical supplies of equipment and medicine. Growing numbers of Sri Lankans want passports to go overseas to search for work.

OTHER DISASTERS

In addition to the political and financial turmoil, both countries have faced disasters that worsened their crises.

On Aug. 4, 2020, a catastrophic explosion s truck Beirut's port, killing at least 216 people and wrecking large parts of the city. The blast, widely considered one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in history, was caused by the detonation of hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate that was stored in a warehouse for years. The dangerous material was housed there apparently with the knowledge of senior politicians and security officials who did nothing about it.

There was widespread outrage at the traditional parties' endemic corruption and mismanagement, which were widely blamed for the calamity.

Sri Lanka faced a disaster in early 2021, when a container ship carrying chemicals caught fire off the coast of the capital of Colombo. It burned for nearly two weeks before sinking while being towed to deeper waters.

The burning ship belched noxious fumes and spilled more than 1,500 tons of plastic pellets into the Indian Ocean, which were later found in dead dolphins and fish on the beaches.

Fishing was banned in the area because of health risks associated with the chemicals in the water, affecting the livelihoods of some 4,300 families, who still have not received compensation.

EXPLAINER: How parade crash insanity plea will work

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — A man accused of driving his SUV through a Christmas parade in suburban Milwaukee last year, killing six people and injuring dozens more, this week served notice he will try to persuade a jury that he was mentally ill during the incident and if convicted should go to an institution instead of prison.

But Darrell Brooks Jr.'s new insanity defense could be a tough sell in Waukesha County, which is still recovering from the horrors of that November day.

Here's a look at how insanity pleas work in the Wisconsin justice system and what Brooks' attorneys

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would have to prove to avoid prison.

WHAT ARE THE CHARGES?

Court documents allege Brooks beat the mother of his child just before the parade began in downtown Waukesha on Nov. 21 because she hadn't bailed him out of jail several days earlier. He had been arrested for running her over with his SUV.

He then drove the vehicle into the parade route, ignoring police orders to stop, according to a criminal complaint. He crashed into people head-on and ran them over as they lay on the ground, the complaint said. He finally turned off the parade route, left his vehicle and tried to get someone to let him into his house. Police captured him there.

Prosecutors have charged him with more than 80 counts, including multiple counts of reckless endangerment and six counts of intentional homicide. Each of the homicide counts carries a mandatory life sentence.

No potential motive has emerged thus far, although his attorneys have said the officers who arrested him noticed he smelled of marijuana and his eyes were red and glassy. His public defender, Jeremy Perri, didn't return a message.

WHAT DID BROOKS PLEAD?

Brooks initially pleaded not guilty. His attorneys asked Judge Jennifer Dorow on Monday to move his trial out of Waukesha County due to negative publicity. When Dorow refused he changed his plea to not guilty by reason of mental disease or defect.

That's Wisconsin's equivalent of an insanity plea. Brooks is essentially saying he was suffering a psychotic episode and didn't realize what he was doing was illegal or was incapable of obeying the law.

WHAT COMES NEXT IN COURT?

Dorow will appoint a psychologist to examine Brooks and issue findings on whether there's enough evidence to support his plea. If the psychologist finds he was competent, Brooks' attorneys can ask Dorow to appoint an examiner of their choosing.

If there's ultimately enough evidence to support the plea, Dorow will conduct a jury trial to determine whether Brooks committed the offenses. If he's found guilty, she will hold another trial with the same jury to determine whether he was so mentally ill that he didn't know he was breaking the law or couldn't conform his actions to the law.

If the jury makes such a finding, Brooks would avoid prison and instead be committed to a mental institution for the duration of the sentences that accompany the criminal charges. He would be allowed to eventually petition for his release, however.

WHAT DOES THE DEFENSE HAVE TO PROVE?

Brooks' attorneys will have to show by a preponderance of the evidence that during the parade Brooks essentially lost touch with reality, said Dr. Ziv Cohen, a New York-based forensic psychiatrist who has consulted on more than 50 homicide cases. They will need to show Brooks has a history of mental illness and what happened to him on the day of the parade that caused the psychotic episode, Cohen said. His current mental state is irrelevant.

HOW DIFFICULT WILL THAT BE FOR BROOKS?

Extremely difficult, according to Daniel Adams, a former Milwaukee County prosecutor who handled a dozen insanity cases during his tenure. Even notorious serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer, who admitted strangling and butchering 17 men or boys over 13 years and dismembering some of the victims, failed to prove he was insane during his trial, Adams noted.

The first hurdle for the defense will be finding a psychologist willing to declare Brooks was mentally ill, he said.

"They have their reputations on the line," he said.

Prosecutors probably won't concede insanity given the high-profile nature of the case, Adams said. They can argue Brooks' decision to eventually turn off the parade route and try to hide shows he understood his actions were illegal, Adams said.

"Somebody who was so mentally ill they didn't know what they were doing was wrong wouldn't have

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done that," Adams said.

HAS ANY EVIDENCE EMERGED THAT SUGGESTS BROOKS HAS MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES?

No. Nothing has been released publicly by either the defense or prosecution suggesting he was of sound mind or mentally ill.

WHAT IF HE WAS HIGH ON MARIJUANA?

That wouldn't support an insanity defense, Cohen said. Defendants can't become intoxicated voluntarily and then argue that the drug caused the break with reality unless they can show it caused an unexpected reaction, he said.

HOW WILL A WAUKESHA COUNTY JURY REACT?

The incident sparked multiple fundraisers for survivors and families of the dead. People erected a makeshift memorial, attended prayer vigils and city officials have hung paintings of the six people who were killed in City Hall. And anger toward Brooks still runs hot.

Juries often view insanity defenses as weak excuses, Cohen said. A Waukesha County jury will almost certainly greet Brooks' arguments with deep skepticism, he said.

"It's going to be hard to overcome that skepticism with a local jury," he said. "You have to have a pretty severe mental disturbance to not know at all what you're doing is wrong."

HAVE ANY HIGH-PROFILE CRIMINAL DEFENDANTS SUCCESSFULLY ARGUED THEY WERE INSANE?

Yes. One of the most famous is John Hinckley Jr., who attempted to assassinate then-President Ronald Reagan in 1981. He was found not guilty by reason of insanity in federal court. He was released from psychiatric care in 2016.

Outrage over the finding led to the passage of the Insanity Defense Reform Act of 1984, which made it harder to win a verdict of not guilty by reason of insanity by lowering the standards of evidence for prosecutors to prove sanity.

Senate OKs landmark gun violence bill, House passage is next

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate easily approved a bipartisan gun violence bill Thursday that seemed unthinkable a month ago, setting up final approval of what will be Congress' most far-reaching response in decades to the nation's run of brutal mass shootings.

After years futile Democratic efforts to curb firearms, 15 Republicans joined with them as both sides decided inaction was untenable after last month's rampages in Buffalo, New York and Uvalde, Texas. It took weeks of closed-door talks but senators emerged with a compromise embodying incremental but impactful movement to curb bloodshed that has come to regularly shock — yet no longer surprise — the nation.

The \$13 billion measure would toughen background checks for the youngest gun buyers, keep firearms from more domestic violence offenders and help states put in place red flag laws that make it easier for authorities to take weapons from people adjudged dangerous. It would also fund local programs for school safety, mental health and violence prevention.

"Families in Uvalde and Buffalo, and too many tragic shootings before, have demanded action. And to-night, we acted," President Joe Biden said after passage. He said the House should send it to him quickly, adding, "Kids in schools and communities will be safer because of it."

The election-year package fell far short of more robust gun restrictions Democrats have sought and Republicans have thwarted for years, including bans on the assault-type weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines used in the slayings in Buffalo and Uvalde. Yet the accord let leaders of both parties declare victory and demonstrate to voters that they know how to compromise and make government work, while also leaving room for each side to appeal to its core supporters.

"This is not a cure-all for the all the ways gun violence affects our nation," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., whose party has made gun restrictions a goal for decades. "But it is a long overdue step in the right direction."

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Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., in a nod to the Second Amendment right to bear arms that drives many conservative voters, said "the American people want their constitutional rights protected and their kids to be safe in school." He said "they want both of those things at once, and that is just what the bill before the Senate will have accomplished."

The day proved bittersweet for advocates of curtailing gun violence. Underscoring the enduring potency of conservative clout, the right-leaning Supreme Court issued a decision expanding the right of Americans to carry arms in public by striking down a New York law requiring people to prove a need for carrying a weapon before they get a license to do so.

McConnell hailed the justices' decision and Senate passage of the guns bill as "complementary victories that will make our country freer and safer at the same time."

The Senate vote on final passage was 65-33. A cluster of House Democrats who watched the vote in the chamber's rear included Rep. Lucy McBath, D-Ga., whose 17-year old son was shot to death in 2012 by a man complaining his music was too loud.

In the key roll call hours earlier, senators voted 65-34 to end a filibuster by conservative GOP senators. That was five more than the 60-vote threshold needed. The House planned to vote Friday and approval seemed certain.

On both votes, 15 Senate Republicans joined all 50 Democrats, including their two allied independents, in backing the legislation.

Yet the votes highlighted the risks Republicans face by defying the party's pro-gun voters and firearms groups like the National Rifle Association. Sens. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Todd Young of Indiana were the only two of the 15 up for reelection this fall. Of the rest, four are retiring and eight don't face voters until 2026.

Tellingly, GOP senators voting "no" included potential 2024 presidential contenders like Ted Cruz of Texas, Josh Hawley of Missouri and Tim Scott of South Carolina. Some of the party's most conservative members voted "no" as well, including Sens. Rand Paul of Kentucky and Mike Lee of Utah.

Cruz said the legislation would "disarm law-abiding citizens rather than take serious measures to protect our children."

John Feinblatt, president of Everytown for Gun Safety, hailed senators who supported the measure for "coming together and putting the safety of the American people ahead of gun lobby priorities."

While the Senate measure was a clear breakthrough, the outlook for continued congressional movement on gun curbs is dim.

Less than one-third of the Senate's 50 GOP senators backed the measure and solid Republican opposition is certain in the House. Top House Republicans urged a "no" vote in an email from the No. 2 GOP leader, Rep. Steve Scalise of Louisiana, that called the bill "an effort to slowly chip away at law-abiding citizens' 2nd Amendment rights."

Both chambers — now narrowly controlled by Democrats — could well be run by the GOP after November's midterm elections.

Senate action came one month after a gunman killed 19 students and two teachers in Uvalde. Just days before that, a white man was accused of being motivated by racism as he killed 10 Black grocery shoppers in Buffalo. Both shooters were 18 years old, a youthful profile shared by many mass shooters, and the close timing of the two slaughters and victims with whom many could identify stirred a demand by voters for action, lawmakers of both parties said.

The talks were led by Sens. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., John Cornyn, R-Texas, and Thom Tillis, R-N.C. Murphy represented Newtown, Connecticut, when an assailant killed 20 students and six staffers at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, while Cornyn has been involved in past gun talks following mass shootings in his state and is close to McConnell.

Murphy said the measure would save thousands of lives and was a chance to "prove to a weary American public that democracy is not so broken that it is unable to rise to the moment."

"I don't believe in doing nothing in the face of what we saw in Uvalde" and elsewhere, Cornyn said.

The bill would make the local juvenile records of people age 18 to 20 available during required federal background checks when they attempt to buy guns. Those examinations, currently limited to three days, would last up to a maximum of 10 days to give federal and local officials time to search records.

People convicted of domestic abuse who are current or former romantic partners of the victim would be prohibited from acquiring firearms, closing the so-called "boyfriend loophole."

That ban currently only applies to people married to, living with or who have had children with the victim. The compromise bill would extend that to those considered to have had "a continuing serious relationship."

There would be money to help states enforce red flag laws and for other states without them that for violence prevention programs. Nineteen states and the District of Columbia have such laws.

The measure expands the use of background checks by rewriting the definition of the federally licensed gun dealers required to conduct them. Penalties for gun trafficking are strengthened, billions of dollars are provided for behavioral health clinics and school mental health programs and there's money for school safety initiatives, though not for personnel to use a "dangerous weapon."

Hearing: Trump told Justice Dept. to call election 'corrupt'

By ERIC TUCKER and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump hounded the Justice Department to pursue his false election fraud claims, striving in vain to enlist top law enforcement officials in his desperate bid to stay in power and relenting only when warned in the Oval Office of mass resignations, according to testimony Thursday to the House panel investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot.

Three Trump-era Justice Department officials recounted persistent badgering from the president, including day after day of directives to chase baseless allegations that the election won by Democrat Joe Biden had been stolen. They said they swept aside each demand from Trump because there was no evidence of widespread fraud, then banded together when the president weighed whether to replace the department's top lawyer with a lower-level official eager to help undo the results.

All the while, Republican loyalists in Congress trumpeted the president's claims — and several later sought pardons from the White House after the effort failed and the Capitol was breached in a day of violence, the committee revealed Thursday.

The hearing, the fifth by the panel probing the assault on the Capitol, made clear that Trump's sweeping pressure campaign targeted not only statewide election officials but also his own executive branch agencies. The witnesses solemnly described the constant contact from the president as an extraordinary breach of protocol, especially since the Justice Department has long cherished its independence from the White House and looked to steer clear of partisan considerations in investigative decisions.

"When you damage our fundamental institutions, it's not easy to repair them," said Jeffrey Rosen, the acting attorney general in the final days of the Trump administration. "So I thought this was a really important issue, to try to make sure that the Justice Department was able to stay on the right course."

The hearing focused on a memorably tumultuous time at the department after the December 2020 departure of Attorney General William Barr, who drew Trump's ire with his public proclamation that there was no evidence of fraud that could have changed the election results.

He was replaced by his top deputy, Rosen, who said that for a roughly two-week period after taking the job, he either met with or was called by Trump virtually every day. The common theme, he said, was "dissatisfaction that the Justice Department, in his view, had not done enough to investigate election fraud."

Trump presented the department with an "arsenal of allegations," none of them true, said Richard Donoghue, another top official who testified Thursday. Even so, Trump prodded the department at various points to seize voting machines, to appoint a special counsel to probe fraud claims and to simply declare the election corrupt.

The department did none of those things.

"For the department to insert itself into the political process this way, I think would have had grave consequences for the country. It may very well have spiraled us into a constitutional crisis," Donoghue said.

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The testimony showed that Trump did, however, find a willing ally inside the department in the form of an environmental enforcement lawyer who'd become the leader of the agency's civil division.

The attorney, Jeffrey Clark, had been introduced to Trump by a Republican congressman and postured himself as an eager advocate for election fraud claims. In a contentious Oval Office meeting on the night of Jan. 3, 2021, just three days before the insurrection, Trump even toyed with replacing Rosen with Clark but backed down amid warnings of mass resignations.

Clark's name was referenced often Thursday, with Rep. Adam Kinzinger, an Illinois Republican and committee member, deriding him as a lawyer whose sole qualification was his fealty to Trump and his willingness to do whatever the president wanted, "including overthrowing a free and fair democratic election."

A lawyer for Clark did not return messages seeking comment.

Barely an hour before the hearing began, it was revealed that federal agents on Wednesday had searched Clark's Virginia home, according to a person familiar with the matter. It was not clear what agents were seeking.

The latest hearing centered less on the violence at the Capitol than on the legal push by Trump to undo the election results, as the panel makes the case that the defeated president's "big lie" over the election led to the insurrection. That included specific asks by Trump but also more general ones.

In one phone conversation, according to handwritten notes taken by Donoghue and highlighted at Thursday's hearing, Trump directed Rosen to "Just say the election was corrupt and leave the rest to me and the R. Congressmen."

Around that time, Trump was connected by a Republican congressman, Rep. Scott Perry of Pennsylvania, to Clark, who'd joined the department in 2018 as its chief environmental lawyer and later set about aiding efforts to challenge the election results.

At one point, 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 Justice Department superiors refused.

Clark was not among the hearing witnesses. He earlier appeared in private before the committee, though lawmakers Thursday played a videotaped deposition showing him repeatedly invoking his constitutional right against self-incrimination in response to questions.

Perry's name surfaced later in the hearing, when the committee played videotaped statements from Trump aides saying he and several other Republican members of Congress sought pardons from the president that would shield them from criminal prosecution.

Perry and fellow GOP Reps. Andy Biggs of Arizona, Mo Brooks of Alabama, Matt Gaetz of Florida and Louie Gohmert of Texas were all involved in efforts to reject the electoral tally or submit "fake electors." Gaetz tweeted Thursday that the hearing was a "political sideshow," and Perry denied in a statement Thursday having ever sought a pardon.

The situation came to a head on Jan. 3, 2021, a Sunday, when Clark informed Rosen that Trump wanted to replace him with Clark as acting attorney general. Rosen, resisting the idea of being fired by a subordinate, testified that he swiftly contacted senior Justice Department officials to rally them together. He also requested a White House meeting, where he and his allies could make their case.

That night, he showed up at the White House for what would be a dramatic, hours-long meeting centered on whether Trump should proceed with plans for a radical leadership change. Clark was present, as were Donoghue and Steven Engel, a Rosen ally and senior Justice Department official who also testified Thursday.

At the start of the meeting, Rosen said, "The president turned to me and he said: 'The one thing we know is you, Rosen, you aren't going to do anything. You don't even agree with the claims of election fraud, and this other guy at least might do something.'"

Rosen told Trump he was correct, and said he wouldn't let the Justice Department do anything to overturn the election.

Donoghue made clear he'd resign if Trump fired Rosen. Trump asked Engel whether he would do the

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same. Engel responded that, absolutely, he would. The entire leadership team would resign, Trump was told. Hundreds of staffers would walk out too.

Donoghue also sought to dissuade Trump from believing Clark had the legal background to do what the president wanted, saying Clark had "never tried a criminal case" or conducted a criminal investigation.

"He's telling you that he's going to take charge of the department, 115,000 employees, including the entire FBI, and turn the place on a dime and conduct nationwide criminal investigations that will produce results in a matter of days," Donoghue said.

"It's impossible," he added, "it's absurd, it's not going to happen, and it's going to fail."

The president backed down. The night, and his Republican administration, ended with Rosen atop the Justice Department.

Hong Kongers reflect on Taiwan, an imperfect exile

By JOHNSON LAI and HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — For Lam Wing-kee, a Hong Kong bookstore owner who was detained by police in China for five months for selling sensitive books about the Communist Party, coming to Taiwan was a logical step.

An island just 640 kilometers (400 miles) from Hong Kong, Taiwan is close not just geographically but also linguistically and culturally. It offered the freedoms that many Hong Kongers were used to and saw disappearing in their hometown.

Lam's move to Taiwan in 2019, where he reopened his bookstore in Taipei, the capital, presaged a wave of emigration from Hong Kong as the former British colony came under the tighter grip of China's central government and its long-ruling Communist Party.

"It's not that Hong Kong doesn't have any democracy, it doesn't even have any freedom," Lam said in a recent interview. "When the English were ruling Hong Kong, they didn't give us true democracy or the power to vote, but the British gave Hong Kongers a very large space to be free."

Hong Kong and Chinese leaders will mark next week the 25th anniversary of its return to China. At the time, some people were willing to give China a chance. China had promised to rule the city within the "one country, two systems" framework for 50 years. That meant Hong Kong would retain its own legal and political system and freedom of speech that does not exist in mainland China.

But in the ensuing decades, a growing tension between the city's Western-style liberal values and mainland China's authoritarian political system culminated in explosive pro-democracy protests in 2019. In the aftermath, China imposed a national security law that has left activists and others living in fear of arrest for speaking out.

Hong Kong still looked the same. The malls were open, the skyscrapers were gleaming. But well-known artist Kacey Wong, who moved to Taiwan last year, said he constantly worried about his own arrest or those of his friends, some of whom are now in jail.

"On the outside it's still beautiful, the sunset at the harbor view. But it's an illusion that makes you think you're still free," he said. "In reality you're not, the government is watching you and secretly following you."

Though Wong feels safe in Taiwan, life as an exile is not easy. Despite its similarities to Hong Kong, Wong found his new home an alien place. He does not speak Taiwanese, a widely spoken Fujianese dialect. And the laid-back island contrasts strongly with the fast-paced financial capital that was Hong Kong.

The first six months were hard, Wong said, noting that traveling as a tourist to Taiwan is completely different than living on the island in self-imposed exile.

"I haven't established the relationship with the place, with the streets, with the people, with the language, with the shop downstairs," he said.

Other, less prominent exiles than Wong or Lam have also had to navigate a system that does not have established laws or mechanisms for refugees and asylum seekers, and has not always been welcoming. That issue is further complicated by Taiwan's increasing wariness of security risks posed by China, which claims the island as its renegade province, and of Beijing's growing influence in Hong Kong.

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For example, some individuals such as public school teachers and doctors have been denied permanent residency in Taiwan because they had worked for the Hong Kong government, said Sky Fung, the secretary general of Hong Kong Outlanders, a group that advocates for Hong Kongers in Taiwan. Others struggle with the tighter requirements and slow processing of investment visas.

In the past year or so, some have chosen to leave Taiwan, citing a clearer immigration path in the U.K. and Canada, despite the bigger gulf in language and culture.

Wong said that Taiwan has missed a golden opportunity to keep talented people from Hong Kong. "The policies and actions, and what the ... government is doing is not proactive enough and caused uncertainty in these people, that's why they're leaving," he said.

The island's Mainland Affairs Council has defended its record, saying it found that some migrants from Hong Kong hired immigration companies who took illegal methods, such as not carrying through on investments and hiring locals they had promised on paper.

"We in Taiwan, also have national security needs," Chiu Chui-cheng, deputy minister at the Mainland Affairs Council, said on a TV program last week. "Of course we also want to help Hong Kong, we have always supported Hong Kongers in their support for freedom, democracy and rule of law."

Some 11,000 Hong Kongers got residence permits in Taiwan last year, according to Taiwan's National Immigration Agency, and 1,600 were able to get permanent residency. The U.K. granted 97,000 applications to Hong Kong holders of British National Overseas passports last year in response to China's crackdown.

However imperfect, Taiwan gives the activists a chance to continue to carry out their work, even if the direct actions of the past were no longer possible.

Lam was one of five Hong Kong booksellers whose seizure by Chinese security agents in 2016 drew global concern.

He often lends his presence to protests against China, most recently attending a June 4 memorial in Taipei to mark the anniversary of a bloody crackdown on democracy protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989. Similar protests in Hong Kong and Macao, until recently the only places in China allowed to commemorate the Tiananmen massacre, are no longer allowed.

"As a Hong Konger, I actually haven't stopped my resistance. I have always continued to do what I needed to do in Taiwan, and participated in my events. I have not given up fighting," Lam said.

Afghans bury dead, dig for survivors of devastating quake

By EBRAHIM NOROOZI Associated Press

GAYAN, Afghanistan (AP) — Villagers rushed to bury the dead Thursday and dug by hand through the rubble of their homes in search of survivors of a powerful earthquake in eastern Afghanistan that state media reported killed 1,000 people. Residents appeared to be largely on their own to deal with the aftermath as their new Taliban-led government and the international aid community struggled to bring in help.

Under a leaden sky in Paktika province, the epicenter of Wednesday's earthquake where hundreds of homes have been destroyed, men dug several long trenches on a mountainside overlooking their village. They prayed over around 100 bodies wrapped in blankets and then buried them.

In villages across Gayan district, toured by Associated Press journalists for hours Thursday, families who had spent the previous rainy night out in the open lifted pieces of timber of collapsed roofs and pulled away stones by hand, looking for missing loved ones. Taliban fighters circulated in vehicles in the area, but only a few were seen helping dig through rubble.

There was little sign of heavy equipment — only one bulldozer was spotted being transported. Ambulances circulated, but little other help to the living was evident.

Many international aid agencies withdrew from Afghanistan when the Taliban seized power nearly 10 months ago. Those that remain are scrambling to get medical supplies, food and tents to the remote quake-struck area, using shoddy mountain roads made worse by damage and rains.

"We ask from the Islamic Emirate and the whole country to come forward and help us," said a survivor who gave his name as Hakimullah. "We are with nothing and have nothing, not even a tent to live in."

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The scenes underscored how the magnitude 6 quake has struck a country that was already nearly on its knees from multiple humanitarian crises.

The quake took the lives of 1,000 people, according to the state-run Bakhtar News Agency, which also reported an estimated 1,500 more were injured. In the first independent count, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said around 770 people had been killed in Paktika and neighboring Khost province.

It's not clear how the totals were arrived at, given the difficulties of accessing and communicating with the affected villages. Either grim toll would make the quake Afghanistan's deadliest in two decades, and officials continued to warn the number could still rise.

Since the Taliban took over in August amid the U.S and NATO withdrawal, the world pulled back financing and development aid that had been keeping the country afloat. The economy collapsed, leaving millions unable to afford food; many medical facilities shut down, making treatment harder to find. Nearly half the population of 38 million faces crisis levels of food insecurity.

Many aid and development agencies also left after the Taliban seizure of power. The U.N. and remaining agencies said they were moving blankets, food, tents, and medical teams to the area.

But they are over-stretched, and U.N. agencies are facing a \$3 billion funding shortfall for Afghanistan this year. That means there will be difficult decisions about who gets aid, said Peter Kessler, a spokesman for the United Nations' refugee agency.

Local medical centers, already struggling to deal with malnutrition cases, were now overwhelmed with people injured by the quake, said Adnan Junaid, the International Rescue Committee vice president for Asia.

"The toll this disaster will have on the local communities ... is catastrophic, and the impact the earthquake will have on the already stretched humanitarian response in Afghanistan is a grave cause for concern," Junaid said.

The Defense Ministry, which leads the Taliban emergency effort, said it sent 22 helicopter flights on Wednesday transporting wounded and taking supplies, along with several more Thursday.

Still, the Taliban's resources have been gutted by the economic crisis. Made up of insurgents who fought for 20 years against the U.S. and NATO, the Taliban have also struggled to make the transition to governing.

On Wednesday, a U.N. official said the government had not requested that the world body mobilize international search-and-rescue teams or obtain equipment from neighboring countries, despite a rare plea from the Taliban's supreme leader, Haibatullah Akhundzadah, for help from the world.

Trucks of food and other necessities arrived from Pakistan, and planes full of humanitarian aid landed from Iran and Qatar, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid wrote on Twitter. India said it sent a technical team to its embassy in Kabul to coordinate the delivery of humanitarian assistance, but it didn't give details on the team or the relief material being sent.

Pakistan also opened several nearby border crossings to allow those affected by the disaster to cross, Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sherif said in a call with the Taliban Prime Minister Mullah Hasan Akhund.

Obtaining more direct international help may be more difficult: Many countries, including the U.S., funnel humanitarian aid to Afghanistan through the U.N. and other organizations to avoid putting money in the Taliban's hands, wary of dealing with the group, which has issued a flurry of repressive edicts curtailing the rights of women and girls and the press.

Germany, Norway and several other countries announced they were sending aid for the quake, but underscored that they would work only through U.N. agencies, not with the Taliban.

In a news bulletin Thursday, Afghanistan state television made a point to acknowledge that President Joe Biden of the United States — their one-time enemy — offered condolences over the earthquake and had promised aid. Biden on Wednesday ordered the U.S. international aid agency and its partners to "assess" options for helping the victims, a White House statement said.

U.N. deputy special representative for Afghanistan, Ramiz Alakbarov, told the U.N. Security Council in a video briefing he intends to visit quake-hit areas on Friday and "to meet with affected families, first-hand responders, including women's civil society groups who are working to ensure that assistance reaches

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women and girls, and to support overall relief efforts.”

In Paktika province, the quake shook a region of deep poverty, where residents scrape out a living in the few fertile areas among the rough mountains. Roads are so difficult that some villages in Gayan District took a full day to reach from Kabul, though it is only 175 kilometers (110 miles away.)

One 6-year-old boy in Gayan wept as he said his parents, two sisters and a brother were all dead. He had fled the ruins of his own home and took refuge with the neighbors.

While modern buildings withstand magnitude 6 earthquakes elsewhere, Afghanistan’s mud-brick homes and landslide-prone mountains make such quakes more dangerous.

One man, Rahim Jan, stood inside the few standing mud-brick walls of his home with the toppled roof timbers all around him.

“It is destroyed completely, all my belongings are gone,” he said. “I have lost 12 members of my family in this house.”

Takeaways: Trump risked provoking ‘constitutional crisis’

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Jan. 6 committee used Thursday’s hearing to show how Donald Trump tried to install a loyalist atop the Justice Department who would pursue his false claims of voter fraud and stop the certification of the 2020 election that Democrat Joe Biden won.

It’s the latest account of how perilously close the United States could have come to a constitutional crisis if the department leaders had not threatened to resign over the scheme and the defeated Trump had been able to orchestrate a plan for the U.S. government to overturn election results in several pivotal states.

Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., led the hearing, saying it would show “how close we came to losing it all.”

The committee investigating the causes of the insurrection at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, has been trying to make the case that Trump’s efforts to reverse his loss resulted in the deadly siege after he sent supporters to the Capitol as Congress was certifying Biden’s victory. Here are some important takeaways from this month’s fifth hearing.

TRUMP’S JUSTICE DEPARTMENT IN TURMOIL

Day after day, Trump pressured the department leaders to dig into false claims of election fraud after the November 2020 election.

Former Attorney General William Barr had described the swirl of false voter fraud theories coming from Trump’s orbit as “wack-a-mole.”

The department declined Trump’s overtures because “we did not think they were appropriate,” testified Jeffrey Rosen, who became acting attorney general after Barr stepped down.

Over and over, the officials explained to Trump that the states conduct their own elections, free from federal interference. They tried to show him there was no voter fraud on a scale that could have tipped the election in his favor.

Trump, however, only pressed harder and started looking for alternatives.

At point in late December 2020, Trump asked what Rosen found to be a “peculiar” question: Do you know Jeff Clark?

Trump was eyeing Clark to take over at the department.

WHO IS JEFF CLARK?

Clark led the civil division and particularly handled environmental cases. He was introduced to Trump by a Republican congressman from Pennsylvania, a leader of the House’s conservative Freedom Caucus.

Clark had been circulating a proposal that would have the legislatures from battleground states not certify their election results. It was similar to a plan from Trump lawyer John Eastman for alternative slates of electors loyal to Trump, rather than Biden, when Congress met Jan. 6, 2021, to certify results.

Clark’s ideas alarmed his colleagues, as did his sudden rise into Trump’s orbit as a potential new acting attorney general.

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"It may well have spiraled us into a constitutional crisis," testified Richard Donoghue, the former acting deputy attorney general.

'WHAT DO I HAVE TO LOSE?'

During a meeting at the White House days before the riot, Justice Department leaders told Trump they would resign if he tried to install Clark and put his scheme in motion to reject electors.

Trump had called the officials to an unexpected Sunday meeting to lay out his plan. Donoghue described how he was dressed inappropriately in jeans, muddy boots and an Army shirt. Trump had him sit between Rosen and Clark. The president asked Donoghue: What if I replace Rosen with Clark?

"What have I got to lose?" Trump said, as Donoghue recalled.

Donoghue told Trump that the president would have everything to lose: mass resignations at the Justice Department, starting with those arrayed before him at the meeting.

Clark would be left to run a "graveyard" at the department, one of the officials said. Trump's plan to reject the state electors with those loyal to Trump would never work. It was a "murder-suicide pact," as his own White House counsel told him, they testified.

Donoghue made the point that "Jeff Clark wasn't even competent to serve as attorney general."

When Clark shot back that he had worked on complicated civil and environmental matters, Donoghue retorted: "How about you go back to your office and we'll call you when there's an oil spill?"

BLANKET PARDONS FOR JAN. 6 ...

At least five Republican members of Congress, including Rep. Scott Perry of Pennsylvania, who had connected Trump and Clark, sought pardons from the president that would shield them from criminal prosecution, according to testimony Thursday.

Perry and Reps. Andy Biggs of Arizona, Mo Brooks of Alabama, Matt Gaetz of Florida and Louie Gohmert of Texas all had been involved in efforts to reject the electoral tally or submit "fake electors." All sought pardons, according to Cassidy Hutchinson, an aide to Trump's chief of staff, Mark Meadows. Hutchinson testified previously in video shown at the hearing.

Blanket pardons for all those involved in Jan. 6 were also discussed, according to another White House aide, John McEntee.

Gaetz tweeted that the hearing is a "political sideshow."

Kinzinger said the only reason to ask for a pardon "is if you think you've committed a crime."

... AND SUBPOENAS SERVED ON 'FAKE ELECTORS'

The hearing was gaveled in as the department escalated its own investigation, searching Clark's Virginia home this week as federal agents also served subpoenas across the country related to the scheme by Trump allies to create sets of fake electors with the intention of invalidating Biden's win.

The purpose of the searches was not immediately clear, but they came as the House committee has pressured the department to step up its investigation.

Among those being investigated are Republican officials in key states, including those working on the fake electors in the run-up to Jan. 6, when Congress would be tallying the election results.

TRUMP VS. MCCARTHY

Trump has decried the proceedings as a "witch hunt" and blamed House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy for declining to have Republicans on the committee who could defend Trump.

Trump recently told a conservative talk radio host that McCarthy, R-Calif., had made a "bad decision," "very foolish decision," by withdrawing the Republicans from the committee.

The only two Republicans on the committee are Kinzinger and Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, both Trump critics.

McCarthy has stood by his choice not to seat Republicans after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., rejected two of his choices because they had voted to decertify the results of the presidential election.

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Rather than picking alternatives acceptable to Pelosi, McCarthy withdrew the others, refusing to play by Pelosi's rules and trying to portray the the committee as unfair and illegitimate.

"I do not regret not appointing anybody at all," McCarthy told reporters Thursday, saying he had said as much in a call with Trump. "The decision is right."

Feds search Trump-era official's home, subpoena GOP leaders

By MICHAEL BALSAMO, ERIC TUCKER and NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal agents searched a former top Justice Department official's home and seized records from key Republicans in at least five states linked to Donald Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election, in what were clear signs that authorities are ramping up their investigation of associates of the former president.

Authorities on Wednesday searched the Virginia home of Jeffrey Clark, who was known at the Justice Department to champion Trump's false claims of election fraud. Agents in recent days also served subpoenas on the Republican Party chairmen of Arizona, Nevada and Georgia, three states that went for President Joe Biden and where Trump allies created slates of "alternate electors" intended to subvert the vote. And Republicans in two other states — Michigan and Pennsylvania — disclosed they had been interviewed by the FBI.

The Justice Department appears to be escalating its probe of pro-Trump efforts to overturn the 2020 election, which culminated in the deadly Jan. 6 insurrection. The disclosures of law enforcement activity came as the U.S. House committee investigating the riot said it had new evidence of Trump's efforts and his knowledge that he had no legal basis to try to overturn the election.

The committee's Thursday hearing focused on Trump's desire to install Clark atop the Justice Department in his administration's last days. The reason for the search of Clark's home was not immediately clear and it was not known what information agents were searching for. The person who confirmed the search was not authorized to discuss it by name and spoke on condition of anonymity.

In an interview Thursday night on Fox News Channel, Clark alleged the timing of the search warrant was "highly politicized" and questioned why his home was searched one day before the congressional hearing.

"It looks highly coincidental and ... I just don't believe in coincidences," he said.

Both the committee and federal authorities are probing the use of replacements for duly chosen electors in seven battleground states that voted for Biden. Trump and his allies furiously pressured authorities in those states to replace Biden's electors with ones for him on specious or nonexistent allegations that his victory was stolen.

The committee this week disclosed text messages that showed an aide to U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson, a Wisconsin Republican and Trump ally, tried to hand-deliver fake elector certificates to an aide for former Vice President Mike Pence. The texts show Pence's aide refused to accept the votes.

Johnson told a Wisconsin conservative talk radio host on Thursday that the fake elector slates came from the office of Rep. Mike Kelly of Pennsylvania. A spokesman for Kelly responded that Johnson's claim was "patently false."

Said the spokesman, Matt Knoedler, "Mr. Kelly has not spoken to Sen. Johnson for the better part of a decade, and he has no knowledge of the claims Mr. Johnson is making related to the 2020 election."

Among those who have received subpoenas in recent days, according to a person familiar with the matter who was not authorized to discuss an ongoing investigation, was Georgia Republican Party Chair David Shafer.

Nevada GOP Chair Michael McDonald turned over his phone to federal agents Wednesday when they approached him outside his car in Las Vegas and presented a warrant, according to another person familiar with the matter. McDonald in December 2020 stood outside Nevada's state capitol with other fake electors to swear a so-called "oath of office," flanked by men in camouflage with semi-automatic rifles.

Arizona Republican Party Chair Kelli Ward, her husband, Michael Ward, and two other alternate electors also received subpoenas, according to a third person familiar with the matter who was not authorized to

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discuss it publicly.

In Pennsylvania, FBI agents interviewed the chairman of the Allegheny County Republican Party at his home Thursday and gave him a subpoena for communications between him, Trump electors in the state and members of Trump's campaign and legal team, the party official, Sam DeMarco, told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

DeMarco said in a statement that his conduct as an elector was "open, above-board and predicated solely on protecting President Trump's legal rights should he prevail in court. That is why I agreed to serve as an elector solely in the event the president prevailed in his legal challenge to the Pennsylvania vote."

And in Michigan, Michele Lundgren told the Detroit News that someone from the FBI served her with a subpoena Thursday and that another Trump elector was served on Wednesday. Lundgren, 72, said her discussion with the agent was "long" and "pleasant" and that she let one of the agents go through her phone and computer.

"They kept asking me questions and asking me questions, and I kept telling them answers," she said.

Clark's home was searched by federal agents shortly before a committee hearing in which he was the focus. Three other former Justice Department officials testified about an extraordinary Jan. 3, 2021, Oval Office meeting at which Trump contemplated naming Clark — who led the department's civil division — as acting attorney general in place of Jeffrey Rosen, who resisted Trump's efforts to involve the agency.

Trump relented only when other senior Justice Department officials warned Trump that they would resign if he followed through with his plan to replace Rosen with Clark.

A lawyer for Clark did not return an email and phone message seeking comment.

Chairman Bennie Thompson said he read about the raid on Clark's home moments before the hearing started. "We're not privy to what the Department of Justice's reasoning is for doing it," he said. "As you know, we demonstrated that he was recommended to lead the Department of Justice and people felt that he was absolutely unqualified to do so."

Russ Vought, president of the Center for Renewing America, which Clark recently joined as a senior fellow, tweeted that federal officers forced Clark "into the streets" while he was wearing pajamas and "took his electronic devices."

"All because Jeff saw fit to investigate voter fraud," Vought continued. "This is not America, folks. The weaponization of govt must end. Let me be very clear. We stand by Jeff and so must all patriots in this country."

Summer swelter: Persistent heat wave breaks records, spirits

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

From the normally chilly Russian Arctic to the traditionally sweltering American South, big swaths of the Northern Hemisphere continued to sizzle with extreme heat as the start of summer more resembled the dog days of August.

In the United States a heat dome of triple digit temperatures in many places combined with high humidity oscillated from west to east. On Thursday, at least eight states hit 100 degrees (37.8 degrees Celsius) and at least nine high temperature marks were set or broken, according to the National Weather Service, which held 30 million Americans under some kind of heat advisory.

The extreme discomfort of Thursday came after 12 states broke the 100-degree mark on Wednesday and 21 records were tied or broken. Since June 15, at least 113 automated weather stations have tied or broken hot-temperature records. Scientists say this early baking has all the hallmarks of climate change.

"It's easy to look at these figures and forget the immense misery they represent. People who can't afford air conditioning and people who work outdoors have only one option, to suffer," said Texas A&M climate scientist Andrew Dessler, who was in College Station, where the temperature tied a record at 102 degrees (38.9 degrees Celsius) Thursday. "Those of us with air conditioning may not physically suffer, but we are prisoners of the indoors."

After three deaths, Chicago has changed its cooling rules.

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Macon, Georgia, the temperature swept from 64 degrees (17.8 degrees Celsius) to 105 (40.6 degrees Celsius) in just nine hours Wednesday. Then on Thursday the temperature peaked at 104 (40 degrees Celsius), a record for the day. Even Minneapolis hit 100 on Monday.

Probably only the Pacific Northwest and Northeast have been spared the heat wave, said National Weather Service meteorologist Marc Chenard at the Weather Prediction Center. On Thursday, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Arizona and California all hit at least 100. The same states hit 100 on Wednesday, joined by North and South Carolina, Kentucky and Tennessee.

"It's persistent," Chenard said. "It's been over a week and it's going to continue in some aspects."

It's not just the U.S.

The Russian city of Norilsk, above the Arctic circle, hit 89.6 degrees (32 degrees Celsius) Thursday for its hottest June day on record and tied for its hottest day in any month on record, according to Maximiliano Herrera, who tracks global temperature records. Several Japanese cities hit their hottest June temperatures including 97 (36.1 degrees Celsius) in Nobeoka City, while Turpan, China, hit 114 degrees (46.5 degrees Celsius). Herrera said it's so crazy that he doesn't have time to eat or sleep, just track broken records and extreme heat.

A European heat wave has also caused problems with fires in Germany and Spain.

Northern Illinois University meteorology professor Victor Gensini said what's happening with this early heat wave is "very consistent with what we'd expect in a continually warming world."

"These temperatures are occurring with only 2 degrees Fahrenheit (1.1 degrees Celsius) of global warming and we are on track for 4 degrees Fahrenheit (2.2 degrees Celsius) more warming over this century," Dessler said. "I literally cannot imagine how bad that will be."

In Raleigh, North Carolina, it hit 100 on Wednesday and usually the city only gets one 100-degree a day a year, but it comes much later than this, said state climatologist Kathie Dello.

"In the southeastern U.S. many lack access to sufficient or stable cooling or cannot afford to use their home cooling systems. Heat morbidity and mortality is among our greatest public health risks in a changing climate."

There may be some cooling by the weekend or Monday in some places, including the north central part of the country, Chenard said. But above normal temperatures are forecast for "at least into the first part of July" and he added it's likely the entire summer will be hotter than normal.

COVID vaccines saved 20M lives in 1st year, scientists say

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

Nearly 20 million lives were saved by COVID-19 vaccines during their first year, but even more deaths could have been prevented if international targets for the shots had been reached, researchers reported Thursday.

On Dec. 8, 2020, a retired shop clerk in England received the first shot in what would become a global vaccination campaign. Over the next 12 months, more than 4.3 billion people around the world lined up for the vaccines.

The effort, though marred by persisting inequities, prevented deaths on an unimaginable scale, said Oliver Watson of Imperial College London, who led the new modeling study.

"Catastrophic would be the first word that comes to mind," Watson said of the outcome if vaccines hadn't been available to fight the coronavirus. The findings "quantify just how much worse the pandemic could have been if we did not have these vaccines."

The researchers used data from 185 countries to estimate that vaccines prevented 4.2 million COVID-19 deaths in India, 1.9 million in the United States, 1 million in Brazil, 631,000 in France and 507,000 in the United Kingdom.

An additional 600,000 deaths would have been prevented if the World Health Organization target of 40% vaccination coverage by the end of 2021 had been met, according to the study published Thursday in the journal *Lancet Infectious Diseases*.

The main finding — 19.8 million COVID-19 deaths were prevented — is based on estimates of how many

more deaths than usual occurred during the time period. Using only reported COVID-19 deaths, the same model yielded 14.4 million deaths averted by vaccines.

The London scientists excluded China because of uncertainty around the pandemic's effect on deaths there and its huge population.

The study has other limitations. The researchers did not include how the virus might have mutated differently in the absence of vaccines. And they did not factor in how lockdowns or mask wearing might have changed if vaccines weren't available.

Another modeling group used a different approach to estimate that 16.3 million COVID-19 deaths were averted by vaccines. That work, by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation in Seattle, has not been published.

In the real world, people wear masks more often when cases are surging, said the institute's Ali Mokdad, and 2021's delta wave without vaccines would have prompted a major policy response.

"We may disagree on the number as scientists, but we all agree that COVID vaccines saved lots of lives," Mokdad said.

The findings underscore both the achievements and the shortcomings of the vaccination campaign, said Adam Finn of Bristol Medical School in England, who like Mokdad was not involved in the study.

"Although we did pretty well this time — we saved millions and millions of lives — we could have done better and we should do better in the future," Finn said.

Funding came from several groups including the WHO; the UK Medical Research Council; Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

LGBTQ students would get new protections under Biden plan

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

The rights of LGBTQ students would become enshrined in federal law and victims of campus sexual assault would gain new protections under rules proposed by the Biden administration on Thursday.

The proposal, announced on the 50th anniversary of the Title IX women's rights law, is intended to replace a set of controversial rules issued during the Trump administration by Education Secretary Betsy DeVos.

President Joe Biden's education secretary, Miguel Cardona, said that even though there have been significant strides toward gender equality, discrimination and sexual violence persist.

"Even as we celebrate all the progress we've achieved, standing up for equal access and inclusion is as important as ever before," he said.

The proposal is almost certain to be challenged by conservatives, and it is expected to lead to new legal battles over the rights of transgender students in schools, especially in sports. It now faces a public feedback period before the administration can finalize any changes, meaning the earliest the policy is likely to take effect is next year.

The step meets a demand from victims rights advocates who wanted Biden to release new rules no later than the anniversary of Title IX, which outlaws discrimination based on sex in schools and colleges. Advocates say DeVos' rules have gone too far in protecting students accused of sexual misconduct, at the expense of victims.

As a presidential candidate, Biden had promised a quick end to DeVos' rules, saying they would "shame and silence survivors."

In announcing its proposal, Biden's Education Department said DeVos' rules "weakened protections for survivors of sexual assault and diminished the promise of an education free from discrimination."

For the first time, the rules would formally protect LGBTQ students under Title IX. Nothing in the 1972 law explicitly addresses the topic, but the new proposal would clarify that the law applies to discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

It would make clear that "preventing someone from participating in school programs and activities consistent with their gender identity would cause harm in violation of Title IX," according to the department. More specific rules dealing with the rights of transgender students in school sports will be released later,

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the department said.

Biden marked the anniversary of Title IX by acknowledging the impact the law has had in advancing equity but acknowledging there was more to do.

"As we look to the next 50 years, I am committed to protecting this progress and working to achieve full equality, inclusion, and dignity for women and girls, LGBTQI+ Americans, all students, and all Americans," he said in a statement.

Many of the proposed changes would restore Obama-era rules that DeVos' policy replaced.

The definition of sexual harassment would be expanded to cover a wider range of misconduct. Schools would be required to address any allegation that creates a "hostile environment" for students, even if the misconduct arises off campus. Most college employees, including professors and coaches, would be required to notify campus officials if they learn of potential sex discrimination.

In a victory for victims rights advocates, the proposal would eliminate a rule requiring colleges to hold live hearings to investigate sexual misconduct cases — one of the most divisive aspects of DeVos' policy. Live hearings would be allowed under the new rules, but colleges could also appoint campus officials to question students separately.

Biden's action drew praise from victims rights groups, LGBTQ advocates and Democratic lawmakers.

"These proposed regulations demonstrate a strong commitment to protecting educational opportunities for all students including LGBTQ students," said Janson Wu executive director of Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders. "Especially in light of ongoing state legislative attacks, we are grateful for the administration's strong support of LGBTQ youth."

Republicans in Congress were quick to denounce the proposal. Rep. Virginia Foxx of North Carolina, the top Republican on the House Education and Labor Committee, said the rules will "demolish due process rights and the safety of young women and girls across the country, with promised regulations still to come to undermine women's access to athletic opportunities."

In a letter to Cardona on Thursday, attorneys general in 18 Republican-led states pushed against protections for transgender students, saying it would "destroy women's sports." The group, led by Montana and Indiana, vowed to fight the changes "with every available tool in our arsenal."

"American women and girls deserve better," the attorneys general wrote. "And if this Administration won't commit to protecting women's rights under Title IX, rest assured, we will."

If the proposal is finalized, it would mark the second rewrite of federal Title IX rules in two years. DeVos' rules were themselves intended to reverse Obama-era guidance. The Obama policy was embraced by victims advocates but led to hundreds of lawsuits from accused students who said their colleges failed to give them a fair process to defend themselves.

The whiplash has left many schools scrambling to adopt ever-changing rules. Some have pressed for a political middle ground that will protect students without prompting new rules every time the White House changes power.

"It doesn't serve anybody's interest to have this ping-pong effect of changing rules every five years," said S. Daniel Carter, a campus security consultant and president of Safety Advisors for Educational Campuses. "That's just not a good way to get things done. It's very difficult for everyone involved."

DeVos' rules dramatically reshaped the way colleges handle allegations of sexual assault and harassment, with an emphasis on ensuring the constitutional due process rights of the accused.

Under her rules, accused students were given wider rights to review and respond to evidence against them, and students had the right to cross-examine one another through a representative at live hearings.

The live hearing requirement was applauded as a victory for accused students, but it drew intense backlash from other advocates who said it forced victims to relive their trauma.

DeVos also reduced colleges' obligations in responding to complaints. Her policy narrowed the definition of harassment and scaled back the types of cases colleges are required to address. As a result, some campuses have seen steep decreases in the number of Title IX complaints coming in from students.

Under her rules, for example, colleges are not required to investigate most complaints that arise off

campus, and they do not have to act on any complaint unless the alleged misconduct is "severe, pervasive and objectively offensive."

The overhaul was partly meant to lighten the burden on colleges as they mediate complex cases, but some say it ultimately added more work.

Leaders of some colleges have said the DeVos rules are too prescriptive and force them to turn campus discipline systems into miniature courtrooms. Many schools have continued to address all sexual misconduct complaints even if they do not meet the narrowed harassment definition, but they have had to set up separate discipline processes to handle those cases.

Advocates on both sides say that can be confusing for students.

"It shouldn't be that way. It should be, if anything, more uniform — that's the whole reason the Title IX regulations were put into place," said Kimberly Lau, a New York lawyer who represents students in Title IX cases.

Biden's proposal is a major step in keeping his promise to reverse DeVos' rules. He started the process last year when he ordered the Education Department to review the rules, but the agency has been bogged down by a slow-moving rule-making process.

Uvalde victim's sister pleads for tougher gun laws in Texas

By JIM VERTUNO and JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Well before the sun came up Thursday, Jazmin Cazares sat on her sister's bed and wept for the 9-year-old killed in the Uvalde school rampage one month ago.

Then the teenager with purple-streaked hair got up for the four-hour drive to the Texas Capitol, where she tearfully pleaded with lawmakers to pass tougher gun laws and questioned why so many security measures failed.

"I shouldn't have to be here right now. I should be at home watching a movie with my sister," she said through sniffles. "I'm here begging for you guys to do something or to change something, because the people that were supposed to keep her safe at school didn't, they failed."

Her sister Jacklyn — a tough-minded and compassionate girl who dreamed of visiting Paris and becoming a veterinarian — was one of 19 children shot to death inside Robb Elementary School on May 24 before police stormed the classroom and killed the gunman. Two teachers also died.

The massacre and a string of recent mass killings in the U.S. have renewed the debate over gun laws, school safety and how to stop the violence. In Texas, lawmakers have responded to several mass shootings in recent years by making it easier to carry guns, rather than to clamp down.

Jazmin's testimony before a committee of lawmakers looking at how to prevent mass shootings came as Congress moved toward passing its most far-reaching gun violence bill in decades and the U.S. Supreme Court issued a ruling saying Americans have the right to carry firearms in public.

But all that mattered to the 17-year-old about to enter her final year of high school was that something be done to make schools safer. She said she's been doing active shooter drills since she was in pre-kindergarten.

"It's terrifying, not knowing if it's true or not every single time we go into lockdown. And then having to go back to school next year?" she said. "Going to school shouldn't have to be a decision. But it is. I have my senior year, that's it. Am I going to survive it?"

Cazares told lawmakers they could honor the victims by adopting gun background checks and "red flag laws" that allow removing guns from people at extreme risk of harming themselves or others.

The Uvalde gunman was a former student, Salvador Ramos, who days after turning 18 bought the AR-15-style semi-automatic rifle he used in the attack.

"There should be absolutely no reason this murderer could have access to a firearm," Cazares said, who later said she knew committee members were listening when she saw them tear up.

"I felt it. It felt genuine," she said.

The Republican-controlled legislature in Texas has stripped away gun restrictions over the past decade,

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even as the state suffered mass shootings that have killed more than 85 people since 2018.

The state doesn't require a permit to carry a long rifle like the one used in Uvalde, and it allows 18-year-olds to buy them. Last year, lawmakers made it legal for anyone 21 and older to carry a handgun in public without a license, background check or training.

Jazmin Cazares told lawmakers that since the shooting she has reviewed the school's security rules, ticking off a list of requirements that failed to stop the shooter, including that teachers are told to keep their doors locked at all times.

"How, when some of those classroom doors didn't lock?" she said, with family members sitting behind her wearing T-shirts featuring pictures of Jacklyn and the words "Forever in our hearts."

Her family's grief, she said, is compounded by the knowledge that some of what happened at Robb Elementary could have been prevented.

Her little sister, she said, loved singing and dancing and "was one of the sweetest souls anyone would ever meet."

Jacklyn and her cousin, Annabell Rodriguez, were best friends, part of a close-knit quintet of classmates. All five died in the shooting.

Right after Jazmin testified, a woman who lost her parents in a 1991 shooting that left two dozen dead in Killeen, Texas, told the committee that waiting periods for gun sales are "worthless" and gun-free zones should be eliminated.

"Let's be clear that the gun, it's just a tool. It's a tool that can be used to kill a family, but it's a tool that can be used to protect a family," said Suzanna Hupp.

Hupp, a former Republican lawmaker, said she was invited to address the committee by one of its co-chairs. After Hupp spoke, Jacklyn's father, Javier Cazares, followed her into a hallway and they exchanged handshakes and a brief hug.

"There is a bond there, just automatically, unspoken," Hupp said. "In one sense, it was my parents, and they died quickly and they died together. I can't imagine losing a kid. I can't even go there in my head."

Days after the Uvalde tragedy, Javier Cazares, told of how he rushed to the school and kept a close watch on children fleeing the school to catch a glimpse of his 9-year-old "firecracker."

He and other parents grew frustrated that police weren't doing more. "A lot of us were arguing with the police, 'You all need to go in there,'" said Cazares, an Army veteran.

Cazares said Thursday that he still struggles to trust the constantly evolving timelines from state police. "Nobody wants to get blamed for what their actions were that day," he said.

During a break in the hearing, Cazares and his family met with about 10 police chiefs and officers in a hallway. "We failed you," Stan Standridge, chief of police in San Marcos, Texas, told the family.

The delays and mistakes in the law enforcement response are now central to multiple investigations. The head of the Texas state police this week called it an "abject failure," and said the police reaction ignored everything learned since the Columbine High School shooting in Colorado in 1999.

Police had enough officers and firepower to stop the gunman three minutes after he entered the school, Col. Steve McCraw, director of the Texas Department of Public Safety, said Tuesday. But police officers armed with rifles waited in a school hallway for more than an hour before going into the classroom and killing the gunman.

He put much of the blame for the delays on Pete Arredondo, the Uvalde school district police chief who McCraw said was the commander in charge.

The school district put Arredondo on administrative leave on Wednesday. Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District Superintendent Hal Harrell said the facts of what happened remain unclear.

Arredondo has said he didn't consider himself in charge and assumed someone else had taken control. He has declined repeated requests for comment from The Associated Press.

Uvalde's mayor pushed back against casting blame on Arredondo, saying the Department of Public Safety has repeatedly released false information and glossed over the role of its own officers.

Supreme Court expands gun rights, with nation divided

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a major expansion of gun rights after a series of mass shootings, the Supreme Court said Thursday that Americans have a right to carry firearms in public for self-defense, a ruling likely to lead to more people legally armed. The decision came out as Congress and states debate gun-control legislation.

About one-quarter of the U.S. population lives in states expected to be affected by the ruling, which struck down a New York gun law. The high court's first major gun decision in more than a decade split the court 6-3, with the court's conservatives in the majority and liberals in dissent.

Across the street from the court, lawmakers at the Capitol sped toward passage of gun legislation prompted by recent massacres in Texas, New York and California. Senators cleared the way for the measure, modest in scope but still the most far-reaching in decades.

Also Thursday, underscoring the nation's deep divisions over the issue, the sister of a 9-year-old girl killed in the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, pleaded with state lawmakers to pass gun legislation. The Republican-controlled legislature has stripped away gun restrictions over the past decade.

President Joe Biden said in a statement he was "deeply disappointed" by the Supreme Court ruling. It "contradicts both common sense and the Constitution, and should deeply trouble us all," he said.

He urged states to pass new laws. "I call on Americans across the country to make their voices heard on gun safety. Lives are on the line," he said.

The decision struck down a New York law requiring people to demonstrate a particular need for carrying a gun in order to get a license to carry a gun in a concealed way in public. The justices said that requirement violates the Second Amendment right to "keep and bear arms."

Justice Clarence Thomas wrote for the majority that the Constitution protects "an individual's right to carry a handgun for self-defense outside the home." That right is not a "second-class right," Thomas wrote. "We know of no other constitutional right that an individual may exercise only after demonstrating to government officers some special need."

California, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island all have laws similar to New York's. Those laws are expected to be quickly challenged.

Gov. Kathy Hochul, D-N.Y., said the ruling came at a particularly painful time, with New York mourning the deaths of 10 people in a shooting at a supermarket in Buffalo. "This decision isn't just reckless. It's reprehensible. It's not what New Yorkers want," she said.

Gun control groups called the decision a significant setback. Michael Waldman, president of the Brennan Center for Justice and an expert on the Second Amendment, wrote on Twitter that the decision could be the "biggest expansion of gun rights" by the Supreme Court in U.S. history.

Republican lawmakers were among those cheering the decision. Tom King, president of the plaintiff New York State Rifle and Pistol Association, said he was relieved.

"The lawful and legal gun owner of New York State is no longer going to be persecuted by laws that have nothing to do with the safety of the people and will do nothing to make the people safer," he said. "And maybe now we'll start going after criminals and perpetrators of these heinous acts."

The court's decision is somewhat out of step with public opinion. About half of the voters in the 2020 presidential election said gun laws in the U.S. should be made more strict, according to AP VoteCast, an expansive survey of the electorate. An additional one-third said laws should be kept as they are, while only about 1 in 10 said gun laws should be less strict.

About 8 in 10 Democratic voters said gun laws should be made more strict, VoteCast showed. Among Republican voters, roughly half said laws should be kept as they are, while the remaining half closely divided between more and less strict.

In a dissent joined by his liberal colleagues, Justice Stephen Breyer focused on the toll from gun violence. Since the beginning of this year, "there have already been 277 reported mass shootings — an average of more than one per day," Breyer wrote. He accused his colleagues in the majority of acting "without

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considering the potentially deadly consequences" of their decision. He said the ruling would "severely" burden states' efforts to pass laws "that limit, in various ways, who may purchase, carry, or use firearms of different kinds."

Several other conservative justices who joined Thomas' majority opinion also wrote separately to add their views.

Justice Samuel Alito criticized Breyer's dissent, questioning the relevance of his discussion of mass shootings and other gun death statistics. Alito wrote that the court had decided "nothing about who may lawfully possess a firearm or the requirements that must be met to buy a gun" and nothing "about the kinds of weapons that people may possess."

"Today, unfortunately, many Americans have good reason to fear they will be victimized if they are unable to protect themselves." The Second Amendment, he said, "guarantees their right to do so."

Justice Brett Kavanaugh, joined by Chief Justice John Roberts, noted the limits of the decision. States can still require people to get a license to carry a gun, Kavanaugh wrote, and condition that license on "fingerprinting, a background check, a mental health records check, and training in firearms handling and in laws regarding the use of force, among other possible requirements."

Backers of New York's law had argued that striking it down would lead to more guns on the streets and higher rates of violent crime. Gun violence, on the rise during the coronavirus pandemic, has spiked anew. Gun purchases have also risen.

In most of the country gun owners have little difficulty legally carrying their weapons in public. But that had been harder to do in New York and the handful of states with similar laws. New York's law, in place since 1913, says that to carry a concealed handgun in public, a person applying for a license has to show "proper cause," a specific need to carry the weapon.

The state had issued unrestricted licenses where a person could carry a gun anywhere and restricted licenses allowing a person to carry the weapon but just for specific purposes such as hunting and target shooting or to and from their place of business.

The challenge to the New York law was brought by the New York State Rifle & Pistol Association, which describes itself as the nation's oldest firearms advocacy organization, and two men seeking an unrestricted ability to carry guns outside their homes.

The Supreme Court last issued a major gun decision in 2010. In that decision and a ruling from 2008 the justices established a nationwide right to keep a gun at home for self-defense. The question for the court this time was just about carrying a gun outside the home. Thomas, who turned 74 on Thursday, wrote in his opinion that: "Nothing in the Second Amendment's text draws a home/public distinction with respect to the right to keep and bear arms."

European Union makes Ukraine a candidate for EU membership

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN and MIKE CORDER Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union agreed Thursday to put Ukraine on a path toward EU membership, acting with uncharacteristic speed and unity to pull the embattled country further away from Russia's influence and bind it more closely to the West.

Meeting at a summit in Brussels, leaders of the EU's 27 nations mustered the required unanimous approval to grant Ukraine candidate status. That sets in motion a membership process that could take years or even decades.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy tweeted his gratitude and declared: "Ukraine's future is within the EU."

"It's a victory. We have been waiting for 120 days and 30 years," he said on Instagram, referring to the duration of the war and the decades since Ukraine became independent upon the breakup of the Soviet Union. "And now we will defeat the enemy."

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen pronounced it a "good day for Europe."

There was no immediate reaction from the Kremlin.

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The EU also gave candidate status to the tiny country of Moldova, another former Soviet republic that borders Ukraine.

Ukraine applied for membership less than a week after Moscow invaded on Feb. 24. Thursday's decision was unusually rapid for the EU and its go-slow approach to expansion. But the war and Ukraine's request for fast-track consideration lent urgency to the cause.

To gain EU membership, countries must meet a detailed host of economic and political conditions, including a commitment to the rule of law and other democratic principles. Ukraine will have to curb entrenched government corruption and adopt other reforms.

The European Parliament endorsed Ukraine's bid hours before the summit started, passing a resolution that called on EU governments to "move without delay."

"It will strengthen Ukraine, it will strengthen Europe. It is a decision for freedom and democracy and puts us on the right side of history," European Parliament President Roberta Metsola said ahead of the final decision.

The EU nations have been united in backing Ukraine in its fight against Russia's invasion with money and weapons, adopting unprecedented economic sanctions against the Kremlin.

EU candidate status doesn't provide any immediate security guarantees. Once a country gains membership, however, it is covered under an EU treaty clause that says if a member falls victim to armed aggression, the other EU countries are obligated to assist it by all means in their power.

The main benefits of EU membership, though, are economic, since it gives access to a market of 450 million consumers with free movement of labor, goods, services and capital.

Ukraine has long aspired to join NATO, too, but the military alliance is not about to offer an invitation, in part because of the country's corruption, shortcomings in its defense establishment, and its contested borders.

Before the war, Russian President Vladimir Putin demanded that Ukraine never be allowed to join NATO, which he has condemned for its eastward spread toward Russia's flank. But earlier this month, he did not seem bothered by Ukraine's determination to get closer to the EU, saying it is not a military pact and thus "we have no objections."

In 2013, however, Putin objected to Ukraine's plans to sign an association agreement with the EU and pressured the Ukrainian president at the time to pull out at the last minute. This backfired by setting off mass protests that eventually ousted the president and ushered in leaders more eager than ever to bring Ukraine into the Western fold.

In the years that followed, Russia seized the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine and fomented a separatist uprising in the country's Donbas region in the east.

The EU's leaders also agreed Thursday to recognize a "European perspective" for yet another former Soviet republic, Georgia. European Council President Charles Michel said the EU will be ready to approve its candidate status once "outstanding priorities" are addressed.

Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, whose country has been a staunch supporter of Ukraine's European aspirations for years, said on Twitter: "This is a great moment for Europe's unity and for the defense of its basic values. The struggle for freedom goes on."

The membership process can be long and tortuous.

Turkey applied for membership in 1987, received candidate status in 1999, and had to wait until 2005 to start talks for actual entry. The whole process is at a standstill because of various disputes between the EU and Turkey.

Similarly, several Balkan countries have been seeking for many years to join the EU.

European officials have said that Ukraine has already adopted about 70% of the EU rules and standards, but they also have pointed to the need for other far-reaching measures.

Leaders also discussed immediate support to Ukraine, with the European Commission set to soon bring forward a proposal to grant new financial aid of up to 9 billion euros.

Food security was also on the table as they agreed to continue working on solutions to help Ukraine export grain and other goods via "solidarity lanes" to get around a Russian blockade of Black Sea ports.

FDA bans Juul e-cigarettes tied to teen vaping surge

By MATTHEW PERRONE and TOM MURPHY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. health regulators on Thursday ordered Juul to pull its electronic cigarettes from the market, the latest blow to the embattled company widely blamed for sparking a national surge in teen vaping.

The action is part of a sweeping effort by the Food and Drug Administration to bring scientific scrutiny to the multibillion-dollar vaping industry after years of regulatory delays.

The FDA said Juul must stop selling its vaping device and its tobacco and menthol flavored cartridges. Those already on the market must be removed. Consumers aren't restricted from having or using Juul's products, the agency said.

To stay on the market, companies must show that their e-cigarettes benefit public health. In practice, that means proving that adult smokers who use them are likely to quit or reduce their smoking, while teens are unlikely to get hooked on them.

The FDA noted that some of the biggest sellers like Juul may have played a "disproportionate" role in the rise in teen vaping. The agency said Thursday that Juul's application didn't have enough evidence to show that marketing its products "would be appropriate for the protection of the public health."

Juul said it disagrees with the FDA's findings and will seek to put the ban on hold while the company considers its options, including a possible appeal and talking with regulators.

In a statement, the FDA said Juul's application left regulators with significant questions and didn't include enough information to evaluate any potential risks. The agency said the company's research included "insufficient and conflicting data" about things like potentially harmful chemicals leaching from Juul's cartridges.

"Without the data needed to determine relevant health risks, the FDA is issuing these marketing denial orders." Michele Mital, acting director of the FDA's tobacco center, said in the statement.

Joe Murillo, Juul's chief regulatory officer, said in the company's statement that Juul submitted enough information and data to address all issues raised by regulators. He noted that the company's application, submitted more than two years ago, included comparisons to combustible cigarettes and other products.

He said it also included information on potential harmful effects of the company's products.

Since last fall, the FDA has given the OK to tobacco-flavored e-cigarettes from R.J. Reynolds, Logic and other companies. But industry players and anti-tobacco advocates have complained that those products account for just a tiny percent of the \$6 billion vaping market in the U.S.

The agency said Thursday that people who use Juul products or smokers who want to move away from cigarettes and cigars could switch to the FDA-authorized e-cigarettes.

Regulators repeatedly delayed making decisions on devices from market leaders, including Juul, which remains the best-selling vaping brand although sales have dipped.

Last year, the agency rejected applications for more than a million other e-cigarettes and related products, mainly due to their potential appeal to underage teens.

Anti-tobacco groups applauded the FDA's move, with the American Lung Association calling it "long overdue and most welcome." The American Vapor Manufacturers Association said it was a "shameful decision."

E-cigarettes first appeared in the U.S. more than a decade ago with the promise of providing smokers a less harmful alternative. The devices heat a nicotine solution into a vapor that's inhaled, bypassing many of the toxic chemicals produced by burning tobacco.

But studies have reached conflicting results about whether they truly help smokers quit. And efforts by the FDA to rule on vaping products and their claims were repeatedly slowed by industry lobbying and competing political interests.

The vaping market grew to include hundreds of companies selling an array of devices and nicotine solutions in various flavors and strengths.

The vaping issue took on new urgency in 2018 when Juul's high-nicotine, fruity-flavored cartridges quickly became a nationwide craze among middle and high school students. The company faces a slew of federal and state investigations into its early marketing practices, which included distributing free Juul products

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at concerts and parties hosted by young influencers.

In 2019, the company was pressured into halting all advertising and eliminating its fruit and dessert flavors. The next year, the FDA limited flavors in small vaping devices to just tobacco and menthol. Separately, Congress raised the purchase age for all tobacco and vaping products to 21.

But the question of whether e-cigarettes should remain on the market at all remained.

The FDA has been working under a court order to render its decisions; anti-tobacco groups successfully sued the agency to speed up its review.

Kenneth Warner, a tobacco expert at the University of Michigan's school of public health, suspects political pressure from those groups played a role in the FDA's decision.

"I think they would have had a hard time coming to any other conclusion," said Warner, who had not seen Juul's application. He added that he does not take tobacco money.

In response, an FDA spokesman said the company didn't provide enough information for a full risk assessment of its products, and that alone would prevent the agency from finding in favor of Juul.

While Juul remains a top seller, a recent federal survey shows that teens have been shifting away from the company.

Overall, the survey showed a drop of nearly 40% in the teen vaping rate as many kids were forced to learn from home during the pandemic. Still, federal officials cautioned about interpreting the results given they were collected online for the first time, instead of in classrooms.

The brainchild of two Stanford University students, Juul launched in 2015 and within two years rocketed to the top of the vaping market. Juul still accounts for nearly 50% of the U.S. e-cigarette market. It once controlled more than 75%.

Tobacco giant Altria, which makes Marlboro cigarettes, paid nearly \$13 billion for a 35% stake in Juul in 2018.

On Tuesday, the FDA also laid out plans to establish a maximum nicotine level for certain tobacco products to reduce their addictiveness. In that announcement, the agency also noted that it has invested in a multimedia public education campaign aimed at warning young people about the potential risks of e-cigarette use.

Settlement would forgive \$6B for defrauded college students

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

The Biden administration has agreed to cancel \$6 billion in student loans for about 200,000 former students who say they were defrauded by their colleges, according to a proposed settlement in a Trump-era lawsuit.

The agreement filed Wednesday in San Francisco federal court would automatically cancel federal student debt for students who were enrolled at one of more than 150 colleges and later applied for debt cancellation because of alleged misconduct by the schools.

Almost all the schools involved are for-profit colleges. The list includes DeVry University, the University of Phoenix and other chains still in operation, along with many that have folded in recent years, including ITT Technical Institute.

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said in a statement that the settlement would resolve the claims "in a manner that is fair and equitable for all parties."

The deal has yet to be approved by a federal judge. A hearing on the proposal is scheduled for July 28.

If approved, it would mark a major step in the Biden administration's efforts to clear a backlog of claims filed through the borrower defense program, which allows students to get their federal loans erased if their schools made false advertising claims or otherwise misled them.

The class-action suit was initially filed by seven former students who argued that President Donald Trump's education secretary, Betsy DeVos, had intentionally stalled the borrower defense process while she rewrote its rules. When the suit was filed, no final decision had been made on any claims for more than a year.

When the department under DeVos started deciding claims months later, it issued tens of thousands of

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denials, often without any explanation. At the time, the judge overseeing the case blasted DeVos for the “blistering pace” of rejections, saying her approach “hangs borrowers out to dry.”

Tens of thousands of borrowers were still in limbo when the Biden administration took over and started negotiating a settlement in 2021, according to court documents. The latest federal data shows there are more than 100,000 pending claims for borrower defense.

Under the proposed settlement, anyone who attended an eligible school and applied for cancellation as of Wednesday would get their federal student loans and interest fully forgiven. They would also get refunds for past payments made on those loans.

An additional 68,000 plaintiffs who did not attend eligible schools will get a “streamlined review” of their claims. The oldest claims will get reviewed first, while the most recent ones will get a decision within 2½ years.

All borrowers who were caught up in DeVos’ flurry of denials will have their rejections revoked and their claims will be treated as if they have been pending since the date they were originally filed.

The Project on Predatory Student Lending, which represented students in the suit, said the agreement will help create a “fair, just and efficient for future borrowers.”

“This momentous proposed settlement will deliver answers and certainty to borrowers who have fought long and hard for a fair resolution of their borrower defense claims after being cheated by their schools and ignored or even rejected by their government,” said Eileen Connor, director of the project.

Borrower defense claims are typically reviewed individually, but the Education Department decided to grant automatic cancellation in this case because of “common evidence of institutional misconduct” at the schools in question, according to the settlement.

At some schools, there was already proof of “substantial misconduct,” while others were included because of high rates of claims coming from their former students, according to the deal.

The borrower defense process was started by Congress in 1994 but was rarely used until the collapse of the Corinthian Colleges chain in 2015. The for-profit company closed its campuses amid widespread findings of fraud, prompting thousands of students to apply for debt cancellation.

That led the Obama administration to expand the program and create clearer rules. It became the centerpiece of the administration’s efforts to crack down on for-profit colleges that lied or used high-pressure tactics to recruit students. Students at Corinthian and other chains said they enrolled on promises that they would land high-paying jobs, only to graduate with few job prospects.

Earlier this month the Biden administration agreed to cancel federal student debt for anyone who attended a Corinthian school from the company’s founding in 1995 to its collapse two decades later. The action will erase \$5.8 billion in debt for more than 560,000 borrowers, the largest single discharge in the Education Department’s history.

The settlement adds to the administration’s effort to cancel student debt for certain groups of borrowers. It has erased billions of additional dollars in debt from other former for-profit college students, along with borrowers who have severe disabilities and those with jobs in public service.

Biden has also faced mounting pressure to pursue mass student debt cancellation. The White House recently signaled that it is considering canceling \$10,000, but no decision has been reached.

World’s biggest bacterium found in Caribbean mangrove swamp

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Scientists have discovered the world’s largest bacterium in a Caribbean mangrove swamp.

Most bacteria are microscopic, but this one is so big it can be seen with the naked eye.

The thin white filament, approximately the size of a human eyelash, is “by far the largest bacterium known to date,” said Jean-Marie Volland, a marine biologist at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and co-author of a paper announcing the discovery Thursday in the journal *Science*.

Olivier Gros, a co-author and biologist at the University of the French West Indies and Guiana, found the first example of this bacterium — named *Thiomargarita magnifica*, or “magnificent sulfur pearl” — clinging

to sunken mangrove leaves in the archipelago of Guadeloupe in 2009.

But he didn't immediately know it was a bacterium because of its surprisingly large size -- these bacteria, on average, reach a length of a third of an inch (0.9 centimeters). Only later genetic analysis revealed the organism to be a single bacterial cell.

"It's an amazing discovery," said Petra Levin, a microbiologist at Washington University in St Louis, who was not involved in the study. "It opens up the question of how many of these giant bacteria are out there — and reminds us we should never, ever underestimate bacteria."

Gros also found the bacterium attached to oyster shells, rocks and glass bottles in the swamp.

Scientists have not yet been able to grow it in lab culture, but the researchers' say the cell has a structure that's unusual for bacteria. One key difference: It has a large central compartment, or vacuole, that allows some cell functions to happen in that controlled environment instead of throughout the cell.

"The acquisition of this large central vacuole definitely helps a cell to bypass physical limitations ... on how big a cell can be," said Manuel Campos, a biologist at the French National Center for Scientific Research, who was not involved in the study.

The researchers said they aren't certain why the bacterium is so large, but co-author Volland hypothesized it may be an adaptation to help it avoid being eaten by smaller organisms.

Michigan to destroy some blood spots in fight over consent

By ED WHITE Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — The state of Michigan has agreed to destroy more than 3 million dried blood spots taken from babies and kept in storage, a partial settlement in an ongoing lawsuit over consent and privacy in the digital age.

At the state's direction, hospitals have routinely pricked the heels of newborns to draw blood to check for more than 50 rare diseases. That practice, which is widespread across the U.S., isn't being challenged. Rather, the dispute is over leftover samples.

A blood spot from each child is stored in Lansing while five more are sent to the Michigan Neonatal Biobank in Detroit for safekeeping under climate-controlled conditions.

Scientists can pay a fee to use the Detroit-stored samples for various research projects. Research with newborn blood spots occurs in other states, too, especially California, New York and Minnesota where they can be kept for decades.

Texas in 2009 agreed to destroy millions of spots to settle a lawsuit over privacy.

Since 2010, Michigan must have permission from parents to use spots for research. But attorney Philip Ellison argues that the program still violates constitutional protections against searches and seizures and might not be fully understood by parents who are presented with forms amid the fog of childbirth.

Ellison claims the consent form and a related brochure are vague, making no reference, for example, to the state collecting fees for blood spots used by scientists.

"If moms and dads say, 'Use them. I don't care' — that's their business," he told The Associated Press. "But the state is not giving them enough information to make an informed decision. ... Most people have no recollection of signing anything. My wife had a C-section. She was still groggy 12 hours later from all the drugs pumped into her from giving birth."

Ashley Kanuszewski acknowledged that she signed forms allowing blood spots from two babies to be added to the research bank but doesn't recall receiving an informational brochure at the hospital.

"I don't like not knowing where or what they're using it for," said Kanuszewski, one of four parents who sued in 2018.

In May, after four years of litigation, the health department said it would destroy certain blood spots stored in Lansing over the next 18 months and stop adding to that inventory, according to an agreement filed in federal court in Bay City.

Those spots number 3.4 million, spokeswoman Lynn Sutfin said.

Sutfin declined to explain why the state agreed to get rid of them, citing the ongoing litigation. But in

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2021, U.S. District Judge Thomas Ludington said the state had no specific permission from parents to keep a single leftover blood spot in Lansing.

The state has described them as spots that could be used by parents in case future health questions arise.

The agreement to destroy those spots doesn't end the case. Still in play: Millions that are under the state's control at Wayne State University in Detroit and available for research, including many that precede May 2010 when the health department began asking for parental consent.

In the months ahead, Ludington will hold a trial to try to determine how many blood spots really are needed for newborn disease screening, including to calibrate critical testing equipment, among other issues.

The health department is defending how it runs the program. It emphasizes that no spots are stored for research unless parents or guardians give permission. Spots also can be destroyed upon request, though the number of people who take that step each year is very small.

A code — not someone's name — is attached to blood spots that are stored in Detroit, making privacy risk during research "very low," the state said.

"We only allow activities which pertain to public health for benefit of all, for public good, for getting better testing in the future, for discovering more and so on," Sandip Shah, director of the state's public health laboratory, said in an interview with lawyers.

The department publishes a list of approved research. The state last year, for example, signed off on scientists using 3,600 newborn blood spots to determine exposure to so-called forever chemicals known as PFAS in western Michigan. Other projects have involved for-profit companies.

"How this court resolves the issues presented by plaintiffs could dramatically impact the biomedical research environment, potentially chilling scientific progress critical to protecting public health," the Association of Public Health Laboratories said in a court filing.

In 2009, Texas agreed to destroy millions of newborn blood spots that were kept without consent. Spots obtained since 2012 now are destroyed after two years unless Texas parents agree to have them stored longer for research.

New Mexico election drama has roots in wider county movement

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and MORGAN LEE Associated Press

SANTA FE, New Mexico (AP) — A rural New Mexico county's initial refusal to certify its primary election results sent ripples across the country last week, a symbol of how even the most elemental functions of democracy have become politicized pressure points amid the swirl of lies stemming from the 2020 presidential outcome.

After the Otero County Commission finally relented, one question persisted: Why New Mexico, a state that has not been a political battleground and where Joe Biden beat Donald Trump handily two years ago?

The seeds of the short-lived election crisis, which ended amid a showdown with the secretary of state and an order from the New Mexico Supreme Court, had been planted months before, when David Clements, a lawyer who has gained prominence in conservative circles, and others began raising conspiracy theories and false claims about the last presidential election that came to dominate political discussion in the heavily Republican county.

But it's not just Otero County where local election administration is in the crosshairs of conspiracy theorists, and it's not just Clements involved in the effort.

Across the country, supporters and allies of former President Donald Trump have been meeting with local officials — sowing doubts about the 2020 election, seeking access to voting equipment and pressing for changes that would upend election administration in their counties. The effort has led to security breaches of voting equipment and, in New Mexico, chaos surrounding what has historically been a routine task.

"You have seen a whole bunch of people — some sincere, some perhaps less sincere — who have rushed to fill the demand to provide evidence of the fraud that Trump created," said David Levine, a former election official who is now a fellow with the Alliance for Securing Democracy.

There was no widespread fraud in the 2020 presidential election that could have changed the outcome.

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Even before the Nov. 3, 2020, election, Trump was telling his supporters that fraud was the only way he could lose re-election, pointing mostly — and without evidence — to the expansion of mail-in voting during the pandemic.

In the months since, there has been no evidence to support the claims. They have been dismissed by dozens of judges, by Trump's attorney general at the time, and by a coalition of federal and state election and cybersecurity officials who called the 2020 vote the "most secure" in U.S. history.

That hasn't stopped the false claims from proliferating, driven by a group of Trump supporters who appear at many of the same events and engage with each other regularly.

Clements, a former assistant district attorney in southern New Mexico and former business professor at New Mexico State University, has traveled the country speaking with local government boards, at conservative conventions and to church groups. He was at the "cybersymposium" last year held by MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell, a key Trump ally who has sought to prove voting machines were somehow manipulated to favor Biden.

Clements' popular social media feed on Telegram frequently weaves pronouncements about democracy with scripture and prayer. It also includes video chats with the like-minded.

In one video from March, Clements chatted with Jim Marchant, a Trump loyalist from Nevada who claims elections have long been rigged. Marchant recently won the Republican primary for secretary of state, Nevada's top elections position. He has been a key organizer of a group of "America First" candidates this year who either deny the outcome of the 2020 presidential election or promote the idea that elections in the U.S. are corrupt.

In the video, Clements and Marchant discuss a "county commission strategy" that involves pressuring local officials to get rid of the "cheat" machines so that all ballots are not only cast by hand but also counted by hand. Election experts say hand-counting of ballots is not only less accurate but extremely labor-intensive, potentially delaying results by weeks if not months. They also say it's unnecessary because voting equipment is tested before and after elections to ensure ballots are read and tallied correctly.

A day earlier, county officials in Nye County, Nevada, had voted to request that the county clerk not use ballot tabulators in the upcoming November election. The clerk is opposed to the move and has decided to retire after the primary. Marchant was among those urging commissioners to make the move.

"It was the first domino to fall to allow us to get back to fair and transparent elections here in the country," Marchant told Clements. "And we're going to do it with many more counties right here in Nevada, and hopefully this will encourage others in other states to do the same thing."

Clements was excited about the development and promised to push counties to do the same in his home state of New Mexico, where he once sought the Republican nomination for U.S. Senate.

"Shouldn't the commissioners care about whether I trust the system or not?" Clements told Marchant. "I love how you just cut through all the noise."

This week, Clements is scheduled to appear at an event in Louisiana with Douglas Frank, another Lindell associate who has been traveling the country meeting with state and local officials. In May 2021, Frank met with members of the Ohio Secretary of State's Office offering to scrutinize their voting procedures, boasting he's been working with county officials in 22 states.

"You either come onto our team and we can audit it together and show that there was no malfeasance, or you can oppose us," Frank told agency staff, according to an audio recording. The office did not accept the offer.

For months now, Clements has been pushing Republican-leaning counties in New Mexico to launch partisan reviews of the 2020 election, similar to the much-maligned effort in Arizona coordinated by Republicans in one chamber of the state's legislature. In Otero County, which Trump won by a wide margin, Clements and his wife, Erin, have been conducting an informal and unpaid review of the county's 2020 election procedures.

The result has been a series of hourslong presentations to the county commission about unproven vulnerabilities in vote-tallying machines and patterns in voter registration activity. The Clements, who list Las Cruces as their residence, did not respond to requests for an interview.

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Earlier this month, when Otero County commissioners were considering whether to discontinue the use of ballot tabulators, the couple again made a presentation. It prompted a rebuttal from Otero County Clerk Robyn Holmes.

"There is a lot of things they have found, that they are saying, that are not true," Holmes said.

Nonetheless, the commissioners — led by Couy Griffin, co-founder of "Cowboys for Trump," who was convicted of entering restricted U.S. Capitol grounds during the Jan. 6 insurrection — voted to stop using the ballot tabulators before the November election.

Clements was among those urging Otero County commissioners against certification of the June 7 primary results, repeating conspiracy theories about voting equipment that trace back to the days immediately following the 2020 election. Holmes, the clerk, said the primary was conducted without problems.

Clements also went to Torrance County, another conservative stronghold in New Mexico, to urge commissioners to defy authorities and refuse to certify their primary results. During the meeting last Friday, the crowd hurled insults of "traitors" and "cowards" at commissioners before they voted — unanimously — to certify the results.

Election officials and experts have expressed concern that local certification boards in other states that are receptive to conspiracy theories surrounding voting machines might be inspired to follow Otero County's example, wreaking havoc with election results.

Counties in Nevada have until Friday to sign off on the results of the state's June 14 primary. Nye County commissioners, who want to stop using ballot tabulators, are scheduled to meet to consider certification on Friday. They have not said publicly what they plan to do.

Judge approves \$1B+ deal in deadly Florida condo collapse

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — A judge gave final approval Thursday to a settlement topping \$1 billion for victims of the collapse of a Florida beachfront condominium building that killed 98 people, one of the deadliest building failures in U.S. history.

The decision by Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Michael Hanzman came a day before the one-year anniversary of the Champlain Towers South disaster in the Miami suburb of Surfside. The judge praised the dozens of lawyers involved for averting what could have been years of litigation with no sure outcome for victims.

"It will never be enough to compensate them for the tragic loss they have suffered," the judge said. "This settlement is the best we can do. It's a remarkable result. It is extraordinary."

The deal sets up a \$1.02 billion fund for people who lost family members in the collapse of the 12-story building, as well as those who suffered physical or mental injuries. Attorneys said another \$200 million is available from the Champlain Towers condo association itself, including insurance.

About \$100 million is earmarked for legal fees — that number will be finalized in September — and \$96 million set aside for owners who lost one of the 136 units in the building based on the assessed value of each one. They range from more expensive four-bedroom units with ocean views to those of lesser value with just one bedroom.

The process of determining the value of claims for the 98 deaths and any injuries will conclude by Aug. 26, Hanzman said. Each person who filed a claim by a July 18 deadline has a right to a private hearing before a judge, but that is not required.

The issue will be figuring out how much a life or injury is worth. Compensation claims for loss of life typically involve several factors and could include, for example, the lifetime earning potential of the deceased.

"My goal is really to make it as painless as possible," Hanzman said.

No victims filed objections to the settlement or decided to opt out, said court-appointed receiver Michael Goldberg. Several people who lost family members or property said in court Thursday that they are grateful for such a swift conclusion to a horrific experience.

Raysa Rodriguez, who survived the collapse in a ninth-floor unit that was initially left intact, had nothing but praise for the outcome.

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"You have no idea what a relief this is to me personally," Rodriguez said. "I am so exhausted. I just want this to be done. I want these souls to rest."

The ruling came during what's called a fairness hearing, in which anyone with objections to the deal could raise them as the judge determined whether the settlement is "fair, reasonable and adequate," according to court documents.

The money comes from 37 different sources, including insurance companies, engineering firms and a luxury condominium whose recent construction next door is suspected of contributing to structural damage of Champlain Towers South. None of the parties admit any wrongdoing.

A billionaire developer from Dubai is set to purchase the 1.8-acre (1-hectare) beachside site for \$120 million, contributing to the settlement. That transaction is expected to close by the end of July.

People could begin receiving checks for their losses in September, the judge said.

Champlain Towers South had a long history of maintenance problems and questions have been raised about the quality of its original construction and inspections in the early 1980s. Other possible factors include sea level rise caused by climate change and damage caused by salt water intrusion.

A final conclusion on the cause is likely years away. The National Institute of Standards and Technology, which is leading the federal probe in to the collapse, recently said invasive testing will begin soon on samples of material from the collapse site.

The tests will help investigators find potential flaws in structural elements of the building by looking into things such as density of the materials, how porous they were and if there was corrosion, NIST said.

Florida will require statewide recertification of condominiums more than three stories tall under new legislation Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law last month in response to the disaster.

The death toll in the Champlain Towers collapse ranks among the highest in U.S. history among similar disasters. The 1981 Hyatt Regency walkway collapse killed 114 people and a Massachusetts mill disaster in 1860 killed between 88 and 145 workers.

Rick Astley revisits his career-making song with 'gratitude'

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — How does Rick Astley handle one of his songs being part of the biggest internet meme of all time? He rolls with it, obviously.

"Listen, let's face it, 'Never Gonna Give You Up' has sort of become something else," he says. "The video and the song have drifted off into the ether and become something else, and I'm ever so grateful for it."

That song turns 35 this year and is still very much alive, buoyed by a second chapter as a gentle joke wherein someone baits you with an enticing online link, which points instead to the video for this 1987 dance-pop smash. It's called Rickrolling.

Thirty-five years later, Astley is singing it this summer on tour with New Kids on the Block, Salt-N-Pepa and En Vogue for the 57-date "The Mixtape Tour 2022." A remastered version of his 1987 debut album also has been released featuring, of course, "Never Gonna Give You Up."

"I'm never going to have a song as big as that ever, and I kind of knew that while it was happening. I kind of thought, 'We're never going to beat this.' But I also kind of thought, 'Well, how bad is that?'"

There has always been much more to Astley than just that song. After blowing up in the late 1980s, he left show business frustrated and has only recently reemerged with the strong albums "50" in 2016 and "Beautiful Life" in 2018.

"Often the second act can be more enjoyable because you're more in control and you savor every minute," said Alistair Norbury, president of repertoire and marketing at BMG UK, which signed Astley.

The passage of time — and the fact that Astley is such a sweet guy — has softened any sharpness. He says he understands how the past can look different with rose-colored glasses. Rock stars have lately told him they love his voice.

"And I'm like, 'Really? I thought you would have strung me up in the village square,'" he says, laughing. "They probably would have done at the time, but I think over time, I think it just changes your perspective."

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Astley, 56, is the youngest of four who grew up near Manchester, England. His sister played a lot of progressive rock and adored David Bowie. A brother was a huge Queen fan, and he remembers Queen's "Night at the Opera" album played on a loop. Astley soaked it all in, from Stevie Wonder to The Smiths.

He was in a band in school — they once performed "So Lonely" by The Police with Astley on drums and singing — that wiped the floor with rivals at a battle of the bands. He would go to gigs and dream of being a music star.

He remembers being astounded one day when he spotted the bass player of The Smiths walking through town. "This can happen?" he recalls thinking. "You can be from a town that I buy my records in but last week you were on 'Top of the Pops?'"

Astley was only in his early 20s while recording his debut album, "Whenever You Need Somebody," with the songwriting and record production trio known as Stock Aitken Waterman, who had crafted songs for Bananarama and Dead or Alive.

"I sold a lot of records. I was having a lot of hits, and then it was getting to a point where it's like touch and go — how is this going to go now because you have to make another record?"

Burned out and frustrated, he walked away at 27. "I think I just didn't have it in me. I just didn't. I didn't want to do it," he says.

He admires pop stars like Madonna or Kylie Minogue for their longevity. "I actually don't know how they've done it," he says.

Being a pop star messes with your head and Astley says that happened to him, too. "I think my days were numbered anyway, but I think I just managed to get out before they threw me out, you know?" He didn't perform for 15 years.

Unlike other pop stars, he hadn't invested his ego in his looks or others' perceptions. "I was never cool. I wasn't cool when I had my hit records," he says. Astley has nothing but compassion for those chewed up by the fame monster. "It must be unbelievably painful."

Astley reemerged from self-exile in 2016 with "50," named, with a hat-tip to Adele, for his age at the time, a strong album that veers from gospel to electro-funky.

Norbury recalls hearing the first few demos on the album and being impressed. He asked Astley's manager who wrote them. The answer was "Rick Astley." He asked who was the co-writer? "The answer was, 'Nobody.' Who produced? 'Rick.' Then who played all the instruments? 'He played all the instruments.'"

Norbury calls Astley "probably one of the hardest working people in this business and always does it with good humor and with a spirit of collaboration and partnership."

Rickrolling started in 2007 — at the infancy of YouTube — and it confused Astley at the beginning. His song and video for "Never Gonna Give You Up" were being used as part of an internet bait-and-switch, but what did it mean?

"I was overthinking it and worrying about it and wondering what it was. And our daughter said to me — she was about 15 at the time — she just kind of said, 'You do realize it's got nothing to do with you?'" She also predicted: "There'll be something else next week or tomorrow."

"She was slightly wrong because it's still kind of kicking around here and there," says Astley. "But the sentiment of what she was saying was, I think, really, really valuable. I embrace my past, but I don't have to embrace the Rickrolling thing in the same way because I accept the fact that it's got nothing to do with me to some degree."

The song has racked up 1.2 billion streams on YouTube and 559 million Spotify listens. Time Out magazine was always a little puzzled by Rickrolling, asking why anyone wouldn't want to hear the buoyant megajam, saying it is "three and a half of the most effervescent minutes in the '80s canon."

Astley, of course, sees "Never Gonna Give You Up" differently than the people who use it to try to mess with friends. He acknowledges the video is "unbelievably late-'80s cheesy" but "it's a good memory. It's like a fond memory."

For Astley, it is the song that led him to Copenhagen, where he met his wife, Lene Bausager. Without that song, he wouldn't have his daughter or have traveled the world. "I've been to some of the most

amazing places in the world that most people have on a bucket list.”

He thinks back to the days when he was a new artist looking up to established acts. Now he’s a seasoned pro with an arsenal of songs, including an instant crowd-pleaser.

“At the time, I was like green with envy and felt totally insecure and all the rest of it. Now, when I walk out on a stage and sing those songs, I just kind of think, ‘Yeah, how lucky am I? Ain’t that great?’”

Black veteran groups seek policy agenda on racial inequities

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

As a young man in Memphis, Tennessee, Robert Dabney Jr. wanted to blaze a path that could set his family up for a better life. So two weeks after high school graduation in 1998, at age 18, he joined the U.S. Army.

During nine years of service that included two tours in Iraq, Dabney was a combat medical specialist. But after he left the Army in 2007 and returned to Memphis, married with children, he struggled to see what he’d gained from his service.

“I had exchanged my youth, ambition and vigor for a future that is limited just because of my mental health,” said Dabney, who was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and depression in 2013.

His experience seeking treatment through the veterans health care system was plagued with challenges, he said. After navigating the system as a Black veteran, he wondered if he might help others find more culturally competent services that the federal government seemed ill-equipped to provide.

Testimony like Dabney’s was being shared at the first-ever national policy conference for Black veterans in Washington on Thursday. Representatives from nearly 20 advocacy groups for service members of color were collaborating on a legislative agenda addressing longstanding racial, economic and social inequities facing more than 2 million Black American veterans.

“For many people from Black and brown (veterans) communities, we’re starting from a different place in life,” said Dabney, 42. “Being able to talk to people who started from that place, who have a mindset similar to yours as they went through the military, has a different meaning to us.”

In addition to disparities in the military justice system, homelessness and unemployment, federal veterans benefits data show Black service members’ post-Sept. 11 disability claims have been granted at lower rates than their white counterparts. Advocates say racial inequality in veterans’ benefit access stifles or, worse, upends the lives of those who proudly served their country.

“The system isn’t accommodating us, we’re accommodating it,” said Victor LaGroon, chairman of the Black Veterans Empowerment Council, which organized Thursday’s conference. “We’ve got to have these systemic and legislative discussions because, until there’s full transparency and accountability, people are going to continue to skirt the issues.”

Slated speakers include the secretaries of the Veterans Affairs and Labor departments, as well as officials from some state and local veterans service agencies.

Richard Brookshire, a former Army combat medic who served in the Afghanistan War, said a major goal is to help the Black veterans community coalesce around “what’s actionable” in a broader agenda that also targets historic inequity dating back to Black veterans serving in World War II.

“There needs to be a critical mass in the Black veteran community to demand it,” said Brookshire, who co-founded the Black Veterans Project. “The seed has been planted and we’re going to begin to see the tree bear fruit.”

The Black Veterans Empowerment Council was formed in 2020 amid the national reckoning that followed the murder of George Floyd by police, as a roundtable of Black veterans groups to advise the House Veterans Affairs Committee. Council members said part of their work has been acquiring data to prove how Black veterans have unequal access to the benefits system.

According to Veterans Benefits Administration records analyzed by the Veterans Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law School and reviewed by The Associated Press, there are statistically significant differences in disability claim outcomes for Black and white veterans. Although disability claim approval rates are low

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across the board, they are significantly lower for Black veterans.

Between 2002 and 2020, Black veterans had the lowest claim approval rate, at 30.3%, when compared to their non-Black counterparts. White veterans had 37.1% of their claims approved, while Hispanic veterans had an approval rate of 36% and Asian or Pacific Islander veterans had a rate of 30.7%.

Linda Mann, co-founder of the African American Redress Network at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, led a group of students that did an additional analysis on the benefits data. According to their findings, disparities in how Black veterans are rated on the severity of their condition amounted to lower disability compensation and decreased eligibility for other VA benefits.

These findings build on historic racial inequities in veterans benefits that stretch back to integration of the armed services in the late 1940s. Black service members who fought in World War II were either denied or prevented from taking full advantage of housing and educational benefits through the GI Bill. Black veterans of the Korean War had similar experiences with the program. Advocates say the generational effects of that discrimination, in terms of wealth, are still being felt today.

"What most people would usually say is we went through the civil rights movement and things are better," Mann said, but that was not borne out by the Freedom of Information Act statistics the advocacy groups received.

"The continued inequity on the part of the military and VA tracked in not only the FOIA data that we looked at, but also in the practices and policies," Mann said.

VA press secretary Terrence Hayes said the Biden administration's focus on equity across the federal government has had significant implications for the agency's approach in delivering benefits "to all veterans, and specifically to historically marginalized and underserved veterans."

"We have used veterans' voices as our North Star," Hayes said in a statement.

Last year, the Black Veterans Project and the National Veterans Council for Legal Redress sued the VA over its Freedom of Information Act requests for benefits data by race. They won the access. In April, the White House released a summary of the VA's equity action plan, in which the agency acknowledged race and gender disparities for veteran benefit access.

Dabney ultimately did blaze a better path for himself, going to college and becoming a hospital chaplain in Chicago. But it took overcoming a descent into alcoholism, infidelity and self-neglect before he found his calling.

After his diagnosis for PTSD and depression, he was connected to mental health counseling services through the VA at a community-based outpatient center near Chicago. The assigned counselor, a white woman, frustrated Dabney because he felt she could not relate to the complexities of his identities as a war veteran and a Black man from rough beginnings in Memphis.

"I got to the point where I would just say 'Yes. Yes, that's it,'" Dabney recalled. "Instead of me advocating for myself, I began to mold what I said based on what I thought that they could understand. In doing so, I wasn't able to really open up and present my full self to them."

He was ready to give up, but what he really needed was a peer encouraging him to stick with it, he said.

Now, Dabney manages a peer apprentice program at the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance in Chicago. The program helps other Black veterans through a network of peer-directed mental health resources.

"It's those relationships that encourage individuals to seek further help, to seek help from clinicians," Dabney said.

Walidah Bennett, founder and director of a multi-faith veterans initiative at DePaul University in Chicago is working to provide Black churches and clergy with resources to serve veterans in their congregations.

Bennett's son, Saad Muhammad, a veteran of the Iraq War, died by suicide in 2013, and in the 10 years since his death, she has established 15 community sites for veterans in crisis. Suicide rates among Black veterans have been on the rise, increasing from 11.8% to 14.5% between 2001 and 2019, though rates remain highest among white veterans, according to the VA's 2021 annual report on veteran suicide prevention.

"Had we had the community spaces that we have today, it could have been very helpful to my son," Bennett said.

Title IX: NCAA report shows stark gap in funding for women

By AARON BEARD AP Sports Writer

The number of women competing at the highest level of college athletics continues to rise along with an increasing funding gap between men's and women's sports programs, according to an NCAA report examining the 50th anniversary of Title IX.

The report, released Thursday morning and entitled "The State of Women in College Sports," found 47.1% of participation opportunities were for women across Division I in 2020 compared to 26.4% in 1982.

Yet, amid that growth, men's programs received more than double that of women's programs in allocated resources in 2020 – and that gap was even more pronounced when looking at some of the most profitable revenue-generating sports: the Football Bowl Subdivision, the top tier within Division I that features the Alabamas, Ohio States and Southern Californias of the sports world.

"It tells you schools are investing a huge amount of money in the moneymakers," NCAA managing director for the office of inclusion and lead report author Amy Wilson told The Associated Press, referring to football as the primary revenue-generating sport along with men's basketball.

"It speaks to the business side of what college sports has become."

The gender gap in funding approached nearly 3-to-1 ratios when examining expenditures for recruiting as well as compensation for head coaches and assistant coaches. And that gap isn't new, even with increased expenditures for women across all three divisions.

The difference between median total expenses for men's and women's programs at FBS schools, in particular, has grown from \$12.7 million in 2009 to \$25.6 million in 2019.

Wilson said those discrepancies don't automatically amount to a violation of Title IX, which ensures equity between men and women in education and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any education program or activity receiving federal funds. But they raise concerns when evaluating whether schools are providing equitable opportunities for, and treatment of, male and female athletes, and how they're spending to achieve those goals.

"Yes, the numbers are stark. It's not a little difference, it's a big difference," she said. "This milestone Title IX anniversary is an opportune time for recommitment to funding equitable participation opportunities, experiences, and financial aid for student-athletes in men's and women's athletics programs."

Title IX compliance can be measured in multiple ways, including whether the overall program's gender breakdown is proportionate to that of the general student body. And yet, the study found Division I athletics couldn't match that standard when examining data from 2020; women accounted for 54% of the undergraduate student body in Division I compared to that aforementioned 47.1% rate.

"I think it's enough of a gap that we need to ask ourselves: ... are there opportunities that could be created and more teams that could be formed?" Wilson said.

Thursday's Title IX anniversary comes at a time when the governing body for college sports recently updated its transgender policy, as well as facing criticism for failing to ensure equity for last year's men's and women's basketball tournaments following a scathing outside review.

Other takeaways from the report:

LACK OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Fewer women are filling head-coaching roles since President Nixon signed Title IX into law.

The percentage of women's teams led by female coaches declined from better than 90% in 1972 to 41% in 2020 among all three divisions. There were fewer women's teams at that time and the study attributes the decline to more men coaching women's teams, enough to outnumber women's coaches by the late 1980s, with no corresponding increase of women coaching men's programs.

These low women-coaching-women numbers don't surprise Richard Lapchick, director of The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport at Central Florida. TIDES annually compiles report cards examining diversity hiring for college sports and professional leagues, with its most recent report on FBS schools released in January.

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"Without movement," Lapchick told the AP. "It's as baffling as any statistic we report on. Usually there's some marginal improvement on some issues. And this one is barely budging."

As for athletic directors, women have accounted for roughly 20% or less of ADs dating to 1980 after dropping "drastically" and 23.9% in 2020, according to the study.

The outlier among women in leadership roles has been conference commissioners, with women outpacing men in acquiring those positions in the past five years and accounting for 31% of those roles for 2019-20, according to the study.

DIVERSITY CONCERNS

The report also noted a lack of women of color in those leadership roles.

The report found that roughly 16% of women working as head coaches of women's teams and 16% of female athletics directors across all divisions were minorities in 2019-20. Those percentages have increased "slightly" from five years ago.

HIGH SCHOOL DROPOFFS

Going back to high-school athletics, the report found that girls participation numbers have yet to reach that of boys in the 1971-72 school year leading to the law's implementation.

At the time, participation opportunities for boys measured at nearly 3.7 million, more than 264,000 higher than girls had as recently as 2019.

"I think it's a reminder that for those who say, 'Girls and women can play any sport they want, it's 50 years after Title IX,' the college data and the high school data shows there's still pretty big participation gaps," Wilson said. "And I don't think it's that they don't want to play. I think we've got to think more about: what are the barriers to that access?"

Fin-tastic! Growing 'mermaiding' subculture makes a splash

By KRISTEN GELINEAU Associated Press

SYDNEY (AP) — There was a pivotal moment in Queen Pangke Tabora's life that eclipsed all others: It was the moment, she says, when she first slid her legs into a mermaid tail.

For the transgender Filipina woman approaching middle age, seeing her legs encased in vibrant, scaly-looking neoprene three years ago was the realization of a childhood dream. And it marked the beginning of her immersion into a watery world where she would find acceptance. The former insurance company worker described the experience of gliding under water, half-human and half-fish, as "meditation in motion."

"The feeling was mermai-zing," Tabora said one recent morning while lounging in a fiery red tail on a rocky beach south of Manila, where she now teaches mermaiding and freediving full-time. "The world outside is really noisy and you will find peace under water. ... It's a good skill in the real world, especially during the pandemic."

Across the world, there are thousands more merfolk like her — at its simplest, humans of all shapes, genders and backgrounds who enjoy dressing up as mermaids. In recent years, a growing number have gleefully flocked to mermaid conventions and competitions, formed local groups called "pods," launched mermaid magazines and poured their savings into a multimillion-dollar mermaid tail industry.

On a planet plagued by war, disease and social upheaval, many merfolk have found life in the water a refuge. Perhaps Sebastian, the ornery crab in the 1989 film "The Little Mermaid," said it best in his warning to land-loving mermaid Ariel: "The human world, it's a mess. Life under the sea is better than anything they got up there!"

Away from the critics and chaos of life on land, mer-world is the kinder, gentler and more joyful alternative to the real world. It is also a world, merfolk say, where you can be whoever and whatever you want.

That openness attracts some transgender people who empathize with Ariel's agony of being trapped in a body that feels wrong. It is also inspiring to merfolk like Che Monique, the Washington, D.C.-based founder of the Society of Fat Mermaids, which promotes body-positive mermaiding.

"I'm a 300-pound Black mermaid in America over 35, and hopefully that tells somebody they can do whatever they want to do," says Monique, whose group sells shirts that read 'Fat mermaids make waves'

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and 'Gender is fluid under the sea.' "Sure, on the one hand it is really silly, but I've watched it change people's lives."

After all, the ocean is vast, she notes, and most of the planet is covered in water. So why not dive in? "I think there's room under the sea for all of us," Monique says.

The lure of mermaiding is clear from the Montreal home of Marielle Henault, which is stuffed to the gills with mermaid tails.

They line her clothes rack and drawers, are squeezed into suitcases and drip from plastic storage tubs, ready for sale by the 31-year-old AquaMermaid CEO to "mers" the world over. About 20 tails belong to Henault herself.

"When you put your mermaid tail on at the beach or pool, you become a superstar," says Henault, whose company runs mermaiding schools across Canada and the United States. "Kids and adults, everybody's happy to see a mermaid!"

When mermaiding first started to catch on, most tails for sale were custom-made silicone creations that weigh up to 23 kilograms (50 pounds), cost upwards of \$6,000 and take a surprising amount of time and lubricant to wrestle into. But over the past few years, the increasing availability of cheaper, lighter fabric options — some of which sell for less than \$100 — has transformed the mermaiding community from an exclusive enclave for privileged professionals into an achievable dream for the wider public.

As mermaiding went mainstream, glamorous photos of mermaids resplendent in glitzy tails began gaining traction on social media, further fuelling mer-mania. An obsession with "The Little Mermaid" is common among merfolk, and there is anticipation of a fresh wave of mermaiding interest when a live action reboot of the film is released next year.

Swimming in the tails takes practice, and requires a piece of equipment long used by freedivers called a monofin — a single fin into which both feet are inserted. A mermaid's mastery of the dolphin kick is key, along with equalization techniques to alleviate ear pressure under water.

PADI, SSI and NAUI, the world's major scuba diving certification organizations, now offer mermaid courses. There's even a World Mermaid Championship, last held in China in 2019, which featured 70 mermaids flipping and posing in a giant glass tank before a panel of pensive judges.

Henault, who competed at the world championship, hopes to help get mermaiding to the Olympics, potentially as a demonstration sport. Multiple "Merlympics" events have been held in Europe and the U.K. in recent years.

Last weekend, masses of merfolk swarmed the streets of New York for the annual Coney Island Mermaid Parade. And mermaid conventions ("Mercons") are now held globally. Last month, more than 300 merfolk from across the U.S. and Canada attended the California Mermaid Convention, which was, as convention co-founder Rachel Smith described it, "a three-day 'shell-ebration' of everything mermaid." It was also, according to fellow co-founder Ashley Rastad, "Dolphin-ityly' a good time!" (Note: the mermaid community is awash in puns.)

For most merfolk, it's all a little tongue-in-cheek. But it's also enormously meaningful. Floating in the Sacramento pool where fellow attendees of the California convention had gathered, Merman Maui summed up the importance of the community this way: "I have a new family with all these people."

"Life is so much better when you learn to have just a little bit of fun, or a lot bit of fun, because we all believe in magic at some point," Maui says. "A lot of times, life can get pretty dull and boring. So why not just enjoy every aspect of it that you can?"

Mermaiding can give you the chance to become someone different. But it can also give you the chance to become more like yourself.

Mermaid Nymphia grew up as a male-presenting child of the 1990s, and gender norms dashed her dream of dressing up as her idol, Ariel. Years later, as an adult transgender woman, her dream was finally realized when her mother helped her sew her first mermaid costume.

Nymphia would later discover a diverse community of like-minded mers online, and, on the suggestion

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of her mother, turned her lifelong obsession into a profession. The Los Angeles-based Nymphia has since appeared at everything from children's parties to corporate events, and in 2019 served as a trans merfolk ambassador at the California Mermaid Convention.

The transformation theme of fish to human in "The Little Mermaid" is inspiring to a subsection of the LGBTQ community, Nymphia says.

"With transgender and nonbinary merfolk, they often connect with that mentality where you're not quite sure which world you belong in, but you're able to be this alluring creature of the sea and live as your most authentic self," Nymphia says. "I know a lot of people who have found their gender identity, myself included, through mermaiding."

In the Philippines, Tabora also applauds the inclusiveness of the mermaid community.

"You can accommodate young people, straight men and gays, older people," says Tabora, whose mermaiding school is called DIVERSity by SeaReynang Pengki. "Everyone can be a mermaid!"

She, too, found a connection between her personal transformation and the mer-world. For her, it is all about evolution — her own, and the ocean's.

"As transgender, it's a transition," Tabora says. "It's like in the sea, everything evolves. The fish evolve, the coral evolves."

Dalestair Kidd, whose "mersona" is Mermaid Salacia: South Australia's Sea Witch, found the mermaiding community reassuringly accepting when Kidd came out as transgender and nonbinary.

"It doesn't matter who you are, we all share this love of the ocean," says Kidd, the proud winner of Mercon Australia's 2017 Miss Congeniality "Sandra Bull-Shark" award. "You can pick a name if your birth name doesn't suit you. You don't have to be whatever you were assigned at birth. You can pick your pronouns. ... And that's OK, because fish don't care about pronouns!"

Merfolk acknowledge their almost-utopia is occasionally rocked by stormy seas. As mermaiding's popularity has risen, so too has the prevalence of creeps known as "merverts," and scam artists who sell non-existent tails, says Kelly Hygema, creator of the Facebook group "Mermaids Beware: Scammers, Merverts, & More."

"Being mermaids, it's a predominantly women-dominated hobby and profession... so of course that does attract attention from strangers on the Internet," says Hygema, who lives on the Caribbean island of St. Thomas. "Most of the time it's just creepy comments, like they want to see you without the tail on or hold your breath underwater."

Hygema advises merfolk to always have a trusted companion, or "mertender," while performing in a tail.

"With your legs bound, you can't really run away, so it's important to have that set of legs there to make sure you're OK," she says.

The tails have also raised safety concerns with several consumer groups. A 2018 study of 25 children by the Royal Life Saving Society of Western Australia found that a majority experienced an average decrease in their swimming ability of 70% while using mermaid fins and 60% while using tails. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission said it has received three reports of incidents involving mermaid tails over the past four years, the most serious of which resulted in a 5-year-old girl being hospitalized after she tucked her arms inside the tail along with her legs and became trapped underwater.

All the more reason why proper training is key, says Lauren Metzler, founder of Sydney Mermaids. Metzler received her advanced mermaid certification this month with a goal of teaching rookie merfolk how to avoid sinking to the seabed.

Dawn is nearing in the Sydney beachside suburb of Manly as Metzler strolls down to the harbour and slips into a shimmering pink and turquoise tail. She scoots backward along the sand and into the chilly grey-blue water, drawing a few amused grins from commuters heading toward the nearby ferry to the city.

"Some people have a coffee in the morning to wake up, some people have a mermaid swim," Metzler says with a laugh as she glides through the water, her skin adorned with sparkly sequins. "This tail is so fun to swim in!"

And at its core, this is what it's all about for many merfolk: Fun. There is a strong need, especially after COVID-related lockdowns, to simply play and enjoy creativity, Metzler says.

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"The more we open up our imagination and accept everyone for how they are, it makes it more of a beautiful experience," she says. "The sky — or ocean floor — is the limit of what you can do with mermaiding."

Trains canceled in UK as unions stage 2nd 24-hour walkout

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Millions of people in Britain faced disruption Thursday as railway staff staged their second national walkout this week, and workers at Britain's busiest airport announced plans to walk out, adding to summertime travel misery.

The 24-hour strike by 40,000 cleaners, signallers, maintenance workers and station staff canceled about four-fifths of passenger services across the country. A third walkout is planned for Saturday as part of Britain's biggest and most disruptive railway strike in 30 years.

Train stations were largely deserted Thursday. Highways also were less busy than expected, and many people appeared to heed advice to avoid travel. Internet provider Virgin Media O2 said its data suggested "millions more people" than usual were working from home.

The strike is a headache for those who can't work from home, as well as for patients with medical appointments, students heading for end-of-year exams and music lovers making their way to the Glastonbury Festival, which runs through Sunday on a farm in southwest England.

Meanwhile, British Airways check-in staff and other ground crew at Heathrow Airport voted to strike in a dispute over pay, their unions said Thursday. Dates have not been set, but the GMB and Unite unions said the walkouts would take place during the peak summer holiday period.

Air travelers in many countries are facing delays and disruption as airports struggle to cope with staff shortages and skyrocketing demand for flights after two pandemic-hit years.

The railway dispute centers on pay, working conditions and job security as Britain's train companies aim to cut costs and staffing after two years in which emergency government funding kept them afloat.

The strike pits the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union against 13 privately owned train-operating companies and the government-owned National Rail. Talks between union representatives and employers ended in deadlock Wednesday. The union accused Britain's Conservative government of scuttling the negotiations.

The union says the government is preventing employers from improving on the 3% pay raise on the table so far. Britain's inflation rate hit 9.1% in May, as Russia's war in Ukraine squeezes supplies of energy and food staples while post-pandemic consumer demand soars.

"Every time we get close, there's some kind of maneuver somewhere outside of the room with people that we're not talking to, that has an impact on what's going on inside the room," Eddie Dempsey, the union's deputy general secretary, said.

The government denies getting involved in negotiations, but Prime Minister Boris Johnson has put blame for the strike squarely on the union. The government also warned that big pay raises would spark a wage-price spiral driving inflation even higher.

All sides are keeping an eye on public frustration, with polls suggesting opinion is about evenly divided between support for and opposition to the strikes.

Unions have told the country to brace for more as workers face the worst cost-of-living squeeze in more than a generation. Lawyers are planning a walkout starting next week, and unions representing teachers and postal workers plan to consult their members about possible action.

Darren Pilling, an RMT union official on a picket line at Liverpool Lime Street station in northwest England, said he believed the public supported the strikes, "because everyone else is suffering just as much as we are."

"I stood here for eight hours on Tuesday and had nothing but support and praise from people," he said.

Gas prices sting US workers who depend on their cars

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

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DETROIT (AP) — High gas prices have Wallace Reid looking for a new career.

Reid, who drives for Uber and Lyft in New York, fills up his Lexus at least three times a week. He pays around \$95 each time, about double what he was paying last year. To make up for that, he's driving more often, but he's also applying for other jobs that wouldn't require his car.

"It's more hours, more stress," he said. "New York City is not an easy city to work and it's affecting our lives."

Reid isn't alone. Millions of Americans who rely on their cars for work are changing their habits, signing up for carpools or even ditching their cars for bicycles as gas prices recently hit \$5 per gallon for the first time ever. This week, it's averaging \$4.95 per gallon nationwide, up from \$3.06 per gallon a year ago, according to AAA.

On Wednesday, President Joe Biden asked Congress to suspend federal gas taxes for three months, which would shave 18.4 cents per gallon off the price of gas. He also called on states to suspend their own gas taxes.

Biden's push faces uphill odds in Congress. In the meantime, gas is straining budgets.

Jace Shoemaker-Galloway agonized over whether to charge more for Paws and Whiskers Sitters, her pet-sitting business in Macomb, Illinois. She visits as many as 10 houses each day and fills up her 2018 Mazda CX-3 almost every week. One recent fill-up cost her nearly \$50.

This month, she finally acted. She contacted her clients and told them she was removing the 10% discount she has always given to repeat customers.

Shoemaker-Galloway, who is also a children's book author, said her customers were understanding. But she worries that gas prices will cut into her business in other ways.

"The cost isn't just impacting my bottom line," she said. "Because the price of everything is so expensive, people are cutting back on non-essentials, which means pet-sitting and book sales."

In a normal summer, Orvilia Nieto might do some traveling in the RV she lives in in Lytle, Texas. But that might not happen this year. She is struggling to fill the tank of her 2008 Ford Expedition SUV so she can get to her job at a T.J. Maxx distribution center in San Antonio, about 20 miles away.

Nieto and her co-workers trade tips on where gas is cheapest. She sometimes carpools or fills her tank only halfway, which still costs her more than \$50. But she feels lucky. A handful of colleagues on her shift, which ends at 2:30 a.m., ride their bikes home in the dark.

"It's been a rough road," she said. "If we lived in the city it would be easier, could take the bus, but at the end of the shift at 2:30 in the morning, what bus line is available?"

Jill Chapman, a senior performance consultant with Insperity, a Texas-based human resources and recruitment company, said gas prices and commute lengths are increasingly a sticking point with job candidates. Chapman said companies may want to consider temporary bonuses, incentives for public transit or gas cards to help their employees.

"A business owner needs to acknowledge that there is stress associated with rising gas prices," Chapman said.

David Lewis, the CEO of Operations Inc., a Norwalk, Connecticut-based human resources consulting company, remembers handing out gas cards to his employees in 2009 when gas prices topped \$4 per gallon. But this time he won't be doing that because employees have another option: working from home.

"This is an unwelcome development for those companies that are trying to get people back to the office," Lewis said. "It is one more reasonable reason why those employees are pushing back."

Lewis has around 100 employees in Norwalk. Before COVID, 85% of them were in the office at least two days a week. Now, maybe 25% of them are. Lewis — and many of his clients — would like to see employees in the office more but say gas prices are a huge barrier.

"If you are the company that requires everyone to come in all the time, you're a pariah," he said.

Psychology professor Brian Cesario used to live within walking distance of the college where he teaches. But last year, he moved 55 miles away to Hopewell Junction, New York, so he could afford a larger home for his growing family.

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Cesario taught remotely even before the pandemic and assumed he would continue doing so. But last fall, his college began requiring him to drive to campus twice a week, a commute that now costs him \$240 in gas each month. Cesario said he doesn't make enough to compensate for that, so he's looking for a fully remote job outside of academia.

For those who must commute, there can be options. On Tuesday, Uber announced it was bringing back discounted shared rides in nine U.S. cities this summer, including New York, Los Angeles and Chicago. Organizations that link carpoolers — like one run by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments in the Detroit area — say they are seeing significantly more participants.

Some are even finding solutions in their own garage. Pame Viens and her husband — both histotechnologists who prepare tissue at medical facilities — switched vehicles because his commute is longer. Now, he's driving her 2016 Volkswagen Passat and she's driving his 2022 Dodge Ram.

"I'm only 5'1." I hit my forehead on the side mirror," she said with a laugh. "But I'm getting used to it."

But others say they simply have to hustle harder. Brian Scheall, an Uber driver in Tampa, Florida, pays \$75 every time he fills up his Volkswagen Atlas.

"You can make money but you have to work, work, work," said Scheall. He recently took a side job driving some customers from Florida to Virginia for some extra cash.

Uber says it understands drivers are feeling the pinch from high gas prices, and it added a 45-cent to 55-cent surcharge on all trips in March to help soften the blow. But both Reid and Scheall say gig companies should be doing much more.

"It makes no difference at all. It's like a grain of sand," Reid said of the surcharge.

Wall Street's bubble may be gone, but stocks can still fall

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The good news for stocks is that this year's sell-off means they no longer look eye-wateringly expensive.

The bad news: That won't matter if corporate profits give out.

A stock's price rises or falls for essentially two reasons: how much cash a company generates and how much an investor is willing to pay for it.

So far, Wall Street's focus has been only on that second part.

With the Federal Reserve jacking up interest rates to knock down inflation, investors are much less willing to pay sky-high prices for stocks when safe bonds are offering better returns.

Analysts and professional investors look at something called the price-earnings ratio to gauge investors' willingness to own stocks. It shows how much investors are paying for each \$1 of a company's earnings, with a few variations.

Across the largest 1,000 companies, one measure has investors paying nearly 29% less for the median than in November, according to Scott Opsal, director of research and equities at Leuthold.

That meant their drop in stock prices, a median of roughly 25%, was entirely because of investors' decreased willingness to pay high prices. On the profit side, analysts actually raised their forecasts.

"Investors are coping with the problems of the day by letting the air out of bubbly valuations," Opsal wrote in a report.

Some pockets of the market still look pricey, such as high-growth and smaller stocks, according to strategists at Credit Suisse. But across the S&P 500 index, stock valuations are now only marginally above their average for the last 50 years, after earlier soaring to their most expensive levels since the 2000 dot-com mania.

The risk for Wall Street going forward is that even though a lot of air has come out of the bubble, more could still leak out. Another dangerous possibility is if corporate profits weaken sharply.

If that were to happen, investors could get hit with a double-whammy pulling down both stock price levers.

With inflation seemingly still accelerating, that risk is growing. Several big-name retailers including Target have warned recently about their customers changing their buying behavior as the pandemic wanes. All

companies are meanwhile contending with higher costs for fuel as gasoline prices soar and for labor as workers demand higher wages amid a red-hot jobs market.

Companies are soon to report how much profit they made during the spring. Analysts are forecasting growth weakened to the slowest pace since the end of 2020, according to FactSet.

Some critics say those forecasts are still too optimistic. If earnings expectations come down, it would trigger another lurch downward for stocks.

Director James Burrows looks back on his career in new book

By ALICIA RANCILIO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — James Burrows loves sitcoms, and he should. The 81-year-old has directed more than 1,000 episodes of TV sitcoms, including fan favorites such as "Friends," "Cheers," and "Will & Grace." He's also directed the pilot episodes for "Frasier," "Two and a Half Men," "The Big Bang Theory" and more, setting the tone for the series going forward.

Ask him why there are so few of his beloved sitcoms on the air these days and Burrows can't answer.

"It's not a good time for the multi-camera sitcom right now. I don't know why. People ask me and I say, I don't know why. There's only two or three on the air."

He does believe the next big sitcom will come, and that will make multi-cam sitcoms popular again, but adds he "doesn't see that show on the horizon right now."

Burrows looks back on his famed career in a new book called "Directed by James Burrows," detailing how he got started in showbiz and became Hollywood's go-to director for sitcom pilots, setting shows up for success to go forward.

He spoke with The Associated Press about the book, working on "Friends" and what entices him to work these days. Remarks have been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: The business seems to prefer single camera comedies these days. Why do you prefer multi-cam?

BURROWS: What I do is not really television. It's really theater that I film for television, so the structure of the piece has to be the work done with the actors and the writers on stage, and then you cover it with a camera. But what makes it great is the interaction, not necessarily the camera work, it's the characters and the situation.

AP: A touching point in the book is when you recall sitting down with the cast of "Friends" when you were leaving the show, and giving them a very fatherly talk about how to handle future situations, such as, listen and learn from new directors but "if you disagree, say something." You reminded them that they knew their characters better than anyone and that David Schwimmer and Jennifer Aniston, in particular, should push for opportunities to do physical comedy, because it's where they shined.

BURROWS: They were all in their 20s and I just wanted to enable them to understand how gifted they all were and to be able to express what they thought about the piece with ensuing directors and the writers because they were all really creative. If an actor contributes, it only makes the show better and it only makes the actor happier to be part of the creative process. I tried to enable them to out there when I left the show and express themselves.

AP: You also say that one of the few regrets of your career is that you didn't stick with the show throughout its nine season run. Why do you think "Friends" is still so popular today?

BURROWS: There's always a new generation of demographic that watches the show. My kids were too young when I was doing it to watch it, but they watch it now and their kids are going to watch it and their kids are going to watch it. There's something really special about that show.

AP: The actors who've worked with you always express such love for you. Why do you think that is?

BURROWS: It's comedy. That's what it should be and what rehearsals should be. I did invoke my fun clause once. I was working on a show and the actors were too difficult. So I said, 'Start my car.' And I started my car and I was off. I can't work under those circumstances. There has to be this feeling on the set that I work, that we're all in it to make a good show and not to either count lines or complain about

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the writing or other actors.

AP: In the book, you include examples of problem solving on the job and provide insight into certain situations that could be helpful for working directors or those who want to become directors. Was that intentional?

BURROWS: It's pretty specific to sitcoms but there are tips in there. The, major tip, which I always try to get out in the community of sitcom directors, is to die with your boots on. It's a writers-driven medium, the writer is also the executive producer and so they kind of control it. There's a lot of sitcom directors who are just traffic cops, who just move people around an parrot exactly what the writers say. I'm a big advocate of, once the read-through of the script is over, you go down to the stage and rehearse and try new things.

AP: These days how do you decide when you're going to take something on or say yes to directing a show?

BURROWS: I'm very selective. I haven't found a show yet that I would attach myself to, like I did with "Will & Grace," which really made me laugh and was like a fountain of youth for me. The last thing I did was I did a pilot with Valerie Bertinelli that didn't get picked up. And before that, I did "Live in Front of a Studio Audience," with "The Facts of Life" and "Diff'rent Strokes," where we had adults playing kids, Kevin Hart and Snoop Dogg and Jen Aniston and Kathryn Hahn and Jason Bateman and Will Arnett. Those make me really happy because I love those people and I love the challenge of taking a show that's decades old and doing it again.

Fewer Americans file for jobless aid

By MATT OTT AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fewer Americans applied for jobless benefits last week as the U.S. job market remains robust despite four-decade high inflation and a myriad of other economic pressures.

Applications for jobless aid for the week ending June 18 fell to 229,000, a decline of 2,000 from the previous week, the Labor Department reported Thursday. First-time applications generally mirror the number of layoffs.

The four-week average for claims, which smooths out some of the week-to-week volatility, rose by 4,500 from the previous week, to 223,500.

The total number of Americans collecting jobless benefits for the week ending June 11 was 1,315,000, up by 5,000 from the previous week. That figure has hovered near 50-year lows for months.

Much of the recent job security and wage gains that Americans have enjoyed recently has been offset by inflation levels not seen in four decades.

Earlier in June, the Labor Department reported that consumer prices surged 8.6% last month — even more than in April — from a year earlier. The Federal Reserve responded last week by raising its main borrowing rate — its main tool for fighting rising prices — by three-quarters of a point. That increase is on top of a half-point increase in early May.

Three weeks ago the government reported that U.S. employers added 390,000 jobs in May, extending a streak of solid hiring that has bolstered an economy under pressure. Though the job growth in May was healthy, it was the lowest monthly gain in a year and there have been signs that more layoffs could be coming, at least in some sectors.

Jobless claims applications the past few weeks, though still relatively low, have been the highest since the first weeks of 2022.

Online automotive retailer Carvana said last month that it's letting about 2,500 workers go, roughly 12% of its workforce. Online real estate broker Redfin, under pressure from a housing market that's cooled due to higher interest rates, said last week that it was laying off 8% of its workers.

Those cuts have extended to companies in the cryptocurrency sector with prices for bitcoin and other digital assets cratering in recent months.

Crypto trading platform Coinbase Global said last week it planned to cut about 1,100 jobs, or approximately

18% of its global workforce, as part of a restructuring in order to help manage its operating expenses in response to current market conditions.

John Williams, 90, steps away from film, but not music

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After more than six decades of making bicycles soar, sending panicked swimmers to the shore and other spellbinding close encounters, John Williams is putting the final notes on what may be his last film score.

"At the moment I'm working on 'Indiana Jones 5,' which Harrison Ford — who's quite a bit younger than I am — I think has announced will be his last film," Williams says. "So, I thought: If Harrison can do it, then perhaps I can, also."

Ford, for the record, hasn't said that publicly. And Williams, who turned 90 in February, isn't absolutely certain he's ready to, either.

"I don't want to be seen as categorically eliminating any activity," Williams says with a chuckle, speaking by phone from his home in Los Angeles. "I can't play tennis, but I like to be able to believe that maybe one day I will."

Right now, though, there are other ways Williams wants to be spending his time. A "Star Wars" film demands six months of work, which he notes, "at this point in life is a long commitment to me." Instead, Williams is devoting himself to composing concert music, including a piano concerto he's writing for Emanuel Ax.

This spring, Williams and cellist Yo-Yo Ma released the album "A Gathering of Friends," recorded with the New York Philharmonic, Pablo Sáinz-Villegas and Jessica Zhou. It's a radiant collection of cello concertos and new arrangements from the scores of "Schindler's List," "Lincoln" and "Munich," including the sublime "A Prayer for Peace."

Turning 90 — an event that the Kennedy Center and Tanglewood are celebrating this summer with birthday concerts — has caused Williams to reflect on his accomplishments, his remaining ambitions and what a lifetime of music has meant to him.

"It's given me the ability to breathe, the ability to live and understand that there's more to corporal life," Williams says. "Without being religious, which I'm not especially, there is a spiritual life, an artistic life, a realm that's above the mundanities of everyday realities. Music can raise one's thinking to the level of poetry. We can reflect on how necessary music has been for humanity. I always like to speculate that music is older than language, that we were probably beating drums and blowing on reeds before we could speak. So it's an essential part of our humanity.

"It's given me my life."

And, in turn, Williams has provided the soundtrack to the lives of countless others through more than 100 film scores, among them "Star Wars," "Jurassic Park," "Jaws," "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," "E.T.," "Indiana Jones," "Superman," "Schindler's List" and "Harry Potter."

"He's lived through the better part of a century, and his music encompasses all of the events and changes of those times," says Ma, a longtime friend. "He is one of the great American voices."

It's an amount of accomplishment that's hard to quantify. Five Oscars and 52 Academy Award nominations, a number bested only by Walt Disney, is one measurement. But even that hardly hints at the cultural power of his music. A billion people might be able to instantly hum Williams' two-note ostinato from "Jaws" or "The Imperial March" from "Star Wars."

"I'm told that the music is played all over the world. What could be more rewarding than that?" says Williams. "But I have to say it seems unreal. I can only see what's in front of me at the piano right at this moment, and do my best with that."

Williams has a warm, humble, courteous manner despite his stature. He began an interview by offering: "Let me see if I can give you anything that might be useful." All those indelible, perfectly constructed themes, he believes, are the product less of divine inspiration than daily hard work. Williams does most

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of his work sitting for hours at a time at his Steinway, composing in pencil.

"It's like cutting a stone at your desk," he says. "My younger colleagues are much faster than I am because they have electronic equipment and computers and synthesizers and so on."

When Williams began (his first feature film score was 1958's "Daddy-O"), the cinematic tradition of grand, orchestral scores was beginning to lose out to pop soundtracks. Now, many are gravitating toward synthesized music for film. Increasingly, Williams has the aura of a venerated old master who bridges distant eras of film and music.

"Recording with the New York Philharmonic, the whole orchestra to a person were awestruck by this gentleman at now 90 who hears everything, is unfailingly kind, gentle, polite. People just wanted to play for him," says Ma. "They were floored by the musicianship of this man."

This late chapter in Williams' career is in some ways a chance to place his mammoth legacy not just in connection with cinema but among the classical legends. Williams, who led the Boston Pops from 1980 to 1993, has conducted the Berlin, Vienna and New York philharmonics, among others. In the world's elite orchestras, Williams' compositions have passed into canon.

"A purist may say that music represented in film is not absolute music. Well, that may be true," says Williams. "But some of the greatest music ever written has been narrative. Certainly in opera. Film offers that opportunity — not often but occasionally it does. And in a rewarding way musically. Occasionally we get lucky and we find one."

Williams' enduring partnership with Steven Spielberg has, of course, helped the composer's odds. Spielberg, who first sought out a lunch with Williams in 1972 after being captivated by his score to "The Reivers," has called him "the single most significant contributor to my success as a filmmaker."

"Without John Williams, bikes don't really fly," Spielberg said when the AFI honored Williams in 2016.

They remain irrevocably linked. Their offices on the Universal lot are just steps from one another. Along with "Indiana Jones," Williams recently scored Spielberg's upcoming semi-autobiographical drama about growing up in Arizona, "The Fabelmans." The two movies make it 30 films together for Spielberg and Williams.

"It's been 50 years now. Maybe we're starting on the next 50," says Williams with a laugh. "Whatever our connections will be, whether it's music or working with him or just being with him, I think we will always be together. We're great, close friends who have shared many years together. It's the kind of relationship where neither one of us would ever say no to the other."

In Spielberg's films and others, Williams has carved out enough perfectly condensed melodies to rival the Beatles. Spielberg once described his five-note "Communication Motif" from "Close Encounters" as "a doorbell."

"Simple little themes that speak clearly and without obfuscation are very hard to find and very hard to do," says Williams. "They really are the result of a lot of work. It's almost like chiseling. Move one note, change a rhythmic emphasis or the direction of an interval and so on. A simple tune can be done in dozens of ways. If you find one that, it seems like you discovered something that wanted to be uncovered."

One thing you won't hear from Williams is a grand pronouncement about his own legacy. He's much more comfortable talking like a technician who tinkers until a gleaming gem falls out.

"My own personality is such that I look at what I've done — I'm quite pleased and proud of a lot of it — but like most of us, we always wish we might have done better," he says. "We live with examples like Beethoven and Bach before us, monumental achievements people have made in music, and can feel very humbled. But I also feel very fortunate. I've had wonderful opportunities, particularly in film where a composer can have an audience of not millions of people, but billions of people."

Williams has a number of concerts planned for the rest of the year, including performances in Los Angeles, Singapore and Lisbon. But while Williams may be stepping away from film, he remains enchanted by cinema, and the ability of sound and image, when combined, to achieve liftoff.

"I'd love to be around in 100 years to see what people are doing with film and sound and spatial, aural and visual effects. It has a tremendous future, I think," says Williams. "I can sense great possibility and great future in the atmospheric of the whole experience. I'd love to come back and see and hear it all."

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Today in History: June 24, Cabot spots North America

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, June 24, the 175th day of 2022. There are 190 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 24, 1497, the first recorded sighting of North America by a European took place as explorer John Cabot spotted land, probably in present-day Canada.

On this date:

In 1509, Henry VIII was crowned king of England; his wife, Catherine of Aragon, was crowned queen consort.

In 1807, a grand jury in Richmond, Virginia, indicted former Vice President Aaron Burr on charges of treason and high misdemeanor (he was later acquitted).

In 1939, the Southeast Asian country Siam changed its name to Thailand. (It went back to being Siam in 1945, then became Thailand once again in 1949.)

In 1940, France signed an armistice with Italy during World War II.

In 1946, Fred M. Vinson was sworn in as the 13th chief justice of the United States, succeeding the late Harlan F. Stone.

In 1948, Communist forces cut off all land and water routes between West Germany and West Berlin, prompting the western allies to organize the Berlin Airlift.

In 1957, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Roth v. United States*, ruled 6-3 that obscene materials were not protected by the First Amendment.

In 1973, President Richard Nixon concluded his summit with the visiting leader of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev, who hailed the talks in an address on American television.

In 1983, the space shuttle Challenger — carrying America's first woman in space, Sally K. Ride — coasted to a safe landing at Edwards Air Force Base in California.

In 1992, the Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, strengthened its 30-year ban on officially sponsored worship in public schools, prohibiting prayer as a part of graduation ceremonies.

In 2015, a federal judge in Boston formally sentenced Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (joh-HAHR' sahr-NEYE'-ehv) to death for the 2013 terror attacks. (A federal appeals court later threw out the sentence; the Supreme Court reinstated it.)

In 2020, three white men were indicted on murder charges in the killing of Ahmaud Arbery, a Black man who was shot while running in a neighborhood near Georgia's coast. (All three were convicted.)

Ten years ago: The Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Morsi was declared the winner of Egypt's first free presidential election. New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman announced a settlement that would bring \$405 million to victims of Bernard Madoff's historic investment scam.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump and first lady Melania Trump were among the guests as Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin (mih-NOO'-shin) married Scottish actor Louise Linton in Washington. At least 10 people were killed by a landslide in a mountain village in southwestern China.

One year ago: A 12-story condominium building in Surfside, Florida, collapsed, killing 98 people. An appeals court suspended Rudy Giuliani from practicing law in New York because he made false statements while trying to get courts to overturn Donald Trump's loss in the presidential race. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said she would create a special committee to investigate the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol; Senate Republicans had blocked legislation that would form a bipartisan commission to investigate the attack. Leaders of indigenous groups in Canada said investigators had found more than 600 unmarked graves at the site of a former residential school for indigenous children.

Today's Birthdays: Rock singer Arthur Brown is 80. Actor Michele Lee is 80. Actor-director Georg Stanford Brown is 79. Rock musician Jeff Beck is 78. Rock singer Colin Blunstone (The Zombies) is 77. Musician Mick Fleetwood is 75. Actor Peter Weller is 75. Rock musician John Illsley (Dire Straits) is 73. Actor Nancy

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Allen is 72. Reggae singer Derrick Simpson (Black Uhuru) is 72. Actor Joe Penny is 66. Singer-musician Andy McCluskey (Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark) is 63. R&B/pop singer-songwriter Siedah (sy-EE'-dah) Garrett is 62. Actor Iain Glen is 61. Rock singer Curt Smith is 61. Actor Danielle Spencer is 57. Actor Sherry Stringfield is 55. Singer Glenn Medeiros is 52. Actor Carla Gallo is 47. Actor Amir Talai (TV: "LA to Vegas") is 45. Actor-producer Mindy Kaling is 43. Actor Minka Kelly is 42. Actor Vanessa Ray is 41. Actor Justin Hires is 37. Actor Candice Patton is 37. Singer Solange Knowles is 36. Actor Max Ehrich is 31. Actor Beanie Feldstein is 29.