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Groton Community Calendar

Friday, Jan. 13

Senior Menu: Chili, corn bread, coleslaw, pears.
School Breakfast: Cereal.
School Lunch: Pizza, cooked carrots.
Elementary Christmas Concert, 2:30 p.m. (re-scheduled from Dec. 22)

Saturday, Jan. 14

Wrestling at Potter County Tournament, 10 a.m.
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

Sunday, Jan. 15

Open Gym: Grades JK-8; 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., Grades 6-12; 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Avantara worship, 3 p.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.

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



"If you want to do something, go for it -- you've got nothing to lose."

-Louis Tomlinson

United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.
Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:45 a.m.
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.

Monday, Jan. 16

Senior Menu: Parmesan chicken breast, baked potato with sour cream, wild rice, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.
School Lunch: Taco salads.
Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.
Girls Basketball at Langford Area: JV game at 6 p.m. followed by varsity.
Middle School Wrestling at Redfield.
The Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

CLOSED: 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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Tigers have clean sweep over Tiospa Zina

The Groton Area basketball teams posted a clean sweep of Tiospa Zina Thursday night at Agency Village. The girls won 45-30 thanks to a 16 point run in the middle of the game. The Tigers lead at the quarter stops at 8-7, 22-14 and 38-19.

Scoring for the Tigers had Brooke Gengerke with 17 points, 6 rebounds, and 4 steals. Jerrica Locke had 16 points, five rebounds, two assists. Sydney Leicht had eight points, six rebounds, one assist and six steals. Faith Traphagen had two points and one rebound. Aspen Johnson had two rebounds and one assist. Kennedy Hansen had two rebounds, one assist and four steals. Jaedyn Penning had seven rebounds, two assists and two steals. Laila Roberts had one rebound. Riley Dunker had two points and one assist.

Groton made 11 of 38 two-pointers for 29%, six of 20 3-pointers for 30%, five of eight free throws for 63%, had 30 rebounds, 12 turnovers, 12 assists, 16 steals, and 14 team fouls.

Kennedy Bissonnette led Tiospa Zina with the 14 points followed by Maya Deutsch with seven, Alexia Quinn had five and Kami Crawford had four points. Tiospa Zina made 11 of 38 field goals for 29%, five of 12 free throws for 42% and had 21 turnovers.

The boys varsity team used a team effort to defeat Tiospa Zina, 69-39. The Tigers lead at the quarter stops at 19 to 630 Dash 20, 46-26.

Lane Tietz lead the Tigers with 18 points, one rebound, three assists and five steals. Jacob Zac had 16 points, five rebounds, two assists and one steal. Tate Larson had eight points, six rebounds, one assist and one steal. Ryder Johnson had 11 points which included 4-4 from the free throw line, had two rebounds, three assists and three steals. Logan Ringgenberg had five points and one rebound. Keegan Tracy had four points, four rebounds and one assist. Cole Simon had four points, five rebounds, two assist and three steals. Cade Larson head one point, one rebound and one assist. Dillon Abeln had one assist.

Groton made 21-36 in two pointers for 58%, 5-20 in three pointers for 25%, 12-14 in free throws for 86%, had 26 rebounds 14 turnovers, 14 assists, 13 steals and 12 team fouls

Tate Never Misses A Shot led the Wambdi with 16 points followed by Storm Sierra with 12 points. Mike Smith and Nate Thompson each had three points, Reondre Greeley had two points, Anton Keoke had two points and Juan Rios had one free-throw. Tiospa Zina made 15 of 30 field goals for 39%, seven of 13 from the free throw line and had 25 turnovers.

Groton area won the boys junior varsity game 43-27 with the help of a 10-point run in the third quarter. The Tigers led the quarter stops at 5-4, 13-8 and 30-17.

Colby Dunker led the Tigers with nine points followed by Ryder Johnson with eight, Logan Ringgenberg and Keegan Tracy each had seven points, Dillon Abeln had six points, Turner Thompson, Jayden Schwan and Carter Simon each had two points

CJ Bissonnette led the Wambdi was 16 points.

The Lady Tigers won the junior varsity game 32-8 leading at the quarter stops at 6-0, 17-2 and 25-5

Elizabeth Fliehs lead the Tigers with seven points while McKenna Tietz had six points Kennedy Hansen and Laila Roberts each had four points, Brooklyn Hansen and Mia Crank each had two points and Emily Clark made one free-throw.

All games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. The varsity games were sponsored by Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Groton Chamber of Commerce, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Locke Electric, Spanier Harvesting & Trucking, Bahr Spray Foam, Thunder Seed with John Wheeting. Sponsoring the junior varsity games were Mike and Dawn Imrie and Larry and Val Fliehs. Shane Clark provided the play-by-play calling of the girls games.

GDILIVE.COM

Friday, Jan. 13, 2:30 p.m.
Groton Area Elementary

Christmas Program

Groton Elementary Music Presents:

A Visit from St. Nicholas

Directed by Scott Glodt

Speaking roles by the 5th Grade Class
Original poem by Clement Clarke Moore

Junior Kindergarten & Kindergarten: Santa Claus is Coming to Town (J. Fred Hoots and Havin Gillespie)
1st Grade: Up on the Housetop (Benjamin Hanby)
2nd Grade: Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer (Johnny Marks)
3rd Grade: Jolly Old St. Nicholas (James R. Murray)
4th Grade: Christmas Time is Here (Vince Guaraldi)
5th Grade: Oh Christmas Tree (Ernst Anshutz)
JK-5th Grade: We Wish You a Merry Christmas (English Carol)

Thank You's

- To all the parents that care for these talented children.
- To Mike Nehls and the custodial staff for all their assistance.
- To Desiree Yeigh for running the sound system and her continuous support.
- To the wonderful Elementary staff who are always willing to lend a helping hand.
- To the administration, the school board, and all of you for your continued support of music education in our school!
- It is truly a blessing to work with so many wonderful kids and adults. I hope you enjoy the performance!



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Tribal chairman calls for collaboration; Noem spokesman responds with criticism

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR AND SETH TUPPER - JANUARY 12, 2023 6:28 PM

PIERRE — A tribal chairman said Thursday that better collaboration is needed among tribal and state officials on deadly storms, and Gov. Kristi Noem's spokesman responded by describing that assertion and others as a "message of division" that perpetuated "false narratives."

Crow Creek Sioux Tribe Chairman Peter Lengkeek delivered the annual State of the Tribes address to lawmakers at the Capitol in Pierre. He talked about the response to recent winter storms, which has been a point of contention between some tribal leaders and the Noem administration.

"A single life lost is one too many," Lengkeek said. "If we are able to collaborate and work in partnership successfully in the future, we must address and correct the dynamics of our relationship, so that the lives of all South Dakotans are protected."

Lengkeek said nine deaths occurred when two winter storms hit the Rosebud Reservation last month. The fatalities included a 12-year-old boy with health problems who couldn't be reached in time by emergency responders, an elderly man found bundled up in his home who'd frozen to death, and a man who froze to death in a ditch, according to Rosebud officials.

Lengkeek referenced the Rosebud Sioux Tribe's disaster declaration during the storm, as well as declarations by the Crow Creek and Oglala Sioux tribes. He said the declarations were meant to raise awareness.

"But emergency services were slow to act," Lengkeek said.

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe issued its disaster declaration Dec. 16. The Noem administration has said it was responsive to tribal requests and communicated with Rosebud officials. Noem activated the National Guard on Dec. 22 to help with efforts on the Rosebud Reservation.

Several hours after Lengkeek's address Thursday, Noem's spokesman, Ian Fury, sent an 800-word email to media outlets criticizing the speech. Fury reiterated the Noem administration's position on the storms and said Lengkeek's statement that emergency services were slow to react "couldn't be further from the truth."

History and education were additional themes in the speech. Lengkeek said schools should teach the history and culture of the tribes in South Dakota.

"There are a lot of South Dakotans who do not understand the history of the nine tribes within our state's boundaries," Lengkeek said. "Oceti Sakowin history is South Dakota history."

The Legislature too often entertains and gets caught up in controversies like critical race theory, according to Lengkeek.

"We need to address the biases that have existed for generations," he said.

Lengkeek also criticized the state process used to draft new social studies standards for schools.

"We certainly do not need out-of-state intellects chosen in a politically motivated manner attempting to write the standards regarding how our history is taught," he said.

Fury, in his email criticizing the speech, said the state's proposed social studies standards "represent the largest emphasis on Native American history of any proposed standards to date." Fury said the standards would ensure that a subset of Native American-specific standards, called the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings, will be taught.

The speech also touched on a new effort to honor tribal veterans with a monument.

During World War I and World War II, hundreds of tribal members from South Dakota served in the

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U.S. military, using their Native language to send covert messages. They were known as "code talkers." Lengkeek and other tribal leaders are calling on lawmakers to fund a monument to honor code talkers. The tribal leaders hope to secure funding during the current legislative session, which began Tuesday and continues until March. The total budget for the project comes to about \$850,000, according to a presentation to the State-Tribal Relations Committee after the speech.

The monument would feature the names of the code talkers on a large slab of granite carved in the shape of South Dakota, with renderings of their medals on the other side, and be located on the Capitol grounds.

Fury said other veterans' memorials on the grounds have been paid for by fundraising from veterans' groups. Fury said Lengkeek is blaming the state for private fundraising that has not materialized and is now "asking the state to foot the bill."

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Speaker vote makes history and reveals extent of Republican rift

Snub of Hansen breaks with 60 years of tradition

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 12, 2023 2:14 PM

When Jon Hansen was passed over for speaker of the state House of Representatives this week, he made history and revealed a rift of historic proportions in the Republican Party.

Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, was the speaker pro tempore last year. That should have made him a shoe-in for speaker of the House when representatives needed to fill the position this year.

Since 1963, when the tradition of promoting the speaker pro tempore began, there had only been five times when that promotion failed to happen. Twice, it was because control of the chamber flipped from Democrats to Republicans, or vice versa. The other three times, it was because the speaker pro tempore left the Legislature.

Hansen became only the sixth speaker pro tempore in the last 60 years who did not become speaker, and the first in those six decades who failed to gain the job for a reason other than partisan control or a departure from office.

Instead of Hansen, representatives elected Hugh Bartels, R-Watertown, as speaker on Tuesday during the first day of the 2023 legislative session at the Capitol in Pierre.

The public vote on the House floor came after a private caucus vote. In the public vote, there were 53 votes in favor of Bartels and 14 against him – including one from Hansen.

"We have maintained a tradition that the speaker pro tempore would become the next speaker of the House," Hansen said. "And we abandoned that tradition."

The speaker of the House is the presiding officer. The speaker makes committee appointments, assigns bills to committees, and presides over floor sessions, making procedural rulings as necessary. The speaker is also second in the line of succession to the governorship, behind the lieutenant governor.

The speaker pro tempore, who assists the speaker and presides in the speaker's absence, is elected in the same manner as the speaker. That position went to Rep. Mike Stevens, R- Yankton, on Tuesday.

Rep. Phil Jensen, R-Rapid City, said the speaker vote reflects the intra-party split between the people he considers real conservatives, and the more moderate lawmakers he derides as "Republicans in Name Only."

"The reason Hansen lost is RINOs have taken over the Legislature," Jensen said.

But that title of "RINOs" means nothing to other Republicans, according to Bartels.

"I think you could use that back the other way towards them as well," Bartels said.

Rep. Linda Duba, D-Sioux Falls, said the Republican moderates are exerting tighter control over the Legislature.

"It's indicative of trying to moderate what's happening in this legislative body and stay more towards the middle and governing, rather than being extremists," Duba said.

The position of speaker pro tempore was first elected in 1937. In the early days of the position, there was no expectation that the speaker pro tempore would serve as speaker in the next session. Before 1960, only half of the speakers pro tempore went on to become speaker, according to the SoDak Governors blog.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Chief justice: Contested elections for local judges may dissolve under lawmaker proposal

BY: JOHN HULT - JANUARY 11, 2023 5:27 PM

South Dakotans would lose the right to elect judges under a proposal from lawmakers that the state's chief justice addressed Wednesday during his State of the Judiciary speech.

Judges can rise to the bench by way of the ballot, but most do not.

Judicial elections are mandated by the state constitution, but they only happen every eight years. When a sitting circuit judge retires or vacates the bench between those elections, the governor appoints their replacement, picking from a list of candidates screened and recommended by the state's Judicial Qualifications Commission.

Most of those appointed judges never see a challenger when election day comes. Just three contested judicial races took place last year, and only one included an incumbent.

On Wednesday, South Dakota Supreme Court Chief Justice Steven Jensen said the high court will confer with circuit judges and the Unified Judicial System (UJS) in the coming weeks as lawmakers consider a resolution that would ask voters in the 2024 general election to do away with contested judicial elections.

Jensen said the court "will be communicating further with the legislature" on the resolution, which is sponsored by Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, R-Watertown, and Rep. Will Mortenson, R-Pierre.

If lawmakers back the effort and voters approve the effort, all judicial elections would ask voters only if they'd like to keep or remove their local judges.

"This is the current process in the constitution for selecting and retaining South Dakota Supreme Court justices," Jensen said. "The proposed amendment would provide for a parallel system to select circuit judges."

The resolution on judicial elections was one of several highlights from Jensen's speech to a joint session of the Legislature.

Also covered: the price of public defenders, access to rehabilitation programs for underage offenders, courthouse security and the importance of the bar exam.

Public defender payments

On public defense, the chief justice said, there's a need to study ways to improve how counties are reimbursed.

Every criminal fine in the state carries a \$50 surcharge, \$7.50 of which is used to cover the cost of the private attorneys who contract as public defenders in 63 of South Dakota's 66 counties.

That pot of money is the lone state funding source for the price of constitutionally mandated public defense, Jensen said, but it covers just 2-3% of the \$21 million those counties pay in attorney fees each year.

Jensen asked lawmakers to authorize a study group to tackle efficiencies and funding for public defense.

"I have no doubt that if we roll up our sleeves we can develop a more cost-effective and efficient public defender system that will continue our state's long tradition of guaranteeing the right to competent counsel in every case," Jensen said.

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Rehabilitation important to public safety

The chief justice stressed the value of existing work groups on courthouse security and rehabilitation. The UJS Barriers Group first convened last year to address access to rehabilitation programs for juvenile offenders across the state. It has representatives from the UJS, as well as from the Governor's Office, Department of Corrections, Department of Social Services and other agencies, all of which have ties to rehabilitation programs for non-violent young offenders.

Most adults in prison are between 18 and 25, and they are often involved in the system before they come of age. If the justice system can address issues with nonviolent offenders and drug users earlier on, he said, the ripple effects will improve public safety overall.

"The greater success we have in rehabilitating nonviolent young offenders, the less likely these offenders will be to gravitate toward gangs, drug dealing, and more serious criminal behavior that often accompanies these high-risk activities," Jensen said.

On courthouse security, Jensen called for a continued expansion of county level committees to improve safety for judges, lawyers, employees and the public in courthouses.

Bar exam backed

On the bar exam, the chief justice pointed to a recently appointed committee formed in part to sidestep legislative efforts to ease entry into the legal profession.

Rep. Mary Fitzgerald, R-Deadwood, introduced a bill last session that would have offered a law license to all University of South Dakota Law School graduates without the need for a passing score on the bar exam. Fitzgerald has signaled that she plans to introduce a modified version of the bill this year, as well.

Bar exam detractors argue that the timed, multiple choice portion of the exam, which is the portion that causes most bar exam failures, is a poor measure of legal competence.

Jensen disagreed from the lectern on Wednesday. The study group will hear from experts with the National Council of Bar Examiners during its work sessions and confront some of the issues raised by backers of Fitzgerald's proposals, he said, but the chief justice told the chamber that the bar exam is an important part of the licensure process in South Dakota.

It's true that the passage rate for South Dakota law graduates dipped significantly for a few years in the last decade, but scores are once again above the national average.

"Some of the criticism of the bar examination is that it is too hard," Jensen said. "Respectfully, the process to assess competence must be rigorous. Lawyers occupy unique positions of trust and responsibility. Clients place their confidence in lawyers to represent them in questions concerning their property, their liberty, and in the most serious criminal cases, their lives."

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story and headline have been corrected to reflect the source of the resolution on contested judicial elections, as well as the South Dakota Supreme Court's position on the resolution.

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux falls Argus Leader.

States that limit business with banks that 'boycott' fossil fuels could pay high cost, study says

BY: CASEY QUINLAN - JANUARY 12, 2023 2:36 PM

Republican state policymakers' efforts to boost fossil fuels by prohibiting their governments from doing business with companies that take sustainability into consideration has the potential to cost states millions, according to a study released Thursday.

Researchers looked specifically at the possible effects on Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma and West Virginia if they passed Texas-like legislation limiting investment options on municipal bonds and found it could cost them between \$264 and \$708 million in additional interest payments. The study noted that the states had not passed such broad legislation.

The six states are among two dozen that last year issued proposed or passed legislation prohibiting state government entities from doing business with financial firms that take environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) into consideration when making investment decisions as anti-ESG efforts spread from state treasurers and attorneys general to governors and lawmakers. Republican policymakers refer to ESG as the "boycotting" of energy companies and argue that the investment funds are following a liberal agenda that hurts jobs.

The study by Econsult Solutions of Philadelphia was commissioned by the Sunrise Project for two groups focused on environmental policy, As You Sow, and Ceres Accelerator for Sustainable Capital Markets. It expands on a Wharton School of Business study released in July that focused on the cost to Texas after anti-ESG laws restricting business with banks that have policies against fossil fuels and firearms took effect there in 2021.

Steven Rothstein, managing director of Ceres Accelerator, calls the anti-ESG bills and changes to state pension funds "short-sighted" and "political." He argues that these approaches will only hurt taxpayers.

"In the long run, we're worried that those taxpayers and pension holders will actually get hurt with higher risk and low return," he said.

With Texas leading the way as the first state to enact anti-ESG laws, the study's authors assumed passage of similar laws and the same bond market restrictions in the six states they chose to examine. They used data on municipal bond transactions from January 2017 to April 2022 and looked at changes in Texas bonds "that occurred during the last 12 months of the period which corresponded to the implementation of the new laws." The six were chosen because they had had more debate about anti-ESG bills and administrative action on ESG issues.

The Wharton study found that Texas paid higher interest rates because of less competition after major banks were forced from the state. Similarly, the Econsult study found that interest costs for its six states could balloon if they underwent Texas-like changes that influenced municipal bonds in addition to state actions.

- In Florida, the costs would range from \$97 million to \$361 million.
- In Kentucky, the costs would be between \$26 million and \$70 million.
- For Louisiana, the cost would fall between \$51 million and \$131 million.
- In West Virginia, the interest costs would be anywhere from \$9 million to \$29 million.
- In Missouri, taxpayers would see an increase in interest of \$32 to \$68 million.
- Oklahoma would have \$49 million in additional costs.

"That is a burden on every taxpayer — every teacher, every elder citizen in those states," Rothstein said. "That obviously doesn't help anyone. It's just higher interest costs, and that is because of having less bankers being able to bid for that work. That is one of the risks. And in addition, they're also not going to be considering climate risk."

Rothstein added that after the pandemic reminded people of how interconnected the supply chain is, it would be ill-advised to rule out considering climate risk, in addition to other ESG factors, and that ESG factors are only one set of considerations investors make among many.

Kentucky and West Virginia have now enacted bills restricting various government agencies and boards

from doing business with financial institutions that “boycott” fossil fuels although neither reference municipal bonds nor are they as broad as the Texas legislation.

In Missouri, state Sen. Mike Moon, R-Ash Grove, has already filed anti-ESG legislation this session, similar to a bill he filed last year that restricted “public bodies” from contracting with businesses that used “ESG scoring.” It is one of three Senate bills aimed at what state officials have labeled “woke” investments. Last year, the state’s then Treasurer, Scott Fitzpatrick, pulled \$500 million in pension funds from BlackRock, the world’s largest asset manager, saying the company had shown it would “prioritize the advancing a woke political agenda” over clients.

Michael Berg, political director of the Missouri chapter of Sierra Club, told States Newsroom he sees these efforts as a way for the fossil fuel industry to “buy time” and get in the way of any progress to address climate change.

“This is a national organized campaign being pushed by the Republican Party politicians, and conservative dark money groups controlled by billionaires and fossil fuel interests,” he said. Berg pointed to the influence of the State Financial Officers Foundation, a Kansas nonprofit that has been influential in the policy push against ESG.

According to a New York Times investigation, the group coordinated with the Heartland Institute, Heritage Foundation, and American Petroleum Institute to push anti-ESG policy approaches since January 2021.

“They (lawmakers) say they don’t like BlackRock looking at anything besides immediate returns, but we have to see whether or not they’re actually costing Missouri pensioners because of political decisions under the guise of opposing political decisions,” Berg said.

Casey Quinlan is an economy reporter for States Newsroom, based in Washington, D.C. For the past decade, they have reported on national politics and state politics, LGBTQ rights, abortion access, labor issues, education, Supreme Court news and more for publications including The American Independent, ThinkProgress, New Republic, Rewire News, SCOTUSblog, In These Times and Vox.

U.S. attorney general names special counsel for classified docs found in Biden’s garage

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND JACOB FISCHLER - JANUARY 12, 2023 1:59 PM

WASHINGTON — The White House revealed Thursday morning that more classified documents from President Joe Biden’s time as vice president were discovered outside of secure government facilities, this time in the garage at his Wilmington, Delaware home.

The files have since been turned over to the U.S. Justice Department, which opened a special counsel investigation into the matter. Another set of documents with classified markings also dating to the Obama administration were discovered earlier at a think tank associated with Biden.

U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland, speaking Thursday afternoon, said he’d appointed former federal prosecutor Robert Hur to lead the investigation to determine if Biden had mishandled classified material.

“This appointment underscores for the public the department’s commitment to both independence and accountability in particularly sensitive matters, and to making decisions indisputably guided only by the facts and the law,” Garland said. “I am confident that Mr. Hur will carry out his responsibility in an even-handed and urgent manner, and in accordance with the highest traditions of this department.”

Hur was appointed in 2018 by then-President Donald Trump to lead the federal prosecutor’s office in Maryland and joined the law firm of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher in April 2021.

Biden expanded on the developments during brief remarks Thursday morning following a speech on the economy, saying his lawyers “discovered a small number of documents with classified markings in storage areas and file cabinets in my home and in my personal library.”

Biden added, while being questioned by reporters, that the garage, where he also stores his classic Corvettes, was locked.

“By the way, my Corvettes [are] in a locked garage. It’s not like they’re sitting out on the street,” Biden said.

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Second discovery

The finding of additional classified documents was announced in a written statement by Richard Sauber, special counsel to the president. The disclosure came after documents with classified markings were found at the Penn Biden Center in Washington, D.C., in November 2022, and the president's lawyers began searching his residences in Wilmington and Rehoboth Beach, Delaware.

Those lawyers found "a small number of additional Obama-Biden Administration records with classified markings," according to Sauber.

"All but one of these documents were found in storage space in the President's Wilmington residence garage," Sauber said. "One document consisting of one page was discovered among stored materials in an adjacent room. No documents were found in the Rehoboth Beach residence."

The lawyers immediately contacted the Department of Justice and arranged to turn over the documents, Sauber said.

Following Garland's remarks, Sauber said Biden and his legal team "will continue that cooperation with the Special Counsel."

"We are confident that a thorough review will show that these documents were inadvertently misplaced, and the President and his lawyers acted promptly upon discovery of this mistake," Sauber added.

The Justice Department received notice from Biden's personal attorney on Dec. 20 that the additional classified documents had been found, Garland said.

Biden in his remarks reiterated that he respects the federal government's classification process.

"As I said earlier this week, people know I take classified documents and classified materials seriously," Biden said. "I also said we're cooperating fully with the Justice Department's review."

Garland laid out a timeline of when the department learned of the classified documents. The National Archives Office of the Inspector General first notified the Justice Department on Nov. 4 that documents were stored at the Penn Biden Center, Garland said.

Trump comparisons

The discovery of classified documents in Biden's private residence, not just an office he used after his time as vice president, immediately drew comparisons to the classified documents found inside Trump's private residence at Mar-a-Lago in Florida.

Those documents were, however, only recovered by the government after the FBI secured a search warrant for parts of his property amid an ongoing struggle by the National Archives to get back all of the classified documents.

Federal authorities are investigating Trump for possible Espionage Act violations because of classified documents he took from the White House to Mar-a-Lago. The FBI executed a search of his residence in August, finding about 100 classified documents out of 11,000 total documents, the Justice Department said.

The search followed Trump's return to the National Archives of documents, including 184 with classified markings, that had been held at Mar-a-Lago after he left the White House.

Still, Republicans seized upon the Biden revelations. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a California Republican, rebuked Biden for keeping the documents with classified markings at an office and his personal residence in Delaware.

"I think Congress has to investigate this," McCarthy said. "Here's an individual that's been in office for more than 40 years, here's an individual that said on '60 Minutes' that [he] was so concerned about President Trump's documents."

McCarthy added: "I do not think any American believes that justice should not be equal to all."

Biden answered questions about the documents just after a speech on the U.S. economy, where he was hoping to focus on low unemployment and reduced inflation.

"The data is clear, even though inflation is high in major economies around the world, it is coming down in America month after month," Biden said.

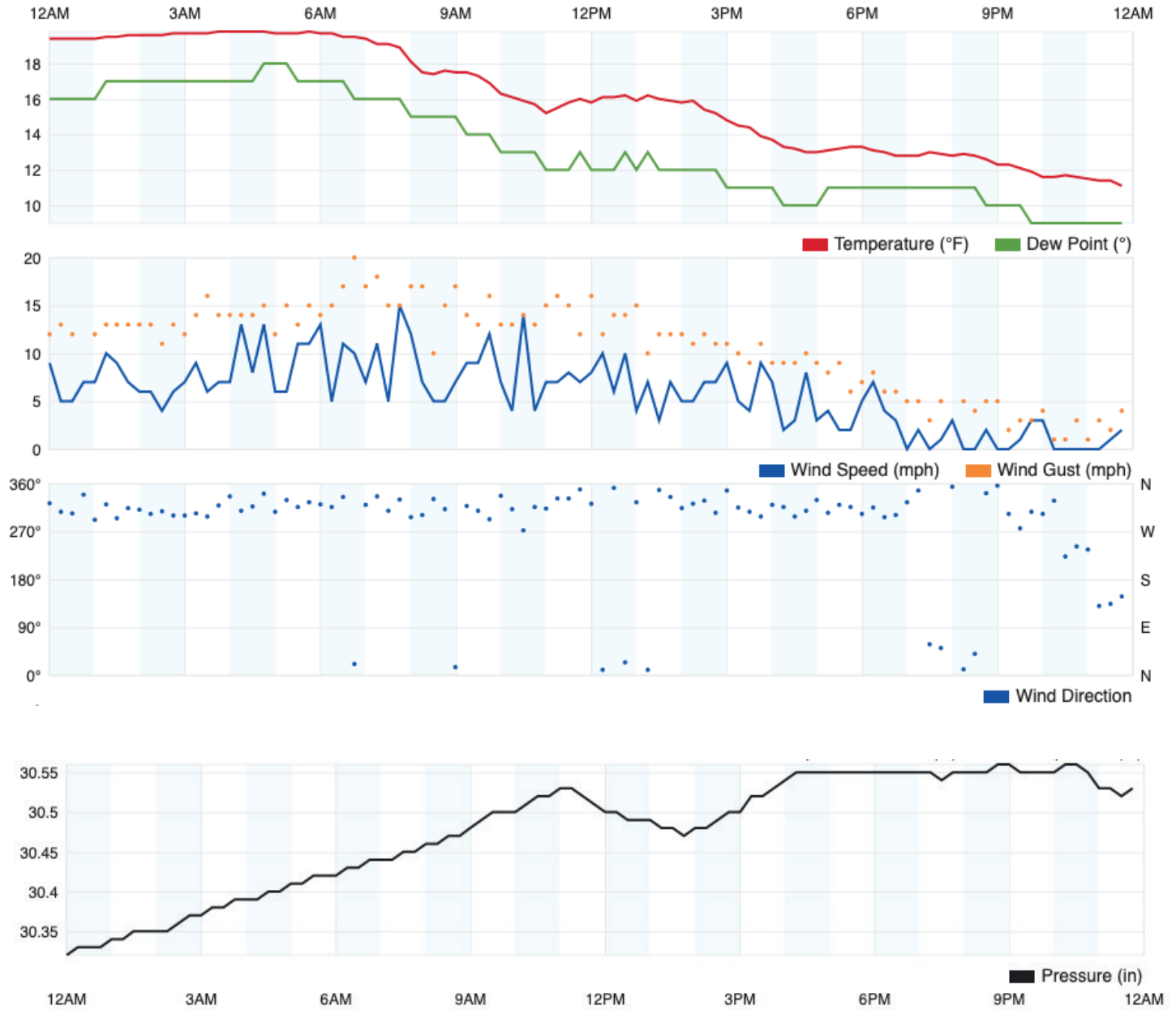
Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

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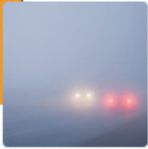






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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs




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Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	M.L.King Day
						
Chance Flurries and Areas Dense Freezing Fog	Areas Fog	Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Slight Chance Snow then Mostly Cloudy
High: 23 °F	Low: 17 °F	High: 32 °F	Low: 21 °F	High: 33 °F	Low: 18 °F	High: 27 °F



January 13, 2023
4:39 AM



	Maximum Temperature Forecast							Maximum
	1/13	1/14		1/15		1/16		
	Fri	Sat	Sun	Sun	Mon	Mon		
	12pm	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	
Aberdeen	24	26	32	29	33	25	28	33
Britton	23	28	33	29	31	23	26	33
Eagle Butte	36	31	38	33	38	26	29	38
Eureka	28	28	33	28	33	22	26	33
Gettysburg	29	30	36	29	34	24	26	36
Kennebec	36	33	40	32	37	27	32	40
McIntosh	33	27	32	29	33	23	25	33
Milbank	23	27	34	32	33	26	28	34
Miller	29	32	36	31	34	26	28	36
Mobridge	34	30	37	31	36	25	29	37
Murdo	39	37	44	35	40	29	33	44
Pierre	38	34	42	33	39	29	33	42
Redfield	23	27	33	28	32	24	27	33
Sisseton	25	28	33	32	34	26	27	34
Watertown	22	26	32	30	32	25	27	32
Webster	21	26	32	29	31	24	25	32
Wheaton	19	23	30	31	32	25	28	32

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Happy Friday! Temperatures are expected to be above average through the weekend, which will help melt some of this snow!

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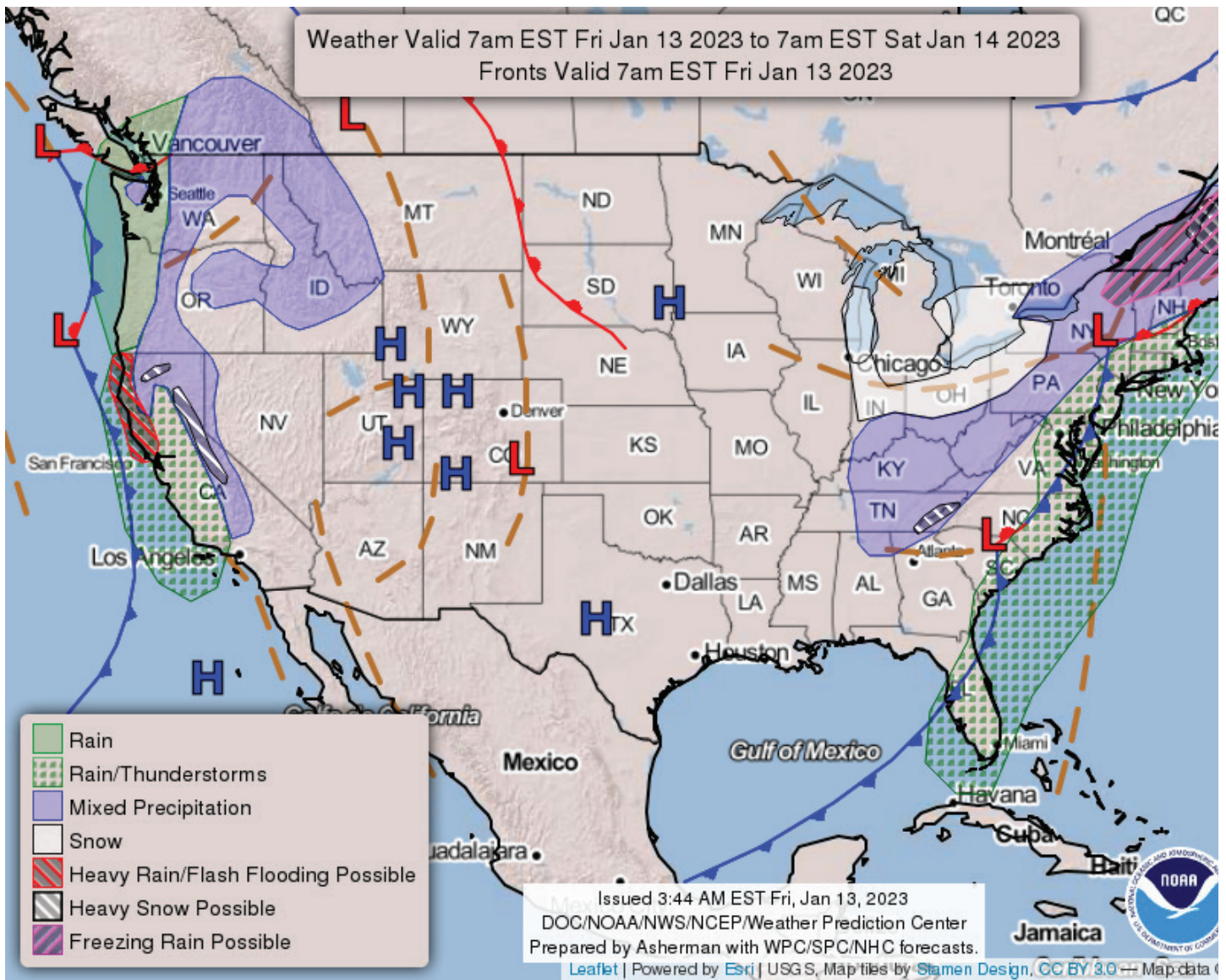
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 20 °F at 3:43 AM
Low Temp: 11 °F at 11:59 PM
Wind: 20 mph at 6:45 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 06 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 56 in 1987
Record Low: -40 in 1912
Average High: 23°F
Average Low: 2°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.26
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.26
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 5:14:27 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:07:12 AM



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Today in Weather History

January 13, 1913: The temperature at Rapid City, South Dakota, rose sixty-four degrees in just fourteen hours.

January 13, 1916: An extreme cold affected central and northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota on January 13th, 1916. Record low temperatures were set at Kennebec, Timber Lake, Wheaton, and Watertown. Timber Lake recorded a low temperature of 37 degrees below zero. Wheaton fell to 38 degrees below zero. Kennebec recorded a low of 39 degrees below zero, with 40 degrees below zero recorded at Watertown on this day in 1916. Aberdeen and Mobridge recorded 38 degrees below zero and 36 degrees below zero, respectively.

January 13, 2009: After a clipper system dropped from 1 to 4 inches of snow on the 13th, Arctic air and blustery north winds pushed into the area. The coldest air and the lowest wind chills of the season spread across much of central and northeast South Dakota. Wind chills fell to 35 to 50 degrees below zero late in the evening of the 13th and remained through the 14th and into the mid-morning hours of the 15th. Across northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota, wind chills were as low as 60 degrees below zero by the morning of the 15th. Many vehicles did not start because of the extreme cold, and several schools had delayed starts. The Arctic high-pressure area settled in on the morning of the 15th, bringing the region's coldest temperatures in many years. The combination of a fresh and deep snowpack, clear skies, and light winds allowed temperatures to fall to record levels at many locations on the 15th. Daytime highs remained well below zero across the area. This was one of the coldest days that most areas experienced since the early 1970s. The records were broken by 1 to as much as 7 degrees. Some of the record lows included -30 degrees at Kennebec; -31 degrees at Sisseton; -32 degrees at Milbank; -33 degrees at Mobridge; -35 degrees at Andover and near Summit; -38 degrees at Eureka; -39 degrees 8 miles north of Columbia and Castlewood; -42 degrees at Aberdeen; and -47 degrees at Pollock. Some near-record low temperatures included -24 degrees at Pierre, -29 degrees at Redfield and Victor; -32 degrees at Roscoe; and -34 degrees at Watertown. In Aberdeen, the low temperature of -42 degrees is the third coldest temperature ever recorded.

1862: Known as the Great Flood of 1862, a series of storms from December 1861 to January 1862 produced the largest flood in the recorded history of Oregon, Nevada, and California. Estimated property damage in California alone was \$10 million in 1862 dollars. More than 200,000 head of cattle lost their lives. The State of California went bankrupt, and the economy evolved from ranching to farm-based. The same areas are expected to be flooded again if another ARkStorm (USGS name) impacts California, which could cause over \$750 billion (2011 USD), making it more disastrous than California's long-overdue major earthquake. California is currently overdue for a Megastorm, and such an event would have severe impacts on the entire U.S. economy.

1886 - A great blizzard struck the state of Kansas without warning. The storm claimed 50 to 100 lives, and eighty percent of the cattle in the state. (David Ludlum)

1888 - The mercury plunged to 65 degrees below zero at Fort Keough, located near Miles City MT. The reading stood as a record for the continental U.S. for sixty-six years. (David Ludlum)

1950: January 1950 was one of the worst winter months on record for Seattle, Washington, and surrounding areas. By the end of the month, Seattle measured 57.2 inches of snow, the most snowfall in any month since records began in 1894. The normal January snowfall is 1.4 inches. On this day, a crippling blizzard produced 40 to 50 mph winds and an astounding 20 inches.

1912 - The temperature at Oakland, MD, plunged to 40 degrees below zero to establish a state record. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 - Dry and mild weather prevailed across the country. Nineteen cities in the Upper Midwest reported record high temperatures for the date, including Grand Island NE with a reading of 67 degrees. (National Weather Summary)

1989 - Friday the 13th was bad luck primarily for the south central U.S. as an upper level weather disturbance spread a mixture of snow and sleet and freezing rain across Texas and Oklahoma. Snowfall totals in central Oklahoma ranged up to 8.5 inches at Norman. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

WHAT GOD PROMISES TO REWARD

Most individuals want to be recognized and rewarded for doing good. Some dedicate their entire lives to work with the sick and oppressed. Others, who are wealthy, establish trusts or foundations, and donate money to what they consider "worthy causes." Many give generously to charitable organizations that serve the less fortunate or those overwhelmed by a disaster. Everyone seems to have a "touch point" in their heart that will trigger an urge to give or share.

But, there is no guarantee that our giving will bring us a reward, or in fact, benefit others. However, as sure as we are that our God is a faithful God and will keep His Word, Solomon, on behalf of God promises us that "Humility and fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life." Certainly, this verse will get the attention of "reward" seekers!

Yet, "seeking" a reward for the sake of a reward is not what this verse is all about. Notice the first word - "humility" is followed by the familiar theme throughout Proverbs: "and fear of the Lord." One can be humble and not fear the Lord. Humility without fearing the Lord is self-serving and an end in itself. To be humble because we "fear the Lord" is rather different. This "fear" grows in the heart of a believer because God is recognized as being sovereign and worthy of worship and reverence, honor and praise. Its understanding fear through the lens of "awe and respect."

Perhaps it is difficult to understand that "humility and fear of the Lord" will bring us "wealth and honor and life." So, can we really expect them as rewards? If we view God as He is and ourselves as we are, we have God's guarantee that He will bless us materially, socially and personally. How can this be? The "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom!" Have you tried it?

Prayer: It's easy, Lord, to live life with grand schemes and false motives. Cleanse us from vanity and fill us with humility. Though we fear You, we know we need not be afraid of You. Amen!

Scripture For Today: Humility and fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life. Proverbs 22:4



We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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2023 Community Events

- 01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 03/25/2023 Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center
- 04/01/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
- 04/01/2023 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
- 04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
- 05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
- 06/16/2023 – SDSU Alumni and Friends Golf Tournament
- 07/04/2023 – Couples Firecracker Golf Tournament
- 07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/26/2023 – GGA Burger Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 08/04/2023 – Wine on Nine 6pm
- 08/11/2023 – GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
- 09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/10/2023 – Couples Sunflower Golf Tournament
- 10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
- 10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
- 12/02/2023 – Tour of Homes & Holiday Party

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.10.23

7 13 14 15 18 9

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$1,350,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 52 Mins 49 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.11.23

5 23 45 46 51 3

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$34,120,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 52 Mins 49 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.12.23

3 12 17 42 45 6

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 22 Mins 48 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.11.23

6 12 18 31 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 52 Mins 48 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.11.23

1 3 11 44 62 6

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 51 Mins 49 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.11.23

4 8 46 47 48 5

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$404,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 51 Mins 49 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Alcester-Hudson 44, Akron-Westfield, Iowa 40
Andes Central/Dakota Christian 70, Mitchell Christian 23
Baltic 62, Chester 60
Bison 55, McIntosh 24
Burke 74, Colome 33
Canton 60, Dakota Valley 57
Castlewood 59, Great Plains Lutheran 24
Centerville 55, Irene-Wakonda 28
Corsica/Stickney 36, Winner 27
Crofton, Neb. 43, West Central 32
DeSmet 68, Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 51
Deubrook 39, Estelline/Hendricks 28
Flandreau 57, Madison 36
Freeman 44, Bon Homme 40
Groton Area 45, Tiospa Zina Tribal 30
Hanson 75, Parker 25
Harding County 44, Sundance, Wyo. 36
Hill City 65, Lead-Deadwood 10
Howard 34, Canistota 21
Kimball/White Lake 40, Gregory 38
Leola/Frederick 43, Strasburg-Zeeland, N.D. 19
Little Wound 62, Pine Ridge 52
Lyman 57, Stanley County 41
McCook Central/Montrose 45, Sioux Valley 42
Menno 47, Bridgewater-Emery 31
Milbank 37, Redfield 25
Miller 56, Sully Buttes 29
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 55, Platte-Geddes 46
Northwestern 58, Ipswich 38
Pierre 60, Lakota Tech 41
Potter County 67, Highmore-Harrold 50
Rapid City Christian 71, Alliance, Neb. 57
Scotland 53, Avon 49
Sioux Falls Christian 60, Tea Area 37
Sioux Falls Lincoln 57, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 33
Sioux Falls Washington 46, Sioux Falls Jefferson 42
Tri-Valley 52, Beresford 40
Vermillion 45, Lennox 35
Viborg-Hurley 68, Gayville-Volin 21
Wagner 59, Parkston 35
Wall 61, Chamberlain 45
Watertown 57, Yankton 37
White River 63, St. Francis Indian 19

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Wilmot 53, Waverly-South Shore 37

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 46, Sisseton 34
Akron-Westfield, Iowa 64, Alcester-Hudson 32
Baltic 50, Chester 46
Beresford 69, Tri-Valley 40
Bison 56, McIntosh 25
Canton 77, Garretson 38
Castlewood 62, Great Plains Lutheran 21
Crazy Horse 66, St. Francis Indian 42
Dakota Valley 86, Hartington Cedar Catholic, Neb. 64
DeSmet 69, Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 23
Dell Rapids St. Mary 79, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 42
Elkton-Lake Benton 61, Arlington 26
Faith 57, Newell 31
Florence/Henry 71, Britton-Hecla 43
Freeman 44, Bon Homme 30
Groton Area 69, Tiospa Zina Tribal 39
Hanson 47, Parker 32
Harding County 78, Hettinger/Scranton, N.D. 55
Highmore-Harrold 66, Herreid/Selby Area 59
Hill City 74, Lead-Deadwood 37
Hot Springs 81, Edgemont 15
Irene-Wakonda 69, Centerville 41
Lemmon 66, Dupree 45
Lennox 71, Vermillion 52
Milbank 62, Redfield 32
Miller 76, Sully Buttes 59
Mitchell Christian 71, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 43
Moorcroft, Wyo. 48, Oelrichs 28
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 72, Platte-Geddes 59
Rapid City Christian 76, Alliance, Neb. 56
Scotland 47, Avon 27
St. Thomas More 70, Custer 42
Tiospaye Topa 81, Timber Lake 57
Upton, Wyo. 41, New Underwood 38
Viborg-Hurley 59, Gayville-Volin 32
Wagner 59, Parkston 35
Warner 57, Langford 28
Jones County Tournament=
Colome 42, Lyman 41
Philip 53, Kadoka Area 37
Stanley County 51, Jones County 43
White River 81, Bennett County 24

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Flames' Duehr 1st player from South Dakota to score in NHL

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By STEVE OVERBEY Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Walker Duehr made history with his first career NHL goal.

Duehr's first goal for Calgary on Thursday night broke a scoreless tie in the second period, and the 23-year-old winger who was born in Sioux Falls became the first South Dakota-born player to score in the NHL.

"This shows that anybody who puts their head down and goes to work can achieve pretty great things," Duehr said.

Dillon Dube scored twice in the third period and Dan Vladar made 25 saves, helping the Flames to a 4-1 win over the St. Louis Blues.

Dube broke a 1-all tie, scoring with 9:10 left in regulation and added an empty-netter in the final minutes. Blake Coleman pushed the lead to 3-1 with his eighth goal of the season with 3:56 left.

Calgary has recorded points in 16 of its last 19 games.

Duehr took a pass from Nazem Kadri late in the second period and wristed a shot past goalie Thomas Greiss, who had stopped 61 successive shots over his last three games. Nazem Kadri set up the goal with a pinpoint pass on a 2-on-1 breakout.

Calgary coach Darryl Sutter got a thrill out of seeing, Duehr get his first goal.

"Good for the young man," Sutter said. "It's awesome. Everybody always remembers their first."

Maybe not Duehr.

"I think I blacked out," Duehr said. "It was a pretty cool feeling. Something you dream about."

Duehr was called up over the weekend and made the second start of his career on Tuesday. He played in one game for the Flames in 2021.

"It was special to see the grin on his face," Dube said. "I train with him and I know him pretty well. I'm happy for him. It's a special night for sure. You enjoy it when someone does that. It was awesome, especially a big goal like that."

Duehr's goal seemed to ignite his teammates. Calgary scored three third-period goals in a span of 5:49.

Vladar, who wears No. 80, improved to 7-4-4 this season.

Jake Neighbours scored for St. Louis, which had won eight of its last nine against the Flames, including a 4-3 overtime decision on Tuesday.

Dube picked up a loose puck in the slot and broke a 1-all tie with his eighth goal of the season. He scored into an empty net with 3:21 left.

"We played a full 60 (minutes)," Dube said.

Kadri was booed throughout the game. Last year, as a member of the Colorado Avalanche, he collided with St. Louis goalie Jordan Binnington in Game 3 of a second-round playoff series and ended Binnington's season.

The Blues are without Vladimir Tarasenko (hand) and Ryan O'Reilly (foot) for four to six weeks.

Greiss made 36 saves and kept his team in the game over the first three periods.

"He was phenomenal tonight," Neighbours said. "It's a little frustrating."

SIGHTSEEING

Calgary coach Darryl Sutter and his staff went to see the Budweiser Clydesdale horses on a day off in downtown St. Louis on Wednesday.

EXTRA DUTY NOT SO FUN

The Flames lead the NHL with 12 overtime games. They lost to Chicago in OT on Sunday before dropping a 4-3 extra-session decision to the Blues on Tuesday. The Flames are 2-6 in OT periods and 1-3 in shootouts.

UP NEXT

Flames: Continue a five-game trip in Dallas on Saturday.

Blues: Face Tampa Bay on Saturday in the third of seven successive home games.

US renames 5 places that used racist slur for a Native woman

By TRISHA AHMED Associated Press/Report for America

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The U.S. Department of the Interior announced Thursday that it has given new names to five places that previously included a racist term for a Native American woman.

The renamed sites are in California, North Dakota, Tennessee and Texas, completing a yearlong process to remove the historically offensive word "squaw" from geographic names across the country.

"Words matter, particularly in our work to ensure our nation's public lands and waters are accessible and welcoming to people of all backgrounds," Interior Secretary Deb Haaland said in a statement. She called the word "harmful."

Haaland, who took office in 2021, is the first Native American to lead a Cabinet agency.

In September, the Interior Department announced its final vote on proposals to change the names of nearly 650 sites that contained the word. The agency conducted an additional review of seven locations, all of which were considered unincorporated populated places. Five of those were changed in Thursday's announcement.

In western North Dakota, the new name Homesteaders Gap was selected by members of a small community as a nod to their local history.

Mark Fox, tribal chairman of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation, welcomed the change, telling The Bismarck Tribune that the slur "really causes serious and strong emotions and resistance to that term." In a statement to The Associated Press, he said it was long overdue, and "we are pleased that the racially insensitive and offensive name has been removed."

But Joel Brown, a member of the McKenzie County Board of Commissioners, said many residents in the area "felt very strongly" in opposition to the switch. Brown, who is white, said he and others prefer as little interference from the federal government as possible because "generally we find they're disconnected from what the culture and economy are out here."

Two other newly named places are the California Central Valley communities of Loybas Hill, which translates to "Young Lady," proposed by the Paskenta Band of Nomlaki Indians; and Yokuts Valley.

The others are Partridgeberry, Tennessee, and Lynn Creek, Texas.

The decision has long precedent. The Interior Department ordered the renaming of places with derogatory terms for Black and Japanese people in 1962 and 1974, respectively.

Last year alone, authorities renamed 28 Wisconsin sites to remove a racist word, a panel recommended the name change of a Colorado mountain tied to a massacre, and the federal government renamed hundreds of peaks, lakes, streams and other geographical features with racist and misogynistic terms.

ND House passes legislation to legalize sports betting

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — The North Dakota House on Thursday approved legislation that would legalize sports betting in the state, sending the proposal to the state Senate.

If the Senate approves the measure, it would be placed on the November 2024 ballot for residents to decide whether to change the state constitution to allow sports betting. Currently, sports betting is allowed only at tribal casinos in the state.

Republican Rep. Greg Stemen, of Fargo, argued legalizing sports betting would bring in millions of dollars in revenue to the state, and provide oversight and regulation, The Bismarck Tribune reported.

Stemen said the American Gaming Association estimates as many as 138,000 North Dakotans are betting over \$300 million annually, including \$30 million in revenues to offshore betting books.

Opponents argued the measure would worsen gambling addictions and lead to ruined lives.

Thirty-five states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico currently authorize some form of sports betting.

Wisconsin, North Carolina governors ban popular TikTok app

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Wisconsin and North Carolina on Thursday became the latest states to ban the use of TikTok on state phones and other devices, a move that comes after nearly half of the states nationwide have blocked the popular social media app owned by a Chinese company.

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Democratic Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers ordered the ban, which also includes WeChat, after he said he consulted with the FBI and emergency management officials. He cited potential risks to privacy, safety and security. Evers' order applies to most state agencies, with some exceptions like criminal investigators who may be using the app to track certain people.

"Defending our state's technology and cybersecurity infrastructure and protecting digital privacy will continue to be a top priority," Evers tweeted when he announced the ban.

North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, who like Evers was under pressure from Republicans to enact a ban, cited similar concerns.

"It's important for us to protect state information technology from foreign countries that have actively participated in cyberattacks against the United States," Cooper said. "Protecting North Carolina from cyber threats is vital to ensuring the safety, security, privacy, and success of our state and its people."

The University of Wisconsin System, which employs 40,000 faculty and staff, is also exempt. But UW System spokesperson Mark Pitsch said despite the exemption, the university was conducting a review and moving toward placing restrictions on the app being used on devices in order to protect against serious cybersecurity risks.

UW has numerous official TikTok accounts like one for the women's volleyball team, which has more than 41,000 followers. Universities often use TikTok accounts as a recruiting tool to connect with high school students.

The ban will be enforced by the state's technology division, which already restricts what apps state employees can access on their government phones.

Only about 12 state phones have TikTok on them, according to Evers.

Evers himself does not have a personal or official TikTok account, but he did maintain an account supporting his reelection campaign earlier this year. His office has said that account was not used on any state-issued devices.

TikTok is owned by ByteDance, a Chinese company that moved its headquarters to Singapore in 2020. It has been targeted by critics who say the Chinese government could access user data, such as browsing history and location. U.S. armed forces also have prohibited the app on military devices.

TikTok is consumed by two-thirds of American teens and has become the second-most popular domain in the world. But there has long been bipartisan concern in Washington that Beijing would use legal and regulatory power to seize American user data or try to push pro-China narratives or misinformation.

Fears were stoked by news reports last year that a China-based team improperly accessed data of U.S. TikTok users, including two journalists, as part of a covert surveillance program to ferret out the source of leaks to the press.

There are also concerns that the company is sending masses of user data to China, in breach of stringent European privacy rules.

"We're disappointed that so many states are jumping on the political bandwagon to enact policies that will do nothing to advance cybersecurity in their states and are based on unfounded falsehoods about TikTok," Jamal Brown, a spokesperson for TikTok, said in an emailed statement.

TikTok is developing security and data privacy plans as part of an ongoing national security review by President Joe Biden's administration.

At least 22 other states, including, Ohio, New Jersey, Mississippi, Louisiana and South Dakota, have instituted bans on the use of TikTok on government devices. Congress last month banned TikTok from most U.S. government-issued devices over bipartisan concerns about security.

U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher, of Wisconsin, and Republican Sen. Marco Rubio, of Florida, introduced a bipartisan bill in December to ban TikTok from operating in the United States. Gallagher this week became chairman of a new House committee created with broad bipartisan support to investigate "strategic competition" between the U.S. and China.

Officials: Rapid City officer justified in fatal shooting

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PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City police officer justifiably believed that his life was in danger when he shot and killed a man at an apartment complex in November, South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley said Thursday.

Jackley said a Division of Criminal Investigation review found the man, James Mathew Murphy, rushed at the officer with a knife and struggled with him before he was shot.

"The officer attempted to deescalate the situation but the individual they encountered continued with threatening behavior," Jackley said. "This was a justified use of lethal force by the officer."

Video and audio recordings from the officer's body worn camera, witness interviews, surveillance video and other forensic evidence corroborated the the officer's account that he feared for his life and that Murphy was a danger to the public, Jackley said.

The officer was not injured.

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. January 10, 2023.

Editorial: YSD's Stand On Proposed Standards

It was no surprise when the Yankton School Board voted unanimously Monday night to express its opposition to the latest proposed Social Studies standards for South Dakota schools.

In fact, that lack of surprise was the point.

The periodic updating of the state's Social Studies standards has previously been an uneventful, little noticed exercise. But in 2021, when a special 46-person commission (which included Native American educators) submitted a final report that was then significantly altered by the governor's office — it redacted much of the Native American education component — the firestorm began, and rightfully so. It prompted Gov. Kristi Noem to scuttle the draft proposal and put together a new 15-person commission last year that included a curious mix of political appointees, the director of the South Dakota Catholic Conference on Education and three teachers, two of whom weren't even certified to teach in this state. The new standards consist of a lot of memorization that some educators believe is age-inappropriate in some cases.

The latest proposal is still in the review phase, and some school boards around the state are weighing in, like Yankton did.

However, the Yankton School District (YSD) turned its decision over to the teachers and to the public, conducting surveys with each group.

The Social Studies teachers were polled on their feelings about the new proposal, and 96% of them voiced their opposition, Superintendent Dr. Wayne Kindle told the YSD board Monday night. He had previously noted the result while speaking at a community forum held at Mount Marty in November.

The parents were also polled on their views, and more than 45% said they didn't support the standards and another 36% said they were undecided "but support and value the opinion of their child's teacher regarding the Social Studies standards."

"When you combine that 'I do not support the Social Studies standards,' along with 'I'm not sure but support and value the opinion of my child's teacher,' that was 81% of our 400 parents that took the survey," Kindle noted. "When you take the answer about supporting and valuing the teacher's opinion, we have 96% of our teachers that say they do not support it."

YSD's approach to this issue illustrates a glaring contrast. The decision approved by the school board Monday night was reached by extensive polling of some of the key stakeholders directly involved: the teachers and the parents of YSD students. This seems quite different from the process the state has used to formulate the current standards or from the consideration devoted to the first standards proposed.

It's difficult to tell how this process will play out, and there are still some curves in the road ahead. But the YSD board deserves credit for letting its stance be guided by the views and feelings of its personnel and its constituents.

END

'Loyalty': Quartet of friends atop D-II women's games chart

By ERIC OLSON AP Sports Writer

KEARNEY, Neb. (AP) — Brooke Carlson, Elisa Backes, Maegan Holt, Klaire Kirsch and Shiloh McCool do almost everything together.

That includes movie nights and meals at the house four of the five share near the University of Nebraska-Kearney campus, organizing community service projects and excelling academically.

Oh, and they play basketball together. Lots and lots of basketball.

Carlson, Backes, Holt and Kirsch are the top four active players in career games played in Division II. Carlson has played in all 138 games for the Lopers since 2018. Backes and Holt each has appeared in 137 and Kirsch, who missed five because of injury last year, has played in 133. The four are using the fifth year of eligibility the NCAA granted players who went through the 2020-21 pandemic season.

McCool would be right there with them in games played if a knee injury hadn't forced her to take a medical redshirt in 2019-20. She has played in 106 games and plans to return next season.

That players from the same school rank one through four in career games is a quirky statistic, if not an anomaly, considering there are 294 teams in Division II women's basketball.

To coach Carrie Eighmey, it's a refreshing stat.

"With all the conversations there are about the transfer portal and grad transfers and all those kinds of things," she said, "the conversation has shifted (away from) the student-athletes who stay where they're at and invest long-term into themselves and into the program they're in."

None of the UNK players were aware of their distinction until last week.

"It's cool," Carlson said. "I don't think there's ever going to be a circumstance like this again, just with COVID and an extra year of eligibility and all of our seniors coming back. It's mind-blowing, it's amazing and it shows you how much loyalty there is in this program that we all came back to play for these coaches one more year."

Carlson, Backes, Holt, Kirsch and McCool were part of Eighmey's 2018 recruiting class known as the "Magnificent Seven." Two moved on, but the other five became fast friends while living on the same floor of the freshman dormitory.

They come from four different states — Carlson from the Omaha suburb of Elkhorn; Backes from Salina, Kansas; Holt from Council Bluffs, Iowa; Kirsch from Rapid City, South Dakota; and McCool from Pleasant Hill, Iowa.

They gravitated to this middle-of-Nebraska city of 34,000 that advertises itself as the Sandhill Crane Capital of the World for drawing more than 40,000 visitors to the area each spring to view the migration of the exotic birds. Mostly it's a college town, and one with a proud history in multiple sports dating to its days as Kearney State College.

"We have a great basketball team and we like each other," Backes said. "We love the school. We love the coaching staff. You're lucky if you go to a college and find one of those things."

The super seniors were building blocks for a program starting over in 2018-19. Only three players returned from Eighmey's 21-win team the previous season.

McCool said there were times all five freshmen were on the court at the same time, most playing out of position and with little idea of what to do. That first team ended up 15-14.

"Things have definitely changed," McCool said.

The Lopers have followed with seasons of 26, 22 and 24 wins and two NCAA Division II Tournament bids. At 15-3, they're on track for a fourth straight 20-win season.

McCool and Backes are the top two scorers this season and Kirsch is the program's all-time leading rebounder. Carlson and Holt are coming off the bench after starting in previous seasons; they say they had no problem accepting their new roles and never considered not coming back for a fifth season.

"Yeah, it kind of humbles me a little bit, and it makes me think of what are the other ways I can contribute to the team," Carlson said. "Can I be cheering on the bench louder, can I be helping people if I see

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something on the floor they can't see? It's buying into the team mentality and putting away our personal pride for the benefit of the team and for something greater than ourselves."

Memories made off the court might be more important to this group. Each spoke fondly of their time together, whether it was watching movies or sharing meals, playing cornhole before football games, going to the driving range to hit golf balls, rafting down the Kearney Canal or those dreaded 6 a.m. offseason workouts.

"We've been together for so long and through so much," Kirsch said, "that if one of us decided not to come back, it definitely would feel like a missing piece."

Russia says it took Soledar in bloody fight in east Ukraine

By ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia claimed Friday that its forces captured a fiercely contested salt mining town, in what would mark a rare victory for the Kremlin after a series of setbacks in its invasion of Ukraine.

There was no immediate confirmation from Ukrainian authorities of Soledar's fall. There have been conflicting reports over who controls the town, the site of a monthslong bloody battle in the grinding fight for Ukraine's eastern regions. Given the dangers there, The Associated Press could not confirm Russia's claim.

Soledar is located in Ukraine's Donetsk province, one of four that Moscow illegally annexed in September. From the outset, Moscow identified Donetsk and neighboring Luhansk province as priorities, and it has treated the areas as Russian territory since their alleged annexation.

"The liberation of the town of Soledar was completed in the evening of Jan. 12," Lt. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, the Russian Defense Ministry's spokesman, said, adding that the development was "important for the continuation of offensive operations in the Donetsk region."

Taking control of Soledar would allow Russian forces "to cut supply lines for the Ukrainian forces" in Bakhmut and then "block and encircle the Ukrainian units there," Konashenkov said.

Still, the Institute for the Study of War, a think tank in Washington, said that a Russian seizure of Soledar was "not an operationally significant development and is unlikely to presage an imminent Russian encirclement of Bakhmut."

The institute said that Russian information operations have "overexaggerated the importance of Soledar," a small settlement, arguing as well that the long and difficult battle has contributed to the exhaustion of Russian forces.

Just hours before Russia's claim, Ukraine reported that there had been a heavy night of fighting but did not acknowledge loss of the town.

In a Telegram post early Friday, Ukraine's deputy defense minister, Hanna Maliar, said that Moscow "had sent almost all (its) main forces" to secure a victory in the east. She said that Ukrainian fighters "are bravely trying to hold the defense."

"This is a difficult stage of the war, but we will win. There is no doubt," Maliar added.

Suspect charged with murder in assassination of Japan's Abe

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japanese prosecutors formally charged the suspect in the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe with murder, sending him to stand trial, a court said Friday.

Tetsuya Yamagami was arrested immediately after allegedly shooting Abe with a homemade gun as the former leader was making a campaign speech in July outside a train station in Nara in western Japan. He then underwent a nearly six-month mental evaluation, which prosecutors said showed he is fit to stand trial.

Yamagami was also charged with violating a gun control law, according to the Nara District Court.

Police have said Yamagami told them that he killed Abe, one of Japan's most influential and divisive politicians, because of Abe's apparent links to a religious group that he hated. In his statements and in social media postings attributed to him, Yamagami said he developed a grudge because his mother had made massive donations to the Unification Church that bankrupted his family and ruined his life.

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One of his lawyers, Masaaki Furukawa, told The Associated Press on Thursday that Yamagami will have to take responsibility for the serious consequences of his alleged actions and that his defense lawyers will do their best to reduce his sentence.

Japanese law allows capital punishment for murder, but experts say the death penalty usually is handed down for multiple killings and Yamagami could get life in prison if convicted.

No date is set for the trial, which is expected to have a panel of civil jurors in addition to the usual bench judges, as is typical in murder cases and other serious criminal trials in Japan. There are no pretrial hearings in Japan and defendants generally undergo trials.

Due to the complexity of the case, it will take months before his trial begins, Furukawa said.

Police are also reportedly considering adding several other allegations, including producing weapons, violating the explosives control law and causing damage to buildings.

In a country known for public safety and tight gun controls, the assassination led to the resignation of top local and national police chiefs and a tightening of security guidelines for political leaders and other prominent people.

"We must take very seriously the heinous act of violence that resulted in the death of former Prime Minister Abe," Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said in response to Yamagami's indictment.

He said Japan will ensure the safety of dignitaries and political leaders with the summit of the Group of Seven nations and nationwide local elections coming in the spring.

Some Japanese have expressed sympathy for Yamagami, especially those who also suffered as children of followers of the South Korea-based Unification Church, which is known for pressuring adherents into making big donations and is considered a cult in Japan.

Thousands of people have signed a petition requesting leniency for Yamagami, and others have sent care packages to his relatives or the detention center.

Kazuo Kobayashi, 64, a resident of Chiba near Tokyo, said Yamagami should face justice regardless of his difficult background.

"I think it's good to bring him to justice and make clear what is right and what is wrong," he said. "I want the case to be fully examined to find the truth in order to have a lesson for Japan's future."

The investigation into the case has led to revelations of years of cozy ties between Abe's governing Liberal Democratic Party and the church since Abe's grandfather, former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, helped the church take root in Japan in the 1960s over shared interests in conservative and anti-communist causes.

Current Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's popularity has plunged over his handling of the church controversy and for insisting on holding a rare, controversial state funeral for Abe.

Kishida shuffled his Cabinet in August to remove ministers with church ties, but the subsequent release of an investigation by the governing party in September showed nearly half of its 400 national lawmakers had church connections.

Kishida, who said has no relations with the church, promised that party lawmakers will cut ties with the group, and his government has begun an investigation that could lead to a revocation of the church's religious status.

The government also adopted a law designed to help victims of the church's fundraising practices, though experts say the measure is insufficient.

Yoshihiro Morishima, a 72-year-old resident of Yokohama, said the church has long been a social problem, and "I would prefer that it disappear at this point. It would be just what the suspect wanted, but that's fine with me."

Rifts in Russian military command seen amid Ukraine fighting

By The Associated Press undefined

As Russian troops wage a ferocious house-to-house fight for control of strongholds in eastern Ukraine, a parallel battle is unfolding in the top echelons of military power in Moscow, with President Vladimir Putin

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reshuffling his top generals while rival camps try to win his favor.

The fighting for the salt mining town of Soledar and the nearby city of Bakhmut has highlighted a bitter rift between the Russian Defense Ministry leadership and Yevgeny Prigozhin, a rogue millionaire whose private military force known as the Wagner Group has played an increasingly visible role in Ukraine.

Putin's shakeup of the military brass this week was seen as a bid to show that the Defense Ministry still has his support and is in charge as the troubled conflict nears the 11-month mark.

Prigozhin rushed Wednesday to declare that his mercenary force had captured Soledar, arguing that the prize was won exclusively by Wagner. The Defense Ministry has challenged that characterization — describing action by airborne troops and other forces in the battle — and claimed credit for taking the town on Friday. Ukraine hasn't confirmed Soledar's fall.

The 61-year-old Prigozhin, who was known as "Putin's chef" for his lucrative catering contracts and was indicted in the U.S. for meddling in the 2016 presidential election, has expanded his assets to include Wagner, as well as mining and other spheres. He has scathingly criticized the military brass for blunders in Ukraine, saying Wagner was more efficient than regular troops.

He has found a powerful ally in Chechnya's leader Ramzan Kadyrov, who has deployed elite troops from his southern Russian region to fight in Ukraine and also assailed the military leadership and the Kremlin for being too soft and indecisive.

While both have pledged loyalty to Putin, their public attacks on his top generals openly challenged the Kremlin's monopoly on such criticism, something that Russia's tightly controlled political system hadn't seen before.

In the reshuffle announced Wednesday, the Defense Ministry said the head of the General Staff, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, was named the new chief of Russian forces in Ukraine, while the former top commander there, Gen. Sergei Surovikin, was demoted to Gerasimov's deputy after only three months on the job.

The Washington-based Institute of the Study of War saw the reshuffle as an attempt by the Kremlin to "reassert the primacy of the Russian Ministry of Defense in an internal Russian power struggle," weaken the influence of its foes, and send a signal to Prigozhin and others to reduce their criticism.

Prigozhin and Kadyrov have repeatedly criticized Gerasimov, the main architect of the Russian operation in Ukraine, and held him responsible for military defeats while praising Surovikin.

Russian troops were forced to retreat from Kyiv after a botched attempt to capture the Ukrainian capital in the opening weeks of the war. In the fall, they hastily pulled back from the northeastern Kharkiv region and the southern city of Kherson under the brunt of a swift Ukrainian counteroffensive.

Surovikin directed the retreat from Kherson, the only regional center captured by Russia, and was credited for shoring up command and increasing discipline in the ranks. But a Ukrainian missile strike on Jan. 1 in the eastern town of Makiivka killed scores of Russian troops and tainted his image.

Political analyst Tatiana Stanovaya observed that Gerasimov's appointment marked yet another attempt by Putin to resolve his military problems by shaking up the brass.

"He is trying to reshuffle the pieces and is therefore giving chances to those who he finds persuasive," she wrote. "But in reality, the problem is not with the people, but with the tasks at hand."

Stanovaya argued that Gerasimov could have asked for "carte blanche in the heat of verbal battles against the background of some very tense discussions." For Putin, "this is maneuvering, a tug-of-war between Surovikin (and sympathizers like Prigozhin) and Gerasimov," she added.

Gerasimov, who began his military career as a Soviet army tank officer in the 1970s, has been chief of the General Staff since 2012 and was seen at the start of the conflict in February sitting next to Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu at a very long table with Putin. His appointment to directly lead the forces in Ukraine drew stinging comments from some Russian hawks.

Viktor Alksnis, a retired Soviet air force colonel who spearheaded botched attempts to preserve the USSR in 1991, noted that Gerasimov had overseen the action in Ukraine even before his appointment.

"This decision reflects the understanding by our political and military leadership that the special military operation has failed and none of its goals has been fulfilled in nearly a year of fighting," Alksnis wrote on his messaging app channel. "Replacing Surovikin with Gerasimov will change nothing."

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Mark Galeotti, who specializes in Russian military and security affairs at University College, London, said the appointment handed Gerasimov "the most poisoned of chalices" as he now will bear direct responsibility for any more setbacks.

"Gerasimov is hanging by a thread," Galeotti said in a commentary on Twitter. "He needs some kind of win, or a career ends in ignominy. This may well suggest some kinds of escalation."

Galeotti also warned that frequent reshuffling of Russia's generals could erode allegiance in the officer corps.

"If you keep appointing, rotating, burning your (relative) stars, setting unrealistic expectations, arbitrarily demoting them, that's not going to win loyalty," he said.

Prigozhin, meanwhile, has taken advantage of military setbacks in Ukraine to expand his clout by making the Wagner Group a pivotal element of the Russian fighting force, augmenting the regular army that has suffered a heavy attrition.

Ukrainian officials alleged Wagner contractors have suffered massive losses in the fighting in Soledar and Bakhmut, advancing "on the bodies of their own comrades."

Once convicted of assault and robbery, for which he served time in prison, Prigozhin in recent months went on a tour of Russia's sprawling network of penal colonies to recruit inmates to join Wagner's forces to fight in Ukraine in exchange for pardons.

He recently released a video showing about 20 convicts allowed to leave the ranks of fighters after a half-year on the front line, while also making clear that anyone breaking ranks will face brutal punishment.

Footage posted in the fall showed a Wagner contractor being beaten to death with a sledgehammer after allegedly defecting to the Ukrainian side. Despite public outrage and demands to investigate the incident, authorities have turned a blind eye to it.

Observers have warned that by giving Prigozhin a free hand to run Wagner as a private army governed by medieval-style rules, the government has effectively planted dangerous seeds of possible upheaval.

"In the end, there is chaos and the expansion of violence -- extrajudicial and illegal," predicted Andrei Kolesnikov, an analyst with the Carnegie Endowment.

Biden political future clouded by classified document probe

By STEVE PEOPLES and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Virtually everything was going right for President Joe Biden as he opened the year. His approval ratings were ticking up. Inflation was slowing. And as Democrats united behind his likely reelection campaign, Republicans were at war with themselves after a disappointing midterm season.

But on Thursday, Biden's political outlook veered into more uncertain territory after Attorney General Merrick Garland appointed a special counsel to investigate the Democratic president's handling of classified documents.

Democrats publicly and privately conceded that the stunning development was at best an unwelcome distraction at an inopportune time that muddies the case against Donald Trump. The Republican former president is facing a special counsel of his own and is under federal criminal investigation for his handling of classified documents and other potential transgressions.

There are major differences between the two cases. Most notably, there is no suggestion that Biden purposefully tried to prevent the documents discovered at his home or office from being turned over or that he was even aware of their presence. Trump, who is being probed for potentially obstructing investigators, also had far more classified documents in his possession.

But Thursday's appointment of a special counsel nonetheless thrusts legal uncertainty over the sitting president and could revive debate among Democrats about the wisdom of him seeking a second term.

"No one's going to say this is helpful," veteran Democratic strategist James Carville said. "It's pretty evident that's not the case."

As Democrats recoiled into a defensive posture, Trump's would-be Republican rivals in 2024 acknowledged that the contours of the upcoming race had shifted.

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Trump "is the luckiest man in American politics," said John Bolton, who served as national security adviser under Trump and is considering a Republican White House bid. "This ought to be disqualifying to both of them."

Thus begins a messy election season in which the current and former presidents of the United States are both under investigation by special counsels as they gear up for a potential rematch in 2024. Many voters in both parties were already calling for a new generation of leadership to emerge in the nascent presidential contest. Such calls are now growing louder.

"On many political fronts, Biden's touted 2024 campaign is potentially vulnerable," said Norman Solomon, a progressive Democrat who leads the so-called Don't Run Joe campaign, which is already running television ads against Biden in key states. "Democrats and the country as a whole would be much better off this year and next if he's not running for president."

The 80-year-old president has already indicated he plans to seek a second term, but he has yet to make a final decision. His allies believe he is likely to make a formal announcement after the end of March.

So far, at least, no high-profile Democrats appear willing to challenge Biden in a prospective presidential primary contest. Privately, however, some Democratic officials believe the new federal probe may help motivate an insurgent candidate.

One of Biden's potential challengers, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, recently told The Associated Press that he would make a decision about his 2024 intentions "at the appropriate time." Nina Turner, who chaired Sanders' 2020 presidential campaign, said after Thursday's announcement that she hopes a "freedom-fighting progressive" mounts a primary challenge against Biden in 2024.

"The American people certainly deserve better choices — Republicans and Democrats," Turner said, applauding the government's decision to review Biden's handling of classified documents in the same way it's investigating Trump. "We shouldn't have these men shoved down our throats."

Garland's appointment of a special counsel followed Biden's acknowledgement Thursday morning that documents with classified markings from his time as President Barack Obama's vice president were found in the garage of his Delaware home and in his personal library, in addition to documents already discovered in a locked closet at an office he used after leaving the White House.

Garland said Biden's lawyers informed the Justice Department on Thursday morning of the discovery of a classified document at Biden's home, after FBI agents first retrieved other documents from the garage in December.

Speaking to reporters Thursday, Biden said he was cooperating "fully and completely with the Justice Department's review."

"People know I take classified documents and classified material seriously," Biden said. He added: "My Corvette's in a locked garage."

To be clear, there are stark differences between the cases, including the volume of documents discovered and the gravity of the ongoing grand jury investigation into the matter at Mar-a-Lago, Trump's Palm Beach, Florida, home.

Roughly 300 records with classification markings were recovered from Mar-a-Lago, a private club that hosts constant events. The search of Trump's property was the culmination of months of back-and-forth between the government and Trump's representatives, who repeatedly resisted efforts to return the missing documents. And the Justice Department says classified documents were "likely concealed and removed" from a storage room as part of what they allege was an effort to obstruct the federal investigation.

A warrant for the search showed the FBI was investigating crimes including the willful retention of national defense information and efforts to obstruct the federal probe.

Trump has nonetheless seized on the news, seeking to use it to undermine the investigation into his actions.

"It's over," Trump said in an interview with conservative talk radio host Mark Levin on Thursday evening. "When all of these documents started coming out and Biden had them, it really changed the complexion and the intensity that they were showing to me because, you know, what they did is — I don't say far

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worse, I did nothing wrong — what they did is not good. What they did is bad.”

Some Democrats were hopeful, but not certain, that voters might distinguish between Biden’s cooperative approach involving a small trove of documents he apparently possessed by mistake and what federal prosecutors described as Trump’s willful obstruction of hundreds of government secrets.

“It’s all the difference in the world between having something you don’t know you have and having something you know you have and aren’t supposed to have,” Carville said. “Is that going to get lost among a third of the country? Probably so.”

Bolton, a fierce Trump critic, predicted that the significant legal differences between the two cases would “get lost in the fog.” Now, he finds it hard to believe that Trump can be prosecuted for the Mar-a-Lago documents, regardless of the circumstances.

“I don’t see how a criminal case goes forward at this point,” Bolton said. “I just think it’s such a cloud over the prosecution.”

While the ground may have shifted, Trump’s legal challenges aren’t going to disappear.

Two months ago, Garland appointed former Justice Department public corruption prosecutor Jack Smith to lead investigations into the classified documents discovered at Mar-a-Lago as well as key aspects of a separate probe involving the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection and efforts to undo the 2020 election.

Federal prosecutors have been especially focused on a scheme by Trump allies to elevate fake electors in key battleground states won by Biden as a way to subvert the vote. They issued subpoenas to multiple state Republican Party chairmen.

Democratic strategist Josh Schwerin described the latest development as “certainly not ideal.”

“I think everyone would wish this hadn’t happened, including the president,” he said. “But it’s important to keep all of this in context: Everyone views President Biden as a far more responsible figure than Donald Trump. And that cannot be forgotten.”

Nighttime Israeli arrests haunt Palestinian kids, families

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

BALATA REFUGEE CAMP, West Bank (AP) — Yousef Mesheh was sleeping in his bunk bed when Israeli forces stormed into his home at 3 a.m.

Within moments, the 15-year-old Palestinian said he was lying on the floor as troops punched him, shouting insults. A soldier struck his mother’s chest with his rifle butt and locked her in the bedroom, where she screamed for her sons.

Yousef and his 16-year-old brother, Wael, were hauled out of their home in Balata refugee camp in the northern West Bank. Yousef was in a sleeveless undershirt and couldn’t see without his glasses.

“I can’t forget that night,” Yousef told The Associated Press from his living room, decorated with photos of Wael, who remains in detention. “When I go to sleep I still hear the shooting and screaming.”

The Israeli military arrested and interrogated hundreds of Palestinian teenagers in 2022 in the occupied West Bank, without ever issuing a summons or notifying their families, according to an upcoming report by the Israeli human rights organization HaMoked.

The charges against those being arrested ranged from being in Israel without a permit to throwing stones or Molotov cocktails. Some teens say they were arrested to obtain information about neighbors or family members.

In the vast majority of the military’s pre-planned arrests of minors last year, children were taken from their homes in the dead of the night, HaMoked said. After being yanked out of bed, children as young as 14 were interrogated while sleep-deprived and disoriented. Water, food and access to toilets were often withheld. Yousef said soldiers beat him when he asked to relieve himself during his seven-hour journey to the detention center.

The Israeli army argues it has the legal authority to arrest minors at its discretion during late-night raids.

Lawyers and advocates say the tactic runs counter to Israel’s legal promises to alert parents about their children’s alleged offenses.

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In response to a petition to the Supreme Court by HaMoked two years ago, there had been some small improvement when Israel asked the military to first summon Palestinian parents about their accused children. But the progress was short-lived. Last year, the Israeli military rounded up hundreds of Palestinians in the West Bank ages 12-17 in late-night arrests, according to HaMoked. Rights activists say they believe such tactics are meant to create fear.

"The fact that the military is making no effort to reduce these traumatic night arrests indicates to us that the trauma is part of the point," said Jessica Montell, director of HaMoked. "This intimidation and terrorizing of communities seems actually part of the policy."

According to figures reported to the Supreme Court, the army summoned Palestinian parents to question their children only a handful of times in 2021. Last year, not a single family received a summons in nearly 300 cases HaMoked tracked in the West Bank.

Petty offenses and cases where children were released without charge — as happened to Yousef — were no exception. HaMoked said the numbers are incomplete because it believes scores of similar cases are never reported.

"They are not implementing the procedure they created themselves," said Ayed Abu Eqtaish, accountability program director for Defense for Children International in the Palestinian territories. "The beating and mistreatment of children during night arrests is really what we're concerned about."

In response to a request for comment, the Israeli military said it tries to summon Palestinian children suspected of minor offenses who have no history of serious criminal convictions. But, the army argued, this policy does not apply to serious offenses or "when a summons to an investigation would harm its purpose."

The army would not comment on Yousef's arrest, but said his brother, Wael, faces charges related to "serious financial crimes," including "contacting the enemy," "illegally bringing in money" and helping "an illegal organization." These charges typically reflect cases of Palestinians communicating with people in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip.

Although HaMoked found most cases were soon dropped, the late-night arrests haunted children long after.

Since his Nov. 7 arrest, Yousef "is not like he was before," said his mother, Hanadi Mesheh, who also recounted her ordeal to the AP. He can't focus in school. He no longer plays soccer. She sleeps beside him some nights, holding him during his nightmares.

"I feel like I'm always being watched," Yousef said. "I'm frightened when my mother wakes me in the morning for school."

Similar stories abound in the area. The northern city of Nablus emerged as a major flashpoint for violence last year after Israel began a crackdown in the West Bank in response to a spate of Palestinian attacks in Israel.

Last year Israeli forces killed at least 146 Palestinians, including 34 children, the Israeli rights group B'Tselem reported, making 2022 the deadliest for Palestinians in the West Bank in 18 years. According to the Israeli army, most of the Palestinians killed have been militants. But youths protesting the incursions and others not involved in confrontations have also been killed. Palestinian attacks, meanwhile, killed at least 31 Israelis last year.

Israel says the operations are meant to dismantle militant networks and thwart future attacks. The Palestinians have decried the raids as collective punishment aimed at cementing Israel's open-ended 55-year-old occupation of lands they want for a future state. Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war, along with east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

Nighttime arrest raids are not limited to the West Bank. Israeli police also carry out regular raids in Palestinian neighborhoods of east Jerusalem.

Last fall in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Beit Hanina, Rania Elias heard pounding on the door before dawn. Her youngest son, 16-year-old Shadi Khoury, was sleeping in his underwear. Israeli police burst into their home, shoved Khoury to the floor and pummeled his face. Blood was everywhere, she said, as police dragged him to a Jerusalem detention center for interrogation.

"You can't imagine what it's like to feel helpless to save your child," Elias said.

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In response to a request for comment, the Israeli police said they charged Khoury with being part of a group that threw stones at a Jewish family's car on Oct. 12, wounding a passenger.

Under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new ultra-nationalist government, parents say they fear for their children more than ever. Some of the most powerful ministers are Israeli settlers who promise a hard-line stance against the Palestinians.

"This is the darkest moment," said activist Murad Shitawi, whose 17-year-old son Khaled was arrested last March in a night raid on their home in the West Bank town of Kfar Qaddum. "I'm worried for my sons."

At least 7 dead as severe winds, tornadoes hammer US South

By KIM CHANDLER and JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

SELMA, Ala. (AP) — A massive storm system whipping up severe winds and spawning tornadoes cut a path across the U.S. South, killing at least seven people in Georgia and Alabama, where a twister damaged buildings and tossed cars in the streets of historic downtown Selma.

Authorities said a clearer picture of the extent of the damage and a search for additional victims would come Friday, when conditions were expected to clear. After the storm began easing Thursday night, tens of thousands of customers were without power across the two states.

In Selma, a city etched in the history of the civil rights movement, the city council used lights from cellphones as they held a meeting on the sidewalk to declare a state of emergency.

Six of the deaths were recorded Autauga County, Alabama, 41 miles (66 kilometers) northeast of Selma, where an estimated 40 homes were damaged or destroyed by a tornado that cut a 20-mile (32-kilometer) path across two rural communities, said Ernie Baggett, the county's emergency management director.

At least 12 people were injured severely enough to be taken to hospitals by emergency responders, Baggett told The Associated Press. He said crews were focused Thursday night on cutting through downed trees to look for people who may need help.

"This is the worst that I've seen here in this county," Baggett said of the damage.

In Georgia, a passenger died when a tree fell on a vehicle in Jackson, Butts County Coroner Lacey Prue said. In the same county southeast of Atlanta, the storm appeared to have knocked a freight train off its tracks, officials said.

Officials in Griffin, south of Atlanta, told local news outlets that multiple people had been trapped inside an apartment complex after trees fell on it. A Hobby Lobby store in the city partially lost its roof, while elsewhere in town firefighters cut a man loose who had been pinned for hours under a tree that fell on his house. The city imposed a curfew from 10 p.m. Thursday to 6 a.m. Friday.

Nationwide, there were 33 separate tornado reports from the National Weather Service on Thursday, and Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, South Carolina and North Carolina all saw tornado warnings for a time. The tornado reports were not yet confirmed and some of them could later be classified as wind damage after assessments are done in coming days.

The tornado that hit Selma cut a wide path through the downtown area, where brick buildings collapsed, oak trees were uprooted, cars were on their side and power lines were left dangling. Plumes of thick, black smoke rose over the city from a fire burning. It wasn't immediately known whether the storm caused the blaze.

Selma Mayor James Perkins said no fatalities have been reported, but several people were seriously injured. First responders were continuing to assess the damage and officials hoped to get an aerial view of the city Friday morning.

"We have a lot of downed power lines," he said. "There is a lot of danger on the streets."

Mattie Moore was among Selma residents who picked up boxed meals offered by a charity downtown.

"Thank God that we're here. It's like something you see on TV," Moore said of all the destruction.

A city of about 18,000 people, Selma is about 50 miles (80 kilometers) west of Montgomery, the Alabama capital. It was a flashpoint of the civil rights movement and where Alabama state troopers viciously attacked Black people advocating for voting rights as they marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on

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March 7, 1965.

Malesha McVay took video of the giant twister, which would turn black as it swept away home after home. "It would hit a house, and black smoke would swirl up," she said. "It was very terrifying."

About 40,000 customers were without power in Alabama on Thursday night, according to PowerOutage.us, which tracks outages nationwide. In Georgia, about 86,000 customers were without electricity after the storm system carved a path across a tier of counties just south of Atlanta.

School systems in at least six Georgia counties canceled classes on Friday. Those systems enroll a total of 90,000 students.

In Kentucky, the National Weather Service in Louisville confirmed that an EF-1 tornado struck Mercer County and said crews were surveying damage in a handful of other counties.

Three factors — a natural La Nina weather cycle, warming of the Gulf of Mexico likely related to climate change and a decades-long shift of tornadoes from the west to east — came together to make Thursday's tornado outbreak unusual and damaging, said Victor Gensini, a meteorology professor at Northern Illinois University who studies tornado trends.

The La Nina, a cooling of parts of the Pacific that changes weather worldwide, was a factor in making a wavy jet stream that brought a cold front through, Gensini said. But that's not enough for a tornado outbreak. What's needed is moisture.

Normally the air in the Southeast is fairly dry this time of year but the dew point was twice what is normal, likely because of unusually warm water in the Gulf of Mexico, which is likely influenced by climate change. That moisture hit the cold front and everything was in place, Gensini said.

FEMA's help for Alaska Natives had mistranslations, nonsense

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — After tidal surges and high winds from the remnants of a rare typhoon caused extensive damage to homes along Alaska's western coast in September, the U.S. government stepped in to help residents — largely Alaska Natives — repair property damage.

Residents who opened Federal Emergency Management Agency paperwork expecting to find instructions on how to file for aid in Alaska Native languages like Yup'ik or Inupiaq instead were reading bizarre phrases.

"Tomorrow he will go hunting very early, and will (bring) nothing," read one passage. The translator randomly added the word "Alaska" in the middle of the sentence.

"Your husband is a polar bear, skinny," another said.

Yet another was written entirely in Inuktitut, an Indigenous language spoken in northern Canada, far from Alaska.

FEMA fired the California company hired to translate the documents once the errors became known, but the incident was an ugly reminder for Alaska Natives of the suppression of their culture and languages from decades past.

FEMA immediately took responsibility for the translation errors and corrected them, and the agency is working to make sure it doesn't happen again, spokesperson Jaclyn Rothenberg said. No one was denied aid because of the errors.

That's not good enough for one Alaska Native leader.

For Tara Sweeney, an Inupiaq who served as an assistant secretary of Indian Affairs in the U.S. Interior Department during the Trump administration, this was another painful reminder of steps taken to prevent Alaska Native children from speaking Indigenous languages.

"When my mother was beaten for speaking her language in school, like so many hundreds, thousands of Alaska Natives, to then have the federal government distributing literature representing that it is an Alaska Native language, I can't even describe the emotion behind that sort of symbolism," Sweeney said.

Sweeney called for a congressional oversight hearing to uncover how long and widespread the practice has been used throughout government.

"These government contracting translators have certainly taken advantage of the system, and they have

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had a profound impact, in my opinion, on vulnerable communities," said Sweeney, whose great-grandfather, Roy Ahmaogak, invented the Inupiaq alphabet more than a half-century ago.

She said his intention was to create the characters so "our people would learn to read and write to transition from an oral history to a more tangible written history."

U.S. Rep. Mary Peltola, who is Yup'ik and last year became the first Alaska Native elected to Congress, said it was disappointing FEMA missed the mark with these translations but didn't call for hearings.

"I am confident FEMA will continue to make the necessary changes to be ready the next time they are called to serve our citizens," the Democrat said.

About 1,300 people have been approved for FEMA assistance after the remnants of Typhoon Merbok created havoc as it traveled about 1,000 miles (1,609 kilometers) north through the Bering Strait, potentially affecting 21,000 residents. FEMA has paid out about \$6.5 million, Rothenberg said.

Preliminary estimates put overall damage at just over \$28 million, but the total is likely to rise after more assessment work is done after the spring thaw, said Jeremy Zidek, a spokesperson for the Alaska Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

The poorly translated documents, which did not create delays or problems, were a small part of efforts to help people register for FEMA assistance in person, online and by phone, Zidek said.

Another factor is that while English may not be the preferred language for some residents, many are bilingual and can struggle through an English version, said Gary Holton, a University of Hawaii at Manoa linguistics professor and a former director of the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Central Alaskan Yup'ik is the largest of the Alaska Native languages, with about 10,000 speakers in 68 villages across southwest Alaska. Children learn Yup'ik as their first language in 17 of those villages. There are about 3,000 Inupiaq speakers across northern Alaska, according to the language center.

It appears the words and phrases used in the translated documents were taken from Nikolai Vakhtin's 2011 edition of "Yupik Eskimo Texts from the 1940s," said John DiCaneloro, the language center's archivist.

The book is the written record of field notes collected on Russia's Chukotka Peninsula across the Bering Strait from Alaska in the 1940s by Ekaterina Rubtsova, who interviewed residents about their daily life and culture for a historical account.

The works were later translated and made available on the language center's website, which Holton used to investigate the origin of the mistranslated texts.

Many of the languages from the area are related but with differences, just as English is related to French or German but is not the same language, Holton said.

Holton, who has about three decades experience in Alaska Native language documentation and revitalization, searched the online archive and found "hit after hit," words pulled right out of the Russian work and randomly placed into FEMA documents.

"They clearly just grabbed the words from the document and then just put them in some random order and gave something that looked like Yup'ik but made no sense," he said, calling the final product a "word salad."

He said it was offensive that an outside company appropriated the words people 80 years ago used to memorialize their lives.

"These are people's grandparents and great-grandparents that are knowledge-keepers, are elders, and their words which they put down, expecting people to learn from, expecting people to appreciate, have just been bastardized," Holton said.

KYUK Public Media in Bethel first reported the mistranslations.

"We make no excuses for erroneous translations, and we deeply regret any inconvenience this has caused to the local community," Caroline Lee, the CEO of Accent on Languages, the Berkeley, California-based company that produced the mistranslated documents, said in a statement.

She said the company will refund FEMA the \$5,116 it received for the work and conduct an internal review to ensure it doesn't happen again.

Lee did not respond to follow-up questions, including how the mistaken translations occurred.

Trump Organization to be sentenced for tax fraud, faces fine

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The stiffest penalty Donald Trump's company could receive when it is sentenced Friday by a New York judge for helping its executives dodge taxes is a \$1.6 million fine — not even enough to buy a Trump Tower apartment.

Neither the former president nor his children, who helped run and promote the Trump Organization, are expected to be in the courtroom for the sentencing hearing. The company will be represented by its lawyers.

Because the Trump Organization is a corporation and not a person, a fine is the only way a judge can punish the company after its conviction last month for 17 tax crimes, including charges of conspiracy and falsifying business records.

By law, the maximum penalty that can be imposed by Judge Juan Manuel Merchan is around \$1.6 million, an amount equal to double the taxes a small group of executives avoided on benefits including rent-free apartments in Trump buildings, luxury cars and private school tuition.

Trump himself was not on trial and denied any knowledge of his executives evading taxes illegally.

While a fine of that amount isn't likely to affect the company's operations or future, the conviction is a black mark on the Republican's reputation as a savvy businessman as he mounts a campaign to regain the White House.

Besides the company, only one executive was charged in the case: former Trump Organization Chief Financial Officer Allen Weisselberg, who pleaded guilty last summer to evading taxes on \$1.7 million in compensation.

He was sentenced Tuesday to five months in jail.

Trump has said the case against his company was part of a politically motivated "witch hunt" waged against him by vindictive Democrats. The company's lawyers have vowed to appeal the verdict.

The criminal case involved financial practices and pay arrangements that the company halted when Trump was elected president in 2016.

Over his years as the company's chief moneymen, Weisselberg had received a rent-free apartment in a Trump-branded building in Manhattan with a view of the Hudson River. He and his wife drove Mercedes-Benz cars, leased by company. When his grandchildren went to an exclusive private school, Trump paid their tuition.

A handful of other executives received similar perks.

When called to testify against the Trump Organization at trial, Weisselberg testified that he didn't pay taxes on that compensation, and that he and a company vice president conspired to hide the perks by having the company issue falsified W-2 forms.

Weisselberg also attempted to take responsibility on the witness stand, saying nobody in the Trump family knew what he was doing. He choked up as he told jurors, "It was my own personal greed that led to this."

Trump Organization lawyers repeated the mantra, "Weisselberg did it for Weisselberg," contending that he had gone rogue and betrayed the company's trust.

Assistant district attorney Joshua Steinglass attempted to refute that claim in his closing argument, showing jurors a lease Trump signed himself for Weisselberg's apartment.

"Mr. Trump is explicitly sanctioning tax fraud," Steinglass argued.

A jury convicted the company of tax fraud on Dec. 6.

The company's fine will be barely a dent in the bottom line for an enterprise with a global portfolio of golf courses, hotels and development deals. It could face more trouble outside of court due to the reputational damage, such as difficulty finding new deals and business partners.

The Trump Organization's conviction and sentencing don't end Trump's battle with Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, a Democrat who took office in January. Bragg has said that a related investigation of Trump that began under his predecessor, Cyrus Vance Jr., is "active and ongoing," with a newly hired prosecutor leading the charge.

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At the same time, New York Attorney General Letitia James is suing Trump and the Trump Organization, alleging they misled banks and others about the value of its many assets, a practice she dubbed the "art of the steal."

James, a Democrat, is asking a court to ban Trump and his three eldest children from running any New York-based company and is seeking to fine them at least \$250 million. A judge has set an October trial date. As a preliminary measure, he appointed a monitor for the company while the case is pending.

Trump faces several other legal challenges as he looks to retake the White House in 2024.

A special grand jury in Atlanta has investigated whether Trump and his allies committed any crimes while trying to overturn his 2020 election loss in Georgia.

Last month, the House Jan. 6 committee voted to make a criminal referral to the Justice Department for Trump's role in sparking the violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. The FBI is also investigating Trump's storage of classified documents.

MLK holiday to feature tributes, commitments to race agenda

By AARON MORRISON AP National Writer

Annual tributes and commemorations of the life and legacy of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., which begin nationwide on Friday, typically include a mix of politics, faith and community service.

For this year's celebration, the 37th since its federal recognition in 1986, a descendant of King hopes to spur progress by helping more Americans personalize the ongoing struggle for racial equity and harmony. Bernice King, daughter of the late civil rights icon, said people must move beyond platitudes and deepen their own commitments to the needed progress.

"We need to change our thinking," said King, who is CEO of The King Center in Atlanta.

Under the theme "It Starts With Me," the center launched its slate of Martin Luther King Jr. Day events on Thursday with youth and adult summits to educate the public on ways to transform unjust systems in the U.S.

The summits were streamed online and are available for replay on the center's social media accounts.

"It seems like we're going through these cycles, because we're trying to approach everything with the same mindset that all of this (racial inequity) was created," King told The Associated Press.

"Change can be very small," she said, "but transformation means that now we changed the character, form, and nature of something. That's something we have not seen yet."

Other King holiday weekend events include a statue unveiling in Boston, a symposium on police brutality in Akron, Ohio, and community service projects in many U.S. cities. The holiday kicks off another year of advocacy on a racial justice agenda — from police reforms and strengthening voting rights to solutions on economic and educational disparities — that has been stymied by culture wars and partisan gridlock in Washington and nationwide.

On Sunday morning, President Joe Biden is due to speak at a commemorative service at Ebenezer Baptist Church, the historic Atlanta house of worship where King preached from 1960 until his assassination in 1968. The church is pastored by the Rev. Sen. Raphael Warnock, who recently won election to a full term as Georgia's first Black U.S. senator.

And on Monday, the federal observance of the King holiday, commemorations continue in Atlanta, as well as in the nation's capital and beyond.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, who got his start as a civil rights organizer in his teens as youth director of an anti-poverty project of King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, will hold his annual King holiday events in Washington, D.C. and New York on Monday. Martin Luther King III, son of the civil rights icon, is expected to attend Sharpton's breakfast gala in Washington with his wife, Drum Major Institute president Arndrea Waters King, who will be honored alongside former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Monday afternoon in New York City, Sharpton, the founder and president of the National Action Network, is scheduled to convene more than 30 prominent state and local elected officials for a public policy forum at the House of Justice, his organization's headquarters in Harlem.

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In the decades since its establishment, the King holiday has become an opportunity for elected officials and candidates seeking office to establish their civil rights and social justice credentials. Bernice King said partisanship among politicians has been a major obstacle to legislative solutions on civil rights.

Overcoming that is "going to require elevating to a place where your loyalty is to humanity, not to party," she said.

"If we don't find humane ways to create policies and implement practices out of those policies, we're going to continue in this vicious cycle of a downward spiral towards destruction and chaos."

Outside of establishment politics, many King holiday weekend events are opportunities for Americans to give back, reflect on the civil right icon's legacy or deal locally with racial discrimination in their own communities.

A massive monument to Martin Luther King Jr. is scheduled to be dedicated Friday in Boston, where the leader first met his wife, Coretta Scott King. In the early 1950s, he was a doctoral student in theology at Boston University and she was studying at the New England Conservatory of Music.

The \$10 million sculpture called "The Embrace" consisting of four intertwined arms was inspired by a photo of the Kings embracing when King Jr. learned he had won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. It was designed by Hank Willis Thomas and MASS Design Group and was selected out of 126 proposals.

Imari Paris Jeffries, executive director of EmbraceBoston, the organization behind the memorial, noted the significance of the sculpture's placement at the Boston Common, America's oldest public park and a high traffic area with millions of city residents and visitors walking its paths every year.

"I think Boston has this reputation of being this city of heroes and abolitionists, like W.E.B. Du Bois and Frederick Douglas, simultaneously with this reputation of not being friendly and in some cases being described as racist. So there's this tension between these two images of Boston. Having the memorial there is part of our intention to transform our city's perspective."

In Akron, Ohio, the family of Jayland Walker, a 25-year-old Black man killed after police officers shot at him 46 times as he fled last July, will hold a symposium on public safety and mental health with local civil rights leaders on Saturday. Walker's case received widespread attention from activists, including from the King family.

And for the seventh year, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation will mark a post-King holiday National Day of Racial Healing. On Tuesday, communities nationwide are scheduled to hold town halls to continue dialog on healing that the foundation says is needed to achieve racial equity.

"Regardless of who you are, there's a journey of healing that everyone must consider," said La June Montgomery Tabron, CEO of the Kellogg Foundation. "We've all been impacted by racism."

Lisa Marie Presley, singer and daughter of Elvis, dies at 54

By KRISTIN M. HALL and HILLEL ITALIE AP Entertainment Writers

Lisa Marie Presley, the only child of Elvis Presley and a singer-songwriter dedicated to her father's legacy, died Thursday after being hospitalized for a medical emergency. She was 54.

Her death in a Los Angeles hospital was confirmed by her mother, Priscilla, a few hours after her daughter was rushed to the hospital by paramedics after a medical episode at her home.

"It is with a heavy heart that I must share the devastating news that my beautiful daughter Lisa Marie has left us," Priscilla Presley said in a statement. "She was the most passionate, strong and loving woman I have ever known."

Presley shared her father's brooding charisma — the hooded eyes, the insolent smile, the low, sultry voice — and followed him professionally, releasing her own rock albums in the 2000s, and appearing on stage with Pat Benatar and Richard Hawley among others.

She even formed direct musical ties with her father, joining her voice to such Elvis recordings as "In the Ghetto" and "Don't Cry Daddy," a mournful ballad which had reminded him of the early death of his mother (and Lisa Marie's grandmother), Gladys Presley.

"It's been all my life," she told The Associated Press in 2012, speaking of her father's influence. "It's not

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something that I now listen to and it's different. Although I might listen closer. I remain consistent on the fact that I've always been an admirer. He's always influenced me."

Her birth, nine months exactly after her parents' wedding, was international news and her background was rarely far from her mind. With the release last year of Baz Luhrmann's major musical feature "Elvis," Lisa Marie and Priscilla Presley had been attending red carpets and award shows alongside stars from the film.

She was at the Golden Globes on Tuesday, on hand to celebrate Austin Butler's award for playing her father. Just days before, she was in Memphis at Graceland — the mansion where Elvis lived, and died — on Jan. 8 to celebrate her father's birth anniversary.

Presley lived with her mother, an actor known for "Dallas" and the "Naked Gun" movies, in California after her parents split up in 1973. She recalled early memories of her dad during her visits to Graceland, riding golf carts through the neighborhood and seeing his daily entrances down the stairs.

"He was always fully, fully geared up. You'd never see him in his pajamas coming down the steps, ever," she told The Associated Press in 2012. "You'd never see him in anything but 'ready to be seen' attire."

Elvis Presley died in August 1977, when he was just 42, and she 9 years old. Lisa Marie was staying at Graceland at the time and would recall him kissing her goodnight hours before he would collapse and never recover. When she next saw him, the following day, he was lying face down in the bathroom.

"I just had a feeling," she told Rolling Stone in 2003. "He wasn't doing well. All I know is I had it (a feeling), and it happened. I was obsessed with death at a very early age."

She would later make headlines of her own. Struggles with drugs and some very public marriages. Her four husbands included Michael Jackson and Nicolas Cage.

Jackson and Presley were married in the Dominican Republic in 1994, but the marriage ended two years later and was defined by numerous awkward public appearances, including an unexpected kiss from Jackson during the MTV Video Music Awards and a joint interview with Diane Sawyer when she defended her husband against allegations he had sexually abused a minor.

Her other celebrity marriage was even shorter: Cage filed for divorce after four months of marriage in 2002.

"I had to sort of run into many walls and trees," she told the AP in 2012. "But now I can also look back at it and tell you all the stuff that was going on around me and all the different people around me and all the awww — and it was not a good situation anyway. That wasn't helping. Either way, it was a growing process. It was just in a different way. It was just out in front of everybody all the time. Because it's all documented of course."

Lisa Marie became involved in numerous humanitarian causes, from anti-poverty programs administered through the Elvis Presley Charitable Foundation to relief efforts after Hurricane Katrina. She would receive formal citations from New Orleans and Memphis, Tennessee for her work.

Presley had two children, actor Riley Keough, born in 1989, and Benjamin Keough, born in 1992, with her former husband Danny Keough. She also had twin daughters, Harper and Finley Lockwood, with ex-husband Michael Lockwood in 2008.

Her marriage to Lockwood would end in a combative and protracted divorce that began in 2016 and still was not resolved when she died, though they were declared single in 2021. The fight saw the girls, now 15, put temporarily in protective custody in 2017. Presley and Lockwood later had joint custody, but were still at odds over the issue, with Lockwood seeking more child support from Presley.

Benjamin Keough died by suicide in 2020 at 27. Presley was vocal about her grief, writing in an essay last August that she had "been living in the horrific reality of its unrelenting grips since my son's death two years ago."

"I've dealt with death, grief and loss since the age of 9 years old. I've had more than anyone's fair share of it in my lifetime and somehow, I've made it this far," she wrote in an essay shared with People magazine.

"But this one, the death of my beautiful, beautiful son? The sweetest and most incredible being that I have ever had the privilege of knowing, who made me feel so honored every single day to be his mother? Who was so much like his grandfather on so many levels that he actually scared me? Which made me worry

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about him even more than I naturally would have?" the essay continued. "No. Just no ... no no no no ..."

Lisa Marie became the sole heir of the Elvis Presley Trust after her father died. Along with Elvis Presley Enterprises, the trust managed Graceland and other assets until she sold her majority interest in 2005. She retained ownership of Graceland Mansion itself, the 13 acres around it and items inside the home. Her son is buried there, along with her father and other members of the Presley family.

Lisa Marie Presley is a former Scientologist — her son was born in 1992 under guidelines set by Church of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard, according to an AP story at the time — but later broke with Scientology.

Lisa Marie and Priscilla Presley would make regular trips to Graceland during huge fan celebrations on the anniversaries of Elvis' death and birthday. One of the two airplanes at Graceland is named the Lisa Marie.

After her first album "To Whom It May Concern," in 2003, some fans came out to see her perform just out of curiosity given her famous family, she told the AP in 2005.

"First I had to overcome a pre-specified idea of me," she said of the barriers to becoming a singer-songwriter.

"I had to sort of burst through that and introduce myself, and that was the first hurdle, and then now sing in front of everybody, and then that was the second one, and I'm the offspring of — you know, who I'm the offspring of — I had a few hurdles to get through, no doubt about it," she continued. "But the scales never tipped in the other direction too much."

Even as NY nurses return to work, more strikes could follow

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Even as 7,000 nurses return to work at two of New York's busiest hospitals after a three-day strike, colleagues around the country say it's just a matter of time before frontline workers at other hospitals begin walking the picket line.

Problems are mounting at hospitals across the nation as they try to deal with widespread staffing shortages, overworked nurses beaten down by the pandemic and a busted pipeline of new nurses.

That's led to nurses juggling dangerously high caseloads, said Michelle Collins, dean at the college of nursing and health at Loyola University New Orleans.

"There's no place that's immune from what's happening with the nursing shortage," Collins said. "It's everywhere."

Union leaders say the tentative contract agreement ending the strike by nurses at Mount Sinai Hospital and Montefiore Medical Center, each privately owned, nonprofit hospitals that hold over 1,000 beds in New York City, will relieve chronic short staffing and boost pay by 19% over three years.

The walkout, which ended Thursday, was just the latest dispute between nurses and their employers.

Last year, six unions representing a total of 32,000 nurses launched strikes outside of hospital systems around the country, according to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics. Those strikes represented about a quarter of all the major strikes in the U.S. last year, an increase from the year before.

Describing hospital environments where nurses are unable to take breaks because they are assigned too many patients — some of whom are pleading for care from frontline workers — the president of the American Nurses Association, Dr. Jennifer Mensik Kennedy, said some nurses may think their only option is to strike.

"Nurses don't feel like their voices have been heard with this exact topic," she told The Associated Press Wednesday. "Nurses are now feeling like they need to strike. That could continue."

In California, nurse unions at two hospitals are likely to strike this year when their contract expires, said former nurse Peter Sidhu, who now works for the state union. Sidhu, who fields objections from nurses across the state who say their caseloads are unsafe, has received 7,000 such complaints in Los Angeles County hospitals since December. He said objections have at least doubled since before the pandemic began.

"What I've seen is that in areas where we've traditionally had good staffing, even they are getting bom-

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barded with patients and a lack of resources," Sidhu said.

Nurse shortages were plaguing some hospitals years before COVID-19 hit, and signs of a crisis loomed, with a large swath of the workforce nearing retirement age.

A policy brief from the Department of Health and Human Services last year found that over half of nurses were over the age of 50, a much higher percentage compared with the overall U.S. labor workforce, where only a quarter of people are 55 or older.

Aspiring nurses are lining up to replace those retirees but even that silver lining has hit a snag, with widespread faculty shortages at nursing colleges. In 2021, nearly 92,000 qualified nursing school applicants were denied entry into a program, largely because of a shortage of educators, according to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

The American Nurses Association asked Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra to declare the nursing shortage a national crisis in late 2021.

"Nurses have remained steadfast on the front lines since the beginning of the pandemic, while overcoming challenges, risks to their personal health and safety such as limited personal protective equipment and the physical, emotional and mental health burden of the COVID-19 virus," the association's president at the time wrote in a letter to the secretary.

Becerra hasn't declared a crisis but has met with association and other health care leaders to discuss the shortage.

"This has been an ongoing issue for a while," Mensik Kennedy said Wednesday. "We really need to work collaboratively with Congress and our health care system to address these issues. Nurses can't solve these issues by ourselves."

The federal agency has pumped more money into its National Health Service Corps program, which covers student tuition for health workers who serve in high-need communities. Since 2019, the program has nearly doubled the number of nurses and nurse faculty it sponsors.

The number of nurses working in the profession is starting to rebound to pre-pandemic levels, said Dave Auerbach, the director of research at the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission.

But hospitals, especially, are still struggling to lure those nurses back to working in their wards, he noted. "That sounds like more of an issue of the attractiveness of the working conditions of the jobs," Auerbach said. "Some of it is outside of the control of the hospitals in those jobs."

Sidhu left his job as an ICU nurse last year when a third COVID surge struck, after being among the first to volunteer for the COVID unit when the pandemic hit.

He's noticed a cultural shift in the profession. Fewer nurses want to work 12-hour shifts, multiple days a week. Many are taking jobs at clinics, where weekend or overnight shifts aren't required. Others have moved to jobs in telehealth, working from the comfort of their home.

Some are simply burnt out from working in a hospital.

"Prior to the pandemic, I knew every once and a while, I'm going to have a bad night," Sidhu said. "Now, every time you walk into the facility, you're not just worried about what patients you're going to have -- now you have four (patients) and you know you're not going to have resources."

Still, strong interest in the profession led Loyola University New Orleans to start an accelerated program this year aimed at second-career students who already have a bachelor's degree.

April Hamilton, a 55-year-old food writer, cooking teacher and mother from Baton Rouge, La., will walk into her first class when that new nursing program starts Tuesday.

She's read the headlines about staffing shortages and stressful working conditions in hospitals. She's also seen the tough work nurses do firsthand: four years ago, she was in the hospital around-the-clock when her daughter spent 40 days in the intensive care unit, recovering from a fall that resulted in an amputated hand and 20 surgeries.

"Witnessing my daughter's miracle fuels me," Hamilton said. "I'm ready. I want to be part of the solution."

Speaker McCarthy's tidy 1st week disguises trouble ahead

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By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chaos? In the House of Representatives?

Republican Kevin McCarthy wrapped his first full week as House speaker in the most outwardly orderly way, with hardly a hint of the chaotic, rebellious fight it took for the Republicans to arrive here, having barely installed him as the leader with the gavel.

The House Republicans marched through the early days of the session like a spunky new business — in by noon, out by dinnertime, the lawmakers rapid-fire voting without much public drama in between. They approved their House rules and sent six Republican bills quickly to passage, including one to gut funding for the Internal Revenue Service.

The Republican committee chairmen were named, members were appointed to the panels and the Oversight committee launched its first requests for financial documents as it probes President Joe Biden and his family.

And when House Republicans met for the first time behind closed doors after the rowdy public spectacle that broke history records and almost came to fistfights to elect McCarthy as speaker, it was a “lovefest,” as one Republican lawmaker put it.

“That’s just the first five days, and we’re just getting started,” McCarthy said Thursday at his first press conference as speaker.

But the semblance of House GOP unity is all but certain to be temporary, a momentary reprieve after the grudging, grueling effort by Republicans to seize the majority from Democrats and elect the embattled McCarthy as the new speaker.

The daunting political math confronting McCarthy remains the same: With a 222-seat majority, he can only lose a few detractors on any issue unless he reaches across the aisle for help and backing from Democrats for the 218 votes typically needed to pass legislation.

While the first bills the House Republicans easily approved were essentially GOP favorites, designed to unite their side of the aisle and even pull in some Democratic support, the next legislative lifts are expected to be more vigorous and politically risky.

McCarthy has made a deal with conservatives that the next government funding bill will be held to fiscal 2022 levels, which means a substantial 8% cut of discretionary accounts — or more if the defense budget is spared.

“We’ve got to change the way we are spending money,” McCarthy said Thursday.

Even more, Congress will be asked this summer to raise the federal debt ceiling to allow more borrowing to pay off the government’s current bills, always a difficult vote for lawmakers and one that the Treasury Department says is coming sooner than expected.

In refusing to allow the federal government to take on more debt unless changes are made to federal spending, House Republicans are heading for a risky showdown that echoes the debt ceiling debate of 2011. That was a months-long political drama that resulted in a downgrade of the U.S. credit rating for the first time in modern memory after the newly-elected tea party class of House Republicans demanded federal spending cuts.

“Come on. Is this how House Republicans are starting the new term: cutting taxes for billionaires, raising taxes for working families, and making inflation worse?” Biden said Thursday in remarks near the White House.

“Well, let me be clear: If any of those bills make it to my desk, I will veto them,” he said. “I’m ready to work with Republicans, but not this kind of stuff.”

Downtown, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce CEO Suzanne Clark said in remarks Thursday that there is “almost a level of despair” among the business community about government gridlock and the inability to solve big issues such as the shortage of workers and immigration reform.

In the Senate, where Democrats still hold a slim 51-seat majority, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer vowed to hold the line as “a firewall to this extreme MAGA Republican agenda,” a reference to former President Donald Trump’s Make American Great Again slogan.

It was Trump’s 11th hour push for McCarthy as voting was underway late last week that both men, who

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are on-again-off-again allies, said was responsible for making the California Republican the new House speaker.

McCarthy won the speaker's gavel only by making concessions to hard-right Republicans in the House Freedom Caucus that now hang over his leadership, including the ability of any single lawmaker to make a motion to vacate the chair — essentially calling a vote to oust McCarthy from office.

The tenuous Republican hold on power is complicated by the presence of Rep. George Santos, the newly elected Republican from New York, who faces calls for his ouster over the lies he has admitted to telling about his education, work experience and other aspects of his life. Instead, McCarthy said the Ethics Committee will investigate. "And if something is found out, it will be dealt with," McCarthy said.

But many House Republicans emerged confident that the messy, bitter fight made them — and McCarthy — stronger, not weaker, as they press ahead in their new majority to govern.

"You always come out better on the back side of it," said Rep. Byron Donalds, R-Fla., who was nominated repeatedly by his colleagues as an alternative GOP choice for speaker. "And now we're back to business."

Said Rep. Scott Perry, the chairman of the Freedom Caucus, "I feel pretty positive — Republicans are in charge and we're whupping up on the left and it's awesome."

Republican Rep. Bob Good, R-Va., one of the chief holdouts in speaker's fight, said the public display put McCarthy in a stronger negotiating position moving forward by showing what the speaker is up against.

"Our speaker is empowered to be in a stronger position in negotiations with the Senate in the White House, because he can say, 'When my folks say no, they mean no.'"

Standing in gilded Statuary Hall rather than the Capitol's usual press briefing studio in the basement, McCarthy compared his new Republican majority to the early American lawmakers. They convened in this room when the Congress was relocated from Philadelphia.

As tourists milled about Thursday afternoon, pausing to listen and take photos, McCarthy noted he was reopening the Capitol to visitors. Democrats under Speaker Nancy Pelosi had kept the building partly closed during the COVID-19 crisis and in the aftermath of the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol attack by Trump's supporters.

Biden's Delaware home is now a player in document drama

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's President Joe Biden's refuge from Washington — a place that's part home office, part Sunday family dinner venue, a safe place for his treasured 1967 Corvette and a makeshift campaign studio during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, Biden's home in Wilmington, Delaware, is coming under fresh scrutiny as a repository of classified material.

The White House confirmed Thursday that classified records were found in the garage of Biden's Wilmington home, as well as an adjacent room that the president later identified as his personal library. The disclosure came three days after the White House said similarly classified materials were located at Biden's former institute in Washington. The discoveries, taken together, prompted Attorney General Merrick Garland to tap a special counsel to oversee the matter.

The announcement shines a brighter spotlight on Biden's Wilmington house, where he regularly spends the weekends and where he finds more freedom and a homier atmosphere than at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.

"I said when I was running, I wanted to be president — not to live in the White House, but to be able to make the decisions about the future of the country," Biden said in February 2021, just after he took office. Living in the White House, he said, is "a little like a gilded cage in terms of being able to walk outside and do things."

So far in his presidency, Biden has spent part or all of 194 days in his home state of Delaware, spending most weekends in either at his Wilmington home or in Rehoboth Beach, where he owns a \$2.7 million home, according to an Associated Press tally. He will head to Wilmington again this weekend.

Despite an onslaught of criticism, particularly from Republicans, for regularly escaping to the state, White House officials say the time spent in Wilmington is important for a president who traveled home nightly during the 36 years he served as senator. Biden also can stand up presidential operations at home, where

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he regularly meets with advisers, and an aide from the National Security Council travels with the president during Wilmington weekends.

"Every president can work from anywhere they are, because that is how presidencies are equipped," former White House press secretary Jen Psaki said in February 2022, as Russia began invading Ukraine and Biden was preparing for another weekend in Wilmington. She confirmed that Biden can make secure calls from "anywhere he is, yes."

Biden's custom-built Wilmington home, finished in 1998, is located in the tony Greenville section of the town and abuts a lake in a neighborhood where residents are now used to Secret Service vehicles and flashing motorcade lights. It's a brief drive to his home church, St. Joseph on the Brandywine, and a branch of the upscale grocery store Wegman's opened nearby in recent months.

The home is also a culmination of Biden's decades-long quest to establish the perfect family home and his self-admitted obsession with real estate. Over the years, he would purchase several homes in Delaware and later sell them at a profit.

"Joe has a very symmetrical eye, and if he had a million dollars he wouldn't be traveling, he would be putting it into his house," his sister, Valerie Biden Owens, said in journalist Jules Witcover's biography of the president. The book, "Joe Biden: A Life of Trial and Redemption," described him as an "admittedly frustrated architect."

So meaningful is the home to the Bidens that when the former vice president floated the prospect of a second mortgage to pay for his ailing son Beau's expenses, then-President Barack Obama flatly refused "with a force that surprised me," Biden wrote in his 2017 memoir, "Promise Me, Dad."

"I'll give you the money," Obama said, in Biden's retelling. "I have it. You can pay me back whenever."

Jill Biden has also written fondly about the home, describing its sunroom — covered in family mementos, campaign paraphernalia and artwork — as "one of my favorite places in the world."

"The small room overlooks the lake behind our house, and I like to sit with my feet tucked up on the sofa, wrapped in a pashmina, grading papers there from my classes at Northern Virginia Community College, where I've taught English and writing for the last eleven years," she wrote in her memoir, "Where the Light Enters." "It's a room made for homeyness and comfort."

This haven for the Bidens quickly morphed into his de facto campaign headquarters in March 2020, when Americans were suddenly homebound with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and presidential candidates ditched in-person stumping for virtual roundtables and Zoom fundraisers. Biden would keep up the at-home campaigning much longer than his opponent, Donald Trump, stirring some heartburn among Democrats and prompting mockery from Republicans that Biden was tethered to his basement.

But it also allowed for an unusual glimpse into the personal home of the Bidens, as he fielded questions sitting in front of shelves stuffed with books and posted Instagram photos of him and Jill dyeing Easter eggs in their kitchen.

In May 2020, Biden was speaking to the Asian American and Pacific Islanders Victory Fund from home when he was repeatedly drowned out by squawking geese.

"There's a pond on the other side of my property," Biden remarked. "A lot of Canadian geese. If you hear them honking away, they're cheering."

The White House was pressed this week to disclose a visitors' log to Biden's personal home, but it's unclear whether one even exists. Aside from family members and close advisers, there is little public knowledge about who comes in and out of Biden's home, particularly when he is handling presidential business.

One exception was Sen. Joe Manchin.

In October 2021, Biden personally invited the influential West Virginia Democrat, as well as Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, to his home for breakfast and a tour of the property — a move seen as a deeply personal gesture from a president struggling to court Manchin on the Democrats' massive social spending package that fall. Manchin would go on to extinguish those efforts two months later, and a furious White House responded that Manchin made a commitment to Biden "at his home in Wilmington," portraying the senator's announcement as a personal betrayal.

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Now Biden's home is again becoming a bit player in a political headache for the White House.

Garland said Thursday that the Justice Department was told Dec. 20 by Biden's personal lawyer that classified material was found in the president's Wilmington garage. Further, DOJ was notified Thursday that another record with classified markings was found elsewhere in the Wilmington home.

Asked about the disclosures Thursday, Biden kept his comments relatively brief, saying he will speak more on this "soon" and that he takes classified material seriously.

But Biden also wanted to make one thing about his house explicitly clear.

"By the way, my Corvette's in a locked garage, OK?" he said. "So it's not like it's sitting out in the street."

China's trade surplus swells to \$877.6B as exports grow

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — China's trade surplus swelled to a record \$877.6 billion last year as exports rose despite weakening U.S. and European demand and anti-virus controls that temporarily shut down Shanghai and other industrial centers.

Exports increased 7% from a year earlier to \$3.95 trillion, decelerating from 2021's explosive 29.9% gain, customs data showed Friday. Imports edged up 1.1% to 2.7 trillion, cooling from the previous year's 30.1% rise as economic growth slowed and consumer spending weakened.

The country's politically volatile global trade surplus expanded by 29.7% from 2021's record, already the highest ever for any economy.

"China's foreign trade and exports showed strong resilience in the face of many difficulties and challenges," said a customs agency spokesperson, Lu Daliang, at a news conference.

Export growth slumped late in the year after the Federal Reserve and other central banks raised interest rates to cool record-setting inflation by slowing economic activity.

December exports fell for a third month, contracting by 10.1% from a year earlier to \$306.1 billion. That was bigger than November's 9% slide.

Last year's exports to the United States edged up 1% over 2021 to \$581.8 billion despite tariff hikes by President Joe Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump, that still are in place on many goods. Chinese imports of American goods declined 1% to \$177.6 billion.

China's annual trade surplus with the United States, one of the irritants that prompted Trump to hike tariffs, widened by 1.8% from 2021 to \$404.1 billion.

Forecasters expect Chinese export growth to weaken further as the possibility of recession in Western economies increases. Some expect this year's exports to shrink.

"China's exports are likely to contract until the middle of the year," Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics said in a report this week.

Earlier in 2022, trade also was hampered by anti-virus controls that shut down Shanghai and other industrial centers in March for up to two months, disrupting manufacturing and global shipping.

In December, exports to the United States fell 19.5% from a year earlier to \$301.1 billion. Imports of American goods shrank 7.3% to \$228.1 billion. That produced a \$78 billion surplus, down 17.5% from a year earlier.

Exports to the 27-nation European Union tumbled 39.5% to \$43.6 billion. Imports of European goods fell 31.3% to \$24 billion. China's trade surplus with Europe fell 50% to \$19.6 billion.

"Downward pressure on the world economy is increasing," warned the customs agency's Lu.

Also in December, Chinese imports from Russia, mostly oil and gas, rose 8.3% over a year earlier to \$9 billion.

China, the biggest global energy consumer, has stepped up purchases from Russia to take advantage of price discounts after Washington, Europe and Japan cut imports to punish President Vladimir Putin's government for its attack on Ukraine.

China can buy Russian oil and gas without triggering Western sanctions, but Biden has warned Beijing against helping Moscow's military. China bought about 20% of Russia's crude exports in 2021 and increased

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that last year.

China's December imports of oil, food, industrial components and consumer goods shrank 7.3% to \$228.1 billion.

Business and consumer activity is starting to rebound following the ruling Communist Party's surprise decision to lift anti-virus controls that kept millions of people at home and blocked most travel into and out of China.

Activity has been temporarily dampened by a surge in COVID-19 infections that forced some factories, restaurants and other businesses to close due to lack of healthy workers. Wary consumers are returning only gradually to shopping malls and restaurants.

The economy also is under pressure from tighter controls on debt, which triggered a slump in the country's vast real estate industry.

Manufacturing activity weakened in December and new export orders contracted for a fifth month, according to a survey by a leading business magazine, Caixin. Auto sales fell 6.7% from a year earlier. Housing sales and retail spending are down.

Authorities say the peak of the infection wave might have passed in Beijing and other major cities.

A revival in Chinese demand would be a boost to global suppliers at a time when U.S., Europe and Japanese sales are weakening. China is the biggest export customer for its Asian neighbors and a key consumer market.

Economists say the only comparison for China's vast trade surplus as a percentage of its economy was Saudi Arabia and other oil exporters during their 1970s price boom, but their total revenues were smaller.

The swollen surplus has strained the ability of China's central bank to manage the exchange rate of its yuan, which rose to multi-year highs against the U.S. dollar as money flowed into the country.

The People's Bank of China responded by ordering banks to keep the exchange rate stable and trying to limit the ability of traders to speculate on the currency's movement.

US stops hundreds fleeing Cuba, Haiti by sea, returns most

CURT ANDERSON and MARTA LAVANDIER Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — The Coast Guard returned another 177 Cuban migrants who were caught at sea off Florida to the island on Thursday, while a group of about two dozen Haitians swam ashore in Miami.

The Cuban migrants were all intercepted separately off the coast earlier this month, according to a Coast Guard news release. They were repatriated by two Coast Guard cutters.

Twenty-five Haitians who had traveled by sailboat from Port-de-Paix, Haiti, swam ashore at Virginia Key, a small island just southeast of downtown Miami, and were taken into the custody of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, agency spokesman Michael Selva said.

Good Samaritans among island beachgoers helped some of the migrants ashore with small boats and jet skis, Selva said.

Dozens of additional migrants still aboard the sailboat were being processed by federal officials at sea, which typically means they are returned to their home countries.

Increasing numbers of Cuban and Haitian migrants have attempted the risky Florida Straits crossing in recent months to illegally enter the Keys Island chain and other parts of the state as inflation soars and economic conditions deteriorate in their home countries.

The spike among Cubans has been especially pronounced. Since Oct. 1, 2022, the Coast Guard has interdicted more than 4,900 Cuban migrants at sea, as compared with more than 6,100 Cubans intercepted during all of fiscal 2022, which ended Sept. 30, according to the news release.

The latest returns and landings came just after President Joe Biden's administration began a new policy to start turning back Cubans, Haitians and Nicaraguans at the Texas border, along with Venezuelans, who arrive illegally.

The administration also is offering humanitarian parole for up to 30,000 people a month from those four countries if they apply online, pay their airfare and find a financial sponsor.

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Migrants who arrive illegally and don't immediately return home will become ineligible for the new parole. U.S. officials are hoping this will deter sea arrivals by offering a safer alternative and a pathway to residency.

The U.S. Embassy in Havana, Cuba recently resumed processing migrant visas, and said Wednesday that some initial Cuban applicants already had been accepted under the new parole. In the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, would-be applicants have flocked an immigration office in recent days to apply for passports needed for the U.S. program.

Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr. Mark Cobb said in a statement that with the new legal pathways available for migrants "we urge all people to use the safe and legal means available to travel to the United States. Don't put your life at risk by taking to the sea when you don't have to."

Storms, tornadoes slam US South, killing at least 7 people

By KIM CHANDLER and JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

SELMA, Ala. (AP) — A giant, swirling storm system billowing across the South on Thursday killed at least six people in central Alabama, where a tornado ripped roofs off homes and uprooted trees in historic Selma, while another person was killed in Georgia, where severe winds knocked out power to tens of thousands of people.

In Autauga County, Alabama, 41 miles (66 kilometers) northeast of Selma, at least six fatalities were confirmed and an estimated 40 homes were damaged or destroyed by a tornado that cut a 20-mile (32-kilometer) path across two rural communities, said Ernie Baggett, the county's emergency management director.

Several mobile homes were launched into the air and at least 12 people were injured severely enough to be taken to hospitals by emergency responders, Baggett told The Associated Press. He said crews were focused Thursday night on cutting through downed trees to look for people who may need help.

"It really did a good bit of damage. This is the worst that I've seen here in this county," Baggett said.

In Georgia, a passenger died when a tree fell on a vehicle in Jackson during the storm, Butts County Coroner Lacey Prue said. In the same county southeast of Atlanta, the storm appeared to have knocked a freight train off its tracks, officials said.

Officials in Griffin, south of Atlanta, told local news outlets that multiple people had been trapped inside an apartment complex after trees fell on it. Firefighters also cut a Griffin man loose who had been pinned for hours under a tree that fell on his house. A high school was damaged, and students were held at four middle schools for parents to pick up after officials determined it was unsafe to run buses. The city of Griffin imposed a curfew from 10 p.m. Thursday to 6 a.m. Friday.

School systems in at least six Georgia counties on the southern fringes of metro Atlanta canceled classes on Friday. Those systems enroll a total of 90,000 students.

Nationwide, there were 33 separate tornado reports Thursday from the National Weather Service as of Thursday evening, with a handful of tornado warnings still in effect in Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina. However, the reports were not yet confirmed and some of them could later be classified as wind damage after assessments are done in coming days.

In Selma, a city etched in the history of the civil rights movement, a tornado cut a wide path through the downtown area, where brick buildings collapsed, oak trees were uprooted, cars were on their side and power lines were left dangling. Plumes of thick, black smoke rose over the city from a fire burning. It wasn't immediately known whether the storm caused the blaze.

Selma Mayor James Perkins said no fatalities have been reported, but several people were seriously injured. First responders were continuing to assess the damage and officials hoped to get an aerial view of the city Friday morning.

"We have a lot of downed power lines," he said. "There is a lot of danger on the streets."

With widespread power outages, the Selma City Council held a meeting on the sidewalk, using lights from cellphones, to declare a state of emergency. A high school was opened as a shelter, officials said.

Mattie Moore was among Selma residents who picked up boxed meals offered by a charity downtown.

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"Thank God that we're here. It's like something you see on TV," Moore said of all the destruction.

A city of about 18,000 people, Selma is about 50 miles (80 kilometers) west of the Alabama capital of Montgomery. It was a flashpoint of the civil rights movement and where Alabama state troopers viciously attacked Black people advocating for voting rights as they marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965.

After the tornado passed, Krishun Moore emerged from her home to the sound of children crying and screaming. She and her mother encouraged the kids to keep screaming until they found the two of them on top of the roof of a damaged apartment. She estimated the kids were about 1 and 4 years old. Both of them are OK, she said through Facebook messenger.

Malesha McVay drove parallel to the tornado with her family. She said it got less than a mile (less than 2 kilometers) from her home before suddenly turning.

"We stopped and we prayed. We followed it and prayed," she said. "It was a 100% God thing that it turned right before it hit my house."

She took video of the giant twister, which would turn black as it swept away home after home.

"It would hit a house, and black smoke would swirl up," she said. "It was very terrifying."

About 40,000 customers were without power in Alabama on Thursday night, according to PowerOutage.us, which tracks outages nationwide. In Georgia, about 86,000 customers were without electricity after the storm system carved a path across a tier of counties just south of Atlanta.

The storm hit in Griffin, south of Atlanta, with winds damaging a shopping area, local news outlets reported. A Hobby Lobby store partially lost its roof, and at least one car was flipped in the parking lot of a nearby Walmart.

Damage was also reported west of downtown Atlanta in Douglas County and Cobb County, with Cobb County government posting a damage report showing a crumbled cinder block wall at a warehouse in suburban Austell.

In Kentucky, the National Weather Service in Louisville confirmed that an EF-1 tornado struck Mercer County and said crews were surveying damage in a handful of other counties.

Three factors — a natural La Nina weather cycle, warming of the Gulf of Mexico likely related to climate change and a decades-long shift of tornadoes from the west to east — came together to make Thursday's tornado outbreak unusual and damaging, said Victor Gensini, a meteorology professor at Northern Illinois University who studies tornado trends.

The La Nina, a cooling of parts of the Pacific that changes weather worldwide, was a factor in making a wavy jet stream that brought a cold front through, Gensini said. But that's not enough for a tornado outbreak. What's needed is moisture.

Normally the air in the Southeast is fairly dry this time of year but the dew point was twice what is normal, likely because of unusually warm water in the Gulf of Mexico, which is likely influenced by climate change. That moisture hit the cold front and everything was in place, Gensini said.

Lisa Marie Presley dies at 54 after hospitalization

By STEFANIE DAZIO and KRYSTA FAURIA Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Lisa Marie Presley — the only child of Elvis Presley — died Thursday after being hospitalized earlier that day, her mother said in a statement. The singer was 54.

"It is with a heavy heart that I must share the devastating news that my beautiful daughter Lisa Marie has left us," Priscilla Presley said in a statement Thursday evening. "She was the most passionate, strong and loving woman I have ever known."

The announcement came just hours after Priscilla Presley had confirmed that Lisa Marie Presley was rushed to the hospital earlier Thursday.

Los Angeles County paramedics were dispatched to a Calabasas home at 10:37 a.m. following a report of a woman in full cardiac arrest, according to Craig Little, a spokesperson for the county's fire department. Property records indicate Presley was a resident at that address.

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Paramedics arrived about six minutes later, Little said. A subsequent statement from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said paramedics performed CPR and "determined the patient had signs of life" before taking her to a hospital in nearby West Hills immediately.

The city of Calabasas is nestled between the foothills of the Santa Monica and the Santa Susanna Mountains, about 30 miles (50 kilometers) northwest of downtown Los Angeles.

News of Presley's hospitalization was first reported by TMZ and later confirmed by People magazine.

Presley, 54, attended the Golden Globes on Tuesday, on hand to celebrate Austin Butler's award for playing her father in "Elvis." She called his performance "mind-blowing" during a red carpet interview with "Entertainment Tonight."

"I really didn't know what to do with myself after I saw it," she told ET of Baz Luhrmann's movie. "I had to take, like, five days to process it because it was so incredible and so spot on and just so authentic that, yeah, I can't even describe what it meant."

Just days before that, she was in Memphis, Tennessee, at Graceland — the mansion where Elvis lived — to celebrate her father's birth anniversary on Jan. 8.

Kristen Sainato and her husband were visiting Memphis from Cleveland when she heard the news of Presley's death on Thursday. She wore a black jacket with the well-known TCB lightning bolt (shorthand for (taking care of business in a flash) on the back as she described meeting Presley at a celebration of her father's birthday on Jan. 8 at Graceland. Sainato set down a bouquet of flowers at the front gate of Graceland.

"Those are for Lisa," she said.

She said Lisa Marie Presley was one of the last connections to her famous father.

"Everyone is shocked over this. Why? Why did this have to happen?" Sainato said, wiping tears from her eyes as she stood in front of the stone wall that borders the home-turned museum. "She deserved a long, happy life."

Presley had recently penned an essay published in People about "the horrific reality" of her grief following her son Benjamin Keough's death by suicide in 2020. Presley is also the mother of actor Riley Keough and twin daughters.

"I've dealt with death, grief and loss since the age of 9 years old. I've had more than anyone's fair share of it in my lifetime and somehow, I've made it this far," she wrote in August.

Lawyer: Suspect in Abe assassination to face murder charge

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japanese prosecutors are expected to formally charge the suspect in the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe with murder on Friday, his lawyer said.

Tetsuya Yamagami was arrested immediately after allegedly shooting Abe with a handmade gun as the former leader was making a campaign speech in July outside a train station in Nara in western Japan. Later that month, Yamagami was sent to an Osaka detention center and given a five-month mental evaluation, which ended Tuesday.

Yamagami is now back in police custody in Nara after reportedly being deemed fit to stand trial.

One of his lawyers, Masaaki Furukawa, told The Associated Press on Thursday that he expects prosecutors to charge Yamagami with murder and gun control law violations.

Given the complexity of the case, it will take months before his trial begins, he said.

Furukawa said he and two other lawyers took turns visiting Yamagami at the detention center every 10-12 days, in between his examination by psychiatric experts. His visitors were limited to his lawyers and sister, he said.

Furukawa said Yamagami was in good health at the detention center. He said he could not disclose the details of their conversations before seeing what evidence prosecutors submit to the court in their indictment.

Police say Yamagami told them that he killed Abe, one of Japan's most influential and divisive politicians,

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because of Abe's apparent links to a religious group that he hated. In his statements and in social media postings attributed to him, Yamagami said he developed a grudge because his mother had made massive donations to the Unification Church which bankrupted his family and ruined his life.

"It's an extremely serious case, but someone has to defend him," Furukawa said. "Naturally, he will have to take criminal responsibility for the serious consequences he caused by allegedly firing his gun to take away the life of a politician, and we are tasked with doing our best to reduce his punishment."

Yamagami's father, an executive of a company founded by the suspect's grandfather, killed himself when Yamagami was 4 years old. After his mother joined the church, she began making large donations that bankrupted the family and shattered Yamagami's hope of going to college. His brother later committed suicide. After a three-year stint in the navy, Yamagami was most recently a factory worker.

Some Japanese have expressed sympathy for Yamagami, especially those who also suffered as children of followers of the South Korea-based Unification Church, which is known for pressuring adherents into making big donations and is considered a cult in Japan.

Thousands of people have signed a petition requesting leniency for Yamagami, and others have sent care packages to his relatives or the detention center.

The investigation into the case has led to revelations of years of cozy ties between Abe's governing Liberal Democratic Party and the church since Abe's grandfather, former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, helped the church take root in Japan in the 1960s over shared interests in conservative and anti-communist causes.

Current Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's popularity has plunged over his handling of the church controversy and for insisting on holding a rare, controversial state funeral for Abe.

In a September 2021 video message, Abe praised the Unification Church's work for peace on the Korean Peninsula and its focus on traditional family values.

Garland appoints special counsel to investigate Biden docs

By ZEKE MILLER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Merrick Garland on Thursday appointed a special counsel to investigate the presence of classified documents found at President Joe Biden's home in Wilmington, Delaware, and at an unsecured office in Washington dating from his time as vice president.

Robert Hur, a onetime U.S. attorney appointed by former President Donald Trump, will lead the investigation and plans to begin his work soon. His appointment marks the second time in a few months that Garland has appointed a special counsel, an extraordinary fact that reflects the Justice Department's efforts to independently conduct high-profile probes in an exceedingly heated political environment.

Both of those investigations, the earlier one involving Trump and documents recovered from his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, relate to the handling of classified information, though there are notable differences between those cases.

Garland's decision caps a tumultuous week at the White House, where Biden and his team opened the year hoping to celebrate stronger economic news ahead of launching an expected reelection campaign. But the administration faced a new challenge Monday, when it acknowledged that sensitive documents were found at the office of Biden's former institute in Washington. The situation intensified by Thursday morning, when Biden's attorney said an additional classified document was found at a room in his Wilmington home — later revealed by Biden to be his personal library — along with other classified documents in his garage.

The attorney general revealed that Biden's lawyers informed the Justice Department of the latest discovery at the president's home on Thursday morning, after FBI agents first retrieved documents from the garage in December.

Biden told reporters at the White House that he was "cooperating fully and completely" with the Justice Department's investigation into how classified information and government records were stored.

"We have cooperated closely with the Justice Department throughout its review, and we will continue that cooperation with the special counsel," said Richard Sauber, a lawyer for the president. "We are confident

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that a thorough review will show that these documents were inadvertently misplaced, and the president and his lawyers acted promptly upon discovery of this mistake.”

Garland said the “extraordinary circumstances” of the matter required Hur’s appointment, adding that the special counsel is authorized to investigate whether any person or entity violated the law. Federal law requires strict handling procedures for classified information, and official records from Biden’s time as vice president are considered government property under the Presidential Records Act.

“This appointment underscores for the public the department’s commitment to both independence and accountability in particularly sensitive matters, and to making decisions indisputably guided only by the facts and the law,” Garland said.

Hur, in a statement, said: “I will conduct the assigned investigation with fair, impartial and dispassionate judgment. I intend to follow the facts swiftly and thoroughly, without fear or favor and will honor the trust placed in me to perform this service.”

While Garland said the Justice Department received timely notifications from Biden’s personal attorneys after each set of classified documents was identified, the White House provided delayed and incomplete notification to the American public about the discoveries.

Biden’s personal attorneys found the first set of classified and official documents on Nov. 2 in a locked closet as they cleared out his office at the Penn Biden Center in Washington, where he worked after he left the vice presidency in 2017 until he launched his presidential campaign in 2019. The attorneys notified the National Archives, which retrieved the documents the next day and referred the matter to the Justice Department.

Sauber said Biden’s attorneys then underwent a search of other locations where documents could have been transferred after Biden left the vice presidency, including his homes in Wilmington and Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. Garland said that on Dec. 20, the Justice Department was informed that classified documents and official records were located in Biden’s Wilmington garage, near his Corvette, and that FBI agents took custody of them shortly thereafter.

A search on Wednesday evening turned up the most recently discovered classified document in Biden’s personal library at his home, and the Justice Department was notified Thursday, Garland revealed.

The White House only confirmed the discovery of the Penn Biden Center documents in response to news inquiries Monday and remained silent on the subsequent search of Biden’s homes and the discovery of the garage tranche until Thursday morning, shortly before Garland announced Hur’s appointment. Biden, when he first addressed the matter Tuesday while in Mexico City, also didn’t let on about the subsequent document discoveries.

Press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre insisted that despite the public omissions, Biden’s administration was handling the matter correctly.

“There was transparency in doing what you’re supposed to do,” she said, declining to answer repeated questions about when Biden was briefed on the discovery of the documents and whether he would submit to an interview with investigators.

Pressed on whether Biden could guarantee that additional classified documents would not turn up in a further search, Jean-Pierre said, “You should assume that it’s been completed, yes.”

The appointment of yet another special counsel to investigate the handling of classified documents is a remarkable turn of events, legally and politically, for a Justice Department that has spent months looking into the retention by Trump of more than 300 documents with classification markings found at the former president’s Florida estate.

Though the situations are factually and legally different, the discovery of classified documents at two separate locations tied to Biden — as well as the appointment of a new special counsel — would almost certainly complicate any prosecution that the department might bring against Trump.

New House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a California Republican, said of the latest news, “I think Congress has to investigate this.”

“Here’s an individual that sat on ‘60 Minutes’ that was so concerned about President Trump’s documents

... and now we find that this is a vice president keeping it for years out in the open in different locations.” Contradicting several fellow Republicans, however, he said, “We don’t think there needs to be a special prosecutor.”

The top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee has requested that intelligence agencies conduct a “damage assessment” of potentially classified documents. Ohio Rep. Mike Turner on Thursday also requested briefings from Garland and the director of national intelligence, Avril Haines, on their reviews by Jan. 26.

“The presence of classified information at these separate locations could implicate the President in the mishandling, potential misuse, and exposure of classified information,” Turner wrote the officials.

Shooting fallout: Metal detectors in elementary schools?

By BEN FINLEY and DENISE LAVOIE Associated Press

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. (AP) — The shooting of a first-grade teacher by a 6-year-old boy has plunged the nation into uncharted waters of school violence, with many in the Virginia shipbuilding city where it happened demanding metal detectors in every school.

On Thursday, the Newport News School Board announced that 90 walk-through metal detectors would be placed in schools across the district, starting with Richneck Elementary School, where teacher Abigail Zwerner was shot Friday.

“The time is now to put metal detectors in all of our schools,” board Chairman Lisa Surles-Law told a news conference.

The move came even as educators and other experts nationwide grappled with the complex issue of how to prevent gun violence in even the youngest school populations.

“This is a real game changer,” said Mo Canady, executive director of the National Association of School Resource Officers, which trains law enforcement members who work in schools.

“How do we begin to approach the idea of protecting students and staff from an armed 6-year-old?”

American educators have long been trying to create safe spaces that feel less like prisons and more like schools. If anything, Friday’s shooting fuels a debate over the effectiveness of metal detectors — which are still relatively rare in schools — and other safety measures.

“Metal detectors and clear backpacks are more likely to cause young children to be fearful and feel criminalized,” said Amanda Nickerson, a school psychology professor at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

“Many of the strategies being suggested do not have any research evidence, and they may actually erode a healthy school climate,” she said — one where students and staff feel free to share concerns about possible threats, which has been shown to prevent shootings.

A more effective approach fosters “positive social, emotional, behavioral and academic success,” Nickerson said.

Ron Avi Astor, a professor of social welfare and education at the University of California, Los Angeles, said “it’s really the gun owners who need to be held responsible.”

Police in Newport News say the 6-year-old brought his mother’s gun, which had been purchased legally, to school, though it’s unclear how he gained access to it. A Virginia law prohibits leaving a loaded gun where it is accessible to a child under 14, a misdemeanor crime punishable with a maximum one-year prison sentence and \$2,500 fine. No charges have been brought against the mother so far.

Astor said that a public health approach to reducing gun violence in schools is needed, as well as gun licensing.

“Let’s all agree that gun education is really important, particularly around gun safety and accidents and kids getting access to guns,” Astor said. “Let’s make that part of health class. Let’s make sure every kid, parent and educator goes through education and hazardous materials safety training in every school in the United States.”

“Gun safety education ... is something that most Americans agree on, based on national polls. That’s a

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great place to start saving lives and reducing injury or death," Astor said.

The shooting Friday occurred as Zwerner taught her first-grade class at Richneck Elementary. There was no warning and no struggle before the 6-year-old pointed the gun at Zwerner and fired one round.

The bullet pierced Zwerner's hand and struck her chest. The 25-year-old hustled her students out of the classroom before being rushed to the hospital. She has improved and was listed in stable condition Monday, authorities said.

Police Chief Steve Drew described the shooting as "intentional." A judge will determine what's next for the child, who is being held at a medical facility following an emergency custody order.

Eric Billet, whose three children attend Newport News public schools, said he supports more security measures, like metal detectors, bag searches and a security officer at every school. But he would also like more behavioral specialists and counselors working with students.

Two of Billet's children go to Richneck, including his fourth-grade daughter who's endured nightmares following the shooting.

"The more challenging piece is the culture change," he said.

"I know some teachers have had trouble controlling classrooms since COVID," Billet added. "I do not know all of the reasons, whether it's parenting at home or other influences, or a lack of authority and discipline at school. I definitely do not blame the teachers for this."

Rick Fogle, whose grandson is in second grade at Richneck, supports increased use of metal detectors. But he also said schools need to be more willing to search backpacks, pockets and desks if kids are suspected of having a gun.

"They've got to overcome social pressure to respect people's rights and realize that the rights of those who could be injured need to be considered," Fogle said.

Researcher David Riedman, founder of a database that tracks U.S. school shootings dating back to 1970, said he's only aware of three other shootings involving 6-year-olds in that time period — and only one other case of a student younger than that.

At the same time, people are shot or guns are taken away at schools almost every day, Riedman said. There were 302 shootings on school property last year. And since 1970, more than 250 teachers, principals and other school staff have been shot.

Still, he questioned how realistic it is for schools to ramp up use of metal detectors.

"Schools are already struggling with adequate resources — finding bus drivers, finding enough teachers," Riedman said. "To have comprehensive school security with 100% weapons detection essentially requires a TSA-style agency that would cost hundreds of billions of dollars to implement across the country. And that's not viable."

The use of metal detectors in schools, particularly elementary schools, is still rare, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

During the 2019-2020 school year, less than 2% of public elementary schools performed random metal detector checks on students. It was 10% for middle schools and 14.8% for high schools.

About 2% of elementary schools required backpacks to be clear while just over 9% of middle schools and 7% of high schools imposed that requirement, the center said. About 54.6% of elementary schools had security staff present at least once a week; at middle schools it was 81.5% and at high schools 84.4%.

Canady said equipping schools with metal detectors requires a lot of training and maintenance — and can provide a false sense of security if they're not operated correctly.

A relationship-based policing approach can better help avert school violence, he said. "Every student in a school environment should have at least one trusted adult that they can connect with," Canady said.

Krista Arnold, executive director of the Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals, agreed. She worked as an elementary school principal for 18 years in Virginia Beach before retiring in 2021.

"I had a couple of knives brought to school during my 18 years, and (the students) usually sing like canaries and tell somebody," Arnold said. "And that usually got to the front office pretty quickly."

Arnold said she's not a proponent of turning schools into fortresses. Instead, she supports teaching

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empathy and other behavioral skills.

"My experience is when you build that community and you explicitly teach social, emotional skills — and you talk about how it makes the other person feel if you've hurt them ... you build that good citizenship and you reduce the amount of discipline and aggression in the school," she said.

EXPLAINER: List of states banning TikTok grows

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Wisconsin and North Carolina have joined at least 22 other states in banning the popular social media app TikTok on state-owned devices, including Mississippi, Indiana, Louisiana and South Dakota.

Congress also recently banned TikTok from most U.S. government-issued devices over bipartisan concerns about security.

TikTok is owned by ByteDance, a Chinese company that moved its headquarters to Singapore in 2020. It has been targeted by critics who say the Chinese government could access user data, such as browsing history and location. U.S. armed forces also have prohibited the app on military devices.

TikTok is consumed by two-thirds of American teens and has become the second-most popular domain in the world. But there's long been bipartisan concern in Washington that Beijing would use legal and regulatory power to seize American user data or try to push pro-China narratives or misinformation.

Here's a look at the action in Wisconsin and North Carolina and the broader debate over TikTok:

WHY DID WISCONSIN AND NORTH CAROLINA BAN TIKTOK?

Democratic Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers cited concerns about privacy, safety and security, after consulting with the FBI and emergency management officials about the app. Evers' order applies to most state agencies, with some exceptions like criminal investigators who may be using the app to track certain people.

The University of Wisconsin System, which employs 40,000 faculty and staff, is also exempt. But a UW System spokesperson said despite the exemption, the university was conducting a review and moving toward placing restrictions on the app being used on devices in order to protect against serious cybersecurity risks.

Both Evers and North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper also prohibited the use of WeChat, a Chinese instant messaging app, on state devices.

"It's important for us to protect state information technology from foreign countries that have actively participated in cyberattacks against the United States," Cooper said. "Protecting North Carolina from cyber threats is vital to ensuring the safety, security, privacy, and success of our state and its people."

WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS ABOUT TIKTOK?

Both the FBI and the Federal Communications Commission have warned that TikTok user data could be shared by owner ByteDance Ltd. with China's authoritarian government. U.S. officials also worry that the Chinese government might use TikTok to push pro-China narratives or misinformation.

Fears were stoked by news reports last year that a China-based team improperly accessed data of U.S. TikTok users, including two journalists, as part of a covert surveillance program to ferret out the source of leaks to the press.

There are also concerns that the company is sending masses of user data to China, in breach of stringent European privacy rules.

Additionally, there's been concern about TikTok's content and whether it harms teenagers' mental health.

WHO HAS PUSHED FOR RESTRICTIONS?

In 2020, then-President Donald Trump and his administration sought to ban dealings with TikTok's owner, force it to sell off its U.S. assets and remove it from app stores. Courts blocked Trump's efforts to ban TikTok, and President Joe Biden rescinded Trump's orders after taking office but ordered an in-depth study

of the issue. A planned sale of TikTok's U.S. assets was shelved.

In Congress, concern about the app has been bipartisan. Congress last month banned TikTok from most U.S. government-issued devices over bipartisan concerns about security.

The Senate in December approved a version of the TikTok ban authored by conservative Republican Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri, a vocal critic of big tech companies.

But Democratic U.S. Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, of Illinois has co-sponsored legislation to prohibit TikTok from operating in the U.S. altogether, and the measure approved by Congress in December had the support of Democratic U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

WHAT DOES TIKTOK SAY?

"We're disappointed that so many states are jumping on the political bandwagon to enact policies that will do nothing to advance cybersecurity in their states and are based on unfounded falsehoods about TikTok," Jamal Brown, a spokesperson for TikTok, said in an emailed statement.

TikTok is developing security and data privacy plans as part of an ongoing national security review by President Joe Biden's administration.

Missing boy's mom: 'I could feel his fingers slipping' away

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Lindsay Doan didn't think the water flowing over the creek crossing on San Marcos Road was deeper than normal when she tried navigating it in her SUV while driving her 5-year-old son to school.

But the creek, swollen with rain from California's epic winter storms, was much higher and flowing stronger than she anticipated. Doan cursed as she lost control of the steering, and the 4,300-pound (1,950-kilogram) Chevy Traverse was carried off the road and pinned against a large sycamore tree.

"Mom, it's OK," her son, Kyle, reassured her from the back seat. "Just be calm."

They were the last words the little boy said to his mother before his fingers slipped away from hers and he was swept away Monday on California's central coast near Paso Robles.

"Yesterday I got to the point where I think I ran out of tears," Doan told The Associated Press. "I just don't know what to expect anymore. I mean, I've tried to do a Google search: How long can a child not eat? How long can they be in wet clothes? ... We're worried because I don't know if they're going to be able to find him."

Close to 200 people — including about 120 National Guard troops, search and rescue crews from six counties, dive teams, searchers using dogs and drones — looked for Kyle Thursday in the receding waters and massive piles of debris along San Marcos Creek, the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Department said. So far, they've found only one of his blue and gray Nike shoes.

The storms that have relentlessly pounded California since the end of last year have claimed at least 18 lives. Most of the deaths have been caused by falling trees and people driving on flooded roads.

Kyle was listed as missing.

With a sister in high school and brother in college, he is the baby in his family and loves being the center of attention.

"He definitely capitalized on it," his mother said. "He loves making everyone laugh. He wanted to make everyone smile. He loves to please people."

As vacation came to an end, Kyle was excited to return to kindergarten Monday at Lillian Larsen Elementary School, his mother said. It was the first day he was going to be allowed to play without restrictions after recovering from a broken leg that required three surgeries and he was looking forward to seeing his friends.

Doan, a special education teacher at the school, was less enthusiastic, wishing she had a few more days off as she took the back road from their home near Paso Robles.

For most of the year, the creek running along San Marcos Road is like so many California rivers and streams — a sinuous band of sand that only flows with winter and spring rains. When it is flowing, it's

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often easy enough to drive through the shallow waters that course over the road in places.

The Doan family drove the same route Sunday to a truck stop on Highway 101, splashing through the waters without incident.

When Doan approached Monday in light rain, there were no road closures and she didn't think it looked any different from the day before.

"But as soon as I hit the bottom, my car started to drift and I realized that it wasn't the same," she said. "It was completely different."

Scotty Jalbert, emergency services manager for San Luis Obispo County, said river crossings can be deceiving and people can run into trouble after successfully fording them several times. As little as 6 inches (15 centimeters) of water is enough to knock a person off their feet and can even push a car off course if it's moving rapidly.

"We use the term, 'Turn around, don't drown,'" Jalbert said. "With this tragedy, when the responders got to the scene, the water was over the vehicle. Obviously, that kind of energy is going to cause a bad situation."

Jalbert said someone trapped in a car taking on water should get out of it if they can and get on the roof, if possible.

Neil Collins and his wife, Danielle, who own an orchard off San Marcos Road had gone down to the creek that morning to see if they would be able to get out across the floodwaters.

When he saw waves of muddy brown water and the steady flow carrying sturdy oak and sycamore limbs downstream, he said, "This isn't going to end well for someone."

Within 15 minutes, his prediction had come true.

After Doan's car came to a rest against the trees it began taking on water, so she decided to abandon it. The windows wouldn't go down, but she was able to open her door and hug a tree. With the current pinning the rear door closed, she told Kyle to leave his belongings and climb into the front seat.

"I don't care about your backpack," she said. "I just want you to come to me."

She was able to grab his hand but her grip was tenuous and the current swept Kyle around the other side of the tree.

"I could feel his fingers slipping from mine," she said.

As the water pulled them apart, she let go of the tree to try to get her son, who couldn't swim.

"I saw his head kind of floating and he was looking at me because he was going backwards," she said. "I was trying to keep my head above the water, but the currents kept pulling me down. And after a while I didn't see Kyle or what was going on."

Collins missed seeing Doan drive into the creek. But her screams caught his attention.

"I looked at my wife and said, 'That sounds like a human,'" he said. "I heard a second scream and just ran up the river."

In a typical winter, the river may be waist deep, but he guessed it was up to 12 feet (3.6 meters) deep and four times its width when it's running.

After he spotted Lindsay Doan struggling to stay afloat, Collins noticed another body floating in the middle of the creek and thought it looked lifeless. So he focused on Doan, who was closer to shore.

He ran alongside her downstream while his wife called 911 and some orchard workers brought a rope. Eventually, Doan managed to grab some branches of bushes underwater and Collins and his crew tossed her a lifeline.

Doan was hysterical when she made it to shore, Collins said. It was only then that he realized the other figure that washed by was her little boy.

If Doan had floated another 100 yards (91 meters), he's not sure he could have helped her. An embankment and barbed wire fence would have prevented him from running alongside her.

"Time was running out," he said.

Brian Doan, Kyle's dad, is grateful his wife was saved. He doesn't fault her for driving that route and thinks she did the right things to try to save their son.

Despite those reassurances, Lindsay Doan can't stop second-guessing herself.

"In the back of your mind, it's like, 'Well, what if, what if, what if I just turned around and went back the other way?'" she said. "What if, what if I had just decided, 'Hey, you know, let's not go down this road this day?' I don't know that that's ever going to disappear."

When asked what her son might say to her in this time, Doan took a breath and collected her thoughts before saying that Kyle always wanted his family to be happy and feel good.

"Maybe he would say something like ... 'There's nothing that you can do, Mom, it's OK. Everything will be OK.'"

Demonstrators protest NCAA's transgender athlete inclusion

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Sports Writer

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Former Kentucky swimmer Riley Gaines and about two dozen demonstrators outside the NCAA convention Thursday protested the inclusion of transgender athletes in women's sports and threatened the association with legal action if it doesn't change its policies.

Gaines competed in last year's NCAA swimming and diving championships against Penn's Lia Thomas, who became first transgender woman to win a national title (the women's 500-yard freestyle). She also placed fifth in the 200 freestyle, tying with Gaines.

"Today, we intend to personally tell the NCAA to stop discriminating against female athletes by handing them a petition that we have garnered nearly 10,000 signatures on in just a couple of days," Gaines said, kicking off more than an hour of speeches that attracted a few onlookers and a handful of quiet counter-protesters.

The topic has divided the U.S. for the past several years, with critics saying transgender athletes have an advantage over cisgender women in competition. Eighteen states have passed laws banning transgender athletes from participating in female school sports; a federal judge earlier this month ruled West Virginia's ban is constitutional and can remain in place.

The NCAA has permitted transgender athletes to compete since 2010.

The Transgender Student-Athlete Participation Policy was updated a year ago, taking a sport-by-sport approach that brings the NCAA in line with the U.S. and international Olympic committees.

Full implementation of the policy was scheduled to be phased in by August but the NCAA Board of Governors this week approved a recommendation to delay that through the 2023-24 academic year "to address operational considerations."

NCAA leadership says the stated goal in policy making is "not if transgender athletes are included, but how."

"We want to have an environment that is fair, welcoming and inclusive for all of (the athletes)," Ivy League executive director Robin Harris said at the convention during a session this week on the topic. Harris said the transgender athletes policy is no different from other eligibility requirements.

"They are playing by the rules," NCAA director of inclusion Jean Merrill said during the session.

Schuyler Bailar, a transgender man who switched from the women's swim team to the men's during his time at Harvard, said he believes the NCAA is doing the best it can to be inclusive, fair and effective with its policies. The challenge is that the standards are not static.

"It's just not that simple. I think they're ever moving, ever evolving. And fairness is ever evolving, as well, the more we learn about bodies and biology and people and the more we understand diversity and equity and inclusion," Bailar said at the convention session.

At the protest, Alliance Defending Freedom attorney Christiana Kiefer said the NCAA is violating Title IX, the landmark gender equity legislation enacted in 1972, and legal action against the NCAA could take several forms.

"So I think that could look like a federal lawsuit against the NCAA," she said. "I think that could look like a Title IX complaint. And I think it could look like even universities starting to actually push back against the NCAA and saying, 'Hey, we have a legal obligation to protect fair athletic opportunities for female

athletes and if we fail to do that, you're kind of binding our hands and not allowing us to fulfill our legal obligations to the female athletes at our schools."

The NCAA has not yet taken a stand against states that have banned transgender athletes from competing in women's sports. The NCAA has previously banned states from hosting its championship events because of the use of Confederate symbolism or for laws that it believe discriminated against LGBTQ people.

Bailar said it would be valuable to have the NCAA take a similar position on this issue.

"I also know that NCAA's jurisdiction is in college athletics and not in children's sports. And many of these laws are about children's sports. So I understand the discrepancy there," he said. "But I mean, if you're asking me do I want more support for trans people? The answer is going to be: absolutely yes."

Study: Exxon Mobil accurately predicted warming since 1970s

By SETH BORENSTEIN and CATHY BUSSEWITZ Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — Exxon Mobil's scientists were remarkably accurate in their predictions about global warming, even as the company made public statements that contradicted its own scientists' conclusions, a new study says.

The study in the journal *Science* Thursday looked at research that Exxon funded that didn't just confirm what climate scientists were saying, but used more than a dozen different computer models that forecast the coming warming with precision equal to or better than government and academic scientists.

This was during the same time that the oil giant publicly doubted that warming was real and dismissed climate models' accuracy. Exxon said its understanding of climate change evolved over the years and that critics are misunderstanding its earlier research.

Scientists, governments, activists and news sites, including *Inside Climate News* and the *Los Angeles Times*, several years ago reported that "Exxon knew" about the science of climate change since about 1977 all while publicly casting doubt. What the new study does is detail how accurate Exxon funded research was. From 63% to 83% of those projections fit strict standards for accuracy and generally predicted correctly that the globe would warm about .36 degrees (.2 degrees Celsius) a decade.

The Exxon-funded science was "actually astonishing" in its precision and accuracy, said study co-author Naomi Oreskes, a Harvard science history professor. But she added so was the "hypocrisy because so much of the Exxon Mobil disinformation for so many years ... was the claim that climate models weren't reliable."

Study lead author Geoffrey Supran, who started the work at Harvard and now is an environmental science professor at the University of Miami, said this is different than what was previously found in documents about the oil company.

"We've dug into not just to the language, the rhetoric in these documents, but also the data. And I'd say in that sense, our analysis really seals the deal on 'Exxon knew,'" Supran said. It "gives us airtight evidence that Exxon Mobil accurately predicted global warming years before, then turned around and attacked the science underlying it."

The paper quoted then-Exxon CEO Lee Raymond in 1999 as saying future climate "projections are based on completely unproven climate models, or more often, sheer speculation," while his successor in 2013 called models "not competent."

Exxon's understanding of climate science developed along with the broader scientific community, and its four decades of research in climate science resulted in more than 150 papers, including 50 peer-reviewed publications, said company spokesman Todd Spitler.

"This issue has come up several times in recent years and, in each case, our answer is the same: those who talk about how 'Exxon Knew' are wrong in their conclusions," Spitler said in an emailed statement. "Some have sought to misrepresent facts and Exxon Mobil's position on climate science, and its support for effective policy solutions, by recasting well intended, internal policy debates as an attempted company disinformation campaign."

Exxon, one of the world's largest oil and gas companies, has been the target of numerous lawsuits that claim the company knew about the damage its oil and gas would cause to the climate, but misled the

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public by sowing doubt about climate change. In the latest such lawsuit, New Jersey accused five oil and gas companies including Exxon of deceiving the public for decades while knowing about the harmful toll fossil fuels take on the climate.

Similar lawsuits from New York to California have claimed that Exxon and other oil and gas companies launched public relations campaigns to stir doubts about climate change. In one, then-Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey said Exxon's public relations efforts were "reminiscent of the tobacco industry's long denial campaign about the dangerous effects of cigarettes."

Oreskes acknowledged in the study that she has been a paid consultant in the past for a law firm suing Exxon, while Supran has gotten a grant from the Rockefeller Family Foundation, which has also helped fund groups that were suing Exxon. The Associated Press receives some foundation support from Rockefeller and maintains full control of editorial content.

Oil giants including Exxon and Shell were accused in congressional hearings in 2021 of spreading misinformation about climate, but executives from the companies denied the accusations.

University of Illinois atmospheric scientist professor emeritus Donald Wuebbles told The Associated Press that in the 1980s he worked with Exxon-funded scientists and wasn't surprised by what the company knew or the models. It's what science and people who examined the issue knew.

"It was clear that Exxon Mobil knew what was going on," Wuebbles said. "The problem is at the same time they were paying people to put out misinformation. That's the big issue."

There's a difference between the "hype and spin" that companies do to get you to buy a product or politicians do to get your vote and an "outright lie ... misrepresenting factual information and that's what Exxon did," Oreskes said.

Several outside scientists and activists said what the study showed about Exxon actions is serious.

"The harm caused by Exxon has been huge," said University of Michigan environment dean Jonathan Overpeck. "They knew that fossil fuels, including oil and natural gas, would greatly alter the planet's climate in ways that would be costly in terms of lives, human suffering and economic impacts. And yet, despite this understanding they choose to publicly downplay the problem of climate change and the dangers it poses to people and the planet."

Cornell University climate scientist Natalie Mahowald asked: "How many thousands (or more) of lives have been lost or adversely impacted by Exxon Mobil's deliberate campaign to obscure the science?"

Critics say Exxon's past actions on climate change undermine its claims that it's committed to reducing emissions.

After tracking Exxon's and hundreds of other companies' corporate lobbying on climate change policies, InfluenceMap, a firm that analyzes data on how companies are impacting the climate crisis, concluded that Exxon is lobbying overall in opposition to the goals of the Paris Agreement and that it's currently among the most negative and influential corporations holding back climate policy.

"All the research we have suggests that effort to thwart climate action continues to this day, prioritizing the oil and gas industry value chain from the "potentially existential" threat of climate change, rather than the other way around," said Faye Holder, program manager for InfluenceMap.

"The messages of denial and delay may look different, but the intention is the same."

Bank to pay \$31M redlining settlement, DOJ's largest ever

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Justice Department accused Los Angeles-based City National Bank on Thursday of discrimination by refusing to underwrite mortgages in predominately Black and Latino communities, requiring the bank to pay more than \$31 million in the largest redlining settlement in department history.

City National is the latest bank in the past several years to be found systematically avoiding lending to racial and ethnic minorities, a practice that the Biden administration has set up its own task force to combat.

The Justice Department says that between 2017 and 2020, City National avoided marketing and underwriting mortgages in majority Black and Latino neighborhoods in Los Angeles County. Other banks operating

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in those neighborhoods received six times the number of mortgage applications that City National did, according to federal officials.

The Justice Department alleges City National, a bank with roughly \$95 billion in assets, was so reluctant to operate in neighborhoods where most of the residents are people of color, the bank only opened one branch in those neighborhoods in the past 20 years. In comparison, the bank opened or acquired 11 branches in that time period. In addition, no employee was dedicated to underwriting mortgages at that one branch, unlike branches in majority white neighborhoods.

"This settlement should send a strong message to the financial industry that we expect lenders to serve all members of the community and that they will be held accountable when they fail to do so," Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke, who leads the Justice Department's civil rights division, said in a statement.

Attorney General Merrick Garland has prioritized civil rights prosecutions since taking the helm at the Justice Department in 2021 and the department, in the Biden administration, has put a higher priority on redlining cases than under previous administrations.

The Biden task force includes the Justice Department as well as bank regulators like the Comptroller of the Currency and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and is focused not only on explicit forms of redlining but also cases where computer algorithms may cause banks to discriminate against Black and Latino borrowers.

Despite a half-century of laws designed to combat redlining, the racist practice continues across the country and the long-term effects are still felt to this day. The average net worth of a Black family is a fraction of a typical white household, and homes in historically redlined neighborhoods are still worth less than homes in non-redlined communities.

As part of the settlement, City National will create a \$29.5 million loan subsidy fund for loans to Black and Latino borrowers, and spend \$1.75 million on advertising, community outreach and financial education programs to reach minority borrowers.

In a statement, City National said it disagreed with the Justice Department's allegations, but that it will "nonetheless support the DOJ in its efforts to ensure equal access to credit for all consumers, regardless of race."

The Justice Department said City National cooperated as part of the redlining investigation and is working to resolve its issues in other markets, as well.

Clarke announced the settlement Thursday morning at a historic Black Baptist church in South Los Angeles that was an important force in the civil rights movement and has been the venue for speeches by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and others.

The settlement with City National is the largest settlement with the Justice Department. A settlement with the Department of Housing and Urban Development with Associated Bank in 2015 involved the bank making a commitment to make \$200 million in increased lending in minority-majority neighborhoods, along with a \$10 million subsidy fund similar to the one agreed to by City National.

US kindergarten vaccination rate dropped again, data shows

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Vaccination rates for U.S. kindergarteners dropped again last year, and federal officials are starting a new campaign to try to bring them up.

Usually, 94% to 95% of kindergarteners are vaccinated against measles, tetanus and certain other diseases. The vaccination rates dropped below 94% in the 2020-2021 school year, during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study released Thursday found rates dropped again in the 2021-2022 school year, to about 93%.

The pandemic disrupted vaccinations and other routine health care for children, and also taxed the ability of school administrators and nurses to track which children weren't up-to-date on shots. CDC officials said decreased confidence in vaccines is another likely contributor.

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"I think it's a combination of all those things," said Dr. Georgina Peacock, director of CDC's immunization division.

Health officials focus on kindergarten because it's when most children enter school systems. Public schools typically require vaccinations as a condition of attendance, though some exemptions are allowed.

Such exemptions were up slightly last school year, but the CDC's Shannon Stokley said they are not the main driver of the decrease. Rather, more schools relaxed their policies to allow enrollment while giving families a grace period to get shots, she said.

The new numbers suggest that as many as 275,000 kindergartners lack full vaccine protection.

Falling vaccination rates open the door to outbreaks of diseases once thought to be in the rearview mirror, experts say. They point to a case of paralytic polio reported last year in New York, and to recent measles surges in Minnesota and Ohio.

Those outbreaks coincide with anecdotal and survey information suggesting more parents are questioning bedrock childhood vaccines long celebrated as public health success stories.

A Kaiser Family Foundation poll last month found less support among parents for school vaccine requirements vs. a 2019 survey.

"It's crazy. There's so much work to be done," said Dr. Jason Newland, a pediatric infectious diseases doctor at St. Louis Children's Hospital and vice chair for community health at Washington University.

Other physicians have told him that more parents are being selective about which vaccines to give their kids. CDC data reflected that: The chickenpox vaccination rate fell more sharply than the rate for shots against measles, mumps and rubella.

This week, the CDC launched a campaign called "Let's RISE" — an acronym for Routine Immunizations on Schedule for Everyone. It includes new educational materials to help doctors talk to families about vaccinations, as well as information for families who have questions about the shots.

Building trust in vaccinations "is something that has to happen at the local and community level," Peacock said.

Thursday's CDC study was based on public school kindergarten vaccination reports from 49 states, and reporting on private schools from 48 states. Montana did not report data.

Rates vary across the country. CDC officials noted significant increases in a few states, including Hawaii, Maine, Maryland and Wyoming. But most states saw declines, with the largest drops in Mississippi, Georgia and Wisconsin.

A second CDC report on Thursday found overall vaccination rates among younger children remained high and stable, although there were declines among kids who were poor and lived in rural areas. The report was based on a 2021 national telephone survey of parents of children who were about 2 years old.

Why the difference? CDC officials said it appears doctors and parents made sure younger and more vulnerable children got initial vaccine protection during the pandemic, but there may have been a drop-off in getting booster doses and additional shots as kids got older.

US inflation eases grip on economy, falling for a 6th month

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rising U.S. consumer prices moderated again last month, bolstering hopes that inflation's grip on the economy will continue to ease this year and possibly require less drastic action by the Federal Reserve to control it.

Inflation declined to 6.5% in December compared with a year earlier, the government said Thursday. It was the sixth straight year-over-year slowdown, down from 7.1% in November. On a monthly basis, prices actually slipped 0.1% from November to December, the first such drop since May 2020.

The softer readings add to growing signs that the worst inflation bout in four decades is steadily waning. Gas prices, which have tumbled, are likely to keep lowering overall inflation in the coming months. Supply chain snarls have largely unraveled. That's helping reduce the cost of goods ranging from cars and shoes to furniture and sporting goods.

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"This is the starting point for much better inflation rates, which should bolster consumer and business confidence," said Joe Brusuelas, chief economist at tax consultants RSM.

December's lower inflation reading makes it likelier that the Fed will slow its interest rate hikes in the coming months. The Fed may raise its benchmark rate by just a quarter-point at its next meeting, which ends Feb. 1, after a half-point increase in December and four three-quarter-point hikes before that.

Fed officials have signaled that they intend to boost their key rate above 5% — a move that would likely keep mortgage rates high, along with the costs of auto loans and business borrowing. The Fed's higher rates are intended to slow spending, cool the economy and curb inflation.

But if inflation continues to ease, the Fed could suspend its rate hikes after that, some economists say, or implement just one additional hike in March and then pause. Futures prices show that investors expect the Fed to then cut rates by year's end, although minutes from its December meeting noted that none of the 19 policymakers foresee any rate cuts this year.

"If actual inflation is trending downward, the Fed can take more comfort that it's landed the economy in a good place," said Daleep Singh, chief global economist at PGIM Fixed Income and a former Fed staffer. Singh expects the Fed to raise its benchmark rate by a quarter-point at each of its next two meetings and then stop with its key rate just below 5%.

Inflation also has been dropping, though to a lesser degree, in Europe and in the United Kingdom. After months of rising prices, annual inflation in the 19 countries that use the euro currency fell for the second straight month in December but still hit a painful 9.2%. That was down from November's 10.1%, with energy prices having dropped from summertime peaks but still higher than normal.

While annual inflation in the U.K. eased to 10.7% in November from 11.1% a month earlier, it's still stuck near a 40-year high, with food and energy prices squeezing consumers. Central banks in Europe and the U.K. are still raising interest rates but have slowed their pace.

In remarks Thursday morning, President Joe Biden suggested that the "data is clear" that U.S. inflation is dropping.

"It's coming down in America month after month, giving families some real breathing room," he said.

Biden is increasingly framing the economic challenge of inflation in political terms: He warned that House Republicans could worsen inflation and inequality with their bills to reduce IRS funding and even eliminate the tax agency and instead levy a national sales tax that would disproportionately hit the middle class.

Excluding volatile food and energy costs, so-called core prices rose 5.7% in December from a year earlier, slower than 6% in November. From November to December, core prices increased just 0.3%, after rising 0.2% in November. In the past three months, core inflation has slowed to an annual rate of just 3.1%.

Even as inflation gradually slows, it remains a painful reality for many Americans, especially with such necessities as food, energy and rents having soared over the past 18 months.

Grocery prices rose 0.2% from November to December, the smallest such increase in nearly two years. Still, those prices are up 11.8% from a year ago.

Behind much of the decline in overall inflation are falling gas prices. The national average price of a gallon of gas has sunk from a \$5 in June to \$3.27 as of Wednesday, according to AAA.

Also contributing to the slowdown are used car prices, which fell for a sixth straight month in December. New car prices declined, too. The cost of airline tickets also dropped.

Still, for most Americans, the Fed's rate hikes have made auto loans much more expensive, thereby negating most of the benefit to consumers from the drop in used-car prices.

Jeff Schrier, president of Schrier Automotive, based in Omaha, Nebraska, said higher loan rates have particularly cut into sales of luxury cars.

"The good news is prices are down, the bad news is that rates are up, and that is driving people away," Schrier said. He estimated that auto loan rates have risen by 4-5 percentage points in the past year.

Most economists predict that inflation will continue easing in the coming months, driven down by cheaper gasoline and factory goods.

Housing costs are still surging, with apartment rental costs jumping 0.8% from November to December and 8.3% compared with a year earlier. The year-over-year increase was the fastest in four decades.

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But real-time measures of new leases tracked by real estate data firms like Zillow and Apartment List show that rental price increases are slowing. As a result, the government's measure of rents, which lag behind private measures, should start to decline later this year.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell is focused, in particular, on the cost of services excluding housing. Price increases in this category can take longer to fade, because they're heavily driven by labor-intensive sectors like restaurants, hotels, health care and education. Wages in most of those industries have been accelerating, which can spur inflation if employers then charge more to cover their higher labor costs.

In December, services prices excluding housing rose 0.3%, down from average monthly increases of about 0.5% this year. But they're falling only slowly: Services prices are still up 6.2% from a year ago, off only slightly from a recent peak of 6.5%.

Many economists expect inflation to fall to roughly 3% or 4% later this year, though it could plateau at that level if services prices remain high. Fed officials may choose to keep their key rate above 5% until inflation gets closer to its 2% target.

Fed officials, for their part, have signaled that they intend to keep their key rate that high all year.

Last week's jobs report for December bolstered the possibility that a recession could be avoided. Even after the Fed's seven rate hikes last year and with inflation still high, employers added a solid 223,000 jobs in December, and the unemployment rate fell to 3.5%, matching the lowest level in 53 years.

At the same time, average hourly pay growth slowed, which should lessen pressure on companies to raise prices to cover their higher labor costs.

"The evidence that the U.S. economy may skirt recession is mounting," Singh said.

2022 was fifth or sixth warmest on record as Earth heats up

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

DENVER (AP) — Earth's fever persisted last year, not quite spiking to a record high but still in the top five or six warmest on record, government agencies reported Thursday.

But expect record-shattering hot years soon, likely in the next couple years because of "relentless" climate change from the burning of coal, oil and gas, U.S. government scientists said.

Despite a La Nina, a cooling of the equatorial Pacific that slightly reduces global average temperatures, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration calculates 2022's global average temperature was 58.55 degrees (14.76 degrees Celsius), ranking sixth hottest on record. NOAA doesn't include the polar regions because of data concerns, but soon will.

If the Arctic -- which is warming three to four times faster than the rest of the world -- and Antarctic are factored in, NOAA said it would be fifth warmest. NASA, which has long factored the Arctic in its global calculations, said 2022 is essentially tied for fifth warmest with 2015. Four other scientific agencies or science groups around the world put the year as either fifth or sixth hottest.

NOAA and NASA records go back to 1880.

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said global temperature is "pretty alarming ... What we're seeing is our warming climate, it's warning all of us. Forest fires are intensifying. Hurricanes are getting stronger. Droughts are wreaking havoc. Sea levels are rising. Extreme weather patterns threaten our well-being across this planet."

Berkeley Earth, a nonprofit group of independent scientists, said it was the fifth warmest on record and noted that for 28 countries it was the hottest year on record, including China, the United Kingdom, Spain, France, Germany and New Zealand.

Another group, whose satellite-based calculations tend to run cooler than other science teams, said it was the seventh hottest year.

Last year was slightly toastier than 2021, but overall the science teams say the big issue is that the last eight years, from 2015 on, have been a step above the higher temperatures the globe had been going through. All eight years are more than 1.8 degrees (1 degree Celsius) warmer than pre-industrial times, NOAA and NASA said. Last year was 2 degrees (1.1 degrees Celsius) warmer than the mid-19th century, NASA said.

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"The last eight years have clearly been warmer than the years before," said NOAA analysis branch chief Russ Vose.

In a human body an extra 2 degrees Fahrenheit is considered a fever, but University of Oklahoma meteorology professor Renee McPherson, who wasn't part of any of the study teams, said the global warmth is actually worse than the equivalent of a planetary fever because fevers can be treated to go down quickly.

"You can't take a pill for it so the fixes aren't easy," McPherson said. "It's more what you consider a chronic illness like cancer."

Like a fever, "every tenth of a degree matters and things break down and that's what we're seeing," Climate Central Chief Meteorologist Bernadette Woods Placky.

The likelihood of the world shooting past the 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) warming threshold that the world adopted in 2015 is increasing with every year, said the World Meteorological Organization. The United Nations weather agency said the last 10 years average 1.14 degrees Celsius warmer than pre-industrial times. Vose said there's a 50-50 chance of hitting 1.5 degrees Celsius temporarily in the 2020s.

Vose and NASA Goddard Institute of Space Studies Director Gavin Schmidt both said there are hints of an acceleration of warming but the data isn't quite solid enough to be sure. But the overall trend of warming is rock solid, they said.

"Since the mid-1970s you've seen this relentless increase in temperature and that's totally robust to all the different methodologies," Schmidt said.

The La Nina, a natural process that alters weather worldwide, is in its third straight year. Schmidt calculated that last year the La Nina cooled the overall temperature by about a tenth of a degree (.06 degrees Celsius) and that last year was the hottest La Nina year on record.

"The La Nina years of today aren't the La Nina years of yesterday," said North Carolina state climatologist Kathie Dello. "Historically, we could rely on La Nina turning down the global thermostat. Now, heat-trapping gases are keeping the temperature cranked up, and handing us another top-10 warmest year on record."

With La Nina likely dissipating and a possible El Nino on the way — which adds to warming — Schmidt said this year will likely be warmer than 2022. And next year, he said, watch out if there's an El Nino.

"That would suggest that 2024 would be the record warmest year by quite a large amount," Schmidt said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Scientists say about 90% of the heat trapped by greenhouse gases goes into the upper 6,561 feet of the ocean (2000 meters), and figures released Wednesday show 2022 was another record year for ocean heat.

"There's a real good connection between the patterns of ocean warming, the stratification, and then the weather that we experience in our daily lives on land," including stronger hurricanes and rising seas, said study co-author John Abraham of the University of St. Thomas.

In the United States, global warming first grabbed headlines when Schmidt's predecessor, climate scientist James Hansen, testified about worsening warming in 1988. That year would go on to be the record warmest at the time.

Now, 1988 is the 28th hottest year on record.

The last year that the Earth was cooler than the 20th century average was 1976, according to NOAA.

But scientists say average temperatures aren't what really affects people. What hits and hurts people are how the warming makes extreme weather events, such as heat waves, floods, droughts and storms worse or more frequent or both, they said.

"These trends should concern everyone," said Cornell University climate scientist Natalie Mahowald, who wasn't part of the study teams.

WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas said in 2022 those extremes "undermined health, food, energy and water security and infrastructure. Large areas of Pakistan were flooded, with major economic losses and human casualties. Record breaking heat waves have been observed in China, Europe, North and South America. The long-lasting drought in the Horn of Africa threatens a humanitarian catastrophe."

New, taller Barbie doll is aimed at kids as young as 3

By LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Love her or loathe her, Barbie has been transformed again, this time into a version for children as young as 3.

Gone is the contentious hourglass figure for My First Barbie, which launched Thursday ahead of July's live-action film about the icon starring Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling.

The slightly softer-bodied Barbie follows on the high heels of tall, petite and curvy iterations that were released five years ago in a massive makeover.

My First Barbie is 13.5 inches tall, 2 inches taller than traditional Babs, with a larger waist that de-emphasizes the bust line (it remains in place, however), and flesh-tone modesty undergarments permanently attached.

Her fashion is more kid-like, with playful heart, star and flower designs on jammies and flouncy preschool-friendly dresses and swim gear. Her accessories are larger for littler hands, and her hair is extra long for easier brushing.

My First Barbie's limbs are moveable, like some past versions of the doll, and her facial features remain recognizable. A huge milestone: Her fingers and thumbs are connected, eliminating a frequent complaint that Barbie's hands get caught in her clothes when children try to put them on.

Lisa McKnight, a Mattel executive vice president and global head of Barbie and dolls, told The Associated Press the company created the new version in response to feedback from parents.

"We talk to parents and kids almost 365 days a year," she said. "We started hearing a theme around younger kids wanting to play with Barbie. Parents were concerned that their children at the preschool age didn't have the fine motor skills to have a positive play experience with our traditional fashion doll."

The first rollout of the new doll includes four diverse skin tones and hair textures.

Critics of 63-year-old Barbie, intended to symbolize a girl in her late teens, have long cited her dimensions as promoting unattainable, sexualized body standards for girls. My First Barbie, at a price point of \$19.99, goes a long way in eliminating that issue.

McKnight wouldn't directly address the criticism or whether My First Barbie has a place in turning around that negative view.

Research is mixed on whether Barbie's bad rap on body issues and her adult-leaning fashion sense have any impact on children, said Jody LeVos, once a leader of Mattel's child development and learning team and now chief learning officer for Begin, a company that creates learning apps and other educational fare for kids.

Among parents, she said, "there's a big nostalgia factor" when it comes to Barbie.

"I don't think there's one specific doll that's most appropriate. I think doll play allows children to really practice storytelling skills, perspective taking and social interactions," LeVos said.

The Barbie line's overall sales have soared in recent years after a period of decline in 2013.

Joaniko Kohchi, director for Adelphi University's Institute for Parenting, questioned Mattel's motives.

"If we're going to think about Mattel guiding our choices then we have already kind of limited them," she said.

McKnight made it clear that My First Barbie will not be a separate, parallel Barbie universe. She said new content featuring the doll will hit Barbie's YouTube channel later this month, with an animated special about the planning of a surprise party.

Andrea Werner, a pediatric occupational therapist in West Hartford, Connecticut, and mother of a preschooler and an infant, supports doll play as developmentally valuable.

"There are plenty of dolls on the market," she said. "Companies will always be trying to sell consumers the next best thing."

Kohchi isn't entirely sold on My First Barbie as appropriate.

"We know that if you're going to hand a child an image and say, this is beauty or this is wonderful or look how pretty that is, it should resemble the child a little bit more closely," she said. "It's certainly still a little older than a preschooler."

Harvick: 'It's just time,' racer says of 2023 final season

By JENNA FRYER AP Auto Racing Writer

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Kevin Harvick received the same answer nearly every time he asked another athlete how they decided to retire: Harvick would just know it was time.

The driver thrust onto the global stage when he was named Dale Earnhardt's replacement just days after Earnhardt's fatal 2001 crash will make this 23rd season his last in NASCAR. The 2014 Cup champion heads into his final year tied for ninth on NASCAR's all-time wins list with 60 career victories, 13 consecutive playoff appearances and he's one of the final active drivers from the sport's halcyon days.

"From talking to all the people I've talked to, it always came down to the same, 'Oh, you'll know, you'll know it is time, you'll know the right moment,'" Harvick said in an interview with The Associated Press ahead of his Thursday announcement.

"It's great to be able to go out on your own terms and plan it how you want it to go, but the biggest thing that sticks out to me is my kids. Being home with them and seeing the impact that you have with them when you are home, being able to be part of that daily process and be that father figure, it's just time."

Harvick at the end of this season will turn his attention to Kevin Harvick Inc., his growing management business, the enjoyable time he's spent in the television booth, some bucket list racing, and most important, his young racing family.

Harvick and his wife, DeLana, were adamant they would not raise racers but the slow early days of the COVID-19 pandemic gave father and son too much free time and 10-year-old Keelan is now karting on the international level. The young racer spent part of 2022 racing in Italy — sometimes traveling abroad without either parent — and Harvick figures he saw his son race only three times last year.

And then there's Piper, his 5-year-old daughter who now wants Dad's attention when she's in her own go-kart.

"You know, Keelan, he needs that father figure in his life, especially as he goes down the racing route," Harvick told the AP. "And then Piper probably asks to go to the go-kart track more than he does, and having to send her to the track by herself really frustrates me."

"You don't want her not to have the opportunity to learn like he did. She makes twice as many strides in a day while I'm there than she would in a day when I'm not there. So there's just a time when you have to ask yourself 'What's the most important thing for me and my time and my family right now?'"

Harvick had already overcome the NASCAR odds of breaking into the Southern-based sport from Bakersfield, California, when Richard Childress Racing said he'd be a Cup rookie alongside seven-time champion Earnhardt in 2002. But when Earnhardt was killed on the final lap of the 2001 season-opening Daytona 500, Harvick's career was upended.

He was in the rebranded No. 29 Chevrolet five days after Earnhardt's death — less than a week before the 25-year-old's planned wedding to DeLana — and that hectic season in the spotlight was a blur. Harvick won in his third start, less than a month after Earnhardt's death, and split his time between his new Cup ride and the Busch Series championship he was chasing.

Harvick competed in 69 NASCAR national races that season with a pair of Cup victories and five wins en route to the Busch title. He was busy but grew jaded by all the attention, the endless Earnhardt comparisons, and the pressure of replacing a superstar during a yearlong grieving period that had engulfed NASCAR.

Perhaps that is what made Harvick so tough.

He fought with his rivals often in his early career and was suspended for a Cup race in 2002 for his actions in a Truck Series race at Martinsville Speedway a day earlier. That incident forged a relationship between Harvick and the late Jim Hunter, a NASCAR executive who helped Harvick navigate the politics of the sport.

But he never softened, not even after having children.

After a 2014 playoff race at Texas Motor Speedway in which Harvick was a bystander to a pit road disagreement between Jeff Gordon and Brad Keselowski, Harvick shoved Keselowski into Gordon and

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Gordon's crew to trigger a melee.

Harvick for days refused to discuss his role in the brawl, only relenting when he finally accepted that son Keelan needed to hear him accept responsibility — even though Harvick had zero remorse.

Harvick doesn't know if his grittiness developed from those first difficult years after Earnhardt's death, but acknowledges an internal pressure to do things his own way and carve out his own legacy that really ramped up around 2006. Some of Earnhardt's sponsors began pulling off the car and Harvick now had to stand on his own and prove his worth.

"We'd gotten through the tough years of transitioning from what Dale liked to what I liked, and through all those battles and conversations, you put your guard up and become a jerk," Harvick told the AP. "Looking back at it now, you can see that you could have handled things differently, but it was digging my heels in thinking 'I need to do this my way now' and that created some tensions. But I wouldn't trade anything other than Dale's death because all those things that came in the next five years were part of surviving and being successful and building something and learning what was right and what was wrong."

His approach led to strained relationships, including a period with seven-time NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson. Both had come to North Carolina from California and both crashed on Hall of Famer Ron Hornaday Jr.'s couch as they struggled to make it in NASCAR.

But as Johnson surged to title after title, and Harvick fought through lean years with RCR, the relationship fractured and Harvick shoved Johnson in the chest following a 2015 playoff race when Johnson tried to speak to him about an on-track incident.

"We've had issues, we've been great, we've had friendship, we've been through it all," Johnson told AP. "I think there's a great deal of respect between both of us. I truly admire his path and what he's overcome. Coming from the West Coast as the starting point, climbing through the ranks, we lose Dale and he's thrust into that position... there's just a lot of layers there and I respect his work ethic and dedication and career."

Harvick, who added a second Busch title in 2006, counts the Daytona 500, Coca-Cola 600, Brickyard 400 and Southern 500 among his crown jewel victories. Harvick also won NASCAR's first race back during the pandemic, held in front of empty grandstands at Darlington Raceway in May 2020, when NASCAR became the first major sport to return to competition.

Harvick told the AP his own handling of the 2013 parting with Richard Childress — in the works for a full year before he moved to Stewart-Haas in 2014 — is the biggest regret of his career and is grateful the relationship is repaired.

He's forged a strong bond at SHR with co-owner Tony Stewart, crew chief Rodney Childers and his entire No. 4 team. Harvick and Childers are currently the longest active driver-crew chief pairing in the Cup Series at 10 years. Among their 37 wins is a pair of victories last season that snapped a 65-race winless streak — the second longest of Harvick's career.

It was Stewart, the three-time Cup champion and Hall of Famer, who encouraged Harvick to make an early announcement about his retirement and enjoy his final year. Stewart shunned all sendoffs and appreciations in his final season, something Harvick told the AP that Stewart now regrets.

Harvick opens the season early next month with the exhibition Clash at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, followed by his final season-opening Daytona 500 on Feb. 19.

"I want Kevin to savor every lap this season, to compete like hell and to take it all in," Stewart said. "He's made all of us at Stewart-Haas Racing incredibly proud and we want to make his last season his best season."

Harvick said with certainty that he will not compete in the Cup Series after this year but he's not completely finished racing. In fact, he's already got plans for the souped up late model he plans to prepare for himself the day that Keelan is old enough to race against his father.

"He's a cocky 10-year-old right now who thinks he can beat anyone," Harvick told AP. "We'll see when the time comes."

US spies lag rivals in seizing on data hiding in plain sight

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By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As alarms began to go off globally about a novel coronavirus spreading in China, officials in Washington turned to the intelligence agencies for insights about the threat the virus posed to America.

But the most useful early warnings came not from spies or intercepts, according to a recent congressional review of classified reports from December 2019 and January 2020. Officials were instead relying on public reporting, diplomatic cables and analysis from medical experts — some examples of so-called open source intelligence, or OSINT.

Predicting the next pandemic or the next government to fall will require better use of open source material, the review found.

“There is little indication that the Intelligence Community’s exquisite collection capabilities were generating information that was valuable to policymakers,” wrote the authors of the review, conducted by Democrats on the House Intelligence Committee.

That echoes what many current and former intelligence officials are increasingly warning: The \$90 billion U.S. spy apparatus is falling behind because it has not embraced collecting open-source intelligence as adversaries including China ramp up their efforts.

This doesn’t diminish the importance of traditional intelligence. Spy agencies have unique powers to penetrate global communications and cultivate agents. They scored a high-profile success when the Biden administration publicized ultimately correct intelligence findings that Russian President Vladimir Putin intended to invade Ukraine.

But officials and experts worry that the U.S. hasn’t invested enough people or money in analyzing publicly available data or taking advantage of advanced technologies that can yield critical insights. Commercial satellite imagery, social media and other online data have given private companies and independent analysts new powers to reveal official secrets. And China is known to have stolen or acquired control over huge amounts of data on Americans, with growing concerns in Washington about Beijing’s influence over widely used apps like TikTok.

“Open source is really a bellwether for whether the intelligence community can protect the country,” said Kristin Wood, a former senior official at the CIA who is now chief executive at the Grist Mill Exchange, a commercial data platform. “We collectively as a nation aren’t preparing a defense for the ammunition that our adversaries are stockpiling.”

Intelligence agencies face several obstacles to using open source intelligence. Some are technological. Officers working on classified networks are often not able to easily access the unclassified internet or open data sources, for example. There are also concerns about civil liberties and protecting First Amendment rights.

But some experts also question whether agencies are held back by a reflexive belief that top-secret information is more valuable.

Rep. Jim Himes, a Connecticut Democrat and longtime Intelligence Committee member, said he believed there needed to be “some cultural change inside places like the CIA where people are doing what they’re doing for the excitement of stealing critical secrets as opposed to reviewing social media pages.”

In one 2017 test held by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, a human team competed against a computer programmed with algorithms to identify Chinese surface-to-air missile sites using commercial imagery.

Both the humans and the computer identified 90% of the sites, Stanford University professor Amy Zegart wrote in the book “Spies, Lies, and Algorithms,” but the computer needed just 42 minutes — and it took the human team 80 times longer.

Reports created using commercial satellites, online posts and other open sources — like the daily analyses on Russian and Ukrainian military tactics published by the Institute for the Study of War — are widely read by lawmakers and intelligence officials.

“There is a lot of open-source capability that the U.S. intelligence community can pretty much rely on to be there,” said Frederick Kagan, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute who oversees the

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creation of those reports. "What it needs to do is figure out how to leverage that ecosystem instead of trying to buy it."

Most of the 18 U.S. spy agencies have open-source programs, from the CIA's Open Source Enterprise to a 10-person program in the Department of Homeland Security's intelligence arm. But top officials acknowledge there isn't consistency across those programs in how they analyze open-source information or how they use and share it.

"We're not paying enough attention to each other and so we're not learning the lessons that different parts of the (intelligence community) are learning, and we're not scaling solutions," said Avril Haines, the U.S. director of national intelligence, at an industry event last year sponsored by the Potomac Officers Club. "And we're not taking advantage of some of the outside expertise and information and work that could be taken advantage of."

The Open Source Enterprise headquartered at the CIA is the successor to the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, where for generations employees monitored broadcasts to translate them for analysts.

Much of that work was transformed in the last decade. Where people once had to travel long distances to pick up tapes of radio broadcasts in remote places or areas where Americans weren't welcome, sensors now transmit more signals automatically. And machine translation has largely taken the place of people who had to listen to the tapes and transcribe them.

But officials acknowledge they have to do more.

Haines has begun multiple open-source reviews since becoming director of national intelligence and is expected to finalize recommendations this year. Some people involved in those reviews have suggested that the Open Source Enterprise no longer be designated as leading OSINT efforts across the spy agencies, said people familiar with the reviews who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal government deliberations.

Three people familiar with Open Source Enterprise say the center had cut its budget for multiple years running prior to last year. They argue that's a sign that open-source work has not always been prioritized at a consistent level.

The CIA recently appointed new leadership for the Open Source Enterprise and in 2021 created a "mission center" dedicated to technology.

"We recognize the importance of open source is only growing as the sheer volume of data openly available increases," the agency said in a statement. "CIA is working not just to keep pace with this trend, but to get ahead of it — and ahead of our adversaries who also utilize open-source information."

There's no consensus on whether the U.S. should create a new open-source agency or center. Supporters say a new organization could focus on adopting advanced technologies and creating more useful products, while opponents question whether it would be unnecessary bloat and take away resources from other agencies.

Carmen Medina, a retired CIA deputy director of intelligence, now studies how spy agencies can incorporate outside ideas and encourage employees to be more creative and intuitive.

She suggests a pilot program in which a cell of open-source analysts would compete for a number of years against the regular output of people with top-secret clearances.

Medina and others who have worked in top positions and briefed White House officials think that on most days, an open-source group would be competitive and might even produce better analysis using information that's broadly available.

"You can't make sense of the world today by just packaging tidbits," she said. "I've come to believe that almost all of the time, the open source way of thinking about it is correct."

'Catastrophe': Cardinal Pell's secret memo blasts Francis

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis will deliver a final send-off for Cardinal George Pell during a funeral Mass on Saturday, the Vatican said, as revelations emerge of the Australian prelate's growing concern

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about what he considered the “disaster” and “catastrophe” of the papacy under Francis.

The Vatican on Thursday said the dean of the college of cardinals, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, would celebrate Pell’s funeral Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica. As is custom for cardinal funerals, Francis will deliver a final commendation and salute.

Pell, who had served as Francis’ first finance minister for three years before returning to Australia to face child sex abuse charges, died on Tuesday at a Rome hospital of heart complications following hip surgery. He was 81.

He had been dividing his time between Rome and Sydney after he was exonerated in 2020 of allegations he molested two choirboys while he was archbishop of Melbourne. Australia’s High Court overturned an earlier court conviction, and Pell was freed after serving 404 days in solitary confinement.

Pell had clashed repeatedly with the Vatican’s Italian bureaucracy during his 2014-2017 term as prefect of the Holy See’s Secretariat for the Economy, which Francis created to try to get a handle on the Vatican’s opaque finances. In his telegram of condolence, Francis credited Pell with having laid the groundwork for the reforms underway, which have included imposing international standards for budgeting and accounting on Vatican offices.

But Pell, a staunch conservative, grew increasingly disillusioned with the direction of Francis’ papacy, including its emphasis on inclusion and canvassing of the laity about the future of the church.

He penned a remarkable memorandum outlining his concerns, and recommendations for the next pope in a future conclave, that began circulating last spring and was published under a pseudonym, “Demos,” on Vatican blog Settimo Cielo.

The blogger Sandro Magister on Wednesday revealed that Pell indeed was the author of the memo, which is an extraordinary indictment of the current pontificate by a onetime close collaborator of Francis.

The memo is divided into two parts — “The Vatican Today” and “The Next Conclave” — and lists a series of points covering everything from Francis’ “weakened” preaching of the Gospel to the precariousness of the Holy See’s finances and the “lack of respect for the law” in the city-state, including in the current financial corruption trial underway that Pell himself had championed.

“Commentators of every school, if for different reasons ... agree that this pontificate is a disaster in many or most respects; a catastrophe,” Pell wrote.

Also Wednesday, the conservative magazine *The Spectator* published what it said was a signed article that Pell wrote in the days before he died. In the article, Pell described as a “toxic nightmare” Francis’ two-year canvassing of the Catholic laity about issues such as church teaching on sexuality and the role of women that is expected to come to a head at a meeting of bishops in October.

Referring to the Vatican’s summary of the canvassing effort, Pell complained of a “deepening confusion, the attack on traditional morals and the insertion into the dialogue of neo-Marxist jargon about exclusion, alienation, identity, marginalization, the voiceless, LGBTQ as well as the displacement of Christian notions of forgiveness, sin, sacrifice, healing, redemption.”

Pell’s anonymous memo, however, is even harsher and takes particular aim at Francis himself. While other conservatives have criticized Francis’ crackdown on traditionalists and mercy-over-morals priorities, Pell went further and devoted an entire section to the pope’s involvement in a big financial fraud investigation that has resulted in the prosecution of 10 people, including Pell’s onetime nemesis, Cardinal Angelo Becciu.

Pell had initially cheered the indictment, which stemmed from the Vatican’s 350 million-euro investment in a London real estate deal, given it vindicated his yearslong effort to uncover financial mismanagement and corruption in the Holy See. But over the course of the trial, uncomfortable questions have been raised about the rights of the defense in a legal system where Francis has absolute power, and has wielded it.

Pell noted that that Francis had issued four secret decrees during the course of the investigation “to help the prosecution” without the right for those affected to appeal. The defense has argued the decrees violated the suspects’ human rights.

Pell also came to the defense of Becciu, whom Francis removed in September 2020 before he was even under investigation. “He did not receive due process. Everyone has a right to due process,” wrote Pell, for

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whom the issue is particularly dear given his own experiences.

"The lack of respect for the law in the Vatican risks becoming an international scandal," Pell wrote.

Today in History: JAN 13, US House impeaches Trump

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Jan. 13, the 13th day of 2023. There are 352 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 13, 2021, President Donald Trump was impeached by the U.S. House over the violent Jan. 6 siege of the Capitol, becoming the only president to be twice impeached; ten Republicans joined Democrats in voting to impeach Trump on a charge of "incitement of insurrection." (Trump would again be acquitted by the Senate in a vote after his term was over.)

On this date:

In 1733, James Oglethorpe and some 120 English colonists arrived at Charleston, South Carolina, while en route to settle in present-day Georgia.

In 1794, President George Washington approved a measure adding two stars and two stripes to the American flag, following the admission of Vermont and Kentucky to the Union. (The number of stripes was later reduced to the original 13.)

In 1898, Emile Zola's famous defense of Capt. Alfred Dreyfus, "J'accuse," (zhah-KOOZ'), was published in Paris.

In 1941, a new law went into effect granting Puerto Ricans U.S. birthright citizenship. Novelist and poet James Joyce died in Zurich, Switzerland, less than a month before his 59th birthday.

In 1964, Roman Catholic Bishop Karol Wojtyla (voy-TEE'-wah) (the future Pope John Paul II) was appointed Archbishop of Krakow, Poland, by Pope Paul VI.

In 1982, an Air Florida 737 crashed into Washington, D.C.'s 14th Street Bridge and fell into the Potomac River while trying to take off during a snowstorm, killing a total of 78 people, including four motorists on the bridge; four passengers and a flight attendant survived.

In 1987, West German police arrested Mohammed Ali Hamadi, a suspect in the 1985 hijacking of a TWA jetliner and the killing of a U.S. Navy diver who was on board. (Although convicted and sentenced to life, Hamadi was paroled by Germany in December 2005 and returned home to Lebanon.)

In 1990, L. Douglas Wilder of Virginia became the nation's first elected Black governor as he took the oath of office in Richmond.

In 1992, Japan apologized for forcing tens of thousands of Korean women to serve as sex slaves for its soldiers during World War II, citing newly uncovered documents that showed the Japanese army had had a role in abducting the so-called "comfort women."

In 2000, Microsoft chairman Bill Gates stepped aside as chief executive and promoted company president Steve Ballmer to the position.

In 2001, an earthquake estimated by the U.S. Geological Survey at magnitude 7.7 struck El Salvador; more than 840 people were killed.

In 2011, a funeral was held in Tucson, Arizona, for 9-year-old Christina Taylor Green, the youngest victim of a mass shooting that also claimed five other lives and critically wounded Rep. Gabrielle Giffords.

In 2020, at a royal family summit in eastern England, Queen Elizabeth II brokered a deal to secure the future of the monarchy; it would allow Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, to live part-time in Canada.

Ten years ago: A Cairo appeals court overturned Hosni Mubarak's life sentence and ordered a retrial of the former Egyptian president for failing to prevent the killing of hundreds of protesters during the 2011 uprising that toppled his regime. (Mubarak was later ordered released.) "Argo" won best motion picture drama at the Golden Globes; "Les Miserables" won best picture musical or comedy.

Five years ago: A false alarm that warned of a ballistic missile headed for Hawaii sent the islands into a panic, with people abandoning cars on a highway and preparing to flee their homes; officials apologized

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and said the alert was sent when someone hit the wrong button during a shift change. Two Army captains who met at West Point, Daniel Hall and Vincent Franchino, returned there to be married, in what The New York Times said was believed to be the first same-sex marriage of active-duty personnel at the military academy.

One year ago: The Supreme Court found that the Biden administration had overstepped its authority by requiring that employees at large businesses get a COVID-19 vaccine or test regularly and wear a mask on the job; the court allowed the administration to proceed with a vaccine mandate for most health care workers. Two U.S. science agencies, NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said 2021 was the sixth hottest year on record globally, part of a long-term warming trend.

Today's birthdays: Actor Frances Sternhagen is 93. TV personality Nick Clooney is 89. Comedian Charlie Brill is 85. Actor Billy Gray is 85. Actor Richard Moll is 80. Rock musician Trevor Rabin is 69. Rock musician James Lomenzo (Megadeth) is 64. Actor Kevin Anderson is 63. Actor Julia Louis-Dreyfus is 62. Rock singer Graham "Suggs" McPherson (Madness) is 62. Country singer Trace Adkins is 61. Actor Penelope Ann Miller is 59. Actor Patrick Dempsey is 57. Actor Suzanne Cryer is 56. Actor Traci Bingham is 55. Actor Keith Coogan is 53. TV producer-writer Shonda Rhimes is 53. Actor Nicole Eggert is 51. Actor Ross McCall is 47. Actor Michael Pena is 47. Actor Orlando Bloom is 46. Meteorologist Ginger Zee (TV: "Good Morning America") is 42. Actor Ruth Wilson is 41. Actor Julian Morris is 40. Actor Beau Mirchoff is 34. Actor Liam Hemsworth is 33. NHL center Connor McDavid is 26.