

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar Wednesday, Jan. 25

Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, creamy noodles, California blend, carrot bars, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Egg and breakfast potatoes.
School Lunch: Grilled cheese, chips.
Emily's Hope Assembly at GHS Arena, 1 p.m., sponsored by Groton Fire & Rescue.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Service Night for Confirmation Students, 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 4 p.m.
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

Thursday, Jan. 26

Senior Menu: Meatloaf, baked potato with sour cream, creamed peas, fruit, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.

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

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.



School Lunch: Goulash, fresh baked bun, corn.
Boys Basketball at Webster: C game at 5 p.m. followed by JV and Varsity.

Friday, Jan. 27

Senior Menu: Potato soup, chicken salad sandwich, tomato spoon salad, cinnamon apple sauce, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Biscuits and gravy.
School Lunch: Fish and nuggets, spudsters.
Girls Basketball hosts Webster: C game at 5 p.m. followed by JV and Varsity.

Saturday, Jan. 28

NEC-DAXXII boys basketball clash at Madison. (Groton vs. Elk Point-Jefferson at 2 p.m.)
Groton Area Wrestling 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.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

- Seven people were killed in two related shootings at agricultural facilities in California yesterday, marking the state's third mass killing in eight days. Suspect Chunli Zhao, 67, has been arrested. On the same day, two students died after a school shooting in Iowa.
- President Biden's classified documents probe is a "self-inflicted wound" which has damaged the president and the Democratic Party, said John Bolton, Donald Trump's former national security adviser.
- Fulton County Superior Court Judge Robert McBurney said he would "circle back" with a decision at a later date on whether to make the special grand jury report public. Some Twitter users speculated that an indictment of Donald Trump could be "imminent."
- Senator Lindsey Graham defended President Joe Biden amid growing Republican scrutiny, saying he did not believe that the classified material in Biden's possession was potentially compromising to national security.
- Pope Francis has said that "being homosexual is not a crime," calling for an end to laws banning homosexuality while also saying "it's a sin."
- Congressional Senators slammed entertainment company Live Nation over its dominance in the ticketing business following a botched sale of tickets last November to Taylor Swift's The Eras Tour.
- A powerful storm tore through southeast Texas, spawning a tornado that caused severe damage near Houston and left about 124,000 people without power. The storm has moved into Louisiana, and a tornado watch was in effect for parts of Alabama, Florida and Mississippi today.
- The sci-fi film Everything Everywhere All At Once netted 11 Oscar nominations, while All Quiet on the Western Front proved to be a frontrunner for Best Picture and Best International Film. See all nominees here.
- Users of Microsoft Teams have reported that the communications platform, used by many businesses, has stopped working.
- Protesters in Ontario, Canada, are calling on Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to resign amid growing concerns about the economy and a possible recession.
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Wagner Group fighters are reportedly advancing on towns in eastern Ukraine as the battle for Bakhmut in Ukraine's Donetsk region continues to rage.

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Senior Drumline

Performances: Feb. 24th at half time of a BB game & April 2nd for the Pops concerts.

L to R (Back Row): Blake Lord, Brody Lord, Gavin Kroll, Jayden Schwan, Jacob Lewandowski, Axel Warrington, Ashtyn Bahr

L to R (front row): Emily Clark, Lincoln Krause, Ellie Weismantel, and Carter Barse.

Not pictured: Natalia Warrington

Director: Mrs. Desiree Yeigh (Courtesy Photo)



Junior Drumline

Performances: Feb. 7th at halftime of BB game & March 14 at the MS talent show.

L to R (back row): Sam Crank, Addison Hoeft, Journey Zieroth, Ryelle Gilbert, Makenna Krause, Jordan Schwan, Connor Kroll, TC Schuster

L to R (front row): Aurora Washenburger, Kyleigh Kroll, Tenley Frost, Novalea Warrington, and Aspen Beto

Director: Mrs. Desiree Yeigh and Assistant Director: Emily Clark (Courtesy Photo)

GDILIVE.COM

**Dak XII/NEC Boys Basketball Clash
Groton Area vs. Elk Point-Jefferson
Saturday, Jan. 28, 2023, 2 p.m.
Madison High School**



Varsity Game

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



\$5 ticket required to watch. Purchased online at GDILIVE.COM
GDI Subscribers will have free access.

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85th Annual Carnival of Silver Skates

Sunday, January 29th—2:00 and 6:30
Groton Ice Rink—west side of Groton

You are cordially invited to attend a great show performed by our local youth. This show will be sure to entertain through music, costumes, and skating talent.

*** Skating Through the Decades ***

Admission:

13 & older—\$3.00

6-12—\$2.00

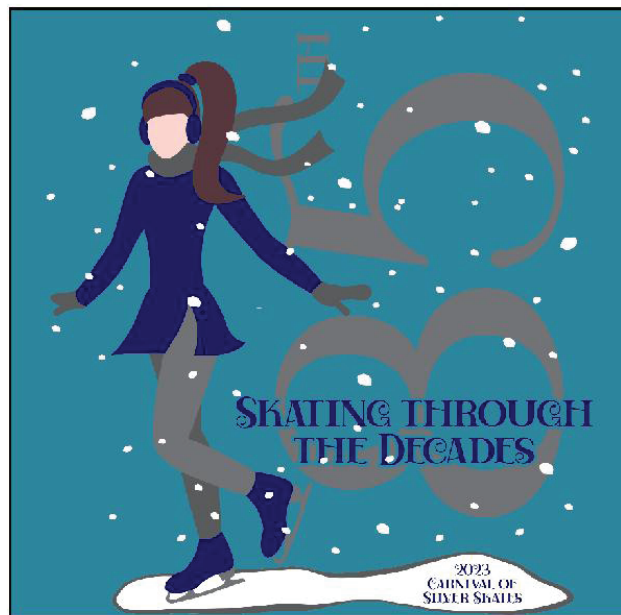
Parking:

-Provided around the rink and on the ice, or cozy up on the bleachers.

-Ice parking begins at 10 am, and again at 4:30 pm.

Check us out on Facebook at
"Silver Skates"

WE HOPE TO
SEE YOU THERE!



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The scenery for the annual Carnival of Silver Skates was erected yesterday by the city public works department personnel. The event is set for Sunday with performances at 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

GDILIVE.COM

85th Annual Carnival of Silver Skates

Sunday, Jan. 29th, 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

Broadcast for **FREE VIEWING** on **GDILIVE.COM**

sponsored by the Carnival of Silver Skates Committee

Internet Service for livestreaming provided free of charge from

**FREE
VIEWING!**



**FREE
VIEWING!**

GROTON

ROBOTICS



Pancake Feed

Sponsored by Groton Lions Club

Sunday, January 29th, 2023

10:00 AM—1:00 PM

Groton Community Center

Pancakes, Sausage, Coffee, Milk and Juice

FREE WILL DONATION!

Proceeds will go to Groton Robotics

Carnival of Silver Skates performing at 2:00pm & 6:30 pm!



Community is invited to **EMILY'S HOPE PRESENTATION**



with

*Angela
Kennecke*

SPONSORED BY GROTON RESCUE

JAN | WED | 2023
25
1PM

GROTON AREA H.S. ARENA

ANGELA KENNECKE IS TURNING HER HEARTBREAK INTO ACTION BY TRAVELING THE COUNTRY TO BRING EMILY'S STORY TO COMMUNITIES, CONFERENCES AND SCHOOLS.

"MY NUMBER ONE REASON FOR TALKING ABOUT EMILY'S DEATH IS TO ERASE THE STIGMA SURROUNDING ADDICTION, ESPECIALLY THE USE OF HEROIN OR OPIOIDS OF ANY KIND.

GDILIVE.COM

Groton Area Boys Basketball at Webster Thursday, Jan. 12, 2023

C Game starts at 5 p.m. followed by JV and Varsity
C Game Sponsor: Darcie and Eric Moody
JV Game Sponsor: Coach Kyle and Tyhe Gerlach



Varsity Game Sponsors

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



Anyone wanting to sponsor a JV game, Call/Text Paul at 605-397-7460



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Low water, oxygen could explain winterkill, GFP says

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 24, 2023 3:58 PM

A recently completed James River dam project was the site of a massive fish die-off in Huron last week, but state officials say the cause of the deaths is unclear.

A state official says they are monitoring the situation on the ground and may restock the affected area of the river.

The fish kill was the subject of a TikTok video that was also shared on other social media platforms. In the video, a man blames the dam project for the situation and levels a series of expletives at the engineers and city leaders who designed and approved it.

A renovation of the Third Street Dam was intended to prevent human drowning in the James River, according to city officials but it has also caught hundreds of dead fish. Most of the fish were shortnose and longnose gar or silver and bighead carp.

The dam was built in 1936 to create a small reservoir for the city's water supply. The city has since changed its water supply to ground wells and the Missouri River, but the reservoir is still used for recreation.

Although the upstream depth of the dam is only a few feet, the downstream depth at the face of the 3rd Street Dam was about 14.5 feet prior to the rock installation, according to the City of Huron. Water flowing over the dam created a strong recirculating current that pulled swimmers under the water.

Huron Police Chief Kevin VanDiepen said at least two people had drowned at the dam since he started with the department in 1988.

Stockwell Engineering, the firm contracted for the project, advised filling the dam's downstream side with rocks to prevent swimmers from being pulled under if they go over the dam's spillway.

About two dozen people attended a meeting in 2017 where Stockwell engineers presented the proposal and answered questions, the Huron Plainsman reported.



The Huron Fish Kill as of Jan. 24, 2023 (Courtesy Photo).

That meeting included questions about the impact on fishing. Stockwell President Jon Brown said not all of the risks can be eliminated.

The Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources was aware of the modifications, according to Nick Harrington of South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP), but "Because the improvements did not alter the dam itself or the area of water impounded by the dam, no regulatory review or approval was required by the department's Safety of Dams program."

State: winterkill not directly related to dam

While some locals have pointed to the rocks as the cause of the fish kill, USGS streamflow data suggests that the situation may be more complicated. The flow is no less than last year, according to a streamgage located near the dam, despite the rocks being installed sometime in 2019.

"Streamflow at the James River at Huron in the winter of 2022-2023 is fairly normal compared to the past four years, and there has not been sudden changes to the flow recently," said USGS Hydrologist Galen Hoogstraat in an emailed statement.

Low water and lack of oxygen may have contributed to the winterkill, Harrington said in a statement.

"Low oxygen levels may stress fish, and over extended periods of time can cause mortality," Harrington said. "Winterkills such as this can happen in lakes and streams when water levels are low and heavy snow prevents sunlight from reaching the water column."

GFP has staff onsite to monitor the situation, Harrington said. He said GFP fisheries staff monitor winterkill through the spring, and that based on the severity and species lost, the department will make fish stocking recommendations for impacted water bodies.

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.

Bill to protect ag operations from nuisance lawsuits heads to the House

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 24, 2023 2:38 PM

A bill to make it more difficult to sue agricultural operations earned the unanimous support of the state House Ag and Natural Resources Committee on Tuesday.

Some opponents called the legislation a move to eliminate nuisance lawsuits all but entirely.

House Bill 1090, introduced by Rep. James Wangsness, R-Miller, restricts the right to file nuisance lawsuits against ag operations to landowners – not organizations or other individuals – who live within one mile of the alleged nuisance. Payouts in successful lawsuits could be no higher than the amount the landowner has lost in property value as a result of the ag operation's activities.

"It is vital we ensure proper protec-



A farmer harvests corn. (Perry Beeman/Iowa Capital Dispatch)

tions from frivolous nuisance claims by protecting our producers and their way of life," Wangness said. The bill also restricts the kinds of nuisance complaints eligible for a legal remedy. If the bill becomes law, "the plaintiff would need to have clear and convincing evidence the nuisance was caused by conduct that did not comply with county, municipal, state, or federal environmental laws or regulations," according to the state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR). The bill only restricts nuisance complaints, however, "so civil liability may still apply for strict liability, contracts, negligence, and other civil suits."

DANR Secretary Hunter Roberts testified in favor of the legislation, as did lobbyists for the South Dakota Farm Bureau and South Dakota Farmers Union.

"We want to keep our farmers on the land, and keep them doing what they do so well, instead of ending up with these frivolous lawsuits in court that slow everything down and cost everyone money," Roberts said.

The bill is substantially similar to a proposal in Nebraska.

What about 'over a mile?'

A speaker from the advocacy group Dakota Rural Action was not allowed to testify remotely before the committee because the group hadn't asked to do so within 24 hours of the hearing. After the hearing, spokesperson Chase Jensen said after the hearing that the organization has concerns about the one-mile provision.

"There are smells and noises that can potentially travel more than one mile, so we're wondering how that decision was made," Jensen said.

Pesticides sprayed on croplands and agricultural waste in waters also travel over a mile, Jensen said.

Rep. Roger Chase, R-Huron, chairs the committee. After the hearing, he told South Dakota Searchlight that the bill would likely stop such complaints unless the operator in question isn't breaking a law.

"If everything is being done the proper way, and nothing's being done illegally, or not the way it's supposed to be, that would protect the farmer producer on the nuisance side," Chase said.

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.

Panel backs proposal to require law enforcement to inform schools of suspected criminal activity by students

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 24, 2023 12:52 PM

A Senate panel endorsed a bill that would require law enforcement to inform school officials when a student is suspected of violating the law.

Current law says officers "may" report their suspicions to school officials. Opponents and several members of the juvenile justice summer study committee said most school districts already communicate well with law enforcement.

Opponents included lobbyists for South Dakota sheriffs, police chiefs and state's attorneys.

Sen. Erin Tobin, R-Winner and sponsor of Senate Bill 3, argued that the compulsory language is needed for when a student is suspected of violating state drug or alcohol laws or of threatening violence.

"There is a problem. Anytime you've missed that line of communication and a child or a teacher are put in a safety situation, there's a problem," Tobin said.

The bill passed 4-2. It now moves to the Senate floor.

Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan whose work has won national and regional awards. She's spent five years as a journalist with experience reporting on workforce, development and business issues within the state.

Postal service on-time performance similar in rural, urban areas, report finds

BY: ADAM GOLDSTEIN - JANUARY 24, 2023 11:22 AM

WASHINGTON – Challenges with the cash-strapped United States Postal Service sent many Americans to their wit's end during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in communities reliant on the mail for essential goods.

Yet despite concerns from members of Congress that recent service changes hit rural communities more than urban centers, a new report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office found few significant differences in on-time USPS delivery rates between these locales.

"The report validates expectations that there are few differences in service performance for urban and rural areas," said Angela Curtis, the USPS vice president of delivery operations, in a written response to the report from the GAO, a government watchdog.

The Postal Service's financial viability has been on the GAO's High Risk List since 2009. The GAO said that in response, the Postal Service has recently "made changes to its operations designed to restore financial self-sufficiency."

New Hampshire senator's request

Sen. Maggie Hassan, D-N.H., a member of the Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, has consistently highlighted the importance of mail service to rural communities since before the COVID-19 pandemic began. Hassan asked the GAO to examine performance differences between rural and urban areas.

"I am concerned that USPS's efforts to address financial and operational challenges in the past several years have disproportionately affected rural communities," Hassan said in her January 2020 request letter to the GAO.

"I regularly hear from our constituents about various mail delivery issues — from transit time that seems to be longer than USPS reports, to mail that is not delivered at all."

GAO auditors analyzed on-time delivery performance for the four largest USPS mail types by volume from October 2020 to December 2021.

The team specifically examined data from first-class mail, marketing mail, periodical and package deliveries. These categories collectively comprise more than 90% of USPS mail volume and more than half of USPS revenue, according to the GAO report, which was published Jan. 12.

At the national and regional levels, the auditors found no differences of 5% or greater in on-time delivery rate between urban and rural areas for any of the mail products studied.

At the postal district level, they found no difference of 5% or greater in on-time delivery rates for packages between urban and rural areas.

The GAO did cite that eight of 50 postal districts nationwide had a 5% or greater difference in on-time mail delivery rate of periodicals, which varied between favoring urban and rural areas.

The districts in which on-time USPS periodical deliveries occurred 5% or more frequently in rural areas than urban areas included Louisiana, Georgia, south Florida, northern Illinois, eastern Pennsylvania plus Delaware, and Maryland.

In Hawaii and the district comprising Massachusetts and Rhode Island, on-time periodical deliveries occurred 5% or more frequently in urban areas than rural areas.

The USPS justified this disparity to the GAO by noting "periodicals arrive at the facility multiple times per day, which can create staffing conflict between package and periodical delivery." The USPS reported that it plans to move up the time in which periodicals enter the mail system in order to minimize these delays.

The GAO also found that Hawaii was the only state with a 5% or greater split in on-time delivery rate of first-class and marketing mail between urban and rural areas, favoring urban areas.

The authors said USPS attributed this difference to the fact that Hawaii brings in mail via boat and plane. These modes of mail transport can lead to problems in rural service due to limited cargo space, according

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to USPS officials cited in the report.

A lack of demographic monitoring

In the same report, the GAO determined that after the USPS makes service and operational changes, administrators do not have a system for collecting data on impacts to demographic groups.

In 2021, USPS implemented two nationwide adjustments to service standards, extending the time carriers could take to deliver first-class mail and periodicals, along with first-class packages. The auditors found the USPS modeled the effects that this change would have on rural areas before consulting the Postal Regulatory Commission for an advisory opinion, as required by federal law.

However, the GAO also found that after these service changes were implemented, the USPS used its existing software to monitor impacts, which does not account for urban and rural differences in delivery performance.

The authors of the report also looked at three major USPS operational changes affecting rural communities in 2021. These changes included consolidating facilities, optimizing delivery routes, and reducing mail carrier trips by merging priority and regular runs. Operational changes within the USPS do not require postal regulators' approval.

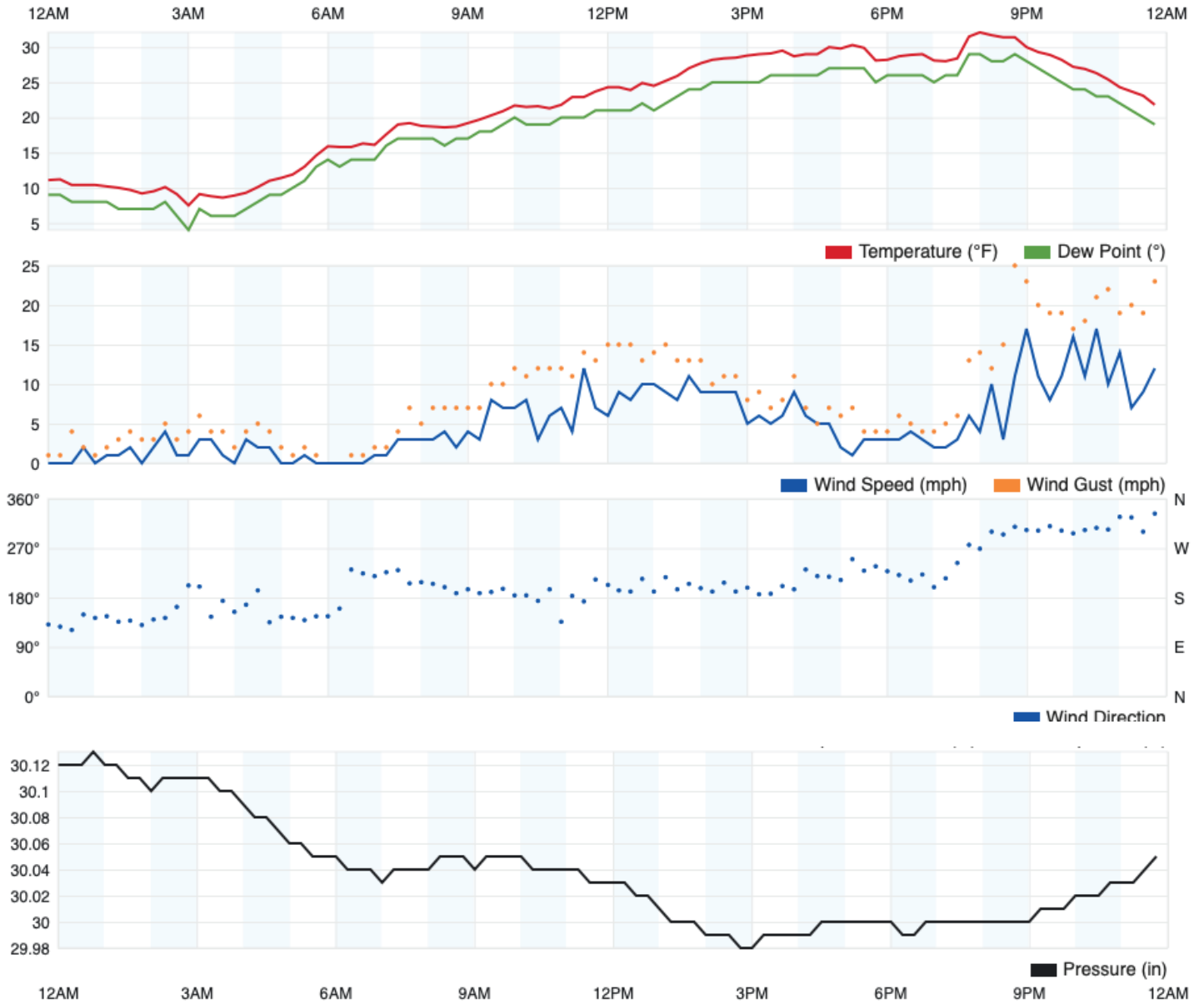
The GAO found that while the USPS consulted agency stakeholders on impacts to rural service prior to making these changes, once again they did not monitor for effects on delivery performance after the changes were executed. USPS officials told the GAO that given no effect on rural deliveries was expected from these changes, the agency did not monitor for impacts to these communities.

Adam Goldstein is the D.C. Bureau intern for States Newsroom. Goldstein is a graduate student at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, studying digital reporting. He is originally from San Francisco, and loves swimming, cooking, and the San Francisco 49ers.

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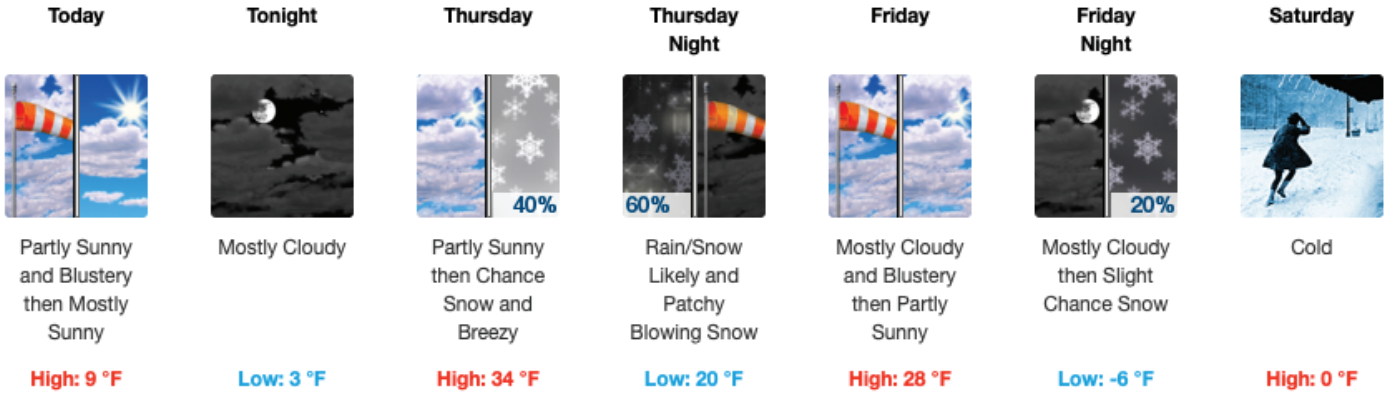
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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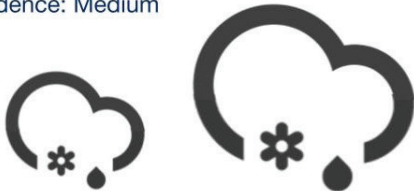
Couple Rounds of Precipitation

January 24, 2023
4:04 PM

Potential Travel Impacts

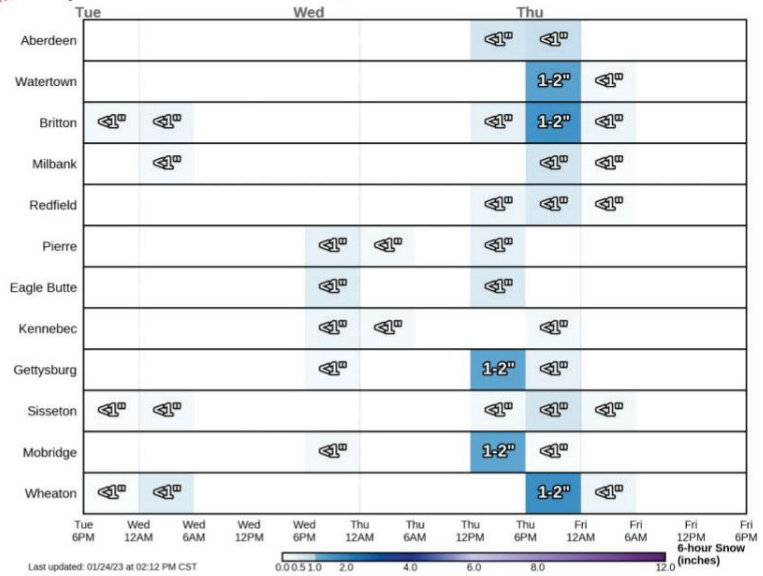
Key Messages

- Light snow with most likely <1" accumulation both tonight across northeastern SD & west central MN and Wednesday evening across central SD
 - ◆ Slick roads possible
- Rain, snow or a mix of the two moves in Thursday afternoon through Friday morning, with 1-2" or less of snowfall.
 - ◆ Slick/icy roads possible
- Confidence: Medium



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD
weather.gov/abr

3-Day 6-hour Snow Forecast



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Heads up for generally light snowfall on occasion through the next several days, with light accumulations and slick roadways possible especially from Thursday into Friday.

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Wind Forecast

January 25, 2023
4:13 AM

Blowing Snow
Potential

	1/25 Wed								1/26 Thu								1/27 Fri					1/28 Sat					
	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm		12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am
Aberdeen	32	31	26	22	16	8	6	7	7	6	12	28	38	45	46	45	45	38	32	26	20	18	20	20	21	21	20
Britton	31	30	25	21	16	10	8	6	6	6	16	31	45	46	43	45	46	44	35	28	23	16	17	14	17	17	16
Eagle Butte	23	24	20	20	18	21	26	26	23	18	22	33	47	51	54	54	51	43	26	18	16	22	29	30	28	26	21
Eureka	25	20	16	15	14	10	10	10	10	9	15	32	39	44	46	53	54	45	32	23	18	16	18	18	17	17	18
Gettysburg	32	26	22	17	16	10	13	15	16	16	16	31	38	44	45	46	48	46	29	22	17	18	24	25	25	21	
Kennebec	32	33	30	23	20	9	8	13	14	14	14	22	38	44	47	47	46	43	28	23	15	16	26	33	33	31	25
McIntosh	20	14	8	9	12	18	26	25	22	13	23	40	51	51	55	58	55	40	25	17	15	21	22	22	21	20	17
Milbank	35	38	35	32	29	26	23	21	18	14	10	17	30	41	44	43	45	45	37	36	26	18	20	18	22	22	17
Miller	28	30	26	22	18	12	10	12	12	13	13	26	39	43	43	45	46	41	30	25	17	16	21	25	28	26	22
Mobridge	26	18	13	12	10	7	10	12	12	12	15	29	41	45	45	47	47	43	26	17	15	20	21	21	22	20	17
Murdo	31	31	24	21	21	13	18	22	23	22	17	26	40	52	53	48	48	40	26	20	14	23	32	35	35	31	25
Pierre	26	24	20	15	14	6	10	14	14	13	13	23	37	46	47	46	45	35	20	16	13	18	28	30	30	26	22
Redfield	31	32	30	26	18	10	9	8	8	7	8	23	36	39	41	45	46	43	31	26	20	16	20	22	24	24	21
Sisseton	35	36	32	29	26	22	21	18	15	13	13	22	37	49	51	45	47	46	38	32	26	17	18	15	17	17	17
Watertown	25	33	32	29	26	20	18	16	14	14	12	22	35	40	41	43	46	46	38	32	28	16	14	18	22	22	20
Webster	31	37	33	28	25	18	16	14	13	12	13	28	45	48	48	48	54	54	44	35	29	17	18	17	21	22	20
Wheaton	31	32	30	28	26	22	18	15	14	10	8	17	26	33	36	39	41	41	38	35	29	21	20	18	17	17	16



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A clipper low pressure system will bring windy conditions to the area Thursday into Friday. There is potential for blowing snow as well, mainly Friday morning across northeastern SD and west central MN.



Arctic Chill Upcoming

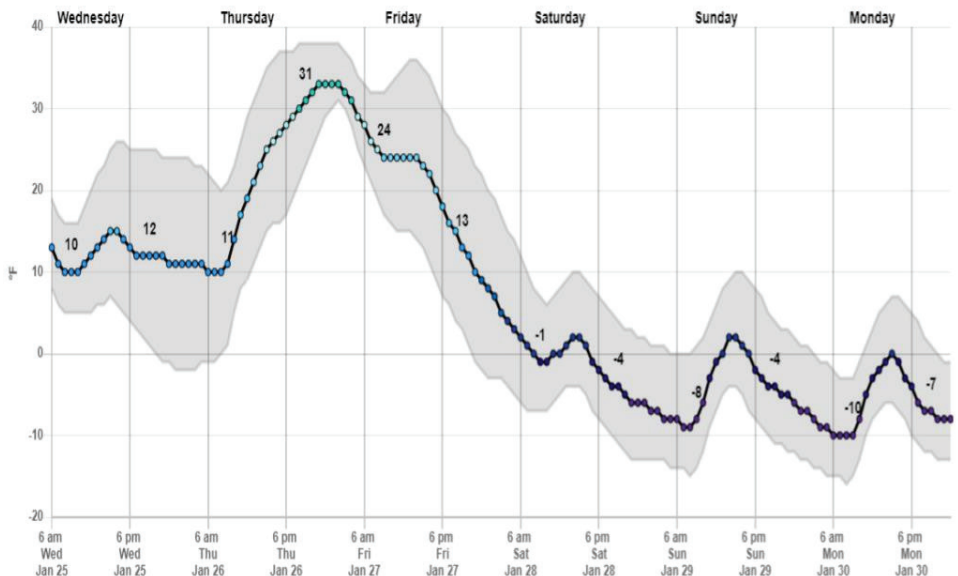
January 25, 2023
4:13 AM

(Warmest = Central SD/Colest = Northeast SD/western MN)

Key Messages - Temps

- Short term cold snap
- Mild Thursday/Friday
- Much colder this weekend/next week
- ◆ Wind chills falling to 20 to 30 below

Regional Temperature Forecast



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 32 °F at 7:52 PM

Low Temp: 7 °F at 3:01 AM

Wind: 27 mph at 8:47 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 31 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 54 in 1942

Record Low: -33 in 1904

Average High: 24°F

Average Low: 1°F

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.45

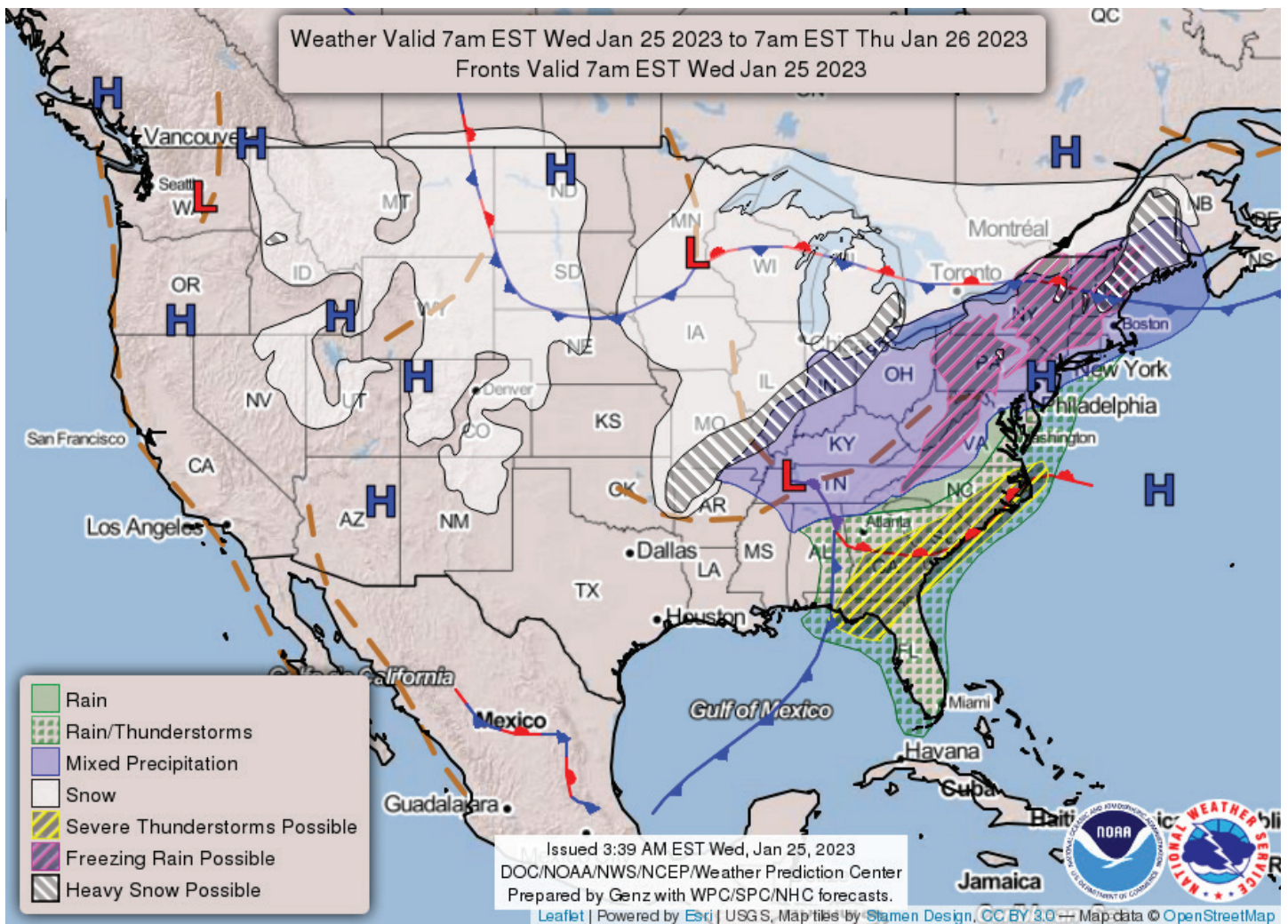
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.45

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:30:25 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:58:00 AM



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Today in Weather History

January 25, 2010: A large upper-level low-pressure area combined with a cold surface high-pressure area building in from the north brought light snow and extreme winds creating widespread blizzard conditions across north-central and northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts of 1 to 4 inches combined with north winds of 25 to 40 mph gusting up to 55 mph, created frequent whiteout conditions across the area. Travel was significantly affected or halted, and several schools were closed. Interstate-29 was closed from the North Dakota border and south on the 25th until the morning of the 26th. The blizzard hampered efforts to restore power to the thousands of customers from the previous winter storm. The snowfall began in the morning hours from 6 to 10 am and ended when the blizzard conditions subsided.

1821: The Hudson River was frozen solid amid the coldest winter in forty-one years. Thousands of persons crossed the ice from New York City to New Jersey, and refreshment taverns were set up in the middle of the river to warm pedestrians.

1837 - At 7 PM a display of the Northern Lights danced above Burlington, VT. Its light was equal to the full moon. Snow and other objects reflecting the light were deeply tinged with a blood red hue. Blue, yellow and white streamers were also noted. (The Weather Channel)

1937: Las Vegas, Nevada dropped to 8 degrees above zero, setting a record low for the city.

1949: Las Vegas, Nevada, recorded 4.7 inches of snow. This brought the monthly snowfall total to 16.7 inches which still ranks as their snowiest month on record.

1965 - Alta, UT, was in the midst of a storm that left the town buried under 105 inches of snow establishing a record for the state. (David Ludlum)

1987 - The second major storm in three days hit the Eastern Seaboard producing up to 15 inches of snow in Virginia, Maryland and Delaware. Up to 30 inches of snow covered the ground in Virginia following the two storms. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - High winds created blizzard conditions in the mountains of Colorado. Winds gusted to 109 mph at Echo Lake, and a wind gust to 193 mph was reported atop Mount Evans. A "nor'easter" moving up the Atlantic Coast spread heavy snow from the Carolinas to New England, with as much as 16 inches reported in the Poconos of eastern Pennsylvania. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Bitter cold air, coming down from Alaska, settled over the Northern Rockies. Wilson WY reported a morning low of 48 degrees below zero. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the south central U.S. One thunderstorm in north central Texas spawned a tornado which injured three persons at Troy. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Low pressure developed explosively over east central Missouri and moved into Lower Michigan producing high winds and heavy snow across parts of Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin. Wind gusts to 60 mph and up to a foot of snow created near blizzard conditions in southeastern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. Wind gusts in Indiana reached 76 mph at Wabash. Thunderstorms associated with the storm produced wind gusts to 54 mph at Fort Madison IA. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2000 - Heavy snow fell from the Carolinas to New England, with up to 20 inches of snow and five deaths reported. (NCDC)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

IT'S ALL ABOUT WHO?

Perhaps the most boring people in the world are those who enjoy heaping praises on themselves. They have a view of themselves that far exceeds the reality of who they are and what they have accomplished in life. As one person so aptly said, "They have 'I' problems" - "I have done this and I have done that and I am better than you are and my opinions about myself are trustworthy, reliable and verifiable. And if you do not believe me, ask me and I'll go into more detail and explain more clearly what I have already achieved in life with more to come."

Solomon must have known people who were not only self-centered but self-sufficient, self-serving and self-satisfied. They had completed a "self-evaluation" survey and broken all previous records. Wisely, Solomon provided some sound advice for those who fall into that category: "Let other people praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips."

"Praise" is not the problem. If we see someone doing something that is commendable, helpful, kind, and gracious in serving others on behalf of God, they are certainly worthy of recognition. So, being recognized or praised for what we have done is not the problem either.

The problem lies in the fact that if we evaluate ourselves by ourselves for ourselves, we usually overlook our flaws and "think more highly of ourselves than we ought to."

Jesus said it best: "I am not seeking glory for myself." If we glorify God, others will praise our works, and we will give God the credit for the gifts He has given us!

Prayer: We pray, Father, for an attitude of humility and a life of integrity as we work with Your Son to bring honor, glory, praise, and thanksgiving to Your name! In Jesus' Name, Amen.



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:
01.24.23

33 41 47 50 62 20

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 15
DRAW: Mins 23 Secs

GAME DETAILS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.23.23

6 8 16 43 47 9

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$34,370,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 15 Mins 23
DRAW: Secs

GAME DETAILS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.24.23

1 25 28 39 47 10

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 45 Mins 23
DRAW: Secs

GAME DETAILS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.21.23

3 11 12 22 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$27,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 15 Mins 23
DRAW: Secs

GAME DETAILS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.23.23

6 15 31 45 58 5

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 14 Mins 23
DRAW: Secs

GAME DETAILS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.23.23

12 31 47 58 60 23

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$526,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 14 Mins 24
DRAW: Secs

GAME DETAILS

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News from the  Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Central 84, Pierre 82, 2OT

Aberdeen Christian 70, Herreid/Selby Area 45

Belle Fourche 54, Lemmon 47

Beresford 58, Irene-Wakonda 40

Bridgewater-Emery 63, Freeman Academy/Marion 42

Canistota 60, Chester 45

Canton 70, Tri-Valley 42

Castlewood 81, Colman-Egan 29

Colome 65, Bennett County 24

Dell Rapids 81, Elkton-Lake Benton 36

Dell Rapids St. Mary 71, Deubrook 57

Douglas 71, Red Cloud 59

Faith 66, Potter County 48

Flandreau 42, Garretson 41

Florence/Henry 63, Arlington 18

Hamlin 72, Aberdeen Roncalli 38

Hot Springs 70, Wall 45

James Valley Christian 62, Highmore-Harrold 42

Kadoka Area 55, Timber Lake 54

Kimball/White Lake 49, Bon Homme 41

Lennox 73, Brookings 69

Leola/Frederick 64, Britton-Hecla 28

Lyman 59, Jones County 52

Madison 76, Chamberlain 40

McCook Central/Montrose 71, Baltic 61

Menno 51, Gayville-Volin 49

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 76, Wagner 40

Northwestern 75, Faulkton 60

Platte-Geddes 64, Parkston 61

Rapid City Christian 81, Custer 67

Redfield 65, Hitchcock-Tulare 42

Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 55, Hanson 49

Sargent County, N.D. 72, Tiospa Zina Tribal 51

Scotland 47, Alcester-Hudson 46

Sioux Falls Christian 56, Tea Area 51

Sioux Falls Jefferson 59, Brandon Valley 58

Sioux Falls Lincoln 60, Yankton 54

St. Thomas More 55, Spearfish 42

Stanley County 58, Sully Buttes 50

Sturgis Brown 52, Hill City 45

Tripp-Delmont/Armour 55, Centerville 33

Watertown 67, Huron 52

Waverly-South Shore 51, Webster 43

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Wessington Springs 54, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 17
West Central 59, Parker 29
Winner 52, Todd County 49
Wolsey-Wessington 54, Sunshine Bible Academy 22

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 70, Wessington Springs 67
Avon 65, Burke 58
Beresford 50, Irene-Wakonda 41
Bon Homme 56, Kimball/White Lake 46
Centerville 52, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 22
Colman-Egan 36, Castlewood 24
Elkton-Lake Benton 55, Dell Rapids 39
Florence/Henry 61, Arlington 54
Great Plains Lutheran 43, Wilmot 34
Gregory 71, Stanley County 49
Hamlin 64, Aberdeen Roncalli 21
Hanson 57, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 44
Harrisburg 40, Mitchell 29
Hill City 41, Sturgis Brown 39
Hitchcock-Tulare 42, Redfield 39
Howard 51, Bridgewater-Emery 16
Lennox 63, Brookings 44
Leola/Frederick 41, Britton-Hecla 35
Menno 55, Gayville-Volin 50
Northwestern 54, Faulkton 45
Parkston 48, Platte-Geddes 40
Pierre 63, Aberdeen Central 54
Rapid City Christian 56, Custer 51
Red Cloud 66, Douglas 20
Richardton-Taylor, N.D. 63, McIntosh 10
Scotland 45, Alcester-Hudson 41
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 71, Tea Area 30
Sioux Falls Washington 42, Sioux Falls Lincoln 39
Sioux Valley 73, DeSmet 48
Sisseton 70, Deuel 33
Spearfish 48, St. Thomas More 45
Tri-Valley 53, Canton 47
Wagner 74, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 55
Warner 49, Langford 30
Watertown 36, Huron 34
West Central 61, Parker 36
Winner 38, Chamberlain 28
Wolsey-Wessington 73, Sunshine Bible Academy 14

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

South Dakota Gov. Noem threatens charges for abortion pills

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, along with the state's Republican attorney general, said Tuesday the state will prosecute pharmacists who dispense abortion-inducing pills following a recent Food and Drug Administration rule change that broadens access to the pills.

The Republican governor and South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley released a letter to South Dakota pharmacists saying they are "subject to felony prosecution" if they procure or dispense abortion-inducing drugs. The state bans all abortions except to save the life of the pregnant person.

"South Dakota will continue to enforce all laws including those that respect and protect the lives of the unborn," Noem and Jackley said in the letter.

The FDA earlier this month formally updated labeling for abortion pills to allow many more retail pharmacies to dispense them, so long as they complete a certification process.

The change could expand access at online pharmacies. People can get a prescription via telehealth consultation with a health professional and then receive the pills through the mail, where permitted by law.

Still, in states like South Dakota, the rule change's impact has been blunted by laws limiting abortion broadly and the pills specifically. Legal experts foresee years of court battles over access to the pills as abortion-rights proponents bring test cases to challenge state restrictions.

Amanda Bacon, the director of the South Dakota Pharmacists Association, said in an email that she was not aware of any South Dakota pharmacies with plans to participate in the federal program to dispense abortion pills.

S. Dakota bill would require reporting of student crimes

By AMANCAI BIRABEN Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota Senate committee advanced a proposal Tuesday that requires law enforcement to tell schools when students threaten violence and violate drug and alcohol policies. The bill, which came about after a period of research into school safety last summer, next faces a vote in the Republican-controlled Senate.

An organization that represents school administrators said that when schools know about criminal incidents involving their students, they can intervene proactively depending on the circumstance. Rob Monson, the executive director of the School Administrators of South Dakota, referenced a recent incident in which a student was arrested at school after police connected him with a string of crimes including car theft, possession of firearms and illegal drugs, and assaulting his sister.

Law enforcement groups oppose the proposal, saying the two institutions already communicate. They worry that spreading sensitive information could damage the individuals involved.

Democratic Sen. Shawn Bordeaux voted to dismiss the proposal, concerned that it would add another layer to criminalization that at-risk youth face.

Grant Flynn, who is lobbying with the South Dakota State's Attorneys Association, said, "It's a solution looking for a problem and creates additional onus on law enforcement."

Bill sponsor Republican Sen. Erin Tobin had discussed the issue with superintendents across the state and found that because an existing bill only suggests law enforcement notify schools, an amendment to require communication between the two agencies was necessary.

"When it's not consistently happening, students are placed right back in school, sometimes where the victim is present," Tobin said. "That is a huge risk to the victim and the offender, and it's just not a safe environment."

BBC film on Indian PM Modi, 2002 riots draws government ire

By SHEIKH SAALIQ and KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Days after India blocked a BBC documentary that examines Prime Minister Narendra Modi's role during 2002 anti-Muslim riots and banned people from sharing it online, authorities are scrambling to halt screenings of the program at colleges and universities and restrict clips of it on social media, a move that has been decried by critics as an assault on press freedom.

Tensions escalated in the capital, New Delhi, on Wednesday at Jamia Millia University, where a student group said it planned to screen the banned documentary, prompting dozens of police equipped with tear gas and riot gear to gather outside campus gates.

Police, some in plain clothes, scuffled with protesting students and detained at least half a dozen, who were taken away in a van.

"This is the time for Indian youth to put up the truth which everybody knows. We know what the prime minister is doing to the society," said Liya Shareef, 20, a geography student and member of the student group Fraternity Movement.

Jawaharlal Nehru University in the capital cut off power and the internet on its campus on Tuesday before the documentary was scheduled to be screened by a students' union. Authorities said it would disturb peace on campus, but students nonetheless watched the documentary on their laptops and mobile phones after sharing it on messaging services such as Telegram and WhatsApp.

The documentary has caused a storm at other Indian universities too.

Authorities at the University of Hyderabad, in India's south, began a probe after a student group showed the banned documentary earlier this week. In the southern state of Kerala, workers from Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party held demonstrations on Tuesday after some student groups affiliated with rival political parties defied the ban and screened the program.

The two-part documentary "India: The Modi Question" has not been broadcast in India by the BBC, but India's federal government blocked it over the weekend and banned people from sharing clips on social media, citing emergency powers under its information technology laws. Twitter and YouTube complied with the request and removed many links to the documentary.

The first part of the program, released last week by the BBC for its U.K. audiences, revives the most controversial episode of Modi's political career when he was the chief minister of western Gujarat state in 2002. It focuses on anti-Muslim riots in which more than 1,000 people were killed.

The riots have long hounded Modi because of allegations that authorities under his watch allowed and even encouraged the bloodshed. Modi has denied the accusations, and the Supreme Court has said it found no evidence to prosecute him. Last year, the country's top court dismissed a petition filed by a Muslim victim questioning Modi's exoneration.

The first part of the BBC documentary relies on interviews with victims of the riots, journalists and rights activists, who say Modi looked the other way during the riots. It cites, for the first time, a secret British diplomatic investigation that concluded Modi was "directly responsible" for the "climate of impunity."

The documentary includes the testimony of then-British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, who says the British investigation found that the violence by Hindu nationalists aimed to "purge Muslims from Hindu areas" and that it had all the "hallmarks of an ethnic cleansing."

Suspicious that Modi quietly supported the riots led the U.S., U.K. and E.U. to deny him a visa, a move that has since been reversed.

India's Foreign Ministry last week called the documentary a "propaganda piece designed to push a particularly discredited narrative" that lacks objectivity, and slammed it for "bias" and "a continuing colonial mindset." Kanchan Gupta, a senior adviser in the government's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, denounced it as "anti-India garbage."

The BBC in a statement said the documentary was "rigorously researched" and involved a wide range of voices and opinions.

"We offered the Indian Government a right to reply to the matters raised in the series — it declined to

respond," the statement said.

The second part of the documentary, released Tuesday in the U.K., "examines the track record of Narendra Modi's government following his re-election in 2019," according to the film's description on the BBC website.

In recent years, India's Muslim minority has been at the receiving end of violence from Hindu nationalists, emboldened by a prime minister who has mostly stayed mum on such attacks since he was first elected in 2014.

The ban has set off a wave of criticism from opposition parties and rights groups that slammed it as an attack against press freedom. It also drew more attention to the documentary, sparking scores of social media users to share clips on WhatsApp, Telegram and Twitter.

"You can ban, you can suppress the press, you can control the institutions ... but the truth is the truth. It has a nasty habit of coming out," Rahul Gandhi, a leader of the opposition Congress party, told reporters at a news conference Tuesday.

Mahua Moitra, a lawmaker from the Trinamool Congress political party, on Tuesday tweeted a new link to the documentary after a previous one was taken down. "Good, bad, or ugly — we decide. Govt doesn't tell us what to watch," Moitra said in her tweet, which was still up Wednesday morning.

Human Rights Watch said the ban reflected a broader crackdown on minorities under the Modi government, which the rights group said has frequently invoked draconian laws to muzzle criticism.

Critics say press freedom in India has declined in recent years and the country fell eight places, to 150 out of 180 countries, in last year's Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders. It accuses Modi's government of silencing criticism on social media, particularly on Twitter, a charge senior leaders of the governing party have denied.

Modi's government has regularly pressured Twitter to restrict or ban content it deems critical of the prime minister or his party. Last year, it threatened to arrest Twitter staff in the country over their refusal to ban accounts run by critics after implementing sweeping new regulations for technology and social media companies.

The ban on the BBC documentary comes after a proposal from the government to give its Press Information Bureau and other "fact-checking" agencies powers to take down news deemed "fake or false" from digital platforms.

The Editors Guild of India urged the government to withdraw the proposal, saying such a change would be akin to censorship.

After US offer, Germany unleashes Leopard tanks for Ukraine

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — After weeks of hesitation that saw growing impatience among Germany's allies, Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced Wednesday that his government would provide Ukraine with Leopard 2 battle tanks and approve requests by other countries to do the same.

In a statement, the German government said it would initially provide Ukraine with one company of Leopard 2 A6 tanks, which comprises 14 vehicles, from its own stocks. The goal is for Germany and its allies to provide Ukraine with a total of two battalions, or 88 tanks.

"This decision follows our well-known line of supporting Ukraine to the best of our ability," Scholz said after a Cabinet meeting in Berlin.

Germany was "acting in close coordination" with its international allies, he added.

The long-awaited decision came after U.S. officials said Tuesday that a preliminary agreement had been struck for the United States to send M1 Abrams tanks to help Ukraine's troops push back Russian forces that remain entrenched in the country's east almost a year after Moscow's invasion and war.

Scholz had insisted that any decision to provide Ukraine with powerful Leopard 2 tanks would need to be taken in conjunction with Germany's allies, chiefly the United States. By getting Washington to commit some of its own tanks, Berlin hopes to share the risk of any backlash from Russia.

Ekkehard Brose, head of the German military's Federal Academy for Security Policy, said tying the United

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States into the decision was crucial, to avoid Europe facing a nuclear-armed Russia alone.

But he also noted the deeper historic significance of the decision.

"German-made tanks will face off against Russian tanks in Ukraine once more," he said, adding that this was "not an easy thought" for Germany, which takes its responsibility for the horrors of World War II seriously.

"And yet it is the right decision," Brose said, arguing that it was up to Western democracies to help Ukraine stop Russia's military campaign.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov described German and U.S. intentions with the tanks as a "a rather disastrous plan."

"I am convinced that many specialists understand the absurdity of this idea," Peskov told reporters Wednesday.

"Simply because of technological aspects, this is a rather disastrous plan. The main thing is, this is a completely obvious overestimation of the potential (the supply of tanks) would add to the armed forces of Ukraine. It is yet another fallacy, a rather profound one," the Kremlin official said.

Peskov predicted "these tanks will burn down just like all the other ones. ... Except they cost a lot, and this will fall on the shoulders of European taxpayers," he added.

Members of Scholz's three-party coalition government welcomed the news ahead of the official announcement.

"The Leopard's freed!" said German lawmaker Katrin Goering-Eckardt, a senior Green party lawmaker.

Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, a member of the Free Democratic Party who chairs the parliamentary defense committee, said the news was "a relief for a mistreated and brave Ukraine."

"The decision to approve (other countries' requests) and supply the Leopard 2 was arduous, but unavoidable," she said.

Strack-Zimmermann had been one of the loudest voices calling for a swift decision on arms supplies to Ukraine.

Two smaller opposition parties criticized the move, however.

The far-right Alternative for Germany called the decision "irresponsible and dangerous."

"Germany risks being drawn directly into the war as a result," its co-leader, Tino Chrupalla, said. The party, known by its acronym AfD, has friendly ties to Russia.

The Left party, which also has historic links to Moscow, warned of a possible escalation in the conflict.

"The supply of Leopard battle tanks, which ends a further taboo, potentially takes us closer to a third world war than in the direction of peace in Europe," the party's parliamentary leader, Dietmar Bartsch, told German news agency dpa.

Recent opinion polls showed German voters split on the idea.

The pressure on Scholz mounted this week after Poland formally asked Germany to approve sending Leopard 2 tanks from Polish stocks to Ukraine.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki of Poland, which was among the countries leading the call for Western allies to send tanks to Germany, thanked Scholz following Wednesday's announcement.

"The decision to send Leopards to Ukraine is a big step towards stopping Russia," he wrote on Twitter. "Together we are stronger."

Other European nations have also indicated a willingness to part with their own Leopard or similar battle tanks as part of a larger coalition.

Still, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made clear late Tuesday that he hoped for a substantial number of tanks from western allies.

"It is not about five, or 10, or 15 tanks. The need is greater," he said.

The German government said it planned to swiftly begin training Ukrainian tank crews in Germany. The package being put together would also include logistics, ammunition and maintenance.

The AP Interview takeaways: Pope decries expanding gun use

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis lamented that the use of guns by civilians to defend themselves is becoming a “habit.”

In an exclusive interview on Tuesday with The Associated Press, the pontiff, who has frequently criticized the arms industry, was asked about the large number of guns in civilian hands and frequent massacres in the United States. Francis expressed concern about how recourse to guns has become “habit.”

“I say when you have to defend yourself, all that’s left is to have the elements to defend yourself. Another thing is how that need to defend oneself lengthens, lengthens, and becomes a habit,” Francis said. “Instead of making the effort to help us live, we make the effort to help us kill.”

Francis has denounced the arms industry as trafficking in death. Francis said he wants to draw attention to the problem by saying: “Please, let’s say something that will stop this.”

The AP asked the question about the proliferation of guns among civilians after recent days saw several shootings, including in California.

Here are some other key takeaways from the interview.

ON ‘PATIENCE’ WITH CHINA

Saying “we must walk patiently in China,” Pope Francis views continued dialogue with Beijing as the guiding principle in his efforts to safeguard his flock, who are a small minority in the Asian nation.

The AP asked what comes next in the diplomatic overtures between the countries.

“We are taking steps,” Francis replied. “Each case (of a bishop’s nomination) is looked at with a magnifying lens.” The pontiff added that “that’s the main thing, the dialogue doesn’t break.”

As for Chinese authorities, “sometimes they are a little closed, sometimes not,” Francis said.

The pope sidestepped a question about how the Vatican’s relationship with Taiwan affects the dialogue. The Holy See is one of the few states to maintain formal ties with Taiwan instead of with China.

Francis has been criticized by more conservative factions of the Catholic Church for a 2018 agreement with Beijing over the appointment of bishops in China, given how that country’s Communist authorities have at times imprisoned priests. Among his harshest critics is Cardinal Joseph Zen, the bishop emeritus of Hong Kong.

In the interview, Francis called Zen, who is 91, a “charming old man,” and a “tender soul.” He recounted how, when the cardinal came to Rome this month for the funeral of Pope Benedict XVI, the pontiff invited him to the Vatican hotel where Francis lives. In front of the pope’s private study is a statue depicting Our Lady of Sheshan. Francis said when the cardinal saw it, “he began to cry, like a child.”

Zen was arrested last year after he fell afoul of Hong Kong authorities over his participation in a now-silenced democracy movement.

ON HOMOSEXUALITY

Pope Francis has stepped up his criticism of discrimination against members of the LGBTQ community. He called laws criminalizing homosexuals unjust but reiterated Catholic Church teaching that homosexual activity is sinful.

“Being homosexual is not a crime. It’s not a crime. Yes, it’s a sin. Well, yes, but let’s make the distinction first between sin and crime,” he said.

ON PAPAL HEALTH AND RETIREMENT

The 86-year-old pontiff was asked to assess his health.

“I’m in good health. For my age, I’m normal. I might die tomorrow, but I am under control. I always ask for the grace the Lord will give me a sense of humor,” he said.

His predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, was the first pontiff in 600 years to resign. Following Benedict’s death, Francis was also asked about the need for rules for any future retirement.

“After some more experience ... then it could be more regularized or regulated,” he said. “But for the moment it hasn’t occurred to me.”

'Happening way too often': Report delves into mass attacks

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the nation reels from a week of high-profile shootings, a new report on mass attacks calls for communities to intervene early when they see warning signs of violence, encourages businesses to consider workplace violence prevention plans and highlights the connection between domestic violence, misogyny and mass attacks.

The report, released Wednesday by the U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center, analyzed 173 mass attacks carried out over a five-year period from January 2016 to December 2020 in public or semi-public places such as businesses, schools or churches.

It was released as the U.S. experienced a particularly deadly start to the new year that has left 39 people dead in six mass killings, including one this week in Monterey Park, California, that left 11 people dead at a dance hall as they welcomed in the Lunar New Year.

"It's just happening way too often," said Lina Alathari, the center's director, during a news conference ahead of the report's release. Alathari said that while the center had not specifically studied the shootings that took place this week, there are themes seen "over and over again" when analyzing mass attacks.

The report is the latest in a series undertaken by the center to look at the problem of mass attacks. While previous reports examined the specific years of 2017, 2018 and 2019, the new report noted that it analyzed multiple years of data and gives more "in-depth analysis of the thinking and behavior of mass attackers."

The center defines a mass attack as one in which three or more people — not including the attacker — were harmed. Almost all the attacks were carried out by one person, 96% of attackers were men and the attackers ranged in age from 14 to 87.

The report noted that nearly two-thirds of attackers exhibited behaviors or communications "that were so concerning, they should have been met with an immediate response." It said these concerns were often shared with law enforcement, employers, school staff or parents. But in one-fifth of the cases, the concerning behavior wasn't relayed to anyone "in a position to respond, demonstrating a continued need to promote and facilitate bystander reporting."

The report also called for greater attention toward domestic violence and misogyny, noting that nearly half of the attackers studied had a history of domestic violence, misogynistic behavior or both.

"Though not all who possess misogynistic views are violent, viewpoints that describe women as the enemy or call for violence against women remain a cause for concern," the report said.

About half the attacks in the study involved a business location, and attackers often had a prior relationship with the business, as an employee, a customer or a former employer. The report also noted the role that grievances like workplace disputes or feuds with neighbors played in mass attacks. About half the attacks were motivated "in whole or in part by a perceived grievance," according to the report.

"Workplaces should establish behavioral threat assessment programs as a component of their workplace violence prevention plans, and businesses should also establish proactive relationships with area law enforcement so that they may work collaboratively to respond to incidents involving a concern for violence, whether that concern arises from a current employee, a former employee, or a customer," the report read.

London gallery to show McCartney photos from Beatlemania era

LONDON (AP) — A trove of previously unseen photos taken by Paul McCartney as The Beatles shot to global stardom will go on display in London this year.

The National Portrait Gallery announced Wednesday that the exhibition, titled "Eyes of the Storm," will help mark the gallery's reopening in June after a three-year refurbishment.

Gallery director Nicholas Cullinan said McCartney, approached the gallery in 2020 saying he had rediscovered a batch of photos from late 1963 and early 1964 that he had thought were lost.

Cullinan said they were an "extraordinary" set of images of "such a famous and important cultural moment ... taken by someone who was really, as the exhibition title alludes, in the eye of the storm."

"Paul McCartney Photographs 1963-64: Eyes of The Storm" opens June 28 and runs to Oct. 1.

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The gallery is due to reopen June 22. Other exhibitions slated for this year include a retrospective of the 20th-century English photographer Yevonde, a show of drawings by David Hockney and an exhibition of portraits by Black artists from the U.S. and Britain.

Microsoft reports outage for Teams, Outlook, other services

LONDON (AP) — Microsoft said it's investigating problems with its online services including its Teams messaging platform and Outlook email system after users around the world reported outages Wednesday.

In a status update, the tech company reported "service degradation" for a number of its Microsoft 365 services.

Thousands of users reported problems with Teams, Outlook, the Azure cloud computing service and Xbox Live online gaming service early Wednesday on the Downdetector website, which tracks outage reports. By later in the morning, it showed the number of reports had dropped considerably.

Many users took to social media to complain that the services were down.

"We've isolated the problem to a networking configuration issue, and we are analyzing the best mitigation strategy to address it without causing additional impact," the Microsoft 365 Status Twitter account said.

It later tweeted that a network change that was suspected to be causing the problem was rolled back and that it's monitoring as the rollback takes effect.

A day earlier, Microsoft reported that its quarterly profit fell 12%, reflecting economic uncertainty that the company said led to its decision this month to cut 10,000 workers.

The AP Interview: Pope on health, critics and future papacy

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis says he hasn't even considered issuing norms to regulate future papal resignations and plans to continue for as long as he can as bishop of Rome, despite a wave of attacks by some top-ranking cardinals and bishops.

In his first interview since the Dec. 31 death of retired Pope Benedict XVI, Francis addressed his health, his critics and the next phase of his pontificate, which marks its 10th anniversary in March without Benedict's shadow in the background.

"I'm in good health. For my age, I'm normal," the 86-year-old pontiff said Tuesday, though he revealed that diverticulosis, or bulges in his intestinal wall, had "returned." Francis had 33 centimeters (13 inches) of his large intestine removed in 2021 because of what the Vatican said was inflammation that caused a narrowing of his colon.

He added that a slight bone fracture in his knee from a fall had healed without surgery after laser and magnet therapy.

"I might die tomorrow, but it's under control. I'm in good health," he told The Associated Press with his typical wry sense of humor.

Speculation about Francis' health and the future of his pontificate has only risen following the death of Benedict, whose 2013 resignation marked a turning point for the Catholic Church since he was the first pontiff in six centuries to retire.

Some commentators believe Francis might be freer to maneuver now that Benedict, who lived out his 10-year retirement in the Vatican, is gone. Others suggest that any sort of ecclesial peace that had reigned was over and that Francis is now more exposed to critics, deprived of the moderating influence Benedict played in keeping the conservative Catholic fringe at bay.

Francis acknowledged the knives were out, but seemed almost sanguine about it.

"I wouldn't relate it to Benedict, but because of the wear-and-tear of a government of 10 years," Francis said of his papacy. At first, his election was greeted with a sense of "surprise" about a South American pope, then came discomfort "when they started to see my flaws and didn't like them," he said.

"The only thing I ask is that they do it to my face because that's how we all grow, right?" he added.

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Francis praised Benedict as a "gentleman," and said of his death: "I lost a dad."

"For me, he was a security. In the face of a doubt, I would ask for the car and go to the monastery and ask," he said of his visits to Benedict's retirement home for counsel. "I lost a good companion."

Some cardinals and canon lawyers have said the Vatican must issue norms to regulate future papal retirements to prevent the few hiccups that occurred during Benedict's unexpectedly long retirement, during which he remained a point of reference for some conservatives and traditionalists who refused to recognize Francis' legitimacy.

From the name Benedict chose (pope emeritus) to the (white) cassock he wore to his occasional public remarks (on priestly celibacy and sex abuse), these commentators said norms must make clear there is only one reigning pope for the sake of the unity of the church.

Francis said issuing such norms hadn't even occurred to him.

"I'm telling you the truth," he said, adding that the Vatican needed more experience with papal retirements before setting out to "regularize or regulate" them.

Francis has said Benedict "opened the door" to future resignations, and that he too would consider stepping down. He repeated Tuesday that if he were to resign he'd be called the bishop emeritus of Rome and would live in the residence for retired priests in the diocese of Rome.

Francis said Benedict's decision to live in a converted monastery in the Vatican Gardens was a "good intermediate solution," but that future retired popes might want to do things differently.

"He was still 'enslaved' as a pope, no?" Francis said. "Of the vision of a pope, of a system. 'Slave' in the good sense of the word: In that he wasn't completely free, as he would have liked to have returned to his Germany and continued studying theology."

By one calculation, Benedict's death removes the main obstacle to Francis resigning, since the prospect of two pensioner popes was never an option. But Francis said Benedict's death hadn't altered his calculations. "It didn't even occur to me to write a will," he said.

As for his own near-term future, Francis emphasized his role as "bishop of Rome" as opposed to pontiff and said of his plans: "Continue being bishop, bishop of Rome in communion with all the bishops of the world." He said he wanted to put to rest the concept of the papacy as a power player or papal "court."

Francis also addressed the criticism from cardinals and bishops that burst into public in the weeks since Benedict's death, saying it's unpleasant — "like a rash that bothers you a bit" — but that is better than keeping it under wraps.

"You prefer that they don't criticize, for the sake of tranquility," Francis said. "But I prefer that they do it because that means there's freedom to speak."

"If it's not like this, there would be a dictatorship of distance, as I call it, where the emperor is there and no one can tell him anything. No, let them speak because ... criticism helps you to grow and improve things."

The first salvo in the wave of attacks came from Benedict's longtime secretary, Archbishop Georg Gaenswein, who revealed the bad blood that accumulated over the last 10 years in a tell-all memoir published in the days after Benedict's funeral.

In one of the most explosive sections, Gaenswein revealed that Benedict learned by reading the Vatican daily newspaper L'Osservatore Romano that Francis had reversed one of the former pope's most significant liturgical decisions and re-imposed restrictions on celebrating the Old Latin Mass.

A few days later, the Vatican was rattled anew by the death of another conservative stalwart, Cardinal George Pell, and revelations that Pell was the author of a devastating memorandum that circulated last year that called the Francis pontificate a "disaster" and a "catastrophe."

The memo, which was initially published under the pseudonym "Demos," listed all the problems in the Vatican under Francis, from its precarious finances to the pontiff's preaching style, and issued bullet points for what a future pope should do to fix them.

Francis acknowledged Pell's criticism but still sang his praises for having been his "right-hand man" on reforming the Vatican's finances as his first economy minister.

"Even though they say he criticized me, fine, he has the right. Criticism is a human right," Francis said. But he added: "He was a great guy. Great."

The AP Interview: Pope Francis: Homosexuality not a crime

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis criticized laws that criminalize homosexuality as “unjust,” saying God loves all his children just as they are and called on Catholic bishops who support the laws to welcome LGBTQ people into the church.

“Being homosexual isn’t a crime,” Francis said during an interview Tuesday with The Associated Press.

Francis acknowledged that Catholic bishops in some parts of the world support laws that criminalize homosexuality or discriminate against the LGBTQ community, and he himself referred to the issue in terms of “sin.” But he attributed such attitudes to cultural backgrounds, and said bishops in particular need to undergo a process of change to recognize the dignity of everyone.

“These bishops have to have a process of conversion,” he said, adding that they should apply “tenderness, please, as God has for each one of us.”

Some 67 countries or jurisdictions worldwide criminalize consensual same-sex sexual activity, 11 of which can or do impose the death penalty, according to The Human Dignity Trust, which works to end such laws. Experts say even where the laws are not enforced, they contribute to harassment, stigmatization and violence against LGBTQ people.

In the U.S., more than a dozen states still have anti-sodomy laws on the books, despite a 2003 Supreme Court ruling declaring them unconstitutional. Gay rights advocates say the antiquated laws are used to harass homosexuals, and point to new legislation, such as the “Don’t say gay” law in Florida, which forbids instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade, as evidence of continued efforts to marginalize LGBTQ people.

The United Nations has repeatedly called for an end to laws criminalizing homosexuality outright, saying they violate rights to privacy and freedom from discrimination and are a breach of countries’ obligations under international law to protect the human rights of all people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Declaring such laws “unjust,” Francis said the Catholic Church can and should work to put an end to them. “It must do this. It must do this,” he said.

Francis quoted the Catechism of the Catholic Church in saying gay people must be welcomed and respected, and should not be marginalized or discriminated against.

“We are all children of God, and God loves us as we are and for the strength that each of us fights for our dignity,” Francis said, speaking to the AP in the Vatican hotel where he lives.

Such laws are common in Africa and the Middle East and date from British colonial times or are inspired by Islamic law. Some Catholic bishops have strongly upheld them as consistent with Vatican teaching that considers homosexual activity “intrinsically disordered,” while others have called for them to be overturned as a violation of basic human dignity.

In 2019, Francis had been expected to issue a statement opposing criminalization of homosexuality during a meeting with human rights groups that conducted research into the effects of such laws and so-called “conversion therapies.”

In the end, the pope did not meet with the groups, which instead met with the Vatican No. 2, who reaffirmed “the dignity of every human person and against every form of violence.”

On Tuesday, Francis said there needed to be a distinction between a crime and a sin with regard to homosexuality.

“Being homosexual is not a crime,” he said. “It’s not a crime. Yes, but it’s a sin. Fine, but first let’s distinguish between a sin and a crime.”

“It’s also a sin to lack charity with one another,” he added.

Catholic teaching holds that while gay people must be treated with respect, homosexual acts are “intrinsically disordered.” Francis has not changed that teaching, but he has made reaching out to the LGBTQ community a hallmark of his papacy.

Starting with his famous 2013 declaration, “Who am I to judge?” when he was asked about a purportedly

gay priest, Francis has gone on to minister repeatedly and publicly to the gay and trans community. As archbishop of Buenos Aires, he favored granting legal protections to same-sex couples as an alternative to endorsing gay marriage, which Catholic doctrine forbids.

Despite such outreach, Francis was criticized by the Catholic LGBTQ community for a 2021 decree from the Vatican's doctrine office that the church cannot bless same-sex unions "because God cannot bless sin."

The Vatican in 2008 declined to sign onto a U.N. declaration that called for the decriminalization of homosexuality, complaining the text went beyond the original scope and also included language about "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" it found problematic. In a statement at the time, the Vatican urged countries to avoid "unjust discrimination" against gay people and end penalties against them.

Hipkins sworn in as New Zealand PM, pledges focus on economy

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — Chris Hipkins was sworn in Wednesday as New Zealand's 41st prime minister, following the unexpected resignation last week of Jacinda Ardern.

Hipkins, 44, has promised a back-to-basics approach focusing on the economy and what he described as the "pandemic of inflation."

He will have less than nine months before contesting a tough general election, with opinion polls indicating his Labour Party is trailing its conservative opposition.

New Zealand Governor-General Cindy Kiro officiated the brief swearing in ceremony in front of his friends and colleagues after she earlier accepted Ardern's resignation.

"This is the biggest privilege and responsibility of my life," Hipkins said at the ceremony. "I'm energized and excited by the challenges that lie ahead."

Carmel Sepuloni was also sworn in as deputy prime minister, the first time a person with Pacific Island heritage has taken on the role. She congratulated Hipkins and thanked him for the trust he'd placed in her.

After the ceremony, Hipkins said as an aside to reporters: "It feels pretty real now."

Hipkins is known to many by the nickname "Chippy," which fits with his upbeat demeanor and skills as an amateur handyman.

He served as education and police minister under Ardern. He rose to public prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic, when he took on a kind of crisis management role. But he and other liberals have long been in the shadow of Ardern, who became a global icon of the left and exemplified a new style of leadership.

Ardern last week said she was resigning after more than five years in the role because she no longer had "enough in the tank" to do the job justice. "It's that simple," she said.

On Tuesday she made her final official appearance as prime minister, saying the thing she would miss most was the people because they had been the "joy of the job." On Wednesday morning, she was greeted with hugs and farewells by dozens of former staff and admirers on Parliament's forecourt as she left the building.

Ardern plans to stay on as a backbench lawmaker until April to avoid triggering a special election ahead of the nation's general election in October.

New Zealand's head-of-state is Britain's King Charles III, and Kiro is his representative in New Zealand, although these days the nation's relationship with the monarchy is largely symbolic.

Britain's Prince William and wife, Kate, thanked Ardern on Twitter "for your friendship, leadership and support over the years, not least at the time of my grandmother's death. Sending you, Clarke and Neve our best wishes. W & C"

Clarke Gayford is Ardern's fiance and Neve is their 4-year-old daughter.

Lebanese environmental group accused of being Hezbollah arm

By BASSEM MROUE and FAY ABUEL GASIM Associated Press

KFAR TIBNIT, Lebanon (AP) — On the outskirts of this southern Lebanese village, workers in a pickup truck parked at a nature reserve named after a fallen fighter of the militant Hezbollah group. They took two large eucalyptus tree seedlings out of the truck and planted them.

The men are from Green Without Borders, a non-governmental organization that says it aims to protect Lebanon's green areas and plant trees.

But Israel, the United States and some in Lebanon accuse the NGO of being an arm of Hezbollah to hide its military activities. They say the organization has been setting up outposts for the militant group along the border with Israel. Last month, residents in the southern Christian village of Rmaych near the border said they encountered armed men at an outpost of the organization that was blocking them from farmlands.

Green Without Borders denies any link to Hezbollah, which also says it is not connected to the environmental group.

"We are not an arm for anyone," the head of Green Without Borders, Zouher Nahli, told The Associated Press. "We as an environmental association work for all the people and we are not politicized." He spoke at the Bassam Tabaja Nature Reserve, named for a Hezbollah fighter killed in Syria in 2014, where the NGO has planted hundreds of trees.

He said the organization's funding comes from the ministries of environment and agriculture as well as from wealthy Lebanese who care about the environment and municipalities, mainly in the eastern Bekaa Valley and southern Lebanon. He said he is an Agriculture Ministry employee.

Since it began operations in 2009, the group has helped plant about 2 million trees, Nahli said.

Israel and Hezbollah are archenemies and have fought several wars over the past decades, the last of which ended in August 2006. The 34-day conflict killed 1,200 in Lebanon, mostly civilians, and 160 Israelis, mostly soldiers.

The U.N. Security Council resolution that ended that war said the border area should be free of "any armed personnel, assets and weapons," other than those of the government and U.N. peacekeepers. After the war, thousands of Lebanese troops were deployed in the border zone and the U.N. peacekeeping force, known as UNIFIL, which has been present there since 1978, was beefed up.

In a November report, UNIFIL said shipping containers and prefabricated buildings, some of them with visible Green Without Borders markings, had been set up at 16 sites along the border. In several instances, UNIFIL patrols were prevented from nearing the locations, it said.

The Israeli military says Green Without Borders outposts on the border are used by Hezbollah to gather intelligence information.

At a Security Council meeting in September, the U.S. deputy U.N. ambassador, Richard Mills, said the proliferation of the group's outposts along the border obstructs UNIFIL access and "is heightening tensions in the area, further demonstrating that this so-called environmental group is acting on Hezbollah's behalf."

At the meeting, the council unanimously approved a resolution strongly condemning harassment, intimidation, attacks and restrictions on UNIFIL.

Last month, an Irish U.N. peacekeeper was killed and several others were wounded when attackers opened fire on a UNIFIL convoy in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah denied any connection to the attack.

Nahli said he was not aware of any shipping containers or buildings being set up by his organization. "All we do along the border is protect forests and all the claims are illogical and baseless," he said.

Residents in border Shiite villages that support Hezbollah praise the organization. It "is doing good for the environment and planting trees along the border. We are very happy with their work," said Salah Rammal, a shop owner in the border village of Odaisseh.

Residents of the Christian village Rmaych, however, have complained for years about a position set up by Green Without Borders on farmland belonging to village families in a nearby valley. They say the organization did not plant any trees there and actually chopped down trees and cut a 1.5-kilometer (1-mile)

dirt road on their land.

"It is a cover for Hezbollah to have positions. We have no problems with Hezbollah, but it should be outside our lands," said Bassam al-Haj, a Rmaych schoolteacher.

In December, al-Haj and other residents went to the outpost and confronted the men there. Al-Haj said some of the men at the site were masked and armed, and that the outpost included several rooms, a tent and a fence that blocked off village farmland.

The residents and the men argued, he said. One resident who was videoing the encounter was told by one of the men, "We will crush you if you don't delete the photos that you took," al-Haj said.

Days after the confrontation, a Hezbollah official and members of the organization visited the village and met residents at the mayor's office, said Father Najib al-Ameel, a priest from Rmaych who attended the talks.

The mayor and residents asked that the post be removed, he said. Al-Ameel said he told the Hezbollah official, "We will not accept anyone but the Lebanese army to protect us." A few days later, Green Without Borders removed the post and now residents can freely access their land, he said.

Nahli said the media had blown the incident in Rmaych out of proportion and refused to discuss details. In the past, Hezbollah has blamed frictions at Rmaych on members of the Christian Lebanese Forces party, which is among Hezbollah's harshest critics.

When asked if peacekeepers could visit the organization's sites, UNIFIL spokesman Andrea Tenenti said, "We had the possibility, of course, to monitor the whole area of operations and also areas and places where Green Without Borders operated."

He said there has not been "a breach of 1701," the Security Council resolution that ended the 2006 war.

Nahli argued that Green Without Border's work is sorely needed. Over the past few decades, Lebanon has experienced one of the world's worst deforestation rates, which he said has accelerated since the economy collapsed, starting in late 2019, as poor people cut trees to use the wood for heating. The forested area has dropped from 25% of the country's territory to only around 3% now, he said.

"We are trying by all our means, in coordination with all concerned authorities, to prevent more deforestation," he said.

Ship sinks between S. Korea and Japan; 9 remain unconscious

By KIM TONG-HYUNG and MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Ships searching in wind-whipped waters between South Korea and Japan have picked up at least 14 of the 22 crew members from a cargo ship that sank early Wednesday.

South Korean officials said nine of them remain unconscious, but they did not immediately confirm any deaths. They said the crew members would be airlifted to Japan for treatment.

South Korean and Japanese coast guard vessels and aircraft as well as two commercial cargo ships were continuing to search for the eight missing crew members but the efforts were being slowed by strong winds and waves, South Korean officials said.

The Japanese coast guard confirmed the rescue of at least 13 crew members and said five of them — all Chinese nationals — were still alive.

The 6,551-ton Jin Tian sank about three and a half hours after it sent a distress call at around 11:15 p.m. Tuesday in Japan's exclusive economic zone, Japanese coast guard spokesperson Shinya Kitahara said.

The vessel, which was Hong Kong registered and carrying lumber, sank about 160 kilometers (100 miles) southwest of Nagasaki, Japan, and about 150 kilometers (93 miles) south of South Korea's Jeju island.

The captain last communicated with the coast guard through a satellite phone around 2:41 a.m., saying crew members would abandon the ship, minutes before it sank, Jeju island coast guard officials said.

Six crew members were picked up by South Korean coast guard vessels, while a cargo ship picked up five and Japanese aircraft picked up three, according to Jeju's coast guard.

According to South Korean and Japanese officials, 14 crew members are Chinese and eight are from Myanmar. According to maritime transport websites, the vessel left Malaysia's Port Klang on Dec. 3 and

was headed for South Korea's Incheon port.

The ship is owned by Long Bright Shipping Limited, a Hong Kong-registered company that is a subsidiary of Shenzhen Shekou Shipping Transportation Co., Ltd., according to a July 2022 filing made by the parent company to China's National Equities Exchange and Quotations. The filing says the Jin Tian was used as collateral for a loan that was later repaid.

Calls to a number listed for Shenzhen Shekou Shipping Transportation in mainland China went unanswered on Wednesday during the weeklong Lunar New Year holiday.

South Korean officials didn't immediately say whether the nine who were unconscious were likely to survive their injuries if they weren't already dead. They said the five other crew members who were rescued were either conscious when found or regained consciousness after being rescued.

Kitahara said the cause of the ship's sinking was not immediately known and there were no signs that it collided with another vessel. He said the arrivals of Japanese patrol boats and aircraft were delayed by difficult weather following the sinking.

Officials at Jeju's coast guard say a strong wind warning was issued for the area earlier on Wednesday but was later lifted. Winds were blowing at around 16 meters (yards) per second in the area as of 7 a.m., creating waves that were 3 to 4 meters (yards) high.

The Japanese coast guard said the water in the area remained rough and its temperature was around 14 degrees Celsius.

Hawaii man imprisoned for 1991 murder, rape released

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — A judge on Tuesday ordered a man released from prison immediately after his attorneys presented new evidence and argued that he didn't commit the crimes he was convicted of and spent more than 20 years locked up for: the 1991 murder, kidnapping and sexual assault of a woman visiting Hawaii.

Albert "Ian" Schweitzer, who was convicted in 2000 and sentenced to 130 years in prison, should be "released from his shackles immediately," Judge Peter Kubota ruled.

That prompted applause in the Hilo courtroom and hugs for Schweitzer, who was flown to the Big Island for the hearing from the Arizona prison where he was serving his sentence.

"My feelings were all over the place," Schweitzer told the AP during a phone interview in recalling the moment of his release. "Nerves, anxiety, scared."

The justice system is "flawed," he said, calling himself one of many imprisoned for crimes they didn't commit. He earlier told reporters that he was "grateful" for the judge doing the "honorable thing."

A petition filed late Monday outlined additional evidence in one of Hawaii's biggest murders, which unfolded on Christmas Eve in 1991 on the Big Island.

Dana Ireland, 23, was found barely alive in the bushes along a fishing trail in Puna, a remote section of the island. She had been sexually assaulted and beaten, and later died at Hilo Medical Center. The mangled bicycle she had been riding was found several miles away and appeared to have been run into by a vehicle.

The slaying of the blond-haired, blue-eyed visitor from Virginia gained national attention and remained unsolved for years, putting intense pressure on police to find the killer.

"Whenever you have a white, female victim ... it gets a lot more attention than people of color and Native Hawaiians," said Kenneth Lawson, co-director of the Hawaii Innocence Project. "The parents, understandably, were becoming more and more infuriated. ... There was insurmountable pressure to solve this case. And when that happens, mistakes are made. Some intentional and some unintentional."

Ireland's relatives couldn't immediately be reached for comment on the petition and Schweitzer's release. Prosecutors didn't immediately comment on Schweitzer's release.

With help from the Innocence Project in New York, the co-counsel in the case, Lawson's group represented Schweitzer, the last of three Native Hawaiian men convicted in Ireland's death who had remained imprisoned.

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DNA evidence previously submitted in the case belonged to an unknown man and all three of the convicted men were excluded as sources.

New DNA evidence, according to the petition, shows a "Jimmy Z" brand T-shirt found near Ireland and soaked with her blood belonged to the same unknown man, and not to one of the three men, as prosecutors claimed.

Additionally, a new tire tread analysis concluded Schweitzer's Volkswagen Beetle car didn't leave the tire marks at either location where Ireland and her bicycle were found. A forensic odontologist also concluded an injury on her left breast wasn't a bite mark, as previously believed, the petition said.

"At a new trial today, a jury would not convict Mr. Schweitzer of Ms. Ireland's sexual assault and murder," the petition said. "In fact, a prosecutor would likely not even arrest Mr. Schweitzer for this crime."

The likelihood that all three men participated in a sexual attack and left no trace of biological evidence — including a lack of evidence uncovered with advanced forensic testing — is "extraordinarily improbable," the petition said.

In 2019, Schweitzer's attorneys and Hawaii County prosecutors entered into a "conviction integrity agreement" to reinvestigate the case. It was the first time in Hawaii there has been this type of agreement, Lawson said, which is increasingly being used to reexamine questionable convictions and guard against future errors.

"Over the last three years, we have shared information and re-examined forensic evidence. No matter the outcome in these post-conviction proceedings, we remain committed to identifying unknown male #1 and seeking justice for Dana Ireland and her 'ohana," Hawaii County Prosecuting Attorney Kelden Waltjen said in a statement before the ruling, using the Hawaiian word for "family."

However, Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Shannon Kagawa asked the judge to deny the petition, saying the new evidence wouldn't change the outcome of a new trial.

Kubota disagreed, saying that based on the new evidence, a jury would acquit Schweitzer.

Much of the background on the Ireland case is detailed in a document filed with the petition listing facts that defense attorneys and prosecutors have stipulated.

In 1994, police made what they believed to be a major breakthrough. A man facing charges for his role in a cocaine conspiracy contacted police and claimed his half-brother, Frank Pauline Jr., witnessed Ireland's attack, according to the stipulated facts document.

Police interviewed Pauline, who was in his third month of a 10-year sentence for an unrelated sex assault and theft. He claimed brothers Ian and Shawn Schweitzer attacked and killed Ireland. But he was interviewed at least seven times and gave inconsistent accounts each time, eventually incriminating himself, the stipulation document said.

Despite the lack of evidence linking them to the killing, the two Schweitzers and Pauline were indicted in 1997.

At one point the charges were dismissed because all three men were excluded as the source of semen found in Ireland and on a hospital gurney sheet. They were indicted again after another informant claimed Ian Schweitzer confessed to him in jail that Pauline raped and killed Ireland.

Pauline later said he offered details to police about the Ireland murder in order to get drug charges dropped against his half-brother.

In a prison interview with the A&E show "American Justice," Pauline compared his story to the tale of the boy who cried wolf. "Wasn't me," he said in a strong Hawaii Pidgin accent. But when he started telling the truth, he said no one believed him.

Shawn Schweitzer took a deal to plead guilty to manslaughter and kidnapping — and receive credit for about a year served and five years of probation — after seeing juries convict Pauline and his brother in 2000.

In October, Shawn Schweitzer met with prosecutors and recanted. According to the stipulation document, he pleaded guilty because his "parents did not want to risk losing another son and encouraged Shawn Schweitzer to do what he needed to do to come home and not suffer the same fate as his brother."

Shawn Schweitzer "continues to feel immense guilt about agreeing to the confession and entering a guilty plea for a crime he did not commit and falsely implicating his brother," the document said.

A polygraph test in November showed he was telling the truth when he denied any involvement in the murder, the document said.

Pauline was killed in a New Mexico prison by a fellow inmate in 2015.

Being back in Hawaii "tastes great," Schweitzer told the AP.

"The air is good," he said. "The water is good."

Asia travel hotspots quiet as Chinese tourists stay away

By TASSANEE VEJPONGSA and ELAINE KURTENBACH Associated Press

CHIANG MAI, Thailand (AP) — Just a handful of Chinese visitors were posing for photos and basking in the sun this week in the market and plazas near Chiang Mai's ancient Tha Phae Gate, one of many tourist hotspots still waiting for millions of Chinese travelers to return.

The beaches and temples of destinations like Bali and Chiang Mai are the busiest they have been since the pandemic struck three years ago, but they're still relatively quiet.

Still, Chanatip Pansomboon, a soft drinks seller in the Chinatown district of Chiang Mai, a scenic river-side city in northern Thailand, was upbeat. He trusts that with the number of flights from China steadily increasing, it's only a matter of time.

"If a lot of them can return, it will be great as they have buying power," Chanatip said.

The expected resumption of group tours from China is likely to bring far more visitors. For now, it's only individual travelers who can afford to pay, with flights costing more than triple what they normally do, who are venturing abroad.

This includes people like Chen Jiao Jiao, a doctor who was posing for pictures with her children in front of Tha Phae Gate's red brick wall, escaping the damp chill of Shanghai to enjoy Chiang Mai's warm sun and cool breezes on her first overseas vacation since the virus surfaced in China in early 2020.

"After three years of pandemic and a severe winter, now it's opening up," Chen said. "For we Chinese, the first choice is to visit Chiang Mai because the weather is warm and the people here are very warmhearted."

In 2019, 1.2 million Chinese tourists visited Chiang Mai, generating 15 billion baht (\$450 million) of tourism-related income, money sorely missed across the region as countries shut their borders to most travel.

Group tours are due to resume from Feb. 6, but the number of tourists who will come will depend on how many flights are operating, said Suladda Sarutilawan, director of the Tourism Authority of Thailand's Chiang Mai office. She said the hope is for about 500,000-600,000 visitors from China this year.

Of course more Chinese would like to visit, said Li Wei, a businessman from Shanghai, as he visited the ancient wall with his extended family of seven.

"Since visas and flights are not back to normal yet, maybe tourists will come in the next three months," Li said.

Far to the south, on the tropical Indonesian resort island of Bali, the shops and restaurants — some decorated with festive red lanterns and red and gold envelopes used for Lunar New Year cash presents — were still relatively empty.

Bali's first post-pandemic direct flight from China arrived on Sunday, bringing 210 tourists from the southern city of Shenzhen who were greeted with garlands of marigolds and dance performances.

"Before COVID, we worked with travel agents who handled Chinese tourists who brought us guests from China everyday, but since they closed down there are far fewer guests," said Made Sutarma, a seafood restaurant owner in Bali's Jimbaran area.

After three long years of almost no customers, Nyoman Wisana, the general manager of a Chinese restaurant, said he was "very happy" to see Chinese tourists return.

Fewer than 23,000 Chinese tourists visited Bali from January-November of last year and only a quarter of the island's 80 tour operators who mostly handle Chinese clients are operating, said Putu Winastra, chairman of the Bali Association of Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies.

"Actually, we're very concerned about this," he said.

Indonesia is developing programs to attract more Chinese tourists, including exploring starting direct flights from major cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, he said.

Those who did visit this week seemed elated after enduring many months of strict pandemic controls that put international travel beyond the reach of almost all Chinese.

"I'm feeling fantastic since I haven't gone abroad and haven't come to Southeast Asia to spend my holidays for the last three years," said Li Zhaolong, a tourist enjoying a day at the beach. "Bali is a very beautiful place so I'm very happy coming here."

Closer to home, casinos in the gambling enclave of Macao and popular tourist spots in Hong Kong, a former British colony, drew bigger crowds than usual but were still empty compared to the days before COVID-19. Normally, places like Hong Kong's scenic Ocean Park and Wong Tai Sin temple, with its Nine-Dragon Wall, would be packed with visitors from the Chinese mainland.

Leo Guo, who works in the travel industry, brought his wife, daughter, sister and parents for a week filled with visits to Hong Kong Disneyland, Victoria Peak and the skyline-studded harbor, and of course, shopping.

"For mainland Chinese, Hong Kong is a special city different from other Chinese cities," said Lee. "It's a top destination for us."

Further afield in Australia, Sydney-based travel agent Eric Wang said the high cost of travel still appears to be keeping Chinese away even as Chinese airlines increase flights.

Chinese accounted for nearly a third of all tourism spending in Australia before the pandemic, with more than 1.4 million visiting in 2019. Australia, like Japan, the U.S. and some other countries, is requiring visitors coming from China to take COVID-19 tests before departure. But Wang, who works for CBT Holidays, a company specializing in travel to and from China, said he didn't view that as a serious obstacle.

"It's more about the airlines, because flights are not back to normal frequency yet so air fares are like five times more expensive," he said.

Peru protesters tear-gassed after president calls for truce

By DANIEL POLITI Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Thousands of protesters took to the streets of Peru's capital and were met with volleys of tear gas and pellets amid clashes with security forces just hours after President Dina Boluarte called for a "truce" in almost two months of protests.

The antigovernment protest Tuesday was the largest – and most violent — since last Thursday, when large groups of people, many from remote Andean regions, descended on the capital to demand Boluarte's resignation, immediate elections and the dissolution of Congress.

"We can't have a truce when she doesn't tell the truth," Blanca España Mesa, 48, said of Peru's president. Even though her eyes were watering from the tear gas, España Mesa said she was "happy because a lot of people came today. It's as if people have woken up."

Before last week, most of the large antigovernment protests that followed the ouster of President Pedro Castillo took place in remote regions of Peru, largely in the country's south, exposing deep division between residents of the capital and the long-neglected countryside.

The crisis that has sparked Peru's worst political violence in more than two decades began when Castillo, Peru's first leader from a rural Andean background, tried to short-circuit the third impeachment proceeding of his young administration by ordering Congress dissolved on Dec. 7. Lawmakers impeached him instead, the national police arrested him before he could find sanctuary and Boluarte, who was his vice president, was sworn in.

Since then, 56 people have died amid the unrest involving Castillo's supporters, 45 of whom died in direct clashes with security forces, according to Peru's ombudsman. None of the deaths have been in Lima.

On Tuesday, police fired round after round of tear gas as they blocked the passage of protesters, who seemed more organized than before. The smell of tear gas permeated the air and could be felt even a block away as people leaving work suddenly had to cover their faces to try to diminish the sting.

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"Murderers," yelled the protesters, some of whom threw rocks at the police.

Even after most of the protesters had left, police continued firing tear gas to disperse small groups of people in a plaza in front of the country's Supreme Court.

"I have a right to protest in this country," Emiliano Merino, 60, said as he was being treated by volunteer paramedics after pellets grazed each of his arms.

Boluarte had earlier called for a truce and blamed protesters for the political violence that has engulfed the country, claiming in a news conference that illegal miners, drug traffickers and smugglers formed a "paramilitary force" to seek chaos for political gain. She said numerous road blockades across the country and damage to infrastructure have cost the country more than \$1 billion in lost production.

She suggested that the protesters who died with bullet wounds were shot by other demonstrators, claiming investigations will show their injuries are incompatible with the weapons officers carry. And meanwhile, some 90 police officers are hospitalized with bruises, she said: "What about their human rights?" the president asked.

The government has not presented evidence that any of the injured officers were struck by gunfire.

Human rights advocates say they are dismayed by the lack of international outcry from the regional and global community and are calling for condemnation of the state violence unleashed since Castillo's impeachment.

Jennie Dador, executive secretary of Peru's National Human Rights Coordinator, said the lack of international response makes it feel like "we're alone."

"None of the states in the region have done anything concrete," she said.

Boluarte was notably absent from a meeting of regional leaders Tuesday in Argentina's capital, where most avoided mention of the civilian deaths in Peru.

Human rights activists have acknowledged acts of violence by some protesters — including efforts to take over airports and burn police stations — but say the demonstrations have largely been peaceful.

Some of the leaders at the summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States did blame Peru's government for the violence.

Chile's President Gabriel Boric said there's "an urgent need for a change in Peru because the result of the path of violence and repression is unacceptable." Mexico's president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, a staunch supporter of Castillo, demanded an "end to the repression."

During the summit's closing ceremony, Argentina's President Alberto Fernández called for an end to "street violence and institutional violence that has taken the lives of so many people" in Peru.

"The international community has expressed concern, but really I think it could be more forceful," said César Muñoz, associate director of the Americas division at Human Rights Watch.

After some feverish closed-door negotiations in Buenos Aires in the afternoon, the situation in Peru was left out of the summit's closing documents. "Peru is a prickly issue," but pressure from some leaders had led to last-minute negotiations, said an official in Argentina's Foreign Ministry, speaking on condition of anonymity for lack of authority to discuss policy.

"Peru has managed to fly under the radar," said Marina Navarro, executive director of Amnesty International Peru. "Given the gravity of the situation, with this number of people who have died, we don't see as much said about it as there could be."

Investigation faults Liberian agency protecting rainforest

By ED DAVEY Associated Press

An independent investigation into logging in the Liberian rainforest found illegal operations "on a significant scale," with multiple missteps or breaches of law by the government agency charged with protecting those forests, according to a copy of the report obtained by The Associated Press.

The report was completed in 2020 but has never been made public despite activists' calls to publish its findings, which included a recommendation that President George Weah order a special inquiry into what went wrong.

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Four sources familiar with the report said Weah, who appointed the forestry agency's head, has ignored repeated calls from European Union, United States and United Kingdom ambassadors to act in response to the report. The sources spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations without fear of retaliation.

In a phone interview with AP on Tuesday, Weah denied that he had been repeatedly made aware of problems in oversight of the Liberian rainforest. But later in the interview, he appeared to acknowledge getting a letter of concern from EU and U.K. ambassadors and said he had organized a meeting on the issue.

"Whatever letter that came, I organized a meeting," he said.

Liberia is West Africa's most forested country, with rainforests covering some two-thirds of the small nation. It's home to endangered forest elephants, pygmy hippos and western chimpanzees. Since 2000, some 22% of the nation's tree cover has been lost to deforestation, largely due to pressure from logging and small farms.

After the illegal logging of \$3 million in tropical hardwoods in Grand Bassa County by a company called the Renaissance Group Inc. was discovered in 2018, Liberia's Ministry of Justice commissioned a forensic investigation by international experts. The probe included the role played by Liberia's forests agency, the Forestry Development Authority.

Investigators highlighted five illegalities by FDA, which is partially funded by the United States, European Union and United Kingdom. A "major failure" was its management's "persistent tendency" to make "unlawful decisions in assessing the severity of offenses," according to the report.

The FDA's managing director, Mike Doryen, was appointed by Weah, who was a former top professional soccer player before he turned to politics. Under Doryen, the agency authorized the export of illegal timber, "apparently bypassing regulations," investigators found. Extensions to the concession — the right to use the land — were "arbitrary" and "illegal." In one "highly irregular" transaction, payment was made to an unusual FDA bank account, according to the report.

When alarm over the environmental destruction came to light, FDA fined Renaissance just \$5,000, "a small fraction" of what the company gained through the unlawful activity. Although that was increased to \$105,000 after criticism from a Swiss monitor, the correct penalty under a 2006 law aimed at sustaining Liberia's forests would have been a \$1.85 million fine and possible prison sentences, investigators said. Even after Renaissance admitted illegal logging, Doryen approved more export permits, a "gross breach of duty."

Doryen did not respond to AP requests for comment. But a written response from the FDA to the EU last November blamed problems on "challenges of the past," insisting no illegal logging rights had been granted. The FDA has taken corrective actions on several incidents of illicit logging, it said, and two FDA technical managers were fired for complacency.

The report urged the launch of a special presidential committee so FDA management could "explain their actions." There is no evidence such a committee has been launched, and it was not in a list of presidential committees active in the last five years as of July 2022. Both Weah and his press secretary, Smith Toby, declined to say whether one had been created since then.

Four official sources close to the case told The AP that Liberia has brushed off diplomatic pressure over more than 18 months to address problems in rainforest oversight. In July 2021, EU and U.K. ambassadors wrote a letter to Liberia's Minister for Presidential Affairs with demands including prosecution of offenders working for the company or the government and a ban on Renaissance. There was no reply until March 2022 and those actions were not taken. The EU's letter also called for the restoration of the rule of law in Liberia's forestry sector.

The official sources said concerns were raised in person with Weah by an EU commissioner last February during an African Union summit, and again in September at a Monrovia meeting attended by several diplomats. In each case, Weah said he knew nothing about the investigation, the official sources said.

Weah told The AP that claims he'd repeatedly been made aware of donor countries' concerns were

“nonsense.”

Asked why Doryen was still heading the FDA despite the report’s findings, he said, “If someone has offended, the law has to take its course.”

In an interview, Laurent Delahousse, the EU’s ambassador to Liberia, declined to criticize Weah directly. But he said the EU wants assurances that illegal logging will end, and that government bodies will operate to the highest ethical and legal standards.

“It’s a condition for us to be able to invest European taxpayer money into this sector,” Delahousse said.

Gemma Tillack, of the nonprofit Rainforest Action Network, said by email such illegal logging, and lax oversight, was “all too common” and “sadly tolerated” by governments.

More investment is needed to tackle such malfeasance, which is driving destruction of precious rainforests, she said.

Elon Musk defiantly defends himself in Tesla tweet trial

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Elon Musk returned to federal court to defend himself against a class-action lawsuit that alleges he misled Tesla shareholders with a tweet about an aborted buyout that the billionaire defiantly insisted Tuesday he could have pulled off, had he wanted.

Musk spent roughly three more hours on the stand during his third day of testimony before being excused by U.S. District Judge Edward Chen. It’s unlikely Musk, 51, will be summoned back to the witness stand during a civil trial expected to be turned over to a nine-person jury in early February.

Musk, who also owns Twitter while continuing to run Tesla, spent much of Tuesday depicting himself, while being questioned by his own attorney, Alex Spiro, as an impeccably trustworthy business leader capable of raising as much money as he needs to pursue his visions. He testily sparred with a shareholder lawyer, Nicholas Porritt, who had raised his ire earlier in the trial.

At two separate junctures Tuesday under Spiro’s gentle prodding, Musk left no doubt about his contempt for Porritt with a remark expressing doubt that the lawyer was looking out for the best interests of Tesla shareholders. The remarks drew a quick rebuke from the judge and were stricken from the record. “It’s inappropriate,” Chen at one point admonished Musk.

When he was being challenged by Porritt, Musk purposefully diverted his gaze from the lawyer and delivered his explanations while looking directly at the jurors sitting a few feet to his right. In another instance, Musk asserted, without elaborating, that a question from Porritt wondering if he had ever caused investors to suffer losses contained “falsehoods.”

On the flip side, Spiro at one point mistakenly addressed Musk as “your honor” while asking the billionaire how much money he had made for investors during his career. The slipup elicited a moment of levity in the San Francisco courtroom filled with media and other spectators in attendance to listen to Musk, who has become even more famous since completing his \$44 billion purchase of Twitter in October.

The current trial hinges on whether a pair of tweets Musk posted on Aug. 7, 2018, damaged Tesla shareholders during a 10-day period leading up to his admission that the buyout he had envisioned wasn’t going to happen. The statements resulted in Musk and Tesla to reach the \$40 million settlement without acknowledging any wrongdoing.

In the first of the 2018 tweets, Musk stated “funding secured” for what would have been a \$72 billion — or \$420 per share — buyout of Tesla at a time when the electric automaker was still grappling with production problems and was worth far less than it is now. Musk followed up a few hours later with another tweet suggesting a deal was imminent.

After those tweets, Musk declared Tesla would remain publicly a few weeks later. A month after that, Musk and Tesla reached a \$40 million settlement with securities regulators who had alleged the tweets were misleading.

Musk has previously contended he entered into the settlement under duress and maintained he never wavered in his belief that he had the money for a deal.

Musk spent most of Tuesday trying to persuade the jurors that there was nothing devious about the two tweets indicating he had lined up the money to take Tesla private as the electric automaker was struggling with production problems and was worth far less than it is now. The judge has already declared the jurors can consider those two tweets to be false, leaving them to decide whether Musk deliberately deceived investors and whether his statements saddled them with losses.

While being steered by Spiro, Musk told jurors he had stated only that he was "considering" a Tesla buyout but never promised a deal would get done. But, Musk said, he thought it important to get the word out to investors that Tesla might be poised to end its eight-year run as a publicly held company.

"I had no ill motive," Musk said. "My intent was to do the right thing for all shareholders."

While being grilled the day before by Porritt, Musk at times was combative, indignant and exasperated. Through it all, Musk has insisted he locked up financial backing for what would have been a \$72 billion buyout of Tesla during 2018 meetings with representatives from Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, although no specific funding amount or price was discussed.

When presented with texts and email indicating that a representative for the Saudi fund had never pledged the money for a full buyout of Tesla, Musk contended it was nothing more than the words of someone trying to backpedal from a previous pledge made in private conversations.

Not long after Porritt resumed his questioning Tuesday, Musk once again scoffed at the notion that his belief that he had the Saudi funding's financial backing wasn't enough for him to tweet about a potential Tesla buyout.

"We are talking about the kingdom of Saudi Arabia," Musk testified. "They can buy Tesla several times over. This was not a large amount of money for them."

Musk also reiterated earlier testimony that he could finance a Tesla buyout by sharing some of his holdings in SpaceX, a privately held maker of rocket ships that he also started. That would be similar to what he did in the Twitter purchase, which led him to sell about \$23 billion of his Tesla stock.

That's something that Musk said Tuesday that he didn't want to do, but that it showed he had the wherewithal to pull together purchases for expensive deals. Musk's ownership of Twitter also has proved unpopular with Tesla shareholders who worry about him being distracted as the automaker faces more competition. Tesla's stock has lost about one-third of its value since Musk took over Twitter.

Despite that downturn, the stock is still worth about seven times more than at the time of Musk's 2018 tweets, after adjusting for two splits that have since occurred. That opened the door for Musk to remind jurors Tuesday that any investor who held Tesla shares in August 2018 would have done "extremely well," had they just held on to the stock.

"It would have been the best investment in the stock market," Musk said.

Suspect in shootings at Half Moon Bay farms was employee

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ and HAVEN DALEY Associated Press

HALF MOON BAY, Calif. (AP) — A farmworker killed seven people in back-to-back shootings in a case of "workplace violence" at two Northern California mushroom farms, officials said Tuesday as the state mourned its third mass killing in just over a week.

Chunli Zhao, 66, was booked on suspicion of seven counts of murder and one count of attempted murder, jail records showed. He was being held without bail and scheduled for a Wednesday court appearance.

Authorities believe Zhao acted alone when he entered a mushroom farm in Half Moon Bay, California, and opened fire, killing four and leaving another seriously wounded, San Mateo County Sheriff's officials said. He then drove to another nearby farm where he had previously worked, and killed another three people, said Eamonn Allen, a sheriff's spokesman.

Officials have not yet released the names of the five men and two women who died, nor the one man who was injured. Some were Asian and others were Hispanic, and some were migrant workers.

Servando Martinez Jimenez said his brother Marciano Martinez Jimenez, who was a delivery person and manager at one of the farms, was among those killed. Servando Martinez Jimenez said his brother never

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mentioned Zhao or said anything about problems with other workers.

"He was a good person. He was polite and friendly with everyone. He never had any problems with anyone. I don't understand why all this happened," Martinez Jimenez said in Spanish outside his Half Moon Bay home.

Marciano Martinez Jimenez, 50, had lived in the United States for 28 years after arriving from the Mexican state of Oaxaca. Servando Martinez Jimenez said he is working with the Mexican consulate to get his brother's body home.

Allen declined to answer questions about whether Zhao had any previous criminal history, saying, "there were no specific indicators that would have led us to believe he was capable of something like this."

But would not have been Zhao's first fit of workplace rage, the San Francisco Chronicle reported. In 2013 Zhao was accused of threatening to split a coworker's head open with a knife and separately tried to suffocate the man with a pillow, the Chronicle reported, based on court documents.

The two were roommates and worked at a restaurant at the time, and the man, identified as Jingjiu Wang, filed a temporary restraining order against Zhao that was granted but is no longer in effect. Wang could not be immediately reached, the Chronicle reported.

The sheriff's office identified the first shooting location as Mountain Mushroom Farm. But California Terra Garden took over the business last year, company spokesperson David Oates said. He did not know how long Zhao worked there, adding that he was one of 35 employees who had stayed on when ownership changed. Oates declined to provide details of the four slain workers.

The site of the second shooting was nearby Concord Farms. Owner Aaron Tung said in a statement that the farm was waiting for more information before it could comment.

Half Moon Bay is a small, laid-back, coastal and agricultural city about 30 miles (50 kilometers) south of San Francisco. Its sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean make it a popular spot for hikers and tourists, who flock there to surf and for an annual giant pumpkin festival.

Several farmworkers and their families lived in mobile homes at the the mushroom farm where the four died and had been relocated to hotels and offered mental health and other support after the shootings, said Half Moon Bay Vice Mayor Joaquin Jimenez. He said the farm employs 20 to 30 Chinese and Latino workers, some of them in the country without legal permission.

"There's a lot of fear," said Jimenez, who is also the farmworker program director for the Latino advocacy group ALAS. "So for them to come forward to ask for help is going to be very difficult,"

Thousands of farmworkers are employed in the broader San Mateo County, an area known for growing mostly flowers, peas, Brussels sprouts and fava beans. There are a few small mushroom growers in the area, said BJ Burns, president of the San Mateo County Farm Bureau.

California was still reeling from an attack in Monterey Park, just outside Los Angeles, that killed 11 and cast a shadow over celebrations of Lunar New Year, an important holiday for many Asian American communities. Authorities are still seeking a motive for the Saturday shooting.

"For the second time in recent days, California communities are mourning the loss of loved ones in a senseless act of gun violence," President Joe Biden said Tuesday. "Even as we await further details on these shootings, we know the scourge of gun violence across America requires stronger action."

The new year has brought six mass killings in the U.S. in fewer than three weeks, accounting for 39 deaths. Three have occurred in California since Jan. 16, according to a database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University. The database tracks every mass killing — defined as four dead, not including the offender — in the U.S. since 2006.

At an afternoon news conference, Gov. Gavin Newsom said he met with Chinese farmworkers who heard the gunshots. Speaking through a translator, they said it was hard to comprehend what was happening, he said.

"They had never heard a sound like that," he said.

The shooting was likely to leave some in the community fearful and searching for other work, he said.

"The trauma and the damage, the devastation, is felt for generations in some cases, communities being

torn asunder no one feeling safe," Newsom said.

The shootings in Half Moon Bay and Monterey Park followed the killing of a teenage mother, her baby and six others at a home in California's Central Valley on Jan. 16. Officials discussing the investigation mentioned a possible gang link to the killings.

Scott Rolen elected to Baseball Hall of Fame

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Scott Rolen sat with his son in the parking lot outside Indiana's Bloomington South High School in 2018, waiting to coach grade schoolers in basketball and listening on the radio for results of his first appearance on baseball's Hall of Fame ballot.

"Dad, I think you're getting in," Rolen recalled 10-year-old Finn predicting.

Rolen received 10.2% of the vote, double the 5% minimum to remain on the ballot the following year but far short of the 75% needed for election.

"Did we win?" dad remembered his son asking. "I said, 'Oh, we won. Yes, we won.'"

Rolen came a long way in a few short years and was elected to the Hall on his sixth try Tuesday, the slick-fielding third baseman achieving baseball's highest honor with five votes to spare.

A seven-time All-Star and eight-time Gold Glove winner, Rolen was picked on 297 of 389 ballots cast by the Baseball Writers' Association of America for 76.3%. That made his modest 10.2% debut the lowest first-ballot percentage of a player later elected; the previous mark had been 17% in 1970 by Duke Snider, who was voted in with 86.5% in 1980.

"There was actually never a point in my life that I thought I was going to be a Hall of Fame baseball player," Rolen said. "Never did I think I was going to get drafted. Never did I think I was going to play in the major leagues. Never going to be whatever."

Rolen will join Fred McGriff, elected last month by the contemporary baseball era committee, as the Class of 2023 inducted July 23 in Cooperstown.

First baseman Todd Helton was second with 281 votes (72.2%) and reliever Billy Wagner third with 265 (68.1%). Helton moved up from 52% and can have five more appearances on the ballot, while Wagner rose from 51% and has two additional chances.

Rolen batted .281 with 316 homers and 1,287 RBIs for Philadelphia (1996-2002), St. Louis (2002-07), Toronto (2008-09) and Cincinnati (2009-12). He was a unanimous pick as the 1997 NL Rookie of the Year and hit .421 as the Cardinals won the 2006 World Series.

His Hall vote rose steadily to 17.2% in 2019, 35.3% in 2020, 52.9% in 2021 and 63.2% last year. He didn't need to follow Ryan Thibodaux's Hall of Fame Ballot Tracker this year.

"My phone would blow up about every day from my son and my buddies and everybody telling me where it was," Rolen said.

He waited Tuesday at home in Bloomington — he was runner-up for Indiana's Mr. Basketball in 1993 — with his parents, wife, son, daughter, brother and his brother's family.

"When the phone call came and I saw baseball Hall of Fame on my phone," Rolen said, "you kind of look around, like, that actually did just happen."

They all cried, and a few minutes later Finn asked him to go out and toss a baseball.

"It's 30 degrees here. It's going to snow about 12 inches tomorrow, and my son and I were in the driveway playing catch," Rolen said.

Then they walked a short distance to his brother's house to celebrate.

"I promised everybody great steaks no matter what, and I had to turn the tongs over," Rolen said. "I was normally going to grill for everybody but now my brother-in-law's grilling."

Rolen played shortstop, second base, third, right field, center, left and pitcher at Jasper High School before settling at third in his sophomore or junior year. He will be the 18th third baseman in the Hall, the fewest of any position.

"Most of the guys who moved to third probably came up as shortstops," said Chipper Jones, the previous third baseman elected, in 2018. "You kind of outgrow the shortstop position as you get older and

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develop more.”

Rolen’s five-vote margin tied for the 12th-smallest among players elected by the writers and his vote percentage was the 10th lowest.

Andruw Jones moved from 41.1% to 58.1%, Gary Sheffield from 40.6% to 55% in his next-to-last possible appearance and Jeff Kent from 32.7% to 46.5% in his final year. Kent can be considered by the contemporary baseball era committee in future years.

Players tainted by drug suspensions again lagged. Alex Rodriguez was at 35.7%, up from 34.3%, and Manny Ramirez at 33.2%, up from 28.9%.

Eight blank ballots were submitted by writers, eligible to vote after 10 consecutive years of membership in the BBWAA.

Among 14 players appearing on the ballot for the first time, just two reached the 5% threshold to remain under consideration next year. Carlos Beltrán received 181 votes (46.5%), his total likely impacted by his role in the Houston Astros cheating scandal en route to the 2017 World Series title.

Relief pitcher Francisco Rodríguez got 42 votes (10.8%).

Next year’s first-time eligibles include Adrián Beltré, Joe Mauer, Chase Utley, David Wright, José Bautista and Matt Holliday.

Rolen smiled widely on a Zoom call, speaking while wearing an “E5” cap, the out-of-character name of his foundation that assists children and families dealing with illness, hardship or special needs.

“A little tightness in the chest all day,” he said. “It was, wow, this is real.”

In reversal, US poised to approve Abrams tanks for Ukraine

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In what would be a reversal, the Biden administration is poised to approve sending M1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine, U.S. officials said Tuesday, as international reluctance to send tanks to the battlefield against the Russians begins to erode. A decision to send a bit more than 30 tanks could be announced as soon as Wednesday, though it could take months for the tanks to be delivered.

U.S. officials said details are still being worked out. One official said the tanks would be bought under an upcoming Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative package, which provides longer-range funding for weapons and equipment to be purchased from commercial vendors.

The U.S. announcement is expected in coordination with an announcement by Germany that it will approve Poland’s request to transfer German-made Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine, according to one official. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because the decision has not yet been made public.

By agreeing to send the Abrams at an as-yet unspecified time under the assistance initiative, the administration is able to meet German Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s demand for an American commitment without having to send the tanks immediately.

Much of the aid sent so far in the 11-month-old war has been through a separate program drawing on Pentagon stocks to get weapons more quickly to Ukraine. But even under that program, it would take months to get tanks to Ukraine and to get Ukrainian forces trained on them. It wasn’t clear Tuesday how soon the U.S. will start training Ukrainian troops on the Abrams and roughly how soon they can get to the battlefield.

Until now, the U.S. has resisted providing its own M1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine, citing extensive and complex maintenance and logistical challenges with the high-tech vehicles. Washington believes it would be more productive to send German Leopards since many allies have them and Ukrainian troops would need less training than on the more difficult Abrams.

Just last week, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl told reporters that the Abrams is a complicated, expensive, difficult to maintain and hard to train on piece of equipment. One thing Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has been very focused on, he said, “is that we should not be providing the Ukrainians systems they can’t repair, they can’t sustain, and that they, over the long term, can’t afford, because it’s not helpful.”

A U.S. official familiar with White House thinking said the administration’s initial hesitancy was based

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on concerns about the requisite training and the sustainment of the tanks. The official added that the administration believes that such plans are now in place, but it could take time to implement them.

At the Pentagon, spokesman Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder said he had nothing to announce on any U.S. decision regarding Abrams tanks. But he said, "anytime that we've provided Ukraine with a type of system, we've provided the training and sustainment capabilities with that."

The administration's reversal comes just days after a coalition of more than 50 senior defense officials from Europe and beyond met in Germany to discuss Ukraine's war needs, and battle tanks were a prime topic.

Ukrainian leaders have been urgently requesting tanks, but Germany had resisted mounting pressure either to supply its own tanks or clear the way for other countries, such as Poland, to send the German-made tanks from their own stocks. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the deployment of Western tanks would trigger "unambiguously negative" consequences.

Defense leaders from the countries that have Leopard 2 tanks met with the Germans during the Friday conference at Ramstein Air Base in an effort to hammer out an agreement.

On Sunday, Berlin indicated it wouldn't stand in the way if other countries wanted to send the Leopard 2 tanks to Kyiv. Germany needs to agree for the tanks to be given to Ukraine, which is not a member of NATO.

U.S. and German officials have given mixed signals about whether the U.S. and German decisions are linked, and whether Berlin was hesitant to send its tanks unless the U.S. sent Abrams.

Polish Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak said Tuesday that Poland has officially requested permission from Germany to transfer its Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine.

German officials confirmed to the dpa news agency they had received the application and said it would be assessed "with due urgency." German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said Sunday that Berlin wouldn't seek to stop Poland from providing the high-tech armor to Kyiv.

German officials declined to comment on the reports of a tank deal. The news weekly Der Spiegel reported Tuesday, without citing a source, that Germany will provide Ukraine with at least one company of Leopard 2 tanks from its own army's stock. A company comprises 15 tanks.

Scholz is due to deliver an address to parliament Wednesday and field questions from lawmakers, many of whom have been pressing the government to join allies in providing the tanks to Ukraine.

Lawmakers in Congress have also been pushing the U.S. to beef up its aid to Ukraine.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said Tuesday "it's time, past time" for the Biden administration and allies to send more military aid to Ukraine, and that the U.S. must provide more tanks and weapons to help Ukraine "win this war."

"It's time, past time, for the Biden administration and our allies to get serious about helping Ukraine finish the job and retake their country."

The likely plans to send the Abrams were first reported by The Wall Street Journal.

'When does this stop?' For 2023, an alarmingly bloody start

By MARYCLAIRE DALE Associated Press

In a country with more guns than people — and one emerging from three years of isolation, stress and infighting amid the pandemic — Americans are beginning 2023 with a steady barrage of mass slaughter.

Eleven people killed as they welcomed the Lunar New Year at a dance hall popular with older Asian Americans. A teen mother and her baby shot in the head in an attack that killed five generations. A 6-year-old shooting his first-grade teacher in the classroom. The list goes on.

"We've been through so much in these past few years, and to continue to see case after case of mass violence in the media is just overwhelming," said Apryl Alexander, an associate professor of public health at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. "When does this stop?"

The carnage over eight days in California, where the dance hall victims Saturday night were among two dozen people killed in three recent attacks, brought painful reminders to families of last year's school

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shooting in Uvalde, Texas. On Tuesday, several Uvalde families and parents traveled more than three hours to their state's Capitol to renew calls for tighter gun laws, even if they have little chance of winning over the Republican-controlled Legislature.

In 2022, the United States marked its first deadly gun rampage of the year on Jan. 23 — a year ago Monday. By that same date this year, six mass killings have claimed 39 lives, according to a database of mass killings maintained by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University.

"People are dying every day. This shouldn't be happening," said Veronica Mata, whose 10-year-old daughter Tess was among the 19 children and two teachers slain in Uvalde. "If it takes us coming every week, then we are going to do it until we see something change."

Americans have come to endure mass shootings in churches and grocery stores, at concerts and office parks, and inside the homes of friends and neighbors. The violence is blamed on hatred toward other communities, grievances within a group, secrets within families and bitterness among colleagues. But it often ends when a man with a grudge grabs a gun.

Sometimes, it's not clear whether a grudge is even part of the equation.

"There was no apparent conflict between the parties. The male just walked in and started shooting," Yakima Police Chief Matt Murray said after three people were shot dead at a Circle K convenience store in Washington state early Tuesday, adding to the national grief.

Gun sales in the U.S. hit historic highs as the coronavirus pandemic took hold, the economy stalled and people took to the streets to protest police brutality and racial injustice. Nearly 23 million firearms were sold in 2020, according to industry analysts. The surge largely continued the following year, with sales spiking 75% the same month that a mob attacked the U.S. Capitol, before dipping to about 16 million this year.

Experts believe there are 393 million guns in private hands across the United States, which in 2022 was a country of 333 million people.

Some Americans say they don't feel safe anywhere. A third avoid certain places as a result, according to the American Psychological Association, whose most recent study shows that the majority of Americans feel stressed.

Yet there seems little appetite to address some of the potential solutions, such as teaching conflict resolution skills in schools or re-examining our societal views of masculinity, according to Alexander.

"Socioemotional learning is just teaching kids how to identify their feelings, how to express themselves, how to navigate conflict — and why is there a ban on that, especially during this particular moment?" she asked, referring to efforts to impose state and local bans on school curricula.

"These kids are going to turn into adults," Alexander said. "If they don't know how to handle conflict, we're going to see unfortunate events like this happen."

The bloodshed began Jan. 4, when a Utah man, investigated but never charged over a 2020 child abuse complaint, shot and killed his wife, her mother and their five children before killing himself.

The database shows 2,793 people have lost their lives in mass killings — those that involve four or more victims, excluding the killer — since 2006. The recent wave of violence follows a spike in 2022, when the U.S. recorded 42 mass killings, the second highest tally in that time span.

Even gun violence that takes fewer lives, or none at all, can shock the conscience.

That was the case in Virginia this month when the 6-year-old shot and wounded his teacher in front of his classmates. Newport News Mayor Phillip Jones said he could barely wrap his head around it. And two teenage students were killed Monday in a school shooting in Iowa.

In the Saturday night shooting in Monterey Park, 11 people died and nine others were injured when a 72-year-old man opened fire at the Star Ballroom Dance Studio just hours after tens of thousands of revelers filled the streets nearby for Lunar New Year festivities. The gunman took his own life as police approached his van the next day.

Before people across the state could process that horror, seven farmworkers were shot and killed near San Francisco, in the picturesque coastal community of Half Moon Bay. A 66-year-old coworker is in custody.

"In the end, there are simply too many guns in this country. And there has to be a change. This is not an

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acceptable way for a modern society to live and conduct its affairs," San Mateo County Board of Supervisors President Dave Pine said Monday, in the wake of the mushroom farm shootings. "Our hearts are broken."

For some, the violence is linked to an alienating period in U.S. history that has isolated people from each other and chipped away at the ability to cope with life's travails.

"The pandemic has amplified and accelerated so many dangerous trends. We are experiencing a social recession that's literally bankrupting our souls," said the Rev. Jonathan Lee Walton, the president of Princeton Theological Seminary. He noted the decline in religious and civic participation.

"We are normalizing diseases of despair like loneliness, addiction, and gun violence," Walton said. "Social media, Zoom church, remote work, and virtual reality may be 'convenient,' but they are morally anemic substitutes for human connection."

'Everything Everywhere' tops Oscar nominations with 11

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The multiverse-skipping sci-fi indie hit "Everything Everywhere All at Once" led nominations to the 95th Academy Awards as Hollywood heaped honors on big-screen spectacles like "Top Gun: Maverick" and "Avatar: The Way of Water" a year after a streaming service won best picture for the first time.

Daniel Scheinert and Daniel Kwan's "Everything Everywhere All at Once" landed a leading 11 nominations on Tuesday, including nods for Michelle Yeoh and comeback kid Ke Huy Quan, the former child star of "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom." Released back in March, the A24 film has proven an unlikely Oscar heavyweight against the expectations of even its makers. Yeoh became the first Asian actor nominated for best actress.

"Even just to be nominated means validation, love, from your peers," said an "overwhelmed" Yeoh speaking by phone from London. "What it means for the rest of the Asians around the world, not just in America but globally, is to say we have a seat at the table. We finally have a seat at the table. We are being recognized and being seen."

The 10 movies up for best picture are: "Everything Everywhere All at Once," "The Banshees of Inisherin," "The Fabelmans," "Tár," "Top Gun: Maverick," "Avatar: The Way of Water," "Elvis," "All Quiet on the Western Front," "Women Talking" and "Triangle of Sadness."

Nominations were announced Tuesday from the academy's Samuel Goldwyn Theater in Beverly Hills, California, by Riz Ahmed and Allison Williams. If last year's Oscars were dominated by streaming — Apple TV+'s "CODA" won best picture and Netflix landed a leading 27 nominations — movies that drew moviegoers to multiplexes after two years of pandemic make up many of this year's top contenders.

For the first time, two sequels — "Top Gun: Maverick" and "Avatar: The Way of Water" — were nominated for best picture. The two films together account for some \$3.5 billion in box office. Tom Cruise missed out on an acting nomination, but "Top Gun: Maverick" — often credited with bringing many moviegoers back to theaters — walked away with seven nominations, including best sound, best visual effects and best song for Lada Gaga's "Hold My Hand." Ryan Coogler's "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever," made in the wake of Chadwick Boseman's death, also scored five nominations, including the first acting nod for a performance in a Marvel movie: Angela Bassett, the likely favorite to win best supporting actress.

Nine of the 10 best-picture nominees were theatrical releases — something cheered by "Tár" filmmaker Todd Field, nominated for direction and screenplay. Field noted the theatrical marketplace — especially the specialty business — is still in recovery mode.

"I hope that the faith and the enthusiasm that's been paid for theatrical films continues," Field said by phone Tuesday from Los Angeles.

Going by earlier guild nominations, Martin McDonagh's Ireland-set dark comedy "The Banshees of Inisherin" may be the stiffest competition for "Everything Everywhere All at Once" at the Oscars. The Searchlight Pictures film landed nine nominations Tuesday, including nods for McDonagh's directing and screenplay, and a quartet of acting nominations: Colin Farrell for best actor, Kerry Condon for best sup-

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porting actress and both Brendan Gleeson and Barry Keoghan for best supporting actor.

Baz Luhrmann's bedazzled biopic "Elvis" — another summer box-office hit, with \$287.3 million worldwide — came away with eight nominations, including a best actor nod for star Austin Butler and nominations for its costumes, sound and production design.

Though Steven Spielberg's "The Fabelmans" struggled to catch on with audiences, the director's autobiographical coming-of-age tale landed Spielberg his 20th Oscar nomination and ninth nod for best-director. John Williams, his longtime composer, extended his record for the most Oscar nominations for a living person, and, at 90, became the oldest nominee ever. Williams' 53rd nominations trails only Walt Disney's 59.

In the ultra-competitive best actress race, "Fabelmans" star Michelle Williams was nominated after being passed over by the Screen Actors Guild. The other nominees for best actress are: Ana de Armas, "Blonde"; Cate Blanchett, "Tár" and Andrea Riseborough, who emerged as a late contender after a host of celebrities rallied around her performance as an alcoholic West Texas mother in the little-seen "To Leslie." Notably left out of the category were Viola Davis ("Woman King") and Danielle Deadwyler ("Till").

Only one streaming title broke into the best picture field: The German WWI film "All Quiet on the Western Front." Though Netflix for the first time in years lacks a possible best picture frontrunner, "All Quiet on the Western Front" landed a better-than-expected nine nominations, including best international film and best adapted screenplay. The streaming service also has the top animated film contender in "Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio," which was nominated for best animated feature alongside "Marcel the Shell With Shoes On," "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish," "The Sea Beast" and "Turning Red."

Along with Butler and Farrell, the best actor nominees are: Brendan Fraser, hailed for his comeback performance as an overweight shut-in in "The Whale," Bill Nighy for "Living" and, in a surprise for one of the most critically lauded films of the year, Paul Mescal, for Charlotte Wells' father-daughter tale "Aftersun."

Brian Tyree Henry landed his first Oscar nomination for his supporting turn in "Causeway," in which he starred opposite Jennifer Lawrence. (Said Tyree in a statement: "To the random man in the elevator who saw me scream at the news, thank you for hugging me and not freaking out!!!!!!") In the supporting actress category, two "Everything Everywhere All at Once" actors — Jamie Lee Curtis and Stephanie Hsu — were nominated along with Hong Chau ("The Whale"), Condon and Bassett.

Quan and Chau — both the children of Vietnam War refugees — and the California-born Hsu and the Malaysia-born Yeoh together make it the most acting nominations ever for Asian or Asian American actors. (Some count Merle Oberon, of Sri Lankan and Welsh heritage, the first Asian best actress nominee, in 1936, though she hid her ancestry.)

For Quan, a much-loved face of the 1980s from "Goonies" and "Temple of Doom," the nomination was a once-unfathomable pinnacle. After his acting opportunities dried up, Quan quit acting for years before being offered the part of Waymond. Speaking by phone from Los Angeles, Quan remembered having dreams as a child of attending the Academy Awards.

"It just seemed so far-fetched. Especially when I had to step away from acting for so many years, that dream seemed like it was dead," Quan said. "My whole thing was: I just wanted a job."

After the best director category saw back-to-back landmark wins for female filmmakers — Chloé Zhao ("Nomadland") in 2021, Jane Campion ("The Power of the Dog") last year — no women were nominated for best director. But in the best picture group, one of the up-for-grabs final slots went to Sarah Polley's "Women Talking," a parable of sexual assault and justice. Polley was also nominated for best adapted screenplay.

In the end, the Oscar push for the Indian action sensation "RRR" landed a sole nomination: best song for M.M. Keeravaani's "Naatu Naatu." The Palme d'Or-winning satire from Swedish director Ruben Östlund, "Triangle of Sadness," scored three big nominations, for best picture, best director and best original screenplay.

Along with "All Quiet on the Western Front," the nominees for best international film are: "Argentina, 1985" (Argentina); "Close" (Belgium); "EO" (Poland); "The Quiet Girl" (a first for Ireland). The category has been criticized for allowing submissions to be chosen by each country's government, a process that

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disadvantages filmmakers working in oppressive regimes. Iranian director Jafar Panahi, whose "No Bears" was hailed as one of 2022's best, was imprisoned earlier this year.

Current politics were also front and center in the documentary category. Nominees include "Navalny," an up-close portrait of the jailed Russian dissident Alexei Navalny; "A House Made of Splinters," about a Ukrainian halfway house; and Laura Poitras' "All the Beauty and the Bloodshed," about Nan Goldin's opioid activism. They were joined by the volcanologist romance "Fire of Love" and Shaunak Sen's "All That Breathes," about three men's efforts to save New Delhi's pollution-ravaged birds of prey.

The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts & Sciences will surely celebrate a best-picture field populated with blockbusters; according to data firm Comscore, their collective domestic box office of \$1.574 billion is the most ever at the time of nominations. Last year's awards had been looking like a comeback edition before "the slap" came to define the ceremony. In the aftermath, the academy banned Will Smith from attending for the next 10 years. Though he could have still been nominated, Smith's performance as a runaway slave in "Emancipation" didn't catch on with voters.

But larger concerns are swirling around the movie business. Last year saw flashes of triumphant resurrection for theaters, like the success of "Top Gun: Maverick," but less stellar results for most dramas. Partially due to an inconsistent stream of major releases, ticket sales for the year recovered only about 70% of pre-pandemic business. Stocks for streaming services, meanwhile have plunged as Wall Street looked to streaming services to earn profits, not just add subscribers.

Last year's Oscar broadcast drew 16.6 million viewers, according to Nielsen, up from the record-low audience of 10.5 million for the pandemic-marred 2021 telecast. This year, ABC is bringing back Jimmy Kimmel to host the March 12 ceremony, one that will surely be seen as a return to the site of the slap.

Rights groups dismayed at lack of criticism for Peru abuses

By DANIEL POLITI Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — More than 50 people have died in ongoing street protests in the weeks since Peru's elected leader was jailed, mostly demonstrators at the hands of police officers, but only a few international voices of concern have emerged.

The relative silence of much of the regional and global community has dismayed human rights advocates, who are calling for condemnation of the state violence unleashed since Pedro Castillo was impeached and imprisoned for trying to dissolve Congress.

Tuesday was another day of fury in Peru's capital as thousands of protesters took to downtown Lima and were almost immediately met with volleys of tear gas amid clashes with security forces that often blocked their passage. It was the largest antigovernment protest since Thursday, when large groups of people, many from remote Andean regions, descended on the capital to demand Boluarte's resignation, immediate elections and the dissolution of Congress.

Previously, most of the large antigovernment protests were in remote regions of Peru, exposing deep divisions between residents of the capital and the long-neglected countryside.

On Tuesday, police often fired round after round of tear gas as the protesters seemed more organized than before and small groups of people tossed canisters back at police although that was not enough to stop their advance. The smell of tear gas permeated the air.

Jennie Dador, executive secretary of Peru's National Human Rights Coordinator, said the lack of international response makes it feel like "we're alone."

"None of the states in the region have done anything concrete," she said.

Peru's new President Dina Boluarte was notably absent from a meeting of regional leaders Tuesday in Argentina's capital, where most avoided mention of the civilian deaths in Peru.

In a defiant news conference on Tuesday, Boluarte called for a "national truce." She blamed protesters for the political violence that has engulfed the country, claiming illegal miners, drug traffickers and smugglers formed a "paramilitary force" to seek chaos for political gain. She said numerous road blockades across the country and damage to infrastructure have cost the country more than \$1 billion in lost production.

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She suggested that the protesters who died with bullet wounds were shot by other demonstrators, claiming investigations will show their injuries are incompatible with the weapons officers carry. And meanwhile, some 90 police officers are hospitalized with bruises, she said: "What about their human rights?" the president asked.

The government has not presented evidence that any of the injured officers were struck by gunfire.

Human rights activists have acknowledged acts of violence by some protesters — including efforts to take over airports and burn police stations — but say the demonstrations have largely been peaceful.

Some of the leaders at the summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States did blame Peru's government for the violence.

Chile's President Gabriel Boric said there's "an urgent need for a change in Peru because the result of the path of violence and repression is unacceptable." Mexico's president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, a staunch supporter of Castillo, demanded an "end to the repression."

During the summit's closing ceremony, Argentina's President Alberto Fernández said his country "is also worried about what is happening in Peru" and called for an end to "street violence and institutional violence that has taken the lives of so many people."

Activists say this attention is far less than what they would expect considering 56 people have died since Castillo's vice-president was sworn in to replace him on Dec. 7. Forty-five died in direct clashes with security forces, according to Peru's ombudsman.

"The international community has expressed concern, but really I think it could be more forceful," said César Muñoz, associate director of the Americas division at Human Rights Watch. Regional leaders could emphasize "that the rule of law means there must be independent investigations of all the deaths."

The crisis that has sparked Peru's worst political violence in more than two decades began when Castillo, Peru's first leader from a rural Andean background, tried to short-circuit the third impeachment proceeding of his young administration by ordering Congress dissolved. Lawmakers impeached him instead, and the national police arrested him before he could find sanctuary.

After some feverish closed-door negotiations in Buenos Aires in the afternoon, the current situation in Peru was left out of the summit's closing documents. "Peru is a prickly issue," but pressure from some leaders has led to last-minute negotiations, said an official in Argentina's Foreign Ministry, speaking on condition of anonymity for lack of authority to discuss policy.

"Peru has managed to fly under the radar," said Marina Navarro, executive director of Amnesty International Peru. "Given the gravity of the situation, with this number of people who have died, we don't see as much said about it as there could be."

Boluarte said Tuesday that Castillo had only himself to blame for trying to avoid the numerous corruption investigations he was facing, and suggested that he was trying "to make himself into a victim of a coup when he was the perpetrator of his own coup."

Questions about Boluarte's sudden rise to power should not impede criticism over police abuses, human rights organizations say.

"There must be international pressure for this government to cease all types of repressive attitudes and that has nothing to do with emitting an opinion about the government's legitimacy," said Manuel Tufró, who leads the justice and security division at the Center for Legal and Social Studies, an Argentine human rights organization.

Boluarte's government has made clear it won't take any criticism lightly. After law enforcement raided a university in Lima where some of the protesters were taking shelter on Saturday, Colombian President Gustavo Petro tweeted that the Organization of American States must "examine Peru's case."

Prime Minister Alberto Otárola fired back, telling Petro to "worry about your own affairs." Peru's Foreign Ministry issued formal notes of protest against Petro and Bolivian President Luis Arce, who expressed support for the protests.

The European Union made one of the strongest statements, saying Monday that it "deplores the very large number of casualties since the start of the protests" and reiterates "its condemnation of the wide-

spread acts of violence as well as the disproportionate use of force by security forces.”

The U.S. ambassador in Lima, Lisa Kenna, also surprised many observers earlier this month when she said it is “fundamental for law enforcement to respect human rights, the right to protest and protect the citizenry.”

Some analysts said the tepid regional response points to how Peru has lost prominence due to its political crises, with six presidents over the past six years.

“Peru as a country has lost presence,” said Oscar Vidarte, an international relations professor at the Catholic University of Peru. “It’s a chaotic country, a country that has become ungovernable, questioned in terms of democracy and respect for human life.”

“Countries in the region have clearly turned their backs,” Vidarte said.

War on drugs locked him up; now he’s a cannabis entrepreneur

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When the war on marijuana came sweeping through his New York City housing project decades ago, Roland Conner found himself going in and out of jail. It’s a time he’d rather not talk about.

Now, at age 50, he has opened the state’s first legal cannabis dispensary to be run by someone previously punished under New York’s old, prohibitionist drug laws.

The shop in Manhattan’s Greenwich Village, called “Smacked,” opened to the public Tuesday with the state’s support. It is New York’s second legal place to buy recreational marijuana, but the first to benefit from a program that set aside dispensary licenses for people with pot-related criminal convictions.

Conner is also receiving support from a \$200 million public-private fund to aid “social equity” applicants for the state’s tightly controlled supply of dispensary licenses. The money is intended to help redress the ravages of the war on drugs, especially in communities of color.

“When people come together passionately to fix something, they can actually make things happen. And I’m a living example of that now,” said Conner as he prepared for the store’s opening.

New York legalized the recreational use of marijuana in March 2021 but the state-sanctioned marketplace for the drug has had a slow roll-out. The first 36 licenses were awarded in November. State officials have reserved 150 dispensary licenses in the initial wave of applicants for people with past convictions for marijuana offenses.

Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, hopes Conner’s venture will serve as a model for other would-be entrepreneurs.

“This dispensary is the latest example of our efforts to build the most equitable and inclusive cannabis industry in the nation,” Hochul said in a statement last week. “As we continue to work toward righting wrongs of the past, I look forward to new dispensaries — owned by those most impacted by the over policing of cannabis prohibition — opening soon.”

Like many others, Conner was locked up for relatively minor offenses in his youth. A conviction in 1991 sent him away for months. Talking about it now, he said, only brings back trauma.

For the past 15 years, he has operated a property management business and he is currently managing a transitional housing facility in the Bronx. That’s given him the business experience required to qualify for a dispensary license.

Smacked is opening as a pop-up dispensary while work is being completed at the storefront. His wife, Patricia, and his son, Darius, will be operating the store with him.

They will have to compete with the scores of illicit dispensaries in New York that have long been in operation. When he opened his store, Conner was mindful that another unlicensed shop would soon be opening nearby.

Conner recalls his younger days, when marijuana was part of daily life. He grew up in the projects, in a poverty-stricken area of New York called the Far Rockaways, where some young men whiled away time getting high.

“We were basically poor. Like any other New York City housing project, it was just riddled with poverty

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and drugs," he said. "We went hungry a lot, but my mother did her best to make sure that we were always fed."

Police patrolled the projects constantly, he recalled. "Sometimes they would come up and down the block and we would see them come in or they would just come out of nowhere," he said. "They'll just come out of nowhere and search us. And if they found some type of drugs on you, they would just lock you up."

"Back in 1991, that's when I started getting locked up for cannabis and just getting sucked into the streets at that point. It was so long ago," he said.

Years later, when his son began selling marijuana to help support his family, Conner grew alarmed.

"When I saw my son going down this path," he said, "I didn't want him to start going down that particular road and jam himself up."

With the state opening up a legal marketplace, Conner and his family decided to take a chance and apply for a dispensary license.

"I had to step back and just listen to my dad and figure out a way," said his son, Darius.

"He said there's a legal way to go about doing what I'm doing now," Darius Conner said. "At the end of the day, I really want to go into the right way of doing it."

Officials said Conner received support from the Bronx Cannabis Hub, which was founded by the Bronx Defenders and the Bronx Community Foundation to support individuals applying for the first round of licenses.

Federal data shows similar percentages of white and Black people use marijuana, but the arrest rate for Black people is much higher, according to reports by the American Civil Liberties Union and others.

"When people are in poverty, they do certain things that they wouldn't normally do," Conner said. "And so if you don't speak to poverty and you only speak to harsh law enforcement without speaking to the reason why people do the things that they do — it's problematic."

Classified documents at Pence's home, too, his lawyer says

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Documents with classified markings were discovered in former Vice President Mike Pence's Indiana residence last week, his lawyer says, the latest in a string of recoveries of papers meant to be treated with utmost sensitivity from the homes of current and former top U.S. officials.

"A small number of documents," taken into FBI custody last Thursday, "were inadvertently boxed and transported" to the former vice president's home at the end of the last administration, Pence's lawyer, Greg Jacob, wrote in a letter to the National Archives shared with The Associated Press.

He said that Pence had been "unaware of the existence of sensitive or classified documents at his personal residence" until a search last week and that he "understands the high importance of protecting sensitive and classified information" and stands ready to cooperate with "any appropriate inquiry."

The revelation came as the Department of Justice was already investigating the discovery of documents with classification markings in President Joe Biden's home in Delaware and his former Washington office, as well as former President Donald Trump's Florida estate. Democrat Biden has indicated he will seek reelection, Republican Trump is already a declared candidate, and Pence has been exploring a possible 2024 campaign that would put him in direct competition against Trump, his former boss.

The newest discovery thrusts Pence, who had previously insisted that he followed stringent protocols regarding classified documents, into the debate over the handling of secret materials by officials who have served in the highest ranks of government.

Trump is currently under criminal investigation after roughly 300 documents with classified markings, including at the top secret level, were discovered at his Mar-a-Lago. Officials are trying to determine whether Trump or anyone else should be charged with illegal possession of those records or with trying to obstruct the months-long criminal investigation. Biden is also subject to a special counsel investigation after classified documents from his time as a senator and in the Obama administration were found at his properties.

Trump, who denies any wrongdoing, reacted to the new development on his social media site: "Mike

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Pence is an innocent man. He never did anything knowingly dishonest in his life. Leave him alone!!!!" Trump and Pence have clashed over Pence's refusal to go along with Trump's efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

While a very different case, the Pence development could bolster the arguments of Trump and Biden, who have sought to downplay the significance of the discoveries at their homes. The presence of secret documents at all three men's residences further underscores the federal government's unwieldy system for storing and protecting the millions of classified documents it produces every year.

Pence's lawyer, Jacob, said in his letter that the former vice president had "engaged outside counsel, with experience in handling classified documents" to review records stored at his home on Jan. 16 "out of an abundance of caution" amid the uproar over the discovery of documents at Biden's home.

Jacob said the Pence documents with classification markings were immediately secured in a locked safe. FBI agents visited the residence the night of Jan. 19 at 9:30 p.m. to collect the documents that had been secured, according to a follow-up letter from the lawyer dated Jan. 22. Pence was in Washington for an event at the time.

A total of four boxes containing copies of administration papers — two in which "a small number" of papers bearing classified markings were found, and two containing "courtesy copies of vice presidential papers" — were discovered, according to the letter. Arrangements were made to deliver those boxes to the National Archives Monday.

Congressional leaders were notified of the discovery by Pence's team on Tuesday.

The boxes, according to a Pence aide, were not kept in a secure location, but were taped shut and were not believed to have been opened since they were packed. The former vice president's staff also searched the Washington office of his advocacy group last week and did not discover additional documents, according to the person, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the search.

Material found in the boxes came mostly from Pence's Naval Observatory vice presidential residence, the packing of which would not have been handled by the vice president's office or its lawyers. Other material came from a West Wing office drawer, the person said.

The National Archives declined to comment on the discovery. A Justice Department spokesman also declined to comment, and a lawyer for Pence did not immediately respond to an email seeking elaboration.

Pence told the Associated Press in August that he did not take any classified information with him when he left office.

Asked directly if he had retained any such information, he said, "No, not to my knowledge."

In an interview this month with Fox Business, Pence described a "very formal process" used by his office to handle classified information as well as the steps taken by his lawyers to ensure none was taken with him.

"Before we left the White House, the attorneys on my staff went through all the documents at both the White House and our offices there and at the vice president's residence to ensure that any documents that needed to be turned over to the National Archives, including classified documents, were turned over. So we went through a very careful process in that regard," Pence said.

On Capitol Hill, members of the Senate intelligence committee expressed incredulity over the mishandling of documents by top U.S. officials.

Republican Sen. John Cornyn of Texas noted that classified documents are only moved out of the committee's offices in locked bags.

"In my book, it's never permissible to take classified documents outside of a secure facility" except by a secure means of transport between such facilities, he said.

House Intelligence Chairman Mike Turner, a Republican, said he planned to request a formal intelligence review and damage assessment.

And Republican Sen. Rick Scott of Florida, another potential 2024 candidate, said, "I don't know how anybody ends up with classified documents. ... I mean, every classified document I've ever seen has a big 'Classified' on it."

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., and a senior member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, pointed to broader

concerns with the classification system, complaining that it "is at the point where there is so much out there it is hard to determine what ought to be classified, and then it is hard to determine what should be declassified."

Meanwhile, some Republicans pressed for a search of former President Barack Obama's personal records.

An Obama spokesperson referred to a 2022 statement from the National Archives that said the agency took control of all of his records after he left office and "is not aware of any missing boxes of presidential records from the Obama administration."

Representatives of former presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton and former Vice President Dick Cheney said all of their classified records had been turned over to NARA upon leaving the White House.

Mike Pompeo, who served as Trump's secretary of state and is mulling his own 2024 GOP presidential bid, told the AP in August that he had not taken any any classified material with him after leaving the administration.

But he told Fox News channel Tuesday, "When you're in the executive branch, you have these documents in your home. One can imagine a note getting someplace, getting stuck. I suspect that may be what happened."

Proud Boys expecting 'civil war' before Jan. 6, witness says

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The month before the riot at the U.S. Capitol, members of the Proud Boys were growing increasingly angry about the outcome of the 2020 election and were expecting a "civil war," a former member told jurors on Tuesday as he took the stand in the seditious conspiracy case against the group's former leader.

Matthew Greene testified in the case against former Proud Boys national chairman Enrique Tarrío and four lieutenants under a cooperation deal with the government after pleading guilty to storming the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, with fellow extremists.

Greene told jurors that the Proud Boys' conversations became more heated as December 2020 wore on and challenges to President Donald Trump's election loss were unsuccessful. The Proud Boys were getting "ready and willing for anything that was going to happen," Greene said, adding that the group saw itself as "essentially the tip of the spear."

"We were openly expecting a civil war at that point," Greene said.

Greene is the first Proud Boys cooperator to take the stand in the case accusing Tarrío and associates of plotting to forcibly stop the transfer of power from Trump to President Joe Biden. He was the first Proud Boys member in December 2021 to publicly plead guilty to conspiring with others to stop Congress from certifying the Electoral College vote. He's cooperating with prosecutors in the hopes of getting a lighter sentence.

Prosecutors allege that members of the Proud Boys carried out a coordinated attack on the Capitol in a desperate attempt to keep Trump in power. It's one of the most consequential cases to emerge from the Justice Department's sprawling Jan. 6 investigation.

The other co-defendants are Joseph Biggs, of Ormond Beach, Florida, a self-described Proud Boys organizer; Zachary Rehl, who was president of the Proud Boys chapter in Philadelphia; and Dominic Pezzola, a Proud Boys member from Rochester, New York.

Defense attorneys say there is no evidence that the Proud Boys plotted to attack the Capitol and stop Congress from certifying the Electoral College vote on Jan. 6. A lawyer for Tarrío has acknowledged that the former chairman and other self-described "Western chauvinists" in the Proud Boys shared "offensive" messages, but said it was Trump who unleashed the mob that attacked the Capitol.

Greene, who was a new recruit to the Proud Boys on Jan. 6 and says he has since left the group, said he didn't know of any specific plan to storm the Capitol. He said leaders didn't overtly encourage members to use force, but when it did happen it was celebrated.

"My expectation was, if there was violence started, you should not back down," he said.

Tarrio, who's from Miami, wasn't in Washington on Jan. 6 because he was arrested two days before the riot and charged with vandalizing a Black Lives Matter banner at a historic Black church during a protest in December 2020. He was ordered to leave the capital, but prosecutors say he remained engaged in the extremist group's planning for Jan. 6.

Others who may testify against Tarrio include Jeremy Bertino, the only Proud Boy who has pleaded guilty to seditious conspiracy. A statement of offense filed in court says that Bertino understood the Proud Boys' goal in traveling to Washington was to stop the certification Biden's victory and that the group was prepared to use force and violence if necessary to do so.

Greene's testimony comes a day after four members of another far-right group, the Oath Keepers, were convicted of seditious conspiracy in a separate case at the same Washington courthouse. The group's leader and another Oath Keeper were convicted of sedition in November.

Greene traveled from Syracuse, New York, to Washington, with other Proud Boys on Jan. 5 and was at the front of the mob on Jan. 6 when police began using pepper spray and other crowd-control measures.

One of those was Pezzola, who is accused of wresting a police riot shield away from an officer and later smashing a Capitol window. Greene was with him around the time that happened, but soon after began having second thoughts and turned back, he testified. He didn't see Pezzola again until much later that day.

Extreme Israeli group takes root in US with fundraising bid

By URI BLAU of Shomrim and TIA GOLDENBERG of The Associated Press undefined

JERUSALEM (AP) — An Israeli group raising funds for Jewish extremists convicted in some of the country's most notorious hate crimes is collecting tax-exempt donations from Americans, according to findings by The Associated Press and the Israeli investigative platform Shomrim.

The records in the case suggest that Israel's far right is gaining a new foothold in the United States.

The amount of money raised through a U.S. nonprofit is not known. But the AP and Shomrim have documented the money trail from New Jersey to imprisoned Israeli radicals who include Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's assassin and people convicted in deadly attacks on Palestinians.

This overseas fundraising arrangement has made it easier for the Israeli group, Shlom Asiraich, to collect money from Americans, who can make their contributions through the U.S. nonprofit with a credit card and claim a tax deduction.

Many Israeli causes, from hospitals to universities to charities, raise money through U.S.-based arms. But having the strategy adopted by a group assisting Jewish radicals raises legal and moral questions.

It also comes against the backdrop of a new, far-right government in Israel led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, where ultranationalists and extremist lawmakers have gained unprecedented power.

According to Shlom Asiraich's promotional pamphlets, its beneficiaries include Yigal Amir, who assassinated Rabin in 1995; Amiram Ben-Uliel, convicted in the 2015 murder of a Palestinian baby and his parents in an arson attack; and Yosef Chaim Ben David, convicted of abducting and killing a 16-year-old Palestinian boy in Jerusalem in 2014. The group also assists an extremist ultra-Orthodox man who fatally stabbed a 16-year-old Israeli girl at Jerusalem's gay pride parade in 2015.

Shlom Asiraich, or "The Well-Being of Your Prisoners," has been raising money in Israel since at least 2018, and officially registered as a nonprofit in 2020 by a group mostly consisting of Israelis from hard-line settlements in the West Bank. At least five of the group's seven founders have themselves been questioned by Israeli authorities for crimes related to their activities against Palestinians. Some have been arrested and charged.

Recipients of its largesse have hailed the group for coming through in difficult times.

"You have no idea how much you help us," the family of Ben-Uliel, who is serving three life sentences, wrote in a hand-written letter posted to the group's Facebook page.

Being a relatively new organization, Shlom Asiraich's official filing to Israel's nonprofit registry provides little data and does not indicate how much money it has raised. But in its promotional flyers, recently broadcast by Israeli Channel 13 news, the organization indicated it has raised 150,000 shekels (about \$43,000).

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Israeli nonprofits have long sought funding abroad, with the U.S. a major source. According to figures published by Noga Zivan, a consultant for nonprofits in Israel, between 2018 to 2020 Jewish-American organizations alone donated \$2 billion to Israel each year.

Israeli right-wing groups have long raised funds in the U.S. But Dvir Kariv, a former official in the department of Israel's domestic security agency Shin Bet that deals with Jewish violence, said it is unusual for extremist Jews such as the ones who run Shlom Asiraich to do so.

He said the group appears to have taken a cue from other far-right Israeli groups, particularly Kach, an anti-Arab racist group that was once banned as a terror organization in the U.S. but which Kariv said was adept at raising money there decades ago.

Itamar Ben-Gvir, a senior Cabinet minister in Israel's new far-right government, is a disciple of Kach's founder, Rabbi Meir Kahane, who was once barred from Israeli politics.

It is not clear when Shlom Asiraich began working with the New Jersey-based World of Tzedaka, a nonprofit that says it works "to enable any individual or organization to raise money for their specific cause."

Donors in the U.S. can enter the Shlom Asiraich site and click on a link that takes them to a donation page hosted by World of Tzedaka. They can also donate directly from World of Tzedaka's site.

According to an instructional video on the World of Tzedaka site, fundraisers must list a rabbi as a reference and receive approval from a Lakewood religious committee. World of Tzedaka charges \$28 a month and a 3% processing fee for transferring funds to an Israeli bank account, the site says.

World of Tzedaka supports other charitable ventures, most of them focused on assisting Jewish families in distress, according to its website.

Ellen Aprill, an expert on tax and charities at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles, said convicted criminals and their families could be considered in need and qualify as a permissible charitable purpose.

While supporting someone convicted of acts of terrorism could be seen as encouraging criminal activity, that would need to be proven, she said.

Marcus Owens, a lawyer who ran the IRS's nonprofit unit in the 1990s, took a tougher stance.

"The U.S. Department of Justice views assistance to the families of terrorists as a form of material support for terrorism," he said.

In order to become a tax-exempt group recognized by the IRS, an organization must operate exclusively for charitable, religious or educational purposes.

Repeated attempts to reach representatives of Shlom Asiraich were unsuccessful. A person who answered the group's phone number hung up on an AP reporter. Moshe Orbach, whose address in the hard-line West Bank settlement of Yitzhar is listed as the group's headquarters, declined through a lawyer to be interviewed.

A World of Tzedaka representative hung up when asked for comment.

The IRS refused to answer questions about the group, saying "federal law prohibits the IRS from commenting."

The State Department on Tuesday referred questions to the Department of Justice. "We condemn extremist violence in all its forms," it said.

According to documents obtained by the AP, Shlom Asiraich was registered as a nonprofit with Israeli authorities by Chanamel Dorfman, an attorney and a top aide to Ben-Gvir, Israel's new national security minister.

Dorfman is also listed as the group's "lawyer/legal adviser" on Guidestar, the official nonprofit registry's site.

In a text message, Dorfman denied ever having been the group's legal adviser and did not respond to additional questions. Dorfman recently told the conservative daily Israel Hayom he was simply acting as a lawyer and that "if I knew that this is what this organization does, I wouldn't have registered it."

In October, on the eve of the Jewish New Year, Shlom Asiraich tweeted a photo of snacks it provided to Jewish suspects under house arrest, and to families of Israelis convicted or charged with crimes against Palestinians. A note accompanying the wine and other goods the nonprofit provided called the men "beloved heroes."

"Stay strong and remain loyal to the people of Israel and to the holy Torah and don't stop being happy!"

the note read.

Indigenous hockey cards shed light on First Nations players

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Hockey Writer

Ted Nolan finally has his rookie card more than 40 years after making his NHL debut. Better late than never, particularly because it includes a nod to his First Nations heritage.

Upper Deck this month unveiled a "First Peoples Rookie Cards" set featuring eight Indigenous hockey players who did not get this opportunity the first time around. It comes at a time when appreciation for Native American and First Nations influences in the sport is on the rise.

"It's kind of like somebody calling you 40 years after your 18th birthday and saying, 'Hey, you're turning 18,'" Nolan said. "It wasn't as exciting as it would have been if I was actually getting it when I was a rookie, but just the same I'm so honored to receive it, especially with the Indigenous component to it because (for) a lot of our kids, representation really does matter, and the more the kids get to see these type of things happening, they can dream, also."

That was the hope of Indigenous card collector Naim Cardinal, who first suggested the idea at a trade show a few years ago. There were some players missing from his collection that he thought deserved their due.

"We thought that was an interesting concept," Upper Deck senior marketing manager Paul Nguyen said. "So, we asked other people within the hockey community to see if there was an appetite for a set like this, and we heard yes."

A group made up mostly of Indigenous community members worked to narrow the possibilities to players who never before had an officially licensed NHL trading card. The result is a set featuring Nolan, Dan Frawley, Jason Simon, Bill LeCaine, Rocky Trottier, Victor Mercredi, Danny Hodgson and Johnny Harms.

The cards, including the logo on each of them, were designed by artist Jacob Alexis from the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, while Cardinal wrote the content on the back that highlighted the player's Indigenous heritage and family history.

Nolan's card, which shows him in a Detroit Red Wings uniform, points out he's Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) from Garden River First Nation in Ontario and not only played in the NHL with the Red Wings and the Pittsburgh Penguins but went on to become a successful coach and has two sons who made the league, Jordan and Brandon.

Having a rookie card like his sons is a cool development for Nolan, who said, "It's kind of like a family thing." Taking it a step further, the cards won't be sold but rather distributed at the 3NOLANS First Nation Hockey School and other Indigenous hockey camps and events.

Nolan hopes that showing kids the cards has a similar effect on them as watching the likes of Stan Jonathan, Gary Sargent and Jimmy Neilson did on him when he was growing up.

"You can kind of walk around school the next day and be very proud of those gentlemen (because) even though we didn't know them, they looked a lot like you," he said. "Now, not only can you talk about it. You can actually show pictures that it really did happen."

Hockey historians in recent months and years have begun to delve deeper into the role of some of hockey's first nonwhite pioneers, including Native American defenseman Taffy Abel and Henry Elmer "Buddy" Maracle.

After more details have come to light about Canada's history of boarding schools used to push First Nations children to assimilate to white culture from the 19th century through the 1970s, Nolan is proud to be an example of an athlete who embraces his Indigenous heritage.

"We had a lot of our elders and a lot of our chiefs that showed the way for us, and especially the survivors of the residential schools and how hard they fought to maintain who we are," said Nolan, who coached parts of six NHL seasons and won the Jack Adams Award as coach of the year in 1996-97. "I'm just another part of that, trying to build on that legacy of our forefathers and make the next generation even stronger than this generation."

Nguyen said this card set has been years in the making and pointed out it comes at a good time given the dialogue going on, especially in Canada, about the treatment of Indigenous peoples and what can be done now to learn from it.

"It's continuing the conversation with everyone and it's not just letting it kind of lie," he said. "It's putting it in a really good light where people can have that conversation."

Senators grill Ticketmaster after Taylor Swift fiasco

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Senators grilled Ticketmaster Tuesday, questioning whether the company's dominance in the ticketing industry led to its spectacular breakdown last year during a sale of Taylor Swift concert tickets.

Republicans and Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee also debated possible action, including making tickets non-transferable to cut down on scalping and requiring more transparency in ticket fees. Some suggested it may also be necessary to split Ticketmaster and Beverly Hills, California-based concert promoter Live Nation, which merged in 2010.

"The fact of the matter is, Live Nation/Ticketmaster is the 800-pound gorilla here," said U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, a Connecticut Democrat. "This whole concert ticket system is a mess, a monopolistic mess."

Ticketmaster is the world's largest ticket seller, processing 500 million tickets each year in more than 30 countries. Around 70% of tickets for major concert venues in the U.S. are sold through Ticketmaster, according to data in a federal lawsuit filed by consumers last year.

In mid-November, Ticketmaster's site crashed during a presale event for Swift's upcoming stadium tour. The company said its site was overwhelmed by both fans and attacks from bots, which were posing as consumers in order to scoop up tickets and sell them on secondary sites. Thousands of people lost tickets after waiting for hours in an online queue.

Live Nation's President and Chief Financial Officer Joe Berchtold apologized to fans and to Swift on Tuesday, and said the company knows it must do better. Berchtold said Ticketmaster has spent \$1 billion over the last decade trying to improve its security and stop bots.

"We need to do better and will do better," he said.

But lawmakers were skeptical. Republican Sen. Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee said plenty of others, including banks and power companies, are also frequent targets of bots but don't suffer service meltdowns.

"They have figured it out but you guys haven't? This is unbelievable," she said. "We've got a lot of people who are very unhappy with the way this has been approached."

Senators also took aim at Ticketmaster's fees. U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, a Minnesota Democrat, recalled piling into a friend's car in high school to go to concerts by Led Zeppelin, The Cars and Aerosmith. These days, she said, ticket prices have gotten so high that shows are too expensive for many fans. Klobuchar said ticket fees now average 27% of the ticket cost and can climb as high as 75%.

Berchtold insisted that Ticketmaster doesn't set prices or service fees for tickets or decide how many tickets will go on sale. Service fees are set by venues, he said. Live Nation only owns around 5% of U.S. venues, he said.

But competitors, like Seat Geek CEO Jack Groetzinger, said even if Live Nation doesn't own a venue, it prevents competition by signing multi-year contracts with arenas and concert halls to provide ticketing services. If those venues don't agree to use Ticketmaster, Live Nation may withhold acts. That makes it tough for competitors to disrupt the market.

"The only way to restore competition is to break up Ticketmaster and Live Nation," Groetzinger said.

Clyde Lawrence, a singer-songwriter with the New York-based pop group Lawrence, said it also hurts artists when Live Nation owns or has contracts with venues, because bands have little ability to negotiate a deal or choose a different ticket seller.

Lawrence shared a hypothetical example: Ticketmaster charges \$30 per ticket, but then adds fees that bump the price to \$42. Just \$12 per ticket goes to the band after accounting for fees they must pay to Live Nation, including — in at least one case — \$250 for a stack of 10 towels in the dressing room.

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Lawrence wants caps on fees, more transparency in what venue fees are used for as well as fairer distribution of profits. Live Nation takes a cut of the band's merchandise sales at a concert, for example, but doesn't share a cut of food and beverage sales.

Berchtold said the ticketing industry would like lawmakers to focus on the problem of ticket scalping — which he said has grown into a massive \$5 billion industry — and prohibit fraudulent practices, such as resellers offering tickets that haven't officially gone on sale yet. He also agreed that the industry should be more transparent about fees.

Sen. John Kennedy, a Louisiana Republican, suggested legislation that would make tickets non-transferable, thus preventing resales. He also suggested that major artists such as Swift or Bruce Springsteen should demand fee caps.

"Not every kid can afford \$500 to go see Taylor Swift," Kennedy said.

Berchtold said Ticketmaster would support making tickets non-transferable, even though the company does business in the ticket resale market. But others, including Republican Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina, said making tickets non-transferable would interfere with people's right to resell them.

The Justice Department allowed Live Nation and Ticketmaster to merge in 2010 as long as Live Nation agreed not to retaliate against concert venues for using other ticket companies for 10 years.

In 2019, the department investigated and found that Live Nation had "repeatedly" violated that agreement. It extended the prohibition on retaliating against concert venues to 2025.

Sen. Mike Lee, a Utah Republican, said Tuesday that the Justice Department is again investigating Live Nation after the Swift ticket fiasco. At this point, he said, Congress should be asking if the department was right to allow the merger to go ahead in the first place.

"It's very important that we maintain fair, free, open and even fierce competition," Lee said. "It increases quality and it reduces price. We want those things to happen.""

Yellen visits Zambian farm to showcase Africa's ag potential

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

CHONGWE, Zambia (AP) — U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen traveled from a small farm on a rural red clay road to a ramen noodle manufacturing plant in Zambia's bustling capitol of Lusaka on Tuesday to showcase Africa's potential to help solve the world's problems with food shortages.

Yellen, midway through a 10-day tour of Africa, devoted her day to highlighting the agricultural investment potential of underdeveloped African nations, especially as Russia's invasion of Ukraine has exacerbated worldwide hunger and the cost of food.

"As we tackle acute needs now, we must also take a longer view and scale up investment in long-term food system resilience. Africa is a perfect example of these dual challenges," Yellen said in Chongwe, a village an hour outside of Lusaka. She stood at her signature podium, surrounded by lush green fields of corn and with chickens grazing nearby.

The continent's potential is evident in one statistic: Africa has 60 percent of the world's uncultivated arable land.

"We want to advance a future where Africa participates more fully in global food and fertilizer markets and supply chains," Yellen said as farmers, mostly women wearing brightly colored wax cloth dresses, stood and listened.

They told Yellen stories of how they've sustained their communities — by sharing goats to mate to build a sustainable livestock supply and by developing collective savings groups and silos for grain.

Echinah Mfula, a Chongwe farmer and participant in the Twalumbu Savings Group, which helps its members pool money to buy livestock and food, said, "It's been a challenge. It's been a big challenge for us, but we are successful."

In Zambia, roughly 2 million people face acute food insecurity, more than half the population lives below the poverty line and nearly half of the population is unable to meet minimum caloric intake needs.

"It is a continent that faces acute food needs," Yellen said. "But it is one that also has the potential not

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only to feed itself but also to help feed the world — if the right steps are taken.”

Solving the country’s well-documented debt crisis is more important than ever if financing for new agricultural projects is to be possible.

Zambia became Africa’s first coronavirus pandemic-era sovereign nation to default when it failed to make a \$42.5 million bond payment in November 2020. Negotiations over how to deal with the debt load have been ongoing.

Experts say a prolonged debt crisis could permanently prevent countries like Zambia from recovering, leading to an entire nation sliding deeper into poverty and joblessness.

Food insecurity is increasing around the globe, due to COVID-19, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and rising food costs, according to a report released Tuesday by the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization and other United Nations agencies. Nearly a half-billion people were undernourished in 2021 and more than 1 billion faced moderate to severe food insecurity, the report said.

On top of that, the costs of fertilizer and natural gas have exploded and global prices for food commodities like grain and vegetable oils were the highest on record in 2022.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine last February worsened the food insecurity crisis because the two countries were leading suppliers of wheat, barley, sunflower oil and other products, especially to nations in parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia that were already struggling with hunger.

In the U.S., the Treasury Department issued a carve-out to the thousands of sanctions that have been imposed on Russia, to allow agricultural transactions and trade related to humanitarian aid and access to communications. The hope is to prevent some of the most damaging impacts of the war on vulnerable populations.

But in Zambia, Yellen said she sees solutions in home-grown firms like Java Foods Limited, a woman-owned company that produces low-cost, nutritionally fortified instant noodles. It targets low-income urban consumers and sources 100% of its wheat from Zambian farmers.

Monica Musonda, Java Foods’ founder, told Yellen at a roundtable Tuesday that staying afloat has been difficult, since her firm is one of the only food manufacturers in Lusaka. “But we are trying to make an impact in our community — you can see what we women can do.”

Java has worked under USAID’s Feed the Future program and with the US Partnership for Food Solutions, a non-profit founded by General Mills.

Yellen began her tour of Africa in Senegal and moves on to South Africa after Zambia.

No more nuggets? School lunch goes farm-to-table — for some

By JOCELYN GECKER Associated Press

CONCORD, Calif. (AP) — As the fine-dining chef at a suburban high school gave samples of his newest recipes, junior Anahi Nava Flores critiqued a baguette sandwich with Toscano salami, organic Monterey Jack, arugula and a scratch-made basil spread: “This pesto aioli is good!”

Classmate Kentaro Turner devoured a deli-style pastrami melt on sourdough and moved on to free-range chicken simmered in chipotle broth with Spanish-style rice. “Everything is delicious!”

These are not words typically uttered in school cafeterias.

The food served at the school system outside San Francisco, Mount Diablo Unified, reflects a trend away from mass-produced, reheated meals. Its lunch menus are filled with California-grown fruits and vegetables, grass-fed meats and recipes that defy the stereotype of inedible school food.

Among American schoolchildren, these students are in the lucky minority. Making fresh meals requires significant investment and, in many areas, an overhaul of how school kitchens have operated for decades. Inflation and supply chain disruptions have only made it harder on school nutrition directors, widening gaps in access to affordable, high-quality food.

What’s more, federal money to boost lunch budgets has declined. The government last year ended a pandemic-era program offering free school meals to everyone. A few states, such as California, have been paying to keep meals free for all students, but most states went back to charging all but the neediest kids

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for meals.

Increases in money from California's state government have made it possible for Mount Diablo to buy fresher local ingredients and hire the chef, Josh Gjersand, a veteran of Michelin-starred restaurants. Local farms, bakers, creameries and fishermen now supply most ingredients to the district, which serves 30,000 students from wealthy and low-income communities east of San Francisco.

On a recent January morning, student taste testers were sampling Gjersand's latest creations. His daily specials have ranged from barbecue spare ribs to fresh red snapper on a whole-grain brioche bun.

"I love the idea of serving students better food," said Gjersand, who quit restaurants during the pandemic, when serving a wagyu-beef-and-caviar crowd lost its luster. "School cafeterias should feel like restaurants, and not fast food chains."

School systems elsewhere can only dream of such offerings.

"Financially, we are dying right now," said Patti Bilbrey, nutrition director for Arizona's Scottsdale Unified School District. It charges students \$2.85 per lunch, but that no longer comes close to covering the district's cost.

A staff shortage makes it impossible to cook more food from scratch, she said. The school relies on mass-produced food that is delivered, then reheated. The pizza: "It's done; you just bake it." The spicy chicken sandwich: "You heat it and put it on a bun." The corn dogs: "You just have to wrap it," she said.

Some students give the food positive reviews. "I eat spicy chicken every day. That's my favorite," said Hunter Kimble, a sixth grader at Tonalea Middle School, where almost 80% of students still qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

Eighth grader Araceli Canales is more critical. The school serves an orange chicken that she says makes her cringe. "The meat is like a different color," she said. At a recent lunchtime, Araceli picked at a chicken Caesar salad, noting the croutons were bland and hard. "The chicken tastes OK, but I want them to cook it longer and add more seasoning." When the bell rang, she tossed most of her salad in the garbage.

Not many schools can afford gourmet offerings like Mount Diablo's, which also benefits from California's year-round growing season. But school menus in several places have improved in the past decade, with fresher ingredients and more ethnic dishes, said School Nutrition Association spokesperson Diane Pratt-Heavner.

The pandemic, however, created new obstacles.

In a national survey of 1,230 school nutrition directors, nearly all said the rising costs of food and supplies were their top challenges this year. More than 90% said they were facing supply chain and staffing shortages.

The survey by the nutrition association also found soaring levels of student lunch debt at schools that have returned to charging for meals. The association is urging Congress to resume free breakfast and lunch nationwide.

"This is the worst and fastest accumulation of debt I've seen in my 12 years in school nutrition," said Angela Richey, nutrition director for the Roseville and St Anthony-New Brighton school districts in Minnesota, which serve about 9,400 students. They don't turn away a hungry child, but this year's school meal debt has surpassed \$90,000, growing at a rate of over \$1,000 a day.

Making food from scratch isn't just healthier, it's cheaper, many school nutrition directors say.

But that's only possible when schools have kitchens. A national shift away from school kitchens began in the 1980s, which ushered in an era of mass-produced, processed school food. Pre-made meals delivered by food service companies meant schools could do away with full-time cafeteria staff and kitchens.

"If you don't have a kitchen to chop things up, there's not much you can do with fresh vegetables," said Nina Ichikawa, executive director of the Berkeley Food Institute, part of a team evaluating a California farm-to-school incubator grant. She describes California's investments as undoing past damage.

In 2021, California committed to spending \$650 million annually to supplement federal meal reimbursements — money for food, staff, new equipment and other upgrades. Additionally, hundreds of millions of dollars are available for kitchen infrastructure and for schools that cook from scratch and buy from California farmers.

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In California's rural Modoc Unified School District, near the Oregon border, lunch menus reflect what the state is trying to change: a rotation of hot dogs, chicken nuggets, pizza, burgers. There are vegetables, as required by federal guidelines, but usually not fresh. "I try not to do canned veggies more than twice a week," said Jessica Boal, nutrition director for the district of 840 students.

The district's five schools lack functional kitchens, so her staff spends half the day unpacking deliveries of processed, pre-made food. But Boal is excited about change on the horizon. The district recently applied for state grants to put new kitchens in every school and bring in more produce.

At Mount Diablo High School, there are still hot dogs and hamburgers, but the meats are grass-fed.

"I haven't served a chicken nugget here in two years. And the kids don't miss it," said Dominic Machi, who has reimagined meals for the district since he became nutrition director five years ago.

Students at the school, 96% of whom belong to a racial or ethnic minority group, say the attention to quality food sends a message of respect.

The school is in a neighborhood of fast-food strip malls. But inside its walls, "this food makes me feel more important. It makes you feel good to not eat trash food," said Kahlanii Cravanas, 16.

Anahi Nava Flores, 17, said the meals instill a sense of self-worth. "When you go to a high-end restaurant, you go home feeling good about life. That's what this food does." _____

This story has been corrected to reflect a student's pronoun usage.

Ukraine war moves 'Doomsday Clock' to 90 seconds to midnight

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — With Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the specter of nuclear weapon use, Earth crept its closest to Armageddon, a science-oriented advocacy group said, moving its famous "Doomsday Clock" up to just 90 seconds before midnight.

"We are really closer to that doomsday," former Mongolian president Elbegdorj Tsakhia said Tuesday at the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists annual announcement rating how close humanity is from doing itself in. He and former Ireland President Mary Robinson joined scientists to underscore what they consider a gathering of several existential threats, with Russian leader Vladimir Putin's actions and words chief among them.

"People and scientists are warning us and we have to wake up now," he said.

The advocacy group started in 1947 to use a clock to symbolize the potential and likelihood of people doing something to end humanity. It moved the clock 10 seconds closer than last year, making it the closest it has ever been to striking 12. It's been as much as 17 minutes from midnight after the end of the Cold War but in the past few years, the group has changed from counting down the minutes to midnight to counting down the seconds.

Doomsday has not happened yet.

"We are sending a message that the situation is becoming more urgent," Bulletin President Rachel Bronson said at the online announcement. "Crises are more likely to happen and have broader consequences and longer standing effects."

And to emphasize the effect that Russia's invasion of Ukraine had on moving closer to theoretical doomsday, the group said it was also announcing the clock movement in the Russian and Ukrainian languages for the first time.

"Putin has repeatedly raised the specter of nuclear use," said Steve Fetter, dean of the graduate school and a public policy professor at the University of Maryland.

"Putin has given no indication that he's willing to accept defeat," Fetter said. "He might make desperate moves if no other options are available that he regards as acceptable."

Scientists and activists at the Bulletin announcement also mentioned nuclear weapon proliferation in China, Iran increasing its uranium enrichment, missile tests in North Korea, future pandemics from animal diseases, pathogens from lab mistakes, "disruptive technologies" and worsening climate change as other existential threats to humanity.

Promising gene therapy delivers treatment directly to brain

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

When Rylae-Ann Poulin was a year old, she didn't crawl or babble like other kids her age. A rare genetic disorder kept her from even lifting her head. Her parents took turns holding her upright at night just so she could breathe comfortably and sleep.

Then, months later, doctors delivered gene therapy directly to her brain.

Now the 4-year-old is walking, running, swimming, reading and riding horses — “just doing so many amazing things that doctors once said were impossible,” said her mother, Judy Wei.

Rylae-Ann, who lives with her family in Bangkok, was among the first to benefit from a new way of delivering gene therapy — attacking diseases inside the brain — that experts believe holds great promise for treating a host of brain disorders.

Her treatment recently became the first brain-delivered gene therapy after its approval in Europe and the United Kingdom for AADC deficiency, a disorder that interferes with the way cells in the nervous system communicate. New Jersey drugmaker PTC Therapeutics plans to seek U.S. approval this year.

Meanwhile, about 30 U.S. studies testing gene therapy to the brain for various disorders are ongoing, according to the National Institutes of Health. One, led by Dr. Krystof Bankiewicz at Ohio State University, also targets AADC deficiency. Others test treatments for disorders such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and Huntington's.

Challenges remain, especially with diseases caused by more than a single gene. But scientists say the evidence supporting this approach is mounting — opening a new frontier in the fight against disorders afflicting our most complex and mysterious organ.

“There's a lot of exciting times ahead of us,” said Bankiewicz, a neurosurgeon. “We're seeing some breakthroughs.”

The most dramatic of those breakthroughs involve Rylae-Ann's disease, which is caused by mutations in a gene needed for an enzyme that helps make neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin, the body's chemical messengers. The one-time treatment delivers a working version of the gene.

At around 3 months old, Rylae-Ann began having spells her parents thought were seizures — her eyes would roll back and her muscles would tense. Fluid sometimes got into her lungs after feedings, sending her to the emergency room. Doctors thought she might have epilepsy or cerebral palsy.

Around that time, Wei's brother sent her a Facebook post about a child in Taiwan with AADC deficiency. The extremely rare disorder afflicts about 135 children worldwide, many in that country. Wei, who was born in Taiwan, and her husband, Richard Poulin III, sought out a doctor there who correctly diagnosed Rylae-Ann. They learned she could qualify for a gene therapy clinical trial in Taiwan.

Though they were nervous about the prospect of brain surgery, they realized she likely wouldn't live past 4 years old without it.

Rylae-Ann had the treatment at 18 months old on November 13, 2019 — which her parents have dubbed her “reborn day.” Doctors delivered it during minimally invasive surgery, with a thin tube through a hole in the skull. A harmless virus carried in a functioning version of the gene.

“It gets put into the brain cells and then the brain cells make the (neurotransmitter) dopamine,” said Stuart Peltz, CEO of PTC Therapeutics.

Company officials said all patients in their clinical trials showed motor and cognitive improvements. Some of them, Peltz said, could eventually stand and walk, and continue getting better over time.

Bankiewicz said all 40 or so patients in his team's NIH-funded study also saw significant improvements. His surgical approach is more involved and delivers the treatment to a different part of the brain. It targets relevant circuits in the brain, Bankiewicz said, like planting seeds that cause ivy to sprout and spread.

“It's really amazing work,” said Jill Morris, a program director with the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, which helped pay for the research. “And he has seen a lot of consistency between patients.”

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One is 8-year-old Rian Rodriguez-Pena, who lives with her family near Toronto. Rian got gene therapy in 2019, shortly before her 5th birthday. Two months later, she held her head up for the first time. She soon started using her hands and reaching for hugs. Seven months after surgery, she sat up on her own.

"When the world was crumbling around us with COVID, we were at our house celebrating like it was the biggest party of our lives because Rian was just crushing so many milestones that were impossible for so long," said her mom, Shillann Rodriguez-Pena. "It's a completely different life now."

Scientists say there are challenges to overcome before this approach becomes widespread for more common brain diseases.

For example, the timing of treatment is an issue. Generally, earlier in life is better because diseases can cause a cascade of problems over the years. Also, disorders with more complex causes — like Alzheimer's — are tougher to treat with gene therapy.

"When you're correcting one gene, you know exactly where the target is," said Morris.

Ryan Gilbert, a biomedical engineer at New York's Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, said there can also be issues with the gene-carrying virus, which can potentially insert genetic information in an indiscriminate way. Gilbert and other researchers are working on other delivery methods, such as messenger RNA — the technology used in many COVID-19 vaccines — to deliver a genetic payload to the nucleus of cells.

Scientists are also exploring ways to deliver gene therapy to the brain without the dangers of brain surgery. But that requires getting around the blood-brain barrier, an inherent roadblock designed to keep viruses and other germs that may be circulating in the bloodstream out of the brain.

A more practical hurdle is cost. The price of gene therapies, borne mostly by insurers and governments, can run into the millions. The one-time PTC therapy, called Upstaza, costs more than \$3 million in Europe, for example.

But drugmakers say they are committed to ensuring people get the treatments they need. And researchers are confident they can overcome the remaining scientific obstacles to this approach.

"So I would say gene therapy can be leveraged for many sorts of brain diseases and disorders," Gilbert said. "In the future, you're going to see more technology doing these kinds of things."

The families of Rylae-Ann and Rian said they hope other families dealing with devastating genetic diseases will someday get to see the transformations they've seen. Both girls are continuing to improve. Rian is playing, eating all sorts of foods, learning to walk and working on language. Rylae-Ann is in preschool, has started a ballet class, and is reading at a kindergarten level.

When her dad picks her up, "she runs to me ... just gives me a hug and says, 'I love you, Daddy.' he said. "It's like it's a normal day, and that's all we ever wanted as parents."

American skier Shiffrin wins record 83rd World Cup race

SAN VIGILIO DI MAREBBE, Italy (AP) — Exhaustion. Relief. Satisfaction.

American skier Mikaela Shiffrin felt all that and more after winning a record 83rd World Cup race Tuesday. Shiffrin's giant slalom victory broke a tie on the all-time women's list with former American teammate Lindsey Vonn, who retired four years ago when injuries cut her career short.

"I don't think there are words to explain all the feelings," Shiffrin said. "In the end of it, it's like there's too much excitement to feel. I don't know if that makes sense. So it's something you can't explain. So I just try to breathe a bit and enjoy it."

Shiffrin now needs only three more wins to match Ingemar Stenmark's overall record — between men and women — of 86 victories. Stenmark competed in the 1970s and 80s.

Shiffrin led from start to finish at the Kronplatz resort in the Italian Dolomites, crossing 0.45 seconds ahead of world champion Lara Gut-Behrami and 1.43 ahead of home favorite and former overall champion Federica Brignone.

Shiffrin posted the fastest first run and was therefore the last skier to race in the second run.

"I was a bit nervous for the second run, but mostly, I hate waiting," Shiffrin said. "Finally, when it was time to go, then it was like everything went quiet, and I just pushed as hard as I could every turn. It was

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pretty amazing to come through the finish and see that I was quite fast. Because I could hear that the other athletes were skiing well. I thought, 'I could lose this, so I better try to ski a really good run.' And it was."

Shiffrin seemed exhausted and relieved immediately after finishing, bending over and resting her head on her poles and then biting her lips before going over to embrace Gut-Behrami and Brignone.

Brignone told Shiffrin, "Congrats," and Shiffrin responded, "Oh my god."

Unlike when she broke down into tears when she matched Vonn's record of 82 wins earlier this month in Kranjska Gora, Slovenia, Shiffrin kept her composure during the playing of her national anthem, singing along to the words.

Then a gold-colored crown was placed atop her head.

It was Shiffrin's ninth win of the season.

What's more is that Shiffrin is still only 27 and could have many more years of elite racing left in her career. Vonn was 33 when she won her last World Cup event and Stenmark was 32.

"I just feel so lucky to be her teammate in this era and watching her break history every day," said Nina O'Brien, the only other American finisher in 18th. "And she's been really supportive as well."

American skier Paula Moltzan was fifth after the first run but fell midway through her second run, losing her balance and getting twisted around before sliding down the mountain.

The record also comes nearly a year after Shiffrin didn't win a medal in six events at the Beijing Olympics after entering amid big expectations. She didn't take long to rebound from her Beijing performance, claiming her fourth overall World Cup title at the end of last season.

Now she's the most successful female skier of all time.

"That's a pretty good image for the sport, for women's Alpine skiers," said Tessa Worley, a two-time world champion in GS. "And she's still doing amazing things. So it's an inspiration for us to just go and keep pushing."

Shiffrin had to learn how to handle the nerves that come with leading the first run.

"It's still hard for me to believe that, apparently, I have the mental focus again to be strong again in the second run," she said. "That's something I don't take for granted."

Shiffrin started her second run immediately after Gut-Behrami had taken the lead by a large margin.

"I saw her from the start and then I was thinking, 'Why did I watch? I can't go that fast.' So, then I was a little bit, kind of wild on some spots but it felt so clean," Shiffrin said. "I thought I wouldn't be faster but I thought I could maybe be close. And then, somehow, I got there to the finish and it was quite good."

Shiffrin can quickly add to her record total in another giant slalom at Kronplatz on Wednesday. Then she has two slaloms — her best event, having accounted for 51 of her 83 victories — in Spindleruv Mlyn, Czech Republic, next weekend. That was where Shiffrin made her World Cup debut as a 15-year-old in March 2011.

If she wins all three of her next races, she could match Stenmark by Sunday.

After a short break, Shiffrin will then again be a multi-medal threat at the world championships in Courchevel and Meribel, France, which start on Feb. 6.

Debt ceiling: 2011 showdown leaves lessons for Biden, GOP

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — The debate around raising the debt ceiling sounds eerily similar: Newly elected House Republicans, eager to confront the Democratic president in the White House, refused to raise the debt limit without cuts to federal spending.

Negotiations over the debt ceiling consumed Washington in 2011, a high-stakes showdown between the Obama White House and the new generation of "tea party" House Republicans.

"Now we're getting down to the real hard stuff: I'll trade you my bicycle for your golf clubs," the chief negotiator, Vice President Joe Biden, said at the time.

But weeks of tense talks between Biden and the House Republicans collapsed that summer, sending

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Washington careening toward a fiscal crisis. When Republicans in Congress refused to raise the debt ceiling, the government risked a catastrophic default and suffered a devastating credit downgrade, a first in the nation's history.

Lessons learned from the debt ceiling standoff more than a decade ago are rippling through Washington, as the White House and Congress brace for another fiscal showdown — one that appears headed toward a very similar outcome. Neither Republicans nor Democrats are willing to budge.

"The whole debate is a façade," said William Gale, a senior fellow at the nonpartisan Brookings Institution who wrote "Fiscal Therapy: Curing America's Debt Addiction and Investing in the Future," a book on the U.S. debt.

"That was the height of the 'tea party' stuff and they wanted to flex their muscles, but it's just such a stupid way to try to do it — because you don't really want to risk the good credit rating of the United States government," Gale said. "I suspect most of these guys already knew it."

The Treasury Department has notified Congress that it's time to again raise the nation's debt ceiling, now at \$31 trillion, to allow more borrowing to pay off the country's accumulated bills. Treasury said it has started taking "extraordinary measures" to keep paying the bills, but the money will run out by June.

Raising the nation's debt ceiling had been a routine matter historically, a final task after Congress had authorized federal spending and appropriated the money needed to pay for the country's various programs and services.

But that all changed when the Republican tea party came to town after the 2010 election.

Saying Americans were "taxed enough already," the tea party House Republicans arrived promising to slash federal spending, using the debt ceiling vote as their political leverage.

Debt had doubled during the George W. Bush presidency and the post-9/11 wars overseas, and it skyrocketed under President Barack Obama in the aftermath of the Great Recession, teetering around \$15 trillion.

At one point, Republicans were seeking \$1-for-\$1 tradeoffs — a dollar of spending cuts for every dollar of new borrowing. They also wanted a "cut, cap and balance" approach that would eventually curb deficits.

"We met for months," Republican Eric Cantor, the former House majority leader tasked by Speaker John Boehner to negotiate with Biden, recalled in a recent interview with The Associated Press. "We all sat down. But this year, this time, President Biden is now refusing negotiate."

In the end, House Republicans could not agree on a deal with the Obama White House.

When the August 2011 deadline came to raise the debt ceiling, only an eleventh-hour agreement with Senate Republicans led by Mitch McConnell and some Democrats tasking a "Super Committee" to recommend further federal reductions ensured there would be no debt default.

Spooked by the political crisis in Washington, the credit markets downgraded the nation's credit ranking for the first time, upping the costs of future borrowing.

The Biden White House appears to have drawn the conclusion that it's not worth negotiating with new House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who won a slim GOP majority in last November's midterm elections and who may — or may not — be able to deliver the votes on any debt ceiling deal.

"Look, lowering the deficit has always been a top priority," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Monday at the White House.

She said Biden, a Democrat, has "always said he is happy to talk to anyone who wants to deal with that in a responsible way."

"But preventing the default," she said, "is a separate matter."

Biden is scheduled to meet Tuesday with Democratic congressional leaders at the White House and is planning to invite McCarthy in the future.

McCarthy has been trying to push Biden to the table. "I think it's arrogance to say, 'Oh, we're not going to negotiate anything,'" the speaker told the AP recently at the Capitol.

McCarthy has already shown how hard it will be to lead his majority -- it took 15 ballots just to make him the House speaker in the face of resistance from right-flank Republicans.

To win over the holdouts, McCarthy promised his detractors he would fight to bring federal spending back to fiscal 2022 levels — an 8% reduction, or 17% if defense military spending is spared.

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In pushing McCarthy to drive a hard bargain in debt talks, House Republicans may be taking a lesson from the tea party era that one way to force their leadership's hand is to threaten his ouster if he caves.

During his campaign to become speaker, McCarthy also agreed to the hard-right demand to reinstate a House rule that allows a single lawmaker to file a "motion to vacate the chair," essentially a House vote to oust the speaker.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., all but dared McCarthy on Monday to put the GOP's proposed spending reductions on the table. "If Republicans are talking about draconian cuts, they have an obligation to show Americans what those cuts are, and let the public react," he said.

But it's not clear if the proposed fiscal 2022 spending cuts, or any, would win over McCarthy's hard-right flank to raise the debt ceiling.

One major difference compared to 2011 is that "Republicans have not coalesced" around a unified position, said Rohit Kumar, who was an aide to McConnell during that showdown.

"At this point, I think it's unclear what could get 218 Republican votes in conjunction with a debt limit increase, even just as an opening bid," said Kumar, now an executive with the tax services firm PwC, referring to the tally of votes typically needed to pass House legislation.

McConnell again is expected to play a pivotal role in easing the debt ceiling standoff, and some have pointed to bipartisan Senate legislation that would review spending, much the way the failed Super Committee was tasked with finding cuts after the 2011 debt ceiling showdown.

"Forget the Super Committee," Rep. Tom Emmer, R-Minn., the GOP whip, said in a recent AP interview. "What a ridiculous outcome."

Many House Republicans were not in Congress during the 2011 debt ceiling showdown. Said Rep. Bob Good, R-Va., one of the McCarthy holdouts: "I'm certainly not focused on what happened 10 years ago."

Netanyahu meets Jordan's king in surprise trip amid tension

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made a surprise trip to Jordan on Tuesday to meet with King Abdullah II for the first time in over four years, seeking to shore up ties that have strained since he took office at the helm of Israel's most right-wing government in history.

The rare meeting between the leaders, who have long had a rocky relationship, comes as tensions grow over Israel's new ultranationalist government, which took office late last year. The talks centered around the status of a contested holy site in the Old City of Jerusalem sacred to both Jews and Muslims, an emotional issue at the heart of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, Jordan's official statement indicated.

Jordan's royal court said the king urged Israel to respect the status quo at the sacred compound, which Muslims call the Noble Sanctuary and Jews call the Temple Mount. The compound — the third-holiest site in Islam — sits on a sprawling plateau also home to the iconic golden Dome of the Rock.

Under an arrangement that has prevailed for decades under Jordan's custodianship, Jews and non-Muslims are permitted visits during certain hours but may not pray there. But Jewish religious nationalists, including members of Israel's new governing coalition, have increasingly visited the site and demanded equal prayer rights for Jews there, infuriating the Palestinians and Muslims around the world.

In Tuesday's meeting, King Abdullah II also pushed Israel to "stop its acts of violence" that are undermining hopes for an eventual peaceful settlement to the decadeslong Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Jordanian government added, reaffirming its support for a two-state solution. Israel's new coalition has vowed to expand Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank and even annex the territory, making a future independent Palestinian state unviable.

Netanyahu's office said he discussed "regional issues" and security and economic cooperation with Jordan, a key regional ally. Jordan's 1994 treaty normalizing ties with Israel produced a chilly-at-best peace between the former enemies.

The Jordanian government has already summoned the Israeli ambassador to Amman twice in the last month since Israel's new government took office — both times after an incident at the Al-Aqsa Mosque

compound. Netanyahu has repeatedly offered assurances that there has been no change in the status quo at the site.

Earlier this month, Israel's new hard-line minister of national security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, made a provocative visit to the site, drawing condemnations from Jordan and across the Arab world. Jordan also protested to Israel after Israeli police briefly blocked the Jordanian ambassador from entering the Al-Aqsa Mosque, decrying the move as an affront to Jordan's role as custodian.

The compound is administered by Jordanian religious authorities as part of an unofficial agreement after Israel captured east Jerusalem, along with the West Bank and Gaza, in the 1967 Mideast war. Israel is in charge of security at the site. Because of Jordan's special role and the site's importance to Muslims around the world, whatever happens at the site has regional implications.

The site emerged as a major flashpoint between Israel and the Muslim world in 2017, when Israel placed metal detectors, cameras and other security measures at entrances to the compound in response to a deadly Palestinian attack there. After days of some of the worst Israeli-Palestinian clashes in years, Jordan helped resolve the crisis.

Over the years, the neighbors have maintained a crucial security alliance, buttressing Jordan's position as a partner of the West in one of the world's most volatile regions.

World War II-era map sparks treasure hunt in Dutch village

By ALEKSANDAR FURTULA Associated Press

OMMEREN, Netherlands (AP) — A hand-drawn map with a red letter X purportedly showing the location of a buried stash of precious jewelry looted by Nazis from a blown-up bank vault has sparked a modern-day treasure hunt in a tiny Dutch village more than three quarters of a century later.

Wielding metal detectors, shovels and copies of the map on cellphones, prospectors have descended on Ommeren — population 715 — about 80 kilometers (50 miles) southeast of Amsterdam to try to dig up a potential World War II trove based on the drawing first published on Jan. 3.

"Yes, it is of course spectacular news that has enthralled the whole village," local resident Marco Roodveldt said. "But not only our village, also people who do not come from here."

He said that "all kinds of people have been spontaneously digging in places where they think that treasure is buried — with a metal detector."

It wasn't immediately clear if authorities could claim the loot if it was found, or if a prospector could keep it.

So far, nobody has reported finding anything. The treasure hunt began this year when the Dutch National Archive published — as it does every January — thousands of documents for historians to pore over.

Most of them went largely unnoticed. But the map, which includes a sketch of a cross section of a country road and another with a red X at the base of one of three trees, was an unexpected viral hit that briefly shattered the mid-winter calm of Ommeren.

"We're quite astonished about the story itself. But the attention it's getting is as well," National Archive researcher Annet Waalkens said as she carefully showed off the map.

Photos on social media in early January showed people digging holes more than a meter (three feet) deep, sometimes on private property, in the hope of unearthing a fortune.

Buren, the municipality Ommeren falls under, published a statement on its website pointing out that a ban on metal detection is in place for the municipality and warned that the area was a World War II front line.

"Searching there is dangerous because of possible unexploded bombs, land mines and shells," the municipality said in a statement. "We advise against going to look for the Nazi treasure."

The latest treasure hunters aren't the first to leave the village empty handed.

The story starts, Waalkens said, in the summer of 1944 in the Nazi-occupied city of Arnhem — made famous by the star-studded movie "A Bridge Too Far" — when a bomb hit a bank, pierced its vault and scattered its contents — including gold jewelry and cash — across the street.

German soldiers stationed nearby "pocket what they can get and they keep it in ammunition boxes,"

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Waalkens said. As World War II nears its end in 1945, the Netherlands' German occupiers were pushed back by Allied advances. The soldiers who had been in Arnhem found themselves in Ommeren and decided to bury the loot.

"Four ammunition boxes and then just some jewelry that was kept in handkerchiefs or even cash money folded in. And they buried it right there," she said, citing an account by a German soldier who was interviewed after the war by Dutch military authorities in Berlin and who was responsible for the map. The archive doesn't know if the soldier is still alive and hasn't released his name, citing European Union privacy regulations.

Dutch authorities using the map and the soldier's account went hunting for the loot in 1947. The first time, the ground was frozen solid and they made no headway. When they went back after the thaw, they found nothing, Waalkens said.

After the unsuccessful attempts, the German soldier said "he believed that someone else has already excavated the treasure," she added.

That detail was largely overlooked by treasure hunters who descended on Ommeren in the days after the map's publication. On a recent visit to the village, there were no diggers to be seen as peace and quiet has returned to Ommeren.

But the village's brief brush with fame left a sour taste for some residents. Ria van Tuil van Neerbos said she didn't believe in the treasure story, but understood why some did.

"If they hear something, they'll head toward it," she said. "But I don't think it's good that they just dug into the ground and things like that."

Earthquake kills 1, injures several in Nepal's mountains

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — An earthquake in Nepal rattled villages in remote Himalayan mountains on Tuesday, killing at least one person and injuring many more, officials said.

The 5.9 magnitude earthquake with an epicenter in Bajura district hit in the afternoon, sending people fleeing their houses, according to the chief district officer, Puskar Khadka.

He said one person was confirmed dead but details were still sketchy because many of the villages are accessible by foot.

Soldiers and police rescuers had already been dispatched, Khadka said. The earthquake also buried cattle and farm animals.

Bajura district is about 400 kilometers (250 miles) northwest of the capital, Kathmandu.

News reports said the earthquake could be felt in cities and towns across the border in India.

Earthquakes are common in Nepal, which is mostly covered by mountains and home to most of the highest peaks in the world.

Today in History: JAN 25, Jury convicts Charles Manson

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Jan. 25, the 25th day of 2022. There are 340 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 25, 1945, the World War II Battle of the Bulge ended as German forces were pushed back to their original positions.

On this date:

In 1533, England's King Henry VIII secretly married his second wife, Anne Boleyn, who later gave birth to Elizabeth I.

In 1915, America's first official transcontinental telephone call took place as Alexander Graham Bell, who was in New York, spoke to his former assistant, Thomas Watson, who was in San Francisco, over a line set up by American Telephone & Telegraph.

In 1924, the first Winter Olympic Games opened in Chamonix (shah-moh-NEE'), France.

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In 1945, Grand Rapids, Michigan, became the first community to add fluoride to its public water supply.
In 1971, Charles Manson and three women followers were convicted in Los Angeles of murder and conspiracy in the 1969 slayings of seven people, including actor Sharon Tate.

In 1981, the 52 Americans held hostage by Iran for 444 days arrived in the United States.

In 1993, Sears announced that it would no longer publish its famous century-old catalog.

In 1994, maintaining his innocence, singer Michael Jackson settled a child molestation lawsuit against him; terms were confidential, although the monetary figure was reportedly \$22 million.

In 2004, NASA's Opportunity rover zipped its first pictures of Mars to Earth, showing a surface smooth and dark red in some places, and strewn with fragmented slabs of light bedrock in others.

In 2020, President Donald Trump's defense team opened its arguments at his first Senate impeachment trial, casting the effort to remove him from office as a politically motivated attempt to subvert the 2016 election and the upcoming 2020 contest. Canada, Australia and Malaysia each reported their first cases of the new coronavirus.

Ten years ago: The U.S. Department of Education declared that students with disabilities had to be given a fair shot to play on a traditional sports team or have their own leagues. Thousands of anti-abortion demonstrators marched through Washington to the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court to protest the landmark decision that legalized abortion.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump arrived at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland; after meeting there with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Trump threatened to cut off U.S. aid to the Palestinians unless they negotiated peace with Israel. In an interview in InStyle magazine, Oprah Winfrey said she was not interested in a presidential bid, adding that she doesn't "have the DNA" for a White House run.

One year ago: A man was found clinging to the hull of an overturned 25-foot boat off Florida; he was the only known survivor from what he said was a group of 40 migrants who had set out for Florida from a chain of islands in the Bahamas. The Navy said it had discharged 23 active-duty sailors for refusing the coronavirus vaccine; it marked the first time the Navy had thrown currently-serving sailors out of the military over the mandatory shots. David Ortiz was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in his first turn on the ballot, while steroid-tainted stars Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens were denied entry to Cooperstown in their final year under consideration by the Baseball Writers' Association of America.

Today's birthdays: Country singer Claude Gray is 91. Actor Leigh Taylor-Young is 79. Actor Jenifer Lewis is 66. Country musician R&B singer Kina is 54. Actor China Kantner is 52. Actor Ana Ortiz is 53. Drummer Joe Sirois (sih-ROYS') (Mighty Mighty Bosstones) is 51. Musician Matt Odmark (OHD'-mark) (Jars of Clay) is 49. Actor Mia Kirshner is 48. Actor Christine Lakin is 44. R&B singer Alicia Keys is 43. Actor Michael Trevino is 38. Pop musician Calum Hood (5 Seconds of Summer) is 27. Actor Olivia Edward is 16.