

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Groton Community Calendar Wednesday, Feb. 15

Senior Menu: Teriyaki chicken, rice pilaf, broccoli, pineapple strawberry ambrosia, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Eggs and breakfast potatoes.  
School Lunch: Chicken strips, tater tots.  
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

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



United Methodist Church: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Book Study with Lindsey Tietz, 4 p.m.; Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.; Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.  
2023 Annual Hunger Banquet, 6:30 PM, SEAS Church

## Thursday, Feb. 16

Senior Menu: Tater tot hot dish, green beans, grape juice, apple crisp, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.  
School Lunch: Hot dogs, chips.  
Parent-Teacher Conferences, 1:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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## The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

### World in Brief

Monday. Aspiring pediatric surgeon Arielle Diamond Anderson, biology student Alex Verner and Brian Fraser, who was studying business, are the victims killed in the mass shooting. The motive remains unclear.

- Alaska has become the closest American state to main geostrategic rivals, China and Russia, separated from Russia by the Bering Strait, which is 55 miles across at its narrowest point.
- Nicola Sturgeon is set to resign as Scotland's first minister, a position she has held since November 2014.
- A Republican-backed legislation introducing state-funded firearms training for teachers passed the Indiana House. The proposal has angered Democrats who say it will increase the danger to children.
- Elon Musk said that he hopes to find a new CEO for Twitter "probably toward the end of this year." According to Securities and Exchange Commission filings, the billionaire donated nearly \$2 billion worth of Tesla shares to charity last year.
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Chechnya leader Ramzan Kadyrov's future fate is "directly linked to [Vladimir] Putin," experts told Newsweek, and he may already have an "exit strategy" prepared should Putin's leadership end for whatever reason. Kadyrov said if he is asked to negotiate with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, he will "convince him very quickly."

- Federal prosecutors investigating Donald Trump's handling of classified materials are said to be ramping up the criminal probe by seeking further testimony from Trump's attorney Evan Corcoran.

- Mike Pence is planning to challenge the subpoena over the Jan. 6 inquiry, a move that could boost the former vice president's standing among Republican voters, experts told Newsweek.

- Anthony Dwayne McRae has been identified as the gunman who opened fire at Michigan State University on

### Governor Noem Closes State Offices in Eight Counties for Winter Storms

PIERRE, S.D. – Tonight, Gov. Kristi Noem ordered all state government executive branch offices in eight northeast South Dakota counties to be closed until noon Wednesday, Feb.15, due to blizzard conditions.

The order impacts Clark, Codington, Day, Deuel, Grant, Hamlin, Marshall, and Roberts Counties.

A Blizzard Warning is in effect for that area now until 9 a.m. CST Wednesday. Snowfall of three to five inches and wind gusts of up to 60 miles an hour are expected.

Interstate 29 is closed from Watertown to the North Dakota state line.

Travel has been impacted in several parts of South Dakota. For the latest road conditions, check sd511.org, dial 511 or the SD511 mobile app.

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Another week has come and gone out here in Washington. One thing about my job in the Senate, which I'm sure you've noticed if you read these regularly, is that no two weeks are ever the same. There are always new people coming in and out, new problems to solve and new ideas for how to address these problems. This past week we had our annual

Senate Republican Conference Retreat, and a new Congress meant we attended the annual State of the Union. I have more thoughts on that below! Here's my Weekly Round[s] Up:

Meetings this past week: Senate Armed Services Committee meeting; and Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). I also attended bible study as a guest this past week with the Republican Governors Association at their first organizational meeting.

Since there were no committee hearings or floor votes on Wednesday, we spent the day at a Senate Republican Conference Retreat. All 49 Republican Senators gathered to discuss our priorities for the upcoming Congress, including our legislative priorities like the Farm Bill and the National Defense Authorization Act. We also heard from multiple speakers, including Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy. As senators, we spend most of our days in Washington, D.C. going from meetings, to hearings, to floor votes, to whatever else is on our schedules for that day. It's nice to be able to spend a whole work day together uninterrupted to really dive into the issues that are important to us and how to address them through our roles in the Senate.

State of the Union: President Biden gave his annual State of the Union speech on Tuesday evening. Each year, the president gives an address to a joint session of Congress, typically to report on the state of our nation in terms of the economy or budget, but more often to push their political agenda, which is what happened this past week. While Republicans agreed with some of what the President said, such as funding research for cancer and other diseases, reining in big tech companies and protecting data privacy for minors, there was a whole lot of it that we did not agree with. The President glossed over some of the real issues that are happening in our country, including out-of-control inflation, the crisis at our Southern Border and our increasingly tense relationship with China. It's important that we hear from the president "from time to time," as required by Article II, Section 3 of our Constitution, but I had hoped to hear him confront our problems and share solutions, instead of pretending they don't exist.

Immediately after the State of the Union, I joined Brian Allen on Dakota News Now to discuss my thoughts. You can listen to our conversation [here](#).

Topics discussed: Housing needs ahead of the B-21 Raider stealth bomber's arrival at Ellsworth, priorities for the upcoming Congress and the Chinese surveillance balloon.

Subcommittee assignments: Two of my committees – Armed Services and Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs – have several subcommittees within them to address more specific issues. This past week, I received my subcommittee assignments. I was also named the top Republican, or ranking member, on two of them:

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## Armed Services

Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Personnel  
Subcommittee on Strategic Forces

## Banking

Subcommittee on Securities, Insurance, and Investment, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Economic Policy  
Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development

Votes taken: 2 – Both of these were on nominations of federal judges.

Hearings: We had one hearing in the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs committee on the State of Housing for 2023. This was Senator Tim Scott's first hearing as Ranking Member of our committee.

Classified briefings: We had a classified briefing on the Chinese surveillance balloon that flew over the continental United States earlier this month. We also had a classified briefing with the Intelligence Committee on this topic. While we are continuing to learn more information, there are still more questions than answers.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Aberdeen, Milbank, Sioux Falls, Tea, Viborg, Watertown and Webster.

Steps taken this week: 60,789 steps or 28.47 miles. I didn't make it back to South Dakota this week, which is unusual. I attended an unofficial event in Florida on Friday and Saturday, but I returned back to DC in time to make 5:00 mass. I walked there, which added a few steps to my total! Still caught the Super Bowl kick-off, too!

Video of the Week: I joined Jake Tapper on CNN's Sunday Show to discuss potential reforms to the Social Security system. I believe any solution to make Social Security viable long-term must protect retirees currently receiving benefits, and those who are counting on those benefits in the next several decades. Many of America's seniors depend on Social Security when they retire. However, as the baby-boomer generation is reaching retirement age, benefits are threatened due to falling revenues and higher overall program costs. As with any federal program, Social Security has room for improvement.

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## Groton Area boys have clean sweep over Aberdeen Roncalli

Groton Area's boys' basketball teams won all five games Tuesday at Aberdeen Roncalli.

The varsity team had a nine-point run in the second quarter and an eight-point run in the third quarter to help get the win. Groton Area led at the quarters tops at 7-4, 22-9 and 39-17 en route to the 45-22 win.

Tate Larson had 14 points and nine rebounds. Lane Tietz had 13 points, two assists and three steals. Cole Simon had seven points, five rebounds, one assist and one steal. Jacob Zak had five points, eight rebounds, two assists and two steals. Ryder Johnson had four points, one assist and one steal. Keegan Tracy had two points and two steals. Cade Larson and Taylor Diegel each had one rebound and one assist. Logan Ringgenberg and Gage Sippel each had one rebound. Braxton Imrie had one steal.

Groton Area made 18 of 33 two-pointers for 55 percent, two of 15 three-pointers for 13 percent, had 28 rebonds, five turnovers, eight assists and 10 steals. The Cavaliers had 10 team fouls which allowed the Tigers to make three of eight free throws for 38 percent. Groton Area had 16 teams fouls which allowed the Cavaliers to make 10 of 14 free throws for 71 percent.

Roncalli was led by Jayden Munroe with eight points followed by Zane Backous and Maddox May with three points each, and adding two points apiece were Maddox Miller, Caden Shelton, Darwin Gambler and Aiden Fisher.

Roncalli made six of 34 field goals for 17 percent and had 18 turnovers.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 40-10, leading at the quarters tops at 14-0, 26-0 and 35-4. Ryder Johnson and Taylor Diegel each had 11 points while Keegan Tracy had six, Gage Sippel four, and Braxton Imrie and Logan Ringgenberg each had three points.

Groton Area won the C game, 28-19, leading at the quarters tops at 8-2, 16-6 and 20-13. Blake Pauli led Groton Area with six points while Logan Pearson and Gage Sippel each had five, Jayden Schwan had four, Karsten Flihs three, Logan Warrington and Carter Simon each had two points and Caden McInerney added one free throw.

Groton Area won the seventh grade, 49-18. Ryder Schelle led Groton Area with 12 points while Easten Weber had 10, TC Schuster had nine, Jace Johnson and Ethan Kroll each had seven points and Karson Zak added four points.

Groton won the eighth grade game, 40-34. Easten Weber had 18 points, Ryder Schelle had 10, Karson Zak eight and Ethan Kroll four.

The C game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Darcie and Eric Moody. The junior varsity game was sponsored by Coach Kyle and The Gerlach. Varsity game sponsors were Bahr Spray Foam, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Groton Chamber of Commerce, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Locke Electric, Milbrandt Enterprises Inc., Spanier Harvesting & Trucking, Thunder Seed with John Wheeting.

- Paul Kosel

# GDILIVE.COM

**Basketball Double Header at Britton-Hecla**  
**Friday, Feb. 17, 2023**

**Livestreaming begins at 5 p.m. for both JV Games**  
**Boys Game sponsored by Grandpa**  
**Girls Game sponsored by Rich & Tami Zimney**

**Varsity to follow 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  
Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc.  
Spanier Harvesting & Trucking  
Bahr Spray Foam  
Thunder Seed with John Wheeting



**Shane Clark will be doing the play-by-play of the girls games!**

**\$5 ticket to watch can be purchased at GDILIVE.COM.**  
**GDI Subscribers can watch for free**

# GDILIVE.COM

**Boys Basketball Action hosting Florence-Henry  
Saturday, Feb. 18, 2023**

**Livestreaming begins at 11 a.m.**

**JH and C games sponsored by**

**GDI Living Heart Fitness Center**

**JV Game sponsored by Steve & Betty Dunker**



**Varsity to follow 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

Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc.

Spanier Harvesting & Trucking

Bahr Spray Foam

Thunder Seed with John Wheeting



**\$5 ticket to watch can be purchased at GDILIVE.COM.**

**GDI Subscribers can watch for free**

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## Region 1A Standings

### Girls Basketball

#	Name	Season			Seed Pts
		W	L	PCT	<u>PTS</u>
1	 Sisseton	16	2	.889	43.944
2	 Milbank	11	7	.611	41.389
3	 Groton Area	11	8	.579	40.789
4	 Aberdeen Roncalli	9	9	.500	40.500
5	 Redfield	9	10	.474	39.789
6	 Waubay/Summit	9	9	.500	38.667
7	 Webster Area	7	11	.389	38.444
8	 Tiospa Zina	5	13	.278	37.556

### Boys Basketball

#	Name	Season			Seed Pts
		W	L	PCT	<u>PTS</u>
1	 Waubay/Summit	14	3	.824	42.765
2	 Groton Area	12	4	.750	42.562
3	 Milbank	11	6	.647	41.882
4	 Tiospa Zina	9	7	.562	41.438
5	 Aberdeen Roncalli	9	10	.474	40.105
6	 Redfield	8	11	.421	39.211
7	 Webster Area	4	13	.235	37.529
8	 Sisseton	1	17	.056	36.278



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### State revenue 'overflowing' this year, but some lawmakers are cautious about the future

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 14, 2023 7:47 PM

PIERRE – South Dakota's 2024 revenue is expected to increase by millions of dollars, but experts say that increase won't last forever, and some legislators are growing cautious about how to spend the state's excess money in the coming year.

At the Joint Committee on Appropriations meeting Tuesday morning at the Capitol, the Legislative Research Council projected \$2.4 billion in ongoing revenue for fiscal year 2024 – an increase of \$122.35 million from the current year's anticipated revenue.

The Bureau of Finance and Management projected a slightly lower revenue estimate of \$2.2 billion for ongoing revenue, which factors in Gov. Kristi Noem's proposed elimination of the sales tax on food. Revenue would increase to \$2.3 billion without the tax cut.

The legislators on the committee use the revenue projections to set the fiscal year 2024 budget. The fate of several tax cut bills is dependent on the numbers in that budget, including three major tax cut proposals: a food sales tax repeal, a property tax reduction, and an overall sales and use tax reduction.

Later in the evening, the Revenue Projection Subcommittee accepted an ongoing revenue estimate of \$2.3 billion for the remainder of the current fiscal year and a revenue projection of \$2.39 billion for fiscal year 2024, which are combinations of the revenue estimates the two state offices presented to legislators earlier in the day.

The revised fiscal year 2023 revenue and the fiscal year 2024 revenue will be presented and officially adopted at Wednesday's Joint Committee on Appropriations meeting.

The revenue estimates factor in federal stimulus dollars entering the state's economy, increased wages due to a tight labor market, and inflation.

Over the last three years, the Legislature's adopted budget underestimated revenues by an average of about \$245.5 million each year compared to the actual revenue collected. LRC Chief Fiscal Analyst Jeff Mehlhaff said that was because legislators didn't factor in federal stimulus money, inflation or wage increases in the state during that time.

Now, the financial experts are "more aggressive" in their projections than in years past, said Derek Johnson, state economist with the governor's Bureau of Finance and Management.

Much of the over \$1 billion in federal American Rescue Plan funds the state received during the pandemic will start circulating in the economy over the next few months, Mehlhaff projects. That will lead to an increase in sales and use tax and contractor's excise tax due to the increase in development across the state. And Mehlhaff doesn't expect a potentially mild national recession predicted by some economists to impact the state's revenue.

"Even if consumers spend less, inflationary increase will come in," Mehlhaff said. "We will see increased revenues even if consumers pull back on spending."

Inflation is expected to average 4% during the current 2023 fiscal year, but decline to 2.3% in fiscal year 2024. While sales tax collections are still higher than typical, personal income has begun to dip. Johnson expects sales tax collections to drop soon after.

"This can't continue. The sales tax collections can't continue to be above personal income," Johnson said. "Regardless of where inflation is, people can only spend the money that they have."

In his revenue projection last year, Mehlhaff said he was concerned about sales and use tax receipts in 2024 and 2025.

That means that while the "glass is overflowing" this year, as Mehlhaff put it, some legislators are calling for caution in case inflation lowers and federal stimulus money runs out in the next few years.

"At some point, we'll get back to normal," said Rep. Lance Koth, R-Mitchell. "I would rather have us end the year with a couple hundred million because we underestimated rather than try to get that to zero, be short and have to do some serious cutting."

Sen. Jean Hunhoff, R-Yankton, chair of Joint Appropriations and a member of the Revenue Projection Subcommittee, fought for a more conservative revenue projection. In part, she said she's cautious about the money that will be available after the federal stimulus runs out.

She referenced the budget cuts of the late 2000s as an example.

"I lived through a 10% budget cut and I don't want anybody to have to do that again, because that was not an experience you want to have," Hunhoff said.

*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.*

## It takes a village: Foster program is a new model of care for Indigenous children

BY: ARIELLE ZIONTS - FEBRUARY 14, 2023 6:54 PM

LA PLANT, S.D. — Past a gravel road lined with old white wooden buildings is a new, 8-acre village dotted with colorful houses, tepees, and a sweat lodge.

The Simply Smiles Children's Village, in this small town on the Cheyenne River Reservation, is home to a program aimed at improving outcomes and reducing trauma for Indigenous foster children.

All foster programs seek to safely reunite children with their families. The Children's Village goes further.

"We want to make Lakota citizens of the world," said Colt Combellick, who oversees mental health programs at the village. "If we can help them relearn their culture and their heritage and connect them to the resources that they need to thrive moving forward, we're going to try to make that happen."

The program is an example of the growing nationwide effort to improve services for Indigenous children, after generations were routinely traumatized by being separated from their families and cultures. While the Indian boarding school era is over, and improvements have been made to child welfare systems, Indigenous families remain overrepresented in the foster care system.

Simply Smiles, a nonprofit organization, aims to improve Indigenous foster care by keeping children in their tribal community instead of placing them in foster families away from the reservation. It has hired trained professionals whose full-time job is to care for children in a village setting that provides cultural programming and mental health services.

"We actually have research that shows that kids who have stronger cultural identity have better child well-being outcomes" such as succeeding in school and avoiding drugs, said Angelique Day, an associate professor at the University of Washington and an expert on Indigenous child welfare.

Day, who is not affiliated with Simply Smiles, said she's excited by any innovative program aimed at improving child welfare in tribal communities if it provides adequate training so foster parents can support the children and avoid turnover. She said it's also important for organizations to arrange for independent evaluation of kids' progress after leaving foster programs.

It's too early to say whether Simply Smiles will succeed in its goals, but the Children's Village has the support of the leaders of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and has attracted interest and visits from officials representing Indigenous nations across the country.

It was a Cheyenne River Sioux tribal member who suggested the nonprofit set up a foster village on the reservation after learning about a similar program the nonprofit runs in Mexico. The tribal council voted to

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support the idea, and Simply Smiles has advisers including child welfare experts, elders, and other leaders of the Cheyenne River Sioux and other tribes.

Simply Smiles' model combines living in a house in a family setting with the resources of more institutional settings, said Bryan Nurnberger, president and founder of the Connecticut-based nonprofit.

The Children's Village in La Plant has one foster parent caring for three teenagers. It's hiring other parents to fill its three homes, which, together, can house up to six parents and 18 children.

The family has access to a counseling and family visiting center, as well as a large blue barn that stores a bus, maintenance equipment, and new clothing for the children to "shop" through.

MarShondria Adams, 39, grew up with stepsiblings who were placed in multiple foster homes. Last year, she moved 300 miles from Sioux Falls, South Dakota's largest city, to La Plant, population 167, to become a foster parent at the Children's Village.

On a recent cold and foggy morning, Adams' three foster teens made smoothies for breakfast inside their navy-blue house with a bubble-gum-pink front door at the Children's Village. Adams drove them to school and then returned home, where she did laundry and filled out paperwork for the state's child welfare department. Her after-school plan was to cook dinner as the kids tackled a YouTube exercise class.

Being a traditional foster parent in Sioux Falls would "be a day-and-night difference," Adams said. She wouldn't have on-site resources and staff members to assist her and the children with tasks ranging from repairing flat tires to finding a specialist who conducts learning disability assessments.

"I have all these people that are around me to support me and help me," Adams said. Traditional foster parents probably spend more time than she does playing phone tag with case managers and searching for other resources, she said.

The program's foster parents receive 70 more hours of training than required by the state, including education about Lakota culture. It also offers telehealth therapy, evaluations, and medication management to the foster parents, children, and birth parents. Combellick said the mental health services use trauma-informed and culturally relevant evidence-based methods.

The nonprofit funds these services through donations, grants, and the state, which also refers potential foster children to Simply Smiles.

Combellick, a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, is another Simply Smiles staffer with a personal story about family separations.

His father was 6 years old when his mother went missing and was found dead on the reservation. Combellick's dad and his siblings were sent 80 miles away to an Indian boarding school, where they stayed about a year before being reunited with their family.

Combellick said his father developed post-traumatic stress disorder from boarding school, where he faced corporal punishment and was not allowed to speak the Lakota language.

"That's what spurred my passion. I just wanted to learn about my family history and how to break those cycles of oppression," he said.

Combellick became a social worker and hoped someday to find a way to directly support his tribe.

"I came by Simply Smiles, and — boom! — it's like 300 yards from where my ancestors grew up," he said.

Studies in the 1970s found that states with large Native American populations were removing up to 35% of Native American children from their families. This was often due to judgments about poverty and traditional child-raising practices, not abuse. Of those who went to foster care, 85% were placed with non-Native families.

Congress passed the Indian Child Welfare Act in 1978 after hearing testimony about the psychological and cultural effects of family separation. The law aims to keep Native American families together or, when that's not possible, to place children with relatives or other tribal members.

The future of the Indian Child Welfare Act is now in the hands of the Supreme Court. Critics challenging the act in court say it is a discriminatory, race-based law. Supporters say the act is supported by the long-standing, but now threatened, legal standard that tribes are sovereign political entities.

Experts say the law has reduced disparities since the 1970s, but by 2003 child protection agencies were still more likely to investigate and substantiate allegations against Native American families than other

groups, and more likely to remove their children than those of any other group, according to data analyzed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

And as recently as 2020, Native American children were nearly three times as likely to be in foster care as other children, according to a Casey Foundation analysis. More than half of these foster children were placed with non-relatives or non-Indigenous caregivers.

South Dakota, which has a foster care rate 60% higher than the national average, has a shortage of licensed foster parents from all backgrounds.

This rate and shortage are highest for Indigenous South Dakotans. More than half the state's foster children are Native American, even though Native children make up only 12% of the population.

South Dakota lawmakers recently rejected legislation that would have codified parts of the Indian Child Welfare Act into state law. But they may create a task force to study how the state can improve Indigenous child welfare.

Eleven percent of the state's licensed foster homes are Native American, according to state data. Child welfare expert Day, a descendant of the Ho-Chunk Nation, said some Native Americans aren't able or approved to accept foster children because they have low incomes or live in crowded or subpar housing.

"It's not like tribal families don't want to step up and do this work. It's that we have barriers, systemic barriers, that are embedded within the system that discriminate against families who want to do this work," she said.

Even with the pay and on-site support, Simply Smiles has found it challenging to recruit and retain caregivers. The first foster family arrived in fall 2020, but the parent burned out amid covid pandemic closures on the reservation. Another parent, from a large city outside South Dakota, left after finding life in such a remote area too difficult.

Marcella Gilbert, a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, coordinates cultural programming such as trips to powwows and outings to hunt elk and bison. She also cares for the children when their foster parent needs a break.

"We're asking people to do the hardest job in the world, which is being a parent to children coming into our homes with loss and trauma," she said.

*KHN (Kaiser Health News) is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues. Together with Policy Analysis and Polling, KHN is one of the three major operating programs at KFF (Kaiser Family Foundation). KFF is an endowed nonprofit organization providing information on health issues to the nation.*

*Arielle Zionts, Rural Health Care Correspondent for Kaiser Health News, is based in South Dakota. She primarily covers South Dakota and its neighboring states and tribal nations. Arielle previously worked at South Dakota Public Broadcasting, where she reported on business and economic development. Before that, she was the criminal justice reporter at the Rapid City Journal and a general assignment reporter at the Nogales International, on the border of Arizona and Mexico. She graduated from Pitzer College in Claremont, California. Arielle lives in Rapid City with her cat, Sully.*

## Committee passes Noem bill proposing a board to vet foreign ag land purchases

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 14, 2023 3:12 PM

In a 7-0 vote Tuesday, the state Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee passed a bill that would establish a vetting process for foreign purchases of agricultural land in South Dakota.

The bill would create a board to investigate proposed purchases of ag land by foreign interests, and to make recommendations of approval or denial.

Governor Kristi Noem announced the bill in December, receiving national attention for doing so.

"With this new process, we will be able to prevent nations who hate us – like Communist China – from buying up our state's agriculture land," Noem said in a news release at the time.

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The board would be called the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States – South Dakota. The bill has gained support from some farmers who worry that foreign investors could drive up land prices and make it more difficult for young farmers and ranchers to enter the industry.

And the bill is necessary to protect the state's agricultural industry and prevent foreign investors from buying up land without proper scrutiny, according to the secretary of the state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Hunter Roberts.

"Food security is national security," Roberts said during the committee hearing at the Capitol in Pierre.

The board's jurisdiction would cover transactions of any number of acres involving any foreign person, foreign government, foreign business, or any organization controlled by a foreign person, government or business.

Opposition to the bill came from many state agriculture associations, including the South Dakota Farm Bureau, Farmers Union, Stockgrowers Association, Dairy Producers, Wheat Growers, and the Pork, Soybean, Corn and Cattlemen's associations. Some took issue with provisions in the bill that would give the governor the final say over the board's recommendations.

"Putting this decision in the hands of one individual, whoever that individual is, that doesn't further democracy," said Jeremiah Murphy, a South Dakota Stockgrowers Association lobbyist.

Other opponents of the bill, like South Dakota Bankers, said it could discourage foreign investment in the state, hurt trade relations, and send a negative message to potential investors. Opponents also argued the issue is best addressed at the federal level.

The bill requires foreigners to apply to the committee before buying ag land. But the bill also puts the final onus of identifying foreign purchasers of ag land onto county registers of deeds. The bill would prohibit registers of deeds from accepting deeds for agricultural land if the transaction is subject to the proposed committee's jurisdiction and lacks an approval letter.

Stanley County Register of Deeds Patricia Duffy testified against the bill.

"We would have no way of knowing if a deed would be subject to the committee," Duffy said. "Bottom line is we are concerned we will be asked to do something that is not possible for us to do."

The bill's proponents disagreed that the bill's aims are better left to the feds.

"This is an issue that we cannot leave in the hands of the federal government," said prime sponsor Sen. Erin Tobin, R-Winner. "We owe it to our future."

Similar efforts are already underway in other states such as Missouri, where legislators have filed several bills that would restrict foreign ownership of agricultural land.

The South Dakota bill still has to go through several stages of review before it can become law. It will need to pass the full Senate, the House of Representatives, and be signed by the governor before it can take effect.

## Related bill and law

A related bill requiring companies to disclose whether they already own agricultural land and have any foreign owners unanimously passed the full House of Representatives on Monday and will next be considered by a Senate committee.

Under that legislation, when corporations file already mandated annual reports with the state, they would have to disclose whether they own any agricultural land and whether they have any foreign owners. The bill would not require those owners to say what country they're from.

There's already a law in South Dakota from 1979 that was designed to prevent some foreign individuals and governments from owning more than 160 acres of farmland. Despite that law, records in 2016 published by the Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting showed multiple examples of foreigners owning more than 160 acres in South Dakota. The 1979 law did not come up during Tuesday's hearing.

According to 2020 data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, foreign residents or entities now own over 350,000 acres of ag land in South Dakota — that's only about 1% of all South Dakota agricultural land, but a greater than 3,000% increase from 1979. The largest foreign owners of South Dakota farmland are from Canada and Europe.

Noem's push to stop some purchases of ag land by foreign entities is part of a broader effort to counter the influence of some foreign countries. She has already banned the Chinese-owned application TikTok from state devices and has undertaken other anti-China measures. On Wednesday, she will deliver a speech to the America First Policy Institute in Washington, D.C., that a news release said will "outline the blueprint for a state response to the threat posed by the Chinese Communist Party."

*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.*

## Lack of action by Congress to protect kids online criticized at U.S. Senate hearing

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - FEBRUARY 14, 2023 7:39 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. senators on Tuesday voiced frustration and outrage that Congress has been unable to pass legislation bolstering protection for children online, including adding guardrails to social media platforms.

During a hearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee, Democrats and Republicans pledged to keep working together to pass several bipartisan bills that didn't make it to President Joe Biden's desk during the last session.

But they also sparred about the best way to protect children online from sexual exploitation, mental health challenges, subpar privacy protections and companies that target children to sell their data to advertisers.

"It's just another reminder of how frustrating and maddening and frankly infuriating it is that Congress has been unable to deal with this in a more timely and a more targeted manner," said Texas GOP Sen. John Cornyn. "But I'm also reminded of the fact that technology does not move at the speed of legislation."

### Oregon parent testifies

Kristin Bride, a social media reform advocate from Portland, Oregon, told the panel how her 16-year-old son, Carson, committed suicide after being harassed online by people who were able to remain anonymous by using certain apps.

Bride told senators she found out after her son committed suicide that he received nearly 100 negative, harassing, or sexually explicit messages leading up to his death.

She also said despite one of the companies writing in its terms of use that it would monitor for cyberbullying and reveal the identities of people who violated its policy, the company ignored her four requests for information.

She then filed a lawsuit, which was dismissed because Sec. 230 of the Communications Decency Act, a 1996 law, insulates companies from liability for the content third parties post on their websites.

"It should not take grieving parents filing lawsuits to hold this industry accountable for their dangerous and addictive product designs," Bride said. "Federal legislation like the Kids Online Safety Act, which requires social media companies to have a duty of care when designing their products for America's children, is long overdue."

### Cyber tip line

Michelle DeLaune, president and CEO of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, told the committee the organization's cyber tip line received more than 3.2 million reports of child abuse within the United States during the last year.

But the quality of the information in the reports "is often lacking and there are significant disparities in how companies report," she said.

"For instance, companies have no duty to report child sex trafficking or online enticement of children," DeLaune said. "Some companies choose not to report sufficient information for those cases to be properly

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assessed and investigated. And some companies choose not to submit actual images or the videos actually being reported, or any information that could be used to identify a suspect or a victim."

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, she said, is "just seeing the tip of the iceberg" since "very few companies choose to engage in voluntary measures to detect known child sexual abuse materials and those who do proactively look for that make the most reports."

But Congress, DeLaune said, has the opportunity to make changes, including providing survivors of child sexual abuse with more power than they have now.

"Currently, child victims have no recourse if a tech company takes no action to stop, remove and report sexually explicit imagery in which they are depicted," DeLaune said.

## Few options

South Carolina Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham summed up the lack of options parents and survivors have against technology and social media companies, saying "You can't sue them, there's no agency with the power to change their behavior and there's no laws on the books that would stop this abusive behavior."

Bride told the committee that increasing safeguards is the best option, noting that at one point automobiles were much more dangerous until the government began requiring seatbelts and airbags.

John Pizzuro, former commander of New Jersey Internet Crimes Against Children and CEO of a firm called Raven that focuses on addressing child exploitation, described the online environment for children as "horrifying."

Many police departments, Pizzuro said, are swamped with reports of online exploitation of children, making it extremely challenging to proactively investigate.

"Children are made vulnerable on these platforms as a result of poor moderation, the absence of age or identity verification, inadequate or missing safety mechanisms and the sheer determination of offenders," Pizzuro said.

Emma Lembke, founder of the Log Off Movement, who is from Alabama but attends college in Missouri, urged the committee to take steps to bolster protections for teens on social media platforms.

"The genie is out of the bottle and we will never go back to a time where social media does not exist, nor should we," Lembke said. "But make no mistake, unregulated social media is a weapon of mass destruction that continues to jeopardize the safety, privacy and wellbeing of all American youth."

Senate Judiciary Chair Dick Durbin, an Illinois Democrat, pledged to at least hold a markup this Congress, a process that would bring legislation forward and allow the panel's members to debate and vote on amendments.

"Like we do in the real world, we need to protect our kids in the virtual world," Durbin said. "This is not a partisan issue, this is an issue that keeps parents and children up at night. It deserves the attention of this committee and this Congress. And it deserves action."

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the Crisis Text Line provides 24/7 support for anyone thinking about committing suicide by dialing 988. The Veterans Crisis Line is available by dialing 1-800-273-8255 and pressing 1 or by sending a text message to 838255.

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



## Biden renews a call for action on gun control following Michigan State mass shooting

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - FEBRUARY 14, 2023 3:38 PM

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden at an annual meeting with county leaders on Tuesday said there is much more work to be done on gun control legislation — such as banning assault-style weapons, which are typically used in most mass shootings.

The call again for gun control came after a school shooting at Michigan State University late Monday in which three students were killed and five more injured. Tuesday was also the five-year anniversary of the deadly high school shooting in Parkland, Florida, in which 14 students and three faculty members at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School were killed.

"It's a family's worst nightmare," Biden said of the Michigan shooting.

"We have to do something to stop gun violence from ripping apart our communities," he told attendees at the National Association of Counties conference.

In a statement issued prior to his remarks to the county officials, Biden said in the five years since Parkland and during his administration, he brought Democrats and Republicans together to pass a bipartisan gun safety bill, but more needs to be done.

"I once again call on Congress to enact commonsense gun law reforms, including requiring background checks on all gun sales, banning assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, and eliminating immunity for gun manufacturers who knowingly put weapons of war on our streets," he said. "We owe it to all those we've lost and to all those left behind to grieve to continue to act."

In another statement, this one on the Michigan State shooting, he said he has offered Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer any federal assistance needed.

"The fact that this shooting took place the night before this country marks five years since the deadly shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, should cause every American to exclaim 'enough' and demand that Congress take action," he said.

### County leaders in D.C.

The National Association of Counties is a non-governmental organization that represents more than 2,300 counties and provides legislative, research, public relations and technical assistance to those members.

The organization is wrapping up a five-day conference of workshops and briefings on federal policy that affects local government such as broadband, the upcoming farm bill, workforce development, public lands, immigration and veterans affairs, among other issues.

Similar to his State of the Union address last week, Biden touched upon his administration's efforts to combat the fentanyl crisis and the need to allocate more funding for personnel at the border to intercept the drugs, and he mentioned how officials have seized more than 23,000 pounds of fentanyl.

He also pointed to lower gas and fuel costs, and said his administration will continue to lower inflation. The Federal Reserve has hiked interest rates in order to slow inflation.

The U.S. Department of Labor on Tuesday released January's consumer price index, which measures a broad basket of common goods and services, and reported that inflation rose .05%, with rising costs of shelter, gas and fuel prices. The CPI was up 6.4% from the same period in 2022.

"In contrast, the fruits and vegetables index fell 0.5 percent over the month with the fresh vegetables index declining 2.3 percent," according to the CPI. "The index for dairy and related products was unchanged in January."

Biden also took a swipe at Republicans, saying that some wanted to cut and sunset popular social safety net programs such as Social Security and Medicare.

"You may have seen a spirited debate in my State of the Union address," he said to attendees, adding that he felt like he was "back on a playground."

"When I call (Republicans) out on this, the State of the Union, it sounded as though they agreed right then and there to take those cuts off the table," he said. "I sure hope so."

Republicans have adamantly stated that they have no plans to make cuts to those programs, but the White House cites a proposal by Republican Sen. Rick Scott of Florida to sunset federal programs after five years unless Congress authorizes them.

Biden also acknowledged that he shares concerns with counties about the debt ceiling issue in Congress and how that can affect their budgets. At issue is how a divided Congress will deal with the nation's borrowing ceiling, known as the debt limit. Congress has until the summer to address it.

"In fact, even coming close to default will raise borrowing costs, (and) make it harder to finance key projects in their communities," Biden said, referring to lawmakers.

Biden said that he met with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and said he wants to lay out his budget, along with McCarthy's budget, and come to an agreement and avoid defaulting.

He said that he knows there will still be "bumps in the road" but that overall, he is optimistic for the year ahead, as pieces of legislation Congress and the administration worked to pass begin to see implementation in states.

Last year, Biden pitched to NACo members his Build Back Better plan, a massive social spending and climate plan. The Build Back Better plan stalled in Congress but it was later cobbled into the Inflation Reduction Act, which Biden signed into law last year.

*Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.*

## One missile fired at mystery flying object wound up in Lake Huron, officials say

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - FEBRUARY 14, 2023 3:29 PM

WASHINGTON — The American public may know by week's end the administration's strategy on unidentified flying objects going forward, but some questions about three recent ones shot down by the U.S. military may not be answered for a long time, if ever.

Debris from the three low-altitude objects downed by U.S. Air Force air-to-air missiles last weekend hasn't yet been found, and one of the missiles that missed its target is now at the bottom of Lake Huron, according to White House and Pentagon officials Tuesday.

The lake is bordered by the state of Michigan and Canada. Officials said Monday they believe the debris from the object crashed into Canadian waters.

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Tuesday "the first shot missed" when two U.S. Air Force F-16 fighter jets were ordered to shoot the object over the lake.

"We go to great lengths to make sure the air space is clear, and the backdrop is clear to the max effect of range of the missile," Milley said.

"In this case the missile landed harmlessly in the water of Lake Huron, we tracked it all the way down. And we made sure the air space was clear of any commercial, civilian or recreational traffic."

The U.S. Air Force did not immediately answer an inquiry about whether the military will recover the missile, an AIM-9X Sidewinder.

### 'Tough conditions' for recovery

Three objects — about which officials have given little detail — were each shot down Friday, Saturday and Sunday over Alaska sea ice, Canadian wilderness and Lake Huron, respectively.

"We're taking this day by day and doing the best we can to try to locate the debris and then develop a plan to recover it," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Tuesday on a call with reporters.

"We're dealing with some pretty tough conditions here," Kirby said.

The incidents followed the Feb. 4 downing of a suspected Chinese surveillance balloon 6 nautical miles off the coast of South Carolina. China claims the high-altitude balloon, flying at 60,000 feet, was collecting weather data.

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U.S. officials say the 200-foot maneuverable balloon carrying equipment the size of a jetliner was part of a vast Chinese surveillance operation that has spanned dozens of countries.

But little has been revealed about the three unmanned objects detected by U.S. and Canadian radar that were moving with the winds between 20,000 and 40,000 feet — except that the object shot down Friday just off Alaska's Northern Slope was the size of a car, officials said.

"Thus far, we haven't seen any indication or anything that points specifically to the idea that these three objects were part of the PRC's spy balloon program, or that they were definitively involved in external intelligence collection efforts," Kirby said, referring to the People's Republic of China.

The U.S. is considering the scenario that the objects could be privately owned commercial or research instruments, but when asked if anyone has claimed the objects, Kirby said no.

Several government agencies are meeting this week to discuss policy and decision-making for shooting down unidentified objects now that the North American Aerospace Defense Command, or NORAD, has adjusted its radar to detect smaller, slower and lower altitude craft. A plan is expected by the end of the week, Kirby said.

## Senators briefed

U.S. senators who are eager for answers about the objects received a private briefing from Pentagon officials Tuesday morning.

Idaho Sen. Jim Risch, the ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, told reporters after the briefing that all three objects were "very, very small" and that at least one of them was carrying a payload.

The Idaho Republican indicated the objects were smaller than a car but wouldn't give further details.

"That's probably all I better say about that," Risch said.

Sen. Tom Cotton, who sits on the Senate's Armed Services and Intelligence committees, called on President Joe Biden to address the nation.

"Americans are worried, they're concerned and they're interested, and they have a right to know why President Biden directed the actions that he did over the last week," the Arkansas Republican said after the classified briefing.

Sen. Chris Coons, a Delaware Democrat, said he thinks the president should wait for more details before giving a speech.

"There's a lot of concern and conversation, that's understandable. If I were advising the president on this, I'd say wait until you've got clarity about what's happening, and a clear path forward about what we will do and should do with regards to both other countries' surveillance programs and resolving the issue of objects of which we're not really certain, their origin and purpose," said Coons, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Kirby maintains the "deliberative process" Biden took to order the downing of the unidentified crafts came at the recommendation of the military over concerns that the objects posed a potential surveillance threat and a danger to civilian air traffic, which travels around 30,000 feet.

When asked by reporters whether the president will deliver an address, Kirby said he had "nothing to speak to with respect to the president's public appearances" and said that Biden is being updated on developments.

Senior reporter Jennifer Shutt contributed to this report.

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

## Committee approves vaccine exemption bill amid misinformation, offensive language

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 14, 2023 2:41 PM

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This story includes offensive language, which has been included to accurately portray the content of a public legislative hearing.*

A South Dakota legislative committee approved a bill Tuesday that would establish a "conscience" exemption from COVID-19 vaccine mandates, after the committee hearing at the Capitol in Pierre disintegrated into a parade of misinformation and offensive language.

The House Health and Human Services Committee voted 7-6 to send the bill to the full House of Representatives. The legislation would establish a legal right to opt out of COVID-19 vaccine mandates that violate a person's "inner conviction regarding that which is right or wrong."

The bill says people couldn't be disciplined for not getting the vaccine. Additionally, institutions could be sued for mandating the vaccine if they failed to let their employees or students know about the exemption.

The legislation does not apply to the National Guard or health care facilities; however, it does apply to educational institutions, including medical schools.

Opponents of the bill, including some public health officials and health care organizations, argued it could undermine efforts to combat a new variant, put vulnerable populations at risk, and exert too much control over private businesses.

"This bill will create an extremely troubling precedent and launch us on a slippery slope that will lead to attempts to expand this subjective and absolute exemption to all vaccines," said Justin Smith, a lobbyist for the Greater Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce.

Prime sponsor Rep. Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, said the bill protects individual freedom and the right to make medical decisions based on personal beliefs.

"The sad reality is that the American people were lied to," Hansen said.

As evidence, he cited COVID vaccine-related deaths people have self-reported to the Vaccine Adverse Event Report System (VAERS).

VAERS is a national early warning system to detect possible safety problems in U.S.-licensed vaccines. VAERS is co-managed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. It's a passive system, meaning anyone can make an unverified report. The system is not intended to be used as proof of a problem with a vaccine. VAERS reports may contain information that is incomplete, inaccurate, coincidental, or unverifiable, according to the CDC.

While there have been self-reported instances of alleged problems with COVID vaccines in South Dakota reported to VAERS, CDC data also say 741,781 South Dakotans have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

The hearing Tuesday included remote testimony from Benjamin Marble, who's known for appearing on disgraced conspiracy theorist Alex Jones' show to argue that Anthony Fauci, formerly the chief medical adviser to President Joe Biden, "created" COVID-19 and is "the greatest mass murderer in the history of the world."

"Earth to poison pushers, you need to wake up," Marble said during testimony. "These fake vaccines are far more deadly than cyanide."

Marble went too far for the committee chairman, Rep. Kevin Jensen, R-Canton.

"Please focus on the bill and stop the attacks, OK?" Jensen asked of Marble.

"Sure, OK. In summation, are you a retard or did God give you a brain?" Dr. Marble said.

"OK, stop, stop. You're done. You're done." Jensen said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that all eligible people receive a vaccine as a safe and effective means of protecting against COVID-19.

"A large CDC vaccine safety study showed that there was no increased risk of death linked to COVID-19 vaccination," the CDC shared in a statement. "Myocarditis after COVID-19 vaccination is rare. Heart problems are five times more likely after COVID-19 illness than after COVID-19 vaccination."

Sixty-six South Dakotans are currently hospitalized with COVID-19, and 3,153 have died with COVID-19 since the pandemic began, according to the state Department of Health.

*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.*

## Attorneys general from Democratic-led states urge judge to keep abortion pill legal

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - FEBRUARY 14, 2023 11:32 AM

WASHINGTON — Attorneys general from 21 Democratic-leaning states are calling on a Texas judge to keep the abortion pill on the market, rejecting claims anti-abortion medical groups made in a lawsuit that's centered on the medication's approval more than two decades ago.

The latest brief in the case, Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine v. U.S. Food and Drug Administration, will likely bring even more attention to a lawsuit that could have sweeping, nationwide effects for medication abortion.

The two-medication regimen, consisting of mifepristone and misoprostol, is approved for up to 10 weeks into a pregnancy and accounts for more than half of abortions in the United States.

New York Attorney General Letitia James filed the brief on behalf of her state as well as California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Washington, Wisconsin and the District of Columbia.

### 22 years of use

The attorneys general argue in their brief that medication abortion is safe and effective, as proven by 22 years of approved use.

They wrote that requiring the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to remove mifepristone would force patients to undergo a procedural abortion or to "forgo an abortion entirely," both of which "would have devastating consequences" for residents of their states.

"Procedural abortion is not only more invasive than medication abortion, but it is also generally more costly and difficult to obtain," the attorneys general wrote. "Indeed, the availability of mifepristone has been particularly critical in providing access to abortion in low-income, underserved, and rural communities where procedural abortion may be unavailable."

"And because medication abortion is the most common method used to terminate pregnancy during the first trimester, eliminating access to this method will result in more abortions taking place later in pregnancy, further increasing costs and medical risks," they added.

The lawsuit, filed in mid-November by anti-abortion legal organization Alliance Defending Freedom, on behalf of four anti-abortion medical organizations and four anti-abortion physicians, argues the FDA overstepped its authority in 2000 when it approved mifepristone to end pregnancies.

The lawsuit calls on the Trump-appointed U.S. district court judge to pull the abortion pill from the market entirely, or to at least set the dispensing and dosage requirements back to how they were authorized before the FDA made changes in 2016 and during the pandemic.

### Competing arguments

The brief filed by the Democratic attorneys general is substantially different from the brief 23 Republican attorneys general filed last week.

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The Democratic attorneys general disparaged the claims made in the lawsuit, including that medication abortion is not safe or effective.

They pointed to a comprehensive survey by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine that "concluded that medication abortion — like procedural abortion — is safe and effective and that complications after medication abortion are rare, i.e., 'occurring in no more than a fraction of a percent of patients.'"

"The relatively few adverse events associated with medication abortion are well within an acceptable range for FDA approval," the attorneys general wrote. "Indeed, evidence shows that medication abortion is as safe or safer than numerous other types of FDA approved drugs and products, including Viagra (four times safer), penicillin (two times safer), and even acetaminophen."

The attorneys general also wrote that it would be impossible to cover up the number and type of complications the anti-abortion groups claim mifepristone causes in medication abortions.

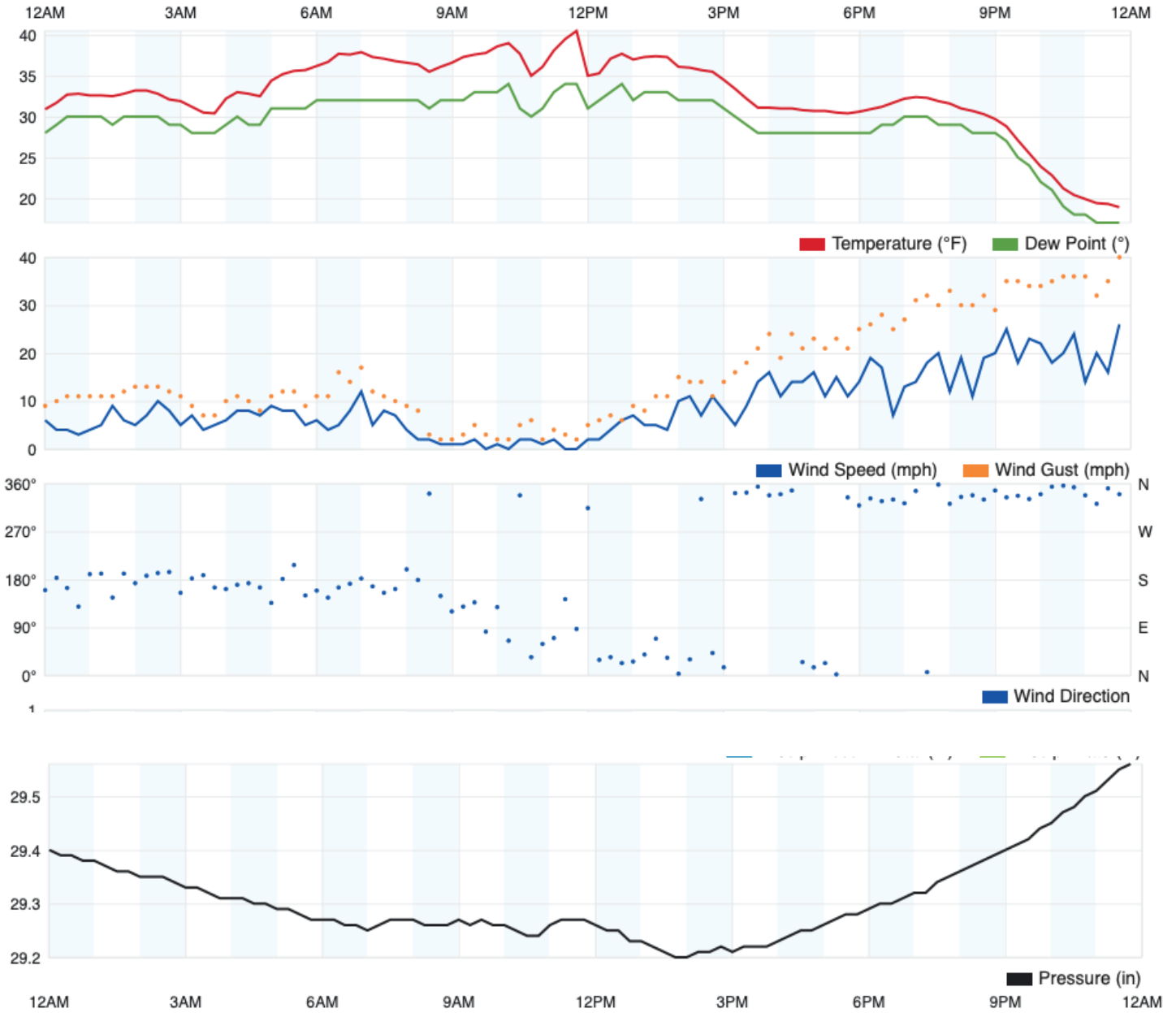
"Given the widespread use of mifepristone, if plaintiffs' allegations regarding the magnitude of risk associated with medication abortion were accurate, those harmful effects would be impossible to hide at the population level," the attorneys general wrote. "But amici have seen no such effects — and in fact, the opposite is true."

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

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
						
Patchy Blowing Snow and Windy then Mostly Sunny and Blustery	Partly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Sunny and Breezy	Partly Cloudy	Partly Sunny
High: 15 °F	Low: -3 °F	High: 13 °F	Low: -2 °F	High: 32 °F	Low: 12 °F	High: 30 °F



## Strong Winds Subsiding Today

February 15, 2023  
3:54 AM

### Maximum Wind Gust Forecast

	2/15 Wed														2/16 Thu						
	4am	5am	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm	12am
<b>Aberdeen</b>	51	52	46	46	43	38	35	32	30	28	26	24	22	18	12	10	8	6	6	6	5
<b>Britton</b>	52	52	46	46	44	38	36	32	28	26	25	24	21	17	13	10	9	6	3	3	3
<b>Eagle Butte</b>	46	41	40	38	35	33	30	28	26	24	22	21	20	17	13	10	9	7	8	9	10
<b>Eureka</b>	51	51	46	44	38	35	32	29	26	26	23	21	20	16	13	10	8	6	6	6	6
<b>Gettysburg</b>	52	49	46	43	38	36	33	31	29	26	26	25	23	21	17	14	12	8	7	7	7
<b>Kennebec</b>	49	46	45	41	39	37	35	33	30	26	25	24	22	20	14	14	12	10	7	7	7
<b>McIntosh</b>	49	47	43	39	36	32	26	24	22	21	20	17	16	13	9	8	7	7	7	8	7
<b>Milbank</b>	52	52	46	46	46	43	41	38	38	36	33	30	28	24	23	22	20	20	18	16	15
<b>Miller</b>	51	46	44	40	35	35	32	31	30	28	25	24	22	20	15	14	12	10	10	9	9
<b>Mobridge</b>	44	43	43	37	33	30	26	24	22	22	18	18	17	15	13	10	6	5	6	6	6
<b>Murdo</b>	46	44	40	38	37	33	32	30	26	25	24	22	22	18	16	14	12	10	9	7	6
<b>Pierre</b>	46	41	38	35	32	30	28	26	23	22	21	20	18	16	14	13	10	7	6	6	5
<b>Redfield</b>	51	51	46	44	40	37	36	35	32	30	26	25	23	20	14	12	10	9	9	7	7
<b>Sisseton</b>	52	52	46	46	46	45	41	38	35	32	30	29	25	24	22	20	18	15	14	12	10
<b>Watertown</b>	52	52	46	46	44	40	38	38	35	35	31	30	26	23	22	18	17	15	14	14	14
<b>Webster</b>	52	52	46	46	46	46	44	40	37	36	35	32	28	25	22	18	16	14	10	10	8
<b>Wheaton</b>	51	51	46	46	45	45	39	38	35	32	31	29	26	23	22	22	18	15	14	10	10



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Strong winds will persist through the morning hours with a gradual diminishing trend expected through the afternoon hours. Any leftover falling snow or loose snow on the ground will continue to blow around posing some travel hazards, especially through the midday hours.



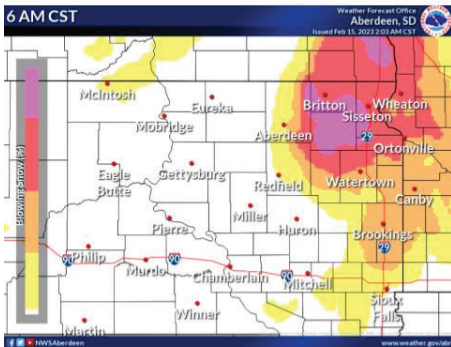
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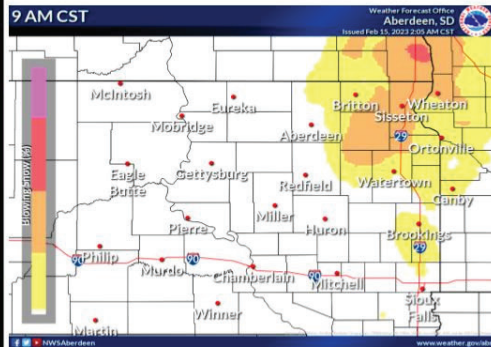


## Blowing Snow Potential This Morning

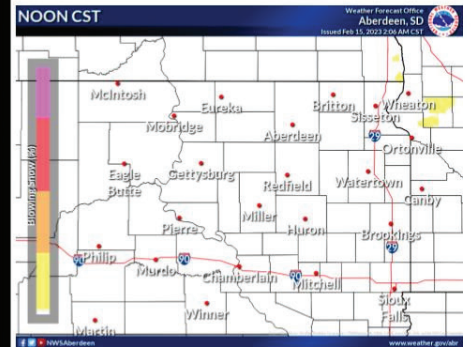
February 15, 2023  
3:54 AM



6 AM CST



9 AM CST



Noon

### Overview

→ Areas highlighted in red and pink in the images above, have the greatest potential for blizzard conditions, with visibilities down to or less than 1/4 mile possible.



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

**Minor** ☁️  
Patchy Blowing Snow with reduced visibilities expected

**Moderate** ☁️☁️  
Areas of Blowing Snow with reduced visibilities expected

**Significant** ☁️☁️☁️  
Widespread Blowing Snow and greatly reduced visibilities expected

**Blizzard** ☁️☁️☁️☁️  
Significant Blowing Snow possible, travel may be impossible

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD



## Turning Milder This Weekend

February 15, 2023  
3:54 AM

### Maximum Temperature Forecast

	2/15	2/16	2/17	2/18	2/19	2/20	2/21	2/22
	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed
<b>Aberdeen</b>	19	15	34	30	34	25	17	14
<b>Britton</b>	17	11	28	29	31	21	12	9
<b>Eagle Butte</b>	24	30	48	46	41	39	25	19
<b>Eureka</b>	15	19	39	36	35	27	18	12
<b>Gettysburg</b>	20	26	46	44	41	32	23	18
<b>Kennebec</b>	23	31	47	46	46	38	27	24
<b>McIntosh</b>	21	23	42	42	36	29	21	13
<b>Milbank</b>	21	12	30	31	34	25	17	15
<b>Miller</b>	23	19	37	36	38	30	20	18
<b>Mobridge</b>	22	27	48	46	41	37	25	18
<b>Murdo</b>	25	34	50	48	45	39	28	25
<b>Pierre</b>	26	35	52	47	49	41	30	26
<b>Redfield</b>	22	15	33	31	35	26	18	16
<b>Sisseton</b>	19	12	32	31	34	19	15	13
<b>Watertown</b>	21	13	26	30	31	20	15	13
<b>Webster</b>	18	12	26	29	30	18	13	10
<b>Wheaton</b>	17	10	29	28	31	17	14	13



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 41 °F at 11:45 AM

Low Temp: 18 °F at 11:53 PM

Wind: 43 mph at 11:01 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 28 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 65 in 1921

Record Low: -35 in 1939

Average High: 28

Average Low: 6

Average Precip in Feb.: 0.31

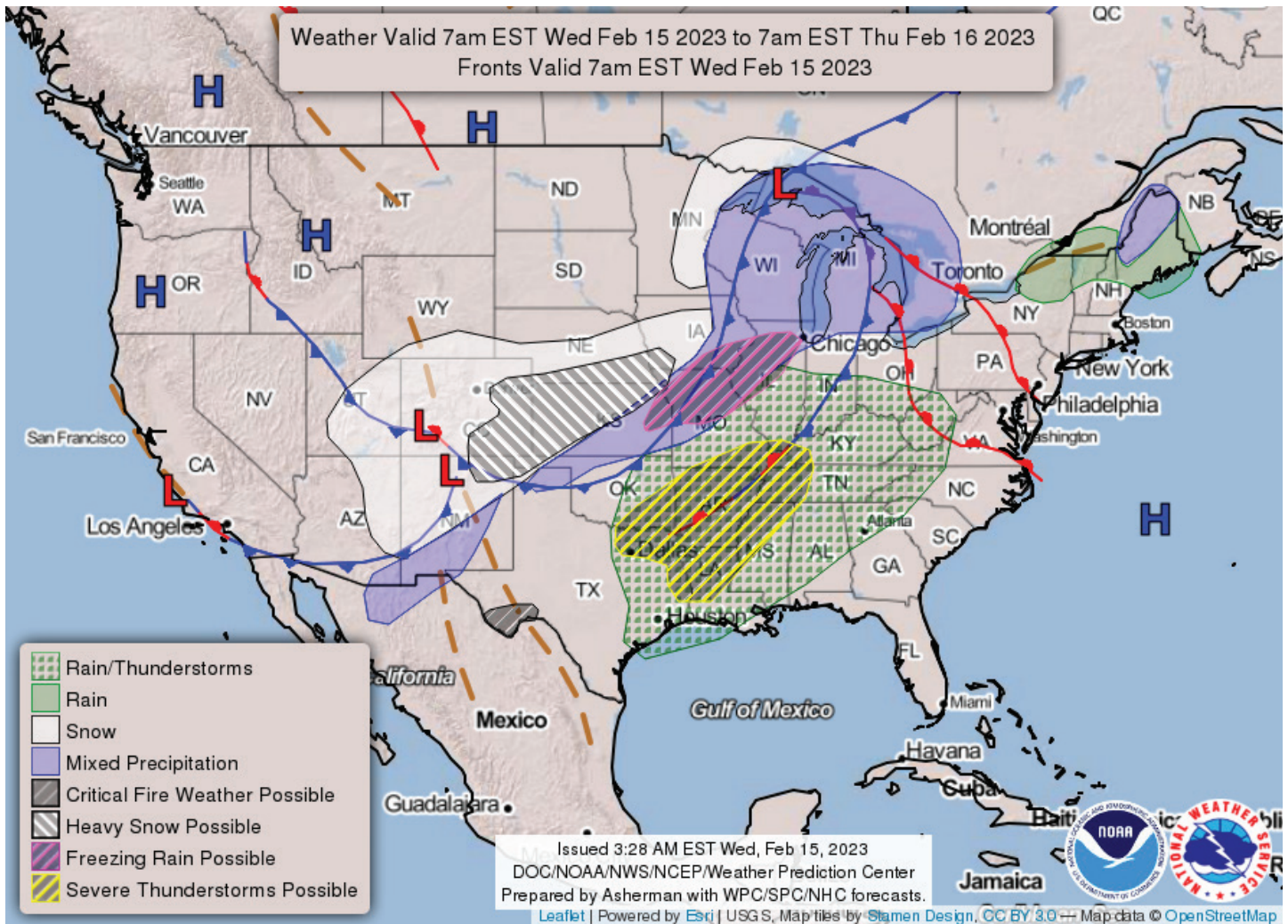
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.86

Precip Year to Date: 0.25

Sunset Tonight: 6:00:42 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:30:43 AM



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## Today in Weather History

February 15th, 1969: Heavy snow and winds of 15 to 25 mph caused blowing and drifting snow, which closed many roads. The heaviest snow fell in the southeast part of the state, where a foot of snow was reported.

February 15th, 1990: Heavy snow developed across southwest South Dakota early on the 15th and moved slowly across the state before ending early on the 16th. A narrow band of 10 to 12 inches accumulated in Central South Dakota from Pierre to near Huron. Lesser amounts of 3 to 6 inches fell north and south of the heavy snow band. Some heavier snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Aberdeen and Sioux Falls, 10 inches Pierre, and 12 inches at Huron.

1564: Galileo Galilei, who invented the telescope, the compass, and the thermometer, was born on February 15th, 1564.

1895 - A big Gulf snowstorm produced six inches at Brownsville TX and Mobile AL, 15 inches at Galveston TX, and 24 inches of snow at Rayne LA in 24 hours. Snow fell at the very mouth of the Mississippi River. Houston TX received 22 inches of snow, and nine inches blanketed New Orleans LA. (David Ludlum)

1936 - The temperature at Parshall ND plunged to 60 degrees below zero to establish a state record. On the 6th of July that same year the temperature at Steele ND hit 121 degrees, also a state record. (David Ludlum)

1982 - An intense cyclone off the Atlantic coast capsized a drilling rig killing 84 persons, and sank a Soviet freighter resulting in 33 more deaths. The cyclone produced 80 mph winds which whipped the water into waves fifty feet high. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A storm crossing the central U.S. produced severe thunderstorms which spawned tornadoes in Louisiana and Mississippi. Tornadoes injured four persons at Pierre Pass LA, three persons at Tangipahoa LA, two persons at Lexie MS and two persons at Nicholson MS. Thunderstorm winds gusting to 100 mph killed one person south of Sulphur LA. Jackson MS was drenched with 1.5 inches of rain in ten minutes. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Low pressure brought heavy snow to parts of Michigan, with eleven inches reported at Rogers City. A cold front crossing the Northern Rockies produced wind gusts to 74 mph at Livingston MT, and created blizzard conditions in Idaho. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thirty-seven cities in the southeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 80 degrees at Atlanta GA was a February record. Highs of 79 degrees at Chattanooga TN, 84 degrees at Columbia SC and 85 degrees at New Orleans LA equalled February records. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Snow, sleet and freezing rain along an arctic cold front prevailed from the north central U.S. to the Northern Atlantic Coast Region. High winds created near blizzard conditions in southern Wyoming, closing Interstate 80, while up to eleven inches of snow fell across central Minnesota.

1990 - Heavy snow also blanketed the Northern Atlantic Coast States, with ten inches reported at Buffalo NY and Mount Washington NH. Freezing rain over southern New England knocked out electricity to more than 10,000 homes in the western suburbs of Boston MA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2000: Amarillo, Texas, set unusual temperature records today. The high of 82 degrees smashed the old daily high of 76 degrees set in 1921. Likewise, the morning low of 41 degrees broke the old high-low record of 40 degrees, established in 1921.

2004 - Up to 11 inches of snow fell in areas south of Nashville, TN, causing power outages and producing hazardous driving conditions. The Weather Doctor

2013: A meteor entered the Earth's atmosphere and exploded over the Russian town of Chelyabinsk.

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### FOR WANT OF PRAISE

One important responsibility that many husbands seem to neglect is giving praise to their wives. Their comments made to others are often critical, unkind, unnecessary and unbecoming.

The disgust of degrading one's wife is not whether or not the statements have any degree of truth in them, but what right does a husband have to criticize her publicly? What has he done to diminish the beauty and elegance of the bride he chose to marry? Has he been supportive and demonstrated sacrificial love? Where has the "love of his life" gone? And what did he do to "impair" the person he "could not live without?" How this must grieve God!

"Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all," would be encouraging words to any wife. Set aside false measures of attainment for a moment and overlook flaws and faults. Kind words and "husbandly help" and support can solve most problems in a relationship. Wives do their very best only to be criticized and condemned and not offered love and help.

In my many years as a pastor and family counselor, a common denominator in failed relationships was criticism and condemnation. It did not matter what the root causes were, one or the other would seize on a symptom and enlarge it beyond any possible solution. How sad!

Consider the rewards of praise. We all need it. We all want it. The demands of managing a home and raising children are often dumped on the wife and when expectations are unmet, criticism begins, praise ends and families unravel unnecessarily. Let's reverse the process.

Prayer: Lord, may Your Spirit encourage husbands to search for ways to praise their "helpmates" and not hurt or harm them by wicked words. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all. Proverbs 31:29



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)
- 01/31/2023-02/03/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Drop Off 6-9pm, Community Center
- 02/04/2023-02/05/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Sale 1-5pm, Community Center
- 02/25/2023 Littles and Me, Art Making 10-11:30am, Wage Memorial Library
- 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
- 10/14/2023 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 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
- 12/09/2023 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9-11am

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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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## Groton Daily Independent

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.14.23

23 24 35 40 43 1

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$84,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 30

DRAW: Mins 45 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.13.23

2 17 21 22 26 10

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$36,070,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 30 Mins

DRAW: 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.14.23

7 21 27 41 44 13

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 16 Hrs 44

DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.11.23

12 14 18 23 24

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$51,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 30 Mins

DRAW: 45 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.13.23

12 17 26 61 69 22

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 29 Mins

DRAW: 45 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.13.23

17 26 37 61 65 2

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$57,000,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 29 Mins

DRAW: 45 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

## Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Alcester-Hudson 51, Freeman Academy/Marion 26  
Andes Central/Dakota Christian 55, Gregory 52  
Arlington 57, Chester 52  
Belle Fourche 45, Newcastle, Wyo. 42  
Colman-Egan 66, Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 30  
Corsica/Stickney 54, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 31  
Estelline/Hendricks 52, Flandreau Indian 30  
Ethan 63, Freeman 55  
Faith 55, Philip 50  
Flandreau 46, Baltic 15  
Garretson 68, Parker 43  
Herreid/Selby Area 86, Potter County 39  
Highmore-Harrold 44, Ipswich 33  
Hill City 43, Custer 33, OT  
Hot Springs 48, Edgemont 30  
Irene-Wakonda 70, Bridgewater-Emery 46  
James Valley Christian 42, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 25  
Kadoka Area 58, Timber Lake 55  
Lakota Tech 83, Crow Creek 35  
Lennox 62, Beresford 41  
Mobridge-Pollock 71, Stanley County 36  
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 65, Bon Homme 46  
Pierre 57, Brookings 31  
Rapid City Christian 45, Spearfish 37  
Redfield 55, Northwestern 49  
Sioux Falls Christian 54, Yankton 23  
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 45, Harrisburg 43  
Sioux Falls Washington 52, Mitchell 39  
Sioux Valley 51, Castlewood 49  
St. Thomas More 56, Douglas 18  
Sully Buttes 59, Sunshine Bible Academy 22  
Viborg-Hurley 68, Menno 32  
Wall 67, Lyman 48  
Wessington Springs 41, Kimball/White Lake 37  
West Central 55, Canton 43  
Winner 59, Platte-Geddes 35  
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=  
Canistota vs. Scotland, ppd.  
Centerville vs. Dell Rapids St. Mary, ppd.  
Florence/Henry vs. Aberdeen Roncalli, ppd.  
McIntosh vs. Dupree, ppd.  
Milbank vs. Madison, ppd.



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## BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Brandon Valley 49, Tea Area 46  
Bridgewater-Emery 57, Irene-Wakonda 32  
Canistota 61, Howard 56  
Chamberlain 67, Hanson 62  
Chester 59, Arlington 40  
Colome 48, Burke 40  
Dakota Valley 79, Sioux City, West, Iowa 69  
Ethan 69, Freeman 51  
Faith 77, Lemmon 38  
Flandreau 55, Baltic 44  
Freeman Academy/Marion 64, Alcester-Hudson 52  
Groton Area 45, Aberdeen Roncalli 22  
Hitchcock-Tulare 43, Ipswich 36  
James Valley Christian 61, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 45  
Lennox 71, Beresford 52  
Milbank 56, Waverly-South Shore 47  
Mobridge-Pollock 58, Stanley County 52  
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 78, Bon Homme 39  
Northwestern 73, Redfield 56  
Parker 62, Garretson 34  
Pierre 73, Brookings 43  
Rapid City Christian 63, Spearfish 40  
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 70, Sioux Falls Lincoln 56  
Sioux Falls Washington 47, Mitchell 42  
Sioux Valley 73, Castlewood 48  
St. Thomas More 55, Hot Springs 41  
Standing Rock, N.D. 70, McLaughlin 48  
Sully Buttes 68, Sunshine Bible Academy 43  
Tri-Valley 52, McCook Central/Montrose 41  
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 46, Corsica/Stickney 45  
Vermillion 64, Wagner 42  
Viborg-Hurley 61, Menno 28  
Wall 70, Lyman 57  
Warner 59, Wolsey-Wessington 51  
Wessington Springs 54, Kimball/White Lake 51  
West Central 46, Canton 35  
Winner 62, Platte-Geddes 59  
Yankton 65, Sioux Falls Christian 48  
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=  
Centerville vs. Dell Rapids St. Mary, ppd.  
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte vs. St. Francis Indian, ppd.  
Gregory vs. Andes Central/Dakota Christian, ppd.  
Leola/Frederick vs. Waubay/Summit, ppd. to Feb 14th.  
Little Wound vs. Bennett County, ppd.  
McIntosh vs. Dupree, ppd.  
Oldham-Ramona/Rutland vs. Great Plains Lutheran, ppd.  
Sisseton vs. Deuel, ppd.

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

## Post-Roe, Native Americans face even more abortion hurdles

By LAURA UNGAR and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

A few months after South Dakota banned abortion last year, April Matson drove more than nine hours to take a friend to a Colorado clinic to get the procedure.

The trip brought back difficult memories of Matson's own abortion at the same clinic in 2016. The former grocery store worker and parent of two couldn't afford a hotel and slept in a tent near a horse pasture — bleeding and in pain.

Getting an abortion has long been extremely difficult for Native Americans like Matson. It has become even tougher since the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade.

New, restrictive state laws add to existing hurdles: a decades-old ban on most abortions at clinics and hospitals run by the federal Indian Health Service, fewer nearby health centers offering abortions, vast rural expanses for many to travel, and poverty afflicting more than a quarter of the Native population.

"That's a lot of barriers," said Matson, who lives in Sioux Falls and is Sicangu Lakota. "We're already an oppressed community, and then we have this oppression on top of that oppression."

Among the six states with the highest proportion of Native American and Alaska Native residents, four — South Dakota, Oklahoma, Montana and North Dakota — have moved or are poised to further restrict abortion. South Dakota and Oklahoma ban it with few exceptions.

In some communities, the distance to the nearest abortion provider has increased by hundreds of miles, said Lauren van Schilfgaarde, a member of Cochiti Pueblo in New Mexico who directs the tribal legal development clinic at the University of California-Los Angeles.

"Native people are having to cross massive, massive distances and absorb all of the travel costs and child care," she said.

Experts say the issue should be seen within the larger context of the tortured history between Indigenous people and white society that began with the taking of Native lands and includes coerced sterilization of Native women lasting into the 1970s. Native Americans on both sides of the abortion debate invoke this history — some arguing the procedure reduces the number of potential citizens in a population that has been threatened for centuries, and others saying new restrictions are another attack on Native women's rights.

Many advocates worry that reduced abortion access will make things even worse for women already facing maternal death rates twice as high as their white peers, teen birth rates more than twice as high as whites, and the worst rates of sexual violence.

"Indigenous women don't have access to reproductive justice in any form, and that includes abortion," said Natalie Stites Means, a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe who serves on the board of the Justice Empowerment Network, an abortion fund. "Any limitation on our health care and any limitation on abortion is going to impact our health and well-being."

### DECADES OF RESTRICTIONS

For centuries, experts said, Indigenous people had their own systems of health care, which in some cases included natural abortive practices.

Today, the main source of care for many is the Indian Health Service, which serves 2.6 million American Indians and Alaska Natives who belong to 574 federally recognized tribes in 37 states. Its clinics and hospitals operate under the Hyde Amendment, which bars them from using federal funds for abortions except in cases of rape, incest or threats to a mother's life.

Even when an IHS patient falls under one of those exceptions, many facilities "don't have the materials or staff or the expertise to provide that abortion care," van Schilfgaarde said.

Matson uses the pronoun they and is two-spirit, a term used to describe those who combine traits of both men and women. Matson, who lived in Rapid City at the time, said IHS staff didn't discuss abortion as an option for their unplanned pregnancy. After getting the procedure at 13 weeks in Colorado, they felt uncomfortable returning to IHS despite ongoing bleeding.

While IHS staff can refer people to places that provide abortions, federal funds can only be used for

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"Hyde-permitted" procedures and related patient travel, agency officials said in a statement. And a federal report shows nearly 1 in 5 American Indians and Alaska Natives are uninsured.

Also, there are often no abortion providers nearby. One reason? The proportion of Catholic health systems, which generally prohibit abortion, has grown significantly. A 2020 report by Community Catalyst, a nonprofit health advocacy organization, found that 1 in 6 acute care hospital beds in the U.S. is in a Catholic system. The share is 40% in South Dakota and 32% in Oklahoma.

## SEEKING SOLUTIONS

After Roe fell, restrictive "trigger" laws took effect in more than a dozen states, including South Dakota and Oklahoma, which already had stopped providing most abortions. North Dakota's abortion ban has been blocked in court.

Some Native women were inspired to organize.

Cherokee women in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, gathered over the summer to discuss a possible amendment to the tribe's constitution protecting reproductive health access for its citizens. They were frustrated that leaders of this tribe with around 450,000 citizens hadn't addressed the issue.

"Fear was just kind of palpable," said group leader Alissa Baker, who teaches psychology at Northeastern State University. "We felt a need to protect our community ... and really in some ways reclaim some of those traditional roles of a Cherokee woman, which is effectively being the voice of the community."

But the effort stalled as the school year approached, with members spread across a rural area, busy with jobs and children.

Other activist efforts panned out. D'Arlyn Bell, a doctoral student at the University of Kansas and another member of the Cherokee Nation, joined with other Native activists to help defeat a proposed amendment to the Kansas state constitution that would have cleared the way for tougher abortion restrictions.

"We were doing it not only for the Native women in our own states but Native women from our own home territories, especially Oklahoma," she said.

Experts stress that abortion views vary among tribal leaders and members – something echoed in a statement from the Cherokee Nation, the only one of the five largest tribes in South Dakota and Oklahoma to respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press.

Opening a clinic on tribal land would be legally challenging, experts said. The Cherokee Nation said it wouldn't set one up, and there have been no announcements from other tribes since Roe was overturned. History shows the issue is fraught: The first woman president of the Oglala Sioux Tribe in South Dakota was impeached in 2006 after publicly proposing an abortion clinic on the reservation.

Post-Roe, Native Americans on both sides of the issue are taking personal and collective action.

Elizabeth Terrill, a board member for the anti-abortion Native American nonprofit Life is Sacred, said she's a foster parent, does post-abortion counseling and supports moms. She said extended families on tribal lands historically have banded together when there is an unplanned pregnancy, and most women choose to continue them.

"I think there's just a different cultural understanding of what life is and when life begins and why life is so sacred," said Terrill, a mental health therapist near the Navajo Nation in New Mexico and member of the Osage Nation of Oklahoma.

Matson, executive director of the summer camp "Rock the Rez," said they share their experience, donate money to those in need and tell others about resources like the Justice Empowerment Network, which covered most of their friend's abortion and travel costs.

"Every time someone is going through this, I offer support," said Matson, 32. "I've helped, I hope, in every way that I can."

## All flights diverted from Frankfurt amid Lufthansa IT glitch

Germany's air traffic control agency said Wednesday that it is diverting all flights away from the country's busiest airport, Frankfurt, after a problem with Lufthansa's computer systems caused major disruption at the German airline.

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Agency spokesman Robert Ertler said all plane parking spots in Frankfurt were full because passengers and crews are unable to board the airline's flights.

"All incoming planes are being diverted to alternative airports" such as as Munich, Nuremberg and Dueseldorf, Ertler told The Associated Press.

Lufthansa Group, which also includes subsidiaries such as Swiss International Air Lines and Eurowings, said the IT outage was caused by construction works in the Frankfurt region.

"This is causing flight delays and cancellations," the company said. "We regret the inconvenience this is causing our passengers."

Telephone company Deutsche Telekom later confirmed that an excavator had cut through fiber optic lines at a depth of five meters (16 feet) while working on a railroad line.

The company said parts of the destroyed line had already been repaired and the situation will improve significantly in the course of Wednesday afternoon, German news agency dpa reported.

According to dpa all of Lufthansa's domestic flights were canceled and passengers were urged to switch to alternative forms of travel, such as trains.

## War in Ukraine at 1 year: Pain, resilience in global economy

By PAUL WISEMAN and DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writers

An Egyptian widow is struggling to afford meat and eggs for her five children. An exasperated German laundry owner watches as his energy bill jumps fivefold. Nigerian bakeries have shut their doors, unable to afford the exorbitant price of flour.

One year after Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, and caused widespread suffering, the global economy is still enduring the consequences — crunched supplies of grain, fertilizer and energy along with more inflation and economic uncertainty in a world that was already contending with too much of both.

As dismal as the war's impact has been, there's one consolation: It could have been worse. Companies and countries in the developed world have proved surprisingly resilient, so far avoiding the worst-case scenario of painful recession.

But in emerging economies, the pain has been more intense.

In Egypt, where nearly a third of the population lives in poverty, Halima Rabie has struggled for years to feed her five school-age children. Now, the 47-year-old widow has cut back on even the most basic groceries as prices keep rising.

"It's become unbearable," Rabie said, heading to her job as a cleaner at a state-run hospital in Cairo's twin city of Giza. "Meat and eggs have become a luxury."

In the United States and other wealthy countries, a painful surge in consumer prices, fueled in part by the war's effect on oil prices, has steadily eased. It's buoyed hopes that U.S. Federal Reserve inflation fighters will relent on interest rate increases that have threatened to tip the world's biggest economy into recession and sent other currencies tumbling against the dollar.

China also dropped draconian zero-COVID lockdowns late last year that hobbled growth in the second-largest economy.

Some good fortune has helped, too: A warmer-than-usual winter has helped lower natural gas prices and limit the damage from an energy crisis after Russia largely cut off gas to Europe. Still, oil and gas prices were high enough to cushion the impact on the energy-exporting Russian economy from the international sanctions imposed after President Vladimir Putin's invasion.

The war "is a human catastrophe," said Adam Posen, president of the Peterson Institute for International Economics. "But its impact on the world economy is a passing shock."

Still, in ways big and small, the war is causing pain. In Europe, for example, natural gas prices are still three times what they were before Russia started massing troops on Ukraine's border.

Sven Paar, who runs a commercial laundry in Walduern, southwest Germany, is facing a gas bill this year of about 165,000 euros (\$176,000) — up from 30,000 euros (\$32,000) last year — to run 12 heavy-duty machines that can wash 8 tons of laundry a day.

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"We have passed the prices on, one to one, to our customers," Paar said.

So far, he has been able to keep his customers after showing them the energy bills that accompany the price increases.

"Fingers crossed, it's working so far," he said. "At the same time, the customers groan, and they have to pass the costs on to their own customers."

While he's kept his steady customers, they're offering less business. Restaurants with fewer customers need fewer tablecloths washed. Several hotels closed in February rather than pay heating costs during their slow season, meaning fewer hotel sheets to clean.

Punishingly high food prices are inflicting particular hardship on the poor. The war has disrupted wheat, barley and cooking oil from Ukraine and Russia, major global suppliers for Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia where many struggle with food insecurity. Russia also was the top supplier of fertilizer.

While a U.N.-brokered deal has allowed some food shipments from the Black Sea region, it's up for renewal next month.

In Egypt, the world's No. 1 wheat importer, Rabie took a second job at a private clinic in July but still struggles to keep up with rising prices. She earns less than \$170 a month.

Rabie said she cooks meat once a month and has resorted to cheaper byproducts to ensure her children get protein. But even those are becoming harder to find.

The government urged Egyptians to try chicken feet and wings as an alternative source of protein — a suggestion met with scorn on social media but that also led to a spike in demand.

"Even the feet have become expensive," Rabie said.

In Nigeria, a top importer of Russian wheat, average food prices skyrocketed 37% last year. Bread prices have doubled in some places amid wheat shortages.

"People have huge decisions to make," said Alexander Verhes, who runs Life Flour Mill Limited in the southern Delta state. "What food do they buy? Do they spend it on food? Schooling? Medication?"

At least 40% of bakeries in the Nigerian capital of Abuja shut down after the price of flour jumped about 200%.

"The ones still in the business are doing so at breaking point with no profits," said Mansur Umar, chairman of the bakers' association. "A lot of people have stopped eating bread. They have gone for alternatives because of the cost."

In Spain, the government is spending 300 million euros (\$320 million) to help farmers acquire fertilizer, the price of which has doubled since the war in Ukraine.

"Fertilizer is vital because the land needs food," said Jose Sanchez, a farmer in the village of Anchuelo, east of Madrid. "If the land does not have food, then the crops do not grow up."

It all means a slowing global economy. The International Monetary Fund dropped growth expectations this year and in 2022 that equates to about \$1 trillion in lost production. Europe's economy, for example, "is still experiencing significant headwinds" despite a drop in energy prices and is at risk of falling into recession, said Nathan Sheets, global chief economist at banking giant Citi.

The IMF says consumer prices jumped 7.3% in the wealthiest countries last year — above its January 2022 forecast of 3.9% — and 9.9% in poorer ones, up from 5.9% expected pre-invasion.

In the U.S., such inflation has forced businesses to be nimble.

Stacy Elmore, co-founder of The Luxury Pergola in Noblesville, Indiana, said the cost of providing health insurance for eight workers has spiked 39% over the past year — to \$10,000 a month. Amid a labor shortage, she also had to raise hourly wages for her top installer from \$24 to \$30 an hour.

Inflation-whipped consumers began to balk at paying \$22,500 for a 10-by-16-foot louvered pergola — kind of a gazebo without walls — that was sold through dealers. Sales sank last year. So Elmore pivoted to do-it-yourself models, selling directly to shoppers at a sharply reduced price of \$12,580.

"With inflation so high, we've worked to broaden the appeal of our products and make them easier for the average person to acquire," Elmore said.

In the Indonesian capital, Jakarta, many street vendors know they can't pass along surging food prices to their already struggling customers. So some are skimping on portions instead, a practice known as

"shrinkflation."

"One kilogram of rice was for eight portions ... but now we made it 10 portions," said Mukroni, 52, who runs a food stall and like many Indonesians goes by only one name. Customers, he said, "will not come to the shop" if prices are too high.

"We hope for peace," he said, "because, after all, no one will win or lose, because everyone will be a victim."

## Elon Musk hopes to have Twitter CEO toward the end of year

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Billionaire Elon Musk said Wednesday that he anticipates finding a CEO for Twitter "probably toward the end of this year."

Speaking via a video call to the World Government Summit in Dubai, Musk said making sure the platform can function remained the most important thing for him.

"I think I need to stabilize the organization and just make sure it's in a financial healthy place," Musk said when asked about when he'd name a CEO. "I'm guessing probably toward the end of this year would be good timing to find someone else to run the company."

It remains unclear how seriously Musk will take that timeline. His comment came only hours after he posted images of his shiba inu dog, Floki, on Twitter as the company's "CEO."

"So much better than that other guy!" wrote Musk, who often posts memes. After making the posts, a cryptocurrency known as Dogecoin, based around the image of a shiba inu meme, rose in value by around 5%. Musk previously has suggested Twitter accept Dogecoin in transactions.

Musk, 51, made his wealth initially on the finance website PayPal, then created the spacecraft company SpaceX and invested in the electric car company Tesla. In recent months, however, more attention has been focused on the chaos surrounding his \$44 billion purchase of the microblogging site Twitter.

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian military's use of Musk's satellite internet service Starlink as it defends itself against Russia's ongoing invasion has put Musk off and on at the center of the war.

Musk offered a wide-ranging 35-minute discussion that touched on the billionaire's fears about artificial intelligence, the collapse of civilization and the possibility of space aliens. But questions about Twitter kept coming back up as Musk described both Tesla and SpaceX as able to function without his direct, day-to-day involvement.

"Twitter is still somewhat a startup in reverse," he said. "There's work required here to get Twitter to sort of a stable position and to really build the engine of software engineering."

Musk also sought to portray his takeover of San Francisco-based Twitter as a cultural correction. Since taking over the company, he's restored Donald Trump's access to the platform after the then-president lost access to the website after a pro-Trump mob attacked the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. Musk also reinstated the accounts of several people who spread misinformation about the coronavirus, including that of Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga.

"I think that the general idea is just to reflect the values of the people as opposed to imposing the values of essentially San Francisco and Berkeley, which are so somewhat of a niche ideology as compared to the rest of the world," Musk said. "And, you know, Twitter was, I think, doing a little too much to impose a niche."

Musk's takeover at Twitter has seen mass firings and other cost-cutting measures. Musk, who is on the hook for about \$1 billion in yearly interest payments for his purchase, has been trying to find way to maximize profits at the company.

However, some of Musk's decisions have conflicted with the reasons that journalists, governments and others rely on Twitter as an information-sharing platform.

Musk on Wednesday described the need for users to rely on Twitter for trusted information from verified accounts. However, a confused rollout to a paid verified account system saw some impersonate famous companies, leading to a further withdrawal of needed advertising cash to the site.

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"Twitter is certainly quite the rollercoaster," Musk acknowledged.

Forbes estimates Musk's wealth at just under \$200 billion. The Forbes analysis ranks Musk as the second-wealthiest person on Earth, just behind French luxury brand magnate Bernard Arnault.

But Musk also has become a thought leader for some as well, albeit an oracle that is trying to get six hours of sleep a night despite the challenges at Twitter.

Musk described his children as being "programmed by Reddit and YouTube." However, he criticized the Chinese-made social media app TikTok.

"TikTok has a lot of very high usage (but) I often hear people say, 'Well, I spent two hours on TikTok, but I regret those two hours,'" Musk said. "We don't want that to be the case with Twitter."

TikTok, owned by Beijing-based ByteDance, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Musk warned that artificial intelligence should be regulated "very carefully," describing it as akin to the promise of nuclear power but the danger of atomic bombs. He also cautioned against having a single civilization or "too much cooperation" on Earth, saying it could "collapse" a society that's like a "tiny candle in a vast darkness."

And when asked about the existence of aliens, Musk had a firm response.

"The crazy thing is, I've seen no evidence of alien technology or alien life whatsoever. And I think I'd know because of SpaceX," he said. "I don't think anybody knows more about space, you know, than me."

## China threatens US entities over downing of balloon

BEIJING (AP) — China said Wednesday it will take measures against U.S. entities related to the downing of a suspected Chinese spy balloon off the American East Coast.

At a daily briefing, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin gave no details and did not identify the targets of the measures.

China says the balloon was a unmanned weather airship that was accidentally blown off course and accuses the U.S. of overreacting in bringing it down with a missile fired from an F-22 fighter jet.

Since the Feb. 4 downing of the balloon, the United States has sanctioned six Chinese entities it said are linked to Beijing's aerospace programs.

The U.S. House of Representatives subsequently voted unanimously to condemn China for a "brazen violation" of U.S. sovereignty and efforts to "deceive the international community through false claims about its intelligence collection campaigns." Secretary of State Antony Blinken also canceled a visit to Beijing that many hoped would stabilize ties that have cratered amid disputes over trade, human rights, Taiwan and China's claim to the South China Sea.

While China denies the balloon was a military asset, it has yet to say what government department or company was responsible.

After initially expressing regret over the balloon's entry into U.S. airspace, China has returned spying accusations against Washington, alongside its threats of retaliation.

"China firmly opposes this and will take countermeasures in accordance with the law against the relevant U.S. entities that undermine China's sovereignty and security," Wang said at Wednesday's briefing.

China will "resolutely safeguard national sovereignty and its legitimate rights and interests," Wang said.

Also Wednesday, U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel said the Chinese balloon's intrusion was part of a pattern of aggressive behavior by Beijing.

Emanuel noted China's recent beaming of military-grade laser on a Philippine coast guard patrol vessel, the harassment of U.S. planes by Chinese jets and China's opening of illegal police stations in the U.S., Ireland and other countries.

"The balloon to me is not an isolated incident," Emanuel said.

If China wants to be a respected member of the international community, "then you act appropriately to certain basic premises. that is you don't open police stations in other countries ignorant of their laws as if your laws don't have any boundaries," he said.

"This is not exactly the qualities and characteristics of the good neighbor policy," the ambassador said,

referring to China's outreach to countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

On Tuesday, Japan's Defense Ministry said at least three flying objects spotted in Japanese airspace since 2019 were strongly believed to have been Chinese spy balloons. It said it has protested and requested explanations from Beijing.

Senior lawmakers in Japan's governing party on Wednesday said they were considering expanding the Self Defense Force law to also include violations of Japanese airspace by foreign balloons.

## Scottish leader Nicola Sturgeon leaves post after 8 years

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Scottish leader Nicola Sturgeon, the face of her country's independence movement for eight years, has announced her intention to resign, amid criticism of her drive to make it easier for people to legally change genders.

Sturgeon made the announcement Wednesday during a news conference at her official residence in Edinburgh, saying that part of serving well is knowing when to make way for someone else.

"In my head and in my heart I know that time is now," she told reporters. "That it's right for me, for my party and my country."

Sturgeon, 52, has led Scotland since 2014, when Scots narrowly voted to remain part of the United Kingdom. While the referendum was billed as a once-in-a-generation decision on independence, Sturgeon and her Scottish National Party have pushed for a new vote, arguing that Britain's departure from the European Union had changed the ground rules. The U.K. government has refused to allow a second referendum.

The first female leader of Scotland said that she had wrestled with the decision to leave, and that it was "not a reaction to short-term pressures".

"Of course there are difficult issues confronting the government just now, but when is that ever not the case?" she said.

The announcement caught political observers by surprise amid her staunch support for both independence and legislation that would make it easier for people in Scotland to legally change genders.

Hailed as a landmark by transgender rights activists, the bill would allow people age 16 or older in Scotland to change the gender designations on identity documents by self-declaration, removing the need for a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria.

While the Scottish parliament approved the legislation, it has been blocked by the British government because it would present problems for authorities in other parts of the U.K., where a medical diagnosis is needed before individuals can transition for legal purposes.

Sturgeon has vowed to take the British government to court, arguing that Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's administration had made a "profound mistake" by vetoing the legislation.

Some members of the SNP have criticized Sturgeon for saying she would make the next Scottish parliament election a de facto referendum on independence. The party is set to hold a conference on the strategy next month, with some members saying it won't work and others criticizing Sturgeon for waiting too long to press ahead.

The gender recognition bill also faced opposition from some members of the party who said it ignored the need to protect single-sex spaces for women, such as domestic violence shelters and rape crisis centers.

Scotland remains part of the U.K. but, like Wales and Northern Ireland, has its own semi-autonomous government with broad powers over areas including health care.

## Buffalo supermarket gunman set to receive life prison term

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — A white supremacist is set to be sentenced to life in prison Wednesday for killing 10 Black people at a Buffalo supermarket in an attack fueled by racist conspiracy theories he encountered online.



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Payton Gendron is scheduled to appear in Erie County Court, where he pleaded guilty in November to charges including murder and domestic terrorism motivated by hate. The terrorism charge carries an automatic life sentence.

Relatives of several victims are expected to speak during the hearing, giving them an opportunity to address the judge and the killer responsible for their sorrow.

Gendron, now 19, wore bullet-resistant armor and a helmet equipped with a livestreaming camera as he carried out the May 14 attack. He killed his victims with a semiautomatic rifle, purchased legally but then modified so he could load it with high-capacity ammunition magazines that are illegal in New York.

There were only three survivors after he shot 13 people, specifically seeking out Black shoppers and workers.

His victims at Tops Friendly Market included a church deacon, the grocery store's guard, a neighborhood activist, a man shopping for a birthday cake, a grandmother of nine and the mother of a former Buffalo fire commissioner. The victims ranged in age from 32 to 86.

In documents posted online, Gendron said he hoped the attack would help preserve white power in the U.S. He wrote that he picked the Tops grocery store, about a three-hour drive from his home in Conklin, New York, because it was in a predominantly Black neighborhood.

While a life prison sentence is guaranteed for Gendron, he also faces separate federal charges that could carry a death sentence if the U.S. Justice Department chooses to seek it.

Gendron's admission of guilt on the state charges is seen as a potential help in avoiding a death sentence in the penalty phase of any federal trial. In a December hearing, defense attorney Sonya Zoghlin said Gendron is prepared to enter a guilty plea in federal court in exchange for a life sentence.

The mass shooting in Buffalo, and another less than two weeks later that killed 19 students and two teachers at a Texas elementary school, amplified calls for stronger gun controls, including from victims' relatives who traveled to Washington, D.C. to testify before lawmakers.

New York legislators quickly passed a law banning semiautomatic rifle sales to most people under age 21. The state also banned sales of some types of body armor.

President Joe Biden signed a compromise gun violence bill in June intended to toughen background checks, keep firearms from more domestic violence offenders and help states put in place red flag laws making it easier for authorities to take weapons from people adjudged to be dangerous.

## American skier Shiffrin splits with longtime coach at worlds

By ANDREW DAMPF AP Sports Writer

MERIBEL, France (AP) — American skiing standout Mikaela Shiffrin had an unexpected parting with her longtime coach, Mike Day, during the middle of the world championships after informing him that she planned to take a new direction with her staff at the end of the season.

"Mikaela wants to do something different going forward. She wants a new challenge. And she informed Mike and Mike decided to go home," U.S. Alpine director Patrick Riml told The Associated Press on Wednesday. "It's a shock for me that he took off."

Day was with Shiffrin when she won the silver medal in super-G last week and then accompanied the skier for a few days of off-site training in Orcieres before returning to Meribel with her this week.

"He left yesterday," Riml said. "He's on the plane probably now."

Shiffrin was due to race again in her favored events of giant slalom on Thursday and slalom on Saturday. "After working with Mike Day for seven seasons, I've decided to move forward with new leadership on my team for the next phase of my career," Shiffrin said in a statement released by the U.S. ski team. "I want to thank Mike and acknowledge all of his work and dedication over the last several years."

Day led Shiffrin's individual team within the U.S. squad. Shiffrin's team is also led by her mother, Eileen, who has coached the skier her entire life.

Shiffrin's personal team also includes new assistant coach Mark Mitter, who remains with her, Riml said. Paul Kristofic is the head coach of the overall U.S. women's team.

"We've got plenty of people here to support Mikaela and provide the training and the information she needs on race day to do her job," Riml said. "She's got great support. ... We'll decide together what makes the most sense moving forward."

Day did not immediately respond to a request for comment from the AP.

Shiffrin is also in the middle of a record-breaking season on the World Cup circuit, having eclipsed Lindsey Vonn's record of 82 World Cup wins among women and moved within one victory of Ingemar Stenmark's overall mark of 86 wins.

The silver in super-G ended a troublesome run for Shiffrin in major championship races after she straddled a gate during the slalom run of the combined event in her opening race at worlds and didn't win a medal in any of her six races at last year's Beijing Olympics.

"Mikaela Shiffrin will be moving forward with new coaching, and will continue to be supported closely by the Stifel U.S. Alpine Ski Team coaches for the remainder of the season and in the future," the team said in a statement. "The team thanks Mike Day for his work and great success over the last seven years."

It's been a hectic week for Shiffrin since the super-G. She was targeted by a small protest from environmentalists who thought she wanted to travel by helicopter between her off-site base in Gap and the training slope in Orcieres, which was a 40-minute drive away.

The Orcieres ski club and a helicopter company had offered the use of a helicopter but Mitter told them from the start that she wasn't interested, said Megan Harrod, Shiffrin's spokeswoman.

"They made up stories," Riml said. "She always planned on driving up and down."

Because of the concerns about the protest, however, security was brought in to protect Shiffrin, Riml said, although Harrod added that the skier "didn't even hear" the protest.

Riml said he didn't think the helicopter flap had anything to do with Day's departure.

## Slain students were 'incredibly loved,' 'tremendous' leaders

By JOHN FLESHER and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. (AP) — One student was a fraternity chapter president. Another was a science student with fond memories of her days as a high-school athlete — and the third was a frequent volunteer who wanted to become a surgeon.

Family and friends mourned the deaths of three Michigan State University students killed in a Monday night shooting that critically wounded five others. Anthony McRae — the 43-year-old gunman with a previous gun violation — fatally shot himself hours later when police, alerted by a tipster who recognized the suspect in photos, confronted him about 5 miles (8047 meters) away from the East Lansing campus.

All three students who were killed came from the suburban Detroit area. The names of the five who were injured have not been released.

Among those killed was Alexandria Verner, a junior from Clawson, whose LinkedIn profile said she was studying integrated biology and anthropology.

A 2020 graduate of Clawson High School, Verner "was and is incredibly loved by everyone," district Superintendent Billy Shellenbarger said in a statement Tuesday. "She was a tremendous student, athlete, leader and exemplified kindness every day of her life.

"If you knew her, you loved her and we will forever remember the lasting impact she has had on all of us," Shellenbarger said, adding that Verner's parents, sister and brother were "grieving but are certainly already feeling the uplifting support of this tremendous community."

Verner's Twitter bio says, "Can't stop dreaming," and features photos and videos from Clawson basketball and volleyball games.

Hundreds of mourners flowed onto a suburban Detroit high school football field Tuesday night to light candles and reminisce about Verner in a vigil led by Shellenbarger.

Those in attendance also observed a 24-second moment of silence in honor of Verner, who wore jersey No. 24 while she was a basketball player at Clawson High.

"While you are silent," Shellenbarger said over the public-address system, "think about her smile, think

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about that hero that was among us for 20 years.”

Also killed was Brian Fraser, a sophomore who attended Grosse Pointe South High School.

Fraser was president of Michigan State’s chapter of Phi Delta Theta fraternity, which said in a statement Tuesday that its members were “heartbroken.”

“Brian was our leader, and we loved him,” the fraternity said. “He cared deeply about his Phi Delt brothers, his family, Michigan State University, and Phi Delta Theta. We will greatly miss Brian and mourn his death deeply as our chapter supports each other during this difficult time.”

University police identified the third victim as Arielle Anderson, a junior who graduated from Grosse Pointe North High School.

“As much as we loved her, she loved us and others even more,” her family said in a statement. “She was passionate about helping her friends and family, assisting children and serving people.” They described her as “sweet and loving,” with an “infectious smile.”

Anderson was pushing to graduate early from Michigan State, hoping to become a surgeon as quickly as possible, the statement said.

“We are absolutely devastated by this heinous act of violence upon her and many other innocent victims,” her family said.

Jon Dean, superintendent of the Grosse Pointe schools, mourned the loss of his district’s former students in an open letter.

“I can’t even process what I just wrote,” Dean said. “It is with a great deal of sadness that I bring this news to you and my thoughts go out to the many families that are suffering from another senseless act of violence.”

## **NASCAR 75: Car evolution includes stock, wings, safety. EV?**

By MARK LONG AP Sports Writer

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (AP) — NASCAR’s next 75 years almost certainly will include at least a partially electric vehicle turning laps at Daytona International Speedway.

It’s unfathomable to some, unconscionable to others.

It’s unlikely the sanctioning body would make the transition without at least trying to keep the heart-pounding sound of a throaty engine and the permeating smell of exhaust fumes – as much garage staples as sponsorship logos and haulers.

“Do I see us racing EVs down the road? Probably,” former NASCAR crew chief and longtime Fox Sports commentator Larry McReynolds said. “But I’m going to be very honest and very candid. I hope it’s after I’ve left the sport. I like what we’ve got.”

Even though the Next Gen car is entering its second NASCAR season – and already has been tweaked in hopes of preventing more head injuries like the one that sidelined 2004 champion Kurt Busch indefinitely – the evolution of the car has been an integral part of the sport since its debut in 1948.

The car has gone from “Strictly Stock” in its inaugural season to high-tech platforms distinguished solely by manufacturer stickers in the 1980s to something in between these days. What’s next will be debated, but most believe a new engine will be introduced sooner rather than later.

“The electrification of the cars has to be on the horizon. Whether it’s 50 miles on the horizon or 300 miles on the horizon, I don’t think any of us know right now for sure,” NASCAR historian Ken Martin said. “But I know there’s talk about a hybrid component.”

Getting there could be trickier to navigate than any road course on the 2023 schedule.

“We might see the day that we might go to a hybrid and use the electrical power for pace laps or pit stops,” Martin said. “That would be a way to ease into it. We know that a huge component of our sport is the sound. It grabs you, and that’s part of what our fans come to hear, come to see, the sights and smells and sounds.”

“I think we’ll be very, very careful about eliminating that sound. But we realize that if Detroit says, ‘Hey, we’re not making any fuel-related engines,’ we’d have to take a look at what would need to be done.”

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Even though EVs are becoming more common in driveways across the country, the elimination of gas engines is years, maybe decades, away. Maybe even longer for NASCAR, which has built an empire on squeezing every bit of horsepower from gas-powered cars since it started racing on the Daytona Beach sand.

Here's a look at that progression as NASCAR celebrates its 75th anniversary:

## GENERATION 1 (1948-66)

The first cars debuted in 1948 and were nearly identically to those on the street. There were three rules: The back seat had to be removed, headlights had to be taped over and doors had to be secured.

Hall of Famer Hershel McGriff, for example, drove his race car from Portland, Oregon, to Darlington, South Carolina, for the 1950 Southern 500, finished ninth and then drove it back across the country.

"That's how stock the cars were back then," Martin said.

## GENERATION 2 (1967-80)

As bigger and higher-banked tracks like Daytona started popping up throughout the South, NASCAR began allowing teams to build cars that could handle speedway rigors. Teams were allowed to beef up hubs, gears and suspensions while bodies remained stock. The cars also no longer featured doors.

Those adjustments led to some of the most memorable winged cars in NASCAR history: the Dodge Charger Daytona and the Plymouth Superbird.

## GENERATION 3 (1981-90)

Custom-built race cars no longer resembled their showroom counterparts. The cars became smaller – 110-inch wheelbases -- faster and more aerodynamically sound. They also received support from manufacturers Chrysler, Ford and General Motors, which provided body panels and other parts.

## GENERATION 4 (1991-2006)

Fiberglass replaced steel bodies to reduce weight, and wind-tunnel time became commonplace to gain aerodynamic advantages. These cars are widely considered the most iconic in NASCAR history.

Three GM brands — Buick in 1992, Oldsmobile in 1994 and Pontiac in 2004 — left the series. Dodge, however, returned in 2001.

The generation was marred by the on-track deaths of Dale Earnhardt, Kenny Irwin and Adam Petty.

## GENERATION 5 (2007-12)

Toyota made its debut in 2007 along with the Car of Tomorrow, which was years in the making following Earnhardt's fatal crash at Daytona. The car was specifically designed to improve safety, with changes that included taller, wider and identical bodies, larger crumple zones and impact-absorbing foam built into both sides.

The most noticeable modifications were a front splitter and a rear wing that evoked so much fan vitriol it was replaced by a spoiler midway through 2010.

"It really got away from what we were doing on the highway," Martin said.

The COT proved to be nearly indestructible on the track, evident by violent crashes involving Kyle Busch, Carl Edwards, Kasey Kahne, Michael McDowell and Ryan Newman.

## GENERATION 6 (2013-21)

Dodge walked away from NASCAR after winning the 2012 Cup Series championship with Brad Keselowski, leaving Chevrolet, Ford and Toyota as the only manufacturers.

These cars were designed with manufacturer-specific bodies that better reflected showroom counterparts, and the chassis underneath had very little competitive wiggle room. They were bulkier and faster.

## NEXT GEN (2022-current)

NASCAR'S current car saw some of the biggest innovations in series history. The sanctioning body moved to an independent rear suspension, rack-and-pinion steering, a five-speed sequential shifter, a transaxle, 19-inch wheels and a center hub instead of lug nuts.

"We did it all for the sake of being more relative to what the fan drives as a passenger car," McReynolds said.

Following concussions to Busch and Alex Bowman, NASCAR adjusted the car in hopes of reducing the

amount of force delivered to drivers amid rear-impact crashes.

"It's automobile racing, and as much we'll always strive to be as safe as we can, we will never, ever make it completely risk free," McReynolds said. "I don't mean to sound morbid, but I don't think it needs to be risk free because that's one of the attractions."

The sound of the engines is another. And that could ultimately go the way of doors, splitters and wings. "We'll probably see more of a hybrid-type engine," McReynolds said. "I think that's a few years down the road. You can't keep putting huge expenses on these owners or you're going to run them out of business. If you change the engine package like we just went through the car package, it's basically throwing everything out the window and starting from scratch again. No one is ready for that."

## Study shows 'striking' number who believe news misinforms

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Half of Americans in a recent survey indicated they believe national news organizations intend to mislead, misinform or persuade the public to adopt a particular point of view through their reporting.

The survey, released Wednesday by Gallup and the Knight Foundation, goes beyond others that have shown a low level of trust in the media to the startling point where many believe there is an intent to deceive.

Asked whether they agreed with the statement that national news organizations do not intend to mislead, 50% said they disagreed. Only 25% agreed, the study found.

Similarly, 52% disagreed with a statement that disseminators of national news "care about the best interests of their readers, viewers and listeners," the study found. It said 23% of respondents believed the journalists were acting in the public's best interests.

"That was pretty striking for us," said Sarah Fioroni, a consultant for Gallup. The findings showed a depth of distrust and bad feeling that go beyond the foundations and processes of journalism, she said.

Journalists need to go beyond emphasizing transparency and accuracy to show the impact of their reporting on the public, the study said.

"Americans don't seem to think that the national news organizations care about the overall impact of their reporting on the society," said John Sands, Knight's senior director for media and democracy.

In one small consolation, in both cases Americans had more trust in local news.

The ability of many people to instantly learn news from a device they hold in their hand, the rapid pace of the news cycle and an increased number of news sources would indicate that more Americans are on top of the news than ever before.

Instead, an information overload appears to have had the opposite effect. The survey said 61% of American believe these factors make it harder to stay informed, while 37% said it's easier.

Like with many other studies, Knight and Gallup found Democrats trust news more than Republicans. Over the past five years, the level of distrust has particularly spiked among independents. Overall, 55% of respondents said there was a great deal of political bias in coverage, compared to 45% in 2017.

In a finding reflected in the financial struggles of some news organizations and declining ratings of television news networks, the survey found 32% of Americans said they pay a great deal of attention to local news, compared to 56% in early 2020. That was at the outset of a presidential election year and the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak.

In a picture of how people get their news, 58% said online, 31% said television, 7% said radio and 3% mentioned printed newspapers or magazines.

For members of Gen Z, aged 18- to 25-years-old, 88% said they got their news online, the survey found.

In one olive branch, if Americans believed local news organizations didn't have the resources or opportunities to cover the news, they would be more likely to pay for it.

The results are based on a Gallup study of 5,593 Americans aged 18 and older conducted between May 31 and July 21, 2022.

## Ukrainian Olympic head on Russian rival: 'He is my enemy'

By JOHN LEICESTER and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — They fought on the same side and together won Olympic gold, young men from Russia and a newly independent Ukraine, joined for one last medal-winning hurrah on a short-lived post-Soviet Unified Team at the 1992 Barcelona Games.

Now, former fencers Vadym Guttsait and Stanislav Pozdnyakov are on opposite sides of the war that Russia is waging on Ukraine. Both have risen to become senior sports administrators, respectively heading the Ukrainian and Russian Olympic committees. The nearly year-old invasion has utterly shredded what was left of their friendship and they're now fighting each other in a divisive and growing split within the Olympic movement over whether Russia and ally Belarus should be barred from next year's Paris Games.

Guttsait, who is also Ukraine's sports minister as well as its Olympic committee president, now has only contempt for his former teammate. Guttsait calls Pozdnyakov "my enemy" and says their friendship began to collapse when Russia invaded Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Moscow's full-scale invasion, which enters its second year next week, was the last straw. Guttsait blames the Russian Olympic Committee president for making supportive comments of the assault.

"I don't want to talk to him. I don't want to know him at all. He is my enemy, who supports this war, who considers it an honor for athletes to take part in the war against Ukrainians, to kill Ukrainians," Guttsait said. "Therefore, for today and forever, this person does not exist for me."

The issue of whether athletes from Russia and Belarus should be allowed to compete is shaping up as the biggest potential spoiler of next year's Paris Olympics. Guttsait is threatening a Ukrainian boycott if Russians and Belarusians are there and he is mobilizing support from other countries, backed by the wartime star power of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Russia and Belarus, on the other hand, are clinging to a lifeline thrown to them by the International Olympic Committee, which says some of their athletes may be able to return to international competition despite the war. The IOC suggests that their athletes who have not actively supported the war could try to qualify and compete as "neutral athletes," stripped of national team uniforms, flags and anthems. Pozdnyakov has said Russia is preparing as if its athletes are going to Paris.

In an interview late Tuesday with The Associated Press, Guttsait laid out the process that could lead to a Ukrainian boycott of Paris if that happens. The minister said his own personal opinion is that "we need to boycott" if Russians and Belarusians attend. But he added that the decision isn't his alone to make and said the Ukrainian Olympic Committee will convene an extraordinary meeting and "we will decide together whether we will participate or not."

"This is a very important question, it is a very serious question and difficult for every athlete, for every coach who prepares all his life to go to the Olympic Games," he said. "But while our people are dying, women and children are being killed, our cities are being destroyed, we stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people. In my opinion, this is more important than going to the competition. But we need to make this political decision together with our Olympic family."

Before any decision for a full boycott, Ukrainian athletes could also show opposition by withdrawing from Olympic qualifying competitions that allow Russian and Belarusian entrants. Guttsait cited the example of the European wrestling championships in Croatia in April. If Russian and Belarusian athletes compete, Ukrainian wrestlers will either not attend "or they will come and not take part," Guttsait said.

International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach is facing a widespread backlash from Ukraine and its allies for opening a door for some athletes from Russia and Belarus to return to international competition. Bach argues that the Olympic movement has a "unifying mission of bringing people together" and a proven track record of opening lines of communication between nations divided by conflict. He cites the example of North and South Korea, which fielded a joint women's hockey team at the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

Guttsait noted, however, that there are also Olympic precedents for keeping nations out. Germany and

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Japan were not invited to the 1948 London Olympics after they were the aggressors in World War II and South Africa was excluded from 1964-1988 because of its racist Apartheid laws.

The minister said support among Russian athletes for the invasion makes their presence at the Paris Olympics unthinkable while the war rages. He also noted that Russian athletes are often enrolled in the country's armed forces.

Ukrainian athletes, on the other hand, are facing the miseries of war as they try, as best they can, to ready themselves for Paris.

"I really want all people to understand how we prepare, how our athletes live, that our athletes train while cruise missiles are flying, bombs are flying," Guttsait said. "The Olympic Games are great, they unite the whole world, but not those athletes who support this war and this aggression."

## New Zealand fears more fatalities after cyclone kills 4

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — A cyclone that left a devastating wake of extensive flooding and landslides in New Zealand has claimed at least four lives and police have "grave concerns" for other residents who remain unaccounted for, the prime minister said on Wednesday.

Cyclone Gabrielle struck the country's north on Monday and has brought more destruction to this nation of 5 million than any weather event in decades.

Police said at least four people had been confirmed killed by the storm, including a child caught in rising water on Tuesday at Eskdale on Hawke's Bay. All four fatalities occurred near the same North Island east coast bay, two in landslides and two by drowning.

A weather station in the Hawke's Bay region recorded three times more rain over Monday night than usually falls for the entire month of February, authorities said.

Prime Minister Chris Hipkins said it was unclear how many people remained unaccounted for, with several communities still isolated by floodwaters, landslides and telecommunications outages.

Police said 1,442 people had been reported uncontactable in the North Island as of Wednesday afternoon. "We expect the vast majority of these people will be accounted for. However, there are several people missing for whom police do hold grave concerns," Hipkins told reporters.

Hipkins said he could not put a figure on how many missing person reports were of grave concern.

He said 1,111 people had been reported found by Wednesday, which would cancel out some of those reported uncontactable. Around 9,000 people have been forced from their homes since Monday.

More than 300 people were rescued Tuesday from the Hawke's Bay area, including 60 stranded on a single roof, an official said. The final 25 rescues of individuals and family groups were expected to be completed on Wednesday.

Hipkins said seven rescues had yet to be completed by late Wednesday. He did not say how many people had yet to be retrieved, but said none was in danger.

"The feedback that we've had is that those seven that are still outstanding, all of the people concerned are safe," Hipkins said.

"The people who were on rooftops and precarious positions have been rescued," he added.

Along with rescues, the government was prioritizing restoring power and telecommunications as well as delivering food, water and medicine to where it was needed, Hipkins said.

A naval ship left Auckland late Wednesday with drinking water for Hawke's Bay communities and another ship would follow with vital supplies on Thursday.

A helicopter would drop bottled water for 3,000 people on Wednesday night.

Emergency responders planned to hold a barbecue for 3,000 people on Wednesday night at the Hawke's Bay town of Wairoa.

"They'll keep cooking into the night until either they run out of people to feed or they run out of food," Hipkins said.

Water treatment equipment would also be delivered to Wairoa on Thursday, he said.

Around 160,000 properties on the North Island were without power on Wednesday, down from 225,000

on Tuesday, the government said.

British King Charles III's sister Princess Anne visited New Zealand's disaster management headquarters in the capital, Wellington, on Wednesday and praised the nation's response. Her visit to New Zealand was scheduled before the cyclone struck.

"My thoughts are with all New Zealanders whose homes or livelihoods have been affected by Cyclone Gabrielle," she said in a statement.

"I admire the courage of the people of Aotearoa during this alarming and difficult time," she said, using the country's Māori-language name.

"You should all be proud of the resilience, strength and care for your communities you are showing in the face of adversity," she added.

Auckland was swamped two weeks ago by a record-breaking storm that also killed four people.

A national emergency was declared Tuesday, enabling the government to support affected regions and provide additional resources. It is only the third national emergency ever declared.

## Barenboim takes it day-by-day, balancing music with illness

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — No one was more surprised than Daniel Barenboim himself at the impromptu homecoming to Milan's Teatro alla Scala as a last-minute sub just two weeks after he formally stepped down as the Berlin's State Opera's music director after 30 years.

A towering figure in classical music, the 80-year-old conductor and pianist got a call at 7:15 a.m. on Sunday with an unexpected invitation to conduct three Mozart concerts, after Daniel Harding canceled for family reasons. By Wednesday, Barenboim — who left his Berlin post for health reasons — was running rehearsals at La Scala, a theater where he worked for nearly a decade as chief visiting conductor before becoming its musical director.

"It's as if I had been away for one week. I was very touched, really," Barenboim told The Associated Press, saying more than the faces, he found familiarity in "the sound."

There is no question his health remains a chief concern after being diagnosed with what he has described only as a "serious neurological condition." He moves slowly and takes his time standing up. People who have watched him in rehearsal, however, say his energy is apparent as soon as he picks up the baton.

Despite the illness, Barenboim is determined to inhabit the conductor's podium as much as possible — even if it means doing so sitting down, which he did for a New Year's Concert in Berlin, and which he may do again in Milan. "We will take it day by day," he said.

"I know I am expected to say this illness changed my life. No," he insisted. "Things that were very important to me as a musician before are still as important. Things that were not important are still not important. I can't say I feel perfectly, but I feel well enough to conduct tomorrow, and I hope Thursday and Saturday. And next we will see."

Piano is another matter. He has only performed twice publicly in the last year, he said. If he plays in private, well, he wants to keep that his business.

What is clear is that at no time during his seven-decade career traversing the globe, commanding orchestras from Berlin to Milan, Chicago to Paris, did Barenboim ever consider slowing down his frenetic pace. That is until his health issues forced him to.

"You know, I never felt my age. I never took into consideration that I was not 20, or 30 or 40 or 50 or 60 or 70 anymore," Barenboim said. "I have been hit, but I feel well, and I can make music. I am very happy making music."

Giving up the Berlin State Opera, he said, saddened him. "But it was necessary," he said. "It is a full-time job. And this I can't do anymore. I don't want to do it anymore."

Maintaining ties, Barenboim will conduct two concerts with the Berlin State Opera's orchestra, the Staatskapelle Berlin, later this month, and looks to do more. "I don't need to hope. I will do it," he said.

Barenboim made his first public performance at age 7 in his native Argentina.



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His extraordinary biography traces a broad swath of the geopolitical history of the 20th Century, from his Jewish grandparents fleeing Russian pogroms in the early 1900s to his parents' decision to move with him to the newly created Jewish state of Israel when he was 10 because, he said, they wanted him to live "as part of a majority, not part of a minority."

He first became aware of the persecution of Jews en route to Israel. His parents took the young Barenboim to Salzburg, for a master class, but would not allow him to accept an invitation to play in Germany because the memory of the Nazi Holocaust was too near. He still struggles to understand why Austria, Hitler's birthplace that annexed with Nazi Germany, was a yes, and Germany a no to his parents.

Fast-forward decades, and Berlin has been his home for 30 years, and his work reviving the Berlin State Opera, located in what is former East Berlin, is widely credited with relaunching cultural life in Germany after reunification.

Even against such historical sweep, Barenboim is troubled by the world around him. Putin's war in Ukraine, which he struggles to comprehend. The state of affairs in Israel. And the decision by some in the West to isolate Russian musicians, which he does not see as justified. "Not all Russians are anti-Ukraine," he said.

"Let's face it, we don't live in a very spiritual time nowadays. The spiritual dimension has diminished, in all ways," Barenboim said. "I think it is very sad, and I hope it's only a transition. I've known the world since the 1950s. For better or worse, I have always been a very happy person to visit the universe. But it has become very matter-of-fact, I find. Very material."

He believes people could find salve in music, but that many, even musicians, are too hurried to take time to appreciate it.

"People don't know how to listen to music. They don't have to know the intricate, technical compositional details. But you must concentrate when you listen. You can't look at the phone and do other things," Barenboim said. "And I think you're supposed to look for this spiritual condition that music can give you. It doesn't come by itself."

Barenboim is continuing his work with the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, which he began with writer Edward Said, with plans to conduct this summer in Salzburg and Lucerne, and the Barenboim-Said music academy in Berlin, which launched in 2017.

Both bring together musicians from countries that have historically been enemies, to promote dialogue. He finds their level of cooperation exemplary, and is especially impressed by the students at the academy. He recounts recently watching a performance at the academy: a Palestinian student on the clarinet, an Israeli pupil of Ethiopian origin the first violin, a Syrian the second violin, an Iranian the viola, and the cellist was Israeli.

"To see this quintet, with what understanding of each other, and what each one is doing and contributing, was heart-warming," he said, pausing to consider. "Which means there is hope."

Barenboim's third Milan appearance on Saturday, featuring three Mozart symphonies, will be live streamed on La Scala's new streaming service, La Scala TV.

## China national soccer boss arrested on corruption charges

BEIJING (AP) — The head of China's national soccer federation has been arrested on corruption charges in the latest blow to the country's effort to grow its standing at home and internationally.

A one-sentence statement from the ruling Communist Party's anti-graft watchdog body said Chen Shuyuan had been placed under investigation by national and Hubei provincial sports bodies. No details were given about the accusations against him.

Chen is head of the Chinese Football Association and vice chair of its party committee, underscoring the government's heavy hand in attempting to direct success in the game.

Despite its success in the Olympics, China has only qualified for one World Cup almost 20 years ago.

China's president and Communist Party leader Xi Jinping declared a goal to make the country a football superpower, but funding and enthusiasm have appeared to dwindle.

The national team has seen a revolving door of foreign and domestic managers and one of its most

decorated past leaders, former Everton and Sheffield United midfielder Li Tie, has been jailed amid a graft investigation.

China's top division clubs paid eye-watering salaries to attract foreign talent, but the league has virtually collapsed under the now-abandoned "zero-COVID" policy and lingering economic malaise.

## Environmentalists say new airport threatens Albanian lagoons

By LLAZAR SEMINI Associated Press

AKERNI, Albania (AP) — A new, multimillion-euro international airport near Albania's coastal city of Vloa will mean hundreds of jobs for area residents. But environmentalists warn it could cause irreparable damage to the fragile ecosystems of protected lagoons that host flamingos, pelicans and millions of other migratory birds.

Albania's new, 104 million-euro (\$125 million) international airport — the country's third — is currently being constructed at the Narta lagoon some 10 kilometers (6 miles) north of the city of Vloa. Set to start operations in 2025, the airport will boast a 3.2-kilometer (2-mile) runway and is expected to handle up to 2 million passengers a year.

That's good news for Adriatik Sela, a resident of Akerni village. The unemployed man hopes that "if there is business here, I could sell a cigarette package, or a coffee, or work as a guard." He and others among the village's 1,000-strong population see the airport as an opportunity for a better life.

Heavy earth-moving vehicles and workers from Swiss company Mabco Constructions are currently busy building the runway as well as a road linking the airport to a nearby highway.

But Aleksander Trajce from the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania, (PPNEA) says the airport poses a grave threat to the Narta lagoon and the Karavasta lagoon farther north and environmentalists have launched a court battle to stop its construction.

Millions of migratory birds use the lagoons as a rest stop as part of the Adriatic flyway, a route the birds use to travel from central and northern Europe to Africa. Up to 3,000 flamingos and pelicans visit the lagoons each year.

"Building such infrastructure right in the middle of this route would mean incredible damage to the bird populations for which this region is famous and on which it flourishes," Trajce said.

Niko Dumani, from the non-governmental group Natural Environment Preservation and Protection Vloa, accuses the government of changing a pre-approved plan delineating a protected zone to incorporate a part of the lagoon into the airport's construction plans.

"It is strange how development policies change from promoting tourism to promoting other industries, like air transport, exploiting a habitat which is so important for tourism, like the lagoon," he said.

Annette Spangenberg, from the German-based conservation group EuroNatur, said the Narta lagoon is part of an ecological network of conservation areas aiming at the long-term survival of bird species and their habitats.

"If you build the airport within this area, it's going to harm the integrity of your river ecosystem. It is like cutting off the leg of the Vjosa River," she said.

The Ministry of Tourism and Environment says it has consulted with locals and with experts. The new airport will generate at least 1,500 jobs.

The ministry told the Associated Press in an email that the site was selected "as the most favorable alternative" for the airport because a military airstrip had started to be built there in the 1920s.

But a European Union progress report on Albania last year noted that work on the airport started in December 2021 "in contradiction with national laws and international biodiversity protection conventions that have already been ratified."

Environmentalists also fear birds could threaten flight safety.

In its most recent meeting in December last year, the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention called on the Albanian government to "suspend the construction of the airport due to its apparent lack of adherence to national and international laws."

The ministry said "a series of protective steps will be applied."

The residents of Akerni are unconcerned. Sela wants the airport to start operating as quickly as possible "to help all people in southern Albania take flights from here and, for sure, that will bring good luck to our lives."

## Indian officials search BBC offices for second straight day

By PIYUSH NAGPAL and CHONCHUI NGASHANGVA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's tax officials searched BBC offices in India for a second straight day on Wednesday questioning staff about the organization's business operations in the country, some staff members said.

BBC management told editorial and other staff members to work from home after they were able to leave the office on Tuesday night, said staff who spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to talk to media.

The searches came weeks after the BBC aired a documentary critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the U.K.

There was no overnight break in the search and investigators scanned the desktops of some employees who were earlier told not to use their phones and keep them aside, the staff members said.

Indian income tax officials have not made any statements since the searches were launched in the BBC's New Delhi and Mumbai offices on Tuesday morning.

The Press Trust of India news agency said the officials were making copies of electronic and paper-based financial data from the organization.

Rights groups and opposition politicians denounced the move by India's Income Tax Department as an attempt to intimidate the media.

Britain's publicly funded national broadcaster said it was cooperating fully with authorities and hoped "to have this situation resolved as soon as possible." Late in the evening, the BBC said officials were still at the two offices.

"Many staff have now left the building but some have been asked to remain and are continuing to cooperate with the ongoing inquiries," it said, adding: "Our output and journalism continue as normal."

While there has been no British government statement so far, U.S. State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday: "We are aware of the search of the BBC offices in Delhi by Indian tax authorities."

"We support the importance of a free press around the world. We continue to highlight the importance of freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief as human rights that contribute to strengthening democracies around the world. It has strengthened this democracy here in this country. It has strengthened India's democracy," Price told reporters in Washington.

India's News Broadcasters and Digital Association criticized the income tax "surveys" at the BBC offices.

While the association "maintains that no institution is above the law, it condemns any attempt to muzzle and intimidate the media and interfere with the free functioning of journalists and media organizations," it said in a statement.

Gaurav Bhatia, a spokesperson for Modi's governing Bharatiya Janata Party, said the BBC should have nothing to fear if it follows Indian laws. But he added that the broadcaster's history is "tainted" and "full of hatred" for India and called it corrupt, without offering any specifics.

The documentary, "India: The Modi Question," was broadcast in the U.K. last month, examining the prime minister's role in 2002 anti-Muslim riots in the western state of Gujarat, where he was chief minister at the time. More than 1,000 people were killed in the violence.

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

The second portion of the two-part documentary examined "the track record of Narendra Modi's government following his re-election in 2019," according to the BBC website.

The program drew an immediate backlash from India's government, which invoked emergency pow-

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ers under its information technology laws to block it from being shown in the country. Local authorities scrambled to stop screenings organized at Indian universities, and social media platforms including Twitter and YouTube complied with government requests to remove links to the documentary.

The BBC said at the time that 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," its statement said.

India's Foreign Ministry called the documentary a "propaganda piece designed to push a particularly discredited narrative" that lacked objectivity.

Press freedom in India has been on a steady decline in recent years. The country fell eight places, to 150 out of 180 countries, in the 2022 Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders. Media watchdog groups accuse the Modi government of silencing criticism on social media under a sweeping internet law that puts digital platforms including Twitter and Facebook under direct government oversight.

Some media outlets critical of the government have been subjected to tax searches.

Authorities searched the offices of the left-leaning website NewsClick and independent media portal NewsLaundry on the same day in 2021. Tax officials also accused the Dainik Bhaskar newspaper of tax evasion in 2021 after it published reports of mass funeral pyres and floating corpses that challenged the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2017, the government's investigation bureau said it was probing cases of loan defaults when it raided the offices of New Delhi Television, known for its liberal slant.

## Rare video of 1986 dive in Titanic wreckage to be released

FALMOUTH, Mass. (AP) — Rare and in some cases never before publicly seen video of the 1986 dive through the wreckage of the Titanic is being released Wednesday by the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

The more than 80 minutes of footage on the WHOI's YouTube channel chronicles some of the remarkable achievements of the dive led by Robert Ballard that marked the first time human eyes had seen the giant ocean liner since it struck an iceberg and sank in the frigid North Atlantic in April 1912. About 1,500 people died during the ship's maiden voyage from Southampton, England, to New York City.

A team from Massachusetts-based Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, in partnership with the French oceanographic exploration organization Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer, discovered the final resting place of the ship in 12,400 feet (3,780 meters) of water on Sept. 1, 1985 using a towed underwater camera.

Nine months later, a WHOI team returned to the site in the famous three-person research submersible Alvin and the remotely-operated underwater exploration vehicle Jason Jr., which took iconic images of the ship's interior.

The release of the footage is in conjunction with the 25th anniversary release on Feb. 10 of the remastered version of the Academy Award-winning movie, "Titanic."

"More than a century after the loss of Titanic, the human stories embodied in the great ship continue to resonate," ocean explorer and filmmaker James Cameron said in a statement. "Like many, I was transfixed when Alvin and Jason Jr. ventured down to and inside the wreck. By releasing this footage, WHOI is helping tell an important part of a story that spans generations and circles the globe."

## Ohio town takes resident questions on derailment, chemicals

EAST PALESTINE, Ohio (AP) — The Ohio village upended by a freight train derailment and the intentional burning of some of the hazardous chemicals on board has invited affected residents to a town hall meeting Wednesday evening to discuss lingering questions.

And there are still plenty — about the huge plumes of smoke, the persisting odors, the reports of sick or dead animals, the potential impact on drinking water, all the cleaning up. Even as school has resumed

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and trains are rolling by again, things aren't the same.

In and around East Palestine, near the Pennsylvania state line, people are asking whether the air and water around them is safe for people, pets and livestock. They want assistance navigating the financial help the railroad offered hundreds of families who evacuated, and they want to know whether it will be held responsible for what happened.

Rail operator Norfolk Southern announced Tuesday that it is also creating a \$1 million charitable fund to help the community of some 4,700 people while continuing remediation work, including removing spilled contaminants from the ground and streams and monitoring air quality.

"We will be judged by our actions," Norfolk Southern President and CEO Alan Shaw said in a statement. "We are cleaning up the site in an environmentally responsible way, reimbursing residents affected by the derailment, and working with members of the community to identify what is needed to help East Palestine recover and thrive."

No one was injured when about 50 cars derailed in a fiery, mangled mess on the outskirts of East Palestine on Feb. 3. As fears grew about a potential explosion, officials seeking to avoid an uncontrolled blast had the area evacuated and opted to release and burn toxic vinyl chloride from five rail cars, sending flames and black smoke billowing into the sky again.

A mechanical issue with a rail car axle has been identified as the suspected cause of the derailment, and the National Transportation Safety Board said it has video appearing to show a wheel bearing overheating just beforehand. The NTSB said it expects its preliminary report in about two weeks.

Misinformation and exaggerations spread online, and state and federal officials have repeatedly offered assurances that air monitoring hasn't detected any remaining concerns. Even low levels of contaminants that aren't considered hazardous can create lingering odors or symptoms such as headaches, Ohio's health director said Tuesday.

Precautions also are being taken to ensure contaminants that reached the Ohio River don't make it into drinking water.

## **Nikki Haley to formally launch GOP campaign for White House**

By MEG KINNARD and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — Republican Nikki Haley plans to formally announce her 2024 presidential campaign on Wednesday, betting that her boundary-breaking career as a woman and person of color who governed in the heart of the South before representing the U.S. on the world stage can overcome entrenched support for her onetime boss, former President Donald Trump.

Haley, a former South Carolina governor and U.N. ambassador, released a video on Tuesday declaring her candidacy. The Wednesday event in the historic coastal city of Charleston marks the first time she'll appear in public as a declared White House hopeful. It could also amount to a show of strength in her home state, which holds a critical early primary that influences the fate of the GOP nomination.

The announcement makes Haley the first major Republican to officially challenge Trump, but she will hardly be the last. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former Vice President Mike Pence and former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo are among those expected to launch campaigns in the coming months. Haley's fellow South Carolinian Sen. Tim Scott is also weighing a White House bid.

As the presidential primary season comes into focus, the biggest question is whether anyone in the field will be able to replace Trump at the top of a party that he transformed with his first campaign in 2016. He remains popular with a wide swath of voters who will have significant sway in the primary, though some party officials have blamed him for the GOP's lackluster performance in last year's midterms. As it did in 2016, a crowded field could work to Trump's advantage, allowing him to march to the nomination while his opponents divide support among themselves.

In her announcement video, the 51-year-old Haley made no direct reference to the 76-year-old former president, instead saying it's "time for a new generation of leadership."

There appears to be openness among Republicans for fresh faces, according to a new poll from The

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Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. In an open-ended question asking Republicans to choose who they want to lead their party, a majority of Republicans didn't choose either Trump or DeSantis, considered the former president's top rival. But they also didn't have a clear alternative in mind.

Eleven other politicians, including Haley, were named by just 1% of Republicans as their preferred leader.

Haley is likely to distinguish herself in the GOP field in part by emphasizing her biography. In the video released on Tuesday, she spoke of growing up in a small South Carolina town as the daughter of Indian immigrants who experienced racist taunts. Despite growing up feeling "different," Haley insisted that America is not a racist country.

That argument could resonate among Republican voters as many in the party push efforts to block or change the way the subject of systemic racism is taught in schools and universities.

Haley also addressed Republicans with some tough talk, saying in the video that the party has lost the popular vote in seven of the last eight presidential elections and that should prompt a new approach. She highlighted her two successful elections as South Carolina governor, starting with the 2010 victory that made her the state's first female and minority governor — along with the nation's youngest, at 38.

She noted — at least in part — the defining moment of her governorship: the 2015 murders of nine Black parishioners in a Charleston church by a self-avowed white supremacist who had been pictured holding Confederate flags.

For years, Haley had resisted calls to remove the Confederate flag from the Statehouse grounds, even casting a rival's push for its removal as a desperate stunt. But after the massacre and with the support of other leading Republicans, Haley advocated for legislation to remove the flag. It came down less than a month after the murders.

The video showed Haley appearing at the church but made no reference to her work to remove the flag.

And in the aftermath of the U.S. shooting down multiple aerial objects in recent weeks, including a suspected Chinese spy balloon off the South Carolina coast, Haley is likely to position herself as well versed in foreign policy. Her video included imagery of her serving as Trump's ambassador to the U.N. with the warning that "China and Russia are on the march" and that they think America can be "bullied" and "kicked around."

"You should know this about me," Haley said. "I don't put up with bullies. And when you kick back, it hurts them more if you're wearing heels."

Haley's campaign is a reversal from two years ago, when she said she wouldn't challenge Trump for president in 2024. But she changed her mind in recent months, citing the country's economic troubles, among other things.

In a statement, Trump said he wished her "luck."

"Even though Nikki Haley said, 'I would never run against my President, he was a great President, the best President in my lifetime,' I told her she should follow her heart and do what she wants to do," Trump said. "I wish her luck!"

## Ukraine aid support softens in the US: AP-NORC Poll

By AAMER MADHANI and EMILY SWANSON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Support among the American public for providing Ukraine weaponry and direct economic assistance has softened as the Russian invasion nears a grim one-year milestone, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Forty-eight percent say they favor the U.S. providing weapons to Ukraine, with 29% opposed and 22% saying they're neither in favor nor opposed. In May 2022, less than three months into the war, 60% of U.S. adults said they were in favor of sending Ukraine weapons.

Americans are about evenly divided on sending government funds directly to Ukraine, with 37% in favor and 38% opposed, with 23% saying neither. The signs of diminished support for Ukraine come as President Joe Biden is set to travel to Poland next week to mark the first anniversary of the biggest conflict in Europe since World War II.

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"I am sympathetic for Ukraine's situation and I feel badly for them, but I feel like we need to first take care of priorities here at home," said Joe Hernandez, 44, of Rocklin, California.

Hernandez, a Republican, added that it's difficult to support generous U.S. spending on military and economic assistance to Ukraine when many American communities don't have the resources to deal with the ramifications of migrants crossing into the U.S. at the southern border, a rise in drug overdoses caused by fentanyl and other lab-produced synthetic opioids, and a homelessness crisis in his state.

Biden has repeatedly stated that the United States will help Ukraine "as long as it takes" to repel the Russian invasion that began on Feb. 24 of last year. Privately, administration officials have warned Ukrainian officials that there is a limit to the patience of a narrowly divided Congress — and American public — for the costs of a war with no clear end. Congress approved about \$113 billion in economic, humanitarian and military spending in 2022.

The poll shows 19% of Americans have a great deal of confidence in Biden's ability to handle the situation in Ukraine, while 37% say they have only some confidence and 43% have hardly any.

Views of Biden's handling of the war divide largely along partisan lines. Among Democrats, 40% say they have a great deal of confidence in Biden to handle the situation, 50% have some confidence and 9% have hardly any. Among Republicans, a large majority (76%) say they have hardly any confidence. Those numbers are largely unchanged since last May.

Janice Fortado, 78, of Ipswich, Massachusetts, said Biden deserves credit for his handling of the war. She agreed with Biden's hesitance early in the war about sending advanced and offensive weaponry out of concern that it would give Russian President Vladimir Putin a pretext to expand the war beyond Ukraine and spur a larger global conflict.

But as the war has dragged on — and Ukrainian forces have held up against a more formidable Russian military — some of that resistance has melted away. Biden has approved sending light multiple rocket launchers known as HIMARS, Patriot missile systems, Bradley fighting vehicles, Abrams tanks, and more. Biden, however, continues to balk at Ukraine's request for fighter jets.

"As my opinion evolved, I came to wish we had offered more to Ukraine sooner," said Fortado, a Democrat, who added that she hopes the U.S. and allies change their mind on the fighter jets. "We seem to have done a drip, drip, drip. I understand why it is they were hesitant, but we are now beyond that point."

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., before winning the speakership, vowed that Republicans wouldn't write a "blank check" for Ukraine once they were in charge. And some of the most right-leaning Republicans lashed out at Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky over his support of a \$1.7 trillion spending bill passed in December that included about \$47 billion for Ukraine.

Alex Hoxeng, 37, of Midland, Texas, said he expected Republicans to take a tougher line on Ukraine spending.

"I think Biden isn't worried enough about inflation," said Hoxeng, a Republican. "We should just stay out of it. Ukraine is halfway around the world and we have our own problems."

A majority of Americans, 63%, still favor imposing economic sanctions on Russia, the poll shows, though that too has decreased from the 71% who said that in May 2022.

And 59% say limiting damage to the U.S. economy is more important than effectively sanctioning Russia, even if that means sanctions are less effective. Almost a year ago, in March 2022, the situation was reversed: 55% said it was a bigger priority to sanction Russia effectively, even if it meant damage to the U.S. economy.

Shandi Carter, 51, of Big Spring, Texas, said she's become frustrated with the global ramifications the war has had on consumers, including volatile gas prices and increasing food costs. Carter, who tends to vote Republican, said she's been displeased with Biden's handling of the crisis but doesn't think Donald Trump would have done any better had he won the 2020 election.

"I just wish it was over. I wish it had never started," Carter said. "It didn't matter if there was a Democrat or Republican there. Putin was going to do what he wanted to do."

Overall, the poll shows that about a quarter of Americans, 26%, now say the U.S. should have a major role in the situation, down from as high as 40% in March 2022. Still, 49% say the U.S. should have a minor

role, and just 24% say it should have no role.

Since last March, the percentage of Democrats saying the U.S. should have a major role has dipped slightly from 48% to 40%, while among Republicans it has dropped from 35% to 17%.

Democrats also remain more likely than Republicans to favor imposing economic sanctions on Russia (75% to 60%), accepting refugees from Ukraine (73% to 42%), providing weapons to Ukraine (63% to 39%) and sending government funds to Ukraine (59% to 21%). Support has softened at least slightly among both Democrats and Republicans since last May.

Tom Sadauskas, 68, a political independent from northern Virginia, said he doesn't believe an end to the war is near. That makes him worried about the direction of American support for a conflict that he believes could have reverberations far beyond Ukraine if Putin is successful.

"I worry that as a country we get easily distracted," said Sadauskas, who approves of Biden's handling of the war thus far. "It's easy to say, 'It's a faraway country. That it really doesn't matter.' But if Ukraine goes, what is our attitude going to be when Putin decides to move on and threaten one of our smaller neighboring NATO countries?"

## U-Haul driver blames 'invisible object' for deadly rampage

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A man who went on a deadly rampage with a U-Haul truck Monday in New York City was suffering from an apparent mental health crisis and said he started mowing people down after seeing an "invisible object" coming toward him, police said Tuesday.

Weng Sor, 62, was charged Tuesday with murder and attempted murder in the attack, which unfolded over a harrowing 48 minutes over a large swath of Brooklyn's bustling Bay Ridge neighborhood. Police eventually pinned the truck against a building after a miles-long chase.

One person was killed and eight people were injured as the U-Haul truck veered onto sidewalks and plowed into bicyclists, moped riders and at least one pedestrian, hitting people at various points along a circuitous route. The truck also rammed a police car, and the officer inside was among the injured.

The scope and length of the destruction led to questions about the NYPD's response and whether the pursuit — which at one point involved a police car speeding after the U-Haul up onto the sidewalk as a man dove to safety — put more people in harm's way.

Sor, a troubled man with a history of violence and mental illness, told police that seeing an "invisible object" set him off, Chief of Detectives James Essig told reporters Tuesday. Sor's family said he'd stopped taking his medication, Essig said.

"He states when he's driving his van he sees an 'invisible object' come towards the car. At that point, he says, 'I've had enough' and he goes on his rampage," Essig said. "There was no object."

Sor, who lived in Las Vegas with his mother, came to New York last week after spending time in Florida and was pulled over twice in the U-Haul in the days prior to the attack, police said. He was walked out of a police station and was expected to be arraigned late Tuesday or Wednesday. Court records did not list a lawyer who could comment on his behalf.

The U-Haul struck three people on mopeds, three people on bicycles, one person on an e-bike and one person who was on foot as the truck moved through a busy section of Brooklyn, just north of the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge along New York Harbor, police said. The victims ranged in age from 30 to 66.

A 44-year-old man riding a moped died from a head injury after he was hit by the truck roughly a half hour after it struck the first victim. Mayor Eric Adams said the man, whose name has not been made public, was a single father "raising those children on his own."

Mohammed Zakaria Salah Rakchi, 36, a delivery worker who emigrated from Algeria three years ago, was hit while running errands after dropping his 7-year-old daughter off at school. He suffered broken bones, including ribs, as well as other injuries and remained in a medically induced coma Tuesday.

A lawyer for Rakchi's family, Derek Sells, questioned whether being chased by police "was a triggering event for this driver and what might have led him to do the things that he did."

NYPD policy requires officers to stop chasing vehicles when the risks to police and the public "outweigh



the danger to the community.”

Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell said Tuesday that the department is reviewing its response. The NYPD later posted body camera video images to social media showing officers urgently clearing a street full of elementary school children near where the U-Haul was wreaking havoc.

Sor rented the U-Haul truck in West Palm Beach, Florida on Feb. 1, paying in advance for a 30-day rental. He remained there until Feb. 4, when he began driving north to Brooklyn, where his son and ex-wife live, Essig said.

On Feb. 5, Sor was pulled over in South Carolina and cited for reckless driving and marijuana possession. He arrived in Brooklyn the next day, surprising his son when he showed up at his door in the middle of the night.

Weng Sor’s son, Stephen Sor, 30, told The Associated Press that his father had a history of mental illness. Records show he was convicted and served time for multiple acts of violence, including stabbing his own brother.

“Very frequently he’ll choose to skip out on his medications and do something like this,” Stephen Sor said in an interview outside his Brooklyn home. “This isn’t the first time he’s been arrested. It’s not the first time he’s gone to jail.”

On Feb. 8, Essig said, police stopped Sor for speeding in the U-Haul on a Brooklyn highway where trucks and other commercial vehicles are prohibited. He was then spotted in New Jersey on Sunday, a day before the mayhem in Brooklyn, Essig said.

The chase with police ended Monday when a police cruiser cut off the winding route and blocked the truck against a building near the entrance to a tunnel leading from Brooklyn to Manhattan, more than 3 miles (5 kilometers) from where the chase began.

After Sor was stopped, Essig said he told police: “You should have shot me.”

Sor’s criminal history includes arrests for driving while intoxicated and evading a police officer in 2002 and multiple instances of battery.

In 2015, Weng Sor stabbed his brother in Las Vegas and served about 17 months in a Nevada prison, according to court and prison records. In 2020, he stabbed someone in the arm and chest with a knife and was sentenced to 364 days in county jail.

Before pleading guilty in that case, Sor was evaluated for several months at state psychiatric facilities before being found competent to face charges, court records show. The records don’t list any diagnosis, but note that Sor was placed on medications.

In an earlier Nevada case, he was ordered to undergo counseling and perform community service after pleading guilty to misdemeanor battery in 2005. The judge noted at the time that Sor was moving to New York and ordered him to submit to a mental health evaluation once he arrived.

## Judge vacates conviction of man imprisoned nearly 3 decades

By JIM SALTER Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — A Missouri judge on Tuesday overturned the conviction of a man who has served nearly 28 years of a life sentence for a killing that he has always said he didn’t commit.

Lamar Johnson, 50, closed his eyes and shook his head slightly as a member of his legal team patted him on the back when Circuit Judge David Mason issued his ruling. In coming to his decision, Mason explained that there had to be “reliable evidence of actual innocence — evidence so reliable that it actually passes the standard of clear and convincing.”

Johnson walked free after he was processed out at the courthouse. Beaming, he walked up to reporters in the courthouse lobby about two hours after the ruling and thanked everyone who worked on his case, as well as the judge.

“This is unbelievable,” said Johnson, who didn’t take any questions.

St. Louis Circuit Attorney Kim Gardner, who filed a motion in August seeking Johnson’s release after an investigation her office conducted with help from the Innocence Project convinced her he was telling the

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truth, applauded the ruling.

"Mr. Lamar Johnson. Thank you. You're free," she said before the gathered press.

Gardner said this is a time for Johnson to spend with his attorneys and family.

"This is Valentine's Day and this is historical," she said.

The Republican-led state attorney general's office fought to keep Johnson locked up. A spokeswoman for the office, Madeline Sieren, said in an email that the office will take no further action in the case. She again defended the office's push to keep Johnson behind bars.

"As he stated when he was sworn in, Attorney General (Andrew) Bailey is committed to enforcing the laws as written," Sieren wrote. "Our office defended the rule of law and worked to uphold the original verdict that a jury of Johnson's peers deemed to be appropriate based on the facts presented at trial."

Johnson's attorneys blasted the state attorney general's office after the hearing, saying it "never stopped claiming Lamar was guilty and was comfortable to have him languish and die in prison."

"Yet, when this State's highest law enforcement office could hide from a courtroom no more, it presented nothing to challenge the overwhelming body of evidence that the circuit attorney and Lamar Johnson had amassed," they said in a statement.

Johnson plans to reconnect with his family and enjoy experiences he was denied for most of his adult life while locked up, his lawyers said.

"While today brings joy, nothing can restore all that the state stole from him. Nothing will give him back the nearly three decades he lost while separated from his daughters and family," they said. "The evidence that proved his innocence was available at his trial, but it was kept hidden or ignored by those who saw no value in the lives of two young Black men from the South Side."

Johnson was convicted of murder for the October 1994 killing of Marcus Boyd, who was shot to death on his front porch by two masked men. Police and prosecutors blamed the killing on a dispute over drug money. Johnson maintained his innocence from the outset, saying he was with his girlfriend miles (kilometers) away when the crime occurred.

While Johnson was convicted and sentenced to life, a second suspect, Phil Campbell, pleaded guilty to a reduced charge in exchange for a seven-year prison term.

Johnson testified at a December hearing that he was with his girlfriend on the night of the crime, except for a few minutes when he stepped outside of the home of a friend to sell drugs on a corner several blocks from where the victim was killed.

Johnson's girlfriend at the time, Erika Barrow, testified that she was with Johnson that entire night, except for about a five-minute span when he left to make the drug sale. She said the distance between the friend's home and Boyd's home would have made it impossible for Johnson to get there and back in five minutes.

The case for Johnson's release was centered around a key witness who recanted his testimony and a prison inmate who says it was he — not Johnson — who joined Campbell in the killing.

James Howard, 46, is serving a life sentence for murder and several other crimes that happened three years after Boyd was killed. He testified at the hearing that he and Campbell decided to rob Boyd, who owed one of their friends money from the sale of drugs. He also said Johnson wasn't there.

Howard testified that he shot Boyd in the back of the head and neck, and that Campbell shot Boyd in the side.

Howard and Campbell years ago signed affidavits admitting to the crime and claiming Johnson was not involved. Campbell has since died.

James Gregory Elking testified in December that he was on the front porch with Boyd, trying to buy crack cocaine, when the two gunmen wearing black ski masks came around the house and began the attack. Elking, who later spent several years in prison for bank robbery, initially told police he couldn't identify the gunmen.

He agreed to view a lineup anyway. Elking testified that when he was unable to name anyone from the lineup as a shooter, Detective Joseph Nickerson told him, "I know you know who it is," and urged him to "help get these guys off the street."

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Saying he felt “bullied” and “pressured,” Elking named Johnson as one of the shooters. Gardner’s office said Elking was also paid at least \$4,000 after agreeing to testify.

“It’s been haunting me,” he said of his role in sending Johnson to prison.

Nickerson denied coercing Elking. He testified in December that Elking’s identification of Johnson was based on all that he could see of the shooter’s face — his eyes. Johnson has one eye that looks different than the other, Nickerson said. “You can clearly see it.”

Dwight Warren, who prosecuted Johnson in 1995, said that beyond Elking’s testimony, the main evidence against Johnson was an overheard jail cell conversation. A jailhouse informant, William Mock, told investigators at the time that he heard Campbell and Johnson talking when one of them said, “We should have shot that white boy,” apparently referring to Elking.

Warren acknowledged that convicting Johnson would have been “iffy” without Mock’s testimony.

In March 2021, the Missouri Supreme Court denied Johnson’s request for a new trial after then-Attorney General Eric Schmitt’s office argued successfully that Gardner lacked the authority to seek one so many years after the case was adjudicated.

The case led to the passage of a state law that makes it easier for prosecutors to get new hearings in cases where there is fresh evidence of a wrongful conviction. That law freed another longtime inmate, Kevin Strickland, last year. He had served more than 40 years for a Kansas City triple killing.

## California Sen. Feinstein says she won’t run for reelection

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD AP Political Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein, whose groundbreaking political career shattered gender barriers from San Francisco’s City Hall to the corridors of Capitol Hill, said Tuesday she won’t seek reelection in 2024.

The senator, who turns 90 in June, is the oldest member of Congress and has faced questions in recent years about her cognitive health and memory, though she has defended her effectiveness representing a state that is home to nearly 40 million people.

The announcement came after several prominent California Democrats, including U.S. Reps. Katie Porter and Adam Schiff, already had declared Senate campaigns. With Feinstein a now 30-year veteran of the Senate, there hasn’t been a wide open competition for her seat in decades.

Feinstein plans to remain in Congress through the end of her current term. Speaking to reporters in Washington on Tuesday, she said “there’s times for all things under the sun.”

“I think that will be the right time, towards the end of next year,” she said.

Feinstein is one of the Senate’s few remaining veterans of the so-called Year of the Woman, referring to several women who were elected to the male-dominated chamber during the 1992 election. But even before she moved to Washington, Feinstein was one of the most prominent women in American politics.

She was the first woman to serve as president of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in the 1970s and the first female mayor of San Francisco. She ascended to that post after the November 1978 assassinations of then-Mayor George Moscone and City Supervisor Harvey Milk by a former supervisor, Dan White. Feinstein found Milk’s body.

In the Senate, she was the first woman to head the Senate Intelligence Committee and the first woman to serve as the Judiciary Committee’s top Democrat. She gained a reputation as a pragmatic centrist who left a mark on political battles over issues ranging from reproductive rights to environmental protection.

Feinstein is particularly closely associated with efforts to broaden gun restrictions. Early in her career, the Senate approved her amendment to ban manufacturing and sales of certain types of assault weapons as part of a crime bill that President Bill Clinton signed into law in 1994. The ban expired 10 years later and was never replaced, but it remained a trademark issue in a career that was molded by gun violence.

“Through force of will, she led the fight to get the assault weapons ban passed. Like so many who have been touched by gun violence, that victory was personal for her,” President Joe Biden said in a statement. “I’ve served with more U.S. senators than just about anyone. I can honestly say that Dianne Feinstein is

one of the very best.”

She was also known for reaching out to Republicans to find middle ground. While that may have helped her notch legislative accomplishments in Washington, it chafed some in a Democratic Party that has moved increasingly to the left in recent years.

That frustration was on display during her last reelection campaign in 2018. The California Democratic Party endorsed a liberal rival for the seat over her, with some delegates complaining Feinstein had been in Washington too long and hadn't stood strong enough for immigrants.

She infuriated liberals in 2020 when she closed out confirmation hearings for Justice Amy Coney Barrett with an embrace of Senate Judiciary Committee Chair Lindsey Graham, a Republican, and a public thanks to him for a job well done.

Liberal advocacy groups that had fiercely opposed Barrett's nomination to replace the late liberal icon Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg were furious and called for her to step down from the committee leadership. A month later, she announced she would remain on the Judiciary Committee but step down as the top Democrat.

But such tension was forgotten on Capitol Hill on Tuesday, where Democrats praised Feinstein's career. At a closed door lunch of Democratic senators, the lawmakers broke into rounds of applause for Feinstein after Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer announced her decision.

"She's a legend," Schumer later told reporters. "A legend in California as the first woman senator; a legend in this Senate. She was the leader on so many different issues, assault weapons, environment, women's rights, and so much else. She approached everything studiously and carefully."

At the lunch, Feinstein told her colleagues how hard her husband's death was and that she would be ready to step away from public life after finishing this term, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., said afterward. Feinstein's husband, Richard Blum, died last year.

"Senator Feinstein made history," said Warren. "She changed this country and she was a woman on the front lines in fights, like access to assault weapons, and national security and intelligence."

Warren added: "Every other woman in public office owes a special debt to Dianne Feinstein."

In her home state, where Feinstein is the longest serving U.S. senator, she was lionized for her historic tenure in public service.

Democratic U.S. Rep. Nancy Pelosi, the former House speaker, called her San Francisco neighbor "a titan" of the Senate who, among her accomplishments, steered billions of federal dollars to California for environmental protection. Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom called Feinstein a mentor and credited her with "blazing a trail for a new generation of female lawmakers."

## Ohio derailment aftermath: How worried should people be?

By JOHN SEEWER and PATRICK ORSAGOS Associated Press

Plumes of smoke, questions about dead animals, worries about the drinking water. A train derailment in Ohio and subsequent burning of some of the hazardous chemicals has people asking: How worried should they be?

It's been more than a week since about 50 cars of a freight train derailed in a fiery, mangled mess on the outskirts of East Palestine near the Pennsylvania state line, apparently because of a mechanical issue with a rail car axle. No one was injured in that wreck. But concerns about air quality and the hazardous chemicals on board the train prompted some village residents to leave, and officials later ordered the evacuation of the immediate area as fears grew about a potential explosion of smoldering wreckage.

Officials seeking to avoid the danger of an uncontrolled blast chose to intentionally release and burn toxic vinyl chloride from five rail cars, sending flames and black smoke again billowing high into the sky. The jarring scene left people questioning the potential health impacts for residents in the area and beyond, even as authorities maintained they were doing their best to protect people.

In the days since, residents' concerns and questions have only abounded — amplified, in part, by misinformation spreading online.

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More on what we know:

## WAS THE CONTROLLED BURN SAFE?

Vinyl chloride is associated with increased risk of certain cancers, and officials at the time warned burning it would release two concerning gases — hydrogen chloride and phosgene, the latter of which was used as a weapon in World War I.

Environmental officials say that monitors detected toxins in the air at the site during the controlled burn and that officials kept people away until that dissipated. They say continuing air monitoring done for the railroad and by government agencies — including testing inside nearly 400 homes — hasn't detected dangerous levels in the area since residents were allowed to return. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has shared air monitoring results online.

## WHAT ARE THE CONTINUING CONCERNS?

Even in communities beyond East Palestine, some residents say they worry about long-term effects of even low-grade exposure to contaminants from the site. The village has scheduled a town hall at the local high school Wednesday evening to hear questions from residents, whose concerns have included lingering smells, how to ensure accountability for the cleanup, and what to make of pets and livestock that have appeared ill or died since the derailment.

The risk to such animals is low, according to the Ohio Department of Agriculture, which recommended that people contact a local veterinarian for any concerns about their livestock or pets' health. The department hasn't received any official reports about livestock or pet illnesses or deaths directly related to the incident, though making such a determination would require a necropsy and lab work, ODA said.

Ohio Health Department Director Bruce Vanderhoff cautioned at a news conference Tuesday that residents who were worried about lingering odors or headaches since the derailment should know that those can be triggered by contaminant levels in the air that are well below what's unsafe.

The derailment also highlighted questions about railroad safety, though federal data show accidents involving hazardous materials at this scale are very rare. Trains were rolling past East Palestine again soon after the evacuation order was lifted.

## WHAT ABOUT THE GROUND AND WATER?

Contaminants from derailed cars spilled into some waterways and were toxic to fish, but officials have said drinking water in the area has remained protected.

In addition to vinyl chloride, at least three other substances — butyl acrylate, ethylhexyl acrylate, and ethylene glycol monobutyl ether — were released into the air, soil or water, according to a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency letter putting rail operator Norfolk Southern on notice about its potential liability for cleanup costs.

Norfolk Southern's response has included efforts to remove spilled contaminants from the ground surface and nearby streams, as well as air quality monitoring, soil sampling and residential water well surveys, according to its preliminary remediation plan.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources estimates the spill affected more than 7 miles (11.2 kilometers) of streams and killed some 3,500 fish, mostly small ones such as minnows and darters.

A plume of contaminants that includes butyl acrylate formed in the Ohio River in the first days after the derailment and on Tuesday was flowing slowly, nearing Huntington, West Virginia, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency officials said.

The contaminant amounts found so far don't pose a risk for cities that rely on the river for its drinking water and the plume is continuing to be diluted as it moves farther along, the state EPA said.

In response, some water companies have shut off their intakes or increased treatment processes as a precaution.

## ARE SOCIAL MEDIA CLAIMS ABOUT THIS SITUATION ACCURATE?

As with any developing situation, misinformation and hyperbole have spread online about the derailment in recent days.

Social media users, for example, falsely claimed that drinking water is contaminated throughout the en-

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tire Ohio River basin when many areas in the multistate region are not affected by the chemical release. Footage of dark, ominous clouds has also spread with claims it showed East Palestine post-burn, despite the fact that the footage appeared online as early as November 2022.

As information continues to develop, disinformation experts emphasize that people should exercise caution before sharing unverified claims.

## WHAT MAY HAVE CAUSED THE ACCIDENT?

Investigators examined the rail car that initiated the derailment and have surveillance video from a home showing "what appears to be a wheel bearing in the final stage of overheat failure moments before the derailment," the National Transportation Safety Board said Tuesday. Its preliminary report is expected in two weeks.

Rail operator Norfolk Southern and the NTSB haven't publicly answered one of the big questions about the Feb. 3 derailment, however: Exactly when was the crew alerted to a mechanical issue with a rail car axle — the suspected cause — and did they respond appropriately?

A wayside defect detector alerted the crew to a mechanical issue "shortly before the derailment," and emergency braking was initiated, a National Transportation Safety Board member said that weekend.

Security video from two businesses in Salem, Ohio, shows the underside of one rail car glowing brightly from an apparent fiery axle, indicating the train might have traveled more than 20 miles (32.1 kilometers) with that malfunction before the derailment, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported. The NTSB says it's reviewing that video, too.

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro said on Tuesday that Norfolk Southern had mismanaged the disaster from the outset and that its actions hampered the response from local and state agencies. He also said the company had been unwilling to look at alternatives to intentionally releasing and burning the five cars filled with vinyl chloride.

"Prioritizing an accelerated and arbitrary timeline to reopen the rail line injected unnecessary risk and created confusion," Shapiro said in a letter to Norfolk Southern CEO Alan Shaw. A message seeking comment was left with the company.

## In Trump probe, US seeks to pierce attorney-client privilege

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Justice Department prosecutors investigating the mishandling of classified documents at Donald Trump's Florida estate are seeking to pierce the attorney-client privilege and want to again question one of the former president's lawyers before a grand jury, a person familiar with the matter said Tuesday night.

The privilege protects lawyers from having to tell prosecutors about confidential conversations their clients have with them. But prosecutors can get around that privilege if they can convince a judge that the communications they want information about were made in furtherance of a crime — a principle known as the crime-fraud exception.

Prosecutors have already questioned M. Evan Corcoran before a grand jury, but he repeatedly invoked attorney-client privilege in declining to answer certain questions, according to the person who spoke with The Associated Press and insisted on anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation. They're seeking to question him again, and want to be able to move past attorney-client privilege, the person said.

The request from prosecutors working with special counsel Jack Smith is expected to lead to closed-door arguments before the chief judge of the District of Columbia federal court about whether prosecutors can compel Corcoran to answer their questions about his conversations with Trump.

It is not the first time during the course of the investigation prosecutors have raised the specter of criminal conduct in connection with the Mar-a-Lago investigation. Last August the Justice Department revealed in a search warrant affidavit that it had probable cause to investigate the unlawful retention of national defense information as well as efforts to obstruct that probe.

It remains unclear whether Trump or anyone else will be charged, though the move is a notably ag-

gressive act by Smith's team. A war crimes prosecutor who previously led the Justice Department's public corruption section, Smith is separately investigating efforts by Trump and his allies to overturn the results of the 2020 election and recently subpoenaed former Vice President Mike Pence as part of that probe.

A spokesman for Smith did not return a call seeking comment Tuesday night, and Corcoran did not return an email seeking comment.

Trump's lawyers and representatives have featured prominently for months in the investigation into the retention by Trump of roughly 300 documents with classified markings at Mar-a-Lago. The Justice Department issued a subpoena last May to recover any remaining classified documents at Mar-a-Lago, but officials who visited the property were given a folder containing only about three dozen records.

One of Trump's lawyers, Christina Bobb, signed a letter stating that a "diligent search" had been conducted for classified documents and that all such records had been returned to the government. She told FBI investigators in an interview last fall that she had not drafted the letter and that Corcoran was the one who prepared it and asked her to sign it in her role as custodian of records.

But Justice Department say they subsequently developed evidence that led them to suspect that additional classified records remained at the property. FBI agents returned in August with a search warrant, removing roughly 100 documents with classified markings.

The New York Times first reported that the Justice Department was seeking to pierce attorney-client privilege.

## 11 states consider 'right to repair' for farming equipment

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press/Report for America

DENVER (AP) — On Colorado's northeastern plains, where the pencil-straight horizon divides golden fields and blue sky, a farmer named Danny Wood scrambles to plant and harvest proso millet, dryland corn and winter wheat in short, seasonal windows. That is until his high-tech Steiger 370 tractor conks out.

The tractor's manufacturer doesn't allow Wood to make certain fixes himself, and last spring his fertilizing operations were stalled for three days before the servicer arrived to add a few lines of missing computer code for \$950.

"That's where they have us over the barrel, it's more like we are renting it than buying it," said Wood, who spent \$300,000 on the used tractor.

Wood's plight, echoed by farmers across the country, has pushed lawmakers in Colorado and 10 other states to introduce bills that would force manufacturers to provide the tools, software, parts and manuals needed for farmers to do their own repairs — thereby avoiding steep labor costs and delays that imperil profits.

"The manufacturers and the dealers have a monopoly on that repair market because it's lucrative," said Rep. Brianna Titone, a Democrat and one of the bill's sponsors. "(Farmers) just want to get their machine going again."

In Colorado, the legislation is largely being pushed by Democrats while their Republican colleagues find themselves stuck in a tough spot: torn between right-leaning farming constituents asking to be able to repair their own machines and the manufacturing businesses that oppose the idea.

The manufacturers argue that changing the current practice with this type of legislation would force companies to expose trade secrets. They also say it would make it easier for farmers to tinker with the software and illegally crank up the horsepower and bypass the emissions controller — risking operators' safety and the environment.

Similar arguments around intellectual property have been leveled against the broader campaign called 'right to repair,' which has picked up steam across the country — crusading for the right to fix everything from iPhones to hospital ventilators during the pandemic.

In 2011, Congress tried passing a right to repair law for car owners and independent servicers. That bill did not pass, but a few years later, automotive industry groups agreed to a memorandum of understanding to give owners and independent mechanics — not just authorized dealerships — access to tools and

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information to fix problems.

In 2021, the Federal Trade Commission pledged to beef up its right to repair enforcement at the direction of President Joe Biden. And just last year, Titone sponsored and passed Colorado's first right to repair law, empowering people who use wheelchairs with the tools and information to fix them.

For the right to repair farm equipment — from thin tractors used between grape vines to behemoth combines for harvesting grain that can cost over half a million dollars — Colorado is joined by 10 states including Florida, Maryland, Missouri, New Jersey, Texas and Vermont.

Many of the bills are finding bipartisan support, said Nathan Proctor, who leads Public Interest Research Group's national right to repair campaign. But in Colorado's House committee on agriculture, Democrats pushed the bill forward in a 9-4 vote along party lines, with Republicans in opposition even though the bill's second sponsor is Republican Rep. Ron Weinberg.

"That's really surprising, and that upset me," said the Republican Wood.

Wood's tractor, which flies an American flag reading "Farmers First," isn't his only machine to break down. His grain harvesting combine was dropping into idle, but the servicer took five days to arrive on Wood's farm — a setback that could mean a hail storm decimates a wheat field or the soil temperature moves beyond the Goldilocks zone for planting.

"Our crop is ready to harvest and we can't wait five days, but there was nothing else to do," said Wood. "When it's broke down you just sit there and wait and that's not acceptable. You can be losing \$85,000 a day."

Rep. Richard Holtorf, the Republican who represents Wood's district and is a farmer himself, said he's being pulled between his constituents and the dealerships in his district covering the largely rural north-east corner of the state. He voted against the measure because he believes it will financially impact local dealerships in rural areas and could jeopardize trade secrets.

"I do sympathize with my farmers," said Holtorf, but he added, "I don't think it's the role of government to be forcing the sale of their intellectual property."

At the packed hearing last week that spilled into a second room in Colorado's Capitol, the core concerns raised in testimony were farmers illegally slipping around the emissions control and cranking up the horsepower.

"I know growers, if they can change horsepower and they can change emissions they are going to do it," said Russ Ball, sales manager at 21st Century Equipment, a John Deere dealership in Western states.

The bill's proponents acknowledged that the legislation could make it easier for operators to modify horsepower and emissions controls, but argued that farmers are already able to tinker with their machines and doing so would remain illegal.

This January, the Farm Bureau and the farm equipment manufacturer John Deere did sign a memorandum of understanding — a right to repair agreement made in the free market and without government intervention. The agreement stipulates that John Deere will share some parts, diagnostic and repair codes, and manuals to allow farmers to do their own fixes.

The Colorado bill's detractors laud that agreement as a strong middle ground while Titone said it wasn't enough, evidenced by six of Colorado's biggest farmworker associations that support the bill.

Proctor, who is tracking 20 right to repair proposals in a number of industries across the country, said the memorandum of understanding has fallen far short.

"Farmers are saying no," Proctor said. "We want the real thing."

## In which Winnie the Pooh stars in an R-rated slasher movie

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Hundred Acre Wood has seen some pretty unsettling things over the years. A honey jar shortage. Rather blustery days. The omnipresent threat of a Heffalump.

But in "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey," a new microbudget R-rated horror film, Pooh wades into far darker territory than even Eeyore could have ever imagined. After 95 years of saying things like "A hug is



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always the right size," Pooh — newly freed from copyright — is now violently terrorizing a remote house of young women.

Countless cherished characters have passed into public domain before, but perhaps never so abruptly and savagely as Pooh.

Pooh, Piglet, Kanga, Roo, Owl, Eeyore and Christopher Robin all became public domain on January 1 last year when the copyright on A.A. Milne's 1926 book, "Winnie-the-Pooh," with illustrations by E.H. Shepard, expired. Just a year later, Pooh and Piglet can now be found on a murderous rampage in nationwide movie theaters — a head-spinning development that's happened faster than a bear could say "Oh, bother."

Depending on how you look at it, "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey" is either a crass way to capitalize on a beloved bear or an ingenious bit of independent filmmaking foresight. Either way, it's probably a harbinger of what's to come.

In the next 10 years, some of the most iconic characters in pop culture — including Bugs Bunny, Batman and Superman — will pass into public domain, or at least their most early incarnations. Some elements of Pooh are still off-limits, like his red shirt, since they apply to later interpretations. Tigger, who debuted in 1928's "The House at Pooh Corner," isn't public until 2024.

Many have next Jan. 1 circled. That's when the original version of Mickey Mouse, from "Steamboat Willie," becomes public domain. It will be open on season on the face of the Walt Disney Co. — or at least that early whistling variety of Mickey.

Pop culture, as a concept, was born in the 1920s, meaning many of the most indelible — and still very culturally present — works will fall into public domain in the coming years. There will be all kinds of new and unlikely contexts for some of these characters. Some could be wonderful, some schlocky. But "Winnie Pooh: Blood and Honey" may just be a taste of what's in store.

"When Superman and Batman fall into the public domain, there's going to be some wild films, I'm sure of it," says "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey" writer, director and co-producer Rhys Waterfield. "There's going to be so many different and cool unique iterations coming off that. I might do one."

Though made for less than \$100,000, "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey" will open Friday on some 1,500 screens in North America, an unusually wide release for such a little-funded movie. It's already made \$1 million in Mexico and has many more international territories booked. For Waterfield, a British film producer of direct-to-DVD titles (credits include "Dinosaur Hotel" and "Easter Killing"), it's already a hit way beyond expectation.

"I kind of thought this could do a small theatrical run in some places and do quite well commercially," says Waterfield. "But it's blown up way beyond that to a scale that's absolutely insane."

In a 2021 tally of media franchises by Statista, Winnie the Pooh, with \$80.3 billion in worldwide revenue, tied Mickey Mouse for No. 3, trailing only Pokémon and Hello Kitty. But unlike them, Pooh accounts for a veritable religion for his kind-hearted witticisms and contented spiritual outlook. Pooh is as much a gentle sage as he is a round-tummied toon. When Waterfield realized Pooh was entering public domain, "I had a spark in my eye," he says.

Here was much-coveted intellectual property that could sell just about any film. "I've never met anyone that doesn't know who Winnie the Pooh is," Waterfield said in a recent phone interview speaking from Amsterdam.

But certainly, not everyone has been so happy about the idea of one of the most benevolent bears turning feral monster. Waterfield says he receives daily messages telling him he's evil, and even some death threats. One person said they were calling the police.

"You've got to be pretty thick-skinned to do a movie like this," Waterfield says. "It baffles me. People think making an alternative version of him is somehow infiltrating their mind and destroying their memories. When I get claims that I ruined people's childhoods, I'm genuinely confused. I just kind of brush it off and carry on making more of them."

Waterfield is already planning sequels with Peter Pan, Bambi and many more. (The Felix Salten book "Bambi, A Life in the Woods" also became public domain last year.)

Jennifer Jenkins, a professor of law and director of Duke's Center for the Study of Public Domain, is used

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to operating in a relatively quiet and byzantine realm of copyright law and thorny rights issues. She writes an annual Jan. 1 column for "Public Domain Day." But nothing has caused her phone to ring off the hook quite like "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey."

The movie has clearly touched a nerve; millions have watched its trailer online. (Typical comment: "I can't believe that this movie is real.") And Jenkins, a firm believer in the long-range benefits of public domain, has been somewhat bemused by the storm kicked up by a movie like "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey." She compares public domain issues like these to the way free speech is a right, regardless of whether you agree with what's said.

"Some uses of public domain material will be welcome to some and disturbing to others," Jenkins says. "But I don't think new content uniformly saps the value of the original work. I have the original books. I adore them. The fact that this slasher film is out there has no effect whatsoever on how I feel about A.A. Milne's original creation or E.H. Shepard's pencil sketches."

It's worth noting that much of the Disney empire was, itself, built on public domain. "Beauty and the Beast" comes from Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's 1756 version of the fairy tale. "Sleeping Beauty" came from Charles Perrault's 1697 fairy tale. "Aladdin" comes from the folk tale collection "The Book of One Thousand and One Nights."

Though Jenkins can't think of too many characters who had such a jarring entry to public domain as Pooh, films like "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies" (2016) and the 2021 book "The Great Gatsby Undead" are reference points.

"People love adding zombies to public domain works," says Jenkins.

To her, "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey" may not be the most glorious example of the effects of public domain, but it's part of a process that human creativity depends upon and thrives on. "Blood and Honey" may not make a lasting mark in the Hundred Acre Woods, but something, someday will. Chalk it up to growing pains.

"The fact that some people may be disturbed or revolted by this particular re-use of some of the characters from Winnie the Pooh doesn't detract from the value of the public domain," says Jenkins. "This is how people throughout history have created. They've always drawn on or been inspired by earlier works. Time will tell with this movie or any other reuse of Winnie the Pooh and Piglet whether movies like this will be rewarded in the marketplace or have any enduring appeal.

"My thing is always: Time will tell."

## Latest downed objects could well be 'benign,' US says

By TARA COPP, ERIC TUCKER, COLLEEN LONG and NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The three still-unidentified aerial objects shot down by the U.S. in the past week likely had merely a "benign purpose," the White House acknowledged Tuesday, drawing a distinction between them and the massive Chinese balloon that earlier traversed the U.S. with a suspected goal of surveillance.

"The intelligence community is considering as a leading explanation that these could just be balloons tied to some commercial or benign purpose," said White House national security spokesman John Kirby.

Officials also disclosed that a missile fired at one of the three objects, over Lake Huron on Sunday, missed its intended target and landed in the water before a second one successfully hit.

The new details came as the Biden's administration's actions over the past two weeks faced fresh scrutiny in Congress.

First, U.S. fighter jets didn't shoot down what officials described as a Chinese spy balloon until after had crossed much of the United States, citing safety concerns. Then the military deployed F-22 fighters with heat-seeking missiles to quickly shoot down what likely were harmless objects.

Taken together, the actions raised political as well as security questions, about whether the Biden administration overreacted after facing Republican criticism for reacting too slowly to the big balloon.

Even as more information about the three objects emerges, questions remain about what they were,

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who sent them and how the U.S. might respond to unidentified airborne objects in the future.

Still unaddressed are questions about the original balloon, including what spying capabilities it had and whether it was transmitting signals as it flew over sensitive military sites in the United States. It was believed by American intelligence to have initially been on a track toward the U.S. territory of Guam, according to a U.S. official.

The U.S. tracked it for several days after it left China, said the official, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive intelligence. It appears to have been blown off its initial trajectory and ultimately flew over the continental U.S., the official said.

Balloons and other unidentified objects have been previously spotted over Guam, a strategic hub for the U.S. Navy and Air Force in the western Pacific.

It's unclear how much control China retained over the balloon once it veered from its original trajectory. A second U.S. official said the balloon could have been externally maneuvered or directed to loiter over a specific target, but it's unclear whether Chinese forces did so.

Even less is known about the three objects shot down over three successive days, from Friday to Sunday, in part because it's been challenging to recover debris from remote locations in the Canadian Yukon, off northern Alaska and near the Upper Peninsula of Michigan on Lake Huron. So far, officials have no indication they were part of a bigger surveillance operation along with the balloon that was shot down off the South Carolina coast on Feb. 4.

"We don't see anything that points right now to being part of the PRC spy balloon program," Kirby told reporters, referring to the People's Republic of China. It's also not likely the objects were "intelligence collection against the United States of any kind — that's the indication now."

No country or private company has come forward to claim any of the objects, Kirby said. They do not appear to have been operated by the U.S. government.

Kirby had hinted Monday that the three objects were different in substantive ways from the balloon, including in their size. And his comments Tuesday marked a clear effort by the White House to draw a line between the balloon, which officials believe was part of a Chinese military program that has operated over five continents, and objects that the administration thinks could simply be part of some research or commercial effort.

In Washington, Pentagon officials met with senators for a classified briefing on the shootdowns. Lawmakers conveyed concerns from their constituents about a need to keep them informed and came away assured the objects were not extraterrestrial in nature but wanting many more details.

Still, Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., said the successful recent interceptions were likely to have a "calming influence" and make future shootdowns less likely.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., told reporters after the briefing that he didn't think the objects posed a threat.

"They're trying to figure out — you know there's a bunch of junk up there. So you got to figure out what's the threat, what's not. You see something, you shouldn't always have to shoot it down," Graham said.

Biden has ordered National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan to form an interagency team to study the detection, analysis and "disposition of unidentified aerial objects" that could pose either safety or security risks.

The recent objects have also drawn the attention of world leaders including in Canada, where one was shot down on Saturday, and in the United Kingdom, where the prime minister has ordered a security review.

Japan's Defense Ministry said Tuesday that at least three flying objects spotted in Japanese airspace since 2019 are strongly believed to have been Chinese spy balloons.

Meanwhile, U.S. officials confirmed that a first missile aimed at the object over Lake Huron landed instead in the water, but that a second one hit the target.

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the military went to "great lengths" to make sure none of the strikes put civilians at risk, including identifying what the debris field size was likely to be and the maximum effective range of the missiles used.

"We're very, very careful to make sure that those shots are in fact safe," Milley said. "And that's the guidance from the president. Shoot it down, but make sure we minimize collateral damage and we preserve

the safety of the American people.”

The object taken down Sunday was the third in as many days to be shot from the skies. The White House has said the objects differed in size and maneuverability from the Chinese surveillance balloon that U.S. fighter jets shot down earlier this month, but that their altitude was low enough to pose a risk to civilian air traffic.

Weather challenges and the remote locations of where the three objects were shot down over Alaska, Canada and Lake Huron have impeded recovery efforts so far.

Milley was in Brussels with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to meet with members of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group on additional weapons and defense needs for Kyiv in advance of Russia's anticipated spring offensive.

## Michigan State urges: 'Run, Hide, Fight' as gunfire erupts

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. (AP) — They broke out windows to escape, barricaded doors and hid under blankets. They silenced their phones — afraid to make even the slightest sound for hours as police searched for a gunman who had already killed three students and critically wounded five others on the Michigan State University campus.

The terror felt by thousands of students — some experiencing their second mass shooting — was evident in texts to parents, posts on social media and in 911 calls.

It started around 8:30 p.m. Monday when Anthony McRae, a 43-year-old with a previous gun violation, opened fire inside an academic building and the student union.

Alerts sent out to students urged them to “run, hide, fight,” and video showed them fleeing as police swarmed toward the chaos. The massive search that ensued ended roughly three hours later when McRae fatally shot himself in a confrontation with police miles from campus, officials said Tuesday.

McRae was neither a student nor an employee of the university. The motive is a mystery.

Jaqueline Matthews, a member of the Michigan State rowing team, crouched for so long when gunfire erupted at Sandy Hook Elementary that her back is permanently injured. Now a decade later, the 21-year-old international law major was watching chaos outside her campus window, stunned to find herself here yet again.

“The fact that this is the second mass shooting that I have now lived through is incomprehensible,” she said in a TikTok video that she recorded in the early morning hours, demanding legislative action. “We can no longer allow this to happen. We can no longer be complacent.”

She wasn't the only one experiencing her second mass shooting. Jennifer Mancini told the Detroit Free Press that her daughter also had survived the November 2021 shooting that left four students dead at Oxford High School in southeastern Michigan. Now a freshman at Michigan State, her daughter was traumatized anew.

“I can't believe this is happening again,” said Mancini, who didn't want her daughter's name used.

Others across campus experienced the terror for the first time.

Ted Zimbo, a 26-year-old astrophysics major, said he was heading back to his residence hall after an off-campus meeting when he saw police cars everywhere and a blood-covered woman hiding behind a car. She told him that someone came into her classroom and started shooting.

“Her hands were completely covered in blood. It was on her pants and her shoes,” he told The Associated Press. “She said, ‘It's my friend's blood.’”

That, he said, is when it hit him: “There was a real shooting, a mass shooting.”

The woman picked up her phone and started crying, unsure of what happened to her friend. Zimbo spent the next three hours hunkered down in his Toyota SUV, a blanket tossed over him.

In a nearby residence hall, Karah Tanski said she spent two hours “crunched under a desk, crying, thinking I was literally going to die.”

The 22-year-old resident assistant said about 40 freshmen relied on her, social media and police scanners for updates during the lockdown. From empty bomb threats to incorrect details about the shooter,

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the updates were sometimes wrong and added to the "mass hysteria" of the night, Tanski said.

About a half-mile east of campus, junior Aedan Kelley hid with his roommate, locking his doors and covering windows.

"It's all very frightening. And then I have all these people texting me wondering if I'm OK, which is overwhelming," he said.

Ryan Kunkel, 22, said he and his classmates turned off the lights and acted like there "was a shooter right outside the door." For more than four hours, as they waited, "nothing came out of anyone's mouth," he recalled.

"This is supposed to be a place where I'm coming, learning and bettering myself. And instead, students are getting hurt."

Dominik Molotky said he was in a Cuban history class when he and the other students heard a gunshot right outside the classroom. He told ABC's "Good Morning America" that a few seconds later the gunman entered the classroom and fired three to four more rounds while the students took cover.

"After that we broke out the window, and I climbed out of there. And then I booked it back to my apartment," he said.

Claire Papoulias, a sophomore, told NBC's "Today" show she was listening to a history lecture when she heard gunshots and dropped to the floor.

"At that moment," she said, "I thought that I was going to die, I was so scared."

She said she quietly called her mom while classmates opened a window and helped people to jump to safety. Once outside, she grabbed her backpack and phone.

"And I remember," she said, "I just ran for my life."

Sophomores Jake Doohan and Nicole Stark were walking off campus when they heard about the shooting and took shelter, barricading a door with a dresser.

With the blinds closed so "not a speck of light could get out," Stark said she felt like they were watching the news, as though "it's not actually happening to us."

The senselessness of it left Doohan stunned.

"It's sad to think," he said, "that things like this will happen just out of the blue to anybody or anywhere."

John and Rona Szydzik, who both graduated from Michigan State University, left flowers on the campus Tuesday after spending the previous night hiding as ambulances wailed past their home.

As a high school teacher, Rona Szydzik has drilled for years to "run, hide, fight." But she added: "To actually be in it, that's very shocking." For her husband, the flowers were a way to let the victims' families know they cared, that they were praying.

"It really was tough," he said, becoming emotional as he spoke.

## Dave Hollis, Disney exec turned self-help author, dies at 47

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — Dave Hollis, who left his post as a Disney executive to help his wife run a successful lifestyle empire, has died at his home in Texas. He was 47.

Hollis, whose ex-wife Rachel Hollis wrote the bestseller "Girl, Wash Your Face," was pronounced dead Sunday afternoon at his home in Dripping Springs, a city on the outskirts of Austin, according to Hays County Justice of the Peace Andrew Cable. An autopsy will be performed to determine the cause of death since Hollis, who was last seen the evening before, was "youthful and didn't have a long medical history," Cable said.

In an Instagram post on Tuesday, Rachel Hollis asked for prayers as the family tries to "navigate through the unthinkable."

"We are devastated," she wrote. "I have no words and my heart is too broken."

Dave Hollis worked for Disney for 17 years and had been head of distribution for the company for seven years when he left in 2018 to join his wife's venture. The parents of four moved from Los Angeles to the Austin area, collaborated on livestreams, podcasts and organized life-affirming conferences. In their pod-

cast, "Rise Together," they focused on marriage.

When Rachel Hollis announced on Instagram in 2020 that they were getting divorced, she said they had worked "endlessly" over the prior three years to make their marriage work but came to the conclusion that "it is healthier and more respectful for us to choose this as the end of our journey as a married couple."

During his tenure at Disney, Hollis oversaw the release of blockbusters including "Black Panther" and films in the the "Star Wars" franchise. He told The Associated Press in 2018 that he joined his wife's enterprise after realizing he was in a corporate rut. He said his new life felt "like a calling."

Hollis also wrote motivational books. His book "Get Out of Your Own Way: A Skeptic's Guide to Growth and Fulfillment" was published in 2020 and he released "Built Through Courage: Face Your Fears to Live the Life You Were Meant For" in 2021.

## Police seek motive of gunman who killed 3 at Michigan State

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and MIKE HOUSEHOLDER Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. (AP) — The 43-year-old gunman who killed three students and wounded five others at Michigan State University had no apparent connection to the campus, police said Tuesday as they searched for a motive for shootings that terrified the community for hours.

Investigators were sorting out why Anthony McRae fired inside an academic building and the student union just before 8:30 p.m. Monday. An hourslong lockdown at the campus in East Lansing ended when he killed himself miles away while being confronted by police.

The shooting happened the day before the fifth anniversary of the Parkland, Florida, school shooting that killed 17 and is the latest in what has become a deadly new year in the U.S.

"We have to do something to stop the gun violence that's ripping apart our communities," President Joe Biden said in a speech Tuesday, mentioning Michigan State.

Meanwhile, a school district in Ewing Township, New Jersey, closed for the day after investigators said that McRae, who lived in the area years ago, had a note in his pocket indicating a threat to schools there. But it was determined there was no credible threat, local police said later in a statement shared by the superintendent.

The dead and injured in the gunfire at Berkey Hall and the MSU Union, a popular place to eat and study, were all Michigan State students. Five remained in critical condition at Sparrow Hospital, said Dr. Denny Martin, who fought back tears during a news conference Tuesday.

"We have absolutely no idea what the motive was," said Chris Rozman, deputy chief of campus police, adding that McRae, of Lansing, was not a student or Michigan State employee.

"This is still fluid," Rozman said. "There are still crime scenes that are being processed, and we still are in the process of putting together the pieces to try to understand what happened."

The dead were all from the Detroit area. Two graduated from separate high schools in the Grosse Pointe district: Brian Fraser, president of Phi Delta Theta fraternity, and Arielle Anderson. Alexandria Verner, a graduate of Clawson High School in another Detroit suburb, also died.

"If you knew her, you loved her and we will forever remember the lasting impact she has had on all of us," Clawson Superintendent Billy Shellenbarger said in an email to families.

The shootings took place in an area of older, stately buildings on the northern edge of the Michigan State campus, one of the nation's largest at 5,200 acres. Just across busy Grand River Avenue lies East Lansing's downtown, teeming with restaurants, bars and shops.

"Our Spartan community is reeling today," Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, a Michigan State graduate, said at the morning briefing.

Biden pledged his support during a phone call, she said.

"We mourn the loss of beautiful souls today and pray for those who are continuing to fight for their lives. ... Another place that is supposed to be about community and togetherness is shattered by bullets and bloodshed," Whitmer said.

Michigan State has about 50,000 students, including 19,000 who live on campus. As hundreds of officers

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scoured the campus, about 90 miles (145 kilometers) northwest of Detroit, students hid where they could Monday night.

At 11 p.m., police were still searching for McRae when he turned up on school security cameras, and his image was quickly released to news media. An "alert citizen" saw the picture, recognized him in the Lansing area and contacted police within minutes, Rozman said.

"That was exactly what we were trying to achieve by releasing that picture. We had no idea where he was at that point," the deputy chief said.

Officers confronted McRae about 5 miles (8 kilometers) from campus in an industrial area, where he killed himself, Rozman said.

In 2019, McRae was accused of illegally possessing a concealed weapon, according to the state Corrections Department, but pleaded guilty to having a loaded gun in a vehicle, a misdemeanor. He completed 18 months of probation.

A large police presence was in his Lansing neighborhood overnight. Suzanne Shook said she has lived a block away from McRae for about a year.

"We never spoke to him," Shook said. "When he would be walking or riding his bike, he was always straightforward and wouldn't look at anybody."

Students, meanwhile, recalled the previous night's terror. Dominik Molotky said he was learning about Cuban history around 8:15 p.m. when he and the other students heard a gunshot outside the classroom. He told ABC's "Good Morning America" that a few seconds later, the gunman entered and fired three to four more rounds.

"I was ducking and covering, and the same with the rest of the students," Molotky said.

Claire Papoulias, a sophomore, described on NBC's "Today" how she and other students scrambled to escape a history class through a window after the gunman entered from a back door and began firing.

"As soon as I fell out of the window I kind of hit the ground a little. I just grabbed my backpack and my phone, and I remember I just ran for my life," she said.

All classes, sports and other activities were canceled for 48 hours. Interim university President Teresa Woodruff said it would be a time "to think and grieve and come together."

Dozens of people have died in mass shootings so far in 2023, most notably in California, where 11 people were killed as they welcomed the Lunar New Year at a dance hall popular with older Asian Americans. In 2022, more than 600 mass shootings occurred in the U.S. in which at least four people were killed or wounded, according to the Gun Violence Archive.

## US arrests 4 tied to assassination of Haitian president

By GISELA SALOMON and DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — U.S. authorities have arrested four more people in the slaying of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse, including the owner of a Miami-area security company that hired ex-Colombian soldiers for the mission, prosecutors announced Tuesday.

The squad of former Colombian soldiers are among dozens of suspects who carried out the July 2021 attack that authorities say originally was envisioned to be a coup rather than an assassination. The plotters had hoped to reap lucrative contracts under a new administration once Moïse was out of the way, investigators allege.

"This was both a human tragedy and an assault on core democratic principles," said Assistant U.S. Attorney Matthew G. Olsen.

Antonio "Tony" Intriago, 59, a Venezuelan-American who owned CTU Security that hired the Colombians, is charged with conspiracy to kill or kidnap a person outside the U.S. among other charges. CTU company representative Arcangel Pretel Ortiz, 50, a Colombian-born resident of the U.S., faces the same charges.

Florida-based U.S. financier Walter Veintemilla, 54, of Weston, Fla., is accused of funding the operation. A fourth suspect, Frederick Joseph Bergmann Jr., 64, of Tampa, is accused of smuggling goods including 20 CTU-branded ballistic vests disguised as medical X-ray vests and school supplies.

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Intriago was known among plotters as "The General" and Pretel as "Colonel Gabriel," according to authorities.

Tama Kudman, Veintemilla's attorney, told The Associated Press that he would plead not guilty to both charges.

Claude Joseph, who was serving as prime minister when Moïse was killed, cheered the announcement. "Justice must prevail," he tweeted.

A total of 11 suspects are now in U.S. custody, including key players like James Solages and Joseph Vincent, two Haitian-Americans who were among the first arrested after Moïse was shot 12 times at his private home in July 2021. Other suspects include Christian Emmanuel Sanon, a pastor and failed businessman whose associates have suggested was duped by the plotters.

A power vacuum following the assassination has allowed gangs in Haiti to gain more power and control more territory, with experts estimating that they control 60% of Port-au-Prince. A spike in kidnappings, rapes and killings have prompted Prime Minister Ariel Henry to demand the immediate deployment of foreign troops. But the request in October has gone unheeded by the U.N. Security Council, which has opted to implement sanctions so far.

Federal authorities said that in April 2021, Veintemilla's company, Worldwide Capital Lending Group, provided CTU with a \$175,000 line of credit.

"By that time, the men planned to foment a public uprising aimed at ousting President Moïse and installing Sanon as president," charging documents say.

Authorities said that Intriago, Ortiz and Veintemilla expected to "reap significant financial benefits" if Sanon became president via anticipated contracts for infrastructure, military equipment and the provision of security forces.

Also in April, Ortiz and others met with the FBI and unsuccessfully tried to draw them into "a discussion about regime change in Haiti."

Around that time, Ortiz told Solages that "the current president is the thief...delete the messages that could compromise you in case of being captured." Ortiz also sent a text message to another suspect, Colombian citizen Germán Rivera García, with a photo of a whiteboard sketch of an assault plan including "snipers" and "10 warrior-neutralizers," according to court documents.

The suspects had used coded language like "screws" and "nails" for ammunition and "tools" or "instruments" for firearms, with Veintemilla providing \$15,000 to Solages to buy ammunition and \$250,000 for armored vests, authorities said.

Authorities have said that the original plan was to detain Moïse, force him onto a plane and whisk him to an unidentified location, but that plot crumbled when suspects couldn't find a plane or sufficient weapons, according to court documents.

Sanon, who envisioned himself as Haiti's new leader, was supposed to seize power, but some suspects soon favored a former Haitian Supreme Court judge to take over instead. Ortiz, Intriago, Veintemilla and others realized that "Sanon had neither the constitutional qualifications nor the popular support of the Haitian people to become president," according to court documents.

Police say the judge remains a fugitive.

A day before the killing, Solages falsely told other suspects that it was a CIA operation and that the real mission was to kill the president. Shortly before Moïse was killed, Solages yelled that it was supposedly a DEA operation so that the president's security detail would comply.

Also detained are former Haitian Sen. John Joël Joseph, who had fled to Jamaica, and former U.S. government informant and Haitian businessman Rodolphe Jaar, who was extradited from the Dominican Republic.

As the U.S. investigation pushes forward, the probe in Haiti is nearly idle. Three judges have stepped down from the case amid fears of reprisals and a fourth one was dismissed. Meanwhile, no court hearings have been held yet for the more than 40 suspects arrested in Haiti, with many of them including 18 Colombian soldiers languishing in a severely overcrowded jail in Port-au-Prince that often lacks food and water.

The situation has angered and frustrated the president's widow, Martine Moïse, who lashed out in a



13-minute video she posted earlier this month, noting that things have worsened in Haiti since the assassination.

"It's a huge crime that happened against the nation," she said. "Where is the mother law of the country, where are the people, where is the democracy?"

## Rising toll makes quake deadliest in Turkey's modern history

By SARAH EL DEEB, ZEYNEP BILGINSOY, BERNAT ARMANGUÉ AND ANDREW WILKS Associated Press ANTAKYA, Turkey (AP) — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced Tuesday that more than 35,000 people have died in Turkey as a result of last week's earthquake, making it the deadliest such disaster since the country's founding 100 years ago.

While the death toll is almost certain to rise even further, many of the tens of thousands of survivors left homeless were still struggling to meet basic needs, like finding shelter from the bitter cold.

Confirmed deaths in Turkey passed those recorded from the massive Erzincan earthquake in 1939 that killed around 33,000 people.

Erdogan said 105,505 were injured as a result of the Feb. 6 quake centered around Kahramanmaras and its aftershocks. Almost 3,700 deaths have been confirmed in neighboring Syria, taking the combined toll in both countries to over 39,000.

The Turkish president, who has referred to the quake as "the disaster of the century," said more than 13,000 people were still being treated in hospital.

Speaking in Ankara following a five-hour Cabinet meeting held at the headquarters of disaster agency AFAD, Erdogan said 47,000 buildings, which contained 211,000 residences, had been destroyed or were so badly damaged as to require demolition.

"We will continue our work until we get our last citizen out of the destroyed buildings," Erdogan said of ongoing rescue efforts.

Aid agencies and governments were stepping up efforts to bring help to devastated parts of Turkey and Syria.

The situation was particularly desperate in Syria, where a 12-year civil war has complicated relief efforts and meant days of wrangling over how to even move aid into the country, let alone distribute it. Some people there said they have received nothing. In Turkey, meanwhile, families huddled in train cars.

The Syrian Health Ministry announced a final count of 1,414 deaths and 1,357 injuries in areas under government control.

On Tuesday, the United Nations launched a \$397 million appeal to provide "desperately needed, life-saving relief for nearly 5 million Syrians" for three months. It came a day after the global body announced a deal with Damascus to deliver U.N. aid through two more border crossings from Turkey to rebel-held areas of northwest Syria — but the needs remained enormous.

Ahmed Ismail Suleiman set up a shelter of blankets outside his damaged house in the town of Jinderis, one of the worst-hit communities in northwest Syria. He was afraid to move his family back into a house that might not be structurally sound, so 18 people slept outside under the makeshift tent.

"We sit but can't sleep lying down here," he said. "We are waiting for a proper tent."

Mahmoud Haffar, head of the town council, said residents have been able to scrounge up about 2,500 tents so far, but some 1,500 families still remain without shelter — as nighttime temperatures fall to around minus 4 degrees Celsius (26 degrees Fahrenheit).

"We are ... still hearing the question of when will aid get in," said Haffar.

While tents have been in short supply, one woman said the town had a surplus of donated bread and water.

To the southwest, in government-held Latakia, Raeefa Breemo said only those packing into shelters seemed to be getting aid.

"We need to eat, we need to drink, we need to survive. Our jobs, our lives, everything have stopped," Breemo said.

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Offers of help — from rescue crews and doctors to generators and food — have come from around the world, but the needs remain immense after the magnitude 7.8 quake and powerful aftershocks toppled or damaged tens of thousands of buildings, destroyed roads and closed airports for a time. The quake affected 10 provinces in Turkey that are home to some 13.5 million people, as well as a large area in northwest Syria that is home to millions.

Much of the water system in the quake-hit region was not working, and Turkey's health minister said samples from dozens of points of the system showed the water was unsuitable to drink.

In the Turkish port city of Iskenderun, displaced families have sheltered in train carriages since last week.

While many have left in recent days for nearby camps or other parts of Turkey, dozens of people were still living in the trains on Tuesday.

"The wagons have become our home," 50-year-old Nida Karahan told Anadolu Agency.

While a first Saudi aid plane, carrying 35 tons of food, landed in Syrian government-held Aleppo on Tuesday, getting aid to the country's rebel-held Idlib has been especially complicated.

Until Monday's deal between the U.N. and the Syrian government of President Bashar Assad, the global body had only been allowed to deliver aid to the area through a single border crossing with Turkey, or via government territory.

The newly opened crossings at Bab al-Salam and Al Raée are to function for an initial period of three months. Russia bristled at suggestions that the opening of the crossings might be made permanent, and its Foreign Ministry accused the West of trying to get aid "exclusively" to areas not controlled by the Syrian government.

Major humanitarian organizations welcomed the development but cautioned that logistical problems remain, even as the first U.N. aid convoy with 11 trucks entered northwestern Syria through Bab al-Salam Tuesday.

"This is a constant back and forth in negotiations," said World Health Organization spokesman Christian Lindmeier. "Every party has to agree to receive convoys."

The death toll in both countries is nearly certain to rise as search teams turn up more bodies — and the window for finding survivors was closing.

Nevertheless, more than 200 hours after the quake struck, teacher Emine Akgul was pulled from an apartment building in Antakya by a mining search and rescue team, Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency reported.

In Adiyaman province, rescuers reached 18-year-old Muhammed Cafer Cetin, and medics gave him an IV with fluids before attempting a dangerous extraction from a building that crumbled further as rescuers were working. Medics fitted him with a neck brace and he was carted away on a stretcher with an oxygen mask, Turkish TV showed.

Many in Turkey have blamed faulty construction for the vast devastation, and authorities continued targeting contractors allegedly linked with buildings that collapsed. Turkey has introduced construction codes that meet earthquake-engineering standards, but experts say the codes are rarely enforced.

Erdogan announced Tuesday that the government planned to start construction of 30,000 houses in March.

"Our aim is to complete the construction of high quality and safe buildings in a year to meet the housing need in the entire earthquake zone," he said.

At a temporary shelter in a sports center in Afrin in northwest Syria, 190 families were sleeping on the floor of a basketball court, lying on mats typically used for training. The families attempted to create a semblance of privacy by hanging blankets on columns or sports bars.

Sabah el Khodr said she and her two toddlers have been sick for the last nine days. The children were wrapped in blankets and sleeping on the floor of the court.

Local officials said the shelter is temporary, until new tents are secured.

## Colts hire Eagles OC Shane Steichen as their head coach

By MICHAEL MAROT AP Sports Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Shane Steichen accepted his dream job on Tuesday.

Now, he's waiting to see if he gets to rebuild the Indianapolis Colts around the quarterback of his dreams.

Team owner Jim Irsay ended a monthlong search that included interviews with more than a dozen candidates by hiring the 37-year-old, first-time head coach who has a penchant for turning promising young quarterbacks into stars.

"We felt Shane had a lot of that offensive magic that can be hard to find, knowing we're going to have a young quarterback to develop," Irsay said. "He had a presence and boy did it come through. Also his mind, thinking multiple things at once, disseminating those things quickly, I think he has a special mind for football."

Indy certainly needs a new perspective — and some stability — after missing the playoffs each of the past two seasons.

Steichen becomes the Colts' fourth coach since 2017 and they're likely to be starting yet another different quarterback on opening day, extending their streak to seven straight seasons.

Irsay and general manager Chris Ballard are now pinning their hopes on a gruff-looking, tough-talking coach who worked previously with Philip Rivers and helped mentor Justin Herbert of the Los Angeles Chargers and Jalen Hurts in Philadelphia.

But for a few minutes during his introductory news conference, Steichen couldn't hide his emotions. His wife and two young children, along with a handful of current Indy players, watched Steichen choke back tears while offering thanks to everyone from family members to former players and coaching colleagues to team officials who employed him.

"Right now, I'm a little emotional because this is a big day for me and my family," Steichen said. "We want to get a lot of things done here and we've got to grind it every single day."

Steichen becomes the second straight former Eagles offensive coordinator to make a Super Bowl run and then leave days later for Indianapolis. Frank Reich took the same path in 2018 after Philadelphia won its first championship since 1960.

Reich was fired in October as the Colts' season started to unravel and was replaced by interim coach Jeff Saturday, who won his first game but lost the final seven.

The unusual decision to bring Saturday out of the broadcast studio to replace Reich was widely panned by critics who contended more qualified candidates already were on Indy's staff and those who thought Irsay skirted NFL rules to include minority candidates in the hiring process.

While those rules don't apply to midseason changes, Ballard and Irsay promised to conduct an exhaustive, inclusive search that did meet the Rooney Rule requirements.

Yet in a candidate pool that included former NFL head coach Raheem Morris, former Raiders interim coach Rich Bisaccia and two internal candidates — Saturday and special teams coordinator Bubba Ventrone — Steichen was hired for one obvious reason.

Most draft analysts expect Indy to use the No. 4 overall draft pick on a quarterback, which drew some banter between Irsay and Ballard about their trading options and ended with a possible hint about Irsay's intention.

"He (Ballard) likes picks, although the Alabama guy doesn't look bad," Irsay said, referring to Bryce Young.

Indy has drafted only two quarterbacks in the first round over the past 25 years — Peyton Manning in 1998 and Andrew Luck in 2012, both with the top overall pick.

There are also striking similarities between Steichen and Reich.

Both progressed through the coaching ranks in similar ways, working together in San Diego with Rivers, and both were college quarterbacks though Steichen, unlike Reich, never took a snap in the NFL. They even seem to have similar philosophies.

"I'm a gut-feeling guy especially on game day as a play-caller," Steichen said. "We're going to be aggressive, but my philosophy on offense is we're going to throw to score points and run to win. That may

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look different from week to week; flow is going to dictate that.”

Still, Irsay wants different results.

Steichen takes over a team that went 4-12-1 and used three starting quarterbacks, two play-callers and two head coaches. He becomes the third 37-year-old head coach in the NFL, the youngest being Sean McVay, who won last year’s Super Bowl with the Los Angeles Rams.

The most immediate priority, though, is putting together a staff. Steichen declined to say whether he would keep Gus Bradley as defensive coordinator or Ventrone.

Steichen must figure out how to revamp an offensive line that had been among the league’s top units from 2018-21 but struggled mightily in 2022. Plus, Indy must decide what to do with veteran quarterbacks Matt Ryan and Nick Foles, who struggled last season.

Ryan is just six days younger than Steichen and would count \$35.2 million against the salary cap if he returns. Indy could save about \$17 million by releasing him. Cutting Foles, the Super Bowl 52 MVP, would save the Colts about \$2 million off his \$3.6 million cap charge in 2023.

Neither has said whether he plans to retire.

But the Colts believe in Steichen.

“High integrity, high character, brilliant football mind and philosophy,” Ballard said. “We see the game the same way and I think that’s important. We’re not going to always agree, we didn’t always agree in the interview, but we see the game the same way.”

## Nikki Haley announces run for president, challenging Trump

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — Nikki Haley, the former South Carolina governor and United Nations ambassador, announced her candidacy for president on Tuesday, becoming the first major challenger to former President Donald Trump for the 2024 Republican nomination.

The announcement, delivered in a tweeted video, marks an about-face for the ex-Trump Cabinet official, who said two years ago that she wouldn’t challenge her former boss for the White House in 2024. But she changed her mind in recent months, citing, among other things, the country’s economic troubles and the need for “generational change,” a nod to the 76-year-old Trump’s age.

“You should know this about me. I don’t put up with bullies. And when you kick back, it hurts them more if you’re wearing heels,” Haley said. “I’m Nikki Haley, and I’m running for president.”

Haley, 51, is the first in a long line of Republicans who are expected to launch 2024 campaigns in the coming months. Among them are Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former Vice President Mike Pence, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina.

President Joe Biden has said he intends to seek reelection in 2024, stalling any jostling for the Democratic nomination.

Haley has regularly boasted about her track record of defying political expectations, saying, “I’ve never lost an election, and I’m not going to start now.”

If elected, Haley would be the nation’s first female president and the first U.S. president of Indian descent.

The daughter of Indian immigrants, Haley grew up enduring racist taunts in a small South Carolina town and has long referenced that impact on her personal and political arc.

In the three-and-a-half minute video, Haley referenced that past, saying she grew up “not Black, not white — I was different.”

Despite that, Haley insisted that America is not a racist country: “Nothing could be further from the truth.” Playing in the background of her video were images of media reports related to The New York Times Magazine’s Pulitzer Prize-winning “1619 Project” — which centered the country’s history around slavery.

Haley never mentions Trump by name in the video, instead saying “the Washington establishment has failed us over and over and over again.” Haley leans into a call for “a new generation of leadership,” which has become the refrain of her messaging leading up to the launch.

There appears to be openness among Republicans to new leadership, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. In an open-ended question asking Republicans

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to choose who they want to lead their party, a majority of Republicans didn't choose either Trump or DeSantis, considered the former president's top rival. But they also didn't have a clear alternative in mind.

Eleven other politicians, including Haley, are named by just 1% of Republicans as their preferred leader.

In a statement, Taylor Budowich, spokesman for Trump's super PAC, said Haley was "just another career politician."

"She started out as a Never Trumper before resigning to serve in the Trump admin," he said. "She then resigned early to go rake in money on corporate boards. Now, she's telling us she represents a 'new generation.' Sure just looks like more of the same, a career politician whose only fulfilled commitment is to herself."

Before entering politics, Haley was an accountant. She defeated the longest-serving member of the South Carolina House in 2004 in her first bid for public office. Three terms later and with little statewide recognition, Haley mounted a long-shot campaign for governor against a large field of experienced politicians.

She racked up a number of high-profile endorsements, including from the sitting South Carolina governor, Mark Sanford, and former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, a tea party darling.

With her 2010 victory, Haley became South Carolina's first female and minority governor — and the nation's youngest at 38. She earned a speaking slot at the 2012 Republican National Convention and gave the GOP response to President Barack Obama's State of the Union in 2016.

The defining moment of Haley's time as governor came after the 2015 murders of nine Black parishioners in a Charleston church by a self-avowed white supremacist who had been pictured holding Confederate flags.

For years, Haley had resisted calls to remove the Confederate flag from the Statehouse grounds, even casting a rival's push for its removal as a desperate stunt. But after the massacre and with the support of other leading Republicans, Haley advocated for legislation to remove the flag. It came down less than a month after the murders.

In the 2016 presidential primary, Haley was an early supporter of Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, later shifting to Texas Sen. Ted Cruz. She ultimately said she would back the party's nominee.

Shortly after Trump's victory, he tapped Haley to be his U.N. ambassador, a move that rewarded Henry McMaster, the lieutenant governor who was the nation's first statewide elected official to back Trump's 2016 campaign. Haley's departure cleared the way for McMaster to ascend to the governorship he had sought, since losing a bruising primary to none other than Haley seven years earlier.

With her Senate confirmation, Haley became the first Indian American in a presidential Cabinet.

During her nearly two-year tenure, Haley feuded at times with other administration officials while bolstering her own public persona.

One of her most memorable moments as U.N. ambassador came in 2018 after National Economic Council Director Larry Kudlow suggested Haley had suffered "momentary confusion" when she said Russian sanctions were imminent.

"With all due respect, I don't get confused," she responded. The first half of the quote became the title of her 2019 memoir.

Her departure from the job later that year fueled speculation that she would challenge Trump in 2020 or replace Pence on the ticket. She did neither.

Instead, Haley returned to South Carolina, where she bought a home on the wealthy enclave Kiawah Island, joined the board of aircraft manufacturer Boeing Co., launched herself on the speaking circuit and wrote two books, including the memoir.

After the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection, Haley initially cast doubts on Trump's political future but said she wouldn't challenge him in 2024. She later shifted course, citing inflation, crime, drugs and a "foreign policy in disarray" among her reasons for considering a White House campaign.

During his South Carolina stop last month, Trump told WIS-TV that Haley had called to seek his opinion on running for president. Trump pointed out her earlier pledge not to run against him but said he made no attempt to stop her.

"She said she would never run against me because I was the greatest president, but people change

their opinions, and they change what's in their hearts," Trump said. "So I said, 'If your heart wants to do it, you have to go do it.'"

## Review: A Marvel villain comes into focus in 'Ant-Man 3'

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

Peyton Reed's "Ant-Man" films have generally served as a kind of palate cleanser to the world-ending stakes of the larger Marvel Cinematic Universe. Paul Rudd's Scott Lang is just an ordinary dude, or so they keep telling us, who still can't really believe that he's part of the Avengers at all. He gets to be the wide-eyed middle-aged fanboy of the group in those films. In his own films, he's just living a blue-sky life in San Francisco as an affable single dad and ex-con who was once fired from Baskin Robbins and who has occasional enemies to defeat.

In this third film, "Ant-Man and The Wasp: Quantumania," in theaters Thursday, he's coasting on his own post-Blip celebrity with a best-selling memoir out, lots of fans around town and a generally sunny disposition — when he's not breaking his teenage daughter Cassie (now played by Kathryn Newton, always an enjoyable presence) out of jail for civil disobedience.

There is a fun, light, sitcom-y touch to these early scenes in which he and his makeshift family, Hope Van Dyne (Evangeline Lilly), Janet Van Dyne (Michelle Pfeiffer) and Hank Pym (Michael Douglas) sit around the table for takeout pizza. They use their particle technology to blow up the tiny pie.

"I just saved us \$8," Pym declares proudly.

But Ant-Man is part of the larger chess board of the MCU, so naturally he's doomed to be sucked into the multiverse mess, setting up pieces for more Avengers films to come with the introduction of a new villain, Kang (played with a maniacal sorrow by the great Jonathan Majors). And the results are mixed. Reed has returned to direct with a new writer, Jeff Loveness, who has also been tapped to write "Avengers: The Kang Dynasty" and it's hard not to empathize with both for the logic gymnastics required to back Ant-Man and his gang into this conflict.

Loveness, who cut his teeth in comedy and has an affinity for comic book and B-movie absurdities, gives Ant-Man his own "Star Wars"-adjacent adventure. There's quite a bit of unrest in the Quantum Realm, with scrappy rebels battling against a powerful ruler with an army of faceless soldiers. But he takes that conceit further and gives the rebels some personality and humor, including William Jackson Harper as the mind-reading Quaz. The villain's a killing machine, M.O.D.O.K., that looks (knowingly) straight out of a "Mystery Science Theater 3000" movie and it is quite entertaining. It's both a nod to the fun of the ridiculousness in sci-fi and a reminder that Serious Superhero Films are sometimes just one crazy special effect away from being Silly Superhero Films.

"Quantumania" also gives Pfeiffer a lot more to do as we, and Hank and Hope, learn a little bit more about Janet's 30 years in the Quantum Realm and the various compromises and allegiances she made to stay alive. Pfeiffer is an unambiguous delight and the real center of the movie despite what the title might claim. Ant-Man just finds himself in the middle of the mess, which starts to drag on in a muddle of sci-fi furnishings that individually are probably quite inspired and interesting but together just blend into a dreary mess.

It's a shame because Reed's films are generally so crisp and styled and are best when focused on characters, not worlds and Quantum Realms. "Quantumania" shines when it is keeping things light and quippy.

But Kang, for what we can assume are bigger story needs, needs to be more serious. Majors is certainly chilling and captivating, but Kang seems like a mismatched foe for a standalone Ant-Man film and the result is a "Quantumania" that is trying to be too many things. One thing it is not is a Wasp movie, though. Lilly gets a lot to do but not a lot of — or any — character development.

"Quantumania" sticks the ending, however. Without giving anything away, we'll just say that Reed and Rudd get to return to their sweet spot, with a bit of a twist.

"Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania," a Walt Disney release in theaters Thursday, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for "some sci-fi action violence." Running time: 122 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four.

## Indian officials search BBC offices after Modi documentary

By KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's tax officials searched BBC offices in New Delhi and Mumbai on Tuesday, weeks after it aired a documentary critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the U.K., the broadcaster said.

Rights groups and opposition politicians denounced the move by India's Income Tax Department as an attempt to intimidate the media.

Britain's publicly funded national broadcaster said it was cooperating fully with authorities and hoped "to have this situation resolved as soon as possible." Late in the evening, the BBC said officials were still at the two offices.

"Many staff have now left the building but some have been asked to remain and are continuing to cooperate with the ongoing inquiries," it said, adding: "Our output and journalism continues as normal."

Indian tax authorities declined to comment.

The tax department was looking at documents related to the BBC's business operations and its Indian arm, the Press Trust of India news agency reported, citing unidentified sources.

The Editors Guild of India denounced the move, saying it continues "a trend of using government agencies to intimidate and harass press organizations that are critical of government policies or the ruling establishment."

Aakar Patel, chair of Amnesty International India's Board, said the raids were "a blatant affront to freedom of expression."

The Indian authorities are clearly trying to harass and intimidate the BBC over its critical coverage of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party," Patel said.

The investigation is "undemocratic" and "reeks of desperation and shows that the Modi government is scared of criticism," tweeted K.C. Venugopal, general secretary of the opposition Congress party. "We condemn these intimidation tactics in the harshest terms."

Gaurav Bhatia, a spokesperson for Modi's governing Bharatiya Janata Party, said the BBC should have nothing to fear if it follows Indian laws. But he added that the broadcaster's history is "tainted" and "full of hatred" for India and called it corrupt, without offering any specifics.

The documentary, "India: The Modi Question," was broadcast in the U.K. last month, examining the prime minister's role in 2002 anti-Muslim riots in the western state of Gujarat, where he was chief minister at the time. More than 1,000 people were killed in the violence.

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

The second portion of the two-part documentary examined "the track record of Narendra Modi's government following his re-election in 2019," according to the BBC website.

The program drew an immediate backlash from India's government, which invoked emergency powers under its information technology laws to block it from being shown in the country. Local authorities scrambled to stop screenings organized at Indian universities, and social media platforms including Twitter and YouTube complied with government requests to remove links to the documentary.

Critics and political opponents decried the ban as an assault on press freedom. The BBC said at the time that 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," its statement said.

India's Foreign Ministry called the documentary a "propaganda piece designed to push a particularly discredited narrative" that lacked objectivity.

Many lawmakers from Modi's party criticized it as an attack on the country's sovereignty. Last week, Hindu right-wing nationalists petitioned the Supreme Court for a complete ban on the BBC. The court dismissed their plea, calling it "absolutely meritless."

Human Rights Watch has said the banning of the documentary reflects a broader crackdown on minorities under the Modi government, which the rights group said has frequently invoked draconian laws to muzzle criticism. In recent years, India's Muslim minority has been the target of violence from Hindu nationalists emboldened by a prime minister who has said little about such attacks since he was first elected in 2014.

Press freedom in India has been on a steady decline in recent years. The country fell eight places, to 150 out of 180 countries, in the 2022 Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders. Media watchdog groups accuse the Modi government of silencing criticism on social media under a sweeping internet law that puts digital platforms including Twitter and Facebook under direct government oversight.

Some media outlets critical of the government have been subjected to tax searches.

Authorities searched the offices of the left-leaning website NewsClick and independent media portal NewsLaundry on the same day in 2021. Tax officials also accused the Dainik Bhaskar newspaper of tax evasion in 2021 after it published reports of mass funeral pyres and floating corpses that challenged the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2017, the government's investigation bureau said it was probing cases of loan defaults when it raided the offices of New Delhi Television, known for its liberal slant.

## Valentine's Day tips for talking about money as a couple

By ADRIANA MORGA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Money might not be the most romantic topic for Valentine's Day, but talking about finances with your significant other is a key element of a healthy relationship.

Money problems are one of the most common reasons couples separate, said Emily Simonian, head of clinical learning at Thriveworks, a mental health company.

In more than 20 years as a financial adviser, Howard Dvorkin, chairman of Debt.com, has had plenty of couples approach him with money issues that eventually lead them to break up.

"You should talk about money, lifestyle, goals and dreams," he said. "Because (money) affects your dreams, and if you go into a relationship with debt, your dreams may be altered."

If you've been wanting to approach this with your partner but you're not sure how, here are some recommendations from experts:

### HAVE AN OPEN CONVERSATION

Dvorkin recommends having a conversation about your finances as early as possible.

That doesn't mean you must disclose everything at once — money conversations can evolve as your relationship does.

For Anna Avery, 31, conversations about money with her boyfriend, Austin, moved in baby steps. First, they opened up about the financial struggles they both faced as freelancers. Then, they talked about their styles of budgeting and, as their relationship progressed, made plans to start saving for a house.

"(We had) honest and vulnerable transparency about how we feel about money and how we grew up with money," said Avery, a publicist based in San Antonio.

If you wait too long to talk about money, you could be unpleasantly surprised to find that your significant other has a lot of debt or irresponsible spending habits, Dvorkin said.

"You can't continually avoid the subject because it eventually comes out anyway," he said. "And sometimes it comes out in a bad way."

### SET EXPECTATIONS

Don't surprise your partner with questions about their finances. Rather, set a time and day to talk and prepare a list of topics, said Olle Lind, founder of the budgeting app Buddy.

"Don't ambush your partner, maybe say something like 'Hey, on Sunday evening, can we go through our savings and set up some goals for the upcoming year?'" Lind said.

Having a list of discussion topics can help you stay on track and not get overwhelmed. Lind also advised that couples approach conversations without judgement about each other's spending habits.

### LEARN ABOUT EACH OTHER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH MONEY



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People's spending habits can be associated with the way they were raised, for example, if their parents got in debt, were big investors or never had credit cards. For couples to start setting financial goals, they must understand each other's backgrounds, said Caleb Silver, editor in chief of Investopedia.

Money conversations can be even more complicated for those who have experienced financial trauma, which can be caused by living through a hard financial circumstance such as your parents experiencing bankruptcy or accumulating a large amount of debt. This trauma can cause people to be scared and feel ashamed when talking about money.

Having a conversation about how your parents handled money and what they taught you about financial habits can make you feel vulnerable, but it's important to do.

Avery and her boyfriend both grew up in low-income Latino households where money was never talked about.

"I had a full lack of education around money," Avery said. "All I knew was that it was scarce."

As their relationship progressed, Avery and her boyfriend realized their life priorities were aligned. They both wanted to own a home and save money to support their parents in the future. Having similar goals motivated them to be transparent about their money.

## TALK ABOUT YOUR DEBT, ALL OF IT

Dvorkin recommends talking about all of your debt, especially if you are considering marriage. That includes credit cards, student loans, mortgages, loans that you co-signed and anything else.

When Anna Craven, 26, met her fiancée, Ryan, they both had a significant amount of student loan debt. Talking about it made them open about their financial struggles.

"The emotional toll that student loan debt was taking over both of us in our early careers was the reason we made it our priority number one," said Craven, who lives in New Hampshire.

## SET FINANCIAL GOALS

When Craven and her partner started to discuss getting married, one of her priorities was to be conscious of how much they would spend on their wedding.

"It was important to me that we'd be on the same page about how long we wanted the engagement to last so we could then map back how much we needed to save," said Craven, who was engaged earlier this month.

Whether you want to budget better, save for a house or pay off your credit card debt, setting a financial goal and making a plan with your significant other can make things less overwhelming, Silver said.

Victoria B. Watson, 30, and her husband have set several financial goals throughout their relationship, such as saving for a house and a new car and, soon, having their first child. But building these plans has taken time and practice.

At first, Watson wasn't used to budgeting and saving. Her husband was very diligent. When they both decided they wanted to stay on track with their financial goals, the challenge of saving became a team effort.

"It makes me feel like we're a team, approaching life together and setting goals together. And that just feels really healthy," Watson said.

## MAKE IT A DATE

Silver recommends that couples have a monthly or quarterly "money date" where they check in on their progress.

He recommends you ask questions such as: Where are we now in relation to our goals? What are some new expenses we have? Are we losing track of where we wanted to be at this point in our lives? Where do we want to be five years from now?

Watson and her husband hold monthly budgeting meetings where they discuss their finances. These meetings, she said, have set them up to buy a house and move from Washington, D.C., to northwest Arkansas.

## RESOURCES

Planning is important. How you do it depends on what works best for you and your significant other. You can use an Excel spreadsheet, paper, or a website or app.

Watson and her husband have used different apps throughout their relationship. First, they used Splitwise, which lets you track your bills and split them between several people. Then they started using YNAB, an app that stands for "You need a budget." YNAB's format is to make sure every dollar you earn is allocated for a specific purpose.

## GET PROFESSIONAL HELP

Sometimes, financial struggles can feel overwhelming. If you feel like you can't communicate with your partner about finances or you both have large debts, you might want to seek professional help, Simonian said.

Couples therapy can be a great space to approach this conversation and understand your partner's financial behavior.

If you are looking for help to map out a plan, financial advisors can be a great resource. Some employers offer free consultations with financial advisors. If your employer doesn't, non-profit organizations around the country also offer these services.

Examples include the National Foundation for Credit Counseling, which matches people with financial counselors to tackle debt, and Savvy Ladies, which offers free financial help to women.

## Gunmen storm hospital of newborn saved from quake in Syria

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Gunmen stormed a Syrian hospital that is caring for a baby girl who was born under the rubble of her family's earthquake-shattered home, and the attackers beat the facility's director, a hospital official said Tuesday.

The official denied reports on social media that the Monday night attack was an attempt to kidnap the infant named Aya — Arabic for "a sign from God." She has been at the hospital since hours after the Feb. 6 earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria. Her parents and four siblings died in the disaster.

Aya's story has been widely shared in news reports, and people from around the world have offered to help her.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals, said the hospital's director had suspected that a nurse who was taking pictures of Aya was planning to kidnap her and kicked him out of the hospital. The nurse returned hours later accompanied by gunmen who beat up the director, the official said.

The director's wife has been breast-feeding Aya, her doctor said previously.

Upon arrival at the hospital, the gunmen told police officers protecting the girl that they were going after the director for firing their friend and were not interested in Aya, according to the official.

Police began guarding the girl after several people showed up falsely claiming to be her relatives, the doctor said.

Aya may be able to leave the hospital as soon as Tuesday or Wednesday, according to her great-uncle, Saleh al-Badran. He said the baby's paternal aunt, who recently gave birth and survived the quake, will raise her.

Rescue workers in the northern Syrian town of Jinderis discovered the dark-haired baby girl more than 10 hours after the quake as they were digging through the wreckage of the five-story apartment building where her parents lived.

Buried under the concrete, the baby was still connected by her umbilical cord to her mother, Afraa Abu Hadiya. She was rushed to the hospital in nearby Afrin, where she has been cared for since.

The devastating quake reduced many communities in southeastern Turkey and northern Syria to piles of broken concrete and twisted metal. More than 35,000 people were killed, a toll expected to rise as search teams find more bodies.

The earthquake destroyed dozens of housing units in the town of Jinderis, where Aya's family had been living since 2018.

Aya's father, Abdullah Turki Mleihan, was originally from the village of Khsham in eastern Deir el-Zour

province, but left in 2014 after the Islamic State group captured the village, said al-Badran, an uncle of Aya's father.

## US inflation slows to 6.4%, but price pressures re-emerge

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The pace of consumer price increases eased again in January compared with a year earlier, the latest sign that the high inflation that has gripped Americans for nearly two years is slowly easing.

At the same time, Tuesday's consumer price report from the government showed that inflationary pressures in the U.S. economy remain stubborn and are likely to keep prices elevated well into this year. Rising costs will also keep pressure on the Federal Reserve to raise its benchmark interest rate further and to keep it there through year's end.

Consumer prices climbed 6.4% in January from a year earlier, down from 6.5% in December. It was the seventh straight year-over-year slowdown and well below a recent peak of 9.1% in June. Yet it remains far above the Federal Reserve's 2% annual inflation target.

And on a monthly basis, consumer prices increased 0.5% from December to January, much higher than the 0.1% rise from November to December. More expensive gas, food and clothing drove up last month's figure.

The data show that while inflation is fading, it is likely to do so slowly and unevenly. The government also incorporated annual revisions of its methods into January's inflation report, which caused monthly increases in the final three months of last year to be higher than originally reported. Combined with January's price figures, the slowdown in inflation since the fall is now more gradual than it seemed just a few weeks ago.

Excluding volatile food and energy costs, so-called "core" prices increased 0.4% last month, up from 0.3% in December. Core prices rose 5.6% from a year ago, down just a tick from December's 5.7%.

In the past three months, core prices have risen at a 4.6% annual rate, which is below the year-over-year number and suggests that more declines are coming. But that figure is up from 4.3% in December.

"These things never happen in a straight line," said Tiffany Wilding, an economist at PIMCO, an asset management firm. "But I think the overall balance of evidence suggests that we are starting to see inflation move in the right direction."

Fed Chair Jerome Powell said last week that the "process of getting inflation down has begun."

But "this process is likely to take quite a bit of time," he added. "It's not going to be, we don't think, smooth, it's probably going to be bumpy."

The Fed has aggressively raised its benchmark interest rate in the past year to its highest level in 15 years in its drive to get rampaging inflation under control. The Fed's goal is to slow borrowing and spending, cool the pace of hiring and relieve the pressure many businesses feel to raise wages to find or keep workers. Businesses typically pass their higher labor costs on to their customers in the form of higher prices, thereby helping fuel inflation.

So far, most of the slowdown in inflation reflects freer-flowing supply chains and earlier declines in gas prices. Those factors have sharply reduced inflation in goods, including cars, furniture and toys. Overall core goods prices ticked up just 0.1% in January, after declining for three months.

Furniture prices were unchanged in January for a second straight month and are up just 2.2% from a year ago. Average new car prices rose just 0.2% last month, though they're still 5.8% more than last January.

Used car prices, which had soared in 2021 and early last year amid widespread supply disruptions, dropped 1.9% last month, the seventh straight decline. They're now 11.9% lower than they were a year ago.

Gas prices rose 2.4% in January, the government said, with prices averaging \$3.50 a gallon nationwide by the end of last month. Prices at the pump have since dropped back to \$3.41 as of Tuesday, according to AAA.

Food prices jumped 0.5% from December to January, defying hopes for a smaller increase. Cereals and bread products became costlier. And egg prices jumped 8.5% just in January and have skyrocketed 70%

in the past year. Those prices have been driven up by more expensive feed and an avian flu epidemic that has devastated chicken flocks.

More expensive food, along with other rising costs, has caused Pat DeCandia, a 65-year-old retired teacher from Ridgefield, New Jersey, to change her buying habits. She will no longer buy specialty items like smoked salmon from Costco.

"I can do without that," she said.

DeCandia is buying more store label items, which are typically cheaper. For mayonnaise, she is skipping Hellmann's and now buys a store label brand at ShopRite called Bowl & Basket. And whenever anything is on sale, she stocks up.

Though goods prices across the economy have come down, services costs, including housing, remain chronically high. Rental costs jumped again in January, up 0.7%, and are 8.6% more than a year ago.

Housing costs account for fully 2.75 percentage points of the 6.4% yearly inflation increase, according to calculations by Eric Winograd, an economist at AllianceBernstein. But Powell and other economists expect housing costs to start declining by the middle of this year. Market rates for new rental leases have been easing since fall, and the Fed expects those lower costs to gradually feed into the government's data.

Excluding housing, however, the cost of other services are still accelerating. Auto insurance prices jumped 1.4% in January and are nearly 15% higher than a year ago. Recreation, which includes movie tickets and veterinary costs, rose 0.7% last month and is up 5.8% from a year earlier.

The Fed is particularly focused on the cost of services excluding housing. That is because the prices of labor-intensive services tend to be especially difficult to curb. With the strong job market compelling employers to raise pay to attract and keep workers, employers are often passing on those higher labor costs to their customers by charging more.

Kathy Bostjancic, chief economist at Nationwide, calculates that in January, services prices excluding housing were 6.1% higher than they were a year earlier, barely below December's figure of 6.2%. The slow decline reflects the fact that the Fed's rate hikes — eight since March of last year — have had no discernible effect on America's job market, which remains exceptionally strong.

The unemployment rate has dropped to 3.4%, the lowest level in 53 years, and job openings remain high. The strength of the job market has, in turn, helped support consumer spending, which underpins the bulk of the U.S. economy. With unemployment so low, average wages are rising at a brisk pace of about 5% from a year ago.

Many economists expect inflation to fall to roughly 4% later this year. But it could plateau at that point so long as hiring and wage gains remain vigorous. The Fed might then feel compelled to keep borrowing rates high well into 2024 or even raise them further this year.

A key question for the economy this year is whether unemployment would have to rise significantly to achieve a slowdown in wage growth. Powell and other Fed officials have said that curbing high inflation would require some "pain" for workers.

## **Pence to fight special counsel subpoena on 2020 election**

By JILL COLVIN and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Vice President Mike Pence is planning to fight a subpoena by the special counsel overseeing investigations into efforts by former President Donald Trump and his allies to overturn the results of the 2020 election, according to people familiar with his thinking.

Pence and his attorneys are planning to cite constitutional grounds as they prepare to resist special counsel Jack Smith's efforts to compel his testimony before a grand jury. They argue that because Pence was serving in his role as president of the Senate on Jan. 6, 2021 as he presided over a joint session of Congress to certify the election results, he is protected from being forced to address his actions under the Constitution's "speech-or-debate" clause that shields members of Congress.

"I think he views it as essential protection of his Constitutional role," said Marc Short, a close adviser to Pence who served as his White House chief of staff.

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Short compared Pence's position to the one he took on Jan. 6 when he refused to go along with Trump's unconstitutional scheme to try to overturn the results of the 2020 election, as well as Pence's rejection of using the 25th Amendment to remove Trump from office in the aftermath.

"The vice president of the United State is the president of the Senate and the fact is the functions of Jan. 6 were specific to that role," he said of Pence, who has been laying the groundwork for a likely presidential campaign that would put him in direct competition against his former boss.

Whether Pence's arguments will succeed in limiting or altogether avoiding grand jury testimony is unclear, but the Justice Department is expected to oppose those efforts and to make the case that the former vice president's cooperation is essential for a probe focused on Trump's actions.

The decision to try to fight the subpoena, which was first reported by Politico, marks a change in posture from Pence, who has cooperated with the Justice Department as it investigates how documents with classified markings ended up at his Indiana home after the end of the Trump administration. He permitted the FBI to search the property last week.

Even if his objection is ultimately rebuffed from the courts, an antagonistic posture could allow Pence to argue that he tried to fight the Justice Department — a potentially useful position in a GOP primary, as many in the Republican base have grown distrustful of federal law enforcement, in part due to Trump's drumbeat of criticism. And it could delay the special counsel probe, which Smith is working to rapidly advance.

Pence has spoken extensively about Trump's pressure campaign urging him to reject President Joe Biden's victory in the days leading up to Jan. 6, including in his book, "So Help Me God." Pence, as vice president, had a ceremonial role overseeing the counting of the Electoral College vote, but did not have the power to impact the results.

Pence's decision to resist the subpoena also came after extensive back-and-forth between his lawyers and the special counsel's office, according to a person familiar with the discussions who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door negotiations.

The Justice Department declined to comment Tuesday on Pence's plans.

Pence is expected to address the issue in more detail during a visit to Iowa Wednesday as he inches closer to a likely presidential run.

Richard Levy, a constitutional law professor at the University of Kansas, said it is true that the vice president is in a unique position as the technical presiding officer of the Senate, making the officeholder in some respects a member of the chamber.

But he said that not everything a member does is protected by the speech-or-debate clause and it is debatable whether the vice president's role in certifying the election, which involves a mix of constitutional and senatorial functions, would be protected.

In any event, Pence's argument would likely serve to limit the scope of his testimony rather than to block it altogether, he said.

"I don't think the speech or debate clause would be a basis for quashing the subpoena altogether. It would be a basis for objecting to particular questions," he said.

The subpoena has been an aggressive step from Smith as he continues to investigate efforts by Trump and his allies to remain in power, including the storming of the Capitol building on Jan. 6.

Trump supporters, driven by the lie that the election was stolen, brutally pushed past the police and smashed through the windows and doors while Pence was presiding over the certification of Biden's victory. The vice president was steered to safety with his staff and family as some in the mob chanted, "Hang Mike Pence!"

While the mob was in the Capitol, Trump tweeted, "Mike Pence didn't have the courage to do what should have been done to protect our Country and our Constitution."

A House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack recommended that the Justice Department bring criminal charges against Trump and others over his efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss.

## Rumors swirl about balloons, UFOs as officials stay mum

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Maybe they came from China. Maybe from somewhere farther away. A lot farther away.

The downing of four aerial devices by U.S. warplanes has touched off rampant misinformation about the objects, their origin and their purpose, showing how complicated world events and a lack of information can quickly create the perfect conditions for unchecked conjecture and misinformation.

The presence of mysterious objects high in the sky doesn't help.

"There will be an investigation and we will learn more, but until then this story has created a playground for people interested in speculating or stirring the pot for their own reasons," said Jim Ludes, a former national defense analyst who now leads the Pell Center for International Relations at Salve Regina University.

"In part," Ludes added, "because it feeds into so many narratives about government secrecy."

President Joe Biden and other top Washington officials have said little about the repeated shootdowns, which began with a suspected Chinese spy balloon earlier this month. Three more unidentified devices have been shot down, with the latest Sunday over Lake Huron. Pentagon officials said they posed no security threats but have not disclosed their origins or purpose.

On Monday, many social media sites in the U.S. lit up with theories that Biden had deployed the aerial devices as a way to distract Americans from other, more pressing issues. Those concerns included immigration, inflation, the war in Ukraine and Republican investigations into Hunter Biden, the president's son.

While the concentration of claims was highest on fringe sites popular with far-right Americans, the unfounded rumors and conspiracy theories popped up on bigger platforms like Twitter and Facebook, too.

One of the most popular theories suggested the White House and Pentagon are using the airborne devices to divert attention from a chemical spill earlier this month in Ohio.

That incident, caused by a train derailment, occurred several days before the most recent devices were shot down, and was covered extensively. Nonetheless, the spill remained the top subject searched on Google on Monday, showing continued public interest in the story.

China's government apparently took notice. On Tuesday Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying tweeted a link to news coverage of the Ohio chemical leak and added #OhioChernobyl, a hashtag used in many posts that suggest the incident is being covered up.

"Apparently some in the US take a wandering civilian balloon as a big threat while the explosive train derailment and toxic chemical leak not," she wrote in the tweet, which racked up tens of thousands of views within hours Tuesday.

Misleading claims about the airborne devices have also prompted violent threats, according to an analysis by the SITE Intelligence Group, a firm that tracks extremist rhetoric online. After the White House said earlier surveillance flights went undetected during Donald Trump's presidency, an article circulated on far-right sites urging the execution of any Trump administration officials who may have withheld the information.

Trump administration officials have said they knew of no such surveillance craft.

Some commenters said Biden's decision to wait until the balloon had reached the East Coast before shooting it down showed he was in league with China. Others, meanwhile, chastised Biden for shooting down foreign aircraft that they imagined could be carrying bioweapons or nuclear weapons.

Alongside the political conspiracy theories were suggestions that the aerial objects were extraterrestrial in origin. Photos of alleged UFOs were shared online and web searches for the term "UFO" soared around the world Sunday, according to information from Google Trends.

Online posts mentioning extraterrestrials increased by nearly 300% since the first balloon was identified, according to an analysis conducted for The Associated Press by Signal Labs, a San Francisco-based media intelligence firm. Signal's review included millions of posts on platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Reddit.

"Don't worry, just some of my friends of mine stopping by," Elon Musk, the CEO of Twitter, Tesla and SpaceX, joked in a tweet Sunday.

Humor aside, while the details of the different claims vary, they have two things in common: a lack of

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evidence and a strong distrust of America's elected leaders.

"Maybe Joe built the balloon & had Hunter launch it to scare we the people!" wrote one Facebook user. "How do WE know??? We don't!"

The federal government must balance the public's desire to know the details with the need for secrecy regarding national security and defense, Ludes said. That's not likely to satisfy Biden's critics, Ludes said, or prevent misleading explanations from going viral.

High-profile news stories and events often precede a spike in false and misleading claims as people turn to the internet for explanations. Conspiracy theories about Buffalo Bills player Damar Hamlin spread quickly after his dramatic on-field collapse in January. Something similar happened last year when the Nord Stream pipelines in the North Sea were damaged.

In that instance, Russia spread conspiracy theories blaming the U.S. for the sabotage. The baseless theories were quickly amplified by far-right users in the U.S. It's not the first time America's authoritarian adversaries have seized on global events to portray the U.S. as belligerent.

China has claimed the balloon shot down Feb. 4 was engaged in meteorological research. On Monday, China's foreign ministry said 10 U.S. balloons had entered Chinese airspace without permission in the past year.

Beijing's response to this latest diplomatic row seeks to portray China as the responsible actor, while sidestepping surveillance allegations made by the U.S., according to Kenton Thibaut, a China expert at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, a Washington-based organization that tracks foreign disinformation and propaganda.

"It's about projecting an image of responsibility and rationality, of being the adult in the room," Thibaut said of China's response. "It's a clear signal to nations in the developing world that the U.S. is selfish, untrustworthy and hypocritical."

On Monday, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre did refute one viral claim to have emerged from the balloon saga.

"I know there have been questions and concerns about this, but there is no — again no indication — of aliens or extraterrestrial activity with these recent takedowns," Jean-Pierre told reporters. "I wanted to make sure that the American people knew that, all of you knew that and it was important for us to say that from here because we've been hearing a lot about it."

## TikTok 'de-influencers' want Gen Z to buy less - and more

By HALELUYA HADERO and ALI SWENSON The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — At a time when consumers are inundated with so-called social media influencers peddling the latest products online, a slew of TikTok users are leveraging their platforms to tell people what not to buy instead.

The trend, called "de-influencing," is a stark contrast to prior ones like #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt, when consumers were showing off products they purchased after seeing them on the social media app.

These days, TikTokers are telling their followers which products aren't worth the money, or urging them to resist indulging in trends. Some influencers are sounding off about blushes, mascaras or other beauty and skincare items that made big promises but don't deliver. And others are telling their followers to avoid hair stylers and water bottles TikTok itself helped popularize.

All told, clips with the hashtag #deinfluencing have racked up more than 150 million views in just a few months. It's not clear how the trend originated, though one of the first TikTok videos came from a former employee for Ulta and Sephora, who listed frequently-returned products at the beauty stores.

Paige Pritchard, 33, said it's refreshing to see consumers finally having this conversation. Now a spending coach who shares financial advice on TikTok, Pritchard said she chose her career path after blowing her entire \$60,000 salary on clothing, beauty and hair products in the first year after she graduated from college.

At the time, Pritchard was living with her parents to help pay off her student loans. But heeding recom-

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recommendations from YouTube influencers, who routinely get paid by brands to market products, she regularly went to Nordstrom or J. Crew on her lunch breaks, easily dropping \$500 per visit.

"When it came time to move out, I realized that I had no money," Pritchard said. "I could barely afford to move out of my parent's house at the end of that year."

She felt embarrassed and ashamed, and characterizes the moment as her "breaking point."

Estefany Teran, 23, said she was inspired to make her "de-influencing" video after her sister-in-law told her she wanted a Stanley cup — a popular 40-ounce drinking tumbler that recently went viral on TikTok. But it was out of stock.

"I was like, 'You can just go to TJ Maxx and get a different cup,'" Teran said.

TikTok trends come and go, and criticisms of consumerism aren't necessarily new. Still, influencers who hop on the de-influencing trend could be seen as more trustworthy and use the opportunity to shore up credibility, said Abhisek Kumar, a marketing lecturer at the University of Essex who has studied how Gen Z interacts with content creators.

A study he did with other academics showed Gen Z shoppers typically ignore influencer campaigns they believe to be controlled by companies. Brand deals and influencers have become almost synonymous over the years, but consumers still crave authenticity and those seen as inauthentic often incur a cost to their reputation.

Most recently, Mikayla Nogueira, a makeup artist with 14.4 million TikTok followers, was accused of wearing fake eyelashes while promoting a L'Oreal mascara in a sponsored video by the brand. (Representatives for Nogueira did not reply to a request for comment.)

"Influencers will still remain relevant, but one of their major weapons -- which is source credibility -- is slowly getting eroded unless they do something about it," Kumar said.

The temptation to make money, however, can be hard to overcome. Many influencers earn their living from the content they produce, oftentimes in collaboration with brands. Such partnerships have exploded in the past decade, according to Influencer Marketing Hub, which says the influencer marketing industry reached over \$16 billion last year, up from \$1.6 billion in 2016. At the same time, the number of people who search for products on social media has risen by 43% since 2015, the audience research company GWI said in a recent report.

Compared to other influencer-dominant platforms like Instagram and YouTube, TikTok is fairly new to driving consumer behavior. But traction there has driven sales on many items, including books by Texas-based writer Colleen Hoover as well as products that can supposedly give the skin a glistening and plump finish known as "dolphin skin."

Data from the market research company NPD Group also shows purchasing decisions on skincare and fragrance products, in particular, were influenced more by TikTok last year compared with 2021.

De-influencing — much like influencing — sprang from a place of authenticity. But the longer the trend lingers, the more it becomes something of a paradox: The hashtag is being used by some users to pan certain products and then turn around and offer up alternatives -- essentially influencing their followers to buy more items, not less.

And there might be money to be made in that as well. For example, some products mentioned in popular TikToker user alyssastephanie's de-influencing videos are listed on her Amazon Storefront, a personalized page on the e-commerce site where influencers earn commission from purchases made using affiliate links. TikToker valeriafride, whose de-influencing video got more than a million views, also has recommendations listed on her Storefront.

Fride has a caption that tells viewers to not buy everything mentioned in her video. She told The Associated Press in an emailed response that she hasn't made and "didn't intend to" make money off of the alternative products she recommended, but did not provide further details. TikToker alyssastephanie said in an email that having a Storefront makes it easier for viewers to find items mentioned in a clip.

Mandy Lee, a fashion critic and freelance writer who posted a TikTok video championing the anti-consumption trend, said she would be skeptical of any influencer who is participating in this conversation for



the first time because its a trend.

"It's hard for me to trust someone who's never done a nuanced take about products before, and suddenly they're doing it now," said Lee, who lives in Brooklyn, New York and has another side job consulting companies about fashion trends. "I would question whether or not it's genuine."

## **Tory Burch deconstructs classic style in new NYFW collection**

By BROOKE LEFFERTS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Some think they know the Tory Burch aesthetic because of the ubiquitous iconic gold metal branding on shoes and handbags, but more recently Burch has been focusing on the unexpected.

Her fall/winter 2023 presentation at New York Fashion Week on Monday night featured deconstructed looks in rich colors and fabrics that served as a creative surprise.

Burch loves a dramatic backdrop and says the space at the historic Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank (built in 1909 in the Beaux-Arts style) in downtown Manhattan set a scene, with mercurial shapes and artworks twisting into themselves, projected onto the towering ornate walls and a mysterious curtain that revealed the models as they entered.

"I just thought it was such an interesting venue to experiment with distortion," Burch told The Associated Press in an interview following the show. "The collection is a lot about distortion and femininity, and so just even taking in Venus and having her feel distorted, and the architecture ... you're looking at something, and that's perception versus reality."

The show included Burch hallmarks — neutral, classic colors like navy, tan, black and olive, but with splashes of brightness in red or metallic shoes and purses. But many looks reflected the themes of deconstruction: asymmetrical lines in skirts and belts, long blazers, exaggerated blouse cuffs, and long and slouchy sleeves and pants.

"It was meant to be a bit undone," Burch explained. "I wanted to crush that idea and challenge the concept of what is femininity and what is beauty, What is perfection? To me, it was a little bit about like how to do beautiful and construction and silhouette but also allow room for interpretation."

The mixes of colors and fabrics were also unexpected — like a long navy wool jacket hugging the model's shape, topping bright lime green satin pants that overflowed over pointed shoes. The jumbo-sized safety pins accenting skirts and dresses and appearing in punk-ish earrings stood out. Another themed element was the mix of casual fabrics with more luxurious ones. One look had a denim knee-length skirt paired with a navy wool peacoat with a shearling collar.

"The satin was this old lingerie idea, looks that were something that women traditionally hide, shapewear that I wanted to expose, and make that beautiful," Burch said. "I twisted them and we made them different proportions and they were off kilter."

Burch shows often attract star power on the runway and in the audience. Models Emily Ratajkowski and Irina Shayk helped close out the show, while front row guests included actors Claire Foy, Suki Waterhouse and Lana Condor.

Model Ashley Graham said she's a huge fan of Burch, especially for making clothing that is accessible at almost any size. Graham said she had to contain herself when she saw her model friends strutting the runway.

"When I'm watching the girls walk in the show, I'm like, 'It's OK, you've got this. Yes! You're not going to fall. You're owning it. You're a supermodel!' And it takes everything in me not to scream some of their names," Graham said with a laugh.

## **LaQuan Smith brings showstopping Hollywood glamour to NYFW**

By BEATRICE DUPUY Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Looking down on the New York Fashion Week crowd, model Frida Aasen dramatically flung her LaQuan Smith shearling coat from the balcony of the ritzy Rockefeller Center Rainbow Room and emerged down the cascading staircase following the infamous words of "Dynasty" actress Joan Collins:

"I now own this house."

While the display was intended to evoke the '80s Hollywood glamour inspiration behind Smith's Monday night show, it was also a subtle reminder to his attendees that this was a house that LaQuan Smith has built from the ground up into a global luxury brand launching with Bergdorf Goodman and Neiman Marcus.

As Aasen descended with a briefcase, fashion week attendees got a close-up look at the artful tailoring of the neckline of her little black mini dress. Smith told The Associated Press that his collection was inspired by the nostalgia of the "Dynasty" television series and James Bond films.

"I wanted to create a collection that really focused on tailoring menswear suits, sharp clean lines that still create a sense of edge, sophistication and sex appeal," Smith said after the show.

One by one, models descended the staircase in his beautifully impressive designs — from the black sheer dress with a plunging neckline and black satin bottom that rose at the hips and dipped below the belly button to the dazzling dress draped with black fringe.

It was only fitting that as Smith displayed his menswear pieces that rapper and red carpet style star Lil Nas X was sitting in the front row. In a refreshing take on menswear, Smith's latest pieces included a double-breasted men's suit jacket that was cropped at the hips while another look featured a sheer black button down with a neck tie under a black suit jacket.

Smith departed from his use of bright colors last season to incorporate warmer rich tones, from the body-hugging, velvety eggplant-colored evening wear dress to the olive full-length bodysuit and ivory trousers paired with a sheer blouse. Smith mixed in some patterns, including a sheer chiffon polka-dot dress and a form-fitting, nude-and-black striped dress.

"This collection is really rich in texture, and it screams luxury quality," Smith said.

When asked what's next for the brand, Smith said he plans on debuting his accessories line soon. At the show Monday, models donned large heart-shaped pendants and futuristic oversized sunglasses.

The significance of Smith's rise to success and his latest show at the Rainbow Room was not lost on his guests.

"I don't think people really understand how big of a deal that they expect someone to come and have a show here because the Rainbow Room is very exclusive and that is historical in many movies and parties we might have seen in the good old days," supermodel Coco Rocha said.

Along with Rocha, front row celebrities at the event included singer Teyana Taylor, actor and fashion muse Julia Fox and Ashley Biden, daughter of U.S. President Joe Biden.

"Fashion designers are like the vanguards of innovation, and I love his clothes," Biden said.

## Amid ChatGPT outcry, some teachers are inviting AI to class

By JOCELYN GECKER AP Education Writer

LEXINGTON, Ky. (AP) — Under the fluorescent lights of a fifth grade classroom in Lexington, Kentucky, Donnie Piercey instructed his 23 students to try and outwit the "robot" that was churning out writing assignments.

The robot was the new artificial intelligence tool ChatGPT, which can generate everything from essays and haikus to term papers within seconds. The technology has panicked teachers and prompted school districts to block access to the site. But Piercey has taken another approach by embracing it as a teaching tool, saying his job is to prepare students for a world where knowledge of AI will be required.

"This is the future," said Piercey, who describes ChatGPT as just the latest technology in his 17 years of teaching that prompted concerns about the potential for cheating. The calculator, spellcheck, Google, Wikipedia, YouTube. Now all his students have Chromebooks on their desks. "As educators, we haven't figured out the best way to use artificial intelligence yet. But it's coming, whether we want it to or not."

One exercise in his class pitted students against the machine in a lively, interactive writing game. Piercey asked students to "Find the Bot:" Each student summarized a text about boxing champion and Kentucky icon Muhammad Ali, then tried to figure out which was written by the chatbot.

At the elementary school level, Piercey is less worried about cheating and plagiarism than high school

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teachers. His district has blocked students from ChatGPT while allowing teacher access. Many educators around the country say districts need time to evaluate and figure out the chatbot but also acknowledge the futility of a ban that today's tech-savvy students can work around.

"To be perfectly honest, do I wish it could be uninvented? Yes. But it happened," said Steve Darlow, the technology trainer at Florida's Santa Rosa County District Schools, which has blocked the application on school-issued devices and networks.

He sees the advent of AI platforms as both "revolutionary and disruptive" to education. He envisions teachers asking ChatGPT to make "amazing lesson plans for a substitute" or even for help grading papers. "I know it's lofty talk, but this is a real game changer. You are going to have an advantage in life and business and education from using it."

ChatGPT quickly became a global phenomenon after its November launch, and rival companies including Google are racing to release their own versions of AI-powered chatbots.

The topic of AI platforms and how schools should respond drew hundreds of educators to conference rooms at the Future of Education Technology Conference in New Orleans last month, where Texas math teacher Heather Brantley gave an enthusiastic talk on the "Magic of Writing with AI for all Subjects."

Brantley said she was amazed at ChatGPT's ability to make her sixth grade math lessons more creative and applicable to everyday life.

"I'm using ChatGPT to enhance all my lessons," she said in an interview. The platform is blocked for students but open to teachers at her school, White Oak Intermediate. "Take any lesson you're doing and say, 'Give me a real-world example,' and you'll get examples from today — not 20 years ago when the textbooks we're using were written."

For a lesson about slope, the chatbot suggested students build ramps out of cardboard and other items found in a classroom, then measure the slope. For teaching about surface area, the chatbot noted that sixth graders would see how the concept applies to real life when wrapping gifts or building a cardboard box, said Brantley.

She is urging districts to train staff to use the AI platform to stimulate student creativity and problem solving skills. "We have an opportunity to guide our students with the next big thing that will be part of their entire lives. Let's not block it and shut them out."

Students in Piercey's class said the novelty of working with a chatbot makes learning fun.

After a few rounds of "Find the Bot," Piercey asked his class what skills it helped them hone. Hands shot up. "How to properly summarize and correctly capitalize words and use commas," said one student. A lively discussion ensued on the importance of developing a writing voice and how some of the chatbot's sentences lacked flair or sounded stilted.

Trevor James Medley, 11, felt that sentences written by students "have a little more feeling. More backbone. More flavor."

Next, the class turned to playwriting, or as the worksheet handed out by Piercey called it: "PI-ai Writing." The students broke into groups and wrote down (using pencils and paper) the characters of a short play with three scenes to unfold in a plot that included a problem that needs to get solved.

Piercey fed details from worksheets into the ChatGPT site, along with instructions to set the scenes inside a fifth grade classroom and to add a surprise ending. Line by line, it generated fully formed scripts, which the students edited, briefly rehearsed and then performed.

One was about a class computer that escapes, with students going on a hunt to find it. The play's creators giggled over unexpected plot twists that the chatbot introduced, including sending the students on a time travel adventure.

"First of all, I was impressed," said Olivia Laksi, 10, one of the protagonists. She liked how the chatbot came up with creative ideas. But she also liked how Piercey urged them to revise any phrases or stage directions they didn't like. "It's helpful in the sense that it gives you a starting point. It's a good idea generator."

She and classmate Katherine McCormick, 10, said they can see the pros and cons of working with chat-

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bots. They can help students navigate writer's block and help those who have trouble articulating their thoughts on paper. And there is no limit to the creativity it can add to classwork.

The fifth graders seemed unaware of the hype or controversy surrounding ChatGPT. For these children, who will grow up as the world's first native AI users, their approach is simple: Use it for suggestions, but do your own work.

"You shouldn't take advantage of it," McCormick says. "You're not learning anything if you type in what you want, and then it gives you the answer."

## Today in History: FEB 15, Jury finds Jeffrey Dahmer sane

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Feb. 15, the 46th day of 2023. There are 319 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 15, 1879, President Rutherford B. Hayes signed a bill allowing female attorneys to argue cases before the Supreme Court.

On this date:

In 1764, the site of present-day St. Louis was established by Pierre Laclède and Auguste Chouteau.

In 1898, the U.S. battleship Maine mysteriously blew up in Havana Harbor, killing more than 260 crew members and bringing the United States closer to war with Spain.

In 1933, President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt escaped an assassination attempt in Miami that mortally wounded Chicago Mayor Anton J. Cermak; gunman Giuseppe Zangara was executed more than four weeks later.

In 1944, Allied bombers destroyed the monastery atop Monte Cassino in Italy.

In 1950, Walt Disney's animated film "Cinderella" premieres in Boston.

In 1961, 73 people, including an 18-member U.S. figure skating team en route to the World Championships in Czechoslovakia, were killed in the crash of a Sabena Airlines Boeing 707 in Belgium.

In 1965, singer Nat King Cole, 45, died in Santa Monica, California.

In 1967, the rock band Chicago was founded by Walter Parazaider, Terry Kath, Danny Seraphine, Lee Loughnane, James Pankow and Robert Lamm; the group originally called itself The Big Thing, then Chicago Transit Authority.

In 1989, the Soviet Union announced that the last of its troops had left Afghanistan, after more than nine years of military intervention.

In 1992, a Milwaukee jury found that Jeffrey Dahmer was sane when he killed and mutilated 15 men and boys. (The decision meant that Dahmer, who had already pleaded guilty to the murders, would receive a mandatory life sentence for each count; Dahmer was beaten to death in prison in 1994.)

In 2003, millions of protesters around the world demonstrated against the prospect of a U.S. attack on Iraq.

In 2005, defrocked priest Paul Shanley was sentenced in Boston to 12 to 15 years in prison on child rape charges.

In 2020, the U.S. government said Americans who were on board a cruise ship under quarantine in Japan because of the coronavirus would be flown back home on a chartered flight, but that they would face another two-week quarantine; about 380 Americans were aboard the Diamond Princess.

Ten years ago: With a blinding flash and a booming shock wave, a meteor blazed across Russia's western Siberian sky and exploded, injuring more than 1,000 people as it blasted out windows. Pressing his case in Chicago, the town that launched his political career, President Barack Obama called for the government to take an active, wide-ranging role in ensuring every American had a "ladder of opportunity" into the middle class.

Five years ago: The last of the bodies of the 17 victims of a school shooting in Florida were removed from the building after authorities analyzed the crime scene; 13 wounded survivors were still hospitalized.

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In response to the shooting, President Donald Trump, in an address to the nation, promised to "tackle the difficult issue of mental health," but avoided any mention of guns. Nikolas Cruz, the suspect in the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, was ordered held without bond at a brief court hearing. American Mikaela Shiffrin used a hard-charging final run to win the women's giant slalom at the Winter Olympics in South Korea.

One year ago: Russian President Vladimir Putin said he welcomed a security dialogue with the West as his military reported pulling back some of its troops near Ukraine. U.S. President Joe Biden said the U.S. had "not yet verified" Russia's claim and that an invasion still remains a distinct possibility. (Russia would invade Ukraine five days later.) The families of nine victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting agreed to a \$73 million settlement of a lawsuit against the maker of the rifle used to kill 20 first graders and six educators in 2012.

Today's birthdays: Actor Claire Bloom is 92. Author Susan Brownmiller is 88. Songwriter Brian Holland is 82. Rock musician Mick Avory (The Kinks) is 79. Jazz musician Henry Threadgill is 79. Actor-model Marisa Berenson is 76. Actor Jane Seymour is 72. Singer Melissa Manchester is 72. Actor Lynn Whitfield is 70. "Simpsons" creator Matt Groening is 69. Model Janice Dickinson is 68. Actor Christopher McDonald is 68. Reggae singer Ali Campbell is 64. Actor Joseph R. Gannascoli is 64. Musician Mikey Craig (Culture Club) is 63. College and Pro Football Hall of Famer Darrell Green is 63. Actor-comedian Steven Michael Quezada is 60. Actor Michael Easton is 56. Latin singer Gloria Trevi is 55. Rock musician Stevie Benton (Drowning Pool) is 52. Actor Alex Borstein is 52. Actor Renee O'Connor is 52. Actor Sarah Wynter is 50. Olympic gold medal swimmer Amy Van Dyken-Rouen is 50. Actor-director Miranda July is 49. Rock singer Brandon Boyd (Incubus) is 47. Rock musician Ronnie Vannucci (The Killers) is 47.