

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

Friday, Feb. 17

Senior Menu: Ham and bean soup, egg salad sandwich, 7 layer salad, cookies.

NO SCHOOL - Faculty In-Service

Basketball Double Header at Britton. (Girls JV and Boys JV both played at 5 p.m. Then Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity)

Saturday, Feb. 18

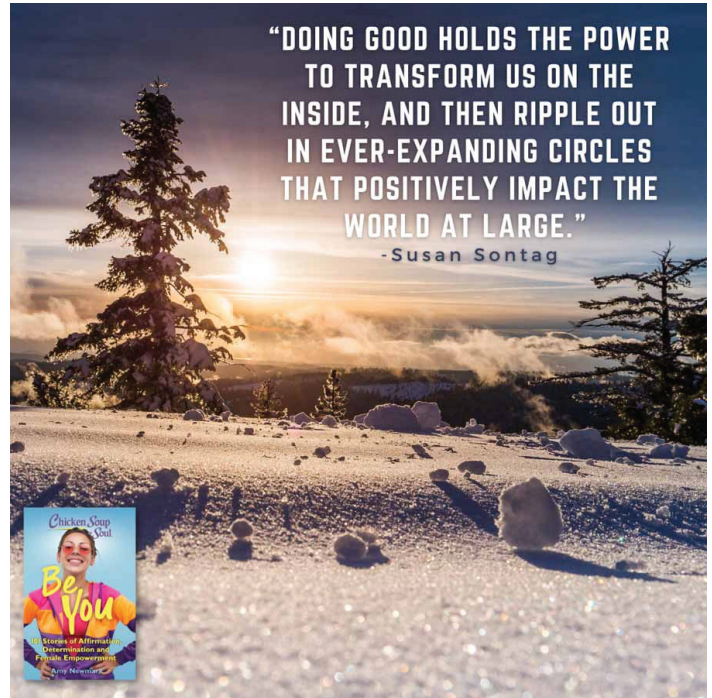
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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

Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



"DOING GOOD HOLDS THE POWER TO TRANSFORM US ON THE INSIDE, AND THEN RIPPLE OUT IN EVER-EXPANDING CIRCLES THAT POSITIVELY IMPACT THE WORLD AT LARGE."

- Susan Sontag

Boys Basketball hosts Florence-Henry. (7th grade game at 11 a.m. followed by 8th grade game. C game at 1 p.m. followed by JV and Varsity)

Emmanuel Lutheran: Rosewood Court worship, 10 a.m.; Council Retreat at church, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Sunday, Feb. 19

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:45 a.m.

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

Open Gym: Grades JK-8; 2:00 PM to 3:30 PM, Grades 6-12; 3:30 PM to 5:00 PM

United Methodist Church: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; No Sunday school; Groton Worship, 10:30 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday school, 10:15 a.m.; worship at Avantara, 3 p.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Zion Lutheran worship with communion, 11 a.m. (no Sunday School)

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

appear in court for an arraignment today.

- Never-before-seen footage of the Titanic's wreckage was shared in an 80-minute uncut video by the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. The video shot during a 1986 dive features a haunting image of a chandelier still swaying against the current.

- Actor Bruce Willis has been diagnosed with frontotemporal dementia, which forced the 67-year-old to retire last year. "While this is painful, it is a relief to finally have a clear diagnosis," his family said.

- Republican Kari Lake failed yet another legal election battle after the Arizona Court of Appeals affirmed a ruling declaring Katie Hobbs as governor.

- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Kyiv said another 800 Russian soldiers were killed, bringing the total number of Russian casualties since the beginning of the war to 141,260—an unconfirmed figure that nonetheless suggests severe losses.

- Former Vice President Mike Pence hinted that he may soon join the 2024 race to challenge Donald Trump for the Republican nomination. "She [Nikki Haley] may have more company soon in the race for president... I'll keep you posted," Pence said in Iowa.

- Fox News hosts and executives privately knew that the 2020 election fraud claims were false but continued to push them as credible on air, a new court filing revealed.

- All five former Memphis police officers charged in connection to the death of 29-year-old Tyre Nichols are set to

Groton Area has two foreign exchange students

by Dorene Nelson

Celia Moreno, a foreign exchange student from Madrid, Spain, is staying with the Dan and Marjae Schinkel family while she attends school in Groton.

"I actually chose to come here to school since my older sister had been here three years ago and really enjoyed the school and the area," Celia explained. "She is now in her second year of college and studying to become a nurse. My parents are both employed in the business field."

"Compared to Spain, South Dakota is very large but with a very small population," she smiled. "I'm from Madrid which has over 3 million residents compared to only 800,000 in the entire state of South Dakota!"

"Obviously it feels more crowded back home since the size of Spain is about the size of North and South Dakota combined," Celia said. "It is also much colder here than back home! I actually bought a heavy winter coat, just to be prepared for the below zero temperatures!"

"Madrid's winters are cold and dry but usually with no snow," she explained. "We very seldom have freezing temperatures."

"I am a junior here in Groton, taking art, English, agribusiness, world history, biology, and chemistry. I also participate in cheer and dance," Celia listed. "In Spain we study general history instead of dividing in into groups like is done here in America."

"I have been able to speak English since I was three years old," she stated. "English is taught in the schools, even in the pre-schools."

"My school in Madrid, which has about 700 students, is close enough for me to walk there," Celia said. "School is much harder in Spain with more homework and tests that cover more information."

"Our tests in Spain are all short answer too," she smiled. "Lots of the tests here in America are multiple choice and cover smaller amounts of material."

"I have found that the people in the Groton area are very friendly and have a wonderful sense of community," Celia said. "When someone here needs help or is sick, others automatically offer help and support. That is something I've never seen before!"

"After I return home and finish high school, I plan to become a criminal psychologist," she stated. "I have really enjoyed my visit to America and to the Groton community and am very grateful that the Schinkels let me stay with them too!"



Celia Moreno

The other foreign exchange student, Nicolas Fernandez, will be featured next week.









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Region 1A Standings

Girls Basketball









Thursday









#	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

Friday

#	Name	Season			Seed	Pts
		W	L	PCT		<u>PTS</u>
1	 Sisseton	17	2	.895		44.263
2	 Milbank	12	7	.632		41.526
3	 Groton Area	11	8	.579		40.789
4	 Aberdeen Roncalli	10	9	.526		40.684
5	 Redfield	9	10	.474		39.789
6	 Waubay/Summit	9	9	.500		38.667
7	 Webster Area	7	12	.368		38.316
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

#	Name	Season			Seed	Pts
		W	L	PCT		<u>PTS</u>
1	 Waubay/Summit	14	3	.824		42.765
2	 Groton Area	12	4	.750		42.375
3	 Milbank	11	6	.647		41.882
4	 Tiospa Zina	9	7	.562		41.438
5	 Aberdeen Roncalli	9	11	.450		39.750
6	 Redfield	8	11	.421		39.211
7	 Webster Area	4	13	.235		37.353
8	 Sisseton	1	18	.053		36.105

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NSU Women's Basketball

Northern Defense Locks Down UMary in Closing Minute of Road Win

Bismarck, N.D. –After drawing the foul on the offensive rebound with five second remaining, Kailee Oliverson stepped to the line and knocked down the two game-winning free throws to give Northern State the 63-62 victory over UMary. The NSU defense also stepped up in critical moments on Thursday night, putting together a stop with 14 seconds remaining to give themselves a chance to win and collecting steal on the Marauders final possession. With tonight's win and a loss by MSU Moorhead, the Wolves moved into sole possession of fourth place in the NSIC North Division with only one regular season game remaining.

THE QUICK DETAILS : Final Score: NSU 63, MARY 62

Records: NSU 16-11 (11-10 NSIC), MARY 13-11 (12-9 NSIC)

Attendance: 300

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State jumped out to a 6-2 lead in the opening minutes of the game with a pair of baskets by Laurie Rogers and another by Kailee Oliverson, the Northern defense held UMary without a field goal until the 7:17 mark of the first quarter

The Marauders gained momentum moments later as Megan Zander scored the first 11 points of the game for UMary; the teams exchanged the lead three times in the opening period, however the Wolves trailed 18-17 after ten minutes of play

Alayna Benike gave NSU the lead back just a little over three minutes in the second quarter with her second 3-pointer of the game; UMary briefly took a 26-24 lead before Northern State ended the first half on an 8-2 scoring run

The Wolves entered the halftime break with a 32-28 lead after an official review waved off a 3-pointer by the Marauder's Ryleigh Wacha that would have made it a one point game

Northern pushed the lead to 11 points (44-33) mid-way through the third period with a 10-2 scoring run and eight consecutive points by Jordyn Hilgemann

The Marauders quickly responded to cut the Wolves lead back down to four points (50-46) at the end of the third period, out-scoring NSU 13-6 in the final five minutes of the quarter

The Wolves opened the final quarter of play with a 6-2 scoring run to push the lead back to seven points, their largest lead of the fourth quarter, before a 3-pointer by Megan Voit capped a 9-3 UMary run to cut the Northern lead back to one

A layup by Zander gave the Marauders a 62-61 lead with 47 seconds remaining, their first lead since mid-way through the second period

After a missed layup the Northern State defense locked down the UMary offense, forcing a desperation 3-pointer to beat the shot clock while Oliverson completed the possession with a defensive rebound with 14 seconds remaining

Oliverson once again stepped up by corralling the offensive rebound while getting fouled with five seconds remaining, she then proceeded to step up to the free throw line and make two clutch free throws

The Northern defense once again locked down UMary on the final possession of the game as Benike secured a steal as time expired to seal the win

With 19 points Oliverson notched her tenth consecutive game in double figures, while Rianna Fillipi recorded her second double-double of the season and seventh consecutive game in double figures scoring with 13 points and ten rebounds

The Wolves won the turnover battle by forcing 14 Marauder turnovers while committing only seven, improving to 9-3 when committing ten or fewer turnovers in a game

NSU out-rebounded UMary 35-28 and grabbed 13 offensive rebounds in the win

Five players dished out three or more assists for the Wolves as they recorded 19 assists in the game, tying for their second most in a game this season

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Kailee Oliverson: 19 points, 9 rebounds, 3 assists, 1 block

Rianna Fillipi: 13 points, 10 rebounds, 5 assists, 5 steals

Jordyn Hilgemann: 10 points, 3 assists, 2 steals

Laurie Rogers: 10 points, 5 rebounds, 4 assists, 1 block

UP NEXT : Northern State wraps up the 2022-23 regular season with a home match-up against Minot State on Saturday evening. The Wolves and Beavers are scheduled for a 6 p.m. tip-off for Senior Night in Wachs Arena.

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NSU Men's Basketball

Nine Straight and a Conference Championship for No. 21 Northern State

Bismarck, N.D. – The No. 21 Northern State University men's basketball team sealed their NSIC Overall and North Division titles this evening with a dominating win at the University of Mary. The Wolves clinched at least a share of each title last weekend and solidified the out-right championships this evening with their nine straight victory.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 93, MARY 67

Records: NSU 22-5 (18-3 NSIC), MARY 11-14 (7-14 NSIC)

Attendance: 300

HOW IT HAPPENED

- The Wolves tallied 48 points in the first and 45 points in the second, leading for the entirety of the contest
- Northern shot 53.8% from the floor and 50.0% from the 3-point line; marking their fourth straight game shooting 50.0% or better as a team
- NSU recorded a game high 16 made 3-pointers, 21 assists, six blocks, and six steals; and matched the Marauders with 29 rebounds
- In total, the Wolves scored 36 points in the paint, 24 points off the bench, and four points off turnovers
- Augustin Reede led four Wolves in double figures, notching 23 points, hitting 6-of-10 from beyond the arc
- Kobe Busch led the team off the bench with eight points and six rebounds

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

- Augustin Reede: 23 points, 60.0 3-point field goal%, 3 rebounds
- Josh Dilling: 13 points, 83.3 field goal%, 4 rebounds, 4 assists
- Jacksen Moni: 13 points, 3 rebounds, 3 assists, 3 blocks
- Sam Masten: 11 points, 50.0 field goal%, 8 assists, 4 rebounds
- Kobe Busch: 8 points, 6 rebounds, 2 assists, 2 steals

BEYOND THE BOX SCORE

- The NSIC Overall Championship is the 39th conference title for the Northern State men in program history
- Northern has also won five NSIC North Division Championships in 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2021, and now 2022-23
- This is the third league title for the Wolves under the direction of head coach Saul Phillips
- NSU has won five NSIC Championships in the last six seasons

UP NEXT

Northern State closes out the regular season on Saturday, hosting Minot State from Wachs Arena. Tip-off is set for 4 p.m. against the Beavers. Northern is set to honor their seniors ten minutes prior to tip-off.

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It was a neat sunrise earlier this week as Sun Dogs flanked the Sun. (Photo by 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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You're Invited!

RESET

women's conference

ROSE HILL CHURCH

12099 ROSE HILL RD, LANGFORD SD

SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 2023

9:30 AM - 2:00 PM

*Women and girls of all generations
are welcome to enjoy a day to reset.*

GUEST SPEAKERS

**PASTORS LISA PALMER
AND MICAH LOMBARDI, A
MOTHER-DAUGHTER TEAM**



REGISTER ONLINE

**THIS IS A FREE EVENT.
REGISTER BY SCANNING
THE QR CODE OR AT
ROSEHILLEFC.COM**

CHILDCARE WILL BE AVAILABLE



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Gov. Noem touts record low unemployment; also presided over the highest

Pandemic spike in unemployment has dissipated since 2020

BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 16, 2023 4:27 PM

By two measures, Gov. Kristi Noem has presided over South Dakota's lowest – and highest – unemployment rate.

One of those metrics is the number of tax forms sent in January to those who've received certain kinds of government assistance in the previous year. That assistance includes things like agricultural payments, taxable grants or unemployment benefits, the last of which are handled in South Dakota by the Department of Labor and Regulation.

Last year, the department sent 5,736 of the 1099G forms to South Dakota residents. That's a 25% drop from 2018, the year before Noem became governor, when the department sent 7,608 such forms.

In 2020, the agency sent 47,314 of the forms.

The news release trumpeting the figures noted that the 2022 figure was the lowest since data collection began.

"South Dakota's jobs market is thriving. We are setting an example of the power of the American work ethic. The careers of the future are available right here," the governor said in a prepared statement. "Thanks to our incredible economic strength, fewer South Dakotans than ever are having to rely on unemployment benefits to keep food on the table for their families."

What the news release didn't say, however, was that the 47,314 forms sent for 2020 likely represent the largest number recorded in South Dakota. Unemployment spiked to historic highs nationwide that year due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Noem spokesman Ian Fury pointed to the Department of Labor and Regulation when asked for historical 1099G figures. The DLR did not immediately respond to a request for additional information, but federal statistics confirm that 2022 was South Dakota's lowest year for unemployment claims.

Unemployment rates are typically reported as a percentage by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. That information dates to 1976.

South Dakota's highest monthly unemployment rate was 8.8%, recorded in April of 2020. The previous high was 6%, logged in December of 1982 and January of 1983.

The lowest monthly rate is the current one, 2.3%, which was the rate in December when the number was last reported. Six other months in 2022 also had a rate of 2.3%.

The current historic lows have sparked legislative action this session. Both chambers passed House Bill 1011, which lowers employer contributions to unemployment insurance by a half percentage point. Gov. Noem signed the bill on Feb. 1, calling it "an \$18 million tax cut for South Dakota businesses."

Low unemployment rates are a sign of a healthy economy, but low unemployment also creates challenges for employers.

The online retailer Amazon recently opened a 5-story fulfillment center in Sioux Falls that its general manager, Tim Choate, said is the largest building in the state by square footage.

At full capacity, the center can employ around 2,300 people, Choate said on a tour this week attended by South Dakota Congressman Dusty Johnson.

At the moment, the center employs about 450 people. In Sioux Falls, the company has placed a host of

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hiring ads across various media platforms and has even sent postcards to residences in the city touting its starting salary, sign-on bonus and benefits package.

"We're very cognizant of hiring constraints," Choate said.

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

COMMENTARY

On ag pollution, state's carrot doesn't work and the stick is a twig

BRAD JOHNSON

FEBRUARY 16, 2023 4:26 PM

Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) Secretary Hunter Roberts confirmed what long has been known about South Dakota during a Jan. 19 briefing before a legislative committee.

South Dakota gives only lip service to controlling agricultural pollution.

In a broad discussion, Roberts told the House Ag and Natural Resources committee that financial efforts to entice producers to protect river and stream banks with buffer strips had failed. A report on the herbicide Dicamba followed.

Grassy buffer strips, Roberts explained, are designed to keep pollutants from "the poor practices that are tough on water quality" away from streams and rivers. But the state's incentive is not lucrative enough, so essentially, the bribe must grow.

Roberts characterized the additional money as carrots to make producers do what normal people would expect – quit polluting the water.

The use of carrots implies the state also carries a stick, but it's more like a twig.

Roberts said as much.

"We have dozens of these facilities that are within a mile of the Big Sioux River or a tributary and they're not managing their waste," Roberts said. "So, if you have 500 head that you're feeding in a feedlot and you're not managing your waste, and they're within a mile of the Big Sioux, the chances that manure ends up loading in the river are pretty high."

Actually, there are hundreds, not dozens of such facilities polluting the state's rivers and streams. DANR, sometimes referred to as the Department of Ag and No Rules, has internal reports gathering dust that have identified scores of medium and small feedlots that need cleanup.

One map marking these facilities looks like a piece of paper on a well-used dartboard.

Throwing a few million at buffer strips makes it look like South Dakota cares, but it doesn't.

Just look at what The 2022 South Dakota Integrated Report for Surface Water Quality Assessment said.

The state has studied the majority of its stream and river segments and "78.2% did not support one or more beneficial uses."

The cause? "Similar to previous reporting cycles, nonsupport for fish life uses was caused primarily by total suspended solids from agricultural nonpoint sources and natural origin. Nonsupport for recreational uses was primarily caused by Escherichia coli contamination from livestock and wildlife contributions."

It's a similar story for the state's lakes, but thanks to a recent decision by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to lower the standard for mercury pollution, the pollution blame can be shifted from agriculture to mercury.

The 2022 report said, "The primary cause for nonsupport in lakes is due to mercury in fish tissue."

Earlier reports, specifically the 2012 report said, "Similar to previous reporting periods, nonsupport for fishery/aquatic life uses was caused primarily by total suspended solids (TSS) from agricultural nonpoint sources and natural origin. Nonsupport for recreational uses was primarily caused by fecal coliform and Escherichia coli (E. coli) contamination from livestock and wildlife contributions."

Interesting how we hide our pollution sources.

Roberts also talked about Dicamba, a controversial herbicide sprayed on soybeans. Lawsuits abound across the country as the chemical is easily swept beyond its intended target. The chemical is designed for a genetically modified soybean plant that is resistant to the chemical. All other plants that aren't welcome in a soybean field are killed.

The problem is that the chemical can drift onto neighboring fields, killing nonresistant soybeans and other unintended targets.

Roberts told the committee the state intended to move up its spray deadline to June 20 as later dates tend to become dryer allowing greater drift.

He said DANR annually fields hundreds of complaints from angry people who have had their fields damaged by airborne July spray.

This brought pushback from some Ag Committee members who use the spray on their crops. There was discussion about "bad actors" who misapply Dicamba and professional applicators who spray during inappropriate weather because of impending deadlines. Such actions harm other producers and the public in general.

Where is DANR's stick when all this pollution occurs? Nowhere to be found.

Brad Johnson is a Watertown real estate appraiser and journalist whose previous career was as a Colorado newspaper reporter and editor. He has been writing regularly appearing opinion columns for at least 20 years.

Committee rejects bill to stop carbon pipelines from using eminent domain

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 16, 2023 2:16 PM

A state Senate committee unanimously rejected a bill Thursday that would prevent two proposed carbon pipeline projects from using eminent domain.

The bill had already passed the House of Representatives 40-28, but it was defeated 9-0 in the Senate Commerce and Energy Committee.

Opponents of the bill said it would be unfair to remove the possibility of eminent domain for projects that are already being actively considered for permits.

"We can't keep changing the rules," said Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, R-Watertown.

Eminent domain is a legal process for obtaining access to land from landowners who aren't willing to grant it.

Two proposed underground carbon pipelines, Navigator CO2's Heartland Greenway project and another proposal by Summit Carbon Solutions, would pass through South Dakota. The projects would capture carbon dioxide emitted from ethanol plants in the Midwest and transport it in liquified form through multi-state pipelines, to be sequestered underground in Illinois and North Dakota, respectively.

Ethanol producers can get more money for their products in states with stricter emission standards by shrinking their carbon footprint. Sequestering carbon keeps it out of the atmosphere, where it traps heat and contributes to climate change. Ethanol producers would also benefit from a federal tax credit for sequestered carbon.

In South Dakota, ethanol plants are a major component of the agricultural industry.

"Sixty percent of the corn that we grow goes into ethanol plants," said Sen. Casey Crabtree, R-Madison.

Current state law says "all pipelines holding themselves out to the general public as engaged in the business of transporting commodities for hire by pipeline" are common carriers. The law also says common carriers may exercise eminent domain.

The bill would have removed carbon pipelines from the list of common carriers, and by extension, eliminated their ability to use eminent domain. Proponents of the bill argued carbon pipelines are different from oil, natural gas or water pipelines, which deliver a product used by the public.

Critics of the carbon pipeline proposals have argued that while the projects would capture carbon, they

wouldn't do anything to reduce emissions. Landowners along the pipeline route are also concerned about potential leaks.

After Thursday's committee hearing, the prime sponsor of the bill described the committee's decision as "economic development over individual rights, industry over farmers, and investors over landowners."

"This is a precedent that should concern every property owner in South Dakota," said Rep. Karla Lems, R-Canton, in a written statement to South Dakota Searchlight.

When asked if she will attempt any procedural maneuvers to resurrect the bill, Lems replied, "That remains to be seen." Legislators can use a procedure known as a "smoke out" to bring a bill to the floor if it fails to pass out of a committee.

"Whether we smoke this out or not, the landowner rights issue will continue to be fought," Lems said. "Our people are not against economic development. They just want the choice to be part of a private project or have the ability to say 'no thank you.'"

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.

Biden's annual physical shows he is 'a healthy, vigorous, 80-year-old male'

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - FEBRUARY 16, 2023 5:52 PM

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden received a mostly positive review of his health from doctors at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center on Thursday after undergoing his annual physical.

The official evaluation of Biden's health comes as the former vice president and longtime U.S. senator from Delaware weighs whether to run for reelection in 2024.

"President Biden remains a healthy, vigorous, 80-year-old male, who is fit to successfully execute the duties of the presidency, to include those as chief executive, head of state and commander in chief," Dr. Kevin O'Connor wrote in a five-page summary.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Thursday afternoon before the report was released that Biden is confident he will be able to keep up with the demands of being president in six years, when he would be 86.

"This is a president that works day-in and day-out in a grueling fashion with a grueling schedule and delivers," Jean-Pierre said.

Thursday's report on Biden's health was similar to the report on his last physical, in November 2021, when O'Connor wrote the president remained "a healthy, vigorous, 78-year-old male, who is fit to successfully execute the duties of the president."

In both reports O'Connor noted Biden was being treated for a common type of heart arrhythmia called non-valvular atrial fibrillation for which Biden remained "completely asymptomatic," hyperlipidemia or high cholesterol, gastroesophageal reflux or acid reflux, seasonal allergies, a stiffened gait, spinal arthritis and mild sensory peripheral neuropathy of both feet.

Peripheral neuropathy is often the result of damage to nerves outside the brain and spinal cord; in this case, Biden's feet. It can result in weakness, numbness, or pain, according to the Mayo Clinic.

The National Institutes of Health estimates more than 20 million Americans have some type of peripheral neuropathy.

All of the conditions were listed as stable in Thursday's report, though the November 2021 report listed the stiff gait as newly significant and neuropathy of the feet as a new finding.

"The president's gait appears to be perceptibly stiffer and less fluid than it has been in the past," O'Connor wrote in November 2021, noting that Biden said he experiences early morning stiffness that improves

through the day.

"As previously reported, he has sustained a number of orthopedic and sports related injuries over the years, and is followed by physical therapy for ongoing wellness and fitness exercises prescription," he wrote in November 2021. "It is also well known that approximately a year ago, he sustained a fracture in his right midfoot, which could certainly contribute to a gait abnormality."

In Thursday's report, O'Connor wrote that while Biden's gait remains stiff, it hasn't "worsened since last year." Symptoms from the peripheral neuropathy have not progressed and his exam during Thursday's physical was "a bit improved," according to O'Connor.

Physical therapy and exercise, O'Connor wrote, would "continue to focus on general flexibility" to address Biden's stiffened gait while custom orthotics would continue being used to address the peripheral neuropathy in his feet.

Biden continues taking three prescription medications — Crestor to treat high cholesterol, Dymista nasal spray for allergies and Eliquis to prevent blood clots — and two over-the-counter medications — Allegra for allergies and Pepcid for acid reflux.

Biden's physical Thursday also included screenings for skin cancer, an eye exam and dental visit, all of which were listed as routine, though one small lesion from his chest was sent for a skin cancer biopsy.

The most notable update to the president's medical history since the last physical, O'Connor wrote, was his COVID-19 diagnosis in July 2022 and his rebound COVID-19. Biden has not experienced any symptoms of long COVID-19 since then, he wrote.

"Fortunately, having been fully vaccinated and twice boosted at the time of initial infection, the president experienced only mild symptoms, consisting mostly of a deep, loose cough and hoarseness," O'Connor wrote, adding Biden has since gotten the bivalent COVID-19 vaccine.

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.

U.S. Senate panel spars over elevated food assistance spending in upcoming farm bill

BY: ADAM GOLDSTEIN - FEBRUARY 16, 2023 5:46 PM

WASHINGTON – Members of the U.S. Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee split along party lines on Thursday as they tussled over financial accountability in farm bill nutrition programs.

The main point of contention was the Department of Agriculture's 2021 changes to the Thrifty Food Plan, one of four food plans the USDA develops to estimate the cost of a healthy diet.

The Thrifty Food Plan is tied to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Benefits Program, or SNAP, formerly known as food stamps. The program provides financial and commodity assistance to low-income households.

Members also debated the associated rise in the cost of food aid in the coming decade.

Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow, a Democrat of Michigan, emphasized that the "critical" nutrition programs in the farm bill help people afford groceries, make healthier choices, and support the food economy.

"They lift millions of American families out of poverty," Stabenow said. "These are our friends, neighbors, and relatives who deserve to be able to put food on the table even when they are going through a hard time."

But several Republicans balked at the ongoing cost of the 2021 update, which they said was made without congressional approval.

"Our people's confidence in SNAP is undermined when this administration usurps Congress' power of the purse, and unilaterally increases the program's cost by hundreds of billions of dollars without any concern to the fiscal impact, and the impact on inflation," U.S. Sen. Chuck Grassley, an Iowa Republican, said.

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Federal nutrition assistance programs support 1 in 4 Americans, according to the Bipartisan Policy Center. The nutrition title is the largest set of mandatory expenditures in the farm bill, accounting for close to 76% of the baseline budget.

The bulk of the food assistance programs included in the farm bill nutrition title consists of SNAP benefits. The programs cost \$233 billion overall in 2021 and 2022, while serving more than 41 million people nationwide, according to the USDA.

Maximum SNAP benefit allotments are calculated based on the USDA's Thrifty Food Plan. The Thrifty Food Plan represents the minimum monthly budget for "a nutritious, cost-effective diet" prepared at home for a "reference family" of two adults and two children, according to the USDA.

The USDA's Food Nutrition and Consumer Services Commission updated the Thrifty Food Plan in 2021, after Congress authorized a reassessment in the 2018 farm bill.

The change brought daily benefits up by roughly \$2 per enrollee, marking the first food-price-related benefits hike since 1975. The decision also hiked nutrition spending by roughly \$35 billion from fiscal years 2020 to 2021.

Republicans battle with USDA

Sen. John Boozman of Arkansas, the committee's ranking member, led a chorus of his fellow Republicans in denouncing the USDA's update to the Thrifty Food Plan.

Boozman cited a Government Accountability Office report saying that from 2023 to 2031, changes in the plan will add approximately \$250 billion in costs, an expense incurred without consultation with Congress.

"I cannot overstate how damaging FNCS' conduct has been," Boozman said. "I'm deeply disappointed in its leadership."

USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services Stacy Dean defended the department's efforts to increase benefit accessibility and spending power amid budget concerns.

Dean noted the department updated the Thrifty Food Plan based on four criteria for the model: inflation, population, dietary guidelines, and food availability. She noted that the update was a "conservative effort" that resulted in a "modest" increase of 40 cents per meal for each enrollee.

"You mentioned the four criteria, cost is not a part of this," Boozman responded. "You go to the CBO score: Zero. Congressional intent: Zero. The USDA's help in regards to what was going on: Zero. And yet, you've increased it another \$250 billion without any congressional interaction whatsoever."

Grassley also noted the Congressional Budget Office projects the update would result in \$1.2 trillion in spending over the next decade.

Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, the Senate's No. 2 Republican, asked if the Congressional Budget Office signed off on the update to the Thrifty Food Plan.

"I don't know if 'signed off' is a technical term," Dean replied. "But absolutely, we were collaborating with them throughout the process."

Democrats advocate for SNAP access

Stabenow said that SNAP assistance is one of the most effective tools Congress has to stimulate the economy, and that the Thrifty Food Plan update will help lift 2.4 million Americans out of poverty.

Stabenow said that when the Biden administration took on the update in 2021, it had been left incomplete for three years under the Trump administration.

"The reality is that we put in place a policy to do a thorough update that hadn't been done since 1975," Stabenow said.

Democratic Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand of New York said that SNAP benefits prior to the pandemic were never sufficient to cover household food expenses, and adjustments made during the crisis were necessary to ensure access to food security.

"The increases in SNAP benefits from 2021 through the Thrifty Food Plan update were long overdue," Gillibrand said. "Let's make the case that these changes are important for this committee to look at holistically, not just an example as to what we used to spend, and what we're spending today."

Adam Goldstein is the D.C. Bureau intern for States Newsroom. Goldstein is a graduate student at the University

of Missouri School of Journalism, studying digital reporting. He is originally from San Francisco, and loves swimming, cooking, and the San Francisco 49ers.

Biden says no evidence yet that unidentified flying objects were tied to China spying

Noem issues statement condemning president's response

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - FEBRUARY 16, 2023 4:03 PM

WASHINGTON — In his first address since the U.S. military shot down three unidentified flying objects last weekend, just days after taking down a suspected Chinese surveillance balloon, President Joe Biden on Thursday defended the actions and said the skies above the U.S. will now be more closely scrutinized.

Biden, who was under increasing pressure from lawmakers to address the unprecedented situation, also said nothing so far suggests the mystery objects were related to Chinese surveillance or spying by any other nation.

"The intelligence community's current assessment is that these three objects were most likely balloons tied to private companies, recreation or research institutions, studying weather, or conducting other scientific research," Biden said.

Biden said during his brief remarks that he has "no apologies" for ordering American forces to shoot down the sizable Chinese balloon suspected of surveillance capabilities and said that he expects to speak with China's President Xi Jinping "to get to the bottom of this."

China denies the balloon was used for espionage, saying it was collecting weather data.

The U.S. maintains that China operates a vast surveillance balloon program over the U.S. and nearly 40 other countries.

Biden said there is no evidence of increasing numbers of unidentified objects in the skies. "We're now just seeing more of them, partially because the steps we've taken to increase our radars, to narrow our radars, and we have to keep adapting our approach to dealing with these challenges," Biden said.

"... But make no mistake, if any object presents a threat to the safety and security of the American people, I will take it down," he said.

Debris in deep waters

Fighter jets from bases in Alaska and Wisconsin were ordered Friday, Saturday and Sunday to take the objects down over Alaska sea ice, Canada's Yukon wilderness and Lake Huron, respectively.

As of Tuesday, White House officials said that none of the debris had yet been found in the difficult terrain with temperatures well below zero, and in waters of up to a couple hundred feet.

Some lawmakers have been urging Biden for days to address the nation about why he ordered the objects to be shot down, what the objects were, and what the protocol will be going forward.

"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," Arkansas Republican Sen. Tom Cotton said after senators received a classified briefing Tuesday.

The White House and Pentagon offered little detail about the objects that were each taken down with a nearly 200-pound air-to-air missile.

The first AIM-9X Sidewinder missile fired from two F-16 jets over Lake Huron missed and landed in the water, Pentagon officials said Tuesday. The second missile hit the object, and debris crashed into the Canadian side of the lake, according to the administration.

The administration promised Tuesday to update the public by week's end about a new interagency policy plan for deciding when to take action against unidentified aerial objects.

Senators who were privately briefed said they were told the objects were "very, very small," according to Idaho Sen. Jim Risch, ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

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'Size of an A.T.V. or four-wheeler'

Democratic U.S. Rep. Jeff Jackson, of North Carolina, wrote in a Substack post Wednesday that the three objects shot down over the weekend were "fundamentally different" than the high-altitude suspected Chinese spy balloon because they were flying lower and moving with the wind, according to what he learned in a congressional briefing from Gen. Glen VanHerck, Commander, North American Aerospace Defense Command, or NORAD.

One was the size and shape consistent with a balloon, and the other two were roughly "the size of an A.T.V. or four-wheeler," he wrote. While the purposes of the objects were unclear, members were told they weren't outfitted with a required transponder that communicates location data to the Federal Aviation Administration, he said.

"This episode has sparked a new effort to develop a set of strategies for detecting and eliminating UAPs (unidentified aerial phenomena) — ideally without having to use extremely expensive missiles — and a better notification system for our governors and allies," Jackson wrote.

GOP governors' statement

Seventeen Republican governors on Thursday released a joint statement criticizing the Biden administration for what they described as a lack of communication about the objects hovering over their states, according to a press release from South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem.

In addition to Noem, those governors included Kim Reynolds, of Iowa; Sarah Sanders, of Arkansas; Ron DeSantis, of Florida; Brian Kemp, of Georgia; Brad Little, of Idaho; Eric Holcomb, of Indiana; Tate Reeves, of Mississippi; Mike Parson, of Missouri; Jim Pillen, of Nebraska; Doug Burgum, of North Dakota; Kevin Stitt, of Oklahoma; Henry McMaster, of South Carolina; Bill Lee, of Tennessee; Greg Abbott, of Texas; Glenn Youngkin, of Virginia; and Mark Gordon, of Wyoming.

"The violation of American airspace by multiple foreign objects is unprecedented and threatens our national sovereignty along with the security of our states," wrote Noem and fellow governors. "As governors, we have sworn an oath to defend against 'all enemies, foreign and domestic.' Yet, President Biden has chosen not to fully communicate with the public about this critical issue impacting public safety."

Noem is now working with state lawmakers on legislation to address the safety of South Dakota's airways, according to her release.

Prior to the three smaller unidentified objects being shot down over the weekend, several U.S. senators, including Alaska's Lisa Murkowski and Montana's Jon Tester, grilled Pentagon officials last week on why the Chinese balloon was able to traverse Alaska and the lower 48 states before being shot down 6 miles off the coast of South Carolina.

New rules for unmanned airborne objects

Biden said Thursday that his administration will soon implement classified protocols to deal with unmanned airborne objects that enter U.S. airspace.

"I'll be sharing with Congress these classified policy parameters when they're completed, and they'll remain classified, so we don't give our roadmap to our enemies to try to evade our defenses," he said.

Biden said other changes will include:

Establishing "a better inventory" of unmanned aerial objects above the U.S. and making sure the inventory is "accessible and up to date."

Implementing "further measures" to detect the unmanned flying objects. (NORAD adjusted its radar sensitivity following the detection of the suspected Chinese surveillance balloon.)

Updating the rules and regulations for those who launch and maintain unmanned aerial objects above the U.S. for commercial, recreational or scientific purposes.

Directing Secretary of State Antony Blinken to begin working with foreign counterparts to establish global norms "in this largely unregulated space."

Bipartisan condemnation of China

The Senate, by unanimous consent, approved a resolution Wednesday condemning China for sending a suspected surveillance balloon over the U.S. just weeks ago.

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"This resolution condemning China is precisely the kind of bipartisanship Americans expect at a time like this. Instead of each party attacking each other, we are united in this resolution, in condemning China, exactly as we should be," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said in his floor remarks Thursday morning.

The Senate resolution came nearly one week after the U.S. House, in a 419-0 vote, unanimously approved a resolution condemning the Chinese Communist Party's use of the surveillance balloon as a "brazen violation of United States sovereignty."

Biden delivered the State of the Union address just three days after a U.S. fighter jet downed the suspected Chinese surveillance balloon upon his order.

While Biden remarked in his Feb. 7 speech that he remains "committed" to working with China when it benefits U.S. interests, he also said "But make no mistake: as we made clear last week, if China threatens our sovereignty, we will act to protect our country. And we did."

Officials estimate the balloon was 200 feet tall and was carrying a "jetliner-sized" payload, or equipment.

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

Federal-state task force grapples with grid protection

BY: ROBERT ZULLO - FEBRUARY 16, 2023 2:52 PM

A federal task force wrestled with the costs and benefits of better shielding the nation's tens of thousands of electric substations from a growing number of attacks, like a neo-Nazi plot the FBI says it foiled earlier this month in Maryland, another that knocked out power to thousands in North Carolina in December and more in the Pacific Northwest.

"These events correspond with an increase in extremism in our country," said Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Chairman Willie Phillips during a Wednesday meeting of a federal-state task force on electric transmission. Phillips cited a report released last year by the Program on Extremism at George Washington University that found that between 2016 and 2022, "white supremacist plots targeting energy systems dramatically increased in frequency," with 13 people arrested and charged in federal court during that span, most of them in the past two years.

In December, FERC ordered a review of security standards at electric transmission facilities and control centers. That review, to be completed by the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, which sets and enforces reliability standards for the bulk power system in the U.S., Canada and part of Mexico, is due in April.

But at the task force meeting, NERC President and CEO James Robb said there are more than 50,000 high voltage substations dispersed across the country and that regulators will have to make difficult decisions about which ones most need additional security.

"That's a tremendous amount of infrastructure to protect," he told the task force, a mix of FERC commissioners and state utility regulators. "It's not as simple as 'we should just protect everything.' Your ratepayers that you're responsible for probably wouldn't like that answer."

Robb said the vast majority of "physical security events," including vandalism, theft of copper wires and other components and shooting attacks, don't result in any impact to the grid. Only about 5% do, though the bad news is the attacks are increasing, with extremist groups posting instructions for disabling critical infrastructure on the "dark web," he said.

Push Kumar, director of the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Cybersecurity, Energy Security and Emergency Response, said that, in 2022, there were 163 events categorized as "physical" incidents involving electric infrastructure, including vandalism and sabotage, up from 92 in 2021.

"The majority of incidents, there isn't a lot of good information on what caused it," he told the task force. "When these events do occur they tend to be pretty localized."

Existing regulations, which came about after a 2014 sniper attack on a California electric substation, only apply to facilities that, if they were knocked out or damaged, could create hazards for the larger grid, like cascading outages.

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Many substations, like the ones targeted in Moore County, North Carolina, don't meet that threshold, but damaging them can still result in a loss of power for thousands.

"The consequence we're protecting against is the cascading event that would (affect) millions of customers, not thousands," he said.

As NERC works through its report, he suggested state regulators open dialogues with utilities about security costs.

"You have to weigh the customer impact of this ... relative to your cost to defend against it," he said. "A substation in a very rural part of the country will have different vulnerabilities than one in downtown Manhattan."

Dan Scripps, a task force member and chair of the Michigan Public Service Commission, said he wasn't "entirely convinced" that there shouldn't be some baseline security requirements, such as fencing, regardless of where a facility is located.

He added that it's difficult, "from an optics and public responsiveness position" to have to explain to utility customers that there are no minimum standards in place for many facilities.

"There's definitely work to be done," Robb said. "There could be room here for a minimum threshold of protection."

Robb added that states are free to impose their own security requirements.

"You can always go further," he said.

FERC Commissioner Mark Christie, a former Virginia utility regulator, suggested states should work with utilities to develop a "hierarchy" of the most crucial facilities.

"You can't harden every substation in the country," he said. "The costs would be astronomical."

Kumar noted that beefing up physical security is one approach to the problem, but so is making the power system more resilient by improving electric transmission, exploring more distributed generation and microgrids with battery storage that are less dependent on the larger power system.

"I think we have an opportunity but we need to be balanced," Phillips said, recalling a conversation with his personal trainer. "You can pay me now or you can pay the doctor later."

Robert Zullo is a national energy reporter based in southern Illinois focusing on renewable power and the electric grid. Robert joined States Newsroom in 2018 as the founding editor of the Virginia Mercury. Before that, he spent 13 years as a reporter and editor at newspapers in Virginia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Louisiana. He has a bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va. He grew up in Miami, Fla., and central New Jersey.

Accusations fly as ranchers push for changes to Brand Board

Committee approves bill to shift appointment power from governor to an election by brand owners

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 16, 2023 1:34 PM

Ranchers lodged accusations against a state board Thursday at the Capitol in Pierre, and a legislative committee advanced a bill to change the way the board members are selected.

The bill would shift the power of appointing members of the South Dakota Brand Board from the governor to a direct election by brand owners.

Brands are the symbols on hot irons used for marking livestock and identifying ownership.

Under the current system, the governor appoints all five members of the Brand Board. It's responsible for registering and regulating livestock brands in South Dakota, and ensuring new brands do not conflict with existing registered brands in the state.

Ranchers say they're waiting more than six months to get a livestock brand registered with the state board, while the wait is about a week in neighboring North Dakota and Nebraska. And multiple South Dakota ranchers testified about being mistreated by the current Brand Board, often during the brand inspection process.

Salebarn owner Baxter Anders said he has been mistreated by brand inspectors multiple times. He said,

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"I filed several complaints, but nothing came of it."

One brand inspector even assaulted one of his employees, Anders alleged.

"He knocks a woman employee of mine down, knocks her to the ground, and makes sure that she knows her place," Anders said. He said the inspector was eventually fired.

Brand Board Director Debbie Trapp attended the hearing and testified but did not address the assault allegation.

In an opening statement to the committee, the bill's prime sponsor, Rep. Liz May, R-Kyle, argued the Brand Board belongs to the South Dakotans who need brands, not to the governor. She said a direct election by brand owners would ensure the board's decisions are reflective of the needs and concerns of those who rely on it.

"My phone has not quit ringing for over a year over this particular issue," May said.

Besides changing the selection process for board members, the bill would change the board from five members to seven from different regions of the state, elected by brand owners from that region for three-year terms. Candidates would have to be at least 18 years old, own a brand, and make the majority of their income from the livestock business.

The bill is supported by the South Dakota Stockgrowers Association, which feels the current system leaves ranchers' interests underrepresented.

"What this is about, at the end of the day, is improved accountability," said Jeremiah Murphy, a lobbyist for the association.

Opponents of the bill acknowledged there are problems to be fixed within the Brand Board, but they argued the board is making improvements.

"The board is working," said Secretary of Agriculture and Natural Resources Hunter Roberts. "I'm confident, right now, that they are working on those issues."

Elections do not guarantee improvement, according to bill opponent Eric Jennings, president of the South Dakota Cattlemen's Association. The South Dakota Farm Bureau also opposed the bill.

Brand Board Director Trapp criticized a provision in the bill that would require the board to bear the costs of elections. She also said the Brand Board does not currently know if a brand owner is 18, nor who lives in the state.

Opponents moved to defeat the bill, but that motion failed 6-7.

Proponents countered, citing that amendments to fix holes in the bill can still be made. Their motion to bring the bill to the full House of Representatives for a vote passed 7-6.

Electronic ID bill

Hot iron brands are not the only form of identification used in South Dakota's ranching industry.

A resolution from Rep. May would have urged the federal government not to impose mandatory electronic identification requirements — such as microchipped livestock ear tags — on livestock producers. The resolution, which the committee rejected by tabling it on a 7-6 vote, argued that such mandates would be an unnecessary and costly burden for farmers and ranchers.

Some South Dakota ranchers who testified have concerns with hacking and a loss of freedom.

"China makes a lot of these chips," said Belvidere rancher Kenny Fox. "I don't think we should be supporting the Chinese communist party."

Florence Thompson, a lobbyist with a group called Citizens for Liberty, alleged that electronic livestock identification is part of a global plot.

"It's not just to manage the cattle, it's to manage the ranchers," Thompson said. "We can't allow the government to have this kind of control over our lives."

Other testimony from ranchers argued that electronic identification improves disease prevention and animal health tracking.

Operations that have already implemented electronic identification systems for livestock have done so without significant problems, according to Cattlemen's Association President Eric Jennings. He said electronic livestock identification is becoming popular as producers, shippers and packers continue to see the

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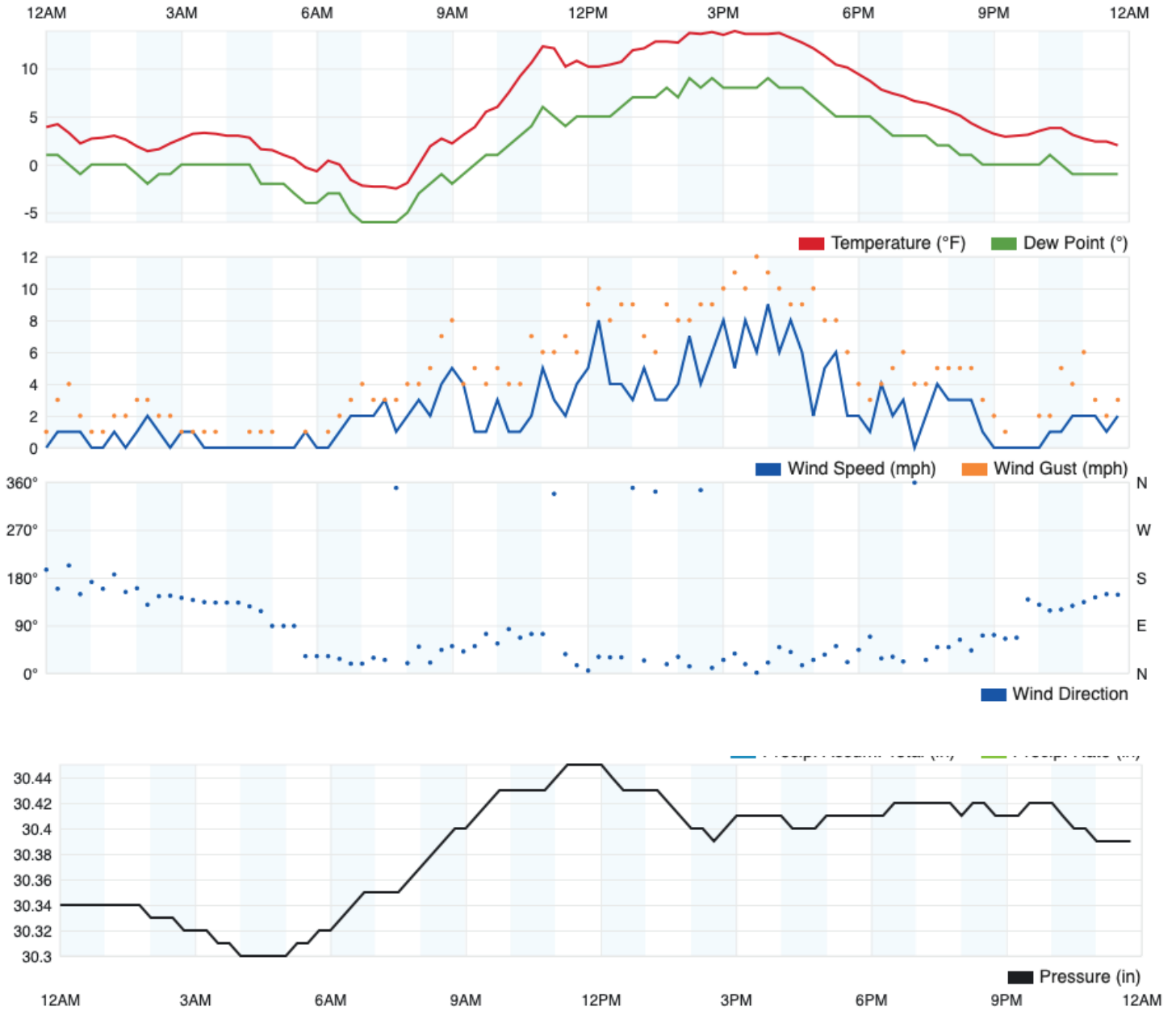
technology improve accuracy, productivity and efficiency.

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.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

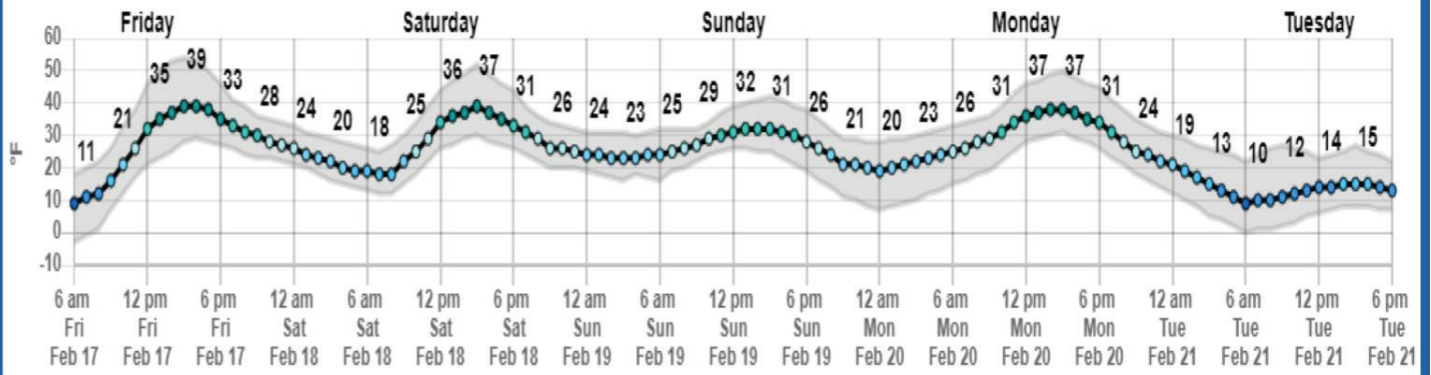


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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Washington's Birthday
Patchy Fog and Breezy then Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Snow	Slight Chance Snow then Partly Sunny and Breezy
High: 35 °F	Low: 11 °F	High: 32 °F	Low: 17 °F	High: 29 °F	Low: 13 °F	High: 35 °F

Regional Temperature Forecast



Warming Trend Through The Weekend...Then Colder, Snowy By Midweek
High Temps →

Friday



30 to 58°

Sat



30 to 54°

Sun



27 to 42°

Mon



31 to 50°

Tue



11 to 29°

www.weather.gov/abr

A warming trend will begin today and last through the upcoming weekend into early next week. Above normal temperatures can be expected. Gusty southwest winds will be fairly strong through the afternoon across the Sisseton Hills region which could lead to some blowing snow. Otherwise, conditions remain dry into early next week. Then, the weather pattern looks to turn more active with colder, snowy conditions moving in by midweek.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 14 °F at 2:47 PM

Low Temp: -2 °F at 7:43 AM

Wind: 12 mph at 3:36 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 34 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 58 in 1981

Record Low: -39 in 1936

Average High: 29

Average Low: 7

Average Precip in Feb.: 0.35

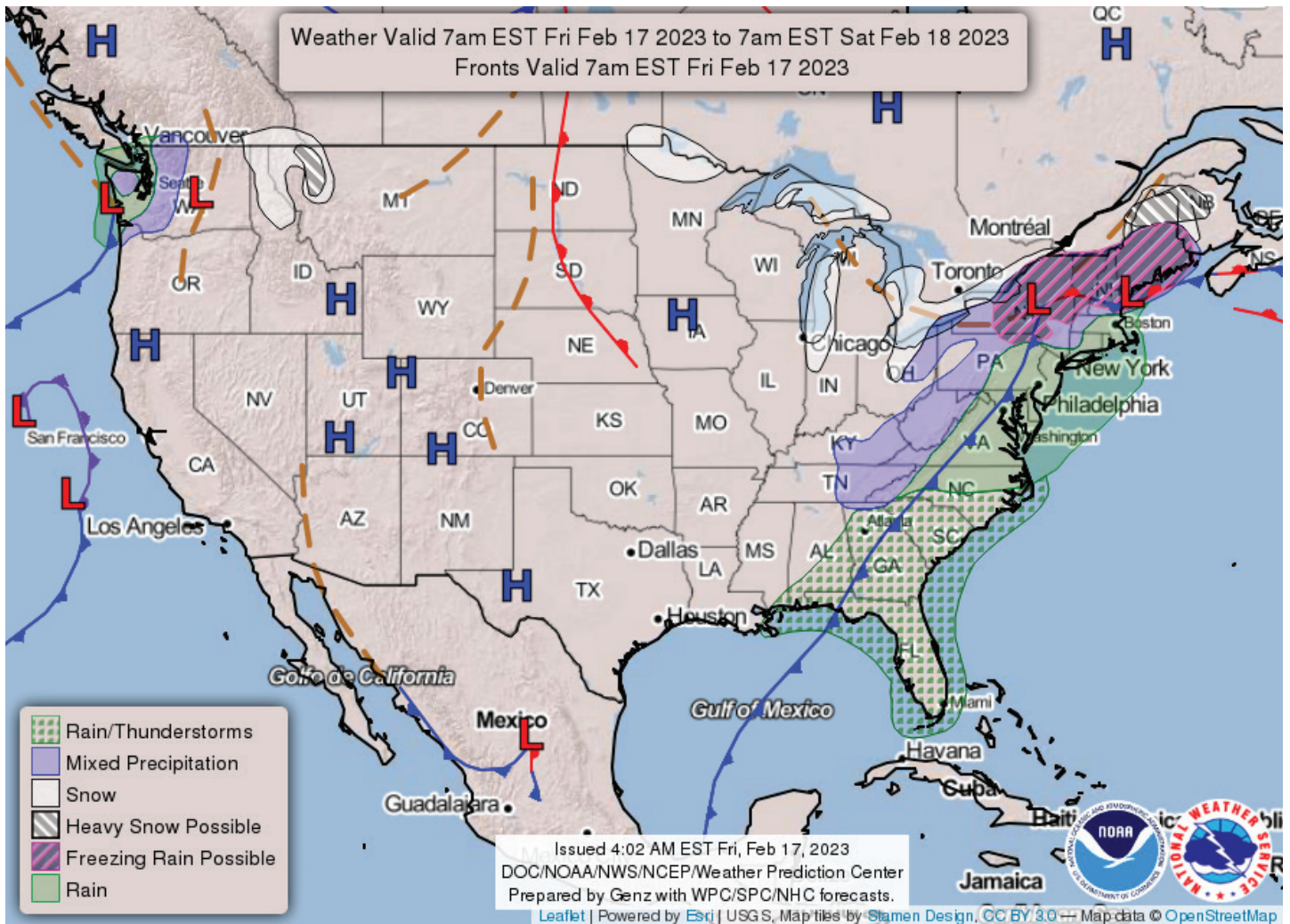
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.90

Precip Year to Date: 0.25

Sunset Tonight: 6:03:34 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:27:33 AM



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Today in Weather History

February 17th, 1962: Very heavy snow of 20 to 30 inches fell across the southeastern half of South Dakota. One location had 44 inches of snowfall from the storm. Everything was shut down due to the storm, including roads, schools, and businesses. Some snowfall amounts included 10 inches at Bryant, 11 inches at Miller, 20 inches at Mitchell, 21 inches at Redfield, 23 inches at Huron, and 32 inches at Sioux Falls.

February 17th, 1972: In Minnesota, high winds of 30 to 50 mph across southern and central Minnesota reduced visibilities to zero at times from blowing snow. Wind gusts of 90 mph were reported at Worthington and Fairmont. Snow of 2 to 6 inches fell across the state. The blizzard stopped almost all traffic from west-central through the south-central part of the state. Most schools in the area were closed. Dozens to hundreds of people were stranded in nearly every town. Many communities stopped all traffic from leaving town. The snow derailed a train at Butterfield. In South Dakota, freezing rain followed by snow accompanied by winds of over 60 mph produced hazardous driving conditions in the area. Traffic was brought to a standstill in many areas resulting in cancellations of school and other activities. Some accidents occurred due to the icy roads. Although the snowfall was light, strong winds caused drifting with visibilities to near zero at times.

February 17th, 1991: On February 17th, a significant snowstorm dumped massive amounts of snow on most of the state from the Black Hills, southwest, central, east-central, and the northeast. At the storm's end, parts of the black hills received up to 2 feet of snow while the rest of the affected area had between 8 and 15 inches. The heavy snow caused most of Interstate 90 west of the Missouri River to close and many other highways in the central part of the state. In addition, many cars and trucks skidded off the roads, causing many minor injuries. The only serious injury was a man rolled his vehicle over after losing control near Belvidere.

1894: According to Grazulis, an estimated F2 tornado hits 5 miles south of Warren, Arkansas. An older woman was killed in one of the small homes that were destroyed. In addition, fruit trees were ripped out and carried a half-mile. Another tornado, estimated F3, killed two people in Claiborne County, Louisiana.

1926: A deadly avalanche, Utah's worst, demolishes 14 miner's cottages and a three-story boarding house in Bingham Canyon. Thirty-six were killed and 13 injured.

1930 - Eureka, CA, reported an all-time record high of 85 degrees, a record which lasted until September of 1983. (The Weather Channel)

1936 - The temperature at McIntosh SD plunged to 58 degrees below zero to establish a state record. (David Ludlum)

1958 - The greatest snowstorm of the mid 20th century struck the northeastern U.S. The storm produced 30 inches of snow in interior New England, including more than 19 inches in 24 hours at the Boston Airport. The same storm produced up to three feet of snow in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region, with 14 inches at Washington D.C., and 15.5 inches at Baltimore MD. The storm resulted in 43 deaths and 500 million dollars damage over the Middle Atlantic Coast States. (David Ludlum)

1973: Snow showers moved across southeast Texas, with most locations only reporting snow flurries. However, the Houston Intercontinental Airport measured 1.4 inches of snow.

1987 - A couple of winter storms, one off the Atlantic coast and another over the south central U.S., produced snow and ice from the Mississippi Valley to the Mid Atlantic Coast Region. Freezing rain produced a coat of ice three inches thick in northern South Carolina, and 30,000 homes around Pee Dee were left without electricity. Parts of south central Kentucky were without electricity for three days following the storm, which was their worst in 35 years. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Santa Ana winds in southern California gusted to 63 mph at Ontario. Heavy snow blanketed parts of Colorado, with 11 inches reported at Strontia. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Low pressure off the Washington coast produced more than a foot of snow in the Cascade Mountains, and more than three inches of rain along the Northern Pacific Coast. Spokane WA was blanketed with 13 inches of snow. Cold arctic air in the Upper Midwest produced all-time record high barometric pressure readings of 31.10 inches at Duluth MN, 31.09 inches at Minneapolis MN, and 31.21 inches at Bismarck ND. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

REWARDED BECAUSE

"Give and it will be given unto you," said Jesus. But it does not end there. He continued His promise by adding, "A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

As we come to the close of our "Seeds of Wisdom," there can be no more fitting words for us to consider than the words in the last verse of Proverbs: "Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate." God does indeed reward those who are faithful to His Word, who follow His instructions and minister to the needs of their family.

This "wife of noble character" did many "good things." As a result of her godly living and disciplined life, she is to be recognized and rewarded by being "praised at the city gate." The city gate is where the husband had been recognized for his wife of "noble character." But, now the recognition is focused on her for a life of selfless-service, family-focus, and faithfulness.

It's her turn to be praised. Imagine a husband leading a chorus of praise at the city gate? "Let's give a shout for my wife of 'noble character!' Give her the recognition she deserves!"

This is no ordinary woman: she is a "gracious woman who attained honor." What a model wife and mother! What a tribute to a life well lived! What an example for all women!

Boaz once said to Ruth: "And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsman know you are a woman of noble character."

Prayer: God, bless all mothers everywhere who seek to honor You, their husbands and children as women of "noble character." May we honor them for honoring You! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate. Proverbs 31:31



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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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.14.23

23 24 35 40 43 1

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$84,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 56 Mins 36
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.15.23

3 11 32 37 43 1

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$36,330,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 56
DRAW: Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.16.23

6 11 40 42 45 10

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 26 Mins 35
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.15.23

5 9 11 22 26

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$55,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 56
DRAW: Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.15.23

25 30 44 52 66 22

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 55
DRAW: Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.15.23

31 32 54 60 63 12

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$73,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 55
DRAW: Mins 35 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Christian 72, Langford 32

Canistota 52, Irene-Wakonda 39

Crazy Horse 88, Bennett County 25

Dakota Valley 85, Canton 49

Deubrook 58, Elkton-Lake Benton 48

Deuel 65, Aberdeen Roncalli 48

Douglas 75, Spearfish 68

Faulkton 62, Sully Buttes 56, OT

Flandreau Indian 71, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 58

Florence/Henry 51, Sisseton 38

Freeman Academy/Marion 60, Menno 35

Great Plains Lutheran 67, Waverly-South Shore 47

Hamlin 56, Clark/Willow Lake 42

Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 45, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 42

Kimball/White Lake 75, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 55

Marty Indian 85, Centerville 41

Miller 66, Chamberlain 59

Mitchell 62, Pierre 55

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 63, Parkston 58

Philip 76, Wall 58

Potter County 67, Ipswich 59

Rapid City Christian 77, Hill City 51

Scotland 54, Gayville-Volin 44

Sioux Valley 77, Garretson 18

Viborg-Hurley 59, Howard 39

Wagner 68, Burke 38

Wessington Springs 65, Mitchell Christian 35

Wolsey-Wessington 69, Hitchcock-Tulare 43

Yankton 77, Tea Area 68

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Christian 49, Langford 22

Aberdeen Roncalli 55, Deuel 30

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 51, Kimball/White Lake 48

Belle Fourche 41, New Underwood 24

Brandon Valley 46, Harrisburg 42

Bridgewater-Emery 51, Mitchell Christian 38

Castlewood 51, Estelline/Hendricks 27

Centerville 64, Dell Rapids St. Mary 61

Custer 57, Lead-Deadwood 17

Deubrook 58, Elkton-Lake Benton 48

Dupree 57, Newell 38

Freeman Academy/Marion 41, Menno 21

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Garretson 45, Sioux Valley 43
Great Plains Lutheran 63, Waverly-South Shore 23
Gregory 61, Burke 42
Hamlin 65, Clark/Willow Lake 30
Hanson 68, Chamberlain 31
Harding County 68, Hulett, Wyo. 34
Herreid/Selby Area 64, Northwestern 47
Irene-Wakonda 62, Canistota 57, OT
Jones County 59, Lyman 40
Kadoka Area 58, Bennett County 28
Lakota Tech 67, White River 52
Lemmon 70, McIntosh 22
Leola/Frederick 60, North Central Co-Op 58
Little Wound 60, St. Francis Indian 49
McCook Central/Montrose 70, Madison 52
Milbank 49, Webster 38
Miller 50, Highmore-Harrold 22
Mobridge-Pollock 60, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 20
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 54, Parkston 36
Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 70, Flandreau Indian 29
Potter County 44, Ipswich 34
Rapid City Central 56, Rapid City Stevens 50
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 59, Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 38
Scotland 48, Gayville-Volin 31
Sioux Falls Lincoln 52, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 38
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 47, Sioux Falls Jefferson 43
Sisseton 52, Florence/Henry 42
Spearfish 57, Douglas 25
Sully Buttes 39, Faulkton 31
Tea Area 62, Yankton 30
Viborg-Hurley 50, Howard 33
Watertown 56, Huron 48
Wolsey-Wessington 65, Hitchcock-Tulare 44

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

Fidler has 27 in Omaha's 80-72 win over South Dakota

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Frankie Fidler had 27 points in Omaha's 80-72 win over South Dakota on Thursday night.

Fidler also had 10 rebounds for the Mavericks (8-20, 4-12 Summit League). Ja'Sean Glover scored 11 points while shooting 4 of 7 from the field and 3 for 3 from the line, and added five rebounds. JJ White shot 2 for 5 (1 for 3 from 3-point range) and 6 of 6 from the free throw line to finish with 11 points. The victory snapped a nine-game slide for the Mavericks.

The Coyotes (11-16, 6-9) were led in scoring by Kruz Perrott-Hunt, who finished with 16 points. South Dakota also got 12 points, seven rebounds and five assists from Tasos Kamateros. A.J. Plitzuweit also had 12 points and four assists.

South Dakota State beats Denver 80-75

By The Associated Press undefined

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DENVER (AP) — Zeke Mayo's 27 points helped South Dakota State defeat Denver 80-75 on Thursday night. Mayo shot 8 for 15 (2 for 4 from 3-point range) and 9 of 9 from the free throw line for the Jackrabbits (16-11, 11-4 Summit League). William Kyle III scored 11 points, shooting 5 of 9 from the field and 1 for 3 from the line. Matthew Mors was 4 of 7 shooting and 3 of 3 from the free throw line to finish with 11 points. Justin Mullins led the Pioneers (13-16, 4-12) in scoring, finishing with 17 points. Tevin Smith added 17 points and two steals for Denver. Touko Tainamo also had 13 points and eight rebounds.

NEXT UP

Both teams next play Saturday. South Dakota State visits Omaha and Denver hosts South Dakota.

The South Dakota Youth Soccer Association Extends Partnership with Sports Connect to Grow and Advance the Sport in the State

Stack Sports undefined

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. and PLANO, Texas, Feb. 16, 2023 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) — South Dakota Youth Soccer Association (SDSYA) – the official youth state soccer association of the United States Soccer Federation and US Youth Soccer has announced a multi-year partnership with Sports Connect, powered by Stack Sports, as the Exclusive Technology and Online Registration Provider for the state. This partnership was established to further South Dakota's mission of advancing and improving the game of soccer.

Sports Connect provides technology solutions for the state association, affiliated clubs and leagues, and the participating players, coaches, families, and volunteers. Advanced functionality and existing features aim to help grow participation in the sport by reducing volunteer burnout and making registration easy for players and their families.

Sports Connect's partnership with SDYSA serves to further the governing body's mission of providing quality opportunities for its members. The technology solutions provided through this partnership assist athletes, coaches, families, and volunteers. The Sports Connect initiative consists of leading services powered by Stack Sports connecting every level of the soccer pathway.

"South Dakota Youth Soccer Association was happy to renew our partnership with Sports Connect and we are excited to grow adoption throughout the state," said Polly Dean, Executive Director of SDYSA. "Our goal with this partnership is to equip our staff and volunteers with the best and most supported tools on the market so they can spend less time on administrative work and more time growing the sport in South Dakota."

"Partnerships like this are an integral part of our goal of creating a connected ecosystem in soccer. We are honored to continue our work with South Dakota to make this a reality," said Adam Abney, General Manager of Sports Connect. "SDYSA helps inspire its members to achieve their full athletic potential, and Sports Connect is beyond honored to help be an integral partner in this mission. We are proud to serve alongside their mission through innovative technology and best-in-class support."

Affiliated clubs partnering with Sports Connect have access to a full suite of features, including Mobile-First Registration, seamless data integration with SDYSA, safety and compliance tracking, professional website designs, business insights, fanwear, and much more.

To learn more about this partnership, visit <https://sportsconnect.com/south-dakota-soccer/>.

Fetterman draws praise for getting help for depression

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Patrick Kennedy was in Congress, he would sneak in his treatments for substance abuse over the holidays, in between congressional work periods. And he refused mental health treatment recommended by his doctors, worried he would be recognized in that wing of the hospital.

Kennedy, a Rhode Island Democrat and the son of the late Edward Kennedy, was eventually forced to reveal his struggles when he crashed his car outside the Capitol while intoxicated in May 2006. He talked openly about his mental health and substance abuse for the first time, and something surprising hap-

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pened — he became more popular with his constituency, winning reelection by a bigger margin than he had two years earlier.

On Thursday, the office of Pennsylvania Sen. John Fetterman, a Democrat who was elected to the Senate after a bruising campaign during which he suffered a stroke, announced he had checked himself into the hospital for clinical depression. The statement said Fetterman had experienced depression on and off in his life, but it had only become severe in recent weeks.

Fetterman's public struggle is extraordinary in a building where few talk about their own mental health, even while members of both parties have legislation to expand aid for it. Kennedy and a handful of others who have been open about their own problems, or those in their family, say they hope Fetterman's honesty — and his decisive action to get help — will foster more openness among lawmakers and their constituents in the wake of a global pandemic that has had far-reaching effects.

"This is a moment for us to tear down the stigma of depression and anxiety," said Kennedy, who retired in 2010 and has become a leading voice on mental illness. "Sen. Fetterman may do more for people just by admitting that he's getting help for depression than any bill he ends up sponsoring."

The U.S. Surgeon General, Vivek Murphy, tweeted praise for Fetterman, saying he hopes his "courage will serve as an example for others."

Fetterman's Senate colleagues were immediately supportive.

"In every single city and town and rural community there is someone struggling with mental health," said Minnesota Sen. Tina Smith, a Democrat who shared her own stories about periods of depression on the Senate floor four years ago. "If they see somebody else, like John, saying, 'OK, I need to get medical care,' that can be important to people."

South Dakota's John Thune, the Senate's No. 2 Republican, said he thinks politicians have become more comfortable discussing the issue since the pandemic.

"The more open, transparent people can be, the better our understanding is," Thune said.

Fetterman's hospitalization comes after a rough year in which the 53 year-old suffered a stroke just ahead of the May primary election and spent much of the summer off the campaign trail, recovering. He has said the stroke nearly killed him. He also underwent surgery to implant a pacemaker with a defibrillator to manage two heart conditions, atrial fibrillation and cardiomyopathy. He entered the Senate in January, where he has had to adjust to life in Washington and the daily grind of a federal lawmaker.

"It's unreal what @JohnFetterman has been through in the last year," tweeted Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn. "A stroke, a recovery, a bruising campaign, a transition to the Senate. I'm so proud of him for taking his health seriously. He's going to be a great Senator for a long time, and I'm pulling for him today."

Texas Sen. John Cornyn said the Senate "can be arduous. So I'm sure if somebody is not up to 100% then it's especially tough, so I wish him well."

Post-stroke depression is common, doctors say. And that could be even more difficult when dealing with it publicly, like Fetterman is.

"Having a stroke in and of itself is devastating and having to recover from a stroke in the public eye only adds to the level of stress as one recovers," said Dr. Bruce Ovbiagele, associate dean and professor of neurology at the University of California-San Francisco.

Dr. Eric Lenze, head of the Department of Psychiatry at Washington University in St. Louis, said he thinks it's "interesting and heroic" for a major political figure to acknowledge depression, "instead of saying they're hospitalized for exhaustion or trying to hide it."

While many members are still loath to talk about themselves or their own hardships, some have been more forthcoming about mental illness in recent years. Pennsylvania Rep. Susan Wild declared from the House floor in 2019 that suicide is a "national emergency" and told the story of her partner, who had recently taken his own life. Rep. Ritchie Torres, D-N.Y., who was elected in 2020, has said he dropped out of college and at times thought of suicide after struggling with depression, substance abuse and grief after the loss of a friend. Smith said she found that ever since she told her own story of periods of depression as a college student and young mother, people still come up to her to talk about it.

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Many lawmakers have also been open about their fear and anxiety after the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol insurrection, when many of them ran for their lives, and the months afterward when tensions between the two parties became even worse. Democratic Reps. Dan Kildee of Michigan and Annie Kuster of New Hampshire both talked about dealing with post-traumatic stress during that time.

The Jan. 6 attack was another inflection point amid the global pandemic.

"We're living in a time of extraordinary stress and crisis," said Maryland Rep. Jamie Raskin, who lost his son to suicide just a few days before the insurrection and has since written a book about his experience. "We've come through a plague, we've had tremendous mental and emotional health problems."

Raskin, who was recently diagnosed with cancer, says there may have been a time when political leaders had to pretend that hardships didn't touch their own families, "but I don't think we are living in that time."

Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin, who has been in the Senate for almost three decades, credits returning veterans from the Iraq war and other conflicts "who have convinced us that this is simple medical, mental health care that many people need from time to time. There isn't a single family that isn't touched by it."

Durbin, the No. 2 Senate Democrat, credited Fetterman for being honest. "This is a challenge, unimaginable challenge, that he's faced in life," Durbin said.

Kennedy says that when he returned from his recovery in the mid-2000s, many of his colleagues sought his help and advice privately. And he has continued to talk to some members in the decade since he retired.

He predicted Fetterman could find a "whole new world of connection with his constituency" when he returns to the Senate, and could help people understand the brain science behind depression.

"This is a very teachable moment here," Kennedy said.

TikTok plans 2 more European data centers amid privacy fears

LONDON (AP) — TikTok said Friday that it's planning two more European data centers, as the popular Chinese-owned video sharing app seeks to allay growing concerns about data privacy for its users in the West.

TikTok has been under fire from European and American authorities over concerns that it could scoop up masses of user data and send it to China.

The company's general manager for European operations, Rich Waterworth, said in a blog post that it is "at an advanced stage of finalizing a plan" with a third-party provider for a second data center in Ireland. It announced its first center there last year.

TikTok also is in talks to set up a third European data center, without specifying a location.

"Regarding local data storage, in line with the growth of our community, we're looking to expand our European data storage capacity," Waterworth said.

Data for European TikTok users will be migrated to the new centers starting this year, Waterworth said.

TikTok is wildly popular with young people, but its Chinese ownership has raised fears that Beijing could use it to collect data on Western users or push pro-China narratives and misinformation. TikTok is owned by ByteDance, a Chinese company that moved its headquarters to Singapore in 2020.

A top European Union official warned CEO Shou Zi Chew last month that the company would have to comply with the 27-nation bloc's sweeping new digital rules.

The Digital Services Act mandates that online platforms and tech companies with 45 million or more users take extra steps aimed at cleaning up illegal content and disinformation or face potentially billions in fines.

TikTok reported Friday that it had 125 million monthly active users in the EU, putting it over the threshold for extra scrutiny under the new rules set to take effect later this year.

Including non-EU countries such as Britain and Switzerland, TikTok has 150 million users.

Google, Twitter, Apple and Facebook and Instagram will also face the stricter EU scrutiny, according to monthly user numbers they released in time for a Friday deadline.

Facebook has 255 million monthly active users, while Instagram has 250 million users, parent company Meta said. Twitter said it has 100.9 million users, including both registered users and those who didn't sign in.

Apple said its iOS App Store had more than 45 million users but didn't give a specific number. Google said its Search service has 332 million signed-in users, while YouTube has 401.7 million signed-in users.

US prosecutors ask for 25 more years in prison for R. Kelly

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — Federal prosecutors Thursday asked a judge to give singer R. Kelly 25 more years in prison for his child pornography and enticement convictions last year in Chicago, which would add to 30 years he recently began serving in a New York case.

The 56-year-old wouldn't be eligible for release until he was around 100 if the judge agrees both to the 25-year sentence and another government request that Kelly begin serving his Chicago sentence only after the 30-year New York sentence is fully served.

In their sentencing recommendation filed late Thursday in U.S. District Court in Chicago, prosecutors described Kelly's behavior as "sadistic," calling him "a serial sexual predator" with no remorse and who "poses a serious danger to society."

"The only way to ensure Kelly does not reoffend is to impose a sentence that will keep him in prison for the rest of his life," the 37-page government filing says.

Kelly's sentencing in Chicago is set for Thursday next week.

Kelly's lawyer, Jennifer Bonjean, wrote in a filing last week that even with his existing 30-year New York sentence, "Kelly would have to defy all statistical odds to make it out of prison alive." She cited data that the average life expectancy of inmates is 64.

She recommended a sentence of around 10 years, at the low end of the sentencing guidelines range, which she said could be served simultaneously with the New York sentence.

In arguing for the lesser sentence, Bonjean alleged Kelly, who is Black, was singled out for behavior that she said white rock stars have gotten away with for decades.

"None have been prosecuted and none will die in prison," she wrote.

Prosecutors acknowledged that a 25-year sentence in the Chicago case would be more time than even sentencing guidelines recommend. But they argued imposing a long sentence and instructing it be served only after the New York sentence was appropriate.

"A consecutive sentence is eminently reasonable given the egregiousness of Kelly's conduct," the filing argued. "Kelly's sexual abuse of minors was intentional and prolific."

At the trial in Chicago last year, jurors convicted the Grammy Award winning singer on six of 13 counts. But the government lost the marquee count that Kelly and his then-business manager successfully rigged his state child pornography trial in 2008.

Both of Kelly's co-defendants, including longtime business manager Derrel McDavid, were acquitted of all charges.

Kelly, born Robert Sylvester Kelly, rose from poverty in Chicago to superstardom, becoming known for smash hit "I Believe I Can Fly" and sex-infused songs such as "Bump n' Grind."

While the Grammy Award-winner went to trial in 2008, it wasn't until after the airing of Lifetime's 2019 docu-series, "Surviving R. Kelly" — featuring testimonials by his accusers — that criminal investigations were kicked into high-gear, ending with federal and new state charges.

In January, an Illinois judge dismissed state sex-abuse charges prior to a trial on the recommendation of Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx. Foxx said she was comfortable dropping the case because Kelly would spend decades in prison for his federal convictions.

Prosecutors at Kelly's federal trial in Chicago portrayed him as a master manipulator who used his fame and wealth to reel in star-struck fans to sexually abuse, in some cases to video record them, and then discard them.

After deliberating over two days, jurors convicted Kelly of three counts each of producing child pornography and enticement of minors for sex, while acquitting him of obstruction of justice, one count of production of child porn and three counts of receiving child porn.

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The Chicago verdict came months after a federal judge in New York sentenced Kelly to 30 years in prison for racketeering and sex trafficking. Based on that sentence alone, he wouldn't be eligible for release until he is around 80.

Even if granted time off for good behavior, Kelly would be only be eligible for release if he serves 25 years after the New York sentence in the year 2066, the government's Thursday filing said.

It will be up to Judge Harry Leinenweber in Chicago to decide the crucial question of whether Kelly serves whatever sentence he imposes concurrently, simultaneously, with the New York sentence or consecutively.

Kelly's legal team is appealing his New York and Chicago convictions. Prosecutors sometimes press for long sentences for defendants sentenced at earlier trials in a bid to ensure that, if some convictions are later tossed, they will still do some time behind bars.

Bonjean argued that traumas throughout Kelly's life, including abuse as a child and illiteracy throughout adulthood, justified leniency in sentencing the singer.

Kelly "is not an evil monster but a complex (unquestionably troubled) human-being who faced overwhelming challenges in childhood that shaped his adult life," she said.

That the conduct for which he was convicted occurred decades ago should also be factored in, she said.

"While Kelly was not a child in the late 1990s, he also was not the middle-aged man he was at the time of his 2019 indictment," she argued. "Kelly was a damaged man in his late 20s."

She added that Kelly has already paid a heavy price from his legal troubles, including a financial one. She said his worth once approached \$1 billion but that he "is now destitute."

Leaders focus on Ukraine war at Munich Security Conference

By KARL RITTER Associated Press

MUNICH (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy planned to give the opening address Friday at a major annual conference on international security policy, where Russia's invasion of Ukraine was expected to dominate the event after almost a year of war that has produced worldwide repercussions.

About 40 heads of state and government, as well as politicians and security experts from almost 100 countries, including the United States, Europe and China, were expected to attend the three-day Munich Security Conference in Germany. Zelenskyy is participating by video link.

For the first time in two decades, conference organizers did not invite Russian officials. Western countries have sought to isolate Russia diplomatically over the invasion of Ukraine that began on Feb. 24 2022.

German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius said Russia's war in Ukraine would overshadow the proceedings. Western officials and analysts say the conflict is approaching a critical phase as it enters its second year next week.

The war is "not merely a European conflict" but has implications far beyond the continent, Pistorius said. Economies around the world have reeled from the war's impact on grain supplies, energy prices and inflation.

U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris was set to join the leaders of France, Germany and the U.K. at the Munich conference.

At the same conference last year, held just days before Russian President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine, Harris shared U.S. warnings that Russia was about to attack its neighbor and said, "Not since the end of the Cold War has this forum convened under such dire circumstances."

In a speech scheduled for Saturday, the vice president will lay out what's at stake in the war and why it matters, to bolster the case for maintaining U.S. support for Ukraine for as long as it takes, the White House said.

Ukraine is depending on Western weapons to thwart Putin's ambition of securing control of large areas of the country, in what has become a test of governments' resolve amid increasing financial costs.

Zelenskyy portrays Ukraine as defending Western values of freedom and democracy against tyranny and argues that his country needs to be properly provisioned to fend off Russia's much bigger force. Western countries have sided with him, but at times they have been slow to meet his requests.

Kyiv, after receiving Western pledges of tanks and more ammunition, is now hoping for fighter jets, but

some countries have balked at sending them.

Frans Timmermans, the executive vice president of the European Union's executive commission, said the 27-nation EU so far has maintained unity on the issue.

"I think everyone can see how important it is for Ukraine to win this war," Timmermans said. "This is important for our Europe, too, because Putin isn't just attacking Ukraine, he is also attacking us in the sense that he doesn't support our values."

He said it was important to make clear that Europe will support Ukraine however long the war lasts. "Putin is in difficulty," Timmermans said, adding that the Russian leader would seek to put severe military pressure on Ukraine in the coming weeks and months.

Timmermans also expressed hope that China could exert pressure on Russia to end the war.

Trump election probe grand jury believes some witnesses lied

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A special grand jury investigating efforts by then-President Donald Trump and his allies to overturn his 2020 election loss in Georgia says it believes "one or more witnesses" committed perjury and urged local prosecutors to bring charges.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis should "seek appropriate indictments for such crimes where the evidence is compelling," according to portions of the special grand jury's final report that were released on Thursday.

Those sections are silent on key details, including who the panel believes committed perjury and what other specific charges should be pursued. But it marks the first time the grand jurors' recommendations for criminal charges tied to the case have been made public. And it's a reminder of the intensifying legal challenges facing the former president as he ramps up his third White House bid amid multiple legal investigations.

Trump is also under investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice for holding classified documents at his Florida estate.

The former president never testified before the special grand jury, meaning he is not among those who could have perjured themselves. But the report doesn't foreclose the possibility of other charges, and the case still poses particular challenges for Trump, in part because his actions in Georgia were so public.

Trump and his allies made unproven claims of widespread voter fraud and berated Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger and Gov. Brian Kemp for not acting to overturn his narrow loss to President Joe Biden in the state.

Willis has said since the beginning of the investigation two years ago that she was interested in a Jan. 2, 2021, phone call in which Trump suggested to Raffensperger that he could "find" the votes needed to overturn his loss in the state.

"All I want to do is this: I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than we have," Trump said during that call. "Because we won the state."

Trump has said repeatedly that his call with Raffensperger was "perfect," and he told The Associated Press last month that he felt "very confident" that he would not be indicted. In a statement on Thursday, he continued to assert he did "absolutely nothing wrong."

In fact, he claimed on his social media platform, Truth Social, that the release had given him "Total exoneration," though it did no such thing and portions having to do with recommended charges are still secret.

State and federal officials, including Trump's attorney general, have consistently said the election was secure and there was no evidence of significant fraud. After hearing "extensive testimony on the issue," the special grand jury agreed in a unanimous vote that there was no widespread fraud in Georgia's election.

The grand jury, which Willis requested to aid her investigation, was seated in May and submitted its report to Fulton County Superior Court Judge Robert McBurney on Dec. 15. The panel does not have the power to issue indictments. Instead, its report contains recommendations for Willis, who will ultimately decide whether to seek one or more indictments from a regular grand jury.

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Over the course of about seven months, the special grand jurors heard from 75 witnesses, among them Trump allies including former New York mayor and Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani and U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina. Top Georgia officials, such as Raffensperger and Kemp, also appeared before the panel.

Graham told reporters Thursday that he has not been contacted by authorities regarding his testimony. "I'm confident I testified openly and honestly," he said.

The partial release of the grand jury's report was ordered Monday by McBurney, who oversaw the special grand jury. During a hearing last month, prosecutors urged him not to release the report until they decide on charges, while a coalition of media organizations, including the AP, pushed for the entire report to be made public immediately.

McBurney wrote in his Monday order that it's not appropriate to release the full report now because it's important to protect the due process rights of people for whom the grand jury recommended charges.

While there were relatively few details in Thursday's release, it does provide some insight into the panel's process. The report's introduction says an "overwhelming majority" of the information that the grand jury received "was delivered in person under oath." It also noted that no one on the panel was an election law expert or criminal lawyer.

Based on witnesses called to testify before the special grand jury, it is clear that Willis is focusing on several areas. Those include:

- Phone calls by Trump and others to Georgia officials in the wake of the 2020 election.
- A group of 16 Georgia Republicans who signed a certificate in December 2020 falsely stating that Trump had won the state and that they were the state's "duly elected and qualified" electors.
- False allegations of election fraud made during meetings of state legislators at the Georgia Capitol in December 2020.
- The copying of data and software from election equipment in rural Coffee County by a computer forensics team hired by Trump allies.
- Alleged attempts to pressure Fulton County elections worker Ruby Freeman into falsely confessing to election fraud.
- The abrupt resignation of the U.S. attorney in Atlanta in January 2021.

Turkish quake victims sleep in trains, tents, greenhouses

By TANYA TITOVA, EMRAH GUREL and ANDREW WILKS Associated Press

SAMANDAG, Turkey (AP) — Nearly two weeks after a massive earthquake leveled tens of thousands of buildings and displaced millions of people in Turkey and Syria, many are still struggling to fulfill their basic needs and some are bedding down in tents, factories, train cars and greenhouses.

People pushed from their homes in the disaster zone described a wide range of conditions: Some were able to find regular hot showers, while others feared freezing to death.

The Turkish government and dozens of aid groups have launched a massive relief effort. The government said Wednesday that more than 5,400 shipping containers have been deployed as shelters and over 200,000 tents dispatched.

But it's facing a massive disaster. The government says at least 56,000 buildings, containing more than 225,000 homes, were either destroyed by the Feb. 6 quake or too damaged to be used. There is no official figure for the number of people displaced in Turkey's side of the disaster region, which is home to some 14 million, or 16% of the country's population.

In the mountain villages of Kahramanmaraş province, locals battle to keep warm during the bitterly cold nights.

Buyuknacar, a village just a few kilometers (miles) from the epicenter of the 7.8 magnitude quake, was severely damaged and 158 were killed. Two days after the initial tremor, a military helicopter brought supplies and on the fifth day the road was cleared.

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Although the villagers have tents, they are too flimsy to keep out the cold. Villagers said they feared icy conditions in the mountains would lead to further deaths.

Umut Sital, 45, said: "Our basic need is, first, containers. Tents won't work here. ... People in tents will freeze to death."

On Tuesday, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said 2.2 million people had left the disaster zone. Of those, he said, the housing needs of 1.6 million had been fulfilled, including some 890,000 people placed in public facilities, such as student dormitories, and 50,000 in hotels.

The Transport Ministry said Wednesday that the government had helped more than 272,000 to evacuate by air, sea and rail. However, many people prefer to remain close to their homes, either to protect their possessions, wait for relatives' bodies to be recovered or, in rural areas, care for their livestock.

Others seeking protection from winter temperatures have resorted to any structure that will keep out the elements.

Near the Mediterranean coast in Hatay, one of the hardest-hit provinces, farmers in Samandag district fled their damaged homes to large tunnel-style greenhouses used for growing tomatoes, bringing with them whatever bedding and cooking utensils they could salvage.

Locals said that around 2,000 people were now living under the plastic covers. Many had lost not just their homes but also their livestock.

"There's no safe place apart from the greenhouses, because the houses collapsed due to the earthquake," said Ozkan Sagaltici, in his 50s.

The villagers have set up wood stoves inside the greenhouses to cook the food handed out by aid agencies.

"We have no clean clothes," said Suzan Sagaltici, who's staying in a greenhouse on the other side of the village. "We can't clean ourselves as we would like to, we can't take a shower. It's very difficult to live here. There's no sink. We have nothing. It's like living in the open air."

Other displaced people have found relatively stable shelter. Elsewhere in Hatay, the Yuksel family found refuge in a metal factory, where they have been provided with necessities including clothing and household items.

Veysel Yuksel, his wife, Dilek Nur Yuksel, and their three children are living in a trailer at the factory near the port city of Iskenderun. The children play among heavy machinery as their parents prepare food.

"Our house has not been completely destroyed but seriously damaged," said Yuksel. "All the buildings surrounding ours have been ruined."

In the first days after the earthquake, around 1,600 people from the nearby town of Dortyol stayed at the factory, but half later left for other parts of Turkey.

The displaced residents can use a shared bathroom with hot water, a laundry and a small kitchen. They sleep in offices, shipping containers or trailers.

At Iskenderun's rail station, families shelter in train carriages, according to the state-run Andalou Agency.

"Our house has become unusable, we can't get into it," said Nida Karahan, 50, whose family of five was living in a cream- and red-painted carriage. "The wagons have become our home."

As well as providing warm shelter, people said they were being provided with three meals a day by the military.

Qatar is sending shelters used to house soccer fans during last year's World Cup. Many other nations have also sent tents and containers.

In the provincial capital of Kahramanmaras, which has the same name as the province, residents also complained of difficulties finding a place to stay.

"I couldn't find anything like a tent for the first three or four days," said father-of-three Haci Kose. "I went around with my family in my car (but) couldn't find a place to stay wherever I went. They said there are tents here and there (but) they're making it up."

He was eventually allocated a tent by an Azerbaijani aid agency, but said he still has problems getting enough to eat or finding a place to relieve himself.

"I wish we were stuck under the rubble too so we didn't have to live in this situation," Kose added. "The aid isn't coming to the people in the tents."

Saudi wealth fund becomes biggest outside Nintendo investor

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A Saudi sovereign wealth fund now holds 8.26% of the stock in the video game maker Nintendo, making it the largest outside investor in the Japanese gaming company, a company filing said Friday.

The investment comes as part of efforts by the kingdom's Public Investment Fund to diversify Saudi Arabia's economy away from oil, including billions already spent on video game firms. The fund has been a major component in the plans of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, himself said to be an avid gamer.

However, the purchase of Nintendo and other gaming stocks also entangles the video game companies into the politics surrounding Saudi Arabia and its assertive 37-year-old crown prince. American intelligence agencies believe Prince Mohammed ordered the slaying of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018.

Nintendo did not immediately respond to a request for comment regarding Saudi investment.

A filing to Japanese regulators on Friday revealed the Public Investment Fund's holding in Kyoto-based Nintendo. Saudi Arabia has been steadily building its stake over recent months in the company, best known for its Super Mario Brothers franchise and its Nintendo Switch gaming console.

The Saudi fund remains behind Nintendo's own holdings in the gaming company. Nintendo is valued at \$52 billion.

Nintendo stock closed slight down Friday on the Tokyo Stock Exchange at \$40.50 a share.

The Public Investment Fund did not immediately acknowledge increasing its holdings in Nintendo. It runs the Savvy Games Group, which aims to establish 250 gaming companies in Saudi Arabia and create 39,000 jobs. Savvy Games plans to invest some \$38 billion into the gaming industry over the coming years.

Already, the Saudi wealth fund holds stock worth \$2.9 billion in Activision Blizzard, \$1.7 billion in Electronic Arts, \$1.2 billion stake in Take-Two Interactive, according to data from the Nasdaq Stock Market.

The Saudi expansion into gaming, however, has sparked criticism. Riot Games, which makes the popular online multiplayer game League of Legends, cancelled a partnership with Prince Mohammed's planned futuristic city Neom in 2020 after an outcry from gamers.

Brazil's Carnival finally reborn in full form after pandemic

By MAURICIO SAVARESE and DAVID BILLER Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Brazil's Carnival is back.

Glittery and outrageous costumes are once again being prepared. Samba songs will ring out 'til dawn at Rio de Janeiro's sold-out parade grounds. Hundreds of raucous, roaming parties will flood the streets. And working-class communities will be buoyed, emotionally and economically, by the renewed revelry.

The COVID-19 pandemic last year prompted Rio to delay Carnival by two months, and watered down some of the fun, which was attended mostly by locals. This year, Brazil's federal government expects 46 million people to join the festivities that officially begin Friday and run through Feb. 22. That includes visitors to cities that make Carnival a world-famous bash, especially Rio but also Salvador, Recife and metropolitan Sao Paulo, which has recently emerged as a hotspot.

These cities have already begun letting loose with street parties.

"We've waited for so long, we deserve this catharsis," Thiago Varella, a 38-year-old engineer wearing a Hawaiian shirt drenched by the rain, said at a bash in Sao Paulo on Feb. 10.

Most tourists are eager to go to the street parties, known as blocos. Rio has permitted more than 600 of them, and there are more unsanctioned blocos. The biggest blocos lure millions to the streets, including one bloco that plays Beatles songs with a Carnival rhythm for a crowd of hundreds of thousands. Such major blocos were called off last year.

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"We want to see the partying, the colors, the people and ourselves enjoying Carnival," Chilean tourist Sofia Umaña, 28, said near Copacabana beach.

The premier spectacle is at the Sambadrome. Top samba schools, which are based in Rio's more working-class neighborhoods, spend millions on hour-long parades with elaborate floats and costumes, said Jorge Perlingeiro, president of Rio's league of samba schools.

"What's good and beautiful costs a lot; Carnival materials are expensive," Perlingeiro said in an interview in his office beside the samba schools' warehouses. "It's such an important party ... It's a party of culture, happiness, entertainment, leisure and, primarily, its commercial and social side."

He added that this year's Carnival will smash records at the Sambadrome, where some 100,000 staff and spectators are expected each day in the sold-out venue, plus 18,000 paraders. While President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva is not expected to be among them, his wife Rosângela da Silva has said she will be at the parade.

The first lady's attendance signals a shift from the administration of former President Jair Bolsonaro, who kept his distance from the nation's marquee cultural event.

Nearly 700,000 Brazilians died in the pandemic, the world's second-highest national total, after the U.S., and many blamed Bolsonaro's response, weakening his bid for reelection that he ultimately lost. Many at this year's street parties are celebrating not just the return of Carnival, but also Bolsonaro's defeat.

That was the case at the Heaven on Earth street party in Rio's bohemian Santa Teresa neighborhood on Feb. 11. Musicians pounded their drums as some revelers climbed fences to watch the scene from above the pulsing throng. Anilson Costa, a stilt-walker, already had a prime view from his elevated perch. Covered in flowers and brightly colored pom-poms, he poured a watering can labeled "LOVE" over people dancing below him.

"Seeing this crowd today is a dream, it's very magical," said Costa. "This is the post-pandemic Carnival, the Carnival of democracy, the Carnival of rebirth."

This year shares some of the spirit of the 1919 edition, which took place right after Spanish influenza killed tens of thousands of Brazilians, but was no longer a significant threat. WWI had just ended, too, and people were eager to unburden themselves, said David Butter, the author of a book about that year's celebration.

"There were so many people in Rio's city center for Carnival that the whole region ran out of water within hours," said Butter.

Carnival's cancelation in 2021 and its lower-key version last year pummeled an industry that is a nearly year-long source of jobs for carpenters, welders, sculptors, electricians, dancers, choreographers and everyone else involved in bringing parades to the public. As such, Carnival's full-fledged return is a shot in the arm for local economies.

"Yesterday, I went to sleep at 3 in the morning. Today, I'll leave earlier, because I've lost my voice," said seamstress Luciene Moreira, 60, as she sewed a yellow costume in samba school Salgueiro's warehouse. "You have to sleep later one day, earlier the next; otherwise, the body can't handle it. But it is very enjoyable!"

Rio expects some 5 billion reais (about \$1 billion) in revenue at its bars, hotels and restaurants, the president of the city's tourism agency, Ronnie Costa, told the AP. Rio's hotels are at 85% capacity, according to Brazil's hotel association, which expects last-minute deals to bring that figure near to its max. Small businesses are benefiting, too.

"Carnival is beautiful, people are buying, thank God all my employees are paid up to date," said Jorge Francisco, who sells sequined and sparkled Carnival accoutrements at his shop in downtown Rio. "For me, this is an immense joy, everyone smiling and wanting. That's how Carnival is."

Facebook ran ads in Moldova for oligarch sanctioned by US

By DAVID KLEPPER and STEPHEN McGRATH Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Facebook allowed an exiled Moldovan oligarch with ties to the Kremlin to run ads

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calling for protests and uprisings against the pro-Western government, even though he and his political party were on U.S. sanctions lists.

The ads featuring politician and convicted fraudster Ilan Shor were ultimately removed by Facebook but not before they were seen millions of times in Moldova, a small nation of about 2.6 million sandwiched between Romania and war-torn Ukraine.

Seeking to exploit anger over inflation and rising fuel prices, the paid posts from Shor's political party targeted the government of pro-Western President Maia Sandu, who earlier this week detailed what she said was a Russian plot to topple her government using external saboteurs.

"Destabilization attempts are a reality and for our institutions, they represent a real challenge," Sandu said Thursday as she swore in a new government led by pro-Western Prime Minister Dorin Recean, her former defense and security adviser. "We need decisive steps to strengthen the security of the country."

The ads reveal how Russia and its allies have exploited lapses by social media platforms — like Facebook, many of them operated by U.S. companies — to spread propaganda and disinformation that weaponizes economic and social insecurity in an attempt to undermine governments in Eastern Europe.

Shor's ads have helped fuel angry protests against the government and appear to be aimed at destabilizing Moldova and returning it to Russia's sphere of influence, according to Dorin Frasineau, a foreign policy adviser to former Moldovan Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilita, whose resignation led to the formation of the new government on Thursday.

"Even though he is on the U.S. sanctions list, I still see sponsored ads on Facebook," Frasineau said, saying he had spotted what he believes were fake accounts sharing the posts this week. He said the Moldovan government sought answers from Facebook to no avail. "We have talked with Facebook, but it is very hard because there is no specific person, no contact."

Rules governing the sanctions list prohibit U.S. companies from engaging in financial transactions with listed individuals and groups. The U.S. Treasury Department, which manages the sanctions program, declined to comment publicly when asked about the ads.

In a statement to The Associated Press, Meta, the company that owns Facebook and Instagram, said it removed the posts as soon as it found them.

"When Ilan Shor and the Shor Party were added to the U.S. sanctions list, we took action on their known accounts," a company spokesperson said. "When we identified new associated accounts, we took action on those, as well. We adhere to U.S. sanctions laws and will continue working to detect and enforce against fake accounts and pages that violate our policies."

Meta, which recently announced deep layoffs, did not respond to questions about the size of its staff in Moldova, or the number of employees who speak Moldova's languages. Like many big tech firms based in the U.S., Meta has sometimes struggled to moderate content in languages other than English.

The ads were identified by researchers at Reset, a London-based nonprofit that researches social media's impact on democracy, who shared their findings with The Associated Press. Felix Kartte, a senior adviser at Reset, said Meta's response to disinformation and propaganda in Moldova could have sweeping implications for European security.

"Their platforms continue to be weaponized by the Kremlin and Russian secret services, and because of the company's inaction, the U.S. and Europe risk losing a key ally in the region," said Kartte, who is based in Berlin.

Nine different paid posts from the Shor Party ran on Facebook after the U.S. imposed sanctions. Most were removed within a week after the sanctions announcement, though Shor bought another paid post in January, two months after he was sanctioned. All were clearly identifiable by Shor's name.

The posts can be found on Facebook's online advertisement library, which contains a searchable catalogue.

The library confirms the ads placed by Shor and his party were seen millions of times before they were ultimately removed.

The most recent ad, taken down a month ago, was pulled because it failed to include a disclaimer about the ad's sponsor, according to a notation attached to one of the videos in the library. The library does not

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mention the sanctions.

The ads weren't money makers for Meta, generating only about \$15,000 in revenue, a pittance for a company that earned \$4.65 billion in the last quarter.

Nonetheless, they were effective. One ad, which ran on Facebook for just two days — October 29-30 — was seen more than a million times in Moldova. In the post, which cost Shor's party less than \$100 to upload, the oligarch accuses Sandu's government of corruption and kleptocracy.

"You and I will have to pull them out of their offices by the ears and throw them out of our country like evil spirits," Shor tells the audience.

Shor, 35, is an Israeli-born Moldovan oligarch who leads the populist, Russia-friendly Shor Party. Currently living in exile in Israel, Shor is implicated in a \$1 billion theft from Moldovan banks in 2014; is accused of bribery to secure his position as chair of a Moldovan bank, and was named in October on a U.S. Treasury Department sanctions list as working for Russian interests.

The U.S. says Shor worked with "corrupt oligarchs and Moscow-based entities to create political unrest in Moldova" and to undermine the country's bid to join the EU. The sanctions list also names the Shor Party and Shor's wife, a Russian pop star. The U.K. also added Shor to a sanctions list last December.

Last fall, Moldova was rocked by a series of anti-government protests initiated by the Shor Party, which saw thousands take to the streets in the capital, Chisinau, at a time of skyrocketing inflation and an acute energy crisis after Russia reduced gas supplies to Moldova.

Many of the protesters called for early elections and demanded Sandu's resignation.

Around the same time, Moldova's government filed a request to the country's Constitutional Court to declare the Shor Party illegal, a case that is ongoing. Moldova's anti-corruption prosecutors' office also opened an investigation into the financing of the protests, which prosecutors said involved at least some Russian money.

On Monday, Sandu went public with what she claimed was a plot by Moscow to overthrow the government using external saboteurs, to put the nation "at the disposal of Russia" and to derail it off its course to one day join the EU.

Sandu said the purported Russian plot envisioned attacks on government buildings, hostage-takings and other violent actions by groups of saboteurs. Russia has since strongly denied those claims.

Once part of the Soviet Union, Moldova declared its independence in 1991. In recent years, the country has lurched from one political crisis to another, often caught in limbo between pro-Russian and pro-Western sentiments.

But in 2021, after decades of largely oligarchic power structures and various Russia-friendly leaders, Moldovans elected a pro-Western, pro-European government, which put it on a more distinctly Western-oriented path. In June, Moldova was granted EU candidate status, the same day as Ukraine.

Ukrainian refugees safe, but not at peace, after year of war

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Months after Russian forces occupied the region of Kherson in eastern Ukraine last year, they started paying visits to the home of a Ukrainian woman and her Russian husband. They smashed their refrigerator and demanded possession of their car. One day, they seized the wife and her teenage daughter, put pillowcases over their heads and led them away.

The woman was locked up for days, her legs beaten with a hammer. The men accused her of revealing Russian soldiers' locations. They subjected her to electric shocks and bore down on her feet with the heels of their military boots until two of her toes broke. She heard screams nearby and feared they came from her daughter.

More than once, with a bag on her head and her hands tied, a weapon was pointed at her head. She'd feel the muzzle at her temple, and a man started counting.

One. Two. Two and a half.

Then, a shot fired to the floor.

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"Although at that moment, it seemed to me that it would be better in my head," she told The Associated Press, recounting the torture that lasted five days, counted by the sliver of sunlight from a tiny window in the room. "The only thing that kept me strong was the awareness that my child was somewhere around."

The Russian officials eventually released the woman and her daughter, she said, and she made her way home. She took a long shower and packed a bag, and the two fled the occupied area — first to Russian-occupied Crimea, then mainland Russia where they crossed by land into Latvia and finally Poland.

Her body was still bruised, and she could barely walk. But in December in Warsaw, she reunited with a son. And she and her daughter joined the refugees who have fled their homes since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Nearly a year has passed since the Feb. 24, 2022, invasion sent millions fleeing across Ukraine's border into neighboring Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Moldova and Romania. Crowds of terrified, exhausted people boarded trains and waited for days at border crossings.

Across Europe, about 8 million refugees have been recorded, according to U.N. estimates based on data from national governments, and nearly 5 million of those have applied for temporary protection. Experts say those numbers are fluid — some people apply in more than one country — but they agree it's the largest movement of refugees in Europe since World War II. Unlike refugees from recent conflicts in the Middle East and Africa, the Ukrainians were largely met with an outpouring of sympathy and help.

Yet while the Ukrainian refugees have found safety, they have not found peace.

They suffer from trauma and loss — uprooted from their lives, separated from relatives, fearing for loved ones stuck in Russian-occupied areas or fighting on the frontline. Children are separated from fathers, grandparents, pets. Others have no family or homes to return to.

The woman from Kherson spoke to AP this month at a Warsaw counseling center run in sponsorship with UNICEF. She insisted on anonymity; she fears for the safety of her husband and other relatives in Russian-occupied areas.

She doesn't like to talk about herself. But she has a goal: For the world to see what Russian troops are doing.

"Even now, I am afraid," she said, wiping her eyes with her pastel-color nails and fiddling over a tissue. "Do you understand?"

She is among the refugees seeking trauma treatment, most often from Ukrainian psychologists who themselves fled home and struggle with their own grief and loss. No agency has definitive numbers on refugees in treatment, but experts say the psychological toll of the conflict is vast, with rates of anxiety and depression skyrocketing.

At the Warsaw center, psychologists describe treating crying children, teenagers separated from everything they know, mothers unknowingly transferring trauma to their kids.

One patient, a boy from Mariupol, was used as a human shield. His hair has already begun to turn gray. The home of the counselor who treats him was destroyed by a Russian bomb.

Refugee mental health is a priority for aid organizations large and small, even as they work to meet needs for housing, work and education.

Anastasiia Gudkova, a Ukrainian providing psychological support to refugees at a Norwegian Refugee Council reception center in Warsaw, said the most traumatized people she meets come from Mariupol, Kherson and other occupied territories. Those who flee bombing in Kyiv, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia also arrive terrified.

But there's pain for those even from relatively safer areas in western Ukraine, she said: "All Ukrainians, regardless of their location, are under a lot of stress."

According to the U.N. refugee agency, 90% of the Ukrainians who have sought refuge abroad are women, children and the elderly.

The psychologists see women struggle to put on a brave face for children, trying to survive in countries where they often don't speak the language. Many women with higher education have taken jobs cleaning other people's homes or working in restaurant kitchens.

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The luckiest ones are able to keep doing their old jobs remotely from exile or are beginning to envision new lives.

Last January, Anastasia Lasna was planning to open her own bakery in Mykolaiv after finding success with providing other businesses with her vegan foods and healthy desserts. Today she is running a food pantry of the Jewish Community Center in Krakow, which has helped some 200,000 Ukrainian refugees, and integrating herself into the southern Polish city's growing Jewish community.

She has Israeli citizenship, but doesn't want to live in another conflict-scarred land. Joined now in Krakow by her husband and her 6-year-old daughter, she cannot imagine returning to her former home.

"There is no future there," she said.

But many refugees still dream of returning home. Their belief that Ukraine will eventually prevail helps them cope.

Last Feb. 23, Maryna Ptashnyk was in the Carpathian mountains celebrating her 31st birthday with her husband and daughter. For months, Russian forces had surrounded her country; waves of anxiety came as she pondered whether there would be "a big war." So she switched off her phone for her special day.

It was the last night of peace for Ukraine, the last night of normality for Ptashnyk. The next morning, her husband, Yevhen, woke her and told her Kyiv was being bombed.

Now Yevhen is in the Ukrainian army, serving in an artillery unit near Soledar in eastern Ukraine, an area of brutal fighting. Ptashnyk lives alone with their 3-year-old daughter, Polina, in a small suburban Warsaw apartment.

Though Polina is settling well into a Polish preschool, her mother sees the stress.

"For the last year she often asks me about death, about when we will die," she said.

Polina sees other children out with their fathers, but she's seen hers only three times since the war began. On a recent visit home, she embraced him. "Daddy's mine," she said.

For the woman from Kherson, trying to face the trauma from her torture is just one challenge. She also must find work to afford an apartment in Warsaw, which is now home to more Ukrainian refugees than any other city.

The influx of people has exacerbated a housing shortage and caused rental prices to surge amid high inflation — an issue in many countries welcoming refugees.

The mother finds herself struggling to create a home, a sense of normalcy. The physical pain and scars haunt her, but some days the lack of moral support hurts the most.

Her husband's family in Russia supports the invasion. Worst of all, he and other loved ones remain trapped in the Russian-occupied territory.

"I am safe now, but it is very dangerous there," she said. "And I can't know if they will survive."

Thousands of flights canceled as German airport staff strike

BERLIN (AP) — Thousands of flights to and from German airports were canceled Friday as workers walked out to press their demands for inflation-busting pay increases.

The strikes at seven German airports, including Frankfurt, Munich and Hamburg, affected almost 300,000 passengers and forced airlines to cancel more than 2,300 flights.

Christine Behle of the Verdi labor union told public broadcaster RBB-Inforadio that failure to reach a meaningful deal with employers on pay could result in a "summer of chaos" at German airports.

The union is seeking a 10.5% increase for its members, or at least 500 euros, to make up for high inflation seen in Germany and elsewhere last year due to the knock-on effects Russia's attack on Ukraine has had on global food and energy prices.

Verdi chairman Frank Werneke told weekly Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung that the willingness among its members to stage strikes was big and future walkouts could reach "another dimension."

He noted that recent strikes at airports, public transport and childcare facilities could be extended to garbage removal services and hospitals.

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Key moments in a year of war after Russia invaded Ukraine

By The Associated Press undefined

The war in Ukraine that began a year ago has killed thousands, forced millions to flee their homes, reduced entire cities to rubble and has fueled fears the confrontation could slide into an open conflict between Russia and NATO.

A look at some of the main events in the conflict.

2022

FEBRUARY

On Feb. 24, Russian President Vladimir Putin launches an invasion of Ukraine from the north, east and south. He says the "special military operation" is aimed at "demilitarization" and "denazification" of the country to protect ethnic Russians, prevent Kyiv's NATO membership and to keep it in Russia's "sphere of influence." Ukraine and the West say it's an illegal act of aggression against a country with a democratically elected government and a Jewish president whose relatives were killed in the Holocaust.

Russian troops quickly reach Kyiv's outskirts, but their attempts to capture the capital and other cities in the northeast meet stiff resistance. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy records a video outside his headquarters to show he is staying and remains in charge.

MARCH

On March 2, Russia claims control of the southern city of Kherson. In the opening days of March, Russian forces also seize the rest of the Kherson region and occupy a large part of the neighboring Zaporizhzhia region, including the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, Europe's largest.

The Russian army soon gets stuck near Kyiv, and its convoys — stretching along highways leading to the Ukrainian capital — become easy prey for Ukrainian artillery and drones.

Moscow announces the withdrawal of forces from Kyiv and other areas March 29, saying it will focus on the eastern industrial heartland of the Donbas, where Russia-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian forces since 2014 following the illegal annexation of Crimea.

APRIL

The Russian pullback from Kyiv reveals hundreds of bodies of civilians in mass graves or left in the streets of the town of Bucha, many of them bearing signs of torture in scenes that prompt world leaders to say Russia should be held accountable for possible war crimes.

On April 9, a Russian missile strike on a train station in the eastern city of Kramatorsk kills 52 civilians and wounds over 100.

Intense battles rage for the strategic port of Mariupol on the Sea of Azov, and Russian air strikes and artillery bombardment reduce much of it to ruins.

On April 13, the missile cruiser Moskva, the flagship of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, is hit by Ukrainian missiles and sinks the next day, damaging national pride.

MAY

On May 16, Ukrainian defenders of the giant Azovstal steel mill, the last remaining Ukrainian stronghold in Mariupol, agree to surrender to Russian forces after a nearly three-month siege. Mariupol's fall cuts Ukraine off from the Azov coast and secures a land corridor from the Russian border to Crimea.

On May 18, Finland and Sweden submit their applications to join NATO in a major blow to Moscow over the expansion of the military alliance.

JUNE

More Western weapons flow into Ukraine, including U.S.-supplied HIMARS multiple rocket launchers.

On June 30, Russian troops pull back from Snake Island, located off the Black Sea port of Odesa and seized in the opening days of the invasion.

JULY

On July 22, Russia and Ukraine, with mediation by Turkey and the United Nations, agree on a deal to unblock supplies of grain stuck in Ukraine's Black Sea ports, ending a standoff that threatened global food security.

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On July 29, a missile strike hits a prison in the Russia-controlled eastern town of Olenivka where Ukrainian soldiers captured in Mariupol were held, killing at least 53. Ukraine and Russia trade blame for the attack.

AUGUST

On Aug. 9, powerful explosions strike an air base in Crimea. More blasts hit a power substation and ammunition depots there a week later, signaling the vulnerability of the Moscow-annexed Black Sea peninsula that Russia has used as a major supply hub for the war. Ukraine's top military officer later acknowledges that the attacks on Crimea were launched by Kyiv's forces.

On Aug. 20, Darya Dugina, the daughter of Russian nationalist ideologist Alexander Dugin, dies in a car bomb explosion outside Moscow that the Russian authorities blame on Ukraine.

SEPTEMBER

On Sept. 6, the Ukrainian forces launch a surprise counteroffensive in the northeastern Kharkiv region, quickly forcing Russia to pull back from broad areas held for months.

On Sept. 21, Putin orders mobilization of 300,000 reservists, an unpopular move that prompts hundreds of thousands of Russian men to flee to neighboring countries to avoid recruitment. At the same time, Russia hastily stages illegal "referendums" in Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions on whether to become part of Russia. The votes are widely dismissed as a sham by Ukraine and the West.

On Sept. 30, Putin signs documents to annex the four regions at a Kremlin ceremony.

OCTOBER

On Oct. 8, a truck laden with explosives blows up on the bridge linking Crimea to Russia's mainland in an attack that Putin blames on Ukraine. Russia responds with missile strikes on Ukraine's power plants and other key infrastructure.

After the first wave of attacks on Oct. 10, the barrage continues on a regular basis in the months that follow, resulting in blackouts and power rationing across the country.

NOVEMBER

On Nov. 9, Russia announces a pullback from the city of Kherson under a Ukrainian counteroffensive, abandoning the only regional center Moscow captured, in a humiliating retreat for the Kremlin.

DECEMBER

On Dec. 5, the Russian military says Ukraine used drones to target two bases for long-range bombers deep inside Russian territory. Another strike takes place later in the month, underlining Ukraine's readiness to up the ante and revealing gaps in Russian defenses.

On Dec. 21, Zelenskyy visits the United States on his first trip abroad since the war began, meeting with President Joe Biden to secure Patriot air defense missile systems and other weapons and addressing Congress.

2023

JANUARY

On Jan. 1, just moments into the New Year, scores of freshly mobilized Russian soldiers are killed by a Ukrainian missile strike on the city of Makiivka. Russia's Defense Ministry says 89 troops were killed, while Ukrainian officials put the death toll in the hundreds.

After months of ferocious fighting, Russia declares the capture of the salt-mining town of Soledar on Jan. 12, although Kyiv does not acknowledge it until days later. Moscow also presses its offensive to seize the Ukrainian stronghold of Bakhmut.

On Jan. 14, when Russia launches another wave of strikes on Ukraine's energy facilities, a Russian missile hits an apartment building in the city of Dnipro, killing 45.

N. Korea threatens unprecedented response to South-US drill

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea threatened Friday to take "unprecedentedly" strong action against its rivals, soon after South Korea announced a series of planned military drills with the United States to hone their joint response to the North's increasing nuclear threats.

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North Korea has halted weapons testing activities since its short-range missile firing on Jan. 1, though it launched more than 70 missiles in 2022 — a record number for a single year. Friday's warning suggests the North's testing could resume soon over its rivals' military training, which it views as an invasion rehearsal.

"In case the U.S. and South Korea carry into practice their already announced plan for military drills that (North Korea), with just apprehension and reason, regards as preparations for an aggression war, they will face unprecedentedly persistent and strong counteractions," the North Korean Foreign Ministry said in a statement carried by state media.

The statement accused South Korea and the United States of planning more than 20 rounds of military drills, including their largest-ever field exercises. It called South Korea and the United States "the arch-criminals deliberately disrupting" regional peace and stability.

"This predicts that the situation in the Korean Peninsula and the region will be again plunged into the grave vortex of escalating tension," the statement said.

It didn't specify which U.S.-South Korean military trainings it was referring to. But North Korea has typically slammed all major regular military drills between Washington and Seoul as a practice to launch an invasion and responded with its own weapons tests.

Some experts say North Korea has used various South Korea-U.S. drills as a chance to test and perfect its weapons systems. They say North Korea would eventually aim to use its enlarged nuclear arsenal to win international recognition as a legitimate nuclear state and win sanctions relief and other concessions.

Seoul and Washington have said their training is defensive in nature.

Earlier Friday, Heo Tae-keun, South Korea's deputy minister of national defense policy, told lawmakers that Seoul and Washington will hold an annual computer-simulated combined training in mid-March. Heo said the 11-day training would reflect North Korea's nuclear threats, as well as unspecified lessons from the Russia-Ukraine War.

Heo said the two countries will also conduct joint field exercises in mid-March that would be bigger than those held in the past few years.

The allies had downsized or canceled some of their regular drills in recent years to guard against the COVID-19 pandemic and support now-dormant diplomacy on North Korea's nuclear program.

Earlier Friday, Seoul officials said that South Korea and the U.S. will hold a one-day tabletop exercise next week at the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, to sharpen a response to a potential use of nuclear weapons by North Korea. The exercise, scheduled for Wednesday, would set up possible scenarios where North Korea uses nuclear weapons, explore how to cope with them militarily and formulate crisis management plans, South Korea's Defense Ministry said in a statement.

Seoul's security concerns about North Korea's nuclear program deepened after Pyongyang last year adopted a law that authorizes the preemptive use of nuclear weapons, and tested nuclear-capable missiles that put South Korea within striking distance.

In response to the intensifying North Korean threats, South Korea and the United States have expanded their joint military drills and stepped up pressure on the North to abandon its nuclear program. In January, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said that the U.S. would also increase its deployment of advanced weapons such as fighter jets and bombers to the Korean Peninsula.

During their annual meeting in November, Austin and South Korean Defense Minister Lee Jong-Sup agreed to conduct tabletop exercises annually and further strengthen the alliance's information sharing, joint planning and execution. Austin reiterated a warning that any nuclear attack against the U.S. or its allies would result in the end of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's regime.

In NBA All-Star spotlight, Utah looks to change perceptions

By SAM METZ Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — In the 1990s, Dallas Mavericks point guard Derek Harper famously shot down an offer to be traded to the Jazz, quipping to ESPN: "You go live in Utah."

Two decades later, members of the Golden State Warriors squad mocked Salt Lake as a nightlife-free

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city that could “lull you to sleep.”

And two months ago, former Jazz star Donovan Mitchell, reflecting on his time in Utah, said it was “draining” being a Black man in the mostly white, deeply religious state.

As the spotlight turns toward Salt Lake City and Utah during this weekend’s NBA All-Star Game, business and political leaders are seeking to chip away at long-held notions — in basketball circles and elsewhere — of the state as a peculiar, boring and homogenous place that lags behind on LGBTQ- and race-related issues.

Their push to showcase the city and state as increasingly diverse and vibrant has been complicated by Utah’s enduring legacy as a religious conservative stronghold, coupled with recent political developments at the intersection of race, gender and sports.

Just a year ago, a statewide ban implemented on transgender kids playing girls’ sports raised worries that organizers of some events like the All-Star Game would think twice about coming to Utah.

Still, political leaders see efforts to make businesses and tourists feel welcome as key to Utah’s continued growth and ability to attract profitable trade shows and the Winter Olympics, which it is seen as likely to bid to host again in 2034.

“What happens with those oddities that people think is, they’re very quickly dispelled when people actually come to Utah,” said Gov. Spencer Cox, a Republican and avid Jazz fan.

Downtown, a pop-up liquor store has been erected to serve fans this weekend between The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ flagship temple and the Jazz’s home arena. Team owner Ryan Smith is telling anyone who will listen about the state’s robust tech sector and progressive thinking. And the NBA is heavily advertising a pregame performance featuring Post Malone, a Utah-based, heavily face-tattooed rap star popular among residents.

Salt Lake City has long been more liberal and religiously diverse than the rest of Utah, a blue island in a sea of red. A majority of members on the current left-leaning city council identify as LGBTQ and are people of color.

In the three decades since 1993, the last time the All-Star Game last was here, the population has diversified and almost doubled, transforming it into a thriving metropolis complete with the politics and problems that plague many midsize cities including pollution, housing shortages and homelessness.

A skyline dense with apartments, office buildings and two downtown malls has sprung up between Temple Square and the nearby mountains. The 2002 Olympics brought an influx of funding that helped build a light rail system many visitors will use during All-Star festivities.

Mayor Erin Mendenhall said The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the counterculture that rose up in response and continues to thrive both contribute to the city’s social fabric.

“We may still be peculiar, but we’re minority Mormon now,” she said.

The extensive influence of the faith known widely as the Mormon church will still be apparent, yet changes within its culture and the influx of thousands of secular residents may complicate how the expected 150,000 All-Star visitors perceive Salt Lake City, said Patrick Mason, a professor of religious studies at Utah State University.

“Anybody who visits — especially for the first time — is going to be immediately struck by the Salt Lake Temple and the church’s holdings right downtown very close to the arena. This is, as a lot of people say, ‘Mormonism’s Vatican,’” he said.

High-profile church members also demonstrate how the image the faith projects has remained distinct while also becoming more assimilated into the mainstream, he said.

“That really gets reflected in the younger generation of entrepreneurs and politicians,” Mason added. “People like Cox and Smith are Latter-day Saints who are committed to their faith but also are savvy people who grow up with the internet, plugged in to a global culture.”

Hosting All-Star Weekend is a major opportunity in particular for Smith, who purchased the Jazz in 2020 after selling the survey-software provider company that he founded, Qualtrics, for \$8 billion.

“This is just a chance to really have a moment together. People definitely know that there’s something

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here," Smith said. "It's absolutely unique in all the positive ways. I think the one thing that is beautiful about Utah, that the people keep telling me from a wellness standpoint, 'Utah is like where I'm at my best.'"

Since Smith attended part of 1993's All-Star Weekend as a member of the Jazz's youth basketball program, the NBA has cultivated a reputation for embracing progressive politics and social justice to a greater extent than most other professional sports leagues.

The ban on transgender athletes in girls' sports didn't end up costing Utah the All-Star Game. But some fear marketing efforts could face challenges as the state doubles down on socially conservative stances on matters of race, gender and sports. Last month lawmakers banned gender-affirming care for transgender youth, a policy being considered by lawmakers in a number of states across the country.

Utah has among the highest white populations of any state at 78% of its 3.3 million residents, and less than 2% are Black. That lack of racial diversity is long believed to have hurt efforts by the Jazz to lure free agents and retain players.

Mitchell, after being traded to the Cavaliers last offseason, said it took a lot of energy to confront a series of highly public race-related experiences and the pushback he received in response. They included incidents of bullying against Black students in Utah schools that he called "demoralizing"; a dustup between him and the state Senate president over new restrictions on how race and history could be taught; and the time Mitchell said he was pulled over and "got an attitude from the cop" until the officer saw Mitchell's ID and realized he was the Jazz player.

"It's no secret there's a lot of stuff that I dealt with being in Utah, off the floor. ... I took on a lot because I felt like I could do it. But at some point, it became a lot to have to deal with," he told the ESPN publication *Andscape* in December.

Some see All-Star weekend as a means of elevating social justice initiatives and changing Salt Lake City's image through showcasing oft-overlooked pockets of diversity. Sheena Meade, CEO of the Clean Slate Initiative, helped organize a expungement clinic with the NBA's social justice arm in the lead-up to the game, a year after Cox signed legislation to clear low-level convictions from people's criminal records. She said the NBA's presence in places regardless of the prevailing local politics has had tangible impacts.

"They are doing more than lip service. They're putting out a host of events," Meade said. "What it means for the All-Star Game to come to a state like Utah is it brings an immersion of culture and diversity and lifts up what's happening on some social issues."

Tank plant in small Ohio city plays big role in Ukraine war

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

LIMA, Ohio (AP) — Thousands of miles from the front lines, a sprawling manufacturing plant in the small midwestern city of Lima, Ohio, is playing a critical role in the effort to arm Ukraine as it fends off the Russian invasion.

Owned by the Army and operated by General Dynamics, the plant is expected to refurbish Abrams tanks for the U.S. to send to Ukraine, and is already preparing to build an updated version of the vehicle for Poland, U.S. Army officials said Thursday as they toured the facility.

Army Secretary Christine Wormuth, who walked through the plant with a number of other Army leaders and senior officers, said it's highly likely the plant will provide the tanks for Ukraine.

"We're still looking at options for exactly what variant of tanks will be provided to the Ukrainians. I think there's still a little bit to be worked out, but certainly, the tanks being built here in Lima are central," she said.

An Associated Press reporter was allowed to accompany Wormuth on the tour, the first journalist to walk the production lines since the U.S. pledged Abrams tanks to Ukraine.

U.S. officials have declined to provide details about the Abrams that will eventually go to Ukraine, saying they have to decide whether to send refurbished older Army tanks, Marine tanks or some other version. But in most cases, the tanks would need upgrades at the Lima plant before being shipped to Ukraine's battlefield.

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"Part of it is figuring out — among the different options — what's the best one that can allow us to get the Ukrainians tanks in as timely a fashion as we can," without disrupting foreign military sales, Wormuth said.

Officials said Thursday that production totals at the plant — which is formally called Joint Systems Manufacturing Center-Lima — vary, based on contract demands. And while the plant is currently building 15-20 armored vehicles per month — including tanks — it can easily boost that to 33 a month and could add another shift of workers and build even more if needed.

Wormuth said the timeline on sending Abrams to Ukraine depends on whether the U.S. takes tanks from existing American military training stocks or from Army units, which would be less desirable because it could affect their readiness to fight. And the development of tanks for Ukraine would also have to be squeezed in between the current contracts for foreign sales, which include 250 of the newest versions for Poland and about 75 for Australia.

In a dramatic reversal, the Biden administration announced in January that it will send 31 M1A2 Abrams tanks to Ukraine — after insisting for months that the 70-ton battle powerhouses were too complicated and too hard to maintain and repair. The decision was part of a broader political maneuver that opened the door for Germany to announce it would send its Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine and allow Poland and other allies to do the same.

Ukrainian leaders have pressed for the Abrams, which first deployed to war in 1991 and has thick armor, a 120 mm main gun, armor-piercing capabilities and advanced targeting systems. It runs on thick tracked wheels and has a 1,500-horsepower turbine engine with a top speed of about 42 miles per hour (68 kilometers per hour).

As she walked the production lanes in the 25-acre building, Wormuth got to see the newest version of the Abrams as it transformed from an empty steel hull into a shiny, newly painted tank — a process that takes 18 to 24 months. The U.S. doesn't build new tanks from scratch. It has a fleet of about 2,500 Abrams, and takes older tanks, tears them down and uses the empty hull as a starting point to build a new one. Some hulls have been refurbished multiple times.

Across the aisle from one empty hull, sparks flew as a worker welded pieces of the tank together. In another section, a worker showed where they will install a new auxiliary engine in the latest version, which will run on diesel when needed to save on the large amount of jet engine fuel the tank consumes. And, farther down the lane, workers had laid out the two rows of tracks the Abrams runs on, preparing to install them on one of the tank bodies. The tracks stretch out more than 60 feet (18 meters) and weigh two tons on each side.

Roughly 800 people work at the plant, which is spread across 369 acres in northwest Ohio. Its 1.6 million square feet of manufacturing space is the only place where the M1A2 Abrams is made. About 45% of the workers are focused on the tank, but the plant also churns out Stryker armored vehicles, tank support vehicles and some other equipment.

As Wormuth wrapped up her visit with a look at some of the finished tanks in another building, a long line of the newest Abrams sat outside on nearby train tracks. And as she was preparing to leave, the train cars began to move, taking the tanks on to Fort Hood, Texas, where they'll get their radios and other equipment before going to their final destination with an Army unit.

Speaking to reporters afterward, Wormuth said the Army will invest about \$558 million into improvements at the plant over the next 15 years. Some of those include expanded use of robotics.

"I think as the war in Ukraine has shown everyone here, there's a real need to level up our defense industrial base," she said. "The plant here in Lima is part of that."

Romney, outspoken about his own party, weighs reelection run

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — He twice voted in favor of convicting former President Donald Trump in impeachment trials. He excoriated his fellow senators who objected to certifying the results of the 2020 presidential

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election. He even scolded New York Rep. George Santos for his audacity in grabbing a prominent seat at the State of the Union address after admitting to fabricating much of his biography.

After four years in Washington, Republican Mitt Romney has established himself as a rare senator willing to publicly rebuke members of his own party.

But the Utah senator's outspoken stances, along with his willingness to work with Democrats, have angered some Republicans in the deep-red state he represents and led them to cast about for someone to try to dethrone him a primary race next year.

The 75-year-old said that he hasn't made a decision on whether to run for reelection in 2024 and doesn't expect to until the start of summer.

"I'm sort of keeping my mind open," Romney said in an interview. "There's no particular hurry. I'm doing what I would do if I'm running with staffing and resources, so it's not like I have to make a formal announcement."

His decision about whether to run again comes as Trump is making his third campaign for the White House, presenting Romney an opportunity to continue to serve as a chief foil to the former president.

But that could also sustain the backlash Romney has faced for serving as a check on Trump, including being heckled at the airport, narrowly avoiding censure by the state GOP and becoming an insult that other Republicans use to slam their rivals as suspect: "A Mitt Romney Republican."

Romney said he didn't know if the prospect of Trump becoming the Republican presidential nominee was something that would spur him to run for reelection run or stay out. But he said it was among the things he would be weighing, along with personal considerations regarding his wife, Ann Romney, and family, and his goals for what he wants to accomplish in the Senate.

"We'll look and see what happens in the rest of the Republican landscape and the national landscape, the presidential race and the other Senate races," he said. "There is just a lot of elements that I will ultimately take into account. But I haven't begun that process yet."

Romney has earned a reputation for bipartisanship, from his role helping broker a sweeping 2021 infrastructure law with Democrats to his being one of only three Republicans to vote to confirm President Joe Biden's nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson as a Supreme Court justice. He helped negotiate legislation to protect same-sex marriages in December by demanding language ensuring that the rights of religious institutions would not be affected. And he joined 14 other Republican senators in supporting a sweeping gun control measure last summer in the wake of mass shootings.

"I didn't come to the Senate to just fight and lose," Romney said. "I came to actually fight and win. And I fell in with a group of Republicans and some Democrats who felt the same way and wanted to work together on issues of significance for the country and for our respective states."

But what garnered Romney heavy booing two years ago and a near censure from the Utah GOP was his vote in 2020 that made him the first senator in U.S. history to vote to convict a president of his own party in an impeachment trial. Romney voted to convict Trump on House charges that he had abused his power by urging the president of Ukraine to investigate then-candidate Biden. He voted to acquit on a separate charge that Trump had obstructed the impeachment investigation.

Romney did it again in the weeks after the Jan. 6 Capitol attack, becoming one of seven Republicans to vote to convict Trump of incitement of insurrection.

Stan Lockhart, a former chair of the Utah Republican Party, said that while Romney's votes in the impeachment trials drew a "huge negative outpouring," he thinks that, nearly two years later, some of the support for Trump has softened and the hostility has "mellowed."

"I think there are people today that were not big fans of Mitt Romney after that impeachment vote who like him better today," Lockhart said.

Romney said he doesn't have a measure of whether the backlash has eased, but said he was following an oath he took "to apply impartial justice."

"People elect you and then you follow your conscience," he said. "It would be sad if people who got elected to office tried to calculate their decisions based upon how popular it was at home. They have to

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do what they feel is absolutely right and then live with the consequences of that.”

No GOP challenger has stepped forward to run against Romney, but several prominent Utah Republicans are seen as potential candidates and at least one major conservative group is looking at spending in the race.

The anti-tax group Club For Growth, which used the phrase “Mitt Romney Republican” in attack ads in 2022, said the Utah Senate race is one where its political super PAC could likely get involved, throwing heft behind a conservative challenger.

“Even if he stays, I think there’s a desire among conservatives to have a real choice in Utah,” said Club For Growth President David McIntosh. “If somebody steps forward and is a credible candidate, we would definitely take a look at that.”

Former U.S. Rep. Jason Chaffetz, who gained the national spotlight leading the House Oversight committee through aggressive investigations of Hillary Clinton, said he is considering a campaign.

“I do think about it. It’s not something I’m working on,” Chaffetz said in an interview. “It’s something I don’t think I need to decide right now and consequently I haven’t.”

He declined to say whether he thinks Romney is vulnerable but said, “I don’t think anybody should ever assume that they will continue to be there in perpetuity.”

Utah Attorney General Sean Reyes, a Republican and staunch Trump ally, is among those seen as a potential challenger. Reyes’ longtime political consultant Alan Crooks told the AP last year that Reyes was getting pressure to run and was well-positioned but wouldn’t say if he would launch a campaign.

The Western state allows candidates to secure a spot on the primary election ballot by collecting voter signatures — something a well-funded or popular candidate can generally do with ease — or by winning the support of 4,000 conservative-leaning delegates at the state GOP party convention.

Romney is unlikely to win the support of delegates — he didn’t in 2018 — and the impeachment votes made it worse.

“Trump is still very popular among the base,” Utah GOP Chair Carson Jorgensen said. “Many Republicans felt it was a waste of time and taxpayer dollars to vote for impeachment.”

In a primary election, where a larger pool of more moderate and independent Republicans cast ballots, the race is seen as Romney’s to lose.

Romney, the former governor of Massachusetts, had long been among the most popular figures in Utah by the time he moved to the state after his unsuccessful 2012 presidential campaign.

A Brigham Young University graduate, Romney was brought on to help the 2002 Winter Olympics in Utah, turning the games that had been overshadowed by a bribery scandal into a successful showcase for the small Western state. As the Republican presidential nominee a decade later, he became the most visible member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a faith to which more than half of Utah residents belong.

The church’s culture of decorum made the state a place where Trump, with his brazen personality and comments about women and people of color, initially received a chilly reception, losing the state’s 2016 caucuses.

Romney that year delivered a scathing speech against Trump, deeming him a “fraud” who was unfit to be president, but later warmed to him and accepted his endorsement during his Senate campaign.

Kirk Jowers, the former chairman and general counsel of Romney’s leadership PACs who remains in touch with Romney, said he has positioned himself at the center of much of what goes on in Washington and probably feels “that he has an incredibly important role to play in our state’s and our country’s and his party’s affairs.”

“I think it would be incredibly difficult for him to walk away from that role as things stand right now,” Jowers said.

Romney said he found it “fun” to get things passed in Washington but said he doesn’t “understand someone who just wants to stay in the Senate.”

“I had a life before I came here, and I’ll have a life after I go,” Romney said. “And I came to actually do things and I’ve been part of a group that allowed me to do that.”

Indian child marriage crackdown leaves families in anguish

By PIYUSH NAGPAL Associated Press

MORIGAON, India (AP) — Standing outside the local police station in her village in northeast India, 19-year-old Nureja Khatun is anxious. Cradling her 6-month-old baby in her arms, she has been waiting to catch a glimpse of her husband before the police take him away to court.

Nearly an hour later, she sees her husband, Akbar Ali, for just a few seconds when he is shuffled into a police van. An officer slams the door in her face before she is able to get any answers.

"Please release my husband. Otherwise take me into custody as well," she pleaded.

Khatun's husband is one of more than 3,000 men, including Hindu and Muslim priests, who were arrested nearly two weeks ago in the northeastern state of Assam under a wide crackdown on illegal child marriages involving girls under the age of 18.

The action has left her — and hundreds of other women like her who got married under 18 — in anguish. Many of the women, who are now adults, say their families have been torn apart, leaving them angry and helpless.

Khatun relied on Ali, with whom she eloped in 2021 when she was 17, to take care of her. Earning 400 rupees (\$5) a day as a laborer, Ali was the sole breadwinner in their family, and the couple had a baby girl six months ago.

"Now there is no one to feed us. I don't know if my family can survive," Khatun said.

The stringent measures are being carried out in a state, home to 35 million people, where many cases of child marriage go unreported. Only 155 cases of child marriages in Assam were registered in 2021, and 138 in 2020, according to the National Crime Records Bureau.

In India, the legal marriageable age is 21 for men and 18 for women. Poverty, lack of education, and social norms and practices, particularly in rural areas, are considered reasons for child marriages across the country.

UNICEF estimates that at least 1.5 million girls under 18 get married in India every year, making it home to the largest number of child brides in the world — accounting for a third of the global total. India's National Health Family Survey data shows that more than 31% of marriages registered in Assam involve the prohibited age group.

The state government passed a resolution last month to completely eradicate the practice of child marriage by 2026.

In some districts, teenage pregnancies are as high as 26%, said Assam's additional director general of police AVY Krishna. "These child marriages have become a social evil and as a result the mortality rates have been quite high," he said.

While the arrests have sparked massive distress among families, with women sobbing outside police stations across the state, the punitive action has also drawn scrutiny from lawyers and activists.

Some men, accused of marrying girls aged between 14 and 18, are being charged under India's law banning child marriage, which carries a jail term of two years. Other men, accused of marrying girls below 14 years, have been charged under a more stringent law that protects children from sexual offenses. This is non-bailable, with jail terms ranging from seven years to life.

Assam police defended their actions as legal under both of these laws, but the High Court in the state's capital, Guwahati, has questioned the arrests. "At the moment, the court thinks that these are not matters for custodial interrogation," it said on Tuesday.

Others said the government should raise awareness through education and social campaigns instead of arrests. "According to Supreme Court guidelines, arrests should be the last resort," said senior advocate Anshuman Bora. "Out of the blue, they decide to start making mass arrests to tackle the problem. Instead, they should focus on social reforms to stop it."

Activists and political opponents in the state have accused the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) — Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party — in power in Assam of carrying out arrests in districts and areas home to many of the state's Bengali-speaking Muslims.

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Critics say the community, which migrated over the years from neighboring Bangladesh, has often been marginalized by authorities, including a contentious citizenship registry in the state that they say discriminated against Muslims.

"We have found that people of all religions have been involved in child marriages," said lawyer and social activist Hasina Ahmed. "We must not judge communities like this. We must not see caste and religion. We must focus on the investigations and proceed legally to solve the issues."

Officials have denied the accusations and say hundreds of Hindu men have also been arrested.

Ahmed said the arrests were doing more harm than good in Assam's communities. A majority of the affected wives were uneducated, unemployed and came from poor families where their husbands were the sole earners.

"The government could have penalized people for engaging in the practice starting from today. Punishing people now for old child marriages is not appropriate," she said.

Radha Rani Mondal, 50, is determined to get her son out of jail, but says she doesn't have the money or the know-how to navigate the legal system. Her 20-year-old son was arrested on Feb. 4 and her 17-year-old daughter-in-law is pregnant. She spent her last 500 rupees (\$6) to hire a lawyer, whom she owes 20,000 rupees (\$250) more.

"I have been going to the police station and to the lawyer every day on an empty stomach. On one hand, I have to arrange money for legal expenses and on the other, I have to run my home and take care of my daughter-in-law. It is very difficult. I feel helpless," she said, crying.

Tesla recalls 'Full Self-Driving' to fix unsafe actions

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — U.S. safety regulators have pressured Tesla into recalling nearly 363,000 vehicles with its "Full Self-Driving" system because it can misbehave around intersections and doesn't always follow speed limits.

The recall, part of a larger investigation by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration into Tesla's automated driving systems, is the most serious action taken yet against the electric vehicle maker.

It raises questions about CEO Elon Musk's claims that he can prove to regulators that cars equipped with "Full Self-Driving" are safer than humans, and that humans almost never have to touch the controls.

Musk at one point had promised that a fleet of autonomous robotaxis would be in use in 2020. The latest action appears to push that development further into the future.

The safety agency says in documents posted on its website Thursday that Tesla will fix the concerns with an online software update in the coming weeks. The documents say Tesla is doing the recall but does not agree with an agency analysis of the problem.

The system, which is being tested on public roads by as many as 400,000 Tesla owners, can make unsafe actions such as traveling straight through an intersection while in a turn-only lane, failing to come to a complete stop at stop signs, or going through an intersection during a yellow traffic light without proper caution, NHTSA said. The problems happen in "certain rare circumstances," the agency wrote.

In addition, the system may not adequately respond to changes in posted speed limits, or it may not account for the driver's adjustments in speed, the documents said.

"FSD beta software that allows a vehicle to exceed speed limits or travel through intersections in an unlawful or unpredictable manner increases the risk of a crash," the agency said in documents.

Musk complained Thursday on Twitter, which he now owns, that calling an over-the-air software update a recall is "anachronistic and just flat wrong!" A message was left Thursday seeking further comment from Tesla, which has disbanded its media relations department.

Tesla has received 18 warranty claims that could be caused by the software from May of 2019 through Sept. 12, 2022, the documents said. But the Austin, Texas, electric vehicle maker told the agency it is not aware of any deaths or injuries.

In a statement, NHTSA said it found the problems during tests performed as part of an investigation

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into Tesla's "Full Self-Driving" and "Autopilot" software that take on some driving tasks. The investigation remains open, and the recall doesn't address the full scope of what NHTSA is scrutinizing, the agency said.

Despite the names "Full Self-Driving" and "Autopilot," Tesla says on its website that the cars cannot drive themselves and owners must be ready to intervene at all times.

NHTSA's testing found that Tesla's FSD beta testing, "led to an unreasonable risk to motor vehicle safety based on insufficient adherence to traffic safety laws."

Raj Rajkumar, a professor of computer engineering at Carnegie Mellon University, doubts that Tesla can fix all of the problems cited by NHTSA with a software update. The automaker, he says, relies only on cameras and artificial intelligence to make driving decisions, a system that will make mistakes.

"Cameras can miss a lot of things," Rajkumar said. "These are not straightforward issues to fix. If they could have fixed it, they would have fixed it a long time back."

Most other companies with self-driving vehicles use laser sensors and radar in addition to cameras to make sure vehicles see everything. "One sensing modality is not perfect by any metric," Rajkumar said.

He questioned whether NHTSA will require testing before the software update is sent out to make sure it works. The agency said that it works closely with automakers as they develop recall remedies "to ensure adequacy."

In documents, NHTSA says that on Jan. 25, as part of regular communications with Tesla, it told the automaker about concerns with FSD, and it asked Tesla to do a recall. On Feb. 7, Tesla decided to do the recall out of an abundance of caution, "while not concurring with the agency's analysis."

The recall is another in a list of problems that Tesla has with the U.S. government. In January, the company disclosed that the U.S. Justice Department had requested documents from Tesla about "Full Self-Driving" and "Autopilot."

NHTSA has been investigating Tesla's automated systems since June of 2016 when a driver using Autopilot was killed after his Tesla went under a tractor-trailer crossing its path in Florida. A separate probe into Teslas that were using Autopilot when they crashed into emergency vehicles started in August 2021. At least 14 Teslas have crashed into emergency vehicles while using the Autopilot system.

NHTSA has sent investigators to 35 Tesla crashes in which automated systems are suspected of being used. Nineteen people have died in those crashes, including two motorcyclists.

The agency also is investigating complaints that Teslas can brake suddenly for no reason.

Since January of 2022, Tesla has issued 20 recalls, including several that were required by NHTSA. The recalls include one from January of last year for "Full Self-Driving" vehicles being programmed to run stop signs at slow speeds.

"Full Self-Driving" went on sale late in 2015, and Musk has used the name ever since. It currently costs \$15,000 to activate the system.

The recall announced Thursday covers certain 2016-2023 Model S and Model X vehicles, as well as 2017 through 2013 Model 3s, and 2020 through 2023 Model Y vehicles equipped with the software, or with installation pending.

Shares of Tesla closed Thursday down 5.7%. The stock has rallied about 64% in the year to date, reversing 2022's hefty loss.

Fox hosts didn't believe 2020 election fraud claims

By RANDALL CHASE Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — Hosts at Fox News had serious concerns about allegations of voter fraud in the 2020 presidential election being made by guests who were allies of former President Donald Trump, according to court filings in a \$1.6 billion defamation lawsuit against the network.

"Sidney Powell is lying," about having evidence for election fraud, Tucker Carlson told a producer about the attorney on Nov. 16, 2020, according to an excerpt from an exhibit that remains under seal.

The internal communication was included in a redacted summary judgment brief filed Thursday by attorneys for Dominion Voting Systems.

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Carlson also referred to Powell in a text as an “unguided missile,” and “dangerous as hell.” Fellow host Laura Ingraham, meanwhile, told Carlson that Powell is “a complete nut. No one will work with her. Ditto with Rudy,” referring to former New York mayor and Trump supporter Rudy Giuliani.

Sean Hannity, meanwhile, said in a deposition “that whole narrative that Sidney was pushing, I did not believe it for one second,” according to Dominion’s filing.

Denver-based Dominion, which sells electronic voting hardware and software, is suing both Fox News and parent company Fox Corporation. Dominion said some Fox News employees deliberately amplified false claims that Dominion had changed votes in the 2020 election, and that Fox provided a platform for guests to make false and defamatory statements.

Attorneys for the cable news giant argued in a counterclaim unsealed Thursday that the lawsuit is an assault on the First Amendment. They said Dominion has advanced “novel defamation theories” and is seeking a “staggering” damage figure aimed at generating headlines, chilling protected speech and enriching Dominion’s private equity owner, Staple Street Capital Partners.

“Dominion brought this lawsuit to punish FNN for reporting on one of the biggest stories of the day—allegations by the sitting President of the United States and his surrogates that the 2020 election was affected by fraud,” the counterclaim states. “The very fact of those allegations was newsworthy.”

Fox attorneys also said in their own summary judgment brief that Carlson repeatedly questioned Powell’s claims in his broadcasts. “When we kept pressing, she got angry and told us to stop contacting her,” Carlson told viewers on Nov. 19, 2020.

Fox attorneys say Dominion’s own public relations firm expressed skepticism in December 2020 as to whether the network’s coverage was defamatory. They also point to an email from Oct. 30, 2020, just days before the election, in which Dominion’s director of product strategy and security complained that the company’s products were “just riddled with bugs.”

In their counterclaim, Fox attorneys wrote that when voting-technology companies denied the allegations being made by Trump and his surrogates, Fox News aired those denials, while some Fox News hosts offered protected opinion commentary about Trump’s allegations.

Fox’s counterclaim is based on New York’s “anti-SLAAP” law. Such laws are aimed at protecting people trying to exercise their First Amendment rights from being intimidated by “strategic lawsuits against public participation,” or SLAPPs.

“According to Dominion, FNN had a duty not to truthfully report the President’s allegations but to suppress them or denounce them as false,” Fox attorneys wrote. “Dominion is fundamentally mistaken. Freedom of speech and freedom of the press would be illusory if the prevailing side in a public controversy could sue the press for giving a forum to the losing side.”

Fox attorneys warn that threatening the company with a \$1.6 billion judgment will cause other media outlets to think twice about what they report. They also say documents produced in the lawsuit show that Dominion has not suffered any economic harm and do not indicate that it lost any customers as the result of Fox’s election coverage.

Superior Court Judge Eric Davis is scheduled to preside over a trial beginning in mid-April, but granting summary judgment to either side would obviate the need for a jury trial that could stretch over five weeks.

In its 192-page brief, Dominion said the judge should rule in its favor because “no reasonable juror could find in Fox’s favor on each element of Dominion’s defamation claim.” Dominion attorneys also assert that no reasonable juror could find in favor of Fox’s “neutral reportage” and “fair report” defenses.

“Recounts and audits conducted by election officials across the U.S. repeatedly confirmed the election’s outcome, including specifically that Dominion’s machines accurately counted votes,” Dominion’s filing states. “That evidence alone more than suffices for summary judgment on the falsity of the claims that Dominion rigged the election and its software manipulated vote counts.”

Fox News attorneys argue the network’s coverage and commentary are not defamatory.

“Even assuming, for the sake of argument, that Dominion could point to any statement that could be actionable defamation, this court should grant Fox News’ summary judgment motion for the independent

reason that Dominion lacks clear and convincing evidence that the relevant individuals at Fox News made or published any statement with actual malice," the attorneys wrote.

Davis ruled last month that, for the purposes of the defamation claims, he will consider Dominion to be a public figure. That means Dominion must prove by a preponderance of the evidence that the Fox defendants acted with actual malice or reckless disregard for the truth.

Attorneys for Fox Corp. joined in the brief filed by Fox News, while also asserting that the parent company is independently entitled to summary judgment because Dominion has not produced any evidence needed to hold it liable.

Kari Lake loses appeal in Arizona governor race challenge

By JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — An Arizona appeals court has rejected Republican Kari Lake's challenge of her defeat in the Arizona governor's race to Democrat Katie Hobbs, denying her request to throw out election results in the state's most populous county and hold the election again.

In a ruling on Thursday, the Arizona Court of Appeals wrote Lake, who claimed problems with ballot printers at some polling places on Election Day were the result of intentional misconduct, presented no evidence that voters whose ballots were unreadable by tabulators at polling places were not able to vote. The court said that even a witness called by Lake to testify had confirmed that ballots that couldn't initially be read at polling places could still ultimately have their vote counted.

And while a pollster who testified on behalf of Lake claimed the polling place problems had disenfranchised enough voters to change the outcome in Lake's favor, the court said his conclusion were baseless.

The appeals court wrote Lake's appeal failed because the evidence supports the conclusion that "voters were able to cast their ballots, that votes were counted correctly, and that no other basis justifies setting aside the election results."

Shortly after the ruling, Lake tweeted: "I told you we would take this case all the way to the Arizona Supreme Court, and that's exactly what we are going to do. Buckle up, America!"

Lake, who lost to Hobbs by just over 17,000 votes, was among the most vocal 2022 Republicans promoting former President Donald Trump's election lies, which she made the centerpiece of her campaign. While most of the other election deniers around the country conceded after losing their races in November, Lake did not.

Lawyers for Lake focused on problems with ballot printers at some polling places in Maricopa County, home to more than 60% of the state's voters. The defective printers produced ballots that were too light to be read by the on-site tabulators at polling places. Lines backed up in some areas amid the confusion.

County officials say everyone had a chance to vote and all ballots were counted since ballots affected by the printers were taken to more sophisticated counters at the elections department headquarters.

Lake's attorneys also claim the chain of custody for ballots was broken at an off-site facility, where a contractor scans mail ballots to prepare them for processing. They claim workers at the facility put their own mail ballots into the pile, rather than returning them through normal channels, and also that paperwork documenting the transfer of ballots was missing. The county disputes the claim.

Hobbs' attorneys said Lake was trying to sow distrust in Arizona's election results and offered no proof to back up her allegations of election misconduct.

Lake faced extremely long odds in her challenge, needing to prove not only that misconduct occurred, but also that it was intended to deny her victory and did in fact result in the wrong woman being declared the winner. In her appeal, her lawyers argued a trial court judge applied the wrong standard of proof in deciding the case.

Hobbs took office as governor on Jan. 2.

Bruce Willis has frontotemporal dementia, condition worsens

The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Nearly a year after Bruce Willis' family announced that he would step away from acting after being diagnosed with aphasia, his family says his "condition has progressed."

In a statement posted Thursday, the 67-year-old actor's family said Willis has a more specific diagnosis of frontotemporal dementia.

"While this is painful, it is a relief to finally have a clear diagnosis," the statement read. "FTD is a cruel disease that many of us have never heard of and can strike anyone."

Last March, Willis' family said his aphasia had affected his cognitive abilities. The condition causes loss of the ability to understand or express speech.

In Thursday's statement, his family said communication challenges were just one symptom of frontotemporal dementia.

The Association for Frontotemporal Degeneration describes FTD as a group of brain disorders caused by degeneration of the frontal and/or temporal lobes of the brain that affects behavior, language and movement. Aphasia can be a symptom of it. The association describes frontotemporal degeneration as "an inevitable decline in functioning," with an average life expectancy of seven to 13 years after the onset of symptoms.

"Today there are no treatments for the disease, a reality that we hope can change in the years ahead," the family's statement read, adding that it can take years to get a proper diagnosis. "As Bruce's condition advances, we hope that any media attention can be focused on shining a light on this disease that needs far more awareness and research."

The statement was posted on the website for the Association for Frontotemporal Degeneration and signed by Willis' wife, Emma Heming Willis, his ex-wife Demi Moore, and his five children, Rumer, Scout, Tallulah, Mabel and Evelyn.

Over a four-decade career, Willis' movies had earned more than \$5 billion at the worldwide box office. While beloved for hits like "Die Hard" and "The Sixth Sense," the prolific actor had in recent years primarily featured in direct-to-video thrillers.

"Bruce has always found joy in life — and has helped everyone he knows to do the same," the family said Thursday. "It has meant the world to see that sense of care echoed back to him and to all of us. We have been so moved by the love you have all shared for our dear husband, father, and friend during this difficult time. Your continued compassion, understanding, and respect will enable us to help Bruce live as full a life as possible."

Sen. John Fetterman checks into hospital for depression

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and MARC LEVY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pennsylvania Democratic Sen. John Fetterman, still recovering from a stroke, has checked himself into Walter Reed National Military Medical Center to seek treatment for clinical depression, his office said Thursday.

Fetterman, who has struggled with the aftereffects of a stroke he suffered last May, checked himself in Wednesday night, it said.

"While John has experienced depression off and on throughout his life, it only became severe in recent weeks," his chief of staff, Adam Jentleson, said in a statement.

Fetterman was evaluated Monday by the attending physician of Congress, Dr. Brian P. Monahan, who recommended inpatient care at Walter Reed, Jentleson said.

"John agreed, and he is receiving treatment on a voluntary basis," Jentleson said. "After examining John, the doctors at Walter Reed told us that John is getting the care he needs, and will soon be back to himself."

Post-stroke depression is common, with one in three stroke patients suffering from it, and is treatable through anti-depressant medication and counseling, doctors say.

Fetterman, 53, is in his first weeks as a U.S. senator after winning the seat held by now-retired Republican Pat Toomey in a hard-fought contest against GOP nominee Dr. Mehmet Oz. Fetterman, who was Pennsylvania's lieutenant governor, defeated the celebrity heart surgeon by 5 percentage points, flipping

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a seat that was key to Democrats holding the Senate majority.

Fetterman's wife, Gisele, said she was proud of Fetterman "for asking for help and getting the care he needs."

"After what he's been through in the past year, there's probably no one who wanted to talk about his own health less than John," she wrote on Twitter.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said Fetterman "is getting the help he needs" and is expected to return soon, but declined to answer questions about Fetterman's condition.

The Democratic caucus is "totally behind him," Schumer said.

Fetterman suffered the stroke days before last May's primary election and spent much of the summer recovering and off the campaign trail.

The stroke nearly killed him, he has said.

As a result of the stroke, Fetterman underwent surgery to implant a pacemaker with a defibrillator to manage two heart conditions, atrial fibrillation and cardiomyopathy.

He returned to campaigning in public in August, but refused to release his medical records or allow his doctors to answer reporters' questions. His health became a central issue in the campaign, as Oz questioned of whether his opponent was honest about the effects of the stroke and whether Fetterman was fit to serve.

Fetterman's campaign in October released a letter from a Pittsburgh-area physician who said he exhibited no effects on his "cognitive ability" or his ability to think and reason after the stroke, was recovering well and "can work full duty in public office."

He continues to suffer the aftereffects of the stroke, in particular auditory processing disorder, which can render someone unable to speak fluidly and quickly process spoken conversation into meaning. To manage it, Fetterman uses devices in conversations, meetings and congressional hearings that transcribe spoken words in real time.

Dr. Bruce Ovbiagele, associate dean and professor of neurology at the University of California-San Francisco, said studies have shown that someone who suffered from depression before having a stroke — like Fetterman — is at greater risk of having post-stroke depression.

It's not clear why strokes tend to cause depression, Ovbiagele said, but strokes act on the brain and can affect behavior, and people who are having trouble recovering can get frustrated, causing depression.

Dr. Eric Lenze, head of the psychiatry department at Washington University in St. Louis, said it is heroic that a major political figure — Fetterman — admitted to being treated for depression instead of trying to hide it.

"It's when people admit to it we start to see a reduction in the stigma around mental illness," Lenze said. "I'm glad he admitted it. I found it a brave thing to do."

Senators from both parties were supportive after Fetterman's office announced the news, applauding him for getting help and acknowledging that he needed it.

Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin, the No. 2 Democrat in the Senate, learned about Fetterman's hospitalization as he walked off the Senate floor after making a speech.

"I stand by John Fetterman and his family," Durbin said. "This is a challenge, unimaginable challenge that he's faced in life. He deserves the very best in professional care and I'm sure he'll get it."

He said he believed Fetterman would be "back in our ranks" and could serve a full six-year term.

The No. 2 Republican, Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, acknowledged he doesn't know Fetterman very well yet but said senators were hoping and praying for his recovery.

"He's been through a lot physically and mentally," Thune said. "He's got to take care of himself and his family. And I think everybody supports that."

Last week, Fetterman stayed two days in George Washington University Hospital, checking himself in after becoming lightheaded. Fetterman's office has said tests found no evidence of a new stroke or a seizure.

Biden wants 'sharper rules' on unknown aerial objects

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By ZEKE MILLER and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden said Thursday that the U.S. is developing “sharper rules” to track, monitor and potentially shoot down unknown aerial objects, following three weeks of high-stakes drama sparked by the discovery of a suspected Chinese spy balloon transiting much of the country.

The president has directed national security adviser Jake Sullivan to lead an “interagency team” to review U.S. procedures after the U.S. shot down the Chinese balloon, as well as three other objects that Biden said the U.S. now believes are most likely “benign” objects launched by private companies or research institutions.

While not expressing regret for downing the three still-unidentified objects, Biden said he hoped the new rules would help “distinguish between those that are likely to pose safety and security risks that necessitate action and those that do not.”

“Make no mistake, if any object presents a threat to the safety and security of the American people I will take it down,” he added, repeating the legal justification cited for the downings — that the objects, flying between 20,000 and 40,000 feet posed a remote risk to civilian planes.

The downing of the Chinese surveillance craft was the first known peacetime shutdown of an unauthorized object in U.S. airspace — a feat repeated three times a week later.

Biden sharply criticized China’s surveillance program, saying the shutdown sent a “clear message, the violation of our sovereignty is unacceptable,” but said he looks to maintain open lines of communication with Beijing. Secretary of State Antony Blinken postponed his first planned trip to China as the balloon was flying over the U.S., and a new meeting with his Chinese counterpart has yet to be scheduled.

“I expect to be speaking with President Xi and I hope we can get to the bottom of this,” Biden said, adding, “But I make no apologies for taking down that balloon.”

Biden said the rules would remain classified so as not to “give a roadmap to our enemies to try to evade our defenses.”

Rep. Jim Himes of Connecticut, the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said he expected the U.S. would keep its radar systems set going forward to detect slow-moving balloons as well as fast-moving aircraft and other possible intruders. But he said he had impressed on White House officials late Tuesday that security forces would have to fine-tune their response for when they spot balloons of unknown provenance.

“The White House scrambling fighters and tankers” and special forces, he said, “is not going to be a scalable solution to every bit of airborne junk.”

The Chinese balloon has escalated tensions between the U.S. and China. Blinken travels Thursday to the Munich Security Conference and there is speculation he might use the opportunity to meet top Chinese foreign policy official Wang Yi, who will also be attending the conference.

Biden had remained largely silent on the objects downed Friday off the coast of Alaska, Saturday over Canada and Sunday over Lake Huron. On Monday, the White House announced earnestly there was no indication of “aliens or extraterrestrial activity.” By Wednesday, U.S. officials said they were still working to locate the wreckage from the objects, but that they expected all three to be unrelated to surveillance efforts.

“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. 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.

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.

After the balloon was shot down, the White House revealed that such balloons had traversed U.S. territory at least three times during President Donald Trump's administration unknown to Trump or his aides — and that others have flown over dozens of nations across five continents. Kirby emphasized Monday that they were only detected by the Biden administration.

Judge suggests jail to limit FTX founder's communications

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A federal judge showed growing impatience Thursday with FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried's use of the internet while on bail, suggesting that incarceration might eventually be the most effective way to prevent him from communicating on electronic devices in ways that can't be traced.

Judge Lewis A. Kaplan did not immediately change a \$250 million bail package that lets Bankman-Fried live with his parents in Palo Alto, California, while preparing for trial on charges that he cheated investors and looted customer deposits at FTX, his cryptocurrency trading platform.

But he raised the possibility for the first time that jail might be the only way to ensure Bankman-Fried won't outfox the government with ways to use electronic devices in ways that can't be tracked.

"There is a solution, but it's not one anybody's proposed yet," Kaplan said as Bankman-Fried sat passively at the defense table. He then noted that there may be many devices in Bankman-Fried's family home that the government will not be tracking, even with any new rules imposed on his bail conditions.

"Why am I being asked to set him loose in this garden of electronic devices?" he asked prosecutors.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Nicolas Roos said a more "drastic alternative" would be to ban Bankman-Fried's use of all electronic devices, but he added that it would be difficult for him to prepare for a trial tentatively set for October if that were to occur.

The judge noted that Bankman-Fried, according to prosecutors, "has done things that suggests to me that maybe he has committed or attempted to commit a federal felony while on release."

Kaplan was alluding to a claim by prosecutors that Bankman-Fried sent an encrypted message over the Signal texting app on Jan. 15 to the general counsel of FTX US.

According to prosecutors, the message said: "I would really love to reconnect and see if there's a way for us to have a constructive relationship, use each other as resources when possible, or at least vet things with each other. I'd love to get on a phone call sometime soon and chat."

Federal prosecutors have told Kaplan that Bankman-Fried's communications indicate he may be trying to influence a witness with incriminating evidence against him.

On Thursday, prosecutors asked Kaplan to more severely limit Bankman-Fried's use of electronic devices and the internet, including banning him from messaging applications and requiring the installation of a device monitoring program on his cellphone and computer.

A day earlier, they wrote in court papers that his "behavior shows that the existing conditions leave too much room for circumvention of restrictions aimed at preventing inappropriate conduct, including contacting witnesses and accessing cryptocurrency assets."

They described him as "a technologically sophisticated person with both the ability and the inclination to seek workarounds of more narrowly drawn bail conditions."

Mark Cohen, Bankman-Fried lawyer, called the proposals by prosecutors "draconian" requests that would make it hard for lawyers and the defendant to prepare for trial. But he soon found himself on the defensive as Kaplan noted his client's apparent bail violations, including accessing an encrypted internet site to watch the Super Bowl.

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The judge mocked Bankman-Fried's use of an encrypted method to watch the game, noting that it was on any television. Cohen responded that there wasn't a TV in the house.

"I think we understand your comments today, your honor, that there is no margin for error," Cohen said. "That if there are any violations, we will be at a very different proceeding."

Of the eventual bail restrictions, the judge said: "I want this to be tight, not just tight in characterization, but tight in fact."

Bankman-Fried has been confined with electronic monitoring to his parents' home since his December arrest on charges that he cheated investors and that diverted their deposits, in part to finance political donations and make risky trades at Alameda Research. He has pleaded not guilty.

EPA chief at train derailment site: 'Trust the government'

By PATRICK ORSAGOS Associated Press

EAST PALESTINE, Ohio (AP) — The head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency got a first-hand look Thursday at the toll left by a freight train derailment in Ohio, where toxic chemicals spilled or were burned off, leaving the stench of fresh paint nearly two weeks later.

EPA Administrator Michael Regan, who walked along a creek that still reeks of chemicals, sought to reassure skeptical residents that the water is fit for drinking and the air safe to breathe around East Palestine, where just under 5,000 people live near the Pennsylvania state line.

"I'm asking they trust the government. I know that's hard. We know there's a lack of trust," Regan said. "We're testing for everything that was on that train."

Since the derailment, residents have complained about headaches and irritated eyes and finding their cars and lawns covered in soot. The hazardous chemicals that spilled from the train killed thousands of fish, and residents have talked about finding dying or sick pets and wildlife.

Residents are frustrated by what they say is incomplete and vague information about the lasting effects from the disaster, which prompted evacuations.

"I have three grandbabies," said Kathy Dyke, who came with hundreds of her neighbors to a public meeting Wednesday where representatives of railroad operator Norfolk Southern were conspicuously absent. "Are they going to grow up here in five years and have cancer?"

Regan said Thursday that anyone who is fearful of being in their home should seek testing from the government.

"People have been unnerved. They've been asked to leave their homes," he said, adding that if he lived there, he would be willing to move his family back into the area as long as the testing shows it's safe.

Those attending the previous night's informational session had questions about health hazards and demanded more transparency from Norfolk Southern, which did not attend, citing concerns about its staff safety. Many who had waited in a long line snaking outside the high school gymnasium came away upset that they didn't hear anything new. Some booed or laughed each time they heard the village mayor or state health director assure them that lingering odors aren't dangerous.

"They just danced around the questions a lot," said Danielle Deal, who lives a few miles from the derailment site. "Norfolk needed to be here."

At least five lawsuits have been filed against the railroad, which announced this week that it is creating a \$1 million fund to help the community while continuing to remove spilled contaminants from the ground and streams and monitoring air quality.

"We are here and will stay here for as long as it takes to ensure your safety and to help East Palestine recover and thrive," Norfolk Southern President and CEO Alan Shaw said in a letter to the community.

Families who evacuated said they want assistance figuring out how to get the promised financial help. Beyond that, they want to know whether the railroad will be held responsible.

State and federal officials have promised to make sure Norfolk Southern not only pays for the cleanup but also reimburses residents.

The White House said teams from the federal health and emergency response and the Centers for

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Disease Control and Prevention will go to East Palestine.

"We understand the residents are concerned — as they should be — and they have questions. That's all understandable," said White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre. "And we're going to get to the bottom of this."

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

The Ohio EPA said the latest tests show five wells supplying the village's drinking water are free from contaminants.

At least, 3,500 fish, mostly small ones such as minnows and darters, have been found dead along more than 7 miles (11.2 kilometers) of streams, according to the estimates from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

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

There have been anecdotal reports that pets or livestock have been sickened. No related animal deaths have been confirmed and the risk to livestock is low, Ohio officials said, but the state Agriculture Department is testing samples from a beef calf that died a week after the derailment.

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

Canada to deploy navy vessels to Haiti as violence worsens

By DÁNICA COTO and ROB GILLIES Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Canada will send navy vessels to Haiti for intelligence-gathering as part of efforts to quell worsening gang violence in the Caribbean nation, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Thursday.

Trudeau made the announcement in the Bahamas at an annual meeting of Caribbean leaders where a key topic has been Haiti's surge in killings, rapes and kidnappings blamed on gangs emboldened since the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse.

Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry, also at the meeting, has pleaded for a full-fledged international military intervention to stem the mayhem. His country requested help from the U.N. Security Council in October, and has suggested the U.S. and Canada lead a force. No such intervention has come together, and neither country has offered to take the lead.

Canada's move to send ships, announced at the meeting of leaders of the 15-member Caricom trade bloc, comes shortly after the return of one of its surveillance planes on a similar mission to collect intelligence for Haitian police.

"Right now, Haiti is confronted with unrelenting gang violence, political turmoil and corruption," Trudeau said. "Now is the moment to come together to confront the severity of this situation."

Trudeau said Canada and Haiti's neighbors need to work on long-lasting solutions to restore order and security, allow for essential aid to flow and create the conditions for free and fair elections.

He also unveiled sanctions on two additional Haitians: former interim president Jocelerme Privert and ex-political aide Salim Succar. Neither could be immediately reached for comment. They join 15 others already banned from making any economic dealings in Canada amid alleged ties to gangs.

Also on Thursday, the U.S. State Department announced it had placed visa restrictions on five more Haitians and seven family members that it did not identify, saying only that they have been fomenting violence, corruption, and instability. A total of 44 people have faced U.S. restrictions since October.

Meanwhile, the Canadian leader said his government would give an additional \$12.3 million in humanitarian assistance and \$10 million to support the International Office on Migration, to protect Haitian women and children along Haiti's border with the Dominican Republic. The neighboring country has deported tens

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of thousands of Haitian migrants and those of Haitian ancestry in the past year.

"The toll of human suffering in Haiti weighs heavily on me," Trudeau said.

Earlier on Thursday, Trudeau met behind closed doors with Henry, who told reporters that he urgently wants Haiti to hold elections despite the worsening insecurity.

The number of reported killings in Haiti last year increased by 35% to 2,183 victims, while the number of reported kidnappings more than doubled to 1,359 victims, according to the U.N.

A report last month from the U.N. Integrated Office in Haiti noted that "gang-related violence reached levels not seen in decades," and that tens of thousands of people have been displaced by the warring gangs.

Canada, the U.S. and other countries already have provided military equipment and other resources, along with training, to Haiti's National Police, which only has 9,700 active-duty officers for a country of more than 11 million people. Gangs control an estimated 60% of the capital of Port-au-Prince.

Trudeau also pledged \$1.8 million to fight illegal drug trafficking and strengthen border and maritime security across the Caribbean.

In addition, Trudeau said his government will set aside \$44.8 million to help the Caribbean fight climate change.

The Caricom meeting, which has drawn other officials including Brian Nichols, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, began on Wednesday and is scheduled to end on Friday.

Tim McCarver, big league catcher and broadcaster, dies at 81

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Tim McCarver, the All-Star catcher and Hall of Fame broadcaster who during 60 years in baseball won two World Series titles with the St. Louis Cardinals and had a long run as one of the country's most recognized, incisive and talkative television commentators, died Thursday. He was 81.

McCarver's death was announced by baseball's Hall of Fame, which said he died Thursday morning due to heart failure in Memphis, Tennessee, where he was with his family.

Among the few players to appear in major league games during four decades, McCarver was a two-time All Star who worked closely with two future Hall of Fame pitchers: The tempestuous Bob Gibson, whom McCarver caught for St. Louis in the 1960s, and the introverted Steve Carlton, McCarver's fellow Cardinal in the '60s and a Philadelphia Phillies teammate in the 1970s.

He switched to television soon after retiring in 1980 and called 24 World Series for ABC, CBS and Fox, a record for a baseball analyst on television.

"I think there is a natural bridge from being a catcher to talking about the view of the game and the view of the other players," McCarver told the Hall in 2012, the year he was given the Ford C. Frick Award for excellence in broadcasting. "It is translating that for the viewers. One of the hard things about television is staying contemporary and keeping it simple for the viewers."

McCarver became best known to national audiences for his 18-year partnership on Fox with play-by-play man Joe Buck. McCarver moved to Fox in 1996 when it began televising baseball and called his final World Series in 2013.

"I learned really fast that if you were in his inner circle, he would be a fierce defender of you and for you," Buck said Thursday. "He taught me how to deal with criticism because he had been criticized, his whole broadcast career. And sometimes it was because he was a teacher of the game. If some player or manager didn't manage or play the way he thought the game should be played, he let a national audience know it. He was always the first one in the clubhouse the next day. If that person had something to say back to him, he would engage and stand his ground, but it was fair.

"He taught me a lot about the game, but he taught me as much or more about how to broadcast on a national level."

Commissioner Rob Manfred said in a statement that McCarver was "a respected teammate and one of the most influential voices our game has known." McCarver, who in the 1960s was an early and prominent union activist, was praised Thursday by Major League Baseball Players Association Executive Director Tony

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Clark for his "lead role" in the union's formation.

Six feet tall and solidly built, McCarver was a policeman's son from Memphis, who got into more than a few fights while growing up but was otherwise playing baseball and football and imitating popular broadcasters, notably the Cardinals' Harry Caray. He was signed while still in high school by the Cardinals for \$75,000, a generous offer for that time; just 17 when he debuted for them in 1959 and in his early 20s when he became the starting catcher.

McCarver attended segregated schools in Memphis and often spoke of the education he received as a newcomer in St. Louis. His teammates included Gibson and outfielder Curt Flood, Black players who did not hesitate to confront or tease McCarver. When McCarver used racist language against a Black child trying to jump a fence during spring training, Gibson would remember "getting right up in McCarver's face." McCarver liked to tell the story about drinking an orange soda during a hot day in spring training and Gibson asking him for some, then laughing when McCarver flinched.

"It was probably Gibby more than any other Black man who helped me to overcome whatever latent prejudices I may have had," McCarver wrote in his 1987 memoir "Oh, Baby, I Love It!"

Few catchers were strong hitters during the '60s, but McCarver batted .270 or higher for five consecutive seasons and was fast enough to become the first in his position to lead the league in triples. He had his best year in 1967 when he hit .295 with 14 home runs, finishing second for NL Most Valuable Player behind teammate Orlando Cepeda as the Cardinals won their second World Series in four years.

McCarver met Carlton when the left-hander was a rookie in 1965 "with an independent streak wider than the Grand Canyon," McCarver later wrote. The two initially clashed, even arguing on the mound during games, but became close and were reunited in the 1970s after both were traded to Philadelphia. McCarver became Carlton's designated catcher even though he admittedly had a below average throwing arm and overall didn't compare defensively to the Phillies' regular catcher, Gold Glover Bob Boone.

"Behind every successful pitcher, there has to be a very smart catcher, and Tim McCarver is that man," Carlton said during his Hall of Fame induction speech in 1994. "Timmy forced me pitch inside. Early in my career I was reluctant to pitch inside. Timmy had a way to remedy this. He used to set up behind the hitter. There was just the umpire there; I couldn't see him (McCarver), so I was forced to pitch inside."

McCarver liked to joke that he and Carlton were so in synch in the field that when both were dead they would be buried 60 feet, 6 inches apart, the distance between the rubber on the pitching mound and home plate.

During a 21-year career, when he also played briefly for the Montreal Expos and Boston Red Sox, McCarver batted .271 and only twice struck out more than 40 times in a season. In the postseason, he averaged .273 and had his best outing in the 1964 World Series, when the Cardinals defeated the New York Yankees in seven games. McCarver finished 11 for 23, with five walks, and his 3-run homer at Yankee Stadium in the 10th inning of Game 5 gave his team a 5-2 victory.

Younger baseball fans first knew him from his work in the broadcast booth, whether local games for the New York Mets, Yankees, Philadelphia and San Francisco, as Jack Buck's partner on CBS (1990-91) or with son Joe Buck for Fox from 1996-2013. McCarver won six Emmys and became enough of a brand name to be a punchline on "Family Guy"; write a handful of books, make cameos in "Naked Gun," "Love Hurts" and other movies and even record an album, "Tim McCarver Sings Songs from the Great American Songbook."

"To a generation of fans, Tim will forever be remembered as the champion whose game-winning home run during the 1964 World Series echoes throughout time," Fox Sports CEO and executive producer Eric Shanks said. "To another, his voice will forever be the soundtrack to some of the most memorable moments in the game's history. To us, he will forever be in our hearts."

Knowledge was his trademark. In his spare time, he visited art museums, read books and could recite poetry from memory. At work, he was like a one-man scouting team, versed in the most granular details, and spent hours preparing before each game. At times, he seemed to have psychic powers. In Game 7 of the 2001 World Series, the score was tied at 2 between the Yankees and Arizona, and New York drew in its infield with the bases loaded and one out in the bottom of the ninth. Mariano Rivera was facing Luis Gonzalez.

"Rivera throws inside to left-handers," McCarver observed. "Left-handers get a lot of broken-bat hits

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into shallow outfield, the shallow part of the outfield. That's the danger of bringing the infield in with a guy like Rivera on the mound."

Moments later, Gonzalez's bloop to short center field drove in the winning run.

"When you consider the pressure of the moment," ESPN's Keith Olbermann told The New York Times in 2002, "the time he had to say it and the accuracy, his call was the sports-announcing equivalent of Bill Mazerowski's home run in the ninth inning to defeat the Yankees in 1960."

Many found McCarver informative and entertaining. Others thought him infuriating. McCarver did not cut himself short whether explaining baseball strategy or taking on someone's performance on the field. "When you ask him the time, (he) will tell you how a watch works," Sports Illustrated's Norm Chad wrote of him in 1992. The same year his criticism of Deion Sanders for playing two sports on the same day led to Atlanta outfielder/Falcons defensive back's dumping a bucket of water on his head. In 1999, McCarver was fired by the Mets after 16 seasons on the air.

The Mets said in a statement that McCarver gave Mets an insightful, humorous and knowledgeable behind the scenes look into the game.

"Some broadcasters think that their responsibility is to the team and the team only," McCarver told the Times soon after the Mets let him go. "I have never thought that. My No. 1 obligation is to the people who are watching the game. And I've always felt that praise without objective criticism ceases to be praise. To me, any intelligent person can figure that out."

After retiring from Fox's national broadcasts, McCarver announced part-time for Fox Sports Midwest and worked the occasional Cardinals game before sitting out the 2020 season because of concerns about COVID-19. Besides the Frick award, he was inducted into the Cardinals Hall of Fame, in 2017.

"By the time I was 26 I had played in three World Series and I thought, 'Man this is great, almost a World Series every year,'" he said during his acceptance speech. "Uh-uh. The game has a way of keeping you honest. I never played in another World Series."

McCarver is survived by his daughters Kathy and Kelley, and grandchildren Leigh and Beau.

Sturgeon's exit leaves Scottish independence path unclear

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Scotland's independence movement needs a new leader — and a new plan.

With the resignation of First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, the decades-long campaign by Scottish nationalists to secede from the United Kingdom is losing its star politician and strongest communicator, at a time when efforts to hold a new vote on independence are at an impasse.

The Times of London said Thursday that Sturgeon's departure was a "huge boost to unionism," and a "generational setback" to the independence cause. Financial Times columnist Robert Shrimmsley said simply: "Nicola Sturgeon ran out of road."

Sturgeon took the U.K. by surprise when she announced her resignation on Wednesday after eight years in office, saying she knew "in my head and in my heart" it was time to leave.

She will remain first minister for several more weeks while the Scottish National Party picks a new leader, a job for which there is no clear favorite. Potential successors include Angus Robertson, a Sturgeon ally who serves as Scotland's constitution secretary, Finance Secretary Kate Forbes and Health Secretary Humza Yousaf. But none of the contenders has Sturgeon's profile or proven political skills.

Voting for the new party leader will open March 12 and close March 27.

Whoever wins will have to find a way to break the independence logjam. Scottish voters opted by 55% to 45% to remain in the U.K. in a 2014 referendum that was billed as a once-in-a-generation decision.

Sturgeon took power in the wake of that defeat and tried to forge a path to a second vote. Brexit looked like it might give her a chance: The U.K. as a whole backed leaving the European Union in a 2016 referendum, but voters in Scotland strongly favored remaining. Sturgeon argued that Brexit had made a new referendum essential because it had dragged Scotland out of the European Union against its will.

But a binding referendum needs agreement from the U.K. government, and the Conservative administra-

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tion in London has refused to grant one.

Sturgeon ruled out emulating Catalan separatists in Spain and holding an unauthorized vote, a decision that struck some independence supporters as too cautious.

Instead she unsuccessfully challenged the British government at the Supreme Court for the right to hold a new referendum. Then she said she would use the next U.K. national election, due by 2024, as “de facto” plebiscite on independence — though it was unclear exactly how that would work.

The SNP on Thursday postponed a special conference on its independence strategy that had been set for March 19,

Recent polls suggest Scots are about evenly split on the issue of independence. John Kampfner of think tank Chatham House said that with Sturgeon gone it’s possible “some of the air has gone out of the bubble” of the independence movement.

He said that momentum could weaken even more if the opposition Labour Party wins the next U.K. election, due by 2024, as polls currently suggest it will. He said Labour leader Keir Starmer is a more appealing figure to many Scots than “very English, divisive and right-wing” former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Sturgeon’s long-time antagonist.

Sturgeon exits without fulfilling her dream of leading Scotland to independence, but leaves a large, and contested, legacy. Scotland’s first female leader refashioned the SNP from a largely one-issue party into a dominant governing force with liberal social positions. Her departure brought praise from Nancy Pelosi — who hailed her “strong, values-driven leadership” — and a jibe from Donald Trump, who bid “Good riddance to failed woke extremist Nicola Sturgeon of Scotland!”

Admirers praised her calm, measured public communications during the coronavirus pandemic — a contrast to Johnson’s erratic bluster.

But Sturgeon’s plan to make it easier for people in Scotland to legally change their gender caused a storm inside the party that may have hastened her decision to leave.

Scotland’s gender recognition bill would allow people aged 16 or older to change the gender designations on identity documents by self-declaration, removing the need for a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria.

Hailed as a landmark by transgender rights activists, the legislation faced opposition from some SNP members who said it ignored the need to protect single-sex spaces for women, such as domestic violence shelters and rape crisis centers.

What to do about the bill — which has been passed by the Scottish parliament but blocked by the U.K. government — will be another challenge for Sturgeon’s successor. Some in the party strongly support it, while others see it as a distraction from the party’s main goal: independence.

Some have already left to join Alba, the rival party formed in 2021 by former First Minister Alex Salmond, Sturgeon’s now-estranged friend and mentor.

John Curtice, professor of politics at the University of Strathclyde, said “the \$64,000 question is” whether the party can find a leader with “the public impact and rhetorical skill” of Salmond and Sturgeon.

“The SNP needs more than just a competent first minister. It needs a campaigning politician who can move the dial on the independence debate. That’s the big question mark,” he told Times Radio.

YouTube CEO steps down, severing longtime ties to Google

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

Susan Wojcicki, a longtime Google executive who played a key role in the company’s creation, is stepping down as YouTube’s CEO after spending the past nine years running the video site that has reshaped entertainment, culture and politics.

In an email to YouTube employees that was shared publicly Thursday, the 54-year-old Wojcicki said she is leaving to “start a new chapter focused on my family, health, and personal projects I’m passionate about.” She didn’t elaborate on her plans.

Neal Mohan, who has worked closely with Wojcicki for years, will replace her as YouTube’s CEO.

Although she became one of the most respected female executives in the male-dominated tech industry,

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Wojcicki will also be remembered as Google's first landlord.

Shortly after Google co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin incorporated their search engine into a business in 1998, Wojcicki rented the garage of her Menlo Park, California, home to them for \$1,700 a month.

Page and Brin — both 25 at the time — continued to refine their search engine in Wojcicki's garage for five months before moving Google into a more formal office and later persuaded their former landlord to come work for their company.

"It would be one of the best decisions of my life," Wojcicki wrote in the announcement of her departure.

In 2006, Google bought Wojcicki's home to serve as a monument to the roots of a company now valued at \$1.2 trillion. During Wojcicki's career at Google, Brin became her brother-in-law when he married her sister, Anne, in 2007. Brin and Anne Wojcicki divorced in 2015.

Wojcicki's departure comes at a time when YouTube is facing one of its most challenging periods since Google bought what was then a quirky video site facing widespread complaints about copyright infringement in 2006 for an announced price of \$1.65 billion. The all-stock deal was valued at \$1.76 billion by the time the transaction closed.

Although Google was initially derided for paying so much for a video service whose future appeared to be in doubt, it turned out to be a bargain. Besides becoming a cultural phenomenon that attracts billions of viewers, YouTube also has become a financial success with ad revenue totaling \$29 billion last year. That was up from annual ad revenue of \$8 billion in 2017 when Google's corporate parent, Alphabet Inc., began to disclose YouTube's financial revenue.

But YouTube's ad revenue during the final six months of last year dropped 5% from the previous year — the first extended downturn that the video service has shown since Alphabet peeled back its financial curtain. Analysts are worried the slump will continue this year, one of the reasons Alphabet's stock price has fallen 11% since it released its most recent quarterly report two weeks ago.

Wojcicki is also leaving just days before the U.S. Supreme Court is scheduled to hear oral arguments in a case threatening the freewheeling style that has long been one of YouTube's biggest advantages.

The case stems from the 2015 death of an American woman killed in Paris during an attack by Islamic State in an incident that spurred the victim's family to file a lawsuit alleging YouTube's algorithms aided the terror group's recruitment. If the court decides that tech companies can be held liable for material posted on their sites, experts say the effects could not only destroy YouTube but shake up the entire internet.

That's because under the U.S. law, internet companies are generally exempt from liability for the material users post on their networks. Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act — itself part of a broader telecom law — provides a legal "safe harbor" for internet companies — a protection that YouTube co-founders Chad Hurley and Steve Chen seized upon as an opportunity to launch as video site to "broadcast yourself."

Michigan State University gunman's note had possible motive

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and MIKE HOUSEHOLDER Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. (AP) — The man who shot eight students at Michigan State University, killing three, was found with two handguns and a note containing a possible motive for the attack, police said Thursday.

The 9 mm guns, dozens of rounds of ammunition and the two-page note were found with Anthony McRae when he killed himself Monday night after being confronted by police, said campus deputy chief Chris Rozman.

Investigators said they still were trying to pin down a motive, three days after the violence at the 50,000-student campus in East Lansing, but the note was a key point.

"It appears based on the content of the note that he felt he was slighted in some way by people or businesses," Rozman said at a news conference. "Did a mental health issue amplify that or was it a component of that? We're not sure at this point. We're working our best to try to determine that as best as possible."

McRae, 43, was the lone shooter and had no connection to the victims or to Michigan State as a student or employee, police said.

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Rozman described the investigation as “massively complex.”

The shootings happened Monday during evening classes at Berkey Hall and nearby at the MSU Union, a social hub where students can study, eat and relax. Students across the vast campus were ordered to shelter in place for four hours — “run, hide, fight” if necessary — while police hunted for the gunman. Some residence halls were a mile away from the shooting scenes.

Students have described breaking windows and taking other desperate steps to escape Berkey Hall, which will stay closed through the spring term.

McRae walked nearly 4 miles (6 kilometers) toward his Lansing home after the shootings and said nothing before killing himself in front of police, said Lt. Rene Gonzalez of the state police.

McRae’s father, who shared the house, told police that “his son does not have any friends,” Gonzalez said. “He pretty much sat in his room most of the time.”

McRae had a misdemeanor gun conviction in 2019, though it didn’t bar him from having the handguns, which Rozman noted were purchased legally but not registered.

The students who died were from suburban Detroit: Brian Fraser, 20, Arielle Anderson, 19, and Alexandria Verner, 20.

One of the five wounded students was upgraded to stable condition at Sparrow Hospital. The others remained in critical condition but with “signs of improvement,” interim university President Teresa Woodruff said.

Two of the students are from China, according to a statement from the Chinese Consulate in Chicago.

Classes remain suspended through the weekend, Woodruff said.

The briefing by police followed a Wednesday night vigil on campus that drew thousands of students. Tom Izzo, the university’s revered basketball coach and father of a student, offered words of comfort.

“Our hearts are heavy. Our loss has been great. Our lives have been permanently changed,” said Izzo, head coach since 1995. “But with a shared commitment to help each other, and a promise to remember those we have lost, we will learn to find joy once again.”

Ukraine war saga unfolds across the lives of 5 friends

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

BUCHA, Ukraine (AP) — In the cemetery where Oleksii Zavadskyi and Yurii Stiahliuk are buried, the women they loved take drags on the men’s favorite brands of cigarettes. Clouds of smoke are exhaled in silence.

Interlaced between Anastasiia Okhrimenko’s dainty fingers are Camels. Anna Korostenska lights L&M’s, her hands shaking in the cold. An intimate ritual when the men were still alive — at the end of the day, when it was just the two of them — it is now a somber tradition carried on after death.

Oleksii and Yurii were killed on Ukraine’s eastern front five months apart. One was Vadym Okhrimenko’s best friend and died in his arms. “Gone, in an instant,” he says, briskly packing his combat uniform and gear. Soon he returns to the battlefield, heavy with sorrow, hungry for revenge.

The five had known each other since childhood. They came of age in Bucha, a Kyiv suburb now synonymous with the war’s most horrific atrocities. Their interwoven tales reveal how Russia’s invasion of Ukraine almost one year ago changed their lives, their neighborhood, their country.

“This war is not just about soldiers,” says Anna. “It’s about everyone connected to them, and their pain.”

With each passing month, sedimentary layers of grief formed: violent occupations followed by tearful separations and interminable waiting. Between chaotic front lines where victory turned to attrition and homes assailed with constant air raids and power cuts, love blossomed, friendships deepened and the fear of death burrowed in.

As the conflict that killed their loved ones rages on, Anna, Anastasiia and her brother, Vadym, wrestle with a question that all of war-torn Ukraine must grapple with: After loss, what comes next?

HISTORY UNFOLDING

In Bucha, familiar childhood landmarks are imbued with a new, dark history.

There is the building behind the playground where dozens took shelter from the approaching Russian

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troops; the garages where Russian soldiers burned to death those sheltering inside; the supermarket, from where the funeral processions now start.

The occupation, which lasted 33 days from the start of the invasion on Feb. 24 to April 1, when Russian troops withdrew, became a potent symbol of the war's horrors. Liberation revealed the mass murder of civilians and cruel accounts of rape. More than 450 people were killed, according to local authorities.

Anastasiia fled the area for another. Anna remained in Bucha until March 10. She spent nights in the shelter as Russian tanks rolled past her neighborhood of Sklozavod, soldiers ransacked shops and ran over a man sitting in a car. All this, she witnessed.

"We are still processing," says Andrii Holovyn, 50, the community's priest, who presided over Yurii's funeral and those of countless other soldiers after him. "People are living in constant danger, without light, with no breaks in between."

The occupation propelled the childhood friends to act. Oleksii's mother and sister escaped to Germany. Vadym's wife fled to the Czech Republic. Yurii asked Anastasiia to leave her job and stay at home.

They were very different, the three men. Yurii had an aura of eternal youth, the kind of guy who smiled broadly even when enraged. Oleksii was a brawler, a rebel on the outside but intensely introverted. Vadym, a terse, self-described "football hooligan," was their leader.

Stirred by the massacre in their hometown, they joined the army in the spring of 2022. No one could afford to fold their arms and watch the war happen, said Vadym.

LIVING CALL TO CALL

This was the moment Anastasiia chose to propose marriage to Yurii.

It was her way of telling him he could count on her to wait for him. They had been together for seven years, a relationship sparked the day that Yurii, the boy she had met as a child and known only as her brother's friend, reappeared in her life with an innocuous greeting on social media.

"I realized that he was the only person with whom I could imagine my future," she says.

It was a no-frills ceremony. Papers were signed, rings exchanged. But future plans were elaborate. "First, we had to win this war," Anastasiia says, twirling her wedding band around her finger. "Probably the first thing we would do after is go on a honeymoon."

Yurii arrived in the eastern city of Kramatorsk in July, heading toward the salt-mining town of Bakhmut, which would turn out to be the focus of the war's longest battle. Says Anastasiia: "I lived from call to call."

Through him, she bore witness to the hellscape that was the war.

Russia had shifted tactics, withdrawing troops from the north after fierce Ukrainian resistance and concentrating on what Moscow described as the "liberation" of the contested Donbas region.

His correspondence with Anastasiia over six months revealed his unit was constantly on the move. The shelling and artillery battles were relentless, he told her. After one night of extensive bombardment, he texted, "I will definitely return," with an emoji blowing a heart-shaped kiss.

In August, he complained that the enemy had more advanced weapons while they had to make do with automatic guns. Helpless, they spent hours hiding in the trenches.

The night before Ukraine's Independence Day on Aug. 25, Yurii said he expected the Russians would mark the occasion with missiles. He made her promise to sleep in the corridor, away from windows.

He returned to the front later. When the shelling ceased for a moment, Yurii made a dash for the car, thinking he had just enough time as the enemy reloaded weapons.

Then the shooting started again.

It was Vadym, not Yurii, who called Anastasiia that morning. He had bad news from the Military Commissariat.

"Tell me it's not true," reads the last text message she sent her husband. "I'm begging you, tell me you're alive."

A DECLARATION OF LOVE

September was a turning point.

Ukraine launched surprise counter-offensives in the northern and southern regions, denting the image of Russia's military might. Kyiv was encouraged to seek more arms from the hesitant West to sustain the

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fight, and Oleksii finally summoned the courage to tell Anna he loved her for the first time.

Theirs was an affair only the two of them understood, one in which moments of affection could quickly devolve into thunderous arguments.

Oleksii was Anna's first kiss at 15, but there was no relationship to speak of until Yurii's death. That changed him. Oleksii revealed he had loved her his entire life but had stayed away because she had been with one of his friends. Now he didn't care anymore.

"Yurii's death pushed us to accept the fact that you can do anything in this life while you are still alive," Anna says.

After Yurii's funeral, Anna planned to spend the night with Anastasiia to comfort her grieving friend. Oleksii, who had taken leave to attend the burial, walked her to the door and kissed her.

After, he called her almost every day.

In mid-September, he seemed especially tired on a video call while stationed in Zaporizhzhia. He asked Anna to help him find out how long soldiers were permitted to take leave. He sent her a link, an information page for officers looking to get time off to get married.

"Zavadskyi, do you want to go on vacation or get married?" she asked him, teasing.

"Let's combine the practical with the pleasant," he responded. That was Oleksii's style. They were engaged.

Before autumn turned to winter, Ukraine liberated the northern city of Kharkiv and Kherson in the south. The victories boosted morale, but were won bit by bit with the help of Western weapons that wore down Russian forces and supply lines.

In the east, gains were harder to come by. Russian forces, with Wagner mercenaries, unleashed human wave tactics to exhaust Ukrainian defenses. On January 11, Oleksii was deployed to a position near Bakhmut, very close to the same front where Yurii was killed.

On Jan. 13, he called. It was too cold to sleep, he said, quivering. The combat lines were very close; he was 15 meters away from the enemy. He was scared.

In long-range battles it's not easy to see when you've killed someone, he explained. He had sent videos of himself from these positions before, shooting toward the faraway enemy lines, crying out: "For Stiahliuk!" — for Yurii. But here, he could clearly see how the bodies of the men he extinguished fell.

Anna told him, sharply. "You have to understand: If you don't kill, they will kill you."

He died the next day from a bullet to the neck.

BROTHERS IN ARMS

Until their redeployment to the east, they had felt invincible. In Zaporizhzhia, they had captured two prisoners after an ambush operation and pushed the Russians back by at least 10 kilometers. Oleksii was both an infantryman and drove the platoon's armored vehicle.

In Bakhmut, they were tasked with carrying out dangerous maneuvers at the foot of the flank, close to enemy lines.

"You have to fight every day, every minute," Vadym says. Russian attacks seemed endless; their soldiers walked passed the corpses of their own comrades in their relentless push toward Ukrainian positions.

In the middle of the shootout on Jan. 14, Oleksii suddenly collapsed. As there was no blood, Vadym thought he had suffered a shock.

He dragged his friend to cover and looked for a pulse. He could swear he felt one, but the medic at the scene said Oleksii died instantly.

This time, Vadym could not bring himself to call Anna. As the commander of their platoon, Vadym had felt responsible for protecting his best friend. He promised Oleksii's father, Sergey, he would bring him back home alive. "I was ashamed," he says. Yurii had been with a different unit.

"There are no golden or miraculous words that can instantly ease their pain," says Holovyn, the priest of the parishioners who come to him with their tales of suffering. The other day, the teacher of the Sunday school told him her husband had died on the front, but that his body remains in Russian controlled territory. Lying there in the snow.

In Bucha, some people are already rebuilding. The smell of sawdust wafts in the air, as workmen repair

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destroyed roofs and residents embrace the precarity of living without peace.

In Oleksii's grandmother's home in Bucha, Anna holds her fiance's shirts close to catch the lingering scent of him. "They say the Earth spins. My Earth has stopped," she says.

Time hasn't made it any easier for Anastasiia, either. "You come out of a stressful state and begin to realize what is actually happening." Sometimes she catches herself still waiting for a call.

Side by side, both women stood together at the funerals of the men they loved. "Only Nastya understood me — like no one else," Anna says, using a nickname for Anastasiia and clasping her hand.

For Vadym, the time to leave has come. "Only fools have no fear at all," he says, realizing that he is the last of his brothers in arms. "But I will try to survive."

The next day, he is gone.

Shiffrin wins gold, thanks former coach after surprise split

By ANDREW DAMPF and ERIC WILLEMSEN Associated Press

MERIBEL, France (AP) — Mikaela Shiffrin covered her mouth with her fluorescent orange mittens and then collapsed to the snow, still breathing heavily as her entire body pulsated from the exertion of her gold medal-winning run.

What a relief after a hectic week for the American skier.

Having endured a small protest aimed at her by environmentalists who mistakenly thought she was using a helicopter for training, Shiffrin's team was thrown into disarray two days before the giant slalom at the world championships when her longtime coach, Mike Day, left suddenly when Shiffrin told him she wanted to change her staff at the end of the season.

"It's been definitely some high levels of stress these days," Shiffrin said. "It was very, very difficult today to keep the focus and keep the intensity on the right level."

Day had coached Shiffrin since 2016 and was with her for 65 of her 85 World Cup wins. Shiffrin needs just one more win to match Ingemar Stenmark's overall record of 86 victories, having already broken Lindsey Vonn's women's mark of 82 wins.

While wins at worlds don't count toward the World Cup totals, that was the last thing on Shiffrin's mind Thursday.

"One thing I really want to say is just, 'Thank you,' to Mike for seven years of — I can't even say helping me — he's been such an integral part of my team and being there to support me through some of the most incredible moments in my career and some of the most challenging moments of my career and also my life," Shiffrin said, her voice cracking with emotion.

Shiffrin has now won two straight medals after taking silver in super-G, ending an unfortunate run in major championship races. She didn't finish three of her five individual races at last year's Beijing Olympics and didn't win a medal despite enormous expectations — then also didn't finish her first race at these worlds, when she straddled three gates from the finish of the combined to throw away what would have surely been gold.

Nobody on Shiffrin's personal team, which is also led by her mother, Eileen, who also coaches her, expected Day to react the way that he did.

"It's just a little bit sad how it came down," Shiffrin said, adding that she was hoping to give Day "the time and the notice" to figure out his own plans before the end of the season but that his decision to leave immediately was "difficult for all of us to imagine" after "being such a tight group, really a family."

The entire skiing circuit is like a family, too, with rivals on the slopes often sleeping in the same Alpine chalets and sharing dinners as they travel together all winter on what is known as the "White Circus."

That tight-knit bond that the skiers feel for each other was evident when Federica Brignone and Ragnhild Mowinckel rushed over to congratulate Shiffrin while she was still lying on the snow, then jumped on top of her.

Brignone finished a mere 0.12 seconds behind Shiffrin to take the silver, adding to the Italian's gold in combined, and Mowinckel of Norway finished 0.22 behind for the bronze.

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French skier Tessa Worley, who was second after the opening run, slid on her inside ski and fell in her second run.

"I didn't want to go for a medal, I wanted to go for the win," said Worley, a two-time giant slalom world champion who had the added pressure of skiing in front of her home fans.

Brignone spent four days at home in bed with a fever before this race and has also been mourning former teammate Elena Fanchini, who died last week of a tumor at age 37.

"It's also been an emotional time for us," Brignone said.

Shiffrin won the giant slalom at the 2018 Olympics but this was her first world title in the discipline, making her only the fourth female skier to win world titles in four different disciplines, after previously winning four golds in slalom, one in super-G and the combined gold two years ago.

It raises Shiffrin's tally to seven world titles and 13 medals overall from 16 career world championship races. She's in second place behind German skier Christl Cranz on the all-time list for the most individual medals won by a woman at the worlds. Cranz won 15 medals in the 1930s.

"Coaches are important but Shiffrin is still Shiffrin," said super-G champion Marta Bassino, who finished fifth. "She wasn't depending (only) on (Day). Let's not take anything away from him or the other coaches, with all due respect, but look at her."

Nina O'Brien posted the second-fastest time in the final run and improved from 21st to 11th position, while American teammate Paula Moltzan spun around and missed a gate halfway through her first run and did not finish. Moltzan fractured her hand in Tuesday's team event, which the U.S. team won. Shiffrin did not compete in that event.

"The hand is as good as it was going to feel so I'm not disappointed with that," said Moltzan, who had her glove taped to her ski pole during her run. "I think I just misjudged my turn a tiny bit and came inside a bit and couldn't recover."

The men's giant slalom is scheduled for Friday then Shiffrin's last race at worlds is the slalom — her best event — on Saturday.

Lonely tunes: Humpback whales wail less as population grows

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Those melancholy tunes sung by humpback whales may really be a sign of loneliness.

Scientists who tracked humpback whales in Australia noticed that fewer whales wailed to find mates as their population grew.

"Humpback whale song is loud and travels far in the ocean," said marine biologist Rebecca Dunlop, who has studied humpback whales that breed near the Great Barrier Reef for more than two decades.

As whale numbers dramatically rebounded following the end of commercial whaling — one of the world's great conservation success stories — she noticed something unexpected.

"It was getting more difficult to actually find singers," said Dunlop, who is based at the University of Queensland in Brisbane. "When there were fewer of them, there was a lot of singing — now that there are lots of them, no need to be singing so much."

Scientists first began to hear and study the elaborate songs of humpback whales in the 1970s, thanks to new underwater microphones. Only male whales sing, and the tunes are thought to play a role in attracting mates and asserting dominance.

Eastern Australia's humpback whales were facing regional extinction in the 1960s, with only around 200 whales left. But numbers grew and reached 27,000 whales by 2015 — approaching estimated pre-whaling levels.

As the density of whales increased, their courtship changed. While 2 in 10 males were singers in 2004, a decade later that ratio had dropped to just 1 in 10, Dunlop and colleagues report Thursday in the journal *Nature Communications Biology*.

Dunlop speculates that singing played an outsized role in attracting mates when populations were severely depleted.

"It was hard just to find other whales in the area, because there weren't many," she said.

When whales live in denser populations, a male looking for a mate also has to ward off the competition, and singing may tip off other suitors, she explained.

"As animal populations recover, they change their behavior — they have different constraints," said marine biologist Boris Worm of Canada's Dalhousie University, who was not involved in the study.

To be sure, the seas are still noisy. Many humpbacks woo with a combination of singing and physical jostling, the Australia researchers report.

"Such a big increase in animals over the time they were studying gave them a unique opportunity to get insights about changes in behavior," said Simon Ingram, a University of Plymouth marine biologist in England, who not involved in the study.

Ingram said that while humpback whales must have been singers long before whaling depleted their numbers, the new study highlights just how essential their elaborate and beautiful songs were to their survival and recovery.

"Clearly singing became incredibly valuable when their numbers were very low," he said. ____

Follow Christina Larson on Twitter at: @larsonchristina

Ryan Seacrest to leave 'Live with Kelly and Ryan' in spring

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Ryan Seacrest has revealed he's leaving "Live with Kelly and Ryan" this spring, saying he never expected to stay so long and thanking his co-host Kelly Ripa, who he jokingly called his "work wife."

Seacrest ends a six-year run alongside Ripa. His replacement will be Ripa's real-life husband, Mark Conuelos, and a frequent guest host. The show will be rebranded as "Live with Kelly and Mark."

"I'm going to miss my work wife and all the laughter we share," Seacrest wrote on Instagram. "When I signed on to host 'Live' in 2017 it was meant to be for three years, but I loved the job and working with Kelly so much that I extended my time and last year I made the decision to stay on for one more final season."

Seacrest said he'll stay busy shooting the new season of "American Idol," his radio show on KIIS-FM and hosting "Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve."

"Goodbyes are never easy, but we look forward to welcoming Ryan back regularly with open arms. As a fan-favorite guest host for years, Mark is no stranger to the 'Live' family. Having him join the show is so special for us and we're sure that viewers will feel the same," Michael Gelman, executive producer of "Live with Kelly and Ryan," said in a statement.

"Live with Kelly and Ryan" on ABC is the No. 1 daytime talk show per household and in total viewership. Ripa has hosted "Live" since 2001, first with Regis Philbin and later with Michael Strahan.

"I'm so grateful to have spent the last six years beside my dear friend of too many decades to count and will miss starting my days with Ryan," said Ripa in a statement. "Ryan's energy, passion and love for entertainment is one-of-a-kind."

Wholesale price pressures emerge despite long-term slowdown

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Wholesale prices in the United States reaccelerated in January, indicating that inflation pressures continue to underlie the U.S. economy despite longer-term signs of improvement.

From December to January, the government's producer price index jumped 0.7%, driven up in part by a 5% surge in energy prices. That increase compared with a 0.2% drop from November to December, and it was nearly twice the rise that economists had been expecting.

The producer price data reflects prices charged by manufacturers, farmers and wholesalers, and it flows into an inflation gauge that the Federal Reserve closely tracks. It can provide an early sign of how fast consumer inflation will rise.

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While the monthly inflation surge was worse than expected, price increases measured over the past year continued to show a slowdown: Wholesale prices in January were up 6% from 12 months earlier, compared with a 6.5% year-over-year rise in December and a recent peak of 11.7% in March. It was the seventh straight month of decelerating year-over-year wholesale inflation, though it still came in higher than forecasters had expected.

Excluding volatile food and energy prices, so-called core wholesale inflation was up 5.4% in January from a year earlier and 0.5% from December to January. Food prices, though, fell 1%, the second straight monthly drop. Egg prices, which have been driven up by a wave of avian flu, sank 12.7% from December to January but are still up more than 200% from a year ago.

In the energy sector, wholesale gasoline prices were up 6.2% from December, diesel fuel 10.9% and natural gas for homes 12.2%.

"While producer prices are off their peaks, inflation is elevated and the monthly change in prices showed a move in the wrong direction last month," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics. "These data will keep the Fed on track to raise interest rates further, to a sufficiently restrictive stance, in order to get inflation back toward" the central bank's 2% inflation target.

This week, the government reported that consumer inflation cooled for a seventh straight month compared with a year earlier. But the report also showed that inflationary pressures underlying the economy were likely to keep prices elevated well into this year. The year-over-year consumer inflation figure for January, 6.4%, remains well above the Fed's 2% annual target.

Since March of last year, the Fed has raised its benchmark interest rate eight times in hopes of slowing the economy enough to conquer high inflation. Inflation has, in fact, eased since hitting a four-decade high in mid-2022. The rate hikes have had the broader economic effect of raising the costs of mortgages and auto loans as well as credit card interest rates.

Despite higher borrowing costs, the U.S. job market has remained surprisingly strong. Employers added a sizzling 517,000 workers last month — nearly three times what forecasters had expected — and the unemployment rate fell to 3.4%, lowest since 1969.

Revelers celebrate street Carnival across German Rhineland

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Tens of thousands of revelers danced in the streets of Cologne, Duesseldorf, Bonn and other cities and towns across the Rhineland Thursday as they celebrated the traditional start of Carnival in Germany.

Dressed up in bright colors and creative costumes, they sang loudly and swayed to familiar tunes of brass bands and folklore music, and drank lots of beer.

It is the first time since the start of the pandemic that Carnival is being celebrated in Germany without any coronavirus restrictions.

The first day of Carnival in Germany is also traditionally dedicated to women taking over the power in city halls across the Rhineland for a day. They symbolically take away the keys from the — mostly male — mayors, and cut off men's ties and shoelaces in return for kisses.

In Duesseldorf, costumed elderly women known as Moehnen stormed city hall at 11:11 a.m., German news agency dpa reported.

"For two years you had your peace, but today it's all about women power. We want the power," shouted Carnival princess Uasa Maisch. "We'll cut off your ties. You're in for it. We want in."

In Cologne alone, tens of thousands of people were expected for the festivities. Police deployed more than 2,000 officers, and the interior minister of North Rhine-Westphalia, where Cologne is located, warned revelers not to drink too much "Koelsch" — the typical, honey-colored beer of Cologne.

"Everyone should know when there's been enough Koelsch," Herbert Reul told Cologne daily paper Koelner Stadt-Anzeiger.

At the same time, the minister acknowledged that "it's all the more important that there are these days when you can switch off for a few hours and put your worries aside" when concern about war and infla-

tion are on many people's minds most of the time.

Around noontime, Cologne police blocked off the Zuelpicher Viertel neighborhood because it was overflowing with people, dpa reported. No more revelers were allowed to enter the district close to the city's main university that's dotted with many popular bars and pubs.

Deputies suspended in Nichols case didn't keep body cams on

By ADRIAN SAINZ Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — Two sheriff's deputies who have been suspended for five days for their role in the arrest of Tyre Nichols failed to keep their body cameras activated after they went to the location where Nichols had been beaten by five Memphis police officers, officials said late Wednesday.

Shelby County Sheriff's Office deputies Jeremy Watkins and Johntavious Bowers each violated multiple policies after they reported to the location of Nichols' violent arrest on Jan. 7, Sheriff Floyd Bonner said in a statement.

Nichols had fled a traffic stop but was caught near his home by Memphis Police Department officers who punched him, kicked him and hit him with a baton, police video footage and other documents showed.

Video released by the city showed several law enforcement officers standing around as Nichols struggled with serious injuries while he sat on the ground, propped up against a police car. Nichols was taken to a hospital in an ambulance that left the location of the beating 27 minutes after emergency medical technicians arrived, authorities have said.

Nichols died at a hospital on Jan. 10. Five Memphis officers accused of beating Nichols have been fired and charged with second-degree murder. One other Memphis officer has been fired but not charged criminally for his role in the traffic stop that preceded the beating.

The sheriff's office previously had said two deputies who went to the scene after Nichols was beaten had been disciplined and were under investigation. But the county law enforcement office had not divulged further details, including their names and the actions they took — or did not take.

Reports released by the sheriff's office late Wednesday showed Bowers and Watkins were suspended for five days without pay for failing to keep their body cameras and in-car video turned on while they were at the arrest location.

The deputies also did not notify dispatch or their supervisor, the reports showed. Watkins also did not report on his daily log that he went to the arrest location, according to the reports.

Bonner said the sheriff's office does not believe that the deputies will face criminal charges.

Bowers and Watkins have been Shelby County deputies since June 2021, Bonner said. Both suspensions began Wednesday.

Potential buyers of Manchester United crunching the numbers

By JAMES ROBSON AP Soccer Writer

MANCHESTER, England (AP) — After missing out on Chelsea last year, British businessman Martin Broughton knows how potential buyers will be feeling ahead of Friday's deadline to submit bids for Manchester United.

The late nights spent crunching the numbers. Checking and double-checking that financial backers will make good on their promises.

Then that final bid emailed to the New York office of merchant bank Raine Group for approval.

"Just before you put in the formal bid you go through all of the debate," Broughton, who has no intention of making a bid for United, told The Associated Press on Wednesday. "How much leeway do we leave ourselves? We need to be on the shortlist. At the same time, we don't want to be overpaying."

Friday has been described as a soft deadline for initial offers before the process of determining the next owner of United gathers pace.

Broughton, a 75-year-old businessman who is the former chairman of British Airways and English soccer club Liverpool, went through all of that last year when heading a consortium that tried to buy Chelsea,

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with Raine also handling that sale. He made it to the final three, but eventually lost to Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital, who paid \$3 billion for the London club — a record for a soccer team.

United is estimated to command as much as double that figure after the American-owning Glazer family announced their willingness to sell last November.

So far Jim Ratcliffe, the British billionaire owner of petrochemicals giant INEOS, is the only confirmed bidder. But he is expected to face a challenge from Qatar, while other interested parties could become clearer after Friday.

"I don't know how many bids there were for Chelsea, but there were at least half a dozen serious bids and that leaves four or five frustrated people," Broughton said.

One of those was Ratcliffe, who, despite matching the bid of Boehly and Clearlake, missed the deadline set by Raine and wasn't considered. He hasn't repeated that mistake with United, declaring last month his intention to move for the club he has supported since childhood.

"Jim wants it. He's prepared to pay properly for it. My surmise would be he's willing to come up with a big number," Broughton said. "Personally, I would guess he'd be at the 4-5 billion pounds (\$4.8-6 billion) level.

"Jim, in the Chelsea case, made it clear at the outset that he wasn't going to be interested at that price, it was too much. Wasn't interested in discussing, joining in with other potential bidders and then made this very late bid."

Broughton, a Chelsea supporter, pitched his attempt to buy out then-owner Roman Abramovich on the premise of a bid by the fans, for the fans. He sees some similarities in Ratcliffe's pursuit of United.

"We didn't see it as just a financial transaction. We saw it more as an opportunity for a greater level of fan involvement. Jim is a fan," Broughton said, adding "somebody who is a fan, I think is preferable because they will think about what the fans want."

Broughton said he wouldn't be surprised if only a "very small number" of buyers come forward for United, given the estimated price and further investment required to redevelop the club's iconic Old Trafford stadium.

A Qatari-backed bid is expected, while it is unknown if a rival offer from the Middle East will also emerge.

Broughton sees Qatar as a serious threat to Ratcliffe if a bid from the oil and gas rich country emerges.

"They might feel a knockout price (would do it and say) ... We'll give you 6 billion (pounds; \$7.2 billion) as long as you sell it to us now and don't carry on the auction.' A take it or leave, something like that could easily settle it," Broughton said.

Broughton has written a memoir of his career called "Whenever I Hear That Song." In it, he recounts overseeing the sale of Liverpool to John Henry in 2010, as well as his attempts to buy Chelsea after Abramovich was forced to sell in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

While he has sounded out potential investors in Liverpool, with Henry's Fenway Sports Group open to selling the Merseyside club, he failed to drum up interest. He has not tried to put a bid together for United and is focusing on his passions, such as horse racing.

Proceeds from his book will go to the charity Retraining of Racehorses.

Another passion is Chelsea, and he has watched with interest as Boehly and Clearlake have spent more than \$660 million on transfers since buying the club for \$2.5 billion in May.

That money has so far failed to produce success on the field, with Chelsea in the middle of the Premier League standings and fighting to stay in the Champions League after losing to Borussia Dortmund 1-0 in the first leg of the round of 16 on Wednesday.

Broughton said he "very much" regrets missing out on Chelsea, but is encouraged by what he has seen from the new owners.

"My principle conclusion would be he (Boehly) has shown the commitment that he intends to make a success of it," Broughton said. "If you compare that to the Glazers, for example, the Glazers have always operated like, 'How can we make money out of this?'"

"He is looking at it as, 'I want this to be a success. I want people to see that my ownership of Chelsea has been good for the club.'"

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Today in History: FEB 17, House elects Jefferson president

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Feb. 17, the 48th day of 2023. There are 317 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 17, 1801, the U.S. House of Representatives broke an electoral tie between Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr, electing Jefferson president; Burr became vice president.

On this date:

In 1815, the United States and Britain exchanged the instruments of ratification for the Treaty of Ghent, ending the War of 1812.

In 1863, the International Red Cross was founded in Geneva.

In 1864, during the Civil War, the Union ship USS Housatonic was rammed and sunk in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, by the Confederate hand-cranked submarine HL Hunley in the first naval attack of its kind; the Hunley also sank.

In 1897, the forerunner of the National PTA, the National Congress of Mothers, convened its first meeting in Washington.

In 1944, during World War II, U.S. forces invaded Eniwetok Atoll, encountering little initial resistance from Imperial Japanese troops. (The Americans secured the atoll less than a week later.)

In 1959, the United States launched Vanguard 2, a satellite that carried meteorological equipment.

In 1964, the Supreme Court, in *Wesberry v. Sanders*, ruled that congressional districts within each state had to be roughly equal in population.

In 1972, President Richard M. Nixon departed the White House with his wife, Pat, on a historic trip to China.

In 1988, Lt. Col. William Higgins, a Marine Corps officer serving with a United Nations truce monitoring group, was kidnapped in southern Lebanon by Iranian-backed terrorists (he was later slain by his captors).

In 1995, Colin Ferguson was convicted of six counts of murder in the December 1993 Long Island Rail Road shootings (he was later sentenced to a minimum of 200 years in prison).

In 2014, Jimmy Fallon made his debut as host of NBC's "Tonight Show."

In 2015, Vice President Joe Biden opened a White House summit on countering extremism and radicalization, saying the United States needed to ensure that immigrants were fully included in the fabric of American society to prevent violent ideologies from taking root at home.

Ten years ago: Danica Patrick won the Daytona 500 pole, becoming the first woman to secure the top spot for any Sprint Cup race. (Patrick covered the 2½-mile Superspeedway in 45.817 seconds, averaging 196.434 mph. A week later, Jimmie Johnson won the race, while Patrick finished eighth.) The Western Conference beat the East 143-138 in the NBA All-Star game played in Houston. Mindy McCready, 37, who'd hit the top of U.S. country music charts before personal problems sidetracked her career, died by her own hand in Heber Springs, Arkansas.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump's national security adviser, H.R. McMaster, told a conference in Germany that there was now "incontrovertible" evidence of a Russian plot to disrupt the 2016 U.S. election; the statement stood in stark contrast to Trump's claim that Russian interference in his election victory was a hoax. Japan's Yuzuru Hanyu made Olympic figure skating history in the men's free skate event in South Korea, becoming the first man to repeat as Olympic champion since Dick Button in 1952.

One year ago: U.S. President Joe Biden warned that Russia could still invade Ukraine within days and Russia expelled the No. 2 diplomat at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, as tensions flared anew in the worst East-West standoff in decades. (Russia would invade Ukraine three days later.) Anna Shcherbakova won a stunning gold medal in women's figure skating at the Beijing Games, while Russian teammate Kamila Valieva tumbled all the way out of the medals after a mistake-filled end to her controversial Olympics.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-comedian Barry Humphries (aka "Dame Edna") is 89. Actor Christina Pickles is 88. Football Hall of Famer Jim Brown is 87. Actor Brenda Fricker is 78. Actor Becky Ann Baker is 70. Actor Rene Russo is 69. Actor Richard Karn is 67. Actor Lou Diamond Phillips is 61. Basketball Hall of Famer

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Michael Jordan is 60. Actor-comedian Larry, the Cable Guy is 60. TV personality Rene Syler is 60. Movie director Michael Bay is 59. Singer Chante Moore is 56. Rock musician Timothy J. Mahoney (311) is 53. Actor Dominic Purcell is 53. Olympic gold and silver medal skier Tommy Moe is 53. Actor Denise Richards is 52. Rock singer-musician Billie Joe Armstrong (Green Day) is 51. Actor Jerry O'Connell is 49. Country singer Bryan White is 49. Actor Kelly Carlson is 47. Actor Ashton Holmes is 45. Actor Conrad Ricamora is 44. Actor Jason Ritter is 43. TV personality Paris Hilton is 42. Actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt is 42. TV host Daphne Oz is 37. Actor Chord Overstreet is 34.