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Groton Community Calendar

Tuesday, Feb. 21

Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, mixed vegetables, garlic toast, mandarin orange.

School Breakfast: Doughnuts.

School Lunch: Corn dogs, fries.

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

The Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Moved to Saturday: Region 1A Girls Basketball

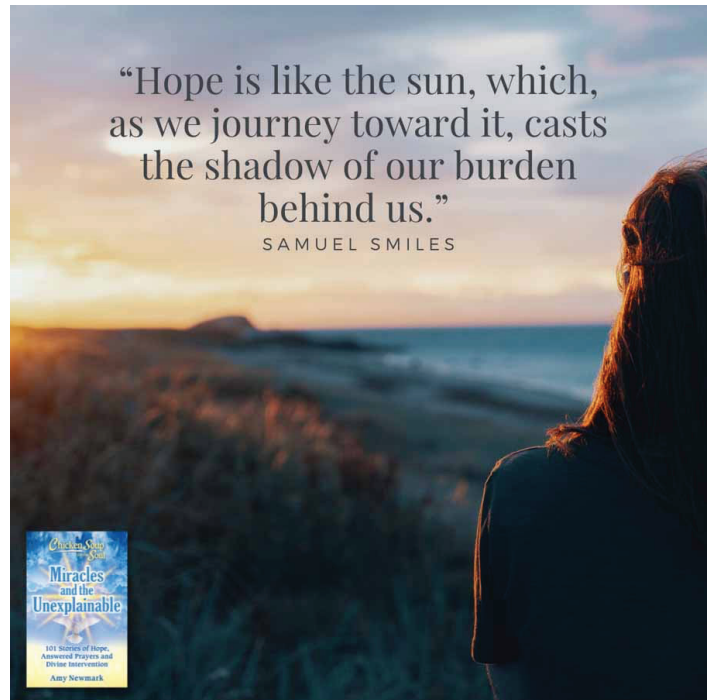
United Methodist Church: Bible Study, 10 a.m.; Conde Ad Council.

St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.

Wednesday, Feb. 22 - Ash Wednesday

Senior Menu: Ash Wednesday. Baked fish, Mac and cheese, 3 bean salad, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.

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



School Breakfast: hash brown pizza.

School Lunch: Beef sticks, baked beans.

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

United Methodist Church: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Book Study with Lindsey Tietz, 4 p.m.; Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Groton Ash Wednesday Service, 6:30 p.m.; UMYF attends Ash Wednesday Service, 6:30 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Soup supper, 6 p.m (WELCA ex. Board serves), Worship, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.; Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Lent Service, 7 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 23

Senior Menu: Roast pork, mashed potatoes and gravy, cauliflower and broccoli, apple sauce, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal.

School Lunch: Goulash, corn.

Moved to Monday: Region 1A Girls Basketball

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

announced the arrest of a suspect, Carlos Medina, in the death of Catholic Bishop David O'Connell. Medina is the husband of the bishop's housekeeper.

- An increasing number of people are trying to bring cheaper eggs from Mexico, with the number of seizures at the border rising nearly 400% in one year, as the grocery staple is now 70% more expensive than last year.

- Georgia GOP Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene has been criticized for suggesting that the U.S. should be split into two nations amid heightened tensions between Democrats and Republicans.

- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, the Wagner Group has reportedly lost access to its supply of weaponry from the Russian Defense Ministry due to the group's "complicated relationships" with unspecified Russian officials, the Institute for the Study of War said.

- Democratic lawmakers slammed GOP House Speaker Kevin McCarthy for reportedly giving Fox News host Tucker Carlson exclusive access to 41,000 hours of Jan. 6 Capitol attack surveillance footage.

- The sudden removal of Project Veritas CEO James O'Keefe has sparked concerns from Republicans and an exodus of more than 200,00 followers on Twitter. O'Keefe said he plans to continue the conservative group's mission to "investigate and expose corruption."

- The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department an-

POLL: South Dakotans Support Grocery Tax Cut

PIERRE, SOUTH DAKOTA – Today, Governor Kristi Noem released polling data indicating that South Dakotans strongly prefer the elimination of the grocery sales tax to other potential tax cut options.

A memo summarizing the poll results is attached. The poll was conducted by Front Porch Strategies on behalf of South Dakota Strong Leadership PAC.

Front Porch Strategies released a memo on the results, which is attached. Key results include:

- 75% of South Dakotans support eliminating the sales tax on groceries, with 50% being very supportive.

- 93% of South Dakotans have been significantly impacted by rising inflation.

- 95% of South Dakotans say their grocery bill is more expensive than it was in 2020, with 82% saying their grocery bill has increased by over \$50.

- When informed of the pros and cons of different tax cut proposals, 58% prefer eliminating the grocery tax, 29% prefer reducing property taxes, and 3% prefer reducing the overall sales tax rate.

South Dakotans across the political spectrum and from every walk of life overwhelmingly support eliminating the sales tax on groceries, including:

- 75% of Republicans;
- 76% of Democrats;
- More than 70% of every income breakdown;
- More than 70% of both genders; and,
- More than 70% of every age bracket.

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How can you not love it?

How can you not love it? The blood, sweat, tears, and petulance. The first two are a given. Head butts in the arena. Spatters on the mat. The locker room stench of soiled lucky socks, the sweet wafting odor of sacrifice and accomplishment.

Tears are unscheduled like the rain, sometimes falling with the relief of winning, but inevitable when it's over. Now, amidst the cheers, or at 3 a.m. when it hits you like brass knuckles. The last match has been wrestled, and graduation is neigh. From this to that. To life. They're ready, though.

And petulance? Petulance comes storming past congratulatory handshakes, a fierce 106 pounds, seething, not because he lost, but because he couldn't quite manage the pin. It's the state tournament. The team could have used the points.

The winners gather for the last portrait of the day, the motliest of crews in mismatched, torn sweatpants. Greens and reds, some kind of stain, and plaids. Hair by hurricane. And in every picture, at least one of them's got a bloody tissue dangling from a nostril. They look like back alley muggers, but they're not that. But, if you can't get them for purse-snatching, they oughta be charged with crimes against fashion.

Wrestling's gravelly siren song brings them in—some kids from broken homes and hardship. Miscreants, searchers from the wrong side of the tracks, some of them seemingly from between the rails. Others attend from less blemished circumstances but they all have something to prove.

They gather at the state tournament, this congress of warriors, this ritual, a thousand years of memories. Young ones swagger. Old ones limp. "Going in for a shoulder replacement on Tuesday," one of them says.

Senior Marshall Lindgren embraces South Border Coach Josh Hoffman after his final match, their faces burrowed in the other's chest. If there are tears, they're mopped up by fabric. Hoffman's wearing a faded, ratty old wrestling shirt. Leading by example.

It's Marshall's third title; and he did it this time with one hand. He started and ended the season with a broken wrist and a big heart. He's a cowboy. Rough stock.

Elite wrestlers are rare. The rest get it done with the gravel in their gut and the spit in their eye. Everyone wrestles hurt. Sometimes the victory's in not getting pinned. A life lesson.

Hettinger Coach Randy Burwick's there with longtime assistant, Theo Schalesky, one of the all-time great heavyweights. I size Burwick up like I did when I met him. His grin's bigger than he is but I still couldn't take him unless he was duct-taped to a chair. Even then, it would still be close and I wouldn't get the pin.

And Theo. "Whatcha up to these days, Theo? Purse snatching?"

"No, raising kids," he says. Not enough to fill every weight class but they're getting there. They're fostering a handsome toddler and Theo's in love.

I gaze at the photo so long, he starts to think I'm gonna to steal his phone. "Beautiful family," I say, and I mean it.

Ashley's Corey Ulmer is there for his induction into the Wrestling Hall of Fame with his own beautiful family. Precocious kids. Corey's a former Mr. Wrestler, a college All-American, and retired MMA fighter. Him? There ain't enough duct-tape.

And I finally get to meet Dale Beckman whose name's been spoken with reverence for as long as I remember. He's the architect of the storied New Salem wrestling program. Coach emeritus now, but he still works with the kids.

When the season began, the experts, the wrestling soothsayers and sages who'd done all the calculations, proclaimed Lisbon, where they serve broken glass for school lunches, unbeatable. Understandable.

Those New Salem kids must be bad at math, though, because they stormed to the individual state championship, a first ever for the Holsteins. Wrestled their butts off.

"If it couldn't be our kids, I'm glad it was yours," I told Dale.

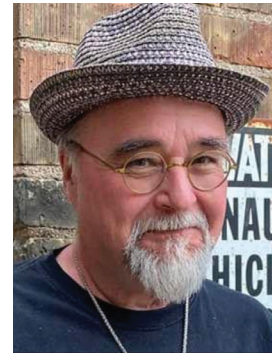
If you build it, Coach, they will win.

Still, our petulant South Border kids knocked off New Salem in the dual semifinals. But Lisbon proved to be too much in the championship.

Coach Hoffman went into the year thinking the Mustangs might be a year away. But you still step onto on the mat. Because you never know.

Yet another life lesson.

And one more. You can't trust math.



**That's
Life**
by Tony Bender

We the People

The South Dakota Humanities Council is making available a weekly column -- "We the People" -- that focuses on the U.S. Constitution. It is written by David Adler, who is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality, and civic education.



By David Adler

Mike Pence Seeks Refuge in the Speech or Debate Clause

Former Vice President Mike Pence plans to invoke the Speech or Debate Clause as justification for challenging a subpoena issued by Special Counsel Jack Smith in his investigation of former President Donald Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election. Pence's claim to immunity from the subpoena shines a spotlight on an important but largely inconspicuous constitutional provision. Article I, section 6 protects "Senators and Representatives" from arrest "for any Speech or Debate in either House," and stipulates that "they shall not be questioned in any other Place."

Pence argues that when he performed his constitutional duty to preside over the certification of Electoral College votes on January 6, 2021, he was acting in his capacity as President of the Senate and thus enjoyed protection under the Speech or Debate Clause. Pence believes he cannot be compelled to testify before a grand jury on matters relevant to Trump's scheme to derail the peaceful transition of power to President Joe Biden.

Pence's claim is ironic and dubious. Recall that he enthusiastically embraced, as a member of the executive branch, Trump's assertion of "executive privilege" to prevent his testimony before the January 6 congressional committee. Now, he asserts that his January 6 role of opening envelopes and counting votes, which he has described as purely ministerial and devoid of discretion, was "legislative" in nature. Questions abound. What is the purpose of the Speech or Debate Clause? Does it clothe the vice president with protection afforded elected members of the House and Senate?

The Speech or Debate Clause was enshrined in the Constitution as a means of enabling congressional representatives to fulfill their public duties. Justice Joseph Story, writing in his magisterial three volume work, *Commentaries on the Constitution* (1833), provided the rationale: "When a representative is withdrawn from his seat by a summons, the people, whom he represents, lose their voice in debate and vote, as they do in his voluntary absence. When a senator is withdrawn by summons, his state loses half its voice in debate and vote, as it does in his voluntary absence. The enormous disparity of the evil admits of no comparison."

The importance of the Speech or Debate Clause, which Justice Story and other writers contemporaneous with the framing of the Constitution characterized as "vital" to the exercise of every other power and duty vested in Congress, may be glimpsed in its enduring usage across the centuries, plumbing the depths of English legal history. The privilege from arrest while traveling to and from Parliament, and protection against being "questioned" in any "other place" for a speech made during a legislative session, was viewed by the founders as an "immemorial right." These ancient privileges were secured in The English Bill of Rights in 1689, applied to members of the Continental Congress, and appeared almost verbatim in the Articles of Confederation and early state constitutions. They were universally admired principles.

The historic and universal admiration of these principles, however, doesn't mean that former Vice President Pence will be successful in his assertion of the Speech or Debate Clause to defy a subpoena to require his testimony before a grand jury assembled by the Department of Justice. There is, first of all, his own confusion about which branch of government the vice president serves when presiding, by virtue of Article I, section 3, clause 4, as president of the Senate, a post which imposes as its sole duty, breaking tie votes and making parliamentary rulings.

Pence, it is familiar, has claimed residence in both branches, as a means of protecting him from what

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most Americans would require as a “duty” to testify about crimes committed on January 6, that he witnessed. To assert executive privilege to refuse to appear before the January 6 Committee, as Pence did, is to present himself as a member of the executive branch.

That argument undercuts Pence’s claim to protection under the Speech or Debate Clause. The provision was designed to encourage and protect full participation in the debates of the legislature. The vice president as president of the Senate, as Pence has stated, plays only a “ministerial” role. The vice president is not an integral part of the Senate’s legislative functions. The vice president is not elected by the Senate, as are all other leaders in the upper chamber, and does not participate in debates.

Another way of looking at the vice president’s status as president of the Senate is through the lens of impeachment. A Senator is not a “civil officer” within the meaning of the Impeachment Clause, but the vice president is and, consequently, may be impeached and removed from office. In addition, members of the Senate may be removed from the body, under the Expulsion Clause—Article I, section 5, clause 2—but the vice president is immune from expulsion. At all events, the Senate, not surprisingly, has not assigned much power to an officer not responsible to it.

In the end, as Alexander Hamilton explained it, the vice president’s role as president of the Senate, was required in order to avoid deadlock. Moreover, a state would be underrepresented if one of its two Senators relinquished his seat to chair the sessions. The origins and practice of the Speech or Debate Clause lend no support to Pence’s effort to find refuge in it.

SB185 - IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUESTED FOREIGN OWNERSHIP OF AG LAND

Agriculture, banking, real estate, and many other groups testified against SB185 at the SD Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee meeting on February 14, 2023. Proponents were mostly government and government-related entities.

South Dakota Farmers Union does not support SB185 because of the following:

Foreign acquisition of agricultural land is not only South Dakota issue, but also a national security issue. We support protecting national security, but it needs to be done prudently and thoughtfully. Not in a rush inspired by enflamed national passions.

The unintentional consequences of SD 185 could be enormous.

National security should be managed by Congress rather than a patchwork of legislation from 50 different states.

Under SB 185, one person is given authority to decide whether the state will confiscate private Ag land that has been sold. Senate Bill 185 creates a board and gives the Governor complete approval authority over the sale or lease of agricultural land to a foreign person or entity. There is no due process or ability for the person selling or buying the land the ability to appeal that decision.

South Dakota Farmers Union urges the SD Senate to defeat SB 185! If foreign entities buying or leasing land in SD is an issue, develop language in coming months and find support from agriculture groups across SD to introduce something next year.

★ SENATE MAJORITY LEADER CASEY ★

CRABTREE

Weekly Column: The South Dakota Way

MADISON—I'm a proud South Dakotan. Here, we value hard work, honoring your word and supporting your neighbor. We also believe the state governs best when it governs the least, and in those cases, government regulations should be limited and fair to all.

South Dakota's conservative approach to government coupled with our support for agriculture and innovation, has led to South Dakota's economic success and the incredible quality of life our families enjoy here. I grew up a small-town South Dakota kid and I still make my home in the epicenter of South Dakota corn and ethanol production. This year, I am concerned with efforts in the Legislature to hurt our ag producers' livelihoods.

Pipelines and eminent domain have been a hot topic in the 2023 legislative session, and for good reason. South Dakota land is a treasure and deserves respect and protections. South Dakota is also an economic engine that requires industry and innovation. This means balancing progress with protections for landowners, the public and the environment.

Creating uncertainty in the rules and regulations for business in the agriculture industry threatens the long-term viability of renewable fuels and value-added agriculture. Changing the rules in the middle of much needed agriculture projects or letting the government pick winners and losers runs contrary to our values and is not how we do business in South Dakota.

We owe it to our state's number one industry to support projects that offer new markets and future growth. I believe we need to look out for our state's rural communities by providing the same consistent and conservative approach that has worked in South Dakota for generations. You will be hard pressed to find a place where the American Dream is more alive and well than in our small communities, and we are all better off when they thrive. From the main street retail shops and restaurants to the implements and dealerships, we owe so much of our state's economic success to our ag industry and we must support it.

Our farmers and producers work hard to provide for all of us and the risks they take day-in and day-out to secure a future for their families and the next generation. As your Senator, I will continue to oppose proposals that could negatively impact farmers and landowners. I will be a voice against out-of-state interests fighting our ag industry and I will stand up for the values that make our state great. That's the South Dakota way.

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Class A - Region 1

#1 - Sisseton High School

 1 Sisseton	17-2	2/25 2:30 PM
 8 Tiospa Zina	5-14	CT

#2 - Sisseton High School

 4 Aberdeen Ronc...	10-9	2/25 1:00 PM
 5 Redfield	10-10	CT

#3 - Milbank Armory Gym

 2 Milbank	12-7	2/25 1:00 PM
 7 Webster Area	7-12	CT

#4 - Milbank Armory Gym

 3 Groton Area	12-8	2/25 2:30 PM
 6 Waubay/Summit	9-10	CT

The Girls Region 1A first round tournament was scheduled for Monday at their respective sites. The buses were on the road to their sites, but then no travel was issued from Summit to the Minnesota State line. The Groton Area bus turned around at Holmquist to return. The Roncalli bus was much further along. Travel east of Webster was bad as there were reports of semis and vehicles in the ditches.

The first round of Region 1A will now be played Saturday afternoon with the second round scheduled for Monday.

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

GDILIVE.COM

REGION 1A GIRLS' BASKETBALL AT MILBANK

Groton Area vs. Waubay-Summit

Saturday, Feb. 25, 2023 around 2:30 p.m.

Join Shane Clark with the play-by-play action on [GDILIVE.COM](https://gdilive.com)

Game sponsored by

Bahr Spray Foam
Bary Keith at Harr Motors
Bierman Farm Service
Dacotah Bank
Groton Ag Solutions
Groton American Legion
Groton Chiropractic Clinic
Groton Dairy Queen
Groton Ford
Harry Implement
John Sieh Agency
Locke Electric
Lori's Pharmacy
Love to Travel
S & S Lumber & Hardware Hank
Weber Landscaping
Weismantel Insurance Agency



\$5 ticket to watch can be purchased at [GDILIVE.COM](https://gdilive.com).

GDI Subscribers can watch for free

GDILIVE.COM

Boys' Basketball Regular Season Finale

To feature the Senior Drum Line!

Friday, Feb. 24, 2023 at the Groton Area Arena

C game starts at 5 p.m. sponsored by Beverly Sombke

JV game to follow sponsored by Grandpa

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

GDILIVE.COM

Groton City Council Meeting Agenda February 21, 2023 – 7:00pm City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

- Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1

(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)

- Minutes
- Bills
- January Finance Report
- Second Reading of Ordinance No. 767 – Amending Rates for Groton Municipal Electric Customers
- Second Reading of Ordinance No. 766 – 2023 Summer Salary Ordinance
- Skating Rink Hours
- Soda Contract Discussion
- Swimming Pool Rates
- Baseball Concessions/Park Bathrooms – LWCF Grant
- Community Center Surplus
- Economic Development
- Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
- Adjournment

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

GDI Subscribers can watch for free



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Parole officers create specialty unit to target parolees in hiding

Unit collaborates with local sheriffs, police, U.S. marshals

BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 20, 2023 10:02 AM



The G. Norton Jameson Annex at the South Dakota State Penitentiary in Sioux Falls, SD. (John Hult/

South Dakota Searchlight)

Until recently, most parole officers in South Dakota managed a caseload that included a mix of low- and high-risk offenders and "absconders," the term given to parolees who lose touch with their parole officers.

A few months ago, however, the Department of Corrections reshuffled those caseloads to create an Absconder Apprehension Unit, whose officers track parolees on the lam.

The unit's officers now serve as a point of contact for local sheriff's offices and the U.S. marshals, and the officers collaborate with them to locate and capture offenders.

"We have established the unit due to the criminal activities involving current parole absconders," DOC Secretary Kellie Wasko said in a written statement. "Our goal is to work with our law enforcement partners to improve and ensure public safety."

The move from the DOC comes as lawmakers in Pierre debate measures that would restrict parole for violent and repeat offenders, and alongside the creation of a specialized violent crime unit by the Sioux Falls Police Department.

Change through communication

The move came in part as a result of conversations between Wasko, who was appointed last March, and sheriffs including Mike Milstead, who presides over the most populous county in South Dakota. The Minnehaha County sheriff also operates his county's jail, which often houses parole absconders caught on warrants or arrested on new criminal charges.

Conversations began in late summer and into early fall, the sheriff said, and included his office, the police chiefs and mayors of Sioux Falls and Rapid City, and Wasko. The same group now meets regularly to collaborate and offer updates on their respective organizations' efforts to rein in repeat offenders, Milstead said.

"Quite frankly, the group was formed because of how many repeat offenders there were and how often they've been involved in violent crimes," Milstead said.

During the initial discussions with Wasko, the group learned that about 470 people had lost touch with parole statewide. As of Feb. 13, the DOC lists about 100 fewer absconders than that on its website, but those represent absconders for whom a warrant has been issued.

A warrant is an important tool for parole officers, according to Brad Lewandowski, the DOC's director of parole. Once a warrant is issued, law enforcement can arrest an absconder.

Lewandowski told the South Dakota Board of Pardons and Paroles this week that the partner agencies

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Brad Lewandowski, Director of Parole for the South Dakota Department of Corrections, at a Feb. 16, 2023 meeting of the Board of Pardons and Paroles in Sioux Falls, SD. (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

have welcomed the sharing of warrant information. The sharing of tips on the whereabouts of parolees with other agencies has also been a welcome change.

Parole officers and law enforcement both benefit, Lewandowski said.

"Parole absconders are often with other criminals around town," he said.

Narrowing down the list to the most concerning cases was part of the goal of the multi-agency collaboration. The Minnehaha County Fugitive Task Force is now in regular contact with the Absconder Apprehension Unit, and its members have ridden along with warrant detectives to get a sense of the work.

Kayla Stuckey, assistant director of field services for the DOC, said the parole office is encouraged by the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Marshals for apprehending parolees in Indian Country.

"That will help us, we're hoping, with some of those reservation cases," Stuckey said.

Focused on high needs

The Absconder Apprehension Unit is part of a broader effort to re-align the parole workload, Stuckey told the parole board on Thursday.

Some parole officers are looking at targeted populations, such as those with mental health needs, the chronically unemployed or those with substance abuse troubles.

Winnowing the list of supervised parolees for the specialists is meant to ease the burden of helping the parolees who struggle the most with their transition to a life outside the walls.

"When you have a caseload of 65, it's really hard to drill down and give those cases the attention they deserve," Stuckey told the board.

Stuckey and Lewandowski also told the board there are 10 open positions in the parole division. That hasn't overwhelmed the office, but they do hope to

fill the jobs quickly.

Board member Kurt Hall asked if parole had enough officers. Lewandowski said officers are managing around 10 more parolees on average than they'd like – 70 instead of 60 – but that "we're sitting so much better now than we were five years ago."

He also told the board that the focus on absconders can skew the picture of parolees and post-incarceration success rates – even for parole officers. There were about 3,500 people on parole at the end of 2022. Most of them are not involved in violent crime.

"You'll have 5% or 10% of your caseload that's constantly in your face, so you forget about the 90% who are doing well," he said.



JOHN HULT  

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.

'They saw the potential': SDSU program boosts Native American success

Five-year-old Wokini Initiative increases enrollment, retention and graduation rates

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 20, 2023 3:00 PM

South Dakota State University was the only college that sent recruiters to the reservation during Traelene Fallis' junior year at Crow Creek Tribal School.

So, she only applied to SDSU.

"It just felt like they actually wanted me to be here," Fallis said. "They were doing all these things because they saw the potential in us."

Fallis was among the first graduating class of SDSU Wokini scholars last spring.

The five-year-old Wokini Initiative is a program intended to create better support systems, higher enrollment and improved graduation rates for Native American students.

So far, the initiative has accomplished just that. As of July 2022, SDSU is the only Board of Regents university to see an increase in Native American enrollment since 2017, and has seen an increase in Native American retention and graduation rates as well.

'The most glaring societal challenge in our state'

Just short of 9% of South Dakotans are Native American, according to the 2020 U.S. Census.

Yet Native Americans are disproportionately represented in the state's justice system and higher education. Native Americans made up about 44% of prisoners in South Dakota in fiscal year 2022 and only 2.8% of students enrolled at Board of Regents universities in fall of 2021.

"Probably the most glaring societal challenge in our state has its roots in our history — the long and tortured history between the white settlement that came with colonization and the Indigenous people of our state," said Barry Dunn, president of South Dakota State.

Dunn is an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. He saw firsthand the impact of higher education growing up: his mother attended college, while her brothers did not. Their "paths were completely different," he said.

"When a public university accepts federal resources and says it provides access to all, I take that responsibility seriously. We're going to figure out a way to get access to all — and that means to the largest minority in our state," Dunn said. "This is a way to attack our state's challenge regarding the Indigenous people of our state and the poverty that exists on the reservations and in urban communities in South Dakota."

Wokini: scholarships, culture & support

One of the biggest barriers to higher education for Native Americans is the cost, Dunn said.

It costs about \$18,000 a year for South Dakota students to attend SDSU. In developing its Wokini Initiative, the school hoped to bridge the gap between government aid and non-university scholarships.

Wokini scholars receive \$5,000 scholarships each year for up to five years. The school has raised roughly \$28 million for the initiative — \$5 million to build an American Indian Student Center and \$18 million for scholarships, among other initiatives.

"Getting that scholarship was the main reason I was able to go to school," said Fallis, an enrolled member of the Crow Creek Tribe. "And it's the reason for a lot of other Indigenous students being able to go."



South Dakota State University President Barry Dunn greets students inside the American Indian Student Center on campus. Part of the Wokini Initiative's funding went toward the construction of the center. (Courtesy of SDSU)

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SDSU President Barry Dunn.

(Courtesy of SDSU)

Fallis is the first in her immediate family to earn a bachelor's degree. Her sister tried attending college but "it just didn't work out."

Fallis graduated with a bachelor's degree in animal science last spring and is in her first year of veterinary school.

Aside from her scholarships, Fallis said additional support systems and programs created by the initiative helped her succeed in school, such as the student center, specific advisers for Wokini students and student organizations.

Fallis said her education would have been much harder without the support.

The program also established an Oyate Living Learning Community for first-year students in one of the dorms. Freshman Wokini students live on the same floor so they're more easily able to connect with one another, said Jessica Begeman, a pre-pharmacy undergraduate student and Wokini scholar.

"You don't have to explain why you're smudging your room," said Begeman, an Oglala Sioux tribal member from Martin. Smudging involves ceremonially burning sacred herbs, such as sage, to purify a space or person.

"You don't have to feel like you're explaining things about yourself; they just understand you and where you're from," Begeman added.

"There's less stress on you to state who you are or prove who you are."

SDSU 'never really tracked' retention for Native American students

The rate of Native American students graduating within six years was formerly less than 20%, Dunn estimated, adding that the freshman retention rate "must have been terrible."

"We never really tracked it before," Dunn said. "It wasn't a group of students we paid a lot of attention to."

Dunn suspects the retention rates were so low because proper support systems weren't in place for students. Native American students easily feel disconnected from their culture and families, in addition to struggling with high costs to attend school and challenges associated with potentially poor educational backgrounds.

"They've heard stories of failure from cousins or aunts and uncles," Dunn said. "We don't have a history of being a place where people succeeded. And if you came to college and took out student loans and didn't get a degree, then you've really got trouble."

Twenty-five Wokini students graduated last spring, and the freshman retention rate from 2021 to 2022 was 70%. While it's not as high as the entire student body, it is "much better than before," Dunn said.

Dunn was recognized for his work with the Wokini Initiative in 2022, earning the McGraw Prize for Higher Education. In addition to the recognition, he received \$50,000 in prize money.

He plans to put that back into scholarships for the Wokini Initiative over time.

"I feel like a grandpa here," Dunn said. "I'm really, really proud of them."

Paying back for the land

The former Great Sioux Reservation spanned about 60 million acres, encompassing all of western South Dakota and parts of surrounding states. The reservation was promised to the Lakota people in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868.

But two decades later, the federal government broke up tribal lands into smaller reservations and claimed much of the land in West River under the Dawes Act of 1887 — two years before South Dakota became a state and SDSU officially became a land-grant college.

After South Dakota earned statehood, and to fulfill the obligations to be a land grant college, SDSU was endowed with thousands of acres of federally controlled land through the Morrill Act to raise funds for the institution's academic mission through land sales or rentals. Much of the land granted to SDSU formerly

made up the Great Sioux Reservation before it was broken apart.

SDSU still retains much of that public land, receiving between \$500,000 and \$750,000 a year from land rent and sales, Dunn said.

Historically, those annual funds flowed into the university's general fund for operational or overhead expenses.

But Dunn specified such funds must go toward supporting Native American students, since that land originally belonged to Native Americans. He said merely acknowledging that South Dakota's land grant universities benefit from Native American lands is not enough.

SDSU has provided an additional recruiter focusing on South Dakota's nine tribal nations, an additional academic adviser for Native American students, and increased programming for students with the funds.

Impact on South Dakota, tribal nations

The impact of the Wokini Initiative isn't instantaneous. It'll come a generation or two later, Dunn said, when Native American youth will regularly see higher education as a right rather than an impossibility.

Begeman said she saw college as a natural choice because several of her family members attended higher education, including her parents and grandfather.

"For me, it wasn't really a question of whether or not I could do it. It was a question of whether or not I wanted to," Begeman said.

Dunn emphasized that while the Wokini program has received some criticism from tribal colleges, SDSU is filling an educational need with a "breadth of degrees" that aren't available at tribal colleges, such as pharmacy or veterinary degrees.

Oglala Lakota College, Sinte Gleska University and Sisseton Wahpeton Community College did not respond to multiple requests for comment from South Dakota Searchlight.

"We're not trying to uproot people from the reservation," Dunn said.

Begeman interned with the Indian Health Service last summer, and she saw the difference she can make in her community as a pharmacist. She hopes to work in South Dakota after finishing her doctorate and residency.

"The students who graduate can go home to their communities and eventually support them with knowledge gained through school — pharmacy, health care, teaching, engineering," Begeman said. "It's really just trying to help the community learn and expand."

The same is true for Fallis. She plans to return to the Crow Creek Reservation, open a vet clinic and help her community with animal care.

"My dreams were never too big and they always believed in me," Fallis said of her tribe. "Just because of where I came from, other people would ask if I can really do that."

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



Veterinary student Traelene Fallis works with a dog during a clinic visit. (Courtesy of Traelene Fallis)

Ongoing study shows Big Sioux River mixing with aquifer that Watertown uses for water

Mixing of sources can hurt water quality

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 20, 2023 12:07 PM

The waters of the Big Sioux River are infiltrating the drinking water pulled from wells near Watertown, causing potentially harmful effects that aren't fully understood yet.

Those early conclusions come from a joint state and U.S. Geological Survey study on interactions between the river and the Big Sioux Aquifer. The study does not offer conclusions on the impact of those interactions on water quality, which varies from place to place for both the river and the aquifer.

An aquifer is an underground layer of porous and fractured rock. Water from aquifers can be extracted using a well and pump.

The Big Sioux Aquifer, which extends from the river's headwaters near Summit in the north all the way south to North Sioux City, is broken into several management units along the Big Sioux River watershed. A watershed is an area of land with a common set of waters and streams that all drain into a single larger body of water, such as a river or lake.

The Big Sioux Aquifer study's preliminary findings indicate that Watertown's aquifer wells are pulling water from the river, according to State Geologist Tim Cowman, who discussed the findings at the Big Sioux River and Sustainability Summit earlier this winter in Sioux Falls.

"The water quality in the river is influencing the water quality in the aquifer," Cowman said during the presentation.

Some of Watertown's wells are located near the river, and water from the river's banks and bottom can seep into the aquifer. Cowman's preliminary research found that the suction force of the wells' pumps is helping to pull more of the river's water into the aquifer.

Bert Magstadt, director of operations with Watertown Municipal Utilities, said the city is pumping the wells near the river less to avoid any potential problems.

Researchers are able to see if the river water feeds the aquifer or vice versa by taking samples in both bodies of water.

"At this point, nobody is making any conclusions," Cowman said.

Even so, the early findings illustrate the importance of managing the streams, ponds and aquifers within a watershed as a system, according to Jay Gilbertson, manager of the East Dakota Water Development District.

"These things are interconnected," Gilbertson said. "We need to make management decisions based on that. Not going, 'That's surface water, and that's groundwater. We don't have to worry about them touching.' They interact and we should pay attention."

Not managing watersheds holistically is a recipe for problems, Gilbertson said.

"If we were to get into a situation where there was something in the river that's undesirable, for whatever reason, and well fields downstream are pulling the water out of the river, into the aquifer, and into the wells, we will have a problem," Gilbertson said.

The researchers are analyzing three water well sites in or near Clark, Watertown and Egan.

Wells near Egan may benefit from the river interacting with the aquifer, Gilbertson said. That area of the aquifer has high levels of nitrate seepage from crop fertilizer. Water from the Big Sioux River could dilute the high-nitrate water in the aquifer, Gilbertson said.

But the aquifer's gain could be the river's loss. If the river picks up nitrates from the aquifer, those nitrates could flow downstream to other water systems, to places such as Sioux Falls.

The state's largest city utilizes the Big Sioux River, the Big Sioux Aquifer, and the Middle Skunk Creek Aquifer to provide water for its residents.

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.

Food sanitation company fined \$1.5 million for illegal child labor

BY: CASEY QUINLAN - FEBRUARY 20, 2023 6:09 PM

A company responsible for cleaning meatpacking plants across the country has paid \$1.5 million in civil penalties for making children as young as 13 work in dangerous conditions.

The fine, announced Friday by the U.S. Department of Labor, followed an investigation by the agency into Packers Sanitation Services Inc., at 13 plants in eight states, including Arkansas, Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska and Tennessee. At three meatpacking plants — in Nebraska, Kansas and Minnesota — Packers Sanitation employed more than 20 children.

The department said children, ranging from 13 to 17 years-old, spent overnight shifts cleaning equipment such as head splitters, back saws and brisket saws, and were exposed to dangerous chemicals such as ammonia. The risks inside meatpacking plants also include diseases from exposure to feces and blood, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Three children out of at least 102 kids sustained injuries while working for Packers Sanitation Services, which is based in Kieler, Wisconsin.

Michael Lazzeri, wage and hour regional administrator for the department, said that the food sanitation business ignored flags from its own system that the workers were minors.

“When the Wage and Hour Division arrived with warrants, the adults — who had recruited, hired and supervised these children — tried to derail our efforts to investigate their employment practices,” Lazzeri said in a press release.

The department’s Wage and Hour division started investigating these issues in August of 2022. In November, the department filed a complaint in the U.S. District Court of Nebraska. The agency’s investigation found that children were working at plants in Gibbon, Grand Island and Omaha. Packers Sanitation Services was fined \$408,726 for employing 27 minors at the JBS Foods plant in Grand Island.

Packers was also fined \$333,036 for employing children at JBS plant in Worthington, Minnesota, and \$393,588 for having children work at a Cargill plant in Dodge City, Kansas.

The \$1.5 million total represents a fine of \$15,138 for each child employed — the maximum civil money penalty allowed by federal law.

In December, the company agreed to comply with labor law and hire a third party specialist to provide child labor compliance training and monitor facilities for three years, among other requirements, as part of the U.S. District Court of Nebraska’s consent order and judgment.

The number of children working in violation of child labor laws has been on the increase since 2018, with the exception of 2021 during the pandemic, according to Department of Labor data. Last year, there were 835 child labor violation cases involving 3,876 children.

The increase in cases comes as some states are considering loosening child labor protections.

An Iowa bill would provide exceptions to state law prohibiting minors aged 14 to 17 from working in more dangerous industries, such as roofing, mining and meatpacking, as long as the state Workforce Development and Department of Education allowed it as part of a “work-based learning or a school or employer-administered, work-related program,” reported the Des Moines Register. It also lets minors under 16 drive themselves to work in some circumstances and let children under 16 work longer hours. An Iowa Senate subcommittee recommended passage of the bill on Feb. 9.

Another bill, in Minnesota, removes a prohibition on 16 and 17 year-olds from working in construction. In Ohio, lawmakers are proposing that minors be allowed to work longer hours.

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

Rural hospitals gird for unwinding of pandemic Medicaid coverage

BY: CASEY QUINLAN - FEBRUARY 20, 2023 10:51 AM

Donald Lloyd, CEO and president of St. Claire HealthCare in Morehead, Kentucky, has spent more than a year dealing with higher costs for food and medical supplies for his regional hospital. Now he's trying to prepare for another financial hit — the loss of Medicaid reimbursements for treating people in rural Appalachia.

"We are all being forced to try to eke out a sustainable margin because of those [inflation] factors," he said. "And then with the potential loss of reimbursement for those who did qualify, that's just going to add an additional layer of burden upon rural institutions."

Lloyd is referring to the unwinding of a policy that began in 2020 as a response to the public health emergency created by COVID-19. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act required states to allow Medicaid recipients to stay enrolled even if their eligibility changed. But that requirement ends on April 1, and with states once again able to remove people from the program, health care officials across the country are worried about how the loss of those Medicaid reimbursements will affect the financial health of their hospitals.

The loss of the federal revenue is expected to be particularly hard on rural hospitals that operate in areas with higher poverty rates and serve an older population and people with lower incomes — all factors that contribute to the financial pressure on hospitals, health care officials said. Rural hospitals were already closing at a rapid rate before the pandemic — more than 150 closed between 2005 and 2019, according to the Center for Healthcare Quality and Payment Reform. Without the federal money to prop them up, the Center estimates that 200 rural hospitals across the country are at risk of closing within the next two to three years.

A report released in January from George Washington University found that up to 2.5 million patients of community health centers, which treat both underserved rural and urban communities, could lose coverage as a result of eligibility redeterminations, costing the health centers somewhere from \$1.5 billion to \$2.5 billion in revenue. The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that between 5 million and 14 million people will lose their coverage, and that two-thirds could be uninsured for several months up to a year.

Carrie Cochran-McClain, chief policy officer at the National Rural Health Association, a nonprofit focused on education and advocacy on rural health issues, said the financial impact will be twofold.

"It's the loss of reimbursement for services, but then also a potential increase in the number of patients that are going to be uninsured who delayed care because they lose their coverage and they're coming in when they have a more severe situation," she said.

Simple mistakes in paperwork could result in many people losing Medicaid even though they're still eligible for it, said Leighton Ku, professor and director of the center for health policy research at the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University. Ku said states can help by making the renewal process easier, and pointed out that people who can't get Medicaid can find insurance at subsidized rates through the Affordable Care Act markets, and benefit from expanded premium subsidies through 2025 because of the Inflation Reduction Act. Still, there will be problems, he said.

"We still expect there's going to be some increase in the number of uninsured people in the U.S. over the next year, no matter how hard we try, so hospitals and community health centers are going to have some rough times ahead," Ku said.

Toni Lawson, vice president of governmental relations at the Idaho Hospital Association, said that the state department of health and welfare is sending out letters to tens of thousands of people alerting them to the change and their options. Still, she's concerned about the effect of so many people losing coverage. Idaho has estimated that 150,000 people could be vulnerable to losing Medicaid, according to Idaho Capital Sun.

"We see a large percentage of our rural hospitals with a negative operating margin right now," Lawson said. "We need to be particularly careful in making policy decisions that impact them negatively that maybe five years ago it would have been like, okay, this is a hit to your reimbursement, but you'll survive. That

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same decision today could affect whether they stay open or close, she said.

Lloyd said he expects less than 3,000 people would lose coverage in the communities that St. Claire serves, which could cost the hospital about \$5 million in Medicaid revenue.

The hospital is preparing for the decrease by slowing down its capital investments even though it needs to replace operating room tables and to repair and do maintenance on a wing built in the 1960s, he said. St. Claire is also looking at "reprioritizing a number of strategic growth projects," Lloyd added, such as accommodating robotic surgery.

Family Health Centers in Louisville plans to cut back on the low-cost or free medical, dental, behavioral health and pharmacy services it has been offering to uninsured patients because of the expected revenue dip, according to the Louisville Courier-Journal. Hospitals also have announced other budget cuts, including layoffs, citing the end of pandemic payments.

Help from Medicaid expansion

The COVID-19 pandemic both helped and hurt rural hospitals.

"In rural communities, the majority of their revenue comes from outpatient-like business and it comes from doing outpatient surgeries and imaging and visits," said Steve Lawler, president and CEO of the North Carolina Healthcare Association. "When you shut those things down to protect your hospital assets to take care of COVID patients, it has a significant financial impact and that has carried on through the current economic conditions where the cost of goods and services and talent for hospitals is up 30% but revenue is only up 2%."

During the pandemic, billions in federal money from the Paycheck Protection Program, Provider Relief Funds and the American Rescue Plan Act helped keep rural hospitals afloat even as they dealt with revenue losses and higher costs for everything from protective gear to salaries.

"COVID sort of interrupted the long-term trend of unprofitability and closure of rural hospitals," said George Pink, deputy director of the NC Rural Health Research Program at the University of North Carolina. "But that funding is now over."

Health care experts say policy changes, including more states expanding access to Medicaid, is needed to keep rural hospitals viable.

Eleven states, including Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Kansas, Tennessee and Wisconsin, still haven't expanded Medicaid coverage through the Affordable Care Act, and rural hospitals in those states are at a particular disadvantage, health care officials said. Researchers have agreed. A January 2018 research article found that Medicaid expansion was associated with better financial performance for hospitals and lower likelihoods of closure. This was particularly true for rural markets and counties that had many uninsured adults before states adopted expansion.

In North Carolina, where the legislature is currently considering a bill to expand Medicaid, 11 hospitals have closed since 2006, and ECU Health, which provides medical care to 29 counties, is shutting down five clinics in the coming weeks, mostly due to financial pressure, the Greenville Daily Reflector reported in January.

Brian Floyd, ECU Health chief operating officer and president of ECU Health Medical Center, told States Newsroom, "We've reached the point of operating loss that we are then at a place where we have to decide what's the best way to ration out our resources and had to make some tough decisions about whether or not we close some clinics. ... This is the story when you don't have expansion of Medicaid. This is what happens. Poor rural communities start to lose access to their health care."

Lawler added that Medicaid expansion in North Carolina would help people manage chronic health issues instead of waiting for their health to reach a crisis point that requires hospitalization and expensive care. His organization supports House Bill 76, the bill to expand Medicaid that passed the state House on Thursday. If negotiations with the state Senate result in passage, Gov. Roy Cooper is expected to sign the measure, benefiting 600,000 North Carolinians.

Lawler said that there may finally be enough political will for the state to join the rest of the nation in expanding Medicaid.

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"It makes so much sense if we're going to make the state healthier and help address the behavioral health crisis and, and the substance abuse crisis in North Carolina," he said "It creates new jobs, so it grows economies. It's going to help rural communities stabilize their hospitals and health care safety net."

Lloyd, the St. Claire HealthCare CEO, said that there's no doubt that Medicaid expansion makes a difference for hospitals. Before coming to St. Claire, he was president and CEO at CHRISTUS Health Southwest Louisiana. Louisiana expanded Medicaid in 2016 and Kentucky in 2014.

"There was greater access to care and a greater sustainability to the hospitals post-expansion, both in Louisiana and here in Kentucky. We've just been very fortunate in the commonwealth that we've had a Medicaid expansion longer than some of the other states that were kind of slow to expand," he said. "... It's just a matter of economics and even though in some states the gap between the actual cost of care and the Medicaid reimbursement is very significant, at least it does offset some of the expense of operations."

Will a new hospital designation help?

A new payment model that became effective in January could offer support to some rural health care facilities but health care officials caution that it is not the answer for all rural hospitals.

Under the change, hospitals that agree to a new rural emergency hospital designation would receive more Medicare reimbursements and a monthly facility payment. The hospitals would have emergency rooms, clinics and outpatient care, but patients couldn't stay for more than 24 hours. The hospitals also can't have more than 50 beds and must meet other eligibility requirements.

Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska and South Dakota have already enacted laws establishing licensing rules for Rural Emergency Hospitals.

"In [rural hospitals] in areas with a large number of residents who are 65 plus and qualify for Medicare, this model would help those hospitals and perhaps help offset any losses due the formerly Medicaid patients becoming uninsured," said Richard Lindrooth, professor in the department of health systems, management, and policy at the Colorado School of Public Health at the University of Colorado.

Pink, with the NC Rural Health Research Program, said the new model isn't a "panacea for rural health."

"It really is directed at small rural hospitals that are at imminent risk of closure. It's not designed to be a replacement for a rural hospital that's breaking even or getting by in their community. ... We're not going to see 1,000 rural emergency hospitals in the country anytime soon. It's a much smaller number of hospitals that this might be of interest to," he said.

Floyd said ECU Health is studying whether this designation would be a good fit in some cases.

"There are trade-offs in that there is a higher payment plan per patient but you have to meet the conditions of 24 hours a day. We have to look at the market and say if it were only 24 hours, what does that do to that community? Do we have access elsewhere ... for them to be?" he said.

Lloyd said it's possible that a hospital in the area of Kentucky that St. Claire HealthCare serves could convert to the new designation, which would have implications for his health care system.

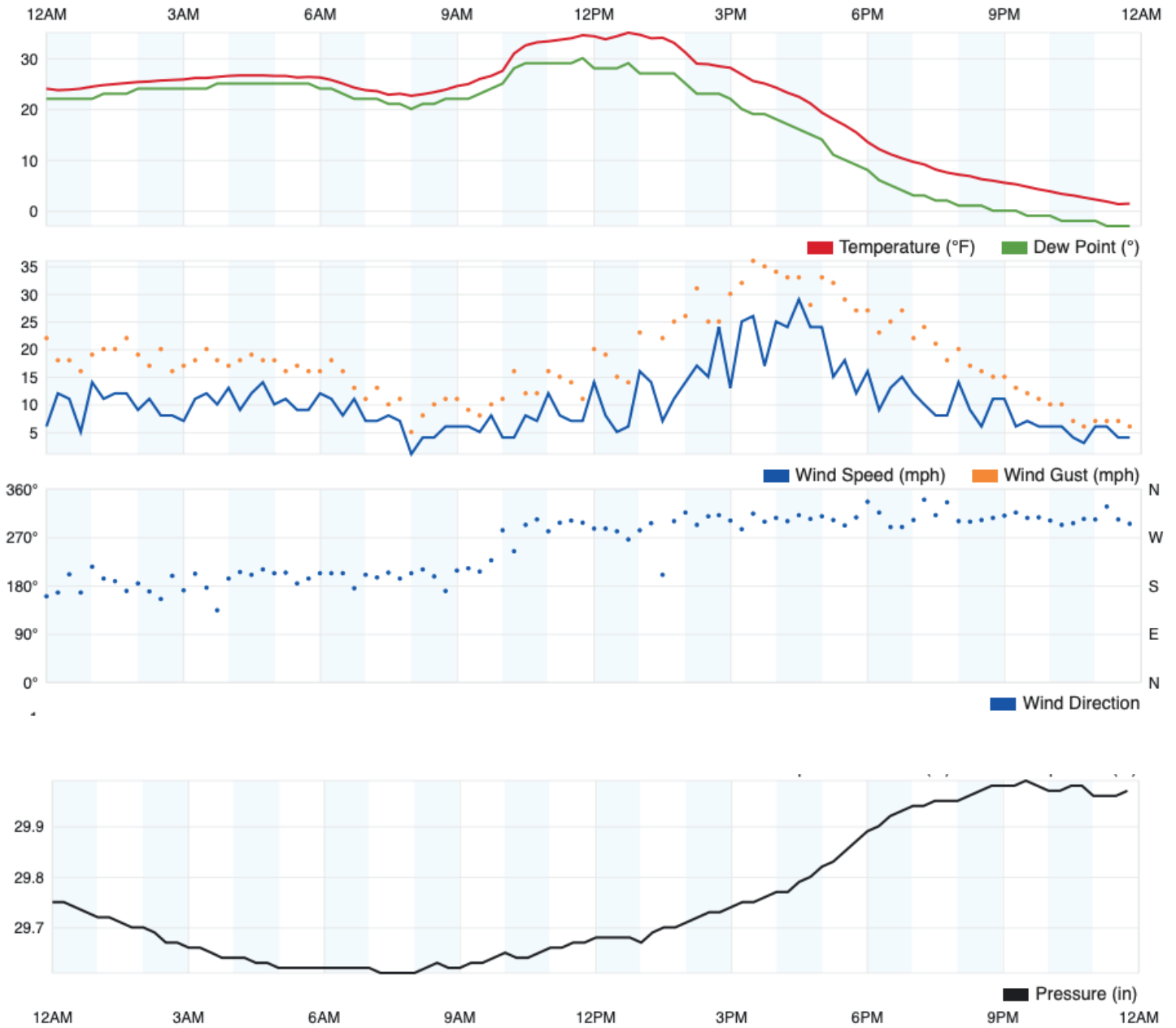
"Obviously we would handle the inpatient admissions for those institutions and so it would increase our capacity, but we're prepared to do so if necessary," he said.

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

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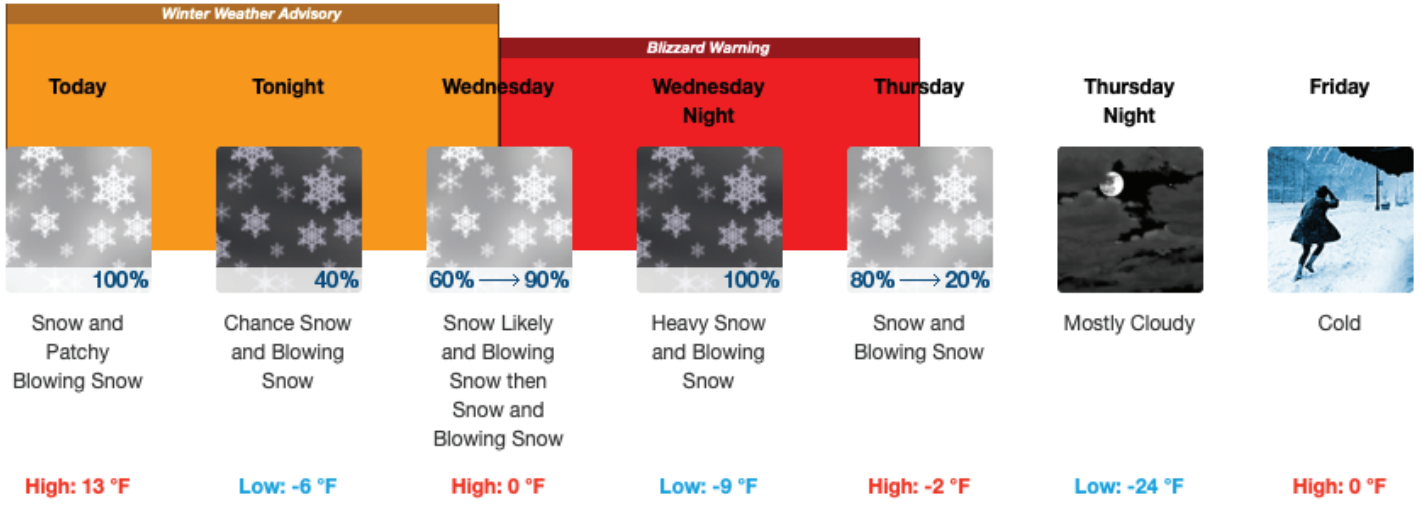
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Widespread Winter Weather Conditions February 21, 2023 5:41 AM

Key Messages

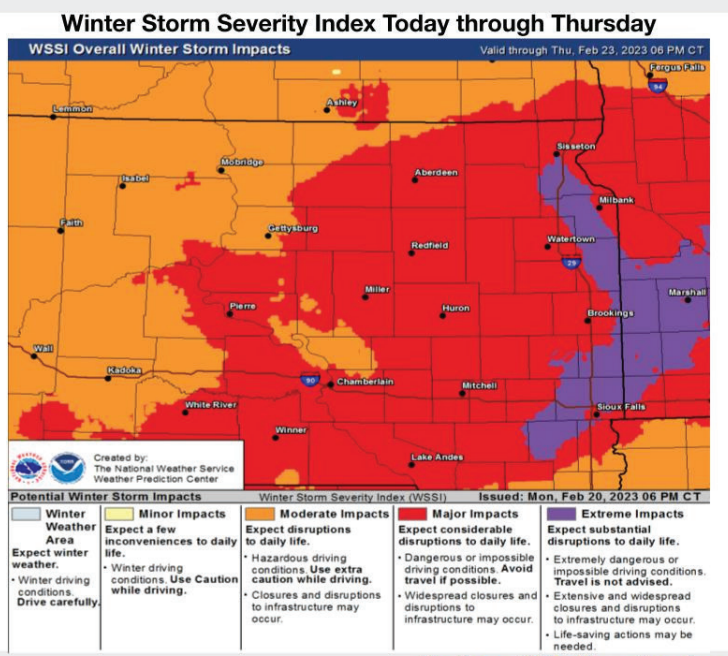
- Two rounds of snow: First today, followed by Blizzard conditions Wednesday into Thursday
- Strong winds tonight through Thursday
- Arctic cold air and dangerous wind chills tonight through Friday morning

NEW Important Updates

- Blizzard Warning issued for northeast South Dakota and western Minnesota - Wednesday into Thursday
- Winter Storm Warning issued for central and north central South Dakota - Wednesday into Thursday

Next Scheduled Briefing

- Tuesday afternoon



Winter weather conditions will be on the increase, with a round of snow today and more snow on Wednesday. Heavy snow, increasing winds and falling temperatures could be life-threatening if you get caught out Wednesday.

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Total Snowfall Projections

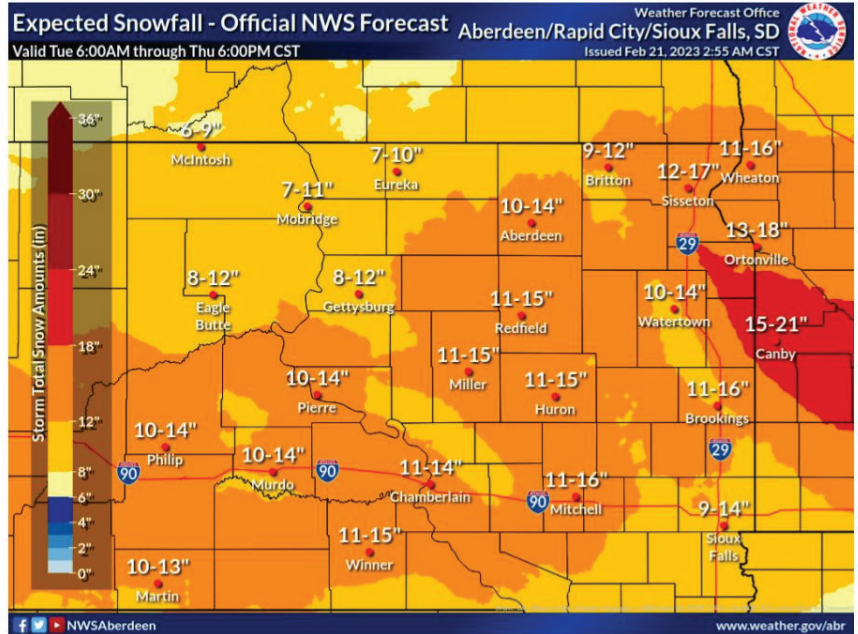
February 21, 2023
5:35 AM

High forecast confidence for significant winter weather impacts!

Today through Thursday afternoon

There will be a lull in the snowfall late tonight & Wednesday morning.

Combination of significant snow accumulation, strong winds & blowing snow will potentially make travel impossible Wednesday through Thursday.



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



Forecast Confidence Levels

February 21, 2023
5:30 AM

Snow Amounts



Wind



Blizzard Potential



Blizzard Timing



Confidence Details

- **Highest confidence** in the strong wind forecast
- **Lowest confidence** in the snowfall amounts tonight and Wednesday, especially across northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota, when there could be a lull in falling snow until Wednesday afternoon.

Alternate Scenarios

- Drier air will be in place across North Dakota. If this dry air were to shift further south, it could lead to a scenario where less snow falls over the northern tier of South Dakota counties.

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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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Preparing For A Winter Storm

February 21, 2023
5:28 AM

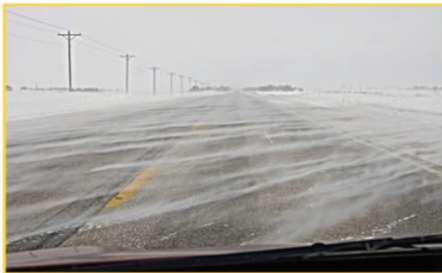
DEFINING SNOW + WIND HAZARDS

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



DRIFTING SNOW

- ✓ **Snow drifts across roads but does not reduce visibility** as snow is not lofted into the air
- ✓ **Dangers:** Hazardous travel due to pillow drifts. Also snow can melt on roads after drifting onto them and then re-freeze, leading to black ice



BLOWING SNOW

- ✓ **Snow is lofted in the air, reducing visibility** to as low as a quarter mile or less *intermittently*
- ✓ **Dangers:** Hazardous travel due to less reaction time from reduced visibilities, as well as slick and/or snow covered roads



BLIZZARD

- ✓ **Frequent visibility 1/4 mile or less & 35+ mph winds for at least 3 consecutive hours** from a combination of falling and blowing snow OR just blowing snow (*ground blizzard*)
- ✓ **Dangers:** Hazardous to impossible travel, disorientation, death



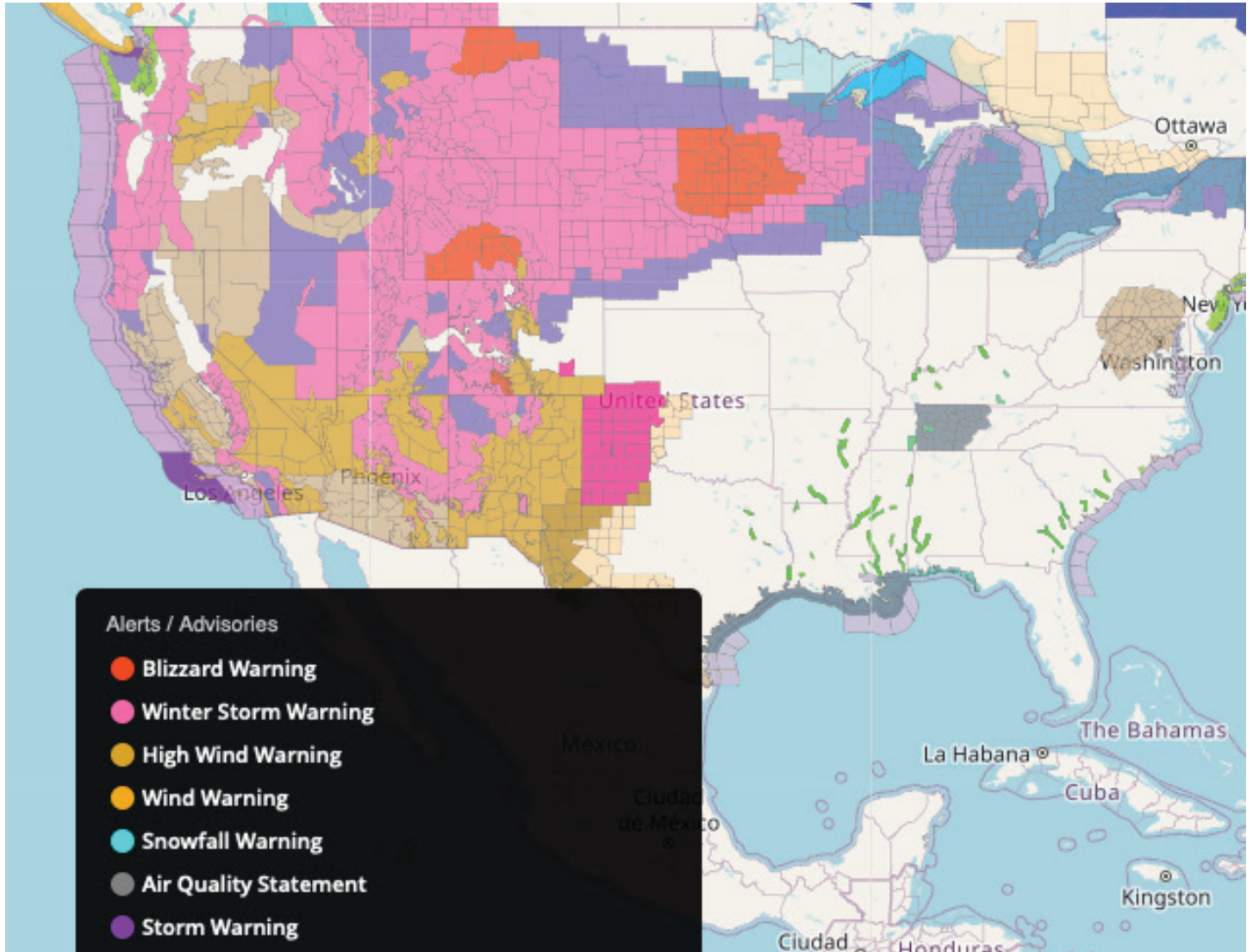
National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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Monster of a storm to hit much of the United States



Winter Weather Advisory Blizzard Warning

...WINTER WEATHER ADVISORY NOW IN EFFECT FROM 6 AM THIS MORNING TO NOON CST WEDNESDAY...

...BLIZZARD WARNING IN EFFECT FROM NOON WEDNESDAY TO NOON CST THURSDAY...

* WHAT...For the Blizzard Warning, blizzard conditions expected. Total snow accumulations of 9 to 12 inches. Winds gusting as high as 40 mph. For the Winter Weather Advisory, snow and blowing snow expected. Total snow accumulations of 3 to 5 inches. Winds gusting as high as 35 mph.

* WHERE...Traverse and Big Stone Counties.

* WHEN...For the Blizzard Warning, from noon Wednesday to noon CST Thursday. For the Winter Weather Advisory, from 6 AM this morning to noon CST Wednesday.

* IMPACTS...Travel could be very difficult to impossible. Widespread blowing snow could significantly reduce visibility. The hazardous conditions could impact the morning or evening commute. The cold wind chills as low as 25 below zero could cause frostbite on exposed skin in as little as 30 minutes.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

Travel should be restricted to emergencies only. If you must travel, have a winter survival kit with you. If you get stranded, stay with your vehicle.

Slow down and use caution while traveling.

The latest road conditions can be obtained at 511mn.org, or by calling 5 1 1.

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Today in Weather History

February 21, 1918: Due to Chinook winds, a warm-up of 83 degrees in just 12 hours occurred in Granville, North Dakota. The temperature soared from an early morning low of 33 degrees below zero to an afternoon temperature of 50.

February 21, 1969: Heavy snow and winds of 15 to 25 mph caused blowing and drifting snow, which closed many roads. Snowfall amounts of 5 to 12 inches were typical across eastern South Dakota from the 20th to the 22nd. Some snowfall amounts included 5 inches at Clear Lake and Brookings, 6 inches at Wilmot, 7 inches at Milbank, Redfield, and Mitchell, 8 inches at Conde, and 9 inches at Webster, Sioux Falls, and Huron.

1935: Frequent dust storms occurred in eastern Colorado during the month, forcing schools to close and people to stay indoors. A fatality happened on this date when two section cars collided on the railroad near Arriba Colorado due to poor visibility.

1936 - The temperature at Langdon, ND, climbed above zero for the first time in six weeks. Readings never got above freezing during all three winter months. (David Ludlum)

1971: A tornado outbreak struck portions of the Lower Mississippi River Valley and the Southeastern United States on February 21–22nd. The two-day tornado outbreak produced at least 19 tornadoes, probably several more, primarily brief events in rural areas, and killed 123 people across three states. The tornadoes "virtually leveled" entire communities in the state of Mississippi.

In Mississippi, the storms killed 107 people, injured 1,060, and hospitalized 454 others. On March 23, 1971, the Mississippi Civil Defense Council estimated 17 million dollars in property damages. In addition, 131,308 individuals received disaster service from the Salvation Army in nine areas. As of 1971, in terms of fatalities, the outbreak produced the fourth-highest number of deaths in Mississippi from tornadoes on one day. The top five tornado events include 317 deaths on May 7, 1840, in Natchez, 216 deaths on April 5, 1936, in Tupelo, 160 deaths on April 20, 1920, in the northeast and east-central Mississippi, 107 deaths from the Mississippi Delta outbreak on February 21, 1971, and 100 deaths on April 24, 1908, in Lamar to Wayne Counties.

Aerial surveys showed that most storm reports from various sources fit into three main tracks. The surveys also found three principal tornadoes contributed to over 300 miles of tornado track, varying in width from 1/4 miles to more than 1/2 mile. One track extended 159 miles as a continuous storm, beginning southwest of Cary, passing west of Belzoni, Greenwood, and Oxford, with the tornado lifting near Abbeville. After passing over Abbeville, the tornado redeveloped to the southwest of Bethlehem in Marshall County and continued northeast to Selmer, Tennessee. Another tornado first developed near Delhi, Louisiana, and continued 102 miles to near Schlater, Mississippi. The tornado struck the towns of Delta City, Inverness, and Moorhead. A third major storm began south-southwest of Bovina, passed through Little Yazoo, and ended near Lexington for a path length of 69 miles. Although much shorter, about eight miles, a fourth track extended from north of Drew to near Rome.

The three significant tornadoes traveled at speeds of 50 to 60 mph. The speed was determined from a selected set of more reliable checks at various locations. All the death occurred along these three tornado tracks. Between 11:56 am and 9:00 pm, the Jackson, Mississippi River radar showed hook echoes in 28 observations. Some of the hooks were as far away as 90 miles. At one time, as many as four hook echoes were observed on the radar.

1971 - Elk City, OK, was buried under 36 inches of snow to establish a 24 hour snowfall record for the state. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Low pressure over central California produced gale force winds along the coast, and produced thunderstorms which pelted Stockton, Oakland and San Jose with small hail. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2013: An astonishing 515 cm (202.8" or almost 17') level of snow depth was measured at Sukayu Onsen, Aomori on Honshu Island in Japan, on February 21, 2013, the deepest snow measured at an official weather site in Japan records. (Last Updated in 2020).

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

AN INSIDE JOB

"Why is it," the little girl asked the botanist, "that when I open a marigold it dies, but when God opens it, it's beautiful?"

"Because," came the answer, "God works from the inside out, while you work from the outside in."

What a beautiful description of the new birth. It's not something that happens on the outside, but something God does on the inside that will eventually be seen on the outside.

A Christian becomes a completely new person. Although we cannot see the change on the inside, we know that there is a change when others see it on the outside - the new behaviors that come with the new birth. When Christ fills our heart on the inside, others will see it on the outside: we will no longer be the same and therefore do the same as we did in the past.

People often speak of "being rehabilitated." This means that one has been restored to good health, a useful life, one's former condition. But, that is not true of those of us who have been born again. We have, in and through Christ, been "recreated" - we become completely "new beings" or actually "new people!" "The old life is gone. A new life has begun," said Paul.

When we are converted to faith in Christ, we do not turn over a new leaf. We begin living a new life under a new Leader that results in a new way of living. Now we begin living a new life by a new set of standards - God's standards. We must now ask, "Do others see Jesus in me?"

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to examine our lives carefully and completely to be sure we are living this "new life." May we allow Your Holy Spirit to work within us to change us, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 2 Corinthians 5:11-19



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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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.17.23

2 33 38 57 70 13

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$104,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 8 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.20.23

4 10 19 27 39 10

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$37,750,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 8 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.20.23

8 12 41 42 47 1

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 38 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.18.23

1 2 18 27 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$60,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 8 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.20.23

2 13 26 51 55 23

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 7 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.20.23

3 17 26 38 54 15

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$100,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 7 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Monday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Baltic 63, Tri-Valley 57

Belle Fourche def. Sundance, Wyo., forfeit

Beresford 54, Wagner 49

Bridgewater-Emery 58, Howard 48

Canton 58, Vermillion 54, OT

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 66, Little Wound 63

Colman-Egan 77, Flandreau Indian 60

Dell Rapids 74, Garretson 42

Elk Point-Jefferson 55, West Central 45

Faulkton 56, Miller 51

Flandreau 60, Deubrook 44

Gregory 70, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 49

Harding County 63, Lemmon 42

Hill City 66, Custer 53

Irene-Wakonda 52, Bon Homme 48

Lennox, Calif. 67, Deuel 49

Lyman 63, Stanley County 51

Madison 57, Milbank 45

Mitchell Christian 48, Centerville 47

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 83, McCook Central/Montrose 42

Parkston 56, Corsica/Stickney 39

Platte-Geddes 63, Todd County 59

Rapid City Christian 101, Lead-Deadwood 40

Red Cloud 74, Bennett County 39

Spearfish 53, Rapid City Stevens 44

Timber Lake 52, Mobridge-Pollock 48

Tri-State, N.D. 63, Wilmot 51

Viborg-Hurley 63, Dell Rapids St. Mary 60

Waubay/Summit 63, Leola/Frederick 34

Winner 61, Crow Creek Tribal School 42

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Colman-Egan 54, Canistota 46

Garretson 58, Dell Rapids 53

Lyman 53, Faulkton 47

Potter County 61, Highmore-Harrold 45

Watertown 55, Aberdeen Central 43

West Central 64, Madison 30

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class A Region 2=

Estelline/Hendricks 44, Deuel 41

Class A Region 5=

Kimball/White Lake 47, Chamberlain 44

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Class B Region 2=
Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 62, Flandreau Indian 30
Class B Region 3=
Howard 62, Chester 51
Class B Region 4=
Freeman Academy/Marion 31, Gayville-Volin High School 28
Class B Region 5=
Burke 52, Colome 19
Class B Region 6=
Ipswich 43, Sunshine Bible Academy 29
Class B Region 7=
Oelrichs 57, Crazy Horse 54
Class B Region 8=
Tiospaye Topa 60, McIntosh 50
Wakpala 69, Takini 36

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

Winter storm to roll across US northwest, Rockies this week

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — A massive winter storm that will push across the northern U.S. in coming days could dump several feet of snow at higher elevations and bring dangerously cold temperatures, forecasters said Sunday.

The arctic blast will sweep into the Pacific Northwest and then push across the northern Rocky Mountains and onto the Great Plains. It will bring heavy snow and strong winds, the National Weather Service said.

Forecasters issued winter storm warnings and advisories across the region beginning Sunday afternoon. Lesser snowfall amounts were expected at lower elevations.

Temperatures will drop drastically after Tuesday leading to dangerous wind chills, the weather service said. Snow was also forecast across portions of North and South Dakota.

Russia suspends only remaining major nuclear treaty with US

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin declared Tuesday that Moscow was suspending its participation in the New START treaty — the last remaining nuclear arms control pact with the United States — sharply upping the ante amid tensions with Washington over the fighting in Ukraine.

Speaking in his state-of-the-nation address, Putin also said that Russia should stand ready to resume nuclear weapons tests if the U.S. does so, a move that would end a global ban on nuclear weapons tests in place since Cold War times.

Explaining his decision to suspend Russia's obligations under New START, Putin accused the U.S. and its NATO allies of openly declaring the goal of Russia's defeat in Ukraine.

"They want to inflict a 'strategic defeat' on us and try to get to our nuclear facilities at the same time," he said, declaring his decision to suspend Russia's participation in the treaty. "In this context, I have to declare today that Russia is suspending its participation in the Treaty on Strategic Offensive Arms."

New START's official name is The Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg voiced regret about Putin's move, saying that "with today's decision on New START, full arms control architecture has been dismantled."

"I strongly encourage Russia to reconsider its decision and respect existing agreements," he told reporters.

Putin argued that while the U.S. has pushed for the resumption of inspections of Russian nuclear facilities under the treaty, NATO allies had helped Ukraine mount drone attacks on Russian air bases hosting

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nuclear-capable strategic bombers.

The Russian military said that it shot down the Soviet-built drones that struck two bomber bases deep inside Russia in December, but acknowledged that several servicemen were killed by debris that also damaged some aircraft.

Putin on Tuesday mocked NATO's statement urging Russia to allow the resumption of the U.S. inspections of Russian nuclear weapons sites as "some kind of theater of the absurd."

"The drones used for it were equipped and modernized with NATO's expert assistance," Putin said. "And now they want to inspect our defense facilities? In the conditions of today's confrontation, it sounds like sheer nonsense."

He said that a week ago he signed an order to deploy new land-based strategic missiles and asked: "Are they also going to poke their noses there?"

The Russian leader also noted that NATO's statement on New START raises the issue of the nuclear weapons of Britain and France that are part of the alliance's nuclear capability but aren't included in the U.S.-Russian pact.

"They are also aimed against us. They are aimed against Russia," he said. "Before we return to discussing the treaty, we need to understand what are the aspirations of NATO members Britain and France and how we take it into account their strategic arsenals that are part of the alliance's combined strike potential."

Putin emphasized that Russia is suspending its involvement in New START and not entirely withdrawing from the pact yet.

The New START treaty, signed in 2010 by U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, limits each country to no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed missiles and bombers. The agreement envisages sweeping on-site inspections to verify compliance.

Just days before the treaty was due to expire in February 2021, Russia and the United States agreed to extend it for another five years.

Russia and the U.S. have suspended mutual inspections under New START since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, but Moscow last fall refused to allow their resumption, raising uncertainty about the pact's future. Russia also indefinitely postponed a planned round of consultations under the treaty.

The U.S. State Department has said that Russia's refusal to allow the inspections "prevents the United States from exercising important rights under the treaty and threatens the viability of U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control." It noted that nothing prevents Russian inspectors from conducting inspections of U.S. facilities.

Putin on Tuesday challenged the U.S. assertion, alleging that Washington has rejected some Russian requests for visits to specific U.S. facilities.

"We aren't allowed to conduct full-fledged inspections under the treaty," he said. "We can't really check anything on their side."

He alleged that the U.S. was working on nuclear weapons and some in the U.S. were pondering plans to resume nuclear tests banned under the global test ban that took effect after the end of the Cold War.

"In this situation, Rosatom (Russia's state nuclear corporation) and the Defense Ministry must ensure readiness for Russian nuclear weapons tests," Putin said. "We naturally won't be the first to do it, but if the U.S. conducts tests we will also do it. No one should have dangerous illusions that the global strategic parity could be destroyed."

Scientist behind gene-edited babies eyes work in Hong Kong

By KANIS LEUNG and EMILY WANG FUJIYAMA Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — A Chinese scientist who set off an ethical debate five years ago with claims that he made the world's first genetically edited babies said Tuesday that he hopes to research rare hereditary diseases in Hong Kong.

He Jiankui shocked the world in 2018 when he announced he had altered the embryos of twin girls, with many in the scientific community criticizing his work as unethical. He was convicted by a mainland Chinese court in 2019 of practicing medicine without a license and sentenced to three years in prison with a fine

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of 3 million yuan (\$445,000).

Ten months after his release, He announced in Beijing on Tuesday that he has been granted a Hong Kong visa and is in contact with universities, research institutes and companies in the financial hub.

He said he would consider working in Hong Kong if there is an appropriate opportunity, and that he plans to research gene therapy for rare hereditary diseases.

"My scientific research will comply with the ethics codes and international consensus on scientific research," he said at a brief news conference.

He's announcement in 2018 sparked a global debate over the ethics of gene editing. In interviews with The Associated Press, he said he had used a tool called CRISPR-cas9 to try to disable a gene that allows HIV to enter cells in an attempt to give the babies the ability to resist AIDS.

The CRISPR-cas9 tool has been tested elsewhere in adults to treat diseases, but many in the scientific community criticized He's work as medically unnecessary and unethical partly because any genetic changes could be passed down to future generations.

In convicting him in 2019, the Chinese court in Shenzhen said he had not obtained qualifications as a doctor, had pursued fame and profit, deliberately violated Chinese regulations on scientific research, and crossed an ethical line in both scientific research and medicine. The court also confirmed a third birth, saying his project involved three gene-edited babies born to two women.

He was released last April and was invited to speak at the University of Oxford next month. But he wrote on Twitter this month that he was not ready to talk about his experiences over the last three years and decided to cancel the visit.

He invited about six media organizations to his news conference on Tuesday but left after reading a statement for about two minutes. He did not respond to questions as he left.

In a later written response, he said he plans to form an advisory committee on ethics to vet his future work and make sure the process is open and transparent.

He said he plans to research Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, a genetic disorder that he said often causes people to die of heart and lung failure when they are about 20 years old. No medicine can cure the disease and gene therapy may help, he said.

"We hope to use AI tools to evolve the adeno-associated virus capsids to improve the efficiency of gene therapy and largely lower the costs of gene therapy so as to make it affordable for each family," he said.

In Hong Kong, the granting of a visa to He under a new program to woo global talent raised concerns that recipients may have criminal records.

Hong Kong Labour Minister Chris Sun refused to comment on individual cases but acknowledged that applicants have not needed to disclose any criminal record in the application process. He said applicants will have to do so starting Wednesday.

Supreme Court looks at law that helped shape modern internet

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is taking up its first case about a federal law that is credited with helping create the modern internet by shielding Google, Twitter, Facebook and other companies from lawsuits over content posted on their sites by others.

The justices are hearing arguments Tuesday about whether the family of an American college student killed in a terrorist attack in Paris can sue Google for helping extremists spread their message and attract new recruits.

The case is the court's first look at Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, adopted early in the internet age, in 1996, to protect companies from being sued over information their users post online.

Lower courts have broadly interpreted the law to protect the industry, which the companies and their allies say has fueled the meteoric growth of the internet and encouraged the removal of harmful content.

But critics argue that the companies have not done nearly enough and that the law should not block lawsuits over the recommendations, generated by computer algorithms, that point viewers to more mate-

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rial that interests them and keeps them online longer.

Any narrowing of their immunity could have dramatic consequences that could affect every corner of the internet because websites use algorithms to sort and filter a mountain of data.

"Recommendation algorithms are what make it possible to find the needles in humanity's largest haystack," Google's lawyers wrote in their main Supreme Court brief.

In response, the lawyers for the victim's family questioned the prediction of dire consequences. "There is, on the other hand, no denying that the materials being promoted on social media sites have in fact caused serious harm," the lawyers wrote.

The lawsuit was filed by the family of Nohemi Gonzalez, a 23-year-old senior at Cal State Long Beach who was spending a semester in Paris studying industrial design. She was killed by Islamic State gunmen in a series of attacks that left 130 people dead in November 2015.

The Gonzalez family alleges that Google-owned YouTube aided and abetted the Islamic State group by recommending its videos to viewers most likely to be interested in them, in violation of the federal Anti-Terrorism Act.

Lower courts sided with Google.

A related case, set for arguments Wednesday, involves a terrorist attack at a nightclub in Istanbul in 2017 that killed 39 people and prompted a lawsuit against Twitter, Facebook and Google.

Separate challenges to social media laws enacted by Republicans in Florida and Texas are pending before the high court, but they will not be argued before the fall and decisions probably won't come until the first half of 2024.

Putin not backing down on Ukraine, insists West is at fault

By The Associated Press undefined

Russian President Vladimir Putin accused Western countries Tuesday of igniting and sustaining the war in Ukraine, refusing any blame for Moscow almost a year after the Kremlin's invasion of its neighbor that has killed tens of thousands of people.

In his long-delayed state-of-the-nation address, Putin cast his country — and Ukraine — as victims of Western double-dealing and said it was Russia, not Ukraine, fighting for its very existence.

"We aren't fighting the Ukrainian people," Putin said in a speech days before the war's first anniversary on Friday. Ukraine "has become hostage of the Kyiv regime and its Western masters, which have effectively occupied the country."

The speech reiterated a litany of grievances that the Russian leader has frequently offered as justification for the widely condemned war while vowing no military let-up in Ukrainian territories he has illegally annexed, apparently rejecting any peace overtures in a conflict that has reawakened fears of a new Cold War.

Russia invaded on Feb. 24, 2022, and made a dash toward Kyiv, apparently expecting to quickly overrun the capital. But stiff resistance from Ukrainian forces — backed by Western weapons — turned back Moscow's troops. While Ukraine has reclaimed many areas initially seized by Russia, the two sides have become bogged down in tit-for-tat battles in others.

The war has revived the old Russia-West divide, reinvigorated the NATO alliance, and created the biggest threat to Putin's more than two-decade rule. U.S. President Joe Biden, fresh off a surprise visit to Kyiv, was in Poland on Tuesday on a mission to solidify that Western unity — and planned his own speech.

Observers were expected to scour Putin's address for any signs of how the Russian leader sees the conflict, where he might take it and how it might end. While the Constitution mandates that the president deliver the speech annually, Putin never gave one in 2022, as his troops rolled into Ukraine and suffered repeated setbacks.

Much of the speech covered old ground — though Putin did sharply up the ante in tensions with Washington by declaring that Moscow would suspend its participation in the last remaining nuclear arms control pact with the United States.

The so-called New START Treaty caps the number of long-range nuclear warheads they can deploy and

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limits the use of missiles that can carry atomic weapons.

In the speech, Putin offered his own version of recent history, which discounted arguments by the Ukrainian government that it needed Western help to thwart a Russian military takeover.

"Western elites aren't trying to conceal their goals, to inflict a 'strategic defeat' to Russia," Putin said in the speech broadcast by all state TV channels. "They intend to transform the local conflict into a global confrontation."

He added that Russia was prepared to respond since "it will be a matter of our country's existence." He has repeatedly depicted NATO's expansion to include countries close to Russia as an existential threat to his country.

Putin denied any wrongdoing, even as the Kremlin's forces in Ukraine strike civilian targets, including hospitals, and are widely accused of war crimes. On the ground in Ukraine on Tuesday, grinding battles and shelling attacks continued in the east and the south of the country. At least six people were killed and seven more sustained injuries over the past 24 hours, Ukraine's presidential office reported in the morning.

"The life of civilians in the region has been turned into hell — they're surviving under constant Russian fire without water and electricity," Ukrainian governor of the partially occupied Donetsk region, Pavlo Kyrylenko, said.

Many observers predicted Putin's speech would address Moscow's fallout with the West — and Putin began with strong words for those countries that have provided Kyiv with crucial military support.

"It's they who have started the war. And we are using force to end it," Putin said before an audience of lawmakers, state officials and soldiers who have fought in Ukraine.

Putin also accused the West of taking aim at Russian culture, religion and values because it is aware that "it is impossible to defeat Russia on the battlefield."

Likewise, he said Western sanctions would have no effect, saying they hadn't "achieved anything and will not achieve anything."

Underscoring the anticipation ahead of the speech, some state TV channels put out a countdown for the event starting Monday.

The Kremlin this year barred media from "unfriendly" countries, the list of which includes the U.S., the U.K. and those in the EU. Peskov said journalists from those nations will be able to cover the speech by watching the broadcast.

He previously told reporters that the speech's delay had to do with Putin's "work schedule," but Russian media reports linked it to the setbacks of Russian forces. The Russian president postponed the state-of-the-nation address before, in 2017.

Last year, the Kremlin also canceled two other big annual events — Putin's press conference and a highly scripted phone-in marathon where people ask the president questions.

Analysts expected Putin's speech would be tough in the wake of Biden's visit to Kyiv on Monday. In his own speech later Tuesday, Biden is expected to highlight the commitment of the central European country and other allies to Ukraine over the past year.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said that Biden's address would not be "some kind of head to head" with Putin's.

"This is not a rhetorical contest with anyone else," said.

Spain court denies Dani Alves' appeal to be freed on bail

By TALES AZZONI AP Sports Writer

MADRID (AP) — A Spanish court denied Dani Alves' appeal on Tuesday to be freed on bail while the investigation of a sexual assault accusation against the Brazilian soccer player continues.

The court ruled that Alves was a flight risk and must remain in prison during the investigation. A trial has not been set.

Alves was provisionally detained in January after being accused of sexually assaulting a woman at a nightclub on Dec. 30. He has denied wrongdoing and said sex with the accuser was consensual.

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A judge ordered him to be jailed without bail after analyzing the initial probe by authorities and hearing testimony from Alves, the alleged victim and witnesses.

"Daniel Alves remains as innocent as he was before this ruling," his defense team said in a statement. "His desire to leave Spain and elude the process did not, and does not, exist."

Alves' lawyers filed the appeal saying the Brazilian agreed to turn in his passport and wear a tracking device if he was freed. Alves would also report to the court and to authorities as often as required, including daily, and would not go within 500 meters (yards) of the accuser or her home or workplace.

But the court ruled that those measures would not be enough to keep the player from potentially trying to escape considering he faces several years in prison if found guilty. It also said there was considerable evidence that a crime might have been committed, and that Alves' wealth could make it easier for him to try to flee regardless of the amount of bail.

"Nothing would stop Mr. Alves from leaving Spain by air, sea or even land without documentation and reaching his country of origin, where he could stay knowing that he would not be delivered to Spain despite international arrest warrants or extradition orders," the court said.

Brazil does not extradite its own citizens when they are sentenced in other countries. Another former Brazil player, Robinho, had a nine-year sentence for the rape of a young woman in Italy upheld by a top Italian court last year, but he remains free in Brazil.

The 39-year-old Alves can appeal again while the court decides whether to set up a trial.

Under Spain's sexual consent law passed last year, sexual assault takes in a wide array of crimes from online abuse and groping to rape, each with different possible punishments. A case of rape can receive a maximum sentence of 15 years.

Alves won 42 soccer titles, including three Champions Leagues with Barcelona and two Copa Americas with Brazil. He played in his third World Cup last year in Qatar.

Home Depot says it will raise pay for US, Canadian workers

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Home Depot said Tuesday it's investing \$1 billion in wage increases for its U.S. and Canadian hourly workers.

The Atlanta-based home improvement chain said every hourly employee will get a raise starting this month. Starting pay will be at least \$15 per hour in all markets.

Home Depot is one of many big retailers who have raised pay to attract workers in a strong U.S. job market, where unemployment is at its lowest level since 1969. Walmart announced in January that it would be raising its hourly wage to an average of \$17.50, while Target invested \$300 million in hourly wage increases last year.

The pay raises could also help Home Depot head off a fledgling campaign to unionize its stores, which it opposes. Workers at a Home Depot in Philadelphia filed to hold a union election last September, saying workers weren't benefiting from Home Depot's strong sales and stores were understaffed. Workers at the store voted to reject the union in November.

Home Depot employs 437,000 people in the U.S. and 34,000 in Canada. The vast majority are hourly employees, the company said. The company operates 2,000 stores in the U.S. and 182 stores in Canada.

"This investment will help us attract and retain the best talent into our pipeline," Home Depot's Chairman, President and CEO Ted Decker wrote in an email to employees. Decker noted that 90% of the chain's store leadership started as hourly workers.

Inside the Trump grand jury that probed election meddling

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — They were led down a staircase into a garage beneath a downtown Atlanta courthouse, where officers with big guns were waiting. From there, they were ushered into vans with heavily tinted windows and driven to their cars under police escort.

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For Emily Kohrs, these were the moments last May when she realized she wasn't participating in just any grand jury.

"That was the first indication that this was a big freaking deal," Kohrs told The Associated Press.

The 30-year-old Fulton County resident who was between jobs suddenly found herself at the center of one of the nation's most significant legal proceedings. She would become foreperson of the special grand jury selected to investigate whether then-President Donald Trump and his Republican associates illegally meddled in Georgia's 2020 presidential election. The case has emerged as one of Trump's most glaring legal vulnerabilities as he mounts a third presidential campaign, in part because he was recorded asking state election officials to "find 11,780 votes" for him.

For the next eight months, Kohrs and her fellow jurors would hear testimony from 75 witnesses, ranging from some of Trump's most prominent allies to local election workers. Portions of the panel's final report released last Thursday said jurors believed that "one or more witnesses" committed perjury and urged local prosecutors to bring charges. The report's recommendations for charges on other issues, including potential attempts to influence the election, remain secret for now.

The AP identified Kohrs after her name was included on subpoenas obtained through open records requests. Fulton County Superior Court Judge Robert McBurney advised Kohrs and other jurors on what they could and could not share publicly, including in interviews with the news media.

During a lengthy recent interview, Kohrs complied with the judge's instructions not to discuss details related to the jury's deliberations. She also declined to talk about unpublished portions of the panel's final report.

But her general characterizations provided unusual insight into a process that is typically cloaked in secrecy.

Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, who was on the receiving end of Trump's pressure campaign, was "a really geeky kind of funny," she said. State House Speaker David Ralston, who died in November, was hilarious and had the room in stitches. And Gov. Brian Kemp, who succeeded in delaying his appearance until after his reelection in November, seemed unhappy to be there.

Kohrs was fascinated by an explainer on Georgia's voting machines offered by a former Dominion Voting Systems executive. She also enjoyed learning about the inner workings of the White House from Cassidy Hutchinson, who Kohrs said was much more forthcoming than her old boss, former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows.

Kohrs sketched witnesses in her notebook as they spoke and was tickled when Bobby Christine, the former U.S. attorney for Georgia's Southern District, complimented her "remarkable talent." When the jurors' notes were taken for shredding after their work was done, she managed to salvage two sketches — U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham and Marc Short, who served as chief of staff to former Vice President Mike Pence — because there were no notes on those pages.

After Graham tried so hard to avoid testifying — taking his fight all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court — Kohrs was surprised when he politely answered questions and even joked with jurors.

Former New York mayor and Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani was funny and invoked privilege to avoid answering many questions but "genuinely seemed to consider" whether it was merited before declining to answer, she said.

When witnesses refused to answer almost every question, the lawyers would engage in what Kohrs came to think of as "show and tell." The lawyers would show video of the person appearing on television or testifying before the U.S. House committee that investigated the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol, periodically asking the witness to confirm certain things. Then the scratching of pens on paper could be heard as jurors tallied how many times the person invoked the Fifth Amendment.

At least one person who resisted answering questions became much more cooperative when prosecutors offered him immunity in front of the jurors, Kohrs said. Other witnesses came in with immunity deals already in place.

Trump's attorneys have said he was never asked to testify. Kohrs said the grand jury wanted to hear from the former president but didn't have any real expectation that he would offer meaningful testimony.

"Trump was not a battle we picked to fight," she said.

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Kohrs didn't vote in 2020 and was only vaguely aware of controversy swirling in the wake of the election. She didn't know the specifics of Trump's allegations of widespread election fraud or his efforts to reverse his loss. When prosecutors played the then-president's phone call with Raffensperger on the first day the jurors met to consider evidence, it was the first time Kohrs had heard it.

"I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than we have," Trump said on the call.

Though Kohrs said she tends to agree more with Democrats, Kohrs said she doesn't identify with any political party and prefers to listen to all opinions.

"If I chose a political party, it would be the not-crazy party," she said.

Kohrs called herself a "geek about the justice system" and noted the challenges some jurors faced balancing their responsibilities on the panel with outside duties. When she eagerly volunteered to be foreperson, she met no resistance from her fellow jurors, who were less enthusiastic about the time-consuming obligation stretching before them, she said.

One of her first duties as foreperson was to sign a big stack of subpoenas.

As the proceedings played out, one of her fellow jurors brought the newspaper every day and pointed out stories about the investigation. Prosecutors, Kohrs said, told jurors they could consume news coverage related to the case but urged them to keep an open mind.

Kohrs said she mostly avoided stories related to the proceedings to avoid forming an opinion.

"I didn't want to characterize anyone before they walked in the room," she said. "I felt they all deserved an impartial listener."

Of the 26 people on the panel — 23 jurors and three alternates — 16 had to be present for a quorum. There was a core group of between 12 and 16 who showed up almost every day they were in session, Kohrs said, and she could recall only one day when they couldn't proceed because not enough seats were filled. The most they ever had in the room was 22 — on the day Giuliani testified.

As the months passed, the grand jurors grew more comfortable with each other and with the four lawyers on Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis' team who led the proceedings. But they're not all best friends now that it's over.

"We are not meeting up now. We don't have a group chat," Kohrs said.

While the jurors asked to hear from certain witnesses, most witnesses were decided upon by the district attorney's office. But Kohrs said she didn't feel as though prosecutors were trying to influence the jurors' final report.

"I fully stand by our report as our decision and our conclusion," she said.

Biden to rally allies as Ukraine war gets more complicated

By AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — President Joe Biden is set to consult with allies from NATO's eastern flank in Poland on Tuesday as the Russian invasion of Ukraine edges toward an even more complicated stage.

After paying an unannounced visit to Kyiv, Biden made his way to Warsaw on Monday on a mission to solidify Western unity as both Ukraine and Russia prepare to launch spring offensives. The conflict — the most significant war in Europe since World War II — has already left tens of thousands of people dead, devastated Ukraine's infrastructure system and damaged the global economy.

"I thought it was critical that there not be any doubt, none whatsoever, about U.S. support for Ukraine in the war," Biden said as he stood with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv before departing for Poland. "The Ukrainian people have stepped up in a way that few people ever have in the past."

Biden is scheduled to meet with Polish President Andrzej Duda on Tuesday and deliver an address from the gardens of Warsaw's Royal Castle, where he's expected to highlight the commitment of the central European country and other allies to Ukraine over the past year. On Wednesday, he'll consult with Duda and other leaders of the Bucharest Nine, a group of the easternmost members of NATO military alliance.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said that the Royal Castle speech would be "vintage

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Joe Biden" and that the Democratic president would lay out that the action democracies take in the coming years will have reverberations for years to come.

Biden is set to speak on the day that Russian President Vladimir Putin was delivering his long-delayed state-of-the-nation address, in which he declares "it is impossible to defeat Russia on the battlefield."

Sullivan said that Biden's address would not be "some kind of head to head" with Putin's address.

"This is not a rhetorical contest with anyone else," said. "This is an affirmative statement of values, a vision for what the world we're both trying to build and defend should look like."

While Biden is looking to use his whirlwind trip to Europe as a moment of affirmation for Ukraine and allies, the White House has also emphasized that there is no clear endgame to the war in the near term and the situation on the ground has become increasingly complex.

The administration on Sunday revealed it has new intelligence suggesting that China, which has remained on the sidelines of the conflict, is now considering sending Moscow lethal aid. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said it could become a "serious problem" if Beijing follows through.

Biden and Zelenskyy discussed capabilities that Ukraine needs "to be able to succeed on the battlefield" in the months ahead, Sullivan said. Zelenskyy has been pushing the U.S. and European allies to provide fighter jets and long-range missile systems known as ATACMS — which Biden has declined to provide so far. Sullivan declined to comment on whether there was any movement on the matter during the leaders' talk.

With no end in sight for the war, the anniversary is a critical moment for Biden to try to bolster European unity and reiterate that Putin's invasion was a frontal attack on the post-World War II international order. The White House hopes the president's visit to Kyiv and Warsaw will help bolster American and global resolve.

"It is going to be a long war," said Michal Baranowski, managing director of the German Marshall Fund East. "If we don't have the political leadership and if we don't explain to our societies why this war is critical for their security ... then Ukraine would be in trouble."

In the U.S., a poll published last week by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that support for providing Ukraine with weapons and direct economic assistance is softening. And earlier this month, 11 House Republicans introduced what they called the "Ukraine fatigue" resolution urging Biden to end military and financial aid to Ukraine, while pushing Ukraine and Russia to come to a peace agreement.

Biden dismissed the notion of waning American support during his visit to Kyiv.

"For all the disagreement we have in our Congress on some issues, there is significant agreement on support for Ukraine," he said. "It's not just about freedom in Ukraine. ... It's about freedom of democracy at large."

Some establishment Republicans say it's now more important than ever for Biden and others in Washington to hammer home why continued backing of Ukraine matters.

"The bottom line for me is this is a war of aggression, war crimes on steroids, on television every day. To turn your back on this leads to more aggression," said Sen. Lindsay Graham, R-S.C. "Putin won't stop in Ukraine. I'm firmly in the camp of it's in our vital national security interest to continue to help Ukraine and I can sell it at home and will continue to sell it."

Former U.S. Ambassador John Herbst, who served as the top diplomat to Ukraine from 2003 to 2006, said Biden's White House can do better making the case to a domestic audience that "at minimum keeping Putin bottled up in Ukraine" is in U.S. economic and foreign policy interest and lessens the chance that Russia can turn the conflict into a wider war.

"The smart play is to give Ukraine the substantial assistance to make sure that the Putin problem is solved," said Herbst, senior director of the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center. "If this were something laid out clearly from the Oval Office and then repeated constantly by the president, his senior foreign policy and national security team, I don't have any doubt the American public will embrace it."

Ahead of the trip, the White House spotlighted Poland's efforts to assist Ukraine. More than 1.5 million Ukrainian refugees have settled in Poland since the start of the war and millions more have crossed through Poland on their way to other countries. Poland has also provided Ukraine with \$3.8 billion in military and humanitarian aid, according to the White House.

The Biden administration announced last summer that it was establishing a permanent U.S. garrison in Poland, creating an enduring American foothold on NATO's eastern flank.

The U.S. has committed about \$113 billion in aid to Ukraine since last year, while European allies have committed tens of billions of dollars more and welcomed millions of Ukrainian refugees who have fled the conflict.

"We built a coalition from the Atlantic to the Pacific," Biden said. "Russia's aim was to wipe Ukraine off the map. Putin's war of conquest is failing."

For the second time in less than a year, Biden will use Warsaw as the backdrop to deliver a major address on the Russian invasion. Last March, he delivered a forceful and highly personal condemnation of Putin at the Royal Castle just weeks after the start of the war.

Duda said Biden's presence on Polish soil as the war's anniversary approaches sends an important signal about the U.S. commitment to European security.

"In Warsaw, the president will deliver a very important address — one that a large part of the world, if not the whole world actually, is waiting for," Duda said.

Fears, questions about N. Korea's growing nuclear arsenal

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

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea's latest missile launches are a demonstration of the country's avowed ability to use nuclear force against South Korea and the mainland U.S. How immediate is that threat?

North Korea claims its nuclear forces are capable of destroying its rivals, and often follows its provocative weapons tests with launch details. But many foreign experts call the North's claim propaganda and suggest that the country is not yet capable of hitting the United States or its allies with a nuclear weapon.

There's no question that North Korea has nuclear bombs, and that it has missiles that place the U.S. mainland, South Korea and Japan within striking distance. What's not yet clear is whether the country has mastered the tricky engineering required to join the bombs and the missiles.

ICBMs

North Korea has demonstrated that it has missiles that could fly far enough to reach deep into the continental U.S., but it's not clear whether they can survive re-entering the earth's atmosphere on arrival.

North Korea said it had launched a Hwasong-15 intercontinental ballistic missile on Saturday to verify the weapon's reliability and combat readiness of the country's nuclear forces. It's one of three kinds of ICBMs the country has developed, along with the Hwasong-14 and Hwasong-17. All three are liquid-fueled, and North Korea has portrayed them all as nuclear-capable.

Launched almost straight up to avoid the territories of neighbors, the weapon reached a maximum altitude of about 5,770 kilometers (3,585 miles) and flew 990 kilometers (615 miles), according to North Korea's state media. The reported flight details suggest the missile could travel 13,000 kilometers (8,080 miles) or beyond if launched on a normal trajectory.

"These days, North Korea has been disclosing information about its launches in a very detailed manner to try to let others believe what they've done is genuine," analyst Shin Jong-woo at South Korea's Defense and Security Forum said. "But I think that's part of their propaganda."

There are questions on whether North Korea has acquired the technology to shield warheads from the high-temperature, high-stress environment of atmospheric re-entry.

A South Korean biennial defense document released last week said that it's not clear whether the missiles can survive re-entry, because all of North Korea's ICBM tests have so far been made on high angles.

Lee Choon Geun, an honorary research fellow at South Korea's Science and Technology Policy Institute, said a normal trajectory would cause greater stress, as a warhead would spend a longer time passing through altitudes of high air density.

North Korea's state media said the launch was made "suddenly" at a surprise order from leader Kim Jong Un.

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"The Kim regime's claims of short-notice launches are thus intended to demonstrate not only the development of strategic and tactical nuclear forces but also the operational capability to use them," Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, said.

In a military parade earlier this month, North Korea showcased around a dozen ICBMs, an unprecedented number that suggested progress in its efforts to mass-produce powerful weapons.

Among them were huge canister-sealed missiles that experts say were likely a version of a solid-fuel ICBM that North Korea has been trying to develop in recent years. Solid-fueled systems allow missiles to be mobile on the ground and make them faster to launch.

WARHEADS

North Korea likely has dozens of nuclear warheads. The question is whether they are small enough to fit on a missile.

North Korea has so far performed six underground nuclear test explosions to manufacture warheads that it can place on missiles. Outside estimates on the number of North Korean nuclear warheads vary widely, ranging from 20-60 to up to about 115.

In a 2021 interview with 38 North, a North Korea-focused website, renowned nuclear physicist Siegfried Hecker, who has visited North Korea's main Yongbyon nuclear complex numerous times, said that "20 to 60 is possible, with the most likely number being 45."

Some experts argue that North Korea has likely already built miniaturized nuclear warheads to be mounted on missiles citing the number of years the country has spent on its nuclear and missile programs. But others say North Korea is still years away from producing such warheads.

"After its sixth nuclear test, people accepted that North Korea really will have nuclear weapons. But they are still debating whether it has warhead miniaturization technology," Shin, the analyst, said.

The North described its sixth nuclear test in 2017 as a detonation of a thermonuclear bomb built for ICBMs. It created a tremor that measured 6.3 on the Richter scale, and some studies put its estimated explosive yield at about 50 to 140 kilotons of TNT. In comparison, the pair of atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II — which killed a total of more than 210,000 people — yielded explosions equivalent to about 15 and 20 kilotons of TNT, respectively.

The biennial South Korean defense document said that North Korea is estimated to have 70 kilograms (154 pounds) of weapons-grade plutonium. Some observers say that's enough for about 9-18 bombs. The document estimated that North Korea has "a considerable amount of" highly enriched uranium as well.

North Korea's Yongbyon complex has facilities to produce both plutonium and highly enriched uranium, the two main ingredients to build nuclear weapons.

Plutonium plants are generally large and generate a lot of heat, making it easier to detect. But a uranium enrichment plant is more compact and can be easily hidden from satellite cameras. North Korea is believed to be running at least one additional covert uranium enrichment facility, in addition to one at its Yongbyon complex.

SHORT-RANGE WEAPONS

Following the collapse of diplomacy with then-U.S. President Donald Trump in 2019, Kim sped up the development of short-range solid-fuel, nuclear-capable missiles designed to strike key targets in South Korea, including U.S. military bases there.

The so-called "tactical" nuclear weapons include what North Korea calls "super-large" 600-millimeter multiple rocket launchers that it tested Monday. South Korea describes the weapon as a short-range missile system.

North Korea's state media said its new artillery system can carry nuclear warheads, saying that four rockets would be enough to wipe out an enemy airfield. The statement drew quick outside doubts about whether weapons are indeed nuclear-capable.

"The North Korean claim doesn't make sense to some extent ... Why do they need four tactical nuclear

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weapons to destroy just one airfield?" Shin, the analyst, said. "Also, which country would disclose such attack scenarios via state media?"

Other new North Korean short-range systems include missiles that were apparently modeled after the Russian Iskander mobile ballistic system or outwardly resemble the U.S. MGM-140 Army Tactical Missile System. Launched from land vehicles, these missiles are designed to be maneuverable and fly at low altitudes, theoretically giving them a better chance of defeating South Korean and U.S. missile defense systems.

Whether North Korea has an ability to arm short-range missiles with nuclear warheads has not been independently confirmed.

While North Korea may be able to place simple nuclear warheads on some of its older missiles, including Scuds or Rodong missiles, it would likely require further technology advancements and nuclear tests to build smaller and more advanced warheads that can be installed on its newer tactical systems, said Lee, the expert.

North Korea also has an intermediate-range, nuclear-capable Hwasong-12 missile capable of reaching Guam, a major U.S. military hub in the Pacific. It has been developing a family of mid-range, solid-fuel Pukguksong missiles, which are designed to be fired from submarines or land vehicles.

Ukraine's year of pain, death —and also nation-building

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — In the final hours before the Russian onslaught, a last grasp at peace. Russian troops would soon pour across Ukraine's borders and Russian missiles would fill Ukrainian skies, taking Ukrainian lives in the biggest air, sea and ground assault in Europe since World War II. But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy still appealed, on war's brink, for reason to prevail.

Staring intently into the camera in a last-ditch, dead-of-night, video-recorded plea against the invasion, Zelenskyy warned Russia that the consequences would be "an abundance of pain, filth, blood and death."

"War is a huge calamity," Zelenskyy said, in what proved to be one of his last outings in a suit before his switch to military-style casual wear. "This calamity carries a huge cost — in every meaning of this word."

The date was Feb. 24, 2022 — cataclysmic for Ukraine, course-changing for Russia, history-shaping for the wider world. Every hour of every day since has proven those words to be right.

As milestones go, the invasion's first anniversary Friday is both grim and vexing. It marks a full year of killing, destruction, loss and pain felt even beyond the borders of Russia and Ukraine — with war-related price shocks being just one example. But it also raises a question that is unsatisfying because it can't be answered at this partway point: How much longer until this stops?

"Not soon enough" might be one response, though any peace deal looks far off as Russia's invasion force meat-grinds into Year Two, with neither side close to reaching hoped-for objectives.

The misery of 365 days of bloodshed and the full scale of the global repercussions are difficult to sum up with mere words. Russia is more isolated than at any time since the Cold War. Western nations are banding together for Russian President Vladimir Putin's defeat while also gambling that the ex-KGB spy won't go nuclear. China is filing away lessons that could be used against Taiwan.

And how to measure all the tears? How to adequately describe all the suffering and atrocities? Or even the broken heart of just one of the children who have lost loved ones and futures?

The numbers are dizzying: hundreds of thousands of Russian men escaping abroad to avoid being thrown into battle, millions of Ukrainians uprooted from their homes, tens of billions of dollars poured into weaponry that is making war ever-more lethal, trillions more dollars estimated lost for the global economy. And even those figures don't do justice to the human and economic costs.

Of the body count — surely the most important tally, but kept under wraps by both sides — all that can be said with certainty is that it is horrific. Western officials estimate it to be in the many tens of thousands and growing inexorably.

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But Ukraine is still here. That in itself is a stinging defeat for the Kremlin. Putin seemingly believed his forces and secret services would have turned Ukraine into a puppet state by now. The invasion plan called for resistant Ukrainian officials to be liquidated, weeded out or flipped into collaborating, according to a British think tank's study based in part on captured Russian documents.

Instead, the threat of extinction as a free nation is pushing Ukraine into an ever-closer orbit with the European Union, the United States and the wider West — the very outcome Putin wanted to avoid. Each additional delivery of NATO-standard weapons, the billions of dollars in other Western aid, and pledges to stand with Ukraine for "as long as it takes" are hard-wiring bonds that, in peacetime, might have taken many more years to build.

Ukraine, independent from the ex-Soviet Union only since 1991, has also grown in war as a nation. Fighting to remain Ukrainian has forced clarity about what exactly that means, sharpening the contours of national identity.

In what have become daily video addresses to share news from the fronts and boost morale, Zelenskyy sometimes wears black hoodies emblazoned on the front with the words, "I'm Ukrainian." Many more Ukrainians have joined the president in ditching Russian for Ukrainian as their primary language. Statues of Russians are also being torn down, street names are being changed and Russian history is being expunged from school textbooks.

Says Olena Sotnyk, a lawyer and former legislator: "Putin did for us something which nobody did. He helped us to become a free nation."

Abroad, too, Ukraine has won hearts and minds, evidenced by the blue-and-yellow flags flying from town halls and the foreign fighters and aid workers risking — and sometimes losing — their lives on Ukrainian battlefields pounded by shellfire into hellscapes hauntingly reminiscent of World War I.

"No one will ever confuse Ukraine and Russia (again)," says Mykhailo Podolyak, one of Zelenskyy's closest advisers. "No one will say, 'It is something over there, near Russia.'"

Ukrainians argue that in resisting Putin, they've also done the world the favor of unmasking him as a cruel and dangerous foe. The Russian leader who bewitched George W. Bush ("I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy," the then U.S. president said in 2001) and who was chauffeured on a golf cart through the gardens of Versailles Palace by France's president in 2017, has become a pariah to Western leaders. But others remain close with him, notably Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

Despite the failure to secure quick victory, Putin's grip on power remains firm, with protests quashed and most Russians seemingly rallied behind the war effort. Still, Russia is making previously unimaginable sacrifices.

In battle, Putin has increasingly had to turn to the mercenaries of the notorious Wagner Group, a private military company that has recruited fighters from prisons and tossed them into combat, with high casualty rates. Putin is also losing energy leverage over Europe as it veers away from Russian gas and most Russian oil. Russia's economy is laboring under Western sanctions. As Putin is boxed in, some fear he could lash out in new ways, perhaps resort to more nuclear saber-rattling or worse.

But history is written by war's victors. And at this point, the invasion's outcome is far from clear.

One of Putin's initial mistakes was trying to conquer a country the size of France with a force that Western estimates suggest was barely larger than the Allies' D-Day army in World War II. And the mission on June 6, 1944, was far narrower: assault five French beaches, opening the breach from which the Allies then pushed through Nazi-occupied Europe.

Putin is now throwing additional equipment and manpower at the problem of his own making, with 300,000 mobilized troops in his pipeline for a new offensive that Russia hasn't announced — but which Western and Ukrainian officials say is already underway in eastern Ukraine.

"Don't be seduced by 'plucky little Ukraine,' because Russia is much bigger. It could just grind Ukraine out," cautions retired Air Marshal Edward Stringer, a former senior officer in Britain's Royal Air Force. "It could force Ukraine to run out of bullets by putting one Russian in front of every bullet until Ukraine runs out of bullets before Putin runs out of Russians."

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Certainly, Podolyak says, time is not on Ukraine's side. Just the opposite.

"A protracted war is the slow death of Ukraine," he says. But the invasion's first anniversary, he insists, "means that we are on the right track."

"It means that we have a different Ukraine," he says. "It looks completely different."

So different that pre-invasion life is an ever-hazier memory. Back then, statues in the capital, Kyiv, hadn't disappeared behind walls of protective sandbags. People didn't need to fill bathtubs when air raid sirens sounded so they have water if Russian strikes knock out supplies. They didn't download phone apps that issue shrill alarms when Russian missiles and killer drones are en route.

And those same apps didn't have "Star Wars" actor Mark Hamill announcing when the danger has passed, reassuringly saying in his Luke Skywalker voice: "The air alert is over. May the force be with you." Surreal.

Sotnyk, the former legislator, recalls the panic that gripped her when Russia's missiles first started striking Kyiv a year ago. She called up her mother and ordered her to pack. Now Sotnyk knows better than to dash across town in an air raid.

"It's not like we became braver," she says. "We (just) became more aware of what does it mean — 'war.'"

Before the invasion, Feb. 24 hadn't been much of a mover and shaker as a date in world history. Then Prince Charles and Lady Diana announced their engagement on that day in 1981. Steve Jobs, co-founder of Apple, was born Feb. 24, 1955. In 1938, it was the launch day of the first nylon-bristle toothbrush, "Dr. West's Miracle Toothbrush."

But in 1920, in Germany, it was also the day that Adolf Hitler presented a 25-point platform for the new Nazi Party. Back then, Hitler's audience couldn't have known that his speech in a Munich beer hall would prove to be a step toward World War II. Had they guessed, would they have turned back?

Feb. 24, 2022, hasn't led to World War III — not "yet," pessimists might add. But the past year was, as Zelenskyy forewarned, full of pain, filth, blood and death.

And ahead: a grim abundance of more to come.

Global shares retreat on mixed manufacturing indicators

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Global shares were mostly lower on Tuesday after manufacturing indicators in Europe and Asia painted a mixed picture and Russian President Vladimir Putin accused Western countries of threatening Russia.

Shares fell in early trading in France, Germany and Britain and U.S. futures declined. Oil prices were mixed.

Russian President Vladimir Putin railed against the West Tuesday in a long-delayed state-of-the-nation address that shed light on how the Kremlin sees its bogged-down war in Ukraine. Such geopolitical factors add to uncertainties over slowing growth and weakening consumer demand in many economies.

France's CAC 40 fell 0.1% in early trading to 7,327.24. Germany's DAX lost 0.2% to 15,441.85. Britain's FTSE 100 edged down 0.1% to 8,005.92.

After U.S. markets were closed Monday for President's Day, the future for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was 0.6% lower while that for the S&P 500 lost 0.7%.

In Europe, surveys of factory managers showed improvement in the manufacturing outlook in Britain but contractions in France and Germany.

In Japan, a preliminary manufacturing indicator, the flash purchasing manager's index, or PMI, fell to 47.4 in February from 48.9 the month before. That was the weakest reading in more than two years.

In Australia, the Judo Bank PMI showed private sector activity remained in contraction for the fifth straight month. Although exports rebounded with help from China's re-opening after it dropped COVID-related restrictions, the sector showed little to no positive momentum. Unemployment has also risen in Australia.

"The distortions in the Australian economy remain extreme and point only to recession," Clifford Bennett, chief economist at ACY Securities, said in a commentary.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 shed 0.2% to 27,473.10. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 slipped 0.2% to 7,336.30. South

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Korea's Kospi gained nearly 0.2% to 2,458.96. Hong Kong's Hang Seng dipped 1.8% to 20,517.91, while the Shanghai Composite gained 0.5% to 3,306.52.

It was unclear if newly issued rules on overseas initial public offerings by Chinese companies had any significant impact on trading.

China cleared the way for more companies to join foreign stock exchanges but issued rules that might make the stock offering process more time-consuming by requiring stricter regulatory scrutiny in advance.

This week will bring updates on U.S. manufacturing and housing and minutes from the last meeting of the Federal Reserve that might provide insights into the outlook for inflation and interest rates.

In energy trading, benchmark U.S. crude picked up 28 cents to \$76.83 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Brent crude, the international pricing standard, lost \$1.12 cents to \$82.95 a barrel.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar inched up to 134.53 Japanese yen from 134.26 yen. The euro cost \$1.0672, down from \$1.0689.

Buttigieg urges safety changes after fiery Ohio derailment

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg wants the nation's freight railroads to immediately act to improve safety while regulators try to strengthen safety rules in the wake of a fiery derailment in Ohio that forced evacuations when toxic chemicals were released and burned.

Buttigieg announced a package of reforms Tuesday — two days after he warned the railroad responsible for the derailment, Norfolk Southern, to fulfill its promises to clean up the mess just outside East Palestine, Ohio, and help the town recover. He said the Department of Transportation will hold the railroad accountable for any safety violations that contributed to the Feb. 3 crash near the Pennsylvania border.

"While ensuring the safety of those impacted by this crash is the immediate priority, we also have to recognize that this represents an important moment to redouble our efforts to make this far less likely to happen again in the future," Buttigieg said.

Even though government data shows that derailments have declined in recent years, there were still 1,049 of them last year.

The head of the Environmental Protection Agency plans to return to the town of 4,700 Tuesday along with the governors of Ohio and Pennsylvania to discuss the cleanup and efforts to keep people safe on the same day officials plan to open a medical clinic staffed by contamination experts to evaluate residents' complaints. State and federal officials have reiterated that their testing of air and water samples in the area doesn't show dangerous levels of any toxins, but some people have been complaining about constant headaches and irritated eyes as they worry about returning to their homes.

Buttigieg said railroads and tank car owners should take action themselves to accelerate their plan to upgrade the tank cars that haul flammable liquids like crude oil and ethanol by 2025 instead of waiting to comply with the 2029 standard Congress ultimately approved after regulators suggested the earlier deadline. He also said freight railroads should quickly agree to use a confidential hotline regulators created that lets employees report safety concerns without fear of retribution, and reach agreements to provide their employees with paid sick time to help prevent fatigue.

He also wants railroads to stop asking for waivers from inspection requirements every time they develop new technology to improve inspections, because he said the technology should supplement but not replace human inspections.

Railroad unions have also been raising concerns that car inspections are being rushed and preventative maintenance may be getting neglected after widespread job cuts in the industry in recent years that they say have made railroads riskier. Greg Regan, president of the AFL-CIO's Transportation Trades Department coalition, said Ohio's derailment should prompt reforms.

"I do think that there's a moment to look in the mirror as an entire industry and decide what we can do better," Regan said. "I think the industry by and large has been reluctant to make the types of changes

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that are needed. They have obviously fought regulations in the past, but I think they are running out of excuses here.”

Buttigieg said regulators will be looking at whether they can revive a proposed rule the Trump administration dropped that would have required upgraded, electronically-controlled brakes on certain trains filled with flammable liquids that are designated “high-hazardous flammable train.” The rule was dropped after Congress directed regulators to use a strict cost-benefit analysis to evaluate the rule and they decided the potential benefits couldn’t justify the costs.

Buttigieg said he’ll ask Congress to “untie our hands here” on the braking rule, and regulators may look at expanding which trains are covered by the “high-hazardous” rules that were announced in 2015 after several fiery crude oil train derailments — the worst of which killed 47 people and decimated the Canadian town of Lac Mégantic in 2013. He also said Congress should raise the current \$225,455 limit on railroad safety fines at least tenfold to create a better deterrent for the multibillion-dollar corporations.

Buttigieg criticized railroads for lobbying against the braking rule and challenging it in court. But railroad safety expert David Clarke, who previously led the Center for Transportation Research at the University of Tennessee, said the industry shouldn’t be criticized too heavily for pushing back against proposed regulations when there are questions about their benefits.

“The fact that you couch those in terms of safety makes it seem like it’s, you know, mom, God and apple pie — anything safety related is sacred,” Clarke said. “But the bottom line is companies have to look at the benefits and the cost of any expenditure.”

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine was incredulous when he learned the Norfolk Southern train that derailed didn’t carry that designation, meaning that the railroad didn’t have to notify the state about the dangerous chemicals it was carrying or follow detailed requirements about finding the safest route for those chemicals.

“This is absurd,” DeWine said. “Congress needs to take a look at how this is handled.”

Regulators and the Association of American Railroads trade group say there are hundreds of pages of other rules railroads must follow when they transport any hazardous chemicals, whether it is the vinyl chloride that has gotten so much attention in this derailment, crude oil, nuclear materials or any of the hundreds of other dangerous chemicals that railroads routinely carry.

It’s not clear whether the “high-hazardous” rules could have prevented this derailment. The federal National Transportation Safety Board is in the early stages of its investigation, although officials with that agency have said they believe the failure of an axle on one of the railcars not long after the train crew got a warning about a possible mechanical problem caused this crash.

The Federal Railroad Administration will also work to finalize its proposed rule to require two-person crews in most circumstances that Buttigieg pointed to as one of the Biden administration’s main efforts to improve rail safety over the past two years.

The president of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, Eddie Hall, said he believes the freight railroads’ efforts to cut crews down to one person represent a clear threat to safety.

“Railroads in the United States largely self-regulate, and right now, rather than learn from their mistakes and improve oversight and safety, they are going in the opposite direction,” Hall said. “We welcome efforts by the Department of Transportation to improve rail safety.”

Norfolk Southern officials declined to respond directly to Buttigieg on Monday other than to reiterate the railroad’s commitment to safety and to cleaning up the derailment. CEO Alan Shaw said in a statement the railroad reissued Monday that he knows the railroad will be judged by its actions, but he pledged to do everything he could to help “get East Palestine back on its feet as soon as possible.”

As part of those efforts, the railroad said it has designated one of its local employees who lives in the town as a liaison between East Palestine and Norfolk Southern. That person will oversee a \$1 million budget to help the community in addition a \$1 million fund the railroad created to help residents and \$3.4 million in payments it has already handed out to families. Those payments are likely just the start, as the EPA has said Norfolk Southern will be responsible for the cleanup costs and several lawsuits have already been filed against the railroad.

University of Illinois professor Christopher Barkan, who teaches a class on railroad operating safety

and advises the industry on tank car safety standards and environmental concerns, said he believes the railroad will follow through.

"I haven't the slightest doubt that Norfolk Southern is going to be responsive, and continue to be responsive. until all of the environmental problems have been addressed," Barkan said. "I understand why the people in that town are really concerned right now. It's a horrible thing to have happen in your town."

Death toll rises to 8 from new Turkey-Syria earthquake

ISTANBUL (AP) — The death toll in Turkey and Syria rose to eight in a new and powerful earthquake that struck two weeks after a devastating temblor killed nearly 45,000 people, authorities and media said Tuesday.

Turkey's disaster management authority said six people were killed and 294 others were injured with 18 in critical condition after Monday's 6.4-magnitude quake. In Syria, a woman and a girl died as a result of panic during the earthquake in the provinces of Hama and Tartus, pro-government media outlets said.

The earthquake's epicenter was in the town of Defne, in Turkey's Hatay province, which borders Syria. It was also felt in Jordan, Cyprus, Israel, Lebanon and as far away as Egypt, and followed by a second, magnitude 5.8 temblor, and dozens of aftershocks.

Hatay was one of the worst-hit provinces in Turkey in the magnitude 7.8 quake that struck on Feb. 6. Thousands of buildings were destroyed in the province and Monday's quake further damaged buildings. The governor's office in Antakya, Hatay's historic heart, was also damaged.

Officials have warned quake victims to not go into the remains of their homes, but people have done so to retrieve what they can. They were caught up in the new quake.

The majority of deaths in the massive Feb. 6 quake, which was followed by a 7.5 temblor nine hours later, were in Turkey with at least 41,156 people killed. The epicenter was in southern Kahramanmaraş province. Authorities said more than 110,000 buildings across 11 quake-hit Turkish provinces were either destroyed or so severely damaged that they need to be torn down.

In government-held Syria, a girl died in the western town of Safita, Al-Watan daily reported while a woman was killed in the central city of Hama that was already affected by the Feb. 6 earthquake, Sham FM radio station said.

The White Helmets, northwest Syria's civil defense organization, said about 190 people suffered different injuries in rebel-held northwest Syria mostly cases of broken bones and bruises. It said that several flimsy buildings collapsed adding that there were no cases in which people were stuck under the rubble.

Ruins of Turkish city of Antakya tell story of a rich past

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

ANTAKYA, Turkey (AP) — For nearly two weeks, Mehmet Ismet has lived in the ruins of Antakya's most beloved historic mosque, a landmark in a now-devastated city that was famed for thousands of years as a meeting place of civilizations and revered by Christians, Muslims and Jews.

The 74-year-old took refuge in the Habib Najjar mosque after a 7.8-magnitude earthquake killed tens of thousands in Turkey and Syria on Feb. 6. He has slept and prayed under the few arches still standing, mourning the future of a city renowned for its past.

The destruction in Antakya was nearly total. Much of the city is rubble. What's still standing is too unsafe to live in. Almost everyone has left. On Monday, a new 6.4 magnitude earthquake, centered in Hatay province where Antakya is located, struck again, killing people, injuring more than 200 and causing more buildings to collapse, in some cases trapping people.

"It can be rebuilt. But it will not be like the old one," said Ismet, pointing to the destruction of the mosque, where he sat in the courtyard with a friend by a wood-burning heater. "The old is gone. Only the name remains."

Antakya, known as Antioch in ancient times, has been repeatedly destroyed by earthquakes and rebuilt over history. But residents fear it will be a long time before it recovers from this one, and that its unique

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historical identity may never be fully restored. The destruction is so great, and they say the government cares little for this area.

Antioch, built in 300 B.C. by a general of Alexander the Great in the Orontes River valley, was one of the biggest cities of the Greco-Roman world, rivaling Alexandria and Constantinople. Saints Peter and Paul are said to have founded one of the oldest Christian communities here, and it's here that the word "Christian" first came into use. It later drew Muslim and Christian Crusader invaders.

The melding of faiths is part of the city's character.

A parable from the Quran kept running through Ismet's mind. Three messengers from God came to a town, urging its sinful people to follow His word. They refused, and God destroyed the city with a mighty blast. The Quran doesn't name the town, but many traditions say it was ancient Antioch.

Ismet saw a new lesson from the present-day devastation.

"All religions are here. We were living well. Then politics and hypocrisy prevailed, and disagreement followed," Ismet said. "People... have disagreed and are robbing each other. God is punishing them."

The mosque can now be reached only by clambering over heaps of concrete and old stones that were once Antakya's old city. It traces Antakya's many histories: The site originally held an ancient pagan temple, then a church, before finally settling as a mosque, built in the 13th century. The mosque was destroyed in an earthquake in 1853 and rebuilt four years later by the Ottomans.

Even the legends surrounding Habib Najjar, the mosque's unknown namesake, are intertwined with multiple faiths.

Ismet recounted one popular story: Najjar was a resident of Antioch who urged locals to believe God's messengers referred to in the Quran. They beheaded him, and his head rolled down the mountain to the spot where the mosque now stands. Another version of the legend says Najjar was a believer in Jesus, whose disciples cured his son of leprosy, and was killed for promoting the new Christian faith.

Modern Antakya was already a shadow of its ancient self.

In recent years, it witnessed steep economic decline and growing emigration to Europe and the Gulf. Tension had been growing between the shrinking local population, which included Christian and Alevi communities, and a growing Syrian population that fled its country's civil war.

Some city residents complain of neglect from a central government busy with helping other provinces where it has a stronger voting base. With little evidence, locals accused Syrian refugees of stealing from stores and the government of downplaying the death toll. Many worry more people could leave if Antakya is not rebuilt quickly.

In the face of rising criticism from several quake-hit cities, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and other officials have recognized delays in the response. No one addressed Antakya's woes in particular.

"Maybe in one month, we will start the renovation or organization," Yahya Coskun, deputy director general of Turkey's museums and cultural heritage, said about the destruction to the city's landmarks.

"Antakya's destruction is a loss to humanity," said Jan Estefan, a silversmith and one of the city's few remaining Christians. "We still want to live here. We have no intention of leaving."

Antakya's Greek Orthodox Church was destroyed. The church, which was the seat of the Greek Orthodox patriarch up until the 14th century, was leveled in an 1872 earthquake and rebuilt.

"History has once again been wiped out," said Fadi Hurigil, chairman of the board of directors of Antakya Greek Orthodox Church Foundation.

Old mosques were cut off by mountains of rubble. The old bazaar lay in ruins. Crushed buildings line Kurtulus Street, said to have been the world's first illuminated street when it was lit with torches at night in Roman times. Parts of the archaeological museum have been damaged.

Outside the city center, Mount Starius protected one of Christianity's earliest churches — St. Pierre — which is built in a cave in the mountain and has sections dating to the 4th century. A set of stairs leading to it was damaged.

There were cracks in the walls of the Synagogue of Antakya, home to the area's 2,500-year-old Jewish community. The president of the city's Jewish community and his wife didn't survive. About a dozen Jew-

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ish residents and the synagogue's Torah scrolls were temporarily relocated to Istanbul, said Rabbi Mendy Chitrik, chairman of the Alliance of Rabbis in Islamic States.

Chitrik said it will be hard for the small, elderly community, whittled down by years of emigration, to rebuild. "However, I am certain that it will come back."

Many residents seem to have accepted it is their city's fate to return from disaster.

"After seven times, they rebuilt and brought it to life again. Now is the eighth time, and God willing ... we will live in it again," said Bulent Cificfli. His mother was killed in the quake, and it took a week to dig her body out.

In one shape or another, Antakya will survive, he said.

"Death is unavoidable. We will die and new people will come," he said, choking on tears. "Who is Antakya? Today it is us. Tomorrow someone else."

Ukraine's unlikely wartime leader Zelenskyy instills hope

By LYNN BERRY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A year ago, with Russian forces bearing down on Ukraine's capital, Western leaders feared for the life of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and advised him to flee. The U.S. offered him an escape route.

Instead, he filmed a defiant video of himself on a darkened street outside the presidential offices with his four closest aides arrayed behind him. "We are all here," Zelenskyy said in a declaration of their determination to stay in Kyiv and defend Ukraine's independence.

It was powerful political theater. From the first days of the war, when few expected Ukraine's army to hold up against a Russian onslaught, Zelenskyy has inspired Ukrainians to fight. He has given them hope.

Night after night, he has addressed the nation in a video posted on social media. His actor-trained voice can be soothing or forceful, rising in moral outrage as he condemns the most recent Russian atrocities and insists that those responsible will be punished.

He speaks of the anger and pain from the devastation of the country and the untold deaths. He vows that Ukraine will one day be made whole. He never tires of thanking all those on the front lines. Through all the horrors of the war, Zelenskyy has instilled a belief that Ukraine can prevail.

Zelenskyy was just 41 when he was elected president in 2019, largely on the promise that he would be the kind of corruption-fighting president he had played so well in a popular television show. In those first years, he struggled to convince Ukrainians he was up to the job and his approval ratings slumped.

War can take leaders and make them heroes or fools. Moscow's struggles in Ukraine have done nothing to elevate Russian President Vladimir Putin in the eyes of the world. But it was as a wartime leader that Zelenskyy found his moment. Many now compare him to Winston Churchill, the British prime minister who famously led his country in World War II as it came under attack from Nazi Germany.

"He's been extraordinarily good at channeling a kind of larger national spirit," Fiona Hill, a Russia scholar at the Brookings Institution who served in the past three U.S. administrations, said in an interview with The Associated Press. She credits, in part, Zelenskyy's training as an actor. "Sometimes, it's literally when we say this is the role of a lifetime, there is that performative element of it."

Hill notes that Churchill "wasn't this great a leader in peacetime as he was in the war, and he himself was a performer and he enjoyed amateur theatricals and also knew that he was playing a role."

As a wartime leader, Zelenskyy almost immediately began to dress the part, shedding his trim suits for an entire wardrobe of army green. His boyish face grew a dark beard. He seemed to age overnight.

Before the invasion, he looked much like the affable young history teacher from his TV show, "Servant of the People," about a man who was improbably elected president after a student surreptitiously filmed his profanity-filled rant against government corruption. The comedy show, which ran from 2015 until the real election in spring 2019, was hugely popular.

Michael Kimmage, who worked on Russia and Ukraine policy at the U.S. State Department during the Obama administration, traces some of Zelenskyy's success in uniting the country back to the 2019 election,

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which he won with 70% of the vote and without the kind of East-West division seen in previous elections.

But Kimmage says Zelenskyy's "quasi-Churchillian characteristics" came as a surprise.

"He's a former entertainer and comedian, so you don't sort of naturally put him into that military role. But it just fit," he said. "I don't know where that came from. It's obviously enormously consequential for the war itself, but not a quality that I saw in Zelenskyy before the war."

While uniting his own country, Zelenskyy also has been highly effective in getting the world to stand with the Ukrainians and provide the steady flow of money and military supplies that have kept them in the fight. After dozens of speeches by video link, Zelenskyy traveled out of the country in December for the first time since the war began to meet U.S. President Joe Biden at the White House and address Congress. He followed that up with visits this month to London, Paris and Brussels.

At the Munich Security Conference last week, Zelenskyy was relentless in imploring allies to keep standing firm with Ukraine and not to waste a minute doing so. Russia is the Goliath, he said; Ukraine is David with the sling.

"There is no alternative to speed," he said, "because it's speed that life depends on."

In pleading for ever more powerful weapons, he has steadily worn down resistance. He has been rewarded recently with promises of the longer-range missiles, advanced air defense systems and modern battle tanks that will help his army try to win back territory as the war enters its second year.

Despite Zelenskyy's obvious star power, his adviser Mykhailo Podolyak, one of the four men standing behind him in the video at the start of the war, qualifies his praise.

"You put me in a bit of an awkward positions, because on the one hand, of course, I see a president who is in his place at this time," Podolyak told the AP. "It's very cool. He has an iron core, an iron will, a fantastic willingness to take responsibility, courage and so on."

But, Podolyak said, the war has shown that Ukraine has many people with the same iron will: "That is, this country cannot be broken because many people will always be against being broken, and who will never kneel down, who will always be ready to take some responsibility."

Hill also made the point that Zelenskyy isn't the only one who has stepped up during the war. Unlike for Russia, where the war is being driven from the top down, for Ukraine it's an existential fight.

"Really, I think every Ukrainian, for the most part, has been stepping up as well," she said. "You think about all the people who have gone to the front, all the people who have basically had to face up to this every single day. This is a national effort."

Before taking office in 2019, Zelenskyy traveled to his hometown of Kryvyi Rih to visit the grave of his grandfather, a Red Army officer who fought the Nazis in World War II. A family friend, Oleksandr Krizhov, a 73-year-old dentist, told the AP that he asked Zelenskyy's father, a university professor, why he had done it.

Said Krizhov: "It was a vow to his grandfather: 'You won't be ashamed of me.'"

Don Lemon to return to 'CNN This Morning' after training

NEW YORK (AP) — Anchor Don Lemon will return to work Wednesday after he receives formal training for his comments about Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley on "CNN This Morning," network CEO Chris Licht said in an email to employees Monday night.

Lemon has not been on the air since Thursday, when during a discussion on "CNN This Morning" about the ages of politicians he said that the 51-year-old Haley was not "in her prime." A woman, he said, was considered in her prime "in her 20s, 30s and maybe her 40s."

Challenged by co-host Poppy Harlow, Lemon added: "Don't shoot the messenger, I'm just saying what the facts are."

"I sat down with Don and had a frank and meaningful conversation," Licht wrote in a memo. "He has agreed to participate in formal training, as well as continuing to listen and learn. We take this situation very seriously," CNN Business reported.

Lemon has since apologized, but he has been widely condemned, including by Licht. According to The New York Times, Licht chastised Lemon during an editorial call Friday, saying his remarks were "upsetting,

unacceptable and unfair” and a “huge distraction.”

“When I make a mistake, I own it,” Lemon said. “And I own this one as well.”

Calls for change in Iran reach even Shiite heartland of Qom

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran’s city of Qom is one of the country’s most important centers for Shiite Muslim clerics, packed with religious schools and revered shrines. But even here, some are quietly calling for Iran’s ruling theocracy to change its ways after months of protests shaking the country.

To be clear: Many here still support the cleric-led ruling system, which marked the 44th anniversary this month of Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution.

This includes support for many of the restrictions that set off the protests, such as the mandatory hijab, or headscarf, for women in public. They believe the state’s claims that Iran’s foreign enemies are the ones fomenting the unrest gripping the country.

But they say the government should change how it approaches demonstrators and women’s demands to be able to choose whether to wear an Islamic head covering or not.

“The harsh crackdown was a mistake from the beginning,” said Abuzar Sahebnezaran, a cleric who described himself as an ardent backer of the theocracy, as he visited a former residence of the late revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. “And the youth should have been treated softly and politely. They should have been enlightened and guided.”

Qom, some 125 kilometers (80 miles) southwest of Iran’s capital, Tehran, draws millions of pilgrims each year and is home to half of the country’s Shiite clerics. Its religious institutions graduate the country’s top clerical minds, making the city a power bastion in the country. The faithful believe the city’s dazzling blue-domed Fatima Masumeh Shrine represents a route to heaven or a place to have prayers answered for their woes.

For Iran today, the woes are many.

Protests have rocked the country since September after the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, an Iranian-Kurdish woman who had been detained by morality police over alleged improper dress. The demonstrations, initially focused on the mandatory hijab, soon morphed into calls for a new revolution in the country.

Activists outside the country say at least 528 people have been killed and 19,600 people detained in a crackdown that followed. The Iranian government has not provided any figures.

Meanwhile, Iran faces increasing pressure abroad over enriching uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels following the collapse of Iran’s 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. Renewed sanctions worsen longstanding financial problems, pushing its currency — the rial — to historic lows against the dollar.

“Many protesters either had economic problems or were influenced by the internet,” Sahebnezaran said from inside Khomeini’s former home, which bore pictures of the ayatollah and Iranian flags.

Protesters have even vented their anger directly at clerics, whom they see as the foundations of the system. Some videos circulated online show young protesters running up behind clerics on the street and knocking off their turbans, a sign of their status. Those wearing a black turban claim descent directly from Islam’s Prophet Muhammad.

The scattered videos are a sign of the alienation felt by some toward the clergy in a nation where, 44 years ago, clerics helped lead the revolution against Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

“This was part of enemy plans, they wanted to tell people that the clerics are the reason behind all problems and high prices,” Sahebnezaran said. “But the clergy are being impacted by the inflation like the rest of the people. Many clerics live on tuition fees at the lowest economic level of society. The majority of them face the same problems as the people do.”

Seminary students receive some \$50 a month, with many working as laborers or taxi drivers. Fewer than 10% of Iran’s 200,000 clerics have official posts in the government.

Sakineh Heidarifard, who voluntarily works with the morality police in Qom and actively promotes the hijab, said arresting women and forcefully taking them into police custody isn’t a good idea.

She said the morality patrols are necessary, but if they find violators they should give them a warning.

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"Use of force and coercion is not correct at all. We should talk to them with a soft and gentle tone, with kindness and care," she said.

Still, she sees the hijab as a central tenet of the Islamic Republic. "We have sacrificed a lot of martyrs or blood to keep this veil," she said. "God willing, it will never be removed from our heads."

Changes in approach, however, are not likely to satisfy those calling for the wholesale rejection of the cleric-run government. Politicians in the reform movement for years have been urging change within the theocratic system to no avail, and many protesters have lost patience.

Also, the ever-growing economic pressure on Iran's 80 million people may one day explode across all of society, said Alireza Fateh, a carpet salesman standing next to his empty shop in Qom's traditional bazaar.

"Economic collapse is usually followed by political collapse ... and unfortunately this is what is happening here," he said.

"The majority of the population ... still have a little left in their bank accounts. But someday they will take to streets too, someday soon. Soon the poor, those who can't make ends meet, will take to streets definitely."

Delegation meeting Taiwan leader reaffirms US commitment

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — A delegation of U.S. lawmakers on Tuesday met with Taiwan's president, who promised to deepen military cooperation between the two sides despite objections from China, which claims the island as its own territory.

The group was one of many U.S. delegations President Tsai Ing-wen has welcomed in recent years even as Beijing has stepped up diplomatic and military harassment of Taiwan.

China responded to foreign visits by holding large-scale military exercises seen by some as a rehearsal for a blockade or invasion. Beijing has not ruled out use of force to reunite Taiwan with mainland China, although the sides have been separated since a civil war in 1949, and most Taiwanese prefer to keep the status quo of de-facto independence.

Tsai thanked the lawmakers for coming, saying it was a chance to deepen ongoing cooperation in semiconductor chip design and manufacturing, renewable energy and next-generation 5G mobile network.

"Taiwan and the U.S. (will) continue to bolster military exchanges. Going forward, Taiwan will cooperate even more actively with the U.S. and other democratic partners to confront such bold challenges as authoritarian expansionism and climate change," Tsai said.

Tensions between the U.S. and China inflated after Washington shot down a suspected Chinese spy balloon that Beijing maintains was an unmanned weather balloon. Both sides are also in opposition on the war in Ukraine, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned Sunday that Beijing could be considering providing weapons to Russia for the war.

Taiwan remains a flash point. Wang Yi, the Chinese Communist Party's most senior foreign policy official, said over the weekend that Taiwan "has never been a country and it will not be a country in the future."

"We are here to affirm the shared values between the U.S. and Taiwan — a commitment to democracy, a commitment to freedom," California Rep. Ro Khanna said. "The U.S. under President Biden's leadership seeks peace in the region."

He is accompanied by Reps. Tony Gonzales of Texas, Jake Auchincloss of Massachusetts and Jonathan Jackson of Illinois. The group met with their legislative counterparts Monday, as well as Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company founder Morris Chang.

Khanna also offered a tribute to former President Jimmy Carter, who recently entered hospice care. He was president when Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act, under which the U.S. must ensure Taiwan can defend itself.

Mardi Gras ebullience intersects with crime worry, politics

By KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — New Orleans' annual Carnival season entered its ebullient crescendo Tuesday with

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thousands of revelers expected to pack the French Quarter and line miles of parade routes in a citywide Mardi Gras celebration underpinned this year by violent crime concerns and political turmoil.

Gunfire that broke out during a parade Sunday night left a teenager dead and four others injured, including a 4-year-old girl. Police quickly arrested Mansour Mbodj, 21, for illegally carrying a weapon, then upgraded the charge to second-degree murder.

Officials stressed Monday that the shooting was an isolated event.

The violence appeared to have little effect on Monday night crowds. St. Charles Avenue, including the area where gunfire broke out, was again lined with people dancing, drinking and eating in a football tailgate atmosphere as they awaited the evening's parades. The French Quarter was packed with partiers wandering among bars, restaurants and strip clubs.

Revelers shrugged off crime at an afternoon riverside park event celebrating this year's king and queen of the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club.

"I think whatever it was, it was a private dispute that happened in a public place," said Chris Flug of New Orleans, referencing the Sunday night shooting. "It's always sad when gun violence takes a life, but it shouldn't taint the city or the event. You can't predict people's behavior."

Crime has contributed to dissatisfaction with Mayor LaToya Cantrell. She won re-election easily in 2021, but has suffered a myriad of political problems since, including criticism about crime, the slow pace of major street repairs and questions over her personal use of a city-owned French Quarter apartment.

A recall petition launched last year is nearing a Wednesday deadline. One of the organizers, Eileen Carter, said she believes the movement has enough signatures, but will make a last-minute push.

"We're going to have people canvassing the parade routes," Carter said. "That's been really helpful to us."

Fueling the political tumult: Cantrell was captured in a social media video gesturing with her middle-finger as a parade passed by a city reviewing stand over the weekend. What sparked the gesture was unclear. The mayor's press office did not respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press. A statement given to The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate shed little light.

"Mardi Gras is a time where satire and jest are on full display," spokesperson Gregory Joseph said in a prepared statement. "The city has been enjoying a safe and healthy Carnival," the statement said, adding that the mayor was looking forward to continuing the celebration.

Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday, is the culmination of Carnival season, which officially begins each year on Jan. 6, the 12th day after Christmas, and closes with the beginning of Lent on Ash Wednesday.

New Orleans' raucous celebration is the nation's most well-known, but the holiday is also celebrated throughout much of Louisiana and the Gulf Coast. Mobile, Alabama, lays claim to the oldest Mardi Gras celebration in the country.

Kari Lake looks to harness her movement after Arizona loss

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Brett Foto and his fiancée were vacationing in Phoenix last fall when they heard about a rally nearby for Kari Lake, then running for governor of Arizona.

No matter that they don't live or vote in Arizona. Lake was going places, an emerging star on the populist right, and they had to see her.

"We're seeing something very interesting tonight," said Foto, a 52-year-old sales representative who lives outside Denver. "We're going to look back and say, 'We saw her when we went to this little hangar in Phoenix.'"

Lake went on to lose that race to Democrat Katie Hobbs, a setback that would typically thwart political ambitions. But among conservatives, defeat has done little to erode Lake's standing. If anything, her refusal to acknowledge her loss only enhances her stature well beyond Arizona.

In the months since the election, Lake has popped up at former President Donald Trump's Florida estate and a palatial California hotel, where she unsuccessfully lobbied members of the Republican National Committee to defeat Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel. A more recent swing through Iowa sparked speculation about whether she may run for president or angle for a role as Trump's running mate if he clinches the

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GOP nomination again.

Wherever she is, she's doubling down on the formula that enthralled the Republican base but was rejected by a broader electorate: unflinching fealty to Trump, a relentless focus on unsubstantiated claims of election fraud, and tough talk about securing the U.S.-Mexico border with force.

Lake will have another chance to showcase her bond with the GOP base next month with a prominent speaking role at the Conservative Political Action Conference, or CPAC, in Washington.

"She speaks MAGA," Chuck Coughlin, a longtime political consultant in Arizona who was one of former Gov. Jan Brewer's top advisers, said, referring to Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan. "She's better than Trump in many respects. She's a cultural warrior. She expresses their angst and anxiety over the way the country's going."

Meanwhile, Lake is continuing to fight her loss in the Arizona appellate courts, which rejected her election challenge Thursday. She vowed to take her lawsuit to the state Supreme Court. She held a campaign-style rally this month to draw attention to her case.

"Kari Lake is the total package. She's articulate. She's confident. She's beautiful, but not in a threatening way," said Linda Greulich, a 70-year-old retiree in Phoenix. "And I think if she wants to stay in politics, I see her going all the way to the top."

The flurry of activity comes as Lake considers running for the U.S. Senate seat now held by Kyrsten Sinema, an independent and former Democrat. She met recently with National Republican Senatorial Committee officials in Washington.

Republicans outnumber Democrats in Arizona, yet they've struggled to win during the Trump era. The GOP lost three straight Senate races in Arizona as ticket-splitting voters who mostly support Republicans refused to vote for candidates closely aligned with Trump.

Eleven percent of voters identifying as Republicans voted for Hobbs last year, compared with just 4% of Democrats who voted for Lake, according to AP VoteCast, an expansive survey of more than 3,200 voters in Arizona.

Sinema has not said whether she'll run for a second term, a decision that could have a monumental impact on the battle for control of the Senate. Democrats worry a three-way race between Sinema, a Democrat and a Republican will scramble the formula that's worked so well for them, creating an opening for a candidate like Lake.

Other Republicans looking at running include Pinal County Sheriff Mark Lamb. Also considering a bid are Jim Lamon, Blake Masters and Karrin Taylor Robson, candidates in 2022 for either the Senate or governor.

Lake is pushing back against those in the GOP trying to move past claims of election fraud that have proved toxic in swing states, including Arizona, where Lake and three other Trump-backed Republicans lost their races. She told Iowans, who are proud of their role in vetting presidential hopefuls, to press candidates about "where they stand on stolen elections."

"We need to make sure all of these candidates think that election integrity is a No. 1 issue," she said.

Lake was a news anchor for nearly 30 years in the Phoenix market. She left the Fox affiliate in 2021, saying journalism had strayed into advocacy. She began her campaign for governor a short time later, channeling Trump with frequent attacks on the news media she left behind.

She records every interaction with reporters, often posting contentious exchanges on social media and earning plaudits from her fans, and she still attracted unprecedented attention from global media.

Money has continued to pour in for Lake since her loss. Her campaign raised \$2.6 million from Election Day through the end of the year, with the biggest haul coming on the day the race was called for Hobbs.

She's raised more money through a nonprofit group her advisers created in December, which doesn't have to disclose details about its donations and has become her main fundraising vehicle.

Foto, who saw Lake on his Arizona vacation, was not deterred by her loss to Hobbs and hopes she'll take another stab at running for office.

"I pray for that to happen and I pray for that for this country," Foto said by phone. "I think we need people like her to make sure of a strong future for all of us."

Liberia may have 'parallel system' for illegal log exports

By ED DAVEY undefined

The lush West African rainforests of Liberia are being cut down and illegally exported with the likely collusion of powerful government officials, according to a diplomatic document obtained by The Associated Press that described an apparent "parallel system" for trade in timber.

The document is a compilation of reports prepared by independent international monitors over the last three years, made public here for the first time. It includes a table of 39 cases where monitors said they found evidence of lawbreaking or governance failure and no action taken to address any of them. It says the country's chief timber official, Mike Doryen, runs his own "special task force" to bypass the personnel stationed at checkpoints who are there to prevent logging virgin rainforest.

The U.K. Foreign Office document describes a network of illicit sawmills, off-the-books exports and payments made to the Liberian forestry agency that were not deposited in official accounts, that could amount to a "parallel system" for the timber trade.

"Such a system suggests the collusion of individuals at the (forestry agency), the National Port Authority, and Customs," U.K. diplomats wrote.

Their document was sent to Liberian ministers last September and was passed to the office of the country's president, correspondence with his deputy press secretary shows.

Liberia is West Africa's most forested country, still home to endangered species including chimpanzees and forest elephants. The U.K. document says up to 70% of Liberia's timber exports may bypass the official tracking system put in place to protect the forest. If so, Liberia is also losing out on large sums in revenue, diplomats warned.

Jonathan Yiah, who directs the forest governance program at the Liberian nonprofit Sustainable Development Institute, called it "a breakdown of the rule of law in the forest sector." He said a shadow system for forest exports does indeed exist in the country.

He said his group brought to light evidence in one case "and there has been no action by the FDA," referring to the country's Forestry Development Authority.

Responding to the criticisms, Forestry Development Authority Managing Director Doryen disputed the idea that no action has been taken. He said in an email he has ordered all sawmills to be registered. All revenue has gone to proper accounts. He said no parallel logging system exists, although one did before he was appointed.

"During the early part of my administration and as part of our learning curve, abandoned logs were allowed to use that system," he said.

But logs like the ones Doryen describes as abandoned have raised eyebrows even within Liberia's timber trade.

When a load of cut trees that had purportedly been lying abandoned for six years was offered to Magna Logging Corporation in Liberia, the logs turned out to be "fresh," according to an email obtained by the AP sent by CEO Morley Kamara. Concerned, Kamara notified the Swiss certification agency that is supposed to verify the legality of Liberian exports, SGS. "I have never seen something like this ... There's no payment to LRA (Liberia Revenue Authority) Transit Account. Too many problems!" Kamara's email said.

A letter signed by Doryen had given permission to export the logs outside Liberia's official log-tracking system. Doryen did not respond to questions about the letter.

Doryen is widely seen as a close ally of President George Weah. Weah is a former soccer star who won FIFA World Player of the Year in 1995. He has refused to remove Doryen, despite mounting accusations of systemic wrongdoing and at least 18 months of diplomatic pressure from the U.K., U.S., E.U. and Norway to clean up the Liberian forest agency. All the countries donate money to Liberia for conservation. The U.K. has given millions of British pounds (millions of dollars).

Now pressure appears to be mounting. On Feb. 3, at a meeting in the capital Monrovia focused on the country's forests and sponsored by the World Bank, E.U. Ambassador Laurent Delahousse called deforestation levels in Liberia "rather dramatic." He decried an "attitude of casual satisfaction if not denial" by

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Liberia, "as if everything was fine, as if just having the forest should entitle Liberia to receive funds from the international community, because those funds would somehow be owed to Liberia."

"Climate finance doesn't work like that," Delahousse warned.

In one case outlined in the document, a load of illegally-felled trees was headed by truck to Gambia in January 2022, when it was flagged at a checkpoint. The driver had receipts showing fees had been paid to the Liberia forest agency, but the money was not deposited in official accounts. "It is unclear where this money goes," the document said.

Police confiscated the logs and took them to a police station. But they disappeared from the station a few days later, the diplomatic missive said, and authorities took no action.

Asked about the lawbreaking, Doryen said, "There may be persons or businesses trying to evade legal processes, and the FDA, under my watch, has remained active in uncovering these challenges."

But Yiah, the forest advocate, called on President Weah to launch a full investigation. It's not just the natural world suffering, he said. Uncontrolled cutting of the forest hurts local communities "in a very serious way ... They depend on the forest for food."

Man arrested in Catholic bishop's killing had worked for him

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ and DAMIAN DOVARGANES Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A man arrested Monday in the weekend killing of a Catholic bishop that shocked Los Angeles religious and immigrant communities is the husband of the victim's housekeeper and had done work at his home, authorities said.

Auxiliary Bishop David O'Connell, 69, was fatally shot Saturday in the bedroom of his home in Hacienda Heights, an unincorporated community about 20 miles (30 kilometers) east of downtown Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said.

A SWAT team arrested Carlos Medina, the husband of O'Connell's housekeeper, at their home in Torrance, about 35 miles (55 kilometers) southwest of Hacienda Heights, Luna said.

The sheriff said detectives first linked Medina to the crime after finding surveillance video that showed his SUV in the driveway of O'Connell's home at the time of the killing.

A caller told authorities that Medina, 65, was acting irrationally and had made comments about O'Connell "owing him money," Luna said, adding that a motive in the killing remains under investigation.

He said detectives found no evidence of forced entry at the archdiocese-owned home and that Medina's wife was cooperating with detectives. Detectives recovered weapons at Medina's home and ballistic tests are pending, Luna said.

It was not immediately known if Medina has an attorney who can speak on his behalf.

A deacon who had gone to check on O'Connell after he failed to show up for a meeting found him at his home just blocks from the St. John Vianney Catholic Church, part of his archdiocese, and called authorities, Luna said.

"Although I personally did not know the bishop, I cannot tell you how many phone calls I've received over the last 48 hours of people who have worked with him in different capacities," Luna said. "This bishop made a huge difference in our community. He was loved."

O'Connell had been a priest for 45 years and was a native of Ireland, according to Angelus News, the news outlet of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the nation's largest. In 2015, Pope Francis named him one of several auxiliary bishops of the archdiocese.

O'Connell worked in South Los Angeles for years and focused on gang intervention, Angelus News reported. He later sought to broker peace between residents and law enforcement following the violent 1992 uprising after a jury acquitted four white LA police officers in the beating of Rodney King, a Black man.

Nearly two decades later, O'Connell brought the San Gabriel Valley community together to rebuild a mission there destroyed in an arson attack. In recent years he also spearheaded Catholic efforts in the region to work with immigrant children and families from Central America.

Los Angeles Archbishop Jose H. Gomez said Monday that O'Connell spoke fluent Spanish with an Irish

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accent and every day showed "compassion to the poor, to the homeless, to the immigrant, and to all those living on society's margins."

"He was a good priest and a good bishop and a man of peace and we're very sad to lose him," added Gomez, his voice breaking.

Janice Hahn, chair of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, said O'Connell was a longtime friend who she first met while on the LA City Council. She said that in recent years O'Connell had devoted much of his time to helping immigrants arriving in the country.

"He devoted himself to supporting immigrants, not only making sure that they have food and shelter, but even helping immigrant children, unaccompanied minors, get into Catholic schools, and he helped them get into college," she said.

Neighbors and parishioners left flowers and candles and prayed the rosary next to police tape in Hacienda Heights on Sunday.

Gabriela Gil, who first met O'Connell when she was pregnant with her youngest child, was among those who prayed outside O'Connell's home.

"I've never ever felt more understood by anyone in this world," she said.

The Diocese of Cork and Ross in Ireland, where O'Connell was born, was shocked by the killing. Bishop Fintan Gavin said in a statement that O'Connell "has always maintained his connection with family and friends in Cork" through frequent visits back to Ireland.

The violence was the latest to rock religious leaders in Los Angeles. Two Jewish men were shot and wounded last week by a gunman who authorities said had targeted them for their faith. Suspect Jaime Tran has been charged with federal hate crimes.

Trump absent as Iowa 2024 GOP caucus train begins to roll

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

URBANDALE, Iowa (AP) — Nikki Haley is swinging through Iowa this week fresh off announcing her presidential campaign. Her fellow South Carolinian Republican, Sen. Tim Scott, will also be here as he decides his political future. And former Vice President Mike Pence was just in the state courting influential evangelical Christian activists.

After a slow start, Republican presidential prospects are streaming into the leadoff presidential caucus state. Notably absent from the lineup, at least for now, is former President Donald Trump.

Few of the White House hopefuls face the lofty expectations in Iowa that Trump does. He finished a competitive second to devout social conservative Ted Cruz in 2016, and went on to carry the state twice, by healthy margins, as the Republican presidential nominee in the 2016 and 2020 elections.

"It is genuinely impossible for this guy to try to manage these expectations," said Luke Martz, a veteran Iowa Republican strategist who helped lead Mitt Romney's 2012 Iowa caucus campaign. "They are enormous. They are self-made. I don't see how anyone who is saying 'I'm the guy' can come in and even get even a second-place finish."

Yet, in the three months since he announced his bid for a comeback, Trump has not set foot in Iowa, the first place his claim of party dominance will be tested early next year.

To be sure, Trump is making moves in Iowa. On Monday, his team announced it had named a state campaign director, Marshall Moreau, who managed the 2022 campaign of Republican attorney general candidate Brenna Bird. Bird defeated Democrat Tom Miller, who had been the longest-serving attorney general in the country, first elected in 1978.

Trump has maintained an Iowa political presence, with a national campaign team member, Alex Latcham, based in the state. But Trump held a kickoff rally on Jan. 28 in South Carolina, where his 2016 primary victory sealed his status as GOP frontrunner. And he squeezed in a speaking spot earlier that day at the annual state GOP meeting in New Hampshire, where he also won the first-in-the-nation primary seven years ago.

Though the caucuses remain nearly a year off, they remain the first event on the calendar, and some

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Iowa GOP activists have taken notice of Trump's absence.

"I found that quite interesting," Gloria Mazza, chairwoman of the Polk County GOP, said of Trump's New Hampshire and South Carolina stops. "Because Iowa is first in the nation, doesn't everybody come here first?"

Meanwhile, others are making impressions.

Haley's sharpest applause during her first stop as a candidate in Iowa — and the first campaign event by any GOP prospect in Iowa — came Monday night at a flooring company warehouse in Urbandale, a Des Moines suburb, as she addressed gender education in schools, a flashpoint among conservatives.

She suggested to an audience of about 200 that gender education need not begin in schools before middle school, marking a contrast with prospective candidate Ron DeSantis. The Florida governor last year signed legislation forbidding instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity before fourth grade.

"Well, I don't even think that goes far enough," she said. "We don't need to be telling our children about gender. That's for the parents to do. That has nothing to do with schools."

Though Pence is not yet a candidate, his advocacy group Advancing American Values last week launched a campaign to organize opposition to school policies like one in an eastern Iowa district.

Pence was in Cedar Rapids on Wednesday rallying opponents of a policy by the nearby Linn-Mar Community School District that's at issue in a federal lawsuit. The school board last year enacted a measure allowing transgender students to request a gender support plan to begin socially transitioning at school without the permission of their parents.

The issue, an early focus of 2024 Republican presidential prospects, is particularly contentious among Christian conservatives, with whom Pence routinely says he identifies. And at Wednesday's event at a pizza restaurant — it had the feel of an early caucus campaign stop — Pence illustrated its traction.

"We don't co-parent with government," Pence told a cheering audience of more than 100. "We trust parents to protect their children and no one will ever protect America's children better than their moms and dads."

Haley plans a rally Tuesday in the Cedar Rapids area. Meanwhile, Scott is speaking an event at Drake University on Wednesday, part of what aides call a national listening tour aimed at informing his plans, before addressing the annual Polk County Republican fundraiser in suburban Des Moines that evening.

Quietly making inroads is former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson, who visited Iowa in January, and met last week with legislative Republicans in the Capitol in Des Moines and Republican activists in western Iowa.

Though several would-be candidates including Trump were in Iowa last year campaigning for midterm candidates, these first impressions at the outset of the GOP presidential primary are important. That's especially true as many in the GOP wait to see whether DeSantis proceeds with a White House bid.

But as the field of candidates grows in the coming months, Trump still retains a core of Republican support that could be hard to overcome.

In October, 57% of Iowa Republicans said they hoped Trump decided to run in 2024, according to a Des Moines Register/Mediacom Iowa Poll, while 33% said they hoped he would not and 10% said they were not sure.

"Of course, there's a contingent that will support him regardless," Iowa Republican national committee-man Steve Scheffler said. "But there's an increasing number of people who want to kick the tires before making a decision. That's what gives others an open door."

Leiji Matsumoto, known for antiwar anime, space tales, dies

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Leiji Matsumoto, the anime creator known for "Space Battleship Yamato" and other classics using a fantastical style and antiwar themes, has died at age 85.

His manga works "Galaxy Express 999" and "Space Pirate Captain Herlock" were adapted into television anime series in the 1970s and became huge hits in and outside Japan.

Matsumoto, whose real name was Akira Matsumoto, died of acute heart failure in a Tokyo hospital on

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Feb. 13, his office, Studio Leijisha, said Monday.

Born in the southwestern city of Kurume, Matsumoto started drawing at age 6, and rose to fame with "Otoko Oidon," a manga series telling the story of a poor man from southern Japan who lives in a boarding house in Tokyo and struggles to balance work and studying.

Many of his manga were in the "battlefield comics" genre with more than 150 stories depicting tragedy of war.

His antiwar theme comes from his father, an elite army pilot who returned from Southeast Asia and taught his son that war should never be fought.

In his interview with Japan's NHK television in 2018, Matsumoto recalled seeing his father apologize to the mothers of his subordinates for not being able to bring them back alive. His father also told Matsumoto that one had to be a demon to not think an enemy has a family.

"War destroys your future," Matsumoto said in the interview, noting that many talented youths who might have contributed to "the civilization of mankind" were killed during war.

"I was told by my father that any life is born in order to live, not to die," Matsumoto said. "I think we should not be wasting time fighting on the Earth."

Matsumoto received several cultural and arts awards from the Japanese government, and the Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters from France.

Matsumoto's daughter Makiko Matsumoto, who heads the studio, said in a statement released on Twitter: "Manga artist Leiji Matsumoto set out on a journey to the sea of stars. I think he lived a happy life, thinking about continuing to draw stories as a manga artist."

Biden declares 'Kyiv stands' in surprise visit to Ukraine

By EVAN VUCCI, JOHN LEICESTER, AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — President Joe Biden swept unannounced into Ukraine on Monday to meet with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in a defiant display of Western solidarity with a country still fighting what he called "a brutal and unjust war" days before the first anniversary of Russia's invasion.

"One year later, Kyiv stands," Biden declared after meeting Zelenskyy at Mariinsky Palace. Jabbing his finger for emphasis on his podium, against a backdrop of three flags from each country, he continued: "And Ukraine stands. Democracy stands. The Americans stand with you, and the world stands with you."

Biden spent more than five hours in the Ukrainian capital, consulting with Zelenskyy on next steps, honoring the country's fallen soldiers and seeing U.S. embassy staff in the besieged country. Altogether he was on Ukrainian territory for about 23 hours, traveling by train from and back to Poland.

The visit came at a crucial moment: Biden is trying to keep allies unified in their support for Ukraine as the war is expected to intensify with spring offensives. Zelenskyy is pressing allies to speed up delivery of promised weapon systems and calling on the West to provide fighter jets — something that Biden has declined to do.

The U.S. president got a taste of the terror that Ukrainians have lived with for close to a year when air raids sirens howled just as he and Zelenskyy wrapped up a visit to the gold-domed St. Michael's Cathedral.

Looking solemn, they continued unperturbed as they laid two wreaths and held a moment of silence at the Wall of Remembrance honoring Ukrainian soldiers killed since 2014, the year Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean peninsula and Russian-backed fighting erupted in eastern Ukraine.

The White House would not go into specifics, but national security adviser Jake Sullivan said that it notified Moscow of Biden's visit to Kyiv shortly before his departure from Washington "for deconfliction purposes" in an effort to avoid any miscalculation that could bring the two nuclear-armed nations into direct conflict.

In Kyiv, Biden announced an additional half-billion dollars in U.S. assistance — on top of the more than \$50 billion already provided — for shells for howitzers, anti-tank missiles, air surveillance radars and other aid but no new advanced weaponry.

Ukraine has also been pushing for battlefield systems that would allow its forces to strike Russian targets that have been moved back from frontline areas, out of the range of HIMARS missiles that have already

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been delivered. Zelenskyy said he and Biden spoke about "long-range weapons and the weapons that may still be supplied to Ukraine even though it wasn't supplied before." But he did not detail any new commitments.

"Our negotiations were very fruitful," Zelenskyy added. Sullivan would not detail any potential new capabilities for Ukraine, but said there was a "good discussion" of the subject.

Biden's mission with his visit to Kyiv, which comes before a scheduled trip to Warsaw, Poland, is to underscore that the United States is prepared to stick with Ukraine "as long as it takes" to repel Russian forces even as public opinion polling suggests that U.S. and allied support for providing weaponry and direct economic assistance has started to soften. For Zelenskyy, the symbolism of having the U.S. president stand side by side with him on Ukrainian land as the anniversary nears is no small thing as he prods allies to provide more advanced weaponry and step up delivery.

"I thought it was critical that there not be any doubt, none whatsoever, about U.S. support for Ukraine in the war," Biden said.

Biden's trip was a brazen rebuke to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who had hoped his military would swiftly overrun Kyiv within days. Biden, a Democrat, recalled speaking with Zelenskyy on the night of the invasion, saying, "That dark night one year ago, the world was literally at the time bracing for the fall of Kyiv. Perhaps even the end of Ukraine."

A year later, the Ukrainian capital remains firmly in Ukrainian control. Although a semblance of normalcy has returned to the city, regular air raid sirens and frequent missile and killer-drone attacks against military and civilian infrastructure across the country are a near-constant reminder that the war is still raging. The bloodiest fighting is, for the moment, concentrated in the country's east, particularly around the city of Bakhmut, where Russian offensives are underway.

At least six civilians have been killed and 17 more have been wounded in Ukraine over the past 24 hours, Ukraine's presidential office reported. In the eastern Donetsk region, the Russian army was using aviation to strike cities on the front line. A total of 15 cities and villages have been shelled over the past 24 hours, according to the region's Ukrainian Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko. In the northeastern Kharkiv region, cities near the border with Russia came under fire. A missile strike hit Kupiansk, damaging a hospital, a plant and residential buildings.

"The cost that Ukraine has had to bear has been extraordinarily high," Biden said. "And the sacrifices have been far too great." But "Putin's war of conquest is failing."

"He's counting on us not sticking together," Biden said. "He thought he could outlast us. I don't think he's thinking that right now. God knows what he's thinking, but I don't think he's thinking that. But he's just been plain wrong. Plain wrong."

Signing a guest book at the presidential palace, Biden praised Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian people, closing with "Slava Ukraini!" — "Glory to Ukraine!"

The trip gave Biden an opportunity to get a firsthand look at the devastation the Russian invasion has caused on Ukraine. Thousands of Ukrainian troops and civilians have been killed, millions of refugees have fled the war, and Ukraine has suffered tens of billions of dollars of infrastructure damage.

Biden, wearing a blue suit and at times his signature aviator sunglasses, told Zelenskyy the U.S. will stand with him "for as long as it takes." Zelenskyy responded in English: "We'll do it."

The Ukrainian leader, wearing a black sweatshirt, as has become his wartime habit, said through an interpreter that Biden's visit "brings us closer to the victory," this year, he hoped. He expressed gratitude to Americans and "all those who cherish freedom."

It was rare for a U.S. president to travel to a conflict zone where the U.S. or its allies did not have control over the airspace.

The U.S. military does not have a presence in Ukraine other than a small detachment of Marines guarding the embassy in Kyiv, making Biden's visit more complicated than other recent visits by prior U.S. leaders to war zones.

While Biden was in Ukraine, U.S. surveillance planes, including E-3 Sentry airborne radar and an electronic

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RC-135W Rivet Joint aircraft, were keeping watch over Kyiv from Polish airspace.

Speculation has been building for weeks that Biden would visit Ukraine around the Feb. 24 anniversary of the Russian invasion. But the White House repeatedly had said that no presidential trip to Ukraine was planned, even after the Poland visit was announced.

Since early morning on Monday many main streets and central blocks in Kyiv were cordoned off without any official explanation. Later people started sharing videos of long motorcades of cars driving along the streets where the access was restricted.

At the White House, planning for Biden's visit to Kyiv was tightly held — with a relatively small group of aides briefed on the plans — because of security concerns. Sullivan said Biden gave final approval for the trip, which had been in the works for months, on Friday during an Oval Office meeting at which he was briefed on security plans for the visit.

The president traveled with an usually small entourage, with just a few senior aides and two journalists, to maintain secrecy.

Asked by a reporter on Friday if Biden might include stops beyond Poland, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby replied, "Right now, the trip is going to be in Warsaw." Moments later — and without prompting — Kirby added, "I said 'right now.'"

Biden quietly departed from Joint Base Andrews near Washington at 4:15 a.m. on Sunday, stopping at Ramstein Air Base in Germany before making his way into Ukraine on an overnight train from Poland. He arrived in Kyiv at 8 a.m. on Monday. He departed after 1 p.m. by train back to Poland.

Until Monday, Biden's failure to visit was making him something of a standout among Ukraine's partners in the West, some of whom have made frequent visits to the Ukrainian capital. White House officials had previously cited security concerns with keeping Biden from making the trip, and Sullivan said Monday that the visit was only undertaken once officials believed they had managed the risk to acceptable levels.

In June, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and then Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi traveled together by night train to Kyiv to meet with Zelenskyy. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak visited Kyiv in November shortly after taking office.

This is Biden's first visit to a war zone as president. His recent predecessors, Donald Trump, Barack Obama and George W. Bush, made surprise visits to Afghanistan and Iraq during their presidencies to meet U.S. troops and those countries' leaders.

Seattle considers historic law barring caste discrimination

By DEEPA BHARATH Associated Press

One of Kshama Sawant's earliest memories of the caste system was hearing her grandfather — a man she "otherwise loved very much" — utter a slur to summon their lower-caste maid.

The Seattle City Council member, raised in an upper-caste Hindu Brahmin household in India, was 6 when she asked her grandfather why he used that derogatory word when he knew the girl's name. He responded that his granddaughter "talked too much."

Now 50, and an elected official in a city far from India, Sawant has proposed an ordinance to add caste to Seattle's anti-discrimination laws. If her fellow council members approve it Tuesday, Seattle will become the first city in the United States to specifically outlaw caste discrimination.

In India, the origins of the caste system can be traced back 3,000 years as a social hierarchy based on one's birth. While the definition of caste has evolved over the centuries, under both Muslim and British rule, the suffering of those at the bottom of the caste pyramid — known as Dalits, which in Sanskrit means "broken" — has continued.

In 1948, a year after independence from British rule, India banned discrimination on the basis of caste, a law that became enshrined in the nation's constitution in 1950. Yet the undercurrents of caste continue to swirl in India's politics, education, employment and even in everyday social interactions. Caste-based violence, including sexual violence against Dalit women, is still rampant.

The national debate in the United States around caste has been centered in the South Asian community,

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causing deep divisions within the diaspora. Dalit activist-led organizations such as Oakland, California-based Equality Labs, say caste discrimination is prevalent in diaspora communities, surfacing in the form of social alienation and discrimination in housing, education and the tech sector where South Asians hold key roles.

The U.S. is the second most popular destination for Indians living abroad, according to the Migration Policy Institute, which estimates the U.S. diaspora grew from about 206,000 in 1980 to about 2.7 million in 2021. The group South Asian Americans Leading Together reports that nearly 5.4 million South Asians live in the U.S. — up from the 3.5 million counted in the 2010 census. Most trace their roots to Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

There has been strong pushback to anti-discrimination laws and policies that target caste from groups such as the Hindu American Foundation and the Coalition of Hindus of North America. They say such legislation will hurt a community whose members are viewed as “people of color” and already face hate and discrimination.

But over the past decade, Dalit activism has garnered support from several corners of the diaspora, including from groups like Hindus for Human Rights. The last three years in particular have seen more people identify as Dalits and publicly tell their stories, energizing this movement.

Prem Pariyar, a Dalit Hindu from Nepal, gets emotional as he talks about escaping caste violence in his native village. His family was brutally attacked for taking water from a community tap, said Pariyar, who is now a social worker in California and serves on Alameda County’s Human Relations Commission. He moved to the U.S. in 2015, but says he couldn’t escape stereotyping and discrimination because of his caste-identifying last name, even as he tried to make a new far from his homeland.

Pariyar, motivated by the overt caste discrimination he faced in his social and academic circles, was a driving force behind it becoming a protected category in the 23-campus California State University system in January 2022.

“I’m fighting so Dalits can be recognized as human beings,” he said.

In December 2019, Brandeis University near Boston became the first U.S. college to include caste in its nondiscrimination policy. Colby College, Brown University and the University of California, Davis, have adopted similar measures. Harvard University instituted caste protections for student workers in 2021 as part of its contract with its graduate student union.

Laurence Simon, international development professor at Brandeis, said a university task force made the decision based “on the feelings and fears of students from marginalized communities.”

“To us, that was enough, even though we did not hear of any serious allegations of caste discrimination,” he said. “Why do we have to wait for there to be a horrendous problem?”

Among the most striking findings in a survey of 1,500 South Asians in the U.S. by Equality Labs: 67% of Dalits who responded reported being treated unfairly at their workplace because of their caste and 40% of Dalit students who were surveyed reported facing discrimination in educational institutions compared to only 3% of upper-caste respondents. Also, 40% of Dalit respondents said they felt unwelcome at their place of worship because of their caste.

Caste needs to be a protected category under the law because Dalits and others negatively affected by it do not have a legal way to address it, said Thenmozhi Soundararajan, founder and executive director of Equality Labs. Soundararajan’s parents, natives of Tamil Nadu in southern India, fled caste oppression in the 1970s and immigrated to Los Angeles, where she was born.

“We South Asians have so many difficult historical traumas,” she said. “But when we come to this country, we shove all that under the rug and try to be a model minority. The shadow of caste is still there. It still destabilizes lives, families and communities.”

The trauma is intergenerational, she said. In her book “The Trauma of Caste,” Soundararajan writes of being devastated when she learned that her family members were considered “untouchables” in India. She recounts the hurt she felt when a friend’s mother who was upper caste, gave her a separate plate to eat from after learning about her Dalit identity.

“This battle around caste is a battle for our souls,” she said.

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The Dalit American community is not monolithic on this issue. Aldrin Deepak, a gay, Dalit resident of the San Francisco Bay area, said he has never faced caste discrimination in his 35 years in the U.S. He has decorated deities in local Hindu temples and has an array of community members over to his house for Diwali celebrations.

"No one's asked me about my caste," he said. "Making an issue where there is none is only creating more fractures in our community."

Nikunj Trivedi, president of the Coalition of Hindus of North America, views the narrative around caste as "completely twisted." Caste-based laws that single out Indian Americans and Hindu Americans are unacceptable, he said.

"The understanding of Hinduism is poor in this country," Trivedi said. "Many people believe caste equals Hinduism, which is simply not true. There is diversity of thought, belief and practice within Hinduism."

Trivedi said Seattle's proposed policy is dangerous because it is not based on reliable data.

"There is a heavy reliance on anecdotal reports," he said, suggesting it would be difficult to verify someone's caste. "How can people who know very little or nothing about caste adjudicate issues stemming from it?"

Suhag Shukla, executive director of the Hindu American Foundation, called Seattle's proposed ordinance unconstitutional because "it singles out and targets an ethnic minority and seeks to institutionalize implicit bias toward a community."

"It sends that message that we are an inherently bigoted community that must be monitored," Shukla said.

Caste is already covered under the current set of anti-discrimination laws, which provide protections for race, ethnicity and religion, she said.

Legislation pertaining to caste is not about targeting any community, said Nikhil Mandalaparth, deputy executive director of Hindus for Human Rights. The Washington, D.C.-based group supports the proposed caste ordinance.

"Caste needs to be a protected category because we want South Asians to have similar access to opportunities and not face discrimination in workplaces and educational settings," he said. "Sometimes, that means airing the dirty laundry of the community in public to make it known that caste-based discrimination is not acceptable."

Council member Sawant said legal recourse is needed because current anti-discrimination laws are not enough. Sawant, who is a socialist, said the ordinance is backed by several groups including Amnesty International and Alphabet Workers Union that represents workers employed by Google's parent company.

More than 150,000 South Asians live in Washington state, with many employed in the tech sector where Dalit activists say caste-based discrimination has gone unaddressed. The issue was in the spotlight in 2020 when California regulators sued Cisco Systems saying a Dalit Indian engineer faced caste discrimination at the company's Silicon Valley headquarters.

Sawant said the ordinance does not single out one community, but accounts for how caste discrimination crosses national and religious boundaries. A United Nations report in 2016 said at least 250 million people worldwide still face caste discrimination in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Pacific regions, as well as in various diaspora communities. Caste systems are found among Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Muslims and Sikhs.

Among the diaspora, many Dalits pushing to end caste discrimination are not Hindu. Nor are they all from India.

D.B. Sagar faced caste oppression growing up in the 1990s in northern Nepal, not far from the Buddha's birthplace. He fled it, emigrating to the U.S. in 2007. Sagar says he still bears physical and emotional scars from the oppression. His family was Dalit and practicing elements of both Hinduism and Buddhism, and felt shunned by both faiths.

"We were not allowed to participate in village festivals or enter temples," he said. "Buddhists did not allow anyone from the Dalit community to become monks. You could change your religion, but you still cannot escape your caste identity. If converting to another religion was a solution, people would be free

from caste discrimination by now.”

In school, Sagar was made to sit on a separate bench. He was once caned by the school’s principal for drinking from a water pot in the classroom that Dalits were barred from using. They believed his touch would pollute the water.

Sagar said he was shocked to see similar attitudes arise in social settings among the U.S. diaspora. His experiences motivated him to start the International Commission for Dalit Rights. In 2014, he organized a march from the White House to Capitol Hill demanding that caste discrimination be recognized under the U.S. Civil Rights Act.

His organization is currently looking into about 150 complaints of housing discrimination from Dalit Americans, he said. In one case, a Dalit man in Virginia said his landlord rented out a basement, but prevented him from using the kitchen because of his caste.

“Caste is a social justice issue, period,” he said.

Like Sagar, Arizona resident Shahira Bangar is Dalit. But she is a practicing Sikh and her parents fled caste oppression in Punjab, India. Her parents never discussed caste when she was young, but she learned the truth in her teens as she attended high school in Silicon Valley surrounded by high-caste Punjabi friends who belonged to the higher, land-owning Jat caste.

She felt left out when her friends played “Jat pride” music and when a friend’s mother used her caste identity as a slur.

“I felt this deep sadness of not being accepted by my own community,” Bangar said. “I felt betrayed.”

Israeli government advances judicial overhaul despite uproar

By LAURIE KELLMAN and ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government on Tuesday for the first time advanced a plan to overhaul the country’s legal system, defying a mass uproar among Israelis and calls for restraint from the United States.

The vote marked only preliminary approval for the plan. But it raised the stakes in a political battle that drew tens of thousands of protesters into the streets, sparked criticism from influential sectors of society and widened the rifts in an already polarized country.

The 63-47 vote after midnight gave initial approval to a plan that would give Netanyahu’s coalition more power over who becomes a judge. It is part of a broader package of changes that seeks to weaken the country’s Supreme Court and transfer more power to the ruling coalition.

Netanyahu’s ultrareligious and ultranationalist allies say these changes are needed to rein in the powers of an unelected judiciary. Critics fear that judges will be appointed based on their loyalty to the government or prime minister — and say that Netanyahu, who faces trial on corruption charges, has a conflict of interest in the legislation.

The showdown has plunged Israel into one of its most bitter domestic crises, with both sides insisting that the future of democracy is at stake in their Middle Eastern country. Israeli Palestinians, a minority that may have the most to lose by the overhaul, have mostly stayed on the sidelines, due to discrimination they face at home and Israel’s ongoing 55-year occupation of their Palestinian brethren in the West Bank.

The legislators cast their votes after a vitriolic debate that dragged on past midnight. During the session, opposition lawmakers chanted, “shame,” and wrapped themselves in the Israeli flag — and some were ejected from the hall.

Thousands were rallying outside the Knesset, waving Israeli flags and holding signs reading “saving democracy!” Earlier in the day, protesters launched a sit-down demonstration at the entrance of the homes of some coalition lawmakers and briefly halted traffic on Tel Aviv’s main highway.

Netanyahu accused the demonstrators of violence and said they were ignoring the will of the people who voted his coalition into power last November.

“The people exercised their right to vote in the elections and the people’s representatives will exercise their right to vote here in Israel’s Knesset. It’s called democracy,” Netanyahu said, though he left the door

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open for dialogue on the planned changes.

The vote on part of the legislation is just the first of three readings required for parliamentary approval, a process that is expected to take months.

Nonetheless, the opposition, including tens of thousands of protesters in front of the Knesset in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv, saw Monday's vote as the coalition's determination to barrel ahead.

"We are fighting for our children's future, for our country's future. We don't intend to give up," said opposition leader Yair Lapid.

Israel's figurehead president has urged the government to freeze the legislation and seek a compromise with the opposition, a position supported by most polls.

Leaders in the booming tech sector have warned that weakening the judiciary could drive away investors.

The overhaul has prompted otherwise stoic former security chiefs to speak out, and even warn of civil war. The plan has even sparked rare warnings from the U.S., Israel's chief international ally.

U.S. Ambassador Tom Nides told a podcast over the weekend that Israel should "pump the brakes" on the legislation and seek a consensus on reform that would protect Israel's democratic institutions.

His comments drew angry responses from Netanyahu allies, telling Nides to stay out of Israel's internal affairs.

The debate raged Monday from the floor of the Knesset to flag-waving demonstrations in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

Simcha Rothman, a far-right lawmaker leading the legislative initiative, presented the proposal to the parliament. Overhead in the viewing gallery, a spectator banged on the protective glass and was carried away by guards.

A fellow Religious Zionism party politician posted a photo on Twitter with Rothman ahead of the vote, celebrating with whisky and sushi.

Last week, some 100,000 people demonstrated outside the Knesset as a committee granted initial approval to the plan. On Monday, the crowds returned, waved Israeli flags, blew horns, and held signs reading "saving democracy."

"All the steps that are going to take place now in the Knesset will change us to a pure dictatorship," said Itan Gur Aryeh, a 74-year-old retiree. "All the power will be with the government, with the head of the government and we'll all be without rights."

Earlier in the day, protesters launched a sit-down demonstration at the entrance of the homes of some coalition lawmakers and briefly halted traffic on Tel Aviv's main highway. Hundreds waved Israeli flags in the seaside city and further up the coast in Haifa, holding signs reading "resistance is mandatory."

While Israel has long boasted of its democratic credentials, critics say that claim is tainted by the country's West Bank occupation and the treatment of its own Palestinian minority.

Israel's Palestinian citizens, who make up about 20% of the population, have the right to vote but continue to suffer discrimination in areas like the job and housing markets. In the West Bank, Jewish settlers can vote in Israeli elections and are generally protected by Israeli laws, while Palestinians in the same territory are subject to military rule and cannot vote.

The parliamentary votes seek to grant the ruling coalition more power over who becomes a judge. Today, a selection committee is made up of politicians, judges and lawyers — a system that proponents say promotes consensus.

The new system would give coalition lawmakers control over the appointments. Critics fear that judges will be appointed based on their loyalty to the government or prime minister.

A second change approved Monday would bar the Supreme Court from overturning what are known as "Basic Laws," pieces of legislation that stand in for a constitution, which Israel does not have. Critics say that legislators will be able to dub any law a Basic Law, removing judicial oversight over controversial legislation.

Also planned are proposals that would give parliament the power to overturn Supreme Court rulings and control the appointment of government legal advisers. The advisers currently are professional civil servants, and critics say the new system would politicize government ministries.

Critics also fear the overhaul will grant Netanyahu an escape route from his legal woes. Netanyahu has been on trial for nearly three years for charges of accepting bribes, fraud and breach of trust. He denies wrongdoing and says he is the victim of a biased judicial system on a witch hunt against him.

Israel's attorney general has barred Netanyahu from any involvement in the overhaul, saying his legal troubles create a conflict of interest. Instead, his justice minister, a close confidant, is leading the charge. On Sunday, Netanyahu called the restrictions on him "patently ridiculous."

Students, faculty return to Michigan State after shooting

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Michigan State University students and faculty returned to the East Lansing campus Monday as the university resumed normal operations, one week after a gunman shot and killed three students and injured five others.

The 50,000-student university's campus remained relatively quiet on the first day back, with many professors allowing students to attend class virtually. Many students skipped class to attend an afternoon protest at the state Capitol in Lansing to call for gun control legislation.

All students at the university this semester will be given a credit/no credit option, which allows students to receive credit for all classes without it impacting their overall grade point average. University officials also asked teachers in an email Friday to "extend as much grace and flexibility as you are able with individual students, now and in the coming weeks."

Brogan Kelley, a freshman at Michigan State, left East Lansing after last week's shooting to return home to his family in west Michigan. But he drove back on Sunday so that he could attend class in person. He said that he felt like it was important "to go back about my life."

"For me, not going to class felt like I would have been letting the shooter win. I didn't want this one tragedy to define the place I call home and the university that's giving me my education," said Kelley.

Kelley, who was at an off-campus house when the shooting took place, said that the majority of his professors had given students the option to attend class in person or online, with many students choosing the latter.

The shootings at Michigan State happened last Monday during evening classes at Berkey Hall and nearby at the MSU Union. Students across the vast campus were ordered to shelter in place for four hours — "run, hide, fight" if necessary — while police hunted for Anthony McRae, 43, who eventually killed himself when confronted by police not far from his home in Lansing.

Two wounded students remain in critical condition at Sparrow Hospital, university police said Monday. Two other students were in stable condition with another student in "fair condition."

The university has been criticized by some in the community for returning too quickly. The editorial board of The State News, the student newspaper, wrote Thursday that they wouldn't attend class next week, either in person or online. More time was needed to heal, the students wrote.

March for Our Lives founder David Hogg, a survivor of a 2018 high school shooting in Parkland, Florida, joined hundreds of students and community members at the state Capitol for a sit-down protest Monday. Hogg and other students spoke on the capitol steps, calling for state lawmakers to pass enact gun reform.

"Enough is enough. How many more students have to die until you can hear our cries?" Michigan State senior Kelsey Gruzin said outside the state Capitol.

In the days after the shooting, Michigan Democrats, who control all levels of the state government for the first time in decades, have promised to pass gun-safety measures. Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has called for gun control legislation that includes universal background checks, safe storage laws and "extreme risk protection orders."

"It's no secret that your governor is probably going to be running for president," Hogg said Monday. "Are you ready to hold Gretchen Whitmer accountable?"

Brazil deluge kills 36; search continues for dozens missing

By TATIANA POLLASTRI and ELÉONORE HUGHES Associated Press

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SAO SEBASTIAO, Brazil (AP) — Hundreds of rescuers searched Monday for survivors of landslides and flooding that killed at least 36 people along the coast of Brazil's southern state of Sao Paulo following a huge weekend downpour.

Worst hit was the city of Sao Sebastiao, where at least 35 were dead. In neighboring Ubatuba a 7-year-old girl was killed. The disaster, in an area famous for beaches flanked by mountains, prompted cancellations in many cities of the Carnival festivities now in full swing elsewhere in the country.

Gov. Tarcisio de Freitas told television network Globo that another 40 people were missing. Nearly 800 people were homeless and 1,730 people have been displaced, his state government said in a statement.

Television footage showed flooded homes with only their roofs visible. Residents used small boats to carry items and people to elevated positions.

A woman who gave only her first name, Mailsa, said she and her husband, daughter and grandson only barely escaped when a landslide destroyed her house in the Juquehy municipality of Sao Sebastiao. The house was partially submerged, parts of it fell away and the rest was left precariously perched on the edge of a hill.

"It was very quick. Either you run or you die," she said. "It's not possible to take anything, only your life, which is the most important thing."

Members of the armed forces joined the search and rescue efforts, aggravated by poor access to many areas after landslides blocked the snaking roads in the region's highlands and floods washed away chunks of pavement in low-lying and oceanfront areas.

"Our rescue teams are not managing to get to several locations. It is a chaotic situation," Sao Sebastiao Mayor Felipe Augusto said on social media late Sunday night.

Augusto said about 50 houses collapsed in the city due to the landslides, and he posted several videos of destruction and search efforts, including one of a baby being rescued by locals lined up on a flooded street.

The highway connecting Rio de Janeiro state with Sao Paulo's port city of Santos was blocked by landslides and floodwaters. Gov. de Freitas said the damage was so extensive, the highway may no longer exist.

Precipitation in Sao Sebastiao had surpassed 600 millimeters (23.6 inches) during a 24-hour period over the weekend, among the largest such downpours ever in such a short period in Brazil.

Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva visited the region on Monday. He observed the damage in Sao Sebastiao from a helicopter and met with Gov. de Freitas at Sao Sebastiao's theatre, where search operations were being coordinated.

Lula called for people living in the hillside areas to be relocated to safer regions. "Every now and then nature plays a surprise on us, but also many times we defy nature," Lula said in remarks to reporters in Sao Sebastiao.

De Freitas declared a state of emergency for the hardest-hit cities, including Sao Sebastiao, Ubatuba, Ilhabela and Bertioga, which enables expedited allocation of funds for relief. He said 7 million reais (\$1.35 million) already had been released. On Monday, the governor also declared three days of official mourning throughout the state of Sao Paulo.

The heavy rain affected water, electricity and phone services, according to a statement from the state government, which posted on Twitter a video showing 30,000 liters of water being transported to Sao Sebastiao. Hygiene kits, blankets, sleeping bags, mattresses and medical supplies have also been sent.

The Minister of Integration and Regional Development Waldez Góes said on Twitter that experts already were looking into reconstruction plans. "In the coming days, we will work on the reconstruction of bridges, public buildings, housing units and all the public infrastructure affected," Góes said.

The affected area, on the northern coast of Sao Paulo state, is a frequent Carnival destination for wealthy tourists who prefer to stay away from massive street parties in big cities.

5-year firearms enhancement dropped in Baldwin shooting case

By ANITA SNOW Associated Press

The prosecution in the case of a fatal New Mexico film-set shooting made a stark turnaround Monday,

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dropping the possibility of a mandatory five-year sentence against Alec Baldwin, new court filings show. The actor-producer's attorneys had earlier objected to the enhancement, saying it was unconstitutional because it was added after the October 2021 shooting. Legal experts had said Baldwin had a strong chance of seeing it tossed out.

"The prosecutors committed a basic legal error by charging Mr. Baldwin under a version of the firearm-enhancement statute that did not exist on the date of the accident," Baldwin's attorneys said in an earlier court filing.

Baldwin's attorney declined to comment Monday after the reversal by prosecutors, who earlier criticized his efforts to have the sentencing requirement dropped. The related standard for the possibility of a mandatory five years would be reckless disregard of safety "without due caution and circumspection" and carried a higher threshold of wrongdoing.

The remaining alternative standard and set of penalties in the case now requires proof of negligence, which is punishable by up to 18 months in jail and a \$5,000 fine under New Mexico law.

Heather Brewer, spokesperson for the New Mexico First Judicial District Attorney's Office, said in an email earlier this month that the prosecution's focus "will remain on ensuring that justice is served and that everyone — even celebrities with fancy attorneys — is held accountable under the law."

Baldwin and Hannah Gutierrez-Reed, the weapons supervisor on the set of the film "Rust," were charged last month with felony involuntary manslaughter in the shooting death of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins, who died shortly after being wounded during rehearsals at a ranch on the outskirts of Santa Fe.

Authorities said Baldwin was pointing a pistol at Hutchins when the gun went off, killing her and wounding director Joel Souza.

Hutchins' parents and sister have filed a lawsuit over the shooting after a similar suit filed by her husband and son was settled.

Production that was halted by the shooting is expected to resume this spring. Rust Movie Productions said Hutchins' widower, Matthew Hutchins, will be the film's new executive producer with Blanca Cline as the new cinematographer.

Rust Movie Productions said last week a related documentary will detail the completion of the film and the life of Halyna Hutchins.

Souza will return as director when production resumes, although it's unclear in what state the filming will take place.

Rust Movie Productions officials said the use of "working weapons" and "any form of ammunition" will be prohibited on the movie set.

Key developments in the aftermath of the Turkey, Syria quake

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — There are reports of more collapsed buildings in Turkey and Syria after another 6.4 magnitude earthquake struck Turkey's Hatay province which was devastated by a massive tremor two weeks ago. Syria's state news agency, SANA, is reporting six people have been injured in Aleppo from falling debris, while the mayor of Hatay says a number of buildings have collapsed, trapping people inside. Turkey's disaster management agency, AFAD, said the new quake was centered around the town of Defne, in Hatay province. It was followed by a second, magnitude 5.8 tremor. NTV television said the quake caused some damaged buildings to collapse, but there were no immediate reports of any casualties. The quake was felt in Syria, Jordan, Israel and Egypt. The magnitude 7.8 earthquake which struck Feb. 6 has killed nearly 45,000 people in Turkey and Syria. Turkish authorities have recorded more than 6,000 aftershocks since.

Here's a look at the key developments Monday in the quake's aftermath:

PEOPLE TRAPPED, ABANDON HOMES IN FEAR

Lutfu Savas, the mayor for Hatay says a number of buildings have collapsed following the new, 6.4 magnitude earthquake, trapping people inside. Savas said those trapped are believed to be people who had either returned to homes or were trying to move furniture from damaged homes.

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In the Turkish city of Adana, eyewitness Alejandro Malaver said people left homes for the streets, carrying blankets into their cars. Malaver said everyone is really scared and that "no one wants to get back into their houses."

MORE INJURIES, COLLAPSED BUILDINGS

Syria's state news agency, SANA, has reported that six people were injured and taken to hospital in the northern city of Aleppo as a result from falling debris shaken loose from buildings by the new tremor.

The Syrian opposition's Syrian Civil Defense also known as White Helmets are reporting that several people have been injured in Syria's rebel-held northwest after they jumped from buildings or when they were struck by falling debris in the town of Jinderis, one of the most affected town by the Feb. 6 earthquake.

The White Helmets added that several damaged and abandoned buildings collapsed in Syria's northwest without injuring anyone.

The Syrian American Medical Society, which runs hospitals in northern Syria, said it had treated a number of patients - including a 7-year-old boy - who suffered heart attacks brought on by fear following the earthquake.

TURKS URGED TO STAY AWAY FROM DAMAGED BUILDINGS:

Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay says inspections for damage were underway in Hatay and is urging citizens to stay away from damaged buildings and to carefully follow rescue teams' directions.

The disaster management agency, AFAD, meanwhile urged citizens to stay away from the coastline as a precaution against "the risk of the sea level rising up to 50 centimeters high."

PEOPLE FLEE HOMES IN SYRIA

Some media outlets in Syria's Idlib and Aleppo regions that were badly affected by the new, 6.4 magnitude earthquake are reporting that some buildings have collapsed and that electricity and internet services have been interrupted in parts of the region.

The media outlets said many people fled their homes and are gathering in open areas.

Meanwhile, the White Helmets issued an alert urging residents in the country's rebel-held northwest to follow guidelines released earlier regarding earthquakes and how to evacuate buildings.

DEATH TOLL APPROACHES 45,000

The Turkish disaster management agency, AFAD, has raised the number of confirmed fatalities from the earthquake in Turkey to 41,156. That increases the overall death toll in both Turkey and Syria to 44,844.

Search and rescue operations for survivors have been called off in most of the quake zone, but AFAD chief Yunus Sezer told reporters that search teams were pressing ahead with their efforts in more than a dozen collapsed buildings — most of them in the hardest-hit province of Hatay.

There were no signs of anyone being alive under the rubble since three members of one family — a mother, father and 12-year-old boy — were extracted from a collapsed building in Hatay on Saturday. The boy later died.

EU SEES RISK OF DISEASE OUTBREAK

The European Union's health agency has warned of the risk of disease outbreaks in the coming weeks.

The Centre for Disease Prevention and Controls said that "food and water-borne diseases, respiratory infections and vaccine-preventable infections are a risk in the upcoming period, with the potential to cause outbreaks, particularly as survivors are moving to temporary shelters."

"A surge of cholera cases in the affected areas is a significant possibility in the coming weeks," it said, noting that authorities in northwestern Syria have reported thousands of cases of the disease since last September and a planned vaccination campaign was delayed due to the quake.

The ECDC also warned of viral infections such as hepatitis A, parasites and bacterial infections that can all be spread by difficult hygiene conditions in emergency shelters and camps.

SYRIA CALLS FOR TEMPORARY HOUSING UNITS

Syria's minister of public works and housing, Suhail Abdul Latif, says the Syrian government will secure 350 housing units for people displaced by the earthquake and made a call for "friendly countries" to send more.

"We will secure the affected people within our capabilities, but after a while, it is not possible to continue

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placing families in shelters in order to preserve their health," he said.

Housing has been a pressing need in all the earthquake-hit areas, with many families sleeping in make-shift tents or cramming into crowded schools and sports stadiums.

ERDOGAN SAYS RECONSTRUCTION TO START IN MARCH

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who faces elections in May or June, says his country will start building tens of thousands of new homes as early as next month.

Erdogan said the new buildings will be no taller than three or four stories, built on firmer ground and to higher standards and in consultation with "geophysics, geotechnical, geology and seismology professors" and other experts.

"We want to avoid disasters ... by shifting our settlements away from the lowlands to the (more solid) mountains as much as possible," Erdogan said in a televised address during a visit to hard-hit Hatay province.

The Turkish leader said destroyed cultural monuments would be rebuilt in accordance with their to "historic and cultural texture."

Erdogan said around 1.6 million people are currently being housed in temporary shelters.

BLINKEN PRAISES AMERICANS' RESPONSE

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has praised the support provided by Americans following the earthquake.

Blinken said in Ankara that the U.S. government had responded "within hours" to the disaster and had so far sent hundreds of personnel and relief supplies. But he said that ordinary Americans had also responded to "heartbreaking" images from the quake zone.

"We have nearly \$80 million in donations from the private sector in the United States, (from) individuals. When I visited the Turkish Embassy in Washington, I almost couldn't get in the front door because boxes were piled high throughout the driveway to the embassy," Blinken said.

NATO SENDS CONTAINER HOMES

NATO says a ship carrying 600 temporary container homes has left Italy and is expected to arrive in Turkey next week.

The military alliance has pledged to send more than 1,000 containers that will serve as temporary shelters for at least 4,000 people left homeless by the earthquake.

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg, who visited the quake-devastated region last week, called it the worst disaster in the alliance's history.

Authorities say more than 110,000 buildings across 11 quake-hit Turkish provinces were either destroyed or so severely damaged that they need to be torn down.

FDA's own reputation could be restraining its misinfo fight

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government agency responsible for tracking down contaminated peanut butter and defective pacemakers is taking on a new health hazard: online misinformation.

It's an unlikely role for the Food and Drug Administration, a sprawling, century-old bureaucracy that for decades directed most its communications toward doctors and corporations.

But FDA Commissioner Dr. Robert Califf has spent the last year warning that growing "distortions and half-truths" surrounding vaccines and other medical products are now "a leading cause of death in America."

"Almost no one should be dying of COVID in the U.S. today," Califf told The Associated Press, noting the government's distribution of free vaccines and antiviral medications. "People who are denying themselves that opportunity are dying because they're misinformed."

Califf, who first led the agency under President Barack Obama, said the FDA could once rely on a few communication channels to reach Americans.

"We're now in a 24/7 sea of information without a user guide for people out there in society," Califf said. "So this requires us to change the way we communicate."

The FDA's answer? Short YouTube videos, long Twitter threads and other online postings debunking medi-

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cal misinformation, including bogus COVID-19 remedies like ivermectin, the anti-parasite drug intended for farm animals. "Hold your horses y'all. Ivermectin may be trending, but it still isn't authorized or approved to treat COVID-19" the FDA told its 500,000 Twitter followers in April.

On Instagram, FDA memes referencing Scooby-Doo and SpongeBob urge Americans to get boosted and ignore misinformation, alongside staid agency postings about the arrival of National Handwashing Awareness Week.

The AP asked more than a half-dozen health communication experts about the FDA's fledgling effort. They said it mostly reflects the latest science on combating misinformation, but they also questioned whether it's reaching enough people to have an impact — and whether separate FDA controversies are undercutting the agency's credibility.

"The question I start with is, 'Are you a trusted messenger or not?'" said Dr. Seema Yasmin, a Stanford University professor who studies medical misinformation and trains health officials in responding to it. "In the context of FDA, we can highlight multiple incidents which have damaged the credibility of the agency and deepened distrust of its scientific decisions."

In the last two years the FDA has come under fire for its controversial approval of an unproven Alzheimer's drug as well as its delayed response to a contaminated baby formula plant, which contributed to a national supply shortage.

Meanwhile, the agency's approach to booster vaccinations has been criticized by some of its top vaccine scientists and advisers.

"It's not fair, but it doesn't take too many negative stories to unravel the public's trust," said Georgetown University's Leticia Bode, who studies political communication and misinformation.

About a quarter of Americans said they have "a lot" of trust in the FDA's handling of COVID-19, according to a survey conducted last year by University of Pennsylvania researchers, while less than half said they have "some trust."

"The FDA's word is still one of the most highly regarded pieces of information people want to see," said Califf, who was confirmed to his second stint leading the FDA last February.

As commissioner he is trying to tackle a host of issues, including restructuring the agency's food safety program and more aggressively deploying FDA scientists to explain vaccine decisions in the media.

The array of challenges before the FDA raises questions about the new focus on misinformation. And Califf acknowledges the limits of what his agency can accomplish.

"Anyone who thinks the government's going to solve this problem alone is deluding themselves," he said. "We need a vast network of knowledgeable people who devote part of their day to combating misinformation."

Georgetown's Bode said the agency is "moving in the right direction," on misinformation, particularly its "Just a Minute" series of factchecking videos, which feature FDA's vaccine chief Dr. Peter Marks succinctly addressing a single COVID-19 myth or topic.

But how many people are seeing them?

"FDA's YouTube videos have a minuscule audience," said Brandon Nyhan, who studies medical misinformation at Dartmouth College. The people watching FDA videos "are not the people we typically think about when we think about misinformation."

Research by Nyhan and his colleagues suggests that fact-checking COVID-19 myths briefly dispels false beliefs, but the effects are "ephemeral." Nyhan and other researchers noted the most trusted medical information source for most Americans is their doctor, not the government.

Even if the audience for FDA's work is small, experts in online analytics say it may be having a bigger impact.

An FDA page dubbed "Rumor Control" debunks a long list of false claims about vaccines, such as that they contain pesticides. A Google search for "vaccines" and "pesticides" brings up the FDA's response as a top result, because the search engine prioritizes credible websites.

"Because the FDA puts that information on its website, it will actually crowd out the misinformation from the top 10 or 20 Google results," said David Lazer, a political and computer scientist at Northeastern

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University.

Perhaps the most promising approach to fighting misinformation is also the toughest to execute: introduce people to emerging misinformation and explain why it's false before they encounter it elsewhere.

That technique, called "pre-bunking," presents challenges for large government agencies.

"Is the FDA nimble enough to have a detection system for misinformation and then quickly put out pre-bunking information within hours or days?" Lazer asked.

Califf said the FDA tracks new misinformation trends online and quickly decides whether — and when — to intervene.

"Sometimes calling attention to an issue can make it worse," he notes.

Other communication challenges are baked into how the FDA operates. For instance, the agency consults an independent panel of vaccine specialists on major decisions about COVID-19 shots, considered a key step in fostering trust in the process.

But some of those experts have disagreed on who should receive COVID-19 vaccine boosters or how strong the evidence is for their use, particularly among younger people.

The FDA then largely relies on news media to translate those debates and its final decisions, which are often laden with scientific jargon.

The result has been "utter confusion," about the latest round of COVID-19 boosters, says Lawrence Gostin, a public health specialist at Georgetown.

"If you're trying to counteract misinformation on social media your first job is to clarify, simplify and explain things in an understandable way to the lay public," said Gostin. "I don't think anyone could say that FDA has done a good job with that."

Major league teams searching for advantages with new rules

By JAY COHEN AP Baseball Writer

PHOENIX (AP) — It's a brand new day in the major leagues — potentially an even brighter one for base-stealers like Trea Turner and Ronald Acuña Jr., and most definitely a change of pace for veteran aces like Gerrit Cole or Yu Darvish.

The bases are bigger, and the pickoff rules are different. The pitch clock has arrived, and infield shifts are gone.

Sorry, Shohei Ohtani, you took too long to throw that pitch. Bryce Harper, get back in the batter's box. Xander Bogaerts, can't stand there when Mookie Betts is hitting.

Only one thing is certain to stay the same: Everyone will try to find an edge, aiming to take advantage of baseball's dramatic alterations.

"I think the one thing we know about our industry is to the extent there's an advantage to be gained, every team is going to be doing everything possible to try to exploit that advantage to the best of its ability," said Chris Antonetti, president of baseball operations for the Cleveland Guardians.

Those are the conversations that are dominating spring training this year after Major League Baseball approved a series of changes in September in an effort to make the sport more appealing to a younger generation turned off by its lack of action and leisurely tempo.

As players reported to camps in Florida and Arizona to ramp up their preparation for the season, Commissioner Rob Manfred expressed confidence that the changes would work — after what could be an occasionally bumpy transition period.

"I think you're going to see a game that moves along with more pace," Manfred said. "I think you're going to see more balls in play. I think that you're going to look at the field and see players positioned the way that most of us grew up seeing them positioned. And I really think that (you're) going to see a movement toward the very best form of our game."

The size of the bases has been increased to 18-inch squares from 15. The new pitch clock is 15 seconds with no runners on base and 20 seconds with runners. The increasingly frequent infield shift has been eliminated, and there is a limit of two of what MLB calls disengagements — pickoff attempts or steps off

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the rubber — per plate appearance.

"I think the pitch clock will be the most impactful for sure," Milwaukee Brewers manager Craig Counsell said. "I mean I'm hoping that's the one that's most impactful. I hope fans notice a real improvement in the pace of the game."

The pitch clock helped reduce the average time of a nine-inning game in the minor leagues from 3 hours, 4 minutes in 2021 to 2:38 last season. A catcher is required to be in the catcher's box with nine seconds left on the clock and a hitter in the batter's box and focused on the pitcher with eight seconds remaining.

Penalties for violations will be a ball called against a pitcher and a strike called against a batter. And there almost assuredly will be some violations through the start of the season as players get used to the clock.

"I'm not worried about it," Chicago White Sox pitcher Lance Lynn said. "The hitters are going to hate it."

Under the new rules on defensive positioning, two infielders will be required to be on either side of second and all infielders to be within the outer boundary of the infield when the pitcher is on the rubber. Infielders may not switch sides unless there is a substitution, but five-man infields will still be allowed.

With the elimination of the shift, major league teams could get more creative with their outfielders. It's not hard to imagine a late-game scenario where a corner outfielder could move into a spot that a shifted infielder used to fill.

"At least for my lifetime, when a ball's hit in a certain spot, you feel like, at least when you're watching on TV, you feel like it's a hit and you look up and somebody's standing there," San Diego Padres general manager A.J. Preller said.

"So I think that'll probably take some getting used to, kind of seeing that shift back, and from a strategy standpoint, how that plays out."

The bigger bases are intended to help reduce injuries and increase stolen bases — due to their size, the bases are closer together by a few inches. There were 3,297 steal attempts in the majors last year, according to Sportradar, up from 2,926 in 2021 but a marked decrease compared with 4,365 attempts a decade ago in 2012.

All those bang-bang plays on the bases just got a little more interesting.

But the most intriguing change just might be the limit on disengagements. A balk is called for a third step off or pickoff unless there is an out, and the limit is reset if a runner advances.

What pitchers do with their disengagements — which ones keep one in their back pocket, which ones use all of them and which ones are willing to risk a balk with a throw over — will be closely scouted at the start of the season as teams look for a baserunning edge.

"There's a lot of gamesmanship here," Chicago Cubs general manager Carter Hawkins said. "So try to figure out how to best play it. I'm sure there'll be some cat-and-mouse games going on, and different pitchers will come up with different plans that we'll have to adjust to, and baserunners as well.

"I think that's exciting to be able to watch and some chances for some competitive advantages."

Biden's test: Sustaining unity as Ukraine war enters Year 2

By AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — One year ago, President Joe Biden was bracing for the worst as Russia massed troops in preparation to invade Ukraine.

As many in the West and even in Ukraine doubted Russian President Vladimir Putin's intentions, the White House was adamant: War was coming and Kyiv was woefully outgunned.

In Washington, Biden's aides prepared contingency plans and even drafts of what the president would say should Ukraine's capital quickly fall to Russian forces — a scenario deemed likely by most U.S. officials. Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, was offered help getting out of his country if he wanted it.

Yet as Russia's invasion reaches the one-year mark, the city stands and Ukraine has beaten even its own expectations, buoyed by a U.S.-led alliance that has agreed to equip Ukrainian forces with tanks, advanced air defense systems, and more, while keeping the Kyiv government afloat with tens of billions of dollars in direct assistance.

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For Biden, Ukraine was an unexpected crisis, but one that fits squarely into his larger foreign policy outlook that the United States and like-minded allies are in the midst of a generational conflict to demonstrate that liberal democracies such as the U.S. can out-deliver autocracies.

In the estimation of the White House, the war transformed what had been Biden's rhetorical warnings — a staple of his 2020 campaign speeches — into an urgent call to action.

Now, as Biden prepares for a major address in Poland tied to the war's first anniversary, he faces a legacy-defining moment.

"President Biden's task is to make the case for sustained free world support for Ukraine," said Daniel Fried, a U.S. ambassador to Poland during the Clinton administration and now a distinguished fellow at the Atlantic Council. "This is an important trip. And really, Biden can define the role of the free world in turning back tyranny."

The president elevated his trip to Europe by first stopping in Ukraine on Monday for an unannounced visit to meet with Zelenskyy and underscore the U.S. commitment to the Ukrainian cause. "I thought it was critical that there not be any doubt, none whatsoever, about U.S. support for Ukraine in the war," Biden said of his decision to visit Kyiv.

Biden administration officials are quick to direct primary credit for Ukraine's staying power to the courage of its armed forces, with a supporting role to the Russian military's ineptitude. But they also believe that without their early warnings and the massive support they orchestrated, Ukraine would have been all but wiped off the map by now.

Sustaining Ukraine's fight, while keeping the war from escalating into a potentially catastrophic wider conflict with NATO, will go down as one of Biden's enduring foreign policy accomplishments, they argue.

In Poland, Biden is set to meet allies to reassure them of the U.S. commitment to the region and to helping Ukraine "as long as it takes." It's a pledge that is met with skepticism both at home and abroad as the invasion enters its second year, and as Putin shows no signs of retreating from an invasion that has left more than 100,000 of his own forces killed or wounded, along with tens of thousands of Ukrainian service members and civilians — and millions of refugees.

Biden's job now is, in part, to convince Americans — and a worldwide audience — that it's more important than ever to stay in the fight, while cautioning that an endgame is unlikely to come quickly.

His visit to Poland is an opportunity to make the case to "countries that repudiate archaic notions of imperial conquest and wars of aggression about the need to continue to support Ukraine and oppose Russia," said John Sullivan, who stepped down as the U.S. ambassador to Moscow in September and is now a partner at the global law firm Mayer Brown. "We always preach, we are seeking to protect a rules-based international order. It's completely done if Russia gets away with this."

The U.S. resolve to stand up to Russia is also being tested by domestic concerns and economic uncertainty.

Forty-eight percent of the U.S. public say they favor the U.S. providing weapons to Ukraine, with 29% opposed and 22% saying they're neither in favor nor opposed, according to a poll published this past week by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. It's evidence of slipping support since May 2022, less than three months into the war, when 60% of U.S. adults said they were in favor of sending Ukraine weapons.

Further, Americans are about evenly divided on sending government funds directly to Ukraine, with 37% in favor and 38% opposed, with 23% saying neither, according to the AP-NORC poll.

This month, 11 House Republicans introduced what they called the "Ukraine fatigue" resolution urging Biden to end military and financial aid to Ukraine, while pushing Ukraine and Russia to come to a peace agreement. Meanwhile, the more traditionalist national security wing of the GOP, including just-announced 2024 presidential candidate Nikki Haley, a former U.N. envoy, has critiqued the pace of U.S. assistance, pressing for the quicker transfer of more advanced weaponry.

"Don't look at Twitter, look at people in power," Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell told the Munich Security Conference on Friday. "We are committed to helping Ukraine."

But Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, said he wants the president and his administration to impress on allies the need to share the burden as Americans grow weary of current levels of U.S. spending to assist

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Ukraine and Baltic allies.

Sullivan said he hears from Alaskans, "Hey, senator, why are we spending all this? And how come the Europeans aren't?"

The U.S. has provided more economic and military aid than any country since the start of the war, but European nations and other allies have collectively committed tens of billions of dollars to back Ukraine and have taken in millions of refugees fleeing the conflict.

From the beginning of his administration, Biden has argued the world is at a crucial moment pitting autocracies against democracies.

The argument was originally framed with China in mind as America's greatest economic and military adversary, and with Biden looking to reorient U.S. foreign policy toward the Pacific. The pivot toward Asia is an effort that each of his recent predecessors tried and failed to complete as war and foreign policy crises elsewhere shifted their attention.

With that goal, Biden sought to quickly end the U.S. military's presence in Afghanistan seven months into his term. The end to America's longest war was darkened by a chaotic withdrawal as 13 U.S. troops and 169 Afghan civilians looking to flee the country were killed by a bombing near Kabul's international airport carried out by the Islamic State group's Afghanistan affiliate.

U.S. officials say the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan has given the administration the bandwidth and resources to focus on assisting Ukraine in the first land war in Europe since World War II while putting increased focus on countering China's assertive actions in the Indo-Pacific.

While the war in Ukraine caused large price increases in energy and food markets — exacerbating rampant and persistent inflation — Biden aides saw domestic benefits to the president. The war, they argued, allowed Biden to showcase his ability to work across the aisle to maintain funding for Ukraine and showcase his leadership on the global stage.

However the months ahead unfold, it's almost certain to be messy.

While Biden last year had to walk back a public call for regime change in Russia that he had delivered off the cuff from Poland just weeks after the war began, U.S. officials increasingly see internal discontent and domestic pressures on Putin as key to ending the conflict.

"So how does it end?" Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland asked at an event this past week in Washington. "It ends with a safe, viable Ukraine. It ends with Putin limping back off the battlefield. I hope it ends eventually with a Russian citizenry, who also says, 'That was a bad deal for us and we want a better future.'"

When Biden hosted Zelenskyy in Washington in December, the U.S. president encouraged him to pursue a "just peace" — a framing that the Ukrainian leader chafed against.

"For me as a president, 'just peace' is no compromises," Zelenskyy said. He said the war would end once Ukraine's sovereignty, freedom and territorial integrity were restored, and Russia had paid back Ukraine for all the damage inflicted by its forces.

"There can't be any 'just peace' in the war that was imposed on us," he added.

Celtics stars Tatum and Brown put on quite an All-Star show

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Best record in the NBA. A team that won the Eastern Conference and went to the NBA Finals last season. A pair of All-Stars, including the MVP. And a coach who isn't an interim coach anymore.

The Boston Celtics have much to like about where they are right now.

Jayson Tatum's All-Star scoring records — 55 points in the game, 27 points in the third quarter, both numbers that never have been touched by any of the other 449 All-Stars in league history — were the big story coming out of Team Giannis' 184-175 victory over Team LeBron on Sunday night.

And it might have signaled that the soon-to-be 25-year-old Tatum — Boston's first All-Star MVP since Larry Bird in 1982 — is ready to take the step from stardom to something even bigger.

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"I guess I'm not 19 anymore," said Tatum, whose birthday is March 3. "But yeah, I say it all the time. I'm extremely grateful and blessed to be in this situation. I'm not too far removed from being a kid in St. Louis with essentially a ball and a dream and dreaming about these moments of being here. And living out that dream, in reality, is hard to describe. I try not to really think about the things I've accomplished. I never want to get complacent. I'm always chasing something, chasing more."

That chase resumes Thursday night, when the Celtics open their post-All-Star slate in Indiana. Boston takes a league-best 42-17 record into the stretch run, a half-game better than Milwaukee (41-17) for the top spots in both the East and the NBA. But the Bucks are ailing; Khris Middleton's knee is a concern, and winning All-Star captain Giannis Antetokounmpo played only 20 seconds Sunday night because of a wrist issue.

The Celtics, meanwhile, are soaring. Tatum and Jaylen Brown — playing for Team LeBron — combined for 90 points in the All-Star Game, further solidifying themselves as one of the best pairings in the league right now.

And the last minute of the third quarter of the All-Star Game was basically them playing 1-on-1. Everyone else on the court stopped to let it happen. Brown went first, hitting a stepback from near the right corner. Tatum lost the ball off the dribble on the next possession. They weren't done; Brown made a 3 over Tatum, hitting him with the "too small" move while laughing. Tatum then made a 3 of his own, and the battle ended when he stopped Brown from getting a shot off before the end-of-quarter buzzer sounded.

"Going against my brother in Jayson, going back and forth, it was like no one was in there at all," Brown said.

Sitting back and watching it all was Celtics coach — and Team Giannis coach — Joe Mazzulla, who isn't Celtics interim coach Joe Mazzulla anymore. Boston made him the permanent coach last week, no surprise after he has kept the Celtics on a title-contending path even after he had to take over for now-former coach Ime Udoka on almost no notice just before training camp. Udoka was suspended over inappropriate conduct with a Celtics employee.

The last time Mazzulla was a head coach without an interim title was March 16, 2019. It was in the NCAA Division II tournament, when his Fairmont State club lost a first-round game to Mercyhurst.

"I'm going to miss that term, I guess, a little bit," Mazzulla said. "And my thing is, the interim tag was never a thing because we're all interims. You have to kind of have a short-term view but also a long-term. ... As coaches, we're here to make the game. The game's not ours. It doesn't belong to us. What matters is the seeds that we plant, and the things that we're able to accomplish with the team."

In Boston, the seeds are planted. Brown and Tatum have blossomed into full-grown stars. And the Celtics have reason to have the biggest goal of all down the stretch this season.

"Historically, or at least since I've been in the league, the team that has kind of clicked in this last stretch, has kind of peaked and played their best of the season going into the playoffs, usually is the team that wins it all," Tatum said. "So, this stretch is important. You want to be as healthy as possible going into the playoffs. You want to be playing your best basketball, individually and as a group. That's what we're trying to do."

Ricky Stenhouse Jr. wins longest Daytona 500 in history

By JENNA FRYER AP Auto Racing Writer

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Ricky Stenhouse Jr. has had a roller coaster career in which he had to fight to keep a job, lost his seat at a NASCAR powerhouse team and opened his 14th season mired in a five-year losing streak.

To say this Daytona 500 was a milestone race was an understatement — for Stenhouse and for NASCAR. Stenhouse won the Daytona 500 in double overtime and under caution Sunday night in the longest running of "The Great American Race." The two overtimes pushed the 65th running of the race to a record 212 laps — a dozen laps beyond the scheduled distance and a whopping 530 miles (850 km).

It provided anxious moments before a landmark celebration: the first Daytona 500-winning team co-owned by a Black man and a woman.

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Stenhouse's win for JTG Daugherty Racing was the third of his career. JTG is the first single-car team to win the Daytona 500 since The Wood Brothers Racing did it with Trevor Bayne in 2011.

The team is owned by Tad and Jodi Geschickter along with former NBA player Brad Daugherty.

Daugherty, who left the track earlier Sunday with an eye irritation, is the first Black car owner to win the race, and Jodi Geschickter joined Teresa Earnhardt as female car owners to win the Daytona 500. Earnhardt ran Dale Earnhardt Inc. when Michael Waltrip and Dale Earnhardt Jr. won the Daytona 500 in 2003 and 2004.

To get to victory lane Sunday, JTG stuck with Stenhouse and even reunited him this season with the crew chief who led him to a pair of Xfinity Series titles years ago.

Mike Kelly's biggest task was convincing Stenhouse that he can indeed win races. So ahead of the Daytona 500, he taped a note inside the Chevrolet. The message? The team believes in the driver.

"When I woke up today I told myself that I was going to do something that I used to do for Ricky when we had tough days," Kelly said. "I just wrote him a note that only he would see. It was on top of the roll bar in front of him, and it just said, 'We believe.' That's been our motto the whole offseason — that we believe.

"We're trying to get people to believe in Ricky Stenhouse Jr. again."

Stenhouse's only other victories came in 2017, at Talladega and the summer race at Daytona.

Now, the 35-year-old from Olive Branch, Mississippi, has a repeat win at Daytona in NASCAR's biggest race of the season.

"I think this whole offseason Mike just preached how much we all believed in each other. They left me a note in the car that said they believe in me and to go get the job done," Stenhouse said. "Man, this is unbelievable. This was the site of my last win back in 2017. We've worked really hard. We had a couple shots last year to get a win and fell short.

"It was a tough season, but man, we got it done, Daytona 500."

Kyle Larson was collected in the race-ending crash after he jumped out of line too early in an attempt to win. His disappointment was alleviated by Stenhouse's victory.

"Happy that Ricky won. I'm super happy. That's all I could think about after I crashed, waiting to hear that he won," Larson said. "He's one of my best friends, so I was like yelling into my helmet when I helped push him to the lead there. I was hoping it was going to stay green so it would have been me or him win.

"I can't wait to go get changed and go give him a big hug because he is one of my great buddies."

Reigning Cup champion Joey Logano finished second in a Ford for Team Penske, which won the race last year with Austin Cindric.

"Second is the worst, man," Logano said. "Congratulations to Ricky. There's nothing like winning the Daytona 500. That's why it stings so much finishing second."

Christopher Bell was third in a Toyota for Joe Gibbs Racing and followed by Chris Buescher in a Ford for RFK Racing and pole sitter Alex Bowman of Hendrick Motorsports in a Chevrolet. It marked the first time the pole sitter has finished in the top five since Bill Elliott in 2001.

AJ Allmendinger was sixth for Kaulig Racing, Daniel Suarez seventh for Trackhouse Racing and Ryan Blaney eighth for Team Penske. Ross Chastain of Trackhouse and Riley Herbst of Rick Ware Racing rounded out the top 10.

Action sports star Travis Pastrana finished 11th in his Daytona 500 debut, and Kevin Harvick was 12th in his final Daytona 500. Harvick is retiring at the end of the year.

Kyle Busch dropped to 0 for 18 in the Daytona 500 but contended for his new Richard Childress Racing team. He was the leader ahead of teammate Austin Dillon with three laps remaining in regulation when a spin by Daniel Suarez brought out the caution and sent the race to overtime.

"Back in 1998, that would be the win, boys," Busch radioed his team in a reference to how the late Dale Earnhardt won his only Daytona 500. There was no overtime then and Earnhardt won under caution.

Busch wound up 19th after the race-ending crash in second overtime.

"I think this is the first time I led lap 200, so I wish it was 1998 rules. But, no, it's just par for the course, just used to it and come down here every year to just find out when and where I'm going to crash and

what lap I come out of the care center," Busch said. "Who won? I don't even know who lucked into it." Busch was told Stenhouse was the victor.

"There you have it," he replied.

Seven-time NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson made his return to the series and ran inside the top 15 for most of the race. He was collected in one of the crashes in overtime and finished 31st. Johnson has returned from two years of racing in the IndyCar Series as part owner of Legacy Motor Club and he plans to enter a handful of races.

Brad Keselowski led a race-high 42 laps but finished 22nd. He declined to speak to reporters after dropping to 0 for 14 in a race he desperately wants to win.

NEXT UP

The Cup Series races at Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, California, next Sunday in the final race of the track's current configuration. It will be renovated into a short track after the race — a project that will prevent the track from hosting any racing in 2024. Kyle Larson won last year's race.

For poor schools, building repairs zap COVID relief money

By SHARON LURYE Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — The air-conditioning gave out as students returned from summer break last year to Jim Hill High School in Jackson, Mississippi, forcing them to learn in sweltering heat. By Thanksgiving, students were huddling under blankets because the heat wasn't working.

Along the way students dealt with broken showers in locker rooms, plumbing issues and a litany of other problems in the nearly 60-year-old school building.

"There's been times we've been cold, there's been times we've been hot," said Mentia Trippeter, a 17-year-old senior. "There's been times where it rained and it poured, we've been drowning. We go through it — we go through it, man."

Like other schools serving low-income communities across the country, Jim Hill has long dealt with neglected infrastructure that has made it harder for students to learn. So when Jackson Public Schools received tens of millions of dollars in federal COVID relief money, it decided to put much of the windfall toward repairing heating and plumbing problems, some of which temporarily caused the school to switch to remote learning.

For poorer school districts, deciding what to do with that money has involved a tough tradeoff: work on long-term academic recovery or fix long-standing infrastructure needs.

All told, the federal government has allocated \$190 billion in pandemic relief aid to help schools recover — more than four times the amount the U.S. Education Department spends on K-12 schools in a typical year, and with few strings attached.

An Associated Press analysis of school district spending plans from across the country found that the poorest districts in each state are far more likely than the richest districts to spend emergency relief funds on upgrading their buildings or transportation systems.

Jackson's academic needs are no less pressing. The majority of students in the district learned virtually for a year and a half during the pandemic and math test scores plummeted by the equivalent of over a full year's worth of learning, according to Harvard and Stanford's Education Recovery Scorecard. But school officials didn't want to miss a rare opportunity to fix infrastructure issues — some of which date back decades.

William Merritt, the school district's chief of staff, said the funds gave the district the ability to "provide our students with tools that other students in well-to-do districts have."

The data in AP's analysis came from education market research firm Burbio, which reviewed how more than 6,000 districts across the country, representing over 75% of the nation's public school students, planned to spend their federal relief money. The data covered the final and largest round of federal aid to schools, totaling \$122 billion.

The AP found that school districts with the highest percentage of children living in poverty — the poorest

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20% of districts in each state — were more than three times as likely as the wealthiest school districts to dedicate money to the construction of new buildings or classrooms. School districts with high levels of poverty were also more than twice as likely to include money for facilities repairs.

"The poor districts are doing it because they're chasing after emergencies," said Mary Filardo, executive director of the 21st Century School Fund.

Infrastructure is a prime example of long-standing inequities in school funding. While affluent districts can rely on local tax revenue to pay for major improvement projects such as installing state-of-the-art heating and ventilation systems, poorer districts that cannot often spend more money over time on short-term fixes.

In Texas, the Victoria Independent School District is also grappling with competing infrastructure needs and pandemic recovery. It plans to spend half of the \$28.4 million it received in the last round of relief funds on academics, teacher retention and student supports that include social-emotional behavior specialists.

But the other 50% of the money is devoted to improving air quality, such as updating ventilation systems. Superintendent Quintin Shepherd says he'd love to spend more on counselors and less on fixing broken air conditioners, but there's no way kids can learn safely in a classroom that's 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius).

"We got into education to improve educational outcomes and life expectations. It's a hard position to have to make these impossible decisions," Shepherd said.

Some have argued the money shouldn't be spent on infrastructure projects, which can take years to complete and often with no immediate benefit to students. But the government only required 20% of the emergency relief funds to be spent addressing learning loss.

U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said in a recent speech that the relief funding was "intended to accelerate reopening and recovery, not to fill decades of underinvestment in education funding and support for students."

Marguerite Roza, director of the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University, said it was right for the government to allow a high degree of flexibility in how to spend the relief funds, rather than bogging districts down in red tape.

In Jackson, officials chose to spend over half of the \$109 million the district received in the last round of federal funding on fixing the facilities in schools like Jim Hill.

Students at the school generally agreed that it needed infrastructure upgrades. Still, when asked what they would do if they were put in charge of spending that money for the district, some had bigger wishes.

"I believe we could hire more teachers to teach different types of subjects," said Elijah Fisher, a 17-year-old junior. But, he admitted, first he would use the money to fix the drainage system around the school.

Overall, officials in Jackson are confident that they're making the right investment.

Though much of the funding went toward infrastructure needs, the school district also bought laptops for every student and invested in after-school programming. Jim Hill now offers near year-round school with the summer term devoted to field trips and "learn by doing" experiences.

The school's principal, Bobby Brown, said the money spent on infrastructure needs is very necessary — although not enough to address decades of inequity in the majority Black school system.

"As you listen to the students, and them having generations of families that have similar experiences," Brown said, "this also sheds light on the types of investment that we have — or the lack of investment that we have in communities where people look like us."

Putin's Ukraine gamble seen as biggest threat to his rule

By ANDREW KATELL Associated Press

Vladimir Putin says he learned from his boyhood brawls in his native St. Petersburg: "If you want to win a fight, you have to carry it through to the end, as if it were the most decisive battle of your life."

That lesson, cited in the most recent biography of the Russian president, seems to be guiding him as his invasion of Ukraine suffers setbacks and stalemates. The Kremlin strongman, who started the war on

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Feb. 24, 2022, and could end it in a minute, appears to be determined to prevail, ruthlessly and at all costs.

Stoking his countrymen this month on the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Stalingrad that turned around Moscow's fortunes in World War II, he said: "The willingness to go beyond for the sake of the Motherland and the truth, to do the impossible, has always been and remains in the blood, in the character of our multiethnic people."

But so far, Putin's gamble in invading his smaller and weaker neighbor seems to have backfired spectacularly and created the biggest threat to his more than two-decade-long rule.

HISTORY AND MODERN ROADBLOCKS

He began the "special military operation" in the name of Ukraine's demilitarization and "denazification," seeking to protect ethnic Russians, prevent Kyiv's NATO membership and to keep it in Russia's "sphere of influence." While he claims Ukraine and the West provoked the invasion, they say just the opposite — that it was an illegal and brazen act of aggression against a country with a democratically elected government and a Jewish president whose relatives were killed in the Holocaust.

Putin laid the foundation for the invasion with a 5,000-word essay in 2021, in which he questioned Ukraine's legitimacy as a nation. That was only the latest chapter in a long obsession with the country and a determination to correct what he believes was a historical mistake of letting it slip from Moscow's orbit. He reached back three centuries, to Peter the Great, to support his quest to reconquer rightful Russian territory.

But rectifying history soon hit modern roadblocks.

"Literally everything that he set out to do has gone disastrously wrong," said British journalist Philip Short, who published his biography, "Putin," last year.

Despite armed interventions in Chechnya, Syria and Georgia, Putin overestimated his military and underestimated Ukrainian resistance and Western support. Russian media try to boost his authority with images of a bare-chested Putin riding a horse, shooting at a military firing range and dressing down government officials on TV, but the war has exposed his shortcomings and the weakness of his military, intelligence services and some economic sectors.

Ukrainian forces have liberated more than half the territory Russia seized. The war has killed tens of thousands on both sides, caused widespread destruction, and induced not only Ukraine but Sweden and Finland to seek NATO membership. It has increased the security threat to Russia and scuttled decades of Russia's integration with the West, bringing international isolation.

Increasingly, Putin seems to be improvising in a conflict much longer and more difficult than he expected. For example, he's threatened to use nuclear weapons, then backed off. The strategy is familiar from his lifelong passion, judo: "You must be flexible. Sometimes you can give way to others if that is the way leading to victory," Putin recounted in flattering 2015-17 interviews with American director Oliver Stone.

In Putin's view, an aggressive West wants to crush Russia. His narrative, along with increasingly repressive measures to stifle domestic dissent, has galvanized patriotic support among many of his countrymen. But it runs up against an inefficient, top-down power structure inherited from the Soviet Union, against the interconnected world's porous borders, and against the sacrifices Russians are suffering firsthand.

AN ERRATIC BUT DETERMINED LEADER

In interviews with The Associated Press, Short, other analysts and a former Kremlin insider describe the 70-year-old Putin as an erratic, weakened leader, rigid and outdated in his thinking, who overreached and is in denial about the difficulties.

They say he seems concerned about waning, though still strong, domestic public opinion — albeit from unreliable polls. Mostly isolated due to COVID-19 concerns and his personal security, Putin speaks with a small set of advisers, but they appear reluctant to provide honest assessments.

Observers see a long, grinding war that Putin is determined to win, with his way out hard to predict.

"It's not Putin that rules Russia. It's circumstances which rule Putin," said Tatiana Stanovaya, senior fellow of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Short believes the Kremlin leader "has painted himself into a corner. ... He will be looking for ways to

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push ahead, but I don't think he's found them." Giving up is unlikely, Short said, recalling that "his character was always to double down and fight harder."

Fiona Hill, who served in the past three U.S. administrations and is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, believes Putin wanted to win quickly in Ukraine, install a new president in Kyiv and force it to join Belarus in a Slavic union with Russia. A successor would run Russia, she said, with Putin elevating himself to lead the larger alliance.

But now, according to Stanovaya, "It feels like there is not any hopes that the conflict can be solved any other way than militarily. And this is scary."

WHAT'S AHEAD

Analysts see several scenarios for Putin, depending on battlefield developments. The scenarios, not mutually exclusive, range from what could be his biggest nightmare — a coup or uprisings like those he saw as a KGB agent in East Germany in 1989, in the USSR in 1991 or Ukraine in 2004 and 2014 — to winning reelection next year. That would extend what is already the longest rule of any Kremlin leader since Josef Stalin.

Dmitry Oreshkin, a political analyst and professor at Free University in Riga, Latvia, said Putin could revise his goals in Ukraine, declaring he achieved them by establishing a land corridor from Russia to Crimea and taking over the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the east. Then he could announce, "We punished them. We showed them who is the boss in the house. We have defeated all NATO countries," Oreshkin added.

But Kyiv has shown no willingness to cede territory, and for Putin to sell this as a victory, Oreshkin believes "he needs to convince himself that he defeated Ukraine. And he understands better than anyone that, in fact, he lost."

As military setbacks mount, Russians are withdrawing morally and psychologically, and thinking, "Yes, we see that something is wrong in the war, but we do not want to know," according to Oreshkin.

Such tuning out, along with economic hardships, could blow back on Putin, he said, perhaps this spring, as Russians ask, "You promised victory, so where is it?"

Former Putin speechwriter Abbas Gallyamov said the Russian president doesn't admit mistakes or defeats, and "desperately needs a victory just to prove the point that he's a strongman."

Even some in the military are turning critical, he said.

"When he becomes hated by more than half — and we're driving in this direction — the chances for a coup, elite coup, military coup, will increase," Gallyamov said, giving a timeline of 2024 "plus a couple of years."

Stanovaya and Short believe no uprising is imminent.

"Even if people are suffering, and they can be discontented and angry, there is no way to make it political," Stanovaya said.

Gallyamov sees a way out for Putin if he can gain recognition of "new territories, plus a declaration of NATO that it stops expansion, for example, or Ukrainian introduction into their constitution of their neutral status ... or their declaration that Russian will be the second official language."

DEATH OR SUCCESSION

Another possibility is Putin dying in office, but CIA Director William Burns is skeptical.

"There are lots of rumors about President Putin's health, and as far as we can tell, he's entirely too healthy," Burns, a former U.S. ambassador to Moscow, told the Aspen Security Forum in Colorado in July.

Short said Putin has established such tight security controls and rival power centers that he's more likely to suffer "a totally unanticipated heart attack than to be overthrown by the people around him."

He and Hill believe Putin will eventually look for a successor. Gallyamov lists "technocrats" such as Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin and Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin as possibilities. Hill said Dmitry Medvedev, whom Putin tapped as president from 2008 to 2012, "seems to be auditioning for that role again."

For the moment, Putin remains very much in charge. In his authorized 2000 biography, he noted: "There are always a lot of mistakes made in war. ... You have to take a pragmatic attitude. And you have to keep thinking of victory."

When a reporter asked him in December if his “special military operation” in Ukraine has been taking too long, Putin replied with a Russian idiom about big goals being achieved incrementally: “The hen pecks grain by grain.”

Record 6,542 guns intercepted at US airport security in 2022

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The woman flying out of Philadelphia’s airport last year remembered to pack snacks, prescription medicine and a cellphone in her handbag. But what was more important was what she forgot to unpack: a loaded .380-caliber handgun in a black holster.

The weapon was one of the 6,542 guns the Transportation Security Administration intercepted last year at airport checkpoints across the country. The number — roughly 18 per day — was an all-time high for guns intercepted at U.S. airports, and is sparking concern at a time when more Americans are armed.

“What we see in our checkpoints really reflects what we’re seeing in society, and in society there are more people carrying firearms nowadays,” TSA administrator David Pekoske said.

With the exception of pandemic-disrupted 2020, the number of weapons intercepted at airport checkpoints has climbed every year since 2010. Experts don’t think this is an epidemic of would-be hijackers — nearly everyone caught claims to have forgotten they had a gun with them — but they emphasize the danger even one gun can pose in the wrong hands on a plane or at a checkpoint.

Guns have been intercepted literally from Burbank, California, to Bangor, Maine. But it tends to happen more at bigger airports in areas with laws more friendly to carrying a gun, Pekoske said. The top 10 list for gun interceptions in 2022 includes Dallas, Austin and Houston in Texas; three airports in Florida; Nashville, Tennessee; Atlanta; Phoenix; and Denver.

Pekoske isn’t sure the “I forgot” excuse is always true or whether it’s a natural reaction to getting caught. Regardless, he said, it’s a problem that must stop.

When TSA staffers see what they believe to be a weapon on the X-ray machine, they usually stop the belt so the bag stays inside the machine and the passenger can’t get to it. Then they call in local police.

Repercussions vary depending on local and state laws. The person may be arrested and have the gun confiscated. But sometimes they’re allowed to give the gun to a companion not flying with them and continue on their way. Unloaded guns can also be placed in checked bags assuming they follow proper procedures. The woman in Philadelphia saw her gun confiscated and was slated to be fined.

Those federal fines are the TSA’s tool to punish those who bring a gun to a checkpoint. Last year TSA raised the maximum fine to \$14,950 as a deterrent. Passengers also lose their PreCheck status — it allows them to bypass some types of screening — for five years. It used to be three years, but about a year ago the agency increased the time and changed the rules. Passengers may also miss their flight as well as lose their gun. If federal officials can prove the person intended to bring the gun past the checkpoint into what’s called the airport’s sterile area, it’s a federal offense.

Retired TSA official Keith Jeffries said gun interceptions can also slow other passengers in line.

“It’s disruptive no matter what,” Jeffries said. “It’s a dangerous, prohibited item and, let’s face it, you should know where your gun is at, for crying out loud.”

Experts and officials say the rise in gun interceptions simply reflects that more Americans are carrying guns.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation, an industry trade group, tracks FBI data about background checks completed for a firearm sale. The numbers were a little over 7 million in 2000 and about 16.4 million last year. They went even higher during the coronavirus pandemic.

For the TSA officers searching for prohibited items, it can be jarring.

In Atlanta, Janecia Howard was monitoring the X-ray machine when she realized she was looking at a gun in a passenger’s laptop bag. She immediately flagged it as a “high-threat” item and police were notified.

Howard said it felt like her heart dropped, and she was worried the passenger might try to get the gun. It turns out the passenger was a very apologetic businessman who said he simply forgot. Howard says

she understands travel can be stressful but that people have to take care when they're getting ready for a flight.

"You have to be alert and pay attention," she said. "It's your property."

Atlanta's airport, one of the world's busiest with roughly 85,000 people going through checkpoints on a busy day, had the most guns intercepted in 2022 — 448 — but that number was actually lower than the year before. Robert Spinden, the TSA's top official in Atlanta, says the agency and the airport made a big effort in 2021 to try to address the large number of guns being intercepted at checkpoints.

An incident in November 2021 reinforced the need for their efforts. A TSA officer noticed a suspected gun in a passenger's bag. When the officer opened the suitcase the man reached for the gun, and it went off. People ran for the exits, and the airport was shut down for 2 1/2 hours, the airport's general manager Balram Bheodari said during a congressional hearing last year.

Officials put in new signage to catch the attention of gun owners. A hologram over a checkpoint shows the image of a revolving blue gun with a red circle over the gun with a line through it. Numerous 70-inch television screens flash rotating messages that guns are not allowed.

"There's signage all over the airport. There is announcements, holograms, TVs. There's quite a bit of information that is sort of flashing before your eyes to just try to remind you as a last ditch effort that if you do own a firearm, do you know where it's at?" Spinden said.

Miami's airport also worked to get gunowners' attention. The airport's director told Congress last year that after setting a gun interception record in 2021 they installed high-visibility signage and worked with airlines to warn passengers. He said the number of firearms intercepted declined sharply.

Pekoske said signage is only part of the solution. Travelers face a barrage of signs or announcements already and don't always pay attention. He also supports gradually raising penalties to grab people's attention.

But Aidan Johnston, from the gun advocacy group Gun Owners of America, said he'd like to see the fines lessened, saying they're not a deterrent. While he'd like to see more education for new gun owners, he also doesn't think of this as a "major heinous crime."

"These are not bad people that are in dire need of punishment," he said. "These are people who made a mistake."

Officials believe they're catching the vast majority, but with 730 million passengers screened last year even a miniscule percentage getting through is a concern.

Last month, musician Cliff Waddell was traveling from Nashville, Tennessee, to Raleigh, North Carolina, when he was stopped at the checkpoint. A TSA officer had seen a gun in his bag. Waddell was so shocked he initially said it couldn't be his because he'd just flown the day before with the same bag. It turned out the gun had been in his bag but missed at the screening. TSA acknowledged the miss, and Pekoske says they're investigating.

When trying to figure out how the gun he keeps locked in his glove compartment got in his bookbag, Waddell realized he'd taken it out when he took the vehicle in for repairs. Waddell said he recognizes it's his responsibility to know where his firearm is but worries about how TSA could have missed something so significant.

"That was a shock to me," he said.

Downpour kills at least 36 in Brazil, cities cancel Carnival

By MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Heavy rain caused flooding and landslides that have killed 36 people on the northern coast of Brazil's Sao Paulo state, officials said Monday, while fatalities could rise.

Sao Paulo's state government said in a statement that 35 died in the city of Sao Sebastiao and a 7-year-old girl was killed in neighboring Ubatuba. On Monday morning, more than 500 people were continuing search and rescue efforts.

Some of the hardest-hit cities that are under a state of emergency, including Sao Sebastiao, Ubatuba,

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Ihabela and Bertioiga, canceled their Carnival festivities as rescue teams continued a search for the injured and missing under the rubble.

"Our rescue teams are not managing to get to several locations; it is a chaotic situation," said Felipe Augusto, the mayor of Sao Sebastiao. Later, he added there are dozens of people missing and that 50 houses collapsed in the city due to the landslides.

Augusto posted on social media several videos of widespread destruction in his city, including one of a baby being rescued by locals lined up on a flooded street.

Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva said on Twitter he will visit the region Monday.

Sao Paulo state government said in a statement that precipitation in the region has surpassed 600 millimeters (23.6 inches) in one day, one of the highest amounts ever in Brazil in such a short period.

Bertioiga alone had 687 millimeters during that period, the state government said.

Gov. Tarcisio de Freitas said in a statement he requested support from the army, which sent two airplanes and rescue teams to the region.

TV footage showed houses flooded with only the roof visible. Residents are using small boats to carry items and people to higher positions. A road that connects Rio de Janeiro to the port city of Santos was blocked by landslides and floodwaters.

The northern coast of Sao Paulo state is a frequent Carnival destination for wealthy tourists who prefer to stay away from massive street parties in big cities.

Today in History: FEB 21, Malcom X assassinated in New York

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Feb. 21, the 52nd day of 2023. There are 313 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 21, 1975, former Attorney General John N. Mitchell and former White House aides H.R. Halderman and John D. Ehrlichman were sentenced to 2 1/2 to 8 years in prison for their roles in the Watergate cover-up (each ended up serving 1 1/2 years).

On this date:

In 1437, James I, King of Scots, was assassinated; his 6-year-old son succeeded him as James II.

In 1885, the Washington Monument was dedicated.

In 1911, composer Gustav Mahler, despite a fever, conducted the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall in what turned out to be his final concert (he died the following May).

In 1964, the first shipment of U.S. wheat purchased by the Soviet Union arrived in the port of Odessa.

In 1965, minister and civil rights activist Malcolm X, 39, was shot to death inside Harlem's Audubon Ballroom in New York. (Three men identified as members of the Nation of Islam were convicted of murder and imprisoned; all were eventually paroled. The convictions of two of the men were dismissed in November 2021; prosecutors said new evidence had undermined the case against them.)

In 1972, President Richard M. Nixon began his historic visit to China as he and his wife, Pat, arrived in Beijing.

In 1973, Israeli fighter planes shot down Libyan Arab Airlines Flight 114 over the Sinai Desert, killing all but five of the 113 people on board.

In 1992, Kristi Yamaguchi (yah-mah-GOO'-chee) of the United States won the gold medal in ladies' figure skating at the Albertville Olympics; Midori Ito (mee-doh-ree ee-toh) of Japan won the silver, Nancy Kerrigan of the U.S. the bronze.

In 1995, Chicago adventurer Steve Fossett became the first person to fly solo across the Pacific Ocean by balloon, landing in Leader, Saskatchewan, Canada.

In 2019, teachers in Oakland, California, went on strike in the latest in a wave of teacher activism that had included walkouts in Denver, Los Angeles and West Virginia.

In 2020, a temporary truce between the United States and the Taliban in Afghanistan took effect, setting

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the stage for the two sides to sign a peace deal the following week.

Ten years ago: Opposition activists said at least 31 people were killed in a car bomb attack in Damascus near the headquarters of the ruling Baath party and the Russian Embassy. Drew Peterson, the Chicago-area police officer who gained notoriety after his much-younger fourth wife, Stacy Peterson, vanished in 2007, was sentenced to 38 years in prison for murdering his third wife, Kathleen Savio.

Five years ago: The Rev. Billy Graham, a confidant of presidents and the most widely heard Christian evangelist in history, died at his North Carolina home at age 99. A week after the Florida school shooting, President Donald Trump met with teen survivors of school violence and parents of slain children; Trump promised to be "very strong on background checks" and suggested he supported letting some teachers and other school employees carry weapons. Thousands of protesters swarmed the Florida state Capitol, calling for changes to gun laws, a ban on assault-type weapons and improved care for the mentally ill. The NBA fined Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban \$600,000 for saying he had recently told some of his players that "losing is our best option." (The Mavericks had one of the league's worst records, putting them in position to land a high draft pick.)

One year ago: Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered forces to "maintain peace" in separatist regions of eastern Ukraine, hours after the Kremlin recognized the area's independence. The announcement raised fears that an invasion was imminent. (It would come three days later.) British Prime Minister Boris Johnson scrapped the last domestic coronavirus restrictions in England, including the requirement for people with COVID-19 to self-isolate. Italy's Mount Etna roared back to spectacular action after months of relative quiet.

Today's birthdays: Actor Gary Lockwood is 86. Actor-director Richard Beymer is 84. Actor Peter McEnery is 83. Film/music company executive David Geffen is 80. Actor Tyne Daly is 77. Actor Anthony Daniels is 77. Tricia Nixon Cox is 77. Former Sen. Olympia J. Snowe, R-Maine, is 76. Rock musician Jerry Harrison (Talking Heads) is 74. Actor Christine Ebersole is 70. Actor William Petersen is 70. Actor Kelsey Grammer is 68. Singer/guitarist Larry Campbell is 68. Country singer Mary Chapin Carpenter is 65. Actor Kim Coates is 65. Actor Jack Coleman is 65. Actor Christopher Atkins is 62. Actor William Baldwin is 60. Sen. Mark Kelly, D-Ariz., is 59. Rock musician Michael Ward is 56. Actor Aunjanue Ellis is 54. Blues musician Corey Harris is 54. Country singer Eric Heatherly is 53. Rock musician Eric Wilson is 53. Rock musician Tad Kinchla (Blues Traveler) is 50. Singer Rhiannon Giddens (Carolina Chocolate Drops) is 46. Actor Tituss Burgess is 44. Actor Jennifer Love Hewitt is 44. Comedian-actor Jordan Peele is 44. Actor Brendan Sexton III is 43. Singer Charlotte Church is 37. Actor Ashley Greene is 36. Actor Elliot Page is 36. Actor Corbin Bleu is 34. Actor Hayley Orrantia is 29. Actor Sophie Turner is 27.