

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

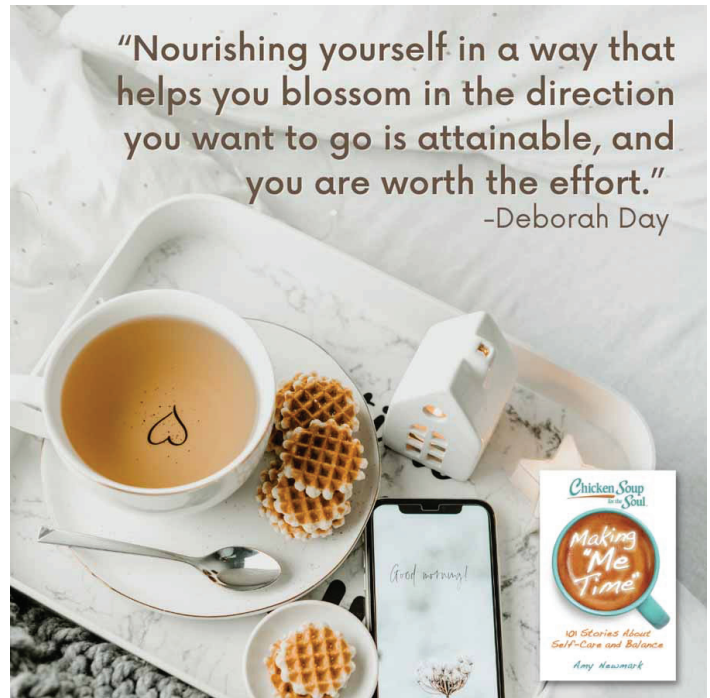
Wednesday, Feb. 22 - Ash Wednesday

About everything is either cancelled or postponed

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.



"Nourishing yourself in a way that helps you blossom in the direction you want to go is attainable, and you are worth the effort."

-Deborah Day

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

Friday, Feb. 24

Senior Menu: Chili, cornbread, coleslaw, pears.

School Breakfast: Cereal.

School Lunch: Fish nuggets, tritaters.

Boys Basketball hosts Aberdeen Christian. (C game at 5 p.m. followed by JV and Varsity.

Saturday, Feb. 25

Region 1A Girls Basketball Tournament at Milbank: Groton Area vs. Waubay-Summit around 2:30 p.m.

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

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

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The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

more about that within the next few days," a plaintiff, said on Facebook.

- Tech entrepreneur and conservative author Vivek Ramaswamy announced his 2024 presidential campaign through a video aimed at opposing social activism, joining Donald Trump and Nikki Haley to compete in the GOP primary race.
- Prince Harry and Meghan Markle are not considering legal action after being mocked by South Park, U.S. royal commentator Kristen Meinzer told Newsweek, calling any such speculation "baseless and boring."
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, China's top diplomat Wang Yi met with Russian officials in Moscow today. An official readout read "peace and stability," but the strategic partners said they "oppose all forms of unilateral bullying." Russian President Vladimir Putin said "very little of actual substance" instead of presenting "new objectives" for Russia's continued offensive during his state of the nation speech yesterday, the Institute for the Study of War said.

- Seattle has become the first U.S. city to ban caste discrimination after the city council voted 6-1 to add caste to its anti-discrimination laws.

- Ilyasah Shabazz, the daughter of civil rights icon Malcolm X, said she intends to sue the FBI, CIA, New York City Police Department, and other agencies for the assassination of her father 58 years ago.

- Three brothers are preparing to roll out their "plan C" to reinstate Donald Trump as president after the Supreme Court once again declined to hear their case. "I will say

Governor Noem Closes State Government Offices for Winter Storm

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Gov. Kristi Noem ordered all state government executive branch offices in certain counties to be closed Wednesday, Feb. 22, because of the winter storms in South Dakota.

State offices are closed in the following counties: Aurora, Beadle, Brookings, Brown, Buffalo, Campbell, Clark, Codington, Davison, Day, Deuel, Douglas, Edmunds, Faulk, Grant, Hamlin, Hand, Hanson, Hutchinson, Hyde, Jerauld, Kingsbury, Lake, Lincoln, Marshall, McCook, McPherson, Miner, Minnehaha, Moody, Potter, Sanborn, Spink, Sully, Turner, Walworth.

While executive branch offices in these counties will be closed, state employees will be working remotely.

Much of the Eastern part of the state is in a blizzard warning from 6am Wednesday until 12pm Thursday. The Western part and the southeasternmost portion of the state will be in a winter storm warning.

Snowfall of between 8-18 inches is expected across the state over the next two days. Winds will pick up overnight and into Wednesday, especially in the eastern part of the state. On Thursday, temperatures are expected to drop to around -20°.

Citizens should be prepared to stay home if possible. Many state highways already have no travel advised, and numerous roads are physically blocked. Portions of I-29 and I-90 will close at 10pm on Tuesday night. If South Dakotans must travel, they should check the sd511.org or the SD511 mobile app.

Interstate Closures Planned for Tuesday, Feb. 21, 2023

PIERRE, S.D. – The combination of accumulating snow and strong winds is causing snow and ice covered roads along with blizzard-like conditions. Conditions are forecasted to continue to deteriorate during the overnight hours and throughout the morning hours on Wednesday.

The following Interstate closures are planned for Tuesday, Feb. 21, 2023:

Interstate 29 (northbound and southbound) will be closed from the North Dakota state line to Brookings at 8 p.m.

Interstate 29 (northbound and southbound) will be closed from Brookings (exit 132) to Sioux Falls (exit 84) at 10 p.m.

Interstate 90 (eastbound and westbound) will be closed from Sioux Falls (exit 395) to Mitchell (exit 332) at 10 p.m.

A blizzard warning has been issued by the National Weather Service for much of the state on Wednesday, Feb. 22, 2023, with heavy accumulating snow totals and sustained high winds expected to cause blizzard-like conditions and extensive drifting. With conditions approaching near zero visibility and significant drifting of snow, SDDOT anticipates additional sections of Interstate 90 and Interstate 29 will be closed on Wednesday morning as the system moves across the state.

Secondary Highways:

No Travel Advisories are also expected to be placed on secondary highways throughout South Dakota due to high winds, blowing snow, and low visibilities associated with this winter storm system.

Motorists should not use secondary highways to avoid Interstate closures. Significantly reduced visibilities and blizzard-like conditions, along with extreme wind chills, will make travel very dangerous over the next few days.

For the latest on road and weather conditions, please visit <https://sd511.org> or dial 511.

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Third attempt to change legal newspaper rules fails in committee

By Dana Hess
For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — For the third time during the current legislative session, legislation designed to change the way legal newspapers are defined in South Dakota has been defeated.

The latest attempt in Tuesday's meeting of the Senate Commerce and Energy Committee was SB178, a hoghoused bill. A hoghouse occurs when a bill's original content is replaced by an entirely new bill.

Earlier in the current session, the Senate Local Government Committee defeated SB80, which would allow free distribution newspapers to qualify as legal newspapers for the purposes of publishing public notices and SB183 which would have lifted the one year publication requirement before a newspaper is allowed to publish public notices.

SB178 was similar to SB80 in that it would allow a free distribution newspaper like the Dakota Scout in Sioux Falls to be eligible to publish public notices.

Much of the discussion in favor of the bill was aimed at criticism of the Sioux Falls Argus Leader, Aberdeen American News and Watertown Public Opinion. The three newspapers are all owned by Gannett, a national chain of newspapers. Gannett's South Dakota publications have sharply cut their staffs and news gathering capabilities.

Speaking in favor of the legislation, Sen. Casey Crabtree, R-Madison, said current laws are "in a way forcing taxpayer dollars to be sent to a business that doesn't exist here in South Dakota."

Crabtree noted that times have changed since the current laws governing legal newspapers were put in place in 1985.

"It's time to get this updated and provide an alternative path for South Dakota-owned newspapers," Crabtree said.

Matt McCaulley, a lobbyist for the Independent Newspaper Association of South Dakota, a new organization, said that with the passage of SB178, much would stay the same for what he referred to as "1985 newspapers" as well as his clients, the "21st century newspapers."

One change SB178 called for was getting both types of newspapers to make an annual report to the Secretary of State's office of all the funds the newspaper received from South Dakota governmental entities.

The committee also heard from Jonathan Ellis and Joe Sneve, former Argus Leader reporters who founded the Dakota Scout, and Troy McQuillen, publisher of Aberdeen Insider, a start-up news website that plans to begin publishing a print edition this spring.

McQuillen said he was drawn to starting the news website when the Aberdeen American News quit employing reporters.

"I was encouraged by local politicians who are very frustrated with the current way our community is covered," McQuillen said. "They do not like providing the legal notices to some outside company."

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Opposing the legislation was Justin Smith, a lobbyist for the South Dakota Newspaper Association. Smith noted it was difficult to prepare for testimony on a bill that was only a few days old and then got amended at the start of the meeting.

"This highlights the disorganization and really the last-minute nature of the bill," Smith said. "This is an issue that is not so easy that we can deal with it in a couple of days."

Calling the way the bill was written a "radical change," Smith said, if the bill became law, a 21st century newspaper could compete for legal notices from any city or school board in the state.

Backers of SB178 characterize the bill as the last, best hope of a dying industry, Smith said. SDNA's member newspapers "know that they either innovate and respond to customer preferences or they fail," Smith said. "Our members' businesses are thriving as a result."

It would be easy, according to Smith, for the new businesses to meet the long-standing requirements necessary to become legal newspapers. The new businesses prefer to change the rules legislatively, Smith said, "not because they cannot meet those requirements but because they do not want to meet those requirements."

The current law, which requires a Periodicals class mailing permit from the U.S. Postal Service and allows for postal service audits, protects not only newspapers, but also governments, according to David Bordewyk, executive director of SDNA.

"The laws assure government entities that the public notices, such as school board minutes, are reaching the intended audience in a bonafide way," Bordewyk said.

Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, R-Watertown, made a do pass motion. A critic of the current state of the Watertown newspaper, Schoenbeck explained that he has always been a supporter of keeping public notices in newspapers.

"The reason I've supported it is because of the importance of a newspaper to be a check on the government and the roles that they play in building communities," Schoenbeck said. "I view it as a flat out subsidy that I think it's important that we do because the press is so critical to a functioning government."

Before a vote could be taken on Schoenbeck's motion, it was substituted by a motion from Sen. Steve Kolbeck, R-Brandon, to move the bill to the 41st day of the session, a tactic for disposing of legislation. Kolbeck noted that two bills that would change the rules governing legal newspapers had already been defeated handily during the session.

The committee endorsed Kolbeck's motion on a vote of 5-4, killing the bill.

Groton Area has two foreign exchange students

by Dorene Nelson

Nicolas Fernandez, a foreign exchange student also from Madrid, Spain, is staying with the Matt and Nicole Jacobson family near Ferney while he attends school in Groton.

"I am a sophomore this year, taking U.S. History, Algebra I, art, English, biology, and horticulture," Nicolas listed. "I decided to come here as a sophomore so that I'd have two years of high school left when I returned back home."

"School is harder in Spain, and I thought it would be better for me to have two years left instead of trying to get all of the hard courses taken and passed in one school year," he explained.

"Here in Groton I was a kicker for the football team and also plan to try running track," Nicolas said. "I play soccer at home but couldn't here since there was no boys soccer team this year."

"In Madrid I ride a public bus to school, not a school bus like those used here in Groton," he stated. "I do live close enough to walk, but it is farther than I'd like so I usually ride the bus."

"I decided to be an exchange student here in Groton because my older sister was a student here in Groton four years ago," Nicolas said. "She also stayed with the Jacobsons and really liked them and the school so I thought I'd take her advice and come here too."

"Both of my older siblings are in college. My brother is studying business while my sister is studying to become a pharmacist," he listed. "Our parents own two restaurants in Madrid, but I don't help out there after school since I need to be sixteen to work there."

"I like being here in this area because the people are very nice and friendly," Nicolas smiled. "I enjoy school in Groton and have more fun here than back home. Besides it is easier here than trying to handle eleven different subjects with very, very hard tests!"

"In Spain sport activities are not connected to the school," he explained. "I play soccer, tennis, and surf all year, but my parents have to pay for each of the activities I participate in."

"Speaking English is not a problem for me since I was taught in school to read and speak in English," Nicolas stated. "I started learning how to speak and read English when I was five years old."

"After I return home, I'll have two years of high school left before I go to college," he said, "but I have no idea at this time what I might study."



Nicolas Fernandez

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

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
Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc.
S & S Lumber & Hardware Hank
Weber Landscaping
Weismantel Insurance Agency



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

GDI Subscribers can watch for free

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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.

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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 ADVANCE 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 interested on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. Action items will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)

- Minutes
- Bills
- January Finance Report
- Second Reading of Ordinance No. 73-23 Amending Fees for Groton Municipal Electric Customers
- Second Reading of Ordinance No. 73-23 Groton Senior Salary Ordinance
- Skating Rink Hours
- Soda Contract Discussion
- Swimming Pool Rates
- Baseball Concessions, Groton WCF Grant
- Community Center Surplus
- Economic Development
- Executive session pursuant to SDCL 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>

House advances mandatory minimums for drunken driving

Amended bill supports DUI courts, offers parole

BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 21, 2023 6:37 PM

The state House of Representatives passed a bill to impose mandatory minimum sentences on anyone who gets four or more driving under the influence convictions.

The passage of House Bill 1170 comes shortly after Senate passage of a proposal to limit parole for the most violent offenders.

HB 1170 comes from Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, who lost his grandmother to a drunken driver who had nine DUI convictions.

In its original incarnation, four DUIs would have resulted in a year in prison for those with four DUIs, three years in prison for fifth offenses and five years for those with six or more.

The original bill also barred repeat DUI offenders from parole eligibility.

The bill that passed 58-12 Tuesday afternoon was amended to earn the support of lawmakers who voted against the version that passed 8-5 out of a House committee. The bill's next stop is a Senate committee.

The amended bill allows judges to suspend sentences through participation in one of the state's DUI courts. It bumps up the minimum penalties to two years for a fourth offense, four for fifth offenses and six for sixth and subsequent DUIs, but requires the final year of each sentence to be served on parole.

Karr told the House that the change was meant to reflect the importance of supervision to public safety. "Part of that amendment came through suggestions from the Department of Corrections regarding that parole piece," Karr said. "I heard from a lot of folks in law enforcement, as well as corrections, on how important the parole process is."

House Majority Whip Mike Stevens, R-Yankton, was among those who voted against HB 1170 in committee but switched his vote Tuesday. Stevens said he understands the importance of the issue, in part because his father was an alcoholic. He changed his mind when Karr agreed to encourage the use of DUI courts.

"What's really important about that is that they have shown over the years that their rehabilitation is really at a high level," Stevens said. "There may be other institutions out there that have a high success rate, but I do know for the DUI court, recidivism rate is only 20%."

Republican Rep. David Kull, a former police chief from Brandon, also voted against the bill in commit-



Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, on the House floor during the 2023 legislative session at the Capitol in Pierre. (Makenzie

Huber, South Dakota Searchlight)

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tee. Like Stevens, he switched his vote because of the amendments. Kull said the change is about accountability for those who fail to heed the lessons of their first few convictions.

"When we start talking about people that are in that fourth, fifth and sixth category, we're talking about people that have had numerous, numerous opportunities to get this figured out," Kull said.

Opponents included Rep. Tim Reisch, R-Miller, who served as DOC secretary for more than a decade, including a stint as interim secretary in 2021 and 2022.

Reisch argued that the cost would be too high, noting that "we are bursting at the seams in our women's prison." Lawmakers are being asked to fund a new \$60 million women's prison this session, and to fund a new penitentiary at several times the cost in the years ahead.

"If we start passing criminal justice laws based on unique individual cases that had a horrible outcome, we'd better start piling up a fortune for prisons because that's the road we'll be on," Reisch said.

Correctional data suggests that the swiftness and certainty of a sanction are more important than its severity, Reisch argued. He did offer that the bill "is in much better shape" because of the amendments.

Karr countered that the bill was borne not only of his own personal story, but from the stories of others and the collection of data on lax sentences.

"It's not just about one instance, we've heard several stories over the years," Karr said.

Rep. Kady Wittman, D-Sioux Falls, asked Karr what the cost might be, asking for figures from a prison-jail population cost estimate. The original bill would have cost more than \$9 million over 10 years for the DOC, but Karr did not ask for an update with the amendment. Gov. Kristi Noem recently signed a bill repealing cost estimate requirements for public safety bills.

Wittman said she planned to vote against the bill regardless of the cost, because it still imposes mandatory minimum sentences.

"I've seen that negatively impact people, especially individuals that are struggling with substance use disorder in our state," Wittman said.

Just before the successful vote, Karr told the House that his bill was meant to force a "societal shift" in thinking about drunken driving.

"We need to stop thinking about DUIs like they're harmless," he said.



Rep. Kady Wittman, D-Sioux Falls, on the House floor during the 2023 legislative session at the Capitol in Pierre. (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

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.

Senate rejects Noem's bill to vet ag-land purchases by foreigners

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 21, 2023 5:44 PM

PIERRE – The state Senate rejected a bill Tuesday that Gov. Kristi Noem had proposed as a way to protect South Dakota's agricultural land from purchases by hostile foreigners.

The vote was 23-11, and it wasn't the only legislative rebuke of the day for Noem. Earlier Tuesday, a House committee rejected her bill to repeal the state sales tax on food.

The ag land bill would have established a seven-member board responsible for reviewing applications from foreigners and foreign entities seeking to purchase land in the state. The board would have made recommendations to the governor.

Noem and other Republicans have said they want to protect South Dakota ag land from coming under the ownership of countries like China. They also fear hostile foreign governments could obtain land near sensitive areas like Ellsworth Air Force Base in Rapid City.

"Make no mistake, this is a national security issue," said Sen. Jessica Castleberry, R-Rapid City.

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

The bill could have a chilling effect on foreign investment in the state, which would be detrimental to South Dakota's banking and agricultural industries, according to Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, R-Watertown.

The bill would have required foreigners to apply to the committee before buying ag land. That language was an amendment to the bill, to take the vetting onus off county registers of deeds.

That language means "this bill is also a self-reporting system," Schoenbeck said. "There's nobody going around, checking every deed, investigating if the law has been complied with."

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

After the Senate vote, Sen. Erin Tobin, R-Winner, announced her intent to try to have the bill reconsidered. She has until Wednesday to convince a majority of the Senate to cancel the original vote and consider the bill again.

Related bill passes

The Senate passed a bill that would prohibit the state from doing business with companies in countries considered hostile to the United States.

The bill, which is similar to an executive order recently issued by Noem, would bar the state from buying products from businesses based in, or with ties to, China, Russia, Iran, Venezuela and North Korea.

Supporters of the bill argued it's necessary to protect South Dakota's economy and ensure the state is not helping to fund enemies of the nation.

"A lot of what it does is codify what the governor did earlier," said Sen. Jim Stalzer, R-Sioux Falls.

The bill now heads to the House of Representatives.



Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, R-Watertown, on the Senate floor during the 2023 legislative session at the Capitol in Pierre. (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

Disaster declarations for tribes land as two-part storm looms Rosebud president says his reservation has bolstered snow removal plans since December

BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 21, 2023 4:02 PM

President Joe Biden declared major disasters for two tribal communities in South Dakota on Tuesday for a pair of deadly December storms.

News of the declarations for the Rosebud and Oglala Sioux tribes arrived as snowflakes began to fall in the first of two more winter storms expected to blanket the state. This week's storms are expected to bring nearly as much snow as the storms that pummeled the Midwest before Christmas.

Each presidential declaration is a pathway to reimbursement for 48 hours' worth of snow removal costs "during or immediate to the incident period." The time period for potential reimbursement is Dec. 12-25, 2022.

Rosebud Sioux Tribal President Scott Herman said tribal officials are set to meet with representatives from the Federal Emergency Management Agency this week to run through their costs during the Dec. 12-16 storm events and decide which 48 hours to claim.

"Hopefully we'll get reimbursed for a lot of those expenses that we used during that 48 hours," Herman said.

The tribe cleared 65% of the roadways after the first round of that event, Herman said, but continued to move snow for weeks after the second round.

On the Rosebud reservation, at least six people perished after the one-two punch of heavy snow in mid-December. Some tribal leaders said the response from the state was slow; state officials said emergency managers had collaborated and offered aid throughout the events and released a timeline of their actions in response.

In December, Herman expressed frustration with the situation, but also gratitude for state assistance. Since then, he said, Rosebud has worked to bolster its snow removal capacity, leasing two loaders and shuffling funds to purchase three more. The tribe also has additional snowblowers, snowmobiles and a "snow tracker" with treads for use in rescue operations in unplowed areas.

Wayne Boyd, chief of staff to the president of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, looks at a map showing cleared and uncleared roads on Dec. 27, 2022, after winter storms. (Joshua Haiar/SD Searchlight)

Wayne Boyd, chief of staff to the president of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, looks at a map showing cleared and uncleared roads on Dec. 27, 2022, after winter storms. (Joshua Haiar/SD Searchlight)

"We've got a lot more equipment than we had for the last storm. I think we're prepared well enough this time to get through this storm," Herman said.

The tribe has also hired an emergency management director to supplement the work of its emergency preparedness program, which covers a wide range of issues on the reservation. The idea is to put additional emphasis on natural disasters through the new position, Herman said.

The newest storm projections have put emergency managers across the state to work. The Department of Public Safety (DPS) has been in touch with tribal leaders and other stakeholders, according to spokesman Tony Mangan.

The department began sharing safety messages and emergency preparedness tips on social media on Feb. 17, four days before the first part of the storm was set to begin, and has offered multiple updates



An apartment complex on the Rosebud Reservation has drifts of snow blocking the doors and windows on Dec. 27, 2022. (Joshua Haiar/SD Searchlight)

each day since. On Tuesday morning, Randy Hartman with the Office of Emergency Management outlined the must-haves for a vehicle emergency kit.

Other messages encouraged citizens to watch for road closures, and to take them seriously when they happen.

The state issued 147 tickets to people who flouted closures during the last storm event, Secretary Craig Price told lawmakers last month. State troopers and others with the DPS also conducted dozens of rescue operations.

The latest estimates from the National Weather Service suggest that this week's storm will drop 8-12 inches of snow on most areas of the state between two weather systems Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday evening into Thursday morning, with parts of central and northeastern South Dakota receiving 12-18 inches. Some areas of the state saw nearly twice as much during the December storms.

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.

Democratic governors in 20 states form reproductive rights alliance

Coalition commits to expanding access as other states introduce more restrictions

BY: KELCIE MOSELEY-MORRIS - FEBRUARY 21, 2023 7:16 PM

Democratic governors from 20 states across the U.S., led by California Gov. Gavin Newsom, have formed a Reproductive Freedom Alliance to safeguard and improve abortion and reproductive health care access "in the face of an unprecedented assault by states hostile to abortion rights," according to a joint statement.

The announcement represents another divide in the country's ongoing debate in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's June decision to effectively overturn *Roe v. Wade* and a constitutional right to abortion care. Eighteen states have either completely banned abortion or restricted it to patients who are between six and 20 weeks pregnant, while the procedure remains legal in 26 states. Six states are trying to institute bans that are blocked or under consideration by courts.



The Reproductive Freedom Alliance comprises Democratic governors from 20 states that aim to protect abortion and reproductive health care access. (Photo by Brendan Hoffman/

Getty Images)

Several of the states that signed on to the alliance — including Illinois, Oregon and New Mexico — border states with abortion bans, and Wisconsin's governor, Tony Evers, joined the coalition despite the fact that his state has a ban in place based on an 1849 law with no exceptions for rape or incest. Evers has filed a

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lawsuit challenging the 174-year-old statute.

"Every Wisconsinite should have the right to make their own reproductive health care decisions without interference from politicians," Evers said in the news release. "That's a right I'll never stop fighting for as long as I'm governor — not just because it's the right thing to do, but because it's the will of the people. Reproductive health care is health care, and I'm proud to join my fellow governors in continuing the fight to restore Roe and reproductive rights for every person in Wisconsin and across the country."

California governor calls alliance a 'firewall' for reproductive rights

Much of the funding for the alliance will be provided by the California Wellness Foundation, with additional support from the Rosenberg Foundation, a California-based philanthropic organization. That funding will be used for logistical purposes to support collaboration between the offices and coordinate actions such as executive or administrative orders, health and human services-related directives, budgetary requests and reproductive-related legislation.

The alliance will also serve as a resource for governors and their staff members to share best practices for their own constituents and those who live in states with bans or restrictions, according to reporting from the Associated Press.

"California has long been a leader in reproductive rights, but we can't do it alone. We have gathered a coalition of bipartisan governors to commit to reproductive freedom, and a coalition this size — 20 and counting — has never been done before," Newsom said in the news release. "This alliance is a moral obligation to what is right and will stand as a firewall to fight for and protect providers, patients, and all who are affected by these attacks on fundamental rights."

The alliance so far includes:

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis
Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont
Delaware Gov. John Carney
Hawaii Gov. Josh Green
Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker
Maine Gov. Janet Mills
Maryland Gov. Wes Moore
Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey
Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer
Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz
New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy
New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham
New York Gov. Kathy Hochul
North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper
Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek
Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro
Rhode Island Gov. Daniel McKee
Washington Gov. Jay Inslee
Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers

Planned Parenthood Northwest reacts

Rebecca Gibron, CEO of Planned Parenthood Great Northwest, Hawaii, Indiana and Kentucky told States Newsroom in a statement that the coalition represents a step forward that the organization is glad to see.

"For far too long, our politicians were afraid to even talk about abortion — a safe and normal procedure that happens in our country every day. The creation of the Reproductive Freedom Alliance is a step in the right direction," Gibron said. "In the face of coordinated attacks on our reproductive freedoms, this work is more crucial than ever. We have to do everything in our power to protect abortion care because frankly, we're already seeing the devastating impacts that bans can have."

The coalition is nonpartisan, according to Newsom's news release, and the alliance welcomes other

governors to join.

"Defending reproductive freedom is a racial justice issue," said Tim Silard, president of the Rosenberg Foundation. "The foundation is committed to reimagining policies and systems to win fundamental rights, protections, and opportunities for Black, brown and immigrant communities. We are proud to join with Gov. Newsom and our colleagues in philanthropy in the fight to protect reproductive rights and access in California and across the country."

Kelcie Moseley-Morris is an award-winning journalist who has covered many topics across Idaho since 2011. She has a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Idaho and a master's degree in public administration from Boise State University. Moseley-Morris started her journalism career at the Moscow-Pullman Daily News, followed by the Lewiston Tribune and the Idaho Press.

Biden administration proposes major new limits on asylum at the border

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - FEBRUARY 21, 2023 7:03 PM

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration is rolling out a proposed rule that for two years would bar migrants from applying for asylum at the Southern border if they have not first asked for protection in a country they traveled through.

The administration is seeking to limit asylum requests at the U.S.-Mexico border as a pandemic-era immigration measure is set to end this summer. But the policy change brought immediate criticism from immigration advocates and Democrats in Congress.

The proposal, which will officially publish in the Federal Register on Thursday, is reminiscent of Trump-era immigration policies, critics said.

In its proposal, the Department of Homeland Security said a high number of migrants at the Southern border "would put an enormous strain on already strained resources; risk overcrowding in already crowded U.S. Border Patrol ("USBP") stations and border ports of entry in ways that pose significant health and safety concerns; and create a situation in which large numbers of migrants — only a small proportion of whom are likely to be granted asylum — are subject to extreme exploitation by the networks that support their movements north."

For a migrant to claim asylum in the U.S., they would first have to schedule an appointment at a U.S. port of entry and apply for a legal pathway in the country they travelled through.

The rule would apply to single adults and families seeking asylum, but there would be an exception for children and teens who are unaccompanied.

There are also exceptions for asylum seekers who are facing an imminent threat to their lives or have a medical emergency.



Immigrants wait overnight next to the U.S.-Mexico border fence to seek asylum in the United States on Jan. 7, 2023, as viewed from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. (Photo by John Moore/Getty Images)

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However, those asylum seekers who “do not establish a reasonable fear of persecution or torture in the country of removal will be promptly removed,” according to a DHS fact sheet.

And those asylum seekers who are ordered removed would be subjected to a five-year ban from requesting asylum and would be ineligible to apply for other parole programs available to those nationals from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

“We are strengthening the availability of legal, orderly pathways for migrants to come to the United States, at the same time proposing new consequences on those who fail to use processes made available to them by the United States and its regional partners,” U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro N. Mayorkas said in a statement.

‘Deeply disappointed’

Immigration advocates and Democrats pushed back on the announcement, and asked the Biden administration to reconsider the proposed rule.

“We are deeply disappointed in the Biden administration’s proposal to limit access to asylum,” House Judiciary Committee ranking member Jerrold Nadler of New York and Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement Subcommittee ranking member Pramila Jayapal of Washington said in a joint statement.

“We should not be restricting legal pathways to enter the United States, we should be expanding them,” they said.

Nadler and Jayapal argued that asylum law is protected by federal law, and that this new proposal violates that protection.

The chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Democrat Bob Menendez of New Jersey, called the proposed rule a transit ban.

Menendez, along with Democratic Sens. Cory Booker of New Jersey, Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico and Alex Padilla of California, issued a joint statement, that said the Biden administration’s proposed rule “only perpetuates the harmful myth that asylum seekers are a threat to this nation.”

“We have an obligation to protect vulnerable migrants under domestic and international law and should not leave vulnerable migrants stranded in countries unable to protect them,” they said. “We urge President Biden and Secretary Mayorkas to reverse course and pave a better path forward that protects the right to asylum while addressing the real operational challenges at our Southern Border.”

Immigration advocates made similar remarks.

“It is deeply disappointing to see the Biden administration recycle immigration policies from the Trump administration that inflict harm on those seeking safety,” said Efrén C. Olivares, deputy legal director for immigrant justice at the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The Trump-era policy barred migrants from claiming asylum in the U.S. if they lived or traveled through other countries before coming to the U.S. The policy was struck down by federal courts.

Public comment on the new Biden administration proposed rule will be open for 30 days after it is published in the Federal Register. The administration said the proposal is in “anticipation of a potential surge of migration at the southwest border,” once Title 42 ends on May 11.

Title 42 is a public health policy that allows the U.S. to expel any noncitizen during a health crisis, such as the coronavirus pandemic.

Since the Trump administration enacted the policy in March 2020, more than 2 million asylum seekers have been expelled under Title 42. The Biden administration is moving to end the public health emergency on May 11, which will also end the policy.

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

Military records for Iowa, Nebraska congressmen incorrectly released by Air Force

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - FEBRUARY 21, 2023 6:32 PM



U.S. Rep. Don Bacon, R-Nebraska, outside the U.S. Capitol on May 19, 2021, in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Air Force unintentionally released military personnel records of at least two members of Congress — Republican Reps. Don Bacon of Nebraska and Zach Nunn of Iowa — eliciting frustration and concerns for veterans' privacy.

"The recent targeting of Members of Congress's personnel military records, the breach of sensitive data, and the duplicitous forgery taken by political hacks isn't only a violation of public trust — it's criminal," Nunn said in a written statement.

"As a country, we should be supporting veterans who want to continue their service instead of harassing and intimidating them," Nunn added. "I strongly support bipartisan efforts being undertaken by the House Armed Services Committee to protect our service members and hold criminal actors accountable."

An Air Force spokesperson said in a written statement that an internal audit of records released between October 2021 and October 2022 showed "unauthorized release of military duty information on 11 individuals."

The Air Force declined to share information about the 11 people.

Air Force employees didn't follow procedures that required getting a signature to release this type of information, though the spokesperson said there "was no evidence of political mo-

tivation or malicious intent on the part of any employee."

The Air Force spokesperson said that "virtually all unauthorized disclosures were in response to a third-party seeking service records for employment or benefit purposes through a process commonly used by other federal agencies to conduct employee background checks."

A letter from Air Force Major General Troy E. Dunn to Bacon about his military personnel record release says that Abraham Payton, a background investigation analyst with Due Diligence Group, LLC, requested the congressman's records from the Air Force Personnel Center Military Records Branch in November 2021.

"He inappropriately requested copies of your military personnel records for the stated purpose of employment and benefits," Dunn wrote. "Although, Mr. Payton was already in possession of your social security number at the time of his request, the records branch still released your Personal Identifiable Information on November 12, 2021 without your authorization, which is protected under Privacy Act of 1974."

Dunn wrote in the letter to Bacon that the Air Force immediately changed its procedures to require a higher level review and additional security checks to avoid records being incorrectly released in the future.

Bacon was in the Air Force from 1985 through 2014, according to his official congressional biography.

Bacon specialized in electronic warfare, intelligence and reconnaissance. His military decorations include the Air Force Distinguished Service Medal, two Bronze Stars, two Legion of Merits, five Meritorious Service Medals, and the Aerial Achievement Medal, according to his congressional website.

Nunn's campaign website says he was a combat aviator who deployed three times to the Middle East and is currently a lieutenant colonel in the Iowa Air National Guard. His official congressional biography lists the United States Air Force and Iowa Air National Guard, though it doesn't list years of service.

Public access to information

The Freedom of Information Act says the public can access some information in military personnel records without approval from the veteran or their next-of kin. That information includes name, service number, dates of service, branch of service, final duty status and final rank.

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It can also include salary, assignments and geographic locations, source of commission, military education level, awards and decorations, photograph, transcript of courts-martial trials and place of entrance and separation, according to the National Archives.

Bacon said in a written statement that "knowing that this third party paid by the Dem Campaign Congressional Committee was able to obtain my social security number and fraudulently use it to obtain my military records is concerning not only for myself and the other ten affected, but to every single veteran."

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee made at least 35 payments totaling more than \$100,000 to Due Diligence Group during the last two years, according to Federal Election Commission records compiled by Open Secrets. The payments are categorized as "GENERIC CMTE RESEARCH MATERIALS" or "GENERIC STRATEGIC/POLITICAL CONSULTANT."

Due Diligence Group LLC writes on its website that it specializes "in using public records research to provide our clients with the knowledge and insights needed to drive strategic decision making." Due Diligence Group LLC did not respond to a request for comment.

The Due Diligence Group's website was lacking additional information Tuesday, after Politico first reported on the military records release.

An archived version of its website from January 2021 lists Payton as a partner and says he "found his passion for transparency and ethics issues" after meeting a colleague at VR Research, an opposition research firm, in 2009.

Payton then trained to be "an adept due diligence researcher through various projects on behalf of political and commercial clientele over the next two years," according to the archived website.

"Abraham joined a democratic SuperPAC in 2011, serving as Due Diligence Director," the archived website says. "He produced over 100 opposition research books and managed over 4,000 public record requests."

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

USDA aims to boost independent meat packers with \$59 million in grants

\$3.3 million goes to South Dakota company for New Underwood facility

BY: ADAM GOLDSTEIN - FEBRUARY 21, 2023 6:23 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Agriculture beefed up its efforts to encourage competition in domestic meat and poultry supply chains on Tuesday, awarding close to \$59 million in federal grants to independent processors from Idaho, Virginia, South Carolina, South Dakota and Maryland.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the funding awards during a trip to Shenandoah Valley Organic LLC's facility in Harrisonburg, Virginia, alongside Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia and Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Jewel Bronaugh. The department selected the organic poultry processing facility, also known as Farmer Focus, to receive a roughly \$3.6 million grant.

The federal money will help fund a \$17.8 million expansion project, growing poultry processing capacity by close to 300,000 chickens per year and bringing 300 new jobs to northern Virginia, according to the USDA's program description.

The USDA funds will be administered through the Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program, which aims to "encourage competition and sustainable growth in the U.S. meat processing sector, and to help improve supply chain resiliency," according to the USDA Office of Rural Development.

"For too long, American farmers and ranchers have been asked to produce more to meet increasing demand across the country and around the world, while they and the rural communities they come from have struggled to see their fair share of the benefits," Vilsack said in a Tuesday statement.

"Through investments like those I'm announcing today, USDA will continue to work tirelessly to give farmers and ranchers a fair chance to compete in the marketplace, which in turn helps lower food costs for the American people."

The four largest meatpacking companies control 85% of the beef market, and roughly 55% of the poultry market, according to a White House-led economic analysis. Among these producers are Tyson Foods, JBS USA, Cargill, Inc., and National Beef Packing Company.

Other grants to independent processors announced Tuesday include:

A \$25 million grant for Idaho beef processor Riverbend Meats LLC, which will "offset the cost" of a new environmentally-friendly processing facility that will double daily processing capacity from 300 to 600 cattle.

A roughly \$25 million grant for poultry meat packer Prestage Farms of South Carolina, LLC, which will help equip a new facility to process 8 million turkeys per year.

A \$3.3 million dollar grant to CNF Enterprises in South Dakota, which will go to building a facility in New Underwood, South Dakota, that will process 4,000 head of livestock annually.

A roughly \$2 million grant for Holly Poultry, LLC in Maryland, to fund equipment purchases that will in-



Butchers at Old Fashion Country Butcher process meat as they work to meet increased demand due to COVID-19 related shortages on May 21, 2020, in Santa Paula, California. (Photo by Brent Stirton/Getty Images)

crease annual processing capacity by 2 million pounds of poultry by 2025.

Tuesday's announcement marks the third allocation of federal funds to small and independent meat processors through the meat and poultry expansion program.

Rural Development spent \$12 million in three meat processing projects last month, and sent \$75 million to 22 meat processing projects in November 2022.

The USDA's meat and poultry program is funded through the American Rescue Plan, the \$1.9 trillion COVID 19-relief law Democrats passed in the early days of President Joe Biden's term, and administered by Rural Development. The USDA received \$4 billion in the law to spend on bolstering food access and supply chains.

In early January, Biden and Vilsack spoke on a webinar about increasing competition in the meatpacking industry. The president noted that 50 years ago, cattle ranchers made 60 or more cents for every dollar that consumers spent on their products, and hog farmers made 40 to 60 cents on every consumer dollar spent.

Today, beef ranchers make 39 cents and hog ranchers make 19 cents on every consumer dollar spent on their meat, Biden said.

"Four big corporations control more than half the markets in beef, pork, and poultry," Biden said in the January appearance. "These companies can use their position as middlemen to overcharge grocery stores and, ultimately, families.

"We're going to fight for fair prices for American farmers, ranchers, and families — all three."

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

Committee rejects Noem-backed grocery tax cut bill, moves forward with general tax cut

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 21, 2023 1:00 PM

Gov. Kristi Noem's re-election campaign promise to eliminate the state sales tax on groceries died Tuesday morning in the House Committee on Appropriations, but the committee approved a bill to reduce state sales taxes across the board.

The projected \$102 million grocery tax repeal was rejected by an 8-1 vote. The committee also rejected a \$73 million tax cut on property taxes for South Dakota homeowners.

The only tax cut bill to make it through the committee was HB 1137, introduced by Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, which was amended to cut the overall

state sales and use tax rate from 4.5% to 4.2%, resulting in a projected \$104 million tax reduction. In its original form, the bill would have cut the state tax rate to 4%.



Gov. Kristi Noem testifies in support of a bill that would eliminate the state sales tax on groceries in front of the House Committee on Appropriations on Feb. 21, 2023, at the Capitol in Pierre.

(Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

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The appropriators' move to support HB 1137 and abandon the other two tax cut bills is in line with the House Republican Caucus' decision.

Rep. Mary Fitzgerald, R-Spearfish and prime sponsor of Noem's bill, failed to gather enough support to revive the bill on the House floor Tuesday afternoon.

Noem herself attended the committee hearing at the Capitol in Pierre to speak in support of her bill and urge legislators to defy the caucus vote.

"I understand you may have taken a caucus position. I'd tell you it's wrong," Noem said.

Noem presented a poll to legislators saying that 75% of South Dakotans support the grocery tax cut, and a majority support the grocery tax cut over the other two major tax cut bills when informed of the pros and cons of each.

The governor emphasized that her bill would primarily help South Dakota residents who buy groceries in the state year-round rather than tourists, who would share more of the benefit from an across-the-board sales tax reduction. She added that her tax cut would do more to help all residents – including senior citizens, renters and the people "who make this state run" – than the other two tax cuts would do.

She also committed to "hold harmless" South Dakota's tribal nations that have sales tax agreements with the state by renegotiating their contracts. The Bureau of Finance and Management told legislators earlier in the session that the tribal nations would lose \$2 million if the state eliminated the state sales tax on food.

Noem cautioned legislators that a proposed ballot question for the 2024 general election that would eliminate the food sales tax will likely pass based on her polling, which could leave lawmakers scrambling for revenue if it comes on the heels of an across-the-board sales tax cut. A similar initiative failed at the ballot box in 2004, when over two-thirds of South Dakota voters opposed cutting the sales tax on food.

"If you pick a different tax cut to do this year, you'll be back here in two years to figure out how to do another \$102 million tax cut," Noem said.

Rep. Karr's bill, HB 1137, would cut a portion of 2016's half-percent tax rate hike, which was implemented to support raising teacher salaries in the state. Despite that legislation, South Dakota currently ranks 50th in average teacher pay. Karr told legislators the tax cut would not negatively affect education.

"We are not going to take these dollars from anyone besides the taxpayers," Karr said.

Karr said there was a plan in place when the half-percent tax was implemented to reduce the sales tax incrementally as the state saw more remote, online sales. But that has not happened since the increase was implemented.

Karr told legislators that he believes the general sales and use tax cut is the "most appropriate tax cut to implement." He also provided legislators with a "sanity check" about whether the state could afford the tax cut, pointing to an average 4.3% growth in sales tax when outlier years, such as the COVID pandemic years, were removed from the equation.

"This growth and expected growth is not all due to the federal stimulus dollars," Karr said. "There is anticipated, foreseeable growth going forward so we can take care of our obligations."

Some state legislators are hesitant to make tax cuts, expecting consumer spending to drop eventually. Senate Majority Whip Helene Duhamel, R-Rapid City, told reporters during last week's Republican leadership press conference there is "growing sentiment" among the chamber's Republican caucus in favor of strategic investments before enacting a tax cut.

"There are people in the conservative position saying, 'Let's take care of our house, and if we're still in that position in a few years, then we can take a look at that then,'" Duhamel said.

Jim Terwilliger with the governor's Bureau of Finance and Management told legislators that Karr's tax cut is less transparent and "less measurable to the taxpayer" than Noem's. Terwilliger said that on a \$100 grocery bill, a consumer would only see a 30-cent savings from Karr's bill.

"It doesn't seem like it's really moving the needle to help those that need it the most," Terwilliger said.

Karr said he does not know how much money each South Dakota resident would save based on the bill.

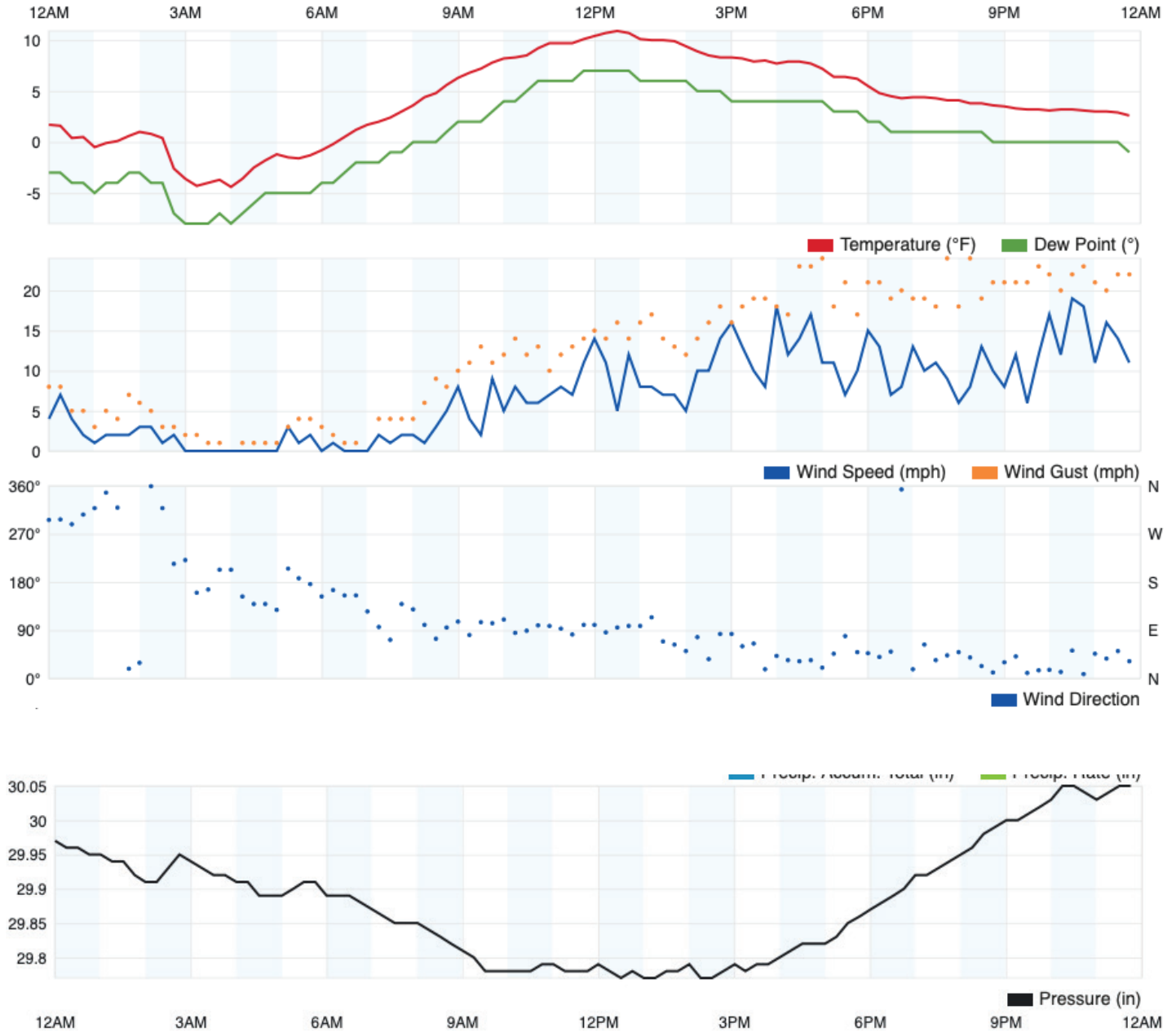
The House is scheduled to debate the general sales and use tax cut bill on the floor Wednesday afternoon.

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.

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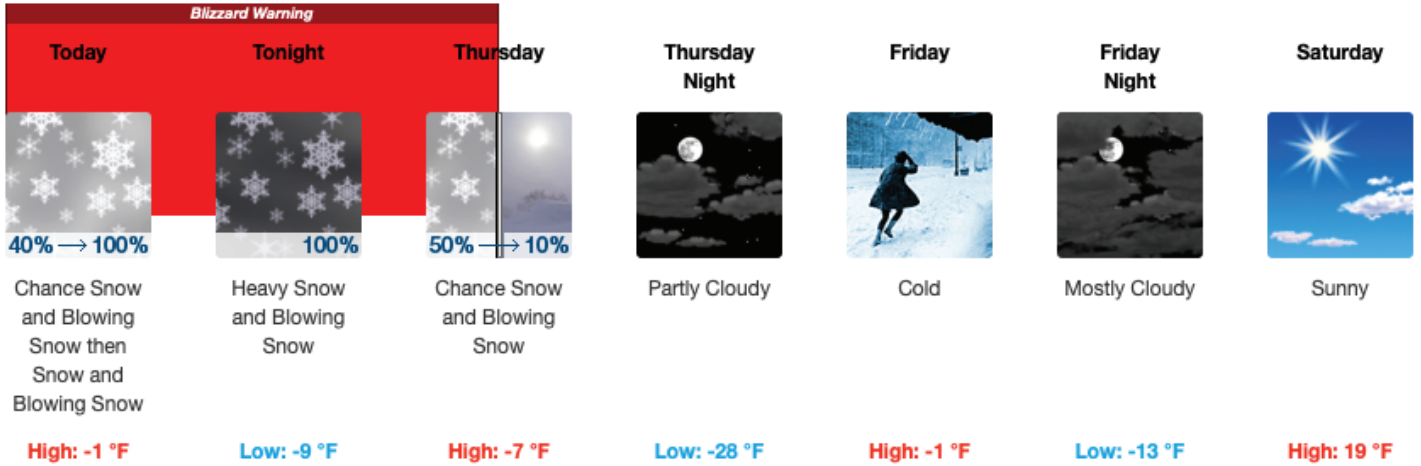
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Snow & Blizzard Conditions Through Mid-Day Thursday February 22, 2023 4:34 AM

Key Messages

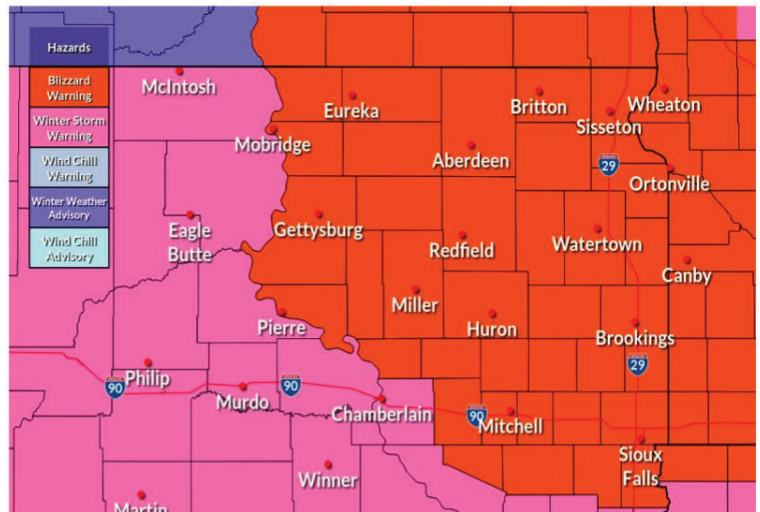
- Snow spreading across the forecast area today
- Winds strengthening - topping out near 40 to 50 mph this afternoon and tonight
- Blizzard conditions east of the Missouri River through Thursday AM
- Arctic cold air & dangerous wind chills through Friday AM



Important Updates

- Winter Storm/Blizzard warnings in effect

Headlines



Next Scheduled Briefing

- Wednesday afternoon



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Overview of blizzard to near blizzard conditions. Snow and winds will be on a steady increase through the day. Travel should be significantly impacted this afternoon and overnight.

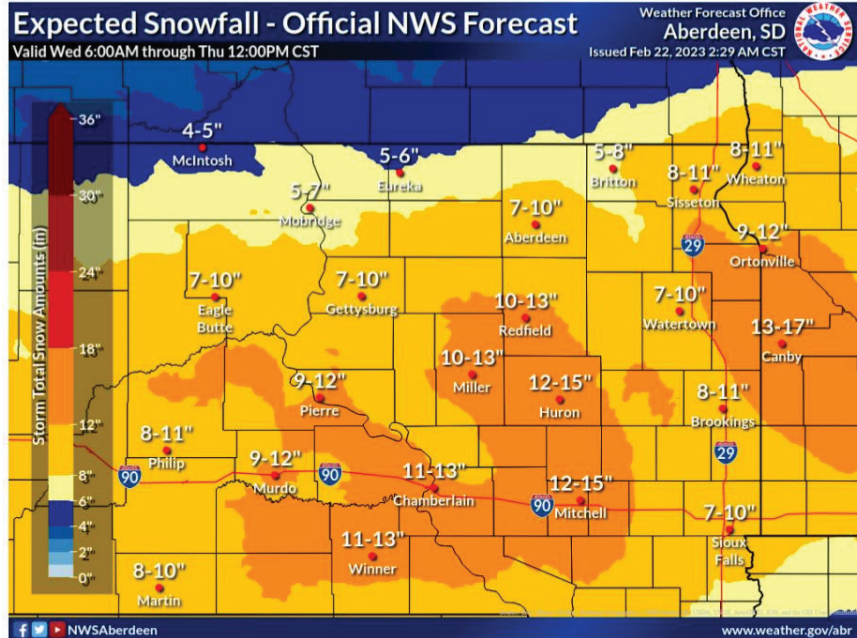
Broton Daily Independent

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Snowfall - Wednesday morning Through midday Thursday

Combination of heavy snow, strong winds, icy roads & blowing snow will potentially make travel impossible through Thursday.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Snowfall totals for this system could top a foot in eastern South Dakota by Thursday morning. Snow and blowing snow, and wind chills 20 below and colder will make for extremely hazardous travel

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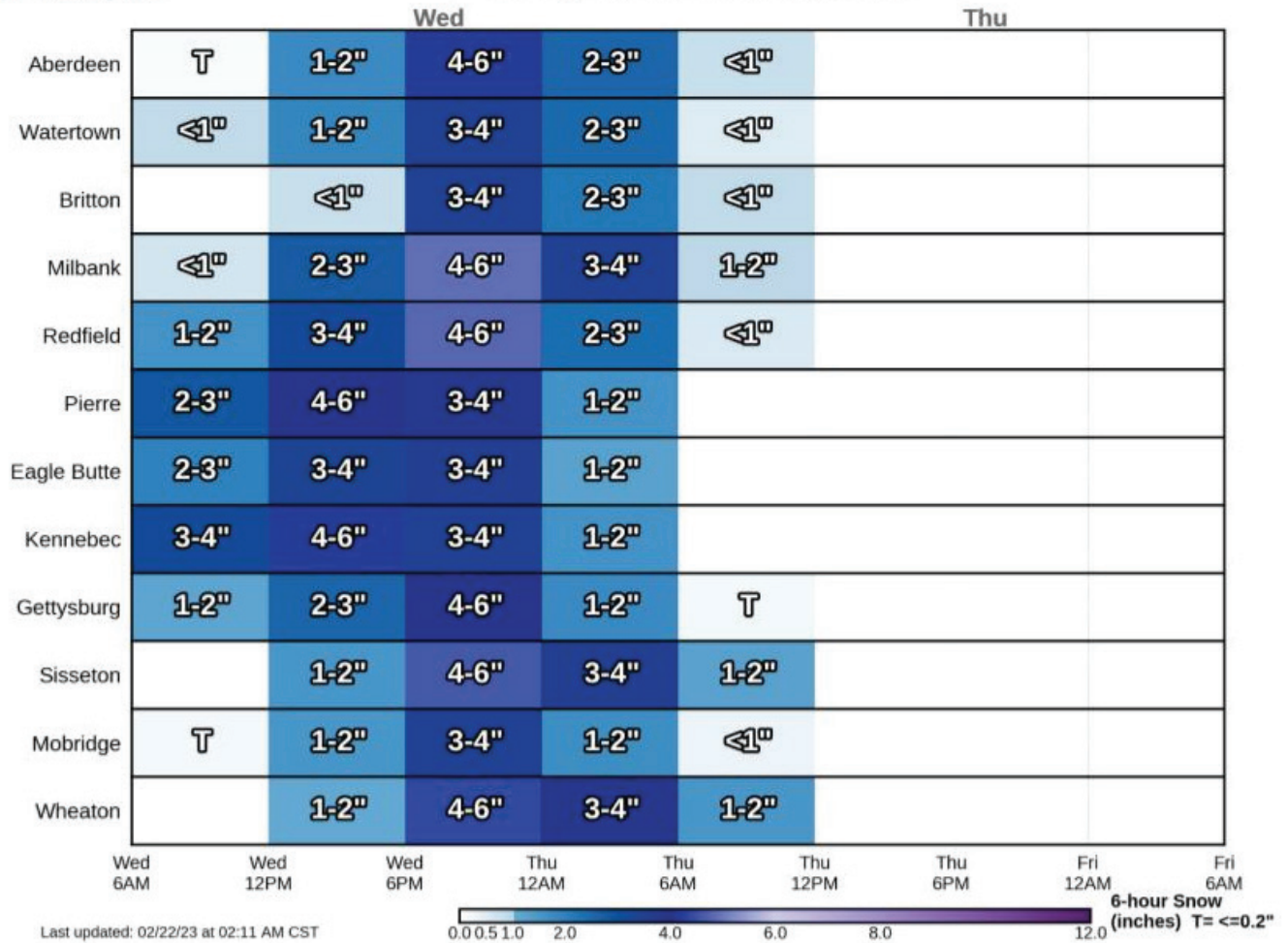
Snow Accumulation & Timing

February 22, 2023
4:56 AM



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD
weather.gov/abr

2-Day 6-hour Snow Forecast



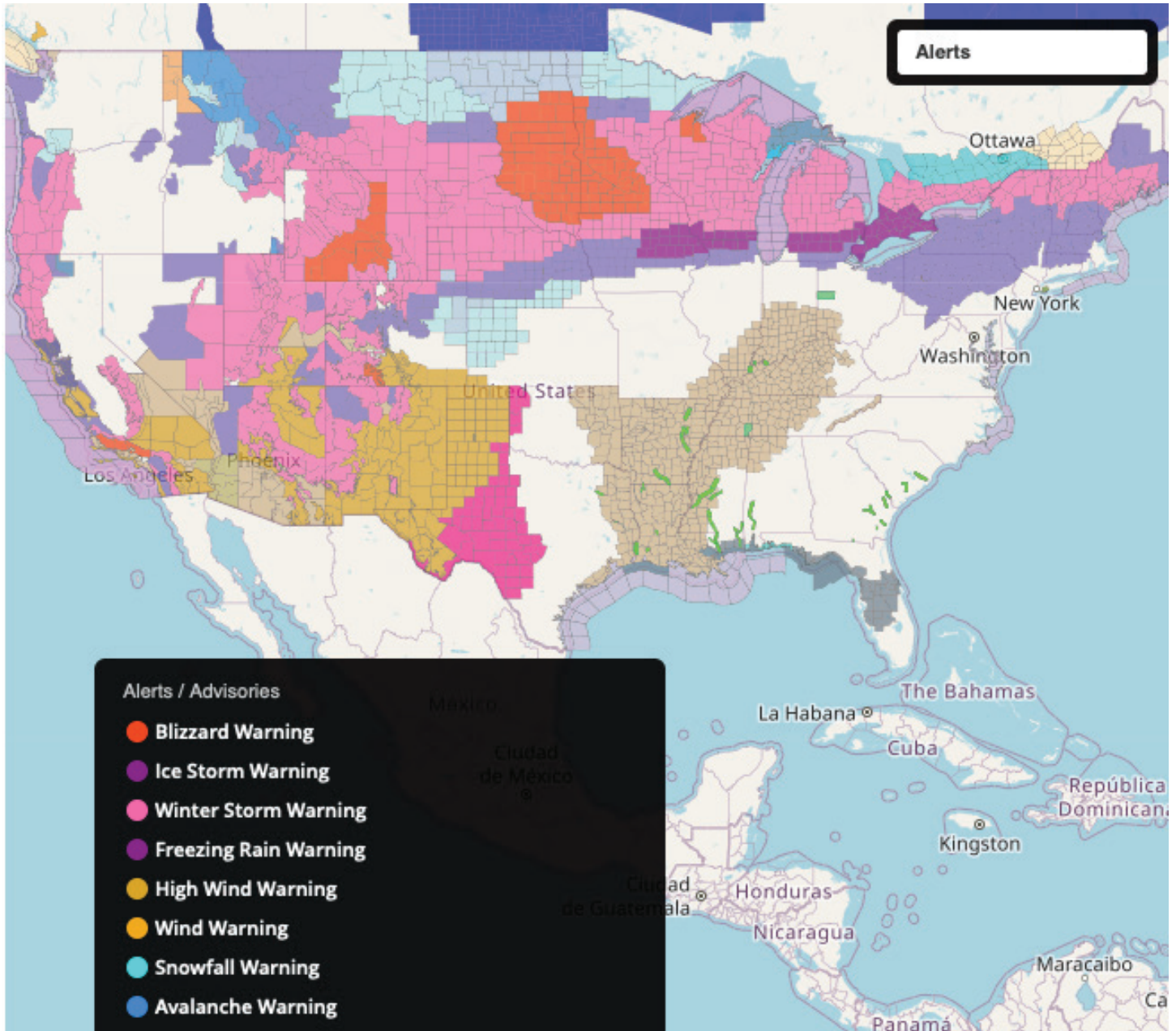
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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Monster of a storm to hit much of the United States



Blizzard Warning

URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE
National Weather Service Aberdeen SD
609 AM CST Wed Feb 22 2023

SDZ006-007-011-018>020-022-222015-
Brown-Marshall-Day-Spink-Clark-Codington-Hamlin-
Including the cities of Aberdeen, Britton, Webster, Redfield, Clark, Watertown, and Hayti
609 AM CST Wed Feb 22 2023

...BLIZZARD WARNING REMAINS IN EFFECT UNTIL NOON CST THURSDAY...
...WINTER WEATHER ADVISORY HAS EXPIRED...

* WHAT...Blizzard conditions. Additional snow accumulations of 7 to 13 inches. Winds gusting as high as 45 mph.

* WHERE...Portions of northeast South Dakota.

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

* 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 dangerously cold wind chills as low as 35 below zero could cause frostbite on exposed skin in as little as 10 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.

The latest road conditions can be obtained by calling 5 1 1.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 11 °F at 12:28 PM

Low Temp: -4 °F at 3:57 AM

Wind: 25 mph at 11:49 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 49 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 60 in 2021

Record Low: -24 in 1918

Average High: 31

Average Low: 9

Average Precip in Feb.: 0.47

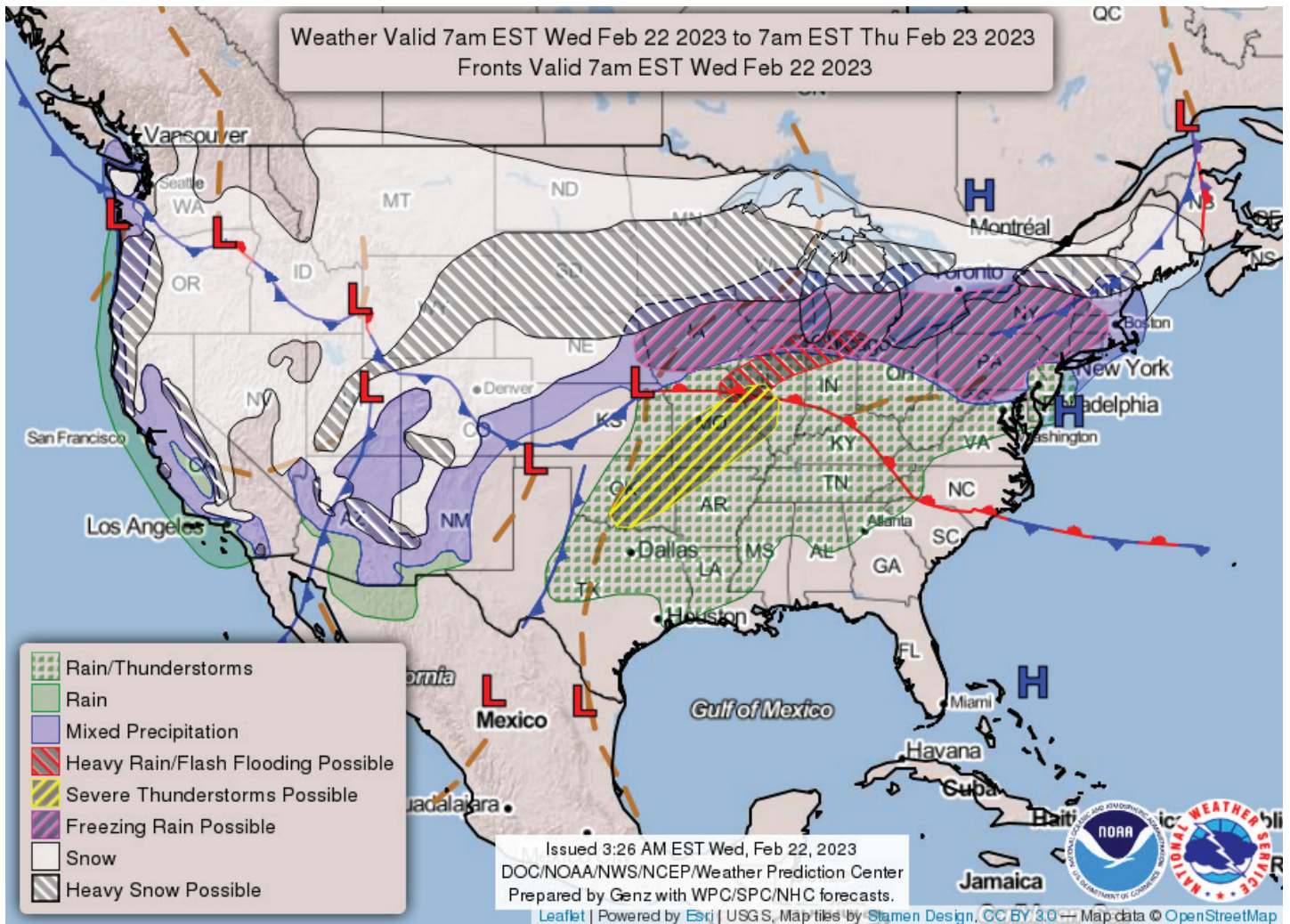
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.02

Precip Year to Date: 0.25

Sunset Tonight: 5:10:41 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:19:19 AM



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Today in Weather History

February 22, 1914: Heavy snow fell across parts of central and north-central South Dakota with 6 to 12 inches of accumulations. Snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Timber Lake and Onida, 7 inches at Kennebec, and 12 inches at Murdo.

February 22, 2000: High temperatures across central and northeast South Dakota were in the 50s and 60s. Record highs occurred at Watertown, Pierre, and Kennebec. Watertown rose to 65 degrees, Pierre rose to 69 degrees, and Kennebec warmed to 71 degrees late in the afternoon. Other high temperatures include; 55 degrees at Sisseton, 59 degrees at Aberdeen, and 64 degrees at Timber Lake.

1773: According to David Ludlum, "The memorable Cold Sabbath in New England history" took place on February 22, 1773. "Many persons froze extremities while going to church."

1936 - Although heat and dust prevailed in the spring and summer, early 1936 brought record cold to parts of the U.S. Sioux Center IA reported 42 inches of snow on the ground, a state record. (20th-22nd) (The Weather Channel)

1971: One of the worst snowstorms in Oklahoma history dumped up to 3 feet of snow on northwest Oklahoma from February 20nd to February 22. By the time the snow ended on the 22nd, the city of Buffalo had 36 inches of snow on the ground, setting the state record for storm-total snowfall. Winds of 30 to 50 mph caused snowdrifts up to 20 feet high. Follett, Texas, picked up 26 inches while Amarillo recorded 14 inches.

1986 - A twelve siege of heavy rain and snow, which produced widespread flooding and mudslides across northern and central California, finally came to an end. The storm caused more than 400 million dollars property damage. Bucks Lake, located in the Sierra Nevada Range, received 49.6 inches of rain during the twelve day period. (Storm Data)

1987 - A storm moving northeastward out of the Gulf of Mexico began to spread heavy snow across the Middle Atlantic Coast Region. Thunderstorms in northern Florida produced wind gusts to 65 mph in Alachua County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Dry weather prevailed across the nation, with windy conditions from the Central Rockies to northern New England. Winds gusted to 58 mph at Cleveland OH, and reached 63 mph at Erie PA. Winds in the Central Rockies gusted to 120 mph at Mines Peak CO and Rendezvous Peak WY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Strong northwesterly winds ushering cold arctic air into the north central U.S. produced snow squalls in the Great Lakes Region, with heavy snow near Lake Michigan. Totals in northwest Indiana ranged up to 24 inches at Gary, and up to 16 inches buried northeastern Illinois. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing along and ahead of a cold front produced severe weather from southern Mississippi to North Carolina. One thunderstorm spawned a tornado just prior to dawn which touched down near Opp AL injuring ten persons and causing half a million dollars damage. Thunderstorm winds injured four persons south of Troy AL, and five people at Columbus GA. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 76 mph at Dothan AL. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1998: Seven tornadoes struck east-central Florida late on this day and early on the 23rd. Three of the tornadoes were rated F3 on the Fujita scale. Twenty-four people were killed in Kissimmee alone. A total of 42 people were killed, 265 injured, and the total damage was \$106 million.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

Have you ever caught "lightning bugs" and placed them in a jar with vents in the lid so they could breathe? It was a favorite activity for children in our neighborhood when I was a child. We would "capture" them and then place them in a glass jar where their tiny bright "lights" would glow in the darkness of the night. After watching them go "on and off" for a while, we would "free" them, and they would fly off into the darkness fulfilling God's purpose for them.

Had they remained in the jar, they would have eventually died. God, however, intended for them to be free and happy and live the life He planned for them.

It's like that with us. God planned a unique life for everyone: a life of happiness and peace. But happiness can only come if we are free. Some think that happiness and pleasure are synonymous. They are not. Happiness is not derived from possessions nor destroyed by poverty. There is a story of a king who wanted the shirt "off the back" of the happiest man in his kingdom. When they found the man, he did not have a shirt - he only had a ragged cloak.

Happiness is not what happens to us - it is what happens within us. It is the by-product of what occurs in us if we live in agreement with the will of God. Life in His will brings us freedom from being "contaminated" by the things of the world. Happiness fills lives that are "regulated" by the Word of God. Following His Word and His way will bring pleasure and peace.

Psalm 1:1 promises "a blessed - or - a happy life" to those who delight in and obey His law. His law will set us free from being contained and controlled by worldly things that fade.

Prayer: Father, may we set our eyes on things that are permanent and not passing. May we discover the joy and peace and satisfaction that only comes from You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. Psalm 1:1



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

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2023 Community Events

- 01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 01/31/2023-02/03/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Drop Off 6-9pm, Community Center
- 02/04/2023-02/05/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Sale 1-5pm, Community Center
- 02/25/2023 Littles and Me, Art Making 10-11:30am, Wage Memorial Library
- 03/25/2023 Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center
- 04/01/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
- 04/01/2023 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
- 04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
- 05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
- 06/16/2023 SDSU Alumni and Friends Golf Tournament
- 07/04/2023 Couples Firecracker Golf Tournament
- 07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/26/2023 GGA Burger Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 08/04/2023 Wine on Nine 6pm
- 08/11/2023 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
- 09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/10/2023 Couples Sunflower Golf Tournament
- 10/14/2023 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
- 10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
- 12/02/2023 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
- 12/09/2023 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9-11am

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.21.23

2 15 30 36 63 24

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$126,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 8
DRAW: Mins 30 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 15 Hrs 8 Mins 30
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.21.23

19 22 35 41 48 7

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 14 Hrs 38 Mins 29
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.18.23

1 2 18 27 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$60,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 8 Mins 29
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.20.23

2 13 26 51 55 23

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 7 Mins 29
DRAW: 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 15 Hrs 7 Mins 29
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 66, Burke 37

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 56, Huron 50

Sioux Falls Washington 54, Yankton 30

Class A Region 5=

Wagner 61, Kimball/White Lake 22

Class B Region 2=

Wolsey-Wessington 61, Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 26

Class B Region 4=

Viborg-Hurley 84, Freeman Academy/Marion 14

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class A Region 3=

Sioux Falls Christian 62, Baltic 26

Tri-Valley 57, McCook Central/Montrose 40

Class A Region 4=

Canton 60, Beresford 43

Lennox 62, Dakota Valley 48

Tea Area 56, Elk Point-Jefferson 36

Vermillion 73, Parker 27

Class A Region 5=

Hanson 62, Platte-Geddes 30

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 64, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 17

Parkston 61, Bon Homme 30

Class A Region 7=

Lakota Tech 89, Pine Ridge 30

Red Cloud 80, Bennett County 23

Todd County 59, Little Wound 44

Winner 73, St. Francis Indian 34

Class B Region 2=

Arlington 83, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 38

Castlewood 64, DeSmet 39

James Valley Christian 45, Deubrook 42

Class B Region 3=

Dell Rapids St. Mary 69, Bridgewater-Emery 44

Ethan 66, Mitchell Christian 12

Class B Region 4=

Centerville 66, Menno 32

Freeman 62, Alcester-Hudson 36

Scotland 47, Irene-Wakonda 43

Class B Region 5=

Corsica/Stickney 42, Avon 30

Gregory 68, Marty Indian 33

Wessington Springs 49, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 25

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

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Aberdeen Central vs. Sioux Falls Roosevelt, ppd.
Brandon Valley vs. Mitchell, ppd.
Elkton-Lake Benton vs. Sioux Valley, ppd.
Faith vs. Bison, ppd.
Harding County vs. Wakpala, ppd.
Sturgis Brown vs. Douglas, ppd.
Sully Buttes vs. Ipswich, ppd.

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=
Centerville 56, Sioux Falls Lutheran 32
Lyman 71, Colome 55
Sioux Falls O’Gorman 87, Huron 71
Sioux Falls Washington 46, Yankton 41
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Brandon Valley vs. Mitchell, ppd.
Sturgis Brown vs. Douglas, ppd.
Wakpala vs. McLaughlin, ppd.

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

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined
Yankton Press & Dakotan. February 20, 2023.
Editorial: Why Are We Messing With Absentee Voting?

Democracy is not a spectator sport; it invites (and needs) participation from everyone, and the rules on voting have generally evolved to accommodate the lifestyles and preferences of those voters.

Recently and in many places, we’ve seen efforts to move the process of voting away from what works for the voters and toward the desires and designs (whatever they are) of others. There are efforts to restrict voting, to limit participation and to generally make the process more difficult, all in the name of “safeguarding” that function.

For instance, a bill in South Dakota that made headway last week — House Bill 1217 — would reduce the window for absentee voting in the state from the current 46 days to just 30 days. It was approved by the House Local Government Committee and now moves on to the full House.

According to KELO, the bill was introduced as a means of “cleaning up” the election process in the state. “Absentee voting has become too easy,” said Rep. Scott Odenbach (R-Spearfish). “We now have an election month or election quarter.”

So, by all means, let’s make this process harder for the voters.

While Odenbach claims the current system is proving to be a growing burden on county auditors, three county auditors testified last week against the measure.

Lyman County Auditor Deb Halverson said that while early voting does create more work for auditors, it has also been quite popular with the electorate.

“No-excuse absentee voting has been a help to registered voters across the state, and I would hate to see that go away,” she said.

Also, Erik Nelson of AARP South Dakota told lawmakers, “HB 1217 will reduce voter participation in our state. There is no evidence that the 46-day window has led to any problems with absentee voting in our state.”

And yet, lawmakers advanced the measure by a 7-5 vote.

Many of these recent “election integrity” efforts have sprung from the 2020 presidential election and Donald Trump’s debunked claims of voter fraud. This has led several states to introduce new reforms that

are said to protect that integrity.

But this is a double-edged sword, for these measures also infer that there are problems with election integrity in South Dakota, for instance, even though no such problems have been reported. That can undermine the process as well as undercut the work currently being done by auditors to run the election smoothly.

"The tone that was set after the 2020 election really put a damper on all election officials across the country," Halverson told KELO. "I would say that was done unfairly. It has made election integrity go out the window, without enough proof or basis to make it worth it."

The state's auditors have done a good job in running the elections, and the secretary of state's office has also done well in making this process more efficient with upgraded databases and polling centers.

For the voters, the increased convenience of the process has proven popular. We would hate to see South Dakota shift gears on this front based on dubious claims and self-serving political interests.

Parts of northern US shut down ahead of winter storm

By TRISHA AHMED and JIM SALTER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — States in the northern plains are largely shutting down ahead of a massive winter storm that could dump up to 2 feet of snow in some areas, accompanied by strong winds and dangerously cold temperatures.

Many schools throughout the Dakotas, Minnesota and Wisconsin were called off for Wednesday, ahead of the storm. Offices closed, and so did the Minnesota Legislature, which won't reconvene until Monday. Emergency management leaders warned people to stay off the roads or face potential "whiteout" conditions due to the snow and fierce winds.

The storm will make its way toward the East Coast later in the week. Places that don't get snow may get dangerous amounts of ice. Forecasters expect up to a half-inch of ice in some areas of southern Michigan, northern Illinois and some eastern states.

The snowfall could be historic, even in a region accustomed to heavy snow. As much as 25 inches may pile up, with the heaviest amounts falling across east-central Minnesota and west-central Wisconsin, the National Weather Service said. Wind gusts could reach 50 mph and wind chills are expected to hit minus 50 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 46 degrees Celsius) in some parts of the Dakotas and Minnesota.

The Minneapolis-St. Paul area could see 2 feet (61 centimeters) of snow or more for the first time in over 30 years.

Some families scrambled Tuesday to get shopping done before the weather closed in. At a Costco in the Minneapolis suburb of St. Louis Park, Molly Schirmer stocked up on heat-and-serve dinners and Mexican Coca-Colas, knowing that she and her two teenagers might get stuck at home.

"The schools are already preparing to go online, so the kids will probably be home doing online school," Schirmer said of her 13- and 15-year-olds.

At another Costco in suburban Eagan, Larry and Sue Lick bought toilet paper, kitchen essentials and coffee ahead of the storm. They also rescheduled medical appointments and a family gathering, just to stay off the roads.

"It's not so much our driving, but you've got to worry about everybody else driving, with so many accidents caused by people that don't know the winter driving," said Larry Lick, 77.

The weather service said the blizzard will actually involve two rounds. For the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, the first blast arrives Wednesday afternoon with up to 7 inches of snow. Round 2 starting later Wednesday and extending into Thursday is the real whopper, "with an additional 10 to 20 inches expected."

Weather service meteorologist Frank Pereira said the system was expected to affect about 43 million Americans.

Temperatures could plunge to minus 15 to minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 26 to minus 29 degrees Celsius) Thursday and to minus 25 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 32 degrees Celsius) Friday in Grand Forks, North Dakota. Wind chills may fall to minus 50 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 46 degrees Celsius), said Nathan

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Rick, a meteorologist in Grand Forks.

Wind gusts of 35 mph will be common in western and central Minnesota, with some reaching 50 mph. That will result in "significant blowing and drifting snow with whiteout conditions in open areas," the weather service said.

According to the weather service, the biggest snow event on record in the Twin Cities was 28.4 inches from Oct. 31 through Nov. 3, 1991 — known as the Halloween Blizzard. The second-largest was 21.1 inches of snow from Nov. 29 through Dec. 1, 1985. The Twin Cities got 20 inches of snow on Jan. 22 and Jan. 23, 1982.

Hardware store owners said residents were generally taking the forecast in stride.

At C&S Supply, an employee-owned hardware store in Mankato, manager Corey Kapaun said demand was high for salt and grit, but not for shovels, snow blowers or other equipment. He attributed that to the fact that winter is two-thirds over.

Kapaun said he's sold 130 to 140 snow blowers and around 1,000 shovels this winter, when Mankato has seen more than 3 feet of snow.

"I think people are either prepared or they're not," Kapaun said. "It's usually the first snowfall of the year that gets a lot of attention. With a storm like this, I expected a little bit more, but we've already had a big year of snow already."

In Sioux Falls, Dallas VandenBos has owned Robson True Value hardware store for 48 years. His customers are used to the snow, but don't necessarily trust the forecast.

"When we had that storm the first part of January, they told us we were probably going to get 3 or 4 inches of snow, and we got 18 inches," VandenBos said.

Sales of snow-related items haven't really picked up, but VandenBos has a backlog of snow blowers to repair. Those bringing them in Tuesday were out of luck — they won't be ready for a week.

"They're not going to get them in time for this snow," VandenBos said.

Forecasters at AccuWeather said the same storm system could result in icing across a 1,300-mile (2,092-kilometer) band from near Omaha, Nebraska, to New Hampshire on Wednesday and Thursday, creating potential travel hazards in or near cities such as Milwaukee, Detroit, Chicago and Boston.

As the northern U.S. deals with a winter blast, record warmth is expected in the mid-Atlantic and Southeast — 30 degrees to 40 degrees above normal in some places. Record highs are expected from Baltimore to New Orleans and in much of Florida, Pereira said.

Washington, D.C., could hit 80 degrees on Thursday, which would top the record of 78 degrees set in 1874.

California was also preparing for the latest in a series of winter storms as winds that began blowing Tuesday brought the potential for rain, snow and hail for much of the state. A "major snow event" was possible in foothills and mountains near Los Angeles, with several inches predicted even for elevations as low as 1,000 feet, the National Weather Service said.

"Nearly the entire population of CA will be able to see snow from some vantage point later this week if they look in the right direction (i.e., toward the highest hills in vicinity)," UCLA climate scientist Daniel Swain wrote on Twitter.

Daytime temperatures in Southern California were unlikely to get out of the low to mid-50s and potentially damaging winds reaching 50 mph were predicted along the central coast, with gusts of 70 mph possible in mountains.

Upper Midwest braces for blizzard, nearly 2 feet of snow

By TRISHA AHMED and JIM SALTER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A monster winter storm took aim at the Upper Midwest on Tuesday, threatening to bring blizzard conditions, bitterly cold temperatures and 2 feet of snow in a three-day onslaught that could affect more than 40 million Americans.

The storm began around midday and was to continue through Thursday morning in parts of the Dakotas, Nebraska, Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin, with winds gusting as high as 50 mph (80 kph) and wind chills

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tumbling as low as minus 50 degrees (minus 46 Celsius) in some places.

The snowfall could be historic, even in a region accustomed to heavy snow. As much as 25 inches may pile up, with the heaviest amounts falling across east-central Minnesota and west-central Wisconsin, the National Weather Service said.

The Minneapolis-St. Paul area could see 2 feet of snow or more for the first since in over 30 years.

Some families scrambled to get shopping done before the weather closed in. At a Costco in the Minneapolis suburb of St. Louis Park, Molly Schirmer stocked up on heat-and-serve dinners and Mexican Coca-Colas, knowing that she and her two teenagers might get stuck at home.

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Weather service meteorologist Frank Pereira said the system was expected to affect about 43 million Americans.

Forecasters warned of life-threatening conditions.

Temperatures could plunge to minus 15 to minus 20 degrees on Thursday (minus 26 to minus 29 Celsius) and minus 25 degrees (minus 32 Celsius) Friday in Grand Forks, North Dakota, meteorologist Nathan Rick said. Wind chills of 50 degrees below zero were possible.

Wind gusts of 35 mph (56 kph) will be common in western and central Minnesota, with some blowing even stronger. That will result in "significant blowing and drifting snow with whiteout conditions in open areas," the weather service said.

According to the weather service, the biggest snow event on record in the Twin Cities was 28.4 inches from Oct. 31 through Nov. 3, 1991 — known as the Halloween Blizzard. The second-largest was 21.1 inches of snow from Nov. 29 through Dec. 1, 1985. The Twin Cities got 20 inches of snow on Jan. 22 and Jan. 23, 1982.

Hours before the snow was to start, the storm was already having an impact. Minnesota state lawmakers canceled all committee hearings scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday as well as the Thursday floor sessions. Since they don't normally meet on Friday, legislators won't reconvene until Monday.

Hardware store owners said customers were generally taking the forecast in stride.

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Portions of northern Illinois, southern Michigan and southern New York state could get up to half an inch of ice, which could topple power lines and cause outages, AccuWeather said.

In California, significant snow was possible in the foothills and mountains near Los Angeles, with several inches predicted even for elevations as low as 1,000 feet, the weather service said.

Nearly the state's entire population "will be able to see snow from some vantage point later this week if they look in the right direction," UCLA climate scientist Daniel Swain wrote on Twitter.

Potentially damaging 50 mph (80 kph) winds were predicted along the central coast, and gusts of 70 mph (113 kph) were possible in the mountains.

As the northern U.S. deals with a winter blast, record warmth was expected later in the week in the mid-Atlantic and Southeast — 30 degrees to 40 degrees above normal in some places. Record highs were likely from Baltimore to New Orleans and in much of Florida, Pereira said.

Washington, D.C., could hit 80 degrees on Thursday, which would top the record of 78 degrees set in 1874.

Noem: Lawmakers "wrong" to reject repeal of grocery tax

By AMANCAI BIRABEN Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers rejected a proposed repeal of the state's grocery tax on Tuesday — despite Republican Gov. Kristi Noem's testimony in support of the measure.

Noem's testimony before the House Appropriations Committee was an unusual move for the leader who has rarely appeared in public this session. She had opposed the \$102 million tax cut in the final days of the 2022 legislative session, but she changed course months later to make it a centerpiece of her reelection campaign. Since her win, she has been trying to do right by her campaign, culminating in Tuesday's final shot at swaying lawmakers in her favor.

"The narrative is going to be that the legislators in this capitol think they know better than the people in this state, and I would disagree. We have to always keep our perspective on the people here that keep this state running, and it's certainly not policymakers who run around during session for 40 days," Noem told reporters.

During her testimony, she said the taxes would have helped people across different socioeconomic statuses and it was a good time to implement the long-suggested tax cut, while the state has a surplus.

Lawmakers have discussed various tax relief proposals since the beginning of the session, agreeing that between cuts to taxes on groceries, general sales and property, only one plan is feasible. The Republican caucus voted over the weekend for the general sales tax cut, favoring its general scope of relief.

Republican House Majority Leader Will Mortenson said that after deep scrutiny on each of the proposals, his fellow representatives agreed that a single exemption to groceries was too narrow of an issue to tackle in a tax cut.

"The caucus decided that they would prefer to keep a broad sales tax base and cut the rates," Mortenson said. "We wanted to cut taxes on food and fireworks and fencing supplies and everything."

Noem hopes people in the state feel that rate drop should it pass further, but she was disappointed at losing the opportunity to remove South Dakota from the list of seven states that continue to tax groceries. The loss adds to other legislation she campaigned on that lawmakers have halted, like state investments into family welfare.

She added that grocery tax discussions would continue in future legislative sessions.

"What has always been refreshing about the state of South Dakota is that we have those hard policy debates, and we make the best decisions," Noem said. "Today they did not make the best decision. They made the easy decision, and it was the wrong one."

US to limit asylum to migrants who pass through a 3rd nation

By REBECCA SANTANA and ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration said Tuesday that it will generally deny asylum to migrants who show up at the U.S. southern border without first seeking protection in a country they passed through, mirroring an attempt by the Trump administration that never took effect because it was blocked in court.

The measure, while stopping short of a total ban, imposes severe limitations on asylum for any nationality except Mexicans, who don't have to travel through a third country to reach the U.S.

The measure is almost certain to face legal challenges. President Donald Trump pursued a similar ban in 2019 but a federal appeals court prevented it from taking effect.

The Biden administration rule proposed Tuesday has to first go through a 30-day public comment period before it can be formally adopted. If adopted it would remain in place for two years.

Administration officials expect the rule will take effect when a pandemic-era rule that denies asylum on grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19 ends. That rule, known as Title 42 authority, is set to expire May 11 but has been delayed twice by legal challenges from Republican-led states.

The Homeland Security and Justice Departments argued that surging numbers of migrants left them little choice. They anticipate illegal crossings to climb to between 11,000 and 13,000 a day if no action is taken after Title 42 ends; that's even higher than the 8,600 daily crossings in mid-December as anticipation spread among migrants and smugglers that Title 42 was about to end. At the last minute the Supreme Court kept it in place.

The proposed rule establishes "a rebuttable presumption of asylum ineligibility" for anyone who passes through another country to reach the U.S. border with Mexico without first seeking protection there, according to a notice in the Federal Register. Exceptions will be made for people with an "acute medical emergency," "imminent and extreme threat" of violent crimes such as murder, rape or kidnapping, being a victim of human trafficking or "other extremely compelling circumstances." Children traveling alone will also be exempted, according to the rule.

The rule largely calls on prospective migrants to follow legal pathways to apply for asylum such as using the CBP One app, through which prospective migrants can schedule an appointment to apply to appear at a border entry point to apply for asylum. The administration portrayed these efforts as a way to protect migrants from the dangerous journeys as they travel north to the U.S. and allow the U.S. border entry points to manage the migrant flows in a "safe and efficient manner." But critics have said the app has been beset by technical problems and its not clear how many appointments are available every day.

U.S. officials insist the measure proposed Tuesday is different from Trump's, largely because there is room for exemptions and because the Biden administration has made other legal pathways available, particularly humanitarian parole for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, Venezuelans and Ukrainians.

"We are a nation of immigrants, and we are a nation of laws. We are strengthening the availability of legal, orderly pathways for migrants to come to the United States, at the same time proposing new consequences on those who fail to use processes made available to them by the United States and its regional partners," said Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

The rule was first mentioned in early January as part of a wider announcement by the administration to let in 30,000 migrants a month from four countries — Haiti, Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua — provided they apply to come to the U.S. and don't just arrive at the border. In the ensuing weeks, the administration said migrant encounters from those countries plummeted, and they've hailed it as a model for dealing with immigration.

But immigration advocates have criticized attempts to limit asylum applications at the southern border, saying some migrants can't wait in their home country and noting that other countries don't have the same asylum protections as the U.S.

Four Democratic senators — Bob Menendez and Cory Booker of New Jersey, Ben Ray Lujan of New Mexico and Alex Padilla of California — said they were "deeply disappointed" the administration was moving forward with the rule and urged it to reconsider.

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"We have an obligation to protect vulnerable migrants under domestic and international law and should not leave vulnerable migrants stranded in countries unable to protect them," the senators' statement read.

Anu Joshi of the American Civil Liberties Union, which litigated many of the challenges to Trump's immigration restrictions, sharply criticized the rule, saying it was simply revisiting Trump's asylum ban.

The new rule comes as President Joe Biden is facing a Republican-controlled House determined to make immigration a key issue as they attempt to portray the southern border as out of control.

For asylum seekers traveling north through Central America and Mexico to the U.S. border, Costa Rica and Mexico have the most robust asylum systems. Both countries, however, have been overwhelmed by the surging number of asylum applications in recent years.

Costa Rica, a country of only 5 million residents, trailed only the United States, Germany and Mexico in the number of asylum applications it received in 2021. In December, President Rodrigo Chaves decreed changes to the asylum system, alleging that it was being abused by economic migrants.

Most of those seeking asylum in Costa Rica in recent years are Nicaraguans fleeing repression in that country. In 2012, Costa Rica received barely 900 asylum applications. Last year, the total was around 80,000.

That has created a tremendous backlog and lengthened the process, something that led more Nicaraguans to look north to the United States last year.

Mexico has been facing increased asylum applications for years and last year received 118,478, mostly from Honduras, Cuba, Haiti and Venezuela. Many migrants had used the asylum system to legally cross Mexico while in process and then to try to enter the U.S.

Other countries along the migrant route north have very limited capacity for receiving asylum seekers.

CNN's Don Lemon tweets another apology, returns to work

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — CNN anchor Don Lemon tweeted an apology to viewers for his remarks about Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley shortly before returning to work on Wednesday, then stuck to the news.

He made no mention of his comments last week that Haley was not in "her prime," during the first hour of "CNN This Morning," sticking to stories like President Joe Biden's trip to Ukraine, the Ohio train derailment and winter weather.

Lemon, during the hour before he went on the air, tweeted that he appreciated the opportunity to return to work. He was absent for three days.

"To my network, my colleagues and our incredible audience — I'm sorry," he tweeted. "I've heard you, I'm learning from you, and I'm committed to doing better."

His tweet made no mention of Haley, who called Lemon's comments sexist and has been referring to them in fundraising appeals.

On last Thursday's show, Lemon and fellow hosts Poppy Harlow and Kaitlan Collins had been discussing Haley's suggestion that politicians over 75 should be subject to mandatory mental competency tests.

"Nikki Haley isn't in her prime, sorry," Lemon said. He said a woman is considered to be in her prime in her 20s, 30s and maybe her 40s. Haley is 51.

He doubled down on his message even after being challenged by his female colleagues. "I think we need to qualify," Harlow said at one point. "Are you talking about prime for childbearing or are you talking about prime for being president?"

After video of his comments spread quickly online, Lemon tweeted regret for his "inartful and irrelevant" comments. He was scolded the next day by CNN chief executive Chris Licht during an internal staff meeting, and appeared on the call to apologize.

Late Sunday, Licht told staff members in a memo that Lemon would return to work and undergo unspecified training. Licht said in the memo, obtained by The Associated Press, that it was important that the network balance accountability with fostering a culture in which people "can own, learn and grow from their mistakes."

Lemon was switched from his own prime-time show when a revamped "CNN This Morning" was launched in November, one of Licht's biggest swings since taking control of the network last year.

Between poor ratings and awkwardness between the new anchor team, it hasn't gone well.

Palestinians: 9 killed in Israeli army raid in West Bank

JERUSALEM (AP) — Palestinian officials say that at least nine Palestinians have been killed and 97 were wounded during a rare daytime Israeli army arrest raid in the occupied West Bank.

The Palestinian Health Ministry says a 72-year-old man was among the dead.

The raid took place on Wednesday in the city of Nablus, a scene of frequent military activity.

The Israeli military confirmed an operation was underway but gave no further information.

It was among the deadliest violence in a year of fighting in the West Bank and east Jerusalem. Over 50 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank and east Jerusalem this year.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below.

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli troops on Wednesday moved into a Palestinian city in the occupied West Bank, setting off fighting that killed at least six Palestinians, including a 72-year-old man, Palestinian health officials said.

It was one of the deadliest incidents in nearly a year of fighting in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, and raised the prospect of further bloodshed. The Hamas militant group, which rules the Gaza Strip, said "its patience is running out."

The Israeli military gave few details about its operation in the northern city of Nablus. The city is known as a militant stronghold, and the army frequently operates there.

Palestinian officials said three of the dead on Wednesday were members of organized militant groups. But a 72-year-old man was also killed. There was no immediate word on whether the other two killed, both men in their 20s, belonged to armed groups.

Amateur video footage appeared to show Israeli troops operating in downtown Nablus, and army vehicles firing tear gas canisters.

Last month, Israeli troops killed 10 militants in a similar raid in the northern West Bank. Within days, lone Palestinian attackers killed 10 Israelis in Jerusalem.

In the Gaza Strip, a spokesman for the ruling Hamas militant group issued a veiled threat.

"The resistance in Gaza is observing the enemy's escalating crimes against our people in the occupied West Bank, and its patience is running out," said Abu Obed, a spokesman for the group.

The group has battled Israel to four wars since seizing control of Gaza in 2007, and Israeli officials have expressed concerns about rising tensions ahead of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which begins in March.

At least 55 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank and east Jerusalem this year. Last year, nearly 150 Palestinians were killed in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, making it the deadliest year in those areas since 2004, according to figures by the Israeli rights group B'Tselem.

Israel says that most of those killed have been militants but others — including youths protesting the incursions and other people not involved in confrontations — have also been killed. An AP tally has found that just under half of those killed belonged to militant groups.

Israel says the military raids are meant to dismantle militant networks and thwart future attacks while the Palestinians view them as further entrenchment of Israel's open-ended, 55-year occupation.

Israel captured the West Bank, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war, territories the Palestinians seek for their hoped-for independent state.

Parts of northern US shut down ahead of winter storm

By TRISHA AHMED and JIM SALTER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — States in the northern plains are largely shutting down ahead of a massive winter

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storm that could dump up to 2 feet of snow in some areas, accompanied by strong winds and dangerously cold temperatures.

Many schools throughout the Dakotas, Minnesota and Wisconsin were called off for Wednesday, ahead of the storm. Offices closed, and so did the Minnesota Legislature, which won't reconvene until Monday. Emergency management leaders warned people to stay off the roads or face potential "whiteout" conditions due to the snow and fierce winds.

The storm will make its way toward the East Coast later in the week. Places that don't get snow may get dangerous amounts of ice. Forecasters expect up to a half-inch of ice in some areas of southern Michigan, northern Illinois and some eastern states.

The snowfall could be historic, even in a region accustomed to heavy snow. As much as 25 inches may pile up, with the heaviest amounts falling across east-central Minnesota and west-central Wisconsin, the National Weather Service said. Wind gusts could reach 50 mph and wind chills are expected to hit minus 50 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 46 degrees Celsius) in some parts of the Dakotas and Minnesota.

The Minneapolis-St. Paul area could see 2 feet (61 centimeters) of snow or more for the first time in over 30 years.

Some families scrambled Tuesday to get shopping done before the weather closed in. At a Costco in the Minneapolis suburb of St. Louis Park, Molly Schirmer stocked up on heat-and-serve dinners and Mexican Coca-Colas, knowing that she and her two teenagers might get stuck at home.

"The schools are already preparing to go online, so the kids will probably be home doing online school," Schirmer said of her 13- and 15-year-olds.

At another Costco in suburban Eagan, Larry and Sue Lick bought toilet paper, kitchen essentials and coffee ahead of the storm. They also rescheduled medical appointments and a family gathering, just to stay off the roads.

"It's not so much our driving, but you've got to worry about everybody else driving, with so many accidents caused by people that don't know the winter driving," said Larry Lick, 77.

The weather service said the blizzard will actually involve two rounds. For the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, the first blast arrives Wednesday afternoon with up to 7 inches of snow. Round 2 starting later Wednesday and extending into Thursday is the real whopper, "with an additional 10 to 20 inches expected."

Weather service meteorologist Frank Pereira said the system was expected to affect about 43 million Americans.

Temperatures could plunge to minus 15 to minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 26 to minus 29 degrees Celsius) Thursday and to minus 25 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 32 degrees Celsius) Friday in Grand Forks, North Dakota. Wind chills may fall to minus 50 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 46 degrees Celsius), said Nathan Rick, a meteorologist in Grand Forks.

Wind gusts of 35 mph will be common in western and central Minnesota, with some reaching 50 mph. That will result in "significant blowing and drifting snow with whiteout conditions in open areas," the weather service said.

According to the weather service, the biggest snow event on record in the Twin Cities was 28.4 inches from Oct. 31 through Nov. 3, 1991 — known as the Halloween Blizzard. The second-largest was 21.1 inches of snow from Nov. 29 through Dec. 1, 1985. The Twin Cities got 20 inches of snow on Jan. 22 and Jan. 23, 1982.

Hardware store owners said residents were generally taking the forecast in stride.

At C&S Supply, an employee-owned hardware store in Mankato, manager Corey Kapaun said demand was high for salt and grit, but not for shovels, snow blowers or other equipment. He attributed that to the fact that winter is two-thirds over.

Kapaun said he's sold 130 to 140 snow blowers and around 1,000 shovels this winter, when Mankato has seen more than 3 feet of snow.

"I think people are either prepared or they're not," Kapaun said. "It's usually the first snowfall of the year that gets a lot of attention. With a storm like this, I expected a little bit more, but we've already had a big year of snow already."

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In Sioux Falls, Dallas VandenBos has owned Robson True Value hardware store for 48 years. His customers are used to the snow, but don't necessarily trust the forecast.

"When we had that storm the first part of January, they told us we were probably going to get 3 or 4 inches of snow, and we got 18 inches," VandenBos said.

Sales of snow-related items haven't really picked up, but VandenBos has a backlog of snow blowers to repair. Those bringing them in Tuesday were out of luck — they won't be ready for a week.

"They're not going to get them in time for this snow," VandenBos said.

Forecasters at AccuWeather said the same storm system could result in icing across a 1,300-mile (2,092-kilometer) band from near Omaha, Nebraska, to New Hampshire on Wednesday and Thursday, creating potential travel hazards in or near cities such as Milwaukee, Detroit, Chicago and Boston.

As the northern U.S. deals with a winter blast, record warmth is expected in the mid-Atlantic and Southeast — 30 degrees to 40 degrees above normal in some places. Record highs are expected from Baltimore to New Orleans and in much of Florida, Pereira said.

Washington, D.C., could hit 80 degrees on Thursday, which would top the record of 78 degrees set in 1874.

California was also preparing for the latest in a series of winter storms as winds that began blowing Tuesday brought the potential for rain, snow and hail for much of the state. A "major snow event" was possible in foothills and mountains near Los Angeles, with several inches predicted even for elevations as low as 1,000 feet, the National Weather Service said.

"Nearly the entire population of CA will be able to see snow from some vantage point later this week if they look in the right direction (i.e., toward the highest hills in vicinity)," UCLA climate scientist Daniel Swain wrote on Twitter.

Daytime temperatures in Southern California were unlikely to get out of the low to mid-50s and potentially damaging winds reaching 50 mph were predicted along the central coast, with gusts of 70 mph possible in mountains.

Biden to meet eastern flank NATO leaders amid Russia worries

By AAMER MADHANI Associated

WARSAW (AP) — President Joe Biden is wrapping up his whirlwind, four-day visit to Poland and Ukraine by reassuring eastern flank NATO allies that his administration is highly attuned to the looming threats and other impacts spurred by the grinding Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Before departing Warsaw on Wednesday, Biden will hold talks with leaders from the Bucharest Nine, a collection of nations on the most eastern parts of the NATO alliance that came together in response to Russian President Vladimir Putin's 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.

As the war in Ukraine drags on, the Bucharest Nine countries' anxieties have remained heightened. Many worry Putin could move to take military action against them next if he's successful in Ukraine. The alliance includes Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

"When Russia invaded, it wasn't just Ukraine being tested. The whole world faced a test for the ages," Biden said in an address from the foot of Warsaw's Royal Castle on Tuesday to mark the somber milestone of the year-old Russian invasion. "Europe was being tested. America was being tested. NATO was being tested. All democracies were being tested."

Putin on Tuesday delivered his own address, in which he lashed out against Ukraine and its Western allies. The Russian president also announced Moscow would suspend its participation in the last remaining U.S.-Russia arms control treaty. The move is expected to have an immediate impact on U.S. visibility into Russian nuclear activities, but the pact was already on life support.

Putin's decision to suspend Russian cooperation with the treaty's nuclear warhead and missile inspections follows Moscow's cancellation late last year of talks that had been intended to salvage an agreement that both sides have accused the other of violating.

Biden met Tuesday in Warsaw with Moldovan President Maia Sandu, who last week claimed Moscow was behind a plot to overthrow her country's government using external saboteurs.

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Sandwiched between Ukraine and Romania and one of Europe's poorest countries, the Eastern European nation has had historic ties to Russia but wants to join the 27-nation European Union. Biden in his remarks endorsed Moldova's bid to join the EU.

"I'm proud to stand with you and the freedom-loving people of Moldova," Biden said of Sandu and her country in his Tuesday address.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine nearly a year ago, Moldova, a former Soviet republic of about 2.6 million people, has sought to forge closer ties with its Western partners. Last June, it was granted EU candidate status, the same day as Ukraine.

Sandu spoke out last week about a Russian plot "to overthrow the constitutional order." She spoke out after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his country had intercepted plans by Russian secret services to destroy Moldova. Those claims were later confirmed by Moldovan intelligence officials.

Biden's speech on the Ukraine war came one day after he made a surprise visit to Kyiv, a grand gesture of solidarity with Ukraine. The address was part affirmation of Europe's role in helping Ukraine repel Russia's ongoing invasion and part sharply worded warning to Putin that the U.S. won't abide Moscow defeating Ukraine.

The White House has praised several eastern flank countries, including Lithuania, Poland and Romania, over the last year for stepping up efforts to back Ukraine with weapons and economic aid and taking in refugees.

Biden has given particular attention to Poland's efforts. The country is hosting about 1.5 million Ukrainian refugees and has committed \$3.8 billion in military and economic assistance to Kyiv.

"The truth of the matter is: The United States needs Poland and NATO as much as NATO needs the United States," Biden said during talks with Polish President Andrzej Duda.

McCarthy gives Carlson access to 1/6 footage, raising alarms

By LISA MASCARO, FARNOUSH AMIRI and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Thousands of hours of surveillance footage from the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol are being made available to Fox News Channel host Tucker Carlson, a stunning level of access granted by House Speaker Kevin McCarthy that Democrats swiftly condemned as a "grave" breach of security with potentially far-reaching consequences.

The hard-right political commentator said his team is spending the week at the Capitol pouring through the video and preparing to reveal their findings to his viewers. But granting exclusive access to sensitive Jan. 6 security footage to such a deeply partisan figure is a highly unusual move, seen by some critics as essentially outsourcing House oversight to a TV personality who has promoted conspiracy theories about the attack.

"It's a shocking development that brings in both political concerns but even more importantly, security concerns," said Rep. Dan Goldman, D-N.Y., who was a chief counsel during President Donald Trump's first impeachment trial.

Many critics warn that Capitol security could be endangered if Carlson airs security footage that details how the rioters accessed the building and the routes lawmakers used to flee to safety. And a sharply partisan retelling of the Capitol attack could accelerate a dangerous rewriting of the history of what happened Jan. 6, when Trump encouraged a mob of supporters to head to the Capitol to overturn Joe Biden's election.

"It is not lost on anyone that the one person that the speaker decides to give hours and hours of sensitive secret surveillance footage is the person who peddled a bogus documentary trying to debunk responsibility for the Jan. 6 riot from Donald Trump onto others," Goldman said.

"Kevin McCarthy has turned over the security of the Capitol to Tucker Carlson and that's a scary thought," he added.

McCarthy's office declined to confirm the arrangement, first reported by Axios, despite repeated requests for comment.

Gripping images and videos from the Capitol attack by Trump supporters have been widely circulated by

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documentarians, news organizations and even the rioters themselves. But officials have held back much of the surveillance video from hundreds of security cameras stationed in and around the Capitol that offer a detailed view of the grisly scene and the brutal beatings of police as they tried to stop the rioters.

The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack went through a painstaking process to work closely with the U.S. Capitol Police to review and ultimately release approved segments of the surveillance footage as part of its public hearings last year.

The chief of the U.S. Capitol Police, Tom Manger, issued a terse statement when asked about the new release of footage: "When Congressional Leadership or Congressional Oversight Committees ask for things like this, we must give it to them."

House Democrats planned to convene Wednesday for a private caucus call to hear from Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., who served as the chairman of the Jan. 6 committee, and others. House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries called McCarthy's decision an "egregious security breach" that threatens the safety of those who work at the Capitol.

"Unfortunately, the apparent disclosure of sensitive video material is yet another example of the grave threat to the security of the American people represented by the extreme MAGA Republican majority," Jeffries, D-N.Y. said in a letter to House colleagues.

Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif., the former chairwoman of the House Administration Committee and a member of the committee that investigated Jan. 6, said: "It's really a road map to people who might want to attack the Capitol again. It would be of huge assistance to them."

Carlson, who previously produced a documentary suggesting the federal government used the Capitol attack by Trump's supporters as a pretext to persecute conservatives, confirmed that his team was reviewing the footage ahead of a possible airing.

"We believe we have secured the right to see whatever we want to see," Carlson, who is the network's most-watched prime-time host, said on his show Monday night.

It's not clear what protocols Carlson and his team are using to view the material, but he said that "access is unfettered."

The House committee investigating Jan. 6 underwent an often intense process to review the tens of thousands of hours of footage as it documented its findings.

Over the nearly two-year probe, the panel, which was disbanded once Republicans took control of the House, created a secure room in their Capitol Hill offices for staff to comb through the more than 14,000 hours of footage. The process took months, according to a person familiar with the investigation who requested anonymity to discuss the private machinations.

Any clip of footage the committee wanted to use for their series of public hearings or for the final report had to be approved by Capitol Police to avoid any security breaches, the person said. If police had an objection, the committee would engage in negotiations to redact any content that could potentially endanger the force or the mechanisms they use to protect the Capitol and lawmakers.

"Throughout our entire review on the committee, we worked with U.S. Capitol Police, one, to get the footage and review it through secure channels, and then we also worked with them again before we released anything," said Marcus Childress, who was the panel's investigative counsel and now is in private practice. "The purpose of that was to make sure that we weren't releasing any sensitive surveillance footage."

Anxiety over security is running high after Capitol Police reported an uptick in threats to member safety over the last several years, its highest on Jan. 6, 2021. The number of possible threats against members of Congress rose from about 4,000 in 2017 to more than 9,600 in 2021, then declined last year to 7,501.

Key Republicans welcomed McCarthy's decision as part of his commitment to create a more transparent House and engage in oversight, as Republicans launch a far-reaching series of investigations and probes touching many aspects of government.

"I support Speaker McCarthy's decision," said Rep. Bryan Steil, R-Wis., the chairman of the House Administration Committee.

Hard-right figures cheered the move. "For all of you that doubted we would release the tapes. Here you

go!" tweeted Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., a right-flank firebrand who has become close to McCarthy.

Former Rep. Rodney Davis, R-Ill., said if House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's daughter, the documentary filmmaker Alexandra Pelosi, was able to film that day and release her footage, McCarthy should be able to grant Carlson access.

But others said the two situations are not comparable — countless hours of footage have been released from many sources that captured what happened that deadly day. A mob of Trump supporters battled Capitol Police, in often violent scenes, breaking into the building. Five people died in the riot and its aftermath.

"I think we should remember that the Jan. 6 attack happened in broad daylight," said Sandeep Prasanna, a former investigative counsel on the Jan. 6 committee now in private practice.

"My concern is that I don't see how releasing thousands of hours of footage to one handpicked controversial media figure could ever produce the same factual and careful analysis that the committee produced over that year and a half," he said.

'Now or never': Young Nigerians pin hopes on key election

By CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — Frustrated by high unemployment and worsening violence, many younger Nigerians are flocking to a candidate outside the political mainstream in this month's presidential election.

Despite being Africa's largest economy and one of its top oil producers, Nigeria is in economic crisis. A currency reform effort has left many unable to access their own money, even to buy food. Meanwhile, extremist violence has continued, leaving thousands dead in the past year. Many young people have left the country, seeing no future at home. But many of those who have stayed hope the Feb. 25 election will bring real change.

So many people registered to vote that many spent days waiting in line to collect permanent voter cards, which are required to cast a ballot. Nigeria's election commission extended the deadline to collect the cards by two weeks in response.

On Feb. 25, voters will choose among 18 candidates in a first-round vote to succeed incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari, who is winding down his second and final term. A runoff will be held unless one candidate gets at least one-quarter of the votes in each of at least two-thirds of all the states.

"Either we get things right now in Nigeria, or never," said Kingsley Chima, 26, as the first-time voter waited to collect his voting card from Nigeria's election commission.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, with more than 210 million people, and it has at least 93 million registered voters, almost 40 percent of whom are under 35. The country has one of the world's largest youth populations, with about 64 million people aged 18-35 and a median age of 18.

Young people have made a third-party candidate with social media appeal into a serious contender in the polls.

That's surprising in a country where elections have long been usually dominated by Nigeria's two largest parties.

Bola Tinubu, 70, of the All Progressives Congress has served as governor of Nigeria's economic hub of Lagos, while Atiku Abubakar, 76, of the Peoples Democratic Party has served as Nigeria's vice-president. Tinubu was an important backer of the current president, and is known as a key funder for the ruling APC. Abubakar, one of Nigeria's richest businessmen, ran for president in 2019 and lost to Buhari.

Both men have been fixtures in Nigerian politics since 1999.

In 2015, Buhari rode a wave of goodwill to power by promising to curb Nigeria's rampant corruption and extremist insurgency, but he failed to make headway on either challenge. Frustration with mainstream parties made room for former governor Peter Obi, 61, to position himself as a change candidate.

"The hopes we placed in the current president have been crushed," said Rinu Oduala, a youth activist. Oduala was among the leaders of unprecedented nationwide demonstrations held in 2020 by young Nigerians to protest police brutality and bad governance. Now, she's mobilizing voters, supporting Obi.

Initially seen as an underdog with little political experience, Obi has emerged as a leading candidate,

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coming ahead of or close behind Tinubu and Abubakar in most polls. He's the candidate of the Labour Party, which won 5,074 votes in the 2019 presidential election, under a tenth of one percent of the vote.

He's spoken to young people, promising jobs, and to Nigeria's vast diaspora, promising changes that will give them a reason to return.

Tinubu has focused on another bloc: Nigeria's Muslim majority. Presidential candidates usually balance their tickets, choosing a running mate from the other side of Nigeria's religious divide, but the APC candidate has chosen a fellow Muslim. Some members of the ruling party see the Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket as Tinubu's biggest chance of securing votes in the Muslim-dominated north, which has more registered voters than the Christian-dominated south.

That strategy could deepen the country's religious divisions, said Hassan Idayat, who leads the Center for Democracy and Development, Nigeria's largest democracy-focused group.

"Nigeria is a giant that has never been quite stable," said Ayisha Osori, an analyst with the Open Society Foundations.

"We are having one of our most polarized elections ever (and) our campaign messaging is a lot more focused on competition between religions, competition between ethnic groups and trying to address political equity issues," she said.

A key question is how many people turn out to vote. Turnout in Nigeria's recent elections has been low. In 2019, only 34% of registered voters cast their ballot in the presidential vote. It reflects both cynicism about politics, and high barriers to participation. Voters can cast ballots only in person, and only at their place of registration.

Long lines to collect voter cards, and enthusiasm online and at rallies, lead many to think this time will be different.

"This time around, it is the young people who are very involved in the process; they are not just involved as voters but they are actually the mobilizers," said Idayat. "They are going to vote."

Youth turnout could be further boosted by a decision to close the country's universities for two weeks before the election. Officials cited security concerns as the main reason for the move, but it will also mean many young people are at home to cast ballots.

"The typical response from our politicians when young Nigerians complain is that we don't vote," Oduala said. "Well, another generation has lately become aware of their responsibilities to join hands to make this nation work. And we have decided to vote."

Among those driving the surge in voter registration is Chukwuenye Igwe in the southeastern Enugu state where she has embarked on a personal campaign urging people to sign up to vote.

"People have really woken up, especially the youths," said Igwe. Last year, the 26-year-old was keen to join other young Nigerians leave the country at a level unseen in recent years. She eventually could not move but many have, often citing economic hardship caused by spiraling unemployment rate of 33% and insecurity.

Among those who have recently relocated from Nigeria is Jude Edozie, who left last year as a pharmacist to further his studies in Ireland. He can't vote abroad, but is watching closely.

"I don't plan on returning any time soon, but how it ends will either increase or reduce the chances of that happening," Edozie said "I hope the election this time is different."

Supreme Court weighs tech giants' liability in terror case

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is weighing Wednesday whether Facebook, Twitter and YouTube can be sued over a 2017 Islamic State group attack on a Turkish nightclub based on the argument the platforms assisted in fueling the growth of the terrorist organization.

What the justices decide to do in this case and a related one it heard Tuesday is important particularly because the companies have been shielded from liability on the internet, allowing them to grow into the giants they are today.

On the first day of arguments, the justices suggested they had little appetite for a far-reaching ruling

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that would upend the internet. Wednesday's case about the nightclub attack in which 39 people died could provide an off-ramp for the justices if they want to limit the impact of what they do.

At the heart of the cases before the justices are two federal laws. The first is Section 230 of the federal Communications Decency Act, which protects tech companies from being sued over material put on their sites by users. The second is the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, which allows Americans injured by a terrorist attack abroad to sue for money damages in federal court.

In Wednesday's case, the family of a man killed in the Reina nightclub attack in Istanbul sued Twitter, Facebook and YouTube parent Google under the terrorism law. Nawras Alassaf's family members, who are U.S. citizens, say the companies aided and abetted the attack because they assisted in the growth of the Islamic State group, which claimed responsibility for the attack. A lower court let the lawsuit go forward.

The platforms argue that they can't be sued because they did not knowingly or substantially assist in the Reina attack. If the justices agree, they don't have to reach bigger questions about Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act and whether it protects platforms when they recommend content.

The broader questions about Section 230 were at the center of the case the justices heard Tuesday. In that case, the family of an American college student who was one of 130 people killed in the Paris attacks sued under the terrorism law.

The family of Nohemi Gonzalez argued that the Islamic State group used YouTube to spread its message and recruit people to its cause. They said YouTube's algorithm, which recommends videos to users based on their viewing habits, was critical to the Islamic State group's growth. Lower courts ruled Section 230 barred the lawsuit.

Global shares follow Wall Street lower in rate hike fears

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Global shares declined Wednesday after stocks tumbled on Wall Street as worries persist about higher interest rates and their tightening squeeze on the global economy.

France's CAC 40 slipped nearly 0.8% in early trading to 7,252.50. Germany's DAX fell 0.7% to 15,290.37. Britain's FTSE 100 dropped 0.9% to 7,902.44. The futures for the Dow Jones Industrial Average and S&P 500 edged 0.1% higher.

In Asian trading, Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei 225 dipped 1.3% to finish at 27,104.32. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 slipped 0.3% to 7,314.50. South Korea's Kospi dropped 1.7% to 2,417.68. Hong Kong's Hang Seng slipped 0.5% to 20,423.84, while the Shanghai Composite shed 0.5% to 3,291.15.

New Zealand's central bank raised its benchmark interest rate by a half-point to 4.75% to try to wrestle down inflation. The increase, which can raise the borrowing costs for consumers on everything from credit cards to mortgages, comes despite widespread economic pain from a devastating cyclone.

Higher rates hurt investment prices and raise the risk of a recession by slowing business investment and consumer spending.

U.S. employment and consumer spending have weathered higher interest rates well, but a report Tuesday showed sales of previously occupied homes slowed to their slowest pace in more than a decade. The mixed signals leave investors wondering if the Fed will ease back on rate hikes or resume a more aggressive stance.

"Amid the evolving new narrative of stronger US growth, payrolls, retail sales, and the additional Fed response required to tame the rude health of the US economy, investors are beginning to think the hawkish Fed may not have entirely run its course yet," Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a commentary.

The S&P 500 fell 2% on Tuesday in its sharpest drop since the market was selling off in December. The Dow industrials lost 2.1%, while the Nasdaq composite sank 2.5%.

Bond yields have shot higher this month as Wall Street ups its forecasts for how high the Federal Reserve will take short-term interest rates in its efforts to stamp out inflation. The Fed has already pulled its key overnight rate up to a range of 4.50% to 4.75%, up from basically zero at the start of last year.

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The worry is that the Fed could ratchet up its forecasts for rates further next month when it releases its latest projections for the economy. Besides showing more strength in the job market and retail sales than expected, recent reports have also suggested inflation is not cooling as quickly and as smoothly as hoped. Investors are also pushing back their forecasts for when the first cut to rates could happen.

In other trading Wednesday, benchmark U.S. crude lost \$1.00 to \$75.36 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Brent crude, the international pricing standard, fell 82 cents to \$81.95 a barrel.

The U.S. dollar fell to 134.95 Japanese yen from 134.98 yen. The euro slipped to \$1.0648 from \$1.0653.

G-20 finance chiefs to tackle global economic threats

By SIBI ARASU and ELAINE KURTENBACH Associated Press

BENGALURU, India (AP) — Top financial leaders from the Group of 20 leading economies are gathering in the south Indian technology hub of Bengaluru this week to tackle myriad challenges to global growth and stability, including stubbornly high inflation and surging debt.

India is hosting the G-20 financial conclave for the first time in 20 years. Later in the year it will convene its first summit of G-20 economies. The meetings offer the world's second most populous country a chance to showcase its ascent as an economic power and its status as a champion of developing nations.

This week's gathering of finance ministers and central bank governors takes place just a year after Russia invaded Ukraine, setting off a cascade of shocks to the world economy, chief among them decades-high inflation. U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is expected to address the global economic impacts of the war while at the G-20 meetings.

India is among the countries treading lightly between the Western nations and Russia, eager to claim more global sway but wary of becoming embroiled in antagonisms as its economy benefits from purchases of discounted Russian crude oil.

"India has a growing leadership role globally," Information Minister Anurag Thakur, said Wednesday, reiterating Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's stance that "today's era is not of war. Dialogues and discussions are the only way forward."

As host of more than 200 G-20 meetings in 28 cities leading up to the summit in November, Modi is expected to use that role to burnish India's stature as a leader in fighting climate change and to act as a bridge between the interests of industrialized nations and developing ones.

"We don't have the resources that developed countries have but within minimum resources we have also achieved a lot in sectors such as space and renewable energies such as green hydrogen," Thakur said.

It's an urgent priority, given the growing importance of emerging economies to global growth: the International Monetary Fund estimates that India and China alone will contribute more than half of global economic growth this year, with other Asian countries contributing another quarter of that expansion with annual growth rates of 6% to 7%.

India's economy is forecast to expand at a 6.1% annual rate this year after growing 6.8% last year, the IMF said in a report issued Monday.

"The tough conditions at the macroeconomic level have somewhat eased but inflation rates are still high. In this situation coordination among major economies is vital," Ajay Seth, a senior Finance Ministry official, told reporters Tuesday in Bengaluru.

Bengaluru is India's start-up and technology powerhouse. First recognized as an outsourcing hub, it's now known for its entrepreneurs and information technology companies. But the city is plagued by poor planning. Last year, it experienced extreme flooding, partly due to global warming, that caused an estimated \$30 million in damage.

Improving urban infrastructure will figure in this week's talks, the first of four G-20 finance minister meetings due to take place this year in India.

The G-20 includes the world's largest economies and has a rolling presidency. Last year, Indonesia was host and next year Brazil will take over, followed by South Africa in 2025.

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In countries like India, it's seen as a counterbalance to gatherings of wealthier economies such as the Group of Seven.

At the meetings in Bengaluru, officials will discuss a range of issues related to climate finance, seeking consensus on regulating digital currencies, global tax issues and other financial priorities.

Yellen and other officials have indicated they will also be discussing risks of heavy debt burdens for many countries after costly efforts to cushion the worst impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those woes have deepened as countries' import bills surged due to sustained higher prices for food, oil and fertilizers and weakening currencies.

Yellen visited Zambia in January, in part to discuss the African country's \$6 billion debt to China, its biggest creditor. Zambia became the site of Africa's first coronavirus pandemic-era sovereign nation to default when it failed to make a \$42.5 million bond payment in November 2020.

But a slew of other countries have seen their finances deteriorate in the past year, including India's neighbor Sri Lanka and others in Asia.

"Several countries are facing huge debt problems. Finding lasting solutions for them will feature prominently in the discussions," said Seth, the Finance Ministry official.

A senior Treasury official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to preview Yellen's travel plans, said she intends to urge fellow G-20 countries to reduce carbon emissions and invest more in developing renewable energy, infrastructure and agriculture.

At a U.N. climate conference last November, India — currently the world's third largest emitter of greenhouse gases — proposed a phaseout of all fossil fuels and repeatedly emphasized the need to revamp global climate finance.

Those longstanding G-20 priorities, which also include building stronger public health systems, expanding use of sustainable energy and helping countries improve productivity often tend to be overshadowed by immediate concerns such as stalling global growth, debt crises and conflicts like the war in Ukraine.

Shocks from the war and from the pandemic have amplified disruptions to energy supplies, shipping and food security, complicating efforts to stabilize the world economy after the upheavals of the pandemic.

Another priority in Bengaluru will be coordination on monetary policy as central banks assess whether to keep raising interest rates or to dial back on efforts to cool inflation.

Somali security forces end al-Shabab siege that killed 10

By OMAR FARUK Associated Press

MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — Security forces in Somalia have ended a siege by al-Shabab extremists that killed 10 people and wounded three others at a home in the capital, Mogadishu.

The Information Ministry late Tuesday said the al-Qaida-linked fighters launched the rare attack on a private home with a suicide bombing. Al-Shabab often attacks hotels and government buildings.

Al-Shabab claimed that the home of a senior army officer also contained members of the Macawisley militia who had been wounded in the ongoing offensive against the extremists that began last year. The al-Shabab statement was released by the group's radio arm, Andalus.

Dozens of communities in central Somalia have been recaptured from al-Shabab during the offensive, which has led the extremists to carry out retaliatory attacks in Mogadishu and elsewhere.

Seattle becomes first U.S. city to ban caste discrimination

By DEEPA BHARATH Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — The Seattle City Council on Tuesday added caste to the city's anti-discrimination laws, becoming the first U.S. city to ban caste discrimination and the first in the world to pass such a law outside South Asia.

Calls to outlaw discrimination based on caste, a division of people based on birth or descent, have grown louder among South Asian diaspora communities in the United States. But the movement has been getting pushback from some Hindu Americans who argue that such legislation maligns a specific community.

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Tensions within the community were visible at Seattle City Hall on Tuesday as a noisy hearing culminated with a 6-1 vote with a majority of the council agreeing that caste discrimination crosses national and religious boundaries and that without such laws, those facing caste discrimination in the U.S. will have no protections.

The packed room, which overflowed with activists from both sides bearing banners, chanting slogans, challenging speakers and city officials as they made their comments, laid bare stark divisions over this issue within the South Asian diaspora. A majority of those present in council chambers were supporters of the ordinance and those opposed were a vocal minority.

As council members voted in favor of the ordinance, the chamber erupted into cheers of "Jai Bhim," which means "victory for Bhim" a rallying cry adopted by followers of B.R. Ambedkar, an Indian Dalit rights icon whose given name was Bhimrao. Dalit groups and their supporters say caste discrimination is prevalent in U.S. diaspora communities, manifesting itself in the form of social alienation and discrimination in housing, education and the tech sector where South Asians hold key roles.

Yogesh Mane, a Seattle resident who grew up as an untouchable in India, broke into tears as he heard the council's decision.

"I'm emotional because this is the first time such an ordinance has been passed anywhere in the world outside of South Asia," he said. "It's a historic moment."

Thenmozhi Soundararajan, executive director of Oakland, California-based Equality Labs, whose advocacy work along with community partners continues to push caste discrimination laws forward, called the council vote "a culture war that has been won."

"We got the support of over 200 organizations from Seattle and around the country," she said. "It's a powerful message that Dalit people are not alone. The South Asian community has united to say we want to heal from the trauma of caste."

Council Member Kshama Sawant, a socialist and the only Indian American on the City Council, said the ordinance, which she proposed, does not single out one community, but it accounts for how caste discrimination crosses national and religious boundaries. Sawant said the council received over 4,000 emails in support of the ordinance.

"We've heard hundreds of gut-wrenching stories over the last few weeks showing us that caste discrimination is very real in Seattle," she said.

Council Member Sara Nelson who cast the lone dissenting vote agreed with opponents calling the ordinance "a reckless, harmful solution to a problem for which we have no data or research."

"This could generate more anti-Hindu discrimination and could dissuade employers from hiring South Asians," she said. "The community that is being impacted is deeply divided on this issue."

Nelson also said the ordinance would also get the city entangled in legal battles to which Sawant responded: "Bring it on." Sawant said being fearful of lawsuits is not the way to effect progress or change.

Council Member Lisa Herbold questioned opponents' logic that the law singles out Hindus and people of Indian descent.

"That's like saying gender discrimination laws single out all men," she said. "And just because we have a small population that is experiencing (caste discrimination) that doesn't make it any less important."

Shobha Swamy, a representative of the Coalition of Hindus of North America said she was disappointed by the council deliberations and line of questioning. The group said they received a show of support from over 100 organizations.

"Due diligence wasn't done," said Swami, who flew in from Atlanta.

C.H. Srikrishna, a San Francisco Bay Area-based tech worker, said he is worried about the ramifications this ordinance might have for the South Asian community.

"I too want discrimination to end," he said. "But we need to first determine that widespread discrimination exists."

Srikrishna, who is Hindu, believes the ordinance does target his religion.

"When you say it originated 2,000 years ago, that is implicitly blaming Hinduism," he said. "That bothers

me. I feel betrayed.”

Sanjay Patel, a tech company owner from the Seattle area, said he never felt discriminated against in the U.S. as a member of a lower caste and that the ordinance pained him because it reminded him of a caste identity, which he thought had become obsolete.

“I fear with this law, businesses will be afraid to hire South Asians,” he said.

Earlier Tuesday morning, several activists braved cold temperatures and wind gusts to line up outside City Hall so they would get a chance to speak to the council before the vote. But the council restricted public comment at the meeting where more than 300 people had requested to speak virtually and in person. They heard about half of the comments before moving on to deliberations and the vote.

The origins of the caste system in India can be traced back 3,000 years as a social hierarchy based on one’s occupation and birth. It is a system that has evolved over the centuries under Muslim and British rule. The suffering of those who are at the bottom of the caste pyramid — known as Dalits — has continued. Caste discrimination has been prohibited in India since 1948, a year after the nation’s independence from British rule.

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.

Over the past three years, several colleges and university systems have moved to prohibit caste discrimination.

In December 2019, Brandeis University near Boston became the first U.S. college to include caste in its nondiscrimination policy. The California State University System, Colby College, Brown University and the University of California, Davis have all adopted similar measures. Harvard University instituted caste protections for student workers in 2021 as part of its contract with its graduate student union.

Rapper Nipsey Hussle’s convicted killer to be sentenced

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A man convicted of gunning down rapper Nipsey Hussle in 2019 is likely to get life in prison when he is sentenced Wednesday in a Los Angeles courtroom.

Jurors in July found Eric R. Holder Jr., 32, guilty of the first-degree murder of the 33-year-old Grammy-nominated hip-hop artist outside the clothing store Hussle founded, the Marathon, in the South Los Angeles neighborhood where both men grew up.

Holder was also convicted of two counts of attempted voluntary manslaughter and two counts of assault with a firearm for gunfire that hit two other men at the scene who survived.

The sentencing has been delayed in part so defense attorney Aaron Jansen could move for Superior Court Judge H. Clay Jacke to reduce Holder’s conviction to manslaughter or second-degree murder, which the judge rejected in December.

Jacke will have a broad range of possibilities when he sentences Holder at the Thursday morning hearing, but the murder conviction alone carries a term of 25 years to life. The other convictions, and special sentencing circumstances that jurors found true, make it almost certain Holder will spend the rest of his life in prison. Holder was not eligible for the death penalty.

“We hope that there is some resounding peace in the fact that his killer will be in prison likely for the rest of his life,” the lead prosecutor, Deputy District Attorney John McKinney, said after the verdict.

Actor Lauren London, who was Hussle’s partner and the mother of his two young children, did not attend any part of the trial, nor did any of his relatives, and none are expected to give victim impact statements, as often happens at such hearings.

The evidence against Holder was so overwhelming — from eyewitnesses to surveillance cameras from local businesses that captured his arrival, the shooting and his departure — that his attorney conceded

during trial that he had shot Hussle.

But Jansen argued to jurors that the heated circumstances of the shooting meant a lesser verdict of voluntary manslaughter was merited.

The jury returned with the first-degree murder verdict after about six hours of deliberations.

Jansen said afterward that he was "deeply disappointed" in the verdict, which they planned to appeal.

He did manage a minor victory for Holder by securing the attempted voluntary manslaughter convictions where prosecutors had sought attempted murder verdicts.

The sentencing, originally scheduled for September but postponed at the request of the defense, brings an end to a legal saga that lasted more than three years and a trial that was often delayed because of the pandemic.

Hussle, whose legal name is Ermias Asghedom, and Holder had known each other for years growing up as members of the Rollin' 60s in South LA. Both were aspiring rappers. But Holder never found the same success as Hussle, who would become a local hero and a national celebrity.

A chance meeting outside the Marathon, in a shopping center Hussle owned, led to a conversation the two men had about rumors that Holder had been acting as an informant for authorities. Jansen argued that being publicly accused of being a "snitch" by a person as prominent as Hussle brought on a "heat of passion" in Holder that prompted the shooting.

A woman who was with Holder that day took a photo with Hussle before becoming Holder's unwitting getaway driver, was a key witness for the prosecution.

After years of devoted work that won him underground acclaim — his nickname was both a play on the name of comedian Nipsey Russell and a nod to the hustle the future hip-hop star showed in making music and selling CDs — Hussle had just released his major-label debut album and earned his first Grammy nomination when he was killed.

A year after his death, he was mourned at a memorial at the arena then known as Staples Center, and celebrated in a performance at the Grammy Awards that included DJ Khaled and John Legend.

Colorado gay club shooting no mystery, but motive unknown

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — It is no mystery who shot and killed five people at a gay nightclub in Colorado Springs last year, but what motivated that person to target a venue that had long been a sanctuary for the LGBTQ community in the mostly conservative city remains unknown.

That could change during a court hearing scheduled to start Wednesday in which prosecutors must lay out enough evidence to support their allegation that it was a hate crime when 22-year-old Anderson Lee Aldrich, who is nonbinary, opened fire in Club Q that night.

Unlike the other allegations, such as murder and attempted murder, hate crime charges require prosecutors to present evidence of a motive — that Aldrich was driven by bias, either wholly or in part. That could include statements Aldrich, who uses they/them pronouns, made on social media or to other people, said Karen Steinhauser, a trial lawyer, former prosecutor and law professor at the University of Denver.

Until now, prosecutors have not revealed anything about why they charged Aldrich with a hate crime.

Aldrich was known to family and friends and in official government documents as a male until defense attorneys revealed after the shooting that Aldrich was nonbinary. Someone who is a member of a group of people, such as the LGBTQ-plus community, can still be charged with a hate crime for targeting peers. Hate crime laws are focused on the victims, not the perpetrator.

Aldrich could give up their right to this week's hearing and avoid new details about the investigation from being made public, a decision that likely would not be announced until everyone is gathered in the courtroom.

Prosecutors usually win preliminary hearings since the standard of proof is lower than a trial and the evidence must be viewed in a light most favorable to them, but defense lawyers sometimes still want to go forward with a preliminary hearing. It's a chance to question witnesses, often investigators, under oath

to learn more about the government's case than may be available in the sometimes thousands of pages of reports likely already turned over to them, Steinhauser said.

The shooting was captured on surveillance video. According to an arrest affidavit, video showed Aldrich pulling into a parking lot at Club Q just before midnight and getting out wearing a ballistic vest and an AR-15 style rifle. Soon after going inside, Aldrich opened fire indiscriminately at patrons, it said.

It is unknown whether Aldrich had any previous history at the club or any disputes with patrons. Their attorneys revealed during a recent hearing Aldrich was at the club earlier that night for about 1 1/2 hours but didn't say why or elaborate further.

Questions also remain on how Aldrich got the gun used in the shooting, but experts say how and where Aldrich obtained it does not have to be discussed in order to convince the judge to rule that there's enough evidence to take the case to trial.

However, former District Attorney George Brauchler, who prosecuted the case against the shooter who killed 12 people at a movie theater in Aurora in 2012, said he hopes prosecutors present evidence about the gun. Questions were raised early on about whether authorities should have sought a red flag order to stop Aldrich from buying guns after they were arrested in 2021, when they threatened their grandparents and vowed to become the "next mass killer," according to law enforcement documents.

Authorities said two guns seized from Aldrich in that case — a ghost gun pistol and an MM 15 rifle — weren't returned. That case was dropped, in part because prosecutors couldn't track down Aldrich's grandparents and mother to testify, so Aldrich had no legal restrictions on buying guns.

Brauchler said if Aldrich obtained the gun used in the attack illegally, that would go against a possible effort by the defense to plead not guilty by reason of insanity. Going around gun laws would show that Aldrich knew right from wrong, as would showing Aldrich was motivated by bias, he said.

"Hate isn't insane. Hate is a choice," Brauchler said.

Defense attorneys have not publicly raised insanity or Aldrich's mental health as an issue and they have not been asked to enter a plea yet. However, an insanity plea is one of the few options Brauchler said he sees for the defense.

"It's not a whodunit. It's not a what happened. It's a why did it happen," he said.

Jill Biden makes 6th visit to Africa, her 1st as first lady

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jill Biden is not a newcomer to Africa.

It will be her sixth time in Africa when she arrives in Namibia on Wednesday as part of a commitment by President Joe Biden to deepen U.S. engagement with the fast-growing region.

It's her first visit as first lady, though. And she'll be following in the footsteps of her recent predecessors, who all made the trip across the Atlantic Ocean in the name of trying to help foster goodwill toward the United States.

During five days split between Namibia, located along the Atlantic coast in southern Africa, and Kenya, in the east, Jill Biden will focus on empowering women and young people, and highlight food insecurity in the Horn of Africa caused by a devastating drought, Russia's war in Ukraine and other factors.

As she departed Washington on Tuesday, the first lady declared, "We have a lot to accomplish."

Africa is the fastest-growing and youngest region in the world, according to the White House, which says 1 of every 4 people in the world will be African by 2050.

The White House has withheld specific details of the first lady's activities in each country, citing security concerns.

Jill Biden previously visited Africa in 2010, 2011, twice in 2014 and once in 2016, all during Joe Biden's service as U.S. vice president. Two of those trips were with him.

This time, she is traveling to Africa without the president as he wraps up his own trip to Poland to mark Friday's anniversary of Russia's aggression toward Ukraine.

Patricia Nixon was the first first lady to travel to Africa on her own. She went as President Richard Nixon's

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"personal representative" to Liberia, Ghana and the Ivory Coast in 1972. She addressed legislative bodies and met with African leaders about U.S. policy toward the country now known as Zimbabwe, and human rights in South Africa, according to the National First Ladies' Library.

What recent first ladies did on their visits to Africa:

MELANIA TRUMP

Mrs. Trump visited for the first time in 2018, when she spent five days as first lady stopping in Ghana, Malawi, Kenya and Egypt to promote U.S. developmental aid and education, cradle babies and highlight animal and historic preservation.

She traveled without President Donald Trump, who had denied making disparaging comments about African countries.

She opened the trip at an infant clinic in Ghana. She also learned about Africa's slave past during a tour of Cape Coast Castle, a former slave holding facility on the Ghanaian coast. She spent time inside the cramped dungeon once used to house male slaves and walked through the "Door of No Return," from which the slaves were shipped to the New World.

In Malawi, the former model toured indoor and outdoor classrooms, observed lessons and watched students play soccer with U.S.-donated balls. She highlighted elephant preservation at Nairobi National Park in Kenya. She closed the tour in Egypt by touring the pyramids and the Great Sphinx to highlight U.S.-supported preservation efforts there.

MICHELLE OBAMA

Mrs. Obama went to South Africa and Botswana on a goodwill mission in the summer of 2011 to promote youth leadership, education and HIV and AIDS awareness.

The centerpiece of the weeklong trip by America's first Black first lady was a 30-minute speech at a U.S.-sponsored leadership conference at a church in Soweto township. The church became a popular refuge during the South African people's fight against apartheid, the now-abolished system of government-imposed segregation.

She was accompanied by her daughters, Malia and Sasha; her mother, Marian Robinson; and a niece and nephew. Mrs. Obama also took her daughters to visit with former South African President Nelson Mandela at his home.

Mrs. Obama made a second solo visit to Africa in June 2016, the final year of the Obama administration. In Liberia and Morocco, she promoted her "Let Girls Learn" initiative to encourage developing countries to educate girls.

She also visited Ghana with President Barack Obama in 2009, his first year in office.

LAURA BUSH

Mrs. Bush traveled to Africa five times on her own between 2005 and 2007 during President George W. Bush's second term, in addition to two trips she took with him.

Her trips mostly focused on promoting the administration's efforts to combat the spread of HIV, as well as malaria. She also emphasized literacy, drug prevention and national parks. During one stop in South Africa, she praised HIV-positive mothers for working to erase the stigma associated with the disease. She spoke openly with African women about taking control of their sex lives.

Mrs. Bush also announced millions of dollars in U.S. funding for programs to stem the spread of AIDS and mosquito-borne malaria. In Mozambique, she covered her face with a white mask to help illustrate the benefits of spraying homes with insecticides to combat malaria. She also passed out mosquito nets.

She was accompanied on these trips by one or both of her twin daughters, Barbara and Jenna.

HILLARY CLINTON

Hillary Clinton took along her 17-year-old daughter, Chelsea, on her two-week visit in March 1997 to Senegal, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Uganda and Eritrea.

The first lady opened her journey at Goree Island in Senegal, a hub for the Atlantic slave trade for 300 years. Mrs. Clinton had said she wanted to see the island because of its significance to Black Americans. She discussed violent crime in South Africa, along with the need to improve education for Black people in

a country that recently had abolished its apartheid policy of racial segregation.

Mrs. Clinton returned in 1998 when President Bill Clinton made his first visit to Africa; it was also the first visit to the continent by a U.S. president in 20 years.

The White House billed the 12-day tour of Ghana, Rwanda, Uganda, South Africa, Botswana and Senegal as a way to encourage trade and investment in Africa.

No economic 'knockout' yet from West's sanctions on Russia

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — One month into the invasion of Ukraine, President Joe Biden stood in the courtyard of a grand Polish castle and laid out the punishing economic costs that the U.S. and its allies were inflicting on Vladimir Putin's Russia, declaring that the ruble is almost immediately "reduced to rubble."

Russia is now the world's most heavily sanctioned country, according to U.S. officials. The ruble did in fact take a temporary dive and has been slipping again in recent months. But as the war nears its one-year mark, it's clear the sanctions didn't pack the instantaneous punch that many had hoped.

The ruble trades around the same 75-per-dollar rate seen in the weeks before the war, though Russia is using capital controls to prop up the currency. And while Russia's economy did shrink 2.2% in 2022, that was far short of predictions of 15% or more that Biden administration officials had showcased. This year, its economy is projected to outperform the U.K.'s, growing 0.3% while the U.K. faces a 0.6% contraction, according to the International Monetary Fund.

The West's export controls and financial sanctions appear, instead, to be gradually eroding Russia's industrial capacity, even as its oil and other energy exports last year enabled it to keep funding a catastrophic war.

Large American multinationals like McDonald's, Citibank and General Electric fled the country, and some of the country's richest citizens are forbidden from traveling to the U.S. But if Muscovites can't get a latte at Starbucks, there's an imitation waiting for them at the knockoff Stars Coffee as Russia has adapted.

U.S. Treasury Deputy Secretary Wally Adeyemo stressed in an interview that the Western sanctions are only one "tool as part of a larger strategy" and that the U.S. continues to adjust its sanctions to outmaneuver Russia's own shifts in strategy.

"You look at the exodus, the brain drain from Russia," Adeyemo said. "The Russian economy is far smaller, far more closed and will look more like Venezuela, North Korea and Iran than like a major G-7 economy."

Still, a December Congressional Research Service report drew an underwhelming conclusion from all the economic parrying, stating that "the sanctions have created challenges for Russia but to date, have not delivered the economic 'knockout' that many predicted."

A closer look at what's been done so far and what lies ahead:

WHAT'S BEEN SANCTIONED, BY WHOM AND WHY?

Biden last year called the West's sanctions "a new kind of economic statecraft with the power to inflict damage that rivals military might."

The sanctions, imposed largely through executive orders, are meant to punish Russia and block its access to the international financial systems and bank accounts that it needs to finance its war effort. Export controls also limit its access to computer chips and other products needed to equip a modern military.

Simultaneously, the U.S. and its allies devoted billions to provide Ukraine with weapons, munitions and other military aid and direct financial assistance.

More than 30 countries, including the U.S., EU nations, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Japan and others — representing more than half the world's economy — are part of the unprecedented effort. They've imposed price caps on Russian oil and diesel, frozen Russian Central Bank funds and restricted access to SWIFT, the dominant system for global financial transactions.

Beyond targeting key institutions and economic sectors, the West has directly sanctioned roughly 2,000 Russian firms, government officials, oligarchs and their families. The sanctions are depriving them of access to their American bank accounts and financial markets, preventing them from doing business with Americans and traveling to the U.S., and more.

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Unlike the countrywide sanctions on Iran and North Korea, the restrictions placed on Russia target specific industry sectors, firms and individuals. This approach was designed to keep Russian oil and natural gas flowing, in order to limit disruptions to the wider global economy. But energy exports also enabled Russia to replenish its finances and stave off a sharp decline.

An industrialized country of its size — the 11th largest economy in the world in 2021 — has never faced such financial pressure. Daniel Fried, a former assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, said that “policy making of this kind is always a shot in dark.”

“You’re looking for hits on the Russian economy, it doesn’t happen overnight,” Fried said, noting that military aid was far more important as Ukrainian troops have performed better in repelling Russian attacks than U.S. and European officials expected.

DIFFERENCES EMERGE

While there has largely been unity among Western governments on the necessity to punish Russia, there have been differences in the lengths to which countries are willing to go.

European and Asian countries are more dependent on Russian oil and natural gas than was the U.S. That made a ban on Russian exports hard for the alliance and forced compromises that took months to forge.

Ultimately, the countries in December settled on a \$60 price cap, which some critics said came too late and was too high to significantly hurt Russia.

Experts and administration officials have said putting greater downward pressure on the sale of oil and other energy products from Russia would make sanctions more effective.

To Marshall Billingslea, assistant Treasury secretary for terrorist financing in the Trump administration, the sanctions were far from bulletproof and easy for the Kremlin to elude.

“Russia has shot holes through the administration’s sanctions,” Billingslea said.

Tom Firestone, a sanctions attorney, said more time is needed for the sanctions to take their course.

“Anyone who expects massive sanctions on Monday, and on Tuesday the Russian regime would fall is not reasonable,” Firestone said. “It’s a large economy that has large reserves. It has a large variety of trading partners. What we’re seeing and what the government is saying is they’re on track and it’s seriously curtailed Russia’s ability to operate.”

Russia is also seeking deeper ties with countries that have refused to join the sanctions effort. Its exports to Brazil, China, India and Turkey have increased by at least 50% since the war started compared with the previous year, according to the Congressional Research Service.

HOW RUSSIA HAS BEEN IMPACTED

“Russia is a different country today than it was just a year ago,” says Adeyemo, “and they’ve given up almost 30 years of progress in terms of their economic policy in the course of one year.”

But on a day-to-day consumer level, it’s a mixed picture.

Shopping centers have a lot of shuttered shops, but Russian entrepreneurs are helping fill the gaps. One Russian startup has created a reasonably convincing analogue of McDonald’s.

Some sectors have suffered greatly from sanctions and the departure of foreign companies.

Russia’s automobile sector, for example, has taken a particular hit. A market analysis from the Association of European Businesses, representing European companies in Russia, said sales of new cars in January were 63% lower than a year earlier.

Still, Russia continues to export some lumber, aluminum and other goods to the U.S., based on the need for the products in America.

Russian goods imported to the U.S. totaled \$14.5 billion in 2022. That’s less than 1% of all U.S. imports and about half the \$30 billion imported from Russia in 2021.

The Justice Department last year formed a task force to target the ill-gotten proceeds of Russian oligarchs, whom the U.S. sees as enabling Moscow’s war against Ukraine.

As part of that effort, the department has seized two luxury yachts — in Fiji and Spain — alleged to belong to oligarchs. Prosecutors have also brought criminal charges against oligarchs accused of sanctions violations, including Oleg Deripaska, an aluminum magnate and close Putin associate. Deripaska remains at large.

WHAT COMES NEXT

The U.S. government is not finished by any means.

Expect the Treasury Department to impose another large round of sanctions on Russia around the invasion's anniversary on Friday, with a likely focus in 2023 on logistics and manufacturing firms.

Daniel Pickard, a sanctions attorney, said it's a safe bet that sanctions "will continue to be used with greater frequency with this administration and other administrations. It allows the president to take action without having to consult Congress and can be adjusted with regard to changing events on the ground."

Protasiewicz, Kelly advance in Wisconsin high court primary

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — A liberal Milwaukee judge and a conservative former state Supreme Court justice won Tuesday's primary to face off in a pivotal Wisconsin Supreme Court race that will determine majority control with major issues looming.

Milwaukee County Circuit Judge Janet Protasiewicz and ex-Justice Dan Kelly were the top two vote-getters in a four-candidate field and advance to the April 4 general election.

Conservatives currently hold a 4-3 majority on the court and have controlled the court for 15 years. But an open seat this year gives liberals a chance to take the majority with issues like abortion access, gerrymandered legislative districts and voting rights heading into the 2024 presidential election at stake.

The court came within one vote of overturning President Joe Biden's win in the state in 2020, and both major parties are preparing for another close margin in 2024. With so much on the line, spending on Wisconsin's state Supreme Court race is expected to shatter national records for such contests.

Protasiewicz won with about 46% of the vote, while Kelly came in second with about 24%. Protasiewicz and the other liberal candidate combined for nearly 54% compared with about 46% for the two conservatives, a worrisome sign for Republicans heading into April.

Protasiewicz said afterward that voters knew how high the stakes were.

"We're saving our democracy in the state of Wisconsin," she said. "That's what I'm explaining to people. I'm talking about the ability to vote, to have a vote that counts about women's rights, reproductive freedoms, the fact that the 2024 presidential election results could likely come into our Supreme Court chamber, just everything people care about."

Kelly said the campaign was now "starting all over at ground zero and having a conversation with people all across the state."

"I think they are going to be passionate about supporting their constitution and protecting it from being overturned by someone who is trying to put her thumb on the scales of justice," he said in a dig at Protasiewicz.

Democrats coalesced around Protasiewicz over Dane County Circuit Judge Everett Mitchell, allowing her to break fundraising records and secure hundreds of endorsements.

All three of the court's current liberal justices endorsed her, while only one of the four current conservative justices endorsed Kelly. The state Democratic Party also endorsed Protasiewicz after her win Tuesday.

Protasiewicz campaigned as a supporter of abortion rights and said legislative maps drawn by Republicans and approved by the current Supreme Court were "rigged." She also made her support for abortion rights a focus of her campaign. Mitchell, who would have been the first Black justice elected to the court, also called the maps unfair and expressed support for abortion rights.

Both conservative candidates were supported by Wisconsin anti-abortion groups and spoke to GOP groups across the state during the primary campaign.

Kelly held off a challenge on the right from Waukesha County Circuit Judge Jennifer Dorow, who gained national attention for presiding over the trial last year of a man convicted of killing six people when he drove his SUV through a Waukesha Christmas parade.

Kelly cast himself as the only tested conservative in the race.

He said Tuesday that voters "don't want to gamble on who the next Supreme Court justice is. They want

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to have someone who has a proven public record of being faithful to the constitution and to the people of Wisconsin. And I see my record as doing that. And I think that's what makes the difference."

The next court is likely to issue key rulings on Wisconsin's 1849 abortion ban law, legislative maps, union rights and challenges to election results.

Republicans also fear that laws they enacted over the past decade could be in jeopardy under a liberal court, such as a 2011 law signed that effectively ended collective bargaining for most public employees, a voter ID law, a ban on absentee ballot drop boxes, and a host of others.

Kelly was endorsed by Trump during his unsuccessful run two years ago and did work for both the state and national Republican parties the past two years, including advising on the scheme in Wisconsin to have fake electors cast ballots for Trump.

Dorow has been active in local Republican Party politics and became nationally known after presiding over the trial of Darrell Brooks Jr., who was convicted of killing six people when he drove his SUV through a Christmas parade in 2021.

Outside groups have already spent about \$9.2 million on the Supreme Court race as of Tuesday, about evenly split between the two sides, according to AdImpact Politics, which tracks advertising.

"People know what this race means," Protasiewicz said Tuesday night, "and they are contributing likewise."

Asian shares decline following Wall Street tumble

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Asian shares declined Wednesday after stocks tumbled on Wall Street as worries persist about higher interest rates and their tightening squeeze on the global economy.

Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei 225 dipped 1.4% in morning trading to 27,100.51. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 slipped 0.3% to 7,312.50. South Korea's Kospi dropped 1.6% to 2,420.93. Hong Kong's Hang Seng slipped 0.1% to 20,500.35, while the Shanghai Composite shed 0.1% to 3,302.23.

New Zealand's central bank raised its benchmark interest rate by a half-point to 4.75% to try to wrestle down inflation. The increase, which can raise the borrowing costs for consumers on everything from credit cards to mortgages, comes despite widespread economic pain from a devastating cyclone.

Higher rates hurt investment prices and raise the risk of a recession by slowing business investment and consumer spending.

U.S. employment and consumer spending have weathered higher interest rates well, but a report Tuesday showed sales of previously occupied homes slowed to their slowest pace in more than a decade. The mixed signals leave investors wondering if the Fed will ease back on rate hikes or resume a more aggressive stance.

"Amid the evolving new narrative of stronger US growth, payrolls, retail sales, and the additional Fed response required to tame the rude health of the US economy, investors are beginning to think the hawkish Fed may not have entirely run its course yet," Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a commentary.

The S&P 500 fell 2% to 3,997.34 on Tuesday for its sharpest drop since the market was selling off in December. The Dow Jones Industrial Average lost 697 points, or 2.1%, to 33,129.59 while the Nasdaq composite sank 2.5% to 11,492.30.

Home Depot fell to one of the market's larger losses after giving financial forecasts that fell short of Wall Street's expectations. It dropped 7.1% despite reporting stronger profit for the last three months of 2022 than expected.

The retailer said it would spend \$1 billion to increase wages for hourly U.S. and Canadian workers. That fed into broader worries for markets that rising costs for companies have been eating into profits, which are one of the main levers that set stock prices.

Rates and stock prices are high enough that strategists at Morgan Stanley say U.S. stocks look to be more expensive than at any time since 2007.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury, which helps set rates for mortgages and other important loans, leaped

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further to 3.95% from 3.82% late Friday. The two-year yield, which moves more on expectations for the Fed, rose to 4.72% from 4.62%. It's close to its highest level since 2007.

"That is what's weighing on the market," said Keith Lerner, chief market strategist at Truist Advisory Services.

Yields have shot higher this month as Wall Street ups its forecasts for how high the Federal Reserve will take short-term interest rates in its efforts to stamp out inflation. The Fed has already pulled its key overnight rate up to a range of 4.50% to 4.75%, up from basically zero at the start of last year.

The worry is that the Fed could ratchet up its forecasts for rates further next month when it releases its latest projections for the economy. Besides showing more strength in the job market and retail sales than expected, recent reports have also suggested inflation is not cooling as quickly and as smoothly as hoped. Investors are also pushing back their forecasts for when the first cut to rates could happen.

Those worries have caused the strong rally by Wall Street early in the year to stall. Having risen as much as 8.9%, the S&P 500 is now clinging to a gain of 4.1% for the year so far.

In other trading Wednesday, benchmark U.S. crude lost 3 cents to \$76.33 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Brent crude, the international pricing standard, fell 4 cents to \$82.73 a barrel.

The U.S. dollar was little changed at 134.93 yen. The euro rose to \$1.0658 from \$1.0653.

'Woke, Inc.' author Vivek Ramaswamy enters White House race

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vivek Ramaswamy, a wealthy biotech entrepreneur and investor and the author of "Woke, Inc.," has entered the Republican race for president.

In a video released Tuesday night, Ramaswamy, 37, formally launched his longshot bid by decrying what he called a "national identity crisis" that he claims is driven by a left-wing ideology that has replaced "faith, patriotism and hard work" with "new secular religions like COVID-ism, climate-ism and gender ideology."

"We have obsessed so much over our diversity and our difference that we forgot all the ways we're really just the same as Americans," he says.

In a Wall Street Journal editorial published at the same time, he pledged to repeal civil service protections for federal workers if he wins, as well as work to eliminate affirmative action, including directing the Justice Department to prosecute "illegal race-based preferences."

Born in Ohio, Ramaswamy, the son of Indian immigrants, founded a biotechnology company before becoming the partner of a hedge fund. He is the author of the books "Woke, Inc." and "Nation of Victims" and gained stature in conservative circles for his criticism of the environmental, social and corporate governance movement that aims to promote socially responsible investing.

Ramaswamy enters what is expected to be a crowded Republican field that already includes former President Donald Trump and his former ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley.

McClellan wins special election for Virginia's 4th District

By SARAH RANKIN Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Virginia voters on Tuesday elected Democrat Jennifer McClellan, a veteran state legislator from Richmond, to fill an open seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, where she will make history as the first Black woman to represent the state in Congress.

"We will make this commonwealth and this country a better place for everyone," McClellan said in a victory speech at a party with supporters in Richmond. "I am ready to get to work."

McClellan, 50, prevailed over right-wing Republican nominee Leon Benjamin in the special election for the blue-leaning 4th District, which has its population center in the capital city and stretches south to the North Carolina border.

The seat was open after the death of Democratic Rep. Donald McEachin, who passed away following a long fight with the secondary effects of colorectal cancer in November, weeks after being elected to a fourth term. McClellan's election won't change the balance of power of the U.S. House, which Republicans

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narrowly control.

"Historical. Had to be a part of it," voter Rashida Mitchell said of the ballot she cast for McClellan on Tuesday afternoon. "She's done great things for the city of Richmond, for the commonwealth as a whole."

Prior to Tuesday, only 22 states had ever elected a Black woman to Congress, according to a recent Pew Research Center analysis of historical records. McClellan said breaking that barrier in Virginia carries extra weight because of her family's history in the Jim Crow South.

Her father's grandfather had to take a literacy test and find three white people to vouch for him just to be able to register to vote, said McClellan, a native of central Virginia. Her grandfather and father paid poll taxes and her mother, now 90, didn't vote until after the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

"It's a huge honor, and responsibility, to ensure that I'm not the last," she said in an interview last week.

An associate general counsel for Verizon, where she's worked for 20 years, McClellan has represented parts of the Richmond area in the General Assembly for nearly as long.

At the statehouse, McClellan has cultivated a reputation as a deeply knowledgeable, widely respected consensus builder and legislator. A skilled debater with a polished, reserved style, she's sponsored many of Democrats' top legislative priorities in recent years, including bills that expanded voting access and abortion rights and legislation that set ambitious clean energy mandates.

Now the mother of two school-aged children, McClellan was the first delegate to serve while pregnant and give birth while in office after she joined the state House in 2006.

McClellan also followed in McEachin's footsteps when she moved up to the state Senate. She announced her candidacy for a seat he previously held after he was first elected to Congress in 2016, and she easily won a January 2017 special election.

In 2021, she was part of the crowded Democratic field seeking the party's nomination for governor, which she and three other candidates lost to Terry McAuliffe. That experience, McClellan said, helped her pivot quickly to this race and the high-speed December nominating contest that lasted just over a week.

McClellan said her interest in politics first began in middle school.

"It was listening to my parents' stories. ... They saw the best of government through the New Deal and they saw the worst of government through Jim Crow. And their stories sparked a love of history," McClellan said.

She graduated from a suburban Richmond high school, attended the University of Richmond and obtained her law degree from the University of Virginia, initially with a goal of becoming an attorney for a congressional committee.

She changed course and first sought elected office herself in 2005. She's been active in the state Democratic party since she was in college and met her husband, David Mills, through politics. They were married by U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine, a mentor and adviser of McClellan who campaigned with her over the weekend.

Kaine said at a Saturday rally in Richmond that McClellan's combination of legislative experience and her existing connections with Virginia's congressional delegation — including four Republican members with whom she served in the General Assembly — means she'll be well positioned to be effective despite the GOP majority.

"She's a hard worker, does the homework, really gets into the details," Kaine told reporters. "She's very firm in her convictions, but she's a civil, courteous person who doesn't push anybody away."

McClellan pledged in her speech Tuesday night to serve as a unifier.

"We can prove that when we come together and we care more about doing the work and solving the problems than soundbites and the show, that we can help people," she said.

She opened her remarks with a remembrance of McEachin. His widow, Richmond prosecutor Colette McEachin, was among a number of high-profile endorsers of McClellan as she campaigned for and handily secured the party's nomination for the race.

The contest between McClellan and Benjamin, a pastor and Navy veteran who as a commentator has espoused conspiracy theories about the coronavirus pandemic and voter fraud, was not seen as competitive, though McClellan said she took nothing for granted. She campaigned and fundraised amid the

ongoing General Assembly session. The two did not meet for a debate, and McClellan largely focused her message on her legislative record rather than highlighting Benjamin's positions.

McClellan far outraised Benjamin, who was endorsed by Gov. Glenn Youngkin and other top Virginia Republicans, and she had a structural advantage in the heavily Democratic, majority-minority district.

The race marked the third loss in a row for Benjamin, who twice previously challenged McEachin.

McClellan's victory Tuesday will set up another special election to fill her seat in the General Assembly. She declined in the interview to say whether she would issue an endorsement in what's shaping up to be another crowded primary.

As for her own political future, she didn't rule out another statewide run down the road but said she hopes to make progress in Congress on some of the same issues she's championed in Richmond: environmental justice and climate change, abortion rights, public school funding, and expanding voting rights.

"All of the success that I have had with major legislation at the state level, all of that work still hasn't been done at the federal level. And so I will bring my expertise on those issues and continue to work on those issues in Congress," she said.

Putin raises tension on Ukraine, suspends START nuclear pact

By The Associated Press undefined

Russian President Vladimir Putin suspended Moscow's participation in the last remaining nuclear arms control pact with the United States, announcing the move Tuesday in a bitter speech in which he made clear he would not change his strategy in the war in Ukraine.

Putin emphasized, however, that Russia isn't withdrawing from the pact yet, and hours after his address the Foreign Ministry said Moscow would respect the treaty's caps on nuclear weapons. It also said Russia would continue to exchange information about test launches of ballistic missiles per earlier agreements with the United States.

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 ahead of the war's first anniversary Friday. "The Ukrainian people have become hostages of the Kyiv regime and its Western masters, which have effectively occupied the country."

The speech reiterated a litany of grievances he has frequently offered as justification for the widely condemned military campaign, while vowing no military letup.

Along with limits on the number of nuclear weapons, the 2010 New START envisages broad inspections of nuclear sites. Putin said Russia should stand ready to resume nuclear weapons tests if the U.S. does so, a move that would end a global ban on such tests in place since the Cold War era.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres responded by calling for Russia and the United States to return to dialogue immediately because "a world without nuclear arms control is a far more dangerous and unstable one."

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken described Moscow's decision to suspend participation in the treaty as "really unfortunate and very irresponsible."

"We'll be watching carefully to see what Russia actually does," he said while visiting Greece.

China's U.N. Ambassador Zhang Jun called on the U.S. and Russia to "continue to negotiate with each other in finding a good solution."

U.S. President Joe Biden, speaking in Poland a day after his surprise visit to Ukraine, did not mention the START suspension but blasted Putin for the invasion. He pledged continued support for Ukraine despite "hard and bitter days ahead."

"Democracies of the world will stand guard over freedom today, tomorrow and forever," Biden said at Warsaw's landmark Royal Castle before a cheering crowd of Poles and Ukrainian refugees.

Putin's announcement was the second time in recent days the Ukraine war showed it could spread into perilous new terrain, after Blinken told China over the weekend that it would be a "serious problem" if

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Beijing provided arms and ammunition to Russia.

China and Russia have aligned their foreign policies to oppose Washington. Beijing has refused to condemn Russia's invasion or atrocities against civilians in Ukraine, while strongly criticizing Western economic sanctions on Moscow. Late last year, Russia and China held joint naval drills.

The deputy head of Ukraine's intelligence service, Vadym Skibitskyi, told The Associated Press his agency hasn't seen any signs so far that China is providing weapons to Moscow.

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

The war has revived the divide between Russia and the West, reinvigorated the NATO alliance, and created the biggest threat to Putin's rule of more than two decades.

In Tuesday's speech, Putin again offered his own version of recent history, discounting Ukraine's arguments that it needed Western help to thwart a Russian military takeover. He has repeatedly depicted NATO's expansion to include countries close to Russia as an existential threat to his country.

"It's they who have started the war. And we are using force to end it," he said before an audience of lawmakers, officials and soldiers, and broadcast on all state TV channels.

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, who was in Ukraine on Tuesday, said she wished Putin had taken a different approach.

"What we heard this morning was propaganda that we already know," Meloni said in English. "He says (Russia) worked on diplomacy to avoid the conflict, but the truth is that there is somebody who is the invader and somebody who is defending itself."

Also meeting with Zelenskyy was the newly appointed chairman of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, who led a delegation for the first time since the start of the war and since Republicans won control of the House of Representatives.

Chairman Mike McCaul and a handful of other GOP lawmakers said they had a productive meeting about what Zelenskyy needs for winning the war. He provided them with a list of weapons, including longer-range artillery and air-to-surface systems.

The meeting comes as some hard-right Republicans are vowing to block future U.S. aid to Ukraine. "We have seen time and again the majority of Republicans and Democrats support our assistance to Ukraine," McCaul said in a statement. "But the Biden administration needs to lay out their long-term strategy."

Putin denied any wrongdoing in Ukraine, even after Kremlin forces struck civilian targets, including hospitals, and are widely accused of war crimes.

Zelenskyy cited fresh attacks on Ukrainian civilians Tuesday, and downplayed Putin's speech.

"I have not watched it, because during this time there were missile strikes on Kherson. Twenty-one people were wounded and six were killed," he said.

Putin also accused the West of taking aim at Russian culture, religion and values. He fired another broadside at Western gender policies that he described as efforts to destroy "traditional" values.

And he said Western sanctions hadn't "achieved anything and will not achieve anything." He blasted Russian tycoons who kept their assets in the West and saw them confiscated or frozen as part of the sanctions.

"Believe me, ordinary people had no sympathy for those who lost their yachts, palaces and other assets abroad," Putin said.

While Russia's Constitution mandates that the president deliver the state-of-the-nation speech annually, Putin never gave one in 2022. Last year, the Kremlin also canceled two other big annual events — Putin's news conference and a highly scripted phone-in marathon taking questions from the public.

Reflecting the Kremlin's clampdown on free speech and press, it barred in-person coverage of the address by media from "unfriendly" countries, including the U.S., the U.K. and those in the European Union.

EPA orders Norfolk Southern to clean up toxic derailment

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By JOHN SEEWER and MICHAEL RUBINKAM Associated Press
EAST PALESTINE, Ohio (AP) — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ordered Norfolk Southern on Tuesday to pay for the cleanup of the East Palestine, Ohio, train wreck and chemical release as federal regulators took charge of long-term recovery efforts and promised worried residents they won't be forgotten.

Speaking to reporters near the derailment site, Norfolk Southern's CEO promised to undertake necessary steps to ensure the long-term health of the community and become a "safer railroad."

EPA used its authority under the federal Superfund law to order Norfolk Southern to take all available measures to clean up contaminated air and water. It also said the company would be required to reimburse the federal government for a new program to provide cleaning services for impacted residents and businesses.

"Norfolk Southern will pay for cleaning up the mess that they created and the trauma that they inflicted on this community," EPA Administrator Michael Regan vowed at a news conference in East Palestine. "I know this order cannot undue the nightmare that families in this town have been living with, but it will begin to deliver much-needed justice for the pain that Norfolk Southern has caused."

He warned that if Norfolk Southern fails to comply, the agency will perform the work itself and seek triple damages from the company.

EPA planned to release more details on the cleanup service for residents and businesses, which it said would "provide an additional layer of reassurance."

The agency said its order marked the end of the "emergency" phase of the Feb. 3 derailment and the start of long-term remediation.

Norfolk Southern CEO Alan Shaw reiterated promises to restore the site and invest in the community.

"From day one, I've made the commitment that Norfolk Southern is going to remediate the site, we're going to do continuous long-term air and water monitoring, we're going to help the residents of this community recover, and we're going to invest in the long-term health of this community. And we're going to make Norfolk Southern a safer railroad," he told reporters.

Jeff Zalick, who lives with his 100-year-old mother just blocks from the derailment site, said he's waiting for the home to be cleaned before moving back. He said there's still a chemical smell inside, though not nearly as bad as a week ago.

The walls need scrubbing, and he wants air purifiers installed before allowing his mother back.

"I just want to make sure she's safe," he said. "She's ready to come home. She cries every day."

In a tweet sent after the EPA announcement, President Joe Biden said the Trump administration and other elected officials have hampered efforts to improve rail safety.

"We'll continue to hold rail companies accountable when they fail to put safety first. But first, we've got Norfolk Southern's mess to clean," he said. "I want affected residents to know that we've got your back."

EPA's move to compel Norfolk Southern to clean up came nearly three weeks after more than three dozen freight cars — including 11 carrying hazardous materials — derailed on the East Palestine outskirts, near the Pennsylvania state line, prompting an evacuation as fears grew about a potential explosion of smoldering wreckage.

Officials seeking to avoid an uncontrolled blast intentionally released and burned toxic vinyl chloride from five rail cars, sending flames and black smoke high into the sky. That left people questioning the potential health impacts even as authorities maintained they were doing their best to protect people.

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine assured residents they will not be left to handle the aftermath on their own once public attention turns elsewhere.

"We understand that it's not just about today, it's not just about two weeks from now," he said. "People have long-term concerns, and we're going to do everything we can to stay at this."

Already, 4,600 yards of contaminated soil and 1.1 million gallons of contaminated water have been removed, DeWine said. But he said Norfolk Southern failed to address the contaminated soil underneath its tracks before repairing them and running freight again. He said the company would have to take the tracks back up and remove the soil.

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro blasted Norfolk Southern over what he called its “failed management of this crisis,” saying the company chose not to take part in a unified incident command, and provided inaccurate information and conflicting modeling data.

“The combination of Norfolk Southern’s corporate greed, incompetence, and lack of concern for our residents is absolutely unacceptable,” said Shapiro, speaking at the news conference with Regan, DeWine and other officials.

Shapiro said his administration had made a criminal referral of Norfolk Southern to the Pennsylvania attorney general’s office. DeWine said Ohio’s attorney general had launched an investigation.

EPA said it has tested indoor air quality at 550 homes so far, with outside air being monitored via aircraft, mobile vans and stationary instruments.

Still, Regan said he is not sure if EPA is testing for dioxin, a carcinogen, as some lawmakers and advocates requested.

Under the so-called Superfund law, EPA has authority to direct those responsible for contamination or hazardous waste to clean it up. EPA can fine the railway up to \$70,000 a day if the work is not completed. EPA can also do the work itself if necessary and bill Norfolk Southern triple its costs.

Separately, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg announced a package of reforms Tuesday and called on railroad operators to take immediate steps to improve safety, such as accelerating the planned upgrade of tank cars.

Pay-Per-Chew: More restaurants trying subscription programs

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Consumers are willing to pay monthly subscription fees for streaming services, pet food and even toilet paper. And now some restaurants are betting they’ll do the same for their favorite meals.

Large chains like Panera and P.F. Chang’s as well as neighborhood hangouts are increasingly experimenting with the subscription model as a way to ensure steady revenue and customer visits. Some offer unlimited drinks or free delivery for a monthly fee; others will bring out your favorite appetizer each time you visit.

They’re following a trend: The average American juggled 6.7 subscriptions in 2022, up from 4.2 in 2019, according to Rocket Money, a personal finance app.

“This is just another way for customers to provide a level of support and joy and love for our offerings,” said Matt Baker, the chef at Gravitas, a Michelin-starred restaurant in Washington.

For \$130 per month, Gravitas Supper Club subscribers get a three-course takeout meal for two. Baker said Gravitas shifted to takeout during the pandemic but saw demand fizzle once its dining room reopened. The Supper Club — which serves about 60 diners per month — keeps that revenue flowing.

The upscale Chinese chain P.F. Chang’s also saw an opportunity to increase to-go orders with its subscription plan, which launched in September. For \$6.99 per month, members get free delivery, among other perks.

Other restaurants are experimenting with memberships, which let diners pre-pay toward their visits.

El Lopo, a San Francisco bar, has 26 members in its Take-Care-Of-Me Club. They pay either \$89 per month for \$100 in dining credits or \$175 per month for \$200 in credits. When members come in, El Lopo starts bringing out their favorite dishes. Each visit, they can gift a free drink to anyone in the bar.

El Lopo owner Daniel Azarkman started the club in March 2021 to encourage patrons to return as the pandemic eased. Now, he’s hearing from restaurants all over the country who are interested in starting similar programs.

“What it really achieves is getting them in more often,” he said.

Rick Camac, executive director of Industry Relations at the Institute of Culinary Education, said he expects many more restaurants to offer subscriptions in the coming years. Consumers are accustomed to them, he said, and the regular monthly income helps restaurants manage their cash flow.

But not all subscription programs have had success. In 2021, On the Border Mexican Grill introduced its Queso Club, which offered free cheese dip for a year for \$1. The program stopped taking new subscribers

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a year later.

Edithann Ramey, On the Border's chief marketing officer, said more than 150,000 people signed up for the Queso Club, and members visited seven times more often than the average guest. But the Dallas-based chain wasn't making enough to cover the cost of the dip.

On the Border is now retooling the program and expects to reintroduce it later this year. It may charge more or move to a monthly model, Ramey said, but the subscription element will remain.

"It's becoming kind of a hot trend and we want to stay as a leading brand," Ramey said.

Taco Bell is also tinkering with its \$10 Taco Lover's Pass, which lets subscribers get a taco every day for a month. The pass was introduced in January 2022 and again in October; it generated buzz, but the chain is trying to think of ways to make it more valuable to consumers, said Dane Mathews, Taco Bell's chief digital officer. A subscription could promise faster service, for example, or unlock unique menu items.

Other restaurants have dropped subscriptions, saying they have their hands full just running the kitchen.

In late 2020, SheWolf, an upscale Italian restaurant in Detroit, started sending subscribers a box of pasta, sauces and other treats for \$80 per month. But when its dining room fully reopened six months later, it was too much work to put together hundreds of boxes.

Still, SheWolf is keeping one foot in the subscription space. Dan Reinisch, the restaurant's beverage director, sends Italian wines to about 80 subscribers who pay \$60 or more each month.

Other businesses have had better luck. St. Louis-based Panera had nearly 40 million members in its loyalty program in early 2020, but it wanted to convince them to drop in more often. So it launched a subscription program that offered unlimited coffee and tea for \$8.99 per month. Customers started coming in several times a week, and about one-third of the time they bought food.

Last year, Panera expanded the subscription. Now, members can pay \$11.99 per month or \$119.99 per year for unlimited hot and cold drinks. Annual subscribers also get free delivery.

Eduardo Luz, Panera's chief brand and concept officer, won't share exact numbers but he said members now make up 25% of the chain's transactions.

"It's a huge traffic driver," Luz said.

The idea quickly spread overseas. Pret A Manger, a sandwich chain owned by the same private company as Panera, launched its own coffee subscription in the U.K. in 2020. As of November, it was being used 1.2 million times per week. Pret also offers subscriptions in France and the U.S.

Chris Hosford, a communications consultant in southern California, joined Panera's subscription plan a year ago. He passes four or five Paneras on his regular routes and often stops to grab a coffee and a bite to eat.

"It's not a huge amount of savings for me — probably \$5-10 in the average month," Hosford said. "But I'm good with that."

Malcolm X's daughter to sue CIA and FBI for wrongful death

NEW YORK (AP) — The family of slain civil rights leader Malcolm X marked on Tuesday the anniversary of his 1965 assassination by announcing plans to sue agencies including the CIA, FBI, the New York Police Department and others for \$100 million, accusing them of playing a role in his death.

Two of his daughters, Ilyasah Shabazz and Qubilah Shabazz, were joined by attorney Ben Crump at a news conference at the site of the former Audubon Ballroom in upper Manhattan, where Malcolm X was fatally shot as a crowd gathered to hear him speak on Feb. 21, 1965.

For decades questions have circulated over who was responsible for his death.

Three men were convicted, but two were exonerated in 2021 after a renewed investigation into the cases against them showed the evidence used to gain convictions was shaky and that authorities had held back some information.

Ilyasah Shabazz, the co-administrator of her father's estate, filed notices of claim, which is the first step in the process, saying that the agencies "conspired with each other and with other individuals and acted, and failed to act, in such a way as to bring about the wrongful death of Malcolm X."

"For years our family has fought for the truth to come to light," she said at the news conference. "We want justice served for our father."

Emails seeking comment were sent to the CIA, FBI, Department of Justice and New York City's legal department. The DOJ and NYPD declined to comment.

Crump noted the anniversary date and said that ever since then, "there has been speculation as to who was involved in the assassination of Malcolm X."

He cited the 2021 exonerations and said that government agencies including the Manhattan district attorney, the NYPD and the FBI "had factual evidence, exculpatory evidence that they fraudulently concealed from the men who were wrongfully convicted for the assassination of Malcolm X."

Asked if he believes government agencies conspired to assassinate Malcolm, Crump said, "That is what we are alleging, yes. They infiltrated many civil rights organizations."

Mormon church fined \$5M for obscuring size of portfolio

By SAM METZ Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its investment arm have been fined \$5 million for using shell companies to obscure the size of the portfolio under church control, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission announced Tuesday.

The faith, widely known as the Mormon church, maintains billions of dollars of investments in stocks, bonds, real estate and agriculture. Much of its portfolio is controlled by Ensign Peak Advisers, a nonprofit investment manager overseen by ecclesiastical leaders known as its presiding bishopric.

The church has agreed to pay \$1 million and Ensign Peak will pay \$4 million in penalties based on the violation.

Ensign Peak avoided disclosing investments "with the church's knowledge," denying the SEC and the public of accurate information required under law, Gurbir Grewal, the agency's enforcement director, said in a statement.

Federal investigators said for a period of 22 years, the firm violated agency rules and the Securities Exchange Act by not filing paperwork required that disclosed the value of its assets.

Instead, they said Ensign Peak filed the forms through 13 shell companies they created, even as they maintained decision-making power. They also had "business managers," most employed by the church, sign the required shell company filings.

"The Church was concerned that disclosure of its portfolio, which by 2018 grew to approximately \$32 billion, would lead to negative consequences," the SEC said in a statement announcing the charges.

Increasingly, the church and its Salt Lake City-based investment arm have faced scrutiny over the fact that tax law largely exempts religious groups from paying U.S. taxes. Ensign Peak is registered as a supporting organization and integrated auxiliary of the church. Investment managers of its size are required to report stockholdings quarterly.

It gained traction in 2019 when a whistleblower alleged the church had stockpiled nearly \$100 billion in funds, rather than directing it toward charitable causes. Ensign Peak has since been a source of intrigue and mystery for the nearly 17-million member Utah-based faith, which encourages members worldwide to give 10% of their income in a what is known as "tithing."

Two years later, prominent church member James Huntsman filed a lawsuit against the church alleging it misrepresented how it used donations and, rather than direct them to charitable causes, invested in assets including real estate and an insurance business. A judge dismissed the complaint last year and Huntsman later appealed the decision.

Earlier this month, the 2019 whistleblower, a former Ensign Peak investment manager named David Nielsen, submitted a 90-page memorandum to the U.S. Senate Finance Committee demanding oversight into the church's finances.

In a statement, church officials said over the time period investigated, none of their holdings had gone unreported and all had been disclosed through the separate companies. They said they had "relied upon

legal counsel regarding how to comply with its reporting obligations while attempting to maintain the privacy of the portfolio” and noted that Ensign Peak had changed its reporting approach after learning of the SEC’s concerns in 2019.

“We affirm our commitment to comply with the law, regret mistakes made, and now consider this matter closed,” they said.

Sam Brunson, a church member and tax law professor at Loyola University Chicago, said the \$5 million fine differed from past accusations leveled against Ensign Peak because the church appears to have admitted some fault.

A failure to fill out SEC paperwork may not fuel broader conversations about how the church manages its money, he said, yet it reflects an “incredibly aggressive” strategy to keep certain information from the public.

“For the last 70 years or so, the Mormon Church has had an ethos of keeping its finances private,” Brunson said.

Upper Midwest braces for blizzard, nearly 2 feet of snow

By TRISHA AHMED and JIM SALTER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A monster winter storm took aim at the Upper Midwest on Tuesday, threatening to bring blizzard conditions, bitterly cold temperatures and 2 feet of snow in a three-day onslaught that could affect more than 40 million Americans.

The storm began around midday and was to continue through Thursday morning in parts of the Dakotas, Nebraska, Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin, with winds gusting as high as 50 mph (80 kph) and wind chills tumbling as low as minus 50 degrees (minus 46 Celsius) in some places.

The snowfall could be historic, even in a region accustomed to heavy snow. As much as 25 inches may pile up, with the heaviest amounts falling across east-central Minnesota and west-central Wisconsin, the National Weather Service said.

The Minneapolis-St. Paul area could see 2 feet of snow or more for the first since in over 30 years.

Some families scrambled to get shopping done before the weather closed in. At a Costco in the Minneapolis suburb of St. Louis Park, Molly Schirmer stocked up on heat-and-serve dinners and Mexican Coca-Colas, knowing that she and her two teenagers might get stuck at home.

“The schools are already preparing to go online, so the kids will probably be home doing online school,” Schirmer said of her 13- and 15-year-olds.

At another Costco in suburban Eagan, Larry and Sue Lick bought toilet paper, kitchen essentials and coffee ahead of the storm. They also rescheduled medical appointments and a family gathering, just to stay off the roads.

“It’s not so much our driving, but you’ve got to worry about everybody else driving, with so many accidents caused by people that don’t know the winter driving,” Larry Lick said.

The weather service said the blizzard will actually involve two rounds. For the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, the first blast arrives Wednesday afternoon with up to 7 inches of snow. Round 2 starting later Wednesday and extending into Thursday is the real whopper, “with an additional 10 to 20 inches expected.”

Weather service meteorologist Frank Pereira said the system was expected to affect about 43 million Americans.

Forecasters warned of life-threatening conditions.

Temperatures could plunge to minus 15 to minus 20 degrees on Thursday (minus 26 to minus 29 Celsius) and minus 25 degrees (minus 32 Celsius) Friday in Grand Forks, North Dakota, meteorologist Nathan Rick said. Wind chills of 50 degrees below zero were possible.

Wind gusts of 35 mph (56 kph) will be common in western and central Minnesota, with some blowing even stronger. That will result in “significant blowing and drifting snow with whiteout conditions in open areas,” the weather service said.

According to the weather service, the biggest snow event on record in the Twin Cities was 28.4 inches

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from Oct. 31 through Nov. 3, 1991 — known as the Halloween Blizzard. The second-largest was 21.1 inches of snow from Nov. 29 through Dec. 1, 1985. The Twin Cities got 20 inches of snow on Jan. 22 and Jan. 23, 1982.

Hours before the snow was to start, the storm was already having an impact. Minnesota state lawmakers canceled all committee hearings scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday as well as the Thursday floor sessions. Since they don't normally meet on Friday, legislators won't reconvene until Monday.

Hardware store owners said customers were generally taking the forecast in stride.

At C&S Supply, an employee-owned hardware store in Mankato, manager Corey Kapaun said demand was high for salt and grit, but not for shovels, snow blowers or other equipment. He attributed that to the fact that winter is two-thirds over.

Kapaun said he's sold 130 to 140 snow blowers and around 1,000 shovels this winter, when Mankato has seen more than 3 feet of snow.

"I think people are either prepared or they're not," Kapaun said. "It's usually the first snowfall of the year that gets a lot of attention. With a storm like this, I expected a little bit more, but we've already had a big year of snow already."

In Sioux Falls, Dallas VandenBos has owned Robson True Value hardware store for 48 years. His customers are used to the snow, but don't necessarily trust the forecast.

He recalled a storm in early January that was supposed to drop 3 or 4 inches of snow. The total was much higher — 18 inches.

Sales of snow-related items haven't really picked up, but VandenBos has a backlog of snow blowers to repair. Those bringing them in Tuesday were out of luck — they won't be ready for a week.

"They're not going to get them in time for this snow," VandenBos said.

Forecasters at AccuWeather said the same storm system could result in icing across a 1,300-mile (2,092-kilometer) band from near Omaha, Nebraska, to New Hampshire on Wednesday and Thursday, creating potential travel hazards in or near cities such as Milwaukee, Detroit, Chicago and Boston.

Portions of northern Illinois, southern Michigan and southern New York state could get up to half an inch of ice, which could topple power lines and cause outages, AccuWeather said.

In California, significant snow was possible in the foothills and mountains near Los Angeles, with several inches predicted even for elevations as low as 1,000 feet, the weather service said.

Nearly the state's entire population "will be able to see snow from some vantage point later this week if they look in the right direction," UCLA climate scientist Daniel Swain wrote on Twitter.

Potentially damaging 50 mph (80 kph) winds were predicted along the central coast, and gusts of 70 mph (113 kph) were possible in the mountains.

As the northern U.S. deals with a winter blast, record warmth was expected later in the week in the mid-Atlantic and Southeast — 30 degrees to 40 degrees above normal in some places. Record highs were likely from Baltimore to New Orleans and in much of Florida, Pereira said.

Washington, D.C., could hit 80 degrees on Thursday, which would top the record of 78 degrees set in 1874.

Mexico's ex-public security chief convicted in US drug case

By JENNIFER PELTZ and BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A former Mexican presidential cabinet member was convicted in the U.S. on Tuesday of taking massive bribes to protect the violent drug cartels he was tasked with combating.

Under tight security, an anonymous New York federal court jury deliberated for three days before reaching a verdict in the drug trafficking case against ex-Public Security Secretary Genaro García Luna.

He is the highest-ranking current or former Mexican official ever to be tried in the United States.

"García Luna, who once stood at the pinnacle of law enforcement in Mexico, will now live the rest of his days having been revealed as a traitor to his country and to the honest members of law enforcement who risked their lives to dismantle drug cartels," Brooklyn-based U.S. Attorney Breon Peace said in a statement.

García Luna, who denied the allegations, headed Mexico's federal police and was later the country's top

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public safety official from 2006 to 2012. His lawyers said the charges were based on lies from criminals who wanted to punish his drug-fighting efforts and to get sentencing breaks for themselves by helping prosecutors.

He showed no apparent reaction on hearing the verdict. His lawyer, César de Castro, said that the defense planned to appeal and that the case lacked "credible and reliable evidence."

"The government was forced to settle for a case built on the backs of some of the most notorious and ruthless criminals to have testified in this courthouse," de Castro said outside court.

García Luna, 54, was convicted on charges that include engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise. He faces at least 20 years and as much as life in prison at his sentencing, set for June 27.

The case had political ramifications on both sides of the border.

Current Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has railed throughout the trial against ex-President Felipe Calderón's administration for, at a minimum, putting García Luna in charge of Mexico's security. López Obrador spokesperson Jesús Ramírez tweeted after the verdict that "justice has come" to a Calderón ally and that "the crimes committed against our people will never be forgotten."

García Luna's work also introduced him to high-level American politicians and other officials, who considered him a key cartel-fighting partner as Washington embarked on a \$1.6 billion push to beef up Mexican law enforcement and stem the flow of drugs.

The Americans weren't accused of wrongdoing, and although suspicions long swirled around García Luna, the trial didn't delve into the extent of U.S. officials' knowledge about them before his 2019 arrest. López Obrador has, however, pointedly suggested that Washington investigate its own law enforcement and intelligence officials who worked with García Luna during Calderón's administration.

A roster of ex-smugglers and former Mexican officials testified that García Luna took millions of dollars in cartel cash, met with major traffickers in settings ranging from a country house to a car wash and kept law enforcement at bay.

He was "the best investment they had," said Sergio "El Grande" Villarreal Barragan, a former federal police officer who worked for cartels on the side and later as his main job.

He and other witnesses said that on García Luna's watch, police tipped off traffickers about upcoming raids, ensured that cocaine could pass freely through the country, colluded with cartels to raid rivals, and did other favors. One ex-smuggler said García Luna shared a document that reflected U.S. law enforcement's information about a huge cocaine shipment that was seized in Mexico around 2007.

One ex-smuggler, Oscar "El Lobo" Nava Valencia, said he personally heard García Luna and a then-top police official say they would "stand with us" during a meeting with notorious Sinaloa cocaine cartel kingpin Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán's associates amid a cartel civil war. That sit-down alone cost the drug gang \$3 million, Nava Valencia said.

García Luna didn't testify at the trial, although his wife took the stand in an apparent effort to portray their assets in Mexico as legitimately acquired and upper-middle-class, but not lavish. The couple moved to Miami in 2012, when the Mexican administration changed and he became a consultant on security issues.

The trial was peppered with glimpses of such narco-extravagances as a private zoo with a lion, a hippo, white tigers and more. Jurors heard about tons of cocaine moving through Latin America in shipping containers, go-fast boats, private jets, planes, trains and even submarines.

And there were horrific reminders of the extraordinary violence those drugs fueled.

Witnesses described cartel killings and kidnappings, allegedly including an abduction of García Luna himself. There was testimony about police officers being slaughtered and drug-world rivals being dismembered, skinned and dangled from bridges as cartel factions fought each other while buying police protection.

Testimony also aired a secondhand claim that Calderón, the former president, sought to shield Guzmán against a major rival; Calderón called the allegation "absurd" and "an absolute lie."

García Luna was arrested after allegations of his alleged graft emerged at Guzmán's high-profile trial about four years ago in the same New York courthouse.

The former lawman also faces various Mexican arrest warrants and charges relating to government tech-

nology contracts, prison contracting and the bungled U.S. "Fast and Furious" investigation into suspicions that guns were illegally making their way from the U.S. to Mexican drug cartels. The Mexican government has also filed a civil suit against García Luna and his alleged associates and businesses in Florida, seeking to recover \$700 million that Mexico claims he garnered through corruption.

Anticorruption activists gathered outside the courthouse to celebrate Tuesday's verdict.

"My country is a grave. It's now a cemetery ... thanks to the corruption," said Carmen Paes, who blamed drug lords in her native Mexico for the disappearance of a nephew decades ago.

Biden in Poland: US, allies 'will never waver' in Ukraine

By AAMER MADHANI, ZEKE MILLER and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — President Joe Biden on Tuesday warned of "hard and bitter days ahead" as Russia's invasion of Ukraine nears the one-year mark, but vowed that no matter what, the United States and allies "will not waver" in supporting the Ukrainians.

A day after his surprise visit to Kyiv, Biden used a strongly worded address in neighboring Poland to praise allies in Europe for stepping up over the past year and to send a clear message to Russian President Vladimir Putin that "NATO will not be divided, and we will not tire."

"One year ago, the world was bracing for the fall of Kyiv," Biden said before a crowd of thousands outside Warsaw's Royal Castle. "I can report: Kyiv stands strong. Kyiv stands proud. It stands tall and, most important, it stands free."

With Russia and Ukraine each preparing spring offensives, Biden insisted there will be no backing down from what he's portrayed as a global struggle between democracy and autocracy — though polling suggests American support for ongoing military assistance appears to be softening.

"Democracies of the world will stand guard over freedom today, tomorrow and forever," Biden declared. The U.S. and allies will "have Ukraine's back."

Biden's speech came a day after his unannounced trip to Kyiv, where he met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and walked the city streets as an air raid siren blared.

Last year, weeks after Russian forces began their attacks on Ukraine, Biden delivered a harsh condemnation of Putin from the gardens of the castle. Speaking Tuesday to a crowd that included Polish citizens and Ukrainian refugees — and millions more following in Ukraine, Russia and around the world — he made his case that Putin's war has been a failure.

"When President Putin ordered his tanks to roll into Ukraine, he thought we would roll over. He was wrong," Biden said.

The president also declared "the democracies of the world have grown stronger" while the world's autocrats — including Putin — have become weaker.

"Autocrats only understand one word — no, no, no," Biden said. "No, you will not take my country. No, you will not take my freedom. No, you will not take my future."

Biden was using the trip to prepare allies for an ever-more-complicated stage of the war and to reassure allies in the region that the U.S. was committed for the long haul. He met Tuesday with Moldovan President Maia Sandu — who last week claimed Moscow was behind a plot to overthrow her country's government using external saboteurs — and with his host Polish President Andrzej Duda.

"We have to have security in Europe," Biden said at the presidential palace. "It's that basic, that simple, that consequential."

He described NATO as "maybe the most consequential alliance in history," and he said it's "stronger than it's ever been" despite the Russian leader's hopes that it would fracture over the war in Ukraine.

Duda praised the American president's visit to Kyiv as "spectacular," saying it "boosted morale of Ukraine's defenders."

He said the trip was "a sign that the free world, and its biggest leader, the president of the United States, stands by them."

On Wednesday, Biden will meet again with Duda along with other leaders of the Bucharest Nine, the

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easternmost members of the NATO military alliance. Ukraine is not a member.

While Biden was in Poland, Putin announced that Moscow would suspend its participation in the last remaining nuclear arms control pact with the United States.

The New START Treaty caps the number of long-range nuclear warheads countries may deploy and limits the use of missiles that can carry atomic weapons.

Despite his criticisms of Putin, Biden did not mention the START suspension during his speech. And the Russian Foreign Ministry later said that, despite Putin's announcement, it would continue abiding by the treaty's caps.

The conflict in Ukraine — 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.

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 acknowledged 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 said it has new intelligence suggesting that China, which has generally 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, said U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan. 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 that during the leaders' talk.

With no quick end in sight for the war, the anniversary is a critical moment for Biden to try to bolster European unity and reiterate the West's position 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.

In the U.S., a poll published last week by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research showed 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. He described the conflict as "about freedom of democracy at large."

Biden had high praise for 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 truth of the matter is the United States needs Poland and NATO as much as NATO needs the United States," Biden told Duda on Tuesday.

'Cocaine Bear' is here to strike a blow to staid Hollywood

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — On Dec. 22, 1985, The Associated Press reported the following from Blue Ridge, Georgia:

"Investigators searching for cocaine dropped by an airborne smuggler have found a ripped-up shipment of the sweet-smelling powder and the remains of a bear that apparently died of a multimillion-dollar high."

Police found a sad scene. A 175-lb. black bear dead near a duffle bag and some \$2 million worth of

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cocaine that had been opened and scattered over a hillside. The parachutist, a former Kentucky narcotics investigator, had fallen to his death in a backyard in Knoxville, Tennessee. His unmanned airplane crashed into a North Carolina mountain. Back in Georgia, the bear, examiners said, had overdosed.

The story is in many ways too much. Too absurd. Too '80s. Even the screenwriters of the "Fast & Furious" movies would think it far-fetched. The stranger-than-fiction tale quickly receded from the headlines and, before some began to stoke the myth of "Pablo Escobear," it mostly stayed buried in news media archives.

That changed when screenwriter Jimmy Warden delivered to producers Phil Lord and Christopher Miller a script titled "Cocaine Bear." They were on board from page one.

"When the movie's pitched, you hear the word 'Cocaine,' you're like 'I'm not sure what to think of this,'" Lord says. "Then when you hear the word 'Bear,' you're like: 'I'm all in.'"

Yes, "Cocaine Bear" is a real movie. And after it opens in theaters Friday, it might even be a hit. Since the trailer first debuted for Elizabeth Banks' very, very loosely based-on-a-true-story R-rated comedy has stoked a rabid zeitgeist. At a time when much in Hollywood can feel pre-packaged, the makers of "Cocaine Bear" think it can be an untamed exception.

"Hopefully the film lives up to the title," Banks says, smiling. "That was the goal."

Little on the movie calendar has captured the public imagination quite like "Cocaine Bear." Its trailer, watched more than 25 million times, immediately went viral. The movie, itself, is like a meme sprung to life — a kind of spiritual heir to "Snakes on a Plane" crossed with a Paddington Bear fever dream. Everything about it is propelled by a tongue-in-cheek sense of humor and can-you-believe-this-is-a-real-movie wink. "I'm the bear who ate cocaine," reads one of the film's official tweets. "This is my story."

While most studio movies are driven by well-known intellectual property and few original comedies manage to attract audiences in theaters, "Cocaine Bear" is here to strike a blow to business-as-usual in Hollywood. "Cocaine Bear" is here to be bold. "Cocaine Bear" is here to party.

"You have to demonstrate theatricality to get the greenlight. It just means you have to swing the bat a little harder," Lord says. "In this world that's increasingly mechanized, things that don't feel mechanized have really special value."

Miller and Lord have in recent years shepherded some of the most vibrant and irreverent films to the screen, including "The Lego Movie," "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse" and "The Mitchells vs the Machines." They like to take apart old conventions and give them an absurdist, post-modern spin.

"Certainly, this movie was not mandated by a corporation," Miller says, laughing. "It's a thing we somehow snuck through the system. That's how we love to make all our movies, like: 'I can't believe they let us get away with this.'"

Warden had been a production assistant on their 2012 action comedy "21 Jump Street." After hearing about the 1985 story, Warden wrote the script on spec and hoped his old bosses would like it. Intrigued at the screenplay's possibility, the producers found an unexpectedly open reception from Universal Pictures chief Donna Langley.

"What's funny is that we thought it would be difficult because of the subject matter. But surprisingly, they were excited right from the jump and didn't shy away from the movie, its tone or even its title," says Miller. "We thought at some point, someone was going to say, 'Well you can't call it 'Cocaine Bear.' You have to call it 'A Walk in the Woods.'"

Since her directorial debut in 2015's "Pitch Perfect 2," Banks has carved out a second career behind the camera. She last helmed 2019's "Charlie's Angels." With Universal's backing and Lord and Miller producing, "Cocaine Bear" struck her as not just a viable, actually-happening project but one where she could marry a gory animal attack movie with comedy.

"Most people are surprised that it is a real thing, and very surprised that I'm the person that made it," says Banks, laughing. "I just got a text from someone who was like, 'I've been hearing about this movie and I had no idea you made it.'"

Though the title meant "Cocaine Bear" would be limited from some advertising platforms, the filmmakers describe the studio as interested in leaning into what made the film distinct from all the options

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viewers are inundated with. Nothing, it turned out, could cut through all the noise like "Cocaine Bear."

"They love things with strong flavor. That's the word I hear a lot in my marketing meetings," Banks says. "It's harder and harder to find things that are theatrically exciting. The hope was that we were making something people needed to leave their house to see."

The film, itself, takes the basis of the real story and imagines what might have transpired if the bear didn't quickly die but went on a coke-fueled rampage through a national forest, terrorizing park wardens, campers and drug dealers seeking the lost shipment. After an initial taste, the bear goes after more cocaine with all the zeal of Yogi pursuing a picnic basket.

The bear, named Cokie, was a CGI concoction created by Weta FX with Allen Henry, a stunt man and student of Andy Serkis, performing motion capture. He wore all black and walked on all fours with prosthetic arms. The rest of the cast includes Keri Russell, Margo Martindale, Alden Ehrenreich, O'Shea Jackson and Ray Liotta. It's one of Liotta's final performances before his death last May, and one that connects back to his similarly cocaine-laced performance in "Goodfellas."

"I've said that this film felt very risky. The risk was: I was never going to have the lead character of the movie on the set of the movie," Banks says. "That was truly what scared me the most. If the bear didn't work, the movie falls apart."

Lord and Miller hope that there's a rising realization within the film industry that movies that are audaciously original can pack theaters. Lord points to the Academy Awards favorite "Everything Everywhere All at Once" as recent proof.

"It could win best picture and it's the zaniest idea out there," Lord says. "For the scale of that movie, it's a huge hit. What we're after is demonstrating that these movies can be original and fun and surprising and they can be hits."

"I can't think of a movie that came out last year that wouldn't have been maybe a little bit better if there had been a cocaine-fueled bear on a rampage as part of it," adds Miller. "Imagine if 'The Banshees of Inisherin' had a big bear just running through biting that guy's fingers off."

If it's successful, "Cocaine Bear" could, of course, become a franchise of its own. A sequel isn't out the question. "LSD Armadillo"? "Quaalude Tortoise"? Banks, for now, is deferring.

"Somebody will put something into the AI chat bot and it will spit out something ridiculous and the internet will write it for us."

Jimmy Carter enters hospice care. What is it?

By The Associated Press undefined

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter entered home hospice care in Plains, Georgia, after a series of short hospital stays.

The Carter Center said in a statement Saturday that Carter, 98, "decided to spend his remaining time at home with his family and receive hospice care instead of additional medical intervention."

WHAT IS HOSPICE CARE?

Hospice care is treatment designed to make patients comfortable and to reduce pain and suffering in their final days. It is usually home-based, but can also be provided in nursing homes, hospitals and hospice centers. It is reserved for those declared by two physicians to be terminally ill, with six months or less to live.

The average time spent in hospice is about three weeks, said Dr. Arif Kamal, chief patient officer at the American Cancer Society.

HOW ARE HOSPICE PATIENTS CARED FOR?

Care may include medicine, but only to reduce symptoms, not with the intent to cure any illness.

Patients are typically cared for by family members, with supervision from hospice doctors, nurses and social workers. Much of the focus is on making sure family caretakers feels supported, Kamal said.

The team "addresses everything from physical symptoms to emotional distress, helping think through logistics related to burials, wills and advanced care planning," he said.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR HOSPICE CARE?

Under Medicare rules, patients may enroll in hospice if they meet certain criteria depending on their illness. For example, cancer patients must be unable to perform at least two usual activities of daily living without help, such as eating or dressing, with other challenges that may include evidence that the disease has spread widely and their health is declining despite treatment.

It is unclear what led to Carter's decision to enter hospice care, but within the past several years he has been treated for metastatic skin cancer and for injuries from falls.

Modeled after U.K. programs, the hospice movement got its start in the United States in the late 1970s during Carter's presidency.

Party animal becomes legendary Carnival parade director

By MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Few Brazilians can claim to dominate their field as much, and at such a young age, as the 39-year-old Carnival showman Leandro Vieira.

Vieira has become one of the most decorated leaders of the annual parade competition in Rio de Janeiro. This year, as Carnival director of a samba school that hasn't won in more than two decades, he could cement his name as one of the greatest since the festivities kicked off almost 100 years ago.

Rio's is the nation's premier Carnival parade, and the contestants compete for money prizes, prestige and fandom.

Vieira's job includes helping to pick his samba school's theme for the year, its material for costumes and who will feature on the top of majestic floats. Ultimately he decides how his school spends about 10 million Brazilian reais (almost \$2 million).

Vieira's prestige as an artist — and his fame as a party animal — has stretched well beyond Rio, achieving the kind of celebrity a film director might gain. He was recently interviewed on Roda Viva, a public TV traditional program that often listens to the most respected Brazilians.

He is a fixture not only in Carnival's formal parade competitions, but of the informal block parties throughout the city at this time of year.

"I can't just work, I need to feel Carnival on the street to be happy," Vieira told The Associated Press in an interview. "Even more so after a pandemic that made us suffer so much, made us stay home in 2021."

Vieira's job title is *carnavalesco*.

He did it for Mangueira, the most popular samba school in Brazil, where he won the parade titles in 2016 and 2019. Later, he lifted two trophies in the second division, which makes him one of the most successful in recent years.

This year he is *carnavalesco* for Imperatriz Leopoldinense — named after a former Empress of Brazil — which recently was relegated to second division and where he hopes to earn the school's first trophy since 2001.

Vieira says he does not aim merely to shock or thrill an audience, but rather to deliver thoughtful statements.

"I am not a *carnavalesco* of surprises. I am not a man of spectacles," Vieira said in the interview while he simultaneously worked on his group's radio equipment that they will use to communicate during their parade.

His school's parade this year focused on the life of 1920s and 30s bandit Virgulino Ferreira da Silva, better known by Brazilians as Lampião. Vieira says he picks his themes with one motto in mind: "It is the history that official history doesn't tell."

Lampião, for example, was not portrayed by the samba school solely as a vicious criminal but also as a brave man who earned the respect of many fellow Brazilians.

Ahead of this year's parade, Vieira walked through the performers fixing costumes and adjusting details with a smile on his face. He made sure all members were doing their part to sing this year's theme music — a detail that can make a difference with the judges who sit in the audience in Rio's Sambadrome.

A key choice for Imperatriz Leopoldinense this year was who to appoint as queen of the drum section

— a role that the school traditionally has given to celebrities and fashion models. Last year it was pop singer Iza.

This time Vieira helped give the nod to a 21-year-old communications student and dancer named Maria Mariá who is from one of Rio's low-income favela neighborhoods. She was crowned during an emotional ceremony last December at the samba school's headquarters with a headpiece designed by Vieira.

"Leandro is a big inspiration to us all. He shows us we can be the best in any field we like," Mariá said Tuesday while dressed as a devil who teases the character of Lampião.

Vieira takes his role in the Carnival parade industry seriously, but says that taking part in the holiday's street parties is just as important for him. Earlier in the week he joined the Prata Preta street party wearing the costume of Brazilian singer Gal Costa, who died last year.

"The soul of the party is on the street," he said.

Supreme Court wrestles with lawsuit shield for social media

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In its first case about the federal law that is credited with helping create the modern internet, the Supreme Court seemed unlikely Tuesday to side with a family wanting to hold Google liable for the death of their daughter in a terrorist attack.

At the same time, the justices also signaled in arguments lasting two and a half hours that they are wary of Google's claims that a 1996 law, Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, affords it, Twitter, Facebook and other companies far-reaching immunity from lawsuits over their targeted recommendations of videos, documents and other content.

The case highlighted the tension between technology policy fashioned a generation ago and the reach of today's social media, numbering billions of posts each day.

"We really don't know about these things. You know, these are not like the nine greatest experts on the internet," Justice Elena Kagan said of herself and her colleagues, several of whom smiled at the description.

Congress, not the court, should make needed changes to a law passed early in the internet age, Kagan said.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh, one of six conservatives, agreed with his liberal colleague in a case that seemed to cut across ideological lines.

"Isn't it better," Kavanaugh asked, to keep things the way they are and "put the burden on Congress to change that?"

The case before the court stems from the death of American college student Nohemi Gonzalez in a terrorist attack in Paris in 2015. Members of her family were in the courtroom to listen to arguments about whether they can sue Google-owned YouTube for helping the Islamic State spread its message and attract new recruits, in violation of the Anti-Terrorism Act. Lower courts sided with Google.

The justices used a variety of examples to probe what YouTube does when it uses computer algorithms to recommend videos to viewers, whether content produced by terrorists or cat lovers. Chief Justice John Roberts suggested what YouTube is doing isn't "pitching something in particular to the person who's made the request" but just a "21st century version" of what has been taking place for a long time, putting together a group of things the person may want to look at.

Justice Clarence Thomas asked whether YouTube uses the same algorithm to recommend rice pilaf recipes and terrorist content. Yes, he was told.

Kagan noted that "every time anybody looks at anything on the internet, there is an algorithm involved," whether it's a Google search, YouTube or Twitter. She asked the Gonzalez family's lawyer, Eric Schnapper, whether agreeing with him would ultimately make Section 230 meaningless.

Lower courts have broadly interpreted Section 230 to protect the industry, which the companies and their allies say has fueled the meteoric growth of the internet by protecting businesses from lawsuits over posts by users and encouraging the removal of harmful content.

But critics argue that the companies have not done nearly enough to police and moderate content and

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that the law should not block lawsuits over the recommendations that point viewers to more material 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.

Lisa Blatt, representing Google, told the court that recommendations are just a way of organizing all that information. YouTube users watch a billion hours of videos daily and upload 500 hours of videos every minute, Blatt said.

Roberts, though, was among several justices who questioned Blatt about whether YouTube should have the same legal protection for its recommendations as for hosting videos.

"They appear pursuant to the algorithms that your clients have. And those algorithms must be targeted to something. And that targeting, I think, is fairly called a recommendation, and that is Google's. That's not the provider of the underlying information," Roberts said.

Reflecting the complexity of the issue and the court's seeming caution, Justice Neil Gorsuch suggested another factor in recommendations made by YouTube and others, noting that "most algorithms are designed these days to maximize profits."

Gorsuch suggested the court could send the case back to a lower court without weighing in on the extent of Google's legal protections. He participated in arguments by phone because he was "a little under the weather," Roberts said.

Several other justices indicated that arguments in a related case Wednesday might provide an avenue for avoiding the difficult questions raised Tuesday.

The court will hear about another 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 would not be argued before the fall or decided until the first half of 2024.

What is Section 230, the rule that made the modern internet?

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

Twenty-six words tucked into a 1996 law overhauling telecommunications have allowed companies like Facebook, Twitter and Google to grow into the giants they are today.

A case coming before the U.S. Supreme Court this week, *Gonzalez v. Google*, challenges this law — namely whether tech companies are liable for the material posted on their platforms.

Justices will decide whether the family of an American college student killed in a terror attack in Paris can sue Google, which owns YouTube, over claims that the video platform's recommendation algorithm helped extremists spread their message.

A second case, *Twitter v. Taamneh*, also focuses on liability, though on different grounds.

The outcomes of these cases could reshape the internet as we know it. Section 230 won't be easily dismantled. But if it is, online speech could be drastically transformed.

WHAT IS SECTION 230?

If a news site falsely calls you a swindler, you can sue the publisher for libel. But if someone posts that on Facebook, you can't sue the company — just the person who posted it.

That's thanks to Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act, which states that "no provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider."

That legal phrase shields companies that can host trillions of messages from being sued into oblivion by anyone who feels wronged by something someone else has posted — whether their complaint is legitimate or not.

Politicians on both sides of the aisle have argued, for different reasons, that Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms have abused that protection and should lose their immunity — or at least have to earn it by satisfying requirements set by the government.

Section 230 also allows social platforms to moderate their services by removing posts that, for instance,

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are obscene or violate the services' own standards, so long as they are acting in "good faith."

WHERE DID SECTION 230 COME FROM?

The measure's history dates back to the 1950s, when bookstore owners were being held liable for selling books containing "obscenity," which is not protected by the First Amendment. One case eventually made it to the Supreme Court, which held that it created a "chilling effect" to hold someone liable for someone else's content.

That meant plaintiffs had to prove that bookstore owners knew they were selling obscene books, said Jeff Kosseff, the author of "The Twenty-Six Words That Created the Internet," a book about Section 230.

Fast-forward a few decades to when the commercial internet was taking off with services like CompuServe and Prodigy. Both offered online forums, but CompuServe chose not to moderate its, while Prodigy, seeking a family-friendly image, did.

CompuServe was sued over that, and the case was dismissed. Prodigy, however, got in trouble. The judge in their case ruled that "they exercised editorial control — so you're more like a newspaper than a newsstand," Kosseff said.

That didn't sit well with politicians, who worried that outcome would discourage newly forming internet companies from moderating at all. And Section 230 was born.

"Today it protects both from liability for user posts as well as liability for any claims for moderating content," Kosseff said.

WHAT HAPPENS IF SECTION 230 GOES AWAY?

"The primary thing we do on the internet is we talk to each other. It might be email, it might be social media, might be message boards, but we talk to each other. And a lot of those conversations are enabled by Section 230, which says that whoever's allowing us to talk to each other isn't liable for our conversations," said Eric Goldman, a professor at Santa Clara University specializing in internet law. "The Supreme Court could easily disturb or eliminate that basic proposition and say that the people allowing us to talk to each other are liable for those conversations. At which point they won't allow us to talk to each other anymore."

There are two possible outcomes. Platforms might get more cautious, as Craigslist did following the 2018 passage of a sex-trafficking law that carved out an exception to Section 230 for material that "promotes or facilitates prostitution." Craigslist quickly removed its "personals" section, which wasn't intended to facilitate sex work, altogether. But the company didn't want to take any chances.

"If platforms were not immune under the law, then they would not risk the legal liability that could come with hosting Donald Trump's lies, defamation, and threats," said Kate Ruane, former senior legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union who now works for PEN America.

Another possibility: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other platforms could abandon moderation altogether and let the lowest common denominator prevail.

Such unmonitored services could easily end up dominated by trolls, like 8chan, a site that was infamous for graphic and extremist content.

Any change to Section 230 is likely to have ripple effects on online speech around the globe.

"The rest of the world is cracking down on the internet even faster than the U.S.," Goldman said. "So we're a step behind the rest of the world in terms of censoring the internet. And the question is whether we can even hold out on our own."

New START: last US-Russia arms control treaty in jeopardy

By TARA COPP and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement Tuesday that Moscow is suspending its participation in the last remaining U.S.-Russia arms control treaty will have an immediate impact on U.S. visibility into Russian nuclear activities, but the pact was already on life support.

Putin's decision to suspend Russian cooperation with the treaty's nuclear warhead and missile inspections follows Moscow's cancellation late last year of talks that had been intended to salvage an agreement that

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both sides have accused the other of violating.

In his state-of-the-nation address to the Russian people, Putin said Russia was withdrawing from the treaty because of U.S. support to Ukraine, and he accused the U.S. and its NATO allies of openly working for Russia's destruction.

The U.S. had previously walked away from the treaty. During the Trump administration, the U.S. declined to engage in negotiations to extend it, accusing Moscow of flagrant violations. But when President Joe Biden took office in 2021, his administration signed a five-year extension.

Here is a look at New START and what Russia's announcement means for keeping U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons in check:

WHAT IS THE RUSSIA-US NUCLEAR TREATY?

New START, formally known as the Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, was signed by the Obama administration in 2010 and took effect in February 2011 as a 10-year agreement. The treaty obligated both Russia and the U.S. to commit to regular communications on the status of their nuclear arsenals, allow regular on-site inspections and abide by caps on the number of deployed and non-deployed warheads each would maintain.

Those caps include: 700 deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), deployed submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and deployed nuclear bombers; 1,550 nuclear warheads on deployed ICBMs, deployed SLBMs and deployed bombers; 800 deployed and non-deployed ICBM launchers, SLBM launchers, and bombers.

Hours after Putin's address, the Russian Foreign Ministry said Russia would respect the caps on nuclear weapons, even though Putin suspended participation in the pact.

Russia also will continue to exchange information about test launches of ballistic missiles per earlier agreements with the United States, the Foreign Ministry said.

WHAT WILL THE SUSPENSION MEAN FOR NUCLEAR INSPECTIONS, INFORMATION SHARING?

Since New START was signed, Russia and the U.S. have allowed each other's compliance teams to conduct 328 on-site inspections of their stockpiles, and importantly the two nations have provided data exchanges and 25,311 notifications on the status of their programs, the State Department said.

Putin's announcement and the subsequent clarification from the Foreign Ministry seemed to indicate the inspections are on a permanent suspension — but they left unclear what data sharing and notifications might be continued.

The U.S. will get its first clues on March 1, the day both parties are supposed to exchange data on the aggregate numbers of their nuclear forces, said Hans Kristensen, director of the nuclear information project at the Federation of American Scientists.

The U.S. and Russia also have been exchanging daily messages on movements and exercises, which has helped keep both nuclear powers clear on the other's actions, both Kristensen and William Alberque, director for strategy, technology and arms control for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said.

"There are notifications that come through every single day," Alberque said. On the U.S. side, those formatted computer messages are processed by a military-civilian team at the National and Nuclear Risk Reduction Center inside the State Department.

If Russia decides not to provide the notifications, "we're immediately going to start losing data, to be able to track exactly how many strategic weapons they have, and whether or not they're in the place that they're supposed to be, and whether or not they're acting the way they're supposed to," Alberque said.

WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE PUTIN'S ANNOUNCEMENT?

Inspections of U.S. and Russian military sites under New START were paused by both sides in March 2020 because of the spread of coronavirus. The U.S.-Russia commission overseeing implementation of the treaty last met in October 2021, but Russia then unilaterally suspended its cooperation with the treaty's inspection provisions in August 2022 to protest U.S. support for Ukraine.

Those discussions were supposed to have resumed in Egypt in late November, but Russia abruptly canceled them without offering a specific reason, according to U.S. officials.

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In late January, the Biden administration reported to Congress that Russia was not complying with the terms of the agreement by refusing to allow inspections on its territory and refusing to agree to new talks on resuming those checks.

At the time, the State Department said "Russia has a clear path for returning to full compliance" and that all it needed to do was to agree to new inspections.

HOW WILL THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION REACT?

Now it will be up to the Biden administration to decide how to react — whether to continue to comply with the treaty.

On Tuesday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken called the Russian move "deeply unfortunate and irresponsible."

"We'll be watching carefully to see what Russia actually does," he said. "We'll, of course, make sure that in any event we are postured appropriately for the security of our own country and that of our allies."

Last month, the State Department reported it could not certify that Russia was in compliance with New START because of its refusal to allow on-site inspectors last year. Now that the treaty has been rejected altogether by Russia, there's a risk of an arms buildup.

"Both the U.S. and Russia have meticulously planned their respective nuclear modernization programs based on the assumption that neither country will exceed the force levels currently dictated by New START," the Federation of American Scientists said in a February report that looked at the risks if the two sides failed to renew the treaty.

"Without a deal after 2026, that assumption immediately disappears; both sides would likely default to mutual distrust amid fewer verifiable data points, and our discourse would be dominated by worst case thinking about how both countries' arsenals would grow in the future."

Don Lemon to return to CNN, undergo 'formal training'

NEW YORK (AP) — CNN anchor Don Lemon will return to work Wednesday and will receive "formal training" in the aftermath of his on-air comments about Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley, network CEO Chris Licht said in an email to employees Monday night.

The memo, obtained by The Associated Press, did not specify the training. Licht added that it was important to him that the network "balances accountability with ... fostering a culture in which people can own, learn and grow from their mistakes."

Lemon has not been on the air since Thursday, when he said the 51-year-old Haley was not "in her prime" during the broadcast of "CNN This Morning." Lemon and fellow hosts Poppy Harlow and Kaitlan Collins had been discussing Haley's suggestion that politicians over 75 should be subject to mandatory mental competency tests.

"Nikki Haley isn't in her prime, sorry," Lemon said, explaining why he was "uncomfortable" with the age discussion. He said a woman is considered to be in her prime in her 20s, 30s and maybe her 40s. Haley is 51.

He was challenged by Harlow, who tried to clarify what Lemon was referencing: "I think we need to qualify. Are you talking about prime for childbearing or are you talking about prime for being president?"

"Don't shoot the messenger, I'm just saying what the facts are," Lemon responded. He brought up the subject again an hour later, and was rebutted by commentator Audie Cornish.

"She's in her prime for running for office," Cornish said of Haley. "Political prime is what we're talking about."

Lemon issued a statement that same day saying he regretted his "inartful and irrelevant" comments, which were widely condemned. Haley herself called the comments sexist and used the episode to fundraise.

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." Lemon appeared at the meeting and apologized to staffers, CNN reported.

"I sat down with Don and had a frank and meaningful conversation," Licht wrote in the Monday night

memo. "He has agreed to participate in formal training, as well as continuing to listen and learn. We take this situation very seriously."

Harlow said at the top of Tuesday morning's show that Lemon would be back the next day.

Brittney Griner re-signs with Phoenix Mercury

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

Brittney Griner will be back in the WNBA this season, once again playing with the Phoenix Mercury.

Griner, who was a free agent, re-signed with the team Tuesday.

The 32-year-old Griner had said she would return to Phoenix in a social media post in December, after she returned home from her 10-month detainment in Russia. Griner had been arrested at an airport just outside of Moscow on drug possession charges a year ago and was brought home in a dramatic high-level prisoner exchange in December.

"We missed BG every day that she was gone and, while basketball was not our primary concern, her presence on the floor, in our locker room, around our organization, and within our community was greatly missed," Mercury GM Jim Pitman said. "We will continue to use the resources of our organization to support her, on and off the floor, and we are thrilled for her that she gets to return to basketball, which she loves so dearly. This is a special signing and today is a special day for all of us."

The 6-foot-9 center last played for the Mercury in 2021 and helped the team reach the WNBA Finals. She averaged 20.5 points and 9.5 rebounds that season.

Griner, who was drafted No. 1 in 2013 by the Mercury, was listed Saturday on Phoenix's roster on the WNBA website.

Since returning home from Russia, Griner has been out of the public spotlight, with the exception of appearances at the Super Bowl, the Phoenix Open and an MLK Day event in Phoenix, where she lives.

"I do not think any of us will forget where we were on Dec. 8 when we heard BG was coming home or on Dec. 15 when she announced she intended not only to play basketball in 2023 but that it would be for the Mercury," Mercury President of Business Operations Vince Kozar said. "And I know none of us will ever forget what it will feel like to welcome her back onto her home floor on May 21. To know BG is to love and appreciate BG, and we can't wait to show her that in person with thousands and thousands of her biggest supporters exactly three months from today at our Welcome Home Opener."

She skipped a USA Basketball training camp earlier this month, but the organization made it clear she could take all the time she needed to decide if she wanted to play for the U.S. again.

The WNBA has said it will address getting Griner special travel accommodations, such as charter flights, after she signed.

"We are very cognizant of BG's unique situation," WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert told the AP earlier this month. "We've been planning and we've been thinking it through with security experts, BG's side, our side. We'll find the right time to comment on it when she signs with a team."

4-day workweek trial: Shorter hours, happier employees

By COURTNEY BONNELL Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Work less, get more.

A trial of a four-day workweek in Britain, billed as the world's largest, has found that an overwhelming majority of the 61 companies that participated from June to December will keep going with the shorter hours and that most employees were less stressed and had better work-life balance.

That was all while companies reported revenue largely stayed the same during the trial period last year and even grew compared with the same six months a year earlier, according to findings released this week.

"We feel really encouraged by the results, which showed the many ways companies were turning the four-day week from a dream into a realistic policy, with multiple benefits," said David Frayne, research associate at University of Cambridge, who helped lead the team conducting employee interviews for the trial. "We think there is a lot here that ought to motivate other companies and industries to give it a try."

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The university's team worked with researchers from Boston College; Autonomy, a research organization focused on the future of work; and the 4 Day Week Global nonprofit community to see how the companies from industries spanning marketing to finance to nonprofits and their 2,900 workers would respond to reduced work hours while pay stayed the same.

Not surprisingly, employees reported benefits, with 71% less burned out, 39% less stressed and 48% more satisfied with their job than before the trial.

Of the workers, 60% said it was easier to balance work and responsibilities at home, while 73% reported increased satisfaction with their lives. Fatigue was down, people were sleeping more and mental health improved, the findings show.

That's just what Platten's fish and chips restaurant in the English seaside town of Wells-Next-The Sea has found, especially in the hospitality industry where people often work seven days a week.

"Everyone is focused, everyone knows what they're doing, everyone is refreshed," said Kirsty Wainwright, general manager of the restaurant about a three-hour drive northeast of London. "What it means is that they are coming into work with a better frame of mind and passing that on to obviously the clients and the public that are coming here for their meals. They're getting a greater service because the team are more engaged."

Starting the trial going into the busy season in June, Platten's, which is open seven days a week, found the biggest hurdle was finding a model that worked for everyone, Wainwright said.

They constantly communicated with employees to find what worked best, which was having the staff split into two groups, allowing one group to work two days on, and other to have two days off, she said.

The concept lets people work, have a day to do chores like cleaning the house and "then have two days off, seeing your friends, seeing your family, doing some stuff yourself," Wainwright said. "And that's what this is all about — is actually just working to live and not living to work."

For companies that rolled out the shorter work hours — whether it was one less workday a week or longer hours in parts of the year and shorter hours the rest of the time to make an average 32-hour week — revenue wasn't affected, the findings say.

Revenue grew 1.4% over the course of the trial for 23 companies that provided adequate data — weighted for the size of the business — while a separate 24 companies saw revenue climb more than 34% from the same six-month period a year earlier.

For Platten's, "I don't think we were really measuring it in terms of profitability," Wainwright said. "That's not really it for us. We wanted to measure it in productivity. And actually, the productivity has gone through the roof."

For all those who participated in the trial, there was a drop in the likelihood of employees quitting, down 57% compared with the same period a year earlier, as well as those calling out sick, down 65% from a year ago, according to the findings.

Of the companies, 92% reported they would continue with the four-day workweek, with 30% saying it's a permanent change. That includes Platten's, which said it's sticking with the model permanently.

Charlotte Lockhart, co-founder and managing director of 4 Day Week Global, said "resounding success" of the U.K. pilot program mirrors earlier efforts in Ireland and the U.S.

There are, of course, industries that can't institute shorter hours because they need workers round the clock, such as nurses and first responders. Those workers and others have been walking off the job in the U.K. in recent months demanding better working conditions and pay that keeps pace with the high cost of living.

The pandemic changed the way the world works, with people seeking greater flexibility to improve work-life balance.

'Night Court' reboot returns favorite but set in modern day

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — You can forgive John Larroquette for thinking he'd entered a time machine when he

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stepped onto the sound stage of the rebooted NBC sitcom "Night Court."

The sets for the arraignment courtroom, chambers and hallways where he had first made people laugh as prosecutor Dan Fielding starting in the 1980s had been carefully remade and even the green couch in the judge's office and the cafeteria chairs were found in storage and redeployed. It was he who had changed.

"Revisiting a character that one played 35 years ago is both an interesting problem as an actor and also a bit disheartening. When I look at my face then and my face now, I'm playing my own grandfather in a way," the 75-year-old actor says.

In the reboot, Larroquette's former prosecutor Dan Fielding is convinced to return as a public defender after years out of the courtroom. He has become a lovable curmudgeon, who says things like: "This is a court. Not a therapist's office, no matter how many mental patients march through here."

Melissa Rauch plays prior Judge Harry Stone's daughter, Abby Stone, the new night court judge and the sunshine to Larroquette's gloom. Of the weirdos who show up in her after-hours court, the judge declares: "It's hard not to like them once you know what's going on underneath."

A verdict on the new "Night Court" has already been handed down: NBC ordered a second season early after the revival earned the highest ratings for a comedy series on the network since 2017.

Larroquette suspects some of the interest is due to nostalgia and reruns but also pointed to the popularity of Rauch, a former star of "The Big Bang Theory." "I'm sure there were millions of people who were very interested in seeing what she would do next," he says.

Rauch also produced the show and came up with the revival concept. She was a huge fan of the original, as a youngster using VHS tapes to capture her favorite episodes to watch and re-watch.

"I think if you would tell the child version of me that I'm getting to do this, my head would have exploded, and I probably would have wanted to fast forward my whole life to get here," she says.

She was drawn to the show's ability to effortlessly shift from heartfelt drama to heightened comedy, a flip she wanted to recreate in the reboot.

"First and foremost, it's a comedy and we're there to make people laugh. But I always feel that you laugh harder if you're also able to feel something. And I think 'Night Court' did that so brilliantly," she says. "Our writers, led by our wonderful showrunner, Dan Rubin, have really struck that balance in a beautiful way."

Larroquette is the only actor to return to the series that first aired from 1984 to 1992, starring the late Harry Anderson, the late Markie Post, Marsha Warfield, the late Charles Robinson and Richard Moll.

The original show's breakout character was Fielding, both clever and lascivious. Larroquette won four consecutive Emmy Awards playing the part, a record at the time. But he initially resisted a return.

"I was not interested in revisiting him for many reasons, partially because of the love I have of physical comedy and the fact that I'm almost 40 years older than I was then, that I can't jump over tables. I can't quite do the things with my body that I could then so easily. And just what do you do after that amount of time? Who is he now?" says Larroquette.

"The more I thought about it, the more as an actor it became an interesting sort of problem to figure out — how could I be funny at this age with him now?"

The Fielding in the reboot has matured past his sowing-his-wild-oats stage. His character finally found the love of his life between the end of the last show and its return — but lost her.

"The Dan Fielding that existed and at that time was very different from the Dan Fielding we're seeing," says Rauch. "But he's still the same person. He still thinks he's the smartest guy in the room. He's still a narcissist. And but at the same time, he's evolved."

While the new series is clearly a product of today — with references to Uber and DJ Khaled — there are plenty of callbacks from the original show, like toy, springy snakes in cans that explode and the stuffed armadillo displayed by the previous Judge Stone.

Set designer Glenda Rovello recreated the sets from the original blueprints. "We gave it a coat of paint to update it, but we thought a government building wouldn't have changed that much over the years," Rauch says.

"Walking onto that set just feels so, so special. And I honestly, I pinch myself when I'm walking through

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those halls. It feels so surreal.”

New this week: ‘Outer Banks,’ Adam Lambert, ‘Snowfall’

By The Associated Press undefined

Here’s a collection curated by The Associated Press’ entertainment journalists of what’s arriving on TV, streaming services and music and video game platforms this week.

MOVIES

— Adult dramas have generally been having a hard time in theaters in recent months, but one notable exception has been “A Man Called Otto.” The film stars Tom Hanks as a despondent and ornery widower whose suicide plans keep getting foiled by the needs of his neighbors. After having made nearly \$100 million in ticket sales worldwide, “A Man Called Otto” arrives on video on demand Tuesday. Marc Forster’s adaptation of Fredrik Backman’s bestseller and a remake of the 2016 Swedish film “A Man Called Ove,” “A Man Called Otto” is well tailored to Hanks’ screen presence while subtly tweaking it. In my review, I wrote that how the film unfolds “won’t surprise anyone, but it does the trick for a little post-holidays heart-warming.”

— Since its prize-winning debut at the Cannes Film Festival last May, Polish filmmaking legend Jerzy Skolimowski’s “EO” has been moving audiences like few other recent films. Skolimowski made “EO,” nominated for best international film at the Academy Awards, from the perspective of a circus donkey on a spiritual journey as it experiences cruelty and kindness while traveling through Poland and Italy. “The idea was from the very beginning that we don’t want to tell the story about the donkey, but that we want the audience to feel like it is a donkey,” Ewa Piaskowska, Skolimowski’s wife and co-writer told AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr. “EO” begins streaming Tuesday on the Criterion Channel and is also available for digital rental.

— Director Miles Warren makes a compelling directorial debut in “Bruiser,” a tender coming-of-age tale streaming Friday on Hulu. “Till” actor Jayln Hall stars as 14-year-old Darious. Set during his summer between 7th and 8th grade, the quiet Darious, back from boarding school, is adjusting to life with his working parents (Shinelle Azoroh, Shamier Anderson) and friends who he’s drifted apart from. With Trevante Rhodes, of “Moonlight.”

— AP Film Writer Jake Coyle

MUSIC

— Adam Lambert offers his takes on some great past pop songs with “High Drama,” an album of covers of such hitmakers as Duran Duran, Bonnie Tyler and Culture Club. The frontman for Queen takes on Sia’s “Chandelier,” Kings of Leon’s “Sex on Fire” and even Noël Coward’s “Mad About the Boy.” His version of Tyler’s “Holding Out For a Hero” is a showcase for Lambert’s vocal fireworks, while he turns Duran Duran’s “Ordinary World” into a lush, moody ballad and he turns in a glam rendition of Billie Eilish’s “Getting Older.” It drops Friday.

— If you missed “KPOP” on Broadway, there’s still the chance to hear what you missed. The original cast recording out Friday features music, lyrics, music production and arrangements by Helen Park and music and lyrics by Max Vernon. It was the first Broadway musical to celebrate Korean culture with Korean, Korean-American and API representation on and off-stage. The musical is a backstage look at some K-pop performers as they get ready for their debut show in New York City. Conflicts break out and get resolved, ending in a concert-like performance.

— After writing and recording two albums over the past four years that he later scrapped, Dierks Bentley is poised to release a third, one he says he “had to get right.” The 14-track “Gravel & Gold” has songs featuring Ashley McBryde and Billy Strings. The single “Gold” is all about freedom, with the lyrics: “I got some rust on my Chevy but it’s ready to roll/I got a rhinestone sky and a song in my soul.” Bentley promises a diverse album, “from the arena shaker to the barroom weeper to the bluegrass fireballer.”

— Entertainment Writer Mark Kennedy

TELEVISION

— FX’s critically-acclaimed series “Snowfall,” about the crack cocaine boom in Los Angeles in the 1980s kicks off its sixth and final season on Thursday. The final episodes are high-stakes for all the characters

including Damson Idris as Franklin Saint, who rose to drug kingpin status throughout the series and had declared war on everyone around him.

— It's been 13 years since we last saw the cater waiters of "Party Down" suffer through another event thrown by the rich and sometimes famous of Los Angeles. Original cast members including Adam Scott, Ken Marino, Ryan Hansen and Megan Mullally reprise their characters in a third season debuting Friday on Starz. This new batch of episodes sees the characters older and (somewhat) at different places in their lives but they're still just as funny. Jennifer Garner, Tyrel Jackson Williams and Zoë Chao also join the cast. Original player Lizzie Caplan was unavailable for season three but the cast has said they're game for another season, especially to work with her again.

— Netflix's "Outer Banks" returns for its third season on Thursday and JJ, Sarah, and the gang have discovered a deserted island they've named Poguelandia. If we've learned anything from "Lord of the Flies" and "Yellowjackets," teens on a deserted island equals trouble. And that's just how the third season begins, promising more action, romance and of course, hidden treasures.

— Alicia Rancilio

VIDEO GAMES

— The big news in games this month is the arrival of Sony's PlayStation VR2 virtual reality headset. It's pricey at \$550 and you need a PlayStation 5 to use it, but there will be a healthy software lineup ready for launch. The marquee title is Horizon: Call of the Mountain, which allows the player to climb mountains and hunt cyborgs in the franchise's lively, postapocalyptic setting. Owners of the racing game Gran Turismo Sport and the horror epic Resident Evil Village will be able to download free VR versions, and there are dozens of other games — some new, some old — in the pipeline. You can begin exploring Sony's updated take on the metaverse on Wednesday.

— Square Enix's Octopath Traveler drew some flak for its goofy name when it debuted in 2018, but it found a big enough audience to warrant a sequel. Like its predecessor, Octopath Traveler II tells eight separate stories of eight intrepid adventurers — a warrior, a thief, a merchant, a cleric, a dancer, a hunter, a scholar and an apothecary — as they explore a magical land. And if the formula holds true, they'll team up at the end to fight off some world-threatening cataclysm. With its retro, semi-2D pixel art, it's bound to appeal to admirers of old-school Japanese role-playing games. The journeys begin Friday on Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 5/4 and PC.

Former US Rep. Adam Kinzinger to release book in October

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) —

Former U.S. Rep. Adam Kinzinger, the Illinois Republican who broke with his party two years ago after the Jan. 6 siege of the U.S. Capitol, has a book deal.

The Open Field, a Penguin Random House imprint overseen by Maria Shriver, announced Tuesday that Kinzinger's "Renegade: My Life in Faith, the Military, and Defending America from Trump's Attack on Democracy" is scheduled for release on Oct. 17.

"Ever since my final falling-out with the GOP, on the day of the deadly January 6 attack on the Capitol by Donald Trump's followers, I have wanted to tell the inside story of how my party and also my faith have been hijacked by extremists who represent a real danger to our democracy," Kinzinger said in a statement.

"This book is the result, a full telling of my experience from a pilgrim with genuine values to a conservative who has no home but is determined to play a role in our recovery from a devastating political war," he added.

Kinzinger, an Iraq War veteran first elected to Congress in 2010, became a leading GOP critic of Trump and his Republican colleagues after Jan. 6. He denounced Trump for inciting "an angry mob" with false claims the 2020 election was stolen and voted to impeach the then-president. He was later one of two Republicans, along with Liz Cheney of Wyoming, who joined the House committee to investigate the Jan. 6 attack.

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Last fall, he announced he would not seek reelection after the Democrat-controlled Illinois Legislature approved new congressional maps that would have forced Kinzinger and a fellow Republican incumbent, Rep. Darin LaHood, into a primary matchup.

Kinsinger "examines the forces that allowed such an attack to happen in the first place, from the misinformation campaign waged by Fox News and partisan media to the inculcation of extremism in families and faith communities," according to his publisher.

The publisher described the book as "part memoir, part searing examination."

The book will offer "an inside account of one of the most tumultuous events in recent American history and sounds the alarm on the devastating consequences of letting extremism go unchecked," the publisher said.

Today in History, FEB 22, George Washington is born

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Feb. 22, the 53rd day of 2023. There are 312 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 22, 2021, the number of U.S. deaths from COVID-19 topped 500,000, according to Johns Hopkins University.

On this date:

In 1630, English colonists in the Massachusetts Bay Colony first sampled popcorn brought to them by a Native American named Quadequina for their Thanksgiving celebration.

In 1732, the first president of the United States, George Washington, was born in Westmoreland County in the Virginia Colony.

In 1784, a U.S. merchant ship, the Empress of China, left New York for the Far East to trade goods with China.

In 1935, it became illegal for airplanes to fly over the White House.

In 1959, the inaugural Daytona 500 race was held; although Johnny Beauchamp was initially declared the winner, the victory was later awarded to Lee Petty.

In 1967, more than 25,000 U.S. and South Vietnamese troops launched Operation Junction City, aimed at smashing a Vietcong stronghold near the Cambodian border. (Although the communists were driven out, they later returned.)

In 1980, the "Miracle on Ice" took place in Lake Placid, New York, as the United States Olympic hockey team upset the Soviets, 4-3. (The U.S. team went on to win the gold medal.)

In 1987, pop artist Andy Warhol died at a New York City hospital at age 58.

In 1997, scientists in Scotland announced they had succeeded in cloning an adult mammal, producing a lamb named "Dolly." (Dolly, however, was later put down after a short life marred by premature aging and disease.)

In 2010, Najibullah Zazi (nah-jee-BOO'-lah ZAH'-zee), accused of buying beauty supplies to make bombs for an attack on New York City subways, pleaded guilty to charges including conspiring to use weapons of mass destruction. (Zazi faced up to life in prison but spent nearly a decade after his arrest helping the U.S. identify and prosecute terrorists; he was given a 10-year sentence followed by supervised release.)

In 2016, the City Council of Charlotte, North Carolina, voted 7-4 to pass a new law allowing transgender people to choose public bathrooms that corresponded to their gender identity.

In 2020, Bernie Sanders scored a resounding win in Nevada's presidential caucuses, cementing his status as the Democrats' front-runner.

Ten years ago: The Justice Department joined a lawsuit against disgraced cyclist Lance Armstrong alleging the former seven-time Tour de France champion had concealed his use of performance-enhancing drugs and defrauded his longtime sponsor, the U.S. Postal Service.

Five years ago: Defying his supporters in the National Rifle Association, President Donald Trump said

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the nation should keep assault rifles out of the hands of anyone under 21. Authorities announced that the armed officer who was on duty at the Parkland, Florida school where a shooter killed 17 people never went into the building to engage the gunman. The U.S. women's hockey team won the gold medal at the Winter Olympics in South Korea, beating Canada 3-2 after a shootout tiebreaker.

One year ago: The East-West faceoff over Ukraine escalated dramatically, with Russian lawmakers authorizing President Vladimir Putin to use military force outside his country and U.S. President Joe Biden and European leaders responding by slapping sanctions on Russian oligarchs and banks. (Russia would invade Ukraine two days later.) In Georgia, the three white men convicted of murder in Ahmaud Arbery's fatal shooting are found guilty of federal hate crimes for violating Arbery's civil rights and targeting him because he was Black. U.S. women soccer players reached a landmark agreement with the sport's American governing body to end a six-year legal battle over equal pay.

Today's birthdays: Actor Paul Dooley is 95. Actor James Hong is 94. Actor John Ashton is 75. Actor Miou-Miou is 73. Actor Julie Walters is 73. Basketball Hall of Famer Julius Erving is 73. Actor Ellen Greene is 72. Former Sen. Bill Frist, R-Tenn., is 71. Former White House adviser David Axelrod is 68. Actor Kyle MacLachlan is 64. World Golf Hall of Famer Vijay Singh is 60. Actor-comedian Rachel Dratch is 57. Actor Paul Lieberstein is 56. Actor Jeri Ryan is 55. Actor Thomas Jane is 54. TV host Clinton Kelly is 54. Actor Tamara Mello is 53. Actor-singer Lea Salonga is 52. Actor Jose Solano is 52. International Tennis Hall of Famer Michael Chang is 51. Rock musician Scott Phillips is 50. Singer James Blunt is 49. Actor Drew Barrymore is 48. Actor Liza Huber is 48. Rock singer Tom Higgenson (Plain White T's) is 44. Rock musician Joe Hottinger (Halestorm) is 41. Actor Zach Roerig is 38.