

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

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.

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

"My willingness to be intimate with my own deep feelings creates the space for intimacy with another."

SHAKTI GAWAIN



Sunday, Feb. 26

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.

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

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

United Methodist Church: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton Worship, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday school after children's sermon.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday school, 10:15 a.m.; Northern Plains Conference meets in Miller, 3 p.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday school, 9:45 a.m.; Zion Lutheran worship, 11 a.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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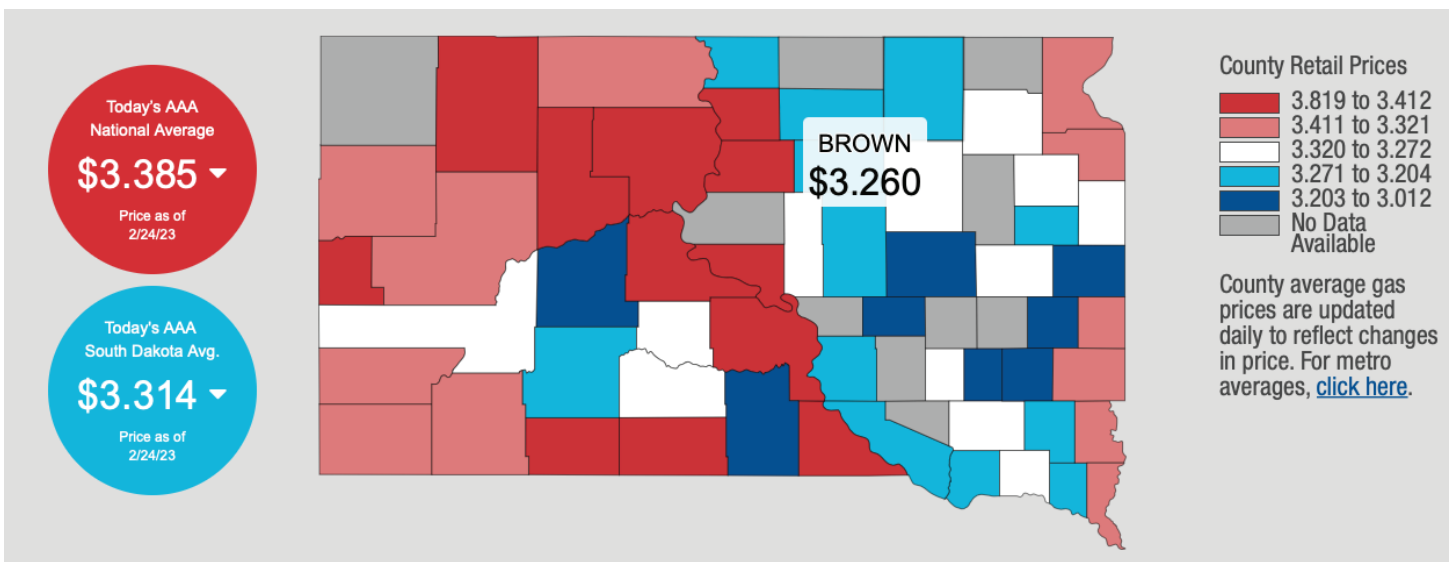
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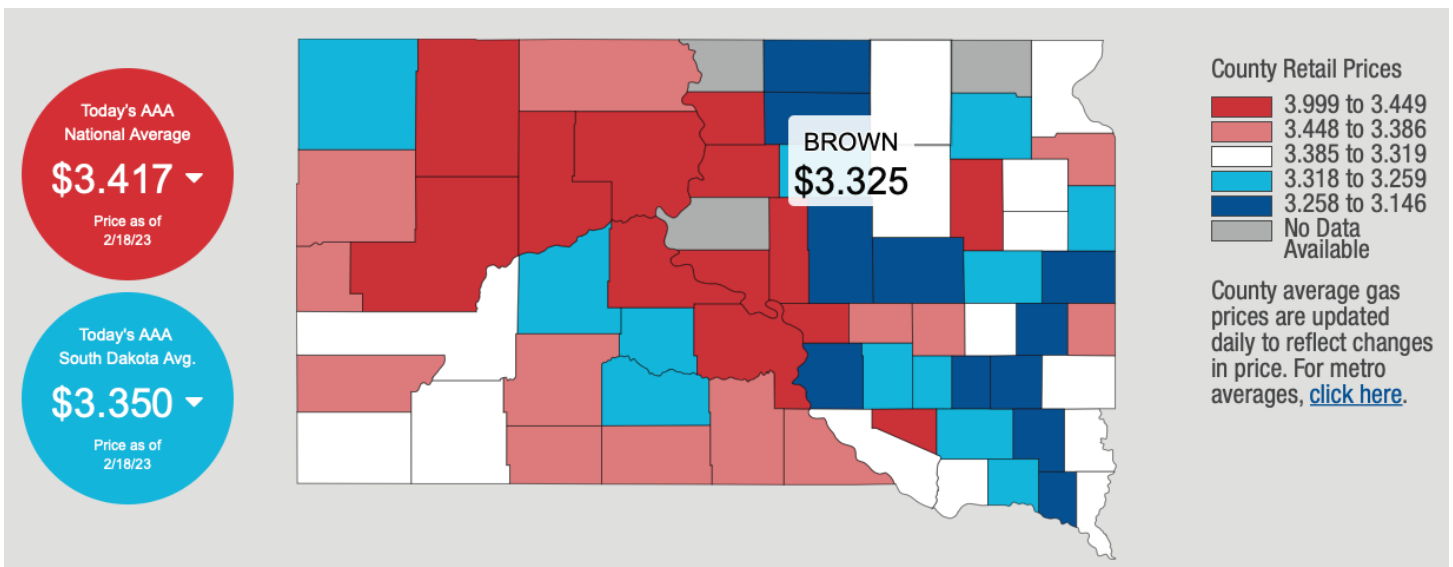
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.314	\$3.493	\$3.987	\$4.243
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.337	\$3.490	\$3.959	\$4.293
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.355	\$3.508	\$3.955	\$4.277
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.357	\$3.518	\$3.966	\$4.358
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.407	\$3.500	\$3.847	\$3.782

This Week



Two Weeks Ago



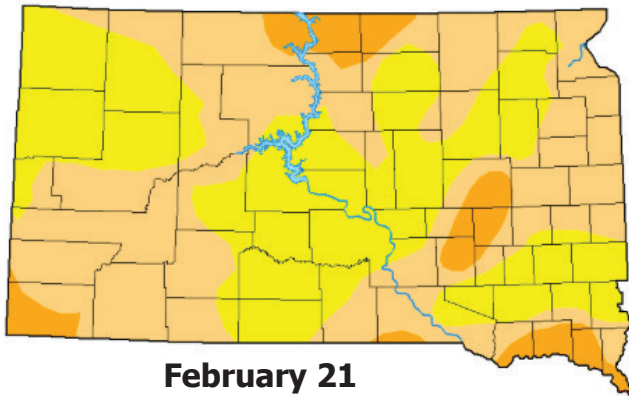
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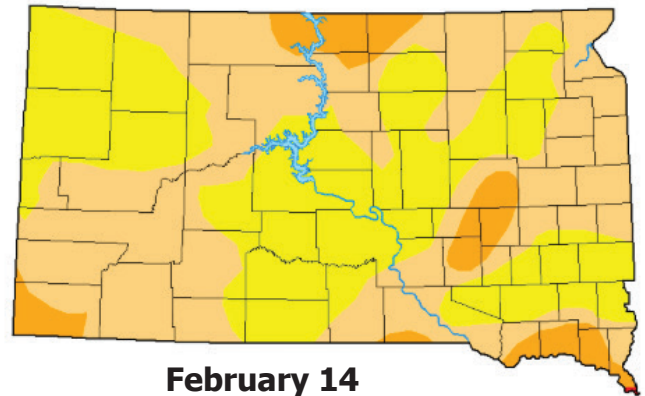
Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



February 21



February 14

A storm system tracked across southern parts of the High Plains region early in the week, with another late in the week tracking across northern Wyoming. Weekly precipitation totals were half an inch to over an inch in parts of Wyoming, Colorado, northern and eastern Kansas, southern and eastern Nebraska, and southeast South Dakota. The rest of the region received little to no precipitation. Moderate to exceptional drought was trimmed in a few areas of northwestern and eastern Kansas, and adjacent parts of Nebraska, while abnormal dryness and severe drought were trimmed in southern Colorado. No change was made to the drought areas in the rest of the region.

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

Blocker Construction

Dacotah Bank

Groton Ag Partners

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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Region 1A Boys Basketball Pairings

Class A - Region 1

<p>#1 -</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"> 1 Waubay/Summit</td> <td style="text-align: center;">17-3</td> <td rowspan="2" style="text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">2/28 TBD</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"> 8 Sisseton</td> <td style="text-align: center;">1-19</td> </tr> </table>	 1 Waubay/Summit	17-3	2/28 TBD	 8 Sisseton	1-19	<p>#5 -</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">#1 WINNER</td> <td rowspan="2" style="text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">3/3 TBD</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">#2 WINNER</td> </tr> </table> <p>SODAK 16 QUALIFIER</p>	#1 WINNER	3/3 TBD	#2 WINNER
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 6 Redfield	8-12								

Seed Point Averages (calculated Feb. 24)
 #1 Waubay/Summit 43.700 - #2 Groton Area 42.368 - #3 Milbank 41.800 - #4 Tiospa Zina 40.684 - #5 Aberdeen Roncalli 39.750 - #6 Redfield 39.200 - #7 Webster Area 37.526 - #8 Sisseton 35.800

Ehresmann takes second at state wrestling tournament

Christian Ehresmann was just shy of the state title, but the Groton Area sophomore lost a close battle in the state match, 2-1, at 138 pounds.

G-106: Liza Krueger (20-17)

Champ. Round 1 - Mary-Katherine Joseph (Brandon Valley) 30-6 won by fall over Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 20-17 (Fall 0:38)

Cons. Round 1 - Bailey Tekrony (Brookings) 22-13 won in sudden victory - 1 over Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 20-17 (SV-1 5-3)

B-120: Walker Zoellner (21-17)

Champ. Round 1 - Gage Anderson (Lemmon/McIntosh) 39-7 won by major decision over Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) 21-17 (MD 13-0)

Cons. Round 1 - Luke Swatek (Elk Point-Jefferson) 27-23 won by major decision over Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) 21-17 (MD 9-0)

B-138 Christian Ehresmann (36-4) placed 2nd and scored 20.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 36-4 won by fall over Mekhi Hayes (Lead-Deadwood) 17-18 (Fall 2:28)

Quarterfinal - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 36-4 won by decision over Carter Sommer (Parkston) 36-16 (Dec 5-4)

Semifinal - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 36-4 won by decision over Kale Ask (Canton) 31-4 (Dec 7-2)

1st Place Match - Jace Blasius (Philip Area) 38-3 won by decision over Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 36-4 (Dec 2-1)

B-160: Korbin Kucker (11-6)

Champ. Round 1 - Carter Randall (McCook Central/Montrose) 42-11 won by fall over Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 11-6 (Fall 0:57)

Cons. Round 1 - Jhett Eklund (Burke/Gregory) 34-14 won by fall over Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 11-6 (Fall 2:53)

B-170: Cole Bisbee (22-16)

Champ. Round 1 - Weston Remmers (McCook Central/Montrose) 35-7 won by major decision over Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 22-16 (MD 11-1)

Cons. Round 1 - Mason Hendrickson (Tri-Valley) 29-16 won by decision over Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 22-16 (Dec 5-1)



Photos courtesy of South Dakota Public Broadcasting.



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Fans watched in the lobby after the basketball game as Christian Ehresmann wrestled in the championship match of the state tournament. Ehresmann got the first point with a reversal, but then ended up being taken down. Ehresmann nearly scored an escape but time ran out. The Groton Area sophomore is the state's runnerup at 138 pounds. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



The senior drum line performed for the first time at the boys basketball game Friday night. They are under the direction of Desiree Yeigh. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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It was senior recognition night Friday in Groton. Seniors recognized with their parents were Ava Kramer, Shaylee Peterson, Tyson Parrow, Cole Simon, and Tate and Cole Larson. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



The Groton Area pep band, under the direction of Desiree Yeigh, has performed at many of the home events this years including Friday night's basketball game. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Gwen Briscoe got the crowd fired up after her dance teams performed for the final time Friday night at the boys basketball game. (Photos by Paul Kosel)



GHS Boys Basketball

Knights slip past Tigers in overtime

It was the most exciting way to end the regular season of boys basketball action Friday night as Aberdeen Christian needed an overtime to edge past Groton Area, 64-60. It was the only overtime game played this year for either boys or girls basketball.

The lead changed hands three times in the first quarter before the Tigers held a 7-6 lead. The Knights took the lead to start the second quarter and then took a seven-point lead at 18-11. Groton Area rallied and scored 11 straight points to take a 22-18 lead. Groton Area led at half time, 24-20.

The third quarter was a complete stalemate. Groton's four-point lead at half time stayed at four-point after three quarters, 37-33. Both teams made six of 12 field goals for 50 percent in the third quarter.

Aberdeen Christian had a nine-point leading into the fourth quarter and took a 40-37 lead. The Tigers reclaimed the lead, 41-40. The Knights tied the game at 44, but the Tigers held the lead, but only at three-points, 47-44 with 35 seconds left. Aberdeen Christian used two time-outs and Ethan Russell hit a three-pointer to tie the game, sending the game into overtime.

Aberdeen Christian got the upper hand in the overtime and opened up a nine-point lead, 57-48. The Tigers clawed their way back to within two, 62-60, but was unable to regain the lead.

Tate Larson had a double-double on the night with 14 points, 1 rebounds, he had three assists and three steals. Jacob Zak scored only two points in the first half but then added 17 more the rest of the game to finish with 19 points, six rebounds and one assist. Ryder Johnson hit a pair of three-pointers and finished the night with 12 points and three rebounds. Cole Simon also hit a pair of three-pointers and finished with 10 points and four rebounds. Lane Tietz, who fouled out with 3:29 left in the fourth quarter, finished with five points, one rebound, five assists and one steal. Keegan Tracy had one rebound and two assists.

Groton Area made 17 of 37 two-pointers for 46 percent, five of 15 three-pointers for 33 percent, 11 of 18 free throws for 61 percent off of Aberdeen Christian's 21 team fouls, Groton Area had 25 rebounds, eight turnovers, 11 assists and four steals.

Three players scored all but two points for Aberdeen Christian. Malek Wieker had only three points for the Knights in the first half, but lit the nets on fire for the rest of the game lead all scorers with a total of 27 points which included five six free throws in the overtime and he made four three-pointers. Ethan Russel had 19 points, Jackson Isakson had 16 points and Andrew Brennan added two points. The Knights made 22 of 48 field goals for 46 percent, 13 of 19 free throws for 68 percent off of Groton Area's 16 team fouls, and had 11 turnovers.

Groton Area, now 14-5, will host the first round of the Region 1A Tournament on Tuesday, taking on the Webster Area Bearcats. Aberdeen Christian is now 18-2 on the season.

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

Groton Area on the junior varsity game, 43-20.

Scoring for Groton Area: Taylor Diegel 14, Dillon Abeln 6, Ryder Johnson 6, Colby Dunker 6, Logan Ringgenberg 4, Braxton Imrie 3, Keegan Tracy 2 and Gage Sippel 2.

Scoring for Aberdeen Christian: Becker Bosma 8, Josh Schaunaman 4, Gabe Eichler 4, Raymond Rodriguez 2 and Grady Jett 2.

The game broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Grandpa.



Cadance Tullis sang the National Anthem before the boys varsity game Friday night in Groton. (Photo lifted from GDILIVE.COM)

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NSU Men's Basketball

No. 18 Wolves Kick Off NSIC Tournament Against Familiar Opponent

Aberdeen, S.D. – It is NSIC Tournament week for the No. 18 Northern State University men's basketball team. The Wolves tip-off with Minot State at 4:30 p.m. on Saturday, February 25 from the Sanford Pentagon.

GAME & FAN INFORMATION

Live video, audio, and stat links are available above or on the full schedule on nsuwolves.com
Tickets can be purchased at the door on game day or at Ticketmaster

NORTHERN STATE STORYLINES

The Wolves enter post-season play with a 23-5 record overall, winning the NSIC Overall and North Division Championships

Four Wolves were honored on the NSIC All-Conference teams Thursday with Sam Masten named the North Division Player of the Year, Saul Phillips named the Coach of the Year, and Jackson Moni and Jordan Belka named to the first and second teams

Northern is averaging 81.4 points, 35.1 rebounds, 16.6 assists, 8.7 turnovers, 5.2 steals, and 3.5 blocks per game this season; out-scoring their opponents by 10.6 points per game

NSU is shooting 47.4% from the field, 38.1% from the 3-point line, and 79.2% from the foul line

Masten leads the team averaging 18.4 points, 7.0 rebounds, and 6.4 assists per game this season, shooting a team best 56.8% from the floor

Moni follows adding 15.6 points per contest, while Belka averages 13.3 points and a team second best 6.1 rebounds per game

Augustin Reede and Josh Dilling round out the starters and double figure scorers, notching 11.7 and 10.2 points per game respectively

Reede leads the team with 81 made 3-point field goals, shooting 44.5% from the 3-point line

MINOT STATE STORYLINES

The Beavers hold an 11-16 record this season and advanced to the Pentagon with a triple overtime win at Southwest Minnesota State on Tuesday

Minot is averaging 75.1 points, 34.0 rebounds, 11.8 assists, 12.0 turnovers, 6.0 steals, and 2.2 blocks per game; out-scoring and out-rebounding their opponents by 2.1 points and 1.4 rebounds per game

They are shooting 44.4% from the floor, 36.7% from the 3-point line, and 76.2% from the foul line

Khari Broadway leads the team averaging 14.3 points and 3.9 rebounds with 71 total assists this season

Cam'ron Dunfee and Jaxon Gunville follow notching 11.2 and 10.0 points per game respectively

Connor Hollenbeck leads the team shooting 51.5% from the floor and grabbing 5.9 rebounds per game

Minot State is led by Matt Murken in his 11th season at the helm

LAST MEETING

Northern went 1-1 against Minot State in the regular season, falling 82-62 early in the year and winning 74-71 to cap off the regular season

Jackson Moni led the team with 21 points and nine rebounds a week ago, while Sam Masten tallied 17 points, nine rebounds, and four assists

The Wolves are 56-19 all-time against the Beavers



Budget committee approves \$100 million of federal money for water projects

BY JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 24, 2023

PIERRE – A bill that would allocate \$100 million of federal money for water projects in South Dakota has passed the Legislature’s Joint Appropriations Committee.

In March 2021, Congress passed and the president signed the American Rescue Plan Act, which provided \$1.9 trillion in economic relief to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic around the nation. In South Dakota, \$600 million of the state’s ARPA funding has already been allocated to support water and wastewater projects.

In a bill hearing Friday at the Capitol, the state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resource and the Bureau of Finance Management spoke against earmarking more ARPA money for water projects. The departments said much of the money allocated last year has not been spent, and inflation could drive the costs of those projects higher.

“I think it’s premature to do this today,” said Jim Terwilliger, commissioner of the Bureau of Finance and Management. “What do you think is going to happen next year and the year after when these projects come in higher and higher and higher? They’re going to be coming to this committee saying, ‘We’re short, we need more money.’”

The bill’s sponsor, Sen. Helene Duhamel, R-Rapid City, wants to make funding available for water projects including a potential water pipeline from the Missouri River to West River communities. Duhamel called it a “big, transformational” project that “would have an impact for generations.” The pipeline would cost up to an estimated \$2 billion and likely take decades to accomplish.

Duhamel argued the bill is necessary because ARPA funds, which can be spent on a variety of things, must be allocated by the end of 2024 and spent by 2026 – otherwise, the remaining funds return to the federal government. Given the opportunity of ARPA dollars, she said, the project backers could quickly finish a feasibility study and work on easements and other issues.

A representative of DANR said the bill would create additional work for a department already stretched thin. DANR also noted the funds could still be allocated during next year’s legislative session, when the department will have a better idea of the status of currently funded projects.

Water system managers from around the state also testified in favor of the bill.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

White House unveils \$2B in weapons for Ukraine on one-year anniversary of Russian invasion

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - FEBRUARY 24, 2023 2:43 PM

WASHINGTON — On the one-year anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Biden administration announced an additional \$2 billion in weapons and a host of new sanctions targeting Russia's key industries and government officials.

The Friday announcement came on the heels of President Joe Biden's historic and surprise visit to Ukraine's capital Kyiv, where for the first time in modern history a sitting U.S. president visited a war zone without the protection of American troops.

"You remind us that freedom is priceless; it's worth fighting for

as long as it takes. And that's how long we're going to be with you, Mr. President: for as long as it takes," Biden said while in Kyiv, in a joint statement with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the city's Mariinsky Palace.

Friday's weapons package includes unmanned aerial systems, electronic warfare detection equipment and additional ammunition for arms already provided to Ukraine by the U.S. and allies.

The Department of Defense will not pull the weapons from its own stocks — as it has with several previous security aid packages. Rather it will purchase the equipment for Ukraine under a new contract, according to the Pentagon.

"One year into a war of aggression waged by a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, our allies and partners worldwide stand united and resolute. Putin's reckless, illegal war is not just an all-out assault on Ukraine's sovereignty and a historic threat to European security. It is also a direct attack on the system of rules, institutions, and laws that the world built at such great cost after World War II—a system that rejects aggression and respects the rights of all countries, big and small," U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said in a statement Friday.



In this aerial view, a destroyed apartment building is seen next to an area of heavily damaged houses on April 21, 2022, in Borodianka, Ukraine. (Photo by Alexey Furman/Getty Images)

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Sanctions, restrictions, tariffs

New measures across multiple other departments will pressure Russia's energy, financial and industrial sectors; impose travel and property restrictions on hundreds of Russia's ministers, regional governors and military personnel; and increase tariffs on roughly 100 Russian metals, minerals and chemical products worth \$2.8 billion to the Kremlin, according to the White House.

The State Department plans to impose visa restrictions on more than 1,200 members of Russia's military and bar entry to the U.S. for three Russian military officials for their involvement in "gross violations of human rights."

Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced new sanctions on dozens of Russian officials — among them, the Russian-appointed official who oversaw the alleged theft of thousands of artifacts from Ukraine's Kherson art museum — and several companies and vessels, including the Russian Federal Nuclear Center and the Kremlin's maritime intelligence agency.

Meanwhile, the Department of Justice has filed a civil forfeiture complaint against six New York and Florida properties owned by Russian oligarch Viktor Vekselberg, who allegedly profited from sanctions evasion and money laundering.

"I think you've seen our announcements today of all the different ways we're going to continue to hold Mr. Putin accountable as well as to continue to support Ukraine," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters on a call Friday morning.

"President Biden, and our whole government really, has rallied the world in response, working with allies and partners to provide Ukraine with security, economic, humanitarian assistance, and of course, leading unprecedented efforts to impose costs on Russia for this aggression."

The one-year mark did not arrive without criticism of Biden's efforts, including that the administration has acted too slowly.

"It is not enough to do the right things; we need to do the right things at the right speed," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said in a statement.

"The Biden Administration and our allies must act more decisively to ensure that both our collective assistance to Ukraine and the investments we each make in our own militaries take place at the speed of relevance," the Kentucky Republican continued. "Every experience tells us it is weakness and hesitation that provoke Putin. The road to peace lies in speedily surging Ukraine the tools they need to achieve victory as they define it."

Texas Republican Rep. Michael McCaul, chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, wrote in an op-ed for Fox News that the administration "has consistently been a step behind throughout this war."

"They (Biden administration officials) have repeatedly claimed sending certain advanced weapon systems — from Stingers, to HIMARS, to Patriot air defense systems, to Western main battle tanks — would somehow provoke Putin. Yet, when these provisions were eventually sent, months later, there was no Russian retribution," McCaul wrote in the article co-authored with retired Army Gen. and Fox News analyst Jack Keane.

Greene, other Republicans oppose more aid

Right-wing Republican U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, of Georgia, told Fox News host Tucker Carlson Thursday night that she plans to re-introduce legislation that would "force" an audit on the billions in U.S. aid to Ukraine.

Greene is among a contingent of GOP lawmakers who oppose more aid to the war torn country, and is among the 20 Republicans who demanded concessions from House Speaker Kevin McCarthy during the multiple rounds of voting in January before he clinched the gavel.

In response to whether the U.S. is providing the types of weapons Ukraine needs quickly enough to secure a win, Kirby said the administration is working "in lockstep in real time" with the Ukrainians.

"We have proven able and willing to evolve the capabilities as the war has evolved," Kirby said Friday. "And contrary to some criticism, we are actually working as well to get ahead of where we think the war

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is going.”

Kirby did not provide details when pressed by reporters on whether the U.S. will supply F-16 fighter jets Ukraine has requested.

Both Democrats and Republicans who support continued aid to Ukraine reiterate that U.S. national security is at stake, particularly in relation to rival nations forging stronger ties with the Kremlin.

Blinken suggested this week that China was considering providing “lethal support” to Russia.

Kirby on Friday declined to answer questions about the comment.

However, he said the U.S. has “additional information that Iran’s support for Russia’s war is expanding.”

“We’re going to be watching this very closely to see what, if anything, actually transpires and whatever transactions are actually made,” Kirby said. “The larger point here is, as I had talked about before, there is this growing defense cooperation between Iran and Russia. And it’s not only certainly going to make things in Ukraine more difficult, but it could certainly make the security situation in the Middle East more difficult for our partners and friends there.”

G7 meeting

Biden met virtually for about an hour-and-a-half with Zelenskyy and G7 leaders early Friday.

The body of seven of the world’s leading economies released a 15-point statement following the meeting condemning Russia’s “irresponsible nuclear rhetoric” and reaffirming coordinated economic sanctions and accountability measures to ensure war crimes are prosecuted.

“We are committed to preventing Russia from finding new ways to acquire advanced materials, technology, and military and industrial equipment from our jurisdictions that it can use to develop its industrial sectors and further its violations of international law,” part of the joint statement read.

Tucked in the statement was also a vow that the governments will work together to address “significant revenues” Russia gains from the export of diamonds, rough or polished.

Shortly after the G7 meeting, Blinken delivered remarks in New York City at the United Nations Security Council, on which Russia holds permanent membership.

“One year and one week ago — on February 17th, 2022 — I warned this council that Russia was planning to invade Ukraine,” Blinken said. “I said that Russia would manufacture a pretext, and then use missiles, tanks, soldiers, cyberattacks to strike pre-identified targets, including Kyiv, with the aim of toppling Ukraine’s democratically elected government.

“Russia’s representative — the same representative who will speak today — called these, and I quote, ‘groundless accusations.’ Seven days later, on February 24th, 2022, Russia launched its full-scale invasion,” he continued.

The council met one day after 141 member nations of the U.N. General Assembly approved a resolution condemning Russia’s continued invasion.

The U.N. Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner estimates that at least 8,000 Ukrainian civilians have died as a result of the war, with another 13,300 injured, though real totals are likely to be much higher.

Ukraine and Russia have not independently released battlefield losses, but British defense officials last week estimated that 40,000 to 60,000 Russian troops had died, with those injured reaching up to 200,000, according to several media reports.

Western officials told reporters in a late January briefing that battlefield deaths and injuries were estimated at 200,000 on both sides.

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Black student loan borrowers at risk as U.S. Supreme Court weighs forgiveness plan

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - FEBRUARY 24, 2023 1:00 PM

WASHINGTON — As the Biden administration prepares to defend its student debt cancellation program before the U.S. Supreme Court on Feb. 28, data shows that Black borrowers have the most to lose should a majority conservative court strike down the policy.

Black borrowers hold a disproportionate share of student loan debt, and many likely were recipients of Pell Grants, federal aid to help low-income students pay for higher education. Those federal student loan borrowers who received Pell Grants could qualify for up to \$20,000 in debt forgiveness under the administration plan.

Fenaba Addo, an associate professor of public policy in the Department of Public Policy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, with her colleagues has studied the rise in student debt. They have looked at which borrowers have disproportionately accumulated the most debt and are struggling the most with repayments, as well as which borrowers are overly concentrated in the pools of defaulters.

"Time and time again, we see Black borrowers over-represented in both of those groups and really struggling with the current policies and programs in place that reportedly were supposed to be assisting and helping borrowers pay down their debts," she said.

Addo pointed out some policies in place that were targeted to help low-income students, such as Pell Grants, "but that didn't keep up with inflation over time."

"The solution has been a debt solution," she said. "It hasn't been, let's figure out how to increase resources, economic resources of households, or how to get people more income. It's been let's figure out a way to saddle them with debt."

On average, Black college graduates at the time they leave school owe \$7,400 more than their white peers, or \$23,400 versus \$16,000, according to a study by the Brookings Institution. But within four years after graduation, due to differences in interest accrual and graduate school borrowing, Black borrowers hold about \$53,000 in student loan debt, or nearly twice as much as their white peers, the study found.

Lawsuits challenge White House reasoning

In its initial explanation of its student loan forgiveness program when it was announced in August, the White House acknowledged that the policy would help "advance racial equity."

The statement said: "Black students are more likely to have to borrow for school and more likely to take out larger loans. Black borrowers are twice as likely to have received Pell Grants compared to their white peers. Other borrowers of color are also more likely than their peers to receive Pell Grants. That is why an Urban Institute study found that debt forgiveness programs targeting those who received Pell Grants



Student loan borrowers gather near The White House to tell President Biden to cancel student debt on May 12, 2020, in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Paul Morigi/Getty Images for We, The 45 Million)

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while in college will advance racial equity.”

That reasoning was the basis of one of two lawsuits that is before the Supreme Court and seeking to overturn the Biden administration’s debt relief policy. Lower courts have put the program on hold, preventing the administration from issuing debt relief to 16 million borrowers who have already been approved for forgiveness by the U.S. Department of Education.

The policy would cancel up to \$10,000 in federal student debt for borrowers earning up to \$125,000 annually, or up to \$250,000 for married couples, with the boost to \$20,000 in forgiveness for Pell Grant recipients. The program only applies to current borrowers, not future ones, and income levels for the 2020 and 2021 tax years would be considered. Those who have private student loans are not eligible.

So far, the Department of Education has collected more than 24 million applications for the relief program.

The first lawsuit, from a conservative advocacy group out of Wisconsin, charges that the White House’s debt relief plan violates federal law because it seeks to help Black borrowers and help narrow the racial wealth gap.

White households hold 86.8% of overall wealth, though they account for only 68.1% of the households in the Survey of Consumer Finances. By comparison, Black and Hispanic households hold only 2.9% and 2.8% of wealth, respectively, while accounting for 15.6% and 10.9% of the U.S. population, “reflecting the fact that wealth is disproportionately skewed towards white households,” according to the Federal Reserve.

Over the past two decades, Black students and people aged 50 and older have become the fastest growing category of student loan borrowers, according to the most recent Federal Reserve data.

Data from the Federal Reserve also found that Black and Hispanic borrowers are “more likely than white borrowers to be behind on their loan repayment and are also less likely to have repaid their loans.”

The U.S. Department of Education does not regularly track borrowers by race, but noted that Black graduates were more likely to take on student debt. A study by the NAACP found that “across all racial groups, Black borrowers hold the most student loan debt.”

A report by the Roosevelt Institute, a liberal think tank, found that broad-based federal student debt cancellation would most benefit Black and brown borrowers, and would also be an effective tool to grow the Black middle-class.

The other suit, from Republican attorneys general of Nebraska, Missouri, Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas and South Carolina, argues that the Biden administration overstepped its reach and that the plan threatens the revenue of those states’ businesses that profit from federal student loans.

A federal judge in Missouri originally rejected the six-state lawsuit, ruling that those states lacked legal standing to pursue a case on the grounds that they will be harmed in the future.

The appeals court later found that Missouri had shown likely injury, because a major loan servicer — Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority, known as MOHELA — that is based in the state would lose revenue because of the debt relief program.

HEROES Act

The White House has stood by its policy, arguing that the 2003 HEROES Act allows the administration to enact its debt relief program. That law gives the secretary of education the authority to respond to a “national emergency” and “waive or modify any statutory or regulatory provision” so that student loan borrowers are not “placed in a worse position financially” due to a national emergency.

The main author of the HEROES Act, George Miller, a former Democratic congressman from California who served as chair of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, wrote in a recent opinion piece in *The Washington Post* that there was no doubt that the coronavirus pandemic constituted a national emergency. He noted that former President Donald Trump declared COVID-19 a national emergency and that President Joe Biden has extended that twice.

The Trump administration issued a pause on federal student loan repayments because of the pandemic, and the Biden administration has extended the pause several times.

“The Biden student debt relief plan achieves our goal of ensuring that student-aid recipients are not put in a worse position by a national emergency,” Miller wrote. “(E)ducation officials determined that the debt-relief plan was necessary to ensure that borrowers would not default on their loans when pandemic-

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related payment pauses — in place since March 2020 — expired at the end of 2022.”

The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that the program would cost up to \$400 billion over 30 years. More than 43 million Americans have student loan debt, and the Federal Reserve estimates that the total U.S. student loan debt is more than \$1.76 trillion.

Rally outside the court

Regardless of the court outcome, the pandemic-era pause on federal student loan repayments will lift on June 30, and those borrowers will be required to begin repayments either after the Supreme Court’s decision or 60 days after the June deadline.

On the day of the oral arguments on Feb. 28, more than 20 advocacy groups and several congressional Democrats are planning to rally outside the Supreme Court. Some of those groups include the NAACP, the Student Borrower Protection Center, American Federation of Teachers and New Georgia Project.

“Student debt cancellation is one of the defining issues of my generation,” Maggie Bell, the lead organizer for New Georgia Project’s C.L.E.A.R. campaign, said in a statement.

“I speak to Black and brown student borrowers across Georgia every day: the burden of their debt is heavy. Many of us fear we may never be able to own a home, raise a family, or retire without our student debt being cancelled. What about our reality is the ‘American Dream?’”

The campaign stands for Cancel Loans for Education and Reparations, and specifically organizes Georgia borrowers around full student loan debt cancellation.

Democratic lawmakers expected to join advocates include U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York; Sens. Bob Menendez of New Jersey and Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts; and Reps. Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Maxwell Frost of Florida and Pramila Jayapal of Washington state.

Warren and Schumer have called for the Biden administration to cancel as much as \$50,000 in federal student loans, arguing that the president has the executive authority to do so.

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Election deniers who lost secretary of state races now run several state GOP operations

BY: ZACHARY ROTH - FEBRUARY 24, 2023 11:50 AM



Republican nominee for Michigan secretary of state Kristina Karamo campaigns in Lansing on Aug. 27, 2022.

(Allison R. Donahue)

Meanwhile, Tina Peters announced last week that she's running for state GOP chair in Colorado. A former county election clerk, Peters is facing felony charges in connection with an alleged scheme to breach secure voting equipment in order to show that her state's 2020 vote was rigged.

All four Republicans ran unsuccessfully last year for secretary of state, which would have made them their state's chief election official. Karamo won the Republican nomination, then was defeated in the general election by Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, a Democrat. Brown, Moon, and Peters all lost in the GOP primaries.

Spokespeople for the Kansas and Idaho Republican parties said the chair position is unsalaried. The Michigan party did not immediately respond to an inquiry.

A new platform

The emerging trend of election deniers running for secretary of state before going on to lead their state party gives deniers yet another platform from which to exert influence, by stoking unfounded fears about election systems and pushing for restrictive voting policies.

Already, hundreds of deniers are in office across the country. A Brookings Institution study found that 226 out of 345 candidates who ran for congressional, state legislative, or statewide positions — 66% — won their races. And, as States Newsroom recently reported, at least five states have deniers running their election systems as secretary of state.

"State party chairs have tremendous power in our two-party system: to appoint poll workers and poll watchers, to influence who makes it on the ballot," said Norman Eisen, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, who co-authored the study of election-denier candidates. "They can direct funding and support to these individuals. They shape the national Republican Party platform and operation. State parties have a lot of power and that means state party chairs have a lot of power."

That could offer a valuable boost to former President Donald Trump in these states — though none of the three chairs has yet endorsed a GOP presidential candidate.

The trend also highlights how, despite some high-profile defeats last year, denialism and extremism

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maintain a hold on many rank-and-file Republican activists and voters.

Karamo has said the January 6, 2021, insurrection was a false-flag operation. "I believe this is completely Antifa posing as Trump supporters," she said the following day, referring to left-wing anti-fascist activists.

And she never conceded her 14-point loss to Benson in November. "Why would I concede to a fraudulent process?" she asked, according to the Detroit Free Press. In winning the party chair post, Karamo defeated another election denier, Matthew DePerno, who lost his race last year for attorney general.

As a legislator, Moon worked to tighten Idaho's voting rules, introducing a bill that would have banned the use of student IDs to vote, eliminated the use of affidavits for voters without proper ID, and ended same-day voter registration.

Arguing for the measure, which ultimately did not pass, Moon spread stories about people crossing into Idaho from Canada to vote illegally. The secretary of state's office said that wasn't happening.

Campaigning last year for secretary of state, Brown raised unfounded fears about the security of Kansas' elections and questioned the 2020 presidential results. After the incumbent secretary of state, Scott Schwab, said there were no major problems with the state's voting, The Associated Press reported, Brown responded: "Because he said so? Or because he can prove it?"

"His answer is, 'There is nothing to see here, keep moving,'" Brown added. "You should start looking and you should stop moving."

Eisen warned that, despite the losses last year by several prominent election deniers, the ascension of deniers to state chair posts underscores the threat that the ideology continues to pose.

"When you combine that with the fact that election deniers have taken control in other places, it represents a clear and present danger," Eisen said. "We must celebrate the successes we had, but keep our guard up, remain at high alert, and redouble efforts to prevent this election denial philosophy from destroying American democracy."

Zachary Roth is the National Democracy Reporter for States Newsroom.

Doctors recount 'heart-wrenching' stories in new study on medical care post-Roe

BY: SOFIA RESNICK - FEBRUARY 24, 2023 7:00 AM



People attend a "Fight4Her" pro-choice rally in front of the White House at Lafayette Square on March 29, 2019, in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Astrid Riecken/Getty Images)

Researchers at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) are trying to piece together how the end of *Roe v. Wade* has so far transformed pregnancy-related medical care in America, and the yet-to-be-released preliminary data are alarming, the lead principal investigator told States Newsroom in an exclusive interview.

The team has already received dozens of stories about health care providers directing patients to continue very high risk or doomed pregnancies, which they might not have done before their states criminalized abortion.

"The stories are really heart-wrenching," said Dr. Daniel Grossman, who directs Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health (ANSIRH) at UCSF, which last October launched the Care Post Roestudy, which draws from a survey in which participants share anecdotes either anonymously or stripped of identifying details.

Through this limited qualitative study, researchers are learning how clinical care deviated from "the usual standard," since last June, when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe*. Grossman said his researchers have so far received around 50 "valid complete submissions" about patients who live in about half of the approximately dozen states that currently or previously banned abortion (totally or partially), including Arizona, Georgia, and Indiana.

A theme of fear is emerging from the data, Grossman said. Not only are providers scared of flouting new laws, but some patients are terrified just to be pregnant in states with abortion bans and are traveling long distances when problems arise.

"[T]hey were too scared to even go seek care in that state because they were worried about what might happen to them," Grossman said. "So, they traveled long distances to another state to be evaluated. And sometimes it turned out they weren't even pregnant. Sometimes it turned out they had had a miscarriage that had actually already been completed and they didn't need any treatment. And in one case, the patient had an ectopic pregnancy, where she should have been able to get that treatment where she lived."

'Patients were being sent home'

Providers told researchers about cases of premature rupture of membranes in the second trimester, Grossman said, noting that the standard of care in these cases is to offer termination, given the high risk of infection and low probability of a live birth.

"And instead, in these cases, patients were being sent home," he said. "And then they come back with infection, and several of them developed very severe infection that required very complicated management in the intensive care unit."

Additionally, UCSF researchers have learned about several cases of patients whose fetuses had no chance of survival but had to leave their state to have abortions, an increasingly common story.

Grossman said providers have described having to jump through hoops to treat patients with ectopic pregnancies, a dangerous condition that occurs in approximately 1 to 2 percent of pregnancies in the U.S., in which the embryo has implanted outside the main cavity of the uterus. More than 90 percent of the

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time, the embryo gets stuck on its way to the uterus in the fallopian tube, where it does not have enough room to grow and cannot survive. If caught early, ectopic pregnancies are most commonly treated with one of the drugs in a typical medication abortion, or with surgery. Left untreated, the tube can rupture and cause uncontrollable bleeding.

Currently, less than 50 people die from ectopic pregnancies annually, according to University of California Davis complex-family-planning specialist Dr. Mitchell Creinin. However, OB-GYNs have expressed concerns that that number could rise due to new post-Roe policies.

And through the Care Post Roe qualitative study, Grossman has become concerned that some doctors are hedging how to treat the rarest type of ectopic pregnancy, which occurs when the embryo implants in a woman's scar from a previous cesarean section. As the pregnancy grows, the uterus can rupture and cause what Grossman calls "catastrophic bleeding." The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine recommends terminating cesarean scar ectopic pregnancies because they pose fatal risks to pregnant people (the complication rate can be as high as 44 percent) and rarely result in live births.

Despite being a rare condition – an estimated 1/1,800 to 1/2,500 of all C-section deliveries – Grossman said his team has already heard about a few cases in which patients could not access recommended treatment for cesarean scar pregnancies. What's trickier about this type of ectopic pregnancy, he said, is that the outcome is not necessarily 100 percent fatal. There have been reported cases of survival for the pregnant person and baby, and if the embryo has cardiac activity, sometimes providers are reluctant to recommend termination.

"[There have been] several cases where it's been hard to arrange treatment for those patients in the states where they live," Grossman said. "And sometimes they just have to follow the patient because the patient can't travel elsewhere. And they're just watching the placenta kind of grow through the uterine wall into surrounding structures. It's really very concerning."

Texas high-risk OB-GYN Patricia Santiago-Munoz says the option to continue a risky pregnancy like this should be up to the patient. The maternal fetal medicine specialist at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas published a blog post last August to inform patients that treatment for cesarean scar ectopic pregnancies are legal under Texas's abortion law.

But as has been true in Texas and in many of the 12 other states where abortion is currently banned, patients have been reportedly experiencing denials and delays in care. These laws level harsh penalties for doctors, many of whom are confused how to navigate narrow or vaguely worded "life of the mother" exceptions.

Lawmakers and health officials in multiple states are currently trying to adopt more explicit health exceptions in their abortion bans. But Grossman says determining what constitutes life-threatening and how immediately life-threatening can be difficult – and daunting.

"The problem in general with these exceptions is that medicine is not black and white; there's a lot of gray," Grossman said. "In many situations a patient can be okay and kind of slowly start deteriorating, and then a condition can suddenly deteriorate very quickly. How big a chance of that happening is considered too big? That is what physicians and hospital administrators are facing now in this new era."

Fear, not fear mongering

Many anti-abortion groups, meanwhile, are lobbying GOP lawmakers to oppose proposed health exceptions. In Tennessee, anti-abortion groups are clashing with state lawmakers who support changing the way the law criminalizes doctors. Sen. Richard Briggs (R-Knoxville), a heart surgeon, last year said heregrets voting for the ban after realizing how it could exacerbate medical emergencies, including cesarean scar ectopic pregnancies.

Grossman acknowledges that Care Post Roe is a very limited study that relies on a relatively small number of anecdotes, many of which are submitted anonymously. He said this was the best way to protect the identity of health providers and patients, many of whom currently fear prosecution for their medical decisions.

That fear is not unfounded, given that many hospital systems have instructed doctors not to talk pub-

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licly about the public health effects of overturning Roe. One OB-GYN, Indiana Dr. Caitlin Bernard, is being investigated for telling a reporter about treating an Ohio child, who had been denied an abortion even though she was 10 years old and had been raped.

The study also invites participants to do in-depth follow-up interviews with UCSF researchers, and Grossman said they've done about a dozen so far. Otherwise, they don't verify the submissions they receive beyond assessing whether they make clinical sense. He also said the submissions have so far been very detailed.

And they mirror many similar stories recounted to journalists and researchers around the country, and borne out in other recent research, like a Commonwealth Fund study that found higher rates of maternal and infant mortality in states with strict abortion restrictions, and a Women's Health Issues study that concluded that OB-GYNs practicing in states with heavy abortion restrictions are less likely than OB-GYNs in states with abortion rights to have received abortion training, and thus less likely to offer optimal care in all cases.

The anti-abortion movement, meanwhile, has shrugged its collective shoulders at these outcomes. Among many anti-abortion groups, the American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists has engaged in a concerted media campaign to dispel stories about care denials as fear-mongering. Instead they blame doctors for their decisions.

"False claims abound that state abortion restrictions will prevent physicians from being able to treat ectopic pregnancies, miscarriage, and other life-threatening complications in pregnancy (such as an intrauterine infection). This is blatantly absurd, as not a single state law restricting abortion prevents treating these conditions," AAPLOG president-elect Dr. Christina Francis testified before Congress last July.

The group is one of the plaintiffs in a lawsuit that would ban an abortion-inducing drug that pregnant people post-Roe have relied on to have safe early terminations, under the false narrative that the drug is unsafe.

An AAPLOG email to members sent on Jan. 6 urged the providers in its network to participate in the Care Post Roe study, but to give different stories from what the UCSF researchers are asking for.

"We encourage members to submit their stories about the abysmal care that medication abortion patients are receiving and the horrendous complications which you are treating in the Emergency Room because the abortionists abandoned their patients to the ER for management of complications," the email read. That's also the crux of one of their main arguments in the lawsuit – that patients are flooding emergency rooms because of increased use of medication abortion. Yet they're basing that claim on speculation and a small number of anecdotes.

Grossman is not aware of any such submissions. But he noted that the team has excluded submissions that were incomplete or vague or didn't make clinical sense and didn't meet the inclusion criteria, which was to reflect changes in care after a change in law.

AAPLOG did not respond to a request for comment.

As doctors and abortion providers continue to warn about dire consequences to come, Grossman said his team has been receiving new stories every week about changes in medical care because of abortion bans. He said UCSF continues to solicit study participants and will begin releasing their preliminary findings in the coming month or two.

"We hope that these findings will be useful for hospital systems as they're trying to figure out workarounds to provide care," Grossman said.

Sofia Resnick is a national reproductive rights reporter for States Newsroom, based in Washington, D.C. She has reported on reproductive-health politics and justice issues for more than a decade.

Legislative roundup: Noem bills bite the dust

BY: SETH TUPPER, JOHN HULT AND MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 24, 2023 5:43 PM

About five months – that’s how long a proposed grocery sales-tax repeal inhabited political news, until a legislative committee brought all the chatter to an abrupt end this week.

Gov. Kristi Noem flipped the traditional political script when she announced her support for the idea in September. Democrats had been proposing the repeal for years, and had always been stymied by Noem’s own Republican Party.

Immediately after that announcement, legislators began to question the fiscal wisdom of exempting such a large category of purchases from the state sales tax. So it wasn’t a shock when Noem’s bill died this week, but it did make for interesting theater. Legislators on a budget panel rejected Noem’s plan and adopted a rival proposal – worth about \$100 million in tax savings, similar to Noem’s bill – to lower the state sales tax from 4.5% to 4.2% across the board. That bill later passed the House and is headed to a Senate committee.

Also this week, the state Senate shot down Noem’s bill to create a committee for vetting foreign purchases of agricultural land. Earlier in the session, lawmakers defeated her proposal to expand family leave for public and private employees.

The governor has had some wins. A couple of examples: She’s signed her bill to reduce unemployment insurance contributions, an \$18 million savings for employers; and this week legislators gave final approval to her bill to formally recognize many out-of-state occupational licenses, making it easier for professionals to relocate and fill jobs in South Dakota.

Noem signed 21 bills into law Wednesday and listed them in a news release. Wednesday was also “Crossover Day,” the deadline for a bill to pass its chamber of origin. All that’s left of the 38-day legislative session are the next two weeks and then one day to consider vetoes on March 27.

Here’s a look at some bills we’re tracking.

Nursing homes

The House passed a HB 1167 Wednesday, which would require an annual 100% reimbursement rate for nursing homes and other community service providers. The day before, the House passed HB 1138, which would require an annually updated cost report to accurately reflect changes in service costs. Both will head to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

Adult day services

A bill that would help expand adult day services for elderly and disabled adults, HB 1078, passed out of Joint Appropriations on Thursday. While it originally asked for \$5 million to award startup grants for facilities, the committee reduced the amount to \$2 million.

Pharmacy costs

A bill that would lower costs for pharmacies by requiring greater transparency in the prescription drug supply chain passed the House last week and the Senate Health and Human Services Committee on Friday. HB 1135 now heads to the Senate floor.

Medicaid work requirements

A resolution that would ask South Dakota voters to authorize the addition of a work requirement for Medicaid enrollees passed out of the House nearly a month ago and finally got a hearing in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee on Friday. The committee rejected Senate Joint Resolution 5004 on a vote of 5-2.

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Medical marijuana

Two bills introduced by Rep. Fred Deutsch that would have regulated the industry by limiting medical marijuana pop-up clinic locations (HB 1172) and regulating advertisements (HB 1129) were defeated in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee Wednesday.

Fentanyl test strips

Gov. Kristi Noem signed into law Wednesday a bill that would legalize Fentanyl test strips. Proponents of HB 1041 say the test strips will help prevent fentanyl overdose deaths in the state.

Free state IDs

HB 1241, which would have allowed homeless South Dakotans to get a state ID card for free was rejected in the Joint Committee on Appropriations on Thursday.

Center for American Exceptionalism

HB 1070 would have funded the establishment of a center to develop state social studies and civics curriculum. It died on the House floor Wednesday. While it did earn a majority of votes, it didn't earn a two-thirds vote needed to pass a special funding appropriation.

Moving county seats

An amended bill that raises the number of signatures needed to let county residents vote on whether to move a county seat received final approval this week. SB 56 is on the governor's desk.

Intellectual diversity report

SB 45, which would repeal a required annual report on intellectual diversity at the state's public universities, was rejected Friday by the House Education Committee.

Three strikes for kids

SB 4 would allow judges to commit children to Department of Corrections custody if they're adjudicated (aka "convicted") for three or more crimes in 12 months. The Senate wanted a two-adjudication standard and passed it as amended. The House Judiciary Committee switched it back to three on Friday and sent it to the full House on an 11-2 vote.

New prisons

The Joint Appropriations Committee endorsed more than \$400 million in spending for new prisons this week. That's \$60 million for a women's prison (HB 1016), which will be built in Rapid City over the next year and a half or so, and \$342 million for a men's prison (HB 1017) in or near Sioux Falls. That one would be built later. Next up: the full House.

Drunken driving

HB 1170, which would impose mandatory minimum sentences on repeat DUI offenders – people with four or more convictions – passed out of the House of Representatives this week 58-12. That one's up in Senate Judiciary next.

Penalties for election circulators

People who purposefully lie on election petitions could be charged with a felony under SB 46, which made it out of the House on Thursday and now goes to Gov. Noem's desk.

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Domestic violence

SB 50 would make it easier to charge a person with the crime of witness tampering, particularly in cases involving domestic violence, where abusers sometimes scare their victims off from testifying. It passed House Judiciary on Wednesday on its way to the full House.

Ag nuisance claims

Agricultural operations would have greater protection from nuisance lawsuits if HB 1090 makes it to the governor. The Senate passed an amended version of the bill Friday, which will send it back to the House for consideration of the changes.

Foreign-owned ag land

After Noem's bill to create a vetting committee for foreign purchases of ag land failed, the Senate sent a related bill to her desk. If Noem signs it, HB 1189 would require corporations filing annual reports with the Secretary of State's Office to disclose whether they own ag land and have foreign owners. That's despite existing laws that already result in the disclosure of that information.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

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.

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.

Recreational marijuana is illegal, but its high-inducing cousins are widespread

Lawmakers grapple with legal weed questions, in spite of recreational cannabis vote

BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 25, 2023 6:00 AM

Recreational marijuana is illegal in South Dakota – voters confirmed as much in November – but the next best thing is available from border to border.

The 2018 Farm Bill legalized the cultivation of hemp. By extension, it legalized two cannabinoids called delta-8 and delta-10 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), which occur naturally in tiny amounts in the hemp plant.

When ingested in significant doses, each can create a high that's all but indistinguishable from the one produced by traditional marijuana. Even when synthesized, the compounds are legal at the federal level because they occur naturally in a legal plant.

Retailers in South Dakota and around the country have now spent five years selling the chemicals in gummies, other edibles, oils in vape devices or in otherwise inert smokable hemp. The products can be loaded with large enough quantities of the THC variants to work as a stand-in for marijuana when consumed, either for recreational or medical purposes.

That reality has created a sort of drug policy dissonance in Pierre.

In contrast to fierce debates about the rules and regulations surrounding medical marijuana or allowable levels of delta-9 THC – the federally banned cannabinoid found in the marijuana plant – products spiked with its molecular cousins are legal to buy and consume for anyone older than 21 in South Dakota.

Between recreational and medical marijuana law changes in many states and the legality of the hemp-based products, "the battle for cannabis legalization is won," said Rod Kight, a North Carolina lawyer who crafted the Hemp Industry Association's position paper on D8 and D10 in 2021.

"Cannabis is legal in one form or the other everywhere in the country," Kight said. "We have cannabis legalization. People just don't recognize it as such."

In Sioux Falls alone, dozens of tobacco shops with names like Roll N' Smoke, High End Glass Gallery or Chasing Clouds sell D8 and D10 products alongside more traditional smoke shop fare like roll-your-own cigarette kits, nicotine vape pens or glass pipes. Gas stations and liquor stores, in Sioux Falls and around the state, also sell them.

In Pierre, there's a delta-8 shop less than a block from the office where Attorney General Marty Jackley practiced law as a private attorney before taking office for his second term as the state's top prosecutor.

The question states are now grappling with, Kight said, is how to regulate the emergent industry's ubiquitous wares. More than a dozen states have taken a hard line and moved to ban the products, which Kight called a "last gasp effort" to maintain prohibition, and one Kight and others have successfully challenged in court.

Other states have moved to regulate the products with age restrictions and regulations for labeling and product testing. That's where the industry hopes things land in all states, Kight said.

"We don't want the 'bathtub gin' products out there. We want the ones that are produced in accordance with good manufacturing practices, where the labeling is accurate, consumers can go to a store, dispensary or online and rely on the products not harming them, in the same way they would if they're buying vitamin C or canned spinach."

South Dakota regulation

Lawmakers in South Dakota have spent the past few years trying to catch up, and have thus far taken the regulation route. In 2022, Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt, R-Sioux Falls, sponsored a successful effort to ban sales to those younger than 21.

This year, Rehfeldt is supporting House Bill 1226, which would require the South Dakota Department of Health to create rules for delta-8 and delta-10 testing, marketing and product labeling.

Instead of moving to ban the products five years after they became legal and available, Rehfeldt said,

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South Dakota ought to recognize that the genie is out of the bottle. An outright ban would be infeasible, she said, and unwise to undertake without the input of law enforcement or a study on the issue.

"The intention here is that we need to be good lawmakers and take a bite at the apple step by step," Rehfeldt said Tuesday on the House floor.

The hemp industry in South Dakota supports HB 1226, an issue that came up in that same floor debate. Republican Rep. Kevin Jensen of Sioux Falls has strong feelings about what some have dubbed "diet weed," and doesn't trust the hemp industry to have South Dakotans' best interests at heart.

Jensen, whose wife is a chemical dependency counselor, would like to see the products banned. He declined an opportunity to sponsor HB 1226 after he learned that the bill merely gave rulemaking authority to the Health Department.

"My idea is to get it the hell off the retail market," Jensen told South Dakota Searchlight earlier this month.

This week on the floor, Jensen supported an amendment from Rep. Sue Peterson, R-Sioux Falls, that would have rewritten the bill to ban the products. He was among the backers of that failed amendment who said the hemp industry's support is proof that Department of Health rules would help to legitimize the products and make them more difficult to ban in the future.

The Food and Drug Administration issued a warning on delta-8 last year pointing to the potential health risks of unregulated sale.

"I appreciate the industry bringing the bill but I don't want to regulate harmful products," said Rep. Fred Deutsch, R-Florence, who reminded the chamber that the Health Department opposes HB 1226. "I want to prohibit them."

Attorney General Jackley has not taken a position on the bill, but issued a statement pertaining to any THC-related legislation.

"The attorney general is monitoring various marijuana bills," spokesman Tony Mangan said. "The attorney general will certainly oppose any attempts to remove any protections for our youth or driving under the influence of these substances. The focus will be on safety."

Is a ban enforceable?

Enforcing a ban on such a widely available substance could be a challenge. Banning the products would create an additional burden for law enforcement in the state.

South Dakota voters approved medical marijuana in 2020. The ability of citizens to offer evidence of a medical condition to defend against a marijuana possession charge, included in the voter-backed law, has already led to a dramatic decline in marijuana arrests in many areas of the state.

Add in the potential for legal delta-8 products that function like marijuana to appear in the pockets of those who come in contact with police, and the difficulty of enforcing recreational prohibition grows even more.

Tracking chemical variants can be difficult, according to Minnehaha County Sheriff Mike Milstead. Officers and deputies need to test products to determine their legality, he said, which can be an expensive task. The testing necessary to identify and write up case reports involving the chemical variants of far more hazardous drugs already eats up plenty of resources, the sheriff said.

"With drugs like fentanyl, trying to keep up with the analogs has been a constant battle," Milstead said.

Delta-8 and delta-10 are only two of the cannabinoids making the rounds on the retail market. THC-O and Hexahydrocannabinol (HHC) are also gaining traction. There are 80 to 100 cannabinoids present in cannabis sativa, the plant species to which hemp and marijuana both belong.

A representative from a cannabis testing lab recently told STAT News that "there are new synthetic variants cropping up every week."

Delta-8 in schools

Vape pens and other products with flavors like grape, chocolate cake or fruit punch are part of the reason the industry in South Dakota wants regulation, according to Katie Sieverding of the South Dakota

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Industrial Hemp Association.

Some of the marketing seems geared toward children, and that's something she said "responsible retailers" want to deal with through regulation.

"There's packages that are floating around that are labeled 'Skittles,' and they're coming in from out of state," Sieverding said. "Right now, there's just no protection out there for consumers."

Fruity flavored vape pens are a concern for school officials in South Dakota, whether they're tied to addictive drugs like nicotine or to the oils found in THC products.

Officer Ryan Valland of the Sioux Falls Police Department spends his days at Jefferson High School. Valland has been a school resource officer for 17 years. In that time, he said, he's watched the preferred substance delivery system make the switch from analog to digital.

He hasn't confiscated a cigarette in a decade.

"The only difference between the kids doing it now and the kids doing it 17-20 years ago is the mode of ingesting it," Valland said. "Before it was a stinky cigarette. Now it's a fruity smelling vape. I wouldn't say the population has actually increased, in my opinion."

Valland confiscates one to two vape pens a week from students on average, he said, with around 90% containing nicotine. The other 10% contain some form of THC.

Those caught with a nicotine vape are cited. If there's THC in a vape (Valland sometimes consults Google to find out if it might), he writes a case report and sends it to the state's attorney.

"Our policy is if they're in possession of a vape pen with THC in it, we charge it out as possession of marijuana," Valland said. "As of right now, we don't differentiate."

Like Sieverding, Valland is concerned about the lack of regulation for vape products. Health experts testified to similar concerns in a learning session posted by the Sioux Falls School District this week, which focused largely on nicotine.

"We get so strict on the food that we eat and the labels on the box. But for the vape pens, we just don't know," Valland said.

Dell Rapids School District Superintendent Summer Schultz installed vape detectors in her school's bathrooms to make it easier to catch those who might sneak a puff between classes.

Vaping has become so common for students, Schultz said, that "if I had to target one area, it would be my middle schoolers. It wouldn't be my high schoolers."

Kight, the hemp industry lawyer, argues that concerns about children using THC products are "mostly a red herring, but it does occur." In the absence of legal age limits, Kight said, he advises his clients to have an age restriction for their shops.

No amount of regulation or consumer protection would be enough for opponents like Jensen, though. Jensen said he understands that a ban would put law enforcement in a difficult position, but he'd still rather prohibit hemp-related THC products than accept them.

"Right is right and wrong is wrong, pure and simple," Jensen said. "If something's wrong, I'm not just going to ignore it because we're too busy."

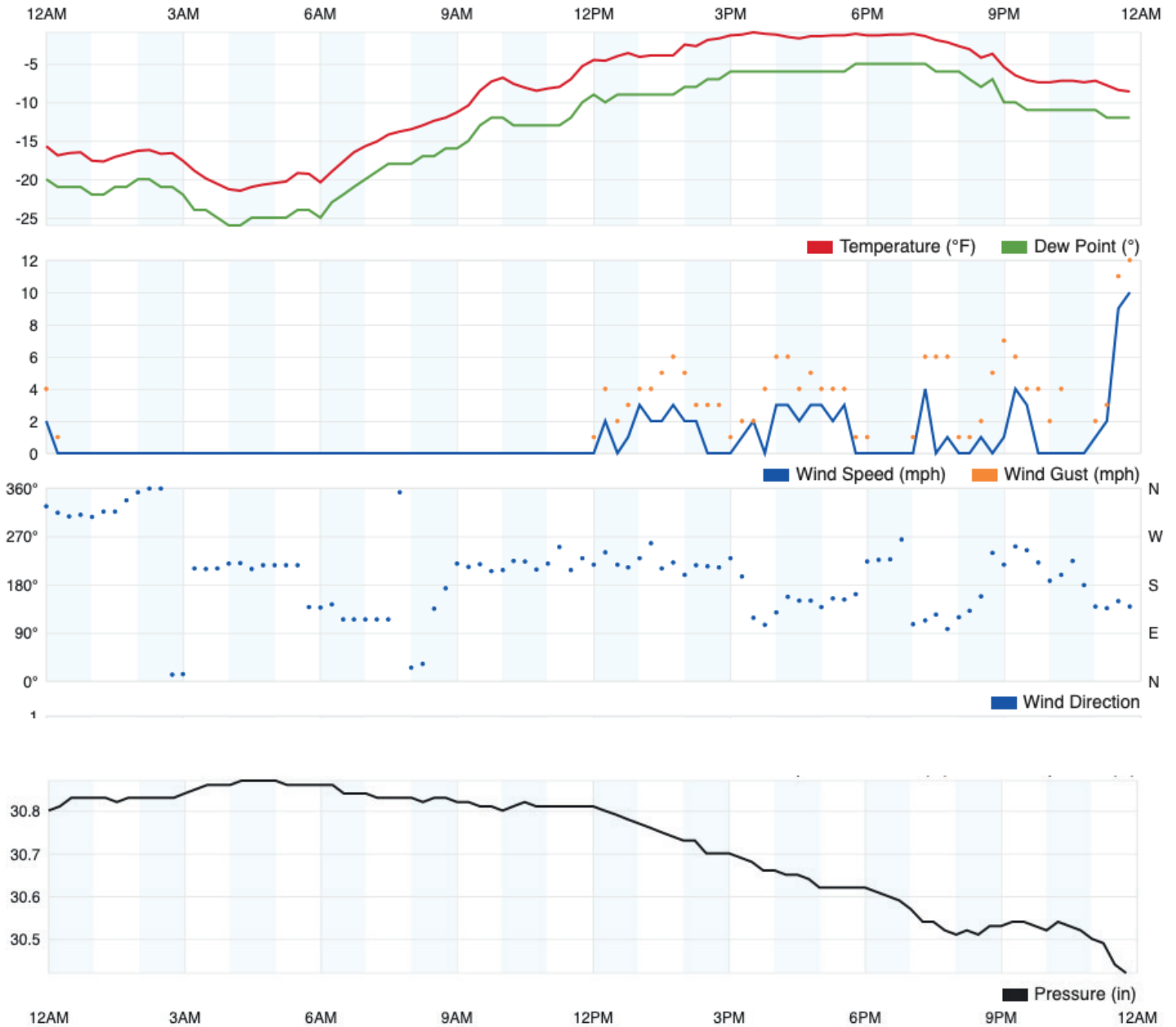
HB 1226, the bill that would require rules and product labeling for delta-8 and delta-10, passed the House of Representatives 48-22. It now heads to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

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.

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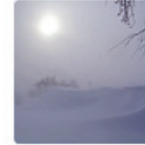


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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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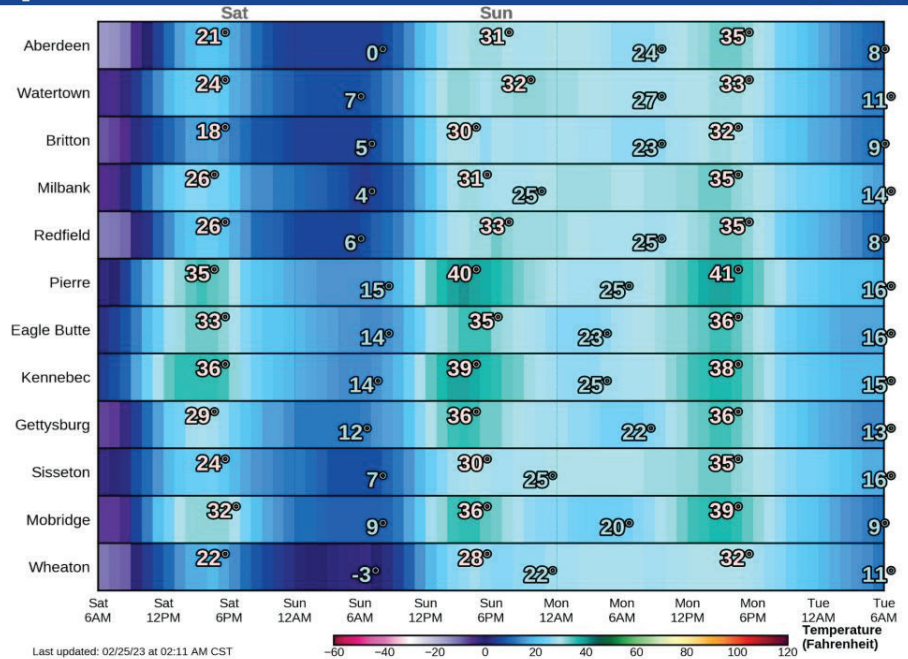
Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
						
Patchy Fog then Sunny	Increasing Clouds	Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Patchy Blowing Snow and Breezy	Patchy Blowing Snow then Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny then Slight Chance Snow
High: 20 °F	Low: 0 °F	High: 31 °F	Low: 24 °F	High: 35 °F	Low: 7 °F	High: 32 °F



Moderating Temperatures

February 25, 2023
3:04 AM

- **Downslope winds along I-29 near Sisseton (Blowing Snow Possible)**
- **Windy across the Sisseton Hills Sunday Too... (Blowing Snow Possible)**



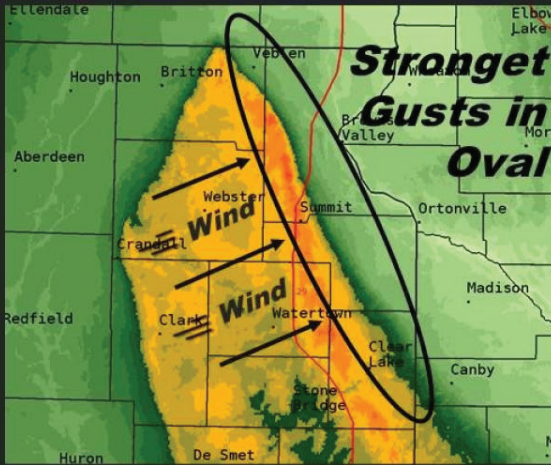
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

We will see some gusty winds around the Sisseton hills through the weekend, otherwise we should see much milder temperatures

Strong Downslope Winds Saturday AM

Created at 2:56 AM - Friday, February 24, 2023



What/Where? ❄️

Breezy to windy conditions, especially in the oval on the map at left, combined with cold temperatures and deep snowpack will lead to **blowing snow and reduced visibilities** across portions of Marshall, Roberts, and Grant Counties.

When? ❄️

Mainly from 6am to early Afternoon Saturday, Feb 25th

Impacts ❄️

Use caution while traveling, especially on I-29 north of Summit and other downslope wind-prone roads where snow exists.



Downslope winds are possible, and with fresh snow, blowing and drifting could be a problem during the morning and early afternoon Saturday.

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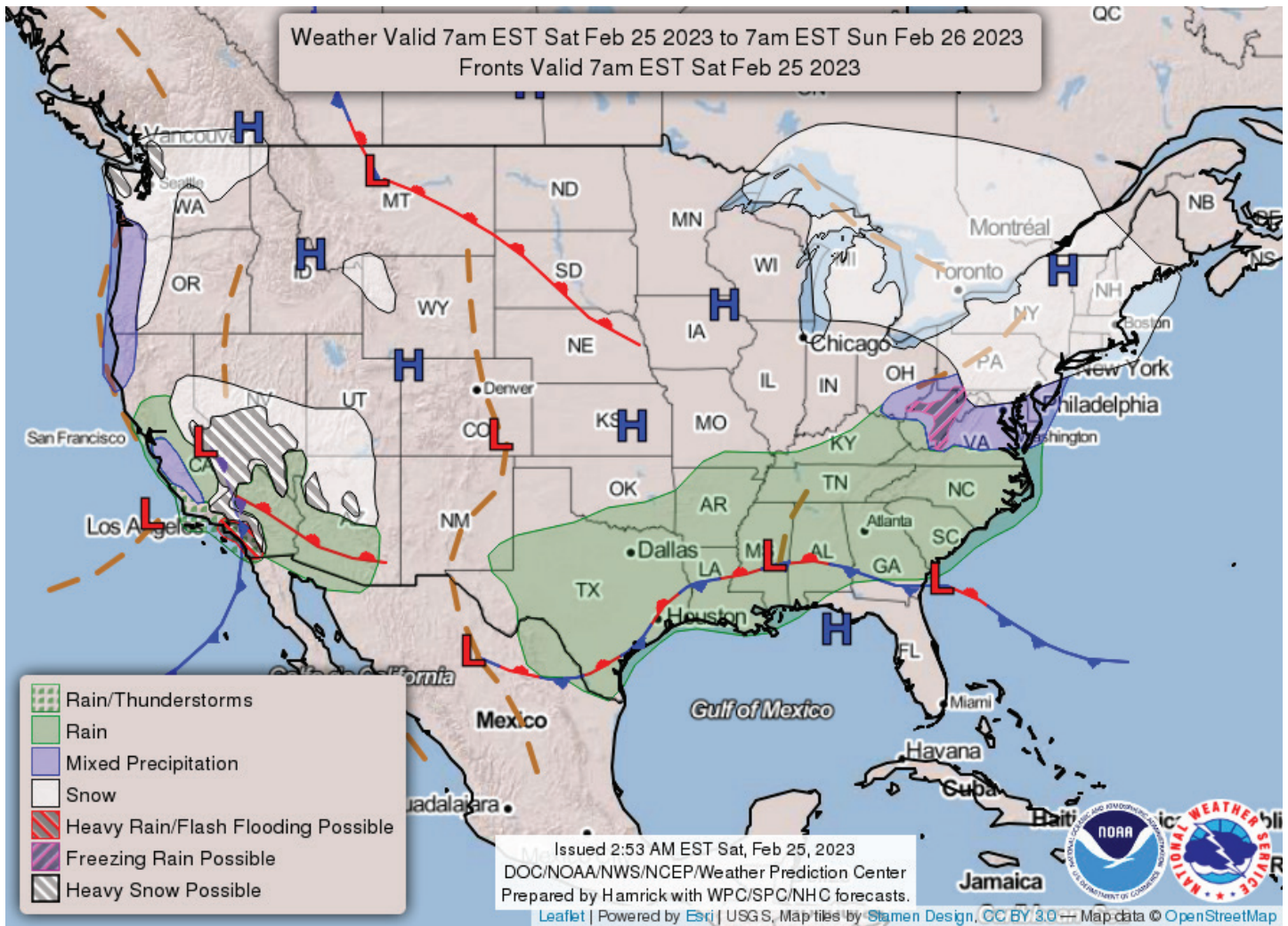
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: -0.9°F at 3:30 PM
Low Temp: -21.5 °F at 4:15 AM
Wind: 12 mph at 11:45 PM
Precip: :

Day length: 10 hours, 58 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 70 in 1958
Record Low: -29 in 1919
Average High: 32
Average Low: 10
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.54
Precip to date in Feb.: 1.33
Average Precip to date: 1.09
Precip Year to Date: 0.25
Sunset Tonight: 6:14:54 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:14:11 AM



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Today in Weather History

February 25, 1987: Six to thirty inches of snow fell on this date in 1987 across much of western and central South Dakota. Three to six inches of snow fell in the northeast part of South Dakota. Some of the most significant snowfall amounts reported were 30 inches at Phillip, 26 inches at Murdo, and Timber Lake, with 15 inches at Rapid City. Numerous accidents occurred in the western and central sections of the state. Many roads were closed, including Interstate 90, for most of the 27th. Slippery roads were a significant factor in the vehicle injuries of three women on Highway 12, six and one-half miles east of Ipswich, in the late afternoon of the 27th. The storm began on the 24th and lasted until the 28th.

February 25-March 1, 1998: An incredible amount of snow falls on Lead, South Dakota, from February 25 through March 01, 1998. The official storm total was 114 inches for the five days.

February 25, 2000: Unusual February severe thunderstorms produced nickel to quarter size hail in Lyman and Hand counties on this date in 2000.

1914: Heavy snow fell over a good portion of South Carolina and North Carolina on February 24-26, 1914. Snowfall amounts include 18 inches near Society Hill, SC, 14 inches in Fayetteville, NC, 13 inches at Darlington, SC, 11.7 inches at Columbia, SC, 8.1 inches at Charlotte, SC, and 7.2 inches at Greensboro, NC, and 7.0 inches at Raleigh, NC.

1934: An outbreak of six tornadoes killed nineteen in Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. The hardest-hit areas were Bowden, GA, and Shady Grove, AL. An estimated F4 tornado damaged or destroyed 90 homes, many in the Shady Grove community. One home in Lauderdale County, Mississippi, was picked up, thrown 400 feet, and blown to bits. Six family members were killed in the house. Three deaths occurred in two homes, and one preacher was killed during services.

1991: Black rain fell over southeastern Turkey for 10-hours, causing panic among people. The black rain resulted from soot from burning oil fields in Kuwait.

2010: A powerful nor'easter spread significant snow and windy conditions across the Middle Atlantic region from Thursday, February 25 into Friday, February 26. An area of low pressure developed off the Carolina coast late Wednesday night, February 24, and then strengthened as it tracked northward to near Long Island, New York, by Thursday evening. As low pressure aloft deepened over the Mid-Atlantic coast Thursday night into Friday, the surface low retrograded and moved westward into northern New Jersey and southern New York. By February 27, the low pushed into southern New England and gradually weakened over the weekend. Strong wind gusts were measured throughout the Middle Atlantic region due to this coastal storm. Some of the highest wind gusts recorded include 62 mph measured at Cape May, New Jersey; 52 mph at the Atlantic City Marina; 51 mph at the Mount Pocono Airport and Lewes, Delaware; and 50 mph at Dover Air Force Base. In addition, wind gusts of 40 mph or higher were recorded in Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Allentown. Considerable blowing and drifting snow resulted, especially from the Poconos eastward into northern New Jersey. Snow drifts as high as 3 to 5 feet were seen across portions of Warren and Sussex counties in New Jersey. Total accumulations of 20 inches or more were recorded from Morris and Sussex counties in New Jersey, westward into Monroe County, Pennsylvania. In addition, a band of 12 to 18 inches of snow accumulation was measured from Warren and Morris counties in New Jersey westward to Lehigh County, Pennsylvania. In addition to snow that accumulated during the daytime on Thursday, many locations across the region experienced a heavier burst of snow with gusty winds Thursday night into early Friday, thanks to additional moisture wrapped around the low-pressure system. Some areas saw snowfall rates of 1 to 2 inches per hour, mainly from northern New Jersey and into the Poconos. Central Park ended the month with 36.9 inches of snow, making this the snowiest month since records began in 1869.

2017: An EF1 tornado was confirmed in Goshen and Conway County, MA. This tornado was the first-ever recorded in February for M.A. since records began.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

DO YOU CARE?

An elderly lady asked a young child, "How do you do, my dear?"

"Fine, thank you," came the reply.

There was a pause, and finally the lady asked, "Why don't you ask me how I am doing?"

After thinking for a moment, the child replied, "You know, I really don't care how you are doing!"

Demonstrating care for others is an important responsibility of the Christian. In fact, the first century Christians were recognized by the saying, "My, how they love one another!" Sadly, that is not true today. Some churches are more like a wrestling match than a worship center.

In His wisdom, God has connected all of us together, believers and nonbelievers. No one is self-sufficient or able to act independently of others and never require help from anyone. We must never think that we are ever excused from the responsibility of giving help to those in need. It's God's way, especially for Christians, to show His love to those who are unsaved.

We read in God's Word that "we will reap whatever we sow." As someone once said, "You can't plant corn and expect to get a crop of watermelons." Although we may not want to believe it, we will only get what we have planted. We see this truth in the laws of nature and find evidence of it in the laws of God as well. Everything we do has predictable results. If we sow comfort, we can be assured of receiving care. Christians must always live God's love.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to be alert to the needs of others and sow Your love and grace. May we share the gifts You give us with others, and bless them in Your Name, for Your sake. Amen.

Scripture For Today: Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. Galatians 6:1-10



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:
02.24.23

2 22 49 65 67 7

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$145,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.22.23

6 24 25 31 38 7

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$38,010,000

NEXT 14 Hrs 36 Mins
DRAW: 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.24.23

17 22 24 30 44 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 14 Hrs 6 Mins 24
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.22.23

1 3 12 21 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$64,000

NEXT 14 Hrs 36 Mins
DRAW: 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.22.23

2 38 53 62 63 2

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 14 Hrs 35 Mins 24
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.22.23

11 19 39 44 65 7

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$119,000,000

NEXT 14 Hrs 35 Mins 24
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Christian 64, Groton Area 60, OT

Brandon Valley 70, Huron 51

Bridgewater-Emery 71, Dell Rapids St. Mary 41

Burke 46, Avon 41

Clark/Willow Lake 84, Arlington 29

Colman-Egan 70, Sioux Falls Lutheran 33

Dakota Valley 89, Lennox 52

Dupree 83, Takini 37

Edgemont 46, Oelrichs 22

Faith 85, Wall 56

Flandreau Indian 79, Estelline/Hendricks 75

Flasher, N.D. 59, Lemmon 42

Florence/Henry 65, Webster 44

Freeman 58, Gayville-Volin High School 42

Great Plains Lutheran 56, Wilmot 20

Hanson 61, Elkton-Lake Benton 43

Harding County 78, Bison 42

Harrisburg 66, Watertown 42

Ipswich 60, Leola/Frederick 37

Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 74, Sunshine Bible Academy 46

Little Wound 72, Bennett County 43

Madison 61, Viborg-Hurley 47

Milbank 60, Tiospa Zina Tribal 52

Miller 72, Highmore-Harrold 62

Mitchell 71, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 70

New Underwood 48, Jones County 46

Northwestern 79, Hitchcock-Tulare 63

Philip 58, Kadoka Area 31

Pierre 68, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 63

Rapid City Christian 66, Hot Springs 47

Sioux Falls Christian 81, Tri-Valley 54

Sioux Falls Jefferson 86, Aberdeen Central 47

Sioux Falls Lincoln 66, Rapid City Central 38

Sioux Falls Washington 74, Rapid City Stevens 56

Sturgis Brown 46, Brookings 42

Sully Buttes 78, North Central Co-Op 65

Timber Lake 70, Potter County 49

Tripp-Delmont/Armour 76, Colome 50

Wakpala 57, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 54

Waubay/Summit 61, Deuel 56

Waverly-South Shore 71, Langford 46

Wessington Springs 53, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 44

White River 73, Lakota Tech 64

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Yankton 66, Spearfish 39

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Brandon Valley 55, Huron 37

Brookings 56, Sturgis Brown 44

Harrisburg 47, Watertown 45

Pierre 57, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 26

Sioux Falls Jefferson 55, Aberdeen Central 52

Sioux Falls Lincoln 45, Rapid City Central 33

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 59, Mitchell 39

Sioux Falls Washington 46, Rapid City Stevens 35

Spearfish 41, Yankton 22

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class A Region 4=

Tea Area 80, Vermillion 79, 2OT

Class A Region 6=

Crow Creek Tribal School 65, North Central Co-Op 50

Dupree 54, Stanley County 17

Miller 55, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 22

Mobridge-Pollock 65, McLaughlin 31

Class B Region 1=

Langford 50, Waverly-South Shore 21

Class B Region 6=

Herreid/Selby Area 69, Lower Brule 62

Lyman 44, Potter County 21

Sully Buttes 54, Ipswich 36

Class B Region 8=

Faith 53, Bison 34

Harding County 72, Wakpala 27

Lemmon 52, Newell 37

Timber Lake 66, Tiospaye Topa 34

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

James Abourezk, 1st Arab American US senator, dies at 92

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — James Abourezk, a South Dakota Democrat who grew up on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, became the first Arab American U.S. senator and was known for his quick wit as he advocated for populist causes, died Friday. He was 92.

Abourezk died at his home in Sioux Falls on his birthday after entering hospice care earlier this week, his son Charles Abourezk said. While in hospice, James Abourezk was surrounded by his wife Sanaa Abourezk and other family members.

Abourezk represented South Dakota for single terms in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate during the 1970s, where he exemplified a brand of Democratic politician known as Prairie Populist. He fought passionately — and with humor — for those he felt were the downtrodden: farmers, consumers and Native American people.

Abourezk was the first chair of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs and successfully pressed for

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the American Indian Policy Review Commission. It produced a comprehensive review of federal policy with American Indian tribes and sparked the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act and the Indian Child Welfare Act — a landmark piece of legislation meant to cut down on the alarming rate at which Native American children were taken from their homes and placed with white families.

When the American Indian Movement seized and occupied Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1973 to protest the federal government's treatment of Native American tribes, Abourezk and fellow South Dakota Democrat Sen. George McGovern traveled to Wounded Knee to negotiate with activists in a standoff with federal law enforcement.

Abourezk also mounted an unsuccessful effort against natural gas de-regulation that raised prices for consumers and became an outspoken critic of U.S. policy in the Middle East. He declined to run for re-election in 1978.

"He was courageous, he was outspoken," said Tom Daschle, the former Senate Democratic leader who started his political career as an aide to Abourezk. He added: "I give him great credit for his advocacy of human rights, especially of the need to recognize the Arab American community in the United States. He was a lone voice for many years."

U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds, a South Dakota Republican, said on Twitter that Abourezk was a "true public servant" who left his mark as he advocated for tribes in the state.

Abourezk's causes often ran afoul of Washington's political establishment. He jabbed back with banter. "He was a great storyteller; he had great humor; he was quick-witted and people loved to be around him," Daschle said.

In Abourezk's 1989 memoir, he wrote of the Senate: "Where else are your doors opened for you, is your travel all over the world provided free of charge, can you meet with world leaders who would otherwise never let you into their countries, have your bad jokes laughed at and your boring speeches applauded? It's the ultimate place to have one's ego massaged, over and over."

The trappings of the Senate were another world from Abourezk's rough-and-tumble childhood on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, where his Lebanese parents had immigrated and ran a general store.

He told colorful tales in his memoir of adolescent adventure: He learned to shoot pool at a local saloon called the Bloody Bucket; drove his father's car backward to reverse the mileage put on the odometer from an unauthorized, 17-mile trip to see a girlfriend; and challenged a group of school bullies to a fight to distract them from picking on another student.

He didn't win the fight, Abourezk wrote in his memoir, "Advise and Dissent." But the bullies left him and the other student alone: "It turned out no one was anxious to tangle with even a sure loser."

Abourezk served four years in the U.S. Navy following World War II. Upon returning to South Dakota, he married his first wife, Mary Ann Houlton, and had three children: Charles, Nikki and Paul. He worked a series of jobs, including as a rancher, blackjack dealer and judo instructor, and then earned a degree in civil engineering from the South Dakota School of Mines.

His job as a civil engineer took him to California, then back to South Dakota, where he worked on the Minuteman missile silos in the western part of the state. He attended law school and opened a solo practice in Rapid City.

Abourezk ran for South Dakota attorney general in 1968 and lost. But he remained undeterred from entering politics and narrowly won a U.S. House seat in 1970. Two years later, he jumped to the Senate. During his term there, he was a seatmate to both former Sens. Joe Biden and Edward Kennedy.

He led a delegation from South Dakota, including members of the University of South Dakota basketball team, to Cuba for a game with the Cuban national basketball team. During the trip, he met with Fidel Castro.

Abourezk also became an outspoken critic of Israel and U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East after touring the region and visiting his parents' hometown in Lebanon as a senator. The position lost him many political allies, and he decided to retire from the Senate after a single term.

Abourezk returned to practicing law in Washington and founded the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination

Committee, where he passionately and colorfully denounced Israeli aggressions in the Middle East. He divorced his first wife in 1980.

Abourezk married Margaret Bethea in 1982. They later divorced.

He set up a law practice in Rapid City where he specialized in American Indian law, but also remained active in advocacy on international policy.

At an embassy event in Washington, he met Sanaa Abourezk, a restaurateur. They were married in 1991, and several years later moved to Sioux Falls where she opened an award-winning restaurant.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by four children, Charles Abourezk, Nikki Pipe On Head, Paul Abourezk and Alya Abourezk; step-daughter, Chelsea Machado; and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Justice Thomas wrote of 'crushing weight' of student loans

By MARK SHERMAN and JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court won't have far to look if it wants a personal take on the "crushing weight" of student debt that underlies the Biden administration's college loan forgiveness plan.

Justice Clarence Thomas was in his mid-40s and in his third year on the nation's highest court when he paid off the last of his debt from his time at Yale Law School.

Thomas, the court's longest-serving justice and staunchest conservative, has been skeptical of other Biden administration initiatives. And when the Supreme Court hears arguments Tuesday involving President Joe Biden's debt relief plan that would wipe away up to \$20,000 in outstanding student loans, Thomas is not likely to be a vote in the administration's favor.

But the justices' own experiences can be relevant in how they approach a case, and alone among them, Thomas has written about the role student loans played in his financial struggles.

A fellow law school student even suggested Thomas declare bankruptcy after graduating "to get out from under the crushing weight of all my student loans," the justice wrote in his best-selling 2007 memoir, "My Grandfather's Son." He rejected the idea.

It's not clear that any of the other justices borrowed money to attend college or law school or have done so for their children's educations. Some justices grew up in relative wealth. Others reported they had scholarships to pay their way to some of the country's most expensive private institutions.

Of the seven justices on the court who are parents, four have signaled through their investments that they don't want their own children to be saddled with onerous college debt, and have piled money into tax-free college savings accounts that might limit any need for loans.

Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Neil Gorsuch have the most on hand, at least \$600,000 and at least \$300,000, respectively, according to annual disclosure reports the justices filed in 2022. Each has two children.

Justices Amy Coney Barrett, who has seven children, and Ketanji Brown Jackson, who has two, also have invested money in college-savings accounts, in which any earnings or growth is tax free if spent on education.

None of the justices would comment for this story, a court spokeswoman said.

Thomas wrote vividly about his past money woes in his up-from-poverty story, recounting how a bank once foreclosed on one of his loans because repayment and delinquency notices were sent to his grandparents' house in Savannah, Georgia, instead of Thomas' home at the time in Jefferson City, Missouri.

Thomas was able to take out another loan to repay the bank only because his mentor, John Danforth, then-Missouri attorney general and later a U.S. senator, vouched for him.

Thomas noted that he signed up for a tuition postponement program at Yale in which a group of students jointly paid for their outstanding loans according to their financial ability, with those earning the most paying the most.

At the time, Thomas' first wife, Kathy, was pregnant. "I didn't know what else to do, so I signed on the dotted line, and spent the next two decades paying off the money I borrowed during my last two years at Yale," Thomas wrote.

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When he was first nominated to be a federal judge in 1989, Thomas reported \$10,000 in outstanding student loans, according to a news report at the time. The Biden administration has picked the same number as the amount of debt relief most borrowers would get under its plan.

Personal experience can shape the justices' questions in the courtroom and affect their private conversations about a case, even if it doesn't figure in the outcome.

"It is helpful to have people with life experiences that are varied just because it enriches the conversation," Justice Sonia Sotomayor has said. Sotomayor, like Thomas, also grew up poor. She got a full scholarship to Princeton as an undergraduate, she has said, and went on to Yale for law school, as Thomas did.

Keeping people from avoiding the kinds of difficult choices Thomas faced is a key part of the administration's argument for loan forgiveness. The administration says that without additional help, many borrowers will fall behind on their payments once a hold in place since the start of the coronavirus pandemic three years ago is lifted, no later than this summer.

Under a plan announced in August but so far blocked by federal courts, \$10,000 in federal loans would be canceled for people making less than \$125,000 or for households with less than \$250,000 in income. Recipients of Pell Grants, who tend to have fewer financial resources, would get an additional \$10,000 in debt forgiven.

The White House says 26 million people already have applied and 16 million have been approved for relief. The program is estimated to cost \$400 billion over the next three decades.

The legal fight could turn on any of several elements, including whether the Republican-led states and individuals suing over the plan have legal standing to go to court and whether Biden has the authority under federal law for so extensive a loan forgiveness program.

Nebraska and other states challenging the program argue that far from falling behind, 20 million borrowers would get a "windfall" because their entire student debt would be erased, Nebraska Attorney General Michael Hilgers wrote in the states' main Supreme Court brief.

Which of those arguments resonate with the court may become clear on Tuesday.

When she was dean of Harvard Law School, Justice Elena Kagan showed her own concern about the high cost of law school, especially for students who were considering lower-paying jobs.

Kagan established a program that would allow students to attend their final year tuition-free if they agreed to a five-year commitment to work in the public sector. While that program no longer exists, Harvard offers grants to students for public service work.

At the time the program was created, Kagan said she wanted students to be able to go to work where they "can make the biggest difference, but that isn't the case now." Instead, she said: "They often go to work where they don't want to work because of the debt burden."

Vote starts late across parts of Nigeria in crucial election

By CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — Polling stations opened late across parts of Nigeria on Saturday as Africa's most populous country held presidential and parliamentary elections amid a nationwide bank note shortage that left many without transport to their voting centers.

The elections come amid fears of violence, from Islamic militants in the north to separatists in the south, though officials did not postpone the vote as the last two presidential elections were.

In the northeastern Borno state, policemen deployed to protect voting units were seen trekking long distances to get to their posts.

The delays concerns raised about whether voters would be disenfranchised. There were no electoral officials in more than 70% of voting units an hour before the vote was due to start, Samson Itodo, head of YIAGA Africa, Nigeria's largest election observer group, told The Associated Press.

Incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari is stepping down after two four-year terms. Out of the field of 18 presidential candidates, three front-runners have emerged in recent weeks to replace Buhari: the ruling party candidate, the main opposition party candidate and a third party challenger who has drawn

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strong support from younger voters grappling with a 33% unemployment rate.

But whether those supporters would show up in force at the polling stations remained unclear as Nigerians have waited hours in line at banks across the country this past week in search of money.

Kingsley Emmanuel, 34, a civil engineer, said the cash scarcity was a real obstacle for many would-be voters.

"They don't have the cash to pay for a commercial vehicle and most of them don't accept (money) transfer," he said from a polling station in the city of Yola in Yola city in Adamawa state. "So it is very difficult for them to access their polling unit."

The vote is being carefully watched as Nigeria is Africa's largest economy and one of the continent's top oil producers. By 2050, the U.N. estimates that Nigeria will tie with the United States as the third most populous nation in the world after India and China.

It is also home to one of the largest youth populations in the world: About 64 million of its 210 million people are between the ages of 18 and 35, with a median age of only 18.

Favour Ben, 29, who owns a food business in the capital, Abuja, said she was backing third-party candidate Peter Obi.

"Obi knows what Nigerians need," she said. "He knows what is actually disturbing us and I believe he knows how to tackle it."

Buhari's tenure was marked by concerns about his ailing health and frequent trips abroad for medical treatment. Two of the top candidates are in their 70s and both have been in Nigerian politics since 1999.

By contrast, at 61, Obi of the Labour party is the youngest of the front-runners and had surged in the polls in the weeks leading up to Saturday's vote.

Still, Bola Tinubu has the strong support of the ruling All Progressives Congress party as an important backer of the incumbent president. And Atiku Abubakar has the name recognition of being one of Nigeria's richest businessmen, having also served as a vice president and presidential hopeful in 2019 for his Peoples Democratic Party.

Analysts have said it is one of Nigeria's most unpredictable elections, with Obi as the surprise candidate in what is usually a two-horse race. But the ruling party's Tinubu insisted Saturday he would prevail.

Asked if he would congratulate the winner of the election if it is not him, Tinubu retorted: "It has to be me!"

Abubakar also told reporters after voting Saturday that he was "very optimistic" about this year's election.

For the first time this year Nigeria's election results will be transmitted electronically to headquarters in Abuja, a step officials say will reduce voter fraud. Officials also say they'll be enforcing a ban on mobile phones inside voting booths to prevent vote-buying: images of the votes are usually sent as proof if people have received money to pick a certain candidate.

The full impact of Nigeria's currency crisis on Saturday's election was not immediately clear, though officials said they'd been able to get much of the money the government needed to carry out the vote. In Lagos, a policewoman who was in a bank queue to withdraw cash told The Associated Press on Thursday she has not been able to go where she was deployed for election duty because she could not get cash.

After officials in November announced the decision to redesign Nigeria's currency, the naira, new bills have been slow to circulate. At the same time, older bank notes stopped being accepted, creating a shortage in a country where many use cash for daily transactions.

N. Korea food shortage worsens amid COVID, but no famine yet

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — There's little doubt that North Korea's chronic food shortages worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and speculation about the country's food insecurity has flared as its top leaders prepare to discuss the "very important and urgent task" of formulating a correct agricultural policy.

Unconfirmed reports say an unspecified number of North Koreans have been dying of hunger. But experts say there is no sign of mass deaths or famine. They say the upcoming ruling Workers' Party meeting

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is likely intended to shore up support for North Korean leader Kim Jong Un as he pushes ahead with his nuclear weapons program in defiance of intense U.S.-led pressure and sanctions.

"Kim Jong Un can't advance his nuclear program stably if he fails to resolve the food problem fundamentally because public support would be shaken," said Lim Eul-chul, a professor at Kyungnam University's Institute for Far Eastern Studies in Seoul. "The meeting is being convened to solidify internal unity while pulling together ideas to address the food shortage."

An enlarged plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party is slated for late February. Its specific agenda is unknown, but the party's powerful Politburo earlier said that a "a turning point is needed to dynamically promote radical change in agricultural development."

The meeting will be the party's first plenary session convened just to discuss agricultural issues, though they often are a key topic at broader conferences in North Korea. Raising grain output was one of 12 economic priorities the party adopted during a plenary meeting in December.

It is difficult to know the exact situation in the North, which kept its borders virtually closed during the pandemic. Food shortages and economic hardships have persisted since a famine killed an estimated hundreds of thousands of people in the mid-1990s.

In his first public speech after taking over from his father as leader in late 2011, Kim vowed that North Koreans would "never have to tighten their belts again."

During the first several years of his rule, the economy achieved modest growth as Kim tolerated some market-oriented activities and increased exports of coal and other minerals to China, the North's main ally and biggest trading partner. More recently, however, tougher international sanctions over Kim's nuclear program, draconian pandemic-related restrictions and outright mismanagement have taken a severe economic toll.

South Korean estimates put North Korea's grain production last year at about 4.5 million tons, a 3.8% decrease from a year earlier. Annual grain output has plateaued at about 4.4 million tons to 4.8 million tons in the past decade.

North Korea needs about 5.5 million tons of grain to feed its 25 million people, so it's usually short about 1 million tons each year. About half of the gap is typically offset by unofficial grain purchases from China. The rest is an unresolved shortfall, said Kwon Tae-jin, a senior economist at the private GS&J Institute in South Korea.

Kwon says curbs on cross-border trade due to the pandemic have likely hindered unofficial rice purchases from China. Efforts by North Korean authorities to tighten controls and restrict market activities have also worsened the situation, he said.

"I believe this year North Korea is facing its worst food situation since Kim Jong Un took power," Kwon said.

Koo Byoungsam, a spokesperson at the South Korean Unification Ministry, said that an unknown number of North Koreans have died of hunger, but said the problem is not as serious as the mid-1990s famine, which stemmed from natural disasters, the loss of Soviet assistance and mismanagement.

The current food problem is more an issue of distribution than of an absolute shortage of grain since much of the grain harvested last year has not yet been eaten, ministry officials said. Food insecurity has worsened as authorities tightened controls over private grain sales in markets, instead trying to confine the grain trade to state-run facilities.

Severe steps taken by the Kim government to contain the pandemic provided effective tools for imposing a tighter grip on the kinds of market activity that earlier helped foster stronger economic growth but might eventually erode the government's authoritarian rule, analysts say.

Kwon said current food shortages are unlikely to cause mass deaths because food is still available in markets, though at high prices. During the famine in the mid-1990s, grain was hard to come by, he said.

North Korea monitoring groups have reported increases in the prices of rice and corn — the two most important staples — though the price of corn has stabilized recently in some regions.

"If North Korea indeed sees people dying of hunger and faces a chaos, it won't publicly say things like

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'a very important and urgent task' for an agricultural policy," said Ahn Kyung-su, head of DPRKHEALTH.ORG, a website focusing on health issues in North Korea.

The North's plenary meeting is "typical propaganda" meant to show Kim is working to improve living conditions and comes at a time when the leadership needs new fodder to burnish his image, on top of the nuclear program and assertions of a victory over the pandemic, Ahn said.

During the plenary meeting, Kwon said that leaders will likely pressure local farm officials to raise grain output without presenting any effective solutions for the food crisis. Targets will be set and officials may be punished for failing to meet them if food shortages worsen, Ahn said.

Yi Jisun, an analyst at the state-run Institute for National Security Strategy in Seoul, said in a report in January that North Korea recently imported large amounts of rice and flour from China, though it is unlikely to accept food assistance from the United States, South Korea and Japan.

While declaring that food problems must be improved at any cost, the state-run media in the North have continued to tout its longstanding policy of "self-reliance," a strategy that shuns Western help.

"The assistance by imperialists is a trap for plundering and subjugation meant to wrest 100 things after giving one," the North's main Rodong Sinmun newspaper said in a commentary Wednesday. "Building up the economy by receiving this 'poisoned candy' would be a mistake."

Africa's largest film festival offers hope in Burkina Faso

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso (AP) — Most film festivals can be counted on to provide entertainment, laced with some introspection.

The weeklong FESPACO that opens Saturday in violence-torn Burkina Faso's capital goes beyond that to also offer hope, and a symbol of endurance: In years of political strife and Islamic extremist attacks, which killed thousands and displaced nearly 2 million in the West African country, it's never been canceled.

"We only have FESPACO left to prevent us from thinking about what's going on," said Maimouna Ndiaye, a Burkinabe actress who has four submissions in this year's competition. "This is the event that must not be canceled no matter the situation."

Since the last edition of the biennial festival in Ouagadougou, the country's troubles have increased. Successive governments' failures to stop the extremist violence triggered two military coups last year, with each junta leader promising security — but delivering few results.

At least 70 soldiers were killed in two attacks earlier this month in Burkina Faso's Sahel region. The fighting also has sowed discord among a once-peaceful population, pitting communities and ethnicities against each other.

Nevertheless, more than 15,000 people, including cinema celebrities from Nigeria, Senegal and Ivory Coast are expected in Ouagadougou for FESPACO, Africa's biggest film festival that was launched in 1969.

Some 1,300 films were submitted for consideration and 100 have been selected to compete from 35 African countries and the diaspora, including movies from Dominican Republic and Haiti. Nearly half of those in the fiction competition this year are directed by women.

Among them is Burkinabe director and producer Apolline Traore, whose film "Sira" — considered a front-runner in this year's competition — is emblematic of many Burkinabes' suffering. It tells the tale of a woman's struggle for survival after being kidnapped by jihadis in the Sahel, as her fiancé tries to find her.

Still, Traore is upbeat about her country's prospects.

"The world has painted Burkina Faso as a red country. It's dangerous to come to my country, as they say," she told The Associated Press. "We're probably a little crumbled but we're not down."

Government officials say they have ramped up security and will ensure the safety of festival attendees.

Many hope FESPACO will help boost domestic unity and strengthen ties with other countries, at a time when anti-French sentiment is on the rise in Burkina Faso.

Wolfram Vetter, the European Union ambassador in Burkina Faso, called the film festival "an important contribution to peace and reconciliation in Burkina Faso and beyond."

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The EU is the event's largest funder after the Burkinabe government, and has contributed approximately 250,000 euros (\$265,000).

Appreciating Jimmy Carter, outspoken but 'never irrelevant'

By WALTER MEARS AP Special Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ever the outsider, Jimmy Carter served a turbulent term in the White House. His presidency was beset by soaring interest and inflation rates, gasoline pump lines and the Iran hostage crisis that eventually led to his re-election defeat.

But he rose to even greater heights with his post-presidential career, devoting another four decades to working as an international envoy of peacemaking and democracy. James Earl Carter Jr., a peanut farmer who became the 39th president of the United States, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Walter Mears was an Associated Press special correspondent who won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the 1976 presidential campaign. Prior to his death in 2022, Mears wrote this retrospective article in appreciation of Carter, who entered hospice care on Feb. 18.

Trounced by Ronald Reagan in the 1980 election, Carter was, at 56, a politician with only a past and "a potentially empty life" ahead. Then, in 1982, he organized the Carter Center in Atlanta.

It kept him traveling, negotiating, leading election observation teams and speaking out, often to the discomfort or even resentment of the government he'd once led. Carter's Nobel citation honored "his decades of untiring effort" to resolve conflicts, promote democracy and foster economic development.

The man who conceded that some considered him "a failed president" made himself the most active and internationally engaged of ex-presidents. "My role as a former president is probably superior to that of other presidents," he said in a 2010 television interview.

When he ran for president as a one-term former Georgia governor, Carter was so improbable a candidate that he said his mother asked him, "President of what?"

To answer that and his all-but-invisible name recognition rating, he started campaigning early. Carter covered some 50,000 campaign miles, his garment bag draped over his shoulder.

He won the Democratic nomination and challenged President Gerald Ford, Nixon's appointed vice president.

Ford had pardoned Nixon for any Watergate crimes. In the aftermath of Watergate, Carter was the anti-Richard Nixon figure. "I will never lie to you," he told voters. But Carter was elected by only 2 percentage points.

The newly elected president and wife Rosalynn shunned the limousine and walked from the Capitol to the White House after his inauguration and tried to drop some of the pomp surrounding the presidency. But his solo style and unintended snubs left him short of political allies when he'd need their help.

For all that, Carter's term left landmarks, such as the Israel-Egypt peace accord he engineered in personal negotiations at Camp David in 1978.

He won the beginnings of an energy conservation policy. He gained ratification of the treaties that yielded U.S. control of the Panama Canal. He opened full diplomatic relations with China. The departments of energy and education were created. But his administration struggled and Carter shook up his Cabinet amid "a crisis of confidence."

And then things got worse.

On Nov. 4, 1979, Iranian demonstrators invaded the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, incited by their ayatollah to retaliate for the exiled former shah's admission into the United States for medical treatment. Fifty-two Americans were held hostage for more than a year. Carter tried to negotiate, and when that didn't work, he ordered the military rescue attempt that failed disastrously in the desert in April 1980.

Eight Americans were killed in the attempt. It was Carter's bleakest hour.

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The hostage crisis shadowed and essentially crippled Carter's re-election campaign. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy challenged him in the Democratic primaries.

After that, it was all uphill against Reagan. Carter carried only six states to Reagan's 44.

Minutes after Reagan was inaugurated on Jan. 20, 1981, the hostages were freed after 444 days in captivity. Carter's first major act as an ex-president was as Reagan's special envoy to welcome the freed hostages in Wiesbaden, Germany, the next day.

Jimmy Carter, the only president inaugurated by nickname, was born in tiny Plains, Georgia, where he arranged to be buried. The father for whom he was named was in the peanut business, with a farm and warehouse. His father, brother, Billy, and two sisters all died of pancreatic cancer.

Carter graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1946, the year he married Rosalynn Smith, also of Plains. They had three sons and a daughter, Amy, the youngest child, who went with them to the White House.

Carter spent nearly seven years in the Navy's nuclear submarine force, resigning to take over the family business after his father died in 1953. His first political stop was in the Georgia State Senate. A Democratic moderate with a New South image, Carter was elected governor of Georgia in 1970, succeeding segregationist Lester Maddox and gaining his first national note when he declared in his inauguration address "the time for racial discrimination is over."

After he lost his presidential re-election bid, a shaken Carter retreated to Plains, to "an altogether new, unwanted" chapter in his life.

He began the Carter Center which, he said later, offered "superior opportunities to do good." He and Rosalynn also worked with Habitat for Humanity, building housing for the poor in the United States and abroad.

Carter was a tireless peacemaker who bypassed usual diplomatic channels and, as he said in 1994, went "where others are not treading" — places such as Ethiopia, Liberia and North Korea, where he secured the release of an American who had been imprisoned after wandering across the border in 2010.

He helped oversee democratic elections in Nicaragua and Haiti, and the first Palestinian elections. Altogether, he participated in 39 of the center's 100 election observation trips.

Carter said his center "filled vacuums in the world. When the United States won't deal with troubled areas, we go there."

And not always quietly.

He went to Cuba in 2002, met with Fidel Castro, then delivered a televised speech calling for an end to the U.S. trade embargo. He likened Israeli policy toward the Palestinians to apartheid. He denounced the Iraq war as "based upon lies." He said George W. Bush was the worst president in history in foreign affairs.

That prompted a Bush White House spokesman to describe Carter as "irrelevant."

He could be meddling, a freelance diplomat who irked more than one administration.

But never irrelevant.

California faces more blizzards, floods in multistate storm

By JOHN ANTCZAK, AMY TAXIN and ED WHITE Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A powerful winter storm lashing California threatened floods, blizzards and avalanches Saturday while adding frigid temperatures to the misery mix.

Overnight lows could drop below freezing in some areas while downtown San Francisco could see record-breaking cold temperatures Saturday morning, according to the National Weather Service. Projected temperatures of 38 degrees Fahrenheit (3 degrees Celsius) would see the city at its coldest since 2009, the weather service said.

Flash flood warnings were issued from Friday through 1 a.m. or 2 a.m. Saturday in Los Angeles and Ventura counties, a region with some 6 million people. The weather service said flash flooding was occurring late Friday in Ventura County, where up to 7 inches (18 centimeters) inches of rain had fallen and up to 10 inches (25.4 centimeters) were possible before the storm turned showery on Saturday afternoon.

In Los Angeles County, forecasters said life-threatening flash flooding was possible near creeks, streams,

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urban areas, highways and areas that were burned by wildfires. The threat zone included downtown L.A., Hollywood, Beverly Hills and many suburbs.

"Shallow landslides and mudslides are expected," the weather service said.

Despite the heavy downpour, no serious problems were immediately reported.

Rain falling at up to an inch an hour raised the fear of flooding or mudslides. Evacuation warnings were issued in some burn-scarred areas and for a mile-long stretch of Oceano, which lies on the central coast near a levee that overflowed during storms last month. Residents were urged to be ready to flee at short notice.

Meanwhile, people farther east were struggling to deal with the fallout from storms earlier this week.

More than a half-million people in Michigan were still without power late Friday night, days after one of the worst ice storms in decades caused widespread power outages by knocking down some 3,000 ice-coated power lines.

Promises of power restoration by Sunday, when low temperatures were expected to climb back above zero (minus 18 Celsius), were of little consolation.

"That's four days without power in such weather," said Apurva Gokhale, of Walled Lake, Michigan. "It's unthinkable."

Back in California, the Weather Prediction Center of the National Weather Service predicted heavy snow over the Cascade Mountains and the Sierra Nevada into the weekend.

California's wine country wasn't spared from the rare brew of wind and snow. Mark Neal told KPIX-TV that he woke up Friday morning to see a foot (30.4 centimeters) of snow — more than he'd seen in more than 40 years — and dozens of his oak trees snapped in half.

"It's pretty much a battleground if you look at it. Some of them are over 200 years old," he said. Luckily, the vines were safely dormant.

The low-pressure system pushing the atmospheric river off the Pacific Ocean into central and Southern California on Friday was driving inland and is expected to bring widespread rain and snow into southern Nevada by Saturday afternoon and then across northwest Arizona Saturday night and Sunday morning, the National Weather Service office in Las Vegas said.

An avalanche warning was issued for the Sierra Nevada backcountry around Lake Tahoe, which straddles the California-Nevada border. Nearly 2 feet (61 cm) of new snow had fallen by Friday and up to another 5 feet (1.5 meters) was expected when another storm moves in with the potential for gale-force winds and high-intensity flurries Sunday, the weather service said.

In Arizona, the heaviest snow was expected late Saturday through midday Sunday, with up to a foot of new snow possible in Flagstaff, forecasters said.

Weekend snow also was forecast for parts of the upper Midwest to the Northeast, with pockets of freezing rain over some areas of the central Appalachians. The storm was expected to reach the central high Plains by Sunday evening.

Yet the cold weather blasting the North and West has avoided the southern states, leading to wild temperature differences. The high temperature for the U.S. on Friday was 93 degrees Fahrenheit (34 degrees Celsius) at Falcon Lake, Texas, while the low was minus-35 degrees Fahrenheit (1.7 Celsius) near Huntley, Montana.

The wintry blasts have led to hundreds of cancelled flights at airports around the country and shut down miles of major highways in several states.

In California, some motorists were trapped overnight on snowy, icy State Route 17, a major road in the San Francisco Bay Area mountains, before it reopened Friday morning.

Interstate 5, the West Coast's major north-south highway, was closed south of the Oregon border as snow fell to the floor of the Sacramento Valley. The Grapevine, a high mountain pass north of Los Angeles, was closed for more than 12 hours. After reopening Friday evening, traffic crept through under police escort and there was a chance of more closures as forecasters predicted strong winds leading to blizzard conditions in mountain ranges and passes.

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Much of a long stretch of Interstate 80 remained closed most of Friday over the top of the Sierra Nevada mountain range between Sacramento, California, and Reno, Nevada.

Harsh weather prompted Los Angeles County to keep its emergency shelters open into March as wind chill was expected to drop weekend temperatures below freezing in the San Fernando and San Gabriel valleys. The county's large homeless population was at special risk.

At least three people have died in the coast-to-coast storms. A Michigan firefighter died Wednesday after coming in contact with a downed power line, while in Rochester, Minnesota, a pedestrian died after being hit by a city-operated snowplow. Authorities in Portland, Oregon, said a person died of hyperthermia.

Much of Portland was shut down with icy roads not expected to thaw until Saturday after the city's second-heaviest snowfall on record this week: nearly 11 inches (28 centimeters).

Tim Varner sat huddled with blankets in a Portland storefront doorway shielding him from some of the wind, ice and snow. Local officials opened six overnight shelters but the 57-year-old, who has been homeless for two decades, said it was too hard to push a shopping cart containing his belongings to reach one.

"It's impossible," he said. "The snow gets built up on the wheels of your cart and then you find slippery spots and can't get no traction. So you're stuck."

Florida Democrats to pick party chair after tough midterms

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Florida Democrats on Saturday are set to choose a new party leader after a disastrous midterm performance in the onetime presidential battleground state, with particularly abysmal results among Latinos.

The strongest contenders are former state Agriculture Commissioner Nikki Fried and former state senator Annette Taddeo, both of whom lost their own races last year. Fried lost the Democratic gubernatorial nomination to Charlie Crist, while Taddeo failed to unseat Republican Rep. Maria Elvira Salazar.

Party members will select the new chair at a special meeting in Maitland, an Orlando suburb. They are picking a replacement for Manny Diaz, who resigned last month. In his resignation letter, he listed a number of problems facing the party, including a lack of resources and volunteers and poor messaging.

Within the last couple of years, Republicans have erased the voter registration advantage in Florida that Democrats had for decades. In the November midterm, longtime blue counties such as Miami-Dade and Palm Beach flipped red, and Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis won a landslide reelection victory as he eyes a 2024 presidential bid.

Democrats performed particularly poorly with Latinos in Florida compared to previous years. Miami-Dade, the state's most populous county, is home to 1.5 million Latinos of voting age.

Fried, whose term as agriculture commissioner wrapped up last month, has vowed to rebuild the party "from the ground up," with a focus on voter registration. As the only statewide elected Democrat, Fried, 45, was a fierce critic of DeSantis, often challenging him on policies related to the COVID-19 pandemic and later on a law critics dubbed the "Don't Say Gay" bill, which bars instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade.

Taddeo, 55, who served as a state senator from 2017 to 2022, says she wants a year-round effort to mobilize young voters and to register voters without outsourcing that job to other groups. She also says the party must conduct more outreach to Black and Hispanic communities.

Just over a decade ago, President Barack Obama won reelection to the White House after twice carrying the state of Florida. President Donald Trump won the state in the last two elections, carrying Florida by an even larger margin in 2020 than four years earlier.

Chicago mayor's race dominated by concerns about crime

By SARA BURNETT Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — For years, Republicans have sought to win over voters by depicting Democratic-led

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cities as lawless centers of violence that need tough-on-crime policies. In Chicago, some of the Democrats running for mayor are deploying the same strategy as they debate how to make the city safer.

One leading candidate, who touts his endorsement from the Chicago police union, says "crime is out of control" and the city needs hundreds more officers patrolling its streets. Another hopeful says that if suspects flee a crime scene, officers should be able to "hunt them down like a rabbit."

Even incumbent Lori Lightfoot, the first Black woman and first openly gay person to serve as Chicago mayor, has used language right out of the GOP playbook, accusing a top rival in her reelection bid of wanting to defund the police.

The shift in rhetoric reflects the degree to which concerns about crime have dominated Tuesday's mayoral election in Chicago and threatened Lightfoot's reelection bid. Far from being an outlier, the nation's third-largest city is just the latest Democratic stronghold where public safety has become a top election issue.

In San Francisco, progressive District Attorney Chesa Boudin was ousted in a recall election last year that was fueled by frustration over public safety. In Los Angeles, two Democrats running for mayor debated how to deal with rising crime rates and an out-of-control homelessness crisis. In New York City, voters elected Eric Adams as mayor, elevating a former city police captain who pledged to fix the department and invest more in crime prevention. And in Philadelphia, candidates running for mayor this year are debating how to curb gun violence.

The increased attention on public safety follows a spike in crime rates in many communities that coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. High-profile incidents of police misconduct drew more scrutiny of policing, and there has been disagreement even among Democrats about so-called progressive public safety policies such as ending cash bail or providing safe injection sites for drug users.

Jaime Domínguez, a political science professor at Northwestern University, said it's the first time in 20 years that he's seen public safety be "front and center" in a Chicago mayoral election.

The difference, he said, is that crime is no longer largely isolated to some predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods. As more crime is occurring in other parts of the highly segregated city, including in the downtown and other areas frequented by tourists, public safety is also top of mind for white voters.

"Historically, it was primarily a pocketed matter. It was still pernicious and candidates spoke to it, but it didn't really affect areas where you see crime occurring now," Dominguez said. "That has been blown up. It's just, it's everywhere."

Chicago has a higher per-capita homicide rate than New York or Los Angeles, but it's lower than other Midwestern cities, such as St. Louis and Detroit. Still, the number of homicides in Chicago hit a 25-year high in 2021 with 797, according to the Chicago Police Department.

That number decreased last year but is still higher than when Lightfoot took office in 2019. Other crimes, such as carjackings and robberies, have increased in recent years.

Nine candidates are running in Tuesday's officially nonpartisan mayoral election. With no candidate expected to get over 50% of the vote, an April 4 runoff between the top two vote-getters is likely.

Randall Fearnow, a 67-year-old health care attorney who is white and who lives near Wrigley Field on the city's north side, experienced the city's crime problem firsthand when he and his wife walked in the back door of their home one day last October and discovered burglars inside. The criminals ransacked the home and stole thousands of dollars' worth of jewelry and money before running out the front door, he said. Police didn't catch the perpetrators.

"It happened in the broad daylight," Fearnow said. "When you step out, it makes you feel a little uneasy. ... You're not immune anywhere from crime in the city."

Fearnow cast an early ballot for Paul Vallas, who was endorsed by the Chicago police union. He also voted against Lightfoot four years ago, saying he believed her rival in the 2019 runoff was "much more level-headed." This year, Fearnow said the two most important factors in his vote were crime and rising property taxes.

"The city gets more expensive to live in and less safe," he said. "So somebody needs to do something."

As she fights to land a spot in the April runoff, Lightfoot has taken on opponents she sees as a threat

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— among them Cook County Commissioner Brandon Johnson. In a recent ad, Lightfoot accuses Johnson of wanting to defund police, using video of him speaking on a local radio program in 2020. She said Johnson, who avoids the word “defund” when speaking on the campaign trail about policing, isn’t being candid with voters.

“He’s asked direct questions at a variety of forums, and that guy’s got more bobs and weaves than Muhammad Ali,” Lightfoot said.

Johnson, a former teacher and union organizer endorsed by the Chicago Teachers Union, says he wants to invest more in areas such as mental health treatment. In a statement responding to Lightfoot, his campaign said that doesn’t mean cuts to the police department. Johnson also notes that Chicago still has a violence problem even though the police budget grows every year.

“Lori Lightfoot hasn’t made Chicago safer, but I will,” Johnson says in a new ad. “It’s time to get smart, not just tough.”

All of Lightfoot’s opponents want to fire the police superintendent she hired, saying that the former Dallas police chief has been ineffective and that hiring an outsider hurt morale. Lightfoot has defended the superintendent, David Brown, and says that while the city faced never-before-seen challenges such as the pandemic, their strategies are working and some crimes are falling.

Vallas, an adviser to the Fraternal Order of Police during the union’s contract negotiations with Lightfoot’s administration, says that if he becomes mayor, he would promote a new leadership team from within the department. Vallas says he would welcome back hundreds of officers who have retired or gone elsewhere out of frustration with Lightfoot. He also wants to return to a community policing strategy, with dedicated officers assigned to patrol each of the city’s nearly 300 police beats.

“We’ve got to restore public safety,” said Vallas. “Everything proceeds from that.”

Wealthy businessman Willie Wilson, another mayoral candidate, has doubled down on his comment that suspects in violent crimes should be hunted down like rabbits. Wilson says he lost a son to gun violence, and he believes police officers are being prevented from doing their jobs.

The other candidates are Rep. Jesus “Chuy” Garcia, Chicago City Council members Sophia King and Roderick Sawyer, activist Ja’Mal Green and state Rep. Kambium “Kam” Buckner.

Snow, rain slam California as Michigan suffers without power

By JOHN ANTCZAK, AMY TAXIN and ED WHITE Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Heavy snow and rain pounded California and other parts of the West on Friday in the nation’s latest winter storm, while tens of thousands of people in Michigan suffered in freezing temperatures days after one of the worst ice storms in decades caused widespread power outages.

Days of winter storms blacked out nearly 1 million homes and businesses from coast to coast, closed major roads, caused pileups on highways and snarled air travel. More than 460 flights were canceled and more than 7,400 were delayed Friday across the U.S., according to FlightAware.com.

In California, the National Weather Service warned of cold, snowy and rainy weather lasting through Saturday and issued flash flood warnings through 10 p.m. Friday for Los Angeles, its suburbs and a portion of Ventura County, a region that is home to about 6 million people.

Cellphones buzzed Friday afternoon with an emergency alert that warned: “This is a dangerous and life-threatening situation. Do not attempt to travel unless you are fleeing an area subject to flooding.”

Some places in the flash flood warning zone could see up to 10 inches (23 centimeters) of rain, the weather service said.

Authorities warned that heavy rainfall could cause debris flow in some areas burned by wildfires in recent years. Evacuation warnings were issued for some areas, with residents urged to be ready to flee at a moment’s notice.

Blizzard warnings were posted in the Sierra Nevada and Southern California mountain ranges, where as much as 5 feet (1.5 meters) of snow was expected. Temperatures could drop far below normal in the region, posing a special risk to homeless people.

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"Simply put, this will be a historic event for the amount of snow over the higher peaks and lower elevation snow," according to the regional weather office.

Interstate 5, the West Coast's major north-south highway, was closed south of the Oregon border as snow fell to the floor of the Sacramento Valley. A high mountain pass north of Los Angeles also was closed for hours before finally reopening late Friday, although traffic was creeping along with a police escort.

In Michigan, hundreds of thousands of people remained without power Friday after a storm earlier this week coated power lines, utility poles and branches with ice as thick as three-quarters of an inch (1.9 centimeters). Gov. Gretchen Whitmer called Friday for more accountability on restoration efforts by the state's two largest utilities.

Annemarie Rogers had been without power for a day and a half in Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan. She sent two kids to stay with relatives and put extra blankets on the bed to try to keep warm.

"It's kind of miserable," she said. "We do have a gas fireplace that's keeping us warm in one room. There's some heat generating from the furnace, but with no electricity to the blower, it's not circulating well."

At one point, more than 820,000 customers in Michigan were in the dark. By Friday, that was down to under 600,000, most in the state's populous southeastern corner around Detroit. But promises of power restoration by Sunday, when low temperatures were expected to climb back above zero (minus 18 Celsius), were of little consolation.

"That's four days without power in such weather," said Apurva Gokhale, of Walled Lake, Michigan. "It's unthinkable."

Tom Rankin said he and his wife were unable to reach his 100-year-old mother-in-law Friday morning by phone. The couple drove to her home in Bloomfield Township, Michigan, to find her in bed "with a whole lot of blankets," Rankin said, adding they helped her to their car, planning to ride out the outage at another relative's home.

"We've not had an ice storm in the last 50 years that has impacted our infrastructure like this," said Trevor Lauer, president of Detroit-based DTE Electric.

At least three people have died in the storms. A Michigan firefighter died Wednesday after coming in contact with a downed power line, while in Rochester, Minnesota, a pedestrian died after being hit by a city-operated snowplow. Authorities in Portland, Oregon, said a person died of hyperthermia.

Much of Portland was shut down with icy roads not expected to thaw until Saturday after the city's second-heaviest snowfall on record this week — nearly 11 inches (28 centimeters).

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In Northern California, snow piled up across Santa Cruz County as roads closed and motorists were forced to abandon their cars.

Not all were dismayed by the winter weather. In the San Francisco Bay Area, hundreds of people drove up to 2,500-foot (760-meter) Mount Tamalpais to play in the snow — a rarity in the area.

San Francisco resident Shankar Krishnan woke up at 4 a.m. and headed out hoping to see snow for the first time in a long time.

"It feels awesome. It's like the trees are all frosty. There's snow on the ground. There's snow coming down from the sky," Krishnan said. "It's beautiful out here."

Some schools in Nevada and northern Arizona were closed, and a Major League Soccer season-opening game in Southern California was postponed.

The storm has added to major precipitation from December and January "atmospheric rivers" that improved California's drought outlook, but authorities who allocate water to farms, cities and industries remain cautious because of a recent history of abrupt changes in hydrologic conditions. ____

This story has been updated to correct the number of flights canceled and delayed across the U.S. A previous story used global figures instead of U.S. figures.

Feds seek to limit telehealth prescriptions for some drugs

By AMANDA SEITZ and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration moved Friday to require patients see a doctor in person before getting attention deficit disorder medication or addictive painkillers, toughening access to the drugs against the backdrop of a deepening opioid crisis.

The proposal could overhaul the way millions of Americans get some prescriptions after three years of relying on telehealth for doctor's appointments by computer or phone during the pandemic.

The Drug Enforcement Administration said late Friday it plans to reinstate once longstanding federal requirements for powerful drugs that were waived once COVID-19 hit, enabling doctors to write millions of prescriptions for drugs such as OxyContin or Adderall without ever meeting patients in person.

Patients will need to see a doctor in person at least once to get an initial prescription for drugs that the federal government says have the the most potential to be abused — Vicodin, OxyContin, Adderall and Ritalin, for example. Refills could be prescribed over telehealth appointments.

The agency will also clamp down on how doctors can prescribe other, less addictive drugs to patients they've never physically met. Substances like codeine, taken to alleviate pain or coughing, Xanax, used to treat anxiety, Ambien, a sleep aid, and buprenorphine, a narcotic used to treat opioid addiction, can be prescribed over telehealth for an initial 30-day dose. Patients would need to see a doctor at least once in person to get a refill.

Patients will still be able to get common prescriptions like antibiotics, skin creams, birth control and insulin prescribed through telehealth visits.

The new rule seeks to keep expanded access to telehealth that's important for patients like those in rural areas while also balancing safety, an approach DEA Administrator Anne Milgram referred to as "expansion of telemedicine with guardrails."

The ease with which Americans have accessed certain medications during the pandemic has helped many get needed treatment, but concerns have also mounted that some companies may take advantage of the lax rules and be overprescribing medications to people who don't need them, said David Herzberg, a historian of drugs at the University of Buffalo.

"Both sides of this tension have really good points," said Herzberg. "You don't want barriers in the way of getting people prescriptions they need. But anytime you remove those barriers it's also an opportunity for profit seekers to exploit the lax rules and sell the medicines to people who may not need them."

U.S. overdose deaths hit a record in 2021, about three-quarters of those from opioids during a crisis that was first spun into the making by drug makers, pharmacies and doctors that pushed the drugs to patients decades ago. But the grim toll from synthetic opioids like fentanyl far outstripped deaths related to prescription drugs that year, according to Centers for Disease Control Data. Fentanyl is increasingly appearing on the illicit market, pressed into fake prescription pills or mixed into other drugs.

The proposed rules deliver a major blow to a booming telehealth industry, with tech startups launching in recent years to treat and prescribe medications for mental health or attention deficit disorders. The industry has largely benefitted from the reprieve on in-person visits for drugs brought on by the pandemic, although some national retailers stopped filling drug orders generated by some telehealth apps over the last year.

The DEA has grown increasingly concerned over the last two years that some of those startup telehealth companies are improperly prescribing addictive substances like opioids or attention deficit disorder medication, putting patients in danger, a DEA official told The Associated Press on Friday.

The official said the agency plans to have the new rule in place before the COVID-19 public health emergency expires on May 11, which will effectively end the loosened rules. That could mean people who may seeking treatment from a doctor who is hundreds of miles away need to start developing plans for

in-person visits with their doctors now, pointed out Boston-based attorney Jeremy Sherer, who represents telehealth companies. Patients will have six months to visit their doctor in person when the regulation is enacted.

"Providers and their patients need to know what that treatment is going to look like moving forward and whether, once the public health emergency ends in May, if they're going to need to figure out a way to have a visit in person before continuing treatment, and that can be a real challenge," he said.

Many states have already moved to restore limitations for telehealth care across state lines. By October, nearly 40 states and Washington, D.C., had ended emergency declarations that made it easier for doctors to see patients in other states.

Young gymnast among 3 killed in shootings near Orlando

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — At age 9, T'yonna Major excelled at her school work and in gymnastics, shown flexing her arms after competitions with newly won medals around her neck in photos her proud dad posted on social media.

"She was a light to everyone that knew her," the girl's father, Tokiyo Major, posted on the fundraising site GoFundMe, where he has asked for donations to help pay for his daughter's funeral. "She was everything to us."

T'yonna was killed Wednesday when a gunman barged into her home outside Orlando and shot the third-grader and her mother, who survived the attack. The Orange County sheriff said the same assailant killed two other people in the Pine Hills area — a TV journalist shot in a vehicle outside and a 38-year-old woman slain hours earlier in the same neighborhood.

Sheriff John Mina said the victims appear to have been killed at random.

Grieving families and friends of the victims are still trying to come to terms with the bloody rampage. A least two vigils in their memory were planned Friday evening.

Julie Schroeder, who has worked with T'yonna's father for nearly a decade, described the girl's family as loving and close. She described T'yonna as precocious, with grades at the top of her class and reading two grade levels above her age group, as well as affectionate and polite.

"She loved deeply when you're around her," Schroeder told WESH-TV. "She always hugged you and she always referred to you as Mr. and Mrs. because respect was very big in their family."

Her father wrote that T'yonna was also an "amazing gymnast," often referred to by her coaches as "the next Gabby Douglas."

Authorities arrested 19-year-old Keith Melvin Moses at the scene and charged him with murder. The public defender's office for Orange and Osceola counties, which is representing Moses, has declined to comment.

The first victim, 38-year-old Natacha Augustin, was killed late Wednesday morning. A man who identified himself as Moses' cousin told investigators that he was driving around with Augustin when he spotted Moses and offered him a ride, according to an arrest affidavit.

The witness, whose name was redacted from the affidavit, said Moses climbed into the backseat behind Augustin, who was fatally shot about 30 seconds later before Moses fled on foot.

Hours later, news crews at the scene of the shooting included Spectrum News 13 reporter Dylan Lyons and photographer Jesse Walden. They found themselves caught in another round of gunshots, which the sheriff said were also fired by Moses when he returned five hours after the first shooting.

Lyons, 24, was killed by gunfire while sitting inside an unmarked news vehicle. Walden was wounded and taken to a hospital.

"You're losing a friend," Walden said of Lyons from his hospital bed. "You're not losing an acquaintance or just coworker — it's someone that made working fun."

Walden said he and Lyons both started working at the TV around the same time last year and regularly covered stories together on the night shift. He told Spectrum News 13 that Lyons was a "very, very wholesome person" with a great sense of humor.

"He had a very strong sense of justice," Walden said. "He would really want everyone to follow the rules

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when it came to people of power.”

Authorities said the gunman then walked into T'yonna's home nearby, shooting the girl and her mother. Mina said that when deputies wrestled Moses to the ground outside and arrested him, the suspect had a semiautomatic handgun that was still hot from being fired.

The AP Interview: Biden ready to run, US first lady says

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — U.S. first lady Jill Biden gave one of the clearest indications yet that President Joe Biden will run for a second term, telling The Associated Press in an exclusive interview on Friday that there's "pretty much" nothing left to do but figure out the time and place for the announcement.

Although Biden has long said that it's his intention to seek reelection, he has yet to make it official, and he's struggled to dispel questions about whether he's too old to continue serving as president. Biden would be 86 at the end of a second term.

"How many times does he have to say it for you to believe it?" the first lady said in Nairobi, the second and final stop of her five-day trip to Africa.

She added, "He says he's not done. He's not finished what he's started. And that's what's important."

Granddaughter Naomi Biden, who is on the trip, cheered the first lady's comments after the interview.

"Preach nana," she said on Twitter.

The president himself was asked about his wife's comments just hours later in an interview with ABC News, and laughed when told of her remarks, adding, "God love her. Look, I meant what I said, I've got other things to finish before I get into a full-blown campaign."

Biden aides have said an announcement is likely to come in April, after the first fundraising quarter ends, which is around the time that President Barack Obama officially launched his reelection campaign.

The first lady has long been described as a key figure in Biden's orbit as he plans his future.

"Because I'm his wife," she laughed.

She brushed off the question about whether she has the deciding vote on whether the president runs for reelection.

"Of course he'll listen to me, because we're a married couple," she said. But, she added later, "he makes up his own mind, believe me."

The wide-ranging interview took place on the anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and Jill Biden recalled her trip into the country last May to meet the besieged country's first lady, Olena Zelenska.

They visited a school that was being used to help migrants who fled the fighting. Some of the families, Jill Biden said, had hid underground for weeks before making their escape.

"We thought then, how long can this go on? And here we are, a year later," she said. "And look at what the Ukrainian people have done. I mean, they are so strong and resilient, and they are fighting for their country."

"We're all hoping that this war is over soon, because we see, every day, the damage, the violence, the horror on our televisions," the first lady added. "And we just can't believe it."

Jill Biden also spoke extensively for the first time about her skin cancer diagnosis, which led doctors to remove multiple basal cell lesions in January.

"I thought, oh, it's just something on my eye, you know," she said. "But then they said, no, we think it's basal cell."

Then doctors checked her chest, she said, and they said "that's definitely basal cell."

"So I'm lucky," the first lady said. "Believe me, I am so lucky that they caught it, they removed it, and I'm healthy."

Raising awareness about cancer screening has been a cornerstone of her advocacy efforts for years, even before her son, Beau, died from a brain tumor almost a decade ago. She often says the worst three words anyone can hear are "you have cancer."

When it was her turn to hear a doctor say that, Jill Biden said, "it was a little harder than I thought."

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Now, she said, she's "extra careful" about sunscreen, especially when she's at the beach, which she described as "one of my favorite places in the world."

Jill Biden is the only first lady to continue her career in addition to her ceremonial duties, teaching writing and English to community college students. At 71 years old, she said she's not ready to think about retirement.

"I know that I will know when it's enough," she said. "But it's not yet."

She said she left detailed lesson plans for a substitute teacher while she was on her trip, and she's been texting with students as she was traveling. She plans to be back in the classroom at 8 a.m. on Tuesday morning, after arriving home from Africa around 3 a.m. Monday.

Education has been a flashpoint in American politics, especially with conservative activists and politicians trying to limit discussion of race and sexuality in classrooms.

"I don't believe in banning books," she said.

She added: "I think the teachers and the parents can work together and decide what the kids should be taught."

During the interview, Jill Biden reflected on the legacy of former President Jimmy Carter, who recently began home hospice care. The Carter Center, which the former president founded after leaving the White House, was key in helping to eliminate the Guinea worm parasite in African countries.

"That's the perfect example," she said. "He's such a humble man. He didn't go out and shout, 'Look what I've done.' He just did the work."

Jill Biden recalled Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, reaching out on the eve of Joe Biden's inauguration two years ago.

"They called and said congratulations," she said. "And it meant so much to me and to Joe."

She also talked about visiting the Carters at their home in Plains, Georgia, early in Biden's presidency.

"It's not just that here are two presidents. It's here are two friends," she said. "Actually four friends, who have really supported one another over the years."

St. Louis Zoo bear has second brief escape from enclosure

ST. LOUIS (AP) — St. Louis Zoo officials say they are working to find a way to keep an Andean bear named Ben inside his enclosure after he escaped Thursday for the second time this month.

The bear was outside for less than an hour and was found only about 100 feet away from his habitat, zoo officials said in a statement. The 4-year-old bear, who weighs about 300 pounds, was tranquilized and returned to the enclosure.

Visitors and zoo staff were kept inside zoo buildings during Ben's escapade.

The bear escaped on Feb. 7 by tearing apart clips that were attached stainless steel mesh to the frame of the enclosure's door. He did not wander far and was outside for about 90 minutes before being returned.

In response, the zoo added stainless steel clips with 450 pounds of tensile strength to the mesh. But Ben managed to snap those clips Thursday.

Zoo officials said they are working on alternative ways to secure the enclosure and will seek advice from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums Bear Taxon Advisory Group.

LIV Golf, PGA Tour spar over testimony from Saudi officials

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

A federal judge declined Friday to postpone the trial date in LIV Golf's antitrust lawsuit against the PGA Tour, even while conceding that might be inevitable if LIV owner Saudi Arabia appeals a ruling that officials with its sovereign wealth fund be required to testify.

Friday's case management hearing in the Northern District of California capped off a flurry of filings in the last week over the PGA Tour alleging the Public Investment Fund and its governor, Yasir al-Rumayyan, were more than just investors in the rival league.

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Saudi Arabia's PIF holds some \$600 billion in oil profits and other assets, making it one of the largest sovereign wealth funds in the world. The PIF owns 93% of LIV Golf, according to court documents.

U.S. Magistrate Susan van Keulen ruled last week that the PIF and al-Rumayyan were not exempt from providing testimony and documents under the Foreign Service Immunity Act because of an exception for commercial activity.

Saudi Arabia, through its attorney, filed a separate letter with U.S. District Judge Beth Labson Freeman on Thursday, arguing that the magistrate's order has "broad implications for Saudi Arabia beyond the instant case" and that it would file a friend-of-court appeal.

A lawyer for the PIF indicated an appeal to the Ninth Circuit was ready to be filed as early as Friday.

Saudi Arabia's leaders, in a lawsuit between their golf circuit and the rival PGA Tour, maintain their high standing in the oil kingdom's government makes them legally immune from most actions by U.S. courts.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman last year successfully used an argument of sovereign immunity to escape a civil lawsuit in Saudi officials' 2018 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

The PIF and al-Rumayyan contend that enforcing subpoenas in the U.S. would force them to violate Saudi law against disclosure of confidential information.

The PGA Tour, meanwhile, filed a motion on the magistrate's order arguing depositions of the PIF and al-Rumayyan should not take place in Saudi Arabia.

"The Tour and its American counsel should not have to run the risk that they might be harassed or detained because something they say in a deposition is perceived as critical of the Saudi government; nor should they have to censor themselves in the course of conducting Court-ordered discovery," the motion said.

Earlier this week, Freeman — who is overseeing the case — allowed the PIF and its governor to be added as defendants to the PGA Tour's counterclaim in the lawsuit.

In the amended counterclaim with the Saudis listed as defendants, the PGA Tour refers to Greg Norman as the "nominal CEO" of the LIV Golf circuit, while al-Rumayyan calls all the shots.

The tour alleges the PIF governor functions as LIV's chief executive, "receiving regular reports from Norman, approving LIV's budget, making key strategic decisions, participating in player recruitment in the United States, and micro-managing LIV's day-to-day operations both while in the United States and from abroad.

"And even once contracts are signed and debts accrued, PIF holds the purse strings: none of LIV's partners or golfers gets paid until PIF and Mr. Al-Rumayyan agree to distribute the money."

John Quinn, a lawyer for the PIF and three players who remain as defendants, described the PIF's relationship as "what you'd expect from a new investor in a startup."

Freeman wasn't swayed.

"Based on everything I've read ... he is in up to his eyeballs in everything that LIV has done," Freeman said during the hearing. "He's intricately involved, and I think it's ludicrous to suggest otherwise."

But she also said there was no need for the PGA Tour to delay the discovery process while waiting to first get testimony — if allowed — from the Saudis. Freeman said the tour and its attorney can always conduct interviews again if new information arises.

LIV Golf attorneys claim the tour wants to delay the trial — tentatively set for January 2024 — to keep LIV golfers off the PGA Tour. Nine LIV players initially sued the PGA Tour after they were banned from competing in its events. The tour requires players to get permission to play in conflicting tournaments.

The Saudi-funded league offered signing fees reported to be upward of \$100 million to players like Dustin Johnson, Phil Mickelson, Bryson DeChambeau and Brooks Koepka, who compete for \$25 million in prize money at each of its 13 tournaments.

The first LIV event of the season began Friday in Mexico. The 48-man field has 37 players who were PGA Tour members. All have been suspended by the tour, and now only have access to the major championships if they are eligible.

Quinn argued the window for a player to compete at his best is small.

Freeman scheduled another meeting for April, when the deadline for discovery has passed.

"I'm concerned that everyone is dragging their feet on both sides," she said.

However, she noted the Saudis can appeal to the Ninth Circuit, which would leave little choice but to delay the trial. The deadline for summary judgment motions is August.

Freeman said she has 400 cases before her and already is setting some of those cases for trial in August 2025.

Court proceedings advance in deadly shooting on film set

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

A film-industry weapons supervisor made her first formal court appearance Friday on a felony charge in the shooting death of a cinematographer by actor Alec Baldwin on the set of a Western movie.

Hannah Gutierrez-Reed's attorney said his client will plead not guilty, but the judge did not take that plea during the virtual court proceeding. Instead, the judge issued conditions of release that allow Gutierrez-Reed to keep a gun at home for self-defense.

Gutierrez-Reed and Baldwin were charged last month with felony involuntary manslaughter in the shooting death of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins, who died shortly after being wounded during rehearsals at a ranch on the outskirts of Santa Fe in October 2021.

Gutierrez-Reed's attorney told the judge his client has received numerous threats and was forced to file for a restraining order against a stalker. He said authorities released documents related to the case and failed to redact identifying information that included phone numbers.

District Attorney Mary Carmack-Altwies told the judge she adamantly opposed the request because of Gutierrez-Reed's "sloppy mishandling of firearms and guns" on the set. She suggested Gutierrez-Reed could either move or keep a bat or pepper spray in her house instead.

Gutierrez-Reed's attorney, Jason Bowles, challenged the district attorney's characterization and disputed the claim about sloppiness.

"There is no allegation that she is a danger to anyone having a firearm within her home, and it's for self-protection because of actions that the state took in releasing private information. That is the reason for that request," he said.

In addition to allowing Gutierrez-Reed to have a gun at home, the judge ordered her not to have any contact with witnesses who might testify as part of the case.

A day earlier Baldwin agreed to forgo a hearing to have his rights explained to him and entered a plea of not guilty.

The judge allowed Baldwin to have limited contact with potential witnesses in connection with plans to complete the filming of "Rust." Other provisions included a prohibition on consuming alcohol and against any possession of weapons, including firearms.

Work on "Rust" was halted with Hutchins' death. Rust Movie Productions says filming is expected to resume this spring, without the use of real weapons or ammunition.

Separately Friday, the producers of "Rust" agreed to pay a \$100,000 fine in connection with allegations of workplace safety violations, in a proposed settlement agreement with New Mexico occupational safety regulators.

The proposed settlement reduces the alleged safety violation to the category of "serious," from "willful-serious," and states that Rust Movie Productions "did not furnish a place of employment free from hazards in that employees were exposed to being struck by discharged rounds or projectiles when firearms were used on the set of the motion picture production."

In April 2020, New Mexico's Occupational Health and Safety Bureau slapped Rust Movie Productions with a maximum \$136,793 fine while distributing a scathing narrative of safety failures in violation of standard industry protocols, including testimony that production managers took limited or no action to address two misfires on set before the fatal shooting.

The bureau also documented gun-safety complaints from crew members that went unheeded and said weapons specialists were not allowed to make decisions about additional safety training.

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Melina Spadone, an attorney for Rust Movie Productions, said Friday in a statement that the settlement would help filmmakers resume work on "Rust."

"Our top priority has always been resuming production and completing this film so we can honor the life and work of Halyna Hutchins," she said.

The involuntary manslaughter charges against Baldwin, a lead actor and co-producer on "Rust," and Gutierrez-Reed, the film's armor, are punishable by up to 18 months in jail and a \$5,000 fine under New Mexico law.

Prosecutors and defense attorneys are preparing for a likely preliminary hearing within a few months to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to proceed to trial.

Authorities said Baldwin was pointing a pistol at Hutchins when the gun went off, killing her and wounding director Joel Souza.

Baldwin's attorney Luke Nikas said when the charges were announced that they were "a terrible miscarriage of justice." He said Baldwin relied on the professionals with whom he worked and "had no reason to believe there was a live bullet in the gun."

Bowles had said the charges were the result of "a very flawed investigation and an inaccurate understanding of the full facts." He said he believed jurors will exonerate his client.

Prosecutors say assistant director David Halls, who oversaw safety on set, has signed an agreement to plead guilty in the negligent use of a deadly weapon, explaining that he may have handled the gun improperly before it was given to Baldwin.

A judge is scheduled to consider approval of the plea agreement in March. Halls waived his first appearance in court.

University to raze house where Idaho students were killed

MOSCOW, Idaho (AP) — The house where four University of Idaho students were stabbed to death in November will be demolished, school officials said Friday.

The owner of the home in Moscow offered to give it to the university and the school accepted, University President Scott Green said in a memo to students and employees.

"This is a healing step and removes the physical structure where the crime that shook our community was committed," Green wrote.

No timeline has set for the demolition, but university spokesperson Jodi Walker told the Idaho Statesman that the goal is to have the house knocked down by the end of the semester.

"We're just working through the processes that it takes to do such a thing," Walker said. "But from the university standpoint, and in talking with the families, the sooner, the better."

Walker also said the university is working with students and other community members to create a plan for the property's future development that would honor the slain students: seniors Madison Mogen and Kaylee Goncalves, both 21, junior Xana Kernodle, 20, and freshman Ethan Chapin, 20.

The victims' bodies were found on Nov. 13 at the rental home, which is across the street from the university campus.

Bryan Kohberger, a former graduate student of Washington State University in neighboring Pullman, Washington, is charged with four counts of first-degree murder and burglary in connection with the killings.

Green also announced Friday that planning has started on a memorial for the four students. The memorial will be the focus of a garden in a location to be determined on campus grounds.

Scholarships in honor of the students are also being established.

Prosecutor: Alex Murdaugh 'fuzzy' about new details of case

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

Disgraced South Carolina attorney Alex Murdaugh faced intense questioning about his movements the night his wife and son were killed as the prosecutor challenged inconsistencies in his memory Friday at his double murder trial.

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A day after revealing for the first time that he was at the kennels where his wife and son were shot shortly before they died, Murdaugh returned to the stand in his own defense. During cross-examination, prosecutor Creighton Waters grilled Murdaugh about what he repeatedly called the once-prominent lawyer's "new story" about what happened at the kennels on the evening June 7, 2021.

Waters asked Murdaugh if he meant what he told the jury Thursday — that he tried to help police find the killers.

"Other than lying to them about going to the kennels, I was cooperative in every aspect of this investigation," Murdaugh said.

"Very cooperative except maybe the most important fact of all, that you were at the murder scene with the victims just minutes before they died," Waters replied.

For 20 months, Murdaugh insisted that he was never at the kennels. But after more than a year, state agents hacked his son's iPhone and found a video with Alex Murdaugh's voice less than five minutes before the victims stopped using their cellphones and prosecutors think they were shot.

Murdaugh, 54, is charged with murder in the deaths of his wife, Maggie, 52, and their 22-year-old son, Paul, but has steadfastly denied any involvement. He faces 30 years to life in prison if convicted.

Waters ended his cross-examination by rattling off the names of about four dozen people — starting with Maggie and Paul Murdaugh and running through his family, friends, law partners, clients and police. He asked Alex Murdaugh if he lied to them and Murdaugh agreed on most.

"And you want this jury to believe a story manufactured to fit the evidence that you brought forth just yesterday after hearing a trial's worth of testimony?" Waters asked.

The prosecutor then showed body camera video of the first officer to respond to the shooting. With the bodies of his wife and son visible, Murdaugh said he hadn't seen them for 45 minutes before he left his home.

Waters also pushed Murdaugh for more details about what happened during the kennel visit, noting that this was all new to investigators since he only admitted it in court Thursday.

The timing, including cellphone and car-tracking data, is a key component. The video ended just before 8:46 p.m. and both Paul and Maggie Murdaugh stopped using their cellphones about three minutes later.

Murdaugh couldn't remember how long he was at the kennels, whether he got blood on his hands pulling a dead chicken from a dog's mouth or the last words he would ever say to his son and his wife.

"There would have been some exchange," Murdaugh said.

Waters said it appeared Murdaugh remembered a lot of specifics when the details were critical, but not when they might get him in trouble.

"You disagree with my characterization that you have a photographic memory about the details that have to fit now that you know these facts but you're fuzzy about the other stuff that complicates that?" Waters said.

For the first time, Murdaugh blamed anger on social media aimed at his son for the killings. Paul Murdaugh had been involved in a boat wreck that killed a teenager and was charged with boating under the influence. He mentioned the boat crash when the first investigators asked if he could think of any suspects.

Murdaugh said his son was the subject of vile "half-truths, half-reports, half-statements, partial information" online.

"I believe then and I believe today that the wrong person saw and read that because I can tell you for a fact the person or people who did what I saw on June the 7th — they hated Paul Murdaugh and they had anger in their heart," Alex Murdaugh said.

Waters told Murdaugh that explanation defied logic, asking if Murdaugh was telling the jury that his wife and son were killed by random vigilantes who knew "they would be at the kennels alone on June 7, knew that you would not be there, but only between the times of 8:49 and 9:02."

"You've got a lot of factors in there, Mr. Waters, all of which I do not agree with, but some of which I do," Murdaugh said.

Murdaugh said Friday that after the brief kennel visit, he returned to the family's house about 1,150 feet

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(350 meters) away on a golf cart, lay down for a few minutes and then got up to get ready to visit his ailing mother about 9:02 p.m., a time verified by step data on his cellphone, which he didn't take to the kennels.

Waters asked Murdaugh if a flurry of steps and a series of unanswered phone calls he started making to his wife and son at 9:02 p.m., after no activity was detected on his phone for nearly an hour, was a way a lawyer and volunteer prosecutor could begin crafting a story to show he couldn't be the killer.

"I never manufactured any alibi in any way shape or form because I did not and would not hurt my wife and my child."

Prosecutors have said Murdaugh killed his wife and son to gain sympathy to buy time because his financial misdeeds were about to be discovered. During his testimony, he has admitted to stealing from clients.

Murdaugh is charged with about 100 other crimes, ranging from stealing from clients to tax evasion. He is being held without bail on those charges, so even if he is found not guilty of the killings, he will not walk out of court a free man. If convicted of most or all of those financial crimes, Murdaugh would likely spend decades in prison.

Jill Biden voices kinship with Africans' fight for democracy

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — U.S. first lady Jill Biden said Friday that she feels a kinship with Africans during her sixth visit to the continent, telling The Associated Press in an exclusive interview that she wants to support nations fighting for democracy — "just like I feel we're doing in the United States."

"We cannot take things for granted, because it's such a precious system of government," she said. "We can't be complacent. We have to keep fighting for it."

The first lady opened her trip earlier this week in Namibia, a young democracy, where on Friday she delivered a rousing speech to more than 1,000 students. She told them the democracy their parents and grandparents fought for is now theirs to defend and protect.

In the interview, Biden said that when first lady Monica Geingos invited her to visit, "I thought there's no better place to go than to go to Namibia" to "encourage the youth to get involved, stay involved, fight for their democracy, just like I feel we're doing in the United States."

Africa's 54 countries are a mix of sometimes fragile democracies in places like Nigeria, which has an election this weekend; and more troubled nations like Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Chad and Sudan that have seen coups in recent years; or Uganda, Gabon, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon, where presidents have been clinging to power for decades. Namibia gained its independence from South Africa in 1990.

American democracy was severely tested after President Joe Biden's election in 2020 when the incumbent, Donald Trump, repeatedly told lies about the election being stolen from him. Hundreds of his supporters who believed his conspiracy theories rioted at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, in a violent attempt to block Congress from certifying Biden as the new president in an unprecedented effort to thwart the customary peaceful transfer of power.

In her speech, Biden said women's and girls voices need to be more prominent in the debate about democracy.

"As the first generation to be born into a free Namibia, the legacy that your parents and grandparents created is now yours — yours to defend and protect," Biden told a largely student audience at Namibia University of Science and Technology.

"Yours to grow. And as we look forward, we must remember that the fight for democracy has no end."

Biden later Friday moved on to Kenya, the second and final stop on her trip.

She highlighted the plight of women and girls on her earlier stops in Namibia. In Kenya, she plans to use her stature to draw attention to a devastating drought across the Horn of Africa that is leaving people hungry and jeopardizing millions of lives. She had visited in 2011 during a severe famine.

"I'm hoping that, you know, that people do pay attention," Biden said in the AP interview. "To see the drought and what I saw before with, just, children who have no food and they can't have livestock, they can't grow crops and to be starving, and so I'm trying to really create awareness and, and just see how

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far things have come in the 10 years, really, that I've been gone."

The first lady, who has spent time in more than a half dozen of Africa's countries, said she feels "really comfortable" on the continent.

"One thing I've learned is that each country is so different — the people are different, the culture is different, the religion is different, the language," she said. "But, you know, we all share so many of the same values.

"And I think that's important, that we're looking for stability, a stable government. We're looking for, you know, representation of the people. We're looking for leaders who have character and integrity, and that's what I think we want to foster. And they do, too."

She said the Biden administration is not "isolationist like we were becoming in the last administration," a reference to Trump and his America-first posture.

"We are reaching out and saying, 'Hey, we're a global society. Take our hands. Let's do this together,'" she said of the current administration.

Biden has worked with young people throughout a 30-year-long teaching career and said in her address to the students that they must exercise their rights to disagree and to dissent, to speak up when they see injustice and support leaders who listen to their concerns.

She noted that, in the United States, "we are still defending and strengthening our democracy, almost 250 years after our founding."

"It's not easy. Democracy isn't easy. It takes work," she said during the rousing, rally-style speech. "But it's worth it, because democracy delivers."

Afterward, she worked her way around the courtyard in a way that she rarely do to shake hands and pose for selfies with scores of excited students. They cheered at one point when she danced briefly to a drum-heavy African beat.

As Ukraine marks year of war, leader vows to secure victory

By JOHN LEICESTER, HANNA ARHIROVA and SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's leader pledged Friday to push for victory in 2023 as he and other Ukrainians marked the somber anniversary of the Russian invasion that upended their lives and Europe's security.

It was Ukraine's "longest day," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, but the country's dogged resistance a year on has proven that "every tomorrow is worth fighting for."

On a day of commemorations, reflection and tears, the Ukrainian president's defiant tone captured the national mood of resilience in the face of Europe's biggest and deadliest war since World War II. Zelenskyy, who has himself become a symbol of Ukraine's refusal to bow to Moscow, said Ukrainians proved themselves to be invincible during "a year of pain, sorrow, faith and unity."

"We have been standing for exactly one year," Zelenskyy said. Feb. 24, 2022, he said, was "the longest day of our lives. The hardest day of our modern history. We woke up early and haven't fallen asleep since."

Ukrainians wept at memorials for their tens of thousands of dead — a toll growing inexorably as fighting rages in eastern Ukraine in particular. Although Friday marked the anniversary of the full-scale invasion, combat between Russian-backed forces and Ukrainian troops has raged in the country's east since 2014. New video from there shot with a drone for The Associated Press showed how the town of Marinka has been razed, along with others.

The killing continued: Russian shelling killed another three civilians and wounded 19 others in the most recent 24-hour spell, Ukraine's presidential office said.

Around the country, Ukrainians looked back at a year that changed their lives and at the clouded future.

"I can sum up the last year in three words: Fear, love, hope," Oleksandr Hranyk, a school director in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, said.

Lining up in the capital, Kyiv, to buy anniversary commemorative postage stamps, Tetiana Klimkova described her heart as "falling and hurting."

Still, "this day has become a symbol for me that we have survived for a whole year and will continue to live," she said. "On this day, our children and grandchildren will remember how strong Ukrainians are

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mentally, physically, and spiritually.”

Although China on Friday called for a cease-fire, peace was nowhere in sight. Ukraine previously rejected a pause in the fighting for fear it would allow Russia to regroup militarily after bruising battlefield setbacks.

Zelenskyy gave qualified support to China’s apparent new interest in playing a diplomatic role, saying: “The fact that China started talking about Ukraine is not bad.”

“But the question is what follows the words,” he said during a wide-ranging news conference. “The question is in the steps and where they will lead to.”

A 12-point paper issued by China’s Foreign Ministry also urged an end to sanctions that aim to squeeze Russia’s economy.

That suggestion also looked like a non-starter, given that Western nations are working to further tighten the sanctions noose, not loosen it. Both the U.K. and U.S. imposed more sanctions Friday.

Ukraine is readying another military push to roll back Russian forces with the help of weaponry that has poured in from the West. NATO member Poland said Friday that it had delivered four advanced Leopard 2A4 tanks, making it the first country to hand the German-made armor to Ukraine.

The prime minister of Poland said on a visit to Kyiv that more Leopards are coming. Poland’s defense minister said contributions from other countries would help form Ukraine’s first Leopard battalion of 31 tanks.

“Ukraine is entering a new period, with a new task — to win,” Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said.

“It will not be easy. But we will manage,” he added. “There is rage and a desire to avenge the fallen.”

Air raid alarms didn’t sound Friday in Kyiv, alleviating concerns that Russia might unleash another barrage of missiles to pile yet more sadness on Ukraine on the anniversary.

Still, the government recommended that schools move classes online, and office employees were asked to work from home. And even as they rode Kyiv’s subway to work, bought coffee and got busy, Ukrainians were unavoidably haunted by thoughts of loss and memories of when missiles struck, troops rolled across Ukraine’s borders and a refugee exodus began a year ago.

Back then, there were fears the country might fall within weeks. Zelenskyy referred to those dark moments in a video address.

“We fiercely fought for every day. And we endured the second day. And then, the third,” he said. “And we still know: Every tomorrow is worth fighting for.”

The anniversary was also poignant for the parents of children born exactly a year ago as bombs began killing and maiming.

“It’s a tragedy for the whole country, for every Ukrainian,” said Alina Mustafaieva, who gave birth to daughter Yeva that day.

“My family was lucky. We didn’t lose anyone or anything. But many did, and we have to share this loss together,” she said.

Tributes to Ukraine’s resilience took place in other countries. The Eiffel Tower in Paris and the Colosseum in Rome were among monuments illuminated in Ukraine’s colors — yellow and blue. In Berlin, a wrecked Russian tank was put on display.

Anti-war activists in Belgrade, Serbia, left a cake covered with red icing representing blood and a skull on top on a pavement near the Russian Embassy, which police stopped them from approaching.

In Russia, media and rights groups reported more police arrests of protesters who took to streets with antiwar slogans and flowers in various parts of the country.

The war’s one-year mark kept Ukraine’s president exceptionally busy. Zelenskyy kicked off the day with an early morning tweet that promised: “We know that 2023 will be the year of our victory!”

He followed that up with his video address, in which he also pledged not to abandon Ukrainians living under Russian occupation. “One way or another, we will liberate all our lands,” he vowed. He also addressed troops on a Kyiv square and handed out honors, including to the widow and daughter of a fallen soldier, telling them: “We will never forget.” In a Kyiv hospital, he decorated wounded fighters.

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Unable to fly by plane from Ukraine while its airspace is closed because of the war, Zelenskyy did the next best thing at his news conference, spending nearly 2 1/2 hours with journalists from around the world. He thanked country after country for its support.

Emotional at times and playful at others, the president offered a glimpse of the people-skills he has used in corralling world leaders to back him and his country's cause. He pushed again for more Western weaponry, including combat aircraft flown by the Royal Air Force in Britain that its government, led by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, isn't for the moment willing to send.

"Where (are) our aircraft, Typhoon?" Zelenskyy said, switching to speaking in English. "Please ask my friend Rishi."

The news conference was televised live, which was unusual. Generally during the war, Zelenskyy's speeches and comments are broadcast with a delay until he has left a location, to protect him from a possible attack.

Zelenskyy argued that Ukraine cannot negotiate with Russia while its aggression continues. "Leave our territory. Stop bombing us," he said. He also argued that Russian President Vladimir Putin should be held responsible for war crimes.

"This is not a child who broke something and can be forgiven," he said.

Zelenskyy said one of his biggest disappointments in the invasion was seeing people who could have fought leave the country, a reference to officials who fled. He said a low point was when Russian atrocities were discovered in the recaptured town of Bucha near Kyiv.

"It was very scary," he said. "We saw that the devil is not somewhere out there, but on Earth."

A year on, casualty figures are horrific on both sides, although Moscow and Kyiv keep precise numbers under wraps. Western estimates suggest hundreds of thousands of killed and wounded.

In Kharkiv, Ukrainian serviceman Dmytro Kovalenko was buried Friday in the city's main cemetery for soldiers, which has added 15 new rows of graves this past year. Kovalenko was killed Monday in the fiercely contested eastern city of Bakhmut. Those saying final goodbyes included Andrii Zatsorenko, a friend who lay red carnations on the grave.

"I never thought I'd be giving him flowers," Zatsorenko said.

"The war will not end soon," he added. "We have a powerful enemy."

Flotsam found off New York may be from famous SS Savannah

By KAREN MATTHEWS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A chunk of weather-beaten flotsam that washed up on a New York shoreline after Tropical Storm Ian last fall has piqued the interest of experts who say it is likely part of the SS Savannah, which ran aground and broke apart in 1821, two years after it became the first vessel to cross the Atlantic Ocean partly under steam power.

The roughly 13-foot (4-meter) square piece of wreckage was spotted in October off Fire Island, a barrier island that hugs Long Island's southern shore, and is now in the custody of the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society. It will work with National Park Service officials to identify the wreckage and put it on public display.

"It was pretty thrilling to find it," said Betsy DeMaria, a museum technician at the park service's Fire Island National Seashore. "We definitely are going to have some subject matter experts take a look at it and help us get a better view of what we have here."

It may be difficult to identify the wreckage with 100% certainty, but park service officials said the Savannah is a top contender among Fire Island's known shipwrecks.

Explorers have searched for the Savannah for over two centuries but have not found anything they could definitively link to the famous ship. The newly discovered wreckage, though, "very well could be" a piece of the historic shipwreck, said Ira Breskin, a senior lecturer at the State University of New York Maritime College in the Bronx. "It makes perfect sense."

Evidence includes the 1-to-1.3-inch (2.5-to-3.3-centimeter) wooden pegs holding the wreckage's planks

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together, consistent with a 100-foot (30.5-meter) vessel, park service officials said in a news release. The Savannah was 98 feet, 6 inches (30 meters) long. Additionally, the officials said, the wreckage's iron spikes suggest a ship built around 1820. The Savannah was built in 1818.

Breskin, author of "The Business of Shipping," noted that the Savannah's use of steam power was so advanced for its time that the May 24, 1819, start of its transatlantic voyage is commemorated as National Maritime Day. "It's important because they were trying to basically show the viability of a steam engine to make it across the pond," he said.

Breskin said a nautical archaeologist should be able to help identify the Fire Island wreckage, which appears likely to be from the Savannah. "It's plausible, and it's important, and it's living history if the scientists confirm that it is what we think it is," he said.

The Savannah, a sailing ship outfitted with a 90-horsepower steam engine, traveled mainly under sail across the Atlantic, using steam power for 80 hours of the nearly month-long passage to Liverpool, England.

Crowds cheered as the Savannah sailed from Liverpool to Sweden and Russia and then back to its home port of Savannah, Georgia, but the ship was not a financial success, in part because people were afraid to travel on the hybrid vessel. The Savannah's steam engine was removed and sold after the ship's owners suffered losses in the Great Savannah Fire of 1820.

The Savannah was transporting cargo between Savannah and New York when it ran aground off Fire Island. It later broke apart. The crew made it safely to shore and the cargo of cotton was salvaged, but the Augusta Chronicle & Georgia Gazette reported that "Captain Holdridge was considerably hurt by being upset in the boat."

Explorers have searched for the Savannah over the two centuries since it but have not found anything they could definitively link to the famous ship.

Until now, perhaps.

FDA's tobacco unit pledges reset after criticism

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Food and Drug Administration officials on Friday pledged a reset in the agency's tobacco program, responding to criticisms that a lack of direction has hampered efforts to regulate cigarettes, vaping devices and related products.

The head of the agency's tobacco center promised to deliver a five-year strategic plan by year's end outlining priorities, including efforts to clean up a sprawling market of largely unauthorized electronic cigarettes. The agency also said it would provide more transparency to companies about its decisions, following the rejection of more than 1 million applications from e-cigarette makers seeking to market their products as alternatives for adult smokers.

The announcement comes as the tobacco center is besieged by criticism from all sides — including lawmakers, anti-smoking advocates and tobacco companies.

FDA chief Dr. Robert Califf commissioned separate, external reviews of the agency's tobacco and food programs last summer, amid controversies in both units.

The blistering report on the tobacco program, issued in December, described the FDA as "reactive and overwhelmed," with a demoralized workforce that struggles to oversee both traditional tobacco products and a freewheeling e-cigarette market.

The report mainly channeled long-standing grievances from groups on opposing sides of the tobacco issue. Public health groups want the FDA to more aggressively police regular cigarettes and flavored e-cigarettes that appeal to teenagers. Tobacco companies complain that the FDA is unwilling to approve new alternative products — including e-cigarettes — that might help adults quit smoking.

FDA's tobacco chief, Brian King, said Friday that regulators are looking at ways to "better communicate" with companies about how the FDA makes decisions. The agency is also working to streamline the review process, when possible.

"Some things will take longer than others, but we're committed to getting everything done that we've

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outlined as expeditiously as possible," King said in an interview.

Vaping industry representatives said they were unimpressed by the FDA update, which they said would continue to result in denials for most vaping products.

"While the devil is in the details, nothing in today's announcement hinted at any material shift in FDA's perpetual attack on every nicotine-containing product," said Tony Abboud of the Vapor Technology Association, in an emailed statement.

The FDA has OK'd a handful of tobacco-flavored e-cigarettes from several large companies. But many industry players are pushing for approval of menthol and other flavors.

Responding to a recommendation in the December report, King said the FDA would convene a meeting with the Department of Justice on its efforts to crack down on unauthorized e-cigarettes, particularly fruit- and candy-flavored products that are popular among teens.

The FDA has sent hundreds of warning letters to vape shops and e-cigarette manufacturers in recent years, calling on them to remove products. But the letters are sometimes ignored. King pointed out that the FDA relies on the Justice Department to make decisions about when to bring lawsuits against bad actors.

In recent months, the FDA and the Justice Department have announced the first lawsuits and fines targeting vape shops and manufacturers selling unauthorized products.

"Those are the first of their kind and I hope they're a wake-up call to industry that if you are violating the law we are going to use the full portfolio of our enforcement activities to ensure that you comply," King said.

The FDA's tobacco center was created by Congress in 2009 and granted sweeping powers to remake the industry, including banning harmful ingredients from traditional products and authorizing new, less-harmful alternatives.

But FDA has been stalled by "near constant" litigation, the December report noted.

Tobacco industry lawsuits have repeatedly blocked FDA actions designed to help smokers quit, including adding graphic warnings to cigarette packs.

"Unfortunately, the tobacco industry has fought the agency on many of the science-based actions we've taken, putting profits over public health," King said.

Meanwhile, lawsuits brought by anti-tobacco groups forced the FDA to speed up its timeline for reviewing more than a million e-cigarette applications from four years to 10 months. The agency has repeatedly pushed back its deadline for completing its review, prompting criticism from parent groups and members of Congress. The agency now says it will take until 2024 to review the remaining products.

King said the FDA will look at whether changes to the law are needed to help the agency accomplish its work.

Among other steps, the FDA has repeatedly asked Congress to collect user fees from e-cigarette makers to help hire more staff and fund product reviews. So far, Congress has not granted that request.

E-bike batteries blamed for 22 NYC fires, 2 deaths this year

NEW YORK (AP) — Lithium ion batteries used to power electric bicycles and scooters have already sparked 22 fires that caused 36 injuries and two deaths in New York City this year, four times the number of fires linked to the batteries by this time last year, officials said Friday.

Fire Commissioner Laura Kavanagh said Mayor Eric Adams' administration is "coming at this problem from every single angle," including working with the City Council and the federal Consumer Product Safety Commission on additional regulations for the batteries and educating the public on their proper use and storage.

"These are incredibly dangerous devices, and we must make sure that members of the community are handling them properly and using them safely," Kavanagh said at a briefing on public safety.

Many of the fires blamed on the batteries have been caused by malfunctioning devices left to charge overnight and placed in a hallway or near a door where they can trap people inside a burning apartment.

Three children and an adult were injured this month when a charging battery started a fire in their up-

per Manhattan apartment at 1:30 a.m., officials said.

Fire Department Chief of Operations John Esposito said after the Feb. 5 blaze that when the battery overheated and sparked a fire, "it blocked the egress out of the apartment, trapping the family."

Kavanagh said the e-bike batteries "present often an immediate inability to exit one's room or one's apartment or one's home. So it's really critical that we work with all our partners up here in government around enforcement, around education, around combating the hazards that these present to citizens and first responders."

Did dioxins spread after the Ohio train derailment?

By MADDIE BURAKOFF and DREW COSTLEY undefined

After a catastrophic 38-train car derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, some officials are raising concerns about a type of toxic substance that tends to stay in the environment.

Last week, Sherrod Brown and J.D. Vance, the U.S. senators from Ohio, sent a letter to the state's environmental protection agency expressing concern that dioxins may have been released when some of the chemicals in the damaged railcars were deliberately burned for safety reasons. They joined residents of the small Midwestern town and environmentalists from around the U.S. calling for state and federal environmental agencies to test the soil around the site where the tanker cars tipped over.

A look at dioxins, their potential harms and whether they may have been created by burning the vinyl chloride that was on the Norfolk Southern train:

HIGHLY TOXIC, PERSISTENT COMPOUNDS

Dioxins refer to a group of toxic chemical compounds that can persist in the environment for long periods of time, according to the World Health Organization.

They are created through combustion and attach to dust particles, which is how they begin to circulate through an ecosystem.

Residents near the burn could have been exposed to dioxins in the air that landed on their skin or were breathed into their lungs, said Frederick Guengerich, a toxicologist at Vanderbilt University.

Skin exposure to high concentrations can cause what's known as chloracne — an intense skin inflammation, Guengerich said.

But the main pathway that dioxin gets into human bodies is not directly through something burning like the contents of the East Palestine tanker cars. It's through consumption of meat, dairy, fish and shellfish that have become contaminated. That contamination takes time.

"That's why it's important for the authorities to investigate this site now," said Ted Schettler, a physician with a public health degree who directs the Science and Environmental Health Network, a coalition of environmental organizations. "Because it's important to determine the extent to which dioxins are present in the soil and the surrounding area."

DOES BURNING VINYL CHLORIDE CREATE DIOXINS?

Linda Birnbaum, a leading dioxins researcher, toxicologist and former director of the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences, said that burning vinyl chloride does create dioxins. Other experts agreed the accident could have created them.

The "tremendous black plume" seen at East Palestine suggests the combustion process left lots of complex carbon compounds behind, said Murray McBride, a Cornell University soil and crop scientist.

McBride said it will be hard to say for sure whether these compounds were released until testing is done where the train cars derailed.

Which is likely why residents, politicians, environmentalists and public health professionals are all calling for state and federal environmental agencies to conduct testing at the derailment site.

ROUTES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

There is already some level of dioxins in the environment — they can be created by certain industrial processes, or even by people burning trash in their backyards, McBride said.

Once they are released, dioxins can stick around in soil for decades. They can contaminate plants includ-

ing crops. They accumulate up the food chain in oils and other fats.

In East Palestine, it's possible that soot particles from the plume carried dioxins onto nearby farms, where they could stick to the soil, McBride said.

"If you have grazing animals out there in the field, they will pick up some of the dioxins from soil particles," he said. "And so some of that gets into their bodies, and then that accumulates in fat tissue."

Eventually, those dioxins could make their way up the food chain to human consumers. Bioaccumulation means that more dioxin can get into humans than what's found in the environment after the crash.

"(Animals) don't metabolize and get rid of dioxins like we do other chemicals," Schettler said, and it's stored in the fat of animals that humans eat, like fish, and builds up over time, making the health effects worse.

SHOULD RESIDENTS BE CONCERNED?

Birnbaum and Schettler agreed that residents have reason for concern about dioxins from this accident.

Even though they are present in small amounts from other sources, the large amount of vinyl chloride burned off from the train cars could create more than usual, McBride said.

"That's my concern, that there could be an unusual concentration," he said. "But again, I'm waiting to see if these soils are analyzed."

It takes between 7 and 11 years for the chemical to start to break down in the body of a person or animal. And dioxins have been linked with cancer, developmental problems in children and reproductive issues and infertility in adults, according to the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences.

Still, Guengerich thought that other potential health risks from the derailment — like the concern that exposure to the vinyl chloride itself could cause cancer — may be more pressing than the possible dioxins: "I wouldn't put it at the highest level on my list," he said.

Dr. Maureen Lichtveld, dean of the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health, agreed that vinyl chloride should be of more concern than dioxins for the public and said that even the mental health of a community rocked by the catastrophic derailment should be a higher public health priority than dioxin exposure.

As with many environmental exposures, it would be hard to prove any dioxin present came from the derailment. "I think that it would be virtually impossible ... to attribute any presence of dioxin to this particular burn," she said.

But most experts thought it was important to test the soils for dioxins — even though that process can be difficult and costly.

"The conditions are absolutely right for dioxins to have been formed," Schettler said. "It's going to be terribly important to determine that from a public health perspective, and to reassure the community."

Navajo community wins fight to replace crumbling campus

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

TO'HAJIILEE, N.M. (AP) — A school tucked into the sandstone cliffs and juniper-dotted mesas of central New Mexico is fortified on one side by a wall of sandbags and an earthen berm. On the other side, melting snow puddles along the edges of classrooms.

Inside, caulking, paint and metal plates hide the cracks that have formed over decades in the block walls. With each rainstorm, the nearly century-old To'Hajiilee Community School on the fringes of the Navajo Nation sinks further into the ground.

The layers of bandages won't have to hold much longer. Residents of the small community off Interstate 40 recently learned that after years of raising flags about the school that lies in a floodplain, the latest federal budget included \$90 million for a new campus.

"It's just unbelievable that we would ever have anything that great happen," said Paulene Abeyta, a mother and vice president of the school board.

To'Hajiilee Community School is just one of about 80 schools funded by the U.S. Bureau of Indian Education that are in desperate need of repair or replacement. The agency's priorities stretch across the country with schools in Maine, Wisconsin, North Dakota, New Mexico, Arizona and Washington.

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The price tag tops \$6.2 billion, and the wait is long.

To'Hajiilee would not have been moved up the priority list last year if not for a community campaign driven by stories of flooded classrooms and playgrounds, relentless calls to Washington, D.C., and invitations for decision-makers to see it in person. Otherwise, another decade would have passed and another generation of students would have walked the same halls.

"When you see the kids here today and the talent and just the excitement, you think about how limitless the opportunities are for kids if they can just focus on becoming the people that they were meant to be and not have to deal with crumbling classrooms," said U.S. Rep. Melanie Stansbury of New Mexico.

Stansbury joined school officials, students and parents earlier this month to celebrate the funding. While it puts only a small dent in the bureau's backlog, she said it will mark a new era for the Navajo community.

Officials hope to break ground in about a year. Already, Abeyta charged the students with dreaming big.

That means softball fields free of prickly weeds, and ant piles, water bottle filling stations, a gym with long bleachers and a big scoreboard, toilets that flush, motion-sensing sinks, well-equipped classrooms for art and woodworking, a music room filled with instruments and a culinary program with big ovens.

School administrator Willinda Castillo said community input will be vital to ensuring success.

"The school is, I think, the heart of this community," she said.

Generations of To'Hajiilee students have learned Navajo history and language in the school. Plaques outside classroom doors display the grade and subjects taught in Navajo, or Diné. Murals adorn hallways and posters remind students and teachers to integrate Diné as often as possible.

Many of the students at the recent celebration wore traditional clothing while members of the senior class danced and performed a blessing way song.

Students erupted with cheers and stomped their feet on the wooden bleachers when school board members talked about the possibilities ahead.

Abeyta and others shared stories of teachers fleeing to their vehicles to avoid being stranded as floodwaters washed over the school grounds. Other times, classes were canceled as moats formed around portable buildings and parking lots were submerged. Flooding even washed out the bridge leading to the school.

Castillo checks the forecast daily and adjusts evacuation plans if needed.

With the backlog of deferred maintenance across the bureau's system ballooning, To'Hajiilee knew pleading from afar wouldn't be enough — they invited former U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland who now heads the Interior Department, members of Congress and top officials from the Bureau of Indian Education to see the school for themselves.

"You know, there's a lot of times when our voices are not heard, and in order for our voices to be heard we just had to take it upon ourselves," Castillo said. "I think that's what made the difference."

Stansbury and her staff followed a visit last year with countless emails, regular phone calls and conversations with as many congressional leaders as possible. They had a singular plea as Congress finalized the budget in December — funding for To'Hajiilee. Videos of raging flood waters, damaged foundations and cracked walls helped make the case that students and staff weren't safe.

The To'Hajiilee campus dates to the 1930s, when the first rock-walled classrooms were erected as part of the federal Works Progress Administration. Those buildings are long gone, having been replaced in the 1950s with buildings that were then overhauled in the 1980s.

Larry Holman, To'Hajiilee's administrative services specialist, picked up a section of broken bathroom piping that was sitting on a shelf in his office. It was thick with corrosion and had a crack running down one side — more evidence of the condition of plumbing throughout the school.

The water gets tested every other week, but it's not potable. The school doles out water bottles daily, creating another expense.

Along with the new school, the community will be tying into the water supply for Albuquerque, which is New Mexico's largest city about 30 miles (48 kilometers) to the east.

"It's not only about building a new place for this community for kids to go to school, but it will be the place where future generations grow up and become who they are. And, you know, a school can literally

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transform lives," Stansbury said.

The congresswoman, who worked in the Office of Management and Budget during the Obama administration, rallied lawmakers last year to increase the bureau budget for school construction and repairs. Still, the 2023 budget is a fraction of what advocates say is needed to address deficiencies in a school system that serves more than 45,000 Native students in nearly two dozen states.

The To'Hajiilee Community School has roots as a federal boarding school. The community itself was settled during the Long Walk when thousands of Navajos endured cold, disease and starvation as the U.S. attempted to relocate them to eastern New Mexico. Some residents say the initial inhabitants of this stretch of high desert were a renegade band of sorts that refused to go farther. They called the spot To'Hajiilee, which translates roughly to "drawing water from a well."

While the \$90 million cost for a new school was unfathomable to second-graders in Adrienne Keene's class who were learning about money, it's not out of line with construction costs for modern education facilities.

Keene handed out bags of play coins for the class to count. When asked if they wanted to count to \$90 million, the students gasped but didn't hesitate to share their ideas about what they wanted at their new school.

"Will we get a new playground?" one girl asked.

"A rollercoaster!" a boy said.

US Navy applies lessons from costly shipbuilding mistakes

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

BATH, Maine (AP) — The U.S. Navy appears to have learned from its costly lessons after cramming too much new technology onto warships and speeding them into production as it embarks on building new destroyers, which are the backbone of the fleet.

Military officials say they're slowing down the design and purchase of its next-generation destroyers to ensure new technology like powerful lasers and hypersonic missiles are mature before pressing ahead on construction.

The Navy has learned "sometimes the hard way, when we move too fast we make big mistakes," said Adm. Michael Gilday, chief of naval operations.

"Let's be deliberate. Let's not have our eyes become bigger than our stomach and get too far ahead of ourselves," Gilday said last week at an event for defense industry officials in San Diego.

The Navy wants to turn the page on recent shipbuilding blunders.

Several newer combat ships designed for speed are being retired early after being beset by problems. A \$13.3 billion aircraft carrier experienced added costs from new catapults that launch airplanes. Workers completed construction of a stealth destroyer before its advanced gun system, already installed, was scrapped.

For the new ship, the Navy is reducing risk by conducting more land tests and borrowing the radar and targeting system from the latest destroyers that'll soon join the fleet, said Lt. Cmdr. Javan Rasnake, spokesman for the assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition.

It's also working with shipbuilders and designers to refine the ship's blueprint, cost estimates, and workforce and supply forecasts, Rasnake said.

The Navy still plans to field some new technologies on the destroyer.

Last week, it awarded Lockheed Martin a \$1.2 billion contract for hypersonic missiles that travel at five times the speed of sound, and can be fired from destroyers. Last summer, it awarded the first design contract for the new ship outfitted with those missiles and lasers powerful enough to shoot down aircraft.

Matt Caris, a defense analyst with Avascent, said it's important that the Navy gets it right by balancing the best technology that's reliable, affordable and attainable.

"The Navy is trying to thread the needle with some potentially revolutionary capabilities in as low risk and evolutionary process as possible. This was a lesson learned by the Navy's laundry list of shameful acquisition programs," he said.

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Some worry about history repeating itself.

There are new Navy leaders overseeing many programs and "it's easy to imagine them making similar mistakes again with a new cast of characters," said Loren Thompson from the Lexington Institute, a security think tank.

The Navy is in the midst of juggling its priorities as it seeks not just a new destroyer but also a new attack submarine and a replacement for the F/A-18 Super Hornet fighter jet.

The Navy is in a difficult spot because the Biden administration is not interested in dramatically increasing the military budget, said Bryan Clark, a defense analyst at the Hudson Institute. Research and development alone would cost an extra \$10 billion to \$20 billion for the destroyer, submarine and jet, he said, representing a big chunk of the \$220 billion Navy budget.

A series of speedy, coast-hugging warships embodied shipbuilding mistakes that the Navy is trying to avoid. Critics said early versions were too lightly armored to survive combat. One version of the craft, known as a littoral combat ship, had propulsion problems. Some of the ships broke down and had to be towed. Plans for a submarine detection system were scrapped.

Combined, the costs of the first ships in that program, the stealthy Zumwalt destroyer and Ford-class aircraft carrier grew by \$6.8 billion in today's dollars, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

"They've digested that lesson," Clark said. "Part of what you're seeing is a recognition that the underlying technologies are not ready yet. They don't want to drive the program where the ship starts production before the technology is ready."

Gilday, who is the Navy's top officer, said the transition to the new destroyers will likely start in the "2032 time frame." For now, top Navy leadership want to keep current production lines of destroyers humming until designs are ready.

That means shipyards in Maine and Mississippi will continue making existing Arleigh Burke-class destroyers. They hold the Navy's record for longest production run for large surface warships.

At Maine's Bath Iron Works, where the first Arleigh Burke was built starting in 1988, shipbuilders are happy to continue building the existing ships while new designs are tested out.

Charles Krugh, shipyard president, said shipbuilders prefer the approach of taking extra time to make sure the technology and design are right.

"If we get a fully designed ship, it's obviously going to make us a whole lot more productive and efficient," Krugh said.

US has a teacher shortage. HBCUs are helping to change that

By ANNIE MA Associated Press

BOWIE, Md. (AP) — Surrounded by kindergarteners, Lana Scott held up a card with upper and lower case Ys, dotted with pictures of words that started with that letter: Yo-yo. Yak. Yacht.

"What sound does Y make?" Scott asked a boy. Head down, he mumbled: "Yuh." Instead of moving on, she gave him a nudge.

"Say it confident, because you know it," she urged. "Be confident in your answer because you know it."

He sat up and sounded it out again, louder this time. Scott smiled and turned her attention to the other kids in her group session.

As a student teacher from Bowie State University, a historically Black institution, Scott said she has learned to build deep connections with students. The school, Whitehall Elementary, is filled with teachers and administrators who graduated from Bowie State. Classrooms refer to themselves as families, and posters on the wall ask children to reflect on what makes a good classmate.

HBCUs play an outsize role in producing teachers of color in the U.S., where only 7% of teachers are Black, compared with 15% of students. Of all Black teachers nationwide, nearly half are graduates of an HBCU.

Having teachers who look like them is crucial for young Americans. Research has found Black students who have at least one Black teacher are more likely to graduate from high school and less likely to be

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suspended or expelled. Some new research suggests the training found at HBCUs may be part of what makes an effective teacher.

A recent study of elementary school students in North Carolina found Black students performed better in math when taught by an HBCU-educated teacher.

"There's something to be said for the environment that's cultivated, the way they connect with their students, the inspiration, the vulnerability that they may have with their students," said Stanford University graduate student Lavar Edmonds, who conducted the study.

In Edmonds' study, the teacher's race did not have an impact on student outcomes, but their training did. For Black students, Black and white HBCU-trained teachers were more effective than their non-HBCU-trained counterparts.

HBCUs also have received recognition as key players in solving teacher shortages around the country. The U.S. Department of Education this month announced \$18 million in awards for minority-serving institutions including HBCUs, highlighting the role they play in building a more diverse teaching force.

At Bowie State faculty, students and alumni said their training as teachers centered the importance of building a strong sense of community and connecting with their students as individuals.

"It's making sure that your students just feel safe at school," Scott said.

The training places an emphasis on culturally responsive teaching, said Rhonda Jeter, dean of the school's College of Education.

"People are doing the research to validate what we've been doing all along," Jeter said. "When they go to places where students are students of color, I don't think they're uncomfortable.

The tradition of training educators at HBCUs dates back to before the Civil War.

Founded in the 1800s to educate Black Americans who were not allowed to study at other colleges, many HBCUs first existed in some form as "normal schools," or training programs for teachers.

Training at HBCUs provides an immersion in Black culture and an understanding that teachers can bring that to classrooms, said Sekou Biddle, a vice president at the United Negro College Fund. Students at HBCUs, he said, also learn about "the history of Black excellence in America that I think oftentimes gets missed in a lot of other environments."

A Bowie State graduate who now teaches at Whitehall Elementary, Christine Ramroop said hearing from her classmates about their experiences as students — including times where they did not feel supported, respected or understood by their teachers — made her more aware of the impact she could have in the classroom.

"Going to an HBCU, I heard a lot of stories about so many teachers that didn't feel seen in the classroom as students," Ramroop said. "It really kind of shapes your mind as a teacher."

Ramroop said that her time at Bowie emphasized the importance of finding a connection with each student and making them feel at home.

As her students walk into her class at Whitehall each day, they pass a poster hung by the doorframe. Under the title "23 reasons why Ms. Ramroop is a grateful teacher," each child's name is listed next to a specific quality.

Lionel's big smile. Aiden's sweet personality. Nadia's leadership.

On a recent Tuesday, Ramroop gathered her first-graders onto a carpet. Hands reached up to volunteer for the chance to answer the vocabulary warm-up exercises. Ramroop was quick to praise the ones who got it right and gentle in correcting the ones who got it wrong.

"Give yourself a round of applause," Ramroop said. "Tell your partner you did a good job. Now point to another friend and say, 'You did a good job.'"

Around her, little voices echoed, "You did a good job. You did a good job. We did a good job!"

Penguin to publish 'classic' Roald Dahl books after backlash

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Publisher Penguin Random House announced Friday it will publish "classic" unexpur-

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gated versions of Roald Dahl's children's novels after it received criticism for cuts and rewrites that were intended to make the books suitable for modern readers.

Along with the new editions, the company said 17 of Dahl's books would be published in their original form later this year as "The Roald Dahl Classic Collection" so "readers will be free to choose which version of Dahl's stories they prefer."

The move comes after criticism of scores of changes made to "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" and other much-loved classics for recent editions published under the company's Puffin children's label, in which passages relating to weight, mental health, gender and race were altered.

Augustus Gloop, Charlie's gluttonous antagonist in "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" — originally published in 1964 — became "enormous" rather than "enormously fat." In "Witches," an "old hag" became an "old crow," and a supernatural female posing as an ordinary woman may be a "top scientist or running a business" instead of a "cashier in a supermarket or typing letters for a businessman."

In "Fantastic Mr. Fox," the word "black" was removed from a description of the "murderous, brutal-looking" tractors.

The Roald Dahl Story Company, which controls the rights to the books, said it had worked with Puffin to review and revise the texts because it wanted to ensure that "Dahl's wonderful stories and characters continue to be enjoyed by all children today."

While tweaking old books for modern sensibilities is not a new phenomenon in publishing, the scale of the edits drew strong criticism from free-speech groups such as writers' organization PEN America, and from authors including Salman Rushdie.

Rushdie, who lived under threat of death from Iran's Islamic regime for years because of the alleged blasphemy of his novel "The Satanic Verses," called the revisions "absurd censorship."

Rushdie, who was attacked and seriously injured last year at an event in New York state, tweeted news of Penguin's change of heart on Friday with the words "Penguin Books back down after Roald Dahl backlash!"

PEN America chief executive Suzanne Nossel wrote on Twitter: "I applaud Penguin for hearing out critics, taking the time to rethink this, and coming to the right place."

Camilla, Britain's queen consort, appeared to offer her view at a literary reception on Thursday. She urged writers to "remain true to your calling, unimpeded by those who may wish to curb the freedom of your expression or impose limits on your imagination."

Dahl's books, with their mischievous children, strange beasts and often beastly adults, have sold more than 300 million copies and continue to be read by children around the world. Their multiple stage and screen adaptations include "Matilda the Musical" and two "Willy Wonka" films based on "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," with a third in the works.

But Dahl, who died in 1990, is also a controversial figure because of antisemitic comments made throughout his life. His family apologized in 2020.

In 2021, Dahl's estate sold the rights to the books to Netflix, which plans to produce a new generation of films based on the stories.

Francesca Dow, managing director of Penguin Random House Children's, said the publisher had "listened to the debate over the past week which has reaffirmed the extraordinary power of Roald Dahl's books and the very real questions around how stories from another era can be kept relevant for each new generation."

"Roald Dahl's fantastic books are often the first stories young children will read independently, and taking care for the imaginations and fast-developing minds of young readers is both a privilege and a responsibility," she said.

"We also recognize the importance of keeping Dahl's classic texts in print," Dow said. "By making both Puffin and Penguin versions available, we are offering readers the choice to decide how they experience Roald Dahl's magical, marvelous stories."

Q&A: Austin Butler on what 'Elvis' taught him about fear

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

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Austin Butler, you may have heard, has taken a bit of flack for sounding too much like Elvis now that he's no longer, um, Elvis.

The 31-year-old breakout star of Baz Luhrmann's flamboyant biopic even had to be defended by fellow Oscar nominee Angela Bassett, who's explained that she, too, had a hard time shaking the Tina Turner vibe after playing her back in 1993.

In any case, Butler says there's something far more significant that's remained with him since making "Elvis": a new relationship with fear.

The challenge of playing an icon who's been imitated as often as Presley was so great, he says, that he suffered from "impostor syndrome" and could have been felled by the fear — fear that kept him from sleeping well for two years, he adds — had he not learned to use it as a "compass," in his words. Now, he says, he asks himself: "What am I terrified of today?" And then he tries to step toward it, rather than away.

Butler, whose Golden Globe from January now has to share shelf space with the BAFTA from February, looks like one of the key favorites to add an Oscar to that shelf, come March. He spoke to The Associated Press shortly after winning his Oscar nod, musing about how he tried to approach the role so it felt human and not like "going to a wax museum," about what he learned personally from the process, and also about the shocking death of Lisa Marie Presley. The interview has been edited for clarity.

AP: It's been an emotional time for you: Winning a Golden Globe, then the tragic death of Lisa Marie Presley, then the Oscar nomination, all within days. Can you describe that journey?

BUTLER: I mean, the peaks are so high and the valleys have been so low. For each of these moments I'm just trying to stay as present as I can ... I just wish Lisa Marie were here with us to celebrate. At times, in the midst of intense grief and just a shattering loss, it feels sort of bizarre to celebrate. But I also know how much this film meant to Lisa Marie, how much her father's legacy meant to her. So I feel so proud and humble to be a part of that story. But it puts things in perspective for sure, when you have such intense loss like that.

AP: Let's talk about the challenges of the role itself. You had to find a way to avoid mimicking a much-mimicked icon, and to bring humanity and authenticity to it. Can you put into words how you managed that?

BUTLER: It's so hard to quantify it, and it's such a tricky thing to talk about without sounding incredibly pretentious and self-important. There are certain aspects that even I don't fully understand. Thankfully I had a long time. I had a year and a half before we started filming, and a large chunk of that time was alone in my apartment in Australia during the six months that the film shut down during the pandemic. So it was a lot of just focusing on it every day and trying to get into the life of this man, rather than all the external things.

Even the way that he moved, it all had to come from his spirit, rather than it ever feeling like choreography. Because there are moments where you want to be meticulous, you know, very specific to how he actually moved in a certain way or how he spoke or whatever that is, but it can't feel like it's a recreation — otherwise then you just feel like you're going to a wax museum or something! So I was very fortunate to be surrounded by amazing people, my amazing movement coach Polly Bennett and dialect coaches and singing coaches and karate instructors. I had so many people around me that that aided me in that process. But it was just a long process of trying to figure it out every day, to feel like a detective.

AP: After all that, would you say the character has changed you in any permanent way?

BUTLER: Yeah and in probably more ways than I can even describe or figure out myself. But one of the main things is that it's altered my relationship with fear, because this was such a daunting undertaking. And there were many moments where I where I felt, you know, where maybe I didn't believe in myself, I felt impostor syndrome — just a terror that didn't allow me to sleep for two years. And so now my experience is that when I feel fear like that, I kind of know that it's not the thing that has to stop you. That you just keep doing the work and you use the fear almost as a compass, to go, "What am I terrified of today?" — and step into that rather than running away from it. I think that that's probably the biggest thing that's really stuck with me.

Key US inflation measure surges at fastest rate since June

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve's preferred inflation gauge rose last month at its fastest pace since June, an alarming sign that price pressures remain entrenched in the U.S. economy and could lead the Fed to keep raising interest rates well into this year.

Friday's report from the Commerce Department showed that consumer prices rose 0.6% from December to January, up sharply from a 0.2% increase from November to December. On a year-over-year basis, prices rose 5.4%, up from a 5.3% annual increase in December.

Excluding volatile food and energy prices, so-called core inflation rose 0.6% from December, up from a 0.4% rise the previous month. And compared with a year earlier, core inflation was up 4.7% in January, versus a 4.6% year-over-year uptick in December.

The report also showed that consumer spending rose 1.8% last month from December after falling the previous month.

January's price data exceeded forecasters' expectations, confounding hopes that inflation was steadily decelerating and that the Fed could relent on its campaign of rate hikes. It follows other recent data that also suggested that the economy remains gripped by inflation despite the Fed's strenuous efforts to tame it.

Last week, the government issued a separate inflation measure — the consumer price index — which showed that prices surged 0.5% from December to January, much more than the previous month's 0.1% rise. Measured year over year, consumer prices climbed 6.4% in January. That was well below a recent peak of 9.1% in June but still far above the Fed's 2% inflation target.

Since March of last year, the Fed has attacked inflation by raising its key interest rate eight times. Yet despite the resulting higher borrowing costs for individuals and businesses, the job market remains surprisingly robust. That is actually a worrisome sign for the Fed because strong demand for workers tends to fuel wage growth and overall inflation. Employers added a sizzling 517,000 jobs in January, and the unemployment rate fell to 3.4%, its lowest point since 1969.

"Reaccelerating price pressures, coupled with a still-strong labor market that is restoring incomes and is supporting demand, will keep the Fed on track to hike rates further over coming meetings," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics.

The Fed is thought to monitor the inflation gauge that was issued Friday — the personal consumption expenditures price index — even more closely than it does the government's better-known CPI.

Typically, the PCE index shows a lower inflation level than CPI. In part, that's because rents, which have soared, carry twice the weight in the CPI that they do in the PCE.

The PCE price index also seeks to account for changes in how people shop when inflation jumps. As a result, it can capture emerging trends — when, for example, consumers shift away from pricey national brands in favor of less expensive store brands.

The consumer price index showed a worrisome rise from December to January: It jumped 0.5% — five times the November-to-December increase.

Likewise, the government's measure of wholesale inflation, which shows price increases before they hit consumers, accelerated 0.7% from December to January after having dropped 0.2% from November to December.

Today in History: FEB 25, Ali defeats Liston for world title

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Feb. 25, the 56th day of 2023. There are 309 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 25, 1964, Muhammad Ali (then known as Cassius Clay) became world heavyweight boxing champion as he defeated Sonny Liston in Miami Beach.

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On this date:

In 1901, United States Steel Corp. was incorporated by J.P. Morgan.

In 1913, the 16th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving Congress the power to levy and collect income taxes, was declared in effect by Secretary of State Philander Chase Knox.

In 1919, Oregon became the first state to tax gasoline, at one cent per gallon.

In 1954, Gamal Abdel Nasser became Egypt's prime minister after the country's president, Mohammed Naguib, was effectively ousted in a coup.

In 1957, the Supreme Court, in *Butler v. Michigan*, overturned a Michigan statute making it a misdemeanor to sell books containing obscene language that would tend to corrupt "the morals of youth."

In 1973, the Stephen Sondheim musical "A Little Night Music" opened at Broadway's Shubert Theater.

In 1986, President Ferdinand Marcos fled the Philippines after 20 years of rule in the wake of a tainted election; Corazon Aquino assumed the presidency.

In 1991, during the Persian Gulf War, 28 Americans were killed when an Iraqi Scud missile hit a U.S. barracks in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

In 1994, American-born Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein opened fire with an automatic rifle inside the Tomb of the Patriarchs in the West Bank, killing 29 Muslims before he was beaten to death by worshippers.

In 1997, a jury in Media, Pennsylvania, convicted chemical fortune heir John E. du Pont of third-degree murder, deciding he was mentally ill when he shot and killed world-class wrestler David Schultz. (Du Pont died in prison in December 2010 while serving a 13- to 30-year sentence; he was 72.)

In 2010, in Vancouver, the Canadian women beat the United States 2-0 for their third straight Olympic hockey title.

In 2020, U.S. health officials warned that the coronavirus was certain to spread more widely in the United States; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urged Americans to be prepared. President Donald Trump, speaking in India, said the virus was "very well under control" in the U.S.

Ten years ago: A high-stakes civil trial started in New Orleans to assign blame and help figure out exactly how much more BP and other companies should pay for the 2010 Gulf oil spill. (U.S. District Judge Carl Barbier ruled in September 2014 that BP acted with "gross negligence"; BP ended up reaching a record-setting \$20 billion settlement with the federal government and five Gulf states.) Former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, 96, died in Hanover, New Hampshire.

Five years ago: China's official news agency said the country's ruling Communist Party had proposed scrapping term limits for China's president, appearing to lay the groundwork for Xi Jinping to rule as president beyond 2023. (China's rubber-stamp lawmakers approved that change on March 11.) Students at the Florida high school where 17 classmates and staff members were killed returned to gather belongings that had been abandoned in panic during the shooting. The Winter Olympics in South Korea came to an end as officials from North and South Korea shared a VIP box at the closing ceremonies with U.S. presidential adviser and first daughter Ivanka Trump.

One year ago: President Joe Biden nominated federal appeals court Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court, making her the first Black woman selected to serve on it. (She would be confirmed by the Senate on April 7.) Russian troops bore down on Ukraine's capital, with gunfire and explosions resonating ever closer to the government quarter, in an invasion of a democratic country that fueled fears of wider war in Europe and triggered worldwide efforts to make Russia stop.

Today's birthdays: Actor Ann McCrea is 92. Actor Tom Courtenay is 86. Former CBS newsman Bob Schieffer is 86. Actor Diane Baker is 85. Actor Karen Grassle is 81. Former talk show host Sally Jessy Raphael is 81. Former professional wrestler Ric Flair is 74. Humorist Jack Handey is 74. Movie director Neil Jordan is 73. Rock singer-musician/actor John Doe (X) is 70. Rock musician Dennis Diken (The Smithereens) is 66. Rock singer-musician Mike Peters (The Alarm; Big Country) is 64. Comedian Carrot Top is 58. Model and actor Veronica Webb is 58. Actor Alexis Denisof is 57. Actor Tea Leoni is 57. Actor Lesley Boone is 55. Actor Sean Astin is 52. Singer Daniel Powter is 52. Latin singer Julio Iglesias Jr. is 50. R&B singer Justin Jeffrey is 50. Actor Anson Mount is 50. Comedian-actor Chelsea Handler is 48. Actor Rashida Jones is 47.

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Country singer Shawna Thompson (Thompson Square) is 45. Actor Justin Berfield is 37. Actors James and Oliver Phelps ("Harry Potter" movies) are 37. Actor Jameela Jamil is 37. Rock musician Erik Haager (Carolina Liar) is 36.