

Groton Daily Independent

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Flags at Half-Staff in Honor of Former U.S. Senator James Abourezk

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Kristi Noem ordered that flags be flown at half-staff at statewide from sunrise until sunset today, in honor of former U.S. Senator James Abourezk. He served in the United States Senate from 1973-1979 and was the first Arab American Senator in American history.

A private family service will take place, and Senator Abourezk will be buried at Black Hills National Cemetery today.

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

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

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Groton Community Calendar

Friday, March 3

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

Senior Menu: Breaded Cod, rice pilaf, pea and cheese salad, apple crisp, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Eggs and sausage.

School Lunch: Chicken quesadilla, Santa Fe Corn.

6:30 p.m.: Boys Region 1A - Milbank at Groton

Middle School All-State Band in Huron

Saturday, March 4

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.

Middle School All-State Band in Huron

Emmanuel Lutheran: Land & Legacy at Bethlehem Lutheran, Aberdeen, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Sunday, March 5

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

The Bulletin by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

- Investigators seized knives, black gloves, criminology books, and other items from the Pennsylvania family home of Bryan Kohberger, newly released court documents show.
- The Biden Administration has added dozens of companies in China and Russia to its trade blacklist over their alleged financial support for military programs, which is likely to further escalate U.S.-China tensions.
- Calls to boycott Walgreens are growing after the pharmacy store chain announced that it will no longer sell abortion pills even in several states where they remain legal.
- Secretary of State Andrew Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov came face-to-face for the first time in months amid tense exchanges at the G20 in India. Blinken told delegates that the meeting had been marred by Russia's "unprovoked and unjustified war," while Lavrov accused Washington of "blackmail and threats".
- Pakistani football and hockey player Shahida Raza, 29, is confirmed to have been among the 62 people killed in Italy's migrant boat crash on Sunday.
- Yosemite National Park has been closed indefinitely following record-breaking snowfall of up to 15 feet in some areas. The National Park Service says there is "no estimated date for reopening".
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, the war-ravaged eastern city of Bakhmut may fall to Russian forces, with Kyiv officials saying its military is contemplating pulling troops back from the city that has become a symbol of Ukrainian resistance.

- The Justice Department has urged an appeals court to reject Donald Trump's claim that he is immune from lawsuits over his role in the Jan. 6 Capitol riots, saying "no part of a president's official responsibilities includes the incitement of imminent private violence."

- Pro-democracy activist and 2022 Nobel Peace Prize winner Ales Bialiatski was sentenced to 10 years in prison after being convicted of funding opposition protests in Belarus. Bialiatski founded the Viasna human rights group. Three other top figures of the organization were also sentenced.

Bates Township Notice of Caucus

Bates Township

BATES TOWNSHIP ANNUAL MEETING NOTICE

Bates Township will hold its annual meeting and election on Tuesday, March 7th, 2023 at the home of the Clerk, 14523 409th Ave, Conde.

Election of officers and business meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m.

We will be receiving bids for road maintenance and gravel. Please mail bids to

Betty Geist, Bates Township Clerk, 14523 409th Ave., Conde, SD 57434 prior to meeting date.

Betty Geist, Township Clerk

Published February 22, March 1, 2023, at the total approximate cost of \$21.85 and may be viewed free of charge at www.sdpublicnotices.com. 21938

GDILIVE.COM

REGION 1A BOYS' BASKETBALL AT GROTON

Groton Area vs. Milbank

Friday, March 3, 2023, 6:30 p.m.

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 Ford

Harry Implement

John Sieh Agency

Locke Electric

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Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc.

S & S Lumber & Hardware Hank

Spanier Harvesting & Trucking

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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Gov. Noem Signs Bills into Law

PIERRE, S.D. – Yesterday, Governor Noem signed the following 5 bills into law:

SB 19 makes an appropriation for the payment of extraordinary litigation expenses;

SB 25 makes an appropriation to reimburse health care professionals who have complied with the requirements for health care recruitment assistance programs and declares;

SB 150 adds provisions regarding construction and maintenance of livestock pipelines on highways;

HB 1046 provides free tuition at Board of Technical Education institutions for children or spouses of members of the South Dakota National Guard disabled or deceased in the line of duty; and,

HB 1184 revises provisions related to the One-Call Notification Board.

Governor Noem has signed 78 bills into law and vetoed 1 this legislative session.

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Senate passes property tax credits, setting up final-week scramble over tax relief

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MARCH 2, 2023 4:35 PM

The state Senate complicated the Legislature's tax-relief debate Thursday by approving legislation that would provide homeowners with an annual tax credit payment.

The Senate passed a bill 31-2 that would send \$425 to South Dakota homeowners each year as a way to relieve their property tax burden. The annual cost to the state's general fund is estimated at just over \$100 million.

That's roughly the same cost as the grocery tax repeal Gov. Kristi Noem proposed during her reelection campaign and the overall general sales and use tax reduction — from 4.5% to 4.2% — that's awaiting a Senate vote after passing the House. A legislative committee rejected Noem's grocery tax bill earlier this session, and she has since threatened to oppose the budget legislators will send her if it doesn't include the grocery tax repeal. All of the proposals have been enabled by a state budget surplus.

Merits debated

The property tax bill would not affect the revenues that schools, counties and other local governments rely on, said Sen. Casey Crabtree, R-Madison and Senate sponsor of the bill, because the payments would come from the state while taxpayers would continue paying their local property taxes in full.

House Majority Leader Will Mortenson, R-Pierre, introduced the legislation back in January as a nearly empty and vaguely worded "vehicle bill." Representatives passed it through the House in that form last month, allowing it to be wholly amended with new text this week in the Senate.

A separate property tax reduction proposal was originally filed as a House bill, but the House Republican Caucus rejected that, along with Noem's bill, in favor of the general sales tax reduction. The new property tax credit bill now heads back to the House for consideration next week, which is the last full week of the session.

The property tax credit payments would benefit 245,302 South Dakota families, Crabtree told legislators on the Senate floor. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, South Dakota has 345,779 family units, so the tax cut would apply to about 70% of families.

Crabtree added that he prefers property tax relief for owner-occupied homes because it only benefits South Dakotans. The grocery and general sales tax cuts would also benefit tourists and out-of-state businesses.

But Sen. Tom Pischke, R-Dell Rapids, said supporting the property tax credit payments and not supporting the general sales tax cut ignores the "promise" legislators made to reduce the state sales tax rate when it was raised in 2016 to support higher teacher salaries (South Dakota remains 50th in the nation for average teacher pay).

Issue comes to a head next week

Noem has not only threatened to pull budget support if lawmakers don't pass her food-tax repeal, but also vetoed a bill Thursday that would allow local governments to increase hotel lodging taxes, posting on Twitter that "we are cutting taxes this legislative session, not increasing them."

And earlier in the session she told South Dakota Public Broadcasting she'd rather see a tax cut broadly applied to consumers than a property tax cut.

"I just don't understand why they only want to help certain people and not the rest of the families in the state," Noem told SDPB. "That only helps the wealthier individuals that own property in the state. So, if you've got a single mom out there renting an apartment, trying to put food on the table for her kids, that brings her no relief whatsoever."

Crabtree said he is confident legislators will agree on "tax relief that people can be proud of."

"Do we maybe disagree slightly on what this tax cut relief would look like? Yeah, well, I think that's a good part of the process," Crabtree told reporters at the weekly Republican leadership press conference Thursday. "And we'll work through that. I think what we'll end up with is some sort of relief for the folks of South Dakota at the end of this in a big, significant way."

The Legislature is taking Friday off, and the state House of Representatives will reconvene at 9 a.m. Central on Monday. The Senate still plans to meet at its regularly scheduled time of 1 p.m. next week, which is the last week of the legislative session until lawmakers return March 27 to consider Noem's vetoes.

While legislators finish their work on tax relief, there's also a pending effort by petition circulators to place a measure on the ballot next year that would repeal the state sales tax on food.

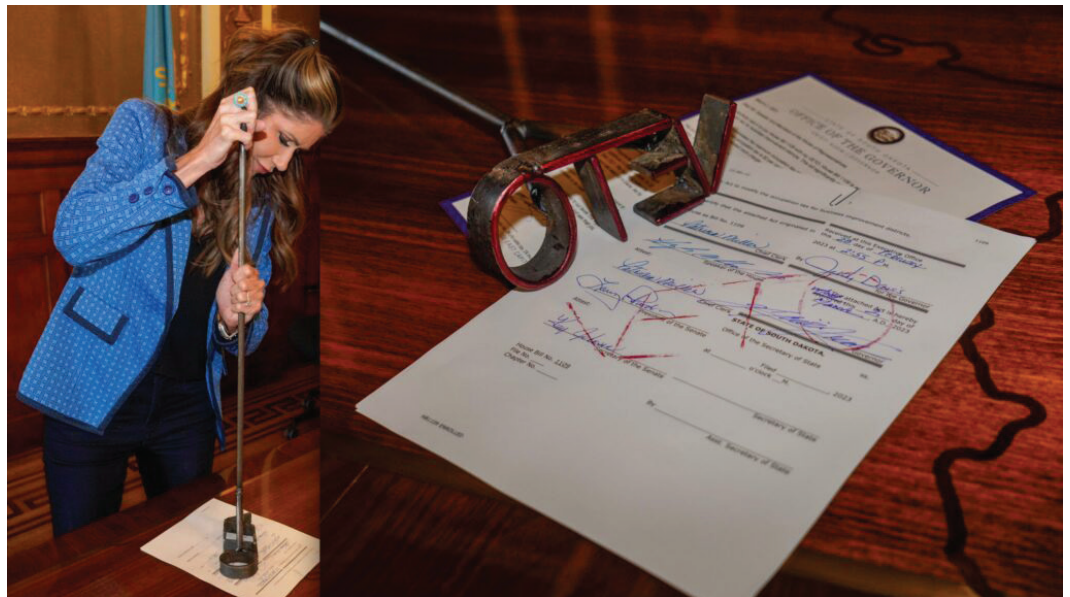
Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan whose work has won national and regional awards. She's spent five years as a journalist with experience reporting on workforce, development and business issues within the state.

Noem issues first veto of legislative session against optional hotel tax increase

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 2, 2023 4:14 PM

Stamping the bill with a custom V-E-T-O livestock brand dipped in red ink, Gov. Kristi Noem has issued her first veto of this year's legislative session. The bill would allow hotels and motels in "business improvement districts," or BIDs, to raise the per-room tax they charge.

Businesses can create a BID to self-impose an extra tax and use the revenue for special projects, such as tourism promotion or downtown beautification efforts. BIDs that include hotels can currently charge up to \$2 per night in extra taxes, beyond regular state and local taxes.



Governor Kristi Noem uses a custom branding iron dipped in ink to issue her first veto of the 2023 legislative session. (Courtesy of the Office of the Governor)

House Bill 1109 would increase the maximum tax to \$4 per night or 4% of the rented room charge.

"The occupation tax is not just paid by out-of-state travelers," Noem said in a veto message to the Legislature. "South Dakota residents are traveling every day for business, medical visits, youth activities, weddings – the list goes on. South Dakotans vacation in South Dakota, as well."

Noem also rejected the argument that South Dakota should follow the example of other states that have raised maximum BID taxes.

"That shouldn't dictate what we do in South Dakota," she said.

Sen. Tim Reed, R-Brookings, is the prime sponsor of the bill in the Senate. Reed said in his eight years serving previously as Brookings' mayor, he saw how using BID funds to recruit entertainment for one venue, for example, can spill over and benefit other businesses in the district.

Reed said it's important to note the bill does not require BIDs to raise the fee. It only allows them to consider it.

"I'm disappointed that the governor would veto a bill that gives communities more local control," Reed said. "Communities want to be empowered to do this. They want to improve tourism."

Reed said he hopes to override the veto but added, "I realize it's going to be a pretty big lift in the Senate."

The bill's prime sponsor in the House, Rep. Becky Drury, R-Rapid City, fears the bill may be dead.

"I do not think that I have the votes to do a veto override," Drury said. "But it was worth bringing the conversation and getting it as far as we did."

Overriding a governor's veto requires a two-thirds majority vote of the Legislature. Lawmakers will finish the main run of the current legislative session March 9 and then return March 27 to the Capitol in Pierre to consider vetoes.

Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden, a rancher, made Noem's veto branding iron several years ago.

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.

COMMENTARY

A doctor's perspective: Here's how Sen. Thune can support South Dakota farmers

RONALD COHEN ~ MARCH 2, 2023 4:13 PM

South Dakota's Sen. John Thune recently told the PBS News Hour, "This is a farm bill year. And it's an issue that historically has been bipartisan. There are things that we can do there to support those who feed not only our country, but the world."

I'm a doctor, not a farmer, but the farm bill is important to me because food is medicine and health-promoting foods come from farms. Lentils, for example, are grown extensively in South Dakota and they provide you with protein, fiber, iron, and other nutrients.

Sen. Thune is a member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, which is the committee that shapes the farm bill. Sen. Cory Booker of New Jersey is also on the committee, and he has ambitious plans to fix some major flaws in our food production system. If Sen. Thune wants to "support" those who feed us, he should wholeheartedly support Sen. Booker's proposed reforms.

In previously proposed legislation, Sen. Booker floated a concept that will probably wind up in the current farm bill — farmers with large-scale livestock operations who wish to transition to growing food crops should get government funding and support to do so.

This positive trend is already underway. Tom Butler, for example, is a hog farmer in North Carolina who is working with his son to transition to growing mushrooms. Tom Butler's father was a tobacco farmer and when Tom took over the farm, tobacco was on the way out. So Tom transitioned to hog farming, which seemed more profitable at the time. Now, it makes sense that Tom's son, Will, wants to roll with the times and phase out the vast hog waste lagoon and other problematic aspects of industrial pork production.

In North Carolina, the voluntary hog farm buyout program was extremely popular with farmers who wished to transition to growing crops. Gov. Roy Cooper's proposed budget sets aside serious cash to re-

start this program. A similar initiative would probably be popular with farmers in South Dakota, and Sen. Thune should do what he can to make it a reality.

As a doctor, I know that grilling mushroom "steaks" is much more healthful than consuming pork, which is high in saturated fat and has zero fiber. Tasty plant-based foods can help people improve heart health, manage diabetes, maintain a healthy weight, and otherwise improve their health. Can my patients afford these health-promoting foods? Apples, beans, potatoes, watermelons, cucumbers and cabbages are budget friendly, according to the Food Network, and they can all be grown in South Dakota.

Drought is affecting many parts of South Dakota, but according to the Yankton Daily Press and Dakotan, "Pulse crops, which include peas, lentils and chickpeas, can have a good fit into cropping systems in South Dakota, especially in areas where precipitation is more limited such as central and western South Dakota."

During times of drought, ranchers in South Dakota and elsewhere have been forced to reduce their herds. If they would like to stay on the land and transition to water-wise crops, they should receive the support that Sen. Thune mentioned.

Large-scale livestock operations require vast amounts of water, mainly to irrigate grains and grasses for feed, plus water for drinking and processing. It's much more efficient in terms of water use to grow crops for people to eat directly. According to the Guardian, growing vegetables uses about 322 liters of water per kilogram, while it takes about 15,415 liters of water to produce one kilogram of beef.

In South Dakota, about 1,614,670 acres are devoted to alfalfa, which is a water-intensive crop grown mainly to feed livestock. Alfalfa growers who would like to transition to growing water-wise crops like lentils should be able to tap into the \$4 billion for drought relief, in the Inflation Reduction Act. Ranchers who wish to phase out livestock should receive funding to plant drought resistant hazelnut trees, or other food crops that can provide income.

In South Dakota, there are about 442 large-scale livestock operations, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, these industrial livestock facilities contribute to climate change because they generate methane and other planet-warming gases. In South Dakota, climate change contributes to drought and wildfires.

If Sen. Thune cares about supporting farmers, conserving water, addressing climate change and improving the health of South Dakotans, he'll support Sen. Booker's vision to phase out factory farms.

Dr. Ronald Cohen is a physician in Sioux Falls.

Remaining abortion clinics face more challenges if abortion pill limited by Texas judge

BY: SHALINA CHATLANI - MARCH 2, 2023 3:30 PM

JACKSON, MISS. — The Pink House — otherwise known as Jackson Women's Health Organization — was the center of the U.S. Supreme Court case that overturned the federal right to abortion in June. Today, the clinic, the only abortion clinic to serve Mississippi and the greater area for years, is shuttered. On a hot day in February, there are no protests outside the clinic's gates, the air is still and quiet, the iconic walls on the outside have been painted white, and the medical equipment has been removed. A new owner has moved in and has begun converting it into a consignment shop for luxury goods.

"I worry about those women a lot, that they no longer have means to health care in the state of Mississippi," said Diane Derzis, former owner of the Pink House.

The Pink House is just one of dozens of clinics across the South that have closed or stopped offering abortion services in the face of trigger abortion bans that went into effect right after *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

Derzis said selling the building that housed the clinic was a "business decision." She said the Jackson clinic's operations, medical equipment, and furniture have moved to Las Cruces, New Mexico, in the face of Mississippi's 15 week abortion ban. She also has clinics in places like Columbus, Georgia, and Richmond, Virginia. Now, many people in the South are traveling out of state to seek an abortion — either in-clinic

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or via medication abortion, she said.

Derzis says she's getting ready to open a clinic in Chicago, Illinois.

But all those clinics and others still operating could soon face new restrictions as a federal judge in Texas decides on a lawsuit filed by anti-abortion groups that directs the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to withdraw its approval of mifepristone — a widely used drug used in medication abortion that's been around for decades.

"I think that women need to pick up their guns and take to the streets, and I'm serious. This is a crusade against women," Derzis said.

A broad lawsuit that leaves room for questions

Medication abortions account for over half of all abortions in the United States, according to the research group Guttmacher Institute. A ruling in favor of the anti-abortion groups would not only make legal abortion more challenging, it would also erase some of the limited options left for people in states where there are strict abortion bans. These restrictions are most prominent across the southeastern United States, where maternal health care deserts are growing.

The likely immediate impact would be that manufacturers would not be allowed to ship mifepristone anywhere in the United States, and providers would no longer be able to prescribe it. It's still unclear what could happen with misoprostol, a drug that's used in medication abortion as well as to treat ulcers.

The typical regimen used in medication abortion involves the use of mifepristone and misoprostol, and has been prescribed by doctors since the 2000s.

Elizabeth Nash, principal policy associate at Guttmacher, says it's likely that only misoprostol would be used for medication abortions — which Nash says has been done in other countries. But she says, the issue is that the lawsuit is broad in some areas, so there are still a lot of unknowns.

"How many providers would switch to a misoprostol regimen? Not every provider would do that. Secondly, it's unclear how patients would feel about using a misoprostol-only regimen especially because it has a higher dosage. They may be asking for more procedural abortions and that may make it harder because in-clinic abortion takes more time and resources for clinic staff," Nash said.

Erik Baptist, senior counsel with the Alliance Defending Freedom, one of the groups that filed the lawsuit, said the lawsuit also asks the FDA to ban the use of misoprostol in medication abortion.

"This lawsuit focused on the FDA's approval of both mifepristone and misoprostol for its use in medication abortion. Whether a doctor could approve the use of these drugs off-label is not in the scope of this lawsuit," he said. "I think it's important to note that this lawsuit doesn't target the use of [misoprostol] for benign issues such as Cushing's disease or gastric ulcers."

The plaintiffs argue that the FDA did not follow protocol to evaluate whether these drugs were safe to be prescribed for medication abortion. Although, numerous studies have shown the regimen to be safe and effective.

"We will evaluate the court's decision no matter how he may rule and determine what to do from there. We are currently focused on prevailing at the district court," Baptist said.

Clinics strapped to provide care, patients with fewer options

While it's still unclear what could happen after the ruling, what is known is that people in abortion restricted states who used to go to clinics like the Pink House in Jackson are already having a tougher time seeking legal abortion.

"People are still needing and wanting abortion services. It's just making it harder for Mississippians. It's more expensive having to travel farther and take longer periods off of work. Some folks have had to fly to either Florida and New York. Some of these people are experiencing their first time being on a plane," said Michelle Colón, executive director of Sisters Helping Every Woman Rise and Organize (SHERo), an abortion-rights organization that helps connect people of color to legal abortion services.

In Florida, abortion is illegal after 15 weeks, although soon that could be reduced. In New York, that timeframe is through viability of a fetus, which is about 24 weeks of pregnancy.

Clinics in northern states are already feeling the pressure of the increased demand, said Mara Pliskin,

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patient navigation manager at Planned Parenthood in Illinois.

"We're in the trenches. We are doing the best we can and have systems in place to get scheduled as fast as we can and get them here," Pliskin said. "We hear patients say, 'I don't know how to make this happen.'... We've definitely seen an increase in patients from the South — Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Florida, all of these states."

Pliskin says many patients are facing dangerous situations, especially if they are in states where they have to be mindful of confidentiality or dealing with issues like intimate partner violence.

Pliskin said that like many abortion clinics around the country, clinics in Illinois have long waitlists and resources are stretched. And, those waitlists will likely get longer if medication abortion becomes restricted, as more patients will opt for the surgical procedure.

In fact, data from Planned Parenthood Illinois shows that for patients from Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida, 38% had a medication abortion and 62% had an in-clinic procedure between Nov. 1, 2022 to Feb. 28, 2023. Meanwhile, for the overall abortion population at that clinic in the same time period, 54% had medication abortion and 46% had an in-clinic abortion for the same time period.

"We will continue to offer medication abortion with misoprostol. There is already a method for it. The only thing is that it will take longer — it's more medication over a longer period of time and it just makes it that much more difficult for people who travel," Pliskin said. "That means patients will have to stay in Illinois longer ... before they can return home to a state where it's illegal or restricted."

Even when it comes to telehealth, Pliskin says the patient still has to come to Illinois when they are actually taking the medication. That means patients will also have to spend more money and time, adding to the emotional toll and financial strain they may be experiencing, said Colón. In turn, that makes it more difficult for advocates too.

"It's put a burden on all of the abortion funds that are in partnership with supporting folks from Mississippi," she said. "When somebody calls you and they need you at the drop of a hat ... it's hard and it's just wrong and sad. This is torture and government sanctioned oppression. But we're doing what we can."

A future of more health and legal safety risks around reproductive care

Anti-abortion groups argue that medication abortion is unsafe. Terri Herring, leader of pro-life group Choose Life Mississippi, says women's lives are at risk.

"Abortion pills without confirmation of gestational age and consultation with a physician are dangerous for women," Herring said. "We need to continue to educate women about the dangers of abortion on both their physical and emotional health."

Other groups say they're prepared to help people who have no choice but to give birth.

"I think that the pro-life movement has shown that we are here for women and we will continue to support women whether they are pursuing abortion or not," said Sarah Zagorski, a spokeswoman for Louisiana Right to Life. "Of course, there are improvements that can be made, but I think we've come a long way in supporting women in crisis."

But reproductive health care in some southern states is lacking, causing some of the highest maternal mortality rates in the country, especially for people of color. CDC data from 2020 show that while the national rate for maternal mortality is 20.4 maternal deaths per 100,000 births, the rate is 30.2 in Mississippi, 31.8 in Louisiana, and 36.2 in Alabama.

"This is about control. This is about obliterating liberation of not only women, but of marginalized Mississippians, Black and brown Mississippians, queer Mississippians, and low income, poor Mississippians," Colón said, adding that people who aren't able to have a child will seek abortion anyway, but that the process will be much less safe for them.

There are also more legal risks ahead for both providers and patients in the wake of a potential ruling to limit medication abortion, said Kelsea McLain, deputy director of the Yellowhammer Fund in Alabama.

Alabama's abortion law is highly restrictive and criminalizes anyone that aids a person seeking an abortion, McLain said. Yellowhammer has had to effectively stop most of its abortion-related services. They can only provide information that's already available in the media.

"We really effectively can't do anything since the Dobbs decision ... we've had to lean heavily into our programs that support new parents," said McLain.

McLain said it's been tough hearing from people who they aren't able to help in specific ways. The other concern, she says, is that there's a pre-filed bill in Alabama that could make abortion akin to homicide.

"The abortion haver would be charged with the crime," she said, noting that the ruling on medication abortion could open up room to investigate people who have miscarriages to see whether they used medication or they had it naturally.

"We are unsure looking at a future where multiple forms of pregnancy loss are facing criminalization or investigation," she said. "So people are going to need to be more clandestine and intentional about when they visit a doctor and disclose if they are pregnant."

Shalina is the national health care reporter for the States Newsroom. She is focused on in-depth accountability journalism that looks at the changing landscape of health care infrastructure in the nation, and whether local legislatures are prioritizing underserved communities.

Child poverty dropped to a record low last year. A new report shows how to keep it that way.

BY: CASEY QUINLAN - MARCH 2, 2023 2:55 PM

The expanded child tax credit that families received in 2021 helped reduce child poverty across the country, but particularly in the South where families lack a sufficient safety net, according to a paper released on Wednesday. The report by the Hamilton Project, the Brookings Institution's economic policy initiative, comes as some Democrats appear ready to attempt another deal to revive the credit.

The analysis looked at the effects of the expanded child tax credit by grouping states together by factors such as their cost of living and poverty levels. Researchers found that the smallest reductions in child poverty came in states that had a high cost of living and low poverty rates even before tax liabilities and income sources such as SNAP, SSI, and unemployment insurance were considered. But even in those states, child poverty rates were reduced 40% after the expansion of the child tax credit.

The credit, which was part of the American Rescue Plan Act, not only boosted the amount of money families received (from \$2,000 to \$3,600 per child under age 6 and to \$3,000 for all others) but also extended the age of qualifying children to 17. It also called for the credit to go to families with little or no income — people who previously did not earn enough money to qualify for a child tax credit.

It's been credited with helping to bring the country's child poverty rate down to a record low of 5.2% last year. If Congress hadn't approved the expanded child tax credit in 2021, another 2.1 million children would have been in poverty that year, according to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities.

"The poverty reductions [across the U.S.] were still pretty widespread and meaningful," said Bradley Hardy, a nonresident senior fellow in Economic Studies at the Brookings Institution and associate professor at Georgetown University, one of the authors of the paper.

Last year, Democrats tried to reach a deal to keep the expanded child tax credit by tying it to support of the extension of a business tax credit for research and development spending, but did not succeed. Now they appear to be regrouping.

CNBC reported last month that members in both the House and Senate were planning to introduce R&D tax legislation, which could give lawmakers an opportunity to push for some kind of expanded child tax credit.

Roman Rodriguez, the press secretary for Rep. Ron Estes, a Republican from Kansas, confirmed that Estes plans to introduce a bill on the R&D tax credit but did not provide a timeline.

"This R&D provision is critical for American jobs and our economy, and I am actively working with my colleagues to ensure this legislation can be introduced with bipartisan support soon," Estes said in a statement to States Newsroom.

New Hampshire Sen. Maggie Hassan, a Democrat, is also reported to be working on a draft bill.

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Researchers said that the expanded child tax credit “yielded widespread reductions in poverty across states” in 2021. Every category of states analyzed had significant falls in child poverty:

States with a high cost of living and low poverty experienced a 40% reduction in child poverty, and included Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, Oregon and Washington.

States with a high cost of living and high poverty rates saw child poverty fall 41%. Those states included California, Florida, Nevada, New York and Texas.

States with a lower cost of living and low poverty rates had a 47% drop in child poverty. Many midwest and mountain states — Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Montana and Wisconsin — fell into this category.

The largest drop — 51% — was in 16 states that have a lower cost of living and high rates of poverty, including Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana and Tennessee.

“You do have relatively higher poverty reductions in these sorts of states, with families that were previously left behind, or states with higher poverty and relatively lower costs,” said Hardy, with the Brookings Institution.

“There’s other evidence to show these are the states that typically have the weakest safety net protections,” Hardy said. “... I think it amplifies the importance of some federal level programs that can be implemented.”

The authors said that the biggest drops in child poverty tended to be in states with a lack of generous policies that benefit moderate and low-income people, such as a dearth of state earned income tax credits and higher minimum wages as well as states where Temporary Assistance for Needy Families reaches far fewer families. Sixteen out of 20 states that haven’t raised the minimum wage higher than the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 have a child poverty rate above 12%.

Groups of children that did not benefit as much from the policies before the expansion of the child tax credit were children in larger families, children in rural areas, Black children, and children in families with unmarried mothers, according to research from Columbia University’s Center on Poverty & Social Policy.

“The results confirm that child poverty reductions related to the CTC are larger in states with a higher proportion of children who were left behind,” according to the Hamilton Project. “The most striking differences are in states with a higher proportion of unmarried mothers, rural households, and large families; in those states, child poverty reduction hovered around 50 percent.”

A potential compromise

Authors of a separate Hamilton Project paper also released on Wednesday have proposed a possible compromise on the child tax credit that they said would address some of policymakers’ criticisms, such as the argument that a fully refundable child tax credit for parents with no earnings would shrink the labor supply. Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) pushed for a work requirement and \$60,000 family income cap in 2021 and last year, Sen. Mitt Romney (R-UT) proposed his own version of an expanded child tax credit that wouldn’t allow families without earnings to receive any credit. The Center for Budget and Policies Priorities’ 2022 analysis on the Romney approach criticized that plan because some research has suggested that making the full credit available to parents would not have a large effect on their work participation.

Under the proposal outlined by the Hamilton Project, an enhanced child tax credit would again offer \$3,600 for each child under 6 years old and \$3,000 for children 6 to 17 years old but families with no earnings would receive only half the full credit amount per child. There would also be a faster phase-in rate than current law provides so that “for each additional \$100 of taxable income, tax filers are refunded an additional \$30 per child eligible for the tax credit.”

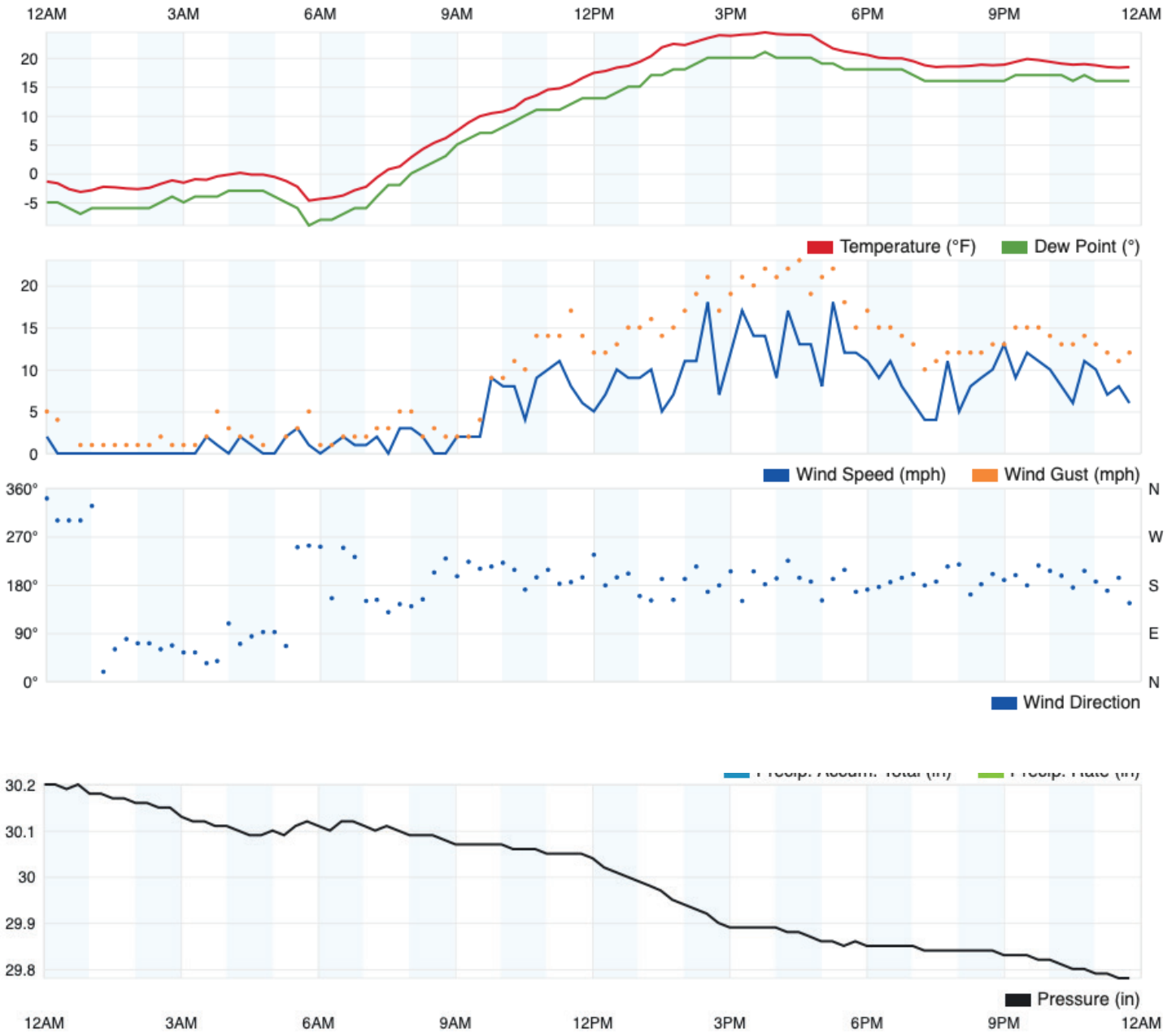
“Withholding the credit amount completely for children whose parents have no qualifying earnings would mean prioritizing labor supply incentives over the urgent needs around child well-being,” the authors of the paper wrote. “That choice is counter-productive, given the well-documented benefits — including greater educational attainment and earnings — that are associated with delivering additional income to children from low-income families.”

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

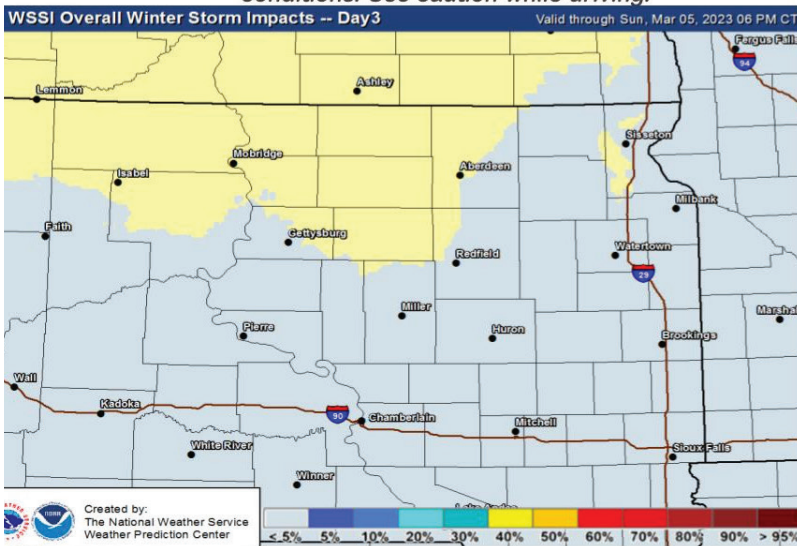
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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
						
Partly Sunny	Patchy Fog	Patchy Fog then Sunny	Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Snow	Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow	Chance Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow	Slight Chance Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow
High: 35 °F	Low: 13 °F	High: 32 °F	Low: 15 °F	High: 33 °F	Low: 20 °F	High: 27 °F



Chance Of Accumulating Snow Returning Late Saturday-Monday March 3, 2023 4:35 AM

Likelihood of at least Minor Impacts through 6 PM Sunday
 Minor Impacts: *Expect a few inconveniences to daily life. Winter driving conditions. Use caution while driving.*



What We Know

- Confidence increasing that a winter weather system will bring light to moderate snow and gusty winds across the Northern Plains Sunday into Monday
- Ongoing snow chances and colder temps Tuesday-Friday

What We Don't Know

- The exact track of this system and thus the location of heaviest snowfall.
- Right now, accumulating snow looks possible along the ND/SD border extending further north into ND

What You Can Do

Continue to monitor the latest forecast from a reliable source, especially if you have travel plans.

Created by:
 The National Weather Service
 Weather Prediction Center

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

National Weather Service
 Aberdeen, SD

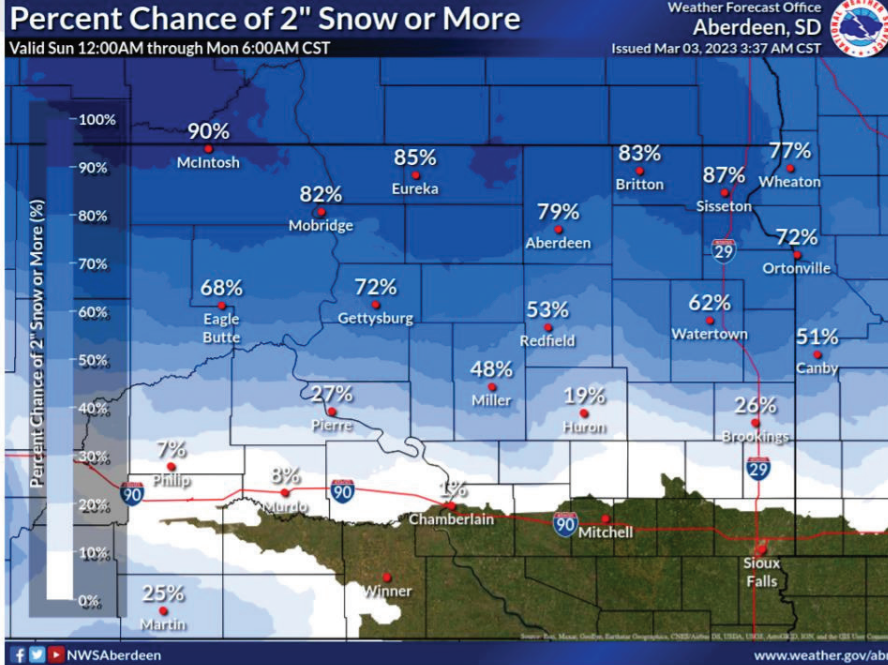
A low pressure system will bring more snow to the area Sunday morning through Monday with ongoing chances of snow through next week.

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Probability of Snow Exceedance Sunday AM - Monday AM March 3, 2023 4:01 AM

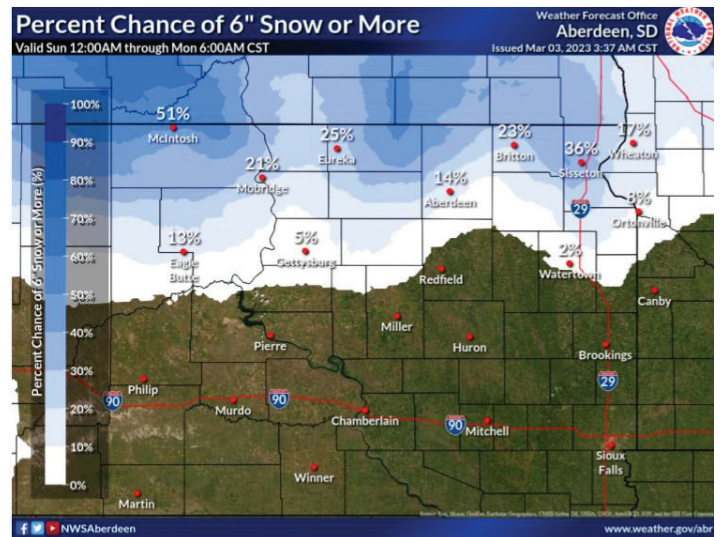
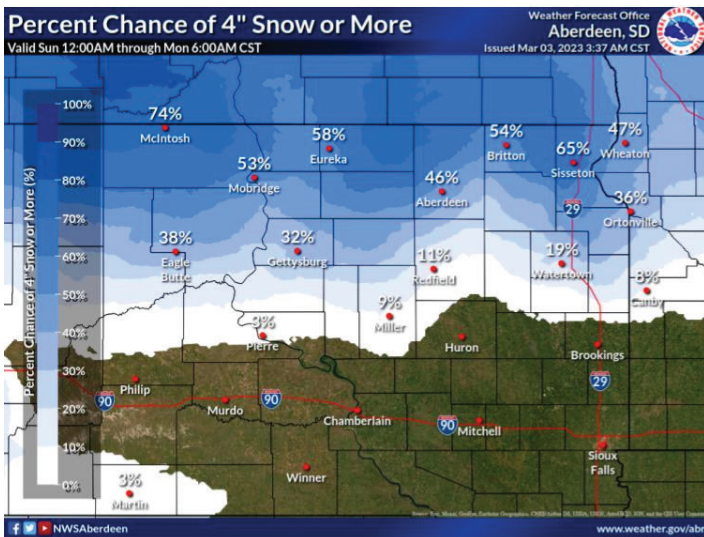


National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



Probability of Snow Exceedance Sunday AM - Monday AM March 3, 2023 4:01 AM



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 24.4 °F at 3:45 PM

Low Temp: -4.7 °F at 5:45 AM

Wind: 23 mph at 4:30 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 17 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 72 in 1905

Record Low: -20 in 2019

Average High: 35

Average Low: 13

Average Precip in March.: 0.07

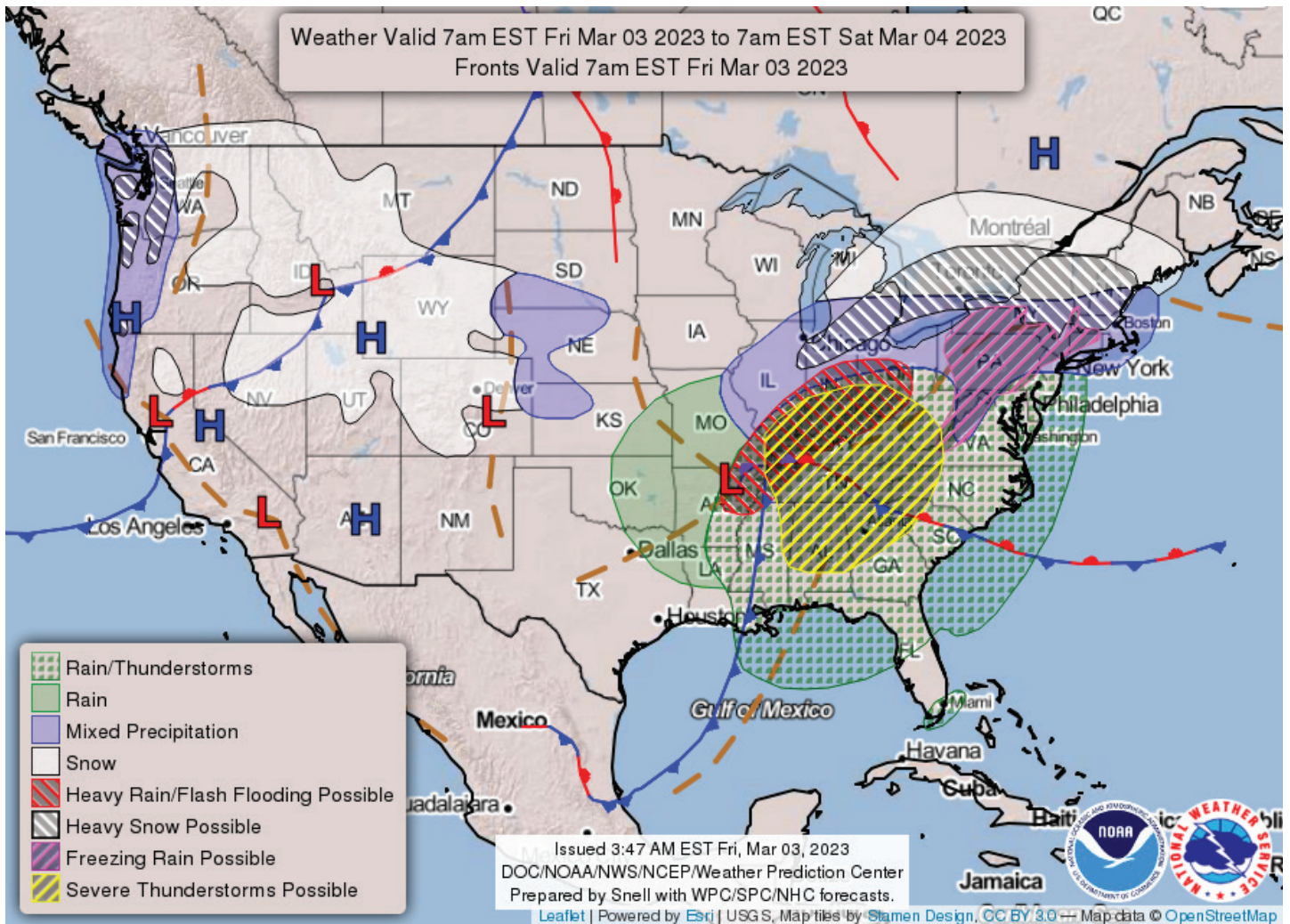
Precip to date in March.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.24

Precip Year to Date: 1.58

Sunset Tonight: 6:23:13 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:03:34 AM



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Today in Weather History

March 3, 1994: The melting of a very high snowpack resulted in flooding along the James River and other lowlands and farmland. Widespread problems included damaged roads, washed-out culverts, and flood damage to homes, especially basement flooding.

1896: The temperature in downtown San Francisco, California, fell to 33 degrees, which was the lowest ever for the city in March.

1966: An F5 tornado, which would become known as the "Candlestick Park" tornado, named after a shopping center in south Jackson, was destroyed by the tornado. One of only two documented F5 tornadoes to strike Mississippi in the 20th century. The worst damage occurred in parts of Hinds, Rankin, Scott, and Leake counties, where 57 people were killed and over 500 were injured.

1980 - A coastal storm produced 25 inches of snow at Elizabeth City, NC, and 30 inches at Cape Hatteras NC. At Miami FL the mercury dipped to 32 degrees. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1983 - The last of a series of storms to strike the California coast finally came to an end. Waves fifteen to twenty feet high pounded the coast for two days, and in a four day period up to 18 inches of rain drenched the Los Angeles and Santa Barbara area. On the morning of the first, thunderstorms spawned two tornadoes which moved through the Los Angeles area. (Storm Data)

1987 - A storm brought heavy rain and gale force winds to Washington and Oregon. Quillayute WA received 2.67 inches of rain in 24 hours, and winds gusted to 60 mph at Astoria OR. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A small but intense low pressure system roared across west central Mississippi at 90 mph early in the morning. A tornado in southern Mississippi picked up an automobile, carried it 150 feet, and tossed it through the brick wall of an unoccupied retirement home. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Wintry weather prevailed from the southern Rockies to the Upper Great Lakes. Neganee MI received 19 inches of snow, and up to 24 inches of snow blanketed Colorado. Blizzard conditions were reported in Minnesota. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - An upper level weather disturbance produced snow in the Colorado Rockies, with eight inches reported at Winter Park, and a storm moving off the Pacific Ocean began to spread rain and snow across the western U.S. March continued to start off like a lamb elsewhere around the country. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1991: A significant ice storm coated parts of central and northwestern New York State with up to two inches of ice. The damage totaled \$375 million. It was the most costly natural disaster ever in the state up until that time. Nearly half a million people were without power at the height of the storm, and many would not see their power restored until the 16th.

2003 - It was a day of temperature extremes. Miami reached a high temperature of 90 degrees, the earliest observed 90 degree temperature since March 5, 1964. Meanwhile Marquette, MI, dropped to 30 degrees below zero, the lowest temperature ever recorded in the city in March.

2016: A deadly severe weather event affected the Southeastern United States on March 3, 2019. Over 6 hours, 41 tornadoes touched down across portions of Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina. The strongest was an EF4 tornado that devastated rural communities from Beauregard, Alabama, through Smiths Station, Alabama, to Talbotton, Georgia, killing 23 people and injuring at least 100 others.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

IS YOUR LIGHT SHINING?

It was in the darkness of night that we called on a mechanic to fix a problem with our car. As he worked under the hood, his helper stood by holding a flashlight so he could see what he was doing.

After a short amount of time, the helper became bored, began to watch our dog and turned the light away from the problem the mechanic was repairing.

"Shine your light on the engine," demanded the mechanic. "That's why you're here."

Jesus said that His followers were like "a city on a mountain, glowing in the night, for all to see." What an interesting picture to consider.

If you have ever flown in an airplane at night and looked out of the window, you have no doubt been fascinated to see the lights of the cities below. If the night is clear, their light cannot be hidden. Their "glow" can be seen for miles in every direction.

What is true of the lights of those cities can be true of the Christian. We always have the opportunity to "glow" like those lights for Christ. As His witnesses in His world, we are to be known for the "light" we can provide to those looking through the darkness of this world for directions to Christ, our Savior. Our faith must be seen if we are to have any value to the lost who are looking for their way in the world. Jesus said, "Don't hide your light, let it shine!"

Prayer: Help us, Jesus, to be the light You planned us to be in Your world. May our light shine brightly so that our words and deeds will lead and guide others to You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden." Matthew 5:14



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

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2023 Community Events

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.28.23

14 16 40 52 59 13

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$167,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 42 Mins 28
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.01.23

8 14 17 38 41 7

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$38,760,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 42
DRAW: Mins 28 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.02.23

10 13 33 40 47 15

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 12 Mins 29
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.01.23

10 12 14 30 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$73,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 42
DRAW: Mins 28 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.01.23

7 12 16 17 39 22

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 41
DRAW: Mins 28 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.01.23

2 9 28 36 53 4

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$161,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 41
DRAW: Mins 28 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class A SoDak 16=

Flandreau 47, St. Thomas More 38

Hamlin 60, Milbank 24

Lakota Tech 68, Dupree 34

Rapid City Christian 60, Miller 47

Red Cloud 63, Garretson 58

Sioux Falls Christian 61, Lennox 29

Sisseton 59, Parkston 46

Wagner 72, Tea Area 52

Class B SoDak 16=

Castlewood 74, Timber Lake 46

Ethan 34, Corsica/Stickney 31

Howard 61, Wessington Springs 40

Jones County 54, Centerville 37

Sully Buttes 44, Harding County 26

Viborg-Hurley 63, Lyman 34

Wall 74, Warner 64

Wolsey-Wessington 58, Leola/Frederick 23

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class A Region 6=

McLaughlin 61, North Central Co-Op 27

Mobridge-Pollock 60, Dupree 48

Class B Region 8=

Lemmon 63, Wakpala 57

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

Noem vetoes plan to let cities hike temporary lodging taxes

By AMANCAI BIRABEN Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Republican Gov. Kristi Noem vetoed a proposal Thursday that would have allowed cities to hike taxes on temporary lodging to help fund events and attractions to draw tourists.

Proponents argued the hike would benefit such things as sports and livestock shows, and that out-of-state tourists would shoulder most of the costs. But Noem and other opponents said the potential hikes could also harm the state's rural residents who travel to cities for doctor appointments, education or recreation.

Noem argued that the state's tourism industry is in good shape and cautioned the taxes could be manipulated to go straight into the pockets of private businesses.

Republican Sen. Tim Reed, who sponsored the bill that narrowly won support in the Senate last week after winning by a large margin in the House, said hotels and campgrounds supported increasing rates because it would help cities thrive. Other supporters pointed out that neighboring states have created business improvement districts and tax hikes would help future business recover from a dearth in tourism

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during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It would allow local government, local lodging industry and local business improvement districts to determine if the current cap should be adjusted," Reed said.

Although proponents said many other states have enacted this kind of tax structure, Noem said that shouldn't influence South Dakota's decisions.

"When South Dakota competes on tax rates, we should compete to be lower — not higher," she said in a statement.

Noem's veto comes a week and a half after lawmakers rejected her proposal to end the state's tax on groceries. The Legislature can override the veto if two-thirds of all members vote to do so.

New crew from US, Russia and UAE arrives at space station

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A new crew arrived at the International Space Station on Friday for a six-month mission, after overcoming trouble with one of the capsule's docking hooks.

The SpaceX capsule and its four astronauts had to wait 65 feet (20 meters) from the orbiting lab, as flight controllers in California scrambled to come up with a software fix.

It's the same problem that cropped up shortly after Thursday's liftoff. Although all 12 hooks on the capsule appeared to be fine, the switch for one of them malfunctioned. SpaceX Mission Control urged patience, telling the U.S., Russian and Emirati astronauts they could stay in this holding pattern for up to two hours.

Once new software commands were relayed, the astronauts received the go-ahead to proceed. In the end, the linkup occurred an hour late as the capsule and space station soared 260 miles (420 kilometers) above the coast of Somalia.

"After a brief scenic detour, welcome to the International Space Station," SpaceX Mission Control radioed. NASA officials agreed the delay added to the anticipation.

The new arrivals include United Arab Emirates' Sultan al-Neyadi, the first astronaut from the Arab world who will spend an extended time in space. Al-Neyadi is only the second person from the UAE to rocket into orbit.

"I can't be happier than this, seeing old friends in space, gathering as a big family. This is the essence of space exploration," al-Neyadi said upon entering the station. "The UAE is taking a great step toward pushing the boundaries of exploration."

Also flying up in the capsule: NASA's Stephen Bowen, a retired Navy submariner who made three space shuttle flights, and Warren "Woody" Hoburg, a space newbie and former research scientist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Andrei Fedyayev, a space rookie who's retired from the Russian Air Force.

SpaceX launched the four astronauts for NASA early Thursday from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. Their flight was delayed a few days by a clogged filter in an ignition fluid line.

The UAE sent its first astronaut, Hazzaa al-Mansoori, to the space station in 2019 aboard a Russian rocket. It had been decades since the first Arab launched in 1985 during NASA's shuttle era. The longest spaceflight by any of them was about a week.

A UAE space official, Hamad al-Mansoori, called the station from Dubai to wish al-Neyadi and his crew a safe and successful mission and said it represented "a huge milestone."

The space station will be home to 11 people for the next week.

The newcomers will replace two NASA astronauts, a Japanese astronaut and a Russian cosmonaut who have been on the station since October and will return in their own SpaceX capsule next week. Two other Russians and an American traveled to the station in September on a Russian Soyuz capsule that had to be replaced because of a leak, pushing their mission to a full year.

Nobel laureate Bialiatski sentenced to 10 years in Belarus

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — A Belarusian court on Friday sentenced Ales Bialiatski, Belarus' top human rights

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advocate and one of the winners of the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize, to 10 years in prison.

Bialiatski and three other top figures of the Viasna human rights center he founded were convicted of financing actions violating public order and smuggling, Viasna reported Friday.

Valiantsin Stefanovich was given a nine-year sentence; Uladzimir Labkovicz seven years; and Dzmitry Salauyou was sentenced to eight years in prison in absentia.

Bialiatski and two of his associates were arrested and jailed after massive protests over a 2020 election that gave authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko a new term in office. Salauyou managed to leave Belarus before he was arrested.

Lukashenko, who has ruled the ex-Soviet country with an iron fist since 1994, unleashed a brutal crack-down on the protesters, the largest in the country's history. More than 35,000 people were arrested, and thousands were beaten by police.

During the trial, which took place behind closed doors, the 60-year-old Bialiatski and his colleagues were held in a caged enclosure in the courtroom. They have spent 21 months behind bars since the arrest.

In the photos from the courtroom released Friday by Belarus' state news agency Belta, Bialiatski, clad in black clothes, looked wan, but calm.

Viasna said after the verdict that all four activists have maintained their innocence.

In his final address to the court, he urged the authorities to "stop the civil war in Belarus." Bialiatski said it became obvious to him from the case files that "the investigators were fulfilling the task they were given: to deprive Viasna human rights advocates of freedom at any cost, destroy Viasna and stop our work."

Exiled Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya denounced the court verdict on Friday as "appalling." "We must do everything to fight against this shameful injustice (and) free them," Tsikhanouskaya wrote in a tweet.

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee, a non-governmental organization working to ensure that human rights are respected in practice, said that it was "shocked by the cynicism behind the sentences that were just issued to our Belarusian friends in Minsk."

"The trial shows how Lukashenko's regime punishes our colleagues, human rights defenders, for standing up against the oppression and injustice," Secretary General Berit Lindeman said in a statement.

Black Vietnam vet at last getting his due: Medal of Honor

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nearly 60 years after he was first recommended for the nation's highest award for bravery during the Vietnam War, retired Col. Paris Davis, one of the first Black officers to lead a Special Forces team in combat, will receive the prestigious Medal of Honor on Friday.

The overdue recognition for the 83-year-old Virginia resident comes after his recommendation for the medal was lost, resubmitted — and then lost again.

It wasn't until 2016 — half a century after Davis risked his life to save some of his men by fighting off the North Vietnamese — that a volunteer group of advocates painstakingly recreated and resubmitted the paperwork.

Some of Davis' supporters believe racism was to blame, but Davis doesn't dwell on it. He said he doesn't know why it has taken decades for his heroism to be recognized.

"Right now I'm overwhelmed," he told The Associated Press in an interview the day before he attends a White House ceremony where President Joe Biden will hang the blue ribbon holding the Medal of Honor around Davis' neck.

"When you're fighting, you're not thinking about this moment," Davis said. "You're just trying to get through that moment."

That moment lasted nearly 19 hours and stretched over two days in mid-June 1965.

Davis, then a captain and commander with the 5th Special Forces Group, engaged in nearly continuous combat during a pre-dawn raid on a North Vietnamese army camp in the village of Bong Son in Binh Dinh province.

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He led the charge against the enemy, called for precision artillery fire, engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the North Vietnamese and thwarted the capture of three American soldiers — all while suffering multiple wounds from gunshots and grenade fragments. Davis used his pinkie finger to fire his rifle after his hand was shattered by an enemy grenade, according to reports.

Davis repeatedly sprinted into an open rice paddy to rescue each member of his team, according to the ArmyTimes. His entire team survived. Davis refused to leave the battlefield until his men were safely removed.

Davis, a native of Cleveland, retired in 1985 at the rank of colonel and now lives in Alexandria, Virginia, just outside Washington. Biden called him several weeks ago to deliver the news.

He compares receiving the medal to getting a long-anticipated ice cream cone and says the wait in no way lessens the honor.

"It's just the antithesis of that," he said. "It heightens the thing, if you've got to wait that long ... It's like someone promised you an ice cream cone. You know what it looks like, what it smells like. You just haven't licked it."

Davis' commanding officer recommended him for the military's top honor, but the paperwork disappeared. He eventually was awarded a Silver Star Medal, the military's third-highest combat medal, as an interim honor, but members of Davis' team have argued that his skin color was a factor in the disappearance of his Medal of Honor recommendation.

"I believe that someone purposely lost the paperwork," Ron Deis, a junior member of Davis' team in Bong Son, told the AP in a separate interview.

Deis, now 79, helped compile the recommendation that was submitted in 2016. He said he knew Davis had been recommended for the Medal of Honor shortly after the battle in 1965 and he spent years wondering why Davis hadn't been awarded the medal. Nine years ago he learned that a second nomination had been submitted "and that also was somehow, quote, lost."

"But I don't believe they were lost," Deis said. "I believe they were intentionally discarded. They were discarded because he was Black, and that's the only conclusion that I can come to."

Army officials say there is no evidence of racism in Davis' case.

"We're here to celebrate the fact that he got the award, long time coming," Maj. Gen. Patrick Roberson, deputy commanding general, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, told the AP. "We, the Army, you know, we haven't been able to see anything that would say, 'Hey, this is racism.'"

"We can't know that," Roberson said.

In early 2021, Christopher Miller, then the acting defense secretary, ordered an expedited review of Davis' case. He argued in an opinion column later that year that awarding Davis the Medal of Honor would address an injustice.

"Some issues in our nation rise above partisanship," Miller wrote. "The Davis case meets that standard."

Davis' daughter, Regan Davis Hopper, a mom of two teenage sons, told the AP that she only learned of her dad's heroism in 2019. But, like him, she said she tries not to dwell on her disappointment in how the situation was handled.

"I try not to think about that. I try not to let that weigh me down and make me lose the thrill and excitement of the moment," Hopper said. "I think that's most important, to just look ahead and think about how exciting it is for America to meet my dad for the first time. I'm just proud of him."

A year into Ukraine war, bodies dug up in once occupied town

By ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

BORODYANKA, Ukraine (AP) — The freshly exhumed remains of three men lie in black body bags on the edge of the small cemetery in a town not far from Ukraine's capital, waiting to be taken to a morgue. None has yet been identified.

Ukrainian authorities are still unearthing people who were hastily buried in makeshift graves during Russia's brief but brutal occupation of villages and towns near Kyiv. Almost 200 bodies remain unidentified,

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while 280 people are listed as missing.

Oleksander Pinchuk's mother, Halyna, is among them. They never found her body in the wreckage of her apartment building, which took a direct hit from an airstrike a year ago. Pinchuk had walked out of the building just eight hours earlier, and has not seen his mother since, he said.

On Thursday, Pinchuk stood in the winter chill, grim-faced among a small group of mourners who gathered for a religious service to commemorate the anniversary of the strike in the town of Borodyanka.

"Just look at what the Russians brought to us and what they did to our beautiful town," said Dmytro Koshka, the priest conducting the service at the former site of the residential building. "How could we ever forget and forgive?"

Nothing remains of the structure except the outline of where it once stood. Behind it is another apartment building, blackened and empty but still standing.

Pinchuk said rescue crews only managed to get to the building last April, after Ukrainian forces retook control of Borodyanka. The crews dug through the rubble for about two weeks and located the remains of 15 people. But they found no trace of dozens more believed to have been inside the 108-apartment building.

"We still have hope for at least some of them, but the rest, they just burned alive," Pinchuk said, his gaze fixed, the pain of loss visible in his eyes.

Without a body to mourn over and bury, the 43-year-old hopes against hope that his mother is still alive. He heard rumors that Russian troops took more than 100 people from Borodyanka to Belarus. Perhaps she was among them.

"Until the last moment, I will think of her as alive," he said.

The exhumation of the three bodies Thursday from two makeshift graves on the edge of Borodyanka's cemetery meant that some families may have a chance to learn what became of their loved ones.

A passer-by found the three in early March 2022, when Russia forces still occupied the town, and he buried the bodies with the help of another man, according to Andrii Nebytov, the head of the Kyiv region's police department.

The passer-by then fled the region. He only just recently returned and told authorities about the burials, the police chief said.

One of the dead is believed to be a 50-year-old local man who was shot and partially burned in his car, but DNA tests are needed to confirm that. Nobody knows who the other two are.

There's not much to go on to identify them. A green pencil is all that was found on one, packets of cigarettes and key fobs on another. The remains are so decomposed that identification and determining exactly how they died will require forensic tests.

The exhumations bring the number of civilian bodies found in previously Russian-occupied areas of the Kyiv region to 1,373, Nebytov said. Of that number, 197 have yet to be identified.

With West Bank in turmoil, new Palestinian militants emerge

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

JABA, West Bank (AP) — The stuttering blasts of M-16s shattered the quiet in a West Bank village, surrounded by barley fields and olive groves. Young Palestinian men in Jaba once wanted to farm, residents say, but now, more and more want to fight.

Last week, dozens of them, wearing balaclavas and brandishing rifles with photos of their dead comrades plastered on the clips, burst into a school playground — showcasing Jaba's new militant group and paying tribute to its founder and another gunman who were killed in an Israeli military raid last month.

"I'd hate to make my parents cry," said 28-year-old Yousef Hosni Hammour, a close friend of Ezzeddin Hamamrah, the group's late founder. "But I'm ready to die a martyr."

Similar scenes are playing out across the West Bank. From the northern Jenin refugee camp to the southern city of Hebron, small groups of disillusioned young Palestinians are taking up guns against Israel's open-ended occupation, defying Palestinian political leaders whom they scorn as collaborators with Israel.

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With fluid and overlapping affiliations, these groups have no clear ideology and operate independently of traditional chains of command — even if they receive support from established militant groups. Fighters from Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other organizations attended last week's ceremony in Jaba.

In near-daily arrest raids over the past year, Israel has sought to crush the fledgling militias, leading to a surge of deaths and unrest unseen in nearly two decades.

While Israel maintains the escalated raids are meant to prevent future attacks, Palestinians say the intensified violence has helped radicalize men too young to remember the brutal Israeli crackdown on the second Palestinian uprising two decades ago, which served as a deterrent to older Palestinians.

This new generation has grown up uniquely stymied, in a territory riven by infighting and fragmented by barriers and checkpoints.

More than 60 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank and east Jerusalem since the start of 2023, after Israel's most right-wing government in history took office. About half were militants killed in fighting with Israel, according to an Associated Press tally, though the dead have also included stone-throwers and bystanders uninvolved in violence.

At least 15 Israelis have been killed in Palestinian attacks in that time, including two Israelis shot Sunday in the town of Hawara, just south of Jaba. In response, Israeli settlers torched dozens of buildings — a rampage that also left one Palestinian dead.

"It's like the new government released the hands of soldiers and settlers, said now they can do whatever they want," said Jamal Khalili, a member of Jaba's local council.

At the recent memorial service, children with black militant bands on their foreheads gathered around the gunmen, eager for a glimpse of their heroes.

"The outcome is what you see here," Khalili added.

Last week, an Israeli military raid in the northern city of Nablus sparked a shootout with Palestinian militants that killed 10 people. The raid targeted the most prominent of the emerging armed groups, the Lion's Den.

Israeli security officials claim the military has crippled the Nablus-based Lion's Den over the past few months, killing or arresting most of its key members. But they acknowledge its gunmen, who roam the Old City of Nablus and pump out slick Telegram videos with a carefully honed message of heroic resistance, now inspire new attacks across the territory.

"The Lion's Den is beginning to become an idea that we see all around," said an Israeli military official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an intelligence assessment. Instead of hurling stones or firebombs, militants now mainly open fire, he said, using M-16s often smuggled from Jordan or stolen from Israeli military bases.

The official said the army was monitoring the Jaba group and others in the northern cities of Jenin, Nablus and Tulkarem. But he acknowledged the army has difficulty gathering intelligence on the small, loosely organized militant groups.

The Palestinian self-rule government administers parts of the West Bank, and works closely with the Israeli military against its domestic rivals, particularly the militant Hamas group, which runs the Gaza Strip.

With young Palestinians increasingly viewing the Palestinian Authority as an arm of the Israeli security forces rather than the foundation for a future state, Palestinian security forces are loathe to intervene against the budding militias. Palestinian forces now rarely venture into militant strongholds like the Old City of Nablus and the Jenin refugee camp, according to residents and the Israeli military.

Jaba militants said the Palestinian security forces have not cracked down on them. Residents said the group, founded last September, has rapidly grown to some 40-to-50 militants.

Hammour described Palestinian leaders as corrupt and out of touch with regular Palestinians. But, he said, "Our goals are much bigger than creating problems with the Palestinian Authority."

With the popularity of the PA plummeting, experts say it cannot risk inflaming tensions by arresting widely admired fighters.

The PA "is experiencing a crisis of legitimacy," said Tahani Mustafa, Palestinian analyst at the International Crisis Group. "There's a huge disconnect between elites at the top and the groups on the ground."

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Palestinian officials acknowledge their grip is slipping.

"We fear any of our actions against (these groups) will create a reaction in the street," said a Palestinian intelligence official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to reporters.

With the Israeli military stepping up raids, the West Bank's power structure faltering and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government expanding settlements on occupied land, frustrated Palestinians say they are not in pursuit of any Islamist or political agenda — they simply want to defend their towns and resist Israel's 55-year-old occupation.

For 28-year-old Mohammed Alawneh, whose two brothers were killed in confrontations with Israeli forces, two decades apart, the Jaba group is a "reaction." He said he could support peace if it meant the end of the occupation and the formation of a single state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. For now, he said, it's clear Israel doesn't want peace.

Hamamrah, the Jaba group's late commander, threw stones at the Israeli army as a teen and later joined an armed offshoot of Fatah, the party of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, according to his mother, Lamia. After 10 agonizing months in Israeli prison, he became religious and withdrawn. He spoke of taking revenge.

After his death, Lamia discovered he had helped form the Jaba group and that Islamic Jihad had supplied them with weapons, including the gun Hamamrah fired at Israeli troops on Jan. 14.

The army chased him into Jaba, killing Hamamrah along with another gunman, Amjad Khleleyah. Their crushed and bloodstained car now sits in the center of Jaba like a macabre monument.

At his funeral, Lamia said Hamamrah's friends urged her to show pride in a son who became a fighter and inspired the whole village.

But Lamia wept and wept. Her 14-year-old daughter, Malak, now wants die a martyr, too. "I'm just a mother who lost her son," she said. "I want this all to stop."

Taylor Jenkins Reid writes her own Hollywood success story

By ALICIA RANCILIO Associated Press

"I'm jealous you get to meet her," an employee working behind the scenes at a recent press opportunity for "Daisy Jones & the Six" told some journalists.

The "her" in question was not Riley Keough, the star of the Amazon limited series, or any of the show's other female stars. It was Taylor Jenkins Reid, the bestselling author behind a celebrity-infused, decades-spanning literary universe suffused with glitz and grit: "The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo," "Daisy Jones," "Malibu Rising" and "Carrie Soto is Back."

"Daisy Jones," debuting Friday on Prime Video, is the first Reid adaptation to hit the screen and others are in the works.

Reid and her husband, Alex, adapted an early book, "One True Loves," which stars Phillipa Soo and Simu Liu and opens April 7. She's also written a screenplay with her best friend, which Kay Cannon ("Pitch Perfect") is slated to direct.

Reid says she always knew she wanted to work in Hollywood and calls writing books "a happy accident." She originally moved out to Los Angeles to work in casting but when she wrote her first novel, "Forever Interrupted," she knew that was what she was meant to do.

"I found this piece of myself I never anticipated," she says. Now, to have Hollywood come calling for her work, Reid says, is "really fun."

Reid spoke with The Associated Press about the future of her book series, the intertwining threads and the status of that "Evelyn Hugo" adaptation. The transcript has been condensed for brevity.

AP: You've said that your most recent novel, "Carrie Soto is Back," is the last in your series of books about celebrities. Is that true?

It's not something that I come to easily. I ache to return to this world. I ache to return to each one of these books. I miss them when I'm done with them. And they never feel like they never feel over for me. It always feels like an opportunity to go back to them is so welcome.

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But I have likened it a little bit to, you know, it's senior year of high school and .. it's important that we go expand and do other things and find new challenges. That is what I am planning to do. It is not because I'm ready to go as much as I just know it's time.

AP: The character of Mick Riva, a playboy, smooth-talking crooner shows up in each of those books. Why?

First and foremost, I write about women and I'm interested in women, but women are very affected by the decisions of men and a lot of time women are left holding the bag. When men make the decisions that they do, that they sort of escape unscathed. There are a lot of men in our culture who keep making pretty big mistakes, and it doesn't stick to them, but there are women behind those men dealing with the consequences of those men's actions.

While I do write about women, I wanted to put forth a man who gets away with it. I know people hate him. And I know when they see his name in books, they get mad. But I want you to be mad because there are many, many, many Mick Rivas in the world. I think we would all do well to look out and see if we can spot any of them, because they're getting away with a lot and they're allowing the women around them to be the one to pick up the pieces, whether it's whether it's Nina Riva or it's Evelyn Hugo or it's Daisy Jones at a party or it's Javier Soto finally being the person who calls them out.

Not every man is Mick Riva, but there are a lot of Mick Rivas in the world.

AP: Do you agree that there was a change in tone to your writing from "Evelyn Hugo" on? If so, was it intentional?

Absolutely. I'm not sure it was intentional as much as it was honestly not too similar to how I feel now with the end of "Carrie Soto." It was just time. I want to tackle new and different things, and it's really wonderful when you find this pocket of creativity where you feel like, "Oh, I can live in this space for a little while and I can tell a lot of stories here," but I never want to stay at the party too long.

AP: "The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo" blew up, in large part due to readers on TikTok posting about it. What was that experience like for you?

You probably heard about it before me, because what happened to me was I'm sitting at my computer. I get an email from my agent with the New York Times list, and she's like, "Evelyn Hugo' just made The New York Times." I yelled in my office and my husband comes rushing in ... and I'm like, "I must be misunderstanding this, right? Can you read this?"

The book had come out many, many years before and had not hit the list when it first came out. My husband read it and he's like, "Nope, I think this is real. I think you're understanding this." It took us probably two weeks to figure out how it had happened. Everyone kept going, "What led to this bump?" And I'm like, "I don't know." Then my manager, Brad, he goes, "I think it was something called BookTok." I was like, "What's that?" And he started showing me that there were all these young women talking about "Evelyn Hugo" on TikTok. I felt very seen because I'm very, very proud of that book and to have it take off with readers, especially young women, just felt really good.

AP: Netflix is adapting "Evelyn Hugo" into a film. Did you ever wonder how they're going to fit a story of a woman who had seven husbands into a movie?

I did. Then I read the script and I'm not concerned, but I get it. I understand. It's not dissimilar to the experience on "Daisy Jones." You have to pick the right people and trust them. Liz Tigelaar, who wrote the script, is a phenomenal talent, and I said, "I don't know how you're going to do this. I think you need to condense the story." And she said, "No, I don't." ... And then she turns in the script and I was like, "I was wrong. You were right. You got it."

AP: Can you share where the casting process is at for "Evelyn Hugo"?

There is no news but I will say that who is going to play Evelyn Hugo and who might play Celia St. James are always on the forefront of my mind. There is no definitive answer (but) there's just a short list of women that I am incredibly, incredibly excited about.

AP: During the height of the pandemic you also wrote a screenplay with your best friend Ashley — who was not a writer prior to this — sold it, and Kay Cannon will direct. Not everyone would take a chance like that.

I grew up with very little, and I have so much more than I ever dreamed. I never thought people would

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read my books at this rate. I never thought that Hollywood would come calling. I have been so blessed that if all I'm doing is taking that in and I'm not using that light to bounce it on others, I'm not sure why I'm doing this.

Need a Lenten fish fry? Let an interactive map point the way

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

WEXFORD, Pa. (AP) — By the time the doors open at 4:30 p.m., a boisterous line of 50 hungry people is looping around the gymnasium foyer at Blessed Francis Seelos Academy. Their objective: to occupy tables on the basketball court and, for the parish's first time since the pandemic descended in 2020, sit down for an old-fashioned Lenten fish fry.

Many patrons are members of the flock — St. Aidan Catholic Parish north of Pittsburgh — and greet each other as longtime friends. But these days, newcomers figure in the mix, too. And some arrive in a way that unites two rich seams of western Pennsylvania culture — tradition and innovation.

The fish fry, a long-established Friday staple during Lent, is roaring back from COVID with an assist from something decidedly newfangled: an interactive map built by local volunteer coders that points the way to scores of churches, fire halls and other places that offer battered and breaded seafood for the taking. In the process, the new Pittsburgh is helping point the way to the old.

"I like to think that this project helps people get excited about these very old cultural and culinary traditions," says Hollen Barmer, a Tennessee transplant who came to Pittsburgh two decades ago and started the map in 2012 for her fish-fry-loving self.

"Fish fries," Barmer likes to say, "are an adventure."

TWO PARTS OF PITTSBURGH

At this moment in its history, Pittsburgh is working to blend its fabled industrial yesterdays with a 21st-century economy based increasingly on services and innovation — something the map project reflects.

"Allowing people to interact with something traditional through technology, it adds an element to it that appeals to a different group of people," says Ellie Newman, a member and the former leader of the non-profit Code for Pittsburgh, which works with Barmer to operate the map.

During Lent, thousands of western Pennsylvanians — Catholic and non-Catholic alike — stream into Friday afternoon fish fries. Some pick up for takeout. Some chow down right there — fish and shrimp, fries and cole slaw and mac and cheese, sometimes pierogies or a local noodle-and-cabbage delicacy called haluski.

Western Pennsylvania loves the past, but the fish fry itself is steered by some very modern forces.

Long a tradition in American cities with Catholic communities, particularly around the Great Lakes, fish fries surged in popularity after the Second Vatican Council essentially told the faithful in 1966 that the practice of not eating meat on Fridays was optional — except during Lent, the period between Ash Wednesday and Easter. That made February to April a concentrated period of fish consumption.

Then came the steel industry's foundering in the 1970s and 1980s. That upended the region, stole elements of civic pride and whipped up a fervor for traditions that shouted, loudly, "Pittsburgh!"

"There was a sense of destabilization — of 'Who are we?' And people tended to center around things that symbolized the community," says Leslie Przybylek, senior curator at the Heinz History Center in Pittsburgh.

Food touchstones like fish fries, pierogies and the "cookie table" — a western Pennsylvania wedding staple — became signifiers of identity. At the same time, technological advances in frozen food and the growth of fast food were making fish more accessible. The longtime presence of powerhouse regional fish distributor Robert Wholey & Co. also honed local tastes.

"People in Pennsylvania are used to good fish," says Bill Yanicko, a funeral director in suburban West Deer Township who runs the community fish fry at Our Lady of the Lakes Parish. "They really don't want to see a cookie-cutter triangle fish."

Overlay all that with a robust interactive map (and pent-up pandemic energy) and you have a potent mix that helps people in western Pennsylvania overcome the geographic hesitations of the region's hills

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and valleys, and go out searching for fish.

"Putting it in a digital frame and encouraging people to engage with it, it adds a level of vocabulary to it that makes a difference," says Przybylek, who favors the fry at the Swissvale Fire Department, just outside the city. "Different generations engage in stories in different ways. It literally takes a food tradition and puts it into a platform that speaks to them on a different level."

MAPPING DELICIOUSNESS

Today, while churches remain a mainstay of Lenten fish fries, fire departments give them a run for their money — of which there is lots at play. Both entities use fish fries as volunteer-staffed fundraisers to offset budget challenges, and each works hard to stand out. "It takes a little army to make this happen," says Keith Young, a retired businessman who helps with the St. Aidan fry.

Code for Pittsburgh, a group designed to create places where "civics and technology meet," is all-volunteer as well. Its varied projects include a food access map of Pittsburgh and a cartographic catalog that helps track vehicle-pedestrian accidents.

The volunteer coding sessions held to build the fish-fry map are — how to say it? — fish-forward. Swedish Fish candies are set out. Bowls of Goldfish crackers are distributed. Radiohead's "Weird Fishes" plays.

"It's kind of the perfect marriage of things — a team of super-nerdy people who know all about maps and know all about coding, and fish fries, which are just so Pittsburgh," Newman says. "I don't know of any other city that has this kind of obsession. ... As soon as people in the group heard about it, they were instantly hooked on it."

Pittsburgh's growing reputation as an innovation hub — with companies from Google to Uber establishing beachheads here — is sometimes cast as recent. But innovation lies at the heart of the region's history. The steel industry that built it into an industrial powerhouse was a cutting-edge transformation of its day, and advances ranging from early movies to the polio vaccine have roots here.

David Schorr, an IT analyst from the Pittsburgh suburb of West Mifflin, is known locally as "The Godfather" for his very public affinity to — and experience with — fish fries. He knows where to go for everything — including the places to secure, as he puts it, "handmade pierogies personally pinched by church ladies." The interactive map, he says, opens myriad possibilities of fish-fry forays.

"It makes it a treasure hunt: 'Oh — let's go to that neighborhood,'" Schorr says. "They go, 'Oh, look, this one's on my way home from work.' Or 'I have to go visit Aunt Edna and we'll be driving right by it.' Or, 'Oh, they have sauerkraut soup.' Or, 'I don't like pollock. This one has cod. I'm going there.'"

The map, Barmer and Newman say, is designed to do precisely that — turn the western Pennsylvania fish-fry culture into an adventure stamped onto the landscape that fosters community engagement and understanding for natives and newcomers alike.

"As things become more globalized and cities tend to look more and more the same, there's something appealing about coming to a place like Pittsburgh that still has things like this that have very deep roots in the community," Newman says. "Things may change around you every year, but you know that every year you can go to your same church basement or fire hall and get that fish sandwich."

Davis falls short in bid to break Maravich's scoring mark

By TOM WITHERS AP Sports Writer

YOUNGSTOWN, Ohio (AP) — Antoine Davis outscored them all — except for "Pistol" Pete.

Detroit Mercy's star guard finished four points shy of surpassing Pete Maravich as the NCAA career scoring leader on Thursday night, scoring 22 in a gritty 71-66 loss to Youngstown State in the Horizon League tournament.

Davis came in needing 26 points to break Maravich's hallowed mark of 3,667 points that stood for over 50 years. But after picking up his fourth foul with 3:36 left, the slender 6-foot-1 guard, who was trapped and double-teamed for much of his 38 minutes by the top-seeded Penguins, couldn't drive as effectively to the basket.

With Maravich's record still within reach, Davis missed four 3-pointers — one of them a wide-open look

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— in the final two minutes of an intense game.

While disappointed with the loss and falling short of Maravich, Davis felt pride afterward.

"It's really special," he said, leaning against a wall outside Detroit Mercy's locker room. "Maybe in 20 or 25 years somebody is going to be doing the same thing that I did, chase that record, maybe even sooner than that.

"It's just a special feeling. I don't take any of this for granted at all. I'm thankful for this. Blessed. I still feel like I'm the best scorer of my generation. Nobody can take that from me."

After the final buzzer, tempers briefly flared after Youngstown State's Dwyane Cohill, who had guarded Davis for much of the game, appeared to say something to the two-time conference player of the year.

Davis then had to be restrained as debris was thrown at him from the student section inside Beeghly Center.

Unless Detroit Mercy gets an unlikely postseason bid, Davis finishes with 3,664 points in five seasons. Maravich amassed his record in just three years while playing for his dad, Press, and he did it before there was a 3-point line or shot clock.

Davis would welcome another shot at history.

"I would love to play in the CBI, NIT, something," he said. "Not even for the record, just to go out on a better note."

From the outset, it was obvious Youngstown State was determined not to let Davis break the record on its floor. The Penguins ran double teams and trapped Davis, who was held to 15 points earlier this season in a loss to YSU.

"That's the respect I deserve," he said. "I'm the best scorer in the league, so I don't look at it as unfair or anything like that."

Wearing a protective mask to protect a broken nose sustained earlier this season at Cincinnati, Davis started slowly in front of a sellout crowd and missed his first four shots before dropping an off-balance jumper from the top of the key.

Davis finished 7 of 26 from the field, including 4 of 16 on 3-pointers.

Just weeks after LeBron James went past Kareem Abdul-Jabbar as the NBA's career scoring leader, Davis just missed his chance to top Maravich, the Hall of Famer his father had him study while learning to play as a kid.

Davis had already set several NCAA records, including consecutive games in double figures (143) and 3-pointers (584). He leads Division I with 159 3s this season, four from breaking Stephen Curry's record of 162 in a season (2007-08).

Standing next to his son, Detroit Mercy coach Mike Davis recalled the unique journey they took together.

"He worked really hard over the years and he's done some things that should blow people away," the elder Davis said. "People thought there was no way he could get close to Maravich and he got close.

"He could have had it down to 17 in the last game, but he had some shots that he gave up to his teammates. I couldn't be more proud of the player that he is and everything he has added to the program and school. It's been beautiful to see."

Unlike Davis, who was granted a fifth year of eligibility due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Maravich didn't play as a freshman — it wasn't allowed at the time — and there was also no 3-point line or shot clock, placing a premium on every possession.

It's mind-boggling to consider that Maravich, who died in 1988 at age 40 after suffering a heart attack while playing in a pickup game, averaged 44.2 points without taking or making a single 3-pointer.

But it also should be noted that Maravich attempted 3,166 shots while Davis came in with 2,961.

Davis admitted the record was impossible to ignore.

"I knew it was within reach and it was possible to get there," he said. "The double teams kind of threw me off my rhythm. I should have been able to adjust and play my game, but I still feel like we played as hard as we could."

How Biden leaves wiggle room to opt against reelection bid

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden exudes confidence as the next race for the White House approaches.

During last month's State of the Union address, he lured unruly Republicans into agreeing with him that federal entitlements should be protected. He's intensified travel outside Washington, trumpeting job-creation in Wisconsin and steep federal health care spending to Florida seniors while touting a trillion-dollar public works package that he says can do everything from revitalize Baltimore's port to easing train tunnel congestion under the Hudson River.

And he used spy-thriller tactics to sweep into war-scarred Ukraine.

For most presidents, these are powerful elements to include as the centerpiece of a reelection campaign — pledging to protect people and the economy at home and democracy in the heart of Europe. But with the famously fickle 80-year-old Biden stopping short of officially declaring his 2024 candidacy, he's leaving just enough room to back out of a race and focus instead on using such moves to cement his legacy.

"I look at Biden from the outside, as a historian, and say, 'Boy, if he stepped away now, his place in history is secure and extraordinarily positive,'" said Jeffrey Engel, director of the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. "That's how a normal person thinks about these things. That's not how a president thinks about these things."

Those close to Biden insist he's not legacy shopping and that he will announce a campaign, likely after the first quarter campaign fundraising period ends this month. The party has cleared a path for Biden's renomination with rivals from his left, including Sens. Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, pledging to support the president's reelection.

Bestselling self-help author Marianne Williamson is formally launching a primary challenge to Biden on Saturday that's largely being shrugged off by the party.

The Democratic National Committee has unanimously expressed "our full and complete support" for Biden's reelection. Party leaders aren't planning primary debates, arguing there's no longer enough time to even build out a debate schedule that would pit Biden against Williamson or anyone else.

In an interview last week with The Associated Press, first lady Jill Biden said there was "pretty much" nothing left for the president to do but pick a time and place to announce his reelection bid.

"How many times does he have to say it for you to believe it?" she asked.

Still, there are signals that even if the prevailing assumption among most Democrats is that Biden will seek another term, the decision isn't yet final. Even Jill Biden was more muted in subsequent interviews when assessing her husband's political future.

"It's Joe's decision," she told CNN, noting that she's personally "all for it."

"If he's in, we're there," she added. "If he wants to do something else, we're there too."

After the AP interview, the president joked to ABC that he needed to call his wife "to find out" if he was running again.

His intention "has been from the beginning to run," the president told the network. "But there's too many other things we have to finish in the near term before I start a campaign."

While Biden's standing among Democratic officials is solid, actual voters seem more wary. A recent poll from the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found just 37% of Democrats want Biden to seek a second term, down from 52% in the weeks before last year's midterm elections.

Biden's age has been a leading concern since the early days of his first campaign. Already the oldest president in U.S. history, he'd be 86 by the end of a second term, should he win one.

If Biden were to eschew a run, the biggest question is whether the party could quickly coalesce around someone else. Much of the initial focus would shift to Vice President Kamala Harris, who has already said that she expects to remain on a Biden ticket in 2024. But she was notably in South Carolina this week, promoting the administration's efforts to expand broadband access.

The state is politically significant, however, after Democrats moved South Carolina's primary to the front

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of their primary calendar at Biden's behest.

Other Democrats outside Washington have worked to gingerly build national profiles without offending Biden. They include California Gov. Gavin Newsom, who has positioned himself as a foil to Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, seen as a leading alternative to former President Donald Trump in the 2024 GOP presidential primary.

While Biden's plans are under intense scrutiny, the Republican presidential field has also been slow to form. So far, there are just three official entrants — Trump, former United Nations ambassador Nikki Haley and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy. Others, including former Vice President Mike Pence, ex-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, may join in the coming months. Some, such as DeSantis, could wait until late summer to officially announce their campaigns.

For his part, Biden has a history of dithering. He agonized over whether to seek the presidency in 2004 and 2016 before ultimately deciding to sit out those races. Both times, he noted that he essentially spent so long deciding that he'd run out of time to be successful in a campaign, rather than really saying he didn't want to run.

"He's notoriously slow on campaign decisions," said Andrew Feldman, a Democratic strategist who interned on Biden's 2008 presidential campaign and worked as part of an advance staffer team during his vice presidency. "None of this should be a surprise."

Feldman said Biden is "always thinking about his legacy" but also "thinking about getting results for the American people."

"I think legacy and results and reelection are very much intertwined," he said.

As far as legacy goes, Biden aides concede that future governing will likely never be as easy as when Democrats controlled Congress during the administration's first two years. The president's now continually low approval ratings may also never climb back to where they were when he first took office, they admit.

But the president's advisers counter that there is no real Democratic alternative capable of defeating Trump or another top Republican like DeSantis. That's not to say Biden doesn't think about his place in history. In 2021, the president took careful notes during an Oval Office meeting with historians that stretched more than two hours — though those discussions focused more on threats to American democracy than Biden's personal legacy.

"This is a guy who essentially grew up in politics, has been involved at high levels of politics as senator, vice president and then president for many decades," said Allan Lichtman, a distinguished professor of history at American University in Washington. "He's someone who is especially concerned with his legacy."

Cambodian opposition leader gets 27 years on treason charge

By SOPHENG CHEANG and GRANT PECK Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — A court in Cambodia on Friday found Kem Sokha, leader of the dissolved Cambodia National Rescue Party, guilty of treason and sentenced him to 27 years imprisonment to be served under house arrest.

Judge Koy Sao of the Phnom Penh Municipal Court said Kem Sokha, backed by foreign powers, had used human rights and politics as a guise to organize people to stage a "color revolution" aimed at toppling the legal government. The maximum sentence on the charge is 30 years.

The opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party was dissolved shortly after his 2017 arrest on related charges.

The ruling, four months ahead of a general election, is the latest blow against the opposition, which has faced years of legal harassment from the government of Prime Minister Hun Sen. Kem Sokha, 69, is the country's most prominent opposition politician not in exile — others having fled abroad to escape what were generally seen as politically inspired prosecutions.

The court said Kem Sokha is barred from all political activity, including voting, and not allowed to meet with outsiders, Cambodian or foreign, except for family members. He may leave the house only with the court's permission.

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His lawyer, Ang Udom, told reporters he will file an appeal within one month.

Kem Sokha was head of the Cambodia National Rescue Party when he was arrested in September 2017. The government charged that an old video of him speaking at a seminar about receiving advice from U.S. pro-democracy groups was proof of collusion with a foreign power to illegally take power.

His arrest marked the beginning of a fierce campaign by the government to use the courts — widely considered to be under its influence — to silence its critics in the political and media spheres or drive them out of the country.

Rights organizations decried Friday's court ruling. "The Cambodian justice system has once again shown its jaw-dropping lack of independence by convicting Kem Sokha on baseless, politically motivated charges," Amnesty International Deputy Regional Director Ming Yu Hah said in an emailed statement. "This verdict is an unmistakable warning to opposition groups months before national elections. The use of the courts to hound opponents of Prime Minister Hun Sen knows no limits."

The United States Embassy in Cambodia also said it was "deeply troubled" by the conviction. U.S. Ambassador Patrick Murphy, along with representatives of other Western nations, had attended Friday's hearing.

"Denying Kem Sokha and other political figures their freedom of expression and association undermines Cambodia's constitution, international commitments, and past progress to develop as a pluralist and inclusive society," said the U.S. statement, emailed to journalists.

Kem Sokha's trial started in January 2020 but was soon suspended due to the coronavirus outbreak and resumed in 2022.

The popular CNRP was seen as an electoral threat to Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party ahead of the 2018 general election. Kem Sokha's arrest was swiftly followed by the dissolution of the party by the Supreme Court in November 2017, after the government accused it of plotting its overthrow.

The CNRP had been the only credible opponent of Hun Sen's party, which consequently swept all the seats in the National Assembly. Rights groups and Western nations charged that the election was neither free nor fair.

Crackdowns continued even after the 2018 polls, as more than 100 former CNRP members and civil society activists were targeted with the charge "incitement to commit a felony" for their nonviolent political activities.

Hun Sen's 2023 election opponents have come under similar pressure. In October, Son Chhay, a deputy president of the Candlelight Party — the CNRP's de facto successor — was fined the equivalent of \$750,000 for remarks he made alleging unfairness and irregularities in the 2022 local elections.

Thach Setha, another of the party's leaders, was arrested in January for allegedly issuing several bounced checks in 2019.

Hun Sen has been in power for 38 years and has vowed to stay in office until 2028. He has endorsed one of his sons to succeed him. He uses guile and threats to exercise authoritarian power in the framework of electoral democracy.

Kem Sokha was released from prison on bail in September 2018, more than a year after he was arrested, and put under house arrest. In November 2019, he was freed from house arrest but still banned from political activity.

The co-founder of the CNRP, Sam Rainsy, has been in self-imposed exile since 2015, avoiding prison for a defamation conviction along with a slew of other legal charges brought by the government. As in Kem Sokha's case, the charges are widely seen as politically motivated.

Sam Rainsy was the de facto leader of the party while Kem Sokha was in prison before his release on bail. Tensions grew between supporters of the two opposition leaders because some felt Kem Sokha faced more pressure from Hun Sen's government while Sam Rainsy was free in exile.

The legal actions against Kem Sokha were widely seen as encouraging a split between the two. Hun Sen is an adroit political operator, and has a record of using divide-and-conquer tactics against his foes.

Kem Sokha's political career began in 1993 when Cambodia held an election organized by the United Nations after more than two decades of war and unrest, and he was elected to the National Assembly. He established the independent Cambodian Center for Human Rights in 2002.

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Rejoining politics in 2005, he founded the Human Rights Party, which finished third in the 2008 general election. In 2012, that party merged with Sam Rainsy's original Candlelight Party to form the Cambodia National Rescue Party, which captured 55 seats out of 123 at stake in the 2013 election.

Edey, Big Ten champ No. 5 Purdue outlast Wisconsin 63-61

By STEVE MEGARGEE AP Sports Writer

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Zach Edey didn't want to know whether Purdue already had clinched the Big Ten outright regular-season title before the end of his team's game with Wisconsin.

Edey's coach couldn't resist finding out.

"I wish I could lie to you, but I asked," Purdue coach Matt Painter said after the fifth-ranked Boilermakers' 63-61 victory over Wisconsin on Thursday night. "I'm nosy that way."

Purdue (25-5, 14-5) had sealed the crown earlier in the evening by virtue of Illinois' 91-87 double-overtime victory over Michigan. That game concluded late in the first half of the Purdue-Wisconsin matchup.

But there was still plenty at stake in this game as Purdue sought to make its case for a No. 1 seed and Wisconsin (16-13, 8-11) attempted to boost its postseason credentials.

Edey also intended to make sure Purdue didn't back into this title, which explains why he didn't want anyone to tell him the Illinois-Michigan result.

"I wouldn't have wanted to win the Big Ten like that, so I was just trying to keep that out of my mind," said Edey, who had 17 points and 19 rebounds.

Neither team led by more than three points for the final 12 minutes. That made the loss that much tougher to take for Wisconsin, which has played in 21 of the last 22 NCAA Tournaments but may need to make a deep Big Ten Tournament run to get there this season.

"We've been playing well enough to win and we just haven't been able to get it done," Wisconsin forward Tyler Wahl said.

Edey's presence made the difference.

The 7-foot-4 center and national player of the year candidate helped Purdue outrebound Wisconsin 37-23 and outscore the Badgers 30-18 in the paint. Edey also helped limit Wahl and 7-footer Steven Crawl to a total of seven points, well below their combined season average of 22.8 heading into the game.

In the eighth and final lead change of the second half, Edey made both ends of a one-and-one to put Purdue ahead 58-57 with 1:45 left. Edey had been 1 of 6 from the line before sinking those two.

"After the way I started at the line, I knew there were going to be opportunities at the end of the game," Edey said. "I knew there were going to be big opportunities. So I kind of tried to focus on that."

Wisconsin's Chucky Hepburn missed a baseline jumper with 1:15 remaining, but Purdue's Ethan Morton misfired on a 3-pointer with 47 seconds remaining.

The Badgers called a timeout and got the ball to Max Klesmit, who missed a driving layup attempt as the Kohl Center crowd pleaded for a foul call.

"I was just trying to get to the rim, get in the paint and make a play," said Klesmit, who scored a season-high 19 points for a second straight game. "I probably should have come to a two-foot stop and controlled myself, but I went off one and missed it."

Purdue then stayed ahead and won for just the second time in five games by converting its free throws. Purdue went 9 of 10 on foul shots in the final 3:45 after going 2 of 8 up to that point.

Wisconsin had the ball while trailing by three on a couple of occasions in the final 10 seconds, but both times Purdue fouled before the Badgers could attempt a tying 3-pointer.

Morton made just one of two free throws with four seconds left, giving Wisconsin one last shot with the score 63-61. Klesmit had just gotten past midcourt when he attempted a potential winning 3-point attempt that fell well short of the basket.

BIG PICTURE

Purdue: The Boilermakers still aren't playing nearly as well as they were when they had the No. 1 ranking, but they deserve credit for winning on the road against a desperate team. Painter shook up his lineup

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as Brandon Newman made his first start of the season and Mason Gillis made his second Big Ten start of the year.

Wisconsin: The Badgers won a share of the Big Ten title last year because of an uncanny knack for winning close games, but they haven't been as fortunate this time. This tough loss came four nights after a buzzer-beating 3-pointer at the end of regulation led to an overtime loss at Michigan. **POLL IMPLICATIONS**

If Purdue follows this win with a victory over Illinois in its regular-season finale, the Boilermakers should stay in the top five for a 15th straight week.

UP NEXT

Purdue: Hosts Illinois on Sunday

Wisconsin: At Minnesota on Sunday ____

AP college basketball: <https://apnews.com/hub/college-basketball> and <https://apnews.com/hub/ap-top-25-college-basketball-poll> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Biden, Scholz to huddle on Ukraine war at White House

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz is visiting the White House on Friday for a private meeting with President Joe Biden as both allies become increasingly vocal about their concerns that China may step off the sidelines and supply weapons to Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

Such a step could dramatically change the war's trajectory by allowing Moscow to replenish its depleted stockpiles.

China is Germany's top trading partner, and European nations have generally been more cautious than the United States in taking a hard line with Beijing. However, there are signs that may be shifting as global rivalries grow more tense.

In a speech to the German parliament on Thursday, Scholz called on China to "use your influence in Moscow to press for the withdrawal of Russian troops, and do not supply weapons to the aggressor Russia."

The U.S. and Germany have worked closely together to supply Ukraine with military and humanitarian assistance. But there has also been friction over issues such as providing tanks, and Washington has occasionally grown frustrated with Berlin's hesitance.

Maintaining a steady flow of weapons to Kyiv will be critical in the war's second year, especially with both sides planning spring offensives.

"We're proud of the collective efforts that we've taken together," John Kirby, a White House national security spokesman, said Thursday.

He said the U.S. has not seen any indication that China has made a decision on whether to provide weapons to Russia.

Scholz last visited the White House a little more than a year ago, shortly before Russia invaded Ukraine. Very little of Friday's meeting will be open to the public, and no announcements are expected afterward.

Unlike formal state visits, such as when French President Emmanuel Macron came to Washington last year, there will be no pomp and ceremony. Scholz's trip will lack the customary press conference where the two leaders take questions from reporters representing both countries.

Kirby described it as a "true working visit between these two leaders."

The meeting will be intimate, according to a senior German official and a U.S. official. Rather than being constantly flanked by advisers, the officials said, Biden and Scholz are likely to be the only people in the room for much of the time. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because of the confidential nature of the talks.

In an interview with German broadcaster Welt, opposition leader Friedrich Merz accused Scholz of being secretive about his trip to Washington, which will take place without the customary press pack in tow. Merz suggested that Scholz had to smooth ruffled feathers over the deal to provide tanks to Ukraine.

Scholz dismissed any notion of discord between allies.

Asked by The Associated Press about the circumstances of his visit, Scholz said he and Biden "want to

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talk directly with each other," and he described "a global situation where things have become very difficult."

"It is important that such close friends can talk about all of these questions together, continually," he said.

Jake Sullivan, Biden's national security adviser, hinted at some tension between the two countries on Sunday when appearing on ABC's "This Week."

He said Biden originally decided against sending Abrams tanks to Ukraine, believing they wouldn't be immediately useful for Ukrainian forces. However, Sullivan said, Germany would not send its Leopard tanks "until the president also agreed to send Abrams."

"So, in the interest of alliance unity and to insure that Ukraine got what it wanted, despite the fact that the Abrams aren't the tool they need, the president said, 'OK, I'm going to be the leader of the free world,'" Sullivan said. "I will send Abrams down the road if you send Leopards now.' Those Leopards are getting sent now."

Scholz's government has denied there was any such demand made of the U.S.

Max Bergmann, a former State Department official who leads the Europe Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the U.S. has often wanted Germany, the world's fifth-largest economy, to be more forceful on the global stage.

"There's a hope that, instead of us having to push all the time, that Germany would take a leadership role," he said.

Bergmann said Germany has gone a long way toward strengthening its defense, but added that there's more work to do.

"The German way of seeing the world doesn't always align with the U.S. way of seeing the world," he said.

Tornadoes, power outages as storm crosses Texas, Louisiana

DALLAS (AP) — Tornadoes touched down in Texas and Louisiana as a powerful storm system that dumped heavy snow in California pushed through the Southern Plains and into the Deep South on Thursday, knocking out power to hundreds of thousands of people and forcing the cancellation of hundreds of flights into and out of the Dallas-area.

Wind gusts of over 70 mph (112 kph) were reported in Texas as tornado watches were issued into Thursday night in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. National Weather Service teams planned to head out Friday to survey areas for likely tornado damage in the storm's path, which stretched from southeast Oklahoma into Texas and neighboring Arkansas and Louisiana.

"If your phone's alerted and you hear sirens, that is for wind speeds as strong as a weak tornado," the weather service tweeted. "So treat it like one! Get inside, away from windows!"

The Dallas suburb of Richardson asked residents to stop using water after the storm knocked out power to pumping stations.

"Water is currently in city water storage facilities, but will run out if all customers do not immediately cease use of water, except for emergency needs only," Richardson officials said in a statement.

North of Dallas, winds brought down trees, ripped the roof off a grocery store and overturned four 18-wheelers along U.S. Highway 75. Only minor injuries were reported, police said.

In Louisiana, a tornado touched down near Louisiana State University in Shreveport.

More than 310,000 utility customers in Texas had no electricity as of Thursday night, according to poweroutage.us. That was down from 346,000 early in the evening.

FlightAware.com reported Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport and Dallas Love Field had tallied more than 400 cancellations total, either to or from the airports.

Several school districts in the Dallas-Fort Worth area canceled after-school activities and events because of the forecast.

Forecasters said the storm system would continue its eastward march Friday, bringing the threat of severe weather into the Ohio and Tennessee River valleys. It was likely to produce snow across the eastern Great Lakes and New England later in the day.

Meteorologists say the same storm produced a "once-in-a-generation" snow in California and Oregon

with up to 7 feet (2 meters) accumulating in spots.

The snowfall, however, is credited with helping reduce, and in some areas eliminate, drought conditions in California.

Jury quickly finds Murdaugh guilty of murder of wife, son

By JEFFREY COLLINS and JAMES POLLARD Associated Press

WALTERBORO, S.C. (AP) — South Carolina attorney Alex Murdaugh was convicted of murder Thursday in the shooting deaths of his wife and son in a case that chronicled the unraveling of a powerful Southern family with tales of privilege, greed and addiction.

The jury deliberated for less than three hours before finding Murdaugh guilty of two counts of murder at the end of a six-week trial that pulled back the curtain on the once-prominent lawyer's fall from grace.

Murdaugh, 54, faces 30 years to life in prison without parole for each murder charge when court is scheduled to reconvene for sentencing at 9:30 a.m. Friday.

After the verdict was read, Judge Clifton Newman denied a defense motion to declare a mistrial, saying "the evidence of guilt is overwhelming."

Murdaugh, who wore a dress shirt and jacket, appeared stoic with a slight grimace as the verdict was read. Once the hearing ended, Murdaugh was handcuffed and led out of the courtroom by two sheriff's deputies.

His 52-year-old wife, Maggie, was shot four or five times with a rifle and their 22-year-old son Paul was shot twice with a shotgun at the kennels near their rural Colleton County home on June 7, 2021.

Prosecutors didn't have the weapons used to kill the Murdaughs or other direct evidence like confessions or blood spatter. But they had a mountain of circumstantial evidence, led by a video locked on the son's cellphone for more than a year — video shot minutes before the killings that witnesses testified captured the voices of all three Murdaughs.

Defense attorney Jim Griffin told reporters the Murdaugh team was disappointed in the outcome but had no further comment until sentencing.

The state's legal team emerged from the courthouse to a celebratory atmosphere. South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson thanked the prosecution for the past six weeks of late nights spent at a local hotel.

"It was all worth it. Because we got to bring justice and be a voice for Maggie and Paul Murdaugh," Wilson said. "Today's verdict proved that no one — no matter who you are in society — is above the law," he added, a line met with applause from spectators.

Through more than 75 witnesses and nearly 800 pieces of evidence, jurors heard about betrayed friends and clients, Murdaugh's failed attempt to stage his own death in an insurance fraud scheme, a fatal boat crash in which his son was implicated, the housekeeper who died in a fall in the Murdaugh home, the grisly scene of the killings and Bubba, the chicken-snatching dog.

In the end, Murdaugh's fate appeared sealed by the cellphone video taken by his son Paul, who he called "Little Detective" for his knack for finding bottles of painkillers in his father's belongings after the lawyer had sworn off the pills.

Testimony culminated in Murdaugh's appearance on the witness stand, when he admitted stealing millions from clients and lying to investigators about being at the dog kennels where the shootings took place but steadfastly maintained his innocence in the deaths of his wife and son.

"I did not kill Maggie, and I did not kill Paul. I would never hurt Maggie, and I would never hurt Paul — ever — under any circumstances," Murdaugh said.

Murdaugh had told police repeatedly after the killings that he was not at the kennels and was instead napping before he went to visit his ailing mother that night. Murdaugh called 911 and said he discovered the bodies when he returned home.

But in his testimony, Murdaugh admitted joining Maggie and Paul at the kennels, where he said he took a chicken away from a rowdy yellow Labrador named Bubba — whose name Murdaugh can be heard saying on the video — before heading back to the house shortly ahead of the fatal shootings.

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Murdaugh lied about being at the kennels for 20 months before taking the stand on the 23rd day of his trial. He blamed his decadeslong addiction to opioids for making him paranoid, creating a distrust of police. He said that once he went down that path, he felt trapped in the lie.

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave. Once I told a lie — I told my family — I had to keep lying," he testified.

Prosecutor Creighton Waters grilled Murdaugh about what he repeatedly called the lawyer's "new story" of what happened at the kennels, walking him moment by moment through the timeline and assailing his "fuzzy" memory of certain details, like his last words to his wife and son.

A state agent also testified that markings on spent cartridges found around Maggie Murdaugh's body matched markings on fired cartridges at a shooting range elsewhere on the property, though the defense said that kind of matching is an inexact science.

Alex Murdaugh comes from a family that dominated the local legal scene for decades. His father, grandfather and great-grandfather were the area's elected prosecutors for more than 80 years and his family law firm grew to dozens of lawyers by suing railroads, corporations and other big businesses.

The now-disbarred attorney admitted stealing millions of dollars from the family firm and clients, saying he needed the money to fund his drug habit. Before he was charged with murder, Murdaugh was in jail awaiting trial on about 100 other charges ranging from insurance fraud to tax evasion.

Prosecutors told jurors that Murdaugh was afraid all of his misdeeds were about to be discovered, so he killed his wife and son to gain sympathy to buy time to cover his tracks.

Waters commended the jurors for seeing through what he described as more lies by Murdaugh.

"We had no doubt that when we had a chance to present our case in the court of law that they would see through the one last con that Alex Murdaugh was trying to pull. And they did," Waters said after the verdict.

Murdaugh's lawyers will almost certainly appeal the conviction based on the judge allowing evidence of the financial crimes, which they contend were unrelated to the killings and were used by prosecutors to smear Murdaugh's reputation.

Trump can be sued for Jan. 6 riot harm, Justice Dept. says

By ERIC TUCKER and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Donald Trump can be sued by injured Capitol Police officers and Democratic lawmakers over the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, the Justice Department said Thursday in a federal court case testing Trump's legal vulnerability for his speech before the riot.

The Justice Department told a Washington federal appeals court in a legal filing that it should allow the lawsuits to move forward, rejecting Trump's argument that he is immune from the claims.

The department said it takes no position on the lawsuits' claims that the former president's words incited the attack on the Capitol. Nevertheless, Justice lawyers told the court that a president would not be protected by "absolute immunity" if his words were found to have been an "incitement of imminent private violence."

"As the Nation's leader and head of state, the President has 'an extraordinary power to speak to his fellow citizens and on their behalf,' they wrote. "But that traditional function is one of public communication and persuasion, not incitement of imminent private violence."

The brief was filed by lawyers of the Justice Department's Civil Division and has no bearing on a separate criminal investigation by a department special counsel into whether Trump can be criminally charged over efforts to undo President Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 presidential election ahead of the Capitol riot. In fact, the lawyers note that they are not taking a position with respect to potential criminal liability for Trump or anyone else.

Trump's lawyers have argued he was acting within the bounds of his official duties and had no intention to spark violence when he called on thousands of supporters to "march to the Capitol" and "fight like hell" before the riot erupted.

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"The actions of rioters do not strip President Trump of immunity," his lawyers wrote in court papers. "In the run-up to January 6th and on the day itself, President Trump was acting well within the scope of ordinary presidential action when he engaged in open discussion and debate about the integrity of the 2020 election."

A Trump spokesperson said Thursday that the president "repeatedly called for peace, patriotism, and respect for our men and women of law enforcement" on Jan. 6 and that the courts "should rule in favor of President Trump in short order and dismiss these frivolous lawsuits."

The case is among many legal woes facing Trump as he mounts another bid for the White House in 2024. A prosecutor in Georgia has been investigating whether Trump and his allies broke the law as they tried to overturn his election defeat in that state. Trump is also under federal criminal investigation over top secret documents found at his Florida estate.

In the separate investigation into Trump and his allies' efforts to keep the Republican president in power, special counsel Jack Smith has subpoenaed former Vice President Mike Pence, who has said he will fight the subpoena.

Trump is appealing a decision by a federal judge in Washington, who last year rejected efforts by the former president to toss out the conspiracy civil lawsuits filed by the lawmakers and police officers. U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta ruled that Trump's words during a rally before the violent storming of the U.S. Capitol were likely "words of incitement not protected by the First Amendment."

"Only in the most extraordinary circumstances could a court not recognize that the First Amendment protects a President's speech," Mehta wrote in his February 2022 ruling. "But the court believes this is that case."

One of the lawsuits, filed by Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-Calif., alleges that "Trump directly incited the violence at the Capitol that followed and then watched approvingly as the building was overrun." Two other lawsuits were also filed, one by other House Democrats and another by officers James Blassingame and Sidney Hemby.

The House Democrats' lawsuit cites a federal civil rights law that was enacted to counter the Ku Klux Klan's intimidation of officials. The cases describe in detail how Trump and others spread baseless claims of election fraud, both before and after the 2020 presidential election was declared, and charge that they helped to rile up the thousands of rioters before they stormed the Capitol.

The lawsuits seek damages for the physical and emotional injuries the plaintiffs sustained during the insurrection.

Even if the appeals court agrees that Trump can be sued, those who brought the lawsuit still face an uphill battle. They would need to show there was more than fiery rhetoric, but a direct and intentional call for imminent violence, said Laurie Levenson, a Loyola Law School professor and former federal prosecutor.

"We are really far away from knowing that even if the court allows the lawsuit to go forward whether they would be successful," she said. "Even if the court says hypothetically you can bring an action against a president, I think they're likely to draw a line that is very generous to the president's protected conduct."

In its filing, the Justice Department cautioned that the "court must take care not to adopt rules that would unduly chill legitimate presidential communication" or saddle a president with burdensome and intrusive lawsuits.

"In exercising their traditional communicative functions, Presidents routinely address controversial issues that are the subject of passionate feelings," the department wrote. "Presidents may at times use strong rhetoric. And some who hear that rhetoric may overreact, or even respond with violence."

No bail for Pennsylvania man with explosives in suitcase

By MARYCLAIRE DALE Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A Pennsylvania man admitted packing explosive materials, fuses and a lighter in a suitcase he checked for a commercial flight to Florida and fled the Lehigh Valley airport when he feared arrest, federal authorities said in a court document filed Thursday.

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Marc Muffley, 40, of Lansford, called his girlfriend for a ride when he heard his name being paged at the airport, and soon switched his phone number to avoid being tracked, prosecutors said.

"The danger he created ... is simply astonishing," Assistant United States Attorney Sherri A. Stephan said at a Thursday court hearing, when she asked a judge to deny bail. "The fact TSA (the Transportation Security Administration) was able to immediately locate this device and prevent it from being placed on an airplane is to their credit."

A defense lawyer suggested that Muffley only wanted to set off fireworks on a Florida beach, where he said the one-time construction worker sometimes cares for an ailing grandfather.

However, U.S. Magistrate Pamela A. Carlos agreed to detain him without bail, finding that Muffley was both a flight risk and a danger to the community.

Authorities said the fact the explosive powder was packed in the same checked bag with the other items increased the risk of an explosion.

"The baggage also contained a can of butane, a lighter, a pipe with white powder residue suspected to be methamphetamine, a wireless drill with cordless batteries, and two GFCI outlets taped together with black tape," prosecutors wrote in a detention memorandum filed Thursday.

"His actions seriously jeopardized the lives of airport workers and patrons, and if the explosive had not been intercepted, the flight's passengers and the aircraft," the memo said.

Muffley is charged with possessing an explosive in an airport and possessing or attempting to place an explosive or incendiary device on an aircraft, according to a criminal complaint.

The defense lawyer, Jonathan McDonald, argued that the items were not "incendiary" and therefore did not meet the requirements of the second charge. Muffley attended the hearing, which was held via videoconference, from jail but did not speak.

"No one has posited one conceivable theory on how this thing could have gone off. That was not going to happen inside of a bag," McDonald said.

However, Carlos found probable cause to uphold both charges.

Muffley was arrested at his home Monday night, hours after he had checked in for the Allegiant Air flight at the Lehigh Valley International Airport. The flight was bound for Orlando.

His record includes misdemeanor arrests for drug possession, theft and driving under the influence, which led to a few jail stints, the memo said. His girlfriend told authorities he feared being arrested at the airport on an outstanding child support warrant, authorities said.

They have said they found a three-inch "circular compound" wrapped in paper and plastic wrap that they believe contained a mix of flash powder and other materials used to make commercial grade fireworks.

Attached to it was a "quick fuse" similar to a candle wick — apparently part of the original manufacture of the compound — as well as a slow-burning "hobby fuse" that appeared to have been added later, they said.

Officials believe the materials could be ignited by heat and friction, and posed a significant risk to the plane and its occupants, according to the criminal complaint. ___ Follow AP Legal Affairs Writer Maryclaire Dale at <https://twitter.com/Maryclairedale>

Transgender pastor claims bias, sues Lutheran denomination

By DEEPA BHARATH Associated Press

The Rev. Megan Rohrer, who was elected as the first openly transgender bishop of one of the largest Christian denominations in the country in May 2021, has filed a lawsuit alleging that he was forced out from his post after enduring several months of discrimination and harassment.

The denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, declined comment, according to an email from spokesperson Candice Buchbinder.

Rohrer, of San Francisco, resigned in June as bishop of the ELCA's Sierra Pacific Synod amid allegations of racism after he fired the pastor of a predominantly Latino, immigrant congregation in Stanton, California, on the Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, for which the community had planned elaborate festivities.

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In his lawsuit filed Wednesday in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, Rohrer accuses the denomination of discriminating against him for being transgender and deliberately misgendering him and creating a "hostile work environment." He is seeking monetary damages.

Rohrer, who now works as a senior communications specialist with a Black nondenominational church in San Francisco, said Thursday that he always felt the support of Lutherans in the pews, but not from the higher echelons of the national church. On his first day as bishop, during a video call, Rohrer said he was misgendered and ridiculed for featuring drag queens at his ordination.

Rohrer alleges in the lawsuit that he was scapegoated and "publicly shamed as a racist."

"All my life, I've been an ally for racial justice and to people from marginalized groups," he said, adding that he chose to remain silent after his removal from office last year so the predominantly white denomination could recognize its shortcomings and pass racial justice reforms. The intent of his lawsuit is not to minimize or undermine any other marginalized group, Rohrer said.

He also accuses the denomination of retaliating against him for blowing the whistle on labor violations in the denomination when he reported to synod officials that they were categorizing employees as independent contractors to avoid paying them a salary, which is a violation of federal and California labor laws.

"Similarly, when Rohrer separately revealed the transgender harassment he had been suffering since beginning his job, the Church terminated him, and falsely accused him of 'weaponizing' his own identity as a trans person to 'avoid being held accountable,'" says the lawsuit, filed on behalf of Rohrer by the Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy LLP law firm of Burlingame, California.

In August, the Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, the denomination's presiding bishop, issued a public apology at the 2022 Churchwide Assembly in Ohio, to members of the Iglesia Luterana Santa Maria Peregrina, describing the events that transpired as "a sharp assault on your dignity." After the pastor's firing, the congregation lost the denomination's financial backing, and was forced to vacate their building and worship in the parking lot.

Rohrer resigned in June and the next day became the target of a church disciplinary process.

"I was pushed out of the church for following the directives of superiors," he said. "And cast as a racist publicly."

He hopes the lawsuit will force the church to follow its own policies to treat LGBTQ people fairly and with dignity within the church. Rohrer said he has never wanted to pit two marginalized groups against one another.

"The church is big enough for everyone," he said, adding that it is important to acknowledge the "tragic history of racism and discrimination" in the church.

The lawsuit states that in addition to enduring "nearly-daily hate mail" including death threats as a result of the denomination's conduct, Rohrer, because of his firing, cannot work as a bishop of a synod or even as a pastor in the denomination.

Colombia proposes shipping invasive hippos to India, Mexico

By ASTRID SUÁREZ Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Colombia is proposing transferring at least 70 hippopotamuses that live near Pablo Escobar's former ranch - descendants of four imported from Africa illegally by the late drug lord in the 1980s - to India and Mexico as part of a plan to control their population.

The hippos, which are territorial and weigh up to 3 tons, have spread far beyond the Hacienda Napoles ranch, located 200 kilometer (124 mile) from Bogota along the Magdalena River. Environmental authorities estimate there are about 130 hippos in the area in Antioquia province and their population could reach 400 in eight years.

Escobar's Hacienda Napoles — and the hippos — have become a sort of local tourist attraction in the years since the kingpin was killed by police in 1993. When his ranch was abandoned, the hippos survived and reproduced in local rivers and favorable climatic conditions.

Scientists warn the hippos do not have a natural predator in Colombia and are a potential problem for

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biodiversity since their feces change the composition of the rivers and could impact the habitat of manatees and capybaras. Last year, Colombia's government declared them a toxic invasive species.

The plan to take them to India and Mexico has been forming for more than a year, said Lina Marcela de los Ríos Morales, director of animal protection and welfare at Antioquia's environment ministry.

The hippos would be lured with food into large, iron containers and transferred by truck to the international airport in the city of Rionegro, 150 kilometers away. From there, they would be flown to India and Mexico, where there are sanctuaries and zoos capable of taking in and caring for the animals.

"It is possible to do, we already have experience relocating hippos in zoos nationwide," said David Echeverri López, a spokesman for Cornare, the local environmental authority that would be in charge of the relocations.

The plan is to send 60 hippos to the Greens Zoological Rescue & Rehabilitation Kingdom in Gujarat, India, which De los Ríos Morales said would cover the cost of the containers and airlift. Another 10 hippos would go to zoos and sanctuaries in Mexico such as the Ostok, located in Sinaloa.

"We work with Ernesto Zazueta, who is the president of sanctuaries and zoos in Mexico, who is the one who liaisons with different countries and manage their rescues," said the official.

The plan is to focus on the hippos living in the rivers surrounding the Hacienda Napoles ranch, not the ones inside the ranch because they are in a controlled environment and don't threaten the local ecosystem.

The relocations would help control the hippo population, and though the animals' native habitat is Africa, it is more humane than the alternate proposal of exterminating them as an invasive species, said De los Ríos Morales.

Ecuador, the Philippines and Botswana have also expressed their willingness to relocated Colombian hippos to their countries, according to the Antioquia Governor's Office.

Two Americans arrested on charges of selling tech to Russia

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department on Thursday arrested two Kansas men on allegations that the pair illegally exported aviation-related technology to Russia and provided repair services for the equipment.

Cyril Gregory Buyanovsky and Douglas Robertson are charged with conspiracy, exporting controlled goods without a license, falsifying and failing to file electronic export information, and smuggling goods in violation of U.S. law.

The charges come as the U.S. has drastically ramped up sanctions and financial penalties on Russia since its invasion of Ukraine began on Feb. 24, 2022. Along with thousands of sanctions on people and firms, export controls on the Kremlin are meant to limit access to computer chips and other products needed to equip a modern military.

The Justice Department says Buyanovsky and Robertson owned and operated KanRus Trading Co., which allegedly supplied aircraft electronics to Russian companies and provided repair services for equipment used in Russian-manufactured aircraft.

The indictment says that since 2020, they conspired to evade U.S. export laws by concealing and misstating the true end users and destinations of their exports and by shipping equipment through third-party countries.

They face up to 35 years in prison if convicted. Lawyers for Buyanovsky and Robertson couldn't be identified from the provided documents, and the Justice Department didn't immediately respond to a request for their information.

The FBI and the Commerce Department's Office of Export Enforcement are investigating the case.

Matthew S. Axelrod, assistant secretary for export enforcement at the Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security, said at an American Bar Association event in Miami Thursday that state actors like Russia, China, Iran and North Korea are trying to "take advantage of rapid advances in technology," adding that sensitive technologies being sent to these countries are "top of our list from an enforcement

perspective.”

Since the anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, U.S. officials have said they would increase enforcement and sanctions on people and entities that assist Russia in the procurement of weaponry and technology that would bolster its military.

Angry Ohio residents confront railroad over health fears

By JOSH FUNK and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

Residents who say they're still suffering from illnesses nearly a month after a train carrying toxic chemicals derailed in Ohio confronted the railroad's operator Thursday at a town forum, demanding to know whether they'd be relocated from homes they're afraid to live in.

"It's not safe here," said one man, staring straight at representatives of Norfolk Southern. "I'm begging you, by the grace of God, please get our people out of here."

While the railroad announced it was ready to begin moving more contaminated soil from underneath the tracks, buying homes and moving people out of East Palestine hasn't been discussed, said Darrell Wilson, the railroad's assistant vice president of government relations.

"Why?" someone shouted.

Few seemed to come away satisfied with answers they heard about air and water testing from state and federal officials — even after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said it was ordering Norfolk Southern to begin testing for dioxins, toxic chemical compounds that can stay in the environment for long periods of time.

Many people remain scared about whether the area will be safe for their children years from now, saying they fear that dioxins not yet detected will cause long-term damage. Testing so far by the EPA for "indicator chemicals" has suggested there's a low chance that dioxins were released from the derailment, the agency said.

Some residents booed, laughed and yelled, "Don't lie to us," when Debra Shore, a regional administrator with the EPA, reiterated that tests have continually shown that the village's air is safe.

Investigators looking into the fire that erupted after the derailment said it melted a key part of the tank cars filled with toxic chemicals, leading federal officials to warn railcar owners earlier Thursday to check their fleets for similar flaws.

The National Transportation Safety Board said investigators determined the aluminum covers over the pressure relief valves on three of the five tank cars carrying vinyl chloride melted and that some of the metal was found around the valves.

The NTSB said melted aluminum may have degraded the performance of the valves and kept them from releasing some of the flammable gas to relieve pressure inside the tank cars. Norfolk Southern CEO Alan Shaw has said the failure of the valves was part of why officials decided to breach the cars and burn off the vinyl chloride. The resulting toxic fire prompted the evacuation of half of East Palestine, Ohio, and the surrounding area near the Pennsylvania border.

Shaw said the railroad agreed with all the officials responding to the Feb. 3 derailment that venting the hazardous materials cars was the best way to prevent a disastrous explosion.

"The factors on the ground at that time were that the safety valves on the rail cars had failed and the temperatures inside the railcars were heating up," Shaw said. "So, our independent expert was extremely concerned about a catastrophic uncontrolled explosion that would shoot shrapnel and hazardous gas throughout this populated community."

Wilson told residents that Norfolk Southern feels horrible about what happened. So far, more than 2 million gallons (7.6 million liters) of water and liquid waste have been removed along with 1400 ton (1,270 metric tonnes) of solid waste.

Many people have complained that Norfolk Southern opened the tracks less than a week after the derailment and didn't remove the soil underneath. The railroad now plans to dig up the areas and should be able to remove all the contaminated soil by the end of April if it's able to start right away, Wilson said.

That only brought more jeers and angry shouts.

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"You should have done it right the first time," someone yelled.

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration sent an urgent safety warning out to tank car owners Thursday saying they should check how many of their cars have aluminum covers over the valves like the ones that melted after the Ohio derailment. The agency said car owners should consider switching to steel covers, which is now the industry standard on new tank cars.

It's not clear how many tank cars in use might have aluminum valve covers. The cars with them involved in the derailment were all manufactured in the 1990s.

The derailment prompted many lingering concerns for the roughly 5,000 residents of East Palestine, even though state and federal officials say their tests haven't found any harmful levels of toxic chemicals in the air or water around the derailment.

The NTSB has said that an overheating bearing likely caused the train to derail, sending 38 cars, including 11 containing hazardous materials, off the tracks. A trackside sensor detected the overheating bearing just before the derailment, but the crew didn't have enough time to stop the train.

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine has said he is focused making sure Norfolk Southern cleans up the mess while helping the town recover, and Shaw agreed to testify in Congress next week at a hearing about the derailment.

Already, members of Congress and the Biden administration have proposed many rail safety reforms, but Norfolk Southern and the other major freight railroads want to wait until after the NTSB completes its investigation a year or more from now to make any significant changes.

The major freight railroads said earlier Thursday they would take one of the steps Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg recommended and join a government program that runs a confidential hotline for employees to report safety concerns.

Lessons about the human psyche from the Murdaugh trial

By JAMES POLLARD Associated Press/Report for America

WALTERBORO, S.C. (AP) — Disgraced attorney Alex Murdaugh has now been convicted of murder in a trial that attracted intense public attention to the Southern tale of privilege and deceit.

Investigations stemming from the June 7, 2021, shooting deaths of Murdaugh's wife and son revealed that the prominent South Carolina lawyer stole millions of dollars from largely poor clients' settlements and staged an attempt on his life to secure his surviving son a \$12 million life insurance payout, according to authorities.

In the process, true crime enthusiasts, concerned onlookers and many others found the latest subject of their fascination in the yearslong unraveling of a mystery that jurors weighed in a six-week trial that culminated in a deliberation that took less than three hours. Murdaugh, 54, faces 30 years to life in prison without parole for each murder charge when court is scheduled to reconvene for sentencing Friday morning.

Experts say the small town saga's transformation into an international point of intrigue highlights insights into the human psyche: People are drawn to events that inform their perceptions of threat. And amid the commotion of the trial, some legal observers have found an important opportunity for education.

Coltan Scrivner, a researcher at the Recreational Fear Lab at Aarhus University in Denmark, said a human desire to avoid getting duped has developed into a natural curiosity about signs of danger. Those cues, he said, are especially strong when the schemes involve the rich and powerful like the Murdaugh family.

"We put it in our rolodex of possible simulations of what could happen in a bad situation," Scrivner said.

Amanda Vicary, a psychology professor at Illinois Wesleyan University, said the obsession with true crime is largely driven by women interested in its self-protective lessons. Many followers might subconsciously ask themselves what they need to look for in their own lives, she said.

Plus, the Murdaugh case's many aspects — mystery, forensics, family, finances — have appealed to a variety of interests.

"Most popular true crime stories might only have one or two of those elements," Vicary said. "It has a little something for everything going on right now."

Stephanie Truesdale, an upstate South Carolina teacher whose crocheted dolls of prominent figures in the

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case went viral on social media, said the combination of a wealthy family's fall from grace and the many unexpected developments piqued her attention from the start. She said she's been particularly interested to see how the state's legal system treats "one of their own."

Although the dolls garnered praise, some other displays of public interest in the case have been less well-received. Several trespassers were found last weekend taking selfies outside the feed room where Paul Murdaugh died, according to defense attorney Dick Harpootlian. He described it as the "most distasteful thing" he had ever seen.

"If people are really paying attention, they could really learn a lot from what's going on right now, instead of just the more gruesome aspect of things," Truesdale said.

Sarah Ford, the legal director for the South Carolina Victim Assistance Network, said she has found that people want to better understand legal processes in connection to the case. She and former state lawmaker Mandy Powers Norrell began hosting Twitter spaces to answer questions about the daily proceedings. Ford said they recently drew 600 people for an hourlong YouTube Live conversation.

For Ford, the trial has spurred conversations that can change common misconceptions about crime. People might be shocked that someone could be accused of killing their wife and son, but the case has raised awareness of issues such as the prevalence of domestic violence, she said.

Although Ford recognized the importance of community engagement, she also had a word of caution: "You don't want this to be something that takes over someone's life as entertainment. Because it's not. These are real people. These are real crimes. These have true, chilling, tragic effects for real people."

It's not the first time a South Carolina double murder trial has reverberated so widely. Susan Smith was sentenced to life in prison for the drowning deaths of her two infant children in 1994.

State Rep. Tommy Pope, who was the lead prosecutor in the Smith case, said he thinks people are drawn to the Murdaugh saga because of its "truth is stranger than fiction" aspects.

"It's like a soap opera, but it's really happening with real people," said Pope, adding, "This is not entertainment. It is a tragedy and lives were lost."

Pope said the Murdaugh case has offered an opportunity to educate the public about the justice system. As an analyst on Court TV during the trial, Pope said today's gavel-to-gavel coverage can help viewers reach their own conclusions and understand the legal system's "positives" and its "warts."

Streaming services have certainly taken notice. Discovery released a three-part series a year after Maggie and Paul Murdaugh were killed, HBO Max launched a three-part documentary in November and Netflix last week released "Murdaugh Murders: A Southern Scandal" for U.S. audiences, with the filmmakers telling Vanity Fair they unearthed additional crimes in the process.

A bevy of 100 other charges including financial crimes — for which lead prosecutor Creighton Waters drew many admissions of guilt last week — have yet to go to trial.

For many South Carolinians, the interest comes from a strong desire to see justice served to a well-connected man who has only recently acknowledged lies and abuses of power that long went unchecked.

In addition to the intense online and media attention the case received, it also attracted crowds outside the courthouse since it began on Jan. 25, including several dozen people who gathered there Thursday morning. Among them was the Rev. Raymond Johnson, a civil rights activist who carried a sign reading "JUSTICE COMING SOON" and who led others in a prayer.

Bill Nettles, the former U.S. attorney for South Carolina, said he wishes every defendant's liberty received the same attention and resources. "We should all strive for a world where the effort to take anybody's liberty gets the same scrutiny as this case," he said.

In a nod to the spectacle of the case, prosecutor Creighton Waters said after the guilty verdicts that his own team of lawyers had taken to calling it their "Super Bowl."

"Y'all saw all of these folks behind me doing amazing work. And I can't be prouder of a team in my life," he said during a news conference. "We called this our Super Bowl, and not because of the media attention, but just because of the effort that we knew that we would have to put into this." _____

James Pollard is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initia-

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tive. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

New leaders, economy to dominate China's legislative session

BEIJING (AP) — The installation of new leaders and the need to shore up a flagging economy will dominate the annual session of China's rubber-stamp parliament that kicks off Sunday.

The nearly 3,000 delegates attending the meeting of the largely powerless National People's Congress will hear reports on the work of government that lay out the ruling Communist Party's priorities.

Don't expect open debates or criticism. All documents, decisions and appointments are expected to receive unanimous support.

Below are some of the issues surrounding the roughly 10-day event.

WHAT'S SPECIAL ABOUT THIS YEAR?

This year's gathering comes at the start of China's latest five-year political cycle, as an addendum to the ruling Communist Party's 20th annual congress in October.

That event saw the appointment of a new Politburo Standing Committee, the apex of political power in China, led by Secretary General Xi Jinping, China's president who has eliminated term limits to allow him to rule for life.

The congress will see Xi renamed head of state along with the replacement of Li Keqiang as premier and the appointment of other top members of the State Council, China's Cabinet.

China's economy was battered by pandemic-related lockdowns, quarantines and other harsh measures imposed under the "zero-COVID" strategy, adding to the woes of a hugely indebted real estate sector and the precarious state of local government finances.

Despite optimistic talk from Beijing, many analysts say the economy is in serious trouble.

At the same time, China's assertive, often adventurous foreign policy has put it at odds with the U.S. and its allies over issues from Russia's invasion of Ukraine to threats against Taiwan and even the banning of the Chinese short video app TikTok by foreign governments on national security grounds.

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER THEMES?

The gathering is expected to pick up on a move to increase centralization — always a key priority for communist states — by shifting responsibilities from government bodies to those directly under the party's Central Committee.

That could be most pronounced in the security field, where the responsibilities of the Ministry of Public Security in charge of the police, and the Ministry of State Security that handles foreign and domestic intelligence, could be taken over by party commissions.

Similar moves have been proposed for the semi-autonomous region of Hong Kong, where the party has steadily ratcheted up control since months of anti-government protests in 2019 and a subsequent crackdown on civil liberties and political opposition.

Measures to boost a flagging birthrate are also expected to be discussed, following the abandonment of the much-criticized and highly punitive one-child policy in 2016. That followed the announcement in January that the population fell by 850,000 last year as a result of a cratering birthrate and aging population, the first decline in 61 years.

Local governments are offering subsidized childcare, cash payments of 5,000 yuan (\$700) or more and even free apartments to couples who decide to start families, especially if they're having more than one child.

In Sichuan province, authorities this year moved to legally recognize children born to unwed mothers. More localities are expected to follow. Previously, women were not banned from having children on their own, but faced bureaucratic hurdles making it almost impossible to register them for school and other social services. IVF services are being expanded, although surrogacy remains illegal.

The issue of Taiwan, which split from the mainland in 1949 and has never been governed by the Communist Party, is also seen as growing more pressing, especially given heightened tensions with Taiwan's

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top ally, the United States.

Since the NPC's passage in 2005 of an "anti-secession law," leaders have debated enacting tougher measures to back up Beijing's threat to use force to annex the island it considers its own territory.

"Now, of course, some people may think (the NPC) is more conservative. That's true," said Cheng Li, an expert on Chinese politics and leadership issues at the Brookings Institution think tank in Washington, D.C.

Xi has shifted policy so that "the top priority is state security. It's national security at a time that war becomes more likely," Cheng said.

WHAT IS THE NPC AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

Made up of regional delegations and one from the People's Liberation Army, the National People's Congress is technically the highest law-making body in China, although the vast majority of its legislative work is performed by its 175-member Standing Committee that meets year-round.

Its annual gathering at the hulking Great Hall of the People in the heart of Beijing is the main public forum for communicating the government's priorities and goals, both economic and political.

A key document is the premier's work report that will set the GDP growth target and the defense budget.

There is also a limited opportunity for feedback, as top officials meet with the various delegation heads, but there is none of the open discussion or tabling of bills typical of other legislatures. That is also the case with the congress' advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, which meets concurrently.

"The purpose of the annual session is a signaling exercise of what the leadership's goals are and what they want everyone to think about going forward," said Scott Kennedy, an expert on the Chinese economy at the Center for Strategic & International Studies.

WHAT'S IT SAY ABOUT CHINA'S POLITICAL SYSTEM?

NPC delegates almost all belong to the ruling Communist Party, which has brooked no opposition and very little criticism since seizing power amid civil war in 1949.

Delegates are generally far better traveled, better educated and more politically astute than in the past. Yet, that hasn't produced any apparent desire to turn the NPC into a more representative body that could act as a check on government and the ruling party. With few exceptions, the NPC has been a loyal adjunct to the party leadership, offering a patina of democracy to an increasingly authoritarian one-party police state.

And in case there is any question, the party routinely issues decrees and takes real steps to quash any push for reform smacking of Western-style liberalism. Dissidents have been imprisoned, exiled or intimidated into silence, while human rights lawyers and legal activists have been under massive pressure since a sweeping 2015 roundup.

Just days before the NPC's opening, the party's General Office issued a directive telling law professors and their students to "oppose and resist Western erroneous views such as 'constitutional government,' 'separation of three powers,' and 'independence of the judiciary.'"

Toxic 'forever chemicals' about to get their first US limits

By MICHAEL PHILLIS and BRITTANY PETERSON Associated Press

The Environmental Protection Agency is expected to propose restrictions on harmful "forever chemicals" in drinking water after finding they are dangerous in amounts so small as to be undetectable. But experts say removing them will cost billions, a burden that will fall hardest on small communities with few resources.

Concerned about the chemicals' ability to weaken children's immune systems, the EPA said last year that PFAS could cause harm at levels "much lower than previously understood."

"We as a community of scientists and policymakers and regulators really missed the boat early on," said Susan Pinney, director of the Center for Environmental Genetics at the University of Cincinnati.

There is also evidence the compounds are linked to low birthweight, kidney cancer and a slew of other health issues. It's unclear what the EPA will now propose and how well it will protect people from these recently-understood harms.

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The compounds PFOA and PFOS are part of a larger family of chemicals called PFAS, for per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances, that are widespread, don't degrade in the environment and have been around for decades. They've been used in nonstick pans, food packaging and firefighting foam. Their use is now mostly phased out in the U.S., but some still remain.

Water providers are preparing for tough standards and testing that will undoubtedly reveal PFOA and PFOS in communities that don't yet know the chemicals are in their water. The deadline for the proposal is Friday, but first it must be reviewed by the White House Office of Management and Budget. As of Thursday, that review wasn't finished.

"This rule would help ensure that communities are not being poisoned," said Jonathan Kalmuss-Katz, senior attorney, toxic exposure and health at Earthjustice.

Over the last decade, an increasing number of cities and towns, often abutting manufacturing plants or Air Force bases, suddenly realized they had a problem. In 2016, for example, Sarah McKinney was on maternity leave when she got word there was too much PFOA and PFOS in the tap water in her Colorado Springs suburb. She picked up her weeks-old daughter and hustled out to buy enough bottled water for her family of five.

"If I'm just spitting it out, can I brush my teeth?" she remembers wondering.

In response to concerns from people who had been drinking the water for years, McKinney's water utility switched to a different source, provided water bottle filling stations and installed a \$2.5 million treatment system that was the first of its kind in the country, according to Lucas Hale, the water district manager. The chemicals had gotten into the water from nearby Peterson Air Force base, which then built a treatment facility.

For communities with the pollutants, it's not a cheap problem to solve.

Nationally, it could cost roughly \$38 billion to remove enough of the chemicals to meet a strict EPA rule limiting them to where they can't be detected, according to an estimate prepared by engineering consultant Black & Veatch for the American Water Works Association, an industry group. There also will be ongoing costs for filter material and testing.

The consultant looked at federal and state test results and estimated that 4% to 12% of water providers nationally will need to treat for PFAS due to the EPA rule.

Smaller, poorer communities will have a harder time affording the new systems and training staff on how to use them, experts said. And in general, smaller water providers with fewer resources already violate water quality rules more often than utilities that serve large cities.

"Small systems often need technologies that are more simple to operate," said Jonathan Pressman, engineer and EPA water researcher. The agency offers technical assistance to states and communities and it recently made \$2 billion available to states for contaminants like PFAS.

Inside the EPA's research facility in Cincinnati, a row of vertical, forearm-sized glass tubes were partially filled with a resin material that can remove PFAS. The work ensures the agency knows how long it will last and how much PFAS it removes. That's important for designing treatment systems.

Last year the agency lowered its conservative, voluntary health thresholds to levels that tests can't even detect – a fraction of a part per trillion. In 2016, it was 70 ppt. Before that, it was even higher. As the EPA recognizes the increased danger of these compounds, it will mean people who were once told their water was safe to drink will find out it actually requires treatment.

When people feel misled about the safety of their tap water, they are less likely to drink it. Instead, they tend to reach for expensive bottled water and consume sugary drinks more often, choices associated with health problems like diabetes.

"We do have challenges in this community with trust," said Abel Moreno, the district manager of the South Adams County Water & Sewer District that serves Commerce City, an industrial stretch of Denver. Contaminants leaked from a nearby chemical manufacturing plant decades ago. Although the district built a facility to treat the contamination, it sparked long-simmering distrust in the predominantly Latino neighborhood, and questions about how long people had been exposed.

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Last year, Betty Rivas was startled by a letter telling her that the drinking fountains her 8-year-old used at school weren't safe. PFAS stories had been in the local news and the school district told families to use bottled water. It reinforced Rivas's fears.

"With this recent PFAS issue, it's one more reason to be certain that you shouldn't drink the water in Commerce City," she said.

Moreno responded that the district tested for PFAS long before the news reports, in 2018. It discovered extremely high levels in certain wells, but once the water went through the treatment plant, it didn't surpass the EPA health advisory threshold in place at the time. Moreno's agency closed the wells. He said the letter Rivas received was frustrating because PFAS hadn't spiked — it had just made the news. Now, the district purchases and mixes in water from Denver to keep PFAS at undetectable levels and plans to build a treatment plant for a permanent fix.

Across the U.S., so far only local utilities and state regulators have imposed changes, not the federal government. Michigan set a drinking water limit and paid for testing. Those tests helped quickly find and fix some places with contamination and Michigan officials have said since then its limits haven't proved too expensive.

New standards, however, will force tradeoffs, according to Chad Seidel, president of a water consultant company.

"Resources going towards addressing this are in some ways coming at a cost" of other needs, like removing dangerous lead pipes and replacing aged water mains, he said.

Kalmuss-Katz of Earthjustice said too many people are drinking contaminated water. Cost can't be a barrier.

"The solution is to do whatever you have to do to ensure that people are not getting sick," he said.

Wayne Shorter, jazz saxophone pioneer, dies at 89

By The Associated Press undefined

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Wayne Shorter, an influential jazz innovator whose lyrical, complex jazz compositions and pioneering saxophone playing sounded through more than half a century of American music, has died. He was 89.

Shorter died Thursday surrounded by his family in Los Angeles, said Alisse Kingsley, a representative for the multi-Grammy winner. No cause of death was given.

"Visionary composer, saxophonist, visual artist, devout Buddhist, devoted husband, father and grandfather Wayne Shorter has embarked on a new journey as part of his extraordinary life — departing the earth as we know it in search of an abundance of new challenges and creative possibilities," a statement released by Kingsley said. It called him a gentle spirit who was "always inquisitive and constantly exploring."

Shorter, a tenor saxophonist, made his debut in 1959 and would go on to be a foundational member of two of the most seminal jazz groups: Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers and the Miles Davis Quintet. Over the next eight decades, Shorter's wide-spanning collaborations would include co-founding the '70s fusion band Weather Report, some 10 album appearances with Joni Mitchell and further explorations with Carlos Santana and Steely Dan.

Many of Shorter's textured and elliptical compositions — including "Speak No Evil," "Black Nile," "Footprints," and "Nefertiti" — became modern jazz standards and expanded the harmonic horizons of jazz across some of its most fast-evolving eras.

Herbie Hancock once said of Shorter in Miles Davis's Second Great Quintet: "The master writer to me, in that group, was Wayne Shorter. He still is a master. Wayne was one of the few people who brought music to Miles that didn't get changed."

Hancock praised Shorter for his musical expertise and leaving a special mark in his life.

"Wayne Shorter, my best friend, left us with courage in his heart, love and compassion for all, and a seeking spirit for the eternal future," Hancock said in a statement. "He was ready for his rebirth. As it is with every human being, he is irreplaceable and was able to reach the pinnacle of excellence as a saxo-

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phonist, composer, orchestrator, and recently, composer of the masterful opera '...Iphigenia'. I miss being around him and his special Wayne-isms but I carry his spirit within my heart always."

As a band leader, Shorter released more than 25 albums and won 12 Grammy Awards. In 2015 he was given a lifetime achievement Grammy. Last month, he won a Grammy in the category of best improvised jazz solo for "Endangered Species" with Leo Genovese.

Shorter's work has been performed by several popular symphonies including Chicago, Detroit and Lyon along with the National Polish Radio Symphonic and Orpheus Chamber orchestras.

In his career, Shorter has had more than 200 compositions and was a Kennedy Center honoree in 2018.

"Maestro Wayne Shorter was our hero, guru, and beautiful friend," said Don Was, the president of Blue Note Records, the label where he recorded several albums. "His music possessed a spirit that came from somewhere way, way beyond and made this world a much better place. Likewise, his warmth and wisdom enriched the lives of everyone who knew him. Thankfully, the work he left behind will stay with us forever. Our hearts go out to Carolina and all who loved him."

Half of California freed from drought thanks to rain, snow

By JOHN ANTCHAK Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Tremendous rains and snowfall since late last year have freed half of California from drought, but low groundwater levels remain a persistent problem, U.S. Drought Monitor data showed Thursday.

The latest survey found that moderate or severe drought covers about 49% of the state, nearly 17% of the state is free of drought or a condition described as abnormally dry. The remainder is still abnormally dry.

"Clearly the amount of water that's fallen this year has greatly alleviated the drought," said Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at the University of California, Los Angeles. "It has not ended the drought completely but we're in a very different place than we were a year ago."

California's latest drought began in 2020 and no relief appeared in sight heading into this winter.

Three months ago virtually all of California was in drought, including at extreme and exceptional levels. Water agencies serving millions of people, agriculture and industry were told to expect only a fraction of requested allocations.

The turnabout began with a series of atmospheric rivers that pounded the state from late December through mid-January, building a huge Sierra Nevada snowpack, causing flooding, toppling trees and smashing the coast with extreme surf.

Water authorities began boosting allocations and, after a few largely dry weeks, powerful storms with arctic air returned in February, creating epic vistas of white-capped mountains while shutting down highways and ski resorts and burying communities in enough snow to collapse roofs.

The monitor shows three regions have received the most benefit from copious precipitation, including snowfall measured in feet rather than inches.

The central Sierra and foothills are now free of drought or abnormal dryness for the first time since January 2020, the monitor said. The central coast from Monterey Bay to Los Angeles County is also now drought-free, along with two counties on the far north coast.

"The rain has improved California soil moisture and streamflow levels, while the snow has increased mountain snowpack to much above-normal levels," the monitor said. "Most California reservoirs have re-filled with water levels near or above average, but groundwater levels remain low and may take months to recover."

As of Thursday, the water content of the Sierra snowpack, which provides about a third of California's water, was 170% of the historical average on April 1, when it is normally at its peak, according to the state Department of Water Resources.

Department officials plan to conduct a Sierra snow measurement on Friday and hold a briefing on how the remaining month of California's traditional snow season will impact the state's water supplies.

Swain said the snowpack could become the largest ever observed in parts of California. The outlook calls

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for a continuing wet pattern, particularly for northern parts of the state, and more feet of snow, he said. "If we can get through the rest of the season without anymore roof collapses or snowmelt floods it will be quite a boon," Swain said.

The snowpack potentially could face threats such as early heatwaves or, as some forecast models have hinted, a warm atmospheric river that could cause melting and flooding. Swain said California is expected to remain cold and the likelihood of the atmospheric river is very low.

"I think that snowpack is going to take well through the summer to melt and ... some shaded patches might still be there next autumn," he said.

While reservoirs have been filling from shockingly low levels, recovery has not been uniform as demonstrated by the state's two largest water storage facilities. Lake Oroville, 65 miles (105 kilometers) north of Sacramento, is at 73% of capacity, 116% of average to date. Another 90 miles (145 kilometers) north, Lake Shasta is only 60% full, 84% of average to date.

Swain said he expects Shasta to get good inflows during snowmelt season because the snowpack there is slightly above average although not exceptional.

The U.S. Drought Monitor is a joint project of the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

As Tennessee, others target drag shows, many wonder: Why?

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI and JEFF McMILLAN Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — "If I hadn't been a girl, I'd have been a drag queen."

Dolly Parton has uttered those words famously and often. But if she really were a drag queen, one of Tennessee's most famous daughters would likely be out of a job under legislation signed into law by Republican Gov. Bill Lee on Thursday.

Lee signed off on the legislation without issuing a statement or having a public ceremony. The bill goes into effect July 1.

Across the country, conservative activists and politicians complain that drag contributes to the "sexualization" or "grooming" of children. Several states are considering restrictions, but none has acted as fast as Tennessee. The efforts seek to extinguish popular "drag story hours" at which queens read to kids. Organizers of LGBTQ Pride events say they put a chill on their parades. And advocates note that the bills, pushed largely by Republicans, burden businesses in an un-Republican fashion.

The protestations have arisen fairly suddenly around a form of entertainment that has long had a place on the mainstream American stage.

Milton Berle, "Mr. Television" himself, was appearing in drag on the public airwaves as early as the 1950s on "Texaco Star Theater." "RuPaul's Drag Race" is a bona fide cultural phenomenon. Highly popular drag brunches bring revenue to restaurants. That such spectacles are now being portrayed as a danger to children boggles the minds of people who study, perform and appreciate drag.

"Drag is not a threat to anyone. It makes no sense to be criminalizing or vilifying drag in 2023," said Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, a professor of culture and gender studies at the University of Michigan and author of "Translocas: The Politics of Puerto Rican Drag and Trans Performance."

"It is a space where people explore their identities," said La Fountain-Stokes, who has done drag himself. "But it is also a place where people simply make a living. Drag is a job. Drag is a legitimate artistic expression that brings people together, that entertains, that allows certain individuals to explore who they are and allows all of us to have a very nice time. So it makes literally no sense for legislators, for people in government, to try to ban drag."

Drag does not typically involve nudity or stripping, which are more common in the separate art of burlesque. Explicitly sexual and profane language is common in drag performances, but such content is avoided when children are the target audience. At shows meant for adults, venues or performers generally warn beforehand about age-inappropriate content.

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The word "drag" does not appear in the Tennessee bill. Instead, it changes the definition of adult cabaret in Tennessee's law to mean "adult-oriented performances that are harmful to minors." It also says "male or female impersonators" now fall under adult cabaret among topless dancers, go-go dancers, exotic dancers and strippers.

The bill then bans adult cabaret from public property or anywhere minors might be present. It threatens performers with a misdemeanor charge, or a felony if it's a repeat offense.

The bill has raised concerns that it could be used to target transgender people, but sponsors say that is not the intent.

The Tennessee Pride Chamber, a business advocacy group, predicted that "selective surveillance and enforcement" will lead to court challenges and "massive expenses" as governments defend an unconstitutional law that will harm the state's brand.

"Tourism, which contributes significantly to our state's growth and well-being, may well suffer from boycotts disproportionately affecting members of our community who work in Tennessee's restaurants, arts, and hospitality industries," chamber President Brian Rosman wrote in an email to The Associated Press. "Corporations will not continue to expand or relocate here if their employees — and their recruits — don't feel safe or welcomed in Tennessee."

John Camp, a Pride organizer in Knoxville, said the event in Tennessee's third-largest city will be somber this October — describing it as "more of a march than a celebration." There were 100 drag performers last year, he said, but he is unsure how many can participate this year.

Several other states, including Idaho, Kentucky, North Dakota, Montana, Oklahoma and Utah, are considering similar bans. And the Arkansas governor recently signed a bill that puts new restrictions on "adult-oriented" performances. It originally targeted drag shows but was scaled back following complaints of anti-LGBTQ discrimination.

"I find it irresponsible to create a law based on a complete lack of understanding and determined willful misinterpretation of what drag actually is," Montana state Rep. Connie Keogh said in February during floor debate. "It is part of the cultural fabric of the LGBTQ+ community and has been around for centuries."

Tennessee state Sen. Jack Johnson, the Republican sponsor, says his bill addresses "sexually suggestive drag shows" that are inappropriate for children.

Months ago, organizers of a Pride festival in Jackson, west of Nashville, came under fire for hosting a drag show in a park. A legal complaint spearheaded by a Republican state representative sought to prevent the show, but organizers reached a settlement to hold it indoors, with an age restriction.

And in Chattanooga, false allegations of child abuse spread online after far-right activists posted video of a child feeling a female performer's sequined costume. Online commentators falsely said the performer was male, and it has gone on to be used as a rationale to ban children from drag shows.

"Rather than focus on actual policy issues facing Tennesseans, politicians would rather spend their time and effort misconstruing age-appropriate performances at a library to pass as many anti-LGBTQ+ bills as they can," Sarah Warbelow, legal director for the Human Rights Campaign, said in a statement last week.

At times, the vitriol has become violence. Protesters, some of them armed, threw rocks and smoke grenades at one another outside a drag event in Oregon last year.

The Tennessee drag bill marks the second major proposal targeting LGBTQ people that lawmakers in the state have passed this year. Last week, lawmakers approved legislation that bans most gender-affirming care. Lee also signed that bill into law on Thursday.

Lee was fielding questions Monday from reporters about the legislation and other LGBTQ bills when an activist asked him if he remembered "dressing up in drag in 1977." He was presented with a photo that showed the governor as a high school senior dressed in women's clothing that was published in the Franklin High School 1977 yearbook. The photo was first posted on Reddit over the weekend.

Lee said it is "ridiculous" to compare the photo to "sexualized entertainment in front of children." When asked for specific examples of inappropriate drag shows taking place in front of children, Lee did not cite any, only pointing to a nearby school building and saying he was concerned about protecting children.

Biden willing to sign effort to block new DC crime laws

By COLLEEN LONG, MARY CLARE JALONICK and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden said Thursday he is willing to sign a Republican-sponsored resolution blocking new District of Columbia laws that would overhaul how the nation's capital prosecutes and punishes crime.

In doing so, the president would be allowing Congress to nullify the city's laws for the first time in more than three decades. Biden's willingness to do so, despite earlier opposition from his White House, is linked to growing concern over rising crime both in the nation's capital and across the U.S. and comes amid relentless criticism from Republicans.

"One thing the president believes in is making sure that the streets in America and communities across the country are safe," said White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre. "That includes D.C."

The district lacks the same rights that states have to make and amend laws. While Congress has allowed the city's residents some powers of "home rule," it has retained veto powers over district government actions. District residents also do not have voting members of Congress.

City officials have spent nearly two decades trying to redo Washington's criminal laws, including redefining crimes, changing criminal justice policies and reworking how sentences should be handed down after convictions. The overhaul was approved late last year by the D.C. Council. It overrode a veto by Mayor Muriel Bowser, who had concerns over some of the changes.

Then the Republican-controlled House decided to wade into the matter, claiming the district's changes would contribute to already-rising crime in Washington — the number of murders in 2021 was the highest in nearly 20 years — and make it easier for some criminals to get out of prison or evade punishment altogether.

The resolution passed the House with some Democratic support and appears poised to clear the U.S. Senate on a bipartisan basis as well, perhaps as early as next week. After Biden privately told senators that he'd sign the measure overriding the changes, some Democratic senators said they'd support the measure too.

Biden later tweeted that while he supported statehood for D.C., "I don't support some of the changes D.C. Council put forward over the mayor's objections — such as lowering penalties for carjackings."

He added, "If the Senate votes to overturn what D.C. Council did — I'll sign it."

The decision comes weeks before Biden is set to announce his reelection campaign and as he works to formulate his message to voters and fend off expected GOP attacks on his record.

The GOP effort is part of a growing political backlash against Democratic-led criminal justice changes that picked up pace after the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer. Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot lost her bid this week for reelection as some of her Democratic challengers argued that the nation's third-largest city needed tough-on-crime policies. Some Republicans blame rising crime on reforms, but the reality is more complicated.

Earlier Thursday, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell cited crimes in his home state of Kentucky as he tried to blame Biden and Democrats for rising crime, including an incident two days ago when masked thieves stormed an auto showroom and drove off with a half-dozen cars.

"Getting murderers off our streets and foreign poison out of our neighborhoods are among the most basic governing responsibilities you can possibly think of," McConnell added, a reference to the country's fentanyl crisis. "Evidently the Biden administration does not agree or just cannot deliver."

Washington's criminal code hasn't been updated substantially since it was first drafted in 1901. Criminal justice experts have said it is outdated, confusing and not in touch with how crimes are punished today. In the nation's capital, like most places in the United States, Black people are disproportionately affected by the criminal laws.

The revisions passed the D.C. Council late last year would do away with mandatory minimum sentences for many crimes and expand jury trials for lower-level charges. The changes also would reduce the maxi-

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mum penalties for burglary, carjacking and robbery.

House Republicans voted 250-173 to overturn the rewrite of the criminal code.

They have also acted to overturn a new D.C. law that would allow noncitizens the right to vote. Biden is also expected to let that override go through.

In allowing such overrides, Democrats would be abandoning a commitment to oppose the unusual rules governing the district that allow Congress to step in. The acquiescence comes despite Democrats' longtime push to grant statehood to the nation's capital. Some grappled with that Thursday.

Hawaii Sen. Mazie Hirono of Hawaii said: "On the one hand, I really support D.C. statehood, I support D.C. home rule. On the other hand, the mayor vetoed the bill saying that it would not provide enough safety ... so I am torn."

Jean-Pierre repeatedly sidestepped questions about how Biden's decision to substitute his own judgment and that of Congress for the will of the city's elected representatives squares with his past support for self-government in the district.

"The decision he's making, he's making for the people of D.C.," she said.

Meanwhile, the Congressional Black Caucus vowed to work swiftly to try to influence the Senate against the bill before next week's expected vote.

"We need to make sure the Senate understands the full effect of taking away local decision-making, particularly for the District of Columbia that does not have representation in that manner," said Congressional Black Caucus Chairman Rep. Steven Horsford, D-Nev. "What the Senate does will matter."

The crime legislation, which would take effect in 2025, created some friction within the district government. In January, Mayor Bowser vetoed it, writing in a letter that she had "very significant concerns" about some of the bill's proposals. She later proposed changes after the council overrode her veto.

In 2022, there were 203 homicides in the district, about a 10% drop after years of steady increases. Homicides in the city had risen for four years straight, and the 2021 murder count of 227 was the highest since 2003. The city's police union said in a statement that changes would "lead to violent crime rates exploding even more than they already have."

But Eleanor Holmes Norton, the district's nonvoting delegate in the House, said the criminal law overhaul was "extraordinarily important" and the result of years of work by lawmakers, criminal justice experts and nonprofits that deal with offenders.

"Any effort to overturn the District of Columbia's democratically enacted laws degrades the right of its nearly 700,000 residents and elected officials to self-govern — a right that almost every other American has," said D.C. Attorney General Brian Schwalb.

While it has been more than three decades since Congress outright nullified a D.C. law, Congress has frequently used alternative methods to alter local laws on issues from abortion funding to marijuana legalization.

Documents detail EMTs' failure to aid Tyre Nichols

By ADRIAN SAINZ Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — Two Memphis Fire Department emergency medical technicians who were fired and had their licenses suspended for failing to give aid to Tyre Nichols for 19 minutes while he struggled with injuries from being brutally beaten by police, did not check his vital signs or perform other basic medical examinations, documents released Thursday showed.

Advanced EMT JaMichael Sandridge and EMT Robert Long went to the location where five Memphis police officers had punched, kicked and hit Nichols with a baton during an arrest after Nichols fled a traffic stop on the night of Jan. 7.

Video footage released by the city of Memphis showed the beating and the aftermath, which included the officers and other first responders chatting and milling about as Nichols was unattended — handcuffed on the ground and slumped against a squad car.

Nichols, 29, died three days later at a hospital. His death led to the firings of the five officers, who have

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since been charged with second-degree murder. They have pleaded not guilty. The Nichols case has intensified calls for police reform in Memphis and around the country.

Documents provided to The Associated Press on Thursday were tied to the Tennessee Emergency Medical Services Division's decision Feb. 3 to suspend the licenses of Sandridge and Long. Officials said they violated state rules of emergency aid and treatment.

In the board's records, officials said both technicians failed to provide any basic emergency care to Nichols for 19 minutes, even as he showed "clear signs of distress, such as the inability to remain in a seated posture and laying prone on the ground multiple times."

Both Long and Sandridge failed to initiate a primary examination, which could help identify the presence of any life-threatening injuries, the documents showed. Nichols' vital signs were not checked, he did not receive high-flow oxygen or an intravenous line, and he was not placed on a heart monitor, the documents showed.

They also did not perform a secondary examination, which is used to establish any non-life-threatening injuries, the documents showed.

"Respondent did not engage his partner at the event location for purposes of taking appropriate action in safeguarding patient T.N. from incompetent health care practices of other emergency medical services personnel," officials said in the documents.

Sandridge did not immediately return a message that was left over the phone for him with a person who answered his listed number. There was no immediate response to a voicemail seeking comment left at a number listed for Long.

During the license suspension hearing last month, board member Sullivan Smith said it was "obvious to even a lay person" that Nichols "was in terrible distress and needed help."

"And they failed to provide that help," Smith said. "They were his best shot, and they failed to help."

Sandridge and Long had both been fired Jan. 30. At the time, officials said a span of 27 minutes elapsed from the time the EMTs arrived on the scene to the moment when an ambulance left the location of the arrest to take Nichols to a hospital.

The two EMTs were joined at the arrest location by a third fire department employee, Lt. Michelle Whitaker, who officials said remained in the fire engine with the driver during the response to Nichols' beating. She has been fired, but it was not immediately clear Thursday if the state board would take any action towards a suspension of her license.

California's snow-stranded residents need food, plows, help

By BEN FINLEY and AMY TAXIN Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Olivia Duke said she's been trapped in her home in the snow-plastered mountains east of Los Angeles for so long that by Thursday the only food she had left was oatmeal.

Snow plows have created a wall of ice between her driveway and the road in the San Bernardino Mountains, and there are at least 5 feet (1.5 meters) of snow weighing on her roof. While her power has been restored, she only has half a gallon of gas left for her generator in case it goes out again.

"California is not used to this. We don't have this kind of snow," said Duke, a corporate recruiter who lives in the community of Cedarripines Park. "I thought I was prepared. But not for this kind of Godzilla bomb of snow. This is something you couldn't possibly really have prepared for."

With Southern California's mountain communities under a snow emergency, residents are grappling with power outages, roof collapses and lack of baby formula and medicine. Many have been trapped in their homes for a week, their cars buried in snow. County workers fielded more than 500 calls for assistance Wednesday while firefighters tackled possible storm-related explosions and evacuated the most vulnerable with snowcats.

Californians are usually elated to see snow-covered mountains from Los Angeles and drive a couple of hours up to sled, ski and snowboard. But what started out as a beautiful sight has become a hazardous nightmare for those renting vacation homes in the scenic, tree-lined communities or who live there year-

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round. Back-to-back-snowstorms have blanketed the region repeatedly, giving people no time to even shovel out.

Some resort communities received as much as 10 feet (3 meters) of snow over the past week, according to the National Weather Service. So much snow fell that ski resorts had to close and roads became impassable. No snow was falling Thursday, and authorities said they hoped to clear as much as possible from the roads while the weather was benign.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom declared an emergency in 13 counties late Wednesday and called up the National Guard to assist.

In the northern part of the state, mountain communities are grappling with similar conditions, though the population is smaller and residents are more accustomed to significant snowfall, said Brian Ferguson, a spokesperson for the governor's Office of Emergency Services.

"These are just areas that don't typically get that much snow," he said of Southern California's mountain communities. "It exceeded the public's perception of what the risk is."

James Norton, 39, said he and his girlfriend have been stranded in Crestline for nearly a week after their SUV got trapped in the snow. They've been racking up credit card debt to pay for a hotel while buying TV dinners from a nearby convenience store.

Norton, who lives about 45 minutes away in San Bernardino, said he is worried about losing his job at an Amazon packaging facility because he's missing shifts. He said they made the trip to dog sit for a friend on Friday and thought they were prepared because he installed chains on the tires of the SUV.

"We knew there was going to be a snowstorm," Norton said. "We didn't know it was going to be a disaster."

Firefighters have been evacuating residents who are medically vulnerable and have no heat or damaged homes to a Red Cross shelter set up at a local high school. They've also been responding to reports of gas leaks and storm-related fires with hydrants buried in deep snow, said Mike McClintock, San Bernardino County Fire Battalion Chief.

Two homes reported explosions that are under investigation but atypical for the area and likely storm-related, he said.

More than 1,000 customers lacked power as of Wednesday night, he said. Many roads were closed and emergency escorts provided to motorists earlier in the week to access the area were suspended as the region received a fresh 2 feet (60 centimeters) of snow.

About 80,000 people live in the San Bernardino Mountain communities either part- or full-time. The county has fielded more than 500 calls on a hotline set up for the emergency, many from people seeking plow assistance, baby formula and medicine, said Dawn Rowe, chair of the county board of supervisors.

Community members also have been helping each other through the Rim Guardian Angels Facebook group. They responded to requests to get an elderly man with high blood pressure to a hospital after he ran out of medication, to provide bandages to someone who suffered a deep laceration and food to people who were trapped in a rented house.

Andrew Braggins, 43, said the ceiling in his kitchen in Crestline began to bow from the weight of all the snow, prompting him to shovel his roof. The snow on it was 5 feet (1.5 meters) deep.

But Braggins, who is one of the administrators for the Facebook group, considers himself one of the luckier ones.

"I've got friends just a few roads away, and they've been without power for days," said Braggins, who works as a wedding and event planner. "You can stock up for a storm. But this storm kind of kept coming."

State officials are urging people to stay off mountain roads this weekend to keep them clear for first responders.

No snow is forecast for Southern California's mountains for several days, but the National Weather Service said Northern California mountains can expect heavy snow on Saturday with a winter storm watch in effect for communities east of Sacramento to South Lake Tahoe on the Nevada border.

Gunmen threaten Messi, shoot up family-owned supermarket

By DANIEL POLITI and ALMUDENA CALATRAVA Associated Press

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BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Gunmen threatened Argentine soccer superstar Lionel Messi in a written message left Thursday when they opened fire at a supermarket owned by his in-laws in Argentina, police said.

Nobody was injured in the early morning attack, and it was unclear why assailants would target Messi or the Unico supermarket in the country's third-largest city of Rosario, owned by the family of his wife, Antonella Rocuzzo.

The city's mayor, Pablo Javkin, went to the supermarket and lashed out at federal authorities over what he called their failure to curb a surge in drug-related violence in Rosario, located about 190 miles (300 kilometers) northwest of the capital of Buenos Aires.

Police said two men on a motorcycle fired at least a dozen shots into an Unico branch in the early hours, leaving a message on cardboard that read, "Messi, we're waiting for you. Javkin is also a drug trafficker, so he won't take care of you."

Messi has not commented. Considered by many to be the greatest soccer player of all time, Messi is revered in Argentina, especially since he led the national team to the country's first World Cup victory in 36 years in Qatar in December.

Messi currently plays for Paris Saint-Germain and spends much of his time overseas, though he often visits Rosario where he has a home in the suburb of Funes. The French team posted a photo on social media of Messi training on Thursday morning.

In Rosario, prosecutor Federico Rébola said authorities were reviewing security camera footage and that the investigation was "preliminary." It was the first time Messi's in-laws had received this kind of threat, he added.

Celia Arena, justice minister for Santa Fe province, where Rosario is located, said the attack amounted to "terrorism" by a "mafia" group meant to intimidate the broader population.

"The aim is to deliberately cause terror in the population and discourage those of us who are fighting against criminal violence, knowing that it will be an event of global significance," Arena wrote in a social media post.

Javkin, a center-left politician in opposition to the ruling Peronist coalition, appeared to throw suspicion of complicity for the attack on both criminal gangs and federal security officials.

"I doubt everyone, even those who are supposed to protect us," Javkin said in an interview with a local radio station.

He said that he had recently had "very strong discussions" with members of the federal security forces over the past couple of weeks demanding that they crack down on the city's crime.

"Where are the ones who need to take care of us?" Javkin said. "It's clear that those who have the weapons and have the possibility of investigating the criminals aren't doing it, and it's very easy for any gang to carry out something like this."

The federal government's Security Minister Aníbal Fernández said drug-related violence was not a recent phenomenon in the city, and that Thursday's attack was typical of what has happened there "for the last 20 years."

He said the incident was an example of how drug traffickers "have won" in Rosario, but now "we have to reverse that."

Opposition politicians blamed President Alberto Fernández's administration for the continuing violence in Rosario. His predecessor, Mauricio Macri, characterized the events as a warning that the country cannot "co-exist" with drug traffickers.

Messi, 35, is currently renegotiating a contract with Paris Saint-Germain that ends this year amid speculation that the soccer superstar could decide to end his career playing for one of the local Rosario clubs, Newell's.

Messi, who this week won FIFA's best men's player award, could travel to Argentina later this month to join the national squad in playing two friendly matches. One takes place March 23 against Panama in Buenos Aires, while the other one will be five days later against Curacao in the northern city of Santiago

del Estero.

Rep. George Santos under investigation by House Ethics panel

By LISA MASCARO and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Ethics Committee announced Thursday it is launching an investigation into embattled Republican Rep. George Santos, the New York congressman whose lies and embellishments about his resume and personal life have drawn deep scrutiny.

The investigation appears to be far reaching. It seeks to determine whether Santos “may have engaged in unlawful activity with respect to his 2022 congressional campaign” among other actions, the committee said in a statement.

The panel will also investigate whether Santos “failed to properly disclose required information on statements filed with the House, violated federal conflict of interest laws in connection with his role in a firm providing fiduciary services, and/or engaged in sexual misconduct towards an individual seeking employment in his congressional office,” the statement said.

Santos had already removed himself from his committee assignments but otherwise has refused calls from Republicans in New York to step down from office. On Twitter, his office said that he is “fully cooperating” with the Ethics probe and would not comment further.

Ethics committee members David Joyce, R-Ohio, and Susan Wild, D-Pa., will lead the probe, with two other lawmakers from each party. The panel had voted unanimously to establish a subcommittee to investigate the allegations.

“The Committee notes that the mere fact of establishing an Investigative Subcommittee does not itself indicate that any violation has occurred,” Thursday’s statement said.

The committee could take an array of actions, from a letter of reprimand to recommending censure and a fine.

It can also recommend expulsion, the sternest form of punishment the House can impose, an action it has used only five times in more than two centuries and never when it comes to conduct that took place before a member was sworn into office. At least two-thirds of the House must vote for expulsion for it to occur.

Any recommendation would be part of a committee report that states the evidence supporting its findings and an explanation of the reasons for the recommended sanctions.

A Long Island prosecutor has already been investigating whether Santos defrauded supporters. The Federal Election Commission has repeatedly flagged problems with Santos’ campaign finance reports.

Santos admitted that he lied about key parts of his background, including his job experience and college education, after The New York Times raised questions in December about the life story that he presented during his campaign.

“My sins here are embellishing my resume. I’m sorry,” Santos told the New York Post in the wake of the Times’ story.

Santos said he obtained a degree from Baruch College in New York, but the school said that couldn’t be confirmed. Santos had also said he had worked for Citigroup and Goldman Sachs, but neither company could find any records verifying that.

A Jewish news outlet, The Forward, questioned a claim on Santos’ campaign website that his grandparents “fled Jewish persecution in Ukraine, settled in Belgium, and again fled persecution during WWII.”

“I never claimed to be Jewish,” Santos told the Post. “I am Catholic. Because I learned my maternal family had a Jewish background I said I was ‘Jew-ish.’”

Perhaps the most serious questions facing Santos involve the personal fortune he claims to have used to finance his campaign.

Since announcing his candidacy in 2021, Santos has reported loaning his campaign organization \$705,000, accounting for nearly 25% of its receipts over the last two years.

The underlying question remains how Santos earned the money. Despite his false claims of having

worked for big, international banks, he was having financial problems up until a few years ago that led to multiple eviction proceedings from New York City apartments.

When Santos first ran for Congress in 2020, his financial disclosure form listed a modest \$55,000 salary from a financial company and no significant assets.

After he lost that race, he took a job selling investments in a company that the Securities and Exchange Commission later accused of being a Ponzi scheme.

Last summer, Santos filed a financial disclosure report suggesting an explosion in his personal wealth.

Santos reported he was making \$750,000 per year from his own company, the Devolder Organization, had \$1 million to \$5 million in savings and owned an apartment in Brazil worth up to \$1 million. Santos has yet to fully answer questions about how he got so rich so quickly. In an interview with Semafor, Santos said he worked as a consultant for "high net worth individuals," helping broker the sale of luxury items like yachts and planes.

Deadly Greek train crash prompts strike; relatives give DNA

By COSTAS KANTOURIS and NICHOLAS PAPHITIS Associated Press

THESSALONIKI, Greece (AP) — Family members awaited the results of DNA testing to identify victims of a train crash that killed nearly 60 people in Greece, as workers went on strike Thursday saying the rail system is outdated, underfunded and dangerous.

The government has blamed human error, and a railway official was charged with manslaughter.

Emergency crews, meanwhile, inched through the mangled remains of passenger carriages in their search for the dead from Tuesday night's head-on collision, which has left 57 confirmed dead — a number that rescuers fear will increase.

The collision of a passenger train and a freight train was the country's deadliest ever, and more than 48 people remained hospitalized — with six in intensive care — most in the central Greek city of Larissa.

RESIDENTS LINE UP IN RAIN TO GIVE BLOOD

Larissa residents lined up to give blood, many waiting in heavy rain for more than an hour, while the city's hotel association provided free accommodation to relatives of the crash victims.

DNA matching was going fast, with at least four families — in the presence of psychologists — receiving confirmation Thursday that their relatives were among the dead, said police spokeswoman Constandia Dimoglidou.

Dimoglidou said the process usually takes several days but authorities are making an effort to finish by Friday. She said 24 bodies have been identified through DNA so far. The testing was necessary because many of the bodies were burned or mangled beyond recognition.

Among the dozens of grieving relatives who spent a second day at the hospital awaiting results Thursday was Dimitris Bournazis, whose father and 15-year-old brother remain unaccounted for. He said phone calls to Italian-owned train operator Hellenic Train have been fruitless.

"I've been trying since yesterday afternoon to communicate with the company to find out what seat my father was in," he said. "Nobody has called me back."

WORKERS, RELATIVES SAY TRAIN SYSTEM UNSAFE

Railway workers' associations called strikes, halting national rail services and the subway in Athens to protest working conditions and what they described as a dangerous failure to modernize the rail system. A second 24-hour strike was called for Friday.

Two separate protests in central Athens were held by left-wing groups, with one resulting in clashes between stone-throwing youths and riot police. Protests were also held in Thessaloniki and Larissa.

Critics blame a lack of public investment during the deep financial crisis that spanned most of the previous decade and brought Greece to the brink of bankruptcy. It was during the crisis, in 2017, that the rail operator, then heavily losing money, was privatized and bought by Italy's Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane Group.

Greece has a limited rail network that doesn't reach much of the country. Despite years of modernization projects, much of the key rail control work is still manually operated.

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The head of the engine drivers' union, Costas Genidounias, said an up-to-date traffic control system was supposed to have been ready three years ago. He said that starting in 2020, union representatives sent legal notices to the company responsible for Greece's railway infrastructure, OSE, as well as government and regulatory officials, but received no reply.

OSE issued a statement Thursday expressing condolences to the victims' families but it has not publicly commented on the criticism.

Markos Bekris, a union representative who took part in the peaceful Athens protest Thursday, said the collision was "a crime waiting to happen."

He argued that Hellenic Train, OSE and the current and previous governments "share responsibility, as they ignored requests from employees who weekly, daily, raised concerns over health and safety issues and the possibility of a serious accident."

"A FOREST OF RESPONSIBILITY"

Transportation Minister Kostas Karamanlis resigned following the crash and officials launched a judicial inquiry to determine how two trains traveled in opposite directions on the same track for more than 10 minutes without anyone raising the alarm.

The Larissa station manager was charged Thursday with multiple counts of manslaughter and causing serious physical harm through negligence. His name was not released.

The stationmaster's lawyer, Stefanos Pandzardzidis, said his client was "devastated" and accepted "his portion of the responsibility."

"But beyond that ... we must not focus on the tree while there's a whole forest beyond it," he said. "There's a forest of responsibility."

Bournazis agreed that the responsibility for the crash should go far beyond the stationmaster.

"We can't dump all the blame on one person for making one mistake," he said.

He said the crash should lead to a full safety overhaul of the country's rail system.

"I've lost my brother, my father. That can't change, I know it," he said. "But the point is for us not to mourn victims like that again. They bought 50 tickets to death."

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis pledged in a televised statement Wednesday night to get to the bottom of the disaster.

"Responsibility will be assigned. We will work so that the words 'never again' ... will not remain an empty pledge," he said. "That I promise you."

"CENTIMETER BY CENTIMETER"

Amid the growing criticism, emergency workers continued their grim recovery effort, proceeding "centimeter by centimeter" through mounds of twisted steel, shattered glass and scattered luggage, said Fire Service spokesman Yiannis Artopios.

"We can see that there are more (bodies) of people there. Unfortunately they are in a very bad condition," he told state television.

Rescuers were focusing on the restaurant car, which was crushed under the first carriage from the force of the collision, said fire official Vassilios Vathrakogiannis.

"This morning we removed seven burned bodies from that carriage," he said.

He added that the entire operation was expected to be concluded by midday Friday.

CRASH SURVIVOR DESCRIBES FIERY ESCAPE

About 350 people were on the passenger train, many of them students returning from a holiday weekend and annual Carnival celebrations around Greece.

Andreas Alikaniotis, a 20-year-old survivor, described how he and fellow students escaped from a jackknifed train car as the fire approached, smashing windows and throwing luggage outside to use as a makeshift landing pad.

"It was a steep drop, into a ditch," Alikaniotis, who suffered a knee injury, told reporters from his hospital bed in Larissa.

"The lights went out. ... The smoke was suffocating inside the rail car but also outside," Alikaniotis said.

He said he was "one of the few around who had not been seriously injured."
"Me and my friends helped people get out."

Kremlin accuses Ukrainian saboteurs of attack inside Russia

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The Kremlin on Thursday accused Ukrainian saboteurs of crossing into western Russia and firing on villagers. Ukraine denied the claim and warned that Moscow could use the allegations to justify stepping up its own attacks in the ongoing war.

The exact circumstances of the reported attack in the Bryansk region were unclear, as was the strategic purpose of such an assault. The regional governor said two civilians were killed.

If confirmed, it would be another indication following drone attacks earlier this week that Kyiv may be intensifying pressure against Moscow by exposing Russian defensive weaknesses, embarrassing the Kremlin and sowing unease among Russian civilians.

Russian President Vladimir Putin blamed Ukrainian "terrorists" for the incursion, claiming that they deliberately targeted civilians, including children in "yet another terror attack, another crime."

"They infiltrated the area near the border and opened fire on civilians," Putin said during a video call. "They saw a civilian vehicle with civilians, with children in it, and they fired on them."

The alleged incursion came just days after Putin ordered the Federal Security Service to tighten controls on Russia's border with Ukraine.

While Russian war hawks have expressed dismay with what they see as Putin's reluctance to declare martial law and launch a sweeping mobilization of soldiers, the Russian leader's comments Thursday did not appear to signal any such moves.

Putin blamed the attack on "neo-Nazis" and said it confirmed that Russia did the right thing by invading Ukraine. "I repeat again: They will not succeed, and we will finish pushing them out," he said.

When he ordered the invasion, the Russian leader vowed to "denazify" Ukraine, alleging falsely that radical neo-Nazi groups dominate the country led by a Jewish president. Kyiv and its Western allies dismissed his assertion as a bogus cover for an unprovoked act of aggression.

Ukraine's military intelligence representative, Andrii Cherniak, saw the Russian claims as evidence that Moscow is facing an uprising among its own disgruntled people.

"This was done by the Russians; Ukraine has nothing to do with it," he told The Associated Press.

A group calling itself the Russian Volunteer Corps claimed it crossed the border into Russia in a video that also urged Russians to rebel. The group's statement did not explain what actions it took or what specific objectives it wanted to achieve.

The Russian Volunteer Corps described itself as "a volunteer formation in the Armed Forces of Ukraine." Little is known about the group, and it was not immediately clear if it has any ties with the Ukrainian military.

The group was founded in August and consists mostly of anti-Putin far-right Russian extremists who have links with Ukrainian far-right groups, according to Michael Colborne, a researcher for the investigative website Bellingcat.

Colborne said on Twitter that Ukrainian military intelligence "very likely" approved the incursion.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak described the Russian claims as "a classic deliberate provocation."

Russia "wants to scare its people to justify the attack on another country (and) the growing poverty after the year of war," he tweeted, suggesting that Russian partisans were behind what happened in Bryansk.

Bryansk Gov. Alexander Bogomaz said the attackers killed two civilians and wounded a child in the village of Lyubechane.

Russia's Federal Security Service said it acted together with the military to "eliminate armed Ukrainian nationalists who violated the state border." The agency claimed later that the attackers had been pushed back into Ukraine "where a massive artillery strike was inflicted on them." It was not possible to verify the claim.

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Putin canceled a planned trip to southern Russia because of the attack. He is set to chair a weekly meeting of the Russian Security Council on Friday.

Asked by reporters whether the activity could warrant a change in the status of the conflict, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, "I can't say for now."

The raid in the Bryansk region followed a spate of drone attacks. On Tuesday, drones that the Kremlin said were launched by Ukraine flew deep inside Russian territory, including one that got within 100 kilometers (60 miles) of Moscow. The Russian Defense Ministry also said Wednesday that the military repelled a drone attack on Crimea.

In Ukraine's southern city of Zaporizhzhia, three people were killed and six others were wounded early Thursday when a Russian missile hit a five-story apartment building, destroying several floors.

A Russian drone attack hit people standing in line for humanitarian aid in a village in southern Ukraine's Kherson region, wounding nine people, including a 16-year-old, the regional administration said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russia "wants to turn every day for our people into a day of terror," adding that "evil will not reign in our land."

Russian artillery, drones and missiles have pounded Ukrainian-held areas in the country's south and east for months. Moscow denies aiming at civilian targets, but its indiscriminate shelling has wrought wide destruction in urban centers.

The war largely slowed to a grinding stalemate during the winter months, although a fierce battle continued for control of Bakhmut, a key eastern stronghold where Ukrainian officials say they might strategically withdraw.

The Ukrainian military's general staff reported that Russian forces "continue to advance and storm the city," but Kyiv's troops repelled some of the attacks. Capturing the city would not only give Russian fighters a rare battlefield gain after months of setbacks, but it might rupture Ukraine's supply lines and allow the Kremlin's forces to press toward other Ukrainian strongholds in Donetsk.

In other developments, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov talked briefly Thursday at a meeting of top diplomats from the Group of 20 nations. It was the first high-level meeting in months between Russia and the U.S.

A senior U.S. official, who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss the private conversation, said Blinken had "disabused" Lavrov of any idea that U.S. support for Ukraine is wavering.

New Easter Island statue found in volcanic crater's dry lake

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — Researchers have found a new moai statue in a dry lake on the Chilean island of Rapa Nui, joining the approximately 1,000 other iconic monolithic sculptures on what is internationally known as Easter Island.

The statue is relatively small at 1.6 meters (5.2 feet), as compared with some of the other broadly featured heads and torsos that reach as tall as 22 meters (72 feet). It was found by researchers from the University of Chile and O'Higgins University.

More statues might be found in the dry lake, which is at the center of the Rano Raraku volcanic crater, said Salvador Atan Hito, vice president of the Ma'u Henua indigenous community that manages Rapa Nui's archeological treasures.

The statue "is in good condition, it has wear from time, erosion, water, but its shapes and features are still very noticeable," Atan told The Associated Press in an interview Wednesday.

"This discovery is something historic for this new generation," he added.

About 400 of the island's 1,000 moai are inside the volcanic crater or on its outer slopes, and the rest are scattered around the rest of the island's 160 square kilometers (60 square miles).

Some of the moai are known to be buried under the surface though they have been left in place. However, this latest one had not previously been cataloged, Atan said.

The figures represent the ancestors of the Rapa Nui community, and their role is to protect community members, which is why they were placed looking inward from the sea, Atan said.

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Rapa Nui, located 3,700 kilometers (2,300 miles) from the continent, was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995. In 2019, it was renamed "Rapa Nui-Easter Island" from its previous name of Easter Island.

US, Russia hold highest-level talks since Ukraine invasion

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

NEW DELHI (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov talked briefly Thursday in the highest-level in-person talks between the two countries since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. But there was no indication of any movement toward easing the intense tensions between their two nations.

The short encounter came as relations between Washington and Moscow have plummeted over Russia's war with Ukraine and tensions have soared amid a myriad of disagreements, complaints and recriminations on other matters ranging from arms control to embassy staffing and prisoners.

U.S. officials said Blinken and Lavrov chatted for roughly 10 minutes on the sidelines of the G-20 conference of foreign ministers in New Delhi. But there was no sign of any progress and the conference itself ended with the grouping unable to reach consensus on the Ukraine war.

Still, with relations at perhaps their lowest point since the Cuban Missile Crisis during the Cold War, the mere fact that the two men met showed that, at least for the moment, lines of high-level communication between Washington and Moscow remains open.

At a news conference, Blinken said he told Lavrov that the U.S. would continue to support Ukraine for as long as it takes and would push for the war to end through diplomatic terms that Kyiv agrees to.

"End this war of aggression, engage in meaningful diplomacy that can produce a just and durable peace," Blinken said he had told Lavrov. But, he noted that "President Putin has demonstrated zero interest in engaging, saying there's nothing to even talk about unless and until Ukraine accepts and I quote 'the new territorial reality.'"

Blinken said he also urged Russia to reverse "its irresponsible decision and return to" participation in the New START nuclear treaty.

"Mutual compliance is in the interest of both our countries," Blinken said he told Lavrov. He added "that no matter what else is happening in the world, in our relationship, the United States is always ready to engage and act on strategic arms control, just as the United States and the Soviet Union did even at the height of the Cold War."

Blinken said he also urged Moscow to release detained American Paul Whelan and that "the United States has put forward a serious proposal. Russia should take it."

Earlier, Blinken had told the G-20 meeting that Russia's war with Ukraine could not go unchallenged.

"We must continue to call on Russia to end its war of aggression and withdraw from Ukraine for the sake of international peace and economic stability," Blinken said. He noted that 141 countries had voted to condemn Russia at the United Nations on the one-year anniversary of the invasion.

Yet, several members of the G-20, including host India, China and South Africa, chose to abstain in that vote and despite appeals from top Indian officials to look beyond their differences over Ukraine and forge consensus on other issues, the foreign ministers were unable to do so or agree on a final communique.

Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said there were "divergences" on the issue of the war in Ukraine "which we could not reconcile as various parties held differing views." "If we had a perfect meeting of minds on all issues, it would have been a collective statement," Jaishankar said.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had earlier appealed for all members of the fractured G-20 to reach consensus on issues of particular concern to poorer countries even if the broader East-West split over Ukraine could not overcome.

"We all have our positions and our perspectives on how these tensions should be resolved," Modi said. "We should not allow issues that we cannot resolve together to come in the way of those we can."

China and Russia objected to two paragraphs taken from the previous G-20 declaration in Bali last year,

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according to a summary of Thursday's meeting released by India. And Blinken lamented that "Russia and China were the only two countries that made clear that they would not sign off on the text."

The paragraphs stated that the war in Ukraine was causing immense human suffering while exacerbating fragilities in the global economy, the need to uphold international law, and that "the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible."

Despite the failure to achieve full consensus, Blinken said it was positive that 18 of the 20 nations had agreed on a statement calling for an end to the war and immediate steps to improve energy and food security that have been badly affected by the conflict.

Lavrov, who did not mention speaking with Blinken when he held a news conference after the G-20 session, told reporters that Moscow would continue to press its action in Ukraine. He shrugged off Western claims of Russia's isolation, saying "we aren't feeling isolated. It's the West that has isolated itself, and it will eventually come to realize it."

He said Russia remains open to talks on ending the conflict in Ukraine, but he accused the West of effectively blocking such talks.

"They are calling on us to have talks, but I don't remember any Western colleagues calling on Ukraine to have talks," he said. "They are encouraging Ukraine to continue the war."

Lavrov also mocked U.S. threats against China, which has presented a peace plan for Ukraine that has been applauded by Moscow but dismissed by Washington and its Western allies.

"Our Western colleagues have lost self-control, forgotten their manners and put diplomacy aside, switching exclusively to blackmail and threats," he said.

Russia had no immediate comment on the substance of the conversation, but Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said Blinken had asked to speak to Lavrov.

It was their first contact since last summer, when Blinken talked to Lavrov by phone about a U.S. proposal for Russia to release Whelan and formerly detained WNBA star Brittney Griner. Griner was later released in a swap for imprisoned Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout, but Whelan remains detained in Russia.

Whelan, a Michigan corporate security executive, has been held for four years on espionage charges that his family and the United States government have said are baseless.

His brother David said the family is grateful that Blinken "took this high profile, rare opportunity to include Paul's freedom in his discussions with Kremlin representatives." But he noted that Paul Whelan turns 53 on Sunday, his fifth birthday in custody. He's held in a prison in the Mordovia region in "sub-zero Celsius temperatures" with heat turned off, David Whelan said in an email.

"Paul continues to suffer...So for all the statecraft and stonewalling, our brother languishes for another birthday and however many more milestones as a Russian hostage," he said.

The last time Blinken and Lavrov met in person was in Geneva, Switzerland, in January 2022 on the eve of Russia's invasion. At that meeting, Blinken warned Lavrov about consequences if Russia went ahead with its planned military operation but also sought to address some complaints that Russian President Vladimir Putin had made about the U.S. and NATO.

Those talks proved to be inconclusive — Russia moved ahead with its plans to invade and Blinken then canceled a scheduled follow-up meeting with Lavrov that was set for just two days before Moscow eventually invaded on Feb. 24, 2022.

Oscar Predictions: Will 'Everything' take everything?

By JAKE COYLE and LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writers

Ahead of the 95th Academy Awards on March 12, Associated Press Film Writers Lindsey Bahr and Jake Coyle share their predictions for a ceremony with some sure things and some major question marks.

BEST PICTURE

Nominees: "All Quiet on the Western Front"; "Avatar: The Way of Water"; "The Banshees of Inisherin"; "Elvis"; "Everything Everywhere All at Once"; "The Fabelmans"; "Tár"; "Top Gun: Maverick"; "Triangle of Sadness"; "Women Talking."

COYLE: I can't help feeling like this best picture field reflects our strange, jumbled movie world. Big-

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budget blockbusters, indie hits, acclaimed arthouse contenders mostly watched on video on demand, a German Netflix film and whatever it is, exactly, that you call "Elvis." Little in this race has gone as expected. Many of the once-presumed favorites — "Bardo," "Empire of Light," "White Noise" — fizzled. Steven Spielberg's "The Fabelmans" had the air of a sure-thing, but audiences didn't show up — a strike against any contender but a fatal blow for a Spielberg movie. Academy members, seemingly, have developed less of a taste for Oscar bait and instead thrown their support behind a movie that never had any designs on the Academy Awards: "Everything Everywhere All at Once." In an odd, mixed-up year, Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert's blissfully chaotic film has turned into an improbable Oscar runaway, cleaning up at all the predictive guild awards. This year, the road to best picture is paved with googly eyes.

BAHR: I usually wish for chaos when a best picture winner is locked — but "Everything Everywhere" is about as chaotic (and inspired) a best picture winner as you can get. This would also make two years in a row that best picture went to films that premiered outside of the Cannes/Fall Festival stranglehold ("EEAAO" debuted at SXSW, "CODA" at Sundance). If anything is going to shake up the industry and the awards industrial complex, it's something like this (and Andrea Riseborough).

BEST ACTRESS

Nominees: Ana de Armas, "Blonde"; Cate Blanchett, "Tár"; Andrea Riseborough, "To Leslie"; Michelle Williams, "The Fabelmans"; Michelle Yeoh, "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

BAHR: So, it's down to Lydia Tár and Evelyn Wang. This has been a race between Blanchett and Yeoh for most of the season. Both were commanding and dynamic in their roles — Blanchett as the genius conductor whose high-flying status in the classical music world begins to unravel around her and Yeoh as the Chinese American laundromat owner who has to save the multiverse, inhabiting different possible versions of herself from movie star to rock along the way. And both have been well decorated and celebrated this season. That their full character names are fully part of the cultural consciousness already speaks volumes. After the Screen Actors Guild Awards, it seems Yeoh is the likely victor, which will be a historic win with wide-ranging significance.

COYLE: This is indeed between Yeoh and Blanchett. And as much as I thought of Blanchett's performance and as much as I'm kinda scared of what Lydia Tár might do to me for saying this, this is Yeoh's year. For both her cosmic but grounded performance and for her butt-kicking career, Yeoh is more than deserved and will triumph.

BEST ACTOR

Nominees: Brendan Fraser, "The Whale"; Colin Farrell, "The Banshees of Inisherin"; Austin Butler, "Elvis"; Bill Nighy, "Living"; Paul Mescal, "Aftersun."

COYLE: The only thing I feel sure of in this category is that I've started to feel a little bad for Austin Butler. All the he's-still-talking-like-Elvis jokes were fun at first, but now I'm worried an appealing young actor is going to get permanently typecast. Butler could very well win, though. And Farrell might even be able to pull off an upset with the much-loved "The Banshees of Inisherin." But I'm leaning toward Fraser here, after his SAG win. He has two powerful Oscar narratives going for him : a comeback story and a massive physical transformation. Wait, didn't I say Oscar bait was out this year? Oh, well. I'm still glad to see Mescal in this mix for the staggering "Aftersun."

BAHR: Austin Butler will be just fine (I still think of him as Tex anyway) and who knows what voice he'll break out for "Dune 2." After SAG, it seemed clearer that this year the industry is looking to honor the journeymen over the relative newcomers. And you're right, Fraser fits the narrative — a perfect comeback story hobbled only by the divisiveness of the movie itself (another reason why it could still be Farrell's). Then again, Nighy could also be this year's Anthony Hopkins.

BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS

Nominees: Angela Bassett, "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever"; Hong Chau, "The Whale"; Kerry Condon, "The Banshees of Inisherin"; Stephanie Hsu, "Everything Everywhere All at Once"; Jamie Lee Curtis, "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

BAHR: Angela Bassett seemed set to "do the thing," with Kerry Condon in the wings as a possible sub, and probably still will. But then Jamie Lee Curtis had to go and make things more interesting when she

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won at the Screen Actors Guild (and gave a great speech).

COYLE: This had been Bassett's all the way before Curtis, Nepo baby supreme, had her magnificent moment at the SAGs. But I'm going to stick with Bassett. It could be that academy members just can't bring themselves to vote for a Marvel movie role. But Bassett gave such a powerhouse performance in "Wakanda Forever" and is overdue for her Oscar moment.

BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR

Nominees: Brian Tyree Henry, "Causeway"; Judd Hirsch, "The Fabelmans"; Brendan Gleeson, "Banshees of Inisherin"; Barry Keoghan, "Banshees of Inisherin"; Ke Huy Quan, "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

COYLE: Finally, an acting lock. Quan is assured of taking this, and it should be one of the most stirring moments of the ceremony. It's been literally decades since the former child actor of "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom" and "Goonies" had a notable role in a movie. The film industry should probably be asking itself some hard questions about how that could happen for an actor as endearing as Quan. But as far as absolution goes, you could do a lot worse than hand Quan an Academy Award.

BAHR: The big question is what Hollywood will do with Quan after the win. The industry has a way of patting itself on the back for feel-good moments like this and Troy Kotsur's last year and then moving on. Let's hope Quan's inbox is already flooded with scripts and offers.

BEST DIRECTOR

Nominees: "Martin McDonagh, "The Banshees of Inisherin"; Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, "Everything Everywhere All at Once"; Steven Spielberg, "The Fabelmans"; Todd Field, "Tár"; Ruben Östlund, "Triangle of Sadness."

BAHR: Awards history would suggest that The Daniels, Kwan and Scheinert, have this one locked after the Directors Guild win. At this point they're the safe bet. But that's not to deny the fact that their win would also be an exciting choice for the industry to celebrate the two 35-year-olds' second film with their branch's highest honor. It would be a win for original storytelling, diverse voices and just a case for just taking big, weird swings. Still, there's a voice in my head saying that Spielberg, who has somehow only won best director twice, could be a wild card.

COYLE: This had once seemed a certainty for Spielberg who, after one of the most celebrated careers in movie history, finally phoned home with "The Fabelmans." And unlike some previous years, he's worked the campaign trail, too. But I think the Daniels — each of whom are less than half the age of Spielberg — have emerged as the likely winners. They would be only the third directing duo to win, following Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise for "West Side Story" and Joel and Ethan Coen for "No Country for Old Men."

BEST DOCUMENTARY

Nominees: "All That Breathes"; "All the Beauty and the Bloodshed"; "Fire of Love"; "A House Made of Splinters"; "Navalny."

COYLE: I'm still smarting a little that Margaret Brown's "Descendant," a living oral history of a documentary, didn't make it into this field. But it's a strong group, including the tenderly lyrical "All That Breathes" and the smoldering romance of "Fire of Love." But I think the most likely to win films are Daniel Roher's "Navalny," about the imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, and Laura Poitras' "All the Beauty and the Bloodshed," about the groundbreaking photographer Nan Goldin and her crusade against the the Sackler pharma family. I give the slight edge to "Navalny," a film with obvious political poignance.

BAHR: Finally, some minor disagreement! I'm placing my bet on the Poitras. It won the Golden Lion over "Tár" and "The Banshees of Inisherin" at the Venice Film Festival, where the academy had a major presence. Poitras' film, both intimate and epic in weaving together Goldin's life, art and activism, is on another level. And she's won before.

BEST INTERNATIONAL FILM

Nominees: "All Quiet on the Western Front" (Germany); "Argentina, 1985" (Argentina); "Close" (Belgium); "EO" (Poland); "The Quiet Girl" (Ireland)."

BAHR: There's not a bad choice in the lot (and so many great ones that didn't make the cut...looking at you "Saint Omer"), but while there's a lot of late-game love for Ireland's small, heart-wrenching "The Quiet Girl," Germany's visceral war epic "All Quiet on the Western Front" has probably had this category

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in the bag for some time. Edward Berger's film, the first ever German-language adaptation of Erich Maria Remarque's novel, hit a nerve and transcended the international category.

COYLE: "All Quiet on the Western Front" is a lock. With a commanding nine nominations, it's maybe even a dark horse for best picture. But the international film award will be a bit anticlimactic. Some of the best movies of the year — Park Chan-wook's "Decision to Leave," Alice Diop's "Saint Omer" and, above all, "No Bears" by the recently imprisoned Iranian director Jafar Panahi — ought to have been in this bunch.

BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

Nominees: "Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio"; "Marcel the Shell With Shoes On"; "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish"; "The Sea Beast"; "Turning Red."

COYLE: This is one of the easiest categories to call. "Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio" — not, repeat not Robert Zemeckis' "Pinocchio" — will take this easily. For me, the film's fascist allegory was far too forced. But it's a beautifully textured creation, and affection for del Toro among academy voters couldn't run deeper. A shame, though, for Marcel. But as the mollusk would say, "You miss a hundred percent of the shots you don't take."

BAHR: It's del Toro's for sure. And it's ok: However cliché, it really seems like the Marcel team is having a great time just being nominated.

MI5 lost chance to stop Grande concert attack, inquiry finds

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's domestic intelligence agency didn't act swiftly enough on key information and missed a significant opportunity to prevent the suicide bombing that killed 22 people at a 2017 Ariana Grande concert in northwest England, an inquiry found Thursday.

Retired judge John Saunders, who led the inquiry into the Manchester Arena attack, said that one MI5 officer admitted they considered intelligence about suicide bomber Salman Abedi to be a possible national security concern but didn't discuss it with colleagues quickly enough.

"I have found a significant missed opportunity to take action that might have prevented the attack," Saunders said.

In a rare televised statement, MI5 Director General Ken McCallum, who normally keeps a low public profile, said he was "profoundly sorry that MI5 did not prevent the attack."

"Gathering covert intelligence is difficult, but had we managed to seize the slim chance we had, those impacted might not have experienced such appalling loss and trauma," McCallum said.

Abedi, 22, set off a knapsack bomb in the arena's foyer at the end of the May 22, 2017 concert, as thousands of young fans, including many children, were leaving the pop star's show. More than 100 people were injured. Abedi died in the explosion.

His brother, Hashem Abedi, was convicted in 2020 of helping to plan and carry out the attack. He was sentenced to life in prison.

Saunders said MI5 had acted on the intelligence it received, it could have led to action — including potentially stopping Abedi at Manchester Airport on his return from Libya four days before the attack.

Caroline Curry, whose 19-year-old son Liam Curry was among those killed in the bombing, said Thursday that she couldn't forgive intelligence officials for their failings.

"From top to bottom, MI5 to the associates of the attacker, we will always believe you all played a part in the murder of our children," she told reporters.

Multiple MI5 witnesses gave evidence to the inquiry behind closed doors, and the intelligence wasn't publicly disclosed.

Abedi had been a "subject of interest" to MI5 officials in 2014, but his case was closed shortly after because he was deemed to be low-risk.

Saunders also said that authorities failed to refer Abedi to the government's counterterrorism program, known as Prevent.

"I have concluded that there was at least a period during Salman Abedi's journey to violent extremism

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when he should have been referred," he said.

Thursday's report was the third and final one into the attack.

Saunders previously criticized the arena's security staff and local police for failing to identify Abedi as a threat. He also slammed delays and failings in the response of emergency services on the night of the bombing.

Joni Mitchell honored with Gershwin Prize at tribute concert

By JOHN CARUCCI Associated Press

WASHINGTON, DC (AP) — When Joni Mitchell finally took the stage near the end of an all-star tribute concert honoring her as this year's recipient of the Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song, she opted to perform a cover rather than one of her own songs.

The 79-year-old music legend leaned against the piano Wednesday as she crooned a sultry version of "Summertime," the popular tune from George Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess," an appropriate choice since the award was named after the composer.

But she wasn't done. The evening's other performers came to the stage and surrounded Mitchell as she launched into one of her more popular tunes, "The Circle Game." Graham Nash, James Taylor, Ledisi, Cyndi Lauper, Herbie Hancock, Marcus Mumford, Brandi Carlile and others brought the crowd to their feet in an evening filled with love and admiration.

Before the show, Mitchell, walked the red carpet with a cane, briefly responding to the Associated Press saying the honor was "very exciting."

Nash, who had dated Mitchell back in the 1970s, spoke of her indelible spirit overcoming gender and physical obstacles.

"She has had many, many difficulties in her life with polio when she was young. And now there's a brain aneurysm several years ago. But to see her come back and be singing again and playing again is incredible. I mean, talk about resilience," Nash said.

Later, he performed, "A Case of You," the song Mitchell wrote about their breakup.

Another former partner of Mitchell's was James Taylor, who described their time together as "one of the chapters in my life that I'm fondest of."

"She had a huge effect on me, on my work. And we collaborated during the year or so that we were together on a lot of stuff," Taylor said.

He added: "Joni is a national treasure."

Carlile was one of the evening's busiest performers, adding backing vocals, as well as taking on Mitchell's "Shine." Before the concert, the nine-time Grammy-winning admitted not discovering Mitchell's music until later in her life.

"It felt really feminine to me, really vulnerable, and it made me really uncomfortable, which is a reflection, I think, on my own ego and my coming of age in being a bit of a gender non-conforming person or just not really understanding the way that she was showing me, and all of us, the world. And it wasn't until I fell in love and met my wife that I realized how multi-dimensional Joni was as an artist," Carlile said.

Before receiving the award from Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden, Mitchell was flanked by a bipartisan group of lawmakers, including House Speaker Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif.; Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn; Patty Murray, D-Wash; and Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine.

The Gershwin Prize, created in 2007, has previously honored Paul McCartney, Paul Simon, Stevie Wonder and Carole King.

"Joni Mitchell: The Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song" will be broadcast March 31 on PBS stations, PBS.org, the PBS App and the American Forces Network.

Here's why it's so hard to buy vegetables in the UK

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — When European Union chief Ursula von der Leyen visited Britain last week, some joked

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on social media: Can you please bring us some tomatoes?

People in the U.K. have had to ration salad staples like tomatoes and cucumbers for the past two weeks amid a shortage of fresh vegetables. Shelves of fresh produce in many stores have been bare, and most major supermarkets have imposed limits on how many salad bags or bell peppers customers are allowed to buy.

Officials blame the problem on recent bad weather in Spain and North Africa, saying the shortages could persist for up to a month. But many people were quick to point out that other European countries don't seem to be suffering the same challenges, leading some to wonder if it was a consequence of Britain's divorce from the EU.

Britain's government has rejected the suggestion that Brexit is to blame. But shoppers aren't happy, and Environment Secretary Therese Coffey's suggestion that consumers should "cherish" British produce and eat more turnips instead of imported food drew widespread mockery.

Experts say Brexit likely played a part in the food shortage, though a more complex set of factors — including climate change, the U.K.'s overreliance on imports during the winter, soaring energy costs and the competitive pricing strategies at British supermarkets — are more salient explanations.

A look at some of the factors contributing to what one European broadcaster has called Britain's "vegetable fiasco":

COLD WEATHER, HIGH ENERGY BILLS

Unusually cold temperatures in Spain and heavy rain and flooding in Morocco — two of the biggest tomato suppliers to the U.K. — have led to poor yields and are cited as the primary cause of the shortage.

In Spain, farmers blame recent freezing temperatures following record heat and dry conditions last year.

In the southern province of Almeria, which grows 40% of Spain's fresh vegetable exports, the production levels of tomatoes, cucumbers and eggplants fell by over 20% during the first three weeks of February compared with the same period in 2022, according to FEPEX, an organization representing Spanish fruit and vegetable exporters. The group said the situation is improving.

Heat and drought in Europe last year also are affecting vegetable harvests in other countries, including Germany.

Separately, the Netherlands, another major tomato producer, has seen a drop in output because skyrocketing energy bills tied to Russia's war in Ukraine meant many growers couldn't justify the cost of turning on the LED lights in their greenhouses this winter.

Vegetable growers in the U.K. have reported that they, too, were forced to leave their greenhouses empty.

Richard Diplock, managing director at the Green House Growers based in southern England, said his energy costs are some six times higher compared with previous winters.

"We made the decision that we couldn't afford to heat the greenhouses in December and January, and we've held back planting until February. Lots of tomato growers are in a similar position," he said.

BLAMING BREXIT

The shortages in Britain — and contrasting pictures of full vegetable shelves in supermarkets in mainland Europe — led to a degree of Brexit schadenfreude in some EU news outlets.

Experts say extra bureaucracy and costs associated with Brexit have played a part, though they stress it's not a main factor.

"One hypothesis for fewer exports to the U.K. is that if supply is constrained, why would you go to extra paperwork (to export to Britain)?" said Michael Winter, a professor of agricultural change at the University of Exeter. "If transaction costs are greater for exporting to one country compared to another, that's going to dictate where you go."

"Brexit has exaggerated the problem, without a doubt," Winter added. "But I don't want to overplay that. It's more to do with climate change and lack of investment in our industry."

SUPERMARKET PRICING

Farmers say another factor is how Britain's biggest supermarkets have sought to stay competitive by keeping prices as low as possible even as food costs have spiked, a major driver of inflation that's at the highest levels in decades.

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In some EU countries, like Germany, there are no empty shelves, but the prices for fresh vegetables have shot up massively. British supermarkets are reluctant to pay more or charge customers so much, Diplock said.

"Being in the U.K., you know every week the price of a cucumber is 75p (\$0.90) no matter what time of year it is," Diplock said. "North African and Spanish producers will see a better return for supplying European supermarkets."

"WHERE'S THE INVESTMENT?"

Even if energy costs hadn't risen so much, British growers would not come close to making up for the shortfalls in imported produce, Diplock said.

During the winter, domestic U.K. production only accounts for 5% or less of tomatoes and cucumbers sold in British supermarkets.

The National Farmers' Union has warned for months that overreliance on imported fresh produce leaves the U.K. vulnerable to unpredictable weather events and other external factors like the war in Ukraine.

Farmers also have complained about the lack of government investment in the sector and funding to help them cope with painfully high energy bills.

The government has spent billions to help consumers and businesses as European natural gas prices soared to record highs on Russia's curtailed supplies.

"The bigger question is why have we, in this country, neglected horticulture," Winter said. "This is a bit of a wake-up call."

Egypt unveils newly discovered chamber inside Great Pyramid

By MOHAMED WAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Egypt's antiquities authorities on Thursday unveiled a newly discovered, sealed-off chamber inside one of the Great Pyramids at Giza, just outside of Cairo, that dates back some 4,500 years ago.

The corridor — on the northern side of the Pyramid of Khufu — was discovered using modern scanning technology. It measures 9 meters (nearly 30 feet) in length and is 2 meters (over 6 feet) wide, perched above the main entrance of the pyramid.

Archaeologists do not know what the function was of the chamber, which is not accessible from the outside. In 2017, scientists announced the discovery of another sealed-off corridor, a 30-meter chamber — or about 98 feet — also inside the Pyramid of Khufu.

Egyptian archaeologist Zahi Hawass and the country's Minister for Tourism Ahmed Eissa, announced the discovery Thursday at an unveiling ceremony outside the pyramid. The Scan Pyramids project, an international program that uses scans to look at unexplored sections of the ancient structure, was credited for the find.

Scientists from the project — which began in 2015 — attended the unveiling.

According to Christian Grosse, Professor of Non-destructive Testing at the Technical University of Munich and a leading member of the project, various scanning techniques were deployed to locate the chamber, including ultrasound measurements and ground penetrating radars. He hopes these techniques will lead to further findings within the pyramid.

"There are two large limestones at the end chamber, and now the question is what's behind these stones and below the chamber," Grosse said.

The Pyramid of Khufu — named after its builder, a Fourth Dynasty pharaoh who reigned from 2509 to 2483 B.C. — is one of three pyramids that make up the Great Pyramids at Giza complex. The Egyptian pyramids are the only one of the ancient Seven Wonders of the World that have survived to this day.

Experts are divided over how the pyramids were constructed, so even relatively minor discoveries generate great interest. Authorities often publicly tout discoveries to attract more tourists, a major source of foreign currency for this cash-strapped Middle eastern country.

Egypt's tourism sector suffered a long downturn after the political turmoil and violence that followed the 2011 uprising that ousted the country's longtime autocratic President Hosni Mubarak, and further setbacks

following the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

Rehab on hold: COVID devastated prison learning programs

By AARON MORRISON AP National Writer

CHOWCHILLA, California (AP) — Joseph Sena has spent nearly half his 27 years in prison for manslaughter. For almost as long, he's been striving to make himself a better man than when he first arrived.

He has taken courses in creative writing, addressed his addictions, and attended school in prison, hoping to be judged fit for parole and ready to return home to Los Angeles if he ever becomes free.

But when the coronavirus pandemic hit, tearing through prisons and killing thousands, it severely disrupted or shut down the very programs prisoners most desperately need to prepare them for eventual release.

Trauma counseling, training in carpentry, masonry and barbering, and college courses were slow to adjust to pandemic learning. Isolation and uncertainty replaced creative outlets and mental health therapies, for months on end.

Sena grew depressed and anxious — he began to doubt that he'd be known for anything other than taking a life when he was 15.

He remembered the words of a poem he wrote to the man he was convicted of killing.

"I know you're not here. I'll remember your name. For you I will live. For us, I will change."

He was afraid he'd never get the chance.

In a nation that incarcerates roughly 2 million people, the COVID pandemic was a nightmare for prisons. Overcrowding, subpar medical care, staffing shortages, and the ebb and flow of prison populations left most places unprepared to manage the spread of the highly contagious virus. At least 3,181 prisoners and 311 correctional staff died of virus-related causes through mid-January of this year, according to a COVID tracking project by the law school at the University of California in Los Angeles.

The 10 largest state prison systems suspended or severely curtailed in-person visitation for an average of 490 days before such restrictions were lifted, based on information and records obtained by The Associated Press. That meant no family visits, and no volunteers coming in to lead rehabilitation programs.

At the worst of times, prisoners said they were locked in their cells for weeks on end, their otherwise normal activities like phone calls to loved ones left up to the whims of correctional officers.

It's hard to overstate the positive impact of educational and skills training on prisoner rehabilitation, said Margaret diZerega, who directs the Vera Institute of Justice's Unlocking Potential initiative, which is focused on expanding college in prison. Given that 90% of people who are incarcerated in the U.S. will return to their communities, prisoner access to rehabilitative programming should matter to everyone, she said.

"We know from the research that these kinds of programs reduce recidivism rates. They improve safety in the prisons, there are fewer violent incidents, which is positive for the staff who work at the prisons and for the people who live in the prisons," diZerega said.

A comprehensive review of in-prison education by the RAND Corporation found that prisoners who participate in any kind of courses while behind bars are up to 43% less likely to commit more crime and return to prison.

Education and rehabilitation programs can also have a positive impact on a prisoner's parole eligibility. Many parole commissioners balance the earning of diplomas and certifications in a trade with prisoners' record of good behavior, criminal history, and potential input from victims of the crime, among other factors.

Corrections officials told the AP they remain committed to making the rehabilitation programs available.

Some prisons expanded mail correspondence learning for prisoners in GED or college programs and introduced learning via mobile tablets where they could. They required masks and distributed hand sanitizers for prisoners and staff, tested and isolated COVID-positive prisoners, encouraged social distancing where possible.

Sena was recently transferred to a medium security facility closer to his mother and younger sisters in Los Angeles, which he sees as an encouraging sign on his journey.

He said he held onto lessons he learned from InsideOUT Writers, an arts-based healing program that

helped him pen the poem to his victim.

He wants to make something of his life, and he credits the prison programs for helping him find a sense of purpose and inner peace.

"My teacher from InsideOUT Writers told me it's not about becoming a new person — it's finding the person that you really are," he said. "I want to find Joseph, the little kid that loves everybody, who was curious and loved to hug people, and loved to see people smile. That's the Joseph that I want back."

Rehab on hold: COVID devastated prison learning programs

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But when the coronavirus pandemic hit, tearing through prisons and killing thousands, it severely disrupted or shut down the very programs prisoners most desperately need to prepare them for eventual release.

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In a nation that incarcerates roughly 2 million people — a disproportionate number of them Black and Hispanic — the COVID pandemic was a nightmare for prisons. Overcrowding, subpar medical care, staffing shortages and the ebb and flow of prison populations left most places unprepared to manage the spread of the highly contagious virus. At least 3,181 prisoners and 311 correctional staff died of virus-related causes through mid-January of this year, according to a COVID tracking project by the law school at the University of California in Los Angeles.

The 10 largest state prison systems suspended or severely curtailed in-person visitation for an average of 490 days before such restrictions were lifted, based on information and records obtained by The Associated Press. That meant no family visits, and no volunteers coming in to lead rehabilitation programs.

At the worst of times, prisoners said they were locked in their cells for weeks on end, their otherwise normal activities like phone calls to loved ones left up to the whims of correctional officers. And when things seemed to return to normal, just one COVID-positive case in their living quarters would send them back into isolation for weeks.

Some prisons expanded mail correspondence learning for prisoners in GED or college programs and introduced learning via mobile tablets where they could.

But prisoners said it wasn't the same as the in-person classes.

"People weren't prepared for this," said Oscar Martinez, a resident of Valley State Prison. "I believe it created a lot of trauma for people, on top of the trauma they already had. The cell that you have in your mind, when you start suffocating in there, it's just like cage after cage after cage."

It's hard to overstate the positive impact of educational and skills training on prisoner rehabilitation, said Margaret diZerega, who directs the Vera Institute of Justice's Unlocking Potential initiative, which is focused on expanding college in prison. Given that 90% of people who are incarcerated in the U.S. will return to their communities, prisoner access to rehabilitative programming should matter to everyone, she said.

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A comprehensive review of in-prison education by the RAND Corporation found that prisoners who participate in any kind of courses while behind bars are up to 43% less likely to commit more crime and return to prison.

"It's hugely important that people have hope and that we, as a society, care about their human dignity and their potential," diZerega said.

Education and rehabilitation programs can also help a prisoner's parole eligibility. Many parole commissioners consider earning diplomas and certifications, along with prisoners' record of good behavior.

"I know that I have to go to a board, in front of these commissioners, and I don't want these commissioners to say, 'So what happened in these two years?'" said Sena who, as of this month, becomes eligible for parole in 2024.

—— Bobby Gonzalez parked his car in the visitors' lot at Valley State Prison and sat for a few minutes to process complex emotions. The 35-year-old was released on parole from the prison in September of 2019, after serving 16 years of a 25-to-life sentence for a gang-related murder.

While incarcerated in Chowchilla, he piloted an art and music therapy program that has been modeled across the state prison system in collaboration with its mental health department.

Some of the men he was about to reunite with had been residents of the prison for the entirety of the coronavirus pandemic, so he didn't presume he knew what they'd been through.

But his mission was clear, he said: "I'm coming to rejuvenate them. Keep going, like we always have, because I know I am."

Lead With Love, an activist arts and entertainment company, organized Gonzalez's visit as part of a touring initiative to bring rehabilitative programming into prisons across California. The Nov. 4 stop on the tour included an advance screening of director Sol Guy's deeply personal film, "The Death of My Two Fathers," which began airing on PBS stations late last month.

The screening at Valley State Prison was held in the prison's gymnasium which, until that day, had been closed for recreational activities like basketball as part of ongoing COVID restrictions. About 150 prisoners were allowed in for the film — individual paper bags of buttered popcorn and cold sodas included with admission — their excitement palpable after months of isolation.

Just before the screening, the prisoners sat silently in metal folding chairs, their eyes shut, through guided meditation, breathwork and interfaith prayers. They were primed for an emotional reception of Guy's film, in which the filmmaker unpacks the meanings of fatherhood, family, race and identity around the death of his Black father and white stepfather.

Several men found Guy, who had been standing in the back of the gym during the screening, and pulled him into tearful hugs and expressed their gratitude.

"When we talk about the power of story in generations, in loving, forgiving and healing, wrestling and facing our fears, and overcoming, we're changing the community," said Daniel Henson, a 40-year-old resident of Valley State Prison who was incarcerated for murder at age 16. He became parole eligible in 2021.

"Sol coming in here proves the point of all of us who believe in restorative justice," Henson said. "People can go from the worst to the best."

Things are almost back to normal at prisons across the U.S., with most returning to regular day-to-day education and rehabilitative programs. Some were able to restart earlier, but new variants of the virus and surges in cases made reopening tricky.

Corrections officials told the AP they're committed to the rehabilitation programs.

"We know that even just some programming positively impacts the likelihood of someone's success in their reentry to the community," Dana Simas, press secretary for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, said in an email.

Guy said it's not just on prisons to ensure the programs are available and plentiful.

"It'd be really easy to say, 'Well, the California Department of Corrections should do better.' But that's half of the circle. The other half is, we in society should ask more questions and knock on the doors," the

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filmmaker said.

Sena, the juvenile offender from Los Angeles, was recently transferred to a medium security facility closer to his mother and younger sisters in Los Angeles, which he sees as an encouraging step in his journey.

Sena said he held onto lessons he learned from InsideOUT Writers, an arts-based healing program that helped him pen the poem to his victim.

He doesn't make excuses for his crime — in late July of 2010, he exchanged gunfire with 25-year-old Julian Obdulio Romero; the car crashed and Romero died at the scene.

Esperanza Sanchez, Sena's mother, who was only 13 when she gave birth, said she encourages her son to share his story of transformation.

"I know you have a purpose," she recalled telling her son. "You've been in prison, you've been in jail, you've been in juvenile hall. You have that story. Your testimony is very important for others."

Sena credits the prison programs for helping him find a sense of purpose and inner peace.

"My teacher from InsideOUT Writers told me it's not about becoming a new person — it's finding the person that you really are," he said. "I want to find Joseph, the little kid that loves everybody, who was curious and loved to hug people, and loved to see people smile. That's the Joseph that I want back."

Applications for jobless claims fall for 3rd straight week

By MATT OTT AP Business Writer

The number of people applying for unemployment benefits in the U.S. fell for third straight week. That's good news for American workers, but potentially bad news in the fight against inflation by the Federal Reserve, which has been ratcheting up its benchmark interest rate for a year in an effort to cool the economy, loosen the labor market and tame inflation.

Applications for jobless claims in the U.S. for the week ending February 25 fell to 190,000 from 192,000 the previous week, the Labor Department said Thursday. It's the seventh straight week claims were under 200,000.

The four-week moving average of claims, which evens out some of the weekly volatility, rose by 1,750 to 193,000, remaining below the 200,000 threshold for the sixth straight week.

Applications for unemployment benefits are considered a proxy for the number layoffs in the U.S.

In February, the Fed raised its main lending rate by 25 basis points, its eighth rate hike in less than a year. The central bank's benchmark rate is now in a range of 4.5% to 4.75%, its highest level in 15 years.

The Fed's hawkish interest rate policy appeared to be slowing inflation, but recent data has suggested otherwise. Some economists now expect the Fed to raise its benchmark rate by a substantial half-percentage point when it meets later this month.

The Fed's rate hikes have done little to cool a red-hot U.S. job market, which has put upward pressure on wages, and as a result, prices.

Last month, the government reported that employers added a better-than-expected 517,000 jobs in January and that the unemployment rate dipped to 3.4%, the lowest level since 1969. Fed policymakers have forecast that the unemployment rate would rise to 4.6% by the end of this year, a sizable increase historically associated with recessions.

Though the U.S. labor market remains strong, layoffs have been mounting in the technology sector, where many companies overhired after a pandemic boom. IBM, Microsoft, Amazon, Salesforce, Facebook parent Meta, Twitter and DoorDash have all announced layoffs in recent months.

The real estate sector has also been battered by the Fed's interest rate hikes. Higher mortgage rates — currently above 6% — have slowed home sales for 12 straight months. That's almost in lockstep with the Fed's rate hikes that began last March.

About 1.66 million people were receiving jobless aid the week that ended Feb. 18, a decrease of 5,000 from the week before.

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Today in History: MARCH 3, Florida becomes 27th state

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, March 3, the 62nd day of 2023. There are 303 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 3, 1974, a Turkish Airlines DC-10 crashed shortly after takeoff from Orly Airport in Paris, killing all 346 people on board.

On this date:

In 1791, Congress passed a measure taxing distilled spirits; it was the first internal revenue act in U.S. history.

In 1845, Florida became the 27th state.

In 1849, the U.S. Department of the Interior was established.

In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed a measure creating the National Academy of Sciences.

In 1931, "The Star-Spangled Banner" became the national anthem of the United States as President Herbert Hoover signed a congressional resolution.

In 1943, in London's East End, 173 people died in a crush of bodies at the Bethnal Green tube station, which was being used as a wartime air raid shelter.

In 1945, the Allies fully secured the Philippine capital of Manila from Japanese forces during World War II.

In 1960, Lucille Ball filed for divorce from her husband, Desi Arnaz, a day after they had finished filming the last episode of "The Lucille Ball-Desi Arnaz Show."

In 1966, death claimed actors William Frawley at age 79 and Alice Pearce at age 48 in Hollywood.

In 1969, Apollo 9 blasted off from Cape Kennedy on a mission to test the lunar module.

In 1991, motorist Rodney King was severely beaten by Los Angeles police officers in a scene captured on amateur video. Twenty-five people were killed when a United Airlines Boeing 737-200 crashed while approaching the Colorado Springs airport.

In 2017, The Nintendo Switch, a hybrid game machine that works as both a console at home and a portable tablet on the go, made its debut.

In 2020, in a surprise move, the Federal Reserve cut its benchmark interest rate by a half-point, its largest cut in more than a decade, to support the economy in the face of the spreading coronavirus.

Ten years ago: Vice President Joe Biden led civil rights leaders and national political figures in a ceremonial crossing of a Selma, Alabama, bridge where voting rights marchers were beaten by law enforcement officers in 1965. The SpaceX company's Dragon capsule made good on its latest shipment to the International Space Station, overcoming earlier mechanical difficulty to deliver a ton of supplies. Bobby Rogers, a founding member of Motown group The Miracles and a songwriting collaborator with Smokey Robinson, died at his suburban Detroit home at age 73.

Five years ago: Actor David Ogden Stiers, best known for playing a surgeon on the "M.A.S.H." television series, died at his Oregon home at the age of 75. Coastal communities in the northeastern United States saw damaging high tide flooding and the lingering effects of powerful, gusting winds in the aftermath of a vicious nor'easter. Roger Bannister, the British athlete who, while a medical student, became the first person to run a mile in under 4 minutes, died in Oxford, England at the age of 88.

One year ago: Amid a wave of cultural protest to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, an Amsterdam museum cut its close links to the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, and the Swedish Academy that hands out the prestigious Nobel Prize in Literature broke its long tradition of not making political statements and condemned the invasion. In New York, soprano Anna Netrebko withdrew from her future engagements at the Metropolitan Opera rather than repudiate support for Russian President Vladimir Putin, costing the company one of its best box-office draws. OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma reached a nationwide settlement over its role in the opioid crisis, with the Sackler family members who own the company boosting their cash contribution to as much as \$6 billion in a deal intended to staunch a flood of lawsuits.

Today's birthdays: Singer-musician Mike Pender (The Searchers) is 82. Movie producer-director George

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Miller is 78. Actor Hattie Winston is 78. Singer Jennifer Warnes is 76. Actor-director Tim Kazurinsky is 73. Singer-musician Robyn Hitchcock is 70. Actor Robert Gossett is 69. Rock musician John Lilley is 69. Actor Miranda Richardson is 65. Radio personality Ira Glass is 64. Actor Mary Page Keller is 62. Olympic track and field gold medalist Jackie Joyner-Kersey is 61. Former NFL player and College Football Hall of Famer Herschel Walker is 61. Actor Laura Harring is 59. Contemporary Christian musician Duncan Phillips (Newsboys) is 59. Rapper-actor Tone Loc (lohk) is 57. Actor Julie Bowen is 53. Country singer Brett Warren (The Warren Brothers) is 52. Actor David Faustino is 49. Gospel singer Jason Crabb is 46. Singer Ronan Keating (Boyzone) is 46. Rapper Lil' Flip is 42. Actor Jessica Biel is 41. Rock musician Blower (AKA Joe Garvey) (Hinder) is 39. Musician Brett Hite (Frenship) is 37. Pop singer Camila Cabello is 26. Actor Thomas Barbusca (TV: "The Mick") is 20. Actor Reylynn Caster is 20.