

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Groton Community Calendar

### Thursday, March 16

Senior Menu: Beef stew, biscuit, Waldorf salad, sherbert.

School Breakfast: Pancake on a stick.

School Lunch: Hamburgers, smiley fries.

Boys Basketball State Tournament in Sioux Falls

Emmanuel Lutheran: WELCA (Program-Nigeria, hostess - Sarah).

### Friday, March 17

Senior Menu: St. Patrick's Day Dinner: Corned beef, boiled potatoes, cabbage, Jell-O cake, dinner roll.

Boys Basketball State Tournament in Sioux Falls  
SPRING BREAK - No School

Fruit Fusion Grand Opening, 7:10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 110 N Main St.

## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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



### Saturday, March 18

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

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

Boys Basketball State Tournament in Sioux Falls  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship at Rosewood Court, 10 a.m.

### Sunday, March 19

Annual Carnival of Silver Skates Meeting, 12:30 p.m., Warming House

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.

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

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

United Methodist: Newsletter items due. NO Sunday school.. Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.

## The Bulletin by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

### World in Brief

shock 20% of the vote

- A special prosecutor in the case against Alec Baldwin over the fatal Rust shooting has stepped down from her role following a challenge from Baldwin's legal team
- After weeks of speculation, Texas will take over Houston's public school district, responsible for nearly 200,000 students. State officials say the move follows years of poor academic outcomes, Democrats are calling it "political"
- The production of cocaine has reached record levels and new hubs for trafficking have emerged in central and western Africa, a United Nations report has found
- The Cure frontman Robert Smith hit out at Ticketmaster following controversy over its Dynamic Pricing system, calling it "a bit of a scam"
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia has reportedly reached the site of the US drone which crashed after a collision with a Russian jet over the Black Sea, according to reports

- FDA approval of the abortion pill mifepristone could be revoked by a federal judge in Texas after an anti-abortion group claimed that the drug's safety was never studied in full

- Norfolk Southern Railway is facing a mounting number of lawsuits following the train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, including a 58-count civil suit filed by the state

- A farmers' political party in the Netherlands only set up in 2019 is set to become the largest party in the country's Senate. The Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB) secured a

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## National Honor Society

Back Row left to right- Lane Tietz, Holden Sippel, Colby Dunker, Logan Ringgenberg, Jackson Dinger, Ethan Clark

Middle Row left to right- Anna Fjeldheim, Ashlyn Sperry, Emma Schinkel, Camryn Kurtz, Claire Heinrich, Ava Wienk, Lexi Osterman

Front Row left to right- Emily Clark, Faith Flihs, Hannah Monson, Cadence Feist

Not pictured - Lydia Meier

The 2023 Groton Area High School National Honor Society Ceremony will be held Monday, March 20, 2023 @ 7:00pm in the Groton Area High School Gym. (Courtesy Photo)

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## **PUC reminds consumers to keep natural gas meters clear of snow and ice**

PIERRE, S.D. - The South Dakota Public Utilities Commission urges consumers to clear their natural gas meters and appliance vents of snow and ice. In recent weeks, two home explosions occurred in South Dakota due to snow accumulation on gas meters. While no one was seriously injured in either event, both homes were destroyed.

"Regularly checking to ensure snow and ice haven't built up on your meter is a must during the colder months," said PUC Chairperson Kristie Fiegen. "It is an essential step that helps ensure you, your home and your family remain warm and safe throughout our long South Dakota winters," she continued.

When removing heavy accumulations of snow or ice on and around your gas meter, be careful not to cause any damage. Use a broom, a snow brush or your hands to lightly remove snow and ice that is capable of being removed. Do not kick the meter to break or clear ice or strike meters with snow blowers, blades or shovels. For extremely heavy ice buildup that cannot be removed as recommended, contact your natural gas provider.

"While gas meters are designed to withstand extreme weather conditions, they still need to be treated with care and protected from ice and snow buildup to continue working properly. The accumulation of frozen precipitation on the meter can cause the regulator and meter to malfunction, can cause damage that may lead to a natural gas leak and unfortunately, have led to two homes in the state exploding," PUC Vice Chairman Gary Hanson explained.

While a strong gaseous odor is the most widely known sign of a gas leak, there are a few other warning signs you should look out for. Seeing a dense fog, mist or white cloud, and hearing hissing, whistling or roaring noises coming from the meter should be red flags of a potentially hazardous situation. If you witness any of these, your next step should be to leave the building and area, then call for help.

"If there is one thing to remember when it comes to natural gas safety, let 'Smell Gas? Leave Fast' be the piece that sticks with you. If you believe damage has occurred around the meter or smell gas, get out of the house, go somewhere safe and call your gas provider immediately," Commissioner Chris Nelson directed.

Protecting your natural gas meter is important. Excessive snow cover may result in abnormal pressure, affect appliance operation and interrupt your service. It is also important in the event of an emergency when emergency response crews may need clear access to your meter.

You can also protect your meters by removing overhead icicles and snow from eaves and gutters to ensure they do not cause damage as they fall. The dripping water can splash and freeze on the meter or vent pipes, which could affect proper operation.

See more tips about natural gas safety on the PUC website at <https://puc.sd.gov/consumer/ngmeter-safety.aspx>.

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March 6 - 12, 2023

Another busy week out here in Washington! We earned a major victory for American consumers and producers this past week. More on that good news later. This past week, I attended hearings, met with South Dakotans and other groups, introduced multiple pieces of legislation and gave a floor speech

attempting to extend the spectrum auction authority. You can read more about that and so much more in my Weekly Round[s] Up:

**Product of USA labeling:** This past week, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a new rule proposing that the 'Product of USA' or 'Made in the USA' labels can only be applied to meat, poultry and egg products that are born, raised, slaughtered and processed in the United States. This is a major victory for American consumers and producers. For years, we've called on USDA to take action to stop foreign beef from receiving the 'Product of USA' label. I've met with Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, submitted multiple comments to USDA on this issue and introduced bipartisan legislation since 2019 that closely mirrors this rule. Our work is finally starting to pay off.

With this announcement, integrity has been restored to the 'Product of USA' label. Once this proposed rule is finalized, American consumers will no longer be misled by a 'Product of USA' label that is allowed to be applied to foreign products. American cattle ranchers will no longer be disadvantaged in the marketplace against lower quality foreign beef that falsely bears the 'Product of USA' label. The USDA's ruling is a major step in the right direction, and I applaud Secretary Vilsack for taking the necessary actions to fix this label.

While we acknowledge the magnitude of this ruling, there is still more work to be done. We need to address meat packer concentration and Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling for beef in order to restore transparency and fairness to the cattle market. I remain committed to fighting for American ranchers and consumers.

I spoke with KELOLAND about our work on this issue. You can watch the clip [here](#).

South Dakota groups I visited with: Frank Star Comes Out, President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe; Dustin Hermansen and Max Lightfield, South Dakota's delegates to the United States Senate Youth Program; members of South Dakota's branch of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); and Mike Belshe, CEO of BitGo.

Meetings this past week: General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Dwight Scott, Blackstone's Global Head of Credit; General Anthony Cotton, Commander of USSTRATCOM; and David Zalkiani, Georgia's Ambassador to the United States.

We also had our Senate Bible Study (Genesis 1:26 was the verse of the week) and our Senate Prayer Breakfast (Senator Debbie Stabenow from Michigan was our speaker).

Met with South Dakotans from: Aberdeen, Brookings, Buffalo, Huron, Milbank, Pine Ridge, Rapid City, Redfield, Sturgis and Wessington Springs.

**Spectrum:** You may remember that I previously promised that we'd have a broader discussion on spectrum – this is your lucky week. To give you a brief explainer, electromagnetic spectrum is all around us, but we can't always see or feel it. There are many different kinds of waves in the electromagnetic spectrum, like radio waves, microwaves, infrared waves, visible light (which we can see with our eyes), ultraviolet waves, X-rays and gamma rays. Each type of wave has a different frequency and wavelength, which determines what it can do and how we can use it. For example, radio waves are used to send signals for radios and TVs, while X-rays are used to take pictures of our bones. In simplest terms, we identify spectrum

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based on the frequency and length of the waves. The Department of Defense (DOD) utilizes radio waves, specifically the 3.1-3.45 GHz band of electromagnetic spectrum, for radar and other sensors that protect our nation from attack.

It's important to know that the use of spectrum is limited. There is only so much available for use, which makes it incredibly valuable and its licensing competitive. Wireless telecommunications companies have an interest in acquiring access to the 3.1-3.45 GHz band of spectrum as they continue to deploy 5G technologies. Many bands of spectrum can be purchased at auctions managed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The 3.1 – 3.45 GHz band, however, is currently not available for auction. Recognizing a tension between the DOD and the telecommunications industry, Congress mandated a joint study be completed by the DOD and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) which would identify ways in which the DOD can share this band of spectrum. This study is expected to be completed by September. We want to extend the FCC's current authority until the end of the fiscal year, which would allow the study to be completed before they try and auction off the 3.1-3.45 GHz band for non-military use.

With that in mind, I introduced bipartisan legislation this week with Senator Mazie Hirono of Hawaii to extend the FCC's spectrum auction authority through September 30, 2023. This extension would allow time for the DOD and NTIA to complete their joint study on the spectrum needs of critical defense capabilities before frequencies in the 3.1-3.45 GHz band could be auctioned. This extension would assure American national security is safeguarded throughout the study process.

This past week, I asked for unanimous consent that this bill be passed in order to avoid a lapse in the spectrum auction authority. Unfortunately, my proposal was blocked on the Senate floor and the authority expired on Thursday evening. Some Senate Commerce Committee members want to extend the authority for a few weeks, giving them an opportunity to rewrite protections that are currently found within existing law concerning this part of the spectrum prior to the study being completed. I am still open to the extension of the auction authority as currently found within law until September 30.

Legislation introduced: I introduced the Traveler's Gun Rights Act, a bill that would allow full-time Recreational Vehicle (RV) travelers, as well as active duty military personnel and military spouses, to use a P.O. Box, Private Mailbox (PMB) or duty station address to purchase a firearm. Currently, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives(ATF) requires a physical address and prohibits P.O. Boxes, PMB and duty station addresses on firearm purchase forms. You can read more about the Traveler's Gun Rights Act in this story from Fox News.

Votes taken: 13 – The most noteworthy was a vote to overturn Washington, DC's new crime bill that was put forth by the DC City Council. I voted yes to block this bill which would reduce maximum penalties for crimes like robbery and armed carjacking.

Hearings: I attended five hearings this week. We had two hearings in the Senate Armed Services Committee and two in the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

I had one hearing in the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs committee where we heard from Jerome Powell, Chair of the Federal Reserve. I questioned him about whether the Federal Reserve has the tools in place to properly address the president's policy-induced inflation. You can watch a clip of that here.

Classified briefings: I had two classified briefings this week: one on spectrum and one with SASC's Subcommittee on Strategic Forces.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Aberdeen, Brookings, Enning and Watertown.

Steps taken this week: 58,726 steps or 27.11 miles.



## SDSU, USD rely heavily on state money and student fees to subsidize Division I athletics

Stu Whitney

South Dakota News Watch

As the clock struck zero at the 2012 Summit League basketball finals, South Dakota State University fans stormed the Sioux Falls Arena court to celebrate their men's team's first-ever bid to one of America's most significant sports spectacles, the NCAA Division I tournament.

Coupled with SDSU's women's basketball triumph earlier on the same court, the moment seemed to bolster the Brookings school's decision eight years earlier to leave the familiar confines of the Division II North Central Conference to compete at the highest level of intercollegiate sports.

"It was one of those days," said SDSU athletic director Justin Sell, "that changed our university."

Like most everything in the increasingly complex world of college athletics, however, there was more to the story. Besides winning, SDSU sought to keep the athletic program financially viable and less reliant on taxpayer money, university support and student fees.

Two years later, the University of South Dakota in Vermillion announced its own jump to Division I and began a similar journey to depend less on those allocated funds, as they're known in NCAA circles.

According to a South Dakota News Watch analysis of mandatory NCAA reporting data over the past decade, the Jackrabbits' Division I reclassification in 2004 has been more successful in that regard:

- SDSU, with an athletic budget of \$20 million, draws about 45% of its revenue from allocated funds, according to the most recent data.
- USD's athletic department is more subsidized, with 66% of its \$18.5 million budget coming from government and institutional money and student fees.

Government support refers to general funds disbursed by the South Dakota Board of Regents, which oversees the state's six public universities. Institutional funds can include money from tuition, tuition waivers and endowments.

### USD and SDSU athletic departments scrambling to find revenue

SDSU and USD compete in the Summit League for most sports and are football members of the Missouri Valley Conference along with North Dakota State and the University of North Dakota.

That puts them in the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS), a lower level than the Football Bowl



**South Dakota State University's Nate Wolters (center) celebrates with teammates and fans after the Jacks beat Western Illinois at the Summit League Basketball Tournament in 2012 in Sioux Falls. The victory sent the Jacks to the NCAA Tournament for the first time.** Photo: Argus Leader file

Subdivision (FBS), which encompasses major-college programs such as Nebraska, Minnesota and Iowa.

The so-called Power Five conferences – the Atlantic Coast (ACC), Big Ten, Big 12, Pacific-12 (Pac 12) and Southeastern (SEC) – reap the benefits of billion-dollar television deals and ticket sales. Their allocated funds average is 7%, due mainly to media rights, NCAA and conference distributions and bowl-related revenues that create a “haves and have nots” chasm in college athletics.

That leaves mid-major programs such as SDSU and USD scrambling to find enough money to meet mounting expenses for scholarships, coaches compensation, facilities and travel. Operating revenue such as ticket sales, corporate sponsorship and donor contributions can be a challenge for mid-major athletic programs to generate.

When compared with rivals, the South Dakota schools are not unique, according to the News Watch analysis of NCAA data from 2012-2020 (fiscal year 2021 was disregarded due to COVID-related impacts):

- The average percentage of allocated funds for FCS schools is 71%, which means USD is less subsidized than most schools at their competitive level.
- Other Summit League public schools that sponsor football also rely heavily on allocated funds: North Dakota State (33%), North Dakota (54%) and Western Illinois (72%).
- SDSU reported \$4.4 million in ticket revenue in 2020, compared with \$960,000 for USD.
- NDSU reported \$6.3 million in ticket sales in 2020, while UND had \$4.9 million (including Division I hockey) and Western Illinois \$900,000.
- Northern Colorado, a former NCC school that reclassified to Division I in 2002, drew 70% of revenue from allocated funds in 2020 and brought in just \$339,500 in ticket sales.

### USD's reliance on allocated funds: 'Time to re-balance?'

USD's reliance on allocated funds has increased nearly 100%, from \$6.58 million in 2012 to \$13.08 million in 2020. SDSU went from \$7.88 million to \$9.9 million during that span, a rise of 27%.

Academic spending at USD increased 23% from 2012-20 (\$164.1 to \$202.6 million), while SDSU's spending increased 12% during that span (\$163.6 to \$183.4 million). Those expenditures include instruction, research,

public service, academic support and student services.

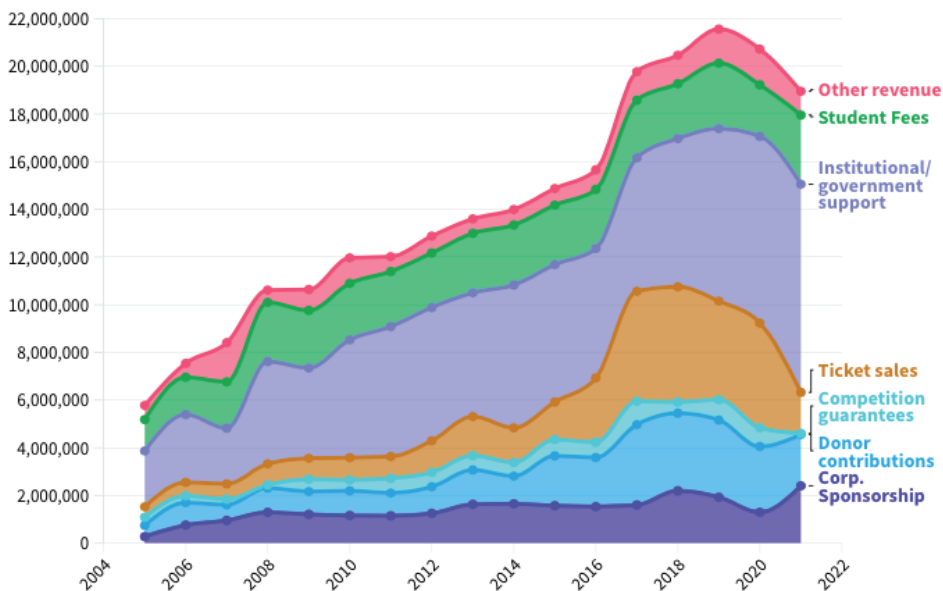
On the athletics side, increased funding to meet Division I demands has not produced higher enrollment. In fact, SDSU's undergraduate enrollment dropped 10.7% from 2012 to 2023, while USD's dipped 4.6%. Tuition more than doubled at both schools during that span from \$114.30 a credit hour to \$256.55, a spike of nearly 125%.

Brian Maher, Board of Regents executive director, was asked if the board was concerned about one of the state's Division I universities being more reliant than the other on public and student subsidies.

“We always have to look at how equitably we are treating like institutions, and we will

## South Dakota State athletic revenues

SDSU, with an athletic budget of \$20 million, draws about 45% of its revenue from allocated funds. The data below shows where revenue has come from since the university moved to Division I. Note: Fiscal years are shown. Not inflation-adjusted.



Source: Knight Foundation; Graphic: Michael Klinski / South Dakota News Watch



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continue to look at that," said Maher. "Is there a concern? I would say, always. Are we overly concerned right now? No, but I do think we need to look at making sure the balance is there and, if not, is it time to re-balance? I think we always need to look at that."

"A lot of schools can't drive the revenue," added SDSU's Sell. "Is one model better than one another, is one good or one bad? I don't know. They're just different. Each school philosophically has to figure that out, and ultimately it's your constituents, students and supporters that need to feel comfortable with that approach."

## **Athletic success equals national exposure for USD and SDSU**

The Jackrabbits and Coyotes have seen their share of sports success, with SDSU's football team claiming its first-ever national title this past season and USD's women's basketball advancing to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA tournament in 2022.

SDSU won the Summit League women's basketball tournament in Sioux Falls last week and will compete in the NCAA tournament for the 11th time since making the move to Division I. The Coyotes' track and field program has produced four NCAA individual pole vault titles.

How has that success translated into meeting the financial demands of fielding competitive teams and creating a rewarding experience for student-athletes and their fans?

USD president Sheila Gestring pointed to renewed efforts to market the school's sports teams and improve game day experience to boost interest. She also noted that Division I sports can bring exposure to a university that goes beyond turnstile counts.

"There is value involved in getting national exposure," Gestring told News Watch. "You can't buy enough marketing to match the free coverage you're getting when you're making a march to win the WNIT (Women's National Invitation Tournament) or get to the Sweet 16, or you have an Olympic silver medalist or Sports Illustrated play of the year. It's a tremendous way to expose not just your athletic teams to a national audience, but the university in general."

Gestring spoke those words several days after watching USD's basketball teams bow out in the first round of the Summit League tournament, the women dealing with the departure of coach Dawn Plitzuweit, who guided the Coyotes to three Summit tourney titles, to West Virginia of the Big 12. The USD football team is coming off a season with three wins and eight losses, reinforcing the notion that selling your school's Division I vision to donors and fans is easier on the heels of victory.

"There's a certain amount of revenue that comes with winning, and I think that's how you fill the gap," said Maher. "Otherwise, to use a phrase from athletics, 'You're just another guy.'"

## **Alumni and other donor support needed to keep athletic departments afloat**

Jim Abbott, who served as USD's president from 1997-2018, knew that change was inevitable when SDSU joined NDSU in reclassifying to Division I in 2004, leaving the Coyotes on a lower competitive level than their in-state and century-old rival.

Abbott agreed with SDSU leadership at the time – president Peggy Gordon Miller and athletic director Fred Oien – that Division II athletics had become watered down and that South Dakota, the nation's last state without a Division I athletic program, would rally around a new era, as suggested in a report by



**University of South Dakota players celebrate after they beat Baylor 61-47 to advance to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament in 2022.** Photo: Molly Shepard / USD

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**South Dakota State quarterback Mark Gronowski and fellow team captain Mason McCormick hoist the championship trophy after beating North Dakota State 45-21 in the FCS title game Jan. 8, 2023, in Frisco, Texas.** Photo: Dave Eggen / Inertia

the SDSU-commissioned consulting firm Carr Associates.

"Healthy universities are living organizations that, if they are student-focused and forward-looking, grow over time," the report said. "Wise universities continue to reaffirm their values but also reach out to new opportunities that present themselves."

Abbott, however, knew that a surge in athletic scholarships, travel and other investments needed for Division I would take an influx of money from alumni and other donors, and he didn't see that level of support in Vermillion.

The school's endowment would grow from \$45 million to \$258 million during his stint as president. But the USD Foundation was still finding its footing at the time. He was also paying attention to UND, which had similar reservations and was staying in Division II despite NDSU's move.

"I had quite a few conversations with Peggy Gordon Miller about it," Abbott told News

Watch. "For a while, we were shooting toward moving to Division I at the same time SDSU did, and we were hoping that UND would go along. It didn't work out that way. In the final analysis, I determined that we didn't have the foundation support at that time. The support had to be substantial, and it just didn't come together at that time."

## **Students supported fee increases at both universities**

But the feeling of inevitability stuck with him, hastened by the deterioration of the NCC, and UND and USD both announced in 2006 that they would transition to Division I in two years.

Abbott knew he had made the right decision after attending the 2008 Division II women's national championship basketball game between USD and Northern Kentucky in Kearney, Nebraska, a 63-58 loss by the Coyotes that drew a crowd of 3,067.

"It was a national championship, and it was pretty ho-hum," Abbott said of that final Division II season. "There just wasn't the enthusiasm generated by it. And by that time all these other schools had gone Division I, and it was pretty clear that it made sense for us long-term."

Spikes in corporate and donor support, including major investments from Sanford Health, helped USD revamp its athletic facilities. Those included the \$73 million Sanford Coyote Sports Center, a 6,000-seat basketball and volleyball arena that opened in 2016, and a \$26 million remodel of the DakotaDome football complex.

The enhancements, as well as a \$10.5 million project to repair the DakotaDome roof in 2000 that included \$4 million in state funds, were bolstered by public and student support.

In 2015, USD students voted to approve a three-year increase in general activity fees (student fees), partly to generate revenue for the athletic department. Student fees went from \$38.30 per credit hour in 2015 to \$52.70 in 2018, bringing the annual fee to \$1,581 for a student taking 30 credit hours. In fiscal year 2023, student fees are \$55.30 per credit hour (\$1,659) at USD and \$50.85 (\$1,525.50) at SDSU.

"Every single time our fees were increased because of athletics, our students were solidly behind it, including building a new arena," Abbott said. "Our students were incredibly supportive."

## **Red ink for red seats at University of South Dakota**

USD reported \$29.4 million in athletics-related debt in its most recent NCAA report, tied to bond service

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**The South Dakota State Jackrabbits storm the court at the buzzer against the Omaha Mavericks at the 2023 Summit League Basketball Championship at the Denny Sanford Premier Center in Sioux Falls. The Jackrabbits won 93-51 to advance to the NCAA Tournament.** Photo:

Miranda Sampson / Inertia

for the Sanford Coyote Sports Center and DakotaDome renovation. The basketball arena included \$22.7 million in bond proceeds, to be paid off with the Sanford Health donation, corporate sponsorships and facility rental.

Funding for the DakotaDome expansion included \$14.5 million in bond proceeds (serviced with private funds), \$6.4 million from USD local fund cash and \$5.4 from the school's Higher Education Facilities Fund (HEFF) maintenance and repair allocation, derived from a student tuition surcharge and typically used for academic buildings.

Despite occasional surges, such as when USD's women's basketball team won the WNIT championship in 2016 on its old DakotaDome court, gate revenue remains a challenge in Vermillion. The Coyotes reported \$960,000 in ticket sales in 2020, which is up from \$280,000 in 2012 but accounts for just 2% of athletic department revenue.

For Greg Huckabee, an economics professor who serves on USD's Board of Athletic Control and regularly attends events on campus, the relative lack of student fan interest is puzzling.

"The students help subsidize athletics with the fees they pay, but we haven't had real good attendance of students in the past 20 years," said Huckabee, who arrived at USD in 2003. "I've asked students why that is, and they point to a lack of consistent success in sports like football. It's sort of hard to generate a strong fan base when you don't have winning programs."

The Coyotes have advanced to the football postseason twice since making the Division I move, with one playoff victory. SDSU has gone on 12 times while compiling 18 wins, including two championship game appearances.

Huckabee attended college at Gonzaga, a small private university in Spokane, Washington, that achieved national acclaim when its men's basketball team started making NCAA tournament runs, including two trips to the national finals.

The Jesuit liberal arts college saw its enrollment spike 82 percent – from 4,185 to 7,605 – and its endowment doubled from 1999 to 2013 as the basketball team made 15 consecutive appearances in the NCAA tournament.

"What comes first? The chicken or the egg?" asked Huckabee. "I think you have to first generate excitement with a winning team that brings people to the games. Geezers like me, we're going to go to the games regardless of whether we have a winning team. But students aren't that way. They'll go home on weekends rather than sticking around to watch football or basketball. You've got to give them reasons to stay."

## **Times have changed: Bison minivan vs. Jackrabbit cooler of beer**

Dana Dykhouse played defensive tackle for SDSU in the late 1970s, when NDSU ruled the Upper Midwest in football and Division I athletics seemed worlds away from the facilities and fan experience in Brookings.

When Dykhouse, now CEO of First Premier Bank, became a prominent booster for the Jackrabbits several decades later, he believed that major donors and corporate partners were the path to a more polished



**SDSU President  
Barry Dunn**

collegiate experience.

"I remember attending an athletic scholarship banquet up in Fargo, where the top auction item was a minivan totally decked out with Bison gear," said Dykhouse. "(SDSU's) top item that year was a cooler filled with beer. Back then we raised about \$50,000 with our scholarship auction and now we bring in over \$1 million in one night."

SDSU had an athletic budget of \$4.8 million in fiscal year 2004, on the cusp of its transition process. The school pushed that to \$12.2 million by 2010, the year after Sell arrived as athletic director, with 60% coming from allocated funds (state/university funds and student fees). The 2022 budget was \$25.6 million, and the percentage of allocated funds was down to 48%.

"We made a commitment to try to figure out how to grow our budget but do it with donors, ticket sales and corporate sponsors, and really try to drive that revenue," said Sell.

### Donor support more important after Division I move

But there's a limit to how much private money should be used, SDSU president Barry Dunn told News Watch.

Finding the right balance between institutional and donor support has been of particular interest to Dunn, who was hired in 2016 and chaired the search committee that hired Summit League commissioner Josh Fenton in 2021. Dunn also serves on the Summit League's finance committee.

"I tackled this when I became president," he said. "I looked at the trends, and at SDSU, counter to a lot of mid-majors, we were becoming more and more reliant on booster support, corporate and ticket revenue. And in a lot of ways that's great, but I didn't want to give up institutional control. We settled on a goal of around

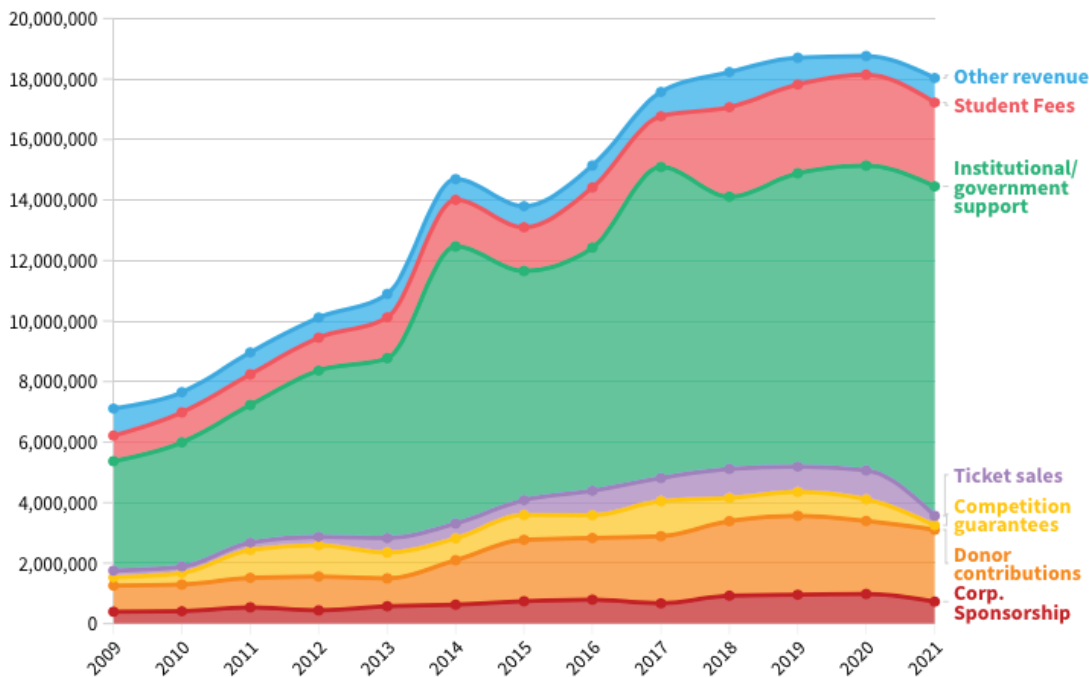
40% (allocated funds), and I think that's very healthy. It's also very different than USD and a lot of other schools in our conferences who receive support of 65-70% or even higher. But with our success we've been able to get that down."

A major priority was upgrading SDSU's athletic facilities largely with private money rather than having to rely on institutional funds or student fees.

Dana J. Dykhouse Stadium, a \$65 million football facility that seats 19,340, opened in 2016, with \$36 million financed

## University of South Dakota athletic revenues

USD draws 66% of its athletic budget from government and institutional money and student fees. Its athletic budget is \$18.8 million. Note: Fiscal years are shown. Not inflation-adjusted.



Source: Knight Foundation; Graphic: Michael Klinski / South Dakota News Watch

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by bonds and \$27 million coming from donations, including \$10 million from First Premier founder Denny Sanford and \$2.5 million from Dykhouse.

Dykhouse and Sanford had earlier donated \$6 million for the Dykhouse Student-Athlete Center, which includes offices, meeting rooms, locker rooms and weight training. Sanford Health donated another \$10 million for an indoor practice facility.

Also underway is a \$53 million renovation of Frost Arena, to become First Bank & Trust Arena after a lead gift of \$20 million. The project calls for \$41.2 million in private donations, \$6 million in HEFF funds and \$4 million in university funds generated from ticket, sponsorship and broadcast rights.

SDSU listed \$28.3 million in athletics-related debt on its most recent NCAA report, tied to bonding for the football stadium. Annual lease payments of \$2.6 million are made primarily from revenue from suites and other premium seating at the stadium.



**Tickets sales at the University of South Dakota account for just 2 percent of the athletic department's revenue.** Photo: Aaron Packard / USD

## **Donor money, not student funds being used at SDSU**

"There is no student money in Dykhouse Stadium, there is no student money in First Bank & Trust Arena, and that is in contrast to how USD has funded their facilities," said Dunn. He pointed out that student fees, approved by the student association, were used for non-athletic department facility upgrades at SDSU such as the Miller Wellness Center and University Student Union.

"We want students to be able to go and have their student fees pay for tickets, but you don't want the students to bear the entire burden of this (athletic) enterprise," Dunn added. "My predecessors not only made tough decisions by going Division I, but they did the really important work of building relationships and growing that donor base, and of course winning always helps."

The Jackrabbits have seen Division I momentum play out in major moments, from the men's first NCAA basketball berth in 2012 to the women making the Sweet 16 in 2019 and ESPN's College Gameday football show (which averages more than 2 million weekly viewers) coming to Brookings that same year. The football team made history with its first-ever national title this January, with a 45-21 rout of NDSU in Frisco, Texas.

Those successes spark media coverage and campus excitement, but much of the progress occurs behind the scenes. Jackrabbit Club fundraising went from \$838,000 in 2013 to \$1.8 million in 2022, and an active football alumni group "browbeats" former players to buy season tickets, according to Dykhouse, adding that the group donated \$75,000 so the team could have new football helmets.

Premium seat sales at Dykhouse Stadium helped the football team to bring in \$3.5 million in ticket sales in 2022, well above men's basketball (\$365,165), women's basketball (\$365,165) and wrestling (\$51,859).

"That did not happen overnight," said Dykhouse, who also noted the Board of Regents' expanded alcohol policy for campus events.

"We were averaging 5,000 to 6,000 fans a game when we went Division I, and we didn't go from that to (more than 15,000) in one year. It's just a hard slog and you have to work at it – athletic department, coaches, alumni, marketing, everybody. If you're not doing the work today, it's not going to instantly get better in two years."

## **Enrollment has not followed investment in athletic programs**

One of the arguments for a university taking its athletic programs to Division I is that playing at a higher

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**South Dakota State and the University of South Dakota have received national exposure by winning the Summit League tournament.** Photo: Miranda Sampson / Inertia

level will spark more exposure and brand awareness, resulting in higher enrollment.

That has not been the case for SDSU and USD, where undergraduate enrollments lag behind or remain static from where they were in 2012, despite modest post-COVID increases for 2022-23.

SDSU is currently at 9,816 undergraduate students, down from 10,993 in fiscal year 2012. USD is at 7,132, down from 7,473 in 2012. Total enrollment (including graduate students) is 11,331 at SDSU and 9,856 at USD.

There are many factors that go into enrollment, including efforts by the Board of Regents to freeze tuition rates and maximize student access to federal aid to get more South Dakota high school graduates on campus. But packaging campus enhancements tied to Division I into SDSU/USD recruiting strategies is a priority moving forward.

and doing our own marketing from a system perspective, and that has trickled into our campuses not getting the marketing they deserve," Maher said. "We need to really hit on these successes and improve messaging and brand notice across the board."

With SDSU sponsoring 18 sports with 493 total athletes and USD 17 sports with 448 athletes, the Division I model brings more students to campus, which acts as an enrollment and tuition stimulus regardless of wins and losses.

"Athletics is a contributor to the academic engines on campus because those students are not all on full scholarship and pay tuition and fees," said USD's Gestring. "We have over 400 student-athletes, and we privately raise the scholarship dollars, so athletics is contributing to the academic balance sheet. Of course, if we're going to be in the Division I space, we need to provide the resources necessary for those teams to be successful."

## Schools trying to keep talent from leaving to Power Fives

That's easier said than done in the tiered system of college sports, where success can easily lead to more lucrative and high-profile opportunities elsewhere.

Basketball coaches Plitzuweit, Amy Williams and Craig Smith at USD and T.J. Otzelberger at SDSU left South Dakota for bigger schools. For athletes, graduate transfer and name, image and likeness (NIL) rules could incentivize more standout players to take the same path.

Sell hopes Congress or new NCAA president Charlie Baker takes action to restrict pay-for-play or transfer policies to make it harder for Power Five schools to poach FCS-level athletes.

But keeping coaches from leaving is a harder sell.

"We try to stress integrity in decision-making, family values, being part of an institution



**South Dakota State broke ground in 2022 on a \$53 million renovation of Frost Arena. The project calls for \$41.2 million in private donations.** Photo illustration:

SDSU Sports Information

and fan base that cares about you," said Sell.

"That comes with facility development, budget growth, support for coaches and athletes and offering a chance to be relevant in winning. There are a lot of boxes we can check to make these jobs valuable and fulfilling, so other schools have to come not only with a higher salary but some of those other pieces."

Sell said that he's been stopped in airports more often these days when he's wearing SDSU gear, which he attributes to the Jacks having a larger national profile due to recent breakthroughs.

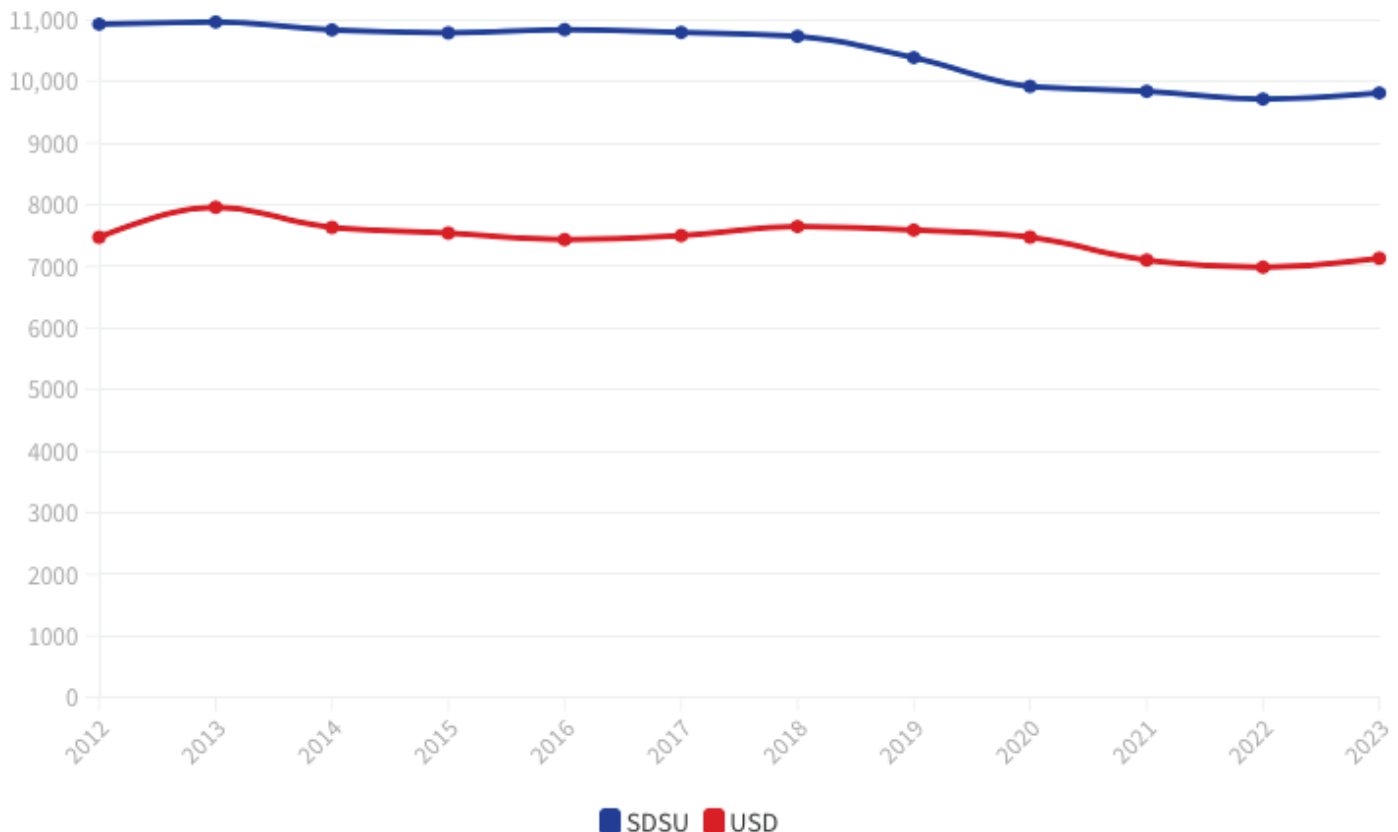
The fact that Division I success hasn't sparked an enrollment boom isn't a huge concern for people like Maher, whose perspective comes from having a son and two daughters who competed as student-athletes at the University of Nebraska.

"I see the benefits," he said of South Dakota's ongoing Division I path. "I see it from the standpoint of improving the student experience and having fun. That's an easy part for all of us to grasp because we see the people in the stands or at a family gathering, gathered around the television watching South Dakota State play on a Sunday afternoon for a national football championship. Some things, when you look at them like that, are easy to see."

— This article was produced by South Dakota News Watch, a non-profit journalism organization located online at [sdnewswatch.org](http://sdnewswatch.org).

## SDSU, USD undergraduate enrollment over time

Undergraduate enrollment numbers have fallen at USD and SDSU since both schools moved to Division I athletics. The total enrollment (including graduate students) for 2023 is 11,331 at SDSU and 9,856 at USD.





Bubble Easter basket with sweettart jelly beans, nerd rope, Easter eggs with candy inside them, two bubble machines, tootsie roll piggy bank with tootsie rolls inside it, a bag of tropical skittles, and bubble bottles. \$18

## Tina's Baskets Call/Text Tina at 605-397-7285



Sloth Easter basket with bubbles, Easter eggs with candy in them , peeps hard candy, mike and Ike's chocolate Easter bunny, and a bag of tootsie rolls. \$20.

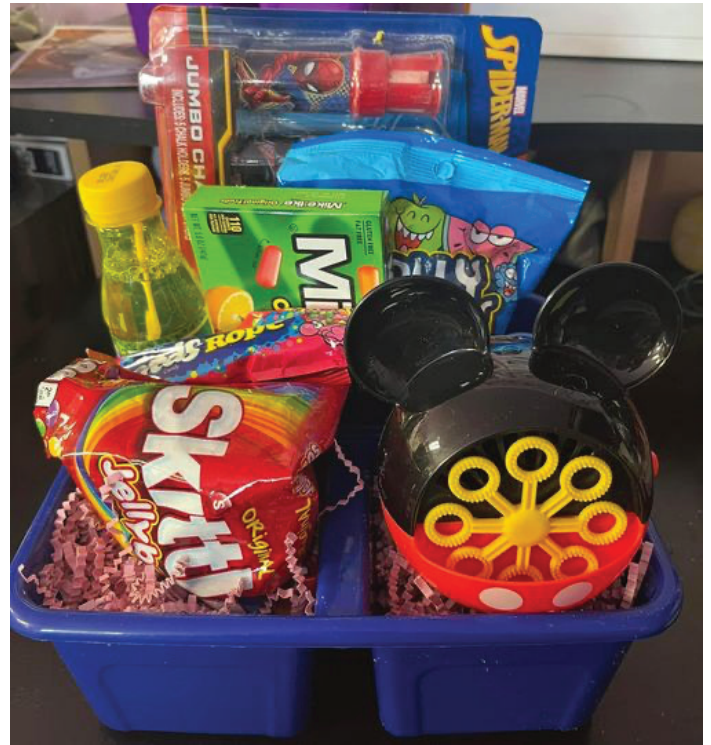


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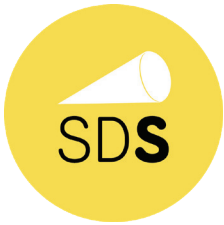
Made with a Sprite can with a foam tip filled the dum dum assorted suckers with a colored ribbon on top \$10.00. Call/Text Tina at 605-397-7285.



Easter basket. It has a Mickey Mouse bubble maker with two bubble containers. Comes with Mike & Ikes , a sack of Jolly Ranchers hard candy, a rainbow nerds rope, a bag of Skittles original flavors and a jumbo Spider-man chalk set. \$18.00 Call/Text Tina at 605-397-7285.

Made up of full size Hershey Candy for the first and second tier with strawberry hard candy on the top and in the middle of the tiers on a brown serving tray that is reusable with two brown ribbon around each tier with mini Hersheys around the tray with also a red ribbon on top . Only \$50 for all of that sweetness! Call/text Tina at 605-397-7285.





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **New state law makes it harder to file a complaint or lawsuit against ag operations**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 15, 2023 5:38 PM**

A new South Dakota law makes it harder to file a nuisance complaint or lawsuit against an agricultural operation and limits the amount of money that can be awarded.

Governor Kristi Noem signed the bill on Wednesday at a farm implement dealership in Mitchell, after legislators approved it earlier this winter. The law will go into effect July 1.

Noem said it's about protecting farmers from frivolous lawsuits.

"I think we all know agriculture is the number one industry in our state," Noem said.

The new law addresses complaints or lawsuits against operations such as farms, ranches or factory farms, for nuisances such as odors or pollution.

Provisions in the new law say only the owner or lessee of an affected property can file a nuisance action, and only if the affected property is within 1 mile of the agricultural operation.

Those provisions are intended to prevent an environmental group such as the Sierra Club from suing an agricultural operation.

That's welcome news for Travis Mockler, a southeast South Dakota farmer who attended the bill signing ceremony. The Sierra Club sued Mockler and the Clay County Board of Adjustment in an attempt to stop a permit to expand his hog and cattle operations.

Mockler eventually built the expansion, after multiple years of legal battles.

"This bill, if it would have been in place at the time, would have solved all of that," Mockler said.

#### **'Too far' for opponents**

Dakota Rural Action, which advocates against large factory farms in favor of smaller family farms, expressed concerns about the bill during the legislative session.

"There are smells and noises that can potentially travel more than 1 mile, so we're wondering how that decision was made," spokesperson Chase Jensen said at the time.

The Izaak Walton League of America, a wildlife conservation organization, opposed the bill.

"The bill is unnecessary due to the low number of lawsuits that have been filed, and it just went too far," Paul Lepisto, a spokesperson for the organization, said Wednesday.

Additional provisions in the new law say the person filing the complaint or lawsuit, in order to hold an ag operation liable, must present "clear and convincing evidence" that the operation violated local, state or federal laws or regulations.

In cases where the nuisance is permanent, the new law says compensatory damages will be measured by the reduction in the fair market value of the plaintiff's property, and the amount cannot exceed that fair market value. If the nuisance is temporary, the damages are limited to the reduction in the fair rental value of the property caused by the nuisance.

The new law says punitive damages cannot be awarded unless the case has been subject to a judgment or conviction by the courts or a federal environmental regulatory agency in the prior three years.

#### **A degraded lake next door**

The city where Noem signed the bill, Mitchell, is home to a lake polluted in part by agricultural runoff that feeds algae blooms and harmful E. coli levels. The new law could make it difficult for the city of Mitchell or Lake Mitchell homeowners to seek a legal remedy for pollution that enters Firesteel Creek more than

a mile upstream and flows into the lake.

When asked about that situation, the governor said the law should not indicate to those homeowners that their frustrations are frivolous. She said the law does not change any legal or regulatory limits on pollution.

"All water quality permits and anything that would be set at the city level, county level, and state level would still have to be met," Noem said.

State Sen. Josh Klumb, R-Mitchell, was the prime sponsor of the bill in the Senate. He would consider legislation to improve water quality in Lake Mitchell, he said, but "there wasn't anything in that area" introduced during the annual legislative session that concluded earlier this month.

"If someone could bring me something that says this is the area of the law that we need to change, we can discuss that," Klumb said. "But I haven't seen that."

*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.*

## Board of Elections changes voter registration form to comply with tribal lawsuit settlement

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MARCH 15, 2023 5:21 PM**

The South Dakota Board of Elections voted Wednesday to change the state voter registration form to fit the requirements of a 2022 lawsuit agreement between Native American tribes and the state.

The lawsuit alleged numerous violations of the National Voter Registration Act, which requires states to allow people to register to vote while applying for driver's licenses, public assistance or disability assistance. The tribe said the state had deprived "thousands of tribal members and other citizens of their federally-guaranteed opportunities to register to vote and to change their voter registration addresses."

A federal judge approved a multifaceted settlement in May 2022. The settlement was a "giant step forward in the battle to make sure Native voices are properly heard at the ballot box," according to the Lakota People's Law Project, which was a plaintiff in the case along with the Rosebud and Oglala Sioux tribes and voters Kimberly Dillon and Hoksila White Mountain.

The Elections Board enacted one of the settlement's required actions Wednesday. The board voted to amend the state's voter registration form to better inform an applicant that they can provide a written description of their physical address if they do not have a U.S. Postal Service address.

The voter registration form previously read, "If Residence Address is a PO Box, rural box, or general delivery, you must give the location of your residence." Now the prompt lets voters know they can write the names of intersections or streets where they live or any existing landmarks, such as schools, churches or stores instead of, for example, the GPS coordinates of their home.

Another requirement of the lawsuit settlement was that South Dakota name a statewide National Voter Registration Act coordinator to ensure compliance with the law across state agencies. Secretary of State Monae Johnson hired Adam Miller into the role on Feb. 11.

Two election bills passed by the state Legislature that would make more changes to voter registration have yet to be vetoed or signed into law by Gov. Kristi Noem.

Senate Bill 139 would further amend the voter registration form to require that potential voters certify they have resided in South Dakota for at least 30 days before submitting the form. Senate Bill 140 would require that any first-time voter who leaves the party affiliation field blank must be registered as independent rather than "no party affiliation."

The board unanimously passed the changes legally required by the settlement agreement despite concerns about the two bills.

"If we have to do it again, we have to do it again," said Deputy Secretary of State Tom Deadrick during the meeting. "We've got to go along with what we promised we would do as far as the settlement is concerned, or else we could probably find ourselves back in court."

*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.*

## U.S. Senate leader calls for safety audit into all major railroads after Ohio derailment

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - MARCH 15, 2023 3:10 PM

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer called Wednesday for the federal authority responsible for determining the causes of transportation casualties to investigate the safety culture at all major North American freight railroads.

Following the Feb. 3 Norfolk Southern derailment that caused a toxic chemical spill in East Palestine, Ohio, Schumer, a New York Democrat, said in a letter to National Transportation Safety Board Chair Jennifer Homendy that the board should investigate safety practices at the seven Class I freight railroads operating in the United States.

A nationwide network of the seven largest freight railroads – BNSF, Canadian National, Canadian Pacific, CSX, Kansas City Southern, Norfolk Southern and Union Pacific – operates across the United States.

Schumer criticized the industry for lobbying for deregulation and asked the board to analyze if those efforts have increased derailments. He also asked NTSB to determine if railroads ignore their own safety best practices and to issue recommendations for regulations that could reduce future incidents.

"I am hopeful that if the NTSB executes a comprehensive and rigorous investigation into the safety practices and culture at all Class I railroads, you can assure Americans that freight rail safety will dramatically improve," Schumer wrote.

The letter singled out a regulation on notifications related to trains carrying hazardous or flammable material, asking if it made sense that such trains only of a certain size should have to notify local communities.

A spokesman for the agency said it had no immediate response Wednesday.

"We don't really have much to say other than we appreciate the leader's commitment to safety," NTSB spokesman Keith Holloway said in a phone interview. "We are reviewing the letter and we'll respond to him."

### Focus on profits

In remarks on the Senate floor, Schumer said a "questionable safety culture" at Norfolk Southern was at least partially to blame for the East Palestine derailment.

Railroads' focus on profits had led to a lax safety culture in the industry generally, he said.

The seven Class I railroads made \$22 billion in profits in the first nine months of last year, while spending \$25 billion on dividends and stock buybacks, Politfact reported, citing company reports.

In the last five years, accidents involving the largest freight railroads caused 2,768 deaths, while the railroads have cut 20% of their workforce, Schumer said.

"Norfolk Southern is just one example of a dangerous, industry-wide trend within the rail industry that puts profits over people's safety," he said.

Representatives for the American Association of Railroads, the industry's advocacy group in Washington, did not return a message seeking comment Wednesday.

The NTSB is already investigating the Norfolk Southern derailment, which, with its toxic chemicals leaking into a community, has drawn considerable interest from the public and lawmakers.

The board should expand that investigation to look at all Class I railroads, Schumer said.

But such a large-scale investigation as Schumer suggested would be unusual for the NTSB, which usually examines individual incidents.

While the recommendations that come from an incident report can have a nationwide reach, it's rare for

the agency to conduct a nationwide inquiry into essentially an entire industry.

The last investigation to focus broadly on an organization's safety culture was the 2014 probe of Metro North in the New York area following five major accidents on its tracks, Holloway said.

## Board approves merger

If the NTSB decides to take up Schumer's request, it could be investigating six railroads instead of seven. Also Wednesday, the Surface Transportation Board, a federal commission that oversees the rail industry, approved the merger of the two smallest Class I railroads, Canadian Pacific Railway and Kansas City Southern.

House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Sam Graves, a Republican from Missouri, applauded the move in a written statement.

"This merger has enormous potential to promote increased competition among railroads and other transportation modes, improve commerce and access to markets, and streamline domestic and cross-border movement of goods," Graves said. "This is especially critical at a time when delays and backlogs continue to trouble our Nation's supply chain."

Democrats, including U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, have been more skeptical. Warren said in a March 3 letter that the merger would reduce competition, eliminate jobs and increase shipping costs.

*Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.*

## Noncitizens allowed to vote in some local elections, spurring backlash from GOP

BY: ZACHARY ROTH - MARCH 15, 2023 7:00 AM

A few cities and towns around the U.S. are letting noncitizens vote in local elections, and more could follow. In response, Republicans see a chance to turn opposition to noncitizen voting into a national rallying cry.

On March 14, Washington, D.C., became the latest city to approve noncitizen voting, when a bill allowing the District's roughly 42,000 noncitizens, including those who are undocumented, to vote in municipal elections became law after a bid by congressional Republicans to overturn it fell short.

A day earlier, a group of prominent conservative voting activists held a Washington, D.C., press conference to promote what they called a national campaign to "protect voting at all levels of government as the exclusive right of citizens." Republicans also have introduced legislation in Congress that would withhold election funding to states where local governments have enfranchised noncitizens. And a separate GOP measure would amend the Constitution to ban the practice.

This crusade is designed in part to push back against efforts to give noncitizens the right to vote, an idea that generally polls badly with most voters. But it could also reinforce a broader set of fears, stoked in recent years by former President Donald Trump and other party leaders, that American elections are threatened by illegal voters.

The District of Columbia isn't alone in embracing noncitizen voting. In January, the Vermont Supreme Court greenlit the practice for two Vermont cities, including the state capital, Montpelier, rejecting a Republican lawsuit.

And on March 9, the state's largest city, Burlington, voted to allow noncitizen voting, though the state legislature still needs to approve the change. Since 2016, San Francisco has let noncitizens vote in school board elections. Eleven Maryland towns also enfranchise noncitizens, the most recent in 2018.

Other cities, including Boston and Los Angeles, have seen efforts to do the same in the last few years. In 2021, New York City passed a bill that would have allowed by far the largest single number of noncitizens to vote, but it was struck down by a court as unconstitutional last year, after another GOP lawsuit. Appeals are ongoing.

A Democratic state lawmaker in Connecticut has introduced a bill to allow noncitizens to vote in state

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elections, though he has said he knows it won't pass, and the goal is simply to spark debate.

## Opponents amend state constitutions

This push for noncitizen voting rights has spurred a vigorous response from opponents. Since 2020, five states — Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Ohio, and, in December, Louisiana — have amended their constitutions to make clear that only citizens can vote in elections at any level. Arizona, Minnesota, and North Dakota have similar language.

The clash over the District of Columbia's bill, which was passed in October, has been among the fiercest. "Our noncitizen residents are paying taxes, enrolled in school, working here in the District of Columbia, and involved in community affairs," said Councilmember Brienne Nadeau, the bill's sponsor. "And without this legislation, they don't have a voice in our elections, which is essentially one of the most fundamental things in our country."

But in a letter to District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser, several GOP members of the House of Representatives said the legislation "fundamentally violates American sovereignty," calling it "a disgraceful episode in the District's history."

In February, the U.S. House passed legislation 260-162 to overturn the District's measure, which Congress is empowered to do under the 1973 District of Columbia Home Rule Act establishing the city's autonomy. It was the first time the House had voted to overturn a District bill since 2015. Forty-two Democrats voted with Republicans.

But the U.S. Senate didn't take up the House's measure, and on March 14, Congress' 30-day window to overturn a District bill expired, meaning the law went into effect.

In arguing against the District bill, Republican leaders often focused on its potential to enfranchise employees of foreign governments.

"Today, in D.C., somebody who is a Russian citizen working at the (Russian embassy) can vote in D.C. elections," House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La., told reporters on March 8. "A CCP member working at the Chinese embassy can vote in D.C. elections. That shouldn't be the case."

In some instances, opponents in Congress have misstated the effects of the bill.

"Does anybody in this country think that someone working for the Chinese embassy here in Washington, D.C., should be voting in the presidential election?" asked House Majority Whip Tom Emmer, R-Minn., in a Feb. 8 Fox News appearance. "Absolutely not. It's insane, what they did."

In fact, the District law applies only to local elections. Federal law bars noncitizens from voting in federal elections. Emmer's office didn't respond to an inquiry about the misstatement.

The District debate has played out amid a broader conflict between Congress and the city.

The Senate on March 8 cleared a House-passed bill that would overturn the District's rewrite of its criminal code, which had been a product of a years-long review and would have reduced penalties for some crimes, among other steps. President Joe Biden has said he'll sign Congress' overturn bill, angering District leaders and many Democrats.

"Our disenfranchisement is on full display right now," said Nadeau. "So we're expanding voting rights here while our autonomy is under attack. It's a pretty spectacular juxtaposition."

## A long history of noncitizen voting

It might seem like a new idea, but noncitizen voting has been around as long as the Republic, though state laws governing it have swung back and forth several times.

Both before and after the Revolution, all property-owning white men could vote, and many noncitizens did so. The practice was then phased out in many places, but it saw a resurgence in the middle of the 19th century, when at least 16 states passed measures to allow noncitizen voting, often to incentivize workers to move to less populous, Western states.

Then, beginning in the 1870s and lasting into the first decades of the 20th century, states gradually began repealing these laws. This retreat from non-citizen voting came amid a wider push in the Northeast to restrict voting by recently arrived Catholic and Jewish immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, regardless of citizenship status, who were seen as less educated and responsible than the white Protes-

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tants who until then had predominated.

During the same period, Southern whites were passing Jim Crow laws to crack down on voting by recently enfranchised Black citizens. Nebraska was the last state to repeal its noncitizen voting law in 1926.

In this century, the issue has resurfaced in some communities where the number of noncitizens has grown quickly. In New York City, it took on a new level of urgency during the COVID-19 pandemic because so many frontline workers were noncitizens, said Nora Moran, the policy and advocacy director for United Neighborhood Houses, which advocated for the bill there.

"Largely, the people who were working in our hospitals, delivering our food, keeping people safe, had no ability to vote on the policies that lawmakers were making that directly impacted their health and safety," said Moran. "So COVID underscored the importance of the bill for us."

This resurgence has given Republicans the chance to expand the issue onto the playing field of national politics.

On March 2, Rep. Claudia Tenney, R-N.Y., who founded and chairs the House Election Integrity Caucus, introduced a resolution calling for a constitutional amendment barring noncitizens from voting in elections at any level.

Three days earlier, Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a Republican, sent a letter to Speaker Kevin McCarthy urging Congress to pass five conservative voting measures, including a constitutional amendment banning noncitizen voting. Since 2021, Raffensperger has been pushing for a similar amendment to Georgia's constitution.

And an oversight plan approved in late February by the Republican-led U.S. Committee on House Administration included a pledge to "investigate how states and localities that allow noncitizens to vote ensure that federal funds are not used to facilitate noncitizen voting."

That built on sweeping elections legislation introduced in July by Rep. Rodney Davis, R-Ill., that contained a provision penalizing states where local governments allow noncitizens to vote, by cutting their share of federal election funding by 30%. Davis' measure also would require that these states keep separate voter rolls for state and federal elections, and would bar them from using federal funds to maintain state rolls containing noncitizens.

The March 13 press conference promoting a national campaign against noncitizen voting was organized by Americans for Citizen Voting, which was founded by the Missouri Republican strategist Christopher Arps, and helps states amend their constitutions to ban noncitizen voting.

Arps was joined by three leaders of the broader conservative push for stricter voting rules: Hogan Gidley, a former Trump campaign spokesman who runs the elections arm of the America First Policy Institute, a Trump-aligned think tank; Christian Adams, whose organization, the Public Interest Legal Foundation, has often sought to raise the alarm about illegal voting by noncitizens; and Ken Cuccinelli, the former attorney general of Virginia, who chairs the Election Transparency Initiative, which supports tighter voting policies and opposes reforms to expand access.

As that lineup suggests, these efforts appear designed in part to fold the practice of legal noncitizen voting in local elections into the existing Republican campaign to raise concerns about rare cases of illegal voting in state and federal elections, including by noncitizens.

On Jan. 31, Emmer and other congressional Republicans sent a letter to Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon asking him to "to investigate claims that DACA recipients and other non-citizens are voting in Minnesota's elections."

At times, opponents of noncitizen voting have sought to conflate the two issues.

"When illegal aliens and felons vote, when identity thieves cast votes of registered voters, or cast them on behalf of people long deceased, the votes of legitimate voters are diluted or diminished," Arps wrote in a 2019 op-ed launching Americans for Citizen Voting.

Moran, of United Neighborhood Houses, said her group has encountered this kind of conflation as it has advocated for the New York City bill. But, she added, noncitizens in fact tend to be especially anxious to follow the law.

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"The people who are following voting rules most closely are often noncitizens," Moran said. "Because they don't want to do anything that could jeopardize their ability to pursue citizenship or other kinds of status down the line."

Still, Moran added, since the New York City bill passed, her organization has heard from local advocates across the country looking for guidance on how to craft their own bills. The calls have come not only from big cities like Los Angeles and Chicago, she said, but also from a group of small towns in Maine that are resettling refugees.

"So for us, it's been very heartening," Moran said, "that, at a time when there's a lot of backlash against voting rights, when there's a lot of rhetoric around migration and who is coming to this country, that there are groups who are interested in making sure that new people coming to our country can participate in civic life and make their communities better."

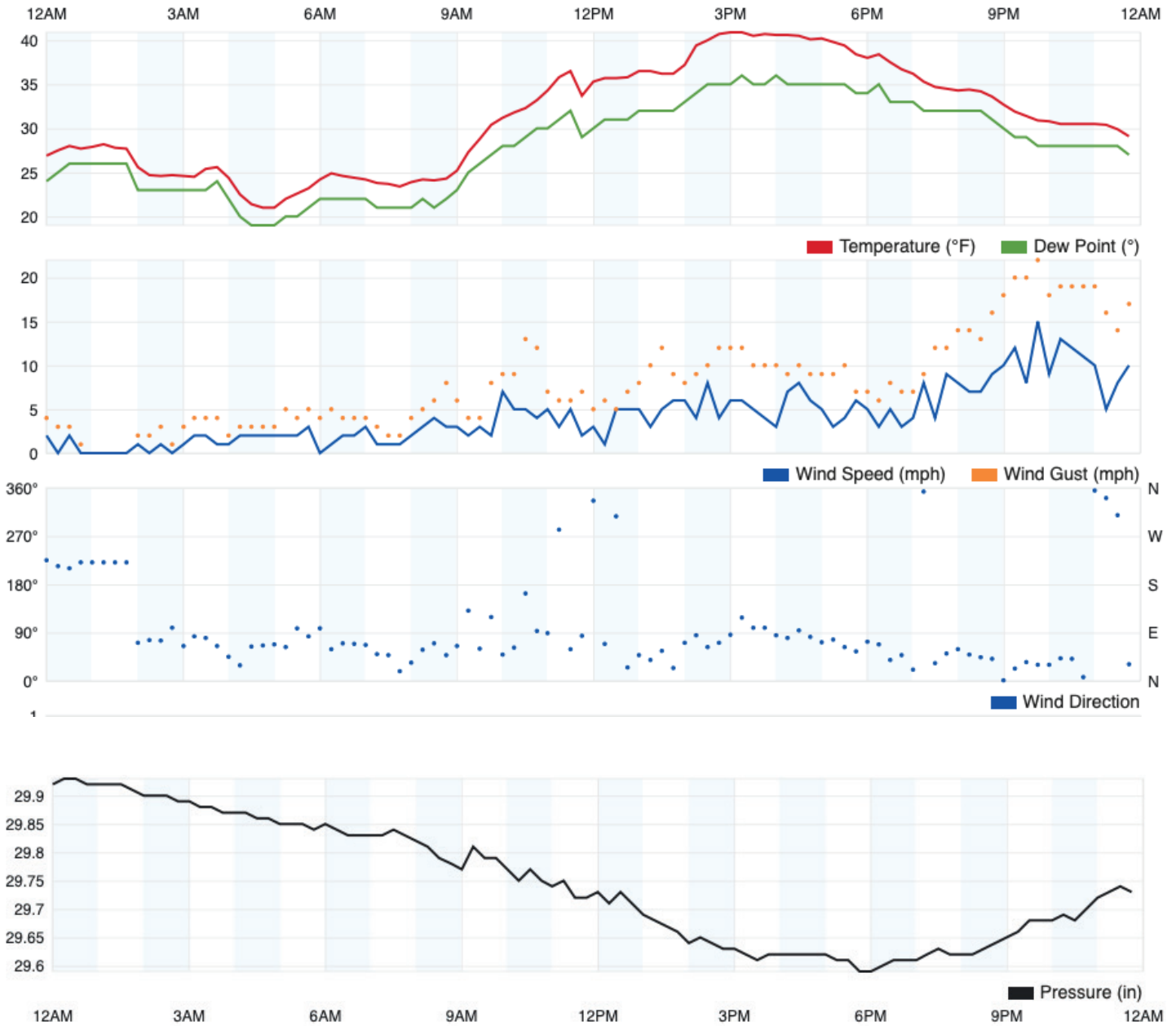
*Zachary Roth is the National Democracy Reporter for States Newsroom.*



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Broton Daily Independent

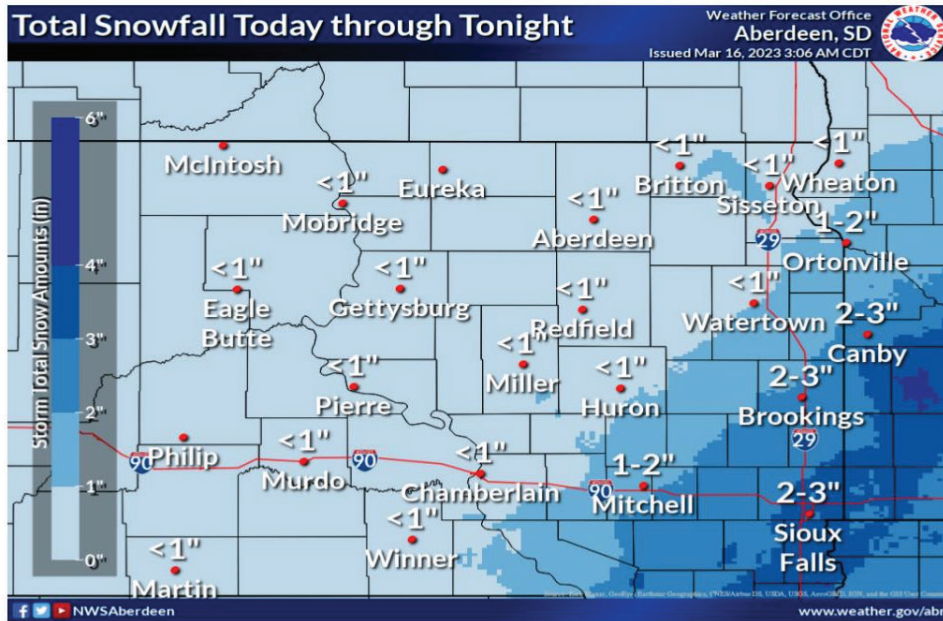
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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
						
Blustery. Chance Snow then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy then Mostly Cloudy and Blustery	Mostly Cloudy and Blustery	Mostly Sunny and Blustery	Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 27 °F ↓	Low: 6 °F	High: 14 °F	Low: 1 °F	High: 15 °F	Low: -7 °F	High: 26 °F



## Snow Accums Today through Tonight

March 16, 2023  
3:22 AM



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## Max Wind Gusts & Timing

March 16, 2023  
3:22 AM

### Maximum Wind Gust Forecast

	3/16 Thu					3/17 Fri					3/18 Sat					3/19 Sun							
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am
Aberdeen	43	44	38	33	33	23	15	22	26	30	31	33	40	41	38	35	32	32	29	23	18	13	12
Britton	44	43	39	35	32	32	22	24	25	29	31	33	39	41	39	36	35	33	30	24	17	14	15
Eagle Butte	38	36	33	32	32	25	35	35	31	31	33	36	38	36	31	28	26	23	20	15	10	13	15
Eureka	38	32	33	35	35	20	15	25	28	31	35	37	38	36	31	30	29	28	23	21	15	10	12
Gettysburg	39	36	36	37	37	22	21	31	29	28	32	36	38	39	33	30	30	30	25	22	16	12	12
Kennebec	40	40	38	37	35	31	22	31	33	29	33	35	38	36	33	31	32	30	28	23	17	13	9
McIntosh	37	36	31	30	30	22	32	31	31	32	33	35	35	33	29	23	18	16	12	8	8	12	14
Milbank	43	45	45	43	40	40	37	31	33	32	31	32	38	43	40	38	36	35	35	30	25	23	20
Miller	39	39	37	36	36	28	20	22	24	29	30	33	37	38	32	30	31	32	30	24	18	13	13
Mobridge	38	35	32	30	29	14	25	28	22	26	30	33	38	36	28	23	22	20	17	16	12	8	10
Murdo	39	40	36	35	31	28	23	33	33	32	32	33	39	37	31	30	29	26	23	18	14	10	14
Pierre	37	36	33	32	30	23	22	31	29	25	29	33	38	39	32	28	25	23	20	16	13	9	10
Redfield	41	43	39	36	35	25	16	18	28	29	31	35	38	37	35	33	33	33	30	24	18	13	10
Sisseton	41	43	43	40	39	39	36	31	33	35	35	36	43	44	44	38	37	36	35	30	26	24	22
Watertown	40	44	44	41	39	40	35	25	28	30	32	35	37	38	37	35	35	33	33	29	24	18	14
Webster	45	47	45	41	40	41	33	28	31	33	36	38	44	44	43	37	38	38	36	30	25	18	15
Wheaton	40	41	41	40	38	38	32	31	32	33	31	32	35	36	36	33	32	33	31	29	24	20	14

\*Table values in mph

\*\*Created: 2 am CDT Thu 3/16/2023

\*\*\*Values are maximums over the period beginning at the time shown.

Don't see your city? Check out [weather.gov/forecastpoints](http://weather.gov/forecastpoints)



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

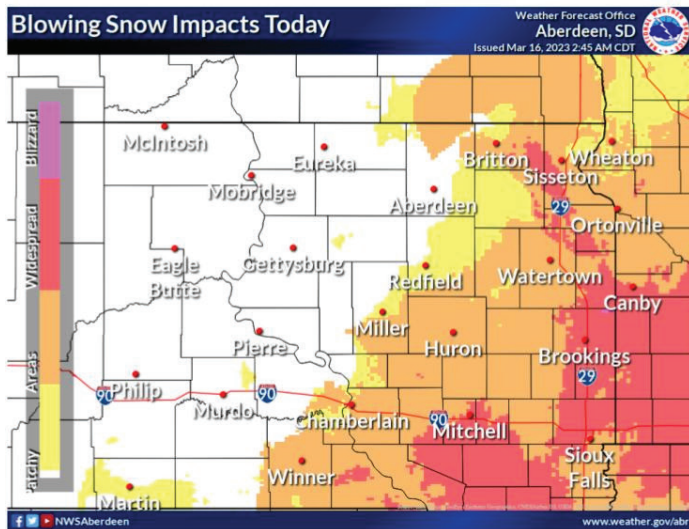
National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD



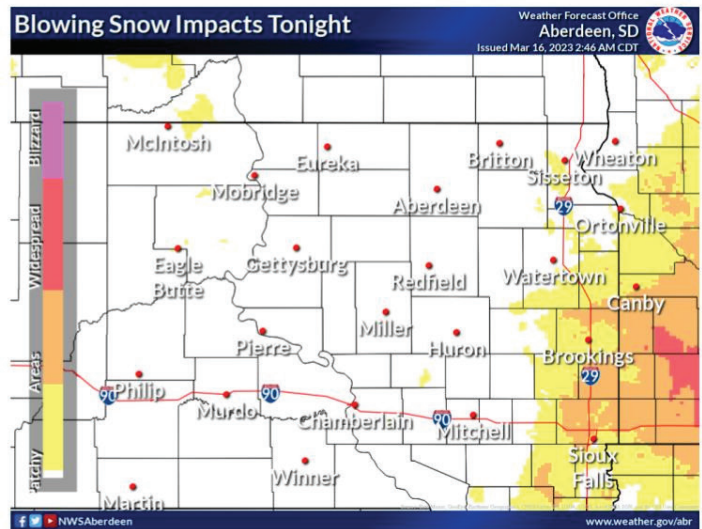
## Blowing Snow Impacts

March 16, 2023  
3:22 AM

### Potential Blowing Snow Impacts Today



### Potential Blowing Snow Impacts Tonight



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

**Minor** 三三三  
Patches of Blowing Snow with reduced visibilities expected

**Moderate** 三三三三  
Areas of Blowing Snow with reduced visibilities expected

**Significant** 三三三三三  
Widespread Blowing Snow and greatly reduced visibilities expected

**Blizzard** 三三三三三三  
Significant Blowing Snow, possible, travel may be impossible

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

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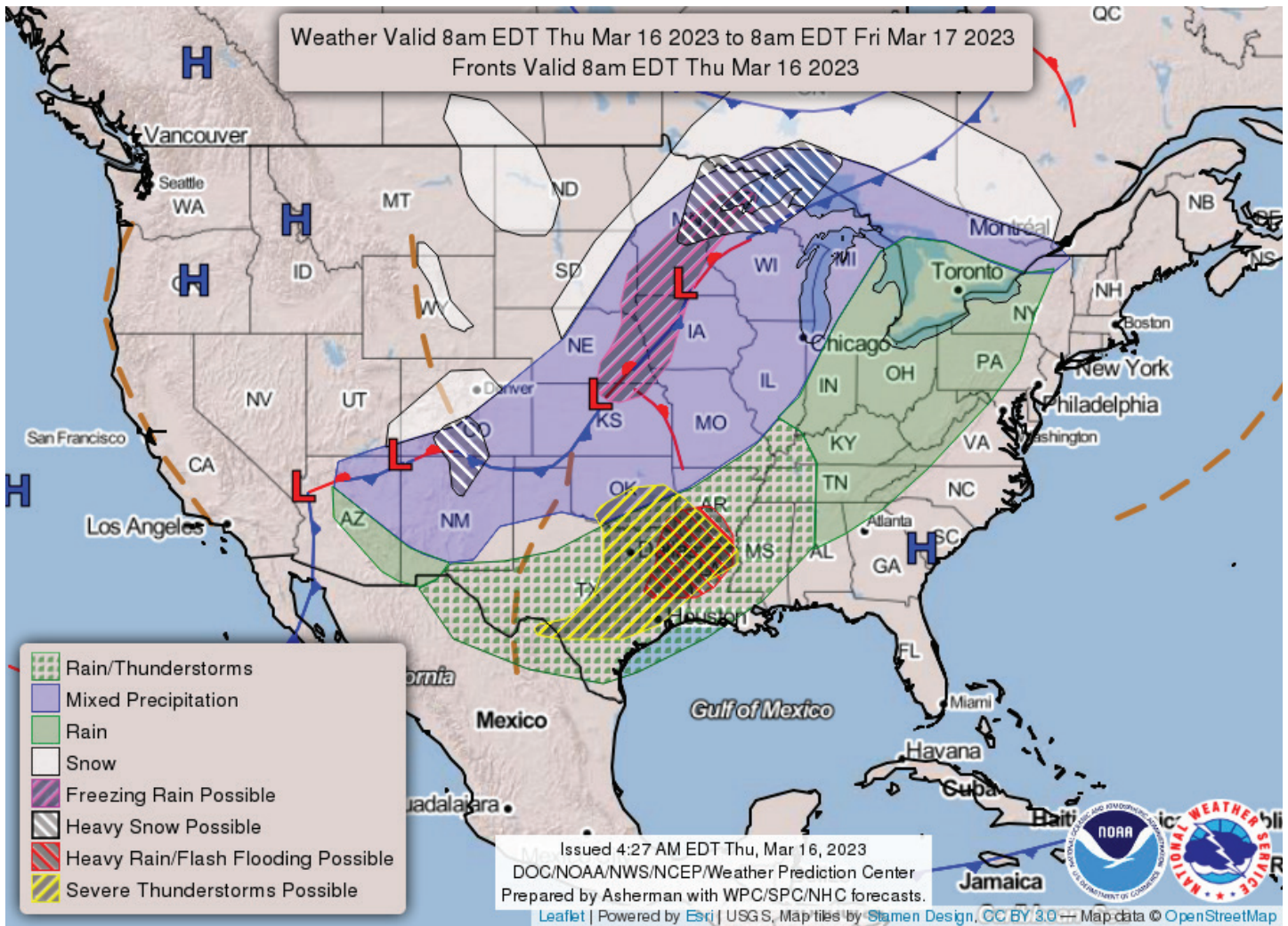
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 41 °F at 2:55 PM**  
**Low Temp: 21 °F at 4:45 AM**  
**Wind: 22 mph at 9:45 PM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 11 hours, 59 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 81 in 2012  
Record Low: -17 in 1906  
Average High: 42  
Average Low: 20  
Average Precip in March.: 0.40  
Precip to date in March.: 1.20  
Average Precip to date: 1.57  
Precip Year to Date: 2.78  
Sunset Tonight: 7:40:41 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:39:26 AM



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## Today in Weather History

March 16, 2012: Temperatures reaching eighty degrees or higher in March across central and northeast South Dakota is a rare occurrence, and for this to occur in mid-March is exceedingly rare. On March 16th, several locations across the area set record highs by topping the 80-degree mark, including Aberdeen, Mobridge, and Pierre. Sisseton and Watertown also set records for March 16th. Aberdeen topped out at 81 degrees, Mobridge reached 83 degrees, with 86 degrees at Pierre.

1885: On this date through the 21st, Pointe-des-Monts, Quebec Canada, received 98 inches of snowfall.

1942: A deadly tornado outbreak occurred over the Central and Southern US on March 16-17th. The tornado outbreak killed 153 people and injured at least 1,284. The best estimate indicates this event contained 13 F3 tornadoes, 6 F4s, and one F5. The F5 tornado occurred north of Peoria, Illinois, in the towns of Alta, Chillicothe, before crossing the Illinois River and striking the town of Lacon. A quarter of the homes in Lacon were destroyed, and debris was carried for 25 miles.

1975 - A single storm brought 119 inches of snow to Crater Lake, O,R establishing a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1986 - A small but rare tornado touched down perilously close to Disneyland in Anaheim CA. (Storm Data)

1987 - Softball size hail caused millions of dollars damage to automobiles at Del Rio TX. Three persons were injured when hailstones crashed through a shopping mall skylight. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data) (The Weather Channel)

1988 - A winter storm produced heavy snow in the Central Rockies. Winds gusted to 80 mph at Centerville UT. Eighteen cities in the southeastern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date, including Tallahassee FL with a reading of 24 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A winter storm brought heavy snow and high winds to the southwestern U.S. Winds gusted to 60 mph at Lovelock NV, Salt Lake City UT, and Fort Carson CO. Snow fell at a rate of three inches per hour in the Lake Tahoe area of Nevada. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced large hail and damaging winds from northwest Florida to western South Carolina. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 75 mph at Floridatown FL. Sixteen cities across the northeastern quarter of the nation reported record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 78 degrees at Burlington VT smashed their previous record for the date by 23 degrees. New York City reported a record high of 82 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### WHERE DOES THE TIME GO?

The angry husband approached the terminal gate obviously upset that the door was closed, and the plane was leaving. Turning to his wife he said, "If you hadn't taken so long to get ready, we would be on that plane."

"Yes," she answered graciously, "and if you hadn't rushed me so, we wouldn't have to wait so long for the next one."

Some people count their minutes rather than making their minutes count. However, we must always remember that time is a God-given gift, and once gone will never be returned. Though others may have more talents or more treasures, no one has more time. We are all given twenty-four hours each day, every day that we live. No more. No less.

Alan Lakein said that "Time is life. It is irreversible and irreplaceable. To waste your time is to waste your life, but to master your time is to master your life and make the most of it."

David accomplished much in his life. Author, poet, musician, politician, judge, leader of an army □ the list goes on and on. No doubt the reason he was able to accomplish so much was his attitude toward life. He put everything in perspective when he said, "Remember how short my time is and what a fleeting life is mine."

Prayer: Help us, Father, to make the most of every moment, using every minute we have to honor You. We pray that we will invest our time in doing Your will. .In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Remember how fleeting is my life. For what futility you have created all humanity! Psalm 89:47



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

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## 2023 Community Events

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

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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.14.23

1 7 23 38 55 2

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$254,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 36

DRAW: Mins 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.15.23

31 36 43 45 52 2

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$39,730,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 36

DRAW: Mins 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.15.23

16 20 21 39 40 15

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 15 Hrs 6 Mins 44

DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.15.23

15 22 28 33 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$94,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 36

DRAW: Mins 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.15.23

7 9 46 64 68 3

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 35

DRAW: Mins 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.15.23

16 18 33 37 50 8

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$78,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 35

DRAW: Mins 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### US tribes get bison as they seek to restore bond with animal

By MATTHEW BROWN and THOMAS PEIPERT Associated Press

GOLDEN, Colo. (AP) — Dozens of bison from a mountain park outside Denver were transferred Wednesday to several tribes from across the Great Plains, in the latest example of Native Americans reclaiming stewardship over animals their ancestors lived alongside for millennia.

Following ceremonial drumming and singing and an acknowledgement of the tribes that once occupied the surrounding landscape, the bison were loaded onto trucks for relocation to tribal lands.

About a half-dozen of the animals from Colorado will form the nucleus of a new herd for the Yuchi people south of Tulsa, Oklahoma, said Richard Grounds with the Yuchi Language Project.

The herd will be expanded over time, to reestablish a spiritual and physical bond broken two centuries ago when bison were nearly wiped out and the Yuchi were forced from their homeland, Grounds said.

He compared the burly animals' return to reviving the Yuchi's language — and said both language and bison were inseparable from the land. Bison were "the original caretakers" of that land, he said.

"We've lost that connection to the buffalo, that physical connection, as part of the colonial assault," Grounds said. "So we're saying, we Yuchi people are still here and the buffalo are still here and it's important to reconnect and restore those relationships with the land, with the animals and the plants."

The transfers also included 17 bison to the Northern Arapaho Tribe and 12 to the Eastern Shoshone Tribe — both of Wyoming — and one animal to the Tall Bull Memorial Council, which has members from various tribes, city officials said.

Wednesday's transfer came two weeks after U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland issued a bison conservation order meant to further expand the number of large herds on Native American lands. Haaland also announced \$25 million to build new herds, transfer more bison from federal to tribal lands and forge new bison management agreements with tribes, officials said.

American bison, also known as buffalo, have bounced back from near-extinction in the 1880s but remain absent from most of the grasslands they once occupied.

Across the U.S., 82 tribes now have more than 20,000 bison, and the number of herds on tribal lands have grown in recent years. The animals have been transferred to reservations from other tribes, from federal, state and local governments and from private ranches.

Tens of millions of bison once roamed North America until they were killed off almost entirely by white settlers, commercial hunters and U.S. troops. Their demise devastated Native American tribes across the continent that relied on bison and their parts for food, clothing and shelter.

The animals transferred to the tribes Wednesday descend from the last remnants of the great herds. They were under care of the Denver Zoo and kept in a city park before being moved to foothills west of Denver in 1914.

Surplus animals from the city's herd were for many years auctioned off, but in recent years city officials began transferring them to tribes instead, said Scott Gilmore, deputy executive director of Denver Parks and Recreation.

Gilmore said the land acknowledgement statement read out loud during Wednesday's ceremony underscored the historical importance of the area to the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Ute and dozens of other tribes that once lived in the area. But he added those were just "words on a piece of paper."

"What we're doing is putting action to those words for Indigenous people. Buffalo are part of the land, they are part of their family," Gilmore said. "They are taking their family members back to their ancestral home."

To date, 85 bison from Denver have been transferred to tribes and tribal organizations. City officials said the shipments will continue through 2030.

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## Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined  
Yankton Press & Dakotan. March 13, 2023.

Editorial: The State Tackles Cryptocurrency

If nothing else, Gov. Kristi Noem's veto of House Bill 1193, which would enact changes in South Dakota's commercial code, will likely bring much more public attention to a topic that many of us may find rather dense.

This refers to the realm of cryptocurrency, which is digital currency used in some financial transactions. In effect, according to South Dakota Public Broadcasting, HB 1193 comes down to what the definition of "money" is.

So, what's up? Here is a rough explanation:

Noem vetoed the bill last Friday, claiming its definition of money doesn't cover cryptocurrency. "By expressly excluding cryptocurrencies as money, it would become more difficult to use cryptocurrency," her veto letter said. "By needlessly limiting this freedom, HB 1193 would put South Dakota citizens at a business disadvantage."

She said it also allows for the creation of federal "Central Bank Digital Currencies," or CBDCs, which could be treated and exchanged as money. The letter said this "opens the door to the risk that the federal government could more easily adopt a CBDC, which then may become the only viable digital currency." However, this has not happened yet, which led Noem to note, "It would be imprudent to create regulations governing something that does not yet exist." (Some may find this ironic, arguably, since the governor has also pushed to ban critical race theory in school curriculums even though it isn't taught here.)

Noem's veto sets up an interesting showdown. HB 1193 has the support of agencies such as the South Dakota Bankers Association (SDBA), the Independent Community Bankers of South Dakota, the South Dakota Retailers Association, the South Dakota Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Sioux Falls Chamber and the South Dakota Trust Association. It also passed both the House and Senate by veto-proof majorities, although a subsequent letter opposing the bill that was sent to Noem had enough signatures to suggest the votes to override the veto may no longer be there.

Karl Adam of the SDBA claimed Noem's concerns were unwarranted. KELO reported that, according to Adam, "virtual currencies aren't defined as money because they aren't physical items and can't be possessed for lending purposes. But, (Adam) said, they are defined elsewhere in the legislation as a controllable electronic record, or CER."

The bill's prime sponsor is Rep. Mike Stevens of Yankton. He addressed the issue when it came up a week ago at a District 18 cracker barrel, in which bill opponent Rep. Julie Auch of Lesterville opened the forum with a long statement condemning HB 1193, claiming the measure could be used by the federal government to control and track spending and personal freedom, according to a Press & Dakotan story.

In response, Stevens noted that the commercial code has been updated several times in its 50-plus years of existence and needs to be fine-tuned for recent developments, including the rise of digital currency.

"A lot has changed in that regard of how we do banking," he said. "I have spoken with every one of our bankers in Yankton, and all large banks and small independent banks agree the bill needs to be passed. They're in favor of it."

Which brings us to Veto Day in Pierre, set for March 27. The topic in general can seem convoluted, but we also know that digital currencies are a modern fact of financial life to varying degrees. Keeping regulations up to speed with these realities would seem practical, and given the agencies that are backing the bill, HB 1193 would appear to have some merit.

But that's something lawmakers must determine — and the rest of us can watch and learn more about — as Veto Day draws near.

END

**Yellen to tell Congress US banking system 'remains sound'**

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By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A week after the second-largest bank collapse in U.S. history, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is set to tell the Senate Finance Committee that the nation's banking system "remains sound" and Americans "can feel confident" about their deposits.

Yellen will be the first Biden administration official to face lawmakers over the decision to protect uninsured money at two failed regional banks, a move that some observers have criticized as a bank "bailout."

"The government took decisive and forceful actions to strengthen public confidence" in the U.S. banking system, Yellen says in prepared testimony released before her appearance. "I can reassure the members of the Committee that our banking system remains sound, and that Americans can feel confident that their deposits will be there when they need them."

In less than a week, Silicon Valley Bank, based in Santa Clara, California, failed after depositors rushed to withdraw money amid anxiety over the bank's health. Then, regulators convened over the weekend and announced that New York-based Signature Bank also failed. They ensured all depositors, including those holding uninsured funds exceeding \$250,000, were protected by federal deposit insurance.

The Justice Department and the Securities and Exchange Commission have since launched investigations into the Silicon Valley Bank collapse.

Thursday's hearing is meant to address President Joe Biden's budget proposal, but it comes after the sudden collapse of the nation's 16th-biggest bank and go-to financial institution for tech entrepreneurs. While Yellen will be prepared to talk about spending proposals, the hearing will inevitably turn to the government's decision-making process to intervene in the bank failure.

Lawmakers will likely question whether the money committed to make depositors whole is a bailout, the degree to which taxpayers will be on the hook for the intervention and the possibility of new regulation impacting the banking system.

Yellen said on CBS' "Face the Nation" last Sunday that a bailout was not on the table, stating, "we're not going to do that again," referring to the U.S. government's response to the 2008 financial crisis, which led to massive government rescue policies to large U.S. banks.

Yellen, a former Federal Reserve chair and past president of the San Francisco Federal Reserve during the 2008 financial crisis, was a leading figure in the resolution this past weekend, which was engineered to prevent a wider systemic problem in the banking sector.

"This week's actions demonstrate our resolute commitment to ensure that depositors' savings remain safe," she says in her Thursday testimony.

## US releases video of Russian jet dumping fuel on its drone

By KARL RITTER and DINO HAZELL Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The Pentagon on Thursday released footage of what it said was a Russian aircraft pouring fuel on a U.S. Air Force surveillance drone and clipping the drone's propeller in international airspace over the Black Sea.

The 42-second video shows a Russian Su-27 approaching the back of the MQ-9 drone and beginning to release fuel as it passes, the Pentagon said. Dumping the fuel appeared to be aimed at blinding its optical instruments and driving it out of the area.

On a second approach, either the same jet or another Russian fighter that had been shadowing the MQ-9 struck the drone's propeller, damaging one blade, according to the U.S. military.

The U.S. military said it ditched the MQ-9 Reaper in the sea after what it described as the Russian fighter making an unsafe intercept of the unmanned aerial vehicle.

The video excerpt released by the Pentagon does not show events before or after the apparent fuel-dumping confrontation.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley have spoken to their Russian counterparts about the destruction of the U.S. drone following the encounter with Russian fighter jets.

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The calls with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of Russian General Staff Gen. Valery Gerasimov on Wednesday were the first since October.

While intercept attempts are not uncommon, the incident amid the war in Ukraine has raised concerns it could bring the United States and Russia closer to direct conflict.

That the two countries' top defense and military leaders were talking so soon after the encounter over the Black Sea underscored its seriousness.

The Russian Defense Ministry said in its report of the call with Austin that Shoigu accused the U.S. of provoking the incident by ignoring flight restrictions the Kremlin had imposed because of its military operations in Ukraine.

Russia also blamed "the intensification of intelligence activities against the interests of the Russian Federation."

Such U.S. actions "are fraught with escalation of the situation in the Black Sea area," the Russian Defense Ministry said, warning that Moscow "will respond in kind to all provocations."

The MQ-9, which has a 66-foot (20-meter) wingspan, includes a ground control station and satellite equipment. It is capable of carrying munitions, but Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, a Pentagon spokesperson, would not say whether the ditched drone had been armed.

Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, a Pentagon spokesperson, said the incident occurred at 7:03 a.m. Central European time (0603 GMT; 2:03 a.m. EST) over international waters, and well clear of Ukraine, after the Russian jets had flown in the vicinity of the drone for 30 to 40 minutes.

There did not appear to be any communications between the aircraft before the collision, Ryder added.

The U.S. has not recovered the crashed drone, U.S. Air Forces-Europe said in a statement, and neither has Russia, Ryder said. Russian officials said Wednesday that they would try to salvage fragments of the MQ-9 from the Black Sea.

U.S. officials have left open the possibility of trying to recover portions of the downed \$32 million drone, which they said crashed into waters that were 4,000 to 5,000 feet (1,200 to 1,500 meters) deep.

Other U.S. officials said the U.S. does not have military ships in the region, and won't likely seek to recover wreckage.

However, they expressed confidence that there would be nothing left of military value on the drone if Russia manages to retrieve the wreckage.

## Freight train carrying hazardous material derails in Arizona

TOPOCK, Ariz. (AP) — A freight train carrying hazardous materials derailed in western Arizona, near the state's border with California and Nevada, an official said.

The train derailed Wednesday evening near the town of Topock, Anita Mortensen, a spokeswoman for the Mohave County Sheriff's Office said, adding that she was not aware of any spills or leaks. No injuries have been reported.

The derailment comes amid heightened attention to rail safety nationwide following a fiery derailment last month in Ohio.

The Arizona derailment occurred near milepost 9 of Interstate 40, Mortensen said, which is a rural, non-residential area about 20 miles (32 kilometers) north of Lake Havasu City. Mortensen said she had no details about how many cars were on the train, or what materials it had been carrying when it derailed.

The sheriff's office had notified the National Transportation Safety Board and the railroad company BNSF, the two entities that she said would be responding to the accident, she said.

Neither replied immediately to requests for comment on Wednesday night.

Last month, a freight train carrying hazardous chemicals derailed in East Palestine, Ohio, near the Pennsylvania border, igniting a fire and causing hundreds of people to be evacuated.

Officials seeking to avoid an uncontrolled blast intentionally released and burned toxic vinyl chloride from five rail cars, sending flames and black smoke high into the sky. That left people questioning the potential health impacts even as authorities maintained they were doing their best to protect people.

## Credit Suisse shares soar after central bank aid announced

By JAMEY KEATEN and DAVID McHUGH Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Credit Suisse's shares soared 30% on Thursday after it announced it will move to shore up its finances by borrowing up to nearly \$54 billion from the Swiss central bank, bolstering confidence as fears about the banking system moved from the U.S. to Europe.

It was a massive swing from a day earlier, when shares of Switzerland's second-largest commercial bank plunged 30% on the SIX stock exchange after its biggest shareholder said it would not put more money into Credit Suisse.

That dragged down other European banks after the collapse of some U.S. banks stirred fears about the health of global banks. European bank shares recovered a bit Thursday, with the Euro Stoxx Banks index of 21 leading lenders up 1.6%, following a steep 8.4% drop Wednesday. Bank stalwarts like Commerzbank, Santander, Unicredit and Raiffeisen all rose more than 2%.

Credit Suisse, which was beset by problems long before the U.S. bank failures, said Thursday that it would exercise an option to borrow up to 50 billion francs (\$53.7 billion) from the Swiss National Bank.

"This additional liquidity would support Credit Suisse's core businesses and clients as Credit Suisse takes the necessary steps to create a simpler and more focused bank built around client needs," the bank said.

The banking turmoil has cast a shadow over Thursday's meeting of the European Central Bank. Before the chaos erupted, ECB head Christine Lagarde had said it was "very likely" that the bank would make a large, half-percentage point rate increase to tackle stubbornly high inflation.

After European bank shares plunged Wednesday, analysts said the meeting outcome was hard to predict, with some saying the central bank might dial back to a quarter-point increase. Higher rates fight inflation, but in recent days have fueled concern that they may have caused hidden losses on bank balance sheets.

Speaking Wednesday at a financial conference in the Saudi capital of Riyadh, Credit Suisse Chairman Axel Lehmann defended the bank, saying, "We already took the medicine" to reduce risks.

When asked if he would rule out government assistance in the future, he said: "That's not a topic. ... We are regulated. We have strong capital ratios, very strong balance sheet. We are all hands on deck, so that's not a topic whatsoever."

Fanning new fears about the health of financial institutions following the recent collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank in the U.S., Credit Suisse's share price hit a record low Wednesday.

It came after the Saudi National Bank told news outlets that it would not inject more money into the Swiss lender. The Saudi bank is seeking to avoid regulations that kick in with a stake above 10%, having invested some 1.5 billion Swiss francs to acquire a holding just under that threshold.

The turmoil prompted an automatic pause in trading of Credit Suisse shares on the Swiss market and sent shares of other European banks tumbling, some by double digits. The stock has suffered a long, sustained decline: Now it's trading at 2.10 Swiss francs, while in 2007, it was at more than 80 francs (\$86.71) each.

Switzerland's central bank announced late Wednesday that it was prepared to act, saying it would support Credit Suisse if needed. Regulators said they believed the bank had enough money to meet its obligations.

Credit Suisse reported earlier this week that managers had identified "material weaknesses" in the bank's internal controls on financial reporting as of the end of last year. That fanned new doubts about the bank's ability to weather the storm.

Credit Suisse is "a much bigger concern for the global economy" than the midsize U.S. banks that collapsed, said Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist for Capital Economics.

It has multiple subsidiaries outside Switzerland and handles trading for hedge funds.

"Credit Suisse is not just a Swiss problem but a global one," he said.

He noted, however, that the bank's "problems were well known so do not come as a complete shock to either investors or policymakers."

The troubles "once more raise the question about whether this is the beginning of a global crisis or just another 'idiosyncratic' case," Kenningham said in a note. "Credit Suisse was widely seen as the weakest

link among Europe's large banks, but it is not the only bank which has struggled with weak profitability in recent years."

Leaving a Credit Suisse branch in Geneva, Fady Rachid said he and his wife are worried about the bank's health. He planned to transfer some money to UBS.

"I find it hard to believe that Credit Suisse is going to be able to get rid of these problems and get through it," said Rachid, a 56-year-old doctor.

Investors responded to "a broader structural problem" in banking following a long period of low interest rates and "very, very loose monetary policy," said Sascha Steffen, professor of finance at the Frankfurt School of Finance & Management.

In order to earn some yield, banks "needed to take more risks, and some banks did this more prudently than others."

European finance ministers said this week that their banking system has no direct exposure to the U.S. bank failures.

Europe strengthened its banking safeguards after the global financial crisis that followed the collapse of U.S. investment bank Lehman Brothers in 2008 by transferring supervision of the biggest banks to the central bank, analysts said.

The Credit Suisse parent bank is not part of EU supervision, but it has entities in several European countries that are. Credit Suisse is subject to international rules requiring it to maintain financial buffers against losses as one of 30 so-called globally systemically important banks, or G-SIBs.

The Swiss bank has been pushing to raise money from investors and roll out a new strategy to overcome an array of troubles, including bad bets on hedge funds, repeated shake-ups of its top management and a spying scandal involving Zurich rival UBS.

In an annual report released Tuesday, Credit Suisse said customer deposits fell 41%, or by 159.6 billion francs (\$172.1 billion), at the end of last year compared with a year earlier.

## **Pakistani court extends pause in arresting ex-premier Khan**

By BABAR DOGAR and MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

LAHORE, Pakistan (AP) — A Pakistani court on Thursday extended a pause in the effort to arrest former premier Imran Khan in a graft case, a sign of easing tension in the country's cultural capital after clashes erupted this week when police tried to detain him.

The decision is a reprieve for Khan, who was due to be arrested a few hours earlier. The Lahore High Court ordered police to suspend the plan to arrest the 70-year-old opposition leader until Friday. It also asked Khan's legal team for talks to resolve the issue.

The court also barred Khan's Pakistan Tehree-e-Insaf opposition party from holding a rally that was to be led by Khan on Sunday ahead of the elections for a regional assembly, according to lawyers from the two sides.

Thursday's order sent a wave of relief through Khan's stick-wielding supporters, who were prepared to prevent police from reaching Khan's house in Lahore, the capital of Punjab province. Despite the order, however, police and paramilitary rangers deployed for Khan's arrest were not immediately withdrawn.

Usman Anwar, the police chief in the Punjab province, said the violence in Lahore began Tuesday when officers went to comply with the court order and arrest Khan. But, he said, Khan's supporters started throwing stones at officers, who were unarmed and only carrying batons.

"We will comply with the court order, and we will do it," he told a local Geo TV station.

Lahore police have registered two new cases against Khan and his supporters on charges of damaging public property and attacking police when they went to his house Tuesday to arrest him.

In Islamabad, Khan's legal team on Thursday asked judge Zafar Iqbal to suspend the arrest warrants he had issued last week for Khan, who is accused of illegally selling state gifts and concealing his assets.

Iqbal gave no indication of whether he will suspend the arrest warrants for Khan. Instead, he asked why Khan resisted when officers went to his house to arrest him. The judge said if Khan surrenders to the

court now, he will stop police from arresting him.

During Thursday's court hearing in Islamabad, Saad Hassan, a lawyer for the election tribunal, opposed Khan's request for the cancellation of his arrest warrants, saying the former premier had been avoiding court hearings since January.

Violence erupted in Lahore on Tuesday when about 1,000 supporters of Khan clashed with police when they tried to arrest the former premier at his house in the upscale area of Zaman Park. Khan's supporters hurled petrol bombs, rocks and bricks at police. Officers responded by swinging batons, firing tear gas and using water cannons. They failed to arrest Khan.

On Wednesday, Khan said in a video message that he was ready to travel to Islamabad on March 18 to appear before the court, if he is not arrested. Khan also posed for cameras seated at a long table, showing off piles of spent tear gas shells he said had been collected from around his home.

"What crime did I commit that my house has been attacked like this," he tweeted the previous day.

Khan, who was ousted in a no-confidence vote in Parliament in April, was ordered to appear before a judge in Islamabad on Saturday to answer charges of illegally selling state gifts he had received during his term as premier and concealing his assets.

He was also disqualified from holding any public office in October on the charges.

## Major oil project approval intensifies Alaska Natives' rift

By MARK THIESSEN and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — The Biden administration's approval this week of the biggest oil drilling project in Alaska in decades promises to widen a rift among Alaska Natives, with some saying that oil money can't counter the damages caused by climate change and others defending the project as economically vital.

Two lawsuits filed almost immediately by environmentalists and one Alaska Native group are likely to exacerbate tensions that have built up over years of debate about ConocoPhillips Alaska's Willow project.

Many communities on Alaska's North Slope celebrated the project's approval, citing new jobs and the influx of money that will help support schools, other public services and infrastructure investments in their isolated villages. Just a few decades ago, many villages had no running water, said Doreen Leavitt, director of natural resources for the Inupiat Community of the Arctic Slope. Housing shortages continues to be a problem, with multiple generations often living together, she said.

"We still have a long ways to go. We don't want to go backwards," Leavitt said.

She said 50 years of oil production on the petroleum-rich North Slope has shown that development can coexist with wildlife and the traditional, subsistence way of life.

But some Alaska Natives blasted the decision to greenlight the project, and they are supported by environmental groups challenging the approval in federal court.

The acrimony toward the project was underscored in a letter dated earlier this month written by three leaders in the Nuiqsut community, who described their remote village as "ground zero for industrialization of the Arctic." They addressed the letter to Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, a member of New Mexico's Laguna Pueblo and the first Native American to lead a Cabinet department.

They cited the threat that climate change poses to caribou migrations and to their ability to travel across once-frozen areas. Money from the ConocoPhillips project won't be enough to mitigate those threats, they said. The community is about 36 miles (58 kilometers) from the Willow project.

"They are payoffs for the loss of our health and culture," the Nuiqsut leaders wrote. "No dollar can replace what we risk....It is a matter of our survival."

But Asisaun Toovak, the mayor of Utqiagvik, the nation's northernmost community on the Arctic Ocean, told the AP that she jumped for joy when she heard the Biden administration approved the Willow project.

"I could say that the majority of the people, the majority of our community and the majority of the people were excited about the Willow Project," she said.

Willow is in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, a vast region on Alaska's resource-rich North Slope that is roughly the size of Maine. It would produce up to 180,000 barrels of oil a day, the use of which



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would result in at least 263 million tons (239 million metric tons) of greenhouse gas emissions over 30 years, according to a federal environmental review.

The Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic, Sierra Club and other groups that sued Tuesday said Interior officials ignored the fact that every ton of greenhouse gas emitted by the project would contribute to sea ice melt, which endangers polar bears and Alaska villages. A second lawsuit seeking to block the project was filed Wednesday by Greenpeace and other environmental groups.

For Alaska Natives to reconcile their points of view with one another, it will take discussions. "We just continue to try to sit at the table together, break bread and meet as a region," said Leavitt, who also is the secretary for the tribal council representing eight North Slope villages.

"I will say the majority of the voices that we heard against Willow were from the Lower 48," she said of the contiguous U.S. states, excluding Alaska and Hawaii.

ConocoPhillips Alaska said the \$8 billion project would create up to 2,500 jobs during construction and 300 long-term jobs, and generate billions of dollars in royalties and other revenues to be split between the federal and state governments.

The project has had widespread support among lawmakers in the state. Alaska's bipartisan congressional delegation met with Biden and his advisers in early March to plead their case for the project, and Alaska Native lawmakers also met with Haaland to urge support.

Haaland visited the North Slope last fall, just hours after state Rep. Josiah Aullaqsruaq Patkotak, a whaling captain along with his brother on their father's whaling crew, harvested a roughly 40-ton (36-metric tons) bowhead whale and spent hours pulling it on the ice from the Arctic Ocean at Utqiagvik. He left the ice around 7 a.m. to be ready to meet with Haaland just two hours later.

For him, the juxtaposition of those activities on the same day underscored the dual life led by Alaska Natives on the North Slope and highlights the choices that communities make every day for their survival.

"That's the walk our leaders have to walk," said Patkotak, an independent who supported Willow. "We maintain our culture and our lifestyle and our subsistence aspect where we're one with the land and animals, and the very next hour you may be having to conduct yourself, you know, in a manner that you're playing the Western world's game."

He invited Haaland to view the bowhead whale that they harvested, but when Patkotak couldn't provide a street name of where she would go, her security didn't allow it. "Well, it's on the ice, there are no street names," he said.

Patkotak met again with Haaland this month in Washington, D.C., where he extended an invitation to leaders in the White House to visit Utqiagvik, "because it's our duty to tell our story so that we're able to strike that balance of both worlds.

"That's a reality for us," he said.

## Texas announces takeover of Houston schools, stirring anger

By JUAN A. LOZANO and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Texas officials on Wednesday announced a state takeover of Houston's nearly 200,000-student public school district, the eighth-largest in the country, acting on years of threats and angering Democrats who assailed the move as political.

The announcement, made by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott's education commissioner, Mike Morath, amounts to one of the largest school takeovers ever in the U.S. It also deepens a high-stakes rift between Texas' largest city, where Democrats wield control, and state Republican leaders, who have sought increased authority following election fumbles and COVID-19 restrictions.

The takeover is the latest example of Republican and predominately white state officials pushing to take control of actions in heavily minority and Democratic-led cities. They include St. Louis and Jackson, Mississippi, where the Legislature is pushing to take over the water system and for an expanded role for state police and appointed judges.

In a letter to the Houston Independent School District, Morath said the Texas Education Agency will

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replace Superintendent Millard House II and the district's elected board of trustees with a new superintendent and an appointed board of managers made of residents from within the district's boundaries.

Morath said the board has failed to improve student outcomes while conducting "chaotic board meetings marred by infighting" and violating open meetings act and procurement laws. He accused the district of failing to provide proper special education services and of violating state and federal laws with its approach to supporting students with disabilities.

He cited the seven-year record of poor academic performance at one of the district's roughly 50 high schools, Wheatley High, as well as the poor performance of several other campuses.

"The governing body of a school system bears ultimate responsibility for the outcomes of all students. While the current Board of Trustees has made progress, systemic problems in Houston ISD continue to impact district students," Morath wrote in his six-page letter.

Most of Houston's school board members have been replaced since the state began making moves toward a takeover in 2019. House became superintendent in 2021.

He and the current school board will remain until the new board of managers is chosen sometime after June 1. The new board of managers will be appointed for at least two years.

House in a statement pointed to strides made across the district, saying the announcement "does not discount the gains we have made."

He said his focus now will be on ensuring "a smooth transition without disruption to our core mission of providing an exceptional educational experience for all students."

The Texas State Teachers Association and the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas condemned the takeover. At a news conference in Austin, state Democratic leaders called for the Legislature to increase funding for education and raise teacher pay.

"We acknowledge that there's been underperformance in the past, mainly due to that severe underfunding in our public schools," state Rep. Armando Walle, who represents parts of north Houston, said.

An annual Census Bureau survey of public school funding showed Texas spent \$10,342 per pupil in the 2020 fiscal year, more than \$3,000 less than the national average, according to the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice University in Houston.

The state was able to take over the district under a change in state law that Houston Democratic state Rep. Harold Dutton Jr. proposed in 2015. In an op-ed piece in the Houston Chronicle on Monday, Dutton said he has no regrets about what he did.

"We're hearing voices of opposition, people who say that HISD shouldn't have to face consequences for allowing a campus to fail for more than five consecutive years. Those critics' concern is misplaced," Dutton wrote.

Schools in other big cities, including Philadelphia, New Orleans and Detroit, in recent decades have gone through state takeovers, which are generally viewed as last resorts for underperforming schools and are often met with community backlash. Critics argue that state interventions generally have not led to big improvements.

Texas started moving to take over the district following allegations of misconduct by school trustees, including inappropriate influencing of vendor contracts, and chronically low academic scores at Wheatley High.

The district sued to block a takeover, but new education laws subsequently passed by the GOP-controlled state Legislature and a January ruling from the Texas Supreme Court cleared the way for the state to seize control.

"All of us Texans have an obligation and should come together to reinvent HISD in a way that will ensure that we're going to be providing the best quality education for those kids," Abbott said Wednesday.

Schools in Houston are not under mayoral control, unlike in New York and Chicago, but as expectations of a takeover mounted, the city's Democratic leaders unified in opposition.

Race is also an issue because the overwhelming majority of students in Houston schools are Hispanic or Black. Domingo Morel, a professor of political science and public services at New York University, said

the political and racial dynamics in the Houston case are similar to instances where states have intervened elsewhere.

"If we just focus on taking over school districts because they underperform, we would have a lot more takeovers," Morel said. "But that's not what happens."

## **UN nuclear watchdog: 2.5 tons of uranium missing in Libya**

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Some 2.5 tons of natural uranium stored in a site in war-torn Libya have gone missing, the United Nations nuclear watchdog said Thursday, raising safety and proliferation concerns.

Natural uranium can't immediately be used for energy production or bomb fuel, as the enrichment process typically requires the metal to be converted into a gas, then later spun in centrifuges to reach the levels needed.

However, each ton of natural uranium — if obtained by a group with the technological means and resources — can be refined to 5.6 kilograms (12 pounds) of weapons-grade material over time, experts say. That makes finding the missing metal important for nonproliferation experts.

In a statement, the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency said its director-general, Rafael Mariano Grossi, informed member states Wednesday about the missing uranium.

The IAEA statement remained tightlipped though on much of the details.

On Tuesday, "agency safeguards inspectors found that 10 drums containing approximately 2.5 tons of natural uranium in the form of uranium ore concentrate were not present as previously declared at a location in the state of Libya," the IAEA said. "Further activities will be conducted by the agency to clarify the circumstances of the removal of the nuclear material and its current location."

Reuters first reported on the IAEA warning about the missing Libyan uranium, saying the IAEA told members reaching the site that's not under government control required "complex logistics."

The IAEA declined to offer more details on the missing uranium. However, its acknowledgment the uranium went missing at a "previously declared site" narrows the possibilities.

One such declared site is Sabha, some 660 kilometers (410 miles) southeast of Libya's capital, Tripoli, in the country's lawless southern reaches of the Sahara Desert. There, Libya under dictator Moammar Qadhafi stored thousands of barrels of so-called yellowcake uranium for a once-planned uranium conversion facility that was never built in his decadeslong secret weapons program.

Estimates put the Libyan stockpile at some 1,000 metric tons of yellowcake uranium under Qadhafi, who declared his nascent nuclear weapons program to the world in 2003 to after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

While inspectors removed the last of the enriched uranium from Libya in 2009, the yellowcake remained behind, with the U.N. in 2013 estimating some 6,400 barrels of it were stored at Sabha. American officials had worried Iran could try to purchase the uranium from Libya, something Qadhafi's top civilian nuclear official tried to reassure the U.S. about, according to a 2009 diplomatic cable published by WikiLeaks.

"Stressing that Libya viewed the question as primarily a commercial one, (the official) noted that prices for uranium yellowcake on the world market had been increasing, and that Libya wanted to maximize its profit by properly timing the sale of its stockpile," then-Ambassador Gene A. Cretz wrote.

But the 2011 Arab Spring saw rebels topple Qadhafi and ultimately kill him. Sabha grew increasingly lawless, with African migrants crossing Libya, saying some had been sold as slaves in the city, the U.N. reported.

In recent years, Sabha largely has been under the control of the self-styled Libyan National Army, headed by Khalifa Hifter. The general, who is widely believed to have worked with the CIA during his time in exile during Qadhafi's era, has been battling for control of Libya against a Tripoli-based government.

A spokesman for Hifter declined to answer questions from The Associated Press. Chadian rebel forces also have had a presence in the southern city over recent years.

## China says US spreading disinformation, suppressing TikTok

BEIJING (AP) — China accused the United States on Thursday of spreading disinformation and suppressing TikTok following reports that the Biden administration was calling for its Chinese owners to sell their stakes in the popular video-sharing app.

The U.S. has yet to present evidence that TikTok threatens its national security and was using the excuse of data security to abuse its power to suppress foreign companies, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told reporters at a daily briefing.

"The U.S. should stop spreading disinformation about data security, stop suppressing the relevant company, and provide an open, fair and non-discriminatory environment for foreign businesses to invest and operate in the U.S.," Wang said.

TikTok was dismissive Wednesday of a report in The Wall Street Journal that said the Committee on Foreign Investment in the U.S., part of the Treasury Department, was threatening a U.S. ban on the app unless its owners, Beijing-based ByteDance Ltd., divested.

"If protecting national security is the objective, divestment doesn't solve the problem: A change in ownership would not impose any new restrictions on data flows or access," TikTok spokesperson Maureen Shanahan said.

Shanahan said TikTok was already answering concerns through "transparent, U.S.-based protection of U.S. user data and systems, with robust third-party monitoring, vetting, and verification."

The Journal report cited anonymous "people familiar with the matter." The Treasury Department and the White House's National Security Council declined to comment.

In late February, the White House gave all federal agencies 30 days to wipe TikTok off all government devices. Some agencies, including the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security and the State Department already have restrictions in place. The White House already does not allow TikTok on its devices.

Congress passed the "No TikTok on Government Devices Act" in December as part of a sweeping government funding package. The legislation does allow for TikTok use in certain cases, including for national security, law enforcement and research purposes.

Meanwhile, lawmakers in both the House and Senate have been moving forward with legislation that would give the Biden administration more power to clamp down on TikTok.

TikTok remains extremely popular and is used by two-thirds of teens in the U.S. But there is increasing concern that Beijing could obtain control of American user data that the app has obtained and push pro-Beijing narratives and propaganda on the app.

China has long been concerned about the influence of overseas social media and communications apps, and bans most of the best-known ones, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube — and TikTok.

## Lebanon's empty schools bode long-term damage from crisis

By FAY ABUEL GASIM and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — On a recent school day, the Rene Mouawad High School in Beirut was empty, its classrooms dark, just like all of Lebanon's public schools have been for most of the past three months. Its striking teachers were protesting in front of the Education Ministry, not far away.

About a hundred teachers joined the demonstration outside the ministry, blocking traffic and holding placards demanding pay raises. "We are done with charity," said Nisreen Chahine, the head of the union for contractor teachers. "We are not negotiating anymore. They should either rightfully pay us or go home."

The teachers gave speeches demanding officials come out and talk to them. But as usual in these regular protests, no one from the ministry emerged. After several hours, the teachers packed up and went home.

Lebanon's schools are crumbling under the weight of the country's economic collapse as the political leadership — which caused the crisis through decades of corruption and mismanagement — balks at taking any measures to resolve it. Since the meltdown began in late 2019, over three-quarters of Lebanon's 6 million people have been plunged into poverty, their assets evaporating as the currency's value shrivels

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and inflation rises at one of the world's highest rates.

Most of the country's children have not been in school for months — many since even before teachers, who say they can no longer live on their salaries, went on strike in December. Lebanon was once known for producing a highly skilled, educated work force. But now an entire generation is missing out on schooling, wreaking long-term damage on prospects for the country's economy and future.

Teachers called their strike because their salaries, in Lebanese pounds, have become too low to cover rent and other basic expenses. The pound has gone from 1,500 to the dollar before the crisis to 100,000 to the dollar currently. Most teachers are now paid the equivalent of about \$1 an hour, even after several raises since 2019. Grocery stores and other businesses now usually price their goods in dollars.

Teachers are demanding adjusted salaries, a transportation stipend, and health benefits. The government only offered to partially cover transportation, saying it didn't have the budget for more. Though schools partially reopened last week after some teachers returned to work, most chose to continue striking.

Even before the crisis, Lebanon's investment in public schools was limited. In 2020, the government's spending on education was equivalent only to 1.7% of Lebanon's GDP, one of the lowest rates in the world, according to the World Bank. The 2022 budget allocated 3.6 trillion Lebanese lira for education — the equivalent of around \$90 million at the time the budget was passed in October, less than half the \$182 million budget on education from a donor-funded humanitarian program.

Instead, the government has relied for years on private and charity schools to educate children. Humanitarian agencies paid to cover salaries and keep decrepit infrastructure functioning. Two-thirds of Lebanese children once went to private schools, but hundreds of thousands dropped out in recent years because private schools have had to increase tuition to cover soaring costs. Public and private schools struggle to keep lights on as fuel costs mount.

Even before the strike, more than 700,000 children in Lebanon, many of them Syrian refugees, were not in school because of the economic crisis. With the strike, an additional 500,000 joined their ranks, according to UNICEF.

"It means we now see children ages 10, 12, 14 and they are not able to even write their own names or write basic sentences," Ettie Higgins, UNICEF deputy representative for Lebanon, told the Associated Press. UNICEF said that last week it gave almost \$14 million to help more than 1,000 public schools pay staff.

Rana Ghalib, a mother of four, said it makes her anxious to see her children at home when they should be in school. Her 14-year-old son had to repeat the 6th grade because he has fallen behind during previous disruptions.

"The classrooms are basically empty because teachers are demanding their rights and they're dark because there is no fuel," Ghalib told the AP.

The international community has been pushing Lebanon's leaders to carry out wide-ranging reforms in the economy, financial system and governance in order to receive a \$3 billion bailout package from the International Monetary Fund and unlock development aid. The political elite, which has run the country since 1990, has stalled — because, critics say, reforms would undermine its grip on power and wealth. Amid political deadlock, there hasn't been a president for months, and the government only functions in a limited caretaker capacity.

Education, meanwhile, is joining banks, medicine and electricity in the ranks of Lebanon's failing institutions. That could cause long-term damage: Lebanon has traditionally relied on its educated and skilled diaspora population abroad to send remittances back home to support families, invest and feed dollars into the banking system. The exodus of skilled people skyrocketed during the economic crisis, leaving remittances as Lebanon's last economic lifeline.

Hussein Cheaito, an economist and nonresident fellow at The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, a Washington-based think tank, says the crippled education system will further "deteriorate the social fabric" of Lebanon and deepen poverty.

"This will have a effect on the longer-term growth of the economy," he told the AP. "This means there

will be less access to jobs in the future ... (and) weaken the labor market in general.”

Ghalib, meanwhile, checks on her children, who are watching TV and playing with their cellphones at a time when they would usually be studying. Even her 9-year-old daughter is aware that her future is in jeopardy, she said.

“My youngest daughter tells me, ‘I want to be a doctor, but how can I do that if I’m sitting at home?’” Ghalib said. “I don’t know what to tell her.”

## **Mets’ Edwin Díaz injured celebrating Puerto Rico’s WBC win**

MIAMI (AP) — New York Mets fans began the year dreaming about a World Series closed out by Edwin Díaz.

For now, they’re facing a potential nightmare.

In a startling scene, Díaz was taken off the field in a wheelchair after injuring his right knee celebrating Puerto Rico’s victory over the Dominican Republic in the World Baseball Classic on Wednesday night.

There was no immediate word on how severely Díaz was hurt — the Mets said he will undergo more tests Thursday. But the way his teammates stood around him in shock didn’t look encouraging.

The injury was exactly what big league teams and their fans fear the most when their high-priced stars go play for their countries in the WBC. Díaz signed a \$102 million, five-year deal in November.

No matter what, this setback was sure to set off spirited debate about whether the tournament, which started in 2006 and was held every three or four years until a cancellation in 2021, is worth it.

“Those things, they can happen to anybody at any given time,” said Los Angeles Dodgers star outfielder Mookie Betts, who was playing for the United States when Díaz was hurt.

“You can always try to place blame on the WBC, but that was just a freak accident that could happen to anyone at any given time,” he said.

Mets teammates Pete Alonso and Jeff McNeil also were with the U.S. team in a game against Colombia when a coach told them about Díaz.

“It’s just really heartbreaking to hear about Edwin,” Alonso said after a 3-2 win in Phoenix.

“Every day you show up to the yard, there’s a possibility of getting hurt. There’s hazard in the job. Anyone can get hurt at any given time. Anything can happen,” he said. “That’s the risk we run playing baseball. We’re athletes and injuries are unfortunately part of the game.”

It’s true that injuries can happen anytime in baseball. Infielder Gavin Lux tore his knee in a recent exhibition game for the Dodgers and is out for the season. Los Angeles teammate Freddie Freeman hurt his hamstring this week playing for Canada.

Still, the intensity of many WBC games is what often scares MLB teams about seeing their players in this event.

“Obviously there’s risk involved,” three-time AL MVP Mike Trout of the Angels said after helping the U.S. win. “You’re still playing baseball, and it’s spring training.”

Díaz was swarmed by teammates after pitching a perfect ninth inning in a 5-2 win that clinched Puerto Rico a spot in the WBC quarterfinals. The group was jumping together in the infield when the right-hander collapsed to the ground, and he immediately reached for his right leg.

As famous for his trumpet-driven entrance music as his dominant pitching, Díaz was in tears and did not put any weight on his right leg as a coach and trainer helped him limp toward the dugout.

Díaz’s brother, Reds pitcher Alexis Díaz, was also crying as Edwin was put in a chair and wheeled away. Mets teammate and Puerto Rico shortstop Francisco Lindor stood nearby with his hands on his head.

“Nightmare scenario for Mets fans and the WBC,” tweeted longtime reliever Jerry Blevins. “Edwin Díaz seems to have been really injured after celebrating a win. This is the big fears mlb players & teams have with participating in the Tournament.”

Díaz is critical to the Mets’ World Series aspirations. Without him, newcomer David Robertson probably would be next in line for the closer’s spot.

Puerto Rico manager Yadier Molina said Díaz underwent testing at the stadium.

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"I was hugging our coaches in the dugout. Then when we looked up, Edwin was on the ground," Molina said. "I didn't know. I didn't know how to act, I didn't know how to — what to say. I mean, I didn't know. It got me for a surprise.

"Like I said in the dugout, it sucks, sorry, but when you see a guy that works so hard like Edwin, I mean when you see him on the ground like that, I mean it just is sad."

The 28-year-old Díaz is a two-time All-Star and two-time reliever of the year. He converted 32 saves for the Mets last season with a 1.31 ERA and 118 strikeouts in 62 innings.

He's become a sensation in New York for his pitching and his dance-inducing entrance music that leads with a rousing trumpet riff. Díaz comes out of the bullpen at Citi Field to "Narco" by Blasterjaxx and Timmy Trumpet. He even had trumpets painted onto his cleats for the WBC.

Díaz is hardly the first pro athlete injured during a rowdy celebration. Los Angeles Angels slugger Kendrys Morales broke his leg in 2010 taking a big leap onto home plate after hitting a game-ending grand slam — manager Mike Scioscia subsequently outlawed bouncing scruns at home plate.

Chicago Cubs pitcher Ryan Dempster broke a toe catching his foot in a dugout railing while rushing the field in 2009, and the Minnesota Twins' Denny Hocking had his nose broken by overzealous teammates after his first walk-off home run in 2001. Perhaps most famously of all, Arizona Cardinals kicker Bill Gramatica ended his rookie season in 2001 by tearing his ACL jumping up and down after a field goal.

But those were games that counted for their teams in regular-season play. Díaz's injury is sure to fuel those who say it's a bad idea for big league teams to loan out players for international play.

The WBC tournament is being played as MLB players ramp up for the start of the season at the end of March. The WBC has rules in place — in addition to some request from MLB teams — to try and protect players, particularly pitchers, from getting injured.

Pitchers for all countries are limited to 65 pitches per outing in the first round. If a player throws more than 50 pitches in an outing, he can't pitch for the next four days. If he throws more than 30, he can't pitch the next day. Finally, if he throws on back-to-back days, he must sit out the next day.

But few could have imagined Wednesday's scene.

Puerto Rico center fielder Kiké Hernández said the locker room was quiet after Díaz's injury.

"It's a certain point that it's bigger than the game," Hernández said. "It's very unfortunate that it happened. As excited as we were about the game and all that, that's one of our brothers."

## 'Star Trek', swear words and TV characters' changing mores

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

For nearly four decades, Jean-Luc Picard of "Star Trek" has largely been presented as genteel, erudite and — at times — quite buttoned up. Yes, he loses his temper. Yes, he was reckless as a callow cadet many years ago. Yes, he occasionally gets his hands dirty or falls apart.

But the Enterprise captain-turned-admiral stepped into a different place in last week's episode of the streaming drama "Star Trek: Picard." Now, he's someone who — to the shock of some and the delight of others — has uttered a profanity that never would have come from his mouth in the 1990s: "Ten f—ing grueling hours," Patrick Stewart's character says at one point during an intense conversation in which he expects everyone will die shortly.

The whole thing was in keeping with the more complex, nuanced aesthetic of this decade's "Star Trek" installments. And the online conversation that ensued illustrates the journey undertaken when a fictional character voyages from the strictures of network and syndicated television to high-end streaming TV.

"'Star Trek' was G-rated when it first came out. 'The Next Generation' was clean-cut and optimistic. What we're seeing now with 'Picard' is a little bit more of the grit," says Shilpa Davé, a media studies scholar at the University of Virginia and a longtime "Trek" fan.

Over the weekend, "Star Trek" Twitter reflected that tension.

"Totally out of character," said one post, reflecting many others. Some complained that it cheapened the utopia that Gene Roddenberry envisioned, that humans wouldn't be swearing like that four centuries

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from now, that someone as polished as Picard wouldn't need such language.

"Part of Star Trek's appeal is the articulate way characters speak. Resorting to gutter language feels like a step backward since Star Trek's characters are meant to be better than this," John Orquiola wrote for the website Screen Rant on Sunday.

The backlash to the backlash followed. Christopher Monfette, the Paramount+ show's co-executive producer, wrote an extensive and persuasive thread about the moment and why he believed it worked.

"It's easy to hear that elevated British tone escaping the mouth of a gentlemanly Shakespearean actor and assume some elevated intellectualism," he said, while acknowledging: "Criticism of its use is fair even if it just strikes a personal nerve — or if you've equated 'Trek' with more broader, family-friendly storytelling. But regardless, cursing in the show is carefully debated & discussed in the room or on set. We don't take it lightly."

The showrunner for "Star Trek: Picard" this season, Terry Matalas, said the F-word from Picard wasn't scripted but was a choice by Stewart in the moment. The result, Matalas said, was "so real."

"Everything you do as artists, as writers and actors, even as editors, is authenticity. That's the thing you want to feel," he told Collider. "I was really torn because hearing that word come from your childhood hero, Captain Picard, it throws you. But wow, is it powerful."

"Star Trek" has a long history of pushing boundaries, linguistic and otherwise.

"Let's get the hell out of here," Capt. James T. Kirk said on network TV in 1967, when that word was edgy. He'd just lost someone dear to him in the most trying of circumstances. Dr. McCoy, the ship's irascible physician, would often say, "Dammit, Jim." And in the larger realm, the original series delicately danced with NBC censors over everything from women's costumes to racial, sexual and war references.

But the crossing of last week's linguistic frontier is an interesting case. It highlights the turbulence generated when a beloved character born during the "family-friendly" TV era evolves against the streaming landscape, where constraints are fewer and opportunities for unflinching authenticity greater.

"This isn't just a rethinking of a fictional world. This is the same actor and the same character in the same setting that we had before. And all these years, he has been speaking and behaving in a certain way," says Robert Thompson, director of the Bleier Center for Television and Popular Culture at Syracuse University.

Sometimes this transition unfolds erratically. Velma, a member of the Gen-X-era Saturday morning cartoon "Scooby Doo," recently appeared in a more multicultural cartoon reboot on HBO Max that featured a high-school shower scene and overt sexual references. It has been roundly panned. Several years ago, when "Riverdale" premiered, the attempts to push Archie, Jughead, Betty and Veronica from the sunny world of comics into the darker realm of teen drama produced uneven, sometimes jarring results.

"Star Trek" is in a whole different universe, so to speak.

Roddenberry famously framed it as a utopian future where the main characters generally avoided conflict with each other, their society wasn't motivated by greed and humanity was seen as inexorably moving forward. Purists have criticized the recent years of what they call "new Trek" as a darker, more fragmented universe.

Nonsense, say many others: Both allegory and word usage evolve with the times. After all, it was only seven decades ago that Lucille Ball (and her character) was expecting a baby on "I Love Lucy" and the word "pregnant" couldn't be uttered on national television — except, oddly, in French.

And for years before and after that, Hollywood's production code prescribed the ways morality and amorality could be depicted in film, with strict regulation of everything from sexual innuendo to whether criminals were portrayed sympathetically to whether the good guys won. Hence the term "Hollywood ending," which remains with us today in many parts of life.

All of which raises the question: Could it also be the boundaries themselves that help create memorable film and television, rather than merely the breaking of them?

"Star Trek had a certain kind of sincerity — almost like 'the 23rd century will be a family-friendly kind of thing,'" Thompson says. "The question is, what happens when your characters outlive the media industry standards? How do you accommodate the fact that you're no longer limited without completely betraying



the world that you've created?"

In this case, Stewart has said he returned to the character because he was persuaded there were new stories to tell. Just as he had aged two decades since his last "Star Trek" appearance, so, too, had Picard — with all the evolution that went along with it.

The kind of evolution, perhaps, that might make a man facing his own end choose a word that still carries a lot of power — even in today's swearing, streaming world. When Jean-Luc Picard says that word, you can be absolutely sure he means it.

## Scientists: Largest US reservoirs moving in right direction

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Parts of California are under water, the Rocky Mountains are bracing for more snow, flood warnings are in place in Nevada, and water is being released from some Arizona reservoirs to make room for an expected bountiful spring runoff.

All the moisture has helped alleviate dry conditions in many parts of the western U.S. Even major reservoirs on the Colorado River are trending in the right direction.

But climate experts caution that the favorable drought maps represent only a blip on the radar as the long-term effects of a stubborn drought persist.

Groundwater and reservoir storage levels — which take much longer to bounce back — remain at historic lows. It could be more than a year before the extra moisture has an effect on the shoreline at Lake Mead that straddles Arizona and Nevada. And it's unlikely that water managers will have enough wiggle room to wind back the clock on proposals for limiting water use.

That's because water release and retention operations for the massive reservoir and its upstream sibling — Lake Powell on the Utah-Arizona border — already are set for the year. The reservoirs are used to manage Colorado River water deliveries to 40 million people in seven U.S. states and Mexico.

Still, Lake Powell could gain 45 feet (14 meters) as snow melts and makes its way into tributaries and rivers over the next three months. How much it rises will depend on soil moisture levels, future precipitation, temperatures and evaporation losses.

"We're definitely going in the right direction, but we still have a long way to go," said Paul Miller, a hydrologist with the National Weather Service's Colorado Basin River Forecast Center.

Federal forecasters are scheduled Thursday to roll out predictions for temperature, precipitation and drought over the next three months, as well as the risk for springtime flooding.

California already has been drenched by a fire hose of moisture from the Pacific Ocean that has led to flooding, landslides and toppled trees.

Ski resorts on the California-Nevada border are marking their snowiest winter stretch since 1971, when record-keeping began. In fact, the Sierra Nevada is on the verge of surpassing the second-highest snow total for an entire winter season, with at least two months still to go.

In Arizona, forecasters warned that heavy rain was expected to fall on primed snowpack in the mountains above the desert enclave of Sedona. One of the main creeks running through the tourist town was expected to reach the flood stage and evacuations were ordered for some neighborhoods late Wednesday.

"We've pretty much blown past all kinds of averages and normals in the Lower Colorado Basin," Miller said, not unlike other western basins.

Forecasters say the real standout has been the Great Basin, which stretches from the Sierra Nevada to the Wasatch Mountains in Utah. It has recorded more snow this season than the last two seasons combined. Joel Lisonbee, with the National Integrated Drought Information System, said that's notable given that over the last decade, only two years — 2017 and 2019 — had snowpack above the median.

Overall, the West has been more dry than wet for more than 20 years, and many areas will still feel the consequences.

An emergency declaration in Oregon warns of higher risks for water shortages and wildfires in the central part of the state. Pockets of central Utah, southeastern Colorado and eastern New Mexico are still dealing

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with extreme drought, while parts of Texas and the Midwest have become drier.

Forecasters are expecting warm, dry weather to kick in over the coming weeks, meaning drought will keep its foothold in some areas and tighten its grip elsewhere.

Tony Caligiuri, president of the preservation group Colorado Open Lands, said all the recent precipitation shouldn't derail work to recharge groundwater supplies.

"The problem or the danger in these episodic wet year events is that it can reduce the feeling of urgency to address the longer-term issues of water usage and water conservation," he said.

The group is experimenting in the San Luis Valley in southern Colorado, the headwaters of the Rio Grande. One of North America's longest rivers, the Rio Grande and its reservoirs have been struggling due to meager snowpack, long-term drought and constant demands. It went dry over the summer in Albuquerque, and managers had no extra water to supplement flows.

Colorado Open Lands reached an agreement with a farmer to retire his land and stop irrigating the about 1,000 acres. Caligiuri said the idea is to take a major straw out of the aquifer, which will enable the savings to sustain other farms in the district so they no longer face the threat of having to turn off their wells.

"We've seen where we can have multiple good years in place like the San Luis Valley when it comes to rainfall or snowpack and then one drought year can erase a decade of progress," he said. "So you just can't stick your head in the sand just because you're having one good wet year."

## With Saudi deals, US, China battle for influence in Mideast

By AAMER MADHANI, MATTHEW LEE and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a matter of days, Saudi Arabia carried out blockbuster agreements with the world's two leading powers — China and the United States.

Riyadh signed a Chinese-facilitated deal aimed at restoring diplomatic ties with its arch-nemesis Iran and then announced a massive contract to buy commercial planes from U.S. manufacturer Boeing.

The two announcements spurred speculation that the Saudis were laying their marker as a dominant economic and geopolitical force with the flexibility to play Beijing and Washington off each other. They also cast China in an unfamiliar leading role in Middle Eastern politics. And they raised questions about whether the U.S.-Saudi relationship — frosty for much of the first two years of President Joe Biden's term — has reached a *détente*.

But as the Biden administration takes stock of the moment, officials are pushing back against the notion that the developments amount to a shift in the dynamics of the U.S.-China competition in the Middle East.

The White House scoffs at the idea that the big aircraft deal signals a significant change in the status of the administration's relations with Riyadh after Biden's fierce criticism early in his presidency of the Saudis' human rights record and of the Saudi-led OPEC+ oil cartel move to cut production last year.

"We're looking forward here in trying to make sure that this strategic partnership really does in every possible way support our national security interests there in the region and around the world," White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said of the U.S.-Saudi relationship. He spoke after Boeing announced this week the Saudis would purchase up to 121 aircraft.

But China's involvement in facilitating a resumption of Iran-Saudi diplomatic ties and the major Boeing contract — one the White House said it advocated for — have added a new twist to Biden's roller-coaster relationship with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

As a candidate for the White House, Biden vowed that Saudi rulers would pay a "price" under his watch for the 2018 killing of U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi, a critic of the kingdom's leadership. More recently, after the OPEC+ oil cartel announced in October it was cutting production, Biden promised "consequences" for a move that the administration said was helping Russia.

Now, Washington and Riyadh seem intent on moving forward, and at moment when China is at least dabbling in a more assertive Middle East diplomacy.

Saudi officials kept the U.S. up to date on the status of talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia on restarting diplomatic relations since they began nearly two years ago, according to the White House. Significant

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progress was made during several rounds of earlier talks hosted by Iraq and Oman, well before the deal was announced in China last week during the country's ceremonial National People's Congress.

Unlike China, the U.S. does not have diplomatic relations with Iran and was not a party to the talks.

The Iran-Saudi relationship has been historically fraught and shadowed by a sectarian divide and fierce competition in the region. Diplomatic relations were severed in 2016 after Saudi Arabia executed prominent Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr. Protesters in Tehran stormed the Saudi Embassy and Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, vowed "divine revenge" for al-Nimr's execution.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan earlier this week said China was "rowing in the same direction" with its work at quelling tensions between the Gulf Arab nations that have been fighting proxy wars in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq for years.

"This is something that we think is positive insofar as it promotes what the United States has been promoting in the region, which is de-escalation, a reduction in tensions," Sullivan said.

But privately White House officials are skeptical about China's ability, and desire, to play a role in resolving some of the region's most difficult crises, including the long, disastrous proxy war in Yemen.

Iran-allied Houthis seized Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in 2014 and forced the internationally recognized government into exile in Saudi Arabia. A Saudi-led coalition armed with U.S. weaponry and intelligence entered the war on the side of Yemen's exiled government in 2015.

Years of inconclusive fighting created a humanitarian disaster and pushed the Arab world's poorest nation to the brink of famine. Overall, the war has killed more than 150,000 people, including over 14,500 civilians, according to The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project.

A six-month cease-fire, the longest of the Yemen conflict, expired in October, but finding a permanent peace is among the administration's highest priorities in the Middle East. U.S. special envoy to Yemen Tim Lenderking is visiting Saudi Arabia and Oman this week to try to build on the U.N.-mediated truce that has brought a measure of calm to Yemen in recent months, according to the State Department.

Beijing swooped in on the Iran-Saudi talks at a moment when the fruit was already "ripening on the vine," according to one of six senior administration officials who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity to discuss the private White House deliberations. The Iran-Saudi announcement coincided with Chinese leader Xi Jinping being awarded a third five-year term as the nation's president.

The official added that if China can play a "reinforcing role" in ending hostilities in Yemen the administration would view that as a good thing. But both the White House and Saudi officials remain deeply skeptical of Iran's intentions in the Yemen war or more broadly acting as a stabilizing force in the region.

To date, China, which has a seat on the U.N. Security Council, has shown little interest in the Yemen conflict, Syria, or the Israeli-Palestinian situation, according to administration officials. Yet, Xi this week called for China to play a bigger role in managing global affairs after Beijing scored a diplomatic coup with the Iran-Saudi agreement.

"It has injected a positive element into the peace, stability, solidarity and cooperation landscape of the region," China's Deputy U.N. Ambassador Geng Shuang told the U.N. Security Council on Wednesday. "We hope it can also create conducive conditions for improving the situation in Yemen."

The administration officials said that Beijing has shown modest interest in reviving the seven-party Iran nuclear agreement — of which it is a signatory — that President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from in 2018. The Biden administration put efforts to revive the nuclear agreement on hold last fall after protests broke out in Iran following the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in police custody for allegedly flouting Iran's strict dress code for women.

To be certain, China — a major customer of both Iranian and Saudi oil — has been steadily increasing its regional political influence. Xi traveled to Riyadh in December and received Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Beijing last month.

But Miles Yu, director of the China Center at the Hudson Institute, said that Xi's call to be a more active player on the international stage would require Beijing to dramatically change its approach.

"China's diplomatic initiatives have been based on one thing: money," said Yu, who served as a China policy adviser to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo during the Trump administration. "They've made friends

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in Africa and Asia, but mostly it was monetary. These kind of transactional dealings do not forge permanent friendship."

Not every move China takes to engage more deeply with the Middle East necessarily harms the United States, noted Sen. Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat and a frequent critic of Saudi Arabia.

"But it's probably true that China should pick up some of the cost of securing the oil that ... frankly, is probably more important to them than to the United States in the long run," Murphy said. "I think China has benefited by being a free rider on U.S. security investments in the region for a long time."

The White House is not particularly concerned at the moment about the Saudis reorienting themselves toward China for several reasons, including that the Saudis' entire defense system is based on American weapons and components, administration officials said. The officials added that it would take the Saudis at least a decade to transition from U.S. weapons systems to Russian or Chinese oriented systems.

Saudi Arabia's reliance on U.S.-made weapons systems and the American military and commercial presence in the kingdom — some 70,000 Americans live there — have played a big part in the relationship weathering difficult moments over the years, said Les Janka, a former president of Raytheon Arabian Systems Co. who spent years living in the kingdom.

It would take "an unbelievable amount of activity to dismantle, given the reliance on American weapons, American technology, American training, everything that goes into it," Janka said.

## North Korea launches ICBM before South Korea-Japan summit

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

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea test-launched an intercontinental ballistic missile Thursday just hours before the leaders of South Korea and Japan were to meet at a Tokyo summit expected to be overshadowed by North Korean nuclear threats.

The North's first ICBM test in a month and third weapons test this week also comes as South Korean and U.S. troops continue joint military exercises that Pyongyang considers a rehearsal to invade.

The missile flew about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) with a maximum altitude of 6,000 kilometers (3,730 miles) during the 70-minute flight, according to South Korean and Japanese assessments. That's similar to the flight details from a February launch of another ICBM, which experts said demonstrated a potential range to reach deep into the U.S. mainland.

The missile fell in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan after being launched on a steep trajectory, apparently to avoid neighboring countries. Japan said the missile landed outside its exclusive economic zone and that there were no reports of damage of ships and aircraft.

North Korea has yet to test ICBMs on a standard trajectory, but it has repeatedly claimed it possesses functioning nuclear missiles. Some foreign experts still doubt the North has mastered the technologies needed to build warheads small enough to be placed on those missiles and protect the warheads during atmospheric reentry.

U.S. National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said Washington will take all necessary measures to ensure the security of the American homeland and its allies South Korea and Japan. She said the launch "needlessly raises tensions and risks destabilizing the security situation in the region."

Before heading Tokyo for a summit with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said, "North Korea's reckless provocations will pay the clear price."

During an emergency security meeting on the North Korean launch, Yoon instructed the South Korean military to thoroughly proceed with its ongoing exercises with U.S. forces, conduct some of the planned joint drills in an intensive manner and strengthen Seoul-Washington-Tokyo security cooperation, according to Yoon's office.

In Tokyo, Kishida said: "We must further strengthen cooperation among the allies and like-minded countries."

The Yoon-Kishida summit set for Thursday afternoon was arranged after Yoon's government last week took a major step toward repairing bilateral ties strained by Japan's 1910-45 colonial rule of the Korean

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Peninsula. The South Korean plan — to use local funds to compensate some of the colonial-era forced labor victims without contributions from Japanese companies that employed them — has met fierce domestic opposition, but it reflects Yoon's resolve to boost Seoul-Tokyo-Washington security cooperation.

"Yoon's Tokyo trip faced domestic opposition for allegedly rushing historical reconciliation in the interest of improving relations with Japan," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. "North Korea's ICBM test on the day of the Yoon-Kishida summit may have been intended to aggravate those politics but instead makes patently clear the need for deepening security cooperation among U.S. allies."

President Joe Biden welcomed the South Korean plan as a major step toward enhancing the partnership between two of America's closest allies, which together host about 80,000 U.S. troops. The United States has sought stronger alliances in Asia to deal with a Chinese rise and North Korean threats.

North Korea's pursuit of an expanded nuclear arsenal has pushed South Korea and Japan to seek to boost their security partnerships with the United States, as both countries are within striking distance of North Korean nuclear-capable missiles. Last October, North Korea fired an intermediate-range missile over northern Japan, forcing communities there to issue evacuation alerts and halt trains.

Under Kishida, Tokyo has also made a major break from its post-World War II principle of self-defense only, adopting a new national security strategy in December that includes the goals of acquiring preemptive strike capabilities and cruise missiles to counter growing threats from North Korea, China and Russia.

The North's ongoing aggressive run of weapons tests has been widely expected. Leader Kim Jong Un last week ordered his military to be ready to repel what he called "frantic war preparations moves" by his country's rivals, referring to large joint drills between the U.S. and South Korea that began Monday.

North Korea has long argued that U.S.-South Korean military drills are proof of their hostile policies against North Korea, though Washington and Seoul say they have no intentions of invading the North. Many experts say North Korea uses its rivals' drills as a pretext to boost its nuclear capability to pressure the United States to make concessions like the relaxing of international sanctions.

After conducting a record number of missile tests last year, North Korea has extended its testing activities this year, including the Feb. 18 launch of its Hwasong-15 ICBM. After that launch, North Korea said the test was meant to further bolster its "fatal" nuclear attack capacity against its rivals.

The Hwasong-15 is one of the North's three ICBMs, which all use liquid propellants that require pre-launch injections. Kim has vowed to build solid-propellant missiles, which are more mobile and harder to detect before their launches because their fuels are already loaded inside.

South Korea's military said Thursday's missile launch occurred in Pyongyang's Sunan neighborhood, home to its international airport. It is a major testing site where the North has launched most of its recent ICBM tests.

Pyongyang also this week fired cruise missiles from a submarine and sent short-range ballistic missiles across its territory into its eastern sea. Last week, North Korea fired at least six short-range ballistic missiles from a western coastal area in an exercise that its state media called a simulated attack on an unspecified South Korean airfield.

The ongoing U.S.-South Korean drills are scheduled to continue until March 23 and include computer simulations and live-fire field exercises. Experts had expected North Korea to further ramp up its testing activities during the drills.

The top nuclear envoys of Seoul, Washington and Tokyo discussed the North's ICBM launch over the phone and agreed to coordinate to elicit a unified international response toward the North's weapons activities, according to Seoul's Foreign Ministry.

## Does 'Ted Lasso' end with season 3? What to ... believe

By ALICIA RANCILIO Associated Press

"Ted Lasso" returns Wednesday for its third season and while there are certainly questions about whether AFC Richmond will finally go all the way — or if Nate will receive his comeuppance — there's one big question: Is this actually the last season?

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The Emmy-winning Apple TV+ series, about an American coaching a soccer team in London, has long been described as a three-season series — but executive producer, writer and star Jason Sudeikis is non-committal about what comes next.

"I'm still in it," he said in a recent interview.

"We're still editing the last few episodes, so it's really something that I haven't had the time to sit with, despite the fact that there's a lot of wonder and curiosity ... from the press or fans — and certainly it seems like people in show business are equally as interested," he laughed. "That answer will arrive probably when there's enough space for the question to really land."

Brendan Hunt, who plays assistant coach Beard, (whose first name "has not been revealed," said the actor. "We don't know that he doesn't have one, but he certainly appears to have no use for it.") is also an executive producer and writer on the show.

"We always saw it as this three-movement suite or a three-piece story," Hunt says, but admits the show's success has added more questions than answers to that original plan. "So the door is still open for — after this suite is finished — that maybe we'll pick up with something else in this world."

When asked, if there's a character from the series whom Hunt would like to see explored further, Hunt deadpans, "Phoebe (Roy Kent's young niece) as she battles London's drug-riddled crime underworld."

Brett Goldstein, who plays Roy Kent, the Richmond player-turned-coach with a gruff exterior and a heart of gold, is a definite breakout. He played Hercules in the end credits of "Thor: Love and Thunder," and is a creator and executive producer on "Shrinking," also on Apple TV+. He credits "Ted Lasso" for giving him creative opportunities of which he had only dreamed.

"I'd worked for years and years and years and 12 people had seen all of it, you know, and then doing a show that loads of people watch is different. It really is different," Goldstein says. "Without being cheesy, I learned an awful lot from working on 'Ted Lasso,' and I will take those lessons with me into anything else I do," he said.

Toheeb Jimoh had only been acting professionally for two years when he got cast as player Sam Obisanya.

"I'm at a stage where, because of this show I'm able to stand on my own two feet as an artist now. I've kind of absorbed the Lasso way in the same way that all of the players have," Jimoh says. "Ted says, 'It's not about the wins or losses, it's about making these players the best versions of themselves on and off the pitch.' I really feel that's the same lesson that 'Ted Lasso' has given us young actors on the show. It's about making us to the best versions of ourselves on and off the screen, you know?"

Hannah Waddingham, who plays AFC Richmond owner Rebecca Welton, was already an accomplished stage performer prior to "Ted Lasso," and already has other exciting jobs lined up including a role in "Mission: Impossible — Dead Reckoning Part Two." But she still wonders if she'll ever be able to duplicate the "Ted Lasso" experience.

"I don't know about you guys here, but Brits are natural worriers. It makes me worried that I may not ever have that again because it is such a beautiful kind of symbiosis with all of us," she says.

For now, Sudeikis seems more willing to address what the show has meant to him than what lies in store.

"I see it through the eyes of my kids when we go somewhere and the way people come up to to myself and .. any of us, just how loving people are," he says, joking that he doubts the the cast of "Succession" gets quite the same reception. "I'm sure they're excited to see them because they're all wickedly talented, but it's a different vibe on that show and a different family, if you will. So, being surrounded by that type of kindness and have it reflected back to you — especially in front of kids or family — has been really, really moving."

## US pregnancy deaths dropped in 2022, after COVID spike

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Deaths of pregnant women in the U.S. fell in 2022, dropping significantly from a six-decade high during the pandemic, new data suggests.

More than 1,200 U.S. women died in 2021 during pregnancy or shortly after childbirth, according to a

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final tally released Thursday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In 2022, there were 733 maternal deaths, according to preliminary agency data, though the final number is likely to be higher.

Officials say the 2022 maternal death rate is on track to get close to pre-pandemic levels. But that's not great: The rate before COVID-19 was the highest it had been in decades.

"From the worst to the near worst? I wouldn't exactly call that an accomplishment," said Omari Maynard, a New Yorker whose partner died after childbirth in 2019.

The CDC counts women who die while pregnant, during childbirth and up to 42 days after birth. Excessive bleeding, blood vessel blockages and infections are leading causes.

COVID-19 can be particularly dangerous to pregnant women, and experts believe it was the main reason for the 2021 spike. Burned out physicians may have added to the risk by ignoring pregnant women's worries, some advocates said.

In 2021, there were about 33 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births. The last time the government recorded a rate that high was 1964.

What happened "isn't that hard to explain," said Eugene Declercq, a long-time maternal mortality researcher at Boston University. "The surge was COVID-related."

Previous government analyses concluded that one quarter of maternal deaths in 2020 and 2021 were COVID-related — meaning that the entire increase in maternal deaths was due to coronavirus infections or the pandemic's wider impact on health care. Pregnant women infected with the coronavirus were nearly 8 times as likely to die as their uninfected peers, according to a recent study published by BMJ Global Health.

The bodies of pregnant women are already under strain, their heart forced to pump harder. Other health problems can make their condition more fragile. And then on top of that, "COVID is going to make all that much worse," said Dr. Elizabeth Cherot, chief medical and health officer for the March of Dimes.

It didn't help that vaccination rates among pregnant women were disappointingly low in 2021 — particularly among Black women. Part of that was related to limited vaccine availability, and that the CDC did not fully recommend shots for pregnant women until August 2021.

"Initially there was a lot of mistrust of the vaccine in Black communities," said Samantha Griffin, who owns a doula service that mainly serves families of color in the Washington, D.C., area.

But there's more to it than that, she and others added. The 2021 maternal mortality rate for Black women was nearly three times higher than it was for white women. And the maternal death rate for Hispanic American women that year rose 54% compared with 2020, also surpassing the death rate for white moms.

More than a year into the pandemic, a lot of doctors and nurses were feeling burned out and they were getting less in-person time with patients.

Providers at the time "were needing to make snap decisions and maybe not listening to their patients as much," Griffin said. "Women were saying that they thought something was wrong and they weren't being heard."

Maynard, who is 41 and lives in Brooklyn, said he and his partner experienced that in 2019.

Shamony Gibson, a healthy 30-year-old, was set to have their second child. The pregnancy was smooth until her contractions stopped progressing and she underwent a cesarean section.

The operation was more involved than expected but their son Khari was born in September. A few days later, Shamony began complaining of chest pains and shortness of breath, Maynard said. Doctors told her she just needed to relax and let her body rest from the pregnancy, he said.

More than a week after giving birth, her health worsened and she begged to go to the hospital. Then her heart stopped, and loved ones called for help. The initial focus for paramedics and firefighters was whether Gibson was taking illicit drugs, Maynard said, adding that she didn't.

She was hospitalized and died the next day of a blood clot in the lungs. Her son was 13 days old.

"She wasn't being heard at all," said Maynard, an artist who now does speaking engagements as a maternal health advocate.

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## Arizona State races to early lead, beats Nevada 98-73

By The Associated Press undefined

DAYTON, Ohio (AP) — DJ Horne had 20 points and Arizona State raced to a big halftime lead and scored the most points ever in a First Four game, burying Nevada 98-73 on Wednesday night.

Desmond Cambridge Jr. — a Nevada transfer — scored 17 points as Arizona State (23-12) led 53-26 at the half and then kept up the pressure on the way to the rout. The first-half output was a season high for Arizona State, which advanced as a No. 11 seed to face TCU in a West Region first-round game on Friday in Denver.

Arizona State hit 67.7% of its shots from the floor and forced 10 turnovers in the first half, piling up a 22-2 run over eight minutes to pull away.

Will Baker scored 17 and Tre Coleman had 14 for the Wolf Pack (22-11). One of Nevada's top players, Kenan Blackshear, picked up three fouls early and sat on the bench for more than five minutes of the opening half. Averaging 14.4 per game, he was held to four points.

FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON 84, TEXAS SOUTHERN 61

DAYTON, Ohio (AP) — Ansley Almonor scored 23 points and Fairleigh Dickinson earned its first NCAA Tournament win in four seasons.

Fairleigh Dickinson shot 50% and advanced to the East Region to play top-seeded Purdue in Columbus, Ohio, on Friday.

Joe Munden Jr. scored 17 points, Demetre Roberts had 15, Grant Singleton finished with 13 and Sean Moore 10 for Fairleigh Dickinson (20-15).

John Walker III led Texas Southern (14-21) with 22 points. Joirdon Karl Nicholas added 10.

## Musk brought internet to Brazil's Amazon. Criminals love it.

By FABIANO MAISONNAVE Associated Press

ATALAIA DO NORTE, Brazil (AP) — Brazilian federal agents aboard three helicopters descended on an illegal mining site on Tuesday in the Amazon rainforest. They were met with gunfire, and the shooters escaped, leaving behind an increasingly familiar find for authorities: Starlink internet units.

Starlink, a division of Elon Musk's SpaceX, has almost 4,000 low-orbit satellites across the skies, connecting people in remote corners of the Amazon and providing a crucial advantage to Ukrainian forces on the battlefield. The lightweight, high-speed internet system has also proved a new and valuable tool for Brazil's illegal miners, with reliable service for coordinating logistics, receiving advance warning of law enforcement raids and making payments without flying back to the city.

Agents from the Brazilian environment agency's special inspection group and the federal highway police rapid response group on Tuesday found one Starlink terminal up and running next to a pit, an officer who participated in the raid told The Associated Press. He spoke on condition of anonymity over concerns for his personal safety.

They also seized mercury, gold and ammunition, and destroyed fuel and other equipment used by miners in an area known as Ouro Mil, controlled by Brazil's most feared criminal organization, known as the First Command of the Capital, according to federal investigations.

Since taking office this year, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has sought to crack down on environmental violations, particularly illegal mining in Yanomami land, Brazil's largest Indigenous territory. In recent years, an estimated 20,000 prospectors contaminated vital waterways with mercury used to separate gold. They have disrupted traditional Indigenous life, brought disease and caused widespread famine.

The environment agency, known as Ibama, has seized seven Starlink terminals in Yanomami land over the past five weeks, the agency's press office said.

Illegal miners have long used satellite internet to communicate and coordinate, but until now that entailed sending a technician, usually by plane, to install a heavy, fixed antenna that cannot be carried off when mining sites move or are raided. And the connection was slow and unstable, especially on rainy days.

Starlink — which first became available in Brazil last year and has spread rapidly — solved those problems.



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Installation is do-it-yourself, the equipment works even on the move, speed is as fast as in Brazil's large cities and it works during storms.

Starlink has long viewed the Amazon as an opportunity. That was underscored by Musk's visit to Brazil last May, when he met with then-President Jair Bolsonaro.

"Super excited to be in Brazil for launch of Starlink for 19,000 unconnected schools in rural areas & environmental monitoring of Amazon," Musk tweeted at the time.

That project with the government hasn't advanced, however. SpaceX and the communications ministry haven't signed any contract, and only three terminals were installed in Amazon schools for a 12-month trial period, the ministry's press office said in an emailed response to questions.

Nevertheless, Starlink has taken off in the region and begun ushering in change.

In Atalaia do Norte, on the western reaches of the Brazilian Amazon near the borders with Peru and Colombia, Rubeney de Castro Alves installed Starlink at his hotel in December. Now, he can make bank transfers and conduct video calls. He even started bingeing Netflix.

"There are so many new things to watch that I'm not even sleeping," Alves said, chuckling.

His son once flew all the way to Manaus, the state capital 1,140 kilometers (708 miles) away, just to negotiate with a group of tourists via conference call. Today, internet at his 11-room hotel in Atalaia do Norte is more reliable than in Manaus, and he bought a second terminal for his tour boat to enable communications on its 10-day voyages, Alves said.

With high demand for internet, dozens of the riverside town's 21,000 residents flock to Alves' hotel each day. Its balcony is a meeting point for teenagers who spend hours playing online games on their phones.

"It made a revolution in our city," Alves said.

A world away, in Ukraine, Starlink has yielded advantages on the battlefield in its war with Russia.

Ukraine has received some 24,000 Starlink terminals that allow continued internet in the most vulnerable regions of the southeast even amid ongoing Russian shelling. In large Ukrainian cities, authorities have set up "points of resilience" that offer free internet along with hot beverages.

The benefits of connectivity were immediately apparent to bad actors in the Amazon, Hugo Loss, operations coordinator for Brazil's environment agency, told the AP in a phone interview.

"This technology is extremely fast and really improves the ability to manage an illegal mine," Loss said. "You can manage hundreds of mining sites without ever setting foot in one."

Another official with the environment agency told AP it is just beginning to expel miners from the Yanomami territory and the spread of Starlink has complicated that mission. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because of concerns about personal safety.

An unauthorized reseller of Starlink in Boa Vista, the gateway for travel into Yanomami territory, has been marketing the units in a WhatsApp group for illegal miners and promising same-day delivery. Her price for a terminal is \$1,600— six times what Alves pays for service at his little hotel in Atalaia do Norte. Others are selling the Starlink terminals on Facebook groups for illegal miners, like one called "Fanatics for Prospecting."

As lawbreakers have gained access to superior internet service, authorities have started using Starlink themselves. Federal agents installed a terminal at a new checkpoint on the Uraricoera River – an important corridor for miners entering Yanomami territory. The official who informed the AP about the Tuesday raid used Starlink to send photos and even heavy video files of their operation.

Brazil's environment agency told the AP via email that it, along with other federal bodies, is studying how to block Starlink's signal in illegal mining areas, calling it crucial to stopping the activity.

The AP emailed James Gleeson, SpaceX's Communications Director, questions about Starlink's presence in Brazil and its use by illegal miners in remote areas, but received no response.

## Honduras ditching Taiwan raises larger geopolitical concerns

By MEGAN JANETSKY and MARLON GONZÁLEZ Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Honduras' decision to cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan in favor of China is yet another sign of growing Chinese influence in Latin America.

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For decades the Asian superpower funneled billions of dollars into investment and infrastructure projects across the region. Now, as geopolitical tensions simmer between China and the Biden administration, that spending has paid off.

Honduras' decision was the second foreign policy coup in a week for China, which brokered an agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia to reestablish diplomatic relations last week.

Now, Taiwan will be recognized by only 13 countries. But some of the few remaining in Latin America, like Paraguay and Guatemala, promised Wednesday to keep their support for Taiwan.

Honduras' minister of foreign relations, Enrique Reina, told The Associated Press on Wednesday that Hondurans "are grateful" for their past relationship with Taiwan, but that their economic links to China ultimately pushed their government to cut diplomatic ties.

"These are political decisions. The world has been moving in this direction," Reina said. "It is a complex decision, we understand, but Honduras' foreign policy should seek to benefit the people. We believe that this step will benefit the country."

The Central American nation follows the steps of El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic in turning their backs on Taiwan.

Honduras' announcement on Tuesday was a blow to the Biden administration, which has rather fruitlessly tried to persuade countries in the region to stick with Taiwan. Taiwan, a U.S. ally, has pushed for sovereignty at the same time that Chinese President Xi Jinping has insisted the island is firmly under its control.

In that sense, Tuesday's announcement also exemplifies the American government is "losing its grasp on" Latin America, said David Castrillon-Kerrigan, research-professor on China-related issues at Colombia's Externado University.

"For countries, like Honduras, not recognizing the government in Beijing meant missing opportunities," Castrillon-Kerrigan. The United States "is definitely losing influence on every front, especially the economic front, but also diplomatically, politically and culturally."

It's left the island with a dwindling number of allies. Reina told AP that the Biden administration "must understand and respect" Honduras' needs and decisions.

But some, like Paraguay and Guatemala, remained steadfast in their support for Taiwan. Guatemalan officials reiterated the government's "recognition of Taiwan as an independent nation that shares democratic values."

Over the past two decades, China has slowly carved out a space for itself in Latin America by pouring money into the region, investing in major infrastructure, energy and space projects.

Between 2005 and 2020, the Chinese have invested more than \$130 billion in Latin America, according to the United States Institute of Peace. Trade between China and the region has also shot up, expected to reach more than \$700 billion by 2035.

That investment has translated to rising power for China and a growing number of allies.

In Honduras, that has come in the form of construction of a hydroelectric dam project in central Honduras built by the Chinese company SINOHYDRO with about \$300 million in Chinese government financing.

Meanwhile, in many countries, the U.S. government has not stepped in with similarly sized projects.

While many view the investment as a positive step for nations that often struggle to pull together funds for development, some, like June Teufel, professor of Political Science at the University of Miami, worry about the long-term ripple effects rising Chinese power could have.

Teufel said China is wielding that new influence as "a diplomatic weapon."

In many countries across in Africa and Latin America, Chinese investment has been marred by mounting debt in developing nations. In many cases, infrastructure projects can only be repaired by Chinese companies, racking up a higher bill, said Teufel.

"It's a little bit like the drug dealer saying to the potential customer, the first dose is free," Teufel said. "It gets another country abandoning Taiwan, which is something it has been wanting to do for a long time, depriving Taiwan of all its remaining allies."

**TikTok dismisses calls for Chinese owners to sell stakes**

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WASHINGTON (AP) — TikTok was dismissive Wednesday of reports that the Biden administration was calling for its Chinese owners to sell their stakes in the popular video-sharing app, saying such a move wouldn't help protect national security.

The company was responding to a report in The Wall Street Journal that said the Committee on Foreign Investment in the U.S., part of the Treasury Department, was threatening a U.S. ban on the app unless its owners, Beijing-based ByteDance Ltd., divested.

"If protecting national security is the objective, divestment doesn't solve the problem: a change in ownership would not impose any new restrictions on data flows or access," TikTok spokesperson Maureen Shanahan said. "The best way to address concerns about national security is with the transparent, U.S.-based protection of U.S. user data and systems, with robust third-party monitoring, vetting, and verification, which we are already implementing."

The Journal report cited an anonymous "people familiar with the matter." The Treasury Department and the White House's National Security Council declined to comment.

Late last month, the White House gave all federal agencies 30 days to wipe TikTok off all government devices.

The Office of Management and Budget called the guidance a "critical step forward in addressing the risks presented by the app to sensitive government data." Some agencies, including the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security and State, already have restrictions in place. The White House already does not allow TikTok on its devices.

Congress passed the "No TikTok on Government Devices Act" in December as part of a sweeping government funding package. The legislation does allow for TikTok use in certain cases, including for national security, law enforcement and research purposes.

Meanwhile, lawmakers in both the House and Senate have been moving forward with legislation that would give the Biden administration more power to clamp down on TikTok.

Rep. Mike McCaul, the chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee, has been a vocal critic of the app, saying the Chinese Communist Party is using it to "manipulate and monitor its users while it gobbles up Americans' data to be used for their malign activities."

"Anyone with TikTok downloaded on their device has given the CCP a backdoor to all their personal information. It's a spy balloon into your phone," the Texas Republican said.

TikTok remains extremely popular and is used by two-thirds of teens in the U.S. But there is increasing concern that Beijing could obtain control of American user data that the app has obtained.

The company has been dismissive of the ban for federal devices and has noted that it is developing security and data privacy plans as part of the Biden administration's ongoing national security review.

## Long-used US abortion pill under threat in Texas lawsuit

By SEAN MURPHY and MATTHEW PERRONE Associated Press

AMARILLO, Texas (AP) — A federal judge in Texas raised questions Wednesday about a Christian group's effort to overturn the decades-old U.S. approval of a leading abortion drug, in a case that could threaten the country's most common method for ending pregnancies.

Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk heard more than four hours of debate over the Alliance Defending Freedom's request to revoke or suspend the Food and Drug Administration's approval of mifepristone. Such a step would be an unprecedented challenge to the FDA and its authority in deciding which drugs to permit on the market.

Kacsmaryk said he would rule "as soon as possible," without giving any clear indication of how he might decide and leaving open the possibility that the standard regimen for medication abortions might soon be curtailed throughout the country.

Mifepristone, when combined with a second pill, was approved in 2000 and is used to end pregnancies until their 10th week. It has been increasingly prescribed since last summer's U.S. Supreme Court ruling overturning Roe v. Wade.

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The Texas lawsuit has become the latest high-stakes legal battle over access to abortion since the question of its legality was returned to the states.

Kacsmaryk, who was appointed by former president Donald Trump, saved some of his most pointed questions for attorneys representing the conservative group, which filed its lawsuit in Amarillo in anticipation of receiving a favorable ruling.

"Explain to me why this court has that sweeping authority?" Kacsmaryk asked, in reference to the group's request for a preliminary order pulling mifepristone from the market.

The judge also questioned whether the group had the legal standing to obtain a pretrial ruling on the drug, grilling both sides on U.S. Supreme Court cases that set out when such extraordinary relief is allowed.

Still, the judge also posed questions suggesting he was considering how he might draft a preliminary injunction in the plaintiffs' favor, at one point asking the alliance's lawyers if the issue of standing had been addressed by appellate courts. At another point, he told them that their outline for the order of their arguments "tracks the elements for an injunction nicely."

Lawyers representing the FDA argued that pulling mifepristone would upend reproductive care for women across the U.S.

"An injunction here would interfere with the interests of every state in the country" said Julie Straus Harris of the U.S. Justice Department, which represented the FDA.

Straus Harris and her colleagues also questioned whether the alliance — which filed its case on behalf of several anti-abortion doctors — had standing to bring the lawsuit, given that none of the plaintiffs could show the type of harm typically needed for such a legal action.

One of the chief arguments leveled against the FDA in the case is that the agency misused its authority when it originally approved mifepristone.

The FDA reviewed the pill under its so-called accelerated approval program, which was created in the early 1990s to speed access to the first HIV drugs. Since then, it has been used to expedite drugs for cancer and other "serious or life-threatening diseases."

"The plain text is clear it applies to illnesses," argued Erik Baptist, the alliance's lead attorney. "Mifepristone is used to end pregnancies, and pregnancy isn't an illness."

The FDA rejected the group's argument on multiple accounts. First, attorneys said FDA regulations make clear that pregnancy is considered a "medical condition" that can be serious and life-threatening in some cases.

Second, government attorneys said the terms of mifepristone's use were replaced more than a decade ago by subsequent FDA programs created by Congress, rendering the argument irrelevant.

Finally, while the FDA reviewed the drug under its accelerated approval regime, it didn't expedite the drug's review. In fact, approval only came after four years of deliberation. Instead, the FDA used regulatory powers under the accelerated program to add extra safety restrictions to mifepristone.

Legal experts have been deeply skeptical of many of the arguments made by the alliance. And there is essentially no precedent for a lone judge overruling an FDA drug approval decision.

At one point, Kacsmaryk asked the alliance's attorneys about the possibility of suspending mifepristone's approval, without withdrawing it completely.

"Any relief you grant must be complete" and apply nationwide, Baptist said. "The harms of these abortion drugs know no bounds."

Kacsmaryk gave each side two hours to make their arguments — with time for rebuttal — in the high-stakes case. Mifepristone's manufacturer, Danco Laboratories, joined the FDA in arguing to keep the pill available.

A ruling could come at any time. A decision against the drug would be swiftly appealed by the Justice Department, which would also likely seek an emergency stay to stop it from taking effect while the case proceeds.

Members of the Women's March advocacy group rallied outside the courthouse, including one person dressed as a kangaroo to decry the proceedings as a "kangaroo court."

Ultimately, courthouse officials allowed 20 members of the media and 20 members of the general public to attend the hearing.

If Kacsmayk rules against the FDA, it's unclear how quickly access to mifepristone could be curtailed or how the process would work. The FDA has its own procedures for revoking drug approvals that involve public hearings and scientific deliberations, which can take months or years.

If mifepristone is sidelined, clinics and doctors that prescribe the combination say they would switch to using only misoprostol, the other drug used in the two-drug combination. That single-drug approach has a slightly lower rate of effectiveness in ending pregnancies but is widely used in countries where mifepristone is illegal or unavailable.

In addition to challenging mifepristone's approval process, the lawsuit takes aim at several later FDA decisions that loosened restrictions on the pill, including eliminating a requirement that women pick it up in person.

## Mississippi State women win First Four game over Illinois

SOUTH BEND, Ind. (AP) — Jessika Carter had 22 points, nine rebounds and four blocks, Anastasia Hayes added 11 points, seven rebounds and five assists and Mississippi State beat Illinois 70-56 on Wednesday night to begin the NCAA Tournament in a First Four game.

Mississippi State (21-10) advances to the field of 64 to take on No. 6 seed Creighton. The Bulldogs improved to 14-3 in the NCAA Tournament since the 2016-17 season.

Freshman Debreasha Powe scored four points during Mississippi State's 11-2 run to begin the third quarter for a 42-32 lead. The Bulldogs extended it to 52-38 at the end of the quarter after shooting 53%. Courtney Weber sank a 3-pointer to cap a 9-1 run to begin the fourth quarter for a 61-39 lead.

After Mississippi State's lead was cut to 12 points with 4:19 left, Carter scored four straight points to reach 20-plus for the sixth time this season.

JerKaila Jordan also scored 11 points for Mississippi State. Weber finished with eight points.

Carter scored 10 points in the first half to help build a 31-30 lead. Makira Cook scored 11 points for Illinois, which shot 48% from the field but didn't attempt a free throw compared to Mississippi State's 10 of 12.

Cook, averaging 18.2 points per game, scored 21 points and Genesis Bryant added 17 for Illinois (22-10), which had one of the best turnarounds in the country after finishing last season with a record of 7-20. Illinois' first free throws of the game came with 5:35 left in the third quarter.

The Illini were making their eighth trip to the NCAA Tournament, the first since 2003.

## NY bank's demise: Contagion or a problem with the business?

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Signature Bank's collapse came stunningly fast, leaving behind the question of whether there was a fundamental flaw in the way it did business — or if it was just a victim of the panic that spread after the failure of Silicon Valley Bank.

There were few outward signs that Signature Bank was crumbling before the New York Department of Financial Services on Sunday seized the bank's assets and asked the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. take over its operations. The FDIC will run it as Signature Bridge Bank until it can be sold.

But leading up to the takeover, there were calls on social media warning depositors to get their funds out of the bank — and those were followed with a real-life frenzy of withdrawals. There hasn't yet been a public accounting of exactly how much money was withdrawn from the bank with a history of being friendlier than most in the U.S. to the cryptocurrency industry.

"This is not about a particular sector in the case of Signature Bank," Adrienne Harris, superintendent of the Department of Financial Services, said at a media briefing this week. "But we moved quickly to make sure depositors were protected."

The department has described the New York-based financial institution as a "traditional commercial bank," but its two-decade history was certainly unconventional.

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Signature catered to privately held businesses and their owners and executives. It became one of the 20 largest banks in the country that way, based on deposits. By the same measure, it was also the third largest U.S. bank to fail, after Washington Mutual's collapse in 2008 and Silicon Valley Bank's demise last week.

Founded in 2001, it was a major lender to New York City apartment building owners. Clients included former President Donald Trump and the family of his son-in-law and former White House adviser, Jared Kushner. Trump's daughter, Ivanka, who also became a key Trump administration adviser, was on the bank's board of directors from 2011-13, before her father's run for president.

She wasn't the only high-profile member of the board. Over the years, two former members of Congress also served on it: Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, a New York Republican, and Rep. Barney Frank, a Massachusetts Democrat who was a co-author of the landmark 2010 legislation that overhauled regulation of the financial industry.

Signature also made loans to New York taxi drivers seeking medallions, a part of the business that struggled as ride-sharing services such as Uber and Lyft took off and the value of medallions fell.

Unlike most U.S. banks, it was also friendly to cryptocurrency businesses, becoming the first FDIC-insured bank to offer a blockchain-based digital payment platform in 2019.

Partly because of crypto, the bank's deposits grew by 67% in 2021. But last year, as the crypto exchange FTX crashed and declared bankruptcy, Signature pulled back. Its deposits over the year declined by \$17 billion, or nearly 17%. The bulk of that was because of what the bank called a "planned reduction" in crypto-related assets.

In a January earnings release, Joseph DePaolo, then Signature's CEO, said the bank planned to expand geographically.

"We see growth on the horizon," DePaolo said.

Even as he made the prediction, the bank's stock was falling amid crypto struggles and a broader stock market slump. After hitting a high of \$365 in early 2022, the bank's stock plunged to less than one-third that value by late February of this year. The freefall began this month until trading was halted on March 10 with the stock sitting at \$70.

Until it was shuttered, it had been a go-to bank for the crypto industry. Konstantin Shulga, co-founder and CEO of Cyprus-based Finery Markets, which connects cryptocurrency businesses with banks and other businesses, said that many of his firm's clients banked with Signature or Silvergate Capital, which last week voluntarily shut down its bank, warning it could end up "less than well capitalized."

Shulga said that having so few banks catering to the cryptocurrency industry is a problem.

"Because of this concentration, both parties failed," he said. "The clients failed because they were only forced to operate within these two banks, and the banks failed because they were not able to pick up more business from other areas to diversify."

The other problem, he said: Social media accelerated the run on Signature deposits.

Twice in March, Signature took the uncommon step of issuing financial updates as depositors fled Silicon Valley Bank, which was taken over by regulators two days before Signature was.

It said that as of March 8, 80% of its deposits came from "middle market" businesses including law and accounting firms, healthcare companies, manufacturers and real estate management firms.

But it also shared had one key characteristic with Silicon Valley Bank, which was a major player in financing the tech industry: a high portion of uninsured domestic deposits. Signature Bank was fourth in that category as of the end of 2021, with nearly 90% uninsured. Silicon Valley Bank was second. Uninsured deposits are amounts above the FDIC insurance limit of \$250,000 per individual account. Only after the bank was taken over did the FDIC waive the insurance cap for depositors in both it and Silicon Valley Bank.

In the meantime, the bank's reassurances did not slow the withdrawals, which picked up Friday and then continued into the weekend, until regulators stepped in.

Frank, the former congressman, called it "an unjustified total shutdown" and said he believed it came about because New York banking officials wanted to send a message to banks to stay away from the

crypto business. He said that things were stabilizing.

The state regulatory agency that shut it down rejected that claim and pointed to what bank executives did as withdrawals continued to mount.

"The bank failed to provide reliable and consistent data, creating a significant crisis of confidence in the bank's leadership," an agency spokesperson said in an email.

A spokeswoman for the bank's former leaders declined to respond, but Frank said that the numbers were changing because the situation was shifting.

An autopsy of the bank could play out in court.

This week, a shareholder filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Brooklyn claiming the bank and its executives misrepresented the facts with its two assurances this month that the business was healthy.

"We intentionally maintain a high level of capital, strong liquidity profile and solid earnings," Eric Howell, then Signature Bank's president and chief operating officer, said in a statement March 9, three days before the bank in its old form ceased to exist, "which continues to differentiate us from competitors, especially during challenging times."

## Bank fears spread to Europe, drag down shares of big lenders

By JAMEY KEATEN and DAVID McHUGH Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Fears about the world banking system spread to Europe on Wednesday as shares in the globally connected Swiss bank Credit Suisse plunged and dragged down other major European lenders in the wake of bank failures in the United States.

At one point, Credit Suisse shares lost more than a quarter of their value, hitting a record low after the bank's biggest shareholder — the Saudi National Bank — told news outlets that it would not put more money into the Swiss lender, which was beset by problems long before the U.S. banks collapsed.

The turmoil prompted an automatic pause in trading of Credit Suisse shares on the Swiss market and sent shares of other European banks tumbling, some by double digits. That fanned new fears about the health of financial institutions following the recent collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank in the U.S.

Speaking Wednesday at a financial conference in the Saudi capital of Riyadh, Credit Suisse Chairman Axel Lehmann defended the bank, saying, "We already took the medicine" to reduce risks.

When asked if he would rule out government assistance in the future, he said: "That's not a topic. ... We are regulated. We have strong capital ratios, very strong balance sheet. We are all hands on deck, so that's not a topic whatsoever."

But Switzerland's central bank announced late Wednesday that it was prepared to act, saying it would support Credit Suisse if needed. A statement from the bank did not specify whether the support would come in the form of cash or loans or other assistance. At the moment, regulators said, they believe the bank has enough money to meet its obligations.

Credit Suisse then said early Thursday that it is taking measures to shore up its finances, including exercising an option to borrow up to 50 billion francs (\$53.7 billion) from the central bank.

"This additional liquidity would support Credit Suisse's core businesses and clients as Credit Suisse takes the necessary steps to create a simpler and more focused bank built around client needs," the bank said.

A day earlier, Credit Suisse reported that managers had identified "material weaknesses" in the bank's internal controls on financial reporting as of the end of last year. That fanned new doubts about the bank's ability to weather the storm.

Credit Suisse stock dropped about 30%, to about 1.6 Swiss francs (\$1.73), before clawing back to a 24% loss at 1.70 francs (\$1.83) at the close of trading on the SIX stock exchange. At its lowest, the price was down more than 85% from February 2021.

After the joint announcement from the Swiss National Bank and the Swiss financial markets regulator, the shares also made up some ground on Wall Street.

The stock has suffered a long, sustained decline: In 2007, the bank's shares traded at more than 80 francs (\$86.71) each.

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With concerns about the possibility of more hidden trouble in the banking system, investors were quick to sell bank stocks.

France's Societe Generale SA dropped 12% at one point. France's BNP Paribas fell more than 10%. Germany's Deutsche Bank tumbled 8%, and Britain's Barclays Bank was down nearly 8%. Trading in the two French banks was briefly suspended.

The STOXX Banks index of 21 leading European lenders sagged 8.4% following relative calm in the markets Tuesday.

The turbulence came a day ahead of a meeting by the European Central Bank. President Christine Lagarde said last week, before the U.S. failures, that the bank would "very likely" increase interest rates by a half percentage point to fight against inflation. Markets were watching closely to see if the bank carries through despite the latest turmoil.

Credit Suisse is "a much bigger concern for the global economy" than the midsize U.S. banks that collapsed, said Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist for Capital Economics.

It has multiple subsidiaries outside Switzerland and handles trading for hedge funds.

"Credit Suisse is not just a Swiss problem but a global one," he said.

He noted, however, that the bank's "problems were well known so do not come as a complete shock to either investors or policymakers."

The troubles "once more raise the question about whether this is the beginning of a global crisis or just another 'idiosyncratic' case," Kenningham said in a note. "Credit Suisse was widely seen as the weakest link among Europe's large banks, but it is not the only bank which has struggled with weak profitability in recent years."

Leaving a Credit Suisse branch in Geneva, Fady Rachid said he and his wife are worried about the bank's health. He planned to transfer some money to UBS.

"I find it hard to believe that Credit Suisse is going to be able to get rid of these problems and get through it," said Rachid, a 56-year-old doctor.

The Swiss National Bank declined to comment. The Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority did not immediately respond to calls and emails seeking comment.

Investors responded to "a broader structural problem" in banking following a long period of low interest rates and "very, very loose monetary policy," said Sascha Steffen, professor of finance at the Frankfurt School of Finance & Management.

In order to earn some yield, banks "needed to take more risks, and some banks did this more prudently than others."

Now investors are worried that banks "have risks on their balance sheet that they don't know about and therefore have accumulated significant losses that haven't been yet realized."

European finance ministers said this week that their banking system has no direct exposure to the U.S. bank failures.

Europe strengthened its banking safeguards after the global financial crisis that followed the collapse of U.S. investment bank Lehman Brothers in 2008 by transferring supervision of the biggest banks to the central bank, analysts said. The central bank is considered less likely than national supervisors to look the other way at developing problems.

The Credit Suisse parent bank is not part of EU supervision, but it has entities in several European countries that are. Credit Suisse is subject to international rules requiring it to maintain financial buffers against losses as one of 30 so-called globally systemically important banks, or G-SIBs.

Share prices plunged after Saudi National Bank Chairman Ammar Al Khudairy told Bloomberg and Reuters that the bank has ruled out further investments in Credit Suisse to avoid regulations that kick in with a stake above 10%.

The Saudi National Bank has invested some 1.5 billion Swiss francs to acquire a holding just under that threshold.

The Swiss bank has been pushing to raise money from investors and roll out a new strategy to overcome



an array of troubles, including bad bets on hedge funds, repeated shake-ups of its top management and a spying scandal involving Zurich rival UBS.

In an annual report released Tuesday, Credit Suisse said customer deposits fell 41%, or by 159.6 billion francs (\$172.1 billion), at the end of last year compared with a year earlier.

## Utah bans abortion clinics in wave of post-Roe restrictions

By SAM METZ Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Utah's Republican Gov. Spencer Cox signed legislation Wednesday that will by next year ban clinics from providing abortions, setting off a rush of confusion among clinics, hospitals and prospective patients in the deeply Republican state.

Administrators from hospitals and clinics have not publicly detailed their plans to adapt to the new law, adding a layer of uncertainty on top of fear that, if clinics close, patients may not be able to access care at hospitals because of a variety of staffing and cost concerns.

With the law set to start taking effect as early as May 3, both the Planned Parenthood Association of Utah and the Utah Hospital Association declined to detail how the increasingly fraught legal landscape for providers in Utah will affect abortion access.

The turmoil mirrors developments in Republican strongholds throughout the United States that have taken shape since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Roe v. Wade decision, transformed the legal landscape and prompted a raft of lawsuits in at least 21 states.

The Utah lawmakers have previously said the law would protect "the innocent" and "the unborn," adding that they don't think the state needs abortion clinics after the high court overturned the constitutional right to abortion.

Though Planned Parenthood previously warned the law could dramatically hamper its ability to provide abortions, Jason Stevenson, the association's lobbyist, said Wednesday it would now further examine the wording of other provisions of the law that could allow clinics to apply for new licenses to perform hospital-equivalent services.

Based on Planned Parenthood's interpretation, he said in an interview, clinics will no longer be able to provide abortions with their current licenses. They plan to continue, however, to provide the majority of their services such as STI and pregnancy testing and cancer screenings. Stevenson said they were "looking closely" at the licensing options in the law, but would not say whether the clinics would apply at this point.

Jill Vicory, a spokesperson for the Utah Hospital Association, said in an email that it was "too early to comment" on whether hospitals could soon be the only abortion providers in Utah, noting each "will need to make a determination on how they choose to proceed."

If clinics stop providing abortions, experts are concerned hospitals' comparatively higher cost of care and staffing shortages will make it harder to get a legal abortion in Utah, even though the law isn't explicitly a restriction on those seeking them in the state, where they remain legal up to 18 weeks.

Dr. Carole Joffe, a University of California, San Francisco professor who has written about the societal effects of reproductive health care, said stripping clinics of licenses would upend how abortions have been provided for decades. Historically, patients with low-complication pregnancies have mostly received abortions at outpatient clinics, which on average are able to provide them at a lower cost.

"Everything in a hospital is more expensive than in a clinic. Doing an abortion in a hospital, you need more personnel," she said, noting hospitals, with teams of anesthesiologists, physicians and surgeons have historically provided them in emergency scenarios.

Another challenge facing already overburdened hospitals is staffing, Joffe said, both in terms of recruitment and getting personnel to provide abortions. Especially in states where anti-abortion sentiment runs strong, many physicians or nurses at hospitals may not want to provide them, she added.

"You have to draw from a pool that may or may not be sympathetic to abortion, unlike in a clinic where you don't go to work at unless you're committed to abortion being part of health care," Joffe said.

Abortion advocates say confusion stems from unclear language about the de-licensing process. The law

prohibits clinics from obtaining new licenses after May 2 and institutes a full ban on Jan. 1, 2024. However, advocates worry about a separate provision in the 1,446-line bill that specifies under state law that abortions may only be performed in hospitals.

The clinic-focused legislation has also raised questions about which kinds of facilities are best equipped to provide specialty care to patients regardless of their socioeconomic status or location.

If clinics stop providing abortions — as early as May or as late as next year — it could reroute thousands of patients to hospitals and force administrators to devise new policies for elective abortions. To do so would require expanding their services beyond emergency procedures they have previously provided, prompting questions about the shift's impact on capacity, staffing, waitlists and costs. Roughly 2,800 abortions were provided in Utah last year.

The Utah Hospital Association said no hospitals provided elective abortions in the state last year.

The new restrictions are most likely to affect those seeking to terminate pregnancies via medication, which accounts for the majority of abortions in Utah and the United States. Abortion medication is approved up to 10 weeks of pregnancy, mostly prescribed at clinics and since a pandemic-era FDA rule change, increasingly offered via telemedicine.

The new law takes on added significance amid legal limbo surrounding other abortion laws that have been signed in Utah.

Last year's Supreme Court ruling triggered two previously passed pieces of legislation— a 2019 ban on abortion after 18 weeks and a 2020 ban on abortions regardless of trimester, with several exceptions including for instances of risk to maternal health as well as rape or incest reported to the police. The Planned Parenthood Association of Utah sued over the 2020 ban, and in July, a state court delayed implementing it until legal challenges could be resolved. The 18-week ban has since been de facto law.

Abortion-access proponents have decried this year's clinic ban as a back door that anti-abortion lawmakers are using to limit access while courts deliberate. If abortions were restricted regardless of trimester to the exceptional circumstances, closures would have less wide-ranging implications for patients pursuing elective abortions from zero to 18 weeks of pregnancy.

The law also clarifies the definition of abortion to address legal liability concerns providers voiced about the way exceptions are worded in state law — a provision that the governor and Republican lawmakers called a compromise.

## Here is what's at stake in abortion medication case

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge heard arguments Wednesday in a lawsuit that poses a threat to the nationwide availability of a leading abortion medication. The hearing comes as a conservative Christian group seeks to reverse federal approval of the drug mifepristone.

A two-pill combination of mifepristone and another drug is the most common form of abortion in the U.S. and the ruling would affect states where abortion is legal as well as those that outlaw it. The case has raised concerns about court transparency and so-called judge shopping.

Here's a look at some of the legal issues surrounding the case:

HOW DID THE ABORTION PILL CHALLENGE START?

Abortion opponents who helped overturn *Roe v. Wade* filed a lawsuit in November, asking a judge in Texas to reverse the approval of mifepristone.

Research shows that medication-induced abortions are safe and effective, and they were approved by the Food and Drug Administration more than 20 years ago.

But the group, Alliance Defending Freedom, argued in the lawsuit that the FDA process was flawed for mifepristone. It also took aim at more recent changes that have eased access to the drug.

The suit was filed in Amarillo, Texas, which meant that it was assigned to U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, a former attorney at a Christian law firm who previously wrote critically about *Roe*. He was appointed by former President Donald Trump and confirmed over fierce opposition from Democrats.

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## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Medication is the most common form of abortion in the U.S., according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights. It's become more available as the FDA allowed it to be prescribed online and sent through the mail. Demand continued as states began banning abortion after Roe was overturned and more women traveled for access, or sought medication online.

If Kacsmaryk reverses the approval of mifepristone, it could restrict access nationwide. Such a ruling would be an unprecedented challenge to the FDA, which approved mifepristone in combination with a second pill, misoprostol, as a safe and effective method for ending a pregnancy in 2000.

That would be "nothing short of catastrophic," a group of 22 Democratic-led states said in court documents filed in the case. Another group of 22 Republican states filed briefs supporting the reversal. They argue the ability to order pills by mail undermines their laws banning abortion.

## WHY IS THIS IN THE HANDS OF ONE TEXAS JUDGE?

Kacsmaryk is a federal judge and one of the major tasks of the U.S. court system has always been deciding whether laws and policy are constitutional. That means any judge weighing a case challenging a federal law or policy could make a decision that has ripple effects across the nation.

Lawyers on either side of a case can appeal a ruling, however, and federal appeals courts can block or overturn a decision. In this case, an appeal would go to the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals, which also leans conservative. It upheld Kacsmaryk's decision in another high-profile case requiring the Biden administration to continue the "Remain in Mexico" immigration policy implemented by Trump. The ruling was later overturned by the Supreme Court.

The case has also raised concerns about judge shopping, a term for litigants seeking to file cases in front of judges they consider sympathetic to their cause. It's a tactic that's been utilized by groups across the ideological spectrum, but the volume of cases filed before Kacsmaryk and other Texas judges has raised concerns among experts.

## WHAT SET OFF TRANSPARENCY ALARM BELLS?

Kacsmaryk set the first hearing in the closely watched case on a conference call with attorneys. He also asked them to for the "courtesy" of not publicizing the upcoming arguments, according to a court transcript.

He said he planned to delay making the hearing public until the evening before, making it difficult for many to attend because Amarillo is hours away from major cities. Such a delay is highly unusual in the American judicial system, where hearing notices are typically quickly made public and often scheduled weeks or months in advance.

After news reports about the call, the hearing was placed on the public docket a day and a half before it was scheduled.

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

A ruling in the case could come any time after the arguments conclude. A decision against the FDA would almost certainly be swiftly appealed by the Justice Department.

A ruling reversing approval 20 years later is all but unprecedented, so it's not clear exactly what would happen next or how quickly access might be curtailed. If mifepristone is sidelined, clinics and doctors that prescribe the combination say they would switch to using only misoprostol, the other drug in the two-drug combination, an approach that is slightly less effective.

## **FACT FOCUS: Claims link 'woke' policies to bank's demise**

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

As Wall Street reels from the swift demise of Silicon Valley Bank — the biggest American bank failure since the 2008 financial meltdown — some social media users are honing in on a single culprit: its socially aware, or "woke," agenda.

But the Santa Clara-based institution's professed commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI, wasn't a driver of the bank's collapse, say banking and financial experts. Its poor investment strategies and a customer base prone to make devastating bank runs were.

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Here's a closer look at the facts.

CLAIM: Silicon Valley Bank failed because it focused on "woke" policies such as diversity, equity and inclusion.

THE FACTS: The nation's 16th largest bank collapsed because of poor investment and risk strategies that left the bank with insufficient cash to weather a mass withdrawal of assets from its largely tech sector customers, who have been particularly hard hit in the current economy, financial and banking experts explain.

There's also no evidence to support claims that the bank's stated commitment to supporting and investing in diversity and sustainability efforts played a role in its demise, they say.

Social media posts in the wake of the collapse have nonetheless pointed critically to any number of diversity efforts at the bank, such as the launch of a month-long LGBTQ pride campaign or donations to Black Lives Matter and other racial justice causes.

Some even cited the bank's 2022 Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) report, which includes a commitment to provide at least \$5 billion in loans, investments and other financing for sustainability efforts by 2027.

"The WOKE agenda coming from SVB is in a large part to blame for their FAILURE," declared a Twitter user in a post that had been liked or shared nearly 4,000 times as of Wednesday. "The insane left-wing agenda is BANKRUPTING our future. Go woke, GET BROKE!"

But the institution's fall had all the hallmarks of a "classic run on the bank," Peter Cohan, a professor of management practice at Babson College in Wellesley, Massachusetts, said in an email. "A focus on DEI had nothing to do with the collapse of SVB."

Rodney Ramcharan, a finance professor at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business, agreed, dismissing the more than \$70 million in tax deductible donations the bank reportedly made to BLM and other groups over the years as "trivial and irrelevant."

Nothing in the bank's publicly available financial disclosure reports suggests any damaging spending on diversity initiatives, he added. If there had been issues they would be included in reports to regulatory agencies such as the Federal Reserve.

"The bank would have suffered loan losses—writing down bad loans made to 'woke' firms," Ramcharan explained in an email. "So this is not a matter of opinion, but actual data. Instead, there are no unusual loan losses or loan loss provisioning."

The bank's \$5 billion commitment to sustainability efforts represents a promise to make future loans and isn't indicative of financial investments that led to the bank's failure today, said William Chittenden, a professor at Texas State University's McCoy College of Business Administration.

"If we were in 2027 and SVB had billions in defaulted 'sustainability loans,' then I would agree that the failure could be attributed to the types of loans they made," he wrote in an email. "But to say the bank failed for loans they likely haven't even made yet makes no sense to me."

What is clear from financial disclosure documents is that the bank, which was founded in 1983, had not properly managed the risk on large investments it had made in recent years as it rapidly grew, experts agreed.

From 2019 to 2021, SVB purchased tens of billions of dollars in mortgage backed securities, U.S. Treasury bonds and other relatively conservative investments at low interest rates, explained Aaron Klein, a financial expert at the Brookings Institution, a D.C.-based think tank. But the bank didn't hedge those bets with other investments.

As interest rates rose rapidly this past year, the value of those investments declined just as the bank's customers were increasingly drawing down on their funds to make ends meet in a worsening economy, he and other experts said. The bank was forced to sell \$21 billion securities at a nearly \$2 billion loss.

"Bottom line: The bank failed because of liquidity issues," Chittenden wrote in an email. "The failure had nothing to do with the quality of any 'woke' bank's loans."

Another crucial factor in the bank's demise was its client base, according to Klein.

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The bank served mostly technology workers and venture capital-backed companies, including some of the industry's best-known brands. But nearly all of them were considered uninsured depositors, meaning their accounts contained more than the \$250,000 covered by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation in the event of a bank's failure, he said.

"Uninsured depositors are more likely to run, making the bank inherently less stable," Klein wrote.

Ironically, despite all the claims of being a "woke bank," SVB wasn't even all that diverse, at least at critical leadership positions, noted Peter Conti-Brown, a professor of financial regulation at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.

The bank's executive team was all white and mostly male and its board of directors had just one Black member and one LGBTQ member, according to the bank's website.

Spokespersons for the bank didn't respond to requests for comment, and the FDIC and other federal and state regulatory agencies declined to comment.

"There's nothing unusual in SVB's focus on diversifying away from such homogeneity - banks and businesses of all shapes and sizes have done the same," Conti-Brown wrote in an email, referring to the company's leadership team. "SVB failed because its bankers were bad at being bankers, something that no extra time away from meetings about diversity would have fixed." —

This is part of AP's effort to address widely shared misinformation, including work with outside companies and organizations to add factual context to misleading content that is circulating online. Learn more about fact-checking at AP.

## **NBA suspends Ja Morant 8 games for video showing gun in club**

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

MIAMI (AP) — Ja Morant will be back with the Memphis Grizzlies next week, after the NBA handed the All-Star guard an eight-game suspension without pay Wednesday and saying his displaying a firearm at a club in suburban Denver earlier this month was "conduct detrimental to the league."

Morant missed his sixth consecutive game when the Grizzlies played in Miami on Wednesday night. He will miss the next two games — at San Antonio on Friday and home against Golden State on Saturday — then be eligible to return on Monday when Memphis plays Dallas, though he is not expected to play that night.

The games he already missed will count toward the suspension, and Morant will forfeit about \$669,000 in salary.

"Ja's conduct was irresponsible, reckless and potentially very dangerous," NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said in a statement. "It also has serious consequences given his enormous following and influence, particularly among young fans who look up to him."

Silver met with Morant in New York before announcing the league's decision. Other league officials, as well as representatives from the National Basketball Players Association, were part of that meeting.

Grizzlies coach Taylor Jenkins said he doesn't expect Morant to play Monday, saying the team is "going to be respectful of the time off he's had."

"There will be a quick ramp-up period after that," Jenkins said. "Obviously, he hasn't been playing basketball for almost two weeks now."

The league's investigation, which started almost immediately after the March 4 incident in which Morant livestreamed himself on Instagram, found that he was "holding a firearm in an intoxicated state" — but did not prove that the gun was owned by Morant "or was displayed by him beyond a brief period."

The league investigation also did not find that Morant had the gun with him on Memphis' flight to Denver, or that he possessed the gun while in any NBA facility. Police in Colorado said last week that they looked into the circumstances surrounding the video and concluded that there was no reason to charge Morant with a crime.

Morant spoke with ESPN for an interview that was to air later Wednesday night, and said the gun was not his.

"He has expressed sincere contrition and remorse for his behavior," Silver said. "Ja has also made it clear

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to me that he has learned from this incident and that he understands his obligations and responsibility to the Memphis Grizzlies and the broader NBA community extend well beyond his play on the court."

The Grizzlies played at Denver on March 3. At 5:19 a.m. the next day, Morant started a livestream from inside a strip club called Shotgun Willies in Glendale, Colorado. The video quickly went viral, and trouble escalated.

The Grizzlies initially said Morant would miss at least two games. Hours later, Morant said in a statement distributed through the agency that represents him that he takes "full responsibility" for his actions and that he was going to "take some time away to get help." ESPN reported that Morant sought counseling at a facility in Florida; Jenkins said Wednesday that "the Florida piece is done for now."

"There's going to be ongoing stuff over the next couple days that he's going to be probably be working on," Jenkins said.

The two-game absence was followed by the team announcing last week that Morant would miss at least four more games, a stretch that concludes Wednesday.

"Now we know the plan moving forward," Jenkins said.

Morant, a two-time All-Star, is averaging 27.1 points and 8.2 assists per game this season for a Memphis team that entered Wednesday in the No. 2 spot in the Western Conference.

This marked at least the second time in recent weeks that Morant was the subject of a league investigation. Morant's actions were investigated after a Jan. 29 incident in Memphis that he said led to a friend of his being banned from home games for a year.

That incident followed a game against the Indiana Pacers; citing unnamed sources, The Indianapolis Star and USA Today reported that multiple members of the Pacers saw a red dot pointed at them, and The Athletic reported that a Pacers security guard believed the laser was attached to a gun.

The NBA confirmed that unnamed individuals were banned from the arena but said its investigation found no evidence that anyone was threatened with a weapon.

Morant and a close friend also are involved in a civil lawsuit brought after an incident at Morant's home last summer, in which a 17-year-old alleged that they assaulted him.

"I don't condone any type of violence," Morant said in the ESPN interview. "But I take full responsibility for my actions. I made a bad mistake and I can see the image that I painted over myself with my recent mistakes. But in the future, I'm going to show everybody who Ja really is, what I'm about and change this narrative."

And when Morant returns, the team knows there will be questions, as well as likely some hostile comments coming in road arenas. The Grizzlies plan to prepare Morant for those moments as best they can.

"We sit down and talk to him and we help guide him through this process," Jenkins said. "That's going to be our focal point, on the court, off the court. Support and accountability, that's what we're focused on, not just in this recent couple of weeks but moving forward. Obviously things are going to be different, but it's going to be great to have him back with the team. The team's going to be able to rally around him as he's been rallying around a difficult situation. We're going to take it one day at a time."

## **EXPLAINER: Next steps for Black reparations in San Francisco**

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — San Francisco supervisors have backed the idea of paying reparations to Black people, but whether members will agree to lump-sum payments of \$5 million to every eligible person or to any of the more than 100 other recommendations made by an advisory committee won't be known until later this year.

The idea of Black reparations is not new, but the federal government's promise of granting 40 acres and a mule to newly freed slaves was never realized. It wasn't until George Floyd, a Black man, was killed in police custody in 2020 that reparations movements began spreading in earnest across the country.

The state of California and the cities of Boston and San Francisco are among jurisdictions trying to atone not just for chattel slavery, but for decades of racist policies and laws that systemically denied Black Americans access to property, education and the ability to build generational wealth.

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## WHAT IS THE ARGUMENT FOR REPARATIONS IN SAN FRANCISCO?

Black migration to San Francisco soared in the 1940s because of shipyard work, but racially restrictive covenants and redlining limited where people could live. When Black residents were able to build a thriving neighborhood in the Fillmore, government redevelopment plans in the 1960s forced out residents, stripped them of their property and decimated Black-owned businesses, advocates say.

Today, less than 6% of Black residents in San Francisco are Black yet they make up nearly 40% of the city's homeless population.

Supporters include the San Francisco NAACP, although it said the board should reject the \$5 million payments and focus instead on reparations through education, jobs, housing, health care and a cultural center for Black people in San Francisco. The president of the San Francisco branch is the Rev. Amos C. Brown, who sits on both the statewide and San Francisco reparations panels.

## WHAT IS THE ARGUMENT AGAINST REPARATIONS?

Critics say California and San Francisco never endorsed chattel slavery, and there is no one alive today who owned slaves or was enslaved. It is not fair for municipal taxpayers, some of whom are immigrants, to shoulder the cost of structural racism and discriminatory government policies, critics say.

An estimate from Stanford University's Hoover Institution, which leans conservative, has said it would cost each non-Black family in San Francisco at least \$600,000 in taxes to pay for the costliest of the recommendations: The \$5 million per-person payout, guaranteed income of at least \$97,000 a year for 250 years, personal debt elimination and converting public housing into condos to sell for \$1.

A 2022 Pew Research Center survey found 68% of U.S. respondents opposed reparations compared with 30% in favor. Nearly 80% of Black people surveyed supported reparations. More than 90% of Republicans or those leaning Republican opposed reparations while Democrats and those leaning Democratic were divided.

## HOW WILL SAN FRANCISCO PAY FOR THIS?

It's not clear. The advisory committee that made the recommendations says it is not its job to figure out how to finance San Francisco's atonement and repair.

That would be up to local politicians, two of whom expressed interest Tuesday in taking the issue to voters. San Francisco Supervisor Matt Dorsey said he would back a ballot measure to enshrine reparations in the San Francisco charter as part of the budget. Shamann Walton, the supervisor leading the charge on reparations, supports that idea.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE OTHER REPARATIONS RECOMMENDATIONS?

Recommendations in education include establishing an Afrocentric K-12 school in San Francisco; hiring and retaining Black teachers; mandating a core Black history and culture curriculum; and offering cash to at-risk students for hitting educational benchmarks.

Recommendations in health include free mental health, prenatal care and rehab treatment for impoverished Black San Franciscans, victims of violent crimes and formerly incarcerated people.

The advisory committee also recommends prioritizing Black San Franciscans for job opportunities and training, as well as finding ways to incubate Black businesses.

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

There is no deadline for supervisors to agree on a path forward. The board next plans to discuss reparations proposals in September, after the San Francisco African American Reparations Advisory Committee issues a final report in June.

## WHAT ABOUT REPARATIONS FROM THE STATE?

In 2020, California became the first state to form a reparations task force. But nearly two years into its work, it still has yet to make key decisions on who would be eligible for payment and how much. The task force has a July 1 deadline to submit a final report of its reparations recommendations, which would then be drafted into legislation for lawmakers to consider.

The task force has spent multiple meetings discussing time frames and payment calculations for five harms experienced by Black people, including government taking of property, housing discrimination and

homelessness and mass incarceration. The task force is also debating state residency requirements.

Previously, the state committee voted to limit financial reparations to people descended from enslaved or freed Black people in the U.S. as of the 19th century.

## **El Salvador: 2,000 more to prison, vows will 'never return'**

By MARCOS ALEMAN Associated Press

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — El Salvador's government sent 2,000 more suspects to a huge new prison built especially for gang members Wednesday, and the justice minister vowed that "they will never return" to the streets.

The tough statement came as the administration of President Nayib Bukele asked for yet another extension of an anti-gang emergency measures that would take the crackdown into its 13th month.

Over the last 354 days, about 65,000 people have been arrested in the antigang campaign. Human rights groups say that there have been many instances of prisoner abuses and that innocent people have been swept up in police raids.

The government announced the mass inmate transfer with a slickly produced video posted on social media. It showed prisoners forced to run barefoot and handcuffed down stairways and over bare ground, clad only in regulation white shorts. They were then forced to sit with their legs locked in closely clumped groups in cells.

Gustavo Villatoro, the government's minister for justice and peace, said the suspected gang members would never return to the streets, even though about 57,000 of those arrested are still awaiting formal charges or a trial.

"They are never going to return to the communities, the neighborhoods, the barrios, the cities of our beloved El Salvador," Villatoro said.

Only about 3,500 people swept up in the crackdown have been released so far.

Bukele, who revels in taking a contrarian stance and once described himself as "world's coolest dictator," wrote in his Twitter account that "there are now 4,000 gang members in the world's most criticized prison."

Dubbed the Terrorism Confinement Center, the prison was inaugurated in February and already holds about 2,000 suspected gang members. It is a sprawling campus 45 miles (72 kilometers) east of San Salvador, the capital, that could eventually house up to 40,000 inmates.

Congress must still approve the extension of the antigang measures, but legislators are expected to do, as they have done a dozen times before.

Bukele requested the special powers to pursue the gangs last March 27, following a surge in gang violence in which 62 people were killed in a single day across the country. Streets gangs like MS-13 and Barrio 18 have long killed and extorted money from residents in El Salvador.

The measures have reduced killings and have proved widely popular among most Salvadorans. Officials say that since the crackdown began, there have been 200 days with no homicides at all.

Under the special powers, the right to association is suspended, police don't have to tell someone being arrested the reason or inform them of their rights. Someone arrested does not have a right to a lawyer and can be held for 15 days without seeing a judge rather than the previous 72 hours.

The local rights group Cristosal documented 3,344 cases of human rights abuses in the first 11 months of the state of emergency.

## **Stormy Daniels meets with prosecutors investigating Trump**

By JENNIFER PELTZ and DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Porn actor Stormy Daniels met Wednesday with prosecutors who are investigating hush money paid to her on former President Donald Trump's behalf, her lawyer said Wednesday.

The news emerged as Michael Cohen, a former Trump attorney who orchestrated the payment, was giving a second day of testimony before a New York grand jury looking into the matter.



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The \$130,000 payment was made in 2016, as Trump's first presidential campaign was in its final weeks and Daniels was negotiating to go on television to air her claims of a sexual encounter with him a decade earlier. Cohen made the payment and arranged another payout to a different woman — at Trump's direction, he says.

Daniels met with and answered questions from Manhattan prosecutors and is willing to be a witness, her attorney, Clark Brewster, tweeted. The adult film actor tweeted her thanks to him for "helping me in our continuing fight for truth and justice."

The Manhattan district attorney's office declined to comment.

Later Wednesday, Cohen emerged from what he expected to be his final day of testimony. He said he would continue to provide prosecutors "any information and any cooperation that they that they need."

Now estranged from Trump, Cohen said he isn't out for vindication or revenge.

"This is not about him. This is about holding accountability, truth to power, and everything else in between," Cohen said.

Daniels has said she had a 2006 sexual encounter with Trump that she didn't want, but didn't say no to. Trump says it never happened. The former president's current lawyer said Trump was invited to testify before the grand jury but has no plans to do so.

Federal prosecutors in 2018 charged Cohen with campaign finance crimes related to payments to Daniels and Playboy model Karen McDougal, arguing that the payouts amounted to impermissible gifts to Trump's election effort.

McDougal, who was paid \$150,000, alleged she had an affair with the married Trump in 2006-07. He denied it.

Cohen pleaded guilty, served prison time and was disbarred. Federal prosecutors never charged Trump with any crime.

Manhattan prosecutors have been examining whether any state laws were broken in connection with the payments or the way Trump's company compensated Cohen for his work to keep the women's allegations quiet.

Cohen and federal prosecutors said the company paid him \$420,000 to reimburse him for the payment to Daniels and to cover bonuses and other supposed expenses. The company classified those payments internally as legal expenses.

Falsifying business records can be a misdemeanor under state law, or a felony if the fudging of paperwork is done in connection with a more serious crime.

Trump and his lawyers have said he was extorted into paying the money to Daniels and should be considered the victim in the investigation. Daniels and the lawyers who helped arrange the payment have denied extorting anyone.

## Trump allies file ethics complaint against Gov. DeSantis

By JILL COLVIN and BRENDAN FARRINGTON Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Allies of former President Donald Trump have filed a complaint with the Florida Commission on Ethics accusing Gov. Ron DeSantis, a leading potential 2024 primary rival, of violating campaign finance and ethics rules with a "shadow" run for the White House.

The 15-page complaint filed Wednesday by MAGA Inc., a Trump-supporting super PAC, and shared with The Associated Press, asks the commission to investigate Florida's Republican leader for allegedly "leveraging his elected office and breaching his associated duties in a coordinated effort to develop his national profile, enrich himself and his political allies, and influence the national electorate."

It says DeSantis is "already a de facto candidate for President of the United States," citing the governor's meetings with donors, outreach by allies to potential staff and his courting of influential Republicans in early-voting states, among other efforts. The complaint asks the nine-member commission — five of whose members were appointed by DeSantis — to punish the governor by having him suspended from office, publicly censured or fined.

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DeSantis communications director Taryn Fenske dismissed the accusations and questioned the motives of the complaint. "Adding this to the list of frivolous and politically motivated attacks. It's inappropriate to use state ethics complaints for partisan purposes," she said in a statement.

Ken Cuccinelli, the former Trump Homeland Security official who recently launched a political action committee supporting DeSantis' potential run, accused Trump allies of playing "establishment games."

"I'm shocked, but not surprised," he said in a statement. "During my tenure as Attorney General of Virginia, I saw complaints all the time and I can tell when spaghetti is just thrown at the wall."

The letter, which was first reported by NBC News, comes as Trump has stepped up his criticism of DeSantis, whom the ex-president's campaign sees as his most serious rival for the 2024 GOP nomination. Trump has tried to belittle DeSantis with nicknames and has focused on the governor's past policy positions, including Florida's early COVID-19 restrictions and his votes on Social Security while he was a member of Congress.

Trump himself faced similar criticism before announcing his own candidacy in November, accused of violating federal campaign laws by raising and spending money for a run ahead of a formal 2024 campaign launch. He was never reprimanded or fined as a result.

While DeSantis has not yet formally announced a 2024 campaign, he is widely expected to do so after Florida's legislative session ends in May. In the meantime, he has traveled to early-voting states to promote his new book and has met with donors. His team has also held informal conversations with prospective campaign staff.

Ethics Commission spokesperson Lynn Blaise said the agency is not allowed to acknowledge any complaints received until a complaint reaches a point where it can be made public.

In addition to the five commission members appointed by DeSantis, the remaining four were appointed by the Senate president and House speaker — both allies of the governor.

Complaints often don't see the light of day unless they are released by the people filing them. The commission does not make complaints or material public until they are dismissed or probable cause determined, in order to protect the privacy of their subjects.

If the commission finds the complaint is valid, it could issue a fine or a reprimand, but cannot remove an elected official from office. It could recommend that the governor suspend an elected official for violating ethics laws, but that would require DeSantis to take action against himself if a violation were found.

The process is often used by campaigns to raise questions about opponents by making complaints public, although many are resolved or dismissed without the commission finding violations. It is illegal in Florida to file a complaint with malicious intent and false claims. The commission can fine violators, who can also be ordered to pay a defendant's legal fees.

Republican Party of Florida Chairman Christian Ziegler, who must remain neutral in a primary, declined to comment on the complaint, but said he's glad DeSantis is traveling the country promoting his success in Florida.

"We're killing it in Florida," he said. "There's great value to having the governor on the road sharing the Florida blueprint with other states. It's going to make the country better, but it's also going to help bring in more pro-freedom residents and businesses to our state."

## Garcetti confirmed as India ambassador after 20-month fight

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD, MARY CLARE JALONICK and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti won confirmation Wednesday from a divided Senate as the nation's next ambassador to India, more than a year and a half after he was first nominated by President Joe Biden and after weathering doubts about his truthfulness in a sexual harassment scandal involving a City Hall adviser.

The 52-42 vote gave the administration a long-sought victory with several Republicans breaking party discipline for the vote that they said was critical to fill one of the country's highest-profile diplomatic posts.

"It's a national security imperative to immediately have an ambassador in place in India. We can't afford to wait any longer," said Indiana Sen. Todd Young, one of the Republican crossover votes.

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The day began with uncertain prospects for Garcetti, a two-term, progressive Democrat first nominated to the diplomatic post by Biden in July 2021.

With several Democrats defecting, Garcetti's fate rested with Republican senators in a chamber often divided along partisan lines. He secured seven GOP votes, more than enough to make up for the Democratic breakaways.

Kansas Republican Roger Marshall said having an ambassador in place in India was vital in advancing relations among members of the "quad" — the U.S., India, Australia and Japan, which he said puts pressure on China.

"We don't agree on all the different policies he did as mayor, but I think he's a good person at heart and he would be a good ambassador," Marshall said. He said on the allegations: "He answered my questions adequately."

At the White House, spokesperson Olivia Dalton said Biden "believes that we have a crucial and consequential partnership with India and that Mayor Garcetti will make a strong and effective ambassador."

The vacancy in the ambassadorship had left a significant diplomatic gap for the administration at a time of rising global tensions, including China's increasingly assertive presence in the Pacific region and Russia's war with Ukraine.

India, the world's most populous democracy, is continuing to buy oil from Russia, while Western governments move to limit fossil fuel earnings that support Moscow's budget, its military and its invasion of Ukraine. Russia also provides the majority of India's military hardware.

The nomination had been freighted with questions about what the former mayor knew, and when, about sexual harassment allegations against his friend and once-close adviser, Rick Jacobs. A lawsuit alleges that Jacobs frequently harassed one of the then-mayor's police bodyguards while Garcetti ignored the abuse or laughed it off.

Garcetti, the son of former Los Angeles district attorney Gil Garcetti, has repeatedly denied the claims. Jacobs has called the allegations against him "pure fiction." The case is scheduled to go to trial later this year.

At a Senate committee hearing in December 2021, Garcetti said, "I never witnessed, nor was it brought to my attention, the behavior that's been alleged. ... If it had been, I would have immediately taken action to stop that."

Wednesday's vote tested Democratic loyalty to Biden, and also measured assessments of Garcetti's judgment and trustworthiness, stemming from the City Hall allegations that shadowed him in the #MeToo era.

"I think we can find somebody that will do the job better," said Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio, one of the Democrats who opposed Garcetti.

Garcetti also failed to win over Democrat Mark Kelly of Arizona, who said he had "serious concerns."

Rachel Rizzo, a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, said she sensed frustration about the lack of an ambassador during a recent trip to India. She said it gave "an impression that the relationship isn't important."

"It really points to the internal dysfunction in the U.S. Congress at the moment, and it makes it very hard for us to send the messages that we're trying to send when it looks to our diplomatic partners that we don't have our house in order," she said.

Last May, a top Senate Republican released an investigation that concluded Garcetti "likely knew or should have known" that Jacobs was alleged to be sexually harassing city employees, a finding that appeared to contradict the mayor's assertion that he was unaware of any inappropriate behavior. The 23-page report released by Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa found it was "extremely unlikely" that the mayor would not have been aware.

The White House called that report a partisan smear.

In a final push to stop the nomination, Grassley released a statement Tuesday saying his office identified at least 19 people who said they either witnessed inappropriate behavior by Jacobs or were victims of it.

"On the one hand, the Biden administration says it supports victims," Grassley wrote. "Yet, on the other hand, the Biden administration supports a nominee who enables misconduct that creates more victims."

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The legal nonprofit Whistleblower Aid, which sought to defeat the nomination, said the vote “will have a chilling effect on future attempts to hold enablers and perpetrators to account and cause victims and witnesses to think twice about the risks they are taking in coming forward.”

The nomination, first announced in July 2021, cleared the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in January 2022 but was not considered by the full Senate. Biden renominated Garcetti early this year, and the White House has defended him as a well-qualified candidate.

On a politically divided vote, the committee again advanced the nomination to the full Senate early this month, though Jim Risch of Idaho, the top Republican on the panel, said that “new evidence” had raised questions about Garcetti’s judgment and prompted him to oppose the nomination.

Garcetti’s confirmation follows a contentious tenure at Los Angeles City Hall framed by rising homelessness, the pandemic and high crime rates as well as sexual harassment and corruption scandals. The Los Angeles area, once known for boundless growth, has seen its population decline.

Garcetti took office in 2013 with a “back to basics” agenda that centered on fixing L.A.’s notoriously cratered streets and sidewalks. But those early ambitions faded as out-of-control homeless encampments transformed the city and then the government shuttered businesses, restaurants and schoolrooms — and shed hundreds of thousands of jobs — in the depths of the pandemic.

Still, the former mayor has been credited with continuing a transit buildup in a city choked with traffic and establishing tougher earthquake safety standards for thousands of buildings.

An Ivy Leaguer and Rhodes Scholar, he spent two decades in city government either as mayor or a city councilman and took a circuitous path toward the diplomatic corps. Ambassadorships are frequently a reward for political supporters.

Garcetti considered a 2020 White House run but later became part of Biden’s inner circle, emerging as a widely discussed possibility to join the Cabinet. He took himself out of the running after many of the plum jobs had been filled, saying the coronavirus crisis at the time made it impossible for him to step away from City Hall.

## US and Russia ratchet up rhetoric over downing of drone

By ELENA BECATOROS and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia and the United States ratcheted up their confrontational rhetoric Wednesday over a U.S. surveillance drone that encountered Russian warplanes and crashed near Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula, which the Kremlin has illegally annexed. At the same time, the two countries’ defense chiefs opened a dialogue about the incident.

The Kremlin said the flight proved again that Washington is directly involved in the fighting in Ukraine and added that Moscow would try to recover the drone’s wreckage from the Black Sea. U.S. officials said the incident showed Russia’s aggressive and risky behavior and pledged to continue their surveillance.

Russia has long voiced concern about U.S. surveillance flights near its borders, but Tuesday’s incident signaled Moscow’s increasing readiness to raise the ante as tensions soar between the two nuclear powers. It reflected the Kremlin’s appetite for brinkmanship that could further destabilize the situation and lead to more direct confrontations.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who said the incident was part of a “pattern of aggressive, risky and unsafe actions by Russian pilots in international airspace,” spoke to his Russian counterpart, Sergei Shoigu, on Wednesday for the first time in five months.

“It’s important that great powers be models of transparency and communication, and the United States will continue to fly and to operate wherever international law allows,” Austin told reporters in Washington.

Army Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who also appeared at the briefing, said, “We know that the intercept was intentional. We know that the aggressive behavior was intentional,” but whether the Russian warplane’s collision with the MQ-9 Reaper drone was intentional was still unclear.

The Russian Defense Ministry said in its report of the call with Austin that Shoigu noted the U.S. had provoked the incident by ignoring flight restrictions the Kremlin had imposed due to its military operation

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in Ukraine and also blamed "the intensification of intelligence activities against the interests of the Russian Federation." Such U.S. actions "are fraught with escalation of the situation in the Black Sea area," it said, warning that Russia "will respond in kind to all provocations."

Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of Russia's Security Council, said in televised remarks the drone incident was "another confirmation" of direct U.S. involvement in the Ukraine conflict. The Kremlin has repeatedly said the United States and other NATO members have become direct war participants by supplying weapons and intelligence to the Kyiv government and pressuring it not to negotiate peace.

Patrushev, a confidant of President Vladimir Putin, also said Russia would search for the drone's debris, but added, "I don't know if we can recover them or not, but we will certainly have to do that."

U.S. officials said Russia dispatched ships to try to recover the wreckage, which Milley said were likely submerged 4,000 to 5,000 feet (1,200 to 1,500 meters) deep.

The U.S. has no vessels in the Black Sea because Turkey closed the Bosphorus Strait to warships in 2022, except for those returning to home port.

U.S. National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said the drone was in international airspace when the Russian warplane struck its propeller. U.S. officials accused Russia of trying to intercept the unmanned aircraft, although its presence over the Black Sea — a strategic military and economic area for both Russia and Ukraine — was not uncommon.

"It is also not uncommon for the Russians to try to intercept them," Kirby said, adding that such an encounter "does increase the risk of miscalculations, misunderstandings."

Kirby said the U.S. "took steps to protect the information and to protect, to minimize any effort by anybody else to exploit that drone for useful content."

Sergei Naryshkin, head of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service, said Russia is capable of recovering the wreckage.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov repeated the Defense Ministry's statement that Russian jets didn't use their weapons or hit the drone. He repeated his description of U.S.-Russia relations as at their lowest point but added that "Russia has never rejected a constructive dialogue, and it's not rejecting it now."

In Washington, Russian Ambassador Anatoly Antonov expressed concern about "the unacceptable actions of the United States military in the close proximity to our borders."

"What do they do thousands of miles away from the United States?" he said in remarks his embassy released. "The answer is obvious -- they gather intelligence which is later used by the Kyiv regime to attack our armed forces and territory."

He noted "it is important that the lines of communication should remain open," emphasizing that "Russia does not seek confrontation and stands for pragmatic cooperation in the interests of the peoples of our countries."

While encounters between Russian and NATO aircraft are not unusual — before the Ukraine invasion, NATO planes were involved in an annual average of 400 intercepts with Russian planes — the war has heightened the significance of such incidents.

"The last thing that anybody should want is for this war in Ukraine to escalate to become something between the United States and Russia," Kirby said, speaking Wednesday on CNN. "We've been working very, very hard throughout the beginning of this conflict ... to make sure that it doesn't escalate."

The secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, Oleksiy Danilov, tweeted the drone incident was "a signal from Putin that he is ready to expand the conflict zone, with drawing other parties in."

In another tussle, the U.K. Defense Ministry said British and German fighter jets were scrambled Tuesday to intercept a Russian aircraft near Estonian airspace. The U.K. and Germany are conducting joint air policing missions in Estonia as part of NATO's bolstering of its eastern flank.

The ministry said the Typhoon jets responded after a Russian refueling aircraft failed to communicate with Estonian air traffic control. The Russian plane did not enter the airspace of Estonia, a NATO member.

In Ukraine, at least three civilians were killed and another 23 wounded in strikes over the previous 24 hours, the presidential office said.

In partially occupied Donetsk province, where much of the heaviest fighting has been concentrated, Gov.

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Pavlo Kyrylenko said 14 cities and villages were shelled. That included Kramatorsk, where some Ukrainian forces are based.

In embattled Bakhmut, where a Russian assault has continued for months, Ukrainian forces have successfully fought for northern parts of the city, Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar said.

In the northeastern Kharkiv region, one person was killed and another was wounded in Vovchansk, a city near the border with Russia. Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said Russian forces also hit a civilian area in Kharkiv city.

Mayor Ihor Terekhov said on Ukrainian television a boarding school and an apartment building were damaged.

In the south, Russian forces shelled the city of Kherson seven times in the last 24 hours, hitting an infrastructure facility and residential buildings and wounding four people. In Dnipropetrovsk province, Russian forces shelled Nikopol and Marhanets, towns located across a river from the shut-down Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.

In another development, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy replaced more governors. Without giving a reason, Zelenskyy dismissed the heads of the Luhansk, Odesa and Khmelnytskyi regions.

Volodymyr Fesenko, an analyst at the Penta Kyiv center, said the dismissals "are associated either with a low level of work efficiency or with criticism of abuses."

## Rodgers plans to play for Jets in 2023, awaits Packers' move

By STEVE MEGARGEE AP Sports Writer

Aaron Rodgers said Wednesday he intends to play for the New York Jets in 2023 after 18 seasons in Green Bay and the four-time NFL MVP quarterback is waiting for the Packers to trade him.

The 39-year-old Rodgers, speaking during an appearance on "The Pat McAfee Show" on YouTube and Sirius XM, said he believes the Packers want to move on and make 2020 first-round draft pick Jordan Love their starting quarterback.

"At this point, as I sit here, I think since Friday I've made it clear that my intention was to play and my intention was to play for the New York Jets," Rodgers said. "I haven't been holding anything up at this point. It's been compensation the Packers are trying to get for me, kind of digging their heels in."

Packers president and CEO Mark Murphy has acknowledged the team granted the Jets permission to talk to Rodgers, the face of the franchise since Hall of Famer Brett Favre was traded to the Jets in 2008. The Jets sent a contingent that reportedly included owner Woody Johnson, coach Robert Saleh and general manager Joe Douglas to Rodgers' home in Southern California last week.

Rodgers expressed his appreciation for his 18 seasons in Green Bay but added that it's time for the Packers "to do the right thing."

"I have nothing but love in my heart for every Packer fan and everybody who works in the organization," Rodgers said. "My life is better because of my time in Green Bay. But we've just got to look at the reality. They want to move on. They don't want me to come back and that's fine. They're ready to move on with Jordan. That's awesome. Jordan's going to be a great player."

The Packers declined to comment on Rodgers' remarks, which follow days of speculation that his time in Green Bay might be done.

Murphy spoke of Rodgers in the past tense while discussing the quarterback's future with Green Bay TV station WBAY last week.

"Very few players play for only one team," Murphy told WBAY. "Obviously Brett had a great career. Aaron had a great career here. Regardless of what happens, Aaron will be in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He'll be in our Hall of Fame. We'll bring him back, retire his number. This is just one of the things that we go through as a team. We want to try to achieve something that's good for both Aaron and us."

In a separate interview that aired Friday during a broadcast of the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association girls basketball championships on Green Bay TV station WCWF, Murphy said he would honor a trade request if Rodgers made one.

"It's trying to find what he wants and what we want, and hopefully we can find a win-win situation," Murphy said.

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Rodgers had said at the end of the 2022 season that he would need time to decide whether to return to the Packers, request a trade or retire. He said Wednesday he had discussions with Packers officials regarding his future shortly after the team wrapped up a 8-9 season that ended a string of three straight NFC North titles.

"Everything that I was told in the week that I was in Green Bay was: 'Take as long as you want and we want you to retire a Packer. If you want to come back and play, obviously the door is wide open,'" Rodgers said. "That was the information I was going on."

As he pondered his future, Rodgers spent multiple days last month on a isolation retreat in Oregon, where he said he stayed alone in a room in total darkness.

Rodgers said he was 90% leaning toward retirement at the time of the retreat. When he was done with it, he said, he noticed a difference in the Packers' approach toward his future with the franchise.

"Now when I came out of the darkness, something changed," Rodgers said. "I'm not exactly sure what that was, but something changed. ... I realized there had been a little bit of a shift. I heard from multiple people that I trust around the league — players mostly — that there was some shopping going on, that they were interested in actually moving me."

Rodgers said that made him realize the Packers probably didn't want him back.

"It was clear to me at that point, that although the Packers were going to say the right thing publicly, that they were ready to move on," he said. "I don't know what changed that or what moved that — if they just said, 'Hey, we need to make a decision here because he hasn't made a decision here yet.' Again, there's no victims here. I'm not sitting here as a victim."

The Jets' interest in Rodgers has been apparent as they seek to end the NFL's longest active playoff drought. They lost their final six games while going 7-10 last season and haven't reached the postseason since 2010.

Their new offensive coordinator is Nathaniel Hackett, who earned raves from Rodgers while coordinating Green Bay's offense from 2019-21.

"There's a lot of reasons why the Jets are attractive," Rodgers said Wednesday. "But there's one coach that has meant as much to me as any coach I've ever had. And he happens to be the coordinator there."

Saleh and Johnson both expressed their interest in adding a veteran quarterback to a roster that already features one of the league's best defenses.

If Rodgers ends up with the Jets, it would be a case of history repeating itself.

The Packers sent a soon-to-be 39-year-old Favre to the Jets in 2008, a move that ushered in Rodgers' arrival as Green Bay's starting quarterback. Favre won three MVPs with Green Bay during his Hall of Fame career.

Rodgers backed up Favre for three seasons after the Packers selected him out of California with the 24th overall pick in the 2005 draft. Love has backed up Rodgers for three seasons since the Packers traded up to take the former Utah State quarterback with the 26th overall pick.

Rodgers' future has been the subject of speculation ever since the Packers selected Love. Rodgers acknowledged the selection caught him by surprise. One year later, he skipped the Packers' mandatory minicamp in a standoff with Packers management.

But the two sides eventually patched things up.

Rodgers signed a contract extension with the Packers last year after producing a second straight MVP season.

When he was asked last June at the Packers' mandatory minicamp whether he expected to finish his career in Green Bay, Rodgers replied, "Yes. Definitely."

Those plans apparently changed after a 2022 season in which he had his lowest passer rating as a starter (91.1) and threw 12 interceptions, his highest total since 2008. Now Rodgers believes his time in Green Bay is done.

"Coming to this reality has been really bittersweet," Rodgers said. "I was drafted by Green Bay. I ... love that city, love that organization. Always going to have love for that organization. But the facts are right now they want to move on, and now so do I."

## Bank runs used to be slow. The digital era sped them up

By KEN SWEET and STAN CHOE The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A bank run conjures images of “It’s a Wonderful Life,” with anxious customers crammed shoulder to shoulder, desperately pleading with a harried George Bailey to hand over their money.

The failure of Silicon Valley Bank last week had the panic but few other similarities, instead taking place on Twitter, message boards, mobile phones and bank websites.

What made the failure of Silicon Valley Bank unique compared to past failures of large banks was how quickly it collapsed. Last Wednesday afternoon, the \$200 billion bank announced a plan to raise fresh capital; by Friday morning it was insolvent and under government control.

Regulators, policymakers and bankers are looking at the role that digital messaging and social media may have played in the collapse, and whether banks are entering an age when the psychological behavior behind a bank run — mass fear from depositors of losing their savings — may be amplified and go viral quicker than bank officers and regulators can successfully respond.

“It was a bank sprint, not a bank run, and social media played a central role in that,” said Michael Imerman, a professor at the Paul Merage School of Business at the University of California-Irvine.

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation estimates that customers withdrew \$40 billion — one fifth of Silicon Valley Bank’s deposits — in just a few hours, prompting the agency to shut down the bank before 12 p.m. ET, instead of waiting until the close of business, which is typical operating procedure for regulators when a bank runs short of money.

Some other well-known bank failures, such as IndyMac or Washington Mutual in 2008 or Continental Illinois in the 1980s, only happened after days or weeks of reports indicated those banks faced deep financial difficulties. Then a run occurred and regulators stepped in.

The Silicon Valley Bank run was, in many ways, the first of the digital era. Few depositors lined up at a branch. Instead, they used bank apps and phone calls to access their money in minutes. Venture capitalists and business owners described the early stages of the Silicon Valley run being led by private message boards or Slack channels, where entrepreneurs were encouraged to withdraw their funds.

Silicon Valley Bank also was unique in being almost entirely exposed to one community — the tech industry, venture capital and startups. When this close-knit community of depositors talked to one another — using digital channels to do so quickly — the bank likely became more vulnerable to rumors and a run. This was a risk outside of the growth of social media, industry experts said.

Sam Altman, CEO of Open AI, tweeted: “the speed of the world has changed. things can unwind fast. people talk fast. people move money fast.”

While the withdrawals initially may have been orderly, they became a full-on bank run Thursday evening after the news spilled over to Twitter that billionaire venture capitalist Peter Thiel had advised his invested companies to close their accounts with Silicon Valley Bank.

“If you are not advising your companies to get the cash out, then you are not doing your job as a Board Member or as a Shareholder. Daily life in startups is risky enough, don’t play with your lifeline...,” wrote Mark Tluszc, the CEO of Europe-based investment firm Mangrove, on Twitter that Friday morning.

For David Murray, the warning of the first bank run of the social-media age came in a one-sentence email. He’s a co-founder of Confirm.com, an employee performance management company in San Francisco that had millions of dollars sitting in accounts at Silicon Valley Bank.

Murray received a terse email Thursday morning saying that a run was underway there and recommending everyone pull their money out immediately. The email came from an investor whom Murray hears from so infrequently that his co-founder wondered if it was a phishing attempt or other scam.

After verifying the email and seeing the steep drop in the stock price of the bank’s parent company, SVB Financial, Murray and his colleagues rushed to withdraw the company’s money. Instead of heading to a branch, they quickly pulled up a webpage and logged in. It took a few tries, but they eventually moved every cent to an account at a different bank within a half hour.

Murray could see fear rising among other startup companies in real time.



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"We have a trusted network of founders" of startup companies who communicate with each other over Slack, Murray said. "Normally these chat groups are dead. But that day, all the Slack groups were lit up."

As depicted with the fictional Building and Loan in "It's a Wonderful Life," runs on a bank often start off as a rumor and can quickly devolve to a tribal-like collective fear that sends depositors clamoring for their money, even when nothing is wrong. Because a bank run can happen at random and is hard to stop once started, the U.S. government created the FDIC to stop future bank runs under the premise that depositors' funds would be insured.

Between 1930 and 1933, during the Great Depression, roughly 9,000 banks failed. Since the FDIC's creation in 1933, bank runs have become much rarer. According to the FDIC, there were 562 bank failures between 2001 and 2023, with the vast majority of those happening during the 2007-2009 recession.

The entire banking industry is now grappling with the fact that they could be the next target of a social media-fueled bank run. The hive-like behavior is similar to what happened during the 2021 "meme stock" boom where companies were targeted by groups of mostly retail investors, although in that case groups of investors were using social media to push stocks higher.

Silicon Valley Bank's failure dominated social media platforms for days. Several prominent investors issued bombastic predictions that if the federal government did not step in to make all Silicon Valley Bank depositors whole — both insured and uninsured — there would be more bank runs on Monday.

In the end, Washington capitulated. Under the plan announced by U.S. regulators on Sunday, depositors at Silicon Valley Bank were able to access all their money. A new Federal Reserve program will allow banks to post certain high-quality securities as collateral and borrow from a government emergency fund. Both Treasury and Federal Reserve officials told reporters over the weekend that the programs were created in part due to concerns further bank runs — fueled by social media — could occur.

"The last several days represent a unique incident fueled by misinformation on social media and are not indicative of the health of our industry," said Lindsey Johnson, president of the Consumer Bankers Association, in a statement.

For policymakers, there doesn't appear to be any immediate solution. One possibility that's been around for decades — also depicted in "It's a Wonderful Life" — is the idea of a bank holiday where regulators close a bank for a few days to allow for cooler heads to prevail.

On Monday after the government stepped in to backstop the banking system, it seemed like a portion of the technology community had become aware of their ability to cause mass panic in finance and should be more careful when posting about the potential health of banks.

"In the age of social media, if you have a big enough platform and yell loud enough about a bank run, you might eventually be correct. Doesn't make it right," wrote Logan Bartlett with Redpoint Ventures.

## Here's how an AI tool may flag parents with disabilities

By SALLY HO and GARANCE BURKE Associated Press

PITTSBURGH (AP) — For the two weeks that the Hackneys' baby girl lay in a Pittsburgh hospital bed weak from dehydration, her parents rarely left her side, sometimes sleeping on the fold-out sofa in the room.

They stayed with their daughter around the clock when she was moved to a rehab center to regain her strength. Finally, the 8-month-old stopped batting away her bottles and started putting on weight again.

"She was doing well and we started to ask when can she go home," Lauren Hackney said. "And then from that moment on, at the time, they completely stonewalled us and never said anything."

The couple was stunned when child welfare officials showed up, told them they were negligent and took their daughter away.

"They had custody papers and they took her right there and then," Lauren Hackney recalled. "And we started crying."

More than a year later, their daughter, now 2, remains in foster care. The Hackneys, who have developmental disabilities, are struggling to understand how taking their daughter to the hospital when she refused to eat could be seen as so neglectful that she'd need to be taken from her home.

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They wonder if an artificial intelligence tool that the Allegheny County Department of Human Services uses to predict which children could be at risk of harm singled them out because of their disabilities.

The U.S. Justice Department is asking the same question. The agency is investigating the county's child welfare system to determine whether its use of the influential algorithm discriminates against people with disabilities or other protected groups, The Associated Press has learned. Later this month, federal civil rights attorneys will interview the Hackneys and Andrew Hackney's mother, Cynde Hackney-Fierro, the grandmother said.

Lauren Hackney has attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder that affects her memory, and her husband, Andrew, has a comprehension disorder and nerve damage from a stroke suffered in his 20s. Their baby girl was just 7 months old when she began refusing to drink her bottles. Facing a nationwide shortage of formula, they traveled from Pennsylvania to West Virginia looking for some and were forced to change brands. The baby didn't seem to like it.

Her pediatrician first reassured them that babies sometimes can be fickle with feeding and offered ideas to help her get back her appetite, they said.

When she grew lethargic days later, they said, the same doctor told them to take her to the emergency room. The Hackneys believe medical staff alerted child protective services after they showed up with a baby who was dehydrated and malnourished.

That's when they believe their information was fed into the Allegheny Family Screening Tool, which county officials say is standard procedure for neglect allegations. Soon, a social worker appeared to question them, and their daughter was sent to foster care.

Over the past six years, Allegheny County has served as a real-world laboratory for testing AI-driven child welfare tools that crunch reams of data about local families to try to predict which children are likely to face danger in their homes. Today, child welfare agencies in at least 26 states and Washington, D.C., have considered using algorithmic tools, and jurisdictions in at least 11 have deployed them, according to the American Civil Liberties Union.

The Hackneys' story — based on interviews, internal emails and legal documents — illustrates the opacity surrounding these algorithms. Even as they fight to regain custody of their daughter, they can't question the "risk score" Allegheny County's tool may have assigned to her case because officials won't disclose it to them. And neither the county nor the people who built the tool have ever explained which variables may have been used to measure the Hackneys' abilities as parents.

"It's like you have an issue with someone who has a disability," Andrew Hackney said in an interview from their apartment in suburban Pittsburgh. "In that case ... you probably end up going after everyone who has kids and has a disability."

As part of a yearlong investigation, the AP obtained the fields of data underpinning several algorithms deployed by child welfare agencies, including some marked "CONFIDENTIAL," offering rare insight into the mechanics driving these emerging technologies. Among the factors they have used to calculate a family's risk, whether outright or by proxy: race, poverty rates, disability status and family size. They include whether a mother smoked before she was pregnant and whether a family had previous child abuse or neglect complaints.

What they measure matters. A recent analysis by ACLU researchers found that when Allegheny's algorithm flagged people who accessed county services for mental health and other behavioral health programs, that could add up to three points to a child's risk score, a significant increase on a scale of 20.

Allegheny County spokesman Mark Bertolet declined to address the Hackney case and did not answer detailed questions about the status of the federal probe or critiques of the data powering the tool, including by the ACLU.

"As a matter of policy, we do not comment on lawsuits or legal matters," Bertolet said in an email.

Justice Department spokeswoman Aryele Bradford declined to comment.

NOT MAGIC

Child welfare algorithms plug vast amounts of public data about local families into complex statistical models to calculate what they call a risk score. The number that's generated is then used to advise social

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workers as they decide which families should be investigated, or which families need additional attention — a weighty decision that can sometimes mean life or death.

A number of local leaders have tapped into AI technology while under pressure to make systemic changes, such as in Oregon during a foster care crisis and in Los Angeles County after a series of high-profile child deaths in one of the nation's largest county child welfare systems.

LA County's Department of Children and Family Services Director Brandon Nichols says algorithms can help identify high-risk families and improve outcomes in a deeply strained system. Yet he could not explain how the screening tool his agency uses works.

"We're sort of the social work side of the house, not the IT side of the house," Nichols said in an interview. "How the algorithm functions, in some ways is, I don't want to say is magic to us, but it's beyond our expertise and experience."

Nichols and officials at two other child welfare agencies referred detailed questions about their AI tools to the outside developers who created them.

In Larimer County, Colorado, one official acknowledged she didn't know what variables were used to assess local families.

"The variables and weights used by the Larimer Decision Aide Tool are part of the code developed by Auckland and thus we do not have this level of detail," Jill Maasch, a Larimer County Human Services spokeswoman, said in an email, referring to the developers.

In Pennsylvania, California and Colorado, county officials have opened up their data systems to the two academic developers who select data points to build their algorithms. Rhema Vaithianathan, a professor of health economics at New Zealand's Auckland University of Technology, and Emily Putnam-Hornstein, a professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Social Work, said in an email that their work is transparent and that they make their computer models public.

"In each jurisdiction in which a model has been fully implemented we have released a description of fields that were used to build the tool, along with information as to the methods used," they said by email.

A 241-page report on the Allegheny County website includes pages of coded variables and statistical calculations.

Vaithianathan and Putnam-Hornstein's work has been hailed in reports published by UNICEF and the Biden administration alike for devising computer models that promise to lighten caseworkers' loads by drawing from a set of simple factors. They have described using such tools as a moral imperative, insisting that child welfare officials should draw from all data at their disposal to make sure children aren't maltreated.

Through tracking their work across the country, however, the AP found their tools can set families up for separation by rating their risk based on personal characteristics they cannot change or control, such as race or disability, rather than just their actions as parents.

In Allegheny County, a sprawling county of 1.2 million near the Ohio border, the algorithm has accessed an array of external data, including jail, juvenile probation, Medicaid, welfare, health and birth records, all held in a vast countywide "data warehouse." The tool uses that information to predict the risk that a child will be placed in foster care two years after a family is first investigated.

County officials have told the AP they're proud of their cutting-edge approach, and even expanded their work to build another algorithm focused on newborns. They have said they monitor their risk scoring tool closely and update it over time, including removing variables such as welfare benefits and birth records.

Vaithianathan and Putnam-Hornstein declined the AP's repeated interview requests to discuss how they choose the specific data that powers their models. But in a 2017 report, they detailed the methods used to build the first version of Allegheny's tool, including a footnote that described a statistical cutoff as "rather arbitrary but based on trial and error."

"This footnote refers to our exploration of more than 800 features from Allegheny's data warehouse more than five years ago," the developers said by email.

That approach is borne out in their design choices, which differ from county to county.

In the same 2017 report, the developers acknowledged that using race data didn't substantively improve the model's accuracy, but they continued to study it in Douglas County, Colorado, though they ultimately

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opted against including it in that model. To address community concerns that a tool could harden racial bias in Los Angeles County, the developers excluded people's criminal history, ZIP code and geographic indicators, but have continued to use those data points in the Pittsburgh area.

When asked about the inconsistencies, the developers pointed to their published methodology documents. "We detail various metrics used to assess accuracy — while also detailing 'external validations,'" the developers said via email.

When Oregon's Department of Human Services built an algorithm inspired by Allegheny's, it factored in a child's race as it predicted a family's risk, and also applied a "fairness correction" to mitigate racial bias. Last June, the tool was dropped entirely due to equity concerns after an AP investigation in April revealed potential racial bias in such tools.

Justice Department attorneys cited the same AP story last fall when federal civil rights attorneys started inquiring about additional discrimination concerns in Allegheny's tool, three sources told the AP. They spoke on the condition of anonymity, saying the Justice Department asked them not to discuss the confidential conversations. Two said they also feared professional retaliation.

## IQ TESTS, PARENTING CLASS

With no answers on when they could get their daughter home, the Hackneys' lawyer in October filed a federal civil rights complaint on their behalf that questioned how the screening tool was used in their case.

Over time, Allegheny's tool has tracked if members of the family have diagnoses for schizophrenia or mood disorders. It's also measured if parents or other children in the household have disabilities, by noting whether any family members received Supplemental Security Income, a federal benefit for people with disabilities. The county said that it factors in SSI payments in part because children with disabilities are more likely to be abused or neglected.

The county also said disabilities-aligned data can be "predictive of the outcomes" and it "should come as no surprise that parents with disabilities ... may also have a need for additional supports and services." In an emailed statement, the county added that elsewhere in the country, social workers also draw on data about mental health and other conditions that may affect a parent's ability to safely care for a child.

The Hackneys have been ordered to take parenting classes and say they have been taxed by all of the child welfare system's demands, including IQ tests and downtown court hearings.

People with disabilities are overrepresented in the child welfare system, yet there's no evidence that they harm their children at higher rates, said Traci LaLiberte, a University of Minnesota expert on child welfare and disabilities.

Including data points related to disabilities in an algorithm is problematic because it perpetuates historic biases in the system and it focuses on people's physiological traits rather than behavior that social workers are brought in to address, LaLiberte said.

The Los Angeles tool weighs if any children in the family have ever gotten special education services, have had prior developmental or mental health referrals or used drugs to treat mental health.

"This is not unique to caseworkers who use this tool; it is common for caseworkers to consider these factors when determining possible supports and services," the developers said by email.

Before algorithms were in use, the child welfare system had long distrusted parents with disabilities. Into the 1970s, they were regularly sterilized and institutionalized, LaLiberte said. A landmark federal report in 2012 noted parents with psychiatric or intellectual disabilities lost custody of their children as much as 80 percent of the time.

Across the U.S., it's extremely rare for any child welfare agencies to require disabilities training for social workers, LaLiberte's research has found. The result: Parents with disabilities are often judged by a system that doesn't understand how to assess their capacity as caregivers, she said.

The Hackneys experienced this firsthand. When a social worker asked Andrew Hackney how often he fed the baby, he answered literally: two times a day. The worker seemed appalled, he said, and scolded him, saying babies must eat more frequently. He struggled to explain that the girl's mother, grandmother and aunt also took turns feeding her each day.

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## FOREVER FLAGGED

Officials in Allegheny County have said that building AI into their processes helps them “make decisions based on as much information as possible,” and noted that the algorithm merely harnesses data social workers can already access.

That can include decades-old records. The Pittsburgh-area tool has tracked whether parents were ever on public benefits or had a history with the criminal justice system — even if they were minors at the time, or if it never resulted in charges or convictions.

The AP found those design choices can stack the deck against people who grew up in poverty, hardening historical inequities that persist in the data, or against people with records in the juvenile or criminal justice systems, long after society has granted redemption. And critics say that algorithms can create a self-fulfilling prophecy by influencing which families are targeted in the first place.

Allegheny County provided researchers at the ACLU and the nonprofit Human Rights Data Analysis Group three months of data from 2021, when the tool was live, allowing the team to audit how the algorithm had actually affected families’ scores.

“These predictors have the effect of casting permanent suspicion and offer no means of recourse for families marked by these indicators,” the researchers found. “They are forever seen as riskier to their children.”

As child welfare algorithms become more common, parents who have experienced social workers’ scrutiny fear the models won’t let them escape their pasts, no matter how old or irrelevant their previous scrapes with the system may have been.

Charity Chandler-Cole, who serves on the Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families, is one of them. She landed in foster care as a teen after being arrested for shoplifting underwear for her younger sister. Then as an adult, she said, social workers once showed up at her apartment after someone spuriously reported that a grand piano was thrown at her nephew who was living at her home — even though they didn’t own such an instrument.

The local algorithm could tag her for her prior experiences in foster care and juvenile probation, as well as the unfounded child abuse allegation, Chandler-Cole says. She wonders if AI could also properly assess that she was quickly cleared of any maltreatment concerns, or that her nonviolent offense as a teen was legally expunged.

“A lot of these reports lack common sense,” said Chandler-Cole, now the mother of four and CEO of an organization that works with the court system to help children in foster care. “You are automatically putting us in these spaces to be judged with these labels. It just perpetuates additional harm.”

Chandler-Cole’s fellow commissioner Wendy Garen, by contrast, argues “more is better” and that by drawing on all available data, risk scoring tools can help make the agency’s work more thorough and effective.

## GLOBAL INFLUENCE

Even as their models have come under scrutiny for their accuracy and fairness, the developers have started new projects with child welfare agencies in Northampton County, Pennsylvania, and Arapahoe County, Colorado. The states of California and Pennsylvania, as well as New Zealand and Chile, have also asked them to do preliminary work.

And as word of their methods has spread in recent years, Vaithianathan has given lectures highlighting screening tools in Colombia and Australia. She also recently advised researchers in Denmark and officials in the United Arab Emirates on how to use technology to target child services.

“Rhema is one of the world leaders and her research can help to shape the debate in Denmark,” a Danish researcher said on LinkedIn last year, regarding Vaithianathan’s advisory role related to a local child welfare tool that was being piloted.

Last year, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funded a national study, co-authored by Vaithianathan and Putnam-Hornstein, that concluded that their overall approach in Allegheny could be a model for other places.

HHS’ Administration for Children and Families spokeswoman Debra Johnson declined to say whether

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the Justice Department's probe would influence her agency's future support for an AI-driven approach to child welfare.

Especially as budgets tighten, cash-strapped agencies are desperate to find more efficient ways for social workers to focus on children who truly need protection. At a 2021 panel, Putnam-Hornstein acknowledged that "the overall screen-in rate remained totally flat" in Allegheny since their tool had been implemented.

Meanwhile, foster care and the separation of families can have lifelong developmental consequences for the child.

A 2012 HHS study found 95% of babies who are reported to child welfare agencies go through more than one caregiver and household change during their time in foster care, instability that researchers noted can itself be a form of trauma.

The Hackneys' daughter already has been placed in two foster homes and has now spent more than half of her short life away from her parents as they try to convince social workers they are worthy.

Meanwhile, they say they're running out of money in the fight for their daughter. With barely enough left for food from Andrew Hackney's wages at a local grocery store, he had to shut off his monthly cell phone service. They're struggling to pay for the legal fees and gas money needed to attend appointments required of them.

In February, their daughter was diagnosed with a disorder that can disrupt her sense of taste, according to Andrew Hackney's lawyer, Robin Frank, who added that the girl has continued to struggle to eat, even in foster care.

All they have for now are twice-weekly visits that last a few hours before she's taken away again. Lauren Hackney's voice breaks as she worries her daughter may be adopted and soon forget her own family. They say they yearn to do what many parents take for granted — put their child to sleep at night in her own bed.

"I really want to get my kid back. I miss her, and especially holding her. And of course, I miss that little giggly laugh," Andrew Hackney said, as his daughter sprang toward him with excitement during a recent visit. "It hurts a lot. You have no idea how bad."

## San Francisco board open to reparations with \$5M payouts

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Payments of \$5 million to every eligible Black adult, the elimination of personal debt and tax burdens, guaranteed annual incomes of at least \$97,000 for 250 years and homes in San Francisco for just \$1 a family.

These were some of the more than 100 recommendations made by a city-appointed reparations committee tasked with the thorny question of how to atone for centuries of slavery and systemic racism. And the San Francisco Board of Supervisors hearing the report for the first time Tuesday voiced enthusiastic support for the ideas listed, with some saying money should not stop the city from doing the right thing.

Several supervisors said they were surprised to hear pushback from politically liberal San Franciscans apparently unaware that the legacy of slavery and racist policies continues to keep Black Americans on the bottom rungs of health, education and economic prosperity, and overrepresented in prisons and homeless populations.

"Those of my constituents who lost their minds about this proposal, it's not something we're doing or we would do for other people. It's something we would do for our future, for everybody's collective future," said Supervisor Rafael Mandelman, whose district includes the heavily LGBTQ Castro neighborhood.

The draft reparations plan, released in December, is unmatched nationwide in its specificity and breadth. The committee hasn't done an analysis of the cost of the proposals, but critics have slammed the plan as financially and politically impossible. An estimate from Stanford University's Hoover Institution, which leans conservative, has said it would cost each non-Black family in the city at least \$600,000.

Tuesday's unanimous expressions of support for reparations by the board do not mean all the recommendations will ultimately be adopted, as the body can vote to approve, reject or change any or all of them. A final committee report is due in June.

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Some supervisors have said previously that the city can't afford any major reparations payments right now given its deep deficit amid a tech industry downturn.

Tinisch Hollins, vice-chair of the African American Reparations Advisory Committee, alluded to those comments, and several people who lined up to speak reminded the board they would be watching closely what the supervisors do next.

"I don't need to impress upon you the fact that we are setting a national precedent here in San Francisco," Hollins said. "What we are asking for and what we're demanding for is a real commitment to what we need to move things forward."

The idea of paying compensation for slavery has gained traction across cities and universities. In 2020, California became the first state to form a reparations task force and is still struggling to put a price tag on what is owed.

The idea has not been taken up at the federal level.

In San Francisco, Black residents once made up more than 13% of the city's population, but more than 50 years later, they account for less than 6% of the city's residents — and 38% of its homeless population. The Fillmore District once thrived with Black-owned night clubs and shops until government redevelopment in the 1960s forced out residents.

Fewer than 50,000 Black people still live in the city, and it's not clear how many would be eligible. Possible criteria include having lived in the city during certain time periods and descending from someone "incarcerated for the failed War on Drugs."

Critics say the payouts make no sense in a state and city that never enslaved Black people. Opponents generally say taxpayers who were never slave owners should not have to pay money to people who were not enslaved.

Advocates say that view ignores a wealth of data and historical evidence showing that long after U.S. slavery officially ended in 1865, government policies and practices worked to imprison Black people at higher rates, deny access to home and business loans and restrict where they could work and live.

Justin Hansford, a professor at Howard University School of Law, says no municipal reparations plan will have enough money to right the wrongs of slavery, but he appreciates any attempts to "genuinely, legitimately, authentically" make things right. And that includes cash, he said.

"If you're going to try to say you're sorry, you have to speak in the language that people understand, and money is that language," he said.

John Dennis, chair of the San Francisco Republican Party, does not support reparations although he says he'd support a serious conversation on the topic. He doesn't consider the board's discussion of \$5 million payments to be one.

"This conversation we're having in San Francisco is completely unserious. They just threw a number up, there's no analysis," Dennis said. "It seems ridiculous, and it also seems that this is the one city where it could possibly pass."

The board created the 15-member reparations committee in late 2020, months after California Gov. Gavin Newsom approved a statewide task force amid national turmoil after a white Minneapolis police officer killed George Floyd, a Black man.

The committee continues to deliberate recommendations, including monetary compensation, and its report is due to the Legislature on July 1. At that point it will be up to lawmakers to draft and pass legislation.

The state panel made the controversial decision in March to limit reparations to descendants of Black people who were in the country in the 19th century. Some reparations advocates said that approach does not take into account the harms that Black immigrants suffer.

Under San Francisco's draft recommendation, a person would have to be at least 18 years old and have identified as "Black/African American" in public documents for at least 10 years. Eligible people must also meet two of eight other criteria, though the list may change.

Those criteria include being born in or migrating to San Francisco between 1940 and 1996 and living in the city for at least 13 years; being displaced from the city by urban renewal between 1954 and 1973, or the

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descendant of someone who was; attending the city's public schools before they were fully desegregated; or being a descendant of an enslaved person.

The Chicago suburb of Evanston became the first U.S. city to fund reparations. The city gave money to qualifying people for home repairs, down payments and interest or late penalties due on property. In December, the Boston City Council approved of a reparations study task force.

## Future NASA moonwalkers to sport sleeker spacesuits

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Moonwalking astronauts will have sleeker, more flexible spacesuits that come in different sizes when they step onto the lunar surface later this decade.

Exactly what that looks like remained under wraps. The company designing the next-generation spacesuits, Axiom Space, said Wednesday that it plans to have new versions for training purposes for NASA later this summer.

The moonsuits will be white like they were during NASA's Apollo program more than a half-century ago, according to the company. That's so they can reflect heat and keep future moonwalkers cool.

The suits will provide greater flexibility and more protection from the moon's harsh environment, and will come in a wider range of sizes, according to the Houston-based company.

NASA awarded Axiom Space a \$228.5 million contract to provide the outfits for the first moon landing in more than 50 years. The space agency is targeting late 2025 at the earliest to land two astronauts on the moon's south pole.

At Wednesday's event in Houston, an Axiom employee modeled a dark spacesuit, doing squats and twisting at the waist to demonstrate its flexibility. The company said the final version will be different, including the color.

"I didn't want anybody to get that mixed up," said Axiom's Russell Ralston.

## What can ChatGPT maker's new AI model GPT-4 do?

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — The company behind the ChatGPT chatbot has rolled out its latest artificial intelligence model, GPT-4, in the next step for a technology that's caught the world's attention.

The new system can figure out tax deductions and answer questions like a Shakespearan pirate, for example, but it still "hallucinates" facts and makes reasoning errors.

Here's a look at San Francisco-based startup OpenAI's latest improvement on the generative AI models that can spit out readable text and unique images:

WHAT'S NEW?

OpenAI says GPT-4 "exhibits human-level performance." It's much more reliable, creative and can handle "more nuanced instructions" than its predecessor system, GPT-3.5, which ChatGPT was built on, OpenAI said in its announcement.

In an online demo Tuesday, OpenAI President Greg Brockman ran through some scenarios that showed off GPT-4's capabilities that appeared to show it's a radical improvement on previous versions.

He demonstrated how the system could quickly come up with the proper income tax deduction after being fed reams of tax code — something he couldn't figure himself.

"It's not perfect, but neither are you. And together it's this amplifying tool that lets you just reach new heights," Brockman said.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Generative AI technology like GPT-4 could be the future of the internet, at least according to Microsoft, which has invested at least \$1 billion in OpenAI and made a splash by integrating AI chatbot tech into its Bing browser.

It's part of a new generation of machine-learning systems that can converse, generate readable text



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on demand and produce novel images and video based on what they've learned from a vast database of digital books and online text.

These new AI breakthroughs have the potential to transform the internet search business long dominated by Google, which is trying to catch up with its own AI chatbot, and numerous professions.

"With GPT-4, we are one step closer to life imitating art," said Mirella Lapata, professor of natural language processing at the University of Edinburgh. She referred to the TV show "Black Mirror," which focuses on the dark side of technology.

"Humans are not fooled by the AI in 'Black Mirror' but they tolerate it," Lapata said. "Likewise, GPT-4 is not perfect, but paves the way for AI being used as a commodity tool on a daily basis."

WHAT EXACTLY ARE THE IMPROVEMENTS?

GPT-4 is a "large multimodal model," which means it can be fed both text and images that it uses to come up with answers.

In one example posted on OpenAI's website, GPT-4 is asked, "What is unusual about this image?" It's answer: "The unusual thing about this image is that a man is ironing clothes on an ironing board attached to the roof of a moving taxi."

GPT-4 is also "steerable," which means that instead of getting an answer in ChatGPT's "classic" fixed tone and verbosity, users can customize it by asking for responses in the style of a Shakespearean pirate, for instance.

In his demo, Brockman asked both GPT-3.5 and GPT-4 to summarize in one sentence an article explaining the difference between the two systems. The catch was that every word had to start with the letter G.

GPT-3.5 didn't even try, spitting out a normal sentence. The newer version swiftly responded: "GPT-4 generates groundbreaking, grandiose gains, greatly galvanizing generalized AI goals."

HOW WELL DOES IT WORK?

ChatGPT can write silly poems and songs or quickly explain just about anything found on the internet. It also gained notoriety for results that could be way off, such as confidently providing a detailed but false account of the Super Bowl game days before it took place, or even being disparaging to users.

OpenAI acknowledged that GPT-4 still has limitations and warned users to be careful. GPT-4 is "still not fully reliable" because it "hallucinates" facts and makes reasoning errors, it said.

"Great care should be taken when using language model outputs, particularly in high-stakes contexts," the company said, though it added that hallucinations have been sharply reduced.

Experts also advised caution.

"We should remember that language models such as GPT-4 do not think in a human-like way, and we should not be misled by their fluency with language," said Nello Cristianini, professor of artificial intelligence at the University of Bath.

Another problem is that GPT-4 does not know much about anything that happened after September 2021, because that was the cutoff date for the data it was trained on.

ARE THERE SAFEGUARDS?

OpenAI says GPT-4's improved capabilities "lead to new risk surfaces" so it has improved safety by training it to refuse requests for sensitive or "disallowed" information.

It's less likely to answer questions on, for example, how to build a bomb or buy cheap cigarettes.

Still, OpenAI cautions that while "eliciting bad behavior" from GPT is harder, "doing so is still possible."

## Social media madness gives opportunities to Edert and others

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

While almost everyone in March Madness wants to be this year's version of reigning national champion Kansas, almost anyone playing over the next three weeks would also love to be this year's version of Doug Edert.

If that name doesn't ring a bell, maybe Edert's wispy mustache will. Edert was the reserve guard from Saint Peter's who turned into a social media sensation after scoring 20 points in a first-round upset over

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Kentucky last March.

By the time he and the Peacocks made history by becoming the first 15 seed to advance to the Elite Eight, Edert's mustache had its own Twitter handle and Edert himself had deals hawking chicken wings and a few other products.

All of this was spurred by the confluence of social media's ever-growing imprint on society (and sports) combined with the new and loosely regulated world of NIL, the name, image and likeness deals that allow college athletes to cash in on paid endorsements.

Edert's success story is one of several examples of the ways social media has turbocharged March Madness, that one-of-a-kind American sporting event that had communal elements built in — think, the bracket and the office pool — long before the internet even existed.

The key for someone like Edert — and there will almost certainly be another "someone like Edert" once the shots start flying — was to move quickly.

"My main focus was basketball, and obviously, I'm trying to do whatever I can to help my team win games," Edert told The Associated Press. "But at the same time, I'm trying to capitalize on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Some things — namely, the emerging love affair with his jump shot, to say nothing of his '70s-style 'stache — took on a life of their own, the way things often do on TikTok, Instagram and the other social media platforms that help drive the tournament's popularity. Others — namely, the hot wings deal and a few more sponsorships — came because he struck quickly at the urging of his friends and parents, who were watching this unheralded guard from a tiny school blow up in real time.

"Nobody was pressuring me, saying, 'You've gotta do this, or you've gotta do that,'" Edert said. "They were just behind me, and they were offering to help in any way they could."

Edert would not divulge the amount he has made from his sponsorships, which included a deal shooting celebrity video messages and another promoting a website that offers adult recreational sports leagues.

But, he said, it gave him a "nice little start, for whatever happens after college." Certainly, it gave him more than someone like him might have gotten only a couple years ago. And it was not something anyone saw coming for a guard from a 3,400-student school in Jersey City, New Jersey.

"There's always that chance that a star player, or an underrated player from a team that goes far, will capture the hearts of America, and where will they capture it? On social media," said Jeffrey Weiner, senior vice president for NIL marketing at GSE Worldwide. "It'll be on TV, and then they'll go look for that person on social media. People are watching these games with their phones in their hands."

Edert said he rarely posted on social media, and had a following of about 1,500 on Instagram in early March of last year.

"And after the Kentucky game, I look at my phone and it's 6,000 followers and it's going up," he said. It is now 149,000, barely a blip by hoop-star standards, but a 1,000 times more than he had a year ago.

Perhaps the single most impactful social media post to emerge in the NIL era came from the TikTok account of Oregon's Sedona Prince.

Her takedown of the NCAA for the sparse weight room facilities at the 2021 women's tournament shined a spotlight on the disparities between men's and women's college sports. That video currently has been viewed more than 12.3 million times.

In the month between February 2021 and the time Prince posted a month later, the hashtag "NCAA" spiked from 7 million to 490 million views on TikTok. The hashtag "March Madness" has gone from 957 million views in 2021 to 1.4 billion views this year on TikTok — and that 2023 figure was calculated before a single basket had been made in the actual tournament.

Prince's TikTok following now numbers 2.8 million. With the explosion in popularity came a deal with an energy drink that includes equity and cash in exchange for creating content on social media. Her current feed also includes sponsored content with Buick and Crocs, which means she now has a bank account to go with her unexpected fame.

"I've tried to optimize my NIL opportunities," Prince said in an interview last year with Yahoo Finance.

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"I take what I do off the court, which is TikTok and certain brand deals, but turn them into something I can use for the rest of my life., money that I can retire with, put my kids through college with."

The NIL platform Opendorse estimated that companies spent \$917 million on college athlete deals in the first year they were approved. Most of those earnings were made via social media.

These days, many arrangements come on the front end through so-called collectives that are tied to schools, often sealed during the recruiting process. Edert, however, was making no such money when he signed to play for Shaheen Holloway at Saint Peter's.

"At the beginning of the year, when they explained to students that you can start your own business or have your own brand, I'm thinking, 'This doesn't really apply to me,'" Edert said of the preseason athletic department presentations he sat through.

Now, it does, and Edert's star turn at March Madness last year also played a roundabout role in his second run through the recruiting process. When Holloway left Saint Peter's for a job at his alma mater, Seton Hall, several Peacocks, including Edert, used social media to let the world know they were entering the transfer portal.

"I announced early in the morning, and by 7:30 or 8, my phone started blowing up," Edert said.

Most of those calls and messages were from coaches at Edert's new school, Bryant University, where they knew a lot more about the guard out of Nutley, New Jersey than they might have the year before. Those coaches weren't the only ones.

"Even yesterday, I was signing autographs and taking some pictures with kids in middle school and high school," Edert said. "They said 'We love you, Doug.'" And I felt great. I'm just doing what I love to do. There's a lot of love and support from a lot of people, and it really means a lot."

## Beloved and debated, French bulldog becomes top US dog breed

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — For the first time in three decades, the U.S. has a new favorite dog breed, according to the American Kennel Club.

Adorable in some eyes, deplorable in others, the sturdy, push-faced, perky-eared, world-weary-looking and distinctively droll French bulldog became the nation's most prevalent purebred dog last year, the club announced Wednesday. Frenchies ousted Labrador retrievers from the top spot after a record 31 years.

Why?

"They're comical, friendly, loving little dogs," says French Bull Dog Club of America spokesperson Patty Sosa. City-friendly, with modest grooming and exercise needs, she says, "they offer a lot in a small package."

Yet the Frenchie's dizzying rise — it wasn't even a top-75 breed a quarter-century ago — worries its fans, to say nothing of its critics.

The buzzy little bulldogs have been targeted in thefts, including last month's fatal shooting of a 76-year-old South Carolina breeder and the 2021 shooting of a California dog walker who was squiring singer Lady Gaga's pets.

There's concern that demand, plus the premium that some buyers will pay for "exotic" coat colors and textures, is engendering quick-buck breeders and unhealthy dogs. The breed's popularity is sharpening debate over whether there's anything healthy about propagating dogs prone to breathing, spinal, eye, and skin conditions.

The British Veterinary Association has urged people not to buy flat-faced breeds, such as Frenchies. The Netherlands has prohibited breeding very short-snouted dogs, and the country's agriculture minister aims to outlaw even owning them.

"French bulldogs can be a polarizing topic," says Dr. Carrie Stefaniak, a Glendale, Wisconsin-based veterinarian who's on the Frenchie club's health committee.

She has treated French bulldogs with breathing difficulties, and she stresses that would-be owners need to research breeders and health testing and to recognize that problems can be expensive to treat.

But she's no Frenchie foe. She owns two and has conditioned them to run agility courses and take hilly

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hikes.

"These dogs can be very fit, can be very active," Stefaniak said. "They don't have to be sedentary dogs that can't breathe."

The AKC's popularity rankings cover about 200 breeds in the nation's oldest canine registry. The stats are based on nearly 716,500 puppies and other dogs newly registered last year — about 1 in every 7 of them a Frenchie. Registration is voluntary.

The most rarely owned? English foxhounds.

The rankings don't count mixed-breeds or, at least for now, Labradoodles, puggles, Morkies and other popular "designer" hybrids. The AKC's top 10 were: French bulldogs, Labrador retrievers, golden retrievers, German shepherds, poodles, bulldogs, Rottweilers, beagles, dachshunds and German shorthaired pointers.

With roots in England and then France, French bulldogs became chic among American elites around the turn of the 20th century, then faded from favor.

That changed, rapidly, in this century. Social media and celebrity owners (ranging from Leonardo di Caprio to Megan Thee Stallion to U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez) gave the dogs fresh exposure. Still more came last year, when U.S. TV audiences watched a Frenchie named Winston take second place at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show and then win the National Dog Show hosted by the Kennel Club of Philadelphia.

Last year, about 108,000 newly registered French bulldogs surpassed Labs by over 21,000.

As a longtime breeder and a veterinarian, Dr. Lori Hunt sees Frenchies as ideal companions but their popularity as "a curse, not a blessing."

"They're being very exploited" by unscrupulous breeders, she said. The Westlake, Ohio-based vet has seen plenty of Frenchies with problems but rejects arguments that the breed is inherently unhealthy. Some of her own do canine performance sports.

Some other breeds are prone to ailments ranging from hip dysplasia to cancers, and mixed-breed dogs also can get sick. But recently published research involving about 24,600 dogs in Britain suggested that Frenchies have "very different, and largely much poorer" health than do other canines, largely due to the foreshortened, wrinkly face that encapsulates the breed's *je ne sais quoi*.

With such findings in mind, the British Veterinary Association has said it "strongly recommends" against buying flat-faced dogs and has campaigned to scrub them from ads and even greeting cards.

The American Veterinary Medical Association is exploring ways to improve flat-faced dogs' welfare, President Dr. Lori Teller says.

To animal rights and welfare activists, the French bulldog frenzy puts a snorting, panting face on problems with dog breeding in general.

"A lot of the breed characteristics that are bred into these dogs, they're for looks, not necessarily health and welfare, and Frenchies are probably one of the most exaggerated examples of that," said Dr. Lorna Grande of the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association, a professional group affiliated with the Humane Society of the United States.

"It is a welfare issue. These dogs are suffering," she says.

The AKC notes that its Canine Health Foundation has donated \$67 million since 1990 for research and education on many breeds, and the kennel and Frenchie clubs say there have been advances. A new breathing test made its U.S. debut on Frenchies, bulldogs and pugs at a show in January.

Prospective purebred owners should explore breeders' history and health testing, accept waiting for a puppy, and ask themselves whether they're prepared for the responsibility, the AKC says.

"Research what goes into owning a dog," says spokesperson Brandi Hunter Munden, "and really take an assessment of your lifestyle to make sure that you're really making the best decision, not just for you, but for the animal."

## What's known and not about US drone-Russian jet encounter

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and TARA COPP Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — When a Russian fighter jet collided with a large U.S. surveillance drone over the Black Sea, it was a rare but serious incident that triggered a U.S. diplomatic protest and raised concerns about the possibility Russia could recover sensitive technology.

U.S. and Russian officials had conflicting accounts of the collision Tuesday between the MQ-9 Reaper drone and the Russian Su-27 fighter jet; each side blamed the other. A Pentagon spokesman raised the possibility that the Defense Department could eventually declassify and release video it has of the collision.

Russian authorities said Wednesday that they will try to recover the fragments of the drone. But National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told CNN that the Reaper crashed into very deep water and he was not sure whether a recovery was possible.

A look at what's known and what's uncertain about the incident.

## WHAT THE US SAYS HAPPENED

The Pentagon and U.S. European Command said that two Russian Su-27 aircraft dumped fuel on the MQ-9, which was conducting a routine surveillance mission over the Black Sea in international airspace. They said the Russian jets flew around and in front of the drone several times for 30 to 40 minutes, and then one of the Russian aircraft "struck the propeller of the MQ-9, causing U.S. forces to have to bring the MQ-9 down in international waters."

Air Force Gen. James Hecker, commander of U.S. Air Forces Europe and Africa, said that the Russian jet's actions "nearly caused both aircraft to crash." Pentagon spokesman Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder said the collision likely also damaged the Russian fighter jet, but the Su-27 was able to land. He would not say where it landed.

The Pentagon said the drone was "well clear" of any Ukrainian territory, but did not provide details. A U.S. defense official said it was operating west of Crimea over the Black Sea. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to provide mission details.

It's not clear if the collision was an accident or intentional, but both sides agree the Russian aircraft were trying to intercept the drone.

## WHAT RUSSIA SAYS HAPPENED

The Russian Defense Ministry said the U.S. drone was flying near the Russian border and intruded in an area that was declared off limits by Russian authorities. It said that the Russian military scrambled fighters to intercept the U.S. drone. It claimed that "as a result of sharp maneuver, the U.S. drone went into uncontrollable flight with a loss of altitude and collided with water surface."

Russia has declared broad areas near Crimea off limits to flights. Ever since the 2014 annexation of Crimea and long before Russia invaded Ukraine last year, Moscow has charged that U.S. surveillance planes were flying too close to its borders while ignoring the notices issued by Russia.

Nations routinely operate in international airspace and waters, and no country can claim limits on territory outside of its own border.

The ministry said the Russian aircraft were scrambled to intercept the drone but didn't use their weapons and "didn't come into contact" with it.

## WHAT IS AN MQ-9 REAPER?

The MQ-9 Reaper is a large unmanned Air Force aircraft that is remotely operated by a two-person team. It includes a ground control station and satellite equipment and has a 66-foot (20-meter) wingspan. The team includes a rated pilot who is responsible for flying the aircraft and an enlisted aircrew member who is charged with operating the sensors and guiding weapons.

Used routinely during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars for surveillance and airstrikes, the Reaper can be either armed or unarmed. It can carry up to eight laser-guided missiles, including Hellfire missiles and other sophisticated munitions, and can loiter over targets for about 24 hours. It is about 36 feet long, 12 feet high, and weighs about 4,900 pounds (11 meters long, 4 meters high, and 2,200 kilograms). It can fly at an altitude of up to 50,000 feet (15 kilometers) and has a range of about 1,400 nautical miles (2,500 kilometers).

The Reaper, which first began operating in 2007, replaced the Air Force's smaller Predator drones. Each

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Reaper costs about \$32 million.

## DIPLOMATIC DUST-UP

The collision triggered a diplomatic protest.

The U.S. State Department summoned Russian Ambassador Anatoly Antonov to a meeting Tuesday with Karen Donfried, the assistant secretary of state for Europe.

"We are engaging directly with the Russians, again at senior levels, to convey our strong objections to this unsafe, unprofessional intercept, which caused the downing of the unmanned U.S. aircraft," said State Department spokesman Ned Price.

Kirby said the U.S. will be "expressing our concerns over this unsafe and unprofessional intercept."

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin had not talked to his Russian counterpart regarding the incident, Ryder said.

## HAS IT HAPPENED BEFORE?

This is not the first time Russian aircraft have flown so close to U.S. aircraft in the Black Sea that it's prompted the Pentagon to publicly condemn the incident for putting the crews at risk. In 2020, Russian jets crossed in front of a B-52 bomber that was flying over the Black Sea, and flew as close as 100 feet (30 meters) in front of the bomber's nose, causing turbulence.

Russian jets have also buzzed U.S. warships during exercises in the Black Sea. In 2021, Russian warplanes buzzed the USS Donald Cook, a Navy destroyer, which had been taking part in a major exercise. Until Russia's invasion last year of Ukraine, U.S. warships more frequently deployed to the Black Sea in response to Russia's 2014 attack on Crimea.

For the most part, however, military intercepts — either in the air or at sea — are routine and have happened a number of times with Russian aircraft in the Pacific, particularly in the north. Just last month, U.S. fighter jets intercepted two Russian TU-95 bombers in international airspace off Alaska's coast, and "escorted them" for 12 minutes, according to the Pentagon.

And Russian aircraft have done similar missions, and also buzzed U.S. Navy ships in the Pacific. In most of the cases, the intercepts are deemed safe and professional.

It's not clear if the Russian pilots were willing to get closer to the Reaper or dump fuel on it because they knew it was unmanned — and therefore there was no risk to an American pilot or crew. The deliberate downing of a manned aircraft — injuring or killing crew members — could be considered an act of war.

## Experts say attacks on free speech are rising across the US

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — In Idaho, an art exhibit was censored and teens were told they couldn't testify in some legislative hearings. In Washington state, a lawmaker proposed a hotline so the government could track offensively biased statements, as well as hate crimes. In Florida, bloggers are fighting a bill that would force them to register with the state if they write posts criticizing public officials.

Meanwhile, bans on books and drag performances are growing increasingly common nationwide.

"We are seeing tremendous attacks on First Amendment freedoms across the country right now, at all levels of government. Censorship is proliferating, and it's deeply troubling," said Joe Cohn, legislative and policy director with the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression.

"This year, we're seeing a wave of bills targeting drag performances, where simply being gender nonconforming is enough to trigger the penalty. We're also seeing a wave of bills regulating what can be in public or K-12 school libraries," Cohn said. "On college campuses, we have been tracking data about attempts to get faculty members punished or even fired for speech or expression and the numbers are startling — it's the highest rate that we've seen in our 20 years of existence."

First Amendment rights had been stable in America for decades, said Ken Paulson, director of the Free Speech Center at Middle Tennessee State University, but in recent years many states have reverted to the anti-speech tactics employed by people like Sen. Joe McCarthy during the "Red Scare" of the early 1950s.

McCarthy and others tried to silence political opponents by accusing them of being communists or so-

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cialists, using fear and public accusations to suppress basic free speech rights. The term "McCarthyism" became synonymous with baseless attacks on free expression, and the U.S. Supreme Court has referred to the phenomena in several First Amendment-related rulings.

"We are seeing a concerted wave that we have not seen in decades," said Paulson, highlighting states like Florida where Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis has pushed for legislation that would criminalize drag shows, limit what pronouns teachers can use for students, allow parents to determine what books can be in libraries and block some history classes entirely.

"It's pretty mind-boggling that so many politicians are waving the flag of freedom while doing anything they possibly can to infringe on the free speech rights of Americans," Paulson said.

Still, no one political group has a monopoly on censorship — aggression is increasing across the spectrum, Cohn said.

Washington state's bias hotline bill, which died in committee earlier this year, was sponsored by Democratic Sen. Javier Valdez and backed by several groups including the Anti-Defamation League, Urban League, Council on American-Islamic Relations and others. It aimed to help the state collect information about hate crimes and bias incidents and to provide support and compensation to victims at a time when hate crime reports are rising.

Opponents, including the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, said they feared it would chill protected speech because it encompasses both criminal behavior and offensively biased statements.

Hate speech can be damaging and repugnant, but is still generally protected by the First Amendment. The Department of Homeland Security and experts who study extremism have warned that hateful rhetoric can be seen as a call to action by extremists groups.

Oregon created a similar bias hotline in 2019. It received nearly 1,700 calls in 2021, with nearly 60% of the reported incidents falling short of criminal standards, according to an annual report from Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum's office.

"People in power target their political adversaries, so who is being silenced really depends on where you are on the map and its individual context," Cohn said.

Artist Katrina Majkut experienced that first-hand last week, when artworks she had shown in more than two dozen states over the past decade were unexpectedly censored at a small state school in Lewiston, Idaho.

Majkut uses embroidery to highlight and subvert historically narrow ideas of wifedom and motherhood. She was hired to curate an exhibit at Lewis-Clark State College focusing on health care issues like chronic illness, pregnancy and gun violence.

But March 2, a day before the show's opening, Majkut and two other artists were told some of their work would be removed over administrator fears about running afoul of Idaho's "No Public Funds for Abortion Act."

The 2021 law bars state-funded entities from promoting abortion or taking other measures that could be seen as training or counseling someone in favor of abortion.

Majkut's cross-stitch depicting misoprostol and mifepristone tablets — which can be used together to induce abortion early in pregnancy — was removed from the exhibit along with a wall plaque detailing Idaho's abortion laws.

Four documentary video and audio works by artist Lydia Nobles that showed women talking about their own experiences with abortion were also removed. And part of artist Michelle Harney's series of 1920s-era letters written to Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger were stricken from the show.

"To be censored like that is shocking and surreal," said Majkut, who designs her art to be educational rather than confrontational. "If the most even-keeled, bipartisan artwork around this topic is censored, then everything is going to be censored."

Logan Fowler, the spokesman for LCSC, said the school made the decision after consulting with attorneys about whether showing the art could violate the law. Republican Rep. Bruce Skaug, the author of the law, said Tuesday that it was not intended to "prevent open discussion" of abortion — only to prevent tax dollars from being used to promote it.

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The art exhibit censorship comes just two months after another controversial decision by Skaug. As chairman of the Idaho House Judiciary and Rules Committee, Skaug announced in January that people under age 18 would not be allowed to testify in his committee. Another Republican committee chair soon followed suit.

Lawmakers have the ability to limit committee testimony, and often use those limits to keep the legislature's work focused and timely. Still, the age-based speech restriction appeared to be a first for the state.

A group of teens took action, launching phone and email campaigns staging protests.

"There is a clear lack of foresight in politicians who seek to eliminate the voices of those who will one day elect and eventually supersede them," a group of 32 high school student leaders wrote in a joint opinion piece sent to news outlets across the state. "We ask Idaho's Republican leaders, what are you so afraid of?"

The lawmakers eventually modified their rules, allowing youth to testify as long as they have signed permission slips from a parent or guardian.

Skaug said the rule was necessary to ensure parents are aware if their kids are leaving school to testify at the Statehouse. He still intends to give priority to older residents when testimony time is limited, but said he's not aware of any youth actually being denied the chance to testify so far this year.

For Cohn, the efforts in Idaho and elsewhere reflect the danger of trying to restrict the expression of people who hold opposing views.

"We have to be ever-vigilant if we want our culture of individual freedoms to prevail," he said. "Bad ideas are better dealt with through debate and dialogue than government censorship."

## After clashes, Pakistani police pause siege at ex-PM's home

By BABAR DOGAR and MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

LAHORE, Pakistan (AP) — After clashing with supporters of former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan outside his home for a second day Wednesday, police paused their efforts to arrest the ousted premier for failing to appear in court last week on graft charges.

Police had besieged the 70-year-old opposition leader's house in the eastern city of Lahore since Tuesday as his supporters hurled rocks and bricks, and swung batons snatched from officers. Police fired tear gas and clashes went on into the afternoon Wednesday before subsiding.

Violence was also reported between Khan's supporters and police in other major cities, including Karachi, Islamabad, the garrison city of Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Quetta and elsewhere in Pakistan. The government sent additional police to Lahore's upscale area of Zaman Park, where Khan lives.

Earlier Wednesday, Khan had emerged from his house to meet with supporters, who had faced tear gas and police batons through the night to defend him from arrest. He said he was ready to travel to Islamabad on March 18 under the arrest warrant, but that police did not accept the offer.

Khan later posed for cameras seated at a long table, showing off piles of spent tear gas shells he said had been collected from around his home.

"What crime did I commit that my house has been attacked like this," he tweeted. Fawad Chaudhry, a senior party leader from Khan's party claimed hundreds of Khan's supporters were injured.

At the Islamabad High Court, Khan's lawyer Khawaja Haris petitioned for the suspension of the warrants for the former premier but the court denied the motion.

Khan, who was ousted in a no-confidence vote in Parliament in April, was ordered to appear before a judge in Islamabad on Friday to answer charges of illegally selling state gifts he had received during his term as premier and concealing his assets.

The former premier has avoided appearances in court since November, when he was wounded in a gun attack at a protest rally in eastern Punjab province, claiming he was not medically fit to travel from Lahore to Islamabad to face indictment.

Last week, he went to Islamabad to appear before three courts, but failed to appear before the fourth court to face indictment in the graft case, which is a legal process for starting his trial.

Khan has claimed that the string of cases against him, which includes terrorism charges, are a plot by



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the government of his successor, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, to discredit the former cricket star turned Islamist politician.

The situation in Lahore calmed in early afternoon and the police stepped back, apparently to ease tensions. This encouraged more Khan supporters to join those outside and inside his home. Many chanted Allahu akbar, the Arabic phrase for "God is great" as Khan, still wearing a gas mask, greeted them.

Azhar Siddique, another lawyer for Khan, said the Lahore High Court ordered police to halt the operation outside Khan's home until Thursday, though they would remain deployed nearby.

The Punjab provincial government said Wednesday that more than 100 police officers were injured in clashes with Khan's supporters. They denied Khan's allegation that officers were using live bullets.

From his home, Khan urged followers on Tuesday to fight on even if he is arrested. "They think this nation will fall asleep when Imran Khan is jailed," he wrote on Twitter. "You need to prove them wrong." On Wednesday, he tweeted that there was a plot "to abduct & assassinate" him.

Prime Minister Sharif on Wednesday criticized Khan in televised remarks, saying that the ex-premier "considers himself above the law, and he has been defying court orders to avoid arrest." Sharif insisted he had nothing to do with the arrest warrant, which he said was a court order and the police were only complying with it.

In Pakistan's turbulent political history, at least seven former prime minister have been arrested in various cases and tried by courts since this South Asian country was created in 1947 after gaining independence from British colonial rule.

Former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was hanged by the military government in 1979 after his ouster in a coup. His daughter, Benazir Bhutto, served twice as prime minister and was assassinated during an election rally in 2007 in the garrison city of Rawalpindi.

Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan's longest-serving premier and the brother of current prime minister, was in office from 1990 to 1993 and from 1997 to 1999, when was ousted in a military coup by Gen. Pervez Musharraf. He returned as premier in 2013 but was ousted by the country's Supreme Court in 2017. He was later arrested, tried and convicted in a corruption case, although he has always denied the charges and today lives in exile in Britain.

## In nursing homes, impoverished live final days on pennies

By MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — New pants to replace Alex Morisey's tattered khakis will have to wait. There's no cash left for sugar-free cookies either. Even at the month's start, the budget is so bare that Fixodent is a luxury. Now, halfway through it, things are so tight that even a Diet Pepsi is a stretch.

"How many years do I have left?" asks 82-year-old Morisey, who lives in a Philadelphia nursing home. "I want to live those as well as I can. But to some degree, you lose your dignity."

Across the U.S., hundreds of thousands of nursing home residents are locked in a wretched bind: Driven into poverty, forced to hand over all income and left to live on a stipend as low as \$30 a month.

In a long-term care system that subjects some of society's frailest to daily indignities, Medicaid's personal needs allowance, as the stipend is called, is among the most ubiquitous, yet least known.

Nearly two-thirds of American nursing home residents have their care paid for by Medicaid and, in exchange, all Social Security, pension and other income they would receive is instead rerouted to go toward their bill. The personal needs allowance is meant to pay for anything not provided by the home, from a phone to clothes and shoes to a birthday present for a grandchild.

One problem: Congress hasn't raised the allowance in decades.

"It's really one of the most humiliating things for them," says Sam Brooks, an attorney for The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care, which advocates for nursing home residents and has urged an increase in the allowance. "It can really be a point of shame."

Especially when an individual has no close relatives or no one able to financially help, the allowance can breed striking need. When Marla Carter visits her mother-in-law at a nursing home in Owensboro, Ken-

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tucky, the scene feels more 19th-century poorhouse than modern-day America. With just a \$40 allowance, residents are dressed in ill-fitting hand-me-downs or hospital gowns that drape open. Some have no socks or shoes. Basic supplies run low. Many don't even have a pen to write with.

"That's what was so surprising to us," Carter says, "the poverty."

She was so horrified that she and her husband started a nonprofit, Faithful Friends Kentucky, to distribute items to area nursing home residents. Among the things most warmly received are Kleenex tissues, because facilities often stock scratchy generics and even those can be hard to come by.

"You bring a soda or a toothbrush and they'll get so excited," she says. "It's so sad to me."

Medicaid was created in 1965 as part of the Great Society programs of Lyndon B. Johnson. A 1972 amendment established the personal needs allowance, set at a minimum of \$25 monthly. Unlike other benefits like Social Security, cost-of-living increases were not built into personal needs allowance rules.

Had it been linked to inflation, it would be about \$180 today. But Congress has raised the minimum rate only once, to \$30, in 1987. It has remained there ever since.

Some politicians have tried to fix the problem, including Rep. Jennifer Wexton, a Democrat from Virginia who in 2019 introduced a bill to raise the minimum allowance to \$60 and cement annual increases tied to those for Social Security. It didn't even get a hearing.

"I was shocked," Wexton says. "It's about dignity for these people."

Medicaid is jointly administered between individual states and the federal government and, faced with federal inaction, states have taken it upon themselves to raise allowances. Even so, most remain low. A majority of states – 28 – have allowances of \$50 or less, according to a state-by-state survey by the American Council on Aging. Just five states grant residents \$100 or more each month, including Alaska, which stands alone in offering \$200 monthly, the maximum under federal law. Four states – Alabama, Illinois, North Carolina and South Carolina – remain at the \$30 minimum.

Despite such paltry allotments, some facilities have been cited for not telling residents they were entitled to an allowance at all, for failing to provide the money, or for spending the funds without their permission. And though federal regulations outline a host of items that are to be provided to nursing home residents, many find themselves unable to use the cheap items facilities offer, spending their allowance on replacements for institutional-grade soap that makes them dry and itchy, tissues that feel like something out of a bus terminal bathroom, razors that leave a face nicked and bleeding and denture adhesives that seem incapable of keeping false teeth in place.

Some homes skirt the rules, making residents pay for things like diapers or haircuts that are supposed to be included.

"As soon as I get it, it's gone," says Chris Hackney, a 74-year-old resident of a nursing home in Durham, North Carolina, who spends his \$30 monthly allowance on body wash, toothpaste, deodorant and some items his facility used to provide but has cut back on, wipes and diapers. "Think of the prices of everything that tripled and quadrupled. And the money hasn't gone up any."

Hackney, a retired appliance technician who has used a wheelchair since a motorcycle accident nine years ago, has a daughter who pays his cell phone and a church that sends care packages. But even a modest boost to the allowance, Hackney says, would mean a ton.

"It would change so many lives in here," he says.

Down the hall, 56-year-old Janine Cox gets an occasional bag of chips from the vending machine and scrimps to add to the collection plate at church. She says her neighbors are even worse off.

"It's like a fight for them to survive another day," she says. "The politicians, they need to come inside these nursing homes and look and see how some of us are living."

It leaves many feeling trapped with no chance of normalcy.

Before a fall that landed her at a nursing home in Toluca, Illinois, 62-year-old Nancy Yundt felt like life was relatively comfortable. Her house was small and needed work, but it was home. Her SUV was 18 years old with 160,000 miles on the odometer, but she loved it. Her \$2,373 monthly disability check left room for a housekeeper and take-out food and plenty of generosity.

She paid her son's cellphone and insurance bills, bought Christmas presents for everyone and doted on

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her family's little ones year-round.

But when her grandniece's 2nd birthday came a few months after she arrived in the nursing home last year, she wanted to buy a doll but realized she couldn't.

"The spoiling aunt can't spoil," she says. "It just makes me feel a little sad."

Nursing home residents often must cede control of everything from how often they get a shower to what they eat. With no financial wiggle room, even more autonomy evaporates, putting out of reach the chance to take a taxi to see a friend, to get lost in a newly purchased book, or to escape the monotony of the cafeteria with some take-out food.

Even after two years of institutionalized life, it is a confounding truth for Morisey.

He ended up in a nursing home after a fall and, once here, learned his income would no longer be his. Pennsylvania's allowance is \$45, and after a monthly \$20 haircut and \$5 tip, a juggling act begins.

Can his razors last a bit longer to put off refills? Can he squeeze a bit more out of the Fixodent tube? Has he cut corners enough to get some aftershave or peanut butter crackers?

"It's the little things," he says. "You don't think about these things until you no longer have them."

When something pricier needs replacing, it's even more of a quandary, like when shirts went missing in the laundry or the top broke on his thermos or his little Bluetooth speaker no longer held a charge.

His meager savings are nearly gone now. If not for help from his church, he wouldn't even be able to afford a phone.

Living simply is at the heart of Morisey's Quaker faith and he decided after college, Ivy League diploma in hand, that he wouldn't use it to chase wealth. He took jobs in nonprofits, putting his skills to the aid of farmworkers, public housing tenants and the mentally ill, and as an aid worker in Central and South America. He has spent each of his 82 years squarely in the middle class.

Looking back, Morisey wouldn't change how he lived his life. But it doesn't seem too much, he says, to ask for a soda. \_\_\_\_

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## Today in History: March 16, Obama nominates Merrick Garland

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, March 16, the 75th day of 2023. There are 290 days left in the year.

Today's highlight in history:

On March 16, 1968, the My Lai (mee ly) massacre took place during the Vietnam War as U.S. Army soldiers hunting for Viet Cong fighters and sympathizers killed unarmed villagers in two hamlets of Son My (suhn mee) village; estimates of the death toll vary from 347 to 504.

On this date:

In 1521, Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan and his crew reached the Philippines, where Magellan was killed during a battle with natives the following month.

In 1802, President Thomas Jefferson signed a measure authorizing the establishment of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York.

In 1935, Adolf Hitler decided to break the military terms set by the Treaty of Versailles by ordering the rearming of Germany.

In 1945, during World War II, American forces declared they had secured Iwo Jima, although pockets of Japanese resistance remained.

In 1968, Senator Robert F. Kennedy of New York announced his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination.

In 1972, in a nationally broadcast address, President Richard Nixon called for a moratorium on court-ordered school busing to achieve racial desegregation.

In 1984, William Buckley, the CIA station chief in Beirut, was kidnapped by Hezbollah militants (he was tortured by his captors and killed in 1985).

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In 1994, figure skater Tonya Harding pleaded guilty in Portland, Oregon, to conspiracy to hinder prosecution for covering up an attack on rival Nancy Kerrigan, avoiding jail but drawing a \$100,000 fine.

In 2004, China declared victory in its fight against bird flu, saying it had "stamped out" all its known cases.

In 2014, Crimeans voted to leave Ukraine and join Russia, overwhelmingly approving a referendum that sought to unite the strategically important Black Sea region with the country it was part of for some 250 years.

In 2016, President Barack Obama nominated Merrick Garland to take the seat of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who had died the previous month. (Republicans who controlled the Senate would stick to their pledge to leave the seat empty until after the presidential election; they confirmed Trump nominee Neil Gorsuch in April 2017.)

In 2020, global stocks plunged again amid coronavirus concerns, with Wall Street seeing a 12% decline, its worst in more than 30 years; the S&P 500 was down 30% from its record set less than a month earlier. Ohio called off its presidential primary just hours before polls were to open, but Arizona, Florida and Illinois went ahead with their plans.

Ten years ago: Thousands of activists gathered for the Conservative Political Action Conference outside Washington gave Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul a narrow victory over Florida Sen. Marco Rubio in their unscientific presidential preference poll (Paul had 25 percent of the vote and Rubio 23 percent; former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum was third with 8 percent). South Korea's Yuna Kim, back at the World Figure Skating Championships after a two-year absence, won the women's title in London, Ontario, Canada. British actor Frank Thornton, 92, best known as Captain Peacock in the long-running television comedy "Are You Being Served?," died in London.

Five years ago: Singer Aretha Franklin canceled two upcoming concerts, saying a doctor had told her to stay off the road and rest completely for at least two months. (Franklin died five months later from pancreatic cancer.) Airstrikes in Syria killed more than 100 people as civilians fled besieged areas for a second straight day.

One year ago: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy summoned the memory of Pearl Harbor and the Sept. 11 terror attacks in an impassioned video plea to the U.S. Congress to send more help for Ukraine's fight against Russia. President Joe Biden announced the U.S. was sending more anti-aircraft, anti-armor weapons and drones, and declared Russian President Vladimir Putin a war criminal. The Federal Reserve launched a high-risk effort to tame the worst inflation since the 1970s, raising its benchmark short-term interest rate. A powerful 7.3 magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Fukushima in northern Japan.

Today's Birthdays: Country singer Ray Walker (The Jordanares) is 89. Game show host Chuck Woolery is 82. Country singer Robin Williams is 76. Actor Erik Estrada is 74. Actor Victor Garber is 74. Country singer Ray Benson (Asleep at the Wheel) is 72. Bluegrass musician Tim O'Brien (Hot Rize; Earls of Leicester) is 69. Rock singer-musician Nancy Wilson (Heart) is 69. World Golf Hall of Famer Hollis Stacy is 69. Actor Clifton Powell is 67. Rapper-actor Flavor Flav is 64. Rock musician Jimmy DeGrasso is 60. Actor Jerome Flynn is 60. Folk singer Patty Griffin is 59. Movie director Gore Verbinski is 59. Country singer Tracy Bonham is 56. Actor Lauren Graham is 56. Actor Judah Friedlander is 54. Actor Alan Tudyk is 52. Actor Tim Kang is 50. R&B singer Blu Cantrell is 47. Actor Brooke Burns is 45. Actor Kimrie Lewis is 41. Actor Brett Davern is 40. Actor Alexandra Daddario is 37. R&B singer Jhené Aiko is 35. Rock musician Wolfgang Van Halen is 32. Toronto Blue Jays baseball star Vladimir Guerrero Jr. is 24.