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Groton Community Calendar

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.

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.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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



Due to the winter storm in the Sioux Falls area, there is no delivery of the Aberdeen American News today.

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

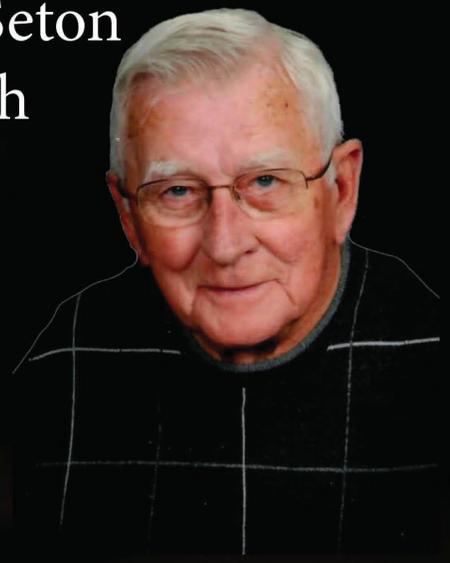
- Some of the largest U.S. banks, led by JP Morgan Chase, moved to rescue First Republic by injecting \$30 billion in deposits as part of a rescue package amid growing concerns that it may be the next to fall
- The COVID-19 virus may have originated from infected raccoon dogs being sold illegally in China's Wuhan market, experts suggest
- Chinese President Xi Jinping will visit Russia early next week in his first visit to Moscow since Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine
- Florida inched closer to a six-week abortion ban after the state's Healthcare Regulation subcommittee voted in favor of the proposed bill. Meanwhile, North Dakota Supreme court blocked a ban on abortions
- Princeton Tigers knocked off No. 2 seed Arizona in a 59-55 victory, pulling off one of the most stirring upsets of March Madness so far, and marking Princeton's first NCAA tournament win in 25 years
- South Korean business leaders pledged to work closely with their Japanese counterparts on technology and chips as the two countries seek to reset bitter relations
- At least 22 people, including three Buddhist monks, were shot at close range at a Buddhist monastery in the eastern Myanmar village of Nam Nain, a doctor's post-mortem report has revealed
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov acknowledged that its invasion of Ukraine has "indeed stretched out," telling Newsweek that it has morphed into a broader confrontation with NATO. However, the support for Ukraine "will not prevent" Russia's victory for "current and future generations."

The service of

Edwin Nehls

Friday, March 17, 11 a.m.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
Catholic Church



GDILIVE.COM

Rep. Dusty Johnson speaks at GHS

by Dorene Nelson

South Dakota Congressman Dusty Johnson addressed the high school students in Groton Area High School on Wednesday, March 15, 2023. South Dakota's enthusiastic lone representative had a very receptive and attentive audience who readily responded to his wit, humor, and honest answers.

For about an hour, Johnson received and answered the students' questions, rewarding them with honest and thoughtful answers as he handed out stickers to those brave enough to take the microphone and ask a question.

He began his speech by explaining the logistics of the United States House of Representatives with such statistics as how many there are, how long each term is, and why South Dakota only has one.

"I know you're concerned about college and its expense," Johnson admitted. "It is especially important to America's neediest citizens."

"I don't support the President's college tuition forgiveness plan," the Congressman began, "because 80% of those funds are earmarked for the richest Americans!"

"In addition to that, college tuition forgiveness starts a vicious cycle," Johnson explained. "Forgiveness results in increased loan requests which ends up in increasing costs of college for all!"

"I received my college education from the University of South Dakota and the University of Kansas, receiving an MDA," he listed. "I came from a working class family who all worked very hard."

"I believe that a stable family is one of the most important supports for a child," Johnson smiled. "It leads us to work hard, try our best, and not to expect handouts!"

"I really believe that government should not do for us what we can do for ourselves," he explained. "Otherwise it increases dependence on others, less for all everyone else, and higher costs for all!"

"I have three sons, two of them teenagers, so I know what you kids are all about," Johnson smiled. "I have time at home with my family and time to travel the country, and time to work really hard, representing you in D.C. Thankfully my wife manages to hold it altogether by herself when I'm not home! I have no idea how she does it!"

When questioned about government support for small businesses, Representative Johnson explained about the rule of law. "It is very important for Americans to have and follow this rule of law," he stated. "It protects the business owner who has financially invested his life savings, his time, and his hopes for the future."

"Business owners want protection here in America, but they want their independence too," Johnson explained.

Another question concerned the Chinese buying American land. "I can see we're in farm country here!" he smiled. "I don't oppose foreign investment as long as we don't give them undue control and privileges in America. Right now they own only a tiny fraction of American farmland, but we don't want them to have control here of our food supply either!"

"An area that is of concern to me is the increase of incivility in how we treat each other," Johnson added. "Try listening to them instead of simply calling them all evil! Be nice to each other."

"The most difficult part of my job is trying to convince others that 'making it easier' does NOT work!" he admitted. "Making it easier simply causes more dependence, increased government interference and cost, and a whole lot of other bad results!"

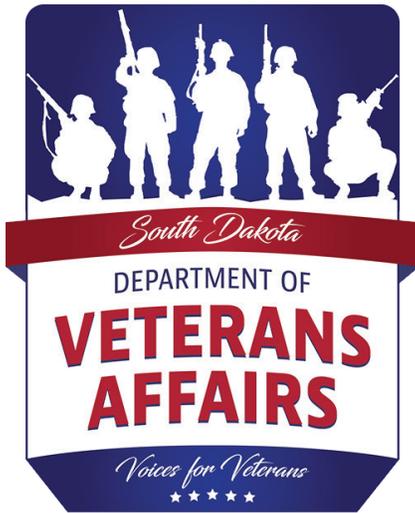
"In conclusion, I want you to know that doing the easy, popular things aren't going to work! It's the challenging, difficult, hard stuff that solves problems and works in the future too," Johnson concluded.

Johnson ended his visit with time for lots of photos with the students who really enjoyed the opportunity and his causal presentation.



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Greg Whitlock,
Secretary
South Dakota
Department of
Veterans Affairs

Honoring Women Veterans and Celebrating their Resiliency

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs joins our nation in observing "Women's History Month" in March and we salute their significant historical contributions.

In 1889, prior to South Dakota's statehood, women took care of our veterans at the State Veterans Home in Hot Springs. For the past 134 years, 65% of our workforce at the Home has consisted of women dedicated to taking care of our heroes by serving as nurses, CNAs, LPNs, household coordinators, accountants, clerical assistants, and activity directors.

Women have served in America's wars and conflicts throughout our history. They played vital roles even in the Revolutionary War, raising the morale, spying on the enemy, and even disguising themselves as men to be able to serve as soldiers.

More than 400 women fought in the Union and Confederate armies during the Civil War. During World War I, about 35,000 women officially served in roles such as nurses, critical support staff, and telephone operators. In World War II, 350,000 women served in the United States military in occupations including nursing, military intelligence, cryptography, and parachute rigging.

During the Korean War more than 120,000 women served in active-duty positions.

It is estimated that 265,000 women raised their hands and swore their oath during the Vietnam War. The majority served as nurses, physicians, physical therapists, traffic controllers, communications specialists, intelligence officers, and clerks.

More than 300,000 women veterans have served since 9/11. And they have served in all military occupational specialties, including logistics, munitions, intelligence, and combat.

We are a mission driven agency that stands ready to assist our women veterans in accessing their benefits. In fact, we have four women veterans serving as state veterans service officers in our claims office in Sioux Falls and fourteen women veterans that serve as county and tribal veterans service officers throughout the state. They are all standing ready to assist our women veterans with their needs. A grateful nation expects nothing less from us.

So today, and every day, we celebrate the women who have served! We honor the women throughout history for their courage and sacrifice. These veterans, and those currently serving in uniform, are part of a proud history of women defending our nation.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs

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

KitKat , nerd rope around the border , with Easter hard candy around the edge and Kool-aid taffy being on top and around the bottom. \$30. Call/Text Tina at 605-397-7285



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



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>

Black Hills National Forest adds 239 acres through deal with elk group and landowners

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 16, 2023 2:43 PM

The Black Hills National Forest is growing by about one-third of a square mile.

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation acquired 239 acres of land from two landowners for a total of \$1.1 million and conveyed it to the national forest. The land is high in the remote western area of the forest in South Dakota, near the Wyoming border. The property is now publicly owned as part of the national forest, open for hunting and other recreational activities.

"This project not only protects habitat and connectivity for elk, mule and whitetail deer, turkey and other game species, but it ensures quality hunting opportunities today and for future generations," Kyle Weaver, the Elk Foundation president and CEO, said in a statement.

The foundation said the property is in the heart of Black Hills elk country, home to more than 6,000 elk. The land includes aspen and pine trees, meadows and grasslands. The headwaters of Cold Springs Creek originate on the property.

"The Black Hills National Forest is very excited about this acquisition, which secures and protects these lands for future wildlife conservation efforts and public recreation opportunities," Meagan Buehler, Black Hills National Forest lands program manager, said in a statement.

Regional public land hunters are also excited. Rob Mahaffey, a board member with South Dakota Bow-hunters, said resident hunters have been dealing with overcrowded public lands.

"And anything to take that pressure off a little bit is welcome," Mahaffey said.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund helped with the project. The fund is a federal program to help states provide outdoor recreation facilities. The program provides up to 50 percent reimbursement funds for land purchases and the development of outdoor recreation projects.

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.

New law provides 100% tuition coverage for SD National Guard members

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MARCH 16, 2023 2:38 PM

Gov. Kristi Noem signed a bill into law Thursday that will provide 100% tuition benefits for National Guard members at South Dakota technical colleges and public universities.

The increase from 50% to 100% coverage will benefit the Guard by providing another incentive for recruitment and retention, Noem said.

Noem, whose father served in the National Guard, spoke in front of several Guard members at the Range Road Armory in Rapid City during the signing and shortly before a deployment ceremony for the 216th Fire Fighting Team, which will spend a year in the U.S. European Command area of operations. Lt. Gov.

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Larry Rhoden, who was a guardsman himself, also spoke at the signing.

Noem told attendees the increased benefit is a statement from South Dakota taxpayers that they support the work of the National Guard, citing the emergency efforts during flooding, wildfires or during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"They recognize every single day, when there is a tornado or derecho, that it's National Guard members who come to their communities and that when they need help, you provide it," Noem said.

She added that discussions to cover tuition costs have been in play since she was elected to the state Legislature in 2006, and she doesn't expect to ever have to "defend spending these dollars on you."

Noem's office put the annual cost of the initiative at \$1.9 million during her budget address in December 2022.

South Dakota Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Lyn Waldie, a recruiter, said the initiative is the "single greatest new benefit" he's seen in his years of service.

"I am excited about the power of possibility that comes with it for those who answer the call to serve our great state and nation," Waldie said.

Noem legislative review

The increase in tuition coverage for National Guard members was one of several proposals Noem introduced during the 2023 legislative session, which lawmakers concluded earlier this month, except for a day on March 27 to consider vetoes.

Noem had three major initiatives she pushed during the session and announced during her annual Budget Address in December and State of the State address in January: improving the state's workforce, "securing" South Dakota and expanding her "Stronger Families" initiative.

Noem signed workforce bills that lower the unemployment insurance employer contributions by 0.5% and recognize out-of-state occupational licenses. She also signed a bill that would amend references to the governor and other officials in state statute and the South Dakota Constitution to their titles instead of "he" or "him."

Noem's "Securing South Dakota" initiative focused on protecting the agricultural industry and assets in South Dakota. Earlier this week, Noem signed a bill that will make it more difficult to file a nuisance complaint or lawsuit against an agricultural operation. However, a bill that would establish a committee to review foreign ag land purchases failed to garner enough support in the Legislature.

Much of Noem's focus on her pro-life, "Stronger Families" initiative failed to pass through the Legislature this session. That included cutting the overall sales tax on groceries, creating a 100% paid family leave program for state employees that private businesses could also buy into, and helping children in foster care with scholarship vouchers.

The only initiative that made it through the legislative process was a bill that requires both parents to cover pregnancy costs instead of just the mother.

While Noem pushed for an elimination of the state sales tax on groceries, lawmakers chose instead to temporarily cut the overall state sales tax from 4.5% to 4.2% for four years. Lawmakers also exceeded her recommended 5% increase in funding for education, state employees and Medicaid providers.

Noem has vaguely threatened to veto the decision in recent weeks.

"I still believe that the best budget option for our state's future is the one that I presented in December, including the elimination of the sales tax on groceries," Noem wrote in a press release last week. "And in the coming weeks, I will have to decide whether the budget that has been presented to me is worthy of my signature."

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.

As opioids overdose deaths keep rising, report urges lawmakers to develop new approaches

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MARCH 16, 2023 4:03 PM

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers should view America's staggering opioid crisis, including the rise of illicit fentanyl, through an "ecosystems" approach, argues a massive RAND Corporation report published Thursday.

That means they should examine the gaps and interconnections among emergency response, data collection, education, treatment, housing and law enforcement, the report advises.

The 600-page volume — which the authors describe as "arguably the most comprehensive analysis of opioids in 21st century America" — encourages federal, state and local lawmakers to think "beyond traditional silos" and innovate ways to stem adverse effects of addiction and increasing drug overdose deaths among Americans.

"There have been lots of initiatives and efforts to try to address it, but when we looked around, the majority, not all but the majority, seemed to fall in the silos — like, 'We're going to improve treatment,' or 'We're going to focus on harm reduction,' or 'We're going to decrease illicit use and try to decrease supply,'" said Bradley Stein, Director of RAND's Opioid Policies, Tools, and Information Center.

RAND, headquartered in Santa Monica, California, is a nonprofit organization that focuses on several areas, including the U.S. military, education, national security and health care.

"One of the things we did was sort of step back and say, 'Are there opportunities sort of between these systems, between the silos? And so thinking about it more as an ecosystem or more holistically, are there things and opportunities that we may be overlooking?'" Stein, one of the authors who is based in RAND's Pittsburgh offices, told States Newsroom.

Overdose rates jump in recent years

Drug overdose rates in the U.S. have risen fivefold in the past two decades, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study published in December.

The study shows that deaths attributed to opioids, including synthetic opioids like fentanyl and its many analogs, have been steadily on the rise, with a staggering jump in recent years.

The CDC tracked a record 107,622 overdose deaths in 2021 — 71,238 of them were due to manmade, illegal fentanyl substances.

The agency defines drug poisoning overdose deaths as those resulting from the "unintentional or intentional overdose of a drug, being given the wrong drug, taking a drug in error, or taking a drug inadvertently."

Illicit fentanyl ending up in other drugs — for example, counterfeit prescription pills, cocaine and heroin — has been the target of federal agencies and the subject of multiple congressional hearings and roundtables.

GOP lawmakers on the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee are poised to mark up the HALT Fentanyl Act, a measure reintroduced this Congress by Republican Reps. Morgan Griffith of Virginia, and Bob Latta of Ohio.

The bill aims to permanently classify fentanyl-related analogs as Class I substances under the Controlled Substances Act.

Just this month, a bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers, including Democratic Reps. Joe Neguse of Colorado and Madeleine Dean of Pennsylvania launched the Fentanyl Prevention Caucus.

The group plans to tackle education and destigmatizing the opioid overdose-reversing medication Naloxone, said Dean, who is public about her son's recovery from opioid addiction.

Not enough data

One of the gaps facing lawmakers as they try to legislate a solution is a lack of data. The U.S. is essentially "flying blind," the RAND report states.

"We've had this opioid crisis for a while, but if we look nationally, there are still all these areas where we still don't have a good sense of the magnitude of the problem. How many people use fentanyl, how many people are using heroin?" Stein said.

Stigmatization of users, unintended consequences of criminal penalties and a lack of communication

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across systems all hamper clear data collection that could improve people's quality of life in other areas — for example, housing, child welfare and employment, the report argues.

However, some state and local governments are developing ways to bring data together, Stein said.

The report notes that Maryland has linked data across health care, substance use treatment, criminal and legal statistics, and mortality information.

Rhode Island has pulled several data sets, including valuable information collected from nonfatal overdoses and distribution networks of Naloxone, in one data center hub.

Pennsylvania's opioid data dashboard, among other data, tracks the number of Naloxone doses administered by EMS personnel and emergency room visits for opioid overdoses

Tim Leech, vice president of Pittsburgh Firefighters Local 1, responds to varying volumes of drug overdose emergency calls that ebb and flow with the trends of local drug use.

"We are usually the first ones to encounter the patient. Once we're there and we start treating the patient, the paramedics will arrive. And depending on the severity, it's possible that a doctor could come as well after the patient's care is handed over to the paramedics," Leech said in an interview. "No matter what happens every call I go on, when I go back to the fire station, I (submit) information on our computer database, and there's a code for overdoses."

Dean talked about efforts in the Philadelphia area to coordinate care across institutions.

"We have an area of the city known as Kensington where some of the most difficult cases of mental health, poverty and addiction are all coming together," she said, mentioning that she recently spoke to the Philadelphia-based Sheller Foundation about efforts to address overdoses.

"So literally what the (Sheller) foundation is doing is trying to bring together different hospital systems and nonprofits and recovery centers and housing to get at this problem in a very coordinated way instead of just one recovery at an ER and out goes the person with the problem to another ER."

Advice to lawmakers

The RAND report, several years in the making, suggests a four-part framework that decision makers can use when thinking about crafting effective policies to help those with substance use disorders.

That four-pronged approach includes:

Integrating issues and systems.

Experimenting with new approaches.

Developing roles for people who can take "ownership" across systems.

Revamping data systems to better understand the problem.

The study's authors built a searchable tool to encourage a "holistic approach" when policymakers are weighing how to tackle the opioid crisis.

"There's not a silver bullet," Stein said. "... Individuals with opioid use disorder move across so many pieces of this ecosystem. But often one part of the system doesn't have a very good idea of what's going on in another part of the system."

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

U.S. Senate moves toward repealing authority for military force against Iraq

South Dakota's Thune and Rounds vote against advancing bill

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 16, 2023 2:57 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate took a broadly bipartisan vote Thursday to advance legislation that would end the 32-year-old and the 20-year-old Authorizations for Use of Military Force against Iraq.

The 68-27 vote moves the measure past the chamber's 60-vote legislative filibuster and towards a final passage vote as soon as next week. House Republican leaders, some of whom have opposed repeal in

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the past, would then need to decide whether to bring the bill to the floor for a vote.

"Iraq is no longer a force for chaos. Iraq is now a force for regional stability and the U.S. is their partner of choice," said Virginia Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine, who sponsored the legislation. "Why would we want two war authorizations against a nation that has become a partner of choice?"

The United States maintains about 2,500 troops in Iraq to help the country's government "counter ISIS and other non-state terrorist threats that threaten not only Iraq, but other nations in the region," Kaine said.

Indiana Republican Sen. Todd Young, a primary co-sponsor of the bill, said during floor debate it's been more than 10 years since any president cited the 2002 AUMF to justify U.S. military action. But he noted keeping the two authorizations in place could create issues.

"Leaving these authorities on the books creates an opportunity for abuse by the executive branch and bypasses Congress on the most important issue we consider as a body, which is how and when to send our men and women in uniform into harm's way," Young said.

Young sought to address objections to the repeal from some of his Republican colleagues, saying the AUMFs are not the appropriate way to try to address Iran.

"I share the views of so many of my colleagues on the need to counter Iran. I really do," Young said. "But reimagining a more than 20-year-old authorization that was passed to combat a totally different enemy is not the way to do it."

The United States and Iran haven't had formal diplomatic relations since 1980, partly in response to the Iranian revolution and the hostage-taking of American diplomats in the country. Tensions have continued in the decades since over numerous issues, including Iran's efforts to develop nuclear weapons, its human rights abuses and treatment of women.

Sens. Mike Braun of Indiana, Ted Budd of North Carolina, Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, Susan Collins of Maine, Kevin Cramer of North Dakota, Steve Daines of Montana, Chuck Grassley of Iowa, Josh Hawley of Missouri, John Hoeven of North Dakota, Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, Mike Lee of Utah, Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming, Roger Marshall and Jerry Moran of Kansas, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Rand Paul of Kentucky, Eric Schmitt of Missouri, J.D. Vance of Ohio and Young of Indiana were among the Republicans voting to advance the measure.

South Dakota Sens. John Thune and Mike Rounds, both Republicans, voted against advancing the measure.

Does not include AUMF from 2001

The four-page bill would repeal the Authorizations for Use of Military Force or AUMFs that Congress approved in 1991 and 2002 for military action in Iraq.

The legislation doesn't repeal the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force that Congress approved following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. That AUMF was originally used for the war in Afghanistan, though it's since been used for military and counterterrorism operations in several other countries.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, said Thursday the chamber would vote on amendments to the Iraq AUMF repeal bill. Those votes will likely take place next week, before the Senate votes to send the measure to the U.S. House.

U.S. House lawmakers voted 268-161 last Congress to approve a similar bill that would have repealed the 2002 AUMF against Iraq, but the U.S. Senate never took it up and efforts to get the language in the annual defense authorization package were unsuccessful.

The current slate of House GOP leaders — Speaker Kevin McCarthy of California, Majority Leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana, Whip Tom Emmer of Minnesota and Conference Chair Elise Stefanik of New York — all voted against approving that bill.

A bipartisan group of U.S. House lawmakers has re-introduced a bill in their chamber this Congress that matches the U.S. Senate legislation advanced Thursday.

It so far has 23 co-sponsors including, Florida Republican Byron Donalds, Oregon Democrat Val Hoyle, Michigan Democrat Daniel Kildee, Tennessee Republican Andrew Ogles, Montana Republican Matthew Rosendale and Virginia Democrat Abigail Spanberger.

"Voting on decisions of war and peace is a fundamental and constitutional responsibility for Members of Congress," Spanberger said in a written statement announcing the bill's release this Congress. "We must be accountable to the American people and cannot abdicate this responsibility to open-ended AUMFs that give too much power to a President and don't require Congress to take consequential votes."

Scalise and Emmer's offices did not return requests for comment about whether they'd put the legislation on the House floor.

Difference from declaration of war

An Authorization for Use of Military Force is different from when Congress formally declares war, which it has done 11 times for five wars, according to the Congressional Research Service.

The House voted 250-183 in January 1991 to approve that AUMF with the Senate approving it by unanimous consent. The 2002 AUMF passed the House following a 296-133 vote in October and the Senate approved the measure on a 77-23 vote.

The White House indicated Thursday that if Congress approves the repeal of both AUMFs, President Joe Biden will sign the measure.

Repealing the Iraq AUMFs "would have no impact on current U.S. military operations and would support this Administration's commitment to a strong and comprehensive relationship with our Iraqi partners," the administration wrote in a Statement of Administration Policy.

"Furthermore, President Biden remains committed to working with the Congress to ensure that outdated authorizations for the use of military force are replaced with a narrow and specific framework more appropriate to protecting Americans from modern terrorist threats."

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

Pentagon to halt use of firefighting foam that contains PFAS as cleanup costs mount

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY AND JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 16, 2023 11:26 AM

WASHINGTON — Battered by years of criticism from U.S. lawmakers and environmental advocates, the Department of Defense will stop purchasing PFAS-containing firefighting foam later this year and phase it out entirely in 2024.

The replacement for Aqueous Film Forming Foam has yet to be determined, and advocates are frustrated it's taken so long to halt the use of a product containing a "forever chemical" that at high levels of exposure may lead to increased risks for cancer, among other effects. The pace of cleanup at potentially contaminated military installations and nearby communities also has come under scrutiny by Congress.

The Defense Department began searching for a fire suppressant that was more effective than water after a horrific fire aboard the USS Forrester in 1967 killed 134 sailors and injured 161.

The answer turned out to be a highly effective firefighting foam containing PFAS — that the Pentagon and other federal agencies like the Forest Service now are struggling to find a substitute for, given the foam's host of potential health and environmental problems.

The federal government's widespread use of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, which are especially strong and don't break down naturally, has spurred concerns for decades. PFAS are used in hundreds of products where resisting heat or repelling water is especially important. That has made them ubiquitous in household items like nonstick pans as well as larger, more industrial applications like firefighting foam.

"The problem with PFAS is it's a highly effective fire remedy. The other problem, of course, is it's indestructible," House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Ken Calvert, R-Calif., told States Newsroom. "So we need to find a solution. We need to find a replacement. It's been a lot harder than expected, but they're working on it."

Iowa Republican Sen. Joni Ernst, a former U.S. Army officer and a member of the Armed Services Com-

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mittee, said there are concerns about how exactly the Defense Department is phasing out PFAS and if the replacements will be as good as the firefighting foam it uses now.

But, she said, the Pentagon needs to ensure its use of PFAS isn't causing health impacts for people on or near military installations. The Pentagon has identified more than 700 installations where PFAS could have leached into the soil or groundwater, and begun testing to determine how extensive any contamination may be. Testing and cleanup costs are expected to mount into the billions.

"It's still used broadly by a lot of the firefighting units that exist across the DOD. And we don't have a replacement, so that is a huge concern," Ernst said. "We need to have the capability of suppressing fires, fighting fires, and until we have a replacement, we'll have to make do."

While the Forest Service, commercial airports and fire departments also use the fire-suppressing foam that contains PFAS, the U.S. military's choice of a replacement in the coming months will likely have tremendous influence on what other agencies do.

Decades of warnings

The Pentagon had plenty of notice there was a problem with its firefighting foam. In the 1990s, after years of use, chemical companies issued health notices about the PFAS-containing firefighting foam, triggering initial reviews of the chemical, according to congressional testimony from Richard Kidd, deputy assistant secretary of defense for environment and energy resilience. Kidd told the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee that it wasn't until 2016 the Defense Department "had a final health advisory from the EPA we were able to take measurable actions." But, Michael Roark, deputy inspector general for evaluations at the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, noted that in 2011 the Defense Department issued a risk alert saying the PFAS-containing firefighting foam "contained chemicals that presented a risk to human health and environmental risks that requires special handling and disposal." That inspector general report on the 2011 risk alert notes the Defense Department was not taking action to regulate or reduce the use of PFAS at that time. "As a result, people and the environment may have been exposed to preventable risks from PFAS containing AFFF," the IG report said. Congress told the Defense Department in the fiscal 2020 National Defense Authorization Act to phase out firefighting foam that contains PFAS, but gave the agency years to do it, seeking to balance environmental health and drinking water exposure concerns with the safety of service members fighting fires, according to a U.S. Senate aide, speaking on background.

Effective at extinguishing fires

PFAS-containing firefighting foams have been highly effective for extinguishing high-heat liquid fuel fires because of their useful and unique chemical properties.

The carbon-fluorine bond is one of the strongest in chemistry.

"It's the strongest bond you can make to carbon, and so that makes the molecules very persistent," said Ryan Sullivan, a chemistry professor and associate director of the Institute for Green Science at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

The man-made chemicals — in which fluorine atoms have been bonded to carbon atoms — are really surface active, meaning they spread quickly across a surface and create a film to interrupt the fuel source feeding the fire.

"If you can quickly coat the surface of, say, the (liquid) that's burning or the forest fire with something that doesn't burn and prevents oxygen from getting to the fire, you shut off the fire," said Sullivan, who began researching PFAS chemicals in 2000.

Contamination near military bases

While the Pentagon has phased out the foam for training to reduce exposure, it's still present in airplane hanger sprinklers, Navy ships and submarines. It's only used if there's an aircraft fire or a plane crash, according to the U.S. Senate aide. The Defense Department has to report to Congress anytime the foam is accidentally spilled, though decades of PFAS use, in the firefighting foam and other products, has already contaminated military bases and the surrounding communities. Congress has also placed language in more than one of the annual defense policy bills, calling for the Defense Department and the Centers

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for Disease Control and Prevention to conduct a human health assessment. New Hampshire Democratic Sen. Jeanne Shaheen said after securing language in the fiscal 2018 defense policy bill for the first nationwide study on the chemical's impact on drinking water that it was "completely unacceptable that parents in our community, and those in affected communities across the nation, have to worry about the safety of their children's drinking water because of this contamination." That led the CDC to begin tracking PFAS contamination near several military sites, including in Berkeley County, West Virginia, near Shepherd Field Air National Guard Base; El Paso County, Colorado, near Peterson Air Force Base; Fairbanks North Star Borough, Alaska, near Eielson Air Force Base; Hampden County, Massachusetts, near Barnes Air National Guard Base; Lubbock County, Texas, near Reese Technology Center; Orange County, New York, near Stewart Air National Guard Base; New Castle County, Delaware, near New Castle Air National Guard Base; and Spokane County, Washington, near Fairchild Air Force Base. Results showed that residents living in several of those communities had higher blood levels of certain PFAS chemicals compared to PFAS blood levels nationwide. The report, released in September, revealed that residents' blood in Airway Heights, Washington, presented significantly higher levels of two types of PFAS chemicals when compared to national levels, and to the other communities tested. Airway Heights sits in close proximity to the runways at Fairchild Air Force Base and Spokane International Airport.

'Early phases' of investigation

As of July 2022, the Defense Department had completed preliminary assessments at 476 of the 700 sites determined to have possible PFAS spread, with preparations for cleanup underway at 144 sites, according to a Defense Department report. Testing and cleanup will cost at least \$2.1 billion more than the \$1.1 billion the Pentagon's already spent, according to a report to the Government Accountability Office, a watchdog agency. "These costs will likely increase significantly, because DOD is still in the early phases of its PFAS investigation," the GAO wrote. Senate Defense Appropriations Chair Jon Tester, a Montana Democrat, said he hopes the Pentagon moves quickly to phase out PFAS wherever it can, noting "it's a problem in polluting the water and causing cancer." "It's a good thing for the military too, because the base cleanup is expensive as s—t," Tester added. Minnesota Democratic Rep. Betty McCollum, ranking member on the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, said in a written statement she plans to focus on PFAS remediation, cleanup and destruction technology during the upcoming government funding cycle. "PFAS is linked to thyroid disease, cancer, and birth defects, among other serious diseases," McCollum said. "It's clear this is a very serious issue that must be addressed to keep people healthy and safe." The funding Congress has approved so far, McCollum said, has led the Pentagon to move toward phasing out firefighting foams, which she called "one of the most significant uses of PFAS." "The DOD must work with the EPA to control these substances similar to the way they do with nuclear waste," McCollum said. "In very rare instances, some PFAS products will need to continue to be used in the short term until alternatives exist — for example, those with national security implications like critical microelectronic production." The Environmental Working Group, one of the main advocacy organizations tracking the cleanup effort, has criticized the Defense Department for moving "slowly." "In most cases, they are not even at the point where they're hiring someone to do the cleanup," said Melanie Benesh, the organization's vice president for government affairs.

Potential risks of PFAS exposure

Scientists and advocates have been sounding the alarm for decades on the potential health impacts of PFAS. The U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry warns studies indicate human exposure to high levels of PFAS "may" lead to increased cholesterol, increased risk of kidney and testicular cancers, increased risk of high blood pressure and pre-eclampsia during pregnancy, low birth weight, changes in liver enzymes, and decreased vaccine response in children. "Additional research may change our understanding of the relationship between exposure to PFAS and human health effects," the agency states on its webpage. As a requirement of the fiscal 2020 defense policy bill, the military in 2021 began testing PFAS levels in the blood of its firefighters during annual exams. Attention to PFAS, beyond just military bases, has accelerated in recent years. More than a dozen government agencies allocated just over \$250 million on research

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and development related to PFAS chemicals between 2019 and 2022, according to an interagency report mandated by the 2021 defense policy bill. The bipartisan infrastructure law, enacted in 2021, allocates \$5 billion in grants and resources for small and disadvantaged communities to tackle PFAS contamination in drinking water. The EPA on March 14 proposed new standards for six types of PFAS chemicals in drinking water. If finalized, the agency will regulate PFOA (Perfluorooctanoic Acid) and PFOS (Perfluorooctane sulfonic acid) to a level of four parts per trillion — the level at which those chemicals can be reliably detected — in public drinking water systems. The rule proposes limits in public drinking water on any mixture of four other specific PFAS chemicals, including types under the brand name GenX, manufactured by the North Carolina-based company Chemours as a replacement for PFOA. The company, a spin-off of DuPont, touts the effectiveness of its GenX chemicals in the defense, energy and technology sectors, particularly in the production of semiconductor chips — an industry crucial for the technology supply chain and the target of potentially hundreds of billions of dollars in government subsidies and research grants.

Alternative firefighting foam

In January, the Pentagon released new requirements for PFAS-free firefighting foam.

The department has until October to ensure there's an alternative foam on the market that meets the new performance standards and to stop buying any PFAS-containing foams. It then has one additional year, until October 2024, to stop using them entirely.

The Pentagon, however, hasn't yet released a list of PFAS-free fire-suppressing foams.

The Naval Sea Systems Command is in the process of reviewing applications from PFAS-free foam manufacturers. Any approved candidates will need to undergo "various inspections, tests, and evaluations to determine if the product meets the specification," according to Kelly Flynn, spokesperson for the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

The process is expected to take up to 120 days.

The Pentagon's two programs tasked with researching the alternatives have "conducted rigorous research and demonstration testing for viable PFAS-free solutions," including some non-foam alternatives.

"There are many viable alternatives for replacing AFFF, however, no single technology is suitable for every situation. The Department continues to evaluate all available technologies to find the best fit for each mission need and level of risk," Flynn said.

PFAS-free firefighting foam has been on the market for decades and several countries have put it to use extinguishing jet fuel blazes at major international airports, including Australia's Sydney Airport, Dubai International in the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom's London Heathrow airport and several European hubs, according to a 2020 report from the European Chemicals Agency.

Several U.S. states have passed or proposed prohibitions on foam that still contains PFAS. Hawaii banned it last year, and bills in the Alaska and Minnesota state legislatures would strictly regulate or outlaw the use of such foams, though with some exceptions.

At the federal level more decisions — for example, what firefighting foams are used by the Federal Aviation Administration — hinge on the Defense Department's decision.

The FAA has until July to develop a plan to transition from the PFAS-containing foam now that the Pentagon has updated its specifications, according to the House and Senate reports that accompanied Congress' latest funding law.

"We're waiting to see their list (of alternatives)," said Benesh, from The Environmental Working Group.

"There are well over 100 foams that are considered good for Class B fires — these high-heat, jet-fuel based (fires) — that are used at airports and fire stations all over the world and have been in development for a long time," Benesh said. "Not all of those hundreds of foams will meet the new military standard, but certainly a number of them will."

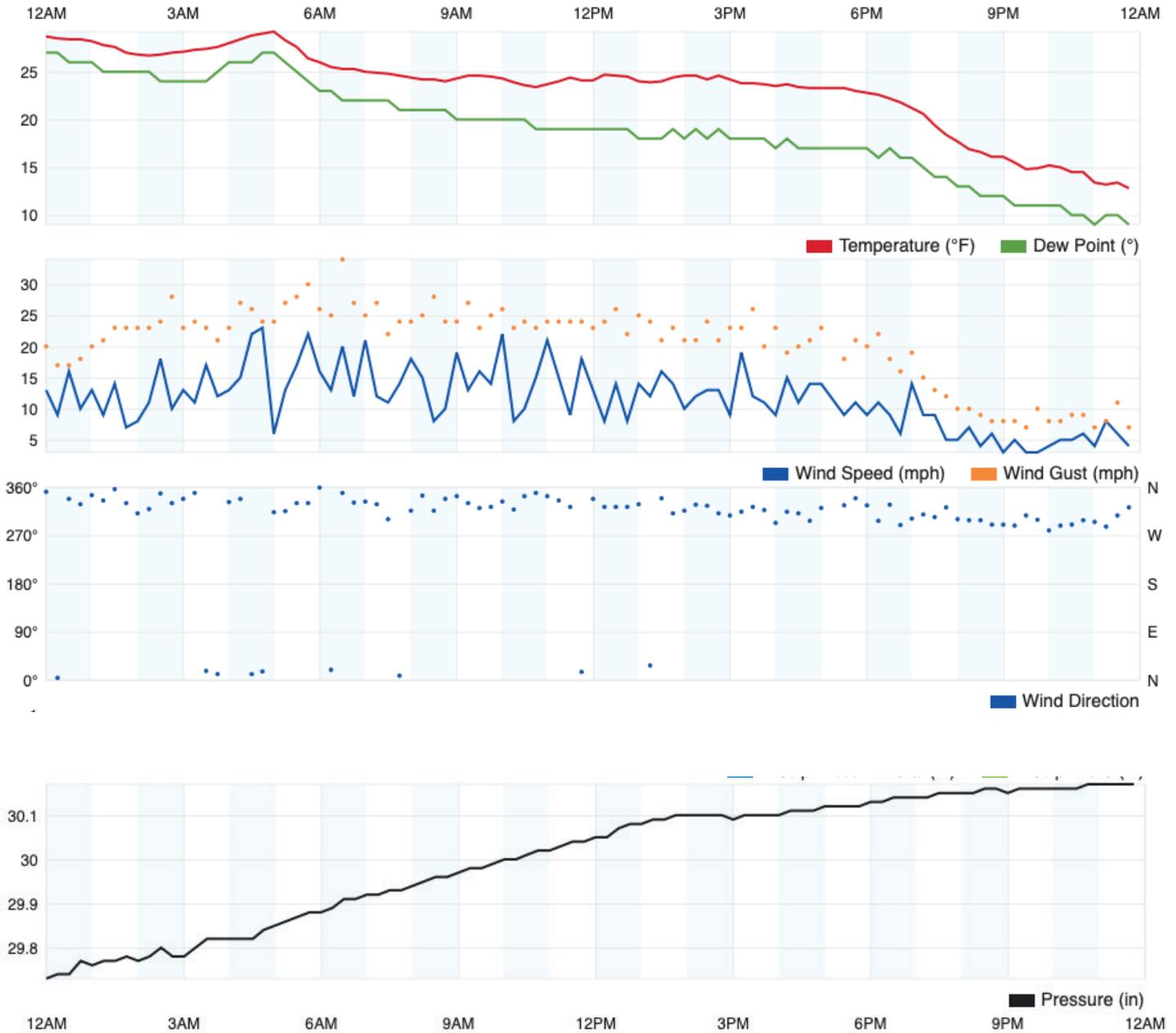
Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
						
Patchy Blowing Snow and Blustery	Patchy Blowing Snow and Blustery	Patchy Blowing Snow	Clear	Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 9 °F	Low: 1 °F	High: 15 °F	Low: -4 °F	High: 31 °F	Low: 11 °F	High: 25 °F



The Weekend Outlook

March 17, 2023
2:40 AM

Today

- Mostly cloudy with scattered snow showers, breezy
- Highs teens east to 20s west



Saturday & Sunday

- Partly to Mostly Sunny, Cold Saturday, milder Sunday
- Highs teens-20s Saturday
- Sunday highs 30-55°

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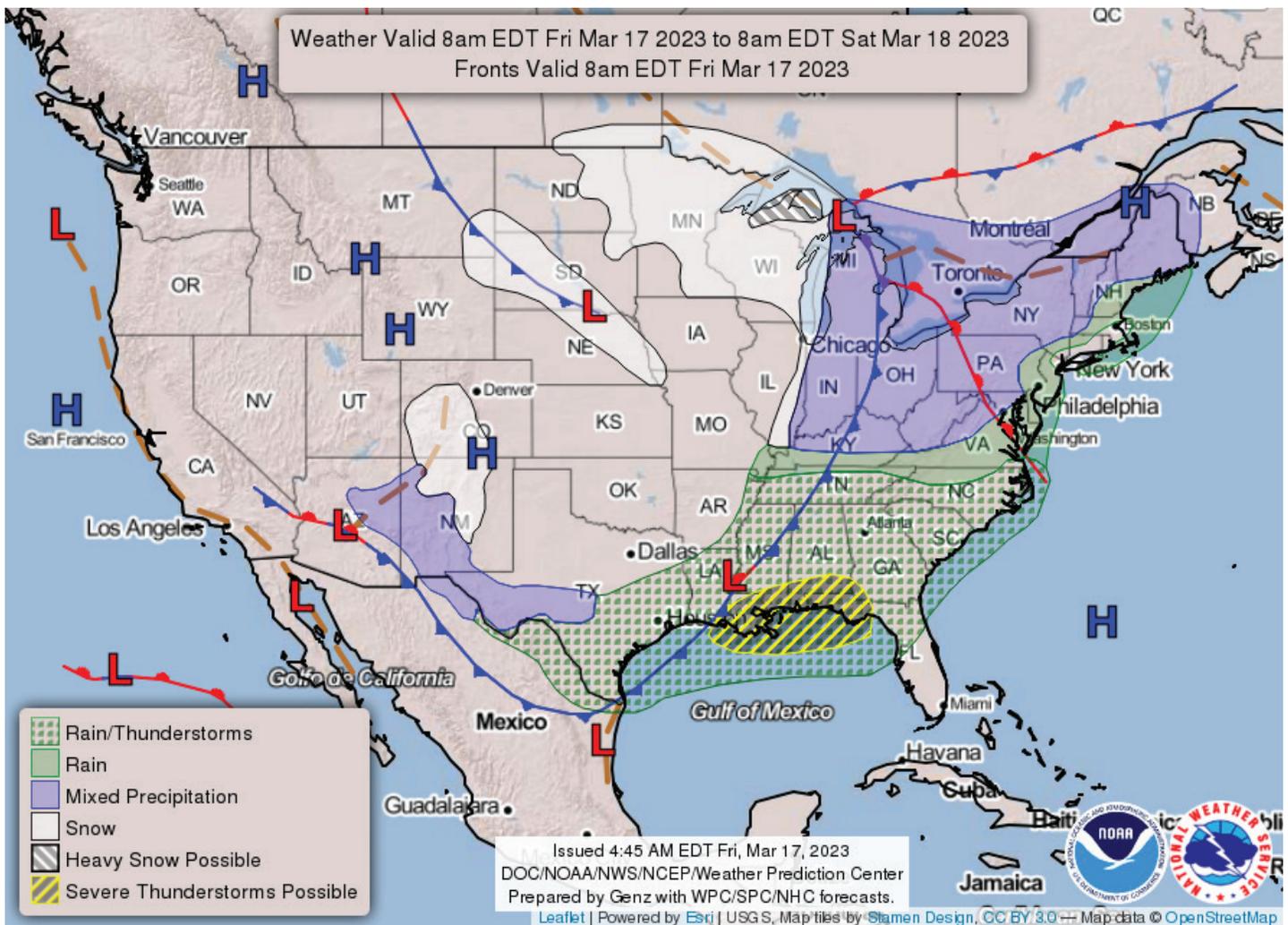
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 29 °F at 4:54 AM
Low Temp: 13 °F at 11:07 PM
Wind: 34 mph at 5:15 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 02 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 77 in 2012
Record Low: -10 in 1906
Average High: 42
Average Low: 20
Average Precip in March.: 0.43
Precip to date in March.: 1.20
Average Precip to date: 1.60
Precip Year to Date: 2.78
Sunset Tonight: 7:42:01 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:37:32 AM



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Today in Weather History

March 17, 1997: High winds of 30 to 50 mph, gusting to over 60 mph, occurred over much of northeast South Dakota through the morning and into the early afternoon hours. Several homes and businesses sustained some roof damage. In Aberdeen, the high winds tore a large piece of the roof off the bowling alley and also ripped a part of a roof off an appliance store. The winds damaged some power lines and connections in Aberdeen, including some traffic lights. In Aberdeen, the power was out for 2500 customers for a few hours in the morning. The wind also damaged two old farm buildings west of Aberdeen. One barn lost 75 percent of its roof. The second barn was pushed six inches off of its foundation, suffering minor structural damage. The Edmunds County Highway Department Shop, under construction east of Ipswich, suffered much damage as many rafters came down, and the sidewall frame shifted. Finally, much small to medium-sized branches were brought down by the high winds. Some peak wind gusts across the area included 58 mph in Aberdeen and 63 mph in Watertown.

1892: A winter storm in southwestern and central Tennessee produced 26.3 inches of snow at Riddleton and 18.5 inches at Memphis. It was the deepest snow on record for those areas.

1906: The temperature at Snake River Wyoming dipped to 50 degrees below zero, a record for the U.S. for March.

1906: A magnitude 7.1 earthquake caused significant damage in Taiwan. According to the Central Weather Bureau in China, this earthquake caused 1,258 deaths, 2,385 injuries, and destroyed over 6,000 homes.

1952: The ban on using the word "tornado" issued in 1886 ended on this date. In the 1880s, John P. Finley of the U.S. Army Signal Corps, then handling weather forecasting for the U.S., developed generalized forecasts on days tornadoes were most likely. But in 1886, the Army ended Finley's program and banned the word "tornado" from forecasts because the harm done by a tornado prediction would eventually be greater than that which results from the tornado itself. The thinking was that people would be trampled in the panic if they heard a tornado was possible. The ban stayed in place after the Weather Bureau; now, the National Weather Service took over forecasting from the Army. A tornado that wrecked 52 large aircraft at Tinker Air Force Base, OK, on 3/20/1948, spurred Air Force meteorologists to begin working on ways to forecast tornadoes. The Weather Bureau also began looking for ways to improve tornado forecasting and established the Severe Local Storm Warning Center, which is now the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, OK. The ban on the word "tornado" fell on this date when the new center issued its first Tornado Watch.

1987 - A powerful spring storm produced severe thunderstorms over the Central Gulf Coast States, and heavy snow in the High Plains Region. A tornado caused three million dollars damage at Natchez MS, and six inches of rain in five hours caused five million dollars damage at Vicksburg MS. Cactus TX received 10 inches of snow. Western Kansas reported blizzard conditions. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A winter storm produced heavy snow from the northeast Texas panhandle to the Ozark area of Missouri and Arkansas. Up to fifteen inches of snow was reported in Oklahoma and Texas. Snowfall totals in the Ozark area ranged up to 14 inches, with unofficial reports as high as 22 inches around Harrison AR. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Strong northerly winds ushered snow and arctic cold into the north central U.S. Winds gusted to 58 mph at Sydney NE and Scottsbluff NE, Cadillac MI received 12 inches of snow, and International Falls MN reported a record low of 22 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Showers and thunderstorms associated with a slow moving cold front produced torrential rains across parts of the southeastern U.S. over a two day period. Flooding claimed the lives of at least 22 persons, including thirteen in Alabama. Up to 16 inches of rain deluged southern Alabama, with 10.63 inches reported at Mobile AL in 24 hours. The town of Elba AL was flooded with 6 to 12 feet of water causing more than 25 million dollars damage, and total flood damage across Alabama exceeded 100 million dollars. Twenty-six counties in the state were declared disaster areas. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

WHERE DOES YOUR LIGHT COME FROM?

Little Sara came home from school and proudly said to her mother, "I learned a new song today!" "Sing it to me," came the request.

"God bless America, land that I love: Stand beside her, and guide her through the night with the light from a bulb," sang Sara.

There is a great difference between "light from a bulb" and "light from above." As we look at our nation today, we find that much "light" has come from education, information, training, and knowledge that enables individuals to earn a living. However, the "light" that comes from wisdom - the ability to judge what is true or right or something with lasting value or worth - appears to be in short supply.

James reminds us that if we want to have the ability to make wise decisions in troubling times we can always pray and ask God for guidance and wisdom.

We do not have to stumble in the darkness hoping to find good answers while looking for a "bulb" to light our path. We can ask God for His directions and He will gladly tell us what to do.

God's wisdom always leads us to the right decision and guarantees us good results. But we must have God-centered goals that come from knowing, accepting, and living our lives according to His Word if we expect to receive His wisdom.

Prayer: Lord, fill our minds with wisdom that can only come from Your Word. May we always look to You for guidance to guard us and live lives worthy of You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. James 1:5



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

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2023 Community Events

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.14.23

1 7 23 38 55 2

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$254,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 9 Mins 14
DRAW: 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 1 Days 17 Hrs 9
DRAW: Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.16.23

5 22 28 34 45 7

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 39 Mins 15
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.15.23

15 22 28 33 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$94,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 9
DRAW: Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.15.23

7 9 46 64 68 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 8
DRAW: Mins 15 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 1 Days 17 Hrs 8
DRAW: Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class A State=

Quarterfinal=

Dakota Valley 80, Hot Springs 47

Elk Point-Jefferson 53, St. Thomas More 50

Hamlin 72, Sioux Valley 64

Sioux Falls Christian 83, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 55

Class AA State=

Quarterfinal=

Mitchell 60, Pierre T F Riggs High School 51

Sioux Falls Jefferson 53, Harrisburg 41

Sioux Falls Lincoln 56, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 48

Yankton 58, Sioux Falls Washington 51

Class B State=

Quarterfinal=

Aberdeen Christian 57, Ethan 47

DeSmet 51, Viborg-Hurley 47

Lower Brule 67, Castlewood 55

White River 72, Faith 56

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

Kentucky lawmakers pass ban on youth gender-affirming care

By BRUCE SCHREINER Associated Press

FRANKFORT, Ky. (AP) — Republican lawmakers in Kentucky passed a measure Thursday to ban gender-affirming care for transgender minors, completing whirlwind voting on a repackaged proposal that triggered outrage and tears among opponents unable to stop the sweeping policymaking on a culture wars issue.

Supporters of the proposal — which affects how gender is discussed in schools — beat a Thursday deadline to retain their power to override an expected gubernatorial veto.

GOP supermajorities in the House and Senate overwhelmingly passed the bill, a day after a slimmed-down version had stalled in the Senate and seemingly left the issue in limbo. A cascade of shouting erupted from some bill opponents in the Senate gallery after the measure won final passage.

The bill's foes denounced the fast-track maneuvering and the expanded measure's consequences for trans youths. Overcome with emotion, a sobbing Rep. Josie Raymond said children would be harmed. "I'm embarrassed and I'm appalled and I'm scared," the Democrat said in opposing the bill in committee.

Republicans backing the far-reaching rendition cobbled together a separate bill that hastily cleared a committee and won House passage. It gained Senate passage a short time later, sending the bill to Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear, who portrayed it as government intrusion in family health decisions.

Republican House Speaker Pro Tempore David Meade, in presenting the revived bill in committee, said: "Our job is to protect children, and that's what we're doing here."

"Surgery or drugs that completely alter their life, and alter their body, is not something we should be allowing until they are adults," Meade said later during the House debate.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky quickly warned that it "stands ready" to challenge the

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measure in court if it becomes law.

"Legislators cannot erase transgender people from existence, and we will continue to fight for equal rights and equal protection under the law," said Amber Duke, the organization's interim executive director.

The new bill designated to carry the sweeping trans-related provisions retained its original language — allowing teachers to refuse to refer to transgender students by their preferred pronouns and requiring schools to notify parents when lessons related to human sexuality are going to be taught.

Multiple layers were added to it — including the proposed ban on gender-affirming medical care for trans youths. It would outlaw gender reassignment surgery for anyone under 18, as well as the use of puberty blockers and hormones, and inpatient and outpatient gender-affirming hospital services. It would not allow schools to discuss sexual orientation or gender identity with students of any age.

The House passed the bill on a 75-22 vote. One after another, opponents stood to denounce the bill while supporters were mostly silent. Democratic Rep. Keturah Herron called the bill "an attack on a very, very, very small population of people."

The debate was shorter but no less fiery in the Senate, which passed the bill 30-7.

"This is absolute, wilful, intentional hate. Hate for a small group of people that are the weakest and the most vulnerable among us," said Democratic Sen. Karen Berg.

The bill's supporters say they are trying to protect children from undertaking gender-affirming treatments that they might later regret as adults.

"We're talking about removing healthy body parts that you cannot put back on," Republican Sen. Lindsey Tichenor said in supporting the bill. "I've seen the pictures. It's horrifying."

Thursday was the last day Kentucky lawmakers were in session until late March, when they'll reconvene for the final two days of this year's session. By beating the Thursday deadline to send the bill to the governor, the GOP supermajorities retained their ability to override a veto.

Beshear, who is seeking reelection this year, said such bills amount to "big government stepping in and imposing its will" on health care decisions that should be left to families.

"I also believe that every child is a child of God — every single one," the governor said Thursday at his weekly news conference.

The expanded version was in stark contrast to the more limited version that stalled Wednesday in the Senate. That version pared down the restrictions on transgender youth, their families and health care providers.

The issue has spurred emotional debate from bill opponents who call it discriminatory and say it would hurt transgender youth. On Tuesday, a former Kentucky lawmaker said his young grandchild would be among those affected if lawmakers banned access to gender-affirming medical care for those under 18.

"This bill condemns vulnerable children to an even more difficult life than they've already been born into," Jerry Miller, a Republican who formerly served in the House, told lawmakers. "Please don't let a parent's right to protect their children be collateral damage in the culture wars."

Nationally, state lawmakers are approving extensive measures that restrict the rights of LGBTQ people this year, from bills targeting trans athletes and drag performers to ones limiting gender-affirming care. In Mississippi, Republican Gov. Tate Reeves recently signed a bill to ban gender-affirming hormones or surgery in the state for anyone younger than 18. The Republican governors of South Dakota and Utah have signed bans on gender-affirming care this year.

Four-seed Hokies, Kitley have special connection

By HANK KURZ Jr. AP Sports Writer

Virginia Tech coach Kenny Brooks remembers feeling special, and lucky.

He was in Atlanta watching an AAU basketball tournament, one of several dozen coaches hoping to lure a program-changing recruit to his school, when someone with no chance of being that player ambled past.

"Raven was at the game and she was going to the bathroom," Brooks said Thursday of Elizabeth Kitley's sister, "and I remember she ran past all the coaches and she took like two or three steps past me, and

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she put the brakes on and she backed up and she said, 'Hi, Coach Brooks'. And she waved at me and she took off, and the other coaches were like, Who was that?

"And I'm like, yeah, we're in good shape with Liz."

Raven Kitley, Elizabeth's older sister, is autistic and especially connected to her sister's career, and the Hokies. It's been huge for Virginia Tech.

Elizabeth Kitley, the two-time Atlantic Coast Conference player of the year, led the No. 4 Hokies to a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament this season. They'll face No. 16 Chattanooga on Friday.

"She'll definitely be here cheering us on, as she always is, and hopefully we can make her proud and happy," Kitley said.

The Hokies will be facing a familiar face. Mocs coach Shawn Poppie spent six seasons as an assistant for Brooks, the last three as associate head coach.

"I tell you what, this past season, I have watched from afar as a fan." Poppie said. "Obviously being here for six years and getting to know the kids and being so close to Coach Brooks and the staff, I have been a fan all year."

The other game will feature eighth-seeded and two-time national champion Southern Cal and ninth-seeded South Dakota State. The USC team is in the tournament for the first time since 2014.

"They're a team that likes to run in transition, get really quick buckets. They're really, really good three-point shooters. Everyone on the floor can shoot, and I think that's different from what we've faced," Trojans guard Destiny Littleton said.

The Jackrabbits are thrilled for the opportunity.

"Any time we can meet up with another opponent, it's fun," Myah Selland said. "We have spent the last 21 games playing very familiar faces, so I think we are excited to play somebody new. Our coaches have done a great job of getting us prepared for that but yeah, really excited for this opportunity."

Kansas anti-ESG push slowed by debate over private investors

By JOHN HANNA AP Political Writer

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Republican lawmakers pushing to prevent Kansas from investing its funds using socially and environmentally conscious principles disagree about also imposing rules for investment managers handling private funds, complicating their efforts to thwart what they see as "woke" investing.

Committees in the Kansas House and Senate this week approved competing versions of anti-ESG legislation, and the two chambers could debate them as early as next week. ESG stands for environmental, social and governance and those considerations have become more prominent in investing in recent years, sparking a nationwide backlash from conservative Republicans.

The Kansas Senate's version of the anti-ESG measure would require private money managers to get their clients' written consent before investing their funds along ESG principles. The House bill contains no such provision.

The issue of requiring managers of private funds to disclose their ESG activities to clients or to get clients' verbal or written consent to use them appears to be the last major sticking point among Republicans in the GOP-controlled Legislature. They've already backed off the toughest version of the anti-ESG legislation because of opposition from powerful business groups, and have rewritten both bills to prevent projected investment losses of \$3.6 billion over 10 years for the pension fund for Kansas teachers and government workers.

A desire to thwart ESG investing has some Republicans breaking with the party's longstanding aversion to tougher business regulations.

"We have labels on our food," said state Rep. Michael Murphy, a Republican from rural south-central Kansas who backed the strongest anti-ESG legislation. "We could look at it and say, 'Well, I don't want that, and I'll take this over here.' It allows you to make that choice, and that's all this is."

Supporters of ESG principles argue that they're not about investment managers boycotting industries such as oil production. Instead, they encourage being more comprehensive about assessing investment

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risks, such as whether concerns about climate change make green energy more attractive and fossil fuels less so. They also argue that Republicans have turned ESG into a culture war issue to keep the GOP's conservative base riled up.

In Kansas, Democrats argue that anti-ESG legislation is unnecessary because state law already requires its managers to work to get the maximum investment returns possible. They also worry that even if the final legislation focuses on the investment of state funds, its provisions will be broad enough to handcuff cities and counties if, for example, they want to purchase energy from green sources.

"It's going to cause problems," said Kansas City-area Rep. Rui Xu, the top Democrat on the House committee that handled the anti-ESG legislation.

Utah's Republican state treasurer recently told a GOP gathering that ESG "opens the door to authoritarianism" and is "Satan's plan." On Thursday, 19 GOP governors, including Ron DeSantis of Florida and Kristi Noem of South Dakota, issued a joint statement calling ESG a "direct threat to the American economy, individual economic freedom, and our way of life."

In Kansas, newly elected GOP Attorney General Kris Kobach and Republican State Treasurer Steven Johnson back anti-ESG measures, but they've argued that allowing the investment of state funds using ESG principles threatens to reduce the state's investment returns. Kobach has argued for an informed consent requirement for private money managers as a consumer protection measure.

But state Rep. Nick Hoheisel, a Wichita Republican who chairs the House committee that handled anti-ESG legislation, said its GOP members don't want to impose new mandates on private businesses.

"We have enough mandates on businesses already," Hoheisel said after the committee approved its bill. "In fact, we need to go back and start repealing some mandates on businesses."

Anger spreads in France over Macron's retirement bill push

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Protesters disrupted traffic in Paris on Friday as angry critics, political opponents and labor unions around France blasted President Emmanuel Macron's decision to force a bill raising the retirement age from 62 to 64 through parliament without a vote.

Opposition parties were expected to start procedures later Friday for a no-confidence vote on the government led by Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne. The vote would likely take place early next week.

Macron ordered Borne on Thursday to wield a special constitutional power to push the highly unpopular pension bill through without a vote in the National Assembly, France's lower house of parliament.

His calculated risk infuriated opposition lawmakers, many citizens and unions. Thousands gathered in protest Thursday at the Place de la Concorde, which faces the National Assembly building. As night fell, police officers charged the demonstrators in waves to clear the Place. Small groups then moved through nearby streets in the chic Champs-Elysees neighborhood, setting street fires.

Similar scenes repeated themselves in numerous other cities, from Rennes and Nantes in eastern France to Lyon and the southern port city of Marseille, where shop windows and bank fronts were smashed, according to French media.

French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin told radio station RTL on Friday that 310 people were arrested overnight. Most of the arrests, 258, were made in Paris, according to Darmanin.

The trade unions that had organized strikes and marches against a higher retirement age said more rallies and protest marches would take place in the days ahead. "This retirement reform is brutal, unjust, unjustified for the world of workers," they declared.

Macron has made the proposed pension changes the key priority of his second term, arguing that reform is needed to make the French economy more competitive and to keep the pension system from diving into deficit. France, like many richer nations, faces lower birth rates and longer life expectancy.

Macron decided to invoke the special power during a Cabinet meeting a few minutes before a scheduled vote in the National Assembly, where the legislation had no guarantee of securing majority support. The Senate adopted the bill earlier Thursday.

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Opposition lawmakers demanded the government to step down. If the expected no-confidence motion passes, which requires approval from more than half of the Assembly, it would be a first since 1962 and force the government to resign. It would also spell the end of Macron's retirement reform plan.

Macron could reappoint Borne if he chooses, and a new Cabinet would be named. If the motion does not succeed, the pension bill would be considered adopted.

China's Xi to visit Moscow in show of support for Putin

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese President Xi Jinping plans to visit Russia from Monday to Wednesday, in an apparent show of support for Russian President Vladimir Putin amid sharpening East-West tensions over the war in Ukraine.

Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine is expected to dominate Putin and Xi's discussions. China has refused to condemn Moscow's aggression and sought to project itself as neutral in the conflict even while Beijing declared last year that it had a "no-limits" friendship with Russia.

The meeting between the leaders was announced by both countries on Friday.

China has said the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries should be respected, while condemning Western sanctions and accusing NATO and the United States of provoking Russia into military action.

On Thursday, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang told his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba that Beijing was concerned about the year-old conflict spinning out of control and urged talks on a political solution with Moscow.

China has "always upheld an objective and fair stance on the Ukraine issue, has committed itself to promoting peace and advancing negotiations and calls on the international community to create conditions for peace talks," Qin said.

Kuleba later tweeted that he and Qin "discussed the significance of the principle of territorial integrity."

"I underscored the importance of (Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's) peace formula for ending the aggression and restoring just peace in Ukraine," wrote Kuleba, who spoke the same day with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Wang Wenbin, spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said in a daily briefing on Friday that Xi "will have an in-depth exchange of views with President Putin on bilateral relations and major international and regional issues of common concern, promote strategic cooperation and practical cooperation between the two countries, and inject new impetus into the development of bilateral relations."

"Currently, the world is entering a new period of turbulences and reform with the accelerated evolution of changes of the century. As permanent members of the UN Security Council and important major countries, the significance and impact of the China-Russia relations go far beyond the bilateral sphere," he added.

The trip comes after the destruction of a U.S. drone over the Black Sea following an encounter with Russian fighter jets, which brought the two countries closest to direct conflict since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine a year ago.

The Kremlin on Friday also announced Xi's visit, saying it would take place "at the invitation of Vladimir Putin."

Xi and Putin will discuss "issues of further development of comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction between Russia and China," as well as exchange views "in the context of deepening Russian-Chinese cooperation in the international arena," the Kremlin said in a statement.

The two leaders will also sign "important bilateral documents," the statement read.

Putin invited Xi to visit Russia during a video conference call the two held in late December. The visit, Putin said, could "demonstrate to the whole world the strength of the Russian-Chinese ties" and "become the main political event of the year in bilateral relations."

North Korea says ICBM test aimed to strike fear into enemies

BY KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

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SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea said Friday it fired an intercontinental ballistic missile to “strike fear into the enemies” as South Korea and Japan agreed at a summit to work closely on regional security with the United States and staged military exercises around the region.

The missile, launched Thursday from North Korea’s main airport as leader Kim Jong Un and his daughter smiled from afar, overshadowed a summit held hours later between South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. The meeting in Tokyo was partially aimed at rebuilding security ties between the often-estranged U.S. allies in the face of North Korean nuclear threats.

With four missile displays in about a week, North Korea has ratcheted up its tit-for-tat response to ongoing U.S.-South Korean military drills that are the biggest of their kind in years.

The Biden administration wants better South Korea-Japan ties, which declined over historical issues in recent years, as it pushes to strengthen its alliance network in Asia to counter the North Korean nuclear threat and China’s rising influence.

Aside from their combined exercises that began Monday and run through March 23, the United States and South Korea are also participating in anti-submarine warfare drills, along with Japan, Canada and India, that began Wednesday.

North Korea’s official Korean Central News Agency said Kim supervised the test-firing of the Hwasong-17 missile, which blasted off from a launch vehicle parked on an airport runway. Kim stressed the need to “strike fear into the enemies” over what it called the “open hostility” shown to the North by the U.S.-South Korea exercises.

Launched at a high angle to avoid the territory of North Korea’s neighbors, the missile reached a maximum altitude of 6,045 kilometers (3,756 miles) and traveled 1,000 kilometers (621 miles) before landing in waters off the country’s eastern coast, KCNA said.

The South Korean and Japanese militaries assessed the flight similarly, indicating the U.S. mainland is within the missile’s range. It remains unclear whether North Korea has developed nuclear bombs small enough to fit on its long-range rockets or the technology to ensure its warheads survive atmospheric reentry when fired at a normal trajectory.

State TV showed the launch in various angles, including footage from a video camera apparently installed on the missile body that provided an aerial view of the rocket soaring from above ground, amid bright orange flames, before its lower chamber fell off in what appeared to be a stage separation.

Pyongyang’s official Rodong Sinmun also published still photos implied to have been taken by a camera on the missile as it soared into space. They showed a rounded view of the Earth, with clouds scattered over what appeared to be the Korean Peninsula and Asian coastline.

Kim was accompanied by his daughter, believed to be named Kim Ju Ae and about 10 years old. She has accompanied him to several military events since she was publicly revealed for the first time during another ICBM launch in November. Analysts say the intent of her public appearances at military events is to tie the Kim family’s dynastic rule to the nuclear arsenal Kim sees as the strongest guarantee of his survival.

The high-altitude photos were apparently intended as proof the missile would be capable of accurately striking its target, said Cheong Seong-Chang, a senior analyst at South Korea’s private Sejong Institute.

While all of North Korea’s ICBM tests have been conducted on a high angle, Cheong said the North is likely coming closer to launching one of those missiles at an angle closer to normal ballistic trajectory across the Pacific Ocean, in what would be one of its most provocative weapons demonstrations ever.

KCNA said the ICBM launch sends a “stronger warning” to North Korea’s rivals who are escalating tensions with their “frantic, provocative and aggressive large-scale war drills.” The test also was designed to confirm the reliability of the weapons system, KCNA said.

Kim said it’s crucial for North Korea’s nuclear missile forces to maintain readiness to counterattack rivals with “overwhelming offensive measures anytime” and make them realize their persistent and expanded military actions will “bring an irreversible, grave threat to them,” KCNA said.

Lee Hyojung, spokesperson of South Korea’s Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, said it’s deeply regrettable that the North continues to use the U.S.-South Korean military drills as an excuse to stage provocative military demonstrations.

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"It's clear that North Korea's reckless nuclear and missile development is the cause of escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula," she said, urging Pyongyang to return to dialogue.

Speaking at a lecture in Singapore on Thursday, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command chief Adm. John Aquilino said China has a role to play in the world if it adheres to the rules-based order, especially in regards to North Korea, which depends on Beijing as its major ally and economic lifeline.

North Korea's ramped-up weapons development, underscored by the dozens of missiles it test-fired last year, poses an increasing threat to South Korea and Japan and the country has also "developed the capabilities to threaten the United States as well," Aquilino said.

"It is destabilizing, it's unpredictable, it's continuing, it's not slowing down. The potential for the People's Republic of China to help to dissuade the DPRK from executing these events would be helpful," Aquilino said, using the initials of North Korea's official name.

North Korea has long portrayed U.S.-South Korean military drills as rehearsals for an invasion, although the allies describe those exercises as defensive.

Many experts say North Korea uses its rivals' drills as a pretext to aggressively expand its nuclear arsenal and overall military capability.

Since last week, North Korea also has test-fired cruise missiles from a submarine and fired short-range missiles into the sea, attempting to show it could conduct potential nuclear strikes on both South Korean targets and the U.S. mainland.

Thursday's launch was North Korea's second of an ICBM this year. The Hwasong-15 launched in February is a slightly smaller weapon than the Hwasong-17.

At the summit between Yoon and Kishida, the leaders agreed to resume defense dialogue and further strengthen security cooperation with the United States to counter North Korea and other challenges.

"The ever-escalating threat of North Korea's nuclear missile program poses a huge threat to peace and stability not only in East Asia but also to the (broader) international community," Yoon said. "South Korea and Japan need to work closely together and in solidarity to wisely counter the threat."

World shares up after First Republic aid spurs Wall St rally

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — Markets advanced Friday in Europe and Asia, tracking a rally on Wall Street after a group of big banks offered a lifeline to First Republic Bank, the latest U.S. lender in the spotlight for troubles in the banking industry.

Shares rose in Paris, London, Tokyo and Hong Kong but edged lower in Mumbai. U.S. futures edged higher, while oil prices gained.

The S&P 500 jumped 1.8% Thursday, erasing earlier losses following reports that First Republic Bank could get help or sell itself to another bank. Markets have gyrated this week on concerns over the toll on banks from the fastest set of interest rate hikes in decades. The turmoil flared with last week's collapse of Silicon Valley Bank, the second largest bank failure in U.S. history.

"The market remains cautious; traders do not want to get overexcited, especially with investors still focusing on what can go wrong instead of what could go right," Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a report.

Germany's DAX gained 0.9% in early trading, to 15,102.37 and the CAC 40 in Paris was up 0.7% at 7,075.74. In London, the FTSE 100 rose 0.8% to 7,471.98.

The future for the S&P 500 inched 0.1% higher while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was unchanged.

In Asia, Hong Kong's Hang Seng jumped 1.8% to 19,548.26 and the Shanghai Composite index added 0.7% to 3,450.55.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index gained 1.2% to 27,333.79 and the Kospi in Seoul was up 0.8% at 2,395.69. Shares in major Japanese banks rebounded after falling sharply at times this week.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 added 0.4% to 6,994.80. India's Sensex was 0.1% higher while Taiwan's Taiex

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surged 1.5%.

Stocks rallied Thursday on Wall Street after 11 of the biggest banks offered help for First Republic with a combined deposit of \$30 billion.

Since SVB's failure, investors have been on the lookout for banks with similar traits, such as many depositors with more than the \$250,000 limit that's insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., tech startups and other highly connected people who can spread worries about a bank's strength quickly.

First Republic Bank rose 10% Thursday after slumping as much as 36% early in the day.

The Federal Reserve's fastest barrage of hikes to interest rates in decades, to drive down inflation, has shocked the banking system following years of historically easy conditions. Higher rates raise the risk of recession and hurt prices for stocks, bonds and other investments. That latter factor hurt Silicon Valley Bank, since high rates forced down the value of its bond investments.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told a Senate committee on Thursday that the nation's banking system "remains sound" and Americans "can feel confident" about their deposits.

Wall Street increasingly expects this week's turmoil to push the Federal Reserve to hike interest rates next week by only a quarter of a percentage point. That would be the same sized increase as last month's, half the hike of 0.50 points that was earlier expected.

The European Central Bank on Thursday raised its key rate by half a percentage point, brushing aside speculation that it may reduce the size because of all the turmoil around banks.

All the stress in the banking system has raised worries about a potential recession because of how important smaller and mid-sized banks are to making loans to businesses across the country. Oil prices have slid this week on such fears.

Reports on the U.S. economy are showing mixed signals. A report said fewer workers applied for unemployment benefits last week than expected.

In other trading, U.S. benchmark crude oil gained 73 cents to \$69.08 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It picked up 74 cents on Thursday to \$68.35 a barrel.

Brent crude, the pricing basis for international trading, climbed 78 cents to \$75.48 a barrel.

The dollar fell to 133.26 Japanese yen from 133.76 yen. The euro rose to \$1.0664 from \$1.0611.

In Israel, TV's dystopian 'Handmaids' is protest fixture

By ISAAC SCHARF and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — It's become an ominous fixture of the mass anti-government protests roiling Israel: a coil of women in crimson robes and white caps, walking heads bowed and hands clasped. They are dressed as characters from Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel, "The Handmaid's Tale," and the eponymous TV series.

The women, growing in numbers as the demonstrations against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policies intensify, say they are protesting to ward off what they believe will be a dark future if the government follows through on its plan to overhaul the judiciary.

"This display is a representation of the things that we fear," said Moran Zer Katzenstein, founder of the women's rights advocacy group Bonot Alternativa, or "building an alternative," which is behind the Handmaid's protest.

"Women are going to be the first to be harmed" under the overhaul, she added.

In a move that has sparked widespread opposition, Netanyahu's government is pushing to weaken the Supreme Court and limit the independence of the judiciary, steps they say will restore power to elected legislators and make the courts less interventionist. Critics say the move upends Israel's system of checks and balances and pushes it toward autocracy.

The overhaul has sent tens of thousands of people into the streets in protest each week.

Unmissable in the crowd are the women in red robes, turning otherwise usual protest scenes into an otherworldly sight.

Ahead of one demonstration, a group of women rode the train from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in costume,

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transforming the cars and the platform into what could have been a scene from the Hulu series. Another time, they encircled a central fountain in the seaside metropolis of Tel Aviv, a site that's typically home to kids in strollers and dogs on leashes. They have also blocked intersections, staying in character during the protests, keeping quiet as they walk in formation.

Their jarring appearance is meant to drive home the notion that Israel, which portrays itself as the Middle East's lone democracy, could morph into a chilling dystopia where women are stripped of their rights.

Atwood's 1985 novel about a futuristic patriarchal society where the robed handmaids are forced to bear children for leaders, has reemerged in recent years as a cultural touchstone thanks to the popular TV series. Its themes of female subjugation and male domination have resonated with women today who see threats in limits on abortion rights, or in Israel's case, in the rise of its conservative, religious government.

The government, Israel's most right-wing ever, is overwhelmingly male. Only nine out of 64 members of Netanyahu's coalition are women. Ultra-Orthodox parties, which are key components of the coalition, deny inclusion to women members entirely.

Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has said men and women should not be permitted to serve together in military combat units, while his governing partners have voiced support for discrimination against LGBTQ people and Palestinian citizens of Israel.

The costume, which has come to embody globally the threat to women under the patriarchy, has been used in protests elsewhere. American women opposing former President Donald Trump's conservative Supreme Court nominees have donned the garb, as have Iranian women demonstrating in Britain in support of the protests in Iran, and Polish women calling to preserve abortion rights.

But with the crisis in Israel showing no sign of abating, the women in red have become a mainstay at protests around the country and their numbers are growing. About 1,000 women wore the robes at a recent Tel Aviv rally.

They're also getting noticed. Atwood herself has retweeted several posts about the women. And Simcha Rothman, the lawmaker and parliamentary committee head spearheading the overhaul, has criticized them, while claiming the legal changes will only strengthen women's rights in Israel.

"I am attentive to the protests and demonstrations and happy to give a response to any concern regarding the legal plan. What do I not accept? A scare campaign that incites falsely that Israel will become 'The Handmaid's Tale,'" he tweeted earlier this month. "The reform will not harm the protection of women."

Zer Katzenstein, who left a career in marketing for international brands to steer the protest, said that she wouldn't count on Rothman, a religious Jew and conservative ideologue, to protect her rights.

The protest is not an exaggeration of where Israel might be headed as some have charged, but rather a warning light, she said.

"We don't think that we (will) wake up and realize that we live in Gilead," she said, referring to the name of the fictional republic in Atwood's book.

"But we fear that it's going to be something evolving. First here and then there and another one and another one," she added. "Our message is that we are drawing a red line and we will not let this happen, not even a bit."

California bill to protect doctors who mail abortion pills

By ADAM BEAM Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Doctors in California who mail abortion pills to people in other states would be protected from prosecution under a new bill to be unveiled Friday in the state Legislature.

The bill would not let California extradite doctors who are facing charges in another state for providing abortion medication. It would also shield doctors from having to pay fines. And it would let California doctors sue anyone who tries to stop them from providing abortions.

The bill would only protect doctors who are in California. If a doctor left California to provide an abortion to someone in another state, that doctor would not be protected. It also would not protect patients

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in other states who receive the medication.

State Sen. Nancy Skinner, a Democrat from Berkeley and the author of the bill, said her intent is to make sure California residents who are traveling in other states or living there temporarily — like college students — can still have access to medication that's legal in their home state. But she acknowledged the bill would also apply to California doctors who treat patients who live in other states.

"This is essential health care," Skinner said. "Our health care practitioners should be protected for treating their patients regardless of where their patients are geographically."

Massachusetts, New York, Connecticut, Maryland and Vermont have proposed or passed similar laws, according to Skinner's office. Connecticut's law, among other things, blocks criminal summonses from other states related to reproductive health care services that are legal in Connecticut while also blocking extradition — unless the person fled from a state requesting them.

"Obviously, if a provider is engaging in telehealth services with someone, even if they do inquire about where they are, they kind of have to take it on faith," said Connecticut state Rep. Matt Blumenthal, a Democrat and co-chair of the General Assembly's Reproductive Rights Caucus. "We don't want to make providers their police for their patients. And we don't want to make them have to do an investigation every time they perform telehealth."

Other states have tried to block the distribution of the abortion pill, known as mifepristone. Attorneys general in 20 states, mostly with Republican governors, have warned some of the nation's largest pharmacy companies they could face legal consequences if they distribute the pill within their states.

Most abortions are outlawed in Idaho, including medication abortions. Blaine Conzatti, president of the Idaho Family Policy Center — a group that opposes abortion rights — said California has a responsibility to extradite physicians who break Idaho laws.

"The arrogance of such a proposal is astounding," Conzatti said of Skinner's bill. "It flaunts the traditional relationship between states and would upend our federal system altogether."

Skinner's bill goes beyond abortions. It would also protect doctors for mailing contraceptives and transgender-related medications.

California already has laws that prevents courts from enforcing out-of-state judgments on abortion providers and volunteers. That law was aimed at protecting doctors who provide abortions to people who travel to California from other states. Abortion opponents say laws like that are illegal because they violate a clause in the U.S. Constitution that says states must give "full faith and credit" to the laws of other states.

Federal courts have recognized an exception to that clause, including laws in one state that violate the "public policy" of another state. Skinner's law declares it is the public policy of California that doctors should not be charged for providing abortion medication.

"We're very careful," Skinner said.

Abortion pills have been legal in the U.S. for more than two decades and can be used up to the 10th week of pregnancy. It's now the most common abortion method in the U.S. A federal judge in Texas is weighing whether to revoke or suspend the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approval of the drug, a decision that would apply to all states and not just the ones who have outlawed abortions.

Skinner's bill is one of 17 pieces of legislation Democrats have introduced in California this year to protect abortion rights, including proposals to improve access to contraceptives and protect patients' privacy.

Flight attack raises questions about security, mental health

MICHAEL CASEY and DAVID KOENIG Associated Press

LEOMINSTER, Mass. (AP) — The music was blaring on a February afternoon when Francisco Torres stopped by a Massachusetts barbershop, proclaiming he was half-angel, half-devil.

He wanted a dozen people to come outside the shop and shoot him with an automatic weapon stored in his car trunk. Before anyone could make sense of the request, Torres fled the shop and drove off. They never saw a weapon and he didn't return.

"I didn't get what he was saying but then I realized he was talking about a gun. I told him there are kids

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in here, why are you saying this," said Saul Perez, who was visiting friends at the shop and noted that an employee called 911, ushered children into the back and shut down the shop. "I was spooked."

The incident took place about a week before Torres would be arrested for attacking a flight attendant and attempting to open the plane's emergency door on a cross-country United flight from Los Angeles to Boston earlier this month.

Confrontations on flights have skyrocketed since the pandemic started, with some altercations captured and replayed endlessly on social media.

In a video taken by a fellow passenger, Torres loudly threatens to kill people and promises a bloodbath before charging the front of the plane, where a group of passengers tackled him down to the ground to restrain him.

He remains behind bars pending a mental health evaluation, with a judge ruling he "may presently be suffering from a mental disease or defect rendering him mentally incompetent."

Torres objected to the evaluation through his federal public defender, Joshua Hanye, who didn't return a call Thursday seeking additional comment. A relative for Torres would not comment on the case.

The flight attack was part of a decadeslong pattern of Torres demonstrating signs of a mental illness. He spent time in mental health facilities, according to lawsuits since closed that he filed in 2021 and 2022 against two hospitals in Massachusetts. Torres says he argued in one of the lawsuits that he was misdiagnosed for a mental illness and, in the other, that he was discriminated against for being vegan.

In December 2022, police confronted him at his house in Worcester County, where he was outside in his underwear saying he was protesting climate change, according to a police report. On another occasion in 2021, police responded to a call from his mother reporting that he was yelling "homicidal threats" out a window. He told police that he was in World War 3 and he had a special device giving him "super sonic hearing," which he used to listen to his neighbors talking about him.

His case history demonstrates the challenges facing airlines and federal regulators when handling passengers like Torres. Especially since experts say data shows those with mental illnesses are more often the victims of crimes than those responsible for committing violent acts.

Despite repeated run-ins with police, authorities said that he rarely acted violent. He once was accused of grabbing his mother's arm, but those charges were dismissed. He didn't legally own a weapon, even though he often talked about guns. And there were no signs of trouble when he boarded that cross-country flight last month, a passenger said, or during the first five hours in the air.

"He is really a nonviolent offender," said Leominster Police Chief Aaron Kennedy, who is familiar with Torres from previous run-ins. "This guy was pretty mild."

And even if past incidents raised red flags, experts said there isn't a whole lot that airline companies can or should be doing. Airlines say they don't share banned passenger lists with each other, though there have been a few cases so notorious that the passenger's name became widely known.

The FBI maintains a no-fly list for people suspected of terrorism, to which special agents and other approved government employees can submit names for consideration.

People with mental illnesses are not prohibited from getting on a plane, according to Jeffrey Price, an aviation-security expert at Metropolitan State University of Denver. Federal law gives U.S. citizens "a public right of transit through the navigable airspace," he said.

Legislation backed by airlines and their labor unions was introduced in Congress last year to create a new no-fly list including people who were charged or fined for interfering with airline crews. The bills died without hearings in the Senate or House, but backers plan to re-introduce them later this month.

Several Republican senators opposed the proposal, saying it could be used to punish critics of the federal rule requiring passengers to wear masks — even to "equate them to terrorists." From January 2021 to April 2022, while the federal mask mandate was still in effect, the vast majority of unruly-passenger cases reported by airlines involved disputes over masks, according to Federal Aviation Administration figures.

Some liberal groups also opposed the legislation, arguing that the current no-fly list of people suspected of terrorism is opaque and unfair.

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The American Civil Liberties Union has sued the government several times over the last decade on behalf of people who didn't know why they were on the list or how to be removed from it. The ACLU also has accused the FBI of putting some people on the list to pressure them to become informants in counter-terrorist investigations against Muslim communities in the U.S.

The captain of an airline flight can decide not to fly with a particular passenger on board, although flight attendants say this usually happens when a passenger appears to be drunk.

The government runs what it calls "trusted traveler" programs such as TSA PreCheck, which lets people who are fingerprinted and pass a background check speed through security without removing shoes, belts, jackets and laptops from their bags. People can be denied PreCheck for certain crimes, which extends to those who are found not guilty by reason of insanity. But of course people who are denied PreCheck can still fly.

Adding travelers like Torres to any no-fly list or barring them from a flight raises a host of logistical and constitutional questions. And determining who would get on a list would be controversial in a country that prides itself on protecting individual rights and keeping health information private by following strict HIPAA rules.

Plus, having a "mental health challenge" is "not a prediction, necessarily, that someone's going to have outbursts, have unpredictable behavior," said Lynn Bufka, a psychologist and the American Psychological Association's associate chief of practice transformation. "That's not going to be a good marker for determining whether or not someone should safely board."

Before Torres became agitated and threatened those around him, fellow passenger Jason Loomis said he didn't exhibit any strange behavior during boarding and was quiet for the beginning of the flight. Hours later though, Loomis witnessed his outburst. Initially, he spoke with Torres to try to calm him down, but when Torres' anger escalated, Loomis joined other passengers in restraining him.

Still, Loomis said he couldn't envision keeping Torres off the flight in the first place. Instead, he said it was a reminder that society needs to take better care of mentally ill people.

"I know there has been a lot of talk about airplane security and safety these days, but this was a very rare occurrence," Loomis said. "It wasn't like he was shouting in the airport. He wasn't threatening anything. He was perfectly fine and then something just snapped."

Most March Madness brackets bust before sundown on Day 1

By MARK ANDERSON AP Sports Writer

From No. 13 seed Furman beating fourth-seeded Virginia to No. 15 Princeton defeating second-seeded Arizona, most NCAA Tournament brackets were busted Thursday before the sun went down.

The NCAA March Madness Twitter account posted after Thursday's late games concluded that only 787 brackets of unspecified millions remained perfect.

Numbers were similar elsewhere.

In ESPN's Tournament Challenge bracket game, only 658 perfect brackets remained by the end of the first day. More than 20 million had gotten at least one of the 16 games wrong.

Furman received a decent amount of support. The Paladins were picked to win their opener in 18.2% of ESPN's brackets. Only 6.6% picked Princeton to beat Arizona, and the Wildcats going down did tremendous damage to many brackets. They were picked in 4.9% of brackets to cut down the nets at the national championship game.

Arizona was a popular pick at CBS Sports, too, appearing on 96.9% of brackets win its opener, 84.9% to make the Sweet 16, 55.2% to make the Elite Eight, 21.5% to reach the Final Four and 5% to win it all.

Biden hosting Irish prime minister on St. Patrick's Day

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is set to host Ireland's prime minister on Friday, after the

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COVID-19 pandemic scuttled the longstanding St. Patrick's Day meetup two years in a row.

Leo Varadkar, known as the taoiseach, and his partner, Matthew Barrett, will attend a breakfast with Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband, Doug Emhoff. Then they will head to the U.S. Capitol for a lunch with congressional leaders and Biden before the two leaders convene.

The meeting with one of the top U.S. allies comes after Biden said he plans to visit both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland this year, the 25th anniversary of the U.S.-brokered Good Friday accord, which helped end sectarian violence that had raged for three decades over the issue of Northern Ireland unifying with Ireland or remaining part of the United Kingdom.

The agreement came under increasing stress following the U.K.'s exit from the European Union, but a recent agreement between the U.K. and the EU addresses some of the issues that arose around commerce and goods that cross the Irish Sea from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

The White House said the agreement, known as the Windsor Framework, is an important step in maintaining the peace accord.

Varadkar took over in December for a second term as part of a job-sharing deal made by the country's centrist coalition government. The two leaders are also expected to discuss the continued support of Ukraine in the face of the Russian invasion.

Varadkar is expected to present Biden with an engraved crystal bowl of shamrocks, a tradition that began in 1952. The shamrocks made it to the Oval Office last year even though then-prime minister Micheál Martin didn't. He came down with COVID-19 at an event and had to join the meeting virtually while he isolated in the nearby Blair House, where world leaders often stay when they come to visit the White House. Their first annual meeting was virtual, too, because of the pandemic.

Biden will also host a reception for Varadkar later Friday at the White House, which was itself designed and built by an Irish-born man, James Hoban. He oversaw the initial construction, rebuilding after it was burned down and adding renovations until his death in 1831.

Biden, who often speaks of his Irish heritage and is fond of quoting Irish poets, declared March Irish-American heritage month. The White House is even dyeing the South Lawn fountain green. According to the Census Bureau, roughly 31.5 million U.S. residents claim Irish heritage, second only to German.

"Ireland and the United States are forever bound together by our people and our passion. Everything between us runs deep," Biden said in his proclamation.

The St. Patrick's Day tradition has evolved, much like the turkey pardon or the Easter egg roll, into an annual affair.

"That's what's wonderful about this history of the White House," said Stewart McLaurin, president of the White House Historical Association. "It's laden with rich traditions that are cultural, not just from our own country."

Santos refuses to quit, brazenly says 'truth still matters'

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Besieged Republican Rep. George Santos arrives on the House floor most days to deliver short speeches — celebrating women-owned small businesses, a special high school in his district or raising concern about various countries in crises.

At other times he can be seen dashing through the halls of the U.S. Capitol as lawmakers do, from one meeting to the next. He once passed out doughnuts to the press corps staking out his office.

Far from being chastened by the widespread criticism, mockery and rejection that Santos has received after having admitted to fabricating many aspects of his life story, the newly elected congressman is breezily carrying on in Congress. He is refusing calls for his resignation all while rewriting the narrative in real time.

For Santos, it's an unusual up-is-down approach that would have been almost unthinkable in an earlier generation but one that signals the new norms taking hold amid the deepening of a post-truth era in Congress.

"I was elected by the people to come here to represent them, and I do that every day," Santos told The

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Associated Press in a brief interview off the House floor.

"It's a hard job. If I said it was easy, I'd be lying to you — and I don't think that's what we want, right?"

Pressed about the idea of a post-truth era, Santos said, "I think truth still matters very much."

Perhaps not since Donald Trump launched his presidency with exaggerated claims of the crowd size at his inauguration has an elected official arrived in Washington and sought so brazenly and defiantly to convince the public of reality different than the one before their very eyes.

Santos is coming of political age at a time of an unmooring in civic life, when a duly-sworn member of the U.S. Congress can persevere, business as usual, despite having admittedly lied to voters about his resume, experience and personal life as he ran for elected office.

While Santos faces a crush of investigations — by the House Ethics Committee and a county prosecutor in New York — as well as questions from earlier charges in Brazil, where he lived for a time, he appears unmoved by the challenges.

Just a few days ago, Santos filed paperwork to potentially seek reelection.

"It used to be that when a politician lied, and they got caught, they were ashamed — or there was some sort of accountability," said Lee McIntyre, the author of "Post-Truth" and a research fellow at Boston University.

"What I see in the post-truth era is not just that people are lying or lying more, it's that they're lying with a political purpose," he said. "The really scary part is getting away with it."

At stake is not just "truthiness," as comedian Stephen Colbert once called falsehoods in public life, but broader questions over the expectation of truth-telling from political leadership.

Santos has admitted he had portrayed himself as someone he was not — not a college graduate, not a Wall Street whiz, not from a Jewish family of Holocaust survivors, not the son who lost his mother in the 9/11 World Trade Center attack.

In the time since, more questions have flowed, including about the origins of a \$700,000 loan he made to his campaign for Congress and his own reported wealth.

Fellow Republican Rep. Anthony D'Esposito of New York, a freshman who won election last fall from the neighboring Long Island district, said: "I don't think it's the state of politics. I think it's state of an individual — and the state that he's in is one of delusion."

D'Esposito has introduced a pair of bills that would prevent elected officials from profiting off wrongdoing and said he is working with others to ensure Santos is not "the face of our party. We've made it very clear. He's not our brand. He's not part of us."

While Santos did remove himself from his committee assignments while the investigations are underway, he has withstood the pressure from Republicans to resign and from Democrats to be expelled from office.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who won a slim Republican majority with just a few seats to spare, has said the voters elected Santos and "he has a right to serve." If wrongdoing is found, Santos could be removed from office, he said.

"He should have resigned a long time ago," said Rep. Robert Garcia of California, the Democratic president of the freshman class who sponsored the resolution to expel Santos.

"This is not just Democrats saying this and his Republican colleagues in New York," Garcia said in an interview. "Nobody wants him in D.C."

But Santos appears emboldened as his profile has risen, even being parodied on "Saturday Night Live." He has introduced his own bills in Congress — including one to require cognitive tests for presidents — and is trying to move on.

"I've owned up to it, and I came clean on it," he said referring to the public apologies he made in December.

When President Joe Biden arrived to deliver the State of the Union address last month, Santos infuriated colleagues by situating himself on the center aisle — the place to see and be seen greeting the high-profile guests. He was scolded by fellow Republican Sen. Mitt Romney, who said it was improper for Santos to be "parading in front of the president" and others.

"Senator Romney just echoed something I heard my entire life, right, coming from a minority group,

coming from a poor family: Go to the back room and shut up. Nobody cares to hear about you," Santos recalled. "Well, I'm not going to do that."

Santos often turns the tables, engaging in the whataboutism that has become commonplace in modern politics — the verbal somersault of equating one's actions with those of others, even when they are not quite comparable situations.

"You know," Santos said, "have you ever not told a lie? Think hard."

It's what McIntyre calls a classic "disinformation tactic" designed not to bring clarity but confusion, and avoid accountability.

Asked if he was here to stay, Santos said, "I'm here to do the job I was elected to do for the next two years."

But will he run for reelection? "Maybe."

California will remake San Quentin prison, emphasizing rehab

By JANIE HAR and SOPHIE AUSTIN Associated Press/Report for America

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — The infamous state prison on San Francisco Bay that has been home to the largest death row population in the United States will be transformed into a lockup where less-dangerous prisoners will receive education, training and rehabilitation, California officials announced Thursday.

The inmates serving death sentences at San Quentin State Prison will be moved elsewhere in the California penitentiary system, Gov. Gavin Newsom's office announced, and it will be renamed the San Quentin Rehabilitation Center. Most of California's nearly 700 inmates facing such sentences are imprisoned at the facility, though some have already been moved.

"Today, we take the next step in our pursuit of true rehabilitation, justice, and safer communities through this evidenced-backed investment, creating a new model for safety and justice — the California Model — that will lead the nation," Newsom said in a statement.

The governor planned a visit Friday to San Quentin, which is also the California location where prisoners were once executed, though none have been put to death since 2006. Newsom announced a moratorium on executions in 2019 and dismantled the prison's gas chamber, and in 2022 he announced plans to begin transferring inmates sentenced to death to other prisons.

Full details of the plan were not immediately made public, though officials said the facility would concentrate on "education, rehabilitation and breaking cycles of crime." Newsom was expected to share more during his visit, the second stop on a four-day policy tour that he's doing in lieu of a traditional State of the State address this year.

Newsom's office cited as a model Norway's approach to incarceration, which focuses on preparing people to return to society, as inspiration for the program. Oregon and North Dakota have also taken inspiration from the Scandinavian country's policies.

In maximum-security Norwegian prisons, cells often look more like dorm rooms with additional furniture such as chairs, desks, even TVs, and prisoners have kitchen access and activities like basketball. The nation has a low recidivism rate.

At the overhauled San Quentin, vocational training programs would set people up to land good-paying jobs as plumbers, electricians or truck drivers after they're released, Newsom told the Los Angeles Times.

A group made up public safety experts, crime victims and formerly incarcerated people will advise the state on the transformation. Newsom is allocating \$20 million to launch the plan.

Republican Assemblymember Tom Lackey expressed criticism of Newsom's criminal justice priorities, saying the governor and state Democratic lawmakers should spend more time focusing their efforts on supporting the victims of crime.

"Communities win when we have rehabilitative efforts, but yet, how about victims?" Lackey said. "Have we rehabilitated them?"

Meanwhile Taina Vargas, executive director of Initiate Justice Action, an advocacy group based in Los Angeles, said she is pleased the state is moving toward rehabilitating incarcerated people but more drastic

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changes are needed to transform the criminal justice system that imprisons so many people.

"Over the long term, I think we want to prevent people from going to prison in the first place, which means that we want to offer more opportunities for high paying jobs in the community," she said.

California voters upheld the death penalty in 2016 and voted to speed up executions. Newsom's decision to halt them in one of his first major acts as governor drew swift pushback from critics including district attorneys who said he was ignoring the voters.

But Californians have also supported easing certain criminal penalties in an attempt to reduce mass incarceration as part of a more recent movement away from tough-on-crime policies that once dominated the state.

San Quentin is California's oldest correctional institution, housing one maximum-security cell block, a medium-security dorm and a minimum-security firehouse.

Inmates on death row will not have their sentences changed, but they will be transferred to other facilities, according to Newsom's office. Today there are 668 inmates serving death sentences in California, almost all of them men, according to the state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

The prison has housed high-profile criminals such as cult leader Charles Manson, convicted murderers and serial killers, and was the site of violent uprisings in the 1960s and 1970s.

But the prison in upscale Marin County north of San Francisco has also been home to some of the most innovative inmate programs in the country, reflecting the politically liberal beliefs of the Bay Area.

Among other such programs, San Quentin houses Mount Tamalpais College, the first accredited junior college in the country based entirely behind bars. The school offers inmates classes in literature, astronomy, U.S. government and others to earn an Associate of Arts degree.

The college's \$5 million annual budget is funded by private donations with volunteer faculty from top nearby universities, including Stanford and the University of California, Berkeley.

Pentagon video shows Russian jet dumping fuel on US drone

By KARL RITTER, AAMER MADHANI and DINO HAZELL Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The Biden administration released video Thursday of a Russian fighter jet dumping fuel on a U.S. Air Force surveillance drone as the U.S. sought to hold Russia responsible for the collision that led to the drone's crash into the Black Sea without escalating already fraught tensions with the Kremlin.

Poland, meanwhile, said it's giving Ukraine a dozen MiG-29 fighter jets, becoming the first NATO member to fulfill Kyiv's increasingly urgent requests for warplanes.

The U.S. military's declassified 42-second color footage shows a Russian Su-27 approaching the back of the MQ-9 Reaper drone and releasing fuel as it passes, the Pentagon said. Dumping the fuel appeared to be aimed at blinding the drone's optical instruments to drive it from the area.

On a second approach, either the same jet or another Russian Su-27 that had been shadowing the MQ-9 struck the drone's propeller, damaging a blade, according to the U.S. military, which said it then ditched the aircraft in the sea.

The video excerpt does not show the collision, although it does show the damage to the propeller.

Russia said its fighters didn't strike the drone and claimed the unmanned aerial vehicle went down after making a sharp maneuver.

While calling out Russia for "reckless" action, the White House tried to strike a balance to avoid exacerbating tensions. U.S. officials said they have not been able to determine whether the Russian pilot intentionally struck the American drone and stressed that lines of communication with Moscow remain open.

"I can't point to that video and say this is a deliberate attempt to escalate or ... tangibly bring about Putin's false claim that this is about the West versus Russia," White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said. "We have made clear on many occasions, we do not seek a conflict with Russia."

Russian President Vladimir Putin argues that by providing weapons to Ukraine and sharing intelligence information with Kyiv, the U.S. and its allies have effectively become engaged in the war, now in its 13th month.

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Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of Russia's Security Council, said Wednesday that an attempt would be made to recover the drone debris.

U.S. officials have expressed confidence that nothing of military value would remain from the drone even if Russia retrieved the wreckage. They left open the possibility of trying to recover portions of the downed \$32 million aircraft, which they said crashed into waters that were 4,000 to 5,000 feet (1,200 to 1,500 meters) deep, although the U.S. does not have any ships in the area.

Russia and NATO member countries routinely intercept each other's warplanes, but Tuesday's incident marked the first time since the Cold War that a U.S. aircraft went down during such a confrontation, raising concerns it could bring the United States and Russia closer to a direct conflict.

Moscow has repeatedly voiced concern about U.S. intelligence flights near the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014 and illegally annexed.

The top U.S. and Russian defense and military leaders spoke Wednesday about the destruction of the drone, underscoring the event's seriousness.

The calls between U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, as well as between Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley and Gen. Valery Gerasimov, chief of Russian General Staff, were the first since October.

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. The U.S. said the drone was operating in international airspace.

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.

The video's release is the latest example of the Biden administration making public intelligence findings over the course of the war. The administration has said it wants to highlight Russian malicious activity as well as plans for Russian misinformation operations so allies remain clear-eyed about Moscow's intent.

The White House deferred to Austin on the decision to release it, with the Pentagon and President Joe Biden's national security aides agreeing it was important to let the world see what happened, according to an administration official familiar with the decision-making process. The official, who requested anonymity to discuss the deliberations, said it took time to go through the declassification process and insisted the administration was not concerned it would further escalate tensions with Russia.

Because the video does not show the actual collision, some involved in the decision to release the footage wondered whether the Russians would seize on that as proof there was no contact between the jet and the drone, according to another official familiar with the discussions about making it public. Those concerns were overcome when the Pentagon explained that the video showed the immediate aftermath and damage to the drone's propeller, which could have come only from a collision, according to the second official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in order to disclose the details.

Separately, Polish President Andrzej Duda said Warsaw would give Ukraine four Soviet-made MiG-29s "within the next few days" and that the rest needed servicing and would be supplied later. The Polish word he used to describe the total number of warplanes can mean between 11 and 19.

"They are in the last years of their functioning but they are in good working condition," Duda added. He did not say whether other countries would follow suit, although Slovakia has said it would send Ukraine its disused MiGs.

While Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has pleaded for fighter jets from the West, some NATO members — including the U.S. — have expressed hesitancy.

The White House said Poland gave the U.S. advanced notice of its decision to provide the MiGs.

Kirby, the White House spokesman, called Poland's providing the fighter jets a sovereign decision and cheered the Poles for continuing to "punch above their weight" in assisting Kyiv, but insisted that Duda's decision would have no bearing on the U.S. president's decision, thus far, not to provide American-made F-16s.

Before Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, Ukraine had several dozen MiG-29s it inherited in

the 1991 demise of the Soviet Union, but it's unclear how many remain in service.

Duda said Poland's air force would replace the planes it gives to Ukraine with South Korean-made FA-50 fighters and American-made F-35s.

A crucial ally of Kyiv, Poland hosts thousands of U.S. troops and is taking in more people fleeing the war in the neighboring country than any other nation. It has suffered invasions and occupations by Russia for centuries and still fears Russia despite being a member of NATO.

Authorities in Warsaw also said the security services have detained members of a Russian espionage ring, alleging they were preparing acts of sabotage in Poland and had been monitoring railroad routes used to transport weapons into Ukraine.

Why TikTok's security risks keep raising fears

By HALELUYA HADERO Associated Press

TikTok is once again fending off claims that its Chinese parent company, ByteDance, would share user data from its popular video-sharing app with the Chinese government, or push propaganda and misinformation on its behalf.

China's Foreign Ministry on Wednesday accused the United States itself of spreading disinformation about TikTok's potential security risks following a report in the Wall Street Journal that 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 Chinese owners divest their stake.

So are the data security risks real? And should users be worried that the TikTok app will be wiped off their phones?

Here's what to know:

WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS ABOUT TIKTOK?

Both the FBI and the Federal Communications Commission have warned that ByteDance could share TikTok user data — such as browsing history, location and biometric identifiers — with China's authoritarian government.

A law implemented by China in 2017 requires companies to give the government any personal data relevant to the country's national security. There's no evidence that TikTok has turned over such data, but fears abound due to the vast amount of user data it, like other social media companies, collects.

Concerns around TikTok were heightened in December when ByteDance said it fired four employees who accessed data on two journalists from BuzzFeed News and The Financial Times while attempting to track down the source of a leaked report about the company.

HOW IS THE U.S. RESPONDING?

White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby declined to comment when asked Thursday to address the Chinese foreign ministry's comments about TikTok, citing the review being conducted by the Committee on Foreign Investment.

Kirby also could not confirm that the administration sent TikTok a letter warning that the U.S. government may ban the application if its Chinese owners don't sell its stake but added, "we have legitimate national security concerns with respect to data integrity that we need to observe."

In 2020, then-President Donald Trump and his administration sought to force ByteDance to sell off its U.S. assets and ban TikTok from app stores. Courts blocked the effort, and President Joe Biden rescinded Trump's orders but ordered an in-depth study of the issue. A planned sale of TikTok's U.S. assets was also shelved as the Biden administration negotiated a deal with TikTok that would address some of the national security concerns.

In Congress, U.S. Sens. Richard Blumenthal and Jerry Moran, a Democrat and a Republican, wrote a letter in February to Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen urging the Committee on Foreign Investment panel, which she chairs, to "swiftly conclude its investigation and impose strict structural restrictions" between TikTok's American operations and ByteDance, including potentially separating the companies.

At the same time, lawmakers have introduced measures that would expand the Biden administration's

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authority to enact a national ban on TikTok. The White House has already backed a Senate proposal that has bipartisan support.

HOW HAS TIKTOK ALREADY BEEN RESTRICTED?

On Thursday, British authorities said they are banning TikTok on government-issued phones on security grounds, following similar moves by the European Union's executive branch, which temporarily banned TikTok from employee phones. Denmark and Canada have also announced efforts to block it on government-issued phones.

Last month, the White House said it would give U.S. federal agencies 30 days to delete TikTok from all government-issued mobile devices. Congress, the U.S. armed forces and more than half of U.S. states had already banned the app.

WHAT DOES TIKTOK SAY?

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

In June, TikTok said it would route all data from U.S. users to servers controlled by Oracle, the Silicon Valley company it chose as its U.S. tech partner in 2020 in an effort to avoid a nationwide ban. But it is storing backups of the data in its own servers in the U.S. and Singapore. The company said it expects to delete U.S. user data from its own servers, but it has not provided a timeline as to when that would occur.

TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew is set to testify next week before the House Energy and Commerce Committee about the company's privacy and data-security practices, as well as its relationship with the Chinese government.

Meanwhile, TikTok's parent company ByteDance has been trying to position itself as more of an international company -- and less of a Chinese company that was founded in Beijing in 2012 by its current chief executive Liang Rubo and others.

Theo Bertram, TikTok's vice president of policy in Europe, said in a Tweet Thursday that ByteDance "is not a Chinese company." Bertram said its ownership consists of 60% by global investors, 20% employees and 20% founders. Its leaders are based in cities like Singapore, New York, Beijing and other metropolitan areas.

ARE THE SECURITY RISKS LEGITIMATE?

It depends on who you ask.

Some tech privacy advocates say while the potential abuse of privacy by the Chinese government is concerning, other tech companies have data-harvesting business practices that also exploit user information.

"If policy makers want to protect Americans from surveillance, they should advocate for a basic privacy law that bans all companies from collecting so much sensitive data about us in the first place, rather than engaging in what amounts to xenophobic showboating that does exactly nothing to protect anyone," said Evan Greer, director of the nonprofit advocacy group Fight for the Future.

Karim Farhat, a researcher with the Internet Governance Project at Georgia Tech, said a TikTok sale would be "completely irrelevant to any of the alleged 'national security' threats" and go against "every free market principle and norm" of the state department's internet freedom principles.

Others say there is legitimate reason for concern.

People who use TikTok might think they're not doing anything that would be of interest to a foreign government, but that's not always the case, said Anton Dahbura, executive director of the Johns Hopkins University Information Security Institute. Important information about the United States is not strictly limited to nuclear power plants or military facilities; it extends to other sectors, such as food processing, the finance industry and universities, Dahbura said.

IS THERE PRECEDENCE FOR BANNING TECH COMPANIES?

Last year, the U.S. banned the sale of communications equipment made by Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE, citing risks to national security. But banning the sale of items could be more easily done than banning an app, which is accessed through the web.

Such a move might also go to the courts on grounds that it might violate the First Amendment as some civil liberties groups have argued.

Australia to buy up to 220 Tomahawk missiles from the US

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australia said it's planning to buy up to 220 Tomahawk cruise missiles from the United States after the U.S. State Department approved the sale Friday.

The deal comes days after Australia announced it would buy nuclear-powered attack submarines from the U.S. to modernize its fleet amid growing concern about China's influence in the Indo-Pacific.

Australian officials said the new nuclear-powered submarines would be able to fire the Tomahawk missiles. Japan last month also announced plans to upgrade its military in an effort to deter China, including buying 400 Tomahawk cruise missiles for deployment as soon as 2026.

The Australian missile sale comes with a price tag of nearly \$900 million. The prime contractor will be Arizona-based Raytheon Missiles and Defense.

"This proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security objectives of the United States," the State Department said in a statement. "Australia is one of our most important allies in the Western Pacific."

Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles said his country would be working closely with the U.S.

"Making sure we have longer-range strike missiles is a really important capability for the country," Marles told Channel Nine. "It enables us to be able to reach out beyond our shores further, and that's ultimately how we are able to keep Australia safe."

Defense Industry Minister Pat Conroy said the missiles could be fired from the Virginia-class submarines Australia would be buying under the so-called AUKUS deal.

"We certainly want the best possible capability for the Australian Defense Force, so that includes the ability to strike opponents as far away as possible from the Australian mainland," he told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. "The cruise missiles are a critical part of that, as are the submarines that launch them."

The submarine deal has raised concerns that it could clear the way for bad actors to escape nuclear oversight in the future. Rafael Grossi, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, this week pledged to be "very demanding" in overseeing the planned transfer from the U.S. to Australia.

Former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating this week launched a blistering attack on his nation's plans, saying that because of the huge cost, "it must be the worst deal in all history."

Australian officials have estimated the cost of the submarines at between 268 billion and 368 billion Australian dollars (\$178-\$245 billion) over three decades.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the government had been transparent about the expense.

"The assessment that has to be made is does the purchase, and then us building our own nuclear-powered submarines, increase the capacity for us to defend ourselves by more than 10%? You bet it does," Albanese told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. "That's why it represents good value."

Henderson, Princeton stun Arizona 59-55 in NCAA Tournament

By JOSH DUBOW AP Sports Writer

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Mitch Henderson's victory leap that punctuated Princeton's famed upset over UCLA in 1996 has become an iconic moment. There is a picture of the joyous jump at the school's practice facility that serves as a constant reminder of what's possible.

Now Henderson's current players have authored one of their own.

Ryan Langborg lifted Princeton to its first lead with 2:03 to play and the Tigers used a late-game run to earn their first NCAA Tournament win in 25 years, topping No. 2 seed Arizona 59-55 on Thursday.

"Pretty surreal feeling," guard Matt Allocco said. "To beat a great team like that on this stage is a pretty special feeling. But also I can't say I'm surprised. This team has been so good all year, so gritty. On paper, it's going to look like a big upset. But we believe in each other and we think we're a really good team."

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When we're at our best, then I think we can beat anybody in the country."

The 15th-seeded Tigers (22-9) scored the final nine points, holding the Pac-12 Tournament champion scoreless over the final 4:43.

Tosan Evbuomwan scored 15 points in Princeton's first tournament victory since beating UNLV in 1998 when Henderson was a player for the Tigers.

Henderson also played on the 1996 team that beat defending champion UCLA in the school's final tournament under coach Pete Carril, who died in August. This victory fittingly came in Sacramento, where Carril spent time as an NBA assistant after retiring as Tigers coach.

"He would be very proud of the group," Henderson said. "He wouldn't want any attention to be brought other than what these guys did. They played to win. We knew we had to keep the game low possessions."

Princeton advanced to play seventh-seeded Missouri in the second round of the South Region. The Tigers beat Utah State 76-65.

Azuolas Tubelis scored 22 points for the Wildcats (28-7), who haven't won a tournament game in consecutive years since 2014-15.

It marked the third straight year and 11th time overall that a No. 15 seed won a first-round game. Arizona is the only school to be on the wrong end of one of those upsets twice, also losing to Steve Nash and Santa Clara in 1993.

"If you want to be a great player, you want to be a great coach, we all got to learn from this," coach Tommy Lloyd said. "We got to go back and figure out what happened and understand the value of being up 10 to 12 points with 10 minutes to go, putting the hammer on people, not letting people get back in the game."

The Wildcats seemed in control of this one when Oumar Ballo's basket put them up 10 with eight minutes left.

But the Tigers responded with seven straight points, capped by a second-chance 3-pointer from Blake Peters that made it 51-48 with about six minutes left.

They closed the game with a 9-0 run — just like they did in their most memorable tournament win against UCLA in 1996.

Keeshawn Kellman started the spurt with a putback dunk before Langborg hit a jumper and then a layup to give the Tigers the lead.

The Wildcats then missed all five shots down the stretch and Princeton put it away at the foul line. Langborg also blocked Courtney Ramey's shot with 50 seconds left and the Tigers protecting a one-point lead.

"When I blocked it I saw the whole crowd erupt," he said. "My teammates were all locked in with each other and it was kind of that moment where you know, like, 'Wow we can really do this. We're going to do this and nothing's going to stop us.'"

Ramey, who hit a game-winning shot in the Pac-12 Tournament, missed a contested 3-pointer with 14 seconds left that could have tied the game. Kerr Kriisa also missed from long range after an offensive rebound, sending Princeton into an early celebration.

LET THEM PLAY

The game featured just 12 free throws, with four coming after intentional fouls by Arizona late in the game. The Wildcats went to the line seven times despite a big size advantage with Tubelis and Bello.

"You go inside over and over and over again, and you shoot seven free throws. I mean, I don't know if they're fouls or not. They must not have been because obviously they didn't get called," Lloyd said. "When the game is reffed like that, it makes it tough."

BIG PICTURE

Princeton: The Tigers gave the Ivy League its first tournament win since 2016 when Yale beat Baylor. The conference had been one-and-done the last four trips, having missed the 2021 edition because of COVID-19.

Arizona: The Wildcats got little help offensively outside of Tubelis and Ballo, who combined for 35 points. The rest of the team shot 9 for 27.

UP NEXT

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Princeton will look to win two games in the tournament for the first time since 1983.

20 years after U.S. invasion, young Iraqis see signs of hope

By JOHN DANISZEWSKI Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — On the banks of the Tigris River one recent evening, young Iraqi men and women in jeans and sneakers danced with joyous abandon to a local rap star as a vermilion sun set behind them. It's a world away from the terror that followed the U.S. invasion 20 years ago.

Iraq's capital today is throbbing with life and a sense of renewal, its residents enjoying a rare, peaceful interlude in a painful modern history. The wooden stalls of the city's open-air book market are piled skyward with dusty paperbacks and crammed with shoppers of all ages and incomes. In a suburb once a hotbed of al-Qaida, affluent young men cruise their muscle cars, while a recreational cycling club hosts weekly biking trips to former war zones. A few glitzy buildings sparkle where bombs once fell.

President George W. Bush called the U.S.-led invasion on March 20, 2003, a mission to free the Iraqi people and root out weapons of mass destruction. Saddam Hussein's government was toppled in 26 days. Two years later, the CIA's chief weapons inspector reported no stockpiles of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons were ever found.

The war deposed a dictator whose imprisonment, torture and execution of dissenters kept 20 million people in fear for a quarter of a century. But it also broke what had been a unified state at the heart of the Arab world, opening a power vacuum and leaving oil-rich Iraq a wounded nation in the Middle East, ripe for a power struggle among Iran, Arab Gulf states, the United States, terrorist groups and Iraq's own rival sects and parties.

For Iraqis, the enduring trauma of the violence that followed is undeniable — an estimated 300,000 Iraqis were killed between 2003 and 2019, according to the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University, as were more than 8,000 U.S. military, contractors and civilians. The period was marred by unemployment, dislocation, sectarian violence and terrorism, and years without reliable electricity or other public services.

Today, half of Iraq's population of 40 million isn't old enough to remember life under Saddam or much about the U.S. invasion. In dozens of recent interviews from Baghdad to Fallujah, young Iraqis deplored the loss of stability that followed Saddam's downfall — but they said the war is in the past, and many were hopeful about nascent freedoms and opportunities to pursue their dreams.

Editor's note: John Daniszewski and Jerome Delay were in Baghdad 20 years ago when the U.S. bombing began. They chronicled the unraveling of the country that followed, in text and photos. They returned 20 years later for this special report on how the country has changed over two decades — especially for its young people.

In a marbled, chandeliered reception room in the palace where Saddam once lived, seated in an overstuffed damask chair and surrounded by paintings by modern Iraqi artists, President Abdul Latif Rashid, who assumed office in October, spoke glowingly of the country's prospects. The world's perception of Iraq as a war-torn country is frozen in time, he told The Associated Press in an interview.

Iraq is rich; peace has returned, he said, and there are opportunities ahead for young people in a country experiencing a population boom. "If they're a little bit patient, I think life will improve drastically in Iraq."

Most Iraqis aren't nearly as bullish. Conversations begin with bitterness that the ouster of Saddam left the country broken and ripe for violence and exploitation by sectarian militias, politicians and criminals bent on self-enrichment or beholden to other nations. Yet, speaking to younger Iraqis, one senses a generation ready to turn a page.

Safaa Rashid, 26, is a ponytailed writer who talks politics with friends at a cozy coffee shop in the Karada district of the capital. With a well-stocked library nook, photos of Iraqi writers and travel posters, the café

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and its clientele could as easily be found in Brooklyn or London.

Rashid was a child when the Americans arrived, but rues “the loss of a state, a country that had law and establishment” that followed the invasion. The Iraqi state lay broken and vulnerable to international and domestic power struggles, he said. Today is different; he and like-minded peers can sit in a coffee shop and freely talk about solutions. “I think the young people will try to fix this situation.”

Another day, a different café. Noor Alhuda Saad, 26, a Ph.D. candidate at Mustansiriyah University who describes herself as a political activist, says her generation has been leading protests decrying corruption, demanding services and seeking more inclusive elections — and won’t stop till they’ve built a better Iraq.

“After 2003, the people who came to power” — old-guard Sunni and Shiite parties and their affiliated militias and gangs — “did not understand about sharing democracy,” she said, tapping her pale green fingernails on the tabletop.

“Young people like me are born into this environment and trying to change the situation,” she added, blaming the government for failing to restore public services and establish a fully democratic state in the aftermath of occupation. “The people in power do not see these as important issues for them to solve. And that is why we are active.”

Signs of the invasion and insurgency have been largely erased from Baghdad. The former Palestine Hotel, Ferdous Square, the Green Zone, the airport road pockmarked by IED and machine-gun attacks have been landscaped or covered in fresh stucco and paint.

The invasion exists only in memory: bright orange flashes and concussions of American “shock-and-awe” bombs raining down in a thunderous cacophony; tanks rolling along the embankment; Iraqi forces battling across the Tigris or wading into water to avoid U.S. troops; civilian casualties and the desperate, failed effort to save a fellow journalist gravely wounded by a U.S. tank strike in the final days of the battle for Baghdad. Pillars of smoke rose over the city as Iraqi civilians began looting ministries and U.S. Marines pulled down the famous Saddam statue.

What appeared to be a swift victory for the U.S.-led forces was illusory: The greatest loss of life came in the months and years that followed. The occupation stoked a stubborn guerrilla resistance, bitter fights for control of the countryside and cities, a protracted civil war, and the rise of the Islamic State group that spread terror beyond Iraq and Syria, throughout the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Europe.

The long, staggeringly costly experience in Iraq exposed the limitations of America’s ability to export democracy and chastened Washington’s approach to foreign engagements, at least temporarily. In Iraq, its democracy is yet to be defined.

Blast walls have given way to billboards, restaurants, cafes and shopping centers — even over-the-top real estate developments. With 7 million inhabitants, Baghdad is the Middle East’s second-largest city after Cairo, and its streets teem with cars and commerce at all hours, testing the skill of traffic guards in shiny reflective caps.

Daily life here looks not so different from any other Arab metropolis. But in the distant deserts of northern and western Iraq, there are occasional clashes with remnants of the Islamic State group. The low-boil conflict involves Kurdish peshmerga fighters, Iraqi army troops and some 2,500 U.S. military advisers still in country.

It is but one of the country’s lingering problems. Another is endemic corruption; a 2022 government audit found a network of former officials and businessmen stole \$2.5 billion.

Meanwhile, digital natives are testing the boundaries of identity and free speech, especially on TikTok and Instagram. They sometimes look over their shoulders, aware that shadowy militias connected to political parties may be listening, ready to squelch too much liberalism. More than a dozen social media influencers were arrested recently in a crackdown on “immoral” content, and this month authorities said they would enforce a long-dormant law banning alcohol imports.

In 2019-20, fed-up Iraqis, especially young people, protested across the country against corruption and

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lack of basic services. After more than 600 were killed by government forces and militias, parliament agreed to a series of election law changes designed to allow more minorities and independent groups to share power.

The sun bakes down on Fallujah, the main city in the Anbar region that was once a hotbed for al-Qaida of Iraq and, later, the Islamic State group. Beneath the iron girders of the city's bridge across the Euphrates, three 18-year-olds are returning home from school for lunch.

In 2004, this bridge was the site of a gruesome tableau. Four Americans from military contractor Blackwater were ambushed, their bodies dragged through the streets, hacked, burned and hung as trophies by local insurgents, while some residents chanted in celebration. For the 18-year-olds, it's a story they've heard from their families — distant and irrelevant to their lives.

One wants to be a pilot, two aspire to be doctors. Their focus is on getting good grades, they say.

Fallujah today is experiencing a construction renaissance under former Anbar Gov. Mohammed al-Halbousi, now speaker of Iraq's parliament. He has helped direct millions of dollars in government funding to rebuild the city, which experienced repeated waves of fighting, including two U.S. military campaigns to rid the city of al-Qaida and the Islamic State group.

Fallujah gleams with new apartments, hospitals, amusement parks, a promenade and a renewed gate to the city. Its markets and streets are bustling. But officials were wary of letting Western reporters wander the city without an escort. The AP team's first attempt to enter was foiled at a checkpoint.

The prime minister's office intervened the next day, and the visit was allowed, but only with police following reporters at a distance, ostensibly for protection. The disagreement over security and press access is a sign of the uncertainty that overhangs life here.

Still, Dr. Huthifa Alissawi, 40, an imam and mosque leader, says such tensions are trifling compared with what his congregation lived through. Iraq has been engulfed in war for half of his life. When the Islamic State group overran Fallujah, his mosque was seized, and he was ordered to preach in favor of the "caliphate" or be killed. He told them he'd think about it, he said, and then fled to Baghdad. He counted 16 killings of members of his mosque.

"Iraq has had many wars. We lost a lot — whole families," he said. These days, he said, he is enjoying the new sense of security he feels in Fallujah. "If it stays like now, it is perfect." _____

Sadr City, a working-class, conservative and largely Shiite suburb in eastern Baghdad, is home to more than 1.5 million people. In a grid of thickly populated streets, women wear abayas and hijabs and tend to stay inside the house. Fiery populist religious leader Moqtada al-Sadr, 49, is still the dominant political power, though he rarely travels here from his base in Najaf, 125 miles to the south. His portraits, and those of his ayatollah father, killed by gunmen in Saddam's time, loom large.

On a clamorous, pollution-choked avenue, two friends have side-by-side shops: Haider al-Saady, 28, fixes tires for taxis and the three-wheeled motorized "tuk-tuks" that jam potholed streets, while Ali al-Mummadwi, 22, sells lumber for construction.

Thick skeins of wires hooked up to generators form a canopy over the neighborhood. City power stays on for just two hours at a time; after that, everyone relies on generators.

They say they work 10 hours every day and scoff when told of the Iraqi president's promises that life will be better for the young generation.

"It is all talk, not serious," al-Saady said, shaking his head. Sadr City was a hotbed of anti-Saddam sentiment, but al-Saady — too young to remember the fallen dictator — nevertheless expressed nostalgia for that era's stability.

His companion echoes him: "Saddam was a dictator, but the people were living better, peacefully." Dismissing current officials as pawns of outside powers, al-Mummadwi added, "We would like a strong leader, an independent leader."

When news spread recently that a musician born and raised in Baghdad whose songs have gotten millions of views on YouTube would headline a rap party hosted at a fancy new restaurant in western Baghdad,

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his fans shared their excitement via texts and Instagram.

Khalifa OG raps about the difficulties of finding work and satirizes authority, but his lyrics aren't blatantly political. A song he performed under strobe lights on a grassy lawn next to the Tigris mocks "sheikhs" who wield power in the new Iraq through wealth or political connections.

Fan Abdullah Rubaie, 24, could barely contain his excitement. "Peace for sure makes it easier" for young people to gather like this, he said. His stepbrother Ahmed Rubaie, 30, agreed.

The Sunni-Shia sectarianism that led to a pitched civil war in Iraq from 2006 to 2007, with bodies of executed victims turning up each morning on neighborhood streets or dumped into the river, is one of the societal wounds that the rappers and their fans want to heal.

"We had a lot of pain ... it had to stop," Ahmed Rubaie said. "It is not exactly vanished, but it's not like before."

Secular young people say that unlike their parents who lived under Saddam, they're not afraid to make their voices heard. The 2019 demonstrations gave them confidence, even in the face of backlash from pro-religious parties.

"It broke a wall that was there before," Ahmed Rubaie said.

Iraq's prime minister, Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, took office in October. A former government minister for human rights and governor of Maysan province, southeast of Baghdad, he won support from a coalition of pro-Iranian Shiite parties after a yearlong stalemate. Unlike other Shiite politicians who fled during the Saddam era, he never left Iraq, even when his father and five brothers were executed.

Working in a former Saddam palace that U.S. and British officers and civilian experts once used as headquarters for their frenetic attempts at nation-building, al-Sudani still grapples with some of the issues that plagued the occupiers, including restoring regional relations and balancing interests among Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds. He said building trust between the people and government will be his first priority.

"We need to see tangible results — job opportunities, services, social justice," al-Sudani said. "These are the priorities of the people."

One of the Shiite militias that took part in that campaign against the Islamic State group is Ketaib Hezbollah, or the Hezbollah Battalions, widely viewed as a proxy for Iran and a cousin to Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria. It also is part of the political coalition that established al-Sudani's government.

Ketaib Hezbollah's spokesman, Jafar al-Hussaini, met AP at an outdoor restaurant in Baghdad's Dijlas Village, an opulent, 5-month-old complex of gardens, spas and a dancing fountain overlooking a bend in the Tigris, an idyllic Xanadu that looks like a transplant from uber-wealthy Dubai.

Al-Hussaini voiced optimism for the new Iraqi government and scorn for the United States, saying the U.S. sold Iraq a promise of democracy but failed to deliver infrastructure, electricity, housing, schools or security.

"Twenty years after the war, we look towards building a new state," he said. "Our project is ideological, and we are against America."

Far from such luxury, 18-year-old Mohammed Zuad Khaman, who toils in his family's kebab café in one of Baghdad's poorer neighborhoods, resents the militias' hold on the country because they are an obstacle to his dreams of a sports career. Khaman is a talented footballer, but says he can't play in Baghdad's amateur clubs because he does not have any "in" with the militia-related gangs that control sports teams in the city.

He got an offer to train in Qatar, he said, but a broker was charging \$50,000, far beyond his family's means.

War and poverty caused him to miss several years of school, he said, and he's trying to get a high school degree. Meanwhile, he takes home about \$8-\$10 a day wiping tables and serving food and tea. He is among those Iraqis who would like to leave.

"If only I could get to London, I would have a different life."

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In contrast, for Muammel Sharba, 38, who managed to get a good education despite the war, the new Iraq offers promise he did not expect.

A lecturer in mathematics and technical English at the Middle Technical University campus in Baquba, a once violence-torn city in Diyala, northeast of Baghdad, Sharba left in 2017 for Hungary, where he earned a Ph.D. on an Iraqi government scholarship.

He returned last year, planning to fulfil his contractual obligations to his university and then move to Hungary permanently. But he's found himself impressed by the changes in his homeland and now thinks he will stay.

One reason: He discovered Baghdad's nascent community of bicyclists who gather weekly for organized rides. They recently rode to Samarra, where one of the worst sectarian attacks of the war happened in 2006, a bombing that damaged the city's 1,000-year-old grand mosque.

Sharba became a biking enthusiast in Hungary but never imagined pursuing it at home. He noticed other changes, too: better technology and less bureaucracy that allowed him to upload his thesis and get his foreign Ph.D. validated online. He got a driver's license electronically in one day. With infrastructure improvements, he's even seen some smoother roads.

Security in Diyala isn't perfect, he said, but it's less fraught than before. Not all his colleagues are as optimistic, but he prefers to focus on the glass half-full.

"I don't think European countries were always as they are now. They went through a long process and lots of barriers, and then they slowly got better," he said. "I believe that we need to go through these steps, too."

On a recent evening, a double line of excited cyclists threaded a course through the capital's busy streets for a night ride, Sharba among them. They raised neon-green-clad arms in a happy salute as they headed out.

As daylight ebbed into a crimson sunset, it wasn't hard to imagine that Iraq, like them, could be on the way to a better place.

Waste pickers collect food waste, help combat climate change

By JENNIFER McDERMOTT and JOEAL CALUPITAN Associated Press

MALABON, Philippines (AP) — Marilene Capentes pushes a cart along the streets of Malabon city just north of Manila every morning except Sundays, collecting bags of segregated garbage.

She places the food waste in a designated container so it can be turned to compost at the local recycling facility. The rest of the waste goes into separate containers and the recyclables are later sold.

Capentes, who is 47, said the trash used to be all mixed together — and heavy — until a local environmental nonprofit started asking residents to separate it a few years ago. The Mother Earth Foundation in the Philippines, as a member of the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, is trying to prevent food waste from going to landfills, where it emits methane as it breaks down and rots. Methane is an extraordinarily powerful greenhouse gas responsible for about 30% of today's global warming.

Along Capentes' route, 50-year-old resident Vilma Mendoza now understands the importance of diverting organic waste from landfills to reduce methane emissions to try to limit future warming.

"If you mixed biodegradable to the non-biodegradable and throw it in the landfill, our environment will suffer," she said.

Preventing waste from going into landfills, incinerators or the environment is a proven, affordable climate solution, according to GAIA. The international environmental organization, which advocates for waste reduction, is supporting its members, including waste picker groups around the world, that are working with government officials to set up systems to segregate and collect organic waste and establish facilities to compost it.

This is happening mainly in the Global South where waste pickers are already working in many communities and cities. Millions of people worldwide make a living as waste pickers, collecting, sorting, recycling and selling materials such as plastics, paper, copper and steel.

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The world needs better systems for dealing with waste because existing ways are contributing to climate change, said Kait Siegel, the waste sector manager on the methane pollution prevention team at the environmental nonprofit Clean Air Task Force. She said organics diversion and treatment is “absolutely” an important way to reduce methane emissions.

“We’ve seen these solutions make a difference in countries around the world,” she said. “We’re all creating organic waste in our day-to-day lives. And that’s something that we can be engaging with, in working towards slowing the pace of climate change.”

There’s more interest in this strategy now because the Global Methane Pledge, launched in November 2021, has pushed countries to take a hard look at their sources of methane. More than 100 countries, including the United States, have agreed to reduce methane emissions by 30% by 2030, though other major methane emitters refused.

Methane is more potent at trapping heat than carbon dioxide, but doesn’t stay in the atmosphere nearly as long — around 12 years compared with centuries. Many see bringing down methane emissions as a crucial, quick way to curb further warming.

The largest anthropogenic source is agriculture, closely followed by the energy sector, which includes emissions from coal, oil, natural gas and biofuels, according to the International Energy Agency.

The waste sector is the third largest source of anthropogenic methane emissions worldwide, accounting for about 20% of the total. About 60% of waste in Global South communities is organic, according to GAIA. That’s 130 tons of waste per day in just Malabon city, population 380,000.

At a materials recycling facility in Malabon, organic waste collected from households is turned into compost that goes into a community garden to grow vegetables. Some of the food waste goes into a biodigester that breaks it down to turn it into biogas, which is then used to cook vegetables for waste workers to eat. It’s a complete cycle, said Froilan Grate, executive director of GAIA Asia Pacific. Workers typically each have a route of about 200 households, Grate added.

Grate, who is based in Manila, said there are challenges in establishing these systems in new places. It costs money upfront to set up a facility for composting, residents and local officials have to be educated on the importance of separating waste, bins have to be provided for households that can’t afford more than one, and sometimes it’s just not a priority. Also, unlike recyclables and metals, there isn’t a large market for organic materials so waste workers must be paid for the service they are providing for the system to work.

But Grate is confident these challenges can be overcome. More people are making the connection between reducing methane and addressing climate change, so there is more interest from cities and philanthropic groups that could help with startup costs, he said. And cities are seeing the benefits of sound waste management because it reduces vermin that cause disease, helps ensure cleaner drinking water, gives waste workers a sustainable livelihood and helps the planet, he added.

In the Philippines, cities pay waste workers with the money they save in tipping fees by sending fewer truckloads to landfills.

In Brazil, one of the world’s five largest methane emitters, there is now interest in supporting waste pickers, investing in waste recycling and fighting climate change since President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva took office in January, said Victor Hugo Argentino de Moraes Vieira, a zero waste adviser and researcher at Instituto Pólis.

A large composting site has been operating for years on the northeast coast in Bahia, an area popular with tourists. Waste pickers there developed a system themselves to collect organic waste from hotels and restaurants, but few other waste pickers collect food waste.

Jeane dos Santos in Salvador said she started working as a waste picker at the age of 7. She’s now 41 and part of the National Movement of Waste Pickers of Brazil. She collects and sells recyclable waste, though a lot of it turns out to be either non-recyclable plastic or contaminated by food waste.

Dos Santos is part of a cooperative of waste pickers whose income derives solely from the recyclables they sell. She said she’s interested in collecting organic waste if it could be segregated, because then the recyclable items won’t be contaminated and the waste pickers could earn money if the state supports

these efforts.

"I earn enough to survive. However, I would like to earn more if we had the proper state support," she said. "Currently, we provide a public service and we are not rewarded by that."

Local waste pickers could educate households, and society, about how to properly separate their waste, dos Santos added.

In South Africa, it's also not common to separate organic waste. But for the past two years it's been tested out at a large market in the port city of Durban.

"It can be a game changer for the continent," said Niven Reddy, the African regional coordinator for GAIA. "It can be tested and tried. If it works in Africa in one place, it's likely to work someplace else — 400,000 people go through that market a day."

GAIA leaders like Reddy are looking to the systems established in the Philippines as a model.

"I do feel like it demonstrates the Global South's leadership on issues like this of methane reduction," he said. "I think it's really impressive. And I feel like it's highly implementable."

10 charged in Irvo Otieno's death at mental hospital

By SARAH RANKIN Associated Press

DINWIDDIE, Va. (AP) — Video from a state mental hospital shows a Black Virginia man who was handcuffed and shackled being pinned to the ground by deputies who are now facing second-degree murder charges in his death, according to relatives of the man and their attorneys who viewed the footage Thursday.

Speaking at a news conference shortly after watching the video with a local prosecutor, the family and attorneys condemned the brutal treatment they said Irvo Otieno, 28, was subjected to, first at a local jail and then at the state hospital where authorities say he died March 6 during the admission process.

They called on the U.S. Department of Justice to intervene in the case, saying Otieno's constitutional rights were clearly violated.

"What I saw today was heartbreaking, America. It was disturbing. It was traumatic. My son was tortured," said Otieno's mother, Caroline Ouko.

Otieno's case marks the latest example of a Black man's in-custody death that has law enforcement under scrutiny. It follows the fatal beating of Tyre Nichols in Memphis, Tennessee, earlier this year and comes nearly three years after the killing of George Floyd in police custody in Minneapolis.

Ben Crump, who represented Floyd's family and is now working with Otieno's, quickly drew a comparison.

"It is truly shocking that nearly three years after the brutal killing of George Floyd by police, another family is grieving a loved one who allegedly died in nearly the exact same manner — being pinned down by police for 12 agonizing minutes," Crump said in a statement.

Mark Krudys, another attorney for Otieno's family, said at the news conference that the video showed all seven of the deputies now facing charges pushing down on Otieno, who was in handcuffs and leg irons.

"You can see that they're putting their back into it. Every part of his body is being pushed down with absolute brutality," he said.

Ten people so far have been charged with second-degree murder in Otieno's death. The seven Henrico County Sheriff's deputies were charged Tuesday and additional charges were announced Thursday against three people who were employed by the hospital.

The footage the family watched Thursday has not been publicly released. But Dinwiddie County Commonwealth's Attorney Ann Cabell Baskervill also described it in court Wednesday, saying at the first hearing for the deputies that Otieno was smothered to death, local news outlets reported.

Baskervill said Otieno did not appear combative and was sitting in a chair before being pulled to the ground by the officers, the Richmond Times-Dispatch reported.

She announced Thursday in a news release the additional charges against the hospital employees: Darian M. Blackwell, 23, of Petersburg; Wavie L. Jones, 34, of Chesterfield; and Sadarius D. Williams, 27, of North Dinwiddie. They were being held without bond, and it wasn't immediately clear if they had attorneys who could speak on their behalf. A spokeswoman for the state police said she didn't know if they had obtained

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counsel, and none were listed in court records. The news release did not say what role they are alleged to have had in Otieno's death.

Additional charges and arrests are pending, Baskervill said.

Otieno, who was a child when his family emigrated from Kenya and grew up in suburban Richmond, had a history of mental health struggles and was experiencing mental distress at the time of his initial encounter with law enforcement earlier this month, his family and their attorneys said.

That set off a chain of events that led to him spending several days in custody before authorities say he died March 6 as he was being admitted to Central State Hospital south of Richmond.

Krudys said the footage from the hospital also showed a lack of urgency to help Otieno after the deputies determined "that he was lifeless and not breathing."

Otieno was a deeply loved young man, an aspiring musician who had been a well-known high school athlete, Krudys said.

"There is goodness in his music and that's all I'm left with now — he's gone," Ouko said at the news conference while clutching a framed photo of her son.

"I cannot be at his wedding. I'll never see a grandchild ... because someone refused to help him. No one stood up to stop what was going on," she said.

Otieno was first taken into custody March 3, according to a timeline provided by Henrico County Police, a separate agency from the sheriff's office.

The police department said in a news release that officers encountered Otieno while responding to a report of a possible burglary in suburban Richmond, and that based on his behavior, they put him under an emergency custody order and took him to a local hospital for evaluation.

According to Krudys, Otieno was experiencing a mental health crisis and a neighbor called police over concerns about him gathering lawn lights from a yard. He said Otieno's mother tried to de-escalate the initial response from a crowd of police officers and said the family supported him being taken to a hospital for treatment.

But while he was at the hospital, police said he became "became physically assaultive toward officers, who arrested him" and took him to a local jail that is managed by the Henrico Sheriff's Office, where he was served with several charges.

While Otieno was in jail, he was denied access to needed medications, the family attorneys said. The family also viewed video from that facility on Thursday, which they said showed Otieno was subjected to further brutality by unidentified officers.

Crump said he was pepper sprayed, and Krudys said the video showed officers on March 6 charging into his cell, which was covered in feces, as Otieno was naked and handcuffed. The video shows officers carrying an "almost lifeless" Otieno out by his arms and legs "like an animal" to a vehicle to be transported to the state hospital.

"My son was treated like a dog, worse than a dog," Ouko said.

Shannon Taylor, the commonwealth's attorney for Henrico County, said in a statement Thursday that she's conducting a review of what happened in the jail that day, and she pledged to release her findings. The Henrico sheriff declined comment beyond a statement released earlier in the week.

Around 4 p.m. on March 6, employees of the sheriff's office arrived at Central State Hospital to admit Otieno, according to Baskervill. It was not until 7:28 p.m. that evening that state police were called to investigate his death, she said.

In court Wednesday, a defense attorney suggested that two medical injections Otieno received may have played a role in his death, which Baskervill disputed, the Times-Dispatch reported.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner has not released its final determination on how Otieno died.

Two of the deputies were released on bond, according to court records and local media. The others remained in custody, with hearings set for next week.

Edward Nickel, an attorney for Deputy Bradley Disse, one of the defendants who was released, said in an email Thursday that Disse has served "honorably" during a 20-year career with the sheriff's department.

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"He is looking forward to his opportunity to try this case and for the full truth to be shared in court and ultimately vindicated," Nickel said in an email.

The Associated Press sent emails and other inquiries and left messages Thursday attempting to reach attorneys listed in court records for the other deputies.

The Henrico Fraternal Order of Police-Lodge 4 stood by the deputies in a statement posted to social media on Tuesday, urging against a rush to judgment and stressing that the charges are yet to go through the rigors of the legal system.

News outlets, including AP, have sought video of the altercation. Officials are withholding it, citing the pending investigation. Crump said Thursday the family believes the public should see the footage.

"How do we build trust unless we have transparency, and then we have accountability?" he said.

Microsoft adds AI tools to office apps like Outlook, Word

By HALELUYA HADERO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Microsoft is infusing artificial intelligence tools into its suite of office software, including Word, Excel and Outlook emails.

The company said Thursday the new feature, named Copilot, is a processing engine that will allow users to do things like summarize long emails, draft stories in Word and animate slides in PowerPoint.

Microsoft 365 General Manager Colette Stallbaumer said the new features are currently only available for 20 enterprise customers. It will roll it out for more enterprise customers over the coming months.

Microsoft is marketing the feature as a tool that will allow workers to be more productive by freeing up time they usually spend in their inbox, or allowing them to more easily analyze trends in Excel.

The tech giant based in Redmond, Washington, will also add a chat function called Business Chat, which resembles the popular ChatGPT. It takes commands and carries out actions — like summarizing an email about a particular project to co-workers — using user data.

"Today marks the next major step in the evolution of how we interact with computing, which will fundamentally change the way we work and unlock a new wave of productivity growth," Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella said in a statement.

Mattel, Instacart and other companies have also been integrating generative AI tools like ChatGPT and the image generator Dall-E to come up with ideas for new toy cars and answer customers' food questions.

Microsoft rival Google said this week it is integrating generative AI tools into its own Workspace applications, such as Google Docs, Gmail and Slides. Google says it will be rolling out the features to its "trusted testers on a rolling basis throughout the year."

Microsoft's announcement came two days after OpenAI, which powers the generative AI technology Microsoft is relying on, rolled out its latest artificial intelligence model, GPT-4.

Review: U2 reworks past in thrilling 'Songs of Surrender'

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

"Songs of Surrender," U2 (Universal)

Imagine walking into your living room and all your stuff is there, but it's different. The sofa has moved, the bookcase is leaning on a different wall and the framed photos have swapped locations. That's the feeling you get listening to U2's new album.

"Songs of Surrender" is a "reimagining" of 40 songs from the Irish quartet's deep catalogue, cleverly presented from "One" to "40." Think of it as a thrilling home makeover.

"I want to tear down the walls that hold me inside," Bono sings in the new "Where the Streets Have No Name" — lyrics that perfectly fit this sonic experiment. This version of the song is virtually unrecognizable from the one the band made famous in 1987.

That's the point of this exercise led by Bono and The Edge. "Once we surrendered our reverence for the original version, each song started to open up to a new authentic voice of this time," The Edge writes in the liner notes.

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There are triumphs and a few fumbles, but there's a growing realization that the architecture of these songs is strong indeed, even with some new lyrics. The new "Vertigo" has Middle Eastern instrumentations, while an acoustic guitar-driven "Sunday Bloody Sunday" sounds more like something from a coffeehouse open-mic night than a strident arena-ready demand. But they're both still gorgeous.

Some might even be improvements. One of the band's earliest hits — "11 O'Clock Tick Tock" — is smoother, slower and cleaner than the original. And would you believe the new "The Miracle (Of Joey Ramone)" might be better than the one on "Songs of Innocence"?

Many reworkings are relatively straight-forward, like "Cedarwood Road," "Peace on Earth," "Bad" and "I Will Follow." Most have a stripped-down feel, which gives Bono's voice little shelter amid moody keyboards or choppy acoustic guitar. "Every Breaking Wave" is cinematic, like something that should run over the end credits when an anguished drama has faded to black.

"I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," gets a cowboy vibe and unexpected honky-tonky electricity. "Desire" has Bono high in his falsetto against a strummy dulcimer and the effect is hypnotic.

"Get Out of Your Own Way" is remade as a Mumford & Sons tune, in a good way, and the new "Stuck in a Moment" is a folkish prayer, the structure holding. The new "One" is a little marred by a choir effect, but it is such a beautiful song that it could be remade as a punk tune and it would still sparkle.

Listening to the new "Sometime You Can't Make It On Your Own" is like running into an ex who is barely recognizable. The reworked "With or Without You" has an air of antiseptic menace.

One effect of the album is to put Bono's lyrics under a spotlight, making his words and imagery more pronounced. The new "Ordinary Love" emerges like a tone poem, the new "Invisible" reveals deeper pain than originally sang.

Some don't work, as when the grimness of "Red Hill Mining Town" is undercut by horns, effectively remaking it into a defanged children's song. The new "Beautiful Day" is not an improvement over the original; it has been made lounge-y and meandering, despite some nifty new lyrics.

In a new "Pride (In the Name of Love)," Bono's voice has been harnessed and tamed, losing the original's stridency and anger. And the new "40" — with Bono appropriately arguing "I will sing a new song" — has been made limp and passive.

If you're not a U2 fan, this collection will not convince you to embrace them. If you are a mega-fan, you will marvel at their mutability. And if you are a casual fan, you must admire a band willing to get in its own way.

Pence defends joke about Buttigieg 'maternity leave'

By HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

KEENE, N.H. (AP) — The husband of Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said Thursday he hasn't heard from Mike Pence in the days since the former vice president mocked his family, but will continue to hold him accountable for his words.

Chasten Buttigieg was asked on ABC's "The View" whether Pence contacted him after joking at a dinner for journalists and politicians that Pete Buttigieg took "maternity leave" after he and his husband adopted newborn twins.

"Pete is the only person in human history to have a child and everyone else gets postpartum depression," Pence said Saturday at the Gridiron Dinner.

Chasten Buttigieg, who said he doesn't expect to hear from Pence, called the remarks "part of a much bigger trend attacking families."

"I spoke up because we all have an obligation to hold people accountable for when they say something wrong, especially when it's misogynistic, especially when it's homophobic, and I just don't take that when it's towards my family, and I don't think anyone else would, especially when you bring a very small, medically fragile child into it," he said.

Pence defended his comments Thursday night after speaking at a Republican Party dinner in New Hampshire.

"The Gridiron Dinner is a roast. I had a lot of jokes directed to me, and I directed a lot of jokes to Republicans and Democrats," he told reporters. "The only thing I can figure is Pete Buttigieg not only can't do his job, but he can't take a joke."

France's Macron risks his government to raise retirement age

By SYLVIE CORBET and ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron ordered his prime minister to wield a special constitutional power Thursday that skirts parliament to force through a highly unpopular bill raising the retirement age from 62 to 64 without a vote.

His calculated risk set off a clamor among lawmakers, who began singing the national anthem even before Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne arrived in the lower chamber. She spoke forcefully over their shouts, acknowledging that Macron's unilateral move will trigger quick motions of no-confidence in his government.

The fury of opposition lawmakers echoed the anger of citizens and workers' unions. Thousands gathered at the Place de la Concorde facing the National Assembly, lighting a bonfire. As night fell, police charged the demonstrators in waves to clear the elegant Place. Small groups of those chased away moved through nearby streets in the chic neighborhood setting street fires. At least 120 were detained, police said.

Similar scenes repeated themselves in numerous other cities, from Rennes and Nantes in the east to Lyon and the southern port city of Marseille, where shop windows and bank fronts were smashed, according to French media. Radical leftist groups were blamed for at least some of the destruction.

The unions that have organized strikes and marches since January, leaving Paris reeking in piles of garbage, announced new rallies and protest marches in the days ahead. "This retirement reform is brutal, unjust, unjustified for the world of workers," they declared.

Macron has made the proposed pension changes the key priority of his second term, arguing that reform is needed to keep the pension system from diving into deficit as France, like many richer nations, faces lower birth rates and longer life expectancy.

Macron decided to invoke the special power during a Cabinet meeting at the Elysee presidential palace, just a few minutes before the scheduled vote in France's lower house of parliament, because he had no guarantee of a majority.

"Today, uncertainty looms" about whether a majority would have voted for the bill, Borne acknowledged, but she said "We cannot gamble on the future of our pensions. That reform is necessary."

Borne prompted boos from the opposition when she said her government is accountable to the parliament. Lawmakers can try to revoke the changes through no-confidence motions, she said.

"There will actually be a proper vote and therefore the parliamentary democracy will have the last say," Borne said.

She said in an interview Thursday night on the TV station TF1 that she was not angry when addressing disrespectful lawmakers but "very shocked."

"Certain (opposition lawmakers) want chaos, at the Assembly and in the streets," she said.

Opposition lawmakers demanded the government step down. One Communist lawmaker called the presidential power a political "guillotine." Others called it a "denial of democracy" that signals Macron's lack of legitimacy.

Marine Le Pen said her far-right National Rally party would file a no-confidence motion, and Communist lawmaker Fabien Roussel said such a motion is "ready" on the left.

"The mobilization will continue," Roussel said. "This reform must be suspended."

The leader of The Republicans, Eric Ciotti, said his party won't "add chaos to chaos" by supporting a no-confidence motion, but some of his fellow conservatives at odds with the party's leadership could vote individually.

A no-confidence motion, expected early next week, needs approval by more than half the Assembly. If it passes — which would be a first since 1962 — the government would have to resign. Macron could reappoint Borne if he chooses, and a new Cabinet would be named.

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If no-confidence motions don't succeed, the pension bill would be considered adopted.

The Senate adopted the bill earlier Thursday in a 193-114 vote, a tally largely expected since the conservative majority of the upper house favored the changes.

Raising the retirement age will make workers put more money into the system, which the government says is on course to run a deficit. Macron has promoted the pension changes as central to his vision for making the French economy more competitive. The reform also would require 43 years of work to earn a full pension.

Leftist leader Jean-Luc Melenchon told the crowd at the Concorde that Macron has gone "over the heads of the will of the people." Members of Melenchon's France Unbowed party were foremost among the lawmakers singing the Marseillaise in an attempt to thwart the prime minister.

Economic challenges have prompted widespread unrest across Western Europe, where many countries, like France, have had low birthrates, leaving fewer young workers to sustain pensions for retirees. Spain's leftist government joined with labor unions Wednesday to announce a "historic" deal to save its pension system.

Spain's Social Security Minister José Luis Escrivá said the French have a very different, unsustainable model and "has not addressed its pension system for decades." Spain's workers already must stay on the job until at least 65 and won't be asked to work longer — instead, their new deal increases employer contributions for higher-wage earners.

Kentucky lawmakers pass ban on youth gender-affirming care

By BRUCE SCHREINER Associated Press

FRANKFORT, Ky. (AP) — Republican lawmakers in Kentucky passed a measure Thursday to ban gender-affirming care for transgender minors, completing whirlwind voting on a repackaged proposal that triggered outrage and tears among opponents unable to stop the sweeping policymaking on a culture wars issue.

Supporters of the proposal — which affects how gender is discussed in schools — beat a Thursday deadline to retain their power to override an expected gubernatorial veto.

GOP supermajorities in the House and Senate overwhelmingly passed the bill, a day after a slimmed-down version had stalled in the Senate and seemingly left the issue in limbo. A cascade of shouting erupted from some bill opponents in the Senate gallery after the measure won final passage.

The bill's foes denounced the fast-track maneuvering and the expanded measure's consequences for trans youths. Overcome with emotion, a sobbing Rep. Josie Raymond said children would be harmed. "I'm embarrassed and I'm appalled and I'm scared," the Democrat said in opposing the bill in committee.

Republicans backing the far-reaching rendition cobbled together a separate bill that hastily cleared a committee and won House passage. It gained Senate passage a short time later, sending the bill to Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear, who portrayed it as government intrusion in family health decisions.

Republican House Speaker Pro Tempore David Meade, in presenting the revived bill in committee, said: "Our job is to protect children, and that's what we're doing here."

"Surgery or drugs that completely alter their life, and alter their body, is not something we should be allowing until they are adults," Meade said later during the House debate.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky quickly warned that it "stands ready" to challenge the measure in court if it becomes law.

"Legislators cannot erase transgender people from existence, and we will continue to fight for equal rights and equal protection under the law," said Amber Duke, the organization's interim executive director.

The new bill designated to carry the sweeping trans-related provisions retained its original language — allowing teachers to refuse to refer to transgender students by their preferred pronouns and requiring schools to notify parents when lessons related to human sexuality are going to be taught.

Multiple layers were added to it — including the proposed ban on gender-affirming medical care for trans youths. It would outlaw gender reassignment surgery for anyone under 18, as well as the use of puberty blockers and hormones, and inpatient and outpatient gender-affirming hospital services. It would not allow

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schools to discuss sexual orientation or gender identity with students of any age.

The House passed the bill on a 75-22 vote. One after another, opponents stood to denounce the bill while supporters were mostly silent. Democratic Rep. Keturah Herron called the bill "an attack on a very, very, very small population of people."

The debate was shorter but no less fiery in the Senate, which passed the bill 30-7.

"This is absolute, wilfull, intentional hate. Hate for a small group of people that are the weakest and the most vulnerable among us," said Democratic Sen. Karen Berg.

The bill's supporters say they are trying to protect children from undertaking gender-affirming treatments that they might later regret as adults.

"We're talking about removing healthy body parts that you cannot put back on," Republican Sen. Lindsey Tichenor said in supporting the bill. "I've seen the pictures. It's horrifying."

Thursday was the last day Kentucky lawmakers were in session until late March, when they'll reconvene for the final two days of this year's session. By beating the Thursday deadline to send the bill to the governor, the GOP supermajorities retained their ability to override a veto.

Beshear, who is seeking reelection this year, said such bills amount to "big government stepping in and imposing its will" on health care decisions that should be left to families.

"I also believe that every child is a child of God — every single one," the governor said Thursday at his weekly news conference.

The expanded version was in stark contrast to the more limited version that stalled Wednesday in the Senate. That version pared down the restrictions on transgender youth, their families and health care providers.

The issue has spurred emotional debate from bill opponents who call it discriminatory and say it would hurt transgender youth. On Tuesday, a former Kentucky lawmaker said his young grandchild would be among those affected if lawmakers banned access to gender-affirming medical care for those under 18.

"This bill condemns vulnerable children to an even more difficult life than they've already been born into," Jerry Miller, a Republican who formerly served in the House, told lawmakers. "Please don't let a parent's right to protect their children be collateral damage in the culture wars."

Nationally, state lawmakers are approving extensive measures that restrict the rights of LGBTQ people this year, from bills targeting trans athletes and drag performers to ones limiting gender-affirming care. In Mississippi, Republican Gov. Tate Reeves recently signed a bill to ban gender-affirming hormones or surgery in the state for anyone younger than 18. The Republican governors of South Dakota and Utah have signed bans on gender-affirming care this year.

Regulators monitor tritium leak at Minnesota nuclear plant

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Minnesota regulators said Thursday they're monitoring the cleanup of a leak of 400,000 gallons of radioactive water from Xcel Energy's Monticello nuclear power plant, and the company said there's no danger to the public.

"Xcel Energy took swift action to contain the leak to the plant site, which poses no health and safety risk to the local community or the environment," the Minneapolis-based utility said in a statement.

While Xcel reported the leak of water containing tritium to state and federal authorities in late November, the spill had not been made public before Thursday. State officials said they waited to get more information before going public with it.

"We knew there was a presence of tritium in one monitoring well, however Xcel had not yet identified the source of the leak and its location," Minnesota Pollution Control Agency spokesman Michael Rafferty said.

"Now that we have all the information about where the leak occurred, how much was released into groundwater, and that contaminated groundwater had moved beyond the original location, we are sharing this information," he said, adding the water remains contained on Xcel's property and poses no immediate public health risk.

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The company said it notified the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the state on Nov. 22, the day after it confirmed the leak, which came from a pipe between two buildings. Since then, it has been pumping groundwater, storing and processing the contaminated water, which contains tritium levels below federal thresholds.

"Ongoing monitoring from over two dozen on-site monitoring wells confirms that the leaked water is fully contained on-site and has not been detected beyond the facility or in any local drinking water," the Xcel Energy statement said.

When asked why Xcel Energy didn't notify the public earlier, the company said: "We understand the importance of quickly informing the communities we serve if a situation poses an immediate threat to health and safety. In this case, there was no such threat." The company said it focused on investigating the situation, containing the affected water and figuring out next steps.

The Monticello plant is about 35 miles (55 kilometers) northwest of Minneapolis, upstream from the city on the Mississippi River.

Tritium is a radioactive isotope of hydrogen that occurs naturally in the environment and is a common by-product of nuclear plant operations. It emits a weak form of beta radiation that does not travel very far and cannot penetrate human skin, according to the NRC. A person who drank water from a spill would get only a low dose, the NRC says.

The NRC says tritium spills happen from time to time at nuclear plants, but that it has repeatedly determined that they've either remained limited to the plant property or involved such low offsite levels that they didn't affect public health or safety. Xcel reported a small tritium leak at Monticello in 2009.

Xcel said it has recovered about 25% of the spilled tritium so far, that recovery efforts will continue and that it will install a permanent solution this spring.

"While this leak does not pose a risk to the public or the environment, we take this very seriously and are working to safely address the situation," Chris Clark, president of Xcel Energy—Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota, said in the statement. "We continue to gather and treat all potentially affected water while regularly monitoring nearby groundwater sources."

Xcel Energy is considering building above-ground storage tanks to store the contaminated water it recovers, and is considering options for the treatment, reuse, or final disposal of the collected tritium and water. State regulators will review the options the company selects, the MPCA said.

Japan is preparing to release a massive amount of treated radioactive wastewater into the sea from the the triple reactor meltdowns 12 years ago at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. The water contains tritium and other radioactive contaminants.

BNSF trains derail in Washington, Arizona; no injuries

ANACORTES, Wash. (AP) — Two BNSF trains derailed in separate incidents in Arizona and Washington state on Thursday, with the latter spilling diesel fuel on tribal land along Puget Sound.

No injuries were reported. It wasn't clear what caused either derailment.

The derailment in Washington occurred on a berm along Padilla Bay, on the Swinomish tribal reservation near Anacortes. Most of 5,000 gallons (nearly 19,000 liters) of spilled diesel fuel leaked on the land side of the berm rather than toward the water, according to the state Ecology Department.

Officials said there were no indications the spill reached the water or affected any wildlife.

Responders placed a boom along the shoreline as a precaution and removed the remaining fuel from two locomotives that derailed. Four tank cars remained upright.

The derailment in western Arizona, near the state's border with California and Nevada, involved a train carrying corn syrup. A spokeswoman for the Mohave County Sheriff's Office, Anita Mortensen, said that she was not aware of any spills or leaks.

BNSF spokeswoman Lena Kent said an estimated eight cars derailed in Arizona and were blocking the main track. The cause of the derailment was under investigation, and it was not immediately known when the track will reopen.

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The derailments came amid heightened attention to rail safety nationwide following a fiery derailment last month in Ohio and a string of derailments since then that have been grabbing headlines, including ones in Michigan, Alabama and other states.

The U.S. averages about three train derailments per day, according to federal data, but relatively few create disasters.

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.

Big banks create \$30B rescue package for First Republic

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Eleven of the biggest U.S. banks Thursday announced a \$30 billion rescue package for First Republic Bank in an effort to prevent it from becoming the third to fail in less than a week and head off a broader banking crisis.

San Francisco-based First Republic serves a similar clientele as Silicon Valley Bank, which failed last week after depositors withdrew about \$40 billion in a matter of hours. New York's Signature Bank was shuttered on Sunday. It appears that First Republic, which had deposits totaling \$176.4 billion as of Dec. 31, was facing similar issues.

The group of banks behind the rescue package confirmed that other unnamed banks had seen large withdrawals of uninsured deposits. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation insures deposits up to \$250,000 for individual accounts.

Republic's shares dropped more than 60% Monday, even after the bank said it had secured additional funding from JPMorgan and the Federal Reserve.

The rescue package brought back memories of the 2008 financial crisis, when banks collectively came to the aid of weaker banks in the early days of the crisis. Banks then bought each other in hurried deals in order to keep the crisis from spreading further.

The \$30 billion in uninsured deposits is seen as a vote of confidence in First Republic, whose banking franchise before the past week was often the envy of the industry. The bank catered to wealthy clients, many of them billionaires, and offered them generous financial terms. The Wall Street Journal reported that Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg got a mortgage through First Republic.

First Republic shares had been down as much as 36% earlier Thursday, but rallied after reports the rescue package was in the works. The stock closed up 10%.

As part of the aid package, JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, Citigroup and Wells Fargo have agreed to each put \$5 billion in uninsured deposits into First Republic. Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs will deposit \$2.5 billion each into the bank. The remaining \$5 billion would consist of \$1 billion contributions from BNY Mellon, State Street, PNC Bank, Truist and US Bank.

"The actions of America's largest banks reflect their confidence in the country's banking system," the banks said in a statement.

Notably the banks came to the rescue of one of their competitors, while Silicon Valley Bank failed because its closest and most loyal customers — venture capitalists and start ups — fled the bank at the first sign of trouble.

"We are deploying our financial strength and liquidity into the larger system, where it is needed the most," the banks said.

The nation's banking regulators also issued a statement praising the rescue package.

"This show of support by a group of large banks is most welcome, and demonstrates the resilience of the banking system," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, Acting Comptroller of the Currency Michael Hsu, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell and FDIC Chairman Martin Gruenberg said in a joint statement.

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The \$30 billion bet on First Republic is seen as a bulwark against future bank runs. The shares of many midsized banks were hit hard this week as investors feared depositors would withdraw their cash and run to the nation's biggest banks.

Over the weekend the federal government, determined to restore public confidence in the banking system, moved to protect all the banks' deposits, even those that exceeded the FDIC's \$250,000 limit per individual account. While the banking crisis started with Silicon Valley Bank, regulators told reporters earlier this week that it became necessary for the government to backstop the banking system because it appeared more runs were possible.

Howard paid visit by VP Harris in 1st NCAA tourney since '92

By DAVE CAMPBELL AP Sports Writer

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — The first appearance for Howard University in the NCAA Tournament since 1992 included a visit by one of the school's most prominent alums.

Vice President Kamala Harris watched Howard's 96-68 first-round loss to Kansas from a suite at Wells Fargo Arena on Thursday afternoon and met with the team afterward.

As supporters in the hallway chanted "H-U, you know!" players trickled into the locker room. Harris and her husband, Doug Emhoff, walked in a few minutes later.

"You played hard. You played to the very last second. You made all us Bisons proud," Harris said, according to the press pool account of her address of the players. "You are smart. You are disciplined. You put everything you had into the game. You guys did not stop, and that is so inspiring. So you keep playing with chin up and shoulders back because you showed the world who Bison are."

Harris, who graduated in 1986 from the historically Black university in the nation's capital, said she has heard alumni all over the world talking about their pride in the team.

"So I know you may not be feeling great right now, OK, but know who you are," Harris said. "You are excellence. You are hard work. You are powerful, and you are winners."

The players were subdued after the end of their season but still able to recognize the significance of meeting Harris.

"It's amazing to know we have people of such power that are affiliated with us and supporting us at the same time," freshman forward Shy Odom said.

When Harris was shown on the video board during the game, the boos — Kansas and Iowa are Republican-leaning states, after all — outweighed the applause.

Wearing their Black History Month jerseys with green trim and a red script "The Mecca" on the front — in reference to Howard's nickname as the country's most prominent historically Black university — the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference champion Bison took the court with plenty of confidence.

"I just love how they have grown as people and have become better men over the course of this season," coach Kenny Blakeney said. "That's a victory no one can take away from us. I'm thrilled that we were able to represent Howard University in a classy way that honored so many people before us."

This was just the third NCAA Tournament appearance in program history for Howard.

"We have had a lot of games on national TV," Blakeney said, "but certainly being in the NCAA Tournament there are more eyes and visibility on you, which is amazing because we have a chance to talk about our university as one of the greatest on the face of this planet."

Iowa lawmakers send school bathroom bill to governor

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Transgender students won't be allowed to use a public school restroom in Iowa that aligns with their gender identity under a bill that Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds was expected to sign into law after it got final legislative approval Thursday.

The bill received support only from Republicans, who argued it was needed to protect children who might feel uncomfortable sharing a restroom with a student whose gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. Opponents countered that the bill was unnecessary and could lead to

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harassment against transgender students.

The House approved the measure 57-39, with five Republicans joining the 34 Democrats present in opposing the proposal. The vote came a week after the Senate approved the bill.

Republican Rep. Steven Holt said the bill "applies to everyone equally." Holt said children have long used different restrooms based on biological and physiological characteristics and this tradition should continue.

"I do understand and empathize with a child that may not feel comfortable using the bathroom of their biological sex. Accommodations should be made when possible to keep that child comfortable as they change or use the restroom," Holt said. "However, that cannot be done or should not be done at the expense of the privacy and safety of our daughters."

Democrats responded that there was no history of transgender students bothering other students in restrooms and that a new requirement would put trans children in danger.

"All students deserve a safe school environment," said Democratic Rep. Jennifer Konfrst. "Forcing transgender students into restrooms that don't match their gender identity puts their safety at risk."

The group Iowa Safe Schools, which advocates for LGBTQ students, said that since gender identity was added to the Iowa Civil Rights Act in 2007, there had been no documented incidents of transgender people acting inappropriately in restrooms.

"This bill is a solution to an imaginary problem, all for the sake of bullying trans children," Becky Tayler, the group's executive director, said in a statement.

Iowa is among several states with Republican leadership that have passed similar legislation.

On Wednesday, lawmakers approved such a bill in Arkansas and sent it to Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders. Alabama, Oklahoma and Tennessee also have passed laws with similar restroom restrictions.

Reynolds, who has been supportive of measures that limit the teaching of transgender topics in schools and restrict trans girls' participation in sports, is expected to sign the bill. Another bill approved last week that awaits the governor's signature would prohibit doctors from providing gender-affirming medical care, including puberty blockers and gender-affirming surgeries.

Yellen declares bank system sound, as new rescues ordered

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen offered firm, upbeat reassurances to rattled bank depositors and investors Thursday, even as American financial institutions and European agencies ordered fresh rescue efforts following the second-largest bank collapse in U.S. history.

Questioned closely, sometimes aggressively, Yellen told senators at a Capitol hearing that the U.S. banking system "remains sound" and Americans "can feel confident" about the safety of their deposits.

Her remarks, against the backdrop of deepening concerns about the health of the global financial system, were an effort to signal to markets that there would be no broader contagion from the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank in California and Signature Bank in New York.

By the time her testimony was over, another major institution, First Republic Bank, received an emergency infusion of \$30 billion in deposits from 11 banks, according to Treasury. And in Europe hours earlier, Credit Suisse, Switzerland's second-largest lender, got a promise from the Swiss central bank of a loan of up to 50 billion francs (\$54 billion).

Wall Street rallied on the rescue news.

Republican senators laid a big part of the blame for the problems on Democratic President Joe Biden's administration.

"The reckless tax and spend agenda that was forced through Congress" contributed to record high inflation that the Federal Reserve is having to compensate for through increasing interest rates, said Sen. Mike Crapo of Idaho. And those surging rates have caused banks — as well as regular citizens — problems.

The Republicans also questioned Biden's assurances that taxpayers won't bear the brunt of the commitment to make depositors whole.

Yellen resisted that scenario, though she said, "We certainly need to analyze carefully what happened to

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trigger these bank failures and examine our rules and supervision" to prevent them from happening again. She defended the government's argument that taxpayers will not end up paying the cost of protecting uninsured money at Silicon Valley and Signature.

The Treasury secretary was the first administration official to face lawmakers over the decision to protect uninsured money at the two failed regional banks, a move some have criticized as a bank "bailout."

"The government took decisive and forceful actions to strengthen public confidence" in the U.S. banking system, Yellen testified. "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."

The week has been a whirlwind for markets globally on worries about banks that may be bending under the weight of the fastest hikes to interest rates in decades, increases intended to quell rising inflation on consumer goods.

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 said that all depositors, including those holding uninsured funds exceeding \$250,000, would be protected by federal deposit insurance.

The Justice Department and the Securities and Exchange Commission have since launched investigations into the Silicon Valley Bank collapse, and President Joe Biden has called on Congress to strengthen rules on regional banks.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Thursday, "There are things that we can do in the administration, but in order to really deal with this issue we have to act. Congress needs to act."

Thursday's hearing, originally scheduled to address Biden's budget proposal for the fiscal year beginning next October, came after the sudden collapse of Silicon Valley, the nation's 16th-biggest bank and a go-to financial institution for tech entrepreneurs. While lawmakers questioned Yellen on the federal deficit and upcoming debt ceiling negotiations, many focused instead on the bank failures and who was to blame.

The Biden administration's "handling of the economy contributed to this," insisted Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C. "I plan to hold the regulators accountable."

Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., asked, "Where were the regulators in all of this?"

"Nerves are certainly frayed at this moment," said Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., who chairs the committee. "One of the most important steps the Congress can take now is make sure there are no questions about the full faith and credit of the United States," he said, referring to raising the federal debt ceiling.

Sen. Mike Crapo of Idaho, the committee's top Republican, said, "I'm concerned about the precedent of guaranteeing all deposits," calling the federal rescue action a "moral hazard."

Yellen said on CBS' "Face the Nation" last Sunday that a banks bailout was not on the table.

"We're not going to do that again," she said, referring to the government's response to the 2008 financial crisis, which led to massive government rescues for 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 banking problem.

"This week's actions demonstrate our resolute commitment to ensure that depositors' savings remain safe," she said.

Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, compared the banks' collapse to rail industry deregulation lobbying that Democrats say contributed to the East Palestine train derailment that rocked an Ohio community. "We see aggressive lobbying like this from banks as well," he said.

In Europe, troubles at Credit Suisse deepened concerns about the global financial system.

The Swiss giant was having issues long before the U.S. banks collapsed, but the news Wednesday that the bank's biggest shareholder would not inject more money led shares of European banks to plunge. On Thursday, they rose after the Swiss Central Bank's action.

Regulators in the U.S. and abroad are trying to reassure depositors that their money is safe. They "don't want anybody to be the person who sits in a darkened room or darkened cinema and shouts fire, because

that's what prompts a rush for the exits," said Russ Mould, investment director at the online investment platform AJ Bell.

Despite the banking turmoil, the European Central Bank hiked interest rates by a half percentage point in its latest effort to curb stubbornly high inflation, saying Europe's banking sector is "resilient," with strong finances and plenty of available cash.

ECB President Christine Lagarde said the central bank would provide additional support to the banking system if necessary. She said banks "are in a completely different position from 2008" because of safeguards added after the financial crisis.

ECB Vice President Luis de Guindos also said Europe's exposure to Credit Suisse, which is outside the European Union's banking supervision structure, was "quite limited."

The Swiss bank, which has seen its stock decline for years, 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.

COVID-19 pill Paxlovid moves closer to full FDA approval

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pfizer's COVID-19 pill Paxlovid won another vote of confidence from U.S. health advisers Thursday, clearing the way for its full regulatory approval by the Food and Drug Administration.

The medication has been used by millions of Americans since the FDA granted it emergency use authorization in late 2021. The agency has the final say on giving Pfizer's drug full approval and is expected to decide by May.

A panel of outside experts voted 16-1 that Paxlovid remains a safe and effective treatment for high-risk adults with COVID-19 who are more likely to face hospitalization and death due to the virus.

"We still have many groups that stand to benefit from Paxlovid, including unvaccinated persons, under-vaccinated persons, the elderly and the immuno-compromised," said Dr. Richard Murphy of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The FDA said using Paxlovid in high-risk patients could prevent 1,500 COVID-19 deaths and 13,000 hospitalizations per week.

The panel's positive vote was widely expected, given that Paxlovid has been the go-to treatment against COVID-19, especially since an entire group of antibody drugs has been sidelined as the virus mutated.

The U.S. continues reporting about 4,000 deaths and 35,000 hospitalizations weekly, the FDA noted.

The agency asked its panel of independent medical experts to address several lingering questions involving Paxlovid, including which people currently benefit from treatment and whether the drug plays a role in cases of COVID-19 rebound.

The panel agreed with assessments by both the FDA and Pfizer that found no clear link between the use of Paxlovid and returning symptoms, but said more information is needed from studies and medical records data. High-profile cases drew attention to the issue last year, including President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden.

Between 10% and 16% of patients across multiple Pfizer studies had symptoms return, regardless of whether they'd received Paxlovid or a dummy pill. Such cases "likely reflect natural COVID-19 progression," the FDA concluded.

The federal government has purchased more than 20 million doses of Paxlovid and encouraged health professionals to prescribe it aggressively to help prevent severe COVID-19. But that's led to concerns of overprescribing and questions of whether some patients are needlessly getting the drug.

Pfizer originally studied Paxlovid in the highest-risk COVID-19 patients: unvaccinated adults with other health problems and no evidence of prior coronavirus infection. But that doesn't reflect the U.S. population today, where an estimated 95% of people have protection from at least one vaccine dose, a prior infection or both.

The FDA reviewed Pfizer data showing Paxlovid made no meaningful difference in otherwise healthy

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adults, whether or not they'd been previously vaccinated.

But when FDA teased out data for high-risk adults — regardless of their vaccination or infection history — Paxlovid still showed a significant benefit, reducing the chance of hospitalization or death between 60% and 85%, depending on individual circumstances. Patients in that group included seniors and those with serious health problems, such as diabetes, obesity, lung disease and immune-system disorders.

With so many different factors, panelists said prescribing Paxlovid will remain a case-by-case decision.

Dr. Sankar Swaminathan of the University of Utah and other panelists stressed the importance of managing potentially dangerous drug interactions between Paxlovid and other commonly used medications.

Pitino again a hot commodity at 70 and with checkered past

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Sports Writer

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — It's a March Madness tradition as predictable as a 12-5 upset.

A successful coach at a small school enters the NCAA Tournament with speculation swirling about being a candidate at a more glamorous school, forcing that coach to dodge questions about his future before the most important games of the season.

The twist this year? That coach is a 70-year-old, two-time national champion whose Hall of Fame four-decade career has been sprinkled with scandal.

"You're not hired by the internet," Iona coach Rick Pitino said. "My players, it's not a distraction for them at all. I've always taken it as a compliment throughout all the years that if somebody else is interested in you, very thankful for that, but I never pay attention to it."

Pitino has the Gaels in the tournament as champions of the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference for the second time in his three seasons at the private Catholic school in New Rochelle, just north of New York City.

Iona, a 13 seed, faces fourth-seeded Connecticut from the Big East on Friday in the first round of the West Region. As much as Pitino tries to keep the focus on the Gaels, it seems likely that his time at the school is winding down and he is going to land one more high-profile gig — St. John's? Georgetown? Texas Tech? — before he calls it quits.

Or rather, if he calls it quits.

"Well, I know when he told me he was going to retire at 60 that he was full of crap," recently retired Syracuse coach Jim Boeheim told The Associated Press. "He'll coach until he's 80 if he can. He loves coaching. We all love it to some extent, but I think he loves it probably more than anybody else."

In 34 full seasons as a college head coach, he has led each of the five schools he has coached to the NCAA Tournament, won national championships at Kentucky and Louisville, and has a .741 winning percentage.

He had two stints in the NBA, one with the New York Knicks, and another with the Boston Celtics that didn't produce a playoff appearance. But in college, Pitino has had just one losing season.

"Probably the best basketball coach I've seen or gone up against," said Boeheim, who hired Pitino as an assistant at Syracuse in 1976.

Pitino is back in play for the big schools after being exonerated for NCAA recruiting violations committed by Louisville under his watch and revealed by an FBI investigation into college basketball corruption.

A few days before this season started, the NCAA's outside arm of enforcement, the Independent Accountability Resolutions Process, announced it had found "no violation by (Pitino) occurred given that he demonstrated he promoted an atmosphere of compliance."

Iona and Pitino celebrated the ruling, but it's not the only blemish on his resume.

The 2013 NCAA championship won Pitino won at Louisville was later vacated after an investigation found an assistant coach paid escorts and exotic dancers to entertain players and recruits in campus dorms.

There were also personal improprieties revealed during a criminal case against a woman who was found guilty of trying to extort Pitino.

Before Pitino could serve his five-game suspension for the earlier NCAA case, he was fired by Louisville in 2017 when his program was implicated in the FBI case.

"He did have a couple of things, yeah," Boeheim said. "That's not a lot when you look at more than 40

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years.”

New Mexico coach Richard Pitino, Rick’s son and former assistant, said that as the leader of a program, his father was accountable for the actions of those who worked for him.

“He was held responsible. If people are still outraged by it, I would just tell them they need to move on. Because it wasn’t like he didn’t go through a lot,” Richard Pitino told the AP. “You know he was fired. He ended up having to coach out of this country for two years. He then goes and takes Iona, which he was fortunate to get.”

After a season out of coaching and two coaching in Greece, Iona took a calculated risk in hiring Pitino when his reputation was tarnished, banking on him not being punished for allegations related to the FBI investigation.

While Iona was vindicated, it also became apparent quickly that it would be difficult for the school to keep its coach.

“We’re aware he might go,” Iona President Seamus Carey told The New York Post earlier this week.

Pitino said he hopes he can coach for 12 more years.

“But I’ll take six or seven,” he said.

Pitino, dressed in a roomy all-white sweatsuit, looked spry Thursday as he coached his team at practice in MVP Arena.

There was no doubt who was in charge as he called out directions at midcourt, and then jumped into the lane a couple of times to play defense against players driving to the basket.

“He loves basketball a lot, he even says it in practice a lot: ‘I’ll die for basketball. I want to die on a basketball court,’” Iona guard Berrick JeanLouis said with a smile. “He talks crazy about it.”

The Gaels missed out on the NCAA Tournament last year after finishing first in the MAAC during the regular season. They were upset in the conference tournament and MAAC champ Saint Peter’s went on to have magical run in March Madness as a 15 seed.

“I have felt more pressure at Iona than any other time, Kentucky, Louisville, the Knicks, Celtics,” Pitino said. “I feel so much pressure with these three (conference tournament) games you have to win to get in the (NCAA) tournament.”

Richard Pitino said he does not know what his father’s next move will be, but he is aware of Rick’s frustration with being in what is traditionally a one-NCAA-bid conference.

“That part of it I think is certainly the reason why maybe he would be open to something else,” Richard Pitino said.

The St. John’s or Georgetown jobs would bring Rick Pitino back into the Big East, where he led Providence to one of the most memorable Final Four runs in tournament history back in 1987, and where he won that national title with Louisville.

“Whoever hires him, they’ll be successful within two years. At the most,” Boenheim said. “That’s like a guarantee.”

There is a Providence link between Pitino and St. John’s right now.

St. John’s President, the Rev. Brian Shanley, was previously at the Rhode Island school, where he contributed to a revival of the basketball program that included investments in facilities and the hiring of coach Ed Cooley.

Pitino said Shanley tried to lure him back to Providence when he was at Louisville.

“I spoke to Ed Cooley the other day, said (Shanley’s) a superstar,” Pitino said.

Pitino talked about how good he has it at Iona, where he has a president and athletic director who provide all the support he needs and four starters expected back next season.

Is he up for another rebuild?

“It’s going to take a special place,” he said, “for me to consider leaving.”

Chef Marcus Samuelsson elevates diversity of culinary world

By GARY GERARD HAMILTON Associated Press

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NEW YORK (AP) — Marcus Samuelsson is keen on leading with intention. That focus is seared into the delectable dishes prepared at his popular restaurants, but it is also expressed with his staffing.

"My restaurants are a reflection of the society we're living in. (At) Hav & Mar, we decided on Black leadership, female leadership, because there was a void for it. Red Rooster opened in Harlem because we wanted to create jobs within our industry for Black and brown individuals," said Samuelsson, a multiple James Beard Award-winning chef. "I love food and I want to gear it towards ... everybody, but the opportunities should also be a little bit more evenly distributed."

To honor trailblazing restaurants founded by women and people of color, Samuelsson and fellow chef Jonathan Waxman host "Seat at the Table," an eight-part Audible original series that premiered toward the end of last year. In the series, chefs, along with many involved in the inception of their restaurants, present an oral history of some of America's most iconic eateries such as New York's groundbreaking Jezebel, started by Albert Wright, Washington, DC's Ben's Chili Bowl, by the Ali Family, and The Slanted Door, created by Charles Phan in San Francisco. Food serves as the roux of the podcast, while the impact the establishments have had on their communities and adds the shrimp, sausage and potatoes.

"Coming out of Black History Month, going into Women's (History) Month, I felt it was really necessary to share this, that we know our Black stories are not monolithic," said Samuelsson, who was born in a hut in Ethiopia but raised in Sweden after his birth mother died during a tuberculosis epidemic in the early '70s. "I always feel like when you enter a restaurant, you're entering a piece of American history ... that's really what we want to capture in 'Seat at the Table.' It's beyond the food — it's really the people that make it so special."

Samuelsson spoke with The Associated Press about his mission to elevate women and people of color, selecting restaurants for the podcast and diversity in the culinary world. Answers may have been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: You've mentioned your goal is to elevate women and talented, diverse people. Why is that part of your mission?

SAMUELSSON: As a Black chef that has privileges and a platform, it's very important to me that I'm setting the standard and creating jobs for other Black culinarians ... One of the reasons why we always have open kitchens is the staff knows they're on a stage but also so the customer can see who cooks and works for them in the dining room. Same thing with Hav & Mar where our mission is to uplift women of color in leadership.

AP: How did you choose the restaurants?

SAMUELSSON: I didn't by myself. It was a constant back-and-forth with my partner in this, Jonathan Waxman. ... He didn't just read about these chefs, he came up with these chefs. But he knew these stories, and we would never gotten as close to these incredible stories without Jonathan's work.

(Chef) Thomas Keller doesn't do a lot of interviews, but he talked to Jonathan. And that's why that story about The French Laundry is so unique. And Charles' (Pham) story, that's a story about the Vietnam War and how a true immigrant tale starts and how a restaurant maybe was not the way that they thought they would be in business, but it became a way of living for him and his family.

AP: What commonalities do you share with the chefs featured in the podcast?

SAMUELSSON: The desire that you want to share your narrative. ... I share that piece with Charles, of course, being an immigrant, feeling the love for America is sometimes misunderstood also.

Leah Chase (of Dooky Chase) has always been my mentor and somebody I admire so much. But I feel, also, Alberta Wright and Jezebel — I was a kid growing up right across the street from Jezebel in Hell's Kitchen in New York City. And I know if I wouldn't have met Ms. Leah Chase, I wouldn't have met Alberta Wright, I would've never created the Red Rooster or Have & Mar, my restaurant here in Manhattan. ... I owe a lot to that generation of incredible Black women.

AP: How would you rate the culinary world when it comes to diversity?

SAMUELSSON: Food is part of society ... so we're improving. We got a ways to go. And part of doing this doc with Audible was to really acknowledge how much labor, how much incredible Black restaurants that were in America that never got acknowledged.

America's history in terms of diversity is very complicated. But it's heading — through a lot of work by effort, by a lot of people — in a better direction. I'm a firm believer in that, even if you (have to) to work at it every day, we're heading towards a better experience as people. And it's important because as diversity goes in America, the world is looking at America. So, it's very, very important to get these small wins because the rest of the world is taking note. As a Black person growing up outside of America, I know this firsthand.

Drought over? Spring outlook finds relief -- and flood risk

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Record snowfall and rain have helped to loosen drought's grip on parts of the western U.S. as national forecasters and climate experts warned Thursday that some areas should expect more flooding as the snow begins to melt.

The winter precipitation wiped out exceptional and extreme drought in California for the first time since 2020, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported Thursday in a seasonal, nationwide outlook that came as parts of the state are under water. In neighboring Nevada, flood warnings were in effect and rushing water prompted some evacuations overnight in one of Arizona's tourist towns.

Elsewhere, NOAA's forecast warned of elevated flood risks from heavy snowpack this spring in the upper Midwest along the Mississippi River from Minnesota south to Missouri.

Despite the receding drought, experts cautioned that the relief may be only a blip as the long-term effects persist from what has been a stubborn dry streak.

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.

Lake Powell could gain 35 feet (11 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.

Paul Miller, a hydrologist with the National Weather Service's Colorado Basin River Forecast Center, said that sounds like a lot of water for one of the nation's largest reservoirs, but it still will be only one-third full.

"It's definitely moving in the right direction, but we're far from filling the reservoirs in the Colorado River system and we're far from being at a comfortable point from a water supply perspective," Miller said during Thursday's NOAA briefing.

Federal forecasters outlined other predictions for temperature, precipitation and drought over the next three months, saying the spring wet season is expected to improve drought conditions across parts of the northern and central Plains and Florida could see dryness disappear there by the end of June.

Overall, the West has been more dry than wet for more than 20 years, and many areas will still feel the consequences. The northern Rockies and parts of Washington state will likely see drought expand over the spring, while areas of extreme to exceptional drought are likely to persist across parts of the southern High Plains.

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

Ranchers in the arid state already are planning for another dry year, and some residents are still reeling from a historic wildfire season.

Jon Gottschalck, chief of the operational prediction branch at NOAA's Climate Prediction Center, said the start of the fire season in the Southwestern U.S. likely will be delayed.

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"But it doesn't mean that it couldn't end up being a very strong season," he said. "It's just likely to be a more muted beginning for sure."

Gottschalck said warmer than average temperatures are forecasted for New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas to the Gulf Coast and up the eastern seaboard, as well as in Hawaii and northern Alaska. Lower than normal temperatures are probable, he said, for North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Minnesota and the Great Basin region.

The real standout this winter 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. That's notable given that over the last decade, only two years — 2017 and 2019 — had snowpack above the median.

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

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 roughly 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."

Floods fill some of California's summer strawberry fields

By AMY TAXIN Associated Press

As river water gushed through a broken levee, thousands of people in a California farming town were forced to evacuate as their homes were flooded and businesses destroyed.

Yet another potential casualty of the powerful rainstorms that drenched coastal California: hundreds of acres of fresh strawberries slated for America's supermarket shelves this summer.

Industry experts estimate about a fifth of strawberry farms in the Watsonville and Salinas areas have been flooded since the levee ruptured late Friday about 70 miles (110 kilometers) south of San Francisco and another river overflowed. It's too soon to know whether the berry plants can be recovered, but the longer they remain underwater the more challenging it can get, said Jeff Cardinale, a spokesperson for the California Strawberry Commission.

"When the water recedes, what does the field look like — if it is even a field anymore?" Cardinale said. "It could just be a muddy mess where there is nothing left."

For years, California's farmers have been plagued by drought and battles over water as key sources have run dry. But so far this winter, the nation's most populous state — and a key source of food for the nation — has been battered by 11 atmospheric rivers as well as powerful storms fueled by arctic air that produced blizzard conditions in the mountains.

Many communities have been coping with intense rainstorms and flooding, including the unincorporated community of Pajaro, known for its strawberry crop. The nearby Pajaro River swelled with runoff from last week's rains and the levee — built in the 1940s to provide flood protection and a known risk for decades — ruptured, forcing the evacuation of more than 8,000 people from the largely Latino farmworker community.

Farmworkers have seen their hours reduced or slashed entirely due to the storms, said Antonio De Loera-Brust, a spokesperson for United Farm Workers. The most critical issue, he said, is helping those

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in the community of Pajaro rebuild.

The overwhelming majority of U.S.-grown strawberries come from California, with farms in different regions of the state harvesting the berries at distinct times of the year. About a third of the state's strawberry acreage is in the Watsonville and Salinas areas, according to the commission.

Peter Navarro grows strawberries, raspberries and blackberries on a farm by the Pajaro River. He said he was fortunate his fields weren't flooded by the levee rupture, but still expects his crop to be delayed several weeks due to the rainy, cold weather.

After planting berries last year, Navarro said he and other farmers were concerned about water sources drying up due to prolonged drought.

"When it started raining, we were elated, happy, saying, 'This is what we need, a rainy season,'" Navarro said. "We certainly were not expecting all these atmospheric rivers. It just overwhelmed us — and overwhelmed the river."

Other crops are also affected by the deluge in the Pajaro Valley, such as lettuce and other greens. Some vegetables had already been planted, but many hadn't, and might see delays in planting due to the storms, said Norm Groot, executive director of the Monterey County Farm Bureau.

"Right now, I think everyone's out trying to save the farm, so to speak," Groot said, adding more rain was forecast for the weekend.

Monterey County is home to Pajaro and the crop-rich Salinas Valley, and has more than 360,000 farmed acres, said Juan Hidalgo, the county's agricultural commissioner. The county estimates the farm sector was hit by \$324 million in losses from January storms, and strawberries, raspberries and greens will likely be affected by this one, he said.

But, he added, many acres of farmland won't be, and consumers may not feel the impact of the storms. "We're still going to have a lot of production," he said.

A challenge for strawberry growers is the plants are already in the ground. Soren Bjorn, president of Driscoll's of the Americas, said the company works with a network of independent growers to package, ship and sell strawberries. In the Pajaro Valley, farmers did their planting last fall so the berries would hit stores during the summertime when it's too hot to grow the fruits further south, he said.

Right now, farmers can't even access the fields, because roads are covered in water. But with about 900 acres (364 hectares) under water in the Pajaro Valley and another 600 acres (243 hectares) flooded in nearby Salinas, Bjorn said the potential impact is significant, especially as farmers not only face the challenge of mud-soaked plants but also damaged equipment.

In the peak of the summer, Bjorn said most of the strawberries in the country come from this region.

"It's too soon to know the full impact of this," he said. "There is no way we are going to get what we had planned for."

Credit Suisse shares soar after central bank offers lifeline

By JAMEY KEATEN and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Credit Suisse shares surged Thursday after the Swiss central bank agreed to loan the bank up to 50 billion francs (\$54 billion) to bolster confidence in the country's second-biggest lender following the collapse of two U.S. banks.

Credit Suisse announced the agreement before the Swiss stock market opened, sending shares up as much as 33% before they settled around a 17% gain, to 2 francs (\$2.15), in late afternoon trading. That was a massive turnaround from a day earlier, when news that the bank's biggest shareholder would not inject more money into Credit Suisse sent its shares tumbling 30%. The plunge in price dragged down other European banks and deepened concerns about the international financial system.

European banking stocks also rose modestly Thursday.

The Swiss National Bank said Wednesday that it was prepared to back Credit Suisse because it meets the higher financial requirements imposed on "systemically important banks," adding that the problems at some U.S. banks don't "pose a direct risk of contagion" to Switzerland.

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Regulators are trying to reassure depositors that their money is safe. They "don't want anybody to be the person who sits in a darkened room or darkened cinema and shouts fire, because that's what prompts a rush for the exits," said Russ Mould, investment director at the online investment platform AJ Bell.

Credit Suisse, which was beset by problems long before the U.S. bank failures, said the loans from the central bank would give it time to complete a reorganization designed to create a "simpler and more focused bank."

"These measures demonstrate decisive action to strengthen Credit Suisse as we continue our strategic transformation," Chief Executive Ulrich Koerner said in a statement.

Despite the banking turmoil, the European Central Bank approved a large, half-percentage point increase in interest rates to try to curb stubbornly high inflation, saying Europe's banking sector is "resilient," with strong finances.

European Central Bank Vice President Luis de Guindos said at a news conference that European banks' exposure to Credit Suisse is "quite limited."

Higher rates fight inflation but in recent days have fueled concern that banks may have caused hidden losses on their balance sheets.

Central banks in the U.S. and Europe have moved quickly to restore confidence after last week's collapse of Silicon Valley Bank, the second-biggest bank failure in U.S. history.

American authorities moved quickly to guarantee all of the deposits of the California-based bank and the smaller Signature Bank of New York. The U.S. Federal Reserve also announced additional funding to ensure other banks could meet the needs of depositors.

In a similar move, the British government and Bank of England facilitated the sale of Silicon Valley Bank's U.K. arm to HSBC, one of Europe's biggest banks, ensuring that customers would have access to their money.

The rapid response is different from what happened at the start of the global financial crisis 15 years ago, when U.S. authorities allowed the investment banking giant Lehman Brothers to collapse.

The loans to Credit Suisse "should prevent a Lehman moment, much to the relief of markets and investors," said Victoria Scholar, the head of investment at the online investment service known as Interactive Investor. "This is a bank that's been around since 1865 and has been instrumental in supporting growth of the Swiss economy."

ECB President Christine Lagarde said the banks "are in a completely different position from 2008" during the financial crisis.

After that crisis, Europe strengthened its banking safeguards by transferring supervision of the biggest banks to the central bank.

"Crises are never exactly the same," she said, "but the architecture of our banking system, the framework within which they operate, the supervision that is applied to the banking system, have been all considerably improved."

Banks are under pressure after interest rates rose rapidly following a prolonged period of historically low rates.

To boost the return on their investments, banks needed to take more risks and some "did this more prudently than others," said Sascha Steffen, professor of finance at the Frankfurt School of Finance & Management.

As a result, some banks now face a shortage of "liquidity," meaning they cannot sell assets quickly enough to meet the demands of depositors.

Credit Suisse shares dropped to a record low Wednesday after the Saudi National Bank said it would not put more money into the Swiss lender to avoid regulations that kick in if an investor's stake rises above 10%.

Credit Suisse also 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.

Its stock has suffered a long, sustained decline: Now trading for a little over 2 francs (\$2.15), the stock was valued at more than 80 francs (\$86.71) in 2007.

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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.

Outside a Credit Suisse branch on Thursday, accountant David Glaus said the Swiss government is unlikely to let such a large bank fail, if for no other reason than to protect Switzerland's banking industry.

"It remains a Swiss bank. In the background, there are people who will support and protect it because I don't think it's in our best interests for it to go bankrupt," he said.

But he thinks the country has a fallback position to keep up appearances in case of the worst.

"We still have chocolate and cheese, anyway, to uphold our image," he said.

Kirka reported from London. AP reporters David McHugh in Frankfurt, Germany, Colleen Barry in Milan and Joseph Krauss in Ottawa, Ontario, contributed.

Stephen Sondheim's last musical finds a New York City stage

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The late Stephen Sondheim's last stage musical — an adaptation of two films by Spanish surrealist director Luis Buñuel — will be given an off-Broadway stage this year, offering theatergoers a chance to see a new work by musical theater's most venerated composer.

"Here We Are" — once known as "Square One" — will begin performances this September at The Shed's Griffin Theater with a book by David Ives, best known for the play "Venus in Fur." Joe Mantello, who helmed "Wicked" and Sondheim's "Assassins," will direct.

The show — based on the films "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie" and "The Exterminating Angel" — was initially workshopped in 2016 with plans for a production at The Public Theater, which did not happen.

The two source films have a connective tissue: In "The Exterminating Angel," a group of guests arrive for a dinner party and cannot leave, while "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie" is about guests who constantly arrive for dinner but are never able to eat.

Ticket information and casting will be announced soon.

Sondheim, who died in 2021, influenced several generations of songwriters, particularly with such landmark musicals as "Company," "Follies" and "Sweeney Todd."

Six of Sondheim's musicals won Tony Awards for best score, and he also received a Pulitzer Prize ("Sunday in the Park"), an Academy Award (for the song "Sooner or Later" from the film "Dick Tracy"), five Olivier Awards and the Presidential Medal of Honor. In 2008, he received a Tony Award for lifetime achievement.

His last new musical to be produced was "Road Show," which reunited Sondheim and writer John Weidman and spent years being worked on. This tale of the Mizner brothers, who embarked on get-rich schemes in the early part of the 20th century, finally made it to the Public Theater in 2008 with poor reviews after going through several different titles, directors and casts.

Several Sondheim musicals have been mounted on Broadway since the master's death, including a Tony-award winning revival of "Company" and a current revival of his "Sweeney Todd," starring Josh Groban.

U.S. Army parachute team member dies in training accident

HOMESTEAD, Florida (AP) — A member of the U.S. Army Parachute Team has died after sustaining injuries during a training jump at Homestead Air Reserve Base in Homestead, Florida.

Sgt. 1st Class Michael Ty Kettenhofen died Monday, the Army said in a news release. He joined the Golden Knights parachute team in 2020 and had over 1,000 jumps with the Army.

"The U.S. Army Parachute Team is deeply saddened by the loss of one of our own," said Lt. Col. Andy Moffit, Golden Knights Parachute Team commander. He noted that Kettenhofen is being remembered "for his sense of humor, joy of life and accomplishments as a senior non-commissioned officer and demonstration parachutist."

The accident remains under investigation. The Army said no additional details are available.

"Our hearts and faith are with his family and friends as we grieve and heal with them. Ty will be honored and remembered as a Golden Knight, Soldier, and friend."

The Golden Knights are made up of several expert teams, including parachute teams, aircraft pilots, and people behind the scenes who handle jump logistics.

Homestead Air Reserve Base is 35 miles (56 kilometers) south of Miami.

Seeking Alzheimer's clues from few who escape genetic fate

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Doug Whitney inherited the same gene mutation that gave Alzheimer's disease to his mother, brother and generations of other relatives by the unusually young age of 50.

Yet he's a healthy 73, his mind still sharp. Somehow, the Washington man escaped his genetic fate.

So did a woman in Colombia who dodged her own family's similar Alzheimer's destiny for nearly three decades.

To scientists, these rare "escapees" didn't just get lucky. They offer an unprecedented opportunity to learn how the body may naturally resist Alzheimer's.

"It's unique individuals oftentimes that really provide us with breakthroughs," said Dr. Eric McDade of Washington University in St. Louis, where Whitney's DNA is being scoured for answers.

The hope: If researchers could uncover and mimic whatever protects these escapees, they might develop better treatments — even preventive therapies — not only for families plagued by inherited Alzheimer's but for everyone.

"We are just learning about this approach to the disease," said neuropsychologist Yakeel Quiroz of Massachusetts General Hospital, who helped study the Colombian woman. "One person can actually change the world -- as in her case, how much we have learned from her."

Quiroz's team has a pretty good idea what protected Aliria Piedrahita de Villegas -- an additional genetic oddity that apparently countered the damage from her family Alzheimer's mutation. But testing showed Whitney doesn't have that protective factor so something else must be shielding his brain.

Now scientists are on the lookout for even more Alzheimer's escapees — people who may have simply assumed they didn't inherit their family's mutation because they're healthy long after the age their loved ones always get sick.

"They just think it's kind of luck of the draw and it may in fact be that they're resilient," said McDade, a researcher with a Washington University network that tracks about 600 members of multiple affected families — including Whitney, the escapee.

"I guess that made me pretty special. And they started poking and prodding and doing extra testing on me," the Port Orchard, Washington, man said. "I told them, you know, I'm here for whatever you need."

Answers can't come quickly enough for Whitney's son Brian, who also inherited the devastating family gene. He's reached the fateful age of 50 without symptoms but knows that's no guarantee.

"I liken my genetics to being a murder mystery," said Brian Whitney, who volunteers for Washington University studies that include testing an experimental preventive drug. "Our literal bodies of evidence are what they need to crack the case."

More than 6 million Americans, and an estimated 55 million people worldwide, have Alzheimer's. Simply getting older is the main risk -- it's usually a disease of people over age 65.

Less than 1% of Alzheimer's is caused by inheriting a single copy of a particular mutated gene. Children of an affected parent have a 50-50 chance of inheriting the family Alzheimer's gene. If they do, they're almost guaranteed to get sick at about the same age as their parent did.

That near certainty allows scientists to study these families and learn critical information about how Alzheimer's forms. It's now clear that silent changes occur in the brain at least two decades before the first symptoms — a potential window to intervene. Among the culprits, sticky amyloid starts building up,

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followed by neuron-killing tau tangles.

What happens instead in the brains of the resilient?

"That's why I'm here," said Doug Whitney, who for years has given samples of blood and spinal fluid and undergone brain scans and cognitive exams, in the hunt for clues. "It's so important that people in my situation come forward."

Whitney's grandparents had 14 children and 10 of them developed early-onset Alzheimer's. The first red flag for his mother: Thanksgiving 1971, when she forgot the pumpkin pie recipe she'd always made from memory.

"Five years later she was gone," Whitney said.

Back then doctors didn't know much about Alzheimer's. It wasn't until the 1990s that separate research teams proved three different genes, when mutated, can each cause this uniquely inherited form of the disease. They each speed abnormal amyloid buildup.

Doug Whitney's family could only watch and worry as his 50th birthday came and went. His older brother had started showing symptoms at 48. (Some other siblings later were tested and didn't inherit the gene although two still don't know.)

"We went through about 10 years when the kids would call home their first question was, 'How's Dad?'" his wife Ione Whitney recalled. "By the time he turned 60 we kind of went, wow, we beat the coin toss."

But not the way he'd hoped. In 2010, urged by a cousin, Whitney joined the St. Louis research. He also agreed to a genetic test he'd expected to provide final reassurance that his children wouldn't face the same worry — only to learn he'd inherited the family mutation after all.

"He kind of got leveled by that result," Brian Whitney said.

While Brian inherited the family gene, his sister Karen didn't — but she, too, is part of the same study, in the healthy comparison group.

U.S. researchers aren't the only ones on the trail of answers. In South America, scientists are tracking a huge extended family in Colombia that shares a similar Alzheimer's-causing variant. Carriers of this mutated gene start showing memory problems in their early 40s.

In contrast, one family member — Piedrahita de Villegas — was deemed to have "extreme resistance," with no cognitive symptoms until her 70s. Researchers flew the woman to Quiroz's lab in Boston for brain scans. And when she died at 77 of melanoma with only mild signs of dementia, her brain was donated to Colombia's University of Antioquia for closer examination.

Her brain was jampacked with Alzheimer's trademark amyloid plaques. But researchers found very little tau — and weirdly, it wasn't in the brain's memory hub but in a very different region.

Clearly something affected how tau formed and where. "The thing that we don't know for sure is why," Quiroz said.

DNA offered a suspect: An ultra-rare mutation on an unrelated gene.

That APOE gene comes in different varieties, including a version notorious for raising people's risk of traditional old-age Alzheimer's and another that's linked to lower risk. Normally the APOE3 version that Piedrahita de Villegas carried makes no difference for dementia.

But remarkably, both copies of her APOE3 gene were altered by the rare "Christchurch" mutation — and researchers think that blocked toxic tau.

To start proving it, Quiroz's team used preserved cells from Piedrahita de Villegas and another Colombian patient to grow some cerebral tissue in lab dishes. Cells given the Christchurch mutation developed less tau.

"We still have more work to do but we're getting closer to understanding the mechanism," Quiroz said.

That research already has implications for a field that's long considered fighting amyloid the key step to treating Alzheimer's.

Instead, maybe "we just need to block what's downstream of it," said Dr. Richard Hodes, director of the National Institute on Aging.

And since Whitney, the Washington man, doesn't have that extra mutation, "there may be multiple pathways for escape," Hodes added.

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In St. Louis, researchers are checking out another clue: Maybe something special about Whitney's immune system is protecting his brain.

The findings also are fueling a search for more escapees to compare. The Washington University team recently began studying one who's unrelated to Whitney. In Colombia, Quiroz said researchers are looking into a few more possible escapees.

That search for answers isn't just work for scientists. Whitney's son Brian estimates he spends about 25 days each year undergoing different health checks and procedures, many of them far from his Manson, Washington, home, as part of Alzheimer's research.

That includes every two weeks, getting hooked up to a pump that administers an experimental amyloid-fighting drug. He also gets regular brain scans to check for side effects.

Living with the uncertainty is tough, and he sometimes has nightmares about Alzheimer's. He tries to follow what he now knows was his parents' mantra: "Make the best of life till 50 and anything after that is a bonus."

He makes lots of time to go fishing and camping with daughter Emily, now 12, who hasn't yet been told about the family gene. He hopes there will be some answers by the time she's an adult and can consider testing.

"When I have a bad day and decide maybe I should not continue (the research), I think of her and then that all vanishes," he said.

Train hauling corn syrup derailed in Arizona; no injuries

TOPOCK, Ariz. (AP) — A freight train carrying corn syrup - not hazardous materials - derailed in western Arizona, near the state's border with California and Nevada, BNSF Railway said.

Railway spokesperson Lena Kent said there were no injuries in the derailment near Topock and, according to preliminary reports, no hazardous materials involved.

A spokeswoman for the Mohave County Sheriff's Office, Anita Mortensen, said that she was not aware of any spills or leaks.

The cause of the derailment of approximately eight cars is under investigation, Kent said in a statement.

The main track is blocked and Kent said it is not known when it will be reopened.

The derailment comes amid heightened attention to rail safety nationwide following a fiery derailment last month in Ohio and a string of derailments since then that have been grabbing headlines, including ones in Michigan, Alabama and other states.

In Arizona, Mortensen had earlier said the train was carrying hazardous materials. The derailment occurred near milepost 9 of Interstate 40, Mortensen said, which is a rural, nonresidential area about 20 miles (32 kilometers) north of Lake Havasu City.

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

The NTSB also did not respond to requests for comment.

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.

US jobless aid claims fell last week as layoffs remain low

By MATT OTT AP Business Writer

Fewer Americans applied for jobless claims last week as the labor market continues to thrive despite the Federal Reserve's efforts to cool the economy and tamp down inflation.

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Applications for jobless claims in the U.S. for the week ending March 11 fell by 20,000 to 192,000 from 212,000 the previous week, the Labor Department said Thursday.

The four-week moving average of claims, which flattens out some of week-to-week volatility, fell by 750 to 196,500, remaining below the 200,000 threshold for the eighth straight week.

Applications for unemployment benefits are seen as a barometer for layoffs in the U.S.

In a note to clients, analysts at Oxford economics said there are still few signs that the recent jump in layoff announcements, particularly in the tech sector, is translating to a rise in unemployment.

"Many announced layoffs don't end up happening, and those that have been laid off are quickly finding work elsewhere, reflecting the ongoing imbalance between labor demand and supply," the analysts wrote.

At its February meeting, the Fed raised its main lending rate by 25 basis points, the eighth straight rate hike in its year-long battle against stubborn inflation. With recent data showing that those rate hikes have done little to bring down inflation and even less to cool the economy and labor market, many analysts were expecting the Fed to raise rates by another half-point when it meets next week.

However, the second- and third-largest bank failures in U.S. history over the last week — which have been blamed in large part to rising interest rates — have some economists thinking Fed officials will tread more lightly next week and either raise its rate by 25 basis points or perhaps not at all.

The central bank's benchmark rate is now in a range of 4.5% to 4.75%, its highest level in 15 years. Before the banking sector turmoil that began last week, the Fed had signaled that two more rate hikes were likely this year. Some analysts had even forecast three increases that could push the lower end of that rate to 5.5%.

The Fed's rate increases are meant to cool the economy, labor market and wages, thereby suppressing prices. But so far, none of those things have happened, at least not to the degree that the central bank had hoped.

Inflation remains more than double the Fed's 2% target, and the economy is growing and adding jobs at a healthy clip.

Last month, the government reported that employers added a substantial 311,000 jobs in February, fewer than January's huge gain but enough to keep pressure on the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates aggressively to fight inflation. The unemployment rate rose to 3.6%, from a 53-year low of 3.4%.

Fed policymakers have forecast that the unemployment rate would rise to 4.6% by the end of this year, a sizable increase historically associated with recessions.

Though the U.S. labor market remains strong, layoffs have been mounting in the technology sector, where many companies overhired after a pandemic boom. IBM, Microsoft, Amazon, Salesforce, Twitter and DoorDash have all announced layoffs in recent months.

Earlier this week, Facebook parent Meta said it was slashing another 10,000 jobs, in addition to the 11,000 culled in November. The social media giant also said it would not fill 5,000 open positions.

The real estate sector has taken the biggest hit from the Fed's interest rate hikes. Higher mortgage rates — which have risen closer to 7% again in recent weeks — have slowed home sales for 12 straight months. That's almost in lockstep with the Fed's rate hikes that began last March.

About 1.68 million people were receiving jobless aid the week that ended March 4, a decrease of 29,000 from the week before. That number is close to pre-pandemic levels.

What's the next step 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

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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.

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, fewer than 6% of San Francisco residents 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

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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.

Don't leave Global South out of green tech growth, UN warns

By WANJOHI KABUKURU Associated Press

The majority of developing nations are set to miss out on the economic benefits of booming green technologies, slowing progress toward their climate goals and widening the inequality gap between rich and poor countries, a United Nations report warned Thursday.

The U.N.'s agency for trade and development, or UNCTAD, said that unless the international community and national governments actively tend to green tech industries in developing countries, the benefits associated with lower-emission technologies will be near inaccessible for many poorer nations particularly in Latin America, the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa.

"We are at the beginning of a technological revolution based on green technologies," said UNCTAD Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan. "Developing countries must capture more of the value being created in this technological revolution to grow their economies."

Electric vehicles, solar and wind energy and green hydrogen are projected to reach a market value of \$2.1 trillion by 2030, four times higher than they're worth today. The industries are set to explode as nations try and limit their planet-warming emissions to try and curb warming to 1.5 or 2 degrees Celsius (2.7 to 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit).

Countries like Mexico, the Philippines and Vietnam were part of a few countries singled out in the report as emerging nations with policies that will enable them to develop some of their green technology sectors for the future. It also pointed to Brazil's bioethanol industry and Chile's green hydrogen potential as examples of successful clean energy industry takeoffs.

The report outlines more than a dozen technologies, including gene editing, blockchain, nanotechnologies and renewable power that are currently being used or developed mostly by industrialized nations. The body has made an urgent appeal to reform existing global trade and intellectual property transfer rules to allow developing countries to harness their own green industries and also be able to access technologies developed in richer states.

"Developing countries need agency and urgency in coming up with the right policy responses" to help the growth of green technology in their own nations, said Shamika Sirimanne, UNCTAD's director of technology. Sirimanne urged developing nations to adopt innovation and energy policies that would propel their clean energy and technology industries.

The report found that total exports of green technologies from the industrialized north almost tripled from \$60 billion in 2018 to over \$156 billion in 2021. In comparison, Global South exports rose from \$57 billion to \$75 billion in the same time period.

High income nations like the United States, Sweden, Singapore and Switzerland dominated the report's ranking of countries ready for the massive boom in the industry and are primed to benefit the most from spiking investments in green technology.

Today in History: March 17, SeaWorld gives up orca breeding

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

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Today is Friday, March 17, the 76th day of 2023. There are 289 days left in the year. This is St. Patrick's Day.

Today's highlight in history:

On March 17, 1969, Golda Meir became prime minister of Israel.

On this date:

In 1762, New York held its first St. Patrick's Day parade.

In 1776, the Revolutionary War Siege of Boston ended as British forces evacuated the city.

In 1905, Anna Eleanor Roosevelt married Franklin Delano Roosevelt in New York.

In 1941, the National Gallery of Art opened in Washington, D.C.

In 1942, six days after departing the Philippines during World War II, Gen. Douglas MacArthur arrived in Australia to become supreme commander of Allied forces in the southwest Pacific theater.

In 1950, scientists at the University of California at Berkeley announced they had created a new radioactive element, "californium."

In 1966, a U.S. Navy midget submarine located a missing hydrogen bomb that had fallen from a U.S. Air Force B-52 bomber into the Mediterranean off Spain. (It took several more weeks to actually recover the bomb.)

In 1970, the United States cast its first veto in the U.N. Security Council, killing a resolution that would have condemned Britain for failing to use force to overthrow the white-ruled government of Rhodesia.

In 2003, edging to the brink of war, President George W. Bush gave Saddam Hussein 48 hours to leave his country. Iraq rejected Bush's ultimatum, saying that a U.S. attack to force Saddam from power would be "a grave mistake."

In 2010, Michael Jordan became the first ex-player to become a majority owner in the NBA as the league's Board of Governors unanimously approved Jordan's \$275 million bid to buy the Charlotte Bobcats from Bob Johnson.

In 2016, finally bowing to years of public pressure, SeaWorld Entertainment said it would no longer breed killer whales or make them perform crowd-pleasing tricks.

In 2020, the Kentucky Derby and the French Open were each postponed from May to September because of the coronavirus.

Ten years ago: Two members of Steubenville, Ohio's celebrated high school football team were found guilty of raping a drunken 16-year-old girl and sentenced to at least a year in juvenile prison in a case that rocked the Rust Belt city of 18,000. Former Oklahoma quarterback Steve Davis, 60, who led the Sooners to back-to-back national championships in the 1970s, was killed in a private plane crash in northern Indiana. Louisville earned the top overall seed in the NCAA tournament after a topsy-turvy season in college basketball.

Five years ago: Superstore company Fred Meyer announced that it would stop selling guns and ammunition; in the aftermath of the Florida high school shooting, the company had earlier said it would stop selling firearms to anyone under 21. Russia said it was expelling 23 British diplomats in a growing diplomatic dispute over a nerve agent attack on a former spy in Britain.

One year ago: Rescuers searched for survivors in the ruins of a theater blown apart by a Russian airstrike in the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol, while ferocious bombardment left dozens dead in a northern city. U.S. Olympic figure skater Alysa Liu and her father Arthur Liu – a former political refugee – were among those targeted in a spying operation that the Justice Department alleged was ordered by the Chinese government. St. Patrick's Day parades across the U.S., including the largest in New York City, resumed after a pandemic-driven hiatus.

Today's Birthdays: The former national chairwoman of the NAACP, Myrlie Evers-Williams, is 90. Former astronaut Ken Mattingly is 87. Singer-songwriter John Sebastian (The Lovin' Spoonful) is 79. Former NSA Director and former CIA Director Michael Hayden is 78. Rock musician Harold Brown (War; Lowrider Band) is 77. Actor Patrick Duffy is 74. Actor Kurt Russell is 72. Country singer Susie Allanson is 71. Actor Lesley-Anne Down is 69. Actor Mark Boone Jr. is 68. Country singer Paul Overstreet is 68. Actor Gary Sinise is

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68. Actor Christian Clemenson is 65. Former basketball and baseball player Danny Ainge is 64. Actor Arye Gross is 63. Actor Vicki Lewis is 63. Actor Casey Siemaszko (sheh-MA'-zshko) is 62. Writer-director Rob Sitch is 61. Actor Rob Lowe is 59. Rock singer Billy Corgan is 56. Actor Mathew St. Patrick is 55. Actor Yanic (YAH'-neek) Truesdale is 54. Rock musician Melissa Auf der Maur is 51. Olympic gold medal soccer player Mia Hamm is 51. Rock musician Caroline Corr (The Corrs) is 50. Actor Amelia Heinle is 50. Country singer Keifer Thompson (Thompson Square) is 50. Actor Marisa Coughlan is 49. Actor Natalie Zea is 48. Sports reporter Tracy Wolfson is 48. Actor Brittany Daniel is 47. Singer and TV personality Tamar Braxton is 46. Country musician Geoff Sprung (Old Dominion) is 45. Reggaeton singer Nicky Jam is 42. TV personality Rob Kardashian is 36. Pop/rock singer-songwriter Hozier is 33. Actor Eliza Hope Bennett is 31. Actor John Boyega is 31. Olympic gold medal swimmer Katie Ledecky is 26. Actor Flynn Morrison is 18.