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The Show Choir will not be going to Mitchell today, due to the road conditions.

Groton Community Calendar

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 high winds and blizzard conditions, 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.

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The Bulletin by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

Donald Trump's lead in a hypothetical 2024 matchup; meanwhile, other 2024 hopefuls are attending events in South Carolina and Iowa this weekend

- Hundreds of protesters were arrested in Paris as rallies continued late Friday following French President Emmanuel Macron pushing through an unpopular bill to increase the retirement age
- As debate over abortion medication intensifies in the U.S., a new bill proposed by California legislators aims to give legal protections to doctors who provide reproductive care to patients residing in other states
- Ford is recalling more than 1.2 million 2013-2018 Fusion and Lincoln MKZ vehicles due to safety concerns about the front brake hoses, as they could increase the risk of a crash
- Facebook and Instagram users can soon pay for a blue check mark; Meta is rolling out a new paid verification option in the U.S. for about \$15 per month
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Moscow said it does not recognize the "jurisdiction" of the International Criminal Court, after the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin for alleged war crimes of abducting and deporting Ukrainian children

- Finland appears poised to join NATO as Turkey begins ratifying the Nordic country's membership and Hungary sets its approval for later this month; however, Sweden's bid remains on hold

- The U.S. is opposing any effort by China to broker a ceasefire in Ukraine amid Chinese President Xi Jinping's meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow early next week

- The latest GOP primary poll from Emerson College finds Florida Governor Ron DeSantis narrowing former President

Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #19 Results

Team Standings: Shihtzus – 15, Chipmunks – 10, Foxes – 10, Jackelopes – 9, Coyotes – 8, Cheetahs – 8

Men's High Games: Brad Waage – 228, Tony Waage – 223, Roger Spanier – 208

Women's High Games: Michelle Johnson – 190, Sam Bahr – 159, 158, Darci Spanier – 157

Men's High Series: Brad Waage – 615, Tony Waage – 604, Roger Spanier – 583

Women's High Series: Michelle Johnson – 458, Darci Spanier – 443, Sam Bahr – 439

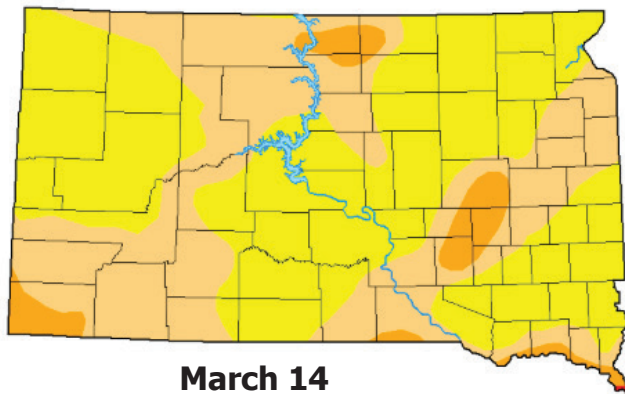
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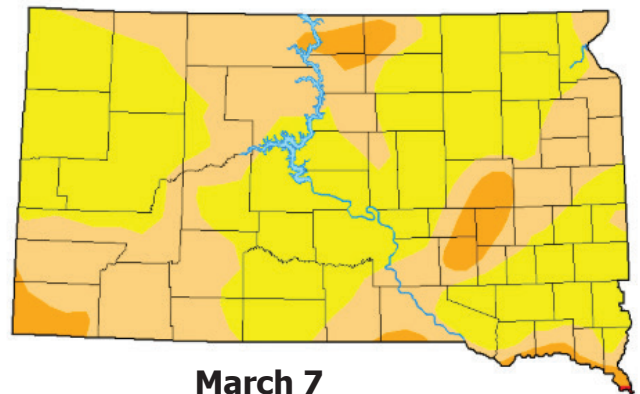
Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



March 14



March 7

Some of the nation's most serious drought conditions persisted across southern sections of the High Plains region, mainly across Kansas and Nebraska. Kansas, like other areas of the central and southern Plains, has an impressive gradient between drought-free conditions (in the east) and extreme to exceptional drought, D3 to D4 (in southern and western sections of the state). On March 12, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, topsoil moisture in Kansas was rated 66% very short to short, while more than half (52%) of the winter wheat was rated in very poor to poor condition. Some of the D4 areas in Kansas received record-low annual precipitation totals during 2022 and have not received much, if any, cold-season drought relief. In the hardest-hit areas, drought impacts—besides damaged rangeland/pastures and poor winter wheat conditions—include frequent episodes of blowing dust and limited surface water supplies in streams and ponds. Farther north, snow has been on the ground since November in much of North Dakota and portions of neighboring states, with recent cold weather maintaining impressive snow depths even as snow continues to fall. Bismarck, North Dakota, reported at least a trace of snow on 11 of the first 13 days of March, totaling 22.5 inches.

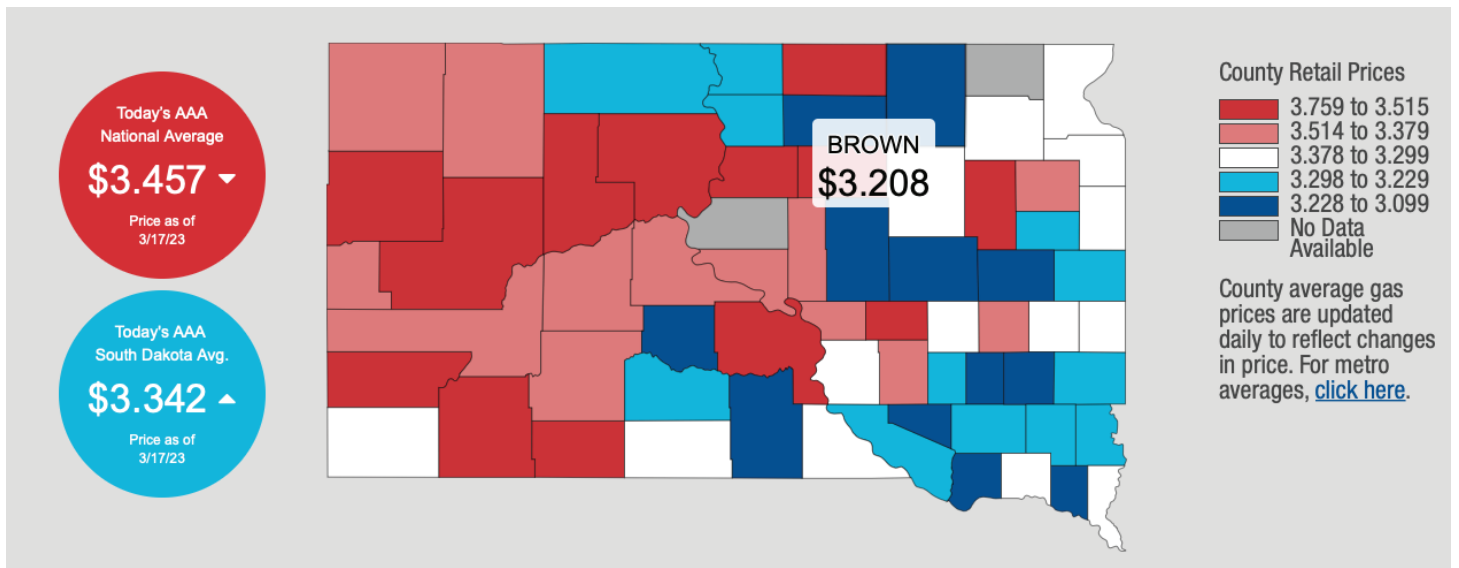
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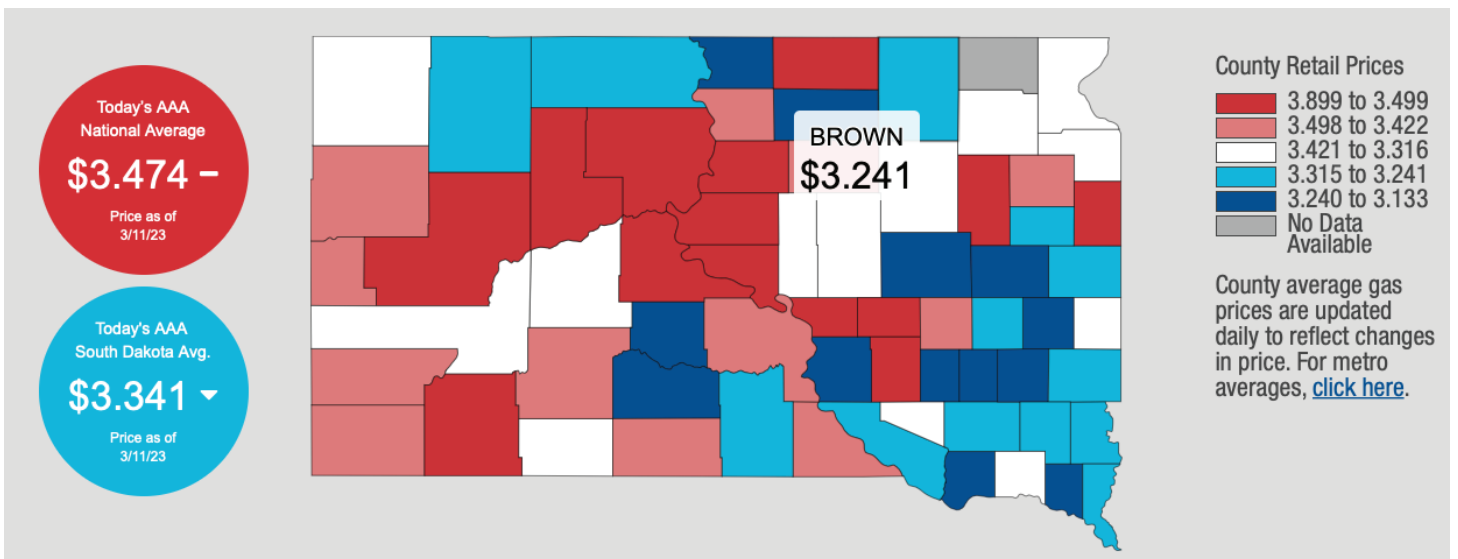
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.342	\$3.495	\$3.966	\$4.078
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.340	\$3.502	\$3.970	\$4.093
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.346	\$3.505	\$3.947	\$4.144
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.355	\$3.508	\$3.955	\$4.277
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.978	\$4.074	\$4.459	\$4.664

This Week



Two Weeks Ago



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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.



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3-Class Shootout

The 35th Annual 3-Class Shootout basketball All-Star game will be held on Saturday, March 25th at the McCook Central Auditorium in Salem. All three classes in both boys and girls will be represented by many of the top seniors in South Dakota. The games are as followed;

- GAME TIMES: 2:00 - "AA" Girls vs "A" Girls
- 3:30 - "B" Girls vs Winner of 1st Girl's game
- 5:15 - "AA" Boys vs "A" Boys
- DUNK CONTEST after first Boys game
- 7:00 - "B" Boys vs Winner of 1st Boy's game

Class "B" Girls:

Leah Williams, Wolsey-Wessington; Coral Mason, Viborg-Hurley; Denae Mach, Viborg-Hurley; Mallory Miller, Wolsey-Wessington; Jessy VanDerWerff, Gregory; Jadyen Jensen, Jones Co.; Ella Griffin Dells St. Mary's; Kate Connor, Howard; Jada Burke, DeSmet

Class "A" Girls:

Kami Wadsworth, Hamlin; Reese Ross, St. Thomas More; Emma Yost, Wagner; Leah Herbster, Vermilion; Landree Wilson, Sioux Valley; Shalayne Nagel, Wagner; Trinity Watson, Florence-Henry; Tyra Gates, Miller; Logan Bly, Garretson; Mollie Thornton, West Central

Class "AA" Girls:

Hilary Behrens, Brandon Valley; Cierra Watkins, SF Jefferson; Brooklyn Harpe, SF Washington; Hannah Harpe, SF Washington; Remington Price, Pierre; Isabella Ellwein, Huron; Macey Wathen, RC Stevens; Jaida Young, Watertown; Mariah Siem, SF Lincoln; Hannah Eide, Harrisburg

Class "B" Boys:

Joe Sayler, White River; Malek Wieker, Aberdeen Christian; Ethan Russell, Aberdeen Christian; Damon Wilkinson, De Smet; Brian La Roche Jr, Lower Brule; Gavin Thigh, Lower Brule; Sutton Arend, Bridgewater-Emery; Cooper Long, Lyman; Sam Hand, Philip, Logan Bobzin Centerville

Class "A" Boys:

Isaac Bruns, Dakota Valley; Randy Rosenquist, Dakota Valley; Oliver Vincent, Sioux Valley; Blake Volmer, Winner; Reed Rus, MVP; Caleb Hollenbeck, St Thomas More; Brayden Pankonen, Dell Rapids; Ethan Bruns, SF Christian; Damon Opdahl, Waubay-Summit; Ethan Cheeseman, Hanson; Aiden Jensen, Madison

Class "AA" Boys:

Ethan Determan, Harrisburg; Matt Eng, SF O'Gorman; Kaden Year, SF Jefferson; Taylen Ashley, SF Jefferson; Elliot Whitney, SF Lincoln; Spencer Barr, Aberdeen Central; Dylan Soulek, Mitchell; Jackson Edman, Pierre; Steele Morgan, Mitchell; Rugby Ryken, Yankton



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Kidnapper, attempted rapist vows to walk free without parole supervision

Inmate, denied early release, still classified as 'high-risk' after 37 years behind bars

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 18, 2023 12:30 AM

SIOUX FALLS — An inmate who abducted and tried to rape a 12-year-old Wasta girl in 1984 told the Board of Pardons and Paroles this week that he'd rather walk free in four years than ask for mercy and supervised release again.

Wayne Edmonds Jr., 62, was sentenced to 75 years for kidnapping and seven and a half years for attempted rape by a Pennington County judge in 1985. Because he was sentenced under the pre-1995 "good time" parole system, the Mike Durfee State Prison inmate will be eligible for release with no supervision in 2027 based on his behavior in prison.

Edmonds came within one vote Wednesday of being released early on parole. The nine-person board was missing member Kurt Hall that day, and the vote on Edmonds was 4-4.

The board then voted unanimously to allow Edmonds to return and plead his case again in eight months. Inmates are not obligated to ask for parole, however.

"You've said your piece, now I'll say mine," Edmonds said after the vote. "This is my last parole hearing. You will not see me again. I will walk out on May 1, 2027."

The vote points to the difficulty of parole board decisions for inmates who are classified, like Edmonds, as having a high-risk to re-offend. Board member Ken Albers of Canton saw parole and supervision as preferable to a release with no strings attached, but voted in favor of detainment for the sake of public safety — at least for now.

If Edmonds were to be released and monitored, Albers said, the board ought to make that call a few months or years down the line.

"I would like to protect the public as long as possible," Albers said prior to casting his vote.

The Albers comment was made on the assumption that Edmonds would return to the board again to request supervised release. Edmonds' assertion that he would not do so came just moments later.

'There shouldn't be any more victims'

Edmonds told the board he learned to empathize with his victims through a combination of coursework in prison and his interest in police and court procedural shows on television.

The victim in the case that brought him to prison wasn't the only one he left outside the walls, he said.

"Somewhere along the line I realized that there shouldn't be any more victims," Edmonds said. "I can't see creating sadness like that in the world anymore."

He told the board "it's long past time" for him to be released. He completed coursework in prison and became a certified braille transcriber. Before his incarceration, he was a mechanic. He wanted to be released to the Glory House in Sioux Falls and told the board he was confident he'd be able to find work.

"There are 10,000 jobs available," he said. "I ought to be able to get one of them."

Board Vice Chair Kirsten Aasen wanted to know if Edmonds understood what he was asking for.

Were the board to vote in Edmonds' favor, she explained, he would have been expected to register as a sex offender every six months, wear a GPS monitoring bracelet, find and maintain employment and participate in sex offender treatment outside the walls. Were he to misbehave on parole, he would return to prison to serve the remainder of his sentence and almost certainly die in prison.

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"You, personally, are risking a lot by going out," Aasen said.

"I feel I'm worth the risk," Edmonds said. "If I can't be a responsible citizen on close monitoring, I deserve to be here."

High-risk classification considered

The vote was complicated by Edmonds' history and the DOC's assessment of his risk to the community. Edmonds argued that "there's always going to be a risk" when inmates are released.

Board Chair Myron Rau pointed out, though, that Edmonds is classified as having a high risk to reoffend, even more than 37 years after his arrival in prison, according to DOC records reviewed by the board.

Rau said he understands that there's always risk, but he told Edmonds that his risk profile is a step beyond that.

"We're not just talking about risk here," Rau said. "You're a high-risk guy."

Edmonds' 1985 plea deal came after an attempt to fight extradition from Colorado – where his victim escaped as he slept in a vehicle – and a move by defense attorneys to place him at the Human Services Center to deal with his attraction to children, drug addiction issues and schizophrenic personality disorder, according to a Rapid City Journal article from Aug. 10, 1985.

Originally, he was set to be tried as a habitual offender, but his plea deal dropped that filing. The family accepted the plea deal in part because, according to news coverage at the time, Edmonds' 12-year-old victim had "already been through hell." The plea deal would keep her from testifying to a jury.

No one testified for or against Edmonds' release on Wednesday.

Before earning a hearing from the full parole board, inmates need to pass through a two-member screening panel. Aasen was on that screening panel for Edmonds. Aasen argued in favor of parole because, she said, "if he's let out on his flat date in 2027, we will have no ability to monitor him."

"I think the public risk this individual poses is minimized by allowing him to get out into the world on supervision," Aasen said.

Prosecutor recalls case

The Pennington County state's attorney who prosecuted Edmonds' case could not recall it from the inmate's name alone when reached by South Dakota Searchlight on Thursday morning.

He did remember after hearing some of the details. There was a five-hour preliminary hearing after Edmonds' extradition back to South Dakota, and several months of motions and hearings thereafter.

"I remember this girl testifying," said Dennis Groff. "I actually have a visual of her testifying,"

Groff was state's attorney in Rapid City for 12 years and later served as a defense attorney. There are certain criminal cases that stuck with Groff, where he would argue that the perpetrator ought never be released. Groff led a successful death penalty case against now-deceased murderer Charles Rhines, for example.

Edmonds' case is not one of them, he said. Absent the details of Edmonds' behavior behind bars, Groff said he could not comment on the parole board vote. He did offer, however, that the decades of time between the crime and today — especially if an inmate completes treatment and behaves well in prison — are important considerations.

"There are compelling arguments for why you'd let him out, and there are compelling arguments for why you'd never let him out again," Groff said.

After the vote Wednesday and Edmonds' agitated pledge to hold out for unfettered freedom in 2027, the 62-year-old was escorted out of the room to prepare for a trip back to the prison in Springfield. At that point, Board Chair Rau said Edmonds' reaction "shows that we made the right choice."

"That was a dumb thing to say," Rau said.

Board member Peter Lieberman, who also voted against parole, said he suspected that Edmonds might change his mind about parole eight months from now.

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

Federal agencies seek to protect Pactola Reservoir and Rapid Creek from mining

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MARCH 17, 2023 11:06 PM

Two federal agencies have announced a proposal to protect 32 square miles of the Black Hills National Forest from mining.

The Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service made the announcement in a Friday news release. The proposal covers the Pactola Reservoir and Rapid Creek Watershed, which are popular recreation destinations that also serve as drinking water sources for Rapid City and Ellsworth Air Force Base.

The federal agencies are considering a 20-year "mineral withdrawal," which means the area would be withdrawn from consideration for claims, exploration and mines.

"The Pactola Reservoir area includes valued cultural and natural resources important to tribes and local communities," said Forest Service Chief Randy Moore in a news release. "We're going to study the feasibility of withdrawing lands in the area because any activity that might affect these critical resources deserves a thorough review."

The agencies said the move is "in response to concerns about potential impacts of mining on the area's natural resources and municipal water supply." The concerns have arisen over plans to conduct exploratory drilling in the area, including a project by Minneapolis-based F3 Gold. The news release from the federal agencies did not name any existing exploration plans or operations, or specify how those existing plans or operations would be affected by the proposal.

The Pactola Reservoir is the largest and deepest reservoir in the Black Hills National Forest, with 14 miles of shoreline, 150-foot depths and 800 acres of surface area in the central Black Hills. Water released from the reservoir into Rapid Creek flows down out of the mountains through Rapid City and onto the western South Dakota plains.

The proposed mineral withdrawal will go through a lengthy process, beginning with a 90-day review period that will include public meetings and consultations with affected Native American tribes. The proposal also triggers a two-year "segregation" of the affected land, which amounts to a temporary ban on staking new mining claims or obtaining new federal mineral leases in the area. The federal agencies will conduct an environmental analysis during that period.

The secretary of the interior, who will make the final decision on the proposal, has the authority to withdraw lands from mining activities for a maximum of 20 years, subject to renewal. Only Congress can legislate a permanent withdrawal.

"The BLM is pleased to work with the USDA Forest Service on this effort," said BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning in a news release. "This proposal will help protect a primary source of drinking water for South Dakotans as the Forest Service assesses a 20-year withdrawal."

Beyond the Pactola Reservoir and the Rapid Creek Watershed, numerous other exploratory drilling projects are proposed or ongoing in various parts of the Black Hills. There is active exploratory drilling in the northern Black Hills, where gold mining has been ongoing since the late 1800s. The region currently has one large-scale, active gold mine — the Wharf Mine near Lead and Terry Peak.

There is also a proposal to mine for uranium in the southern Black Hills, and lithium claims have been proliferating around the Black Hills as companies seek supplies of the metal for electric-vehicle batteries.

Congressional Roundup: Sustainability vs. safety

Delegation focuses on schools, banks, drone crash, forests, fitness

BY: SETH TUPPER - MARCH 17, 2023 1:52 PM

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first in a series of periodic updates on the activities of South Dakota's congressional delegation.

A new bill from Sen. Mike Rounds, R-South Dakota, would take money away from sustainability efforts in schools and redirect it to school safety.

The bill takes aim at \$500 million in funding appropriated by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act for energy efficiency and renewable energy improvements at public school facilities. Rounds' legislation would reallocate the money to states, so they could create school safety grants.

"The redirecting of funds would allow schools to access metal detectors and school security officers rather than providing solar panels at schools," Rounds' news release said.

Bank deregulation

Some financial experts say part of the blame for the recent Silicon Valley Bank collapse and related banking-industry woes is a 2018 rollback of banking regulations – especially a provision that pushed the trigger for tighter capital and liquidity standards from \$50 billion in bank assets to \$250 billion.

One of the supporters of that rollback legislation was Rounds, who was and still is a member of the Senate Banking Committee.

A Bloomberg television host asked Rounds this week how he'd react if the Biden administration seeks to "tighten or re-tighten" banking regulations.

"Let's not do a knee-jerk reaction," Rounds said. "Let's find out what it is that's it's going to take, get good data first, then we can decide whether or not we need to modify anything there, and whether or not the regulators actually utilized the data that is being provided right now."

Rounds' fellow Republican and South Dakotan, Sen. John Thune, who also voted for the 2018 regulatory rollback, offered a sharper take this week on Fox News.

"Why did the regulators not see this?" Thune said. "I mean, this seems to me like an epic failure of the job that they have to supervise the banks."

Yet Thune, in a speech this week on the Senate floor, also accused the Biden administration of being too eager in its approach to regulation.

"President Biden has made aggressive use of regulatory power to push his agenda – and burden our economy in the process," he said.

That comment came as Thune introduced a bill that would require federal agencies to conduct a more transparent and objective analysis of the economic impacts of proposed regulations.

Rounds is 'pissed off'

During a public event hosted by the Ronald Reagan Institute, Rounds said he is "pissed off" about a Russian fighter jet's collision with an American MQ-9 Reaper drone, which caused the drone to crash into the Black Sea.

"The report coming out of our government is that this was an unprofessional act and environmentally unsound," Rounds said. "I'm sorry, folks, they shot down a United States warplane. They took it out of action. And that's the response we get back? So, yeah, not very happy about it."

Ellsworth Air Force Base near Rapid City is one of the locations where remote pilots control MQ-9 Reaper drones. The office of Rounds, who is on the Armed Services and Intelligence committees, did not respond to a South Dakota Searchlight question this week about whether the crashed drone was piloted from Ellsworth.

Forest management

Thune introduced a bill that would require the U.S. Forest Service to expedite "treatment" (such as logging, thinning or prescribed fires) of more than 70 million acres of national forest lands to "reduce the threat of insect and disease infestations and catastrophic wildfires."

The bill represents another salvo in the fight over logging levels for the Black Hills National Forest. Forest

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managers have allowed less logging recently, in response to Forest Service researchers who say a forest that's already been drastically altered by wildfires and mountain pine beetles can no longer sustain as much logging as it once did.

Meat processing

Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, went to Wall on Friday with Xochitl Torres, under secretary of rural development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. They celebrated the recent announcement of \$3.3 million in federal funding for CNF Enterprises to construct a 30,000-square-foot meat processing facility in New Underwood. The plant will process up to 4,000 head per year, including beef, pork, lamb and buffalo.

Fitness money

Thune and a bipartisan group of lawmakers introduced a bill that would let Americans use a portion of their pre-tax health savings accounts (known as HSAs) and flexible spending accounts (known as FSAs) to pay for sports and fitness purchases such as gym memberships, fitness equipment and youth sports league fees.

The 62-year-old Thune celebrated the announcement with a social media highlight reel of himself working out and baring his biceps.

Other news

In other congressional action this week:

Rounds introduced legislation that would allow the year-round, nationwide sale of ethanol blends higher than 10 percent.

Rounds led a bipartisan group of 10 senators in drafting a letter urging two federal agencies to reconsider plans to increase business fees for H-2A and H-2B work visas, which bring temporary agricultural and other workers into the U.S. from foreign countries.

Rounds introduced a bill that would allow the interstate sale of state-inspected meat and poultry.

Johnson introduced a bill to expand work requirements for federal nutrition aid.

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

Limits on foreign ownership of U.S. farmland gain support in Congress, despite skepticism

Legislation from SD's Rounds would bar owners from several countries

BY: ADAM GOLDSTEIN - MARCH 17, 2023 1:01 PM

WASHINGTON — Bipartisan momentum is building in Congress to restrict China and other foreign adversaries from purchasing U.S. farmland, a reflection of a similar push by some states as well as apprehension over Chinese spy balloons, rising land prices and growing international competition.

"Foreign ownership of agricultural land threatens small family farms and the overall health of the agricultural supply chain," wrote a bipartisan group of House lawmakers in a Feb. 27 letter to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, condemning the department's insufficient foreign transaction reporting from 2015 to 2018.

"I don't think we should be allowing countries who don't give a damn whether we exist or not to own land, whether it's farmland or agribusiness, in this country," said Democratic Sen. Jon Tester of Montana in a Feb. 28 Senate committee hearing.

"I believe that one acre of American farmland owned by the Chinese Communist Party is one acre too many," said Republican Alabama Sen. Katie Britt in the same February hearing.

And while policy and legal experts outside Congress believe a national restriction on foreign ownership could get passed this session, they also believe there could be challenges in its rollout, as well as unintended consequences for the agricultural community.

John Schwarz, a row crop farmer and lawyer in Cass County, Indiana, questioned if any national bill would be enforceable due to the sheer scope of farmland in the country. He suggested it may be better

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left to counties and localities to handle.

"If this is going to work, it really has to be on a micro level," Schwarz said. "I don't think a macro level is going to do it because there's just way too many ways to slip through, getting cute with the ownership and companies."

Vilsack said in a Thursday Senate hearing that Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea together own under 400,000 acres of agricultural land as of 2021. He added that the nation's largest foreign landholders include Canada, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

The secretary expressed concern over how federal foreign ownership restrictions could be implemented in a way that was fair and legally sound for international investors.

Clay Lowery, former assistant secretary for international affairs at the Department of the Treasury, also raised questions about a wide-reaching foreign ownership restriction at the Senate hearing in February.

"I do believe strongly in the ability for countries and entities to invest in the United States, because I think that is actually a positive," he said.

Jennifer Zwagerman, director of the Drake University Agricultural Law Center in Iowa, said she understands that there are growing national security concerns over farmland. Yet she is concerned a federal ownership restriction could exacerbate problems with farmland loss, and provoke xenophobia across the country.

"It's easy to focus on one area of concern and one aspect," Zwagerman said. "My bigger fear is that we limit groups or entities or individuals that are really interested in farming or production themselves. And in doing so, we end up with land that is purchased by those less interested in farming and more as development."

Foreign land holdings

The USDA reports that foreign persons and entities held an interest in just over 40 million acres of U.S. agricultural land in 2021.

This number marked an increase of over 2.4 million acres from the Dec. 31, 2020, report, and the agency added that foreign land holdings have increased by an average of 2.2 million acres per year since 2015.

Challenges persist with ownership transparency, outdated sales, and incomplete price information in the Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act. Gaps in this legislation – which facilitates USDA oversight of foreign transactions through the Farm Service Agency – make it unclear if more or less acreage is actually owned by foreign governments.

Regardless, at the USDA Agricultural Outlook Forum in late February, Micah Brown of the National Agricultural Law Center said momentum for foreign ownership bills is being fueled by shifting ownership trends and national security concerns.

The Arkansas-based lawyer added that the current movement follows some farmland ownership "flash points" in American history dating back to the Revolutionary War.

Schwarz said the current push is likely in response to the Chinese spy balloon event in early February, along with recent Chinese land purchases close to North Dakota and Texas Air Force bases over the last three years.

Zwagerman said that another one of the "always-valid" concerns driving this issue is access to sufficient and adequate farmland for producers. Farmland prices have not declined by a significant margin since the late 1980s, according to the USDA Economic Research Service.

In early February, Republican Sen. Mike Rounds of South Dakota introduced the PASS Act of 2023 with Tester, which would bar North Korea, Iran, China, and Russia from purchasing U.S. farmland. The bill would also add the USDA to the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, a multi-agency council that reviews financial transactions that affect national security.

Rounds said in an interview with States Newsroom that he and his co-sponsor have "done their due diligence" in writing long-term legislation that protects its citizens, "the primary responsibility of the United States government."

"We've seen evidence of an attempt by China to purchase land near a very sensitive military installation," Rounds said, referring to the North Dakota and Texas incidents. "That should be a heads-up that

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you address it before it becomes a problem, rather than waiting until it is a problem.”

Rounds added that another pressing issue is the intellectual property concern surrounding foreign ownership, in which China could reproduce high-yield seeds and pesticides while circumventing intellectual property law.

States limit foreign investments

While there is no federal law that restricts foreign investors from acquiring agricultural land in the United States, 14 states currently have laws restricting foreign private investment in agricultural land.

These states include Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Kansas, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Virginia will be the 15th state to adopt a restriction in the coming days when Governor Glenn Youngkin is expected to sign S.B. 1438.

Renée Johnson, an agricultural policy analyst with the Congressional Research Service, spoke at the February USDA Agricultural Outlook Forum about four categories of foreign farmland ownership restrictions that have gathered interest in the 117th and 118th Congress.

The first category of legislation Johnson identified was legislation which restricts foreign entities from accessing USDA-administered programs, like the Farm Credit for Americans Act introduced in 2022 by Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa.

Johnson noted that these bills, while popular, would be “extremely complicated” to do as a general restriction given there are many different USDA programs that have different constituents and requirements.

Schwarz said he does not believe curbing access to USDA programs will reduce foreign investment, since the value of the farmland as an asset may outweigh the benefits of being eligible for voluntary programs.

The second category Johnson identified was adding the Department of Agriculture to CFIUS, like in the FARM Act of 2023 introduced by Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama. This change would give the agriculture community a voice on the committee, which can request the President block land sales it deems threatening to national security.

Johnson said that Congress’ agriculture committees would not have the ability to pass the bill, as CFIUS is governed by the Treasury. Yet she noted that this change is feasible if advanced through the Senate Banking Committee.

Lowery said in the February Senate hearing that he views adding the USDA to CFIUS as “totally reasonable.”

Johnson added that the idea is worth keeping an eye on as it has gained bipartisan support.

Bans on foreign land purchases

A third category Johnson identified was sweeping bans on ag land purchases for “foreign adversaries,” such as in Rounds’ PASS Act.

Johnson noted that these bills have much more to do with military infrastructure and conflict between the U.S. and the governments of China, Iran, Russia, and North Korea.

Zwagerman said that while the federal government may have the right to restrict foreign ownership for national security reasons, passing the bill would require an “extreme set of circumstances with a lot of fighting.”

“There are concerns about already-owned foreign property, and that the government is taking its authority to regulate land ownership for security concerns too far,” she said.

Schwarz said that the Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service, which would likely be responsible for handling oversight on laws like these, may become “over-bloated programs” if this is done at the national level.

Zwagerman added that she holds other concerns with discussions of these wide-reaching land ownership restrictions, especially the “isolationist aspect” she thinks it could pull the country towards.

Rounds said concerns about this section of his bill are misplaced.

“It is strictly based upon whether or not they have an affiliation with the government of those four countries,” Rounds said. “That’s pretty straightforward.”

A fourth category that Johnson identified is large-scale agricultural land ownership restrictions on China

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alone, as in the Prohibition of Agricultural Land for the People's Republic of China Act introduced last session by Republican Rep. Dan Newhouse of Washington.

Brown, in a National Agricultural Law Center webinar, said the broad language of some USDA program-related and foreign ownership restriction bills could affect many entities with looser ties to China.

Johnson said that some members of the House Select Committee on Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party are concerned about fueling backlash against "certain Asian communities in the United States."

"It's concerning," said Manjusha Kulkarni, executive director of AAPI Equity Alliance, of proposed restrictions in a message to States Newsroom.

"Our elected leaders are responsible for ensuring we don't pass or propose any laws that will do little good but cause real harm to Asian Americans."

What Congress might consider

The evidence that prohibiting foreign farmland purchases would serve any national security or economic purpose is inconclusive.

The Department of Agriculture could find "neither a consistent nor significant relationship" between foreign ownership and land values or rental rates.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies also found that "these acquisitions do not represent a substantial enough portion of food production in the United States to threaten national food security."

Still, a number of industry groups have publicly acknowledged support for restricting foreign farmland ownership, including the American Farm Bureau and Family Farm Action, an advocacy group for family-owned farms.

Zwagerman said that when it comes to monitoring foreign investment through the USDA and FDA, it "sort of feels like that ship sailed."

"There isn't just a local, or even national, agriculture-and-food economy anymore," she said. "Everything we have is already at an international level."

Schwarz said he doubts anything will get done at the federal level on foreign ownership, but state or county taxing infrastructure could be a better way to monitor foreign farmland transactions.

Brown said at the Agricultural Outlook Forum that despite an uncertain outlook for a federal foreign ownership law, "something he's been thinking about" is the prospect of a random audit system for foreign transactions monitored by the USDA.

He added that the Farm Service Administration already does randomized audits with participants in its other programs, like crop insurance.

Zwagerman said she thinks the energy being given to this issue may be better spent on encouraging the next generation of producers, and keeping land in production.

From 2001 through 2016, the U.S. converted more than 11 million acres of agricultural land to other uses, according to the American Farmland Trust.

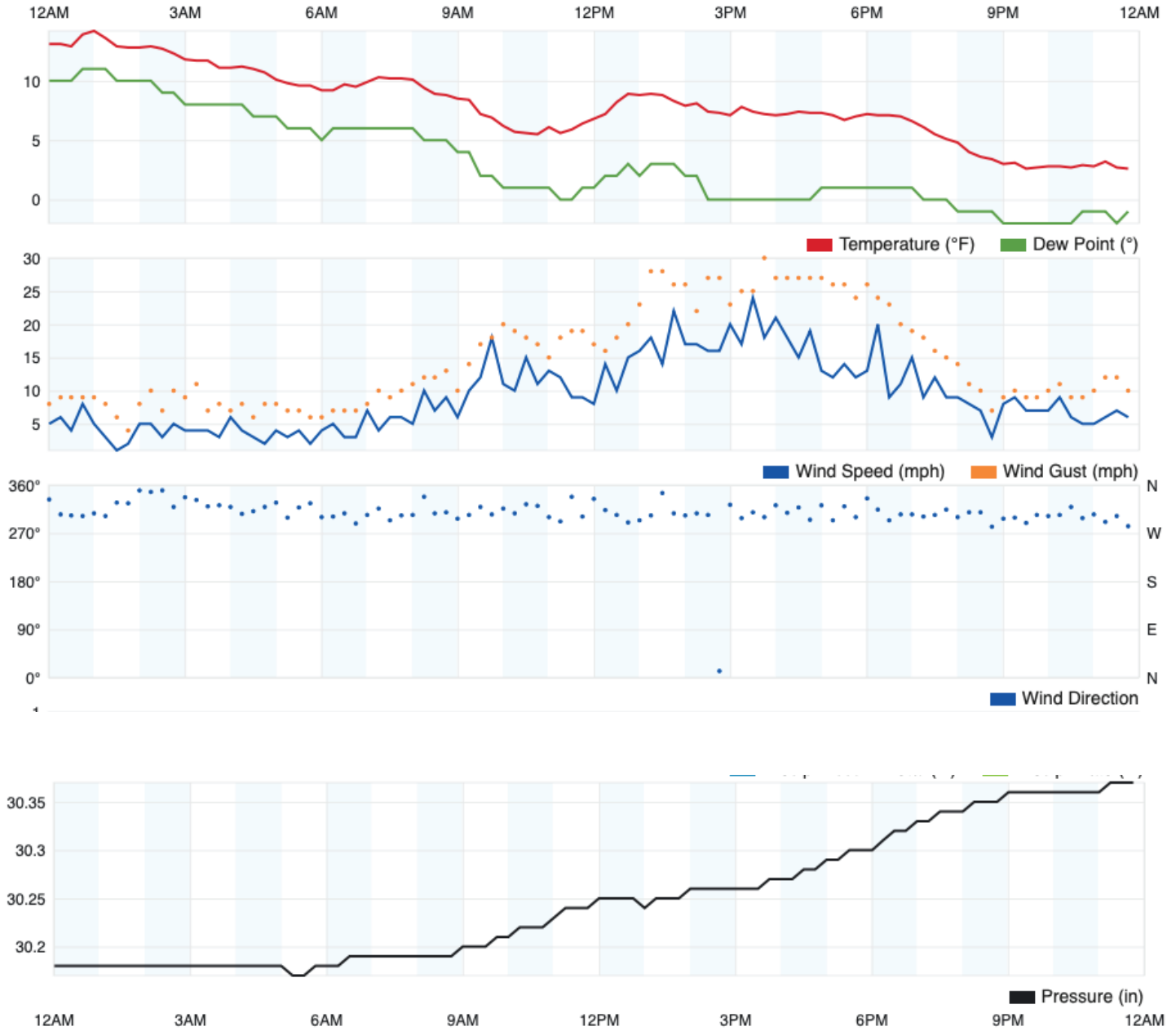
"I would rather have more of a consideration or discussion about how we just keep farmland, as a whole," Zwagerman said. "That's a bigger concern."

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
						
Becoming Sunny	Clear	Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Chance Snow
High: 16 °F	Low: -6 °F	High: 32 °F	Low: 10 °F	High: 24 °F	Low: 14 °F	High: 29 °F

Cold Today, Milder for Sunday

March 18, 2023
2:49 AM

BREEZY

Today

- Partly Sunny, Cold and Breezy
- Highs teens & 20s

Sunday

- Mostly Sunny, Milder
- Highs 30-60° (warmest SC SD)

Monday

- Partly Sunny
- 20-40°

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Cold Today, Milder Sunday

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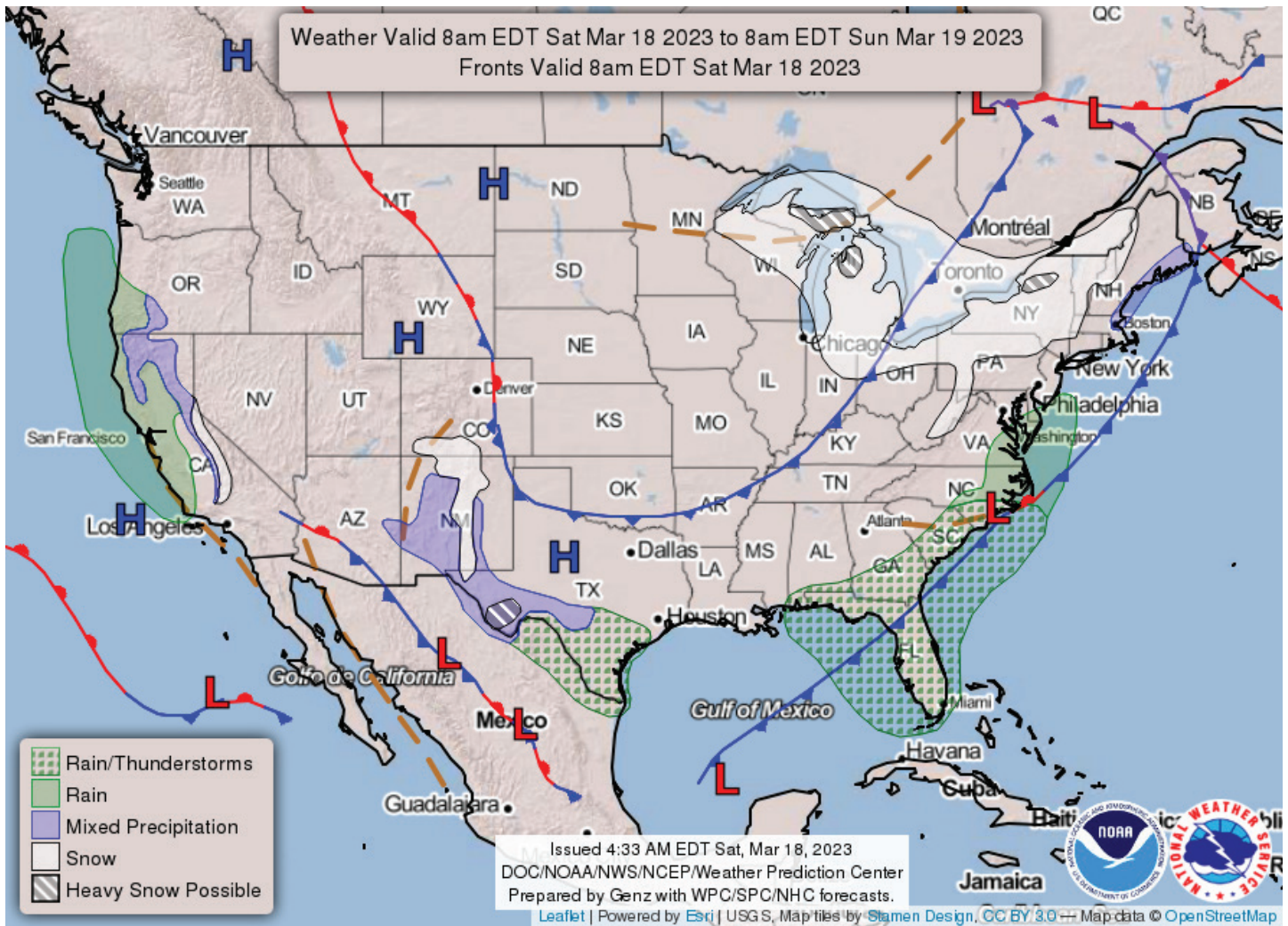
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 14 °F at 12:51 AM
Low Temp: 3 °F at 9:29 PM
Wind: 31 mph at 4:17 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 05 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 85 in 2012
Record Low: -15 in 1923
Average High: 43
Average Low: 21
Average Precip in March.: 0.46
Precip to date in March.: 1.20
Average Precip to date: 1.63
Precip Year to Date: 2.78
Sunset Tonight: 7:43:20 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:35:38 AM



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Today in Weather History

March 18, 1982: Northern Lawrence and Southwest Butte Counties experienced strong winds during the afternoon of March 18, 1982. Winds gusting to 70mph in Spearfish and Belle Fourche areas overturned a trailer house near Belle Fourche. No injuries were reported.

March 18, 2013: An area of low pressure moving across the region brought widespread accumulating snowfall along with powerful northwest winds to northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts from 1 to 4 inches along with sustained winds of 25 to 35 mph with gusts up to near 60 mph caused widespread blizzard conditions. Travel was disrupted or halted. Some businesses and schools were also closed. Some snowfall amounts included; 1 inch at Sisseton; 2 inches south of Bristol and at Bowdle; 3 inches near Big Stone City; and 4 inches at Summit. The highest wind gust was 58 mph at Aberdeen and near Summit. The snowfall began between 5 and 7 pm on the 17th and ended between 5 and 9 pm on the 18th.

March 18, 2014: A low-pressure surface area moving off to the east brought some heavy snow into far eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. A narrow band of heavy snow set up across this area bringing from 6 to 11 inches of snow.

1925: The great "Tri-State Tornado" occurred, the deadliest tornado in U.S. history. The storm claimed 695 lives (including 234 at Murphysboro, IL, and 148 at West Frankfort, IL), and caused seventeen million dollars property damage. It cut a swath of destruction 219 miles long and as much as a mile wide from east-central Missouri to southern Indiana between 1 PM and 4 PM. The tornado leveled a school in West Frankfort, Illinois, and picked up sixteen students setting them down unharmed 150 yards away. Seven other tornadoes claimed an additional 97 lives that day.

1952: 151.73 inches of rain fell at Cilaos, La Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean over five days (13th-18th) to set the world rainfall record. This record was broken on February 24th-28th, 2007, when Commerce La Reunion Island picked up 196.06 inches.

1971 - High winds accompanied a low pressure system from the Rocky Mountains to the Great Lakes. Winds gusted to 100 mph at Hastings NE, and reached 115 mph at Hays KS. High winds caused two million dollars damage in Kansas. Fire burned 50,000 forest acres in eastern Oklahoma. (17th-19th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A storm in the central U.S. produced up to 10 inches of snow in western Nebraska, and up to six inches of rain in eastern sections of the state. The heavy rains pushed the Elkhorn River out of its banks, submerging the streets of Inman under three feet of water. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Light rain and snow prevailed east of the Mississippi River. Fair weather prevailed west of the Mississippi. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A storm in the western U.S. produced heavy rain in California, with heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada Range. Venado CA was drenched with 5.40 inches of rain in 24 hours. A dozen cities in the eastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date, including Baltimore MD with a reading of 82 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Heavy rain caused extensive flooding of rivers and streams in Georgia, with total damage running well into the millions. Flooding also claimed six lives. Nearly seven inches of rain caused 2.5 million dollars damage around Columbus, and up to nine inches of rain was reported over the northern Kinchafoone Basin in Georgia. (Storm Data)

1990: An intense hailstorm struck the Sydney region in Australia, producing strong winds and torrential rains in a swath from Camden to Narrabeen, causing extensive damage. Hailstones were measured up to 3 inches in diameter. The total insured cost was estimated at \$319 million, the third-largest loss event in Australian insurance history.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

WHERE TO FIND HAPPINESS

A professor was known to ask his students questions to make them think. On one occasion he stood before the class and wrote on the chalkboard, "Who's more content - the man with six million dollars or the man with six children? Now think!" he challenged them.

After a few moments, one of the students raised his hand and answered, "The man with the six children." "Oh? Why?" asked the professor.

"Well, the man with the six million dollars would always want more!" came the reply.

True contentment is always independent of "things" - whether possessions or pleasures. It only comes from an inner attitude toward life. That is why Paul said, "True religion, with contentment, is great wealth."

This does not imply that being a Christian means living in poverty or wanting to be poor. But it does mean that the attraction of "things" will never bring true happiness or satisfaction, and that the Christian must always focus on things that are eternal.

In the final analysis, we can only take two things to heaven: Ourselves, through His grace, and those who we have let to the Lord through witnessing His grace to others.

So, we must live our lives with one goal: that is: to present ourselves to God without shame and share His grace with the lost..

Prayer: Help us, Father, to realize that life does not consist in the abundance of things, but in pleasing You and doing Your will. May we center our lives on things eternal. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: True religion, with contentment, is great wealth. 1 Timothy 6:6



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

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2023 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.17.23

26 28 29 39 49 25

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$272,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[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 14 Hrs 26 Mins 35
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.17.23

26 29 35 39 48 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 13 Hrs 56 Mins 35
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.15.23

15 22 28 33 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$94,000

NEXT 14 Hrs 26 Mins 35
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.15.23

7 9 46 64 68 3

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 14 Hrs 25 Mins 35
DRAW: 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 14 Hrs 25 Mins
DRAW: 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Selland carries South Dakota State past Southern Cal

JIMMY ROBERTSON Associated Press

BLACKSBURG, Va. (AP) — Myah Selland scored 29 points to lead No. 9 seed South Dakota State to a 62-57 overtime victory over eighth-seeded Southern Cal on Friday night in the first round of the NCAA Tournament's Seattle Region.

Selland scored 16 consecutive points spanning the fourth quarter and overtime for the Jackrabbits (29-5), who won their 22nd consecutive game despite shooting 35.2% (19 of 54) and committing 20 turnovers.

"I think he (Coach Aaron Johnston) put me in a lot of positions," said Selland, who has scored at least 20 points in a game nine times this season. "We have a lot of sets that we had practiced all season and he put me in a lot of positions where I just felt comfortable and saw a few shots go in. I just let the game kind of come from there, but we all made really big plays throughout the game."

Destiny Littleton led Southern Cal (21-10) with 18 points.

Littleton tied the game at 47 on a 3-pointer with 7 seconds in regulation. Selland then missed a tough jumper at the buzzer, sending the game into overtime.

Selland scored nine consecutive points in overtime for the Jackrabbits, who opened the extra session with an 11-2 run and never trailed. Littleton had a chance to tie the game at 58, but missed an off-balance 3-pointer with 14 seconds left and Tori Nelson's two free throws with 11 seconds to go all but sealed it for the Jackrabbits.

"Even late in the game when we had some separation, they came back and made a run, and we lost the lead and had to get the lead back," South Dakota State coach Aaron Johnston said. "We felt like we had it won, and now it's a tie game. And then we go into overtime and really play well in overtime.

"It just says a lot about the resiliency of our team and the ability to let go and move on, to be in the present. That's fun as a coach. It's just great to see that part of it rewarded."

Selland connected on 10 of 18 from the floor and 8 of 10 from the free-throw line to stand as the bright spot in a rather ugly game. The two teams combined for 40 turnovers and neither shot better than 35.2% from the floor.

"I mean, shoot, to me she's a pro," Southern Cal coach Lindsay Gottlieb said of Selland. "She scores at all three levels —when I say that, more from the free-throw line, on the block, and in from 3. But their system and their offense makes it really hard. You can't really double her because they will kick out for 3's. She is constantly moving. They play in flow really well, and she's a terrific player who got to her spots and made big shots."

Rayah Marshall finished with 17 points and 13 rebounds for the Trojans.

"I'm really proud," Gottlieb said. "I'm proud of our team, and I'm proud of the people in the locker room. The journey we went on was an exceptional one. We wish it were longer. We wanted to keep playing. I'm really disappointed, but the predominant feeling is pride in this group and what they have done for our program."

TIP-INS

South Dakota State: The Jackrabbits were held 17 points below their scoring average - they were 11th nationally at 79.4 points per game coming in - but should gain confidence heading into their matchup against Virginia Tech by winning a tough, low-scoring affair against the Trojans

Southern Cal: The Trojans will be lamenting this one for a while. They had numerous chances around the rim in the second half, but struggled to finish. As a result, they shot just 31.3% (21 of 67) and closed the season shooting worse than 32% in their final four games.

UP NEXT

South Dakota State: The Jackrabbits will meet top seed Virginia Tech on Sunday.

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Friday's Scores

The Associated Press
BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=
SDHSAA Playoffs=
Class A State=
Consolation Semifinal=
Sioux Valley 65, Hot Springs 52
St. Thomas More 64, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 57
Semifinal=
Dakota Valley 77, Hamlin 63
Sioux Falls Christian 75, Elk Point-Jefferson 51
Class AA State=
Consolation Semifinal=
Harrisburg 65, Sioux Falls Washington 55
Pierre T F Riggs High School 56, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 46
Semifinal=
Mitchell 61, Sioux Falls Lincoln 59
Yankton 69, Sioux Falls Jefferson 66
Class B State=
Consolation Semifinal=
Castlewood 59, Faith 49
Viborg-Hurley 56, Ethan 42
Semifinal=
DeSmet 46, Aberdeen Christian 31
Lower Brule 57, White River 49

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

Pro-Moscow voices tried to steer Ohio train disaster debate

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Soon after a train derailed and spilled toxic chemicals in Ohio last month, anonymous pro-Russian accounts started spreading misleading claims and anti-American propaganda about it on Twitter, using Elon Musk's new verification system to expand their reach while creating the illusion of credibility.

The accounts, which parroted Kremlin talking points on myriad topics, claimed without evidence that authorities in Ohio were lying about the true impact of the chemical spill. The accounts spread fearmongering posts that preyed on legitimate concerns about pollution and health effects and compared the response to the derailment with America's support for Ukraine following its invasion by Russia.

"Biden offers food, water, medicine, shelter, payouts of pension and social services to Ukraine! Ohio first! Offer and deliver to Ohio!" posted one of the pro-Moscow accounts, which boasts 25,000 followers and features an anonymous location and a profile photo of a dog. Twitter awarded the account a blue check mark in January.

Regularly spewing anti-US propaganda, the accounts show how easily authoritarian states and Americans willing to spread their propaganda can exploit social media platforms like Twitter in an effort to steer domestic discourse.

The accounts were identified by Reset, a London-based nonprofit that studies social media's impact on democracy, and shared with The Associated Press. Felix Kartte, a senior advisor at Reset, said the report's findings indicate Twitter is allowing Russia to use its platform like a bullhorn.

"With no one at home in Twitter's product safety department, Russia will continue to meddle in US elec-

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tions and in democracies around the world," Kartte said.

Twitter did not respond to messages seeking comment for this story.

The 38-car derailment near East Palestine, Ohio, released toxic chemicals into the atmosphere, leading to a national debate over rail safety and environmental regulations while raising fears of poisoned drinking water and air.

The disaster was a major topic on social media, with millions of mentions on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, according to an analysis by San Francisco-based media intelligence firm Zignal Labs, which conducted a study on behalf of the AP.

At first, the derailment received little attention online but mentions grew steadily, peaking two weeks after the incident, Zignal found, a time lag that gave pro-Russia voices time to try to shape the conversation.

The accounts identified by Reset's researchers received an extra boost from Twitter itself, in the form of a blue check mark. Before Musk purchased Twitter last year, its check marks denoted accounts run by verified users, often public figures, celebrities or journalists. It was seen as a mark of authenticity on a platform known for bots and spam accounts.

Musk ended that system and replaced it with Twitter Blue, which is given to users who pay \$8 per month and supply a phone number. Twitter Blue users agree not to engage in deception and are required to post a profile picture and name. But there's no rule that they use their own.

Under the program, Twitter Blue users can write and send longer tweets and videos. Their replies are also given higher priority on other posts.

The AP reached out to several of the accounts listed in Reset's report. In response, one of the accounts sent a two-word message before blocking the AP reporter on Twitter: "Shut up."

While researchers spotted clues suggesting some of the accounts are linked to coordinated efforts by Russian disinformation agencies, others were Americans, showing the Kremlin doesn't always have to pay to get its message out.

One account, known as Truth Puke, is connected to a website of the same name geared toward conservatives in the United States. Truth Poke regularly reposts Russian state media; RT, formerly known as Russia Today, is one of its favorite groups to repost, Reset found. One video posted by the account features ex-President Donald Trump's remarks about the train derailment, complete with Russian subtitles.

In a response to questions from the AP, Truth Puke said it aims to provide a "wide spectrum of views" and was surprised to be labeled a spreader of Russian propaganda, despite the account's heavy use of such material. Asked about the video with Russian subtitles, Truth Puke said it used the Russian language version of the Trump video for the sake of expediency.

"We can assure you that it was not done with any Russian propagandist intent in mind, we just like to put out things as quickly as we find them," the company said.

Other accounts brag of their love for Russia. One account on Thursday reposted a bizarre claim that the U.S. was stealing humanitarian earthquake relief supplies donated to Syria by China. The account has 60,000 followers and is known as Donbass Devushka, after the region of Ukraine.

Another pro-Russian account recently tried to pick an online argument with Ukraine's defense department, posting photos of documents that it claimed came from the Wagner Group, a private military company owned by a Yevgeny Prigozhin, a key Putin ally. Prigozhin operates troll farms that have targeted U.S. social media users in the past. Last fall he boasted of his efforts to meddle with American democracy.

A separate Twitter account claiming to represent Wagner actively uses the site to recruit fighters.

"Gentlemen, we have interfered, are interfering and will interfere," Prigozhin said last fall on the eve of the 2022 midterm elections in the U.S. "Carefully, precisely, surgically and in our own way, as we know how to do," Prigozhin said at the time.

Bank failures: Anger in Congress, but division on what to do

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Bills were filed, hearings were planned and blame was cast as Congress reacted

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this past week to the abrupt failure of two banks. A look at what lawmakers are saying and planning as the fallout continues from the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank.

QUICK LEGISLATIVE FIXES UNLIKELY

While President Joe Biden called Monday on Congress to strengthen the rules for banks to prevent future failures, lawmakers are divided on whether any legislation is needed.

Some congressional leaders are skeptical that a closely divided Congress will act at all.

"There's people who are going to choose bills, but I cannot imagine that, with the hold banks have on Republican members of Congress, that we can pass anything significant," said Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, chairman of the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee.

Republicans say the laws already in place were sufficient to prevent the bank failures, if only regulators had done their job by spotting obvious problems and directing the banks to take steps that would reduce their risk.

"If there are ideas out there that people have, you know, at some point, we would be willing to entertain those, but I think it would be premature to start talking about solutions before we fully define the problem and ultimately get answers from the regulators about why they were asleep at the job," said Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, the second-ranking Republican.

SO WHAT'S NEXT? The House Financial Services Committee has announced its first hearing for March 29, featuring at least two witnesses: Martin Gruenberg, chairman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.'s board of directors, and Michael Barr, vice chair for supervision with the Federal Reserve's board of governors. "We will conduct this hearing without fear or favor to get the answers the American people deserve," lawmakers said.

On the Senate side, Brown said his committee will also hold a hearing soon to help lawmakers assess what went wrong. He said the first hearing is likely to focus on bringing in witnesses responsible for regulating the failed banks. The Fed board was the primary regulator for Silicon Valley Bank in California, while the FDIC was the primary federal regulator for Signature Bank in New York.

Brown spelled out some of the questions lawmakers probably will have for the regulators in a letter Thursday asking them to undertake a comprehensive review of what went wrong. What role did social media-led coordination among customers play? What role did the large percentage of uninsured deposits at Silicon Valley Bank play? Were there regulatory gaps with respect to capital, liquidity and stress testing that played a role in the failures?

Sen. Bill Hagerty, R-Tenn., said he wants to know why regulators did not act on detailed reports of a liquidity risk at Silicon Valley Bank and why the FDIC failed to auction off the bank's remaining parts last weekend.

Sen. Cynthia Lummis, R-Wyo., said she wants to know if regulators intend to use the failure of Signature Bank to further crack down on cryptocurrency. She has been a vocal advocate for cryptocurrency development and is an investor in bitcoin. Signature was the first FDIC-insured bank to offer a blockchain-based digital payment platform in 2019 and had been a go-to bank for the crypto industry.

Sen. John Kennedy, R-La., said he wanted to know how private stock analysts had warned about Silicon Valley's investments but regulators did not seem to know about potential problems.

CONGRESSIONAL ACTION Democrats in both chambers have rallied around two legislative proposals. The first, from Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., and Rep. Katie Porter, D-Calif., would repeal the 2018 rollback of certain aspects of the Dodd-Frank Act enacted after the financial crisis a decade earlier.

The Dodd-Frank Act subjected all banks with \$50 billion or more in assets to enhanced regulation, such as annual stress testing and the submission of resolution plans or "living wills" in the event of bankruptcy.

But after years of complaints from community and regional banks about the cost of compliance, Congress lifted the threshold for meeting all the Dodd-Frank Act requirements to \$250 billion.

Banks with assets valued at less than \$100 billion were automatically exempted from the enhanced

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regulation. The Fed was given the discretion to apply on a case-by-case basis the enhanced oversight for banks between the \$100 billion and \$250 billion level. Both Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank fell in that category.

"President Trump's rollback paved the way for the SVB collapse," Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said on the Senate floor Thursday.

But Republicans have countered that the tiered oversight they established in 2018 with the support of several Democrats in both chambers gave federal regulators all the tools they needed to catch the problems at Silicon Valley and Signature before they became fatal.

"I think the issue here is liquidity and there are liquidity stress tests that regulators have established for the banks," said Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, and the author of the 2018 changes to Dodd-Frank. "If they need to tighten those up, they have the authority to do it."

With that philosophical divide, it's unlikely the Warren and Porter bill will advance in Congress.

A second bill might have a better shot. The bill from Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., and Democratic Reps. Adam Schiff and Mike Levin of California would recoup any bonuses and profits that bank executives receive from stock sales make in the 60 days before a bank failure.

Republicans also directed considerable ire at the executives of the failed banks this week.

"I think all of that ought to be clawed back," Kennedy said of bonuses. "And this time, I hope somebody goes to jail."

On Friday, Biden called on Congress to grant the FDIC the power to force the return of compensation paid to executives at a broader range of banks should they fail, and to lower the threshold for the regulator to impose fines and bar executives from working at another bank.

POINTING FINGERS AT THE OTHER PARTY

The recent bank failures create an opportunity to shape the political narrative for next year's election.

While Republicans are saying that regulators were "asleep at the switch," they are also trying to tie Biden and Democrats to the turmoil by blaming them for higher inflation, which is leading to the higher interest rates and reduced the value of Silicon Valley Banks investments.

"A failure of the bank, a failure with regulators, and without any question, a failure at the top," said Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., in reference to Biden.

Democrats are pinning the failures on the changes Republicans led in scaling back Dodd-Frank requirements for certain banks, saying it's an example of how Washington caters to powerful interest groups rather than average voters.

"The 2018 rollbacks permitted the banks to take on more risk in order to boost their profits," Warren said. "So what did they do? They took on more risks, boosted their profits, gave their executives big bonuses and salaries, and then blew the banks up."

Mostly calm on Paris streets, garbage still piled up

PARIS (AP) — A spattering of protests were planned to continue in France over the weekend against President Emmanuel Macron's controversial pension reform, as garbage continued to reek in the streets of Paris and beyond owing to continuing action by refuse collectors.

An eerie calm, returned to Paris Saturday after two nights of thousands-strong protests across the French capital, with one flash point at the elegant Place de la Concorde where angry protesters tossed an effigy of Macron into a bonfire to cheers from the crowd Friday night. Police dispersed crowds with tear gas and water cannons and there were hundreds of arrests.

Protesters are trying to pressure lawmakers to bring down Macron's government and doom the unpopular retirement age increase he's trying to impose without a vote in the National Assembly.

Further protests were planned Saturday in Paris as well as in the cities of Marseille and Nantes, but they were expected to be smaller than in previous days.

In Paris' 12th district Saturday, trash piled up meters away from a bakery, wafting fumes encouraged by

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the mild weather and sunshine. Some Parisian residents buying their weekend baguette blamed Macron's administration.

"The government should change its position and listen to the people because what is happening is extremely serious. And we are seeing a radicalization," said Isabelle Vergriette, 64, a psychologist. "The government is largely responsible for this."

The district's mayor, Emmanuelle Pierre-Marie, was out and about from the crack of dawn voicing concern in her neighborhood about the consequences of the refuse pile-up, which has become a visual and olfactory symbol of the anti-pension action.

"Food waste is our priority because it is what brings pests to the surface," said Pierre-Marie. "We are extremely sensitive to the situation. As soon as we have a dumpster truck available, we give priority to the places most concerned, like food markets."

Strikes in numerous sectors, from transport to energy, are planned for Monday. The Civil Aviation authority asked that 30% of flights be canceled at Orly, Paris' second airport, and 20% in Marseille.

Laurent Berger, head of the moderate CFDT union, said the retirement reform "must be withdrawn."

"We condemn violence. ... But look at the anger. It's very strong, even among our ranks," he said on RMC radio.

On Friday, one day after Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne invoked a special constitutional power to skirt a vote in the chaotic lower chamber, lawmakers on the right and left filed no-confidence motions to be voted on Monday.

Pakistani police storm home of former PM Khan, arrest 30

By BABAR DOGAR Associated Press

LAHORE, Islamabad (AP) — Police in Pakistan stormed former Prime Minister Imran Khan's residence in the eastern city of Lahore on Saturday and arrested 30 people amid tear gas shelling after someone opened fire from the roof of the building, officials said.

Senior police officer Suhail Sukhera, who is leading the operation in an upscale Lahore neighborhood, said police moved to remove encroachments and a blockade erected by Khan's Tehreek-e-Insaf party and his defiant supporters.

He said baton-wielding Khan supporters attempted to resist police by throwing stones and petrol bombs, but the officers moved on until a man on the roof of Khan's residence opened fire. No one was hurt.

Sukhera said police broke open the main door of Khan's residence and found masks, petrol-filled bottles, iron rods and batons used in attacks on police during the week. Sukhera said that inside the sprawling residence, illegal structures were erected to shelter those who have been involved in attacks on police that have injured dozens of officers.

Witnesses said police attempted to disperse Khan supporters by firing tear gas and chased them to several homes in the Zaman Park neighborhood. Khan was expected to appear in an Islamabad court on Saturday after a top court Friday suspended his arrest warrant, giving him a reprieve to travel to Islamabad and face charges in a graft case without being detained.

Khan had been holed up at his home in Lahore since Tuesday, after failing to appear at an earlier hearing in the case. His supporters hurled stones and clashed with baton-wielding police for two days to protect the former premier from arrest.

Khan, during his road trip to Islamabad, said in a video message that the government had planned his arrest despite his travel to a hearing. He said police had broken into his residence in Lahore while his wife was alone at the home. He condemned the action and demanded that those responsible be punished.

Khan, now the opposition leader, was ousted in a no-confidence vote in Parliament last April. He is accused of selling state gifts while in office and concealing assets. It's one in a string of cases that the former cricket star turned Islamist politician has been facing since his ouster.

The 70-year-old has also claimed that his removal from power was part of a conspiracy by his successor, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, and the United States. Both Washington and Sharif's government have

denied the allegations.

Wyoming governor signs measure prohibiting abortion pills

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) — Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon signed a bill Friday night prohibiting abortion pills in the state and also allowed a separate measure restricting abortion to become law without his signature.

The pills are already banned in 13 states with blanket bans on all forms of abortion, and 15 states already have limited access to abortion pills. The Republican governor's decision comes after the issue of access to abortion pills took center stage this week in a Texas court. A federal judge there raised questions about a Christian group's effort to overturn the decades-old U.S. approval of a leading abortion drug, mifepristone.

Medication abortions became the preferred method for ending pregnancy in the U.S. even before the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, the ruling that protected the right to abortion for nearly five decades. A two-pill combination of mifepristone and another drug is the most common form of abortion in the U.S.

Wyoming's ban on abortion pills would take effect in July, pending any legal action that could potentially delay that. The implementation date of the sweeping legislation banning all abortions that Gordon allowed to go into law is not specified in the bill.

With an earlier ban tied up in court, abortion currently remains legal in the state up to viability, or when the fetus could survive outside the womb.

In a statement, Gordon expressed concern that the latter law, dubbed the Life is a Human Right Act would result in a lawsuit that will "delay any resolution to the constitutionality of the abortion ban in Wyoming."

He noted that earlier in the day, plaintiffs in an ongoing lawsuit filed a challenge to the new law in the event he did not issue a veto.

"I believe this question needs to be decided as soon as possible so that the issue of abortion in Wyoming can be finally resolved, and that is best done with a vote of the people," Gordon, a Republican, said in a statement.

In a statement, Wyoming ACLU advocacy director Antonio Serrano criticized Gordon's decision to sign the ban on abortion pills, which are already prohibited in a number of states that have total bans on all types of abortion.

"A person's health, not politics, should guide important medical decisions — including the decision to have an abortion," Serrano said.

Of the 15 states that have limited access to the pills, six require an in-person physician visit. Those laws could withstand court challenges; states have long had authority over how physicians, pharmacists and other providers practice medicine.

States also set the rules for telemedicine consultations used to prescribe medications. Generally that means health providers in states with restrictions on abortion pills could face penalties, such as fines or license suspension, for trying to send pills through the mail.

Women have already been traveling across state lines to places where abortion pill access is easier. That trend is expected to increase.

Since the reversal of *Roe* last June, abortion restrictions have been up to states and the landscape has shifted quickly. Thirteen states are now enforcing bans on abortion at any point in pregnancy, and one more, Georgia, bans it once cardiac activity can be detected, or at about six weeks' gestation.

Courts have put on hold enforcement of abortion bans or deep restrictions in Arizona, Indiana, Montana, Ohio, South Carolina, Utah and Wyoming. Idaho courts have forced the state to allow abortions during medical emergencies.

Election conspiracy movement grinds on as 2024 approaches

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

FRANKLIN, Tenn. (AP) — One by one, the presenters inside the crowded hotel ballroom shared their computer screens and promised to show how easy it is to hack into voting systems across the U.S.

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Drawing gasps from the crowd, they highlighted theoretical vulnerabilities and problems from past elections. But instead of tailoring their efforts to improve election security, they argued that all voting machines should be eliminated — a message that was wrapped in conspiracies about elections being rigged to favor certain candidates.

"We are at war. The only thing that's not flying right now is bullets," said Mark Finchem, a Republican candidate for secretary of state in Arizona last year who continues to contest his loss and was the final speaker of the daylong conference.

Finchem was among a group of Republican candidates running for governor, secretary of state or state attorney who disputed the outcome of the 2020 election and who lost in a clean sweep last November in important political battleground states, including Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Yet deep distrust about U.S. elections persists among Republicans, skepticism fueled by former President Donald Trump's false claims and by allies who have been traveling the country meeting with community groups and holding forums like the one recently just outside Nashville, attended by some 250 people.

As the nation barrels toward the next presidential election, the election conspiracy movement that mushroomed after the last one shows no signs of slowing down. Millions have been convinced that any election in which their preferred candidate loses has been somehow rigged against them, a belief that has fed efforts among conservatives to ditch voting machines and to halt or delay certification of election results.

"Voters who know the truth about our elections have faith in them," said Liz Iacobucci, election security program manager with the voter advocacy group Common Cause. "But the people who have been led into disbelief — those people can be led into other things, like Jan. 6."

Trump, running for the White House for the third time, has signaled that the 2020 election will remain an integral part of his 2024 presidential bid. In a recent call with reporters about a new book, Trump pointed to polls that show a sizable number of people believe the 2020 election was stolen, even though there is no such evidence.

"I'm an election denier," Trump said. "You've got a lot of election deniers in this country and they're not happy about what's happened."

There has been no evidence of widespread fraud or manipulation of voting machines in the U.S., and multiple reviews in the battleground states where Trump disputed his loss confirmed the election results were accurate. State and local election officials have spent more than two years explaining the many layers of protection that surround voting systems, and last year's midterm election was largely uneventful.

Trump allies such as MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell and former Trump national security adviser Michael Flynn remain prominent voices calling for a ban on voting machines. They want hand-marked paper ballots counted individually without the aid of machines by poll workers in the nearly 180,000 voting precincts across the country.

"We all have the same agenda, to get our elections fair and transparent and where they can't be hacked," said Lindell, who recently announced plans to form what he calls an "election crime bureau" to bring his myriad legal, cybersecurity and legislative efforts under one organization.

In an interview, Lindell said he has spent \$40 million since the 2020 election investigating fraud claims and supporting efforts to ban voting machines. He said he is taking out loans to continue to fund the work.

During an "America First Forum" held last month in South Carolina, Flynn told those gathered at a Charleston hotel that they were fighting not only Democrats but fellow Republicans who are dismissive of their concerns about the 2020 election.

"Our Republican Party, they want to move on," Flynn said via video conference. "And frankly, the American people are not going to move on."

An investigation by the AP and the PBS series "Frontline" last year examined how Flynn, a retired Army lieutenant general, was traveling the country spreading conspiracy theories about the 2020 election and vaccines as he builds a movement based on Christian nationalist ideas. He relies in part on groups such as The America Project and America's Future.

The America Project was launched in 2021 by Patrick Byrne, founder of Overstock.com. Byrne said elections remain a top priority for the group, though it also will focus on border issues. Asked how much he's

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planning to spend ahead of the 2024 election, Byrne told the AP, "There is no budget."

"I have no children, no wife," he said. "There's no point in me saving it for anything."

Recently filed tax forms do not detail where the group's \$7.7 million in revenue came from that year, but Byrne and Michael Flynn's brother, Joseph Flynn, told the AP that most of it came from Byrne himself. The group reported giving \$2.75 million to Cyber Ninjas for a partisan and much-criticized review of the 2020 election in Maricopa County, Arizona, which includes Phoenix.

Michael Flynn is now focused on the nonprofit group he leads, America's Future, and other projects, according to his brother. That group reported raising \$2.3 million in 2021 and paying out \$1.2 million in grants, including just under \$1 million to Cyber Ninjas.

Others who have been central in the effort to raise doubts about the accuracy of elections also have been active this year. Among them is Douglas Frank, an Ohio math and science educator, who said on his social media account that he met with various groups in six states in January, seven states in February and planned to be in eight states in March.

At the Tennessee forum, Kathy Harms, one of the event organizers, took the stage to talk about why she is fighting to get rid of voting machines.

"I don't do this for me. I would rather just be a grandmother at home," said Harms, who lives in the county where the conference was held. "I have granddaughters I do this for because I want them to have what I have. I don't want a banana republic."

Presentations by people who work in information technology claimed election officials have little security knowledge or experience.

One of them, Mark Cook, walked attendees through the voting process, pointing out potential threats and playing a video he said was of an "Iranian whistleblower" accessing U.S. voter registration data to fraudulently request and submit military ballots.

Cook said the video had some "real components to it" and "could be legitimate." He did not mention that an influx of duplicate military ballots would be readily apparent because election workers log each person who casts a ballot, meaning a second ballot that appears to be cast by the same person would be caught.

"There are thousands of ways to exploit these systems," Cook said, dismissing security steps taken by election officials as a "shell game" and "smoke and mirrors to distract us."

Election officials acknowledge that vulnerabilities exist, but say multiple defenses are in place to thwart attempted manipulation or detect malicious activity.

"Election officials and their partners understand that the goal isn't to create a perfect election system, but one that ensures that any attack on the election system doesn't exceed the ability to detect and recover from it," said David Levine, a former local election official who is now a fellow with the Alliance for Securing Democracy.

Among those listening to the presentations at the Tennessee conference was Luann Adler, a retired educator and school administrator who said she has lost confidence in elections after reading articles and watching videos online about voting machines. She has been advocating in her community to ban voting machines and limit voting to a single day.

Serving as a poll worker last year, Adler said, she did not observe any problems. Still, the experience did not change her mind.

"As we have seen today, a machine can be manipulated," Adler said. "I'm not pointing the finger at any individual or any community as being nefarious, but I don't trust the machine."

Fairleigh Dickinson stuns No. 1 seed Purdue in March Madness

By TOM WITHERS AP Sports Writer

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Fairleigh Dickinson brought down a giant.

Pulling off one of the biggest upsets in NCAA Tournament history, the undersized, underdog Knights stunned top-seeded Purdue 63-58 on Friday night, becoming the second No. 16 seed to win a game in

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March Madness.

The shortest of the 363 Division I teams in the country, the Knights (21-15) showed no fear in swarming 7-foot-4 All-America center Zach Edey from the start and simply outplayed the Big Ten champion Boilermakers (29-6).

"If we played them 100 times, they'd probably beat us 99 times," FDU coach Tobin Anderson said. "Play them 100 times, we have one win. But tonight's the one we had to be unique, we had to be unorthodox. We had to make it tough on them, just be different."

Sean Moore scored 19 points to lead FDU and a relentless defensive charge — the Knights pressed most of the game — by a team that now has everyone's attention.

Five years ago, UMBC showed the way for the little guys by overwhelming Virginia in the first 16-over-1 victory after numerous close calls over the years. Still, No. 16s had a 1-150 record against No. 1s and were 1-151 overall before FDU's shocker.

After the final horn, FDU's players mobbed each other on the floor of Nationwide Arena, where the fans from Memphis and Florida Atlantic who were waiting for the day's final game joined forces in cheering on the Knights in the final, frantic minutes.

The Knights will meet FAU — a 66-65 winner over Memphis — on Sunday for a Sweet 16 berth and a trip next week to play at Madison Square Garden in New York, just a short drive from the private school's main campus in Teaneck, New Jersey.

"Man, I can't even explain it," Moore said. "I'm still in shock right now. I can't believe it. It's crazy. But it feels amazing."

Fairleigh Dickinson didn't even win the Northeast Conference Tournament, falling by one point in the title game to Merrimack, which couldn't participate in the NCAA Tournament because of an NCAA rule that bars it from the postseason because it's still completing its four-year transition from Division II.

FDU held Purdue scoreless for more than 5 1/2 minutes down the stretch and moved ahead by five on a 3-pointer by Moore — who is from suburban Columbus — with 1:03 left.

The Knights held on from there, becoming the third straight double-digit seed to send the Boilermakers home. Purdue was a No. 3 seed when it lost to No. 15 seed Saint Peter's, another small New Jersey school, in the Sweet 16 last year. The Boilermakers were bounced in the first round by 13th-seeded North Texas in 2021.

"Our job was just to come into the game and throw a punch," said FDU's Demetre Roberts, 20 inches shorter than Edey. "We knew they would throw multiple punches. Just throw a punch back. We knew what type of game this was."

Edey finished with 21 points and 15 rebounds in what may have been his final college game, but the Knights were masterful against him in the second half. Edey didn't attempt a shot in the final nine minutes, and anytime he touched the ball there were FDU players draped all around him.

"A lot of times they would have one dude guarding from behind and one dude basically sitting in my lap," Edey said. "They were full fronting the entire game. Made it very hard to get catches. Credit to them, they had a great game plan coming in. And they executed it very well."

When Purdue's late push fell short and its season ended, Edey squeezed the shoulder straps on his jersey and walked stone-faced toward Purdue's locker room.

The junior center is a possible NBA lottery pick, but the bitterness of this defeat could sway Edey to stick around for another year.

"I have no opinion on that," Edey said when asked about his future. "I'll make my decision going forward."

The Knights' two prior NCAA Tournament wins came in the First Four, including this year, when they drubbed Texas Southern 84-61. After that game, Anderson told his players he believed they could handle Edey and Co.

"The more I see Purdue, the more I think we can beat them," Anderson said with a camera in the locker room.

Some of Purdue's players said they felt disrespected by the comments, which turned out to be prophetic.

"It was the right message, wrong audience," Anderson said. "I would have said that with no camera in

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there. I didn't mean to get Purdue upset. That was not the idea at all. But that's got to be the message. We're trying to win the next game. We just can't be happy to be here."

"And the guys gotta believe."

Just being in the tourney was quite an accomplishment for FDU, which went 4-22 a year ago and now has two NCAA tourney wins in three days.

This was Anderson's first season at the school, and after he landed the job in May, he held a practice the first night just so he knew what he had to work with from a team that had the second-worst record in the program's 58-year history.

It wasn't a lot, so he brought three players — Roberts, Grant Singleton and Moore — along with him from Division II power St. Thomas Aquinas.

Turns out, they're giant slayers.

"We're the shortest team in the country," Anderson said. "But we made him (Edey) uncomfortable. And the things he made were not easy baskets. I don't think he ever felt terribly comfortable. And that was just a great team effort."

"We were sagging in the paint. We went off certain shooters. Let's make them make 3s, but not give them 3s -- make them make 3s. Just an unbelievable team effort."

Purdue finished 5 of 26 from beyond the arc — including 3 of 15 in the second half.

It was the Boilermakers, not the undersized Knights, who were scrambling from the opening tip.

Purdue may have had Fairleigh Dickinson outsized on the floor and in the stands as a boisterous group of Boilermakers fans gave their team what felt like a home-court advantage despite being 240 miles from West Lafayette, Indiana.

However, when the Knights' Joe Munden drained a step-back 3-pointer in the first half, "F-D-U!" chants broke out inside the arena and it became obvious this small team had big dreams.

Without a player on its roster taller than 6-6, Fairleigh Dickinson sometimes needed two players to guard Edey — one in front and one behind — and he missed his first three shots before a dunk.

Edey showed some frustration and at one point told one of the officials, "Sir, he's holding my left arm."

Purdue eventually settled in and reeled off 11 straight points — four on Edey free throws — to take 24-19 lead. The Knights, though, responded with their own spurt and Heru Bligen's layup after a steal helped FDU take a 32-31 into halftime.

Roberts finished with 12 points and 6-4 forward Cameron Tweedy had 10 points on 5-of-6 shooting for FDU.

Officials are preparing security in case of Trump indictment

By COLLEEN LONG and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Law enforcement officials in New York are making security preparations for the possibility that former President Donald Trump could be indicted in the coming weeks and appear in a Manhattan courtroom in an investigation examining hush money paid to women who alleged sexual encounters with him, four law enforcement officials said Friday.

There has been no public announcement of any timeframe for the grand jury's secret work, including any potential vote on whether to indict the ex-president.

The law enforcement officials, who were not authorized to speak publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, said authorities are just preparing in case of an indictment. They described the conversations as preliminary and are considering security, planning and the practicalities of a potential court appearance by a former president.

Trump's lawyer, Joseph Tacopina, told The Associated Press that if Trump is indicted, "we will follow the normal procedures."

The Manhattan district attorney's office had no comment. A message was left for court administrators.

The grand jury has been hearing from witnesses including former Trump lawyer Michael Cohen, who says he orchestrated payments in 2016 to two women to silence them about sexual encounters they said

they had with Trump a decade earlier.

Trump denies the encounters occurred, says he did nothing wrong and has cast the investigation as a "witch hunt" by a Democratic prosecutor bent on sabotaging the Republican's 2024 presidential campaign.

"Democrats have investigated and attacked President Trump since before he was elected — and they've failed every time," campaign spokesperson Steven Cheung said in a statement Thursday about the inquiry.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office has apparently been examining whether any state laws were broken in connection with the payments or the way Trump's company compensated Cohen for his work to keep the women's allegations quiet.

Daniels and at least two former Trump aides — onetime political adviser Kellyanne Conway and former spokesperson Hope Hicks — are among witnesses who have met with prosecutors in recent weeks.

Cohen has said that at Trump's direction, he arranged payments totaling \$280,000 to porn actor Stormy Daniels and Playboy model Karen McDougal. According to Cohen, the payouts were to buy their silence about Trump, who was then in the thick of his first presidential campaign.

Cohen and federal prosecutors said the company paid him \$420,000 to reimburse him for the \$130,000 payment to Daniels and to cover bonuses and other supposed expenses. The company classified those payments internally as legal expenses.

The \$150,000 payment to McDougal was made by the then-publisher of the supermarket tabloid National Enquirer, which kept her story from coming to light.

Federal prosecutors agreed not to prosecute the Enquirer's corporate parent in exchange for its cooperation in a campaign finance investigation that led to charges against Cohen in 2018. Prosecutors said the payments to Daniels and McDougal amounted to impermissible, unrecorded gifts to Trump's election effort.

Cohen pleaded guilty, served prison time and was disbarred. Federal prosecutors never charged Trump with any crime.

Judge orders more Trump lawyer testimony in Mar-a-Lago probe

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal prosecutors investigating the potential mishandling of classified documents at former President Donald Trump's Florida estate will be able to again question a Trump lawyer before a grand jury, a judge has ruled in a sealed order.

The order will require M. Evan Corcoran to answer additional questions as prosecutors pursue their investigation into classified documents found at Mar-a-Lago as well as potential efforts to obstruct that probe. The order was described Friday by a person familiar with it, who was not authorized to discuss a sealed proceeding and spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity.

The precise scope of the order, which is expected to be appealed, was not immediately clear. Neither Corcoran nor his lawyer returned messages seeking comment, and a spokesman for special counsel Jack Smith, who is leading the investigation, also did not respond to an email about the order.

A Trump spokesman said the Trump team would "fight the Department of Justice on this front and all others that jeopardize fundamental American rights and values."

Corcoran had already appeared weeks ago before the federal grand jury in Washington investigating the Mar-a-Lago matter, but he had invoked attorney-client privilege in declining to answer certain questions. That privilege protects lawyers from being forced to share with prosecutors details of the conversations they have with clients.

Prosecutors can get around that privilege if they can convince a judge that an attorney's services were being used in furtherance of a crime — a principle known as the crime-fraud exception. The Justice Department invoked that exception in this case, arguing to Beryl Howell, the outgoing chief judge of the federal court in Washington, D.C., that more testimony was needed.

Howell issued her order granting at least some additional testimony before the end of her tenure Friday as chief judge. She is being replaced as chief judge by James "Jeb" Boasberg, a fellow Obama appointee who has served on the federal bench since 2011.

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Corcoran is regarded as relevant to the investigation in part because last year he drafted a statement to the Justice Department asserting that a "diligent search" for classified documents had been conducted at Mar-a-Lago in response to a subpoena. Months later, though, FBI agents searched the home with a warrant and found roughly 100 additional documents with classified markings.

The Justice Department is investigating whether Trump or anyone in his orbit obstructed its efforts to recover all the classified documents, which included top-secret material, from his home.

As chief judge, Boasberg will have oversight of federal grand juries, including ones handling Trump matters, in the courthouse and will preside over sealed disputes like the Corcoran one.

Separately, former Vice President Mike Pence has said he will challenge a grand jury subpoena that seeks to compel him to testify in the special counsel's Jan. 6. investigation. Pence has argued that because he was serving in his role as president of the Senate on Jan. 6, as he presided over a joint session of Congress to certify the election results, he is protected from being forced to address his actions under the Constitution's "speech-or-debate" clause that shields members of Congress.

It is not clear how that disagreement will be resolved.

How a warrant for Putin puts new spin on Xi visit to Russia

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chinese President Xi Jinping's plans to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow next week highlighted China's aspirations for a greater role on the world stage. But they also revealed the perils of global diplomacy: Hours after Friday's announcement of the trip, an international arrest warrant was issued for Putin on war crimes charges, taking at least some wind out of the sails of China's big reveal.

The flurry of developments — which followed China's brokering of an agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran to resume diplomatic relations and its release of what it calls a "peace plan" for Ukraine — came as the Biden administration watches warily Beijing's moves to assert itself more forcefully in international affairs.

U.S. President Joe Biden said Friday he believes the decision by the International Criminal Court in The Hague to charge Putin was "justified." Speaking to reporters as he left the White House for his Delaware home, he said Putin "clearly committed war crimes."

While the U.S. does not recognize the court, Biden said it "makes a very strong point" to call out the Russian leader for his actions in ordering the invasion of Ukraine.

Other U.S. officials privately expressed satisfaction that an international body had agreed with Washington's assessment that Russia has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine.

Asked about the Xi-Putin meeting, Biden said, "Well, we'll see when that meeting takes place."

The Biden administration believes China's desire to be seen as a broker for peace between Russia and Ukraine may be viewed more critically now that Putin is officially a war crime suspect, according to two U.S. officials. The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the matter publicly, said the administration hopes the warrants will help mobilize heretofore neutral countries to weigh in on the conflict.

A look at the Xi-Putin meeting and how it may be affected by the warrant.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF XI MEETING WITH PUTIN?

The visit to Russia will be Xi's first foreign trip since being elected to an unprecedented third term as China's president. It comes as Beijing and Moscow have intensified ties in steps that began shortly before Russia's invasion of Ukraine with a meeting between the two leaders in Beijing during last year's Winter Olympics at which they declared a "no limits" partnership.

Since then, China has repeatedly sided with Russia in blocking international action against Moscow for the Ukraine conflict and, U.S. officials say, is considering supplying Russia with weapons to support the war. But it has also tried to cast itself in a more neutral role, offering a peace plan that was essentially ignored.

The meeting in Moscow is likely to see the two sides recommit to their partnership, which both see

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as critical to countering what they consider undue and undeserved influence exerted by the U.S. and its Western allies.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ICC ARREST WARRANT ISSUED FOR PUTIN?

In the immediate term, the ICC's warrant for Putin and one of his aides is unlikely to have a major impact on the meeting or China's position toward Russia. Neither China nor Russia — nor the United States or Ukraine — has ratified the ICC's founding treaty. The U.S., beginning with the Clinton administration, has refused to join the court, fearing that its broad mandate could result in the prosecution of American troops or officials.

That means that none of the four countries formally recognizes the court's jurisdiction or is bound by its orders, although Ukraine has consented to allowing some ICC probes of crimes on its territory and the U.S. has cooperated with ICC investigations.

In addition, it is highly unlikely that Putin would travel to a country that would be bound by obligations to the ICC. If he did, it is questionable whether that country would actually arrest him. There is precedent for those previously indicted, notably former Sudanese President Omar Bashir, to have visited ICC members without being detained.

However, the stain of the arrest warrant could well work against China and Russia in the court of public opinion and Putin's international status may take a hit unless the charges are withdrawn or he is acquitted.

WHAT IS THE VIEW FROM WASHINGTON?

U.S. officials have not minced words when it comes to Xi's planned visit to Moscow. White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby called Beijing's push for an immediate cease-fire in Ukraine a "ratification of Russian conquest" and warned that Russians could use a cease-fire to regroup their positions "so that they can restart attacks on Ukraine at a time of their choosing."

"We do not believe that this is a step towards a just, durable peace," he said. Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan this week called on Xi to also speak with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian leader has also expressed interest in talks with Xi.

WHAT IS THE VIEW FROM KYIV?

Speaking before the ICC warrant was unveiled, Ukrainian analysts cautioned against falling into a potential trap ahead of the Xi-Putin meeting. "We need to be aware that such peace talks are a trap for Ukraine and its diplomatic corps," said Yurii Poita, who heads the Asia section at the Kyiv-based New Geopolitics Research Network.

"Under such conditions, these peace talks won't be directed toward peace," said Nataliia Butyrska, a Ukrainian analyst on politics related to Eastern Asia. She said the visit reflects not so much China's desire for peace but its desire to play a major role in whatever post-conflict settlement may be reached.

"China does not clearly distinguish between who is the aggressor and who is the victim. And when a country begins its peacekeeping activities or at least seeks to help the parties, not distinguishing this will affect objectivity," Butyrska said. "From my perspective, China seeks to freeze the conflict."

WHAT IS THE VIEW FROM MOSCOW?

Even if China stops short of providing military assistance to Russia as the U.S. and its allies fear, Moscow sees Xi's visit as a powerful signal of Chinese backing that challenges Western efforts to isolate Russia and deal crippling blows to its economy.

Kremlin spokesman Yuri Ushakov noted that Putin and Xi have "very special friendly and trusting personal ties" and hailed Beijing's peace plan. "We highly appreciate the restrained, well-balanced position of the Chinese leadership on this issue," Ushakov said.

Observers say that despite China's posturing as a mediator, its refusal to condemn the Russian action leaves no doubt about where Beijing's sympathy lies.

"The Chinese peace plan is a fig leaf to push back against some Western criticism on support for Russia," said Alexander Gabuev, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "The optics that it creates is that China has a peace plan, both parties of war endorsed it and were ready to explore the opportunities and then it was killed by the hostile West."

WHAT IS THE VIEW FROM BEIJING?

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Chinese officials have been boasting about their new-found clout in the international arena as their country's foreign policy has become increasingly assertive under Xi.

In announcing the Xi visit, China's foreign ministry said Beijing's ties with Moscow are a significant world force. "As the world enters a new period of turbulence and change, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and an important power, the significance and influence of China-Russia relations go far beyond the bilateral scope," it said.

It called the visit "a journey of friendship, further deepening mutual trust and understanding between China and Russia, and consolidating the political foundation and public opinion foundation of friendship between the two peoples for generations."

Lack of hugs caused US fentanyl crisis, Mexico's leader says

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico's president said Friday that U.S. families were to blame for the fentanyl overdose crisis because they don't hug their kids enough.

The comment by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador caps a week of provocative statements from him about the crisis caused by the fentanyl, a synthetic opioid trafficked by Mexican cartels that has been blamed for about 70,000 overdose deaths per year in the United States.

López Obrador said family values have broken down in the United States, because parents don't let their children live at home long enough. He has also denied that Mexico produces fentanyl.

On Friday, the Mexican president told a morning news briefing that the problem was caused by "a lack of hugs, of embraces."

"There is a lot of disintegration of families, there is a lot of individualism, there is a lack of love, of brotherhood, of hugs and embraces," López Obrador said of the U.S. crisis. "That is why they (U.S. officials) should be dedicating funds to address the causes."

López Obrador has repeatedly said that Mexico's close-knit family values are what have saved it from the wave of fentanyl overdoses. Experts say that Mexican cartels are making so much money now from the U.S. market that they see no need to sell fentanyl in their home market.

Cartels frequently sell methamphetamines in Mexico, where the drug is more popular because it purportedly helps people work harder.

López Obrador has been stung by calls in the United States to designate Mexican drug gangs as terrorist organizations. Some Republicans have said they favor using the U.S. military to crack down on the Mexican cartels.

On Wednesday, López Obrador called anti-drug policies in the U.S. a failure Wednesday and proposed a ban in both countries on using fentanyl in medicine — even though little of the drug crosses from hospitals into the illegal market.

U.S. authorities estimate that most illegal fentanyl is produced in clandestine Mexican labs using Chinese precursor chemicals. Relatively little of the illegal market comes from diverting medicinal fentanyl used as anesthesia in surgeries and other procedures.

There have been only scattered and isolated reports of glass flasks of medicinal fentanyl making it to the illegal market. Most illegal fentanyl is pressed by Mexican cartels into counterfeit pills made to look like other medications like Xanax, oxycodone or Percocet.

New COVID origins data point to raccoon dogs in China market

By DAKE KANG and MARIA CHENG Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Genetic material collected at a Chinese market near where the first human cases of COVID-19 were identified show raccoon dog DNA comingled with the virus, adding evidence to the theory that the virus originated from animals, not from a lab, international experts say.

"These data do not provide a definitive answer to how the pandemic began, but every piece of data is important to moving us closer to that answer," World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adha-

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nom Ghebreyesus said Friday.

How the coronavirus emerged remains unclear. Many scientists believe it most likely jumped from animals to people, as many other viruses have in the past, at a wildlife market in Wuhan, China. But Wuhan is home to several labs involved in collecting and studying coronaviruses, fueling theories scientists say are plausible that the virus may have leaked from one.

The new findings do not settle the question, and they have not been formally reviewed by other experts or published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Tedros criticized China for not sharing the genetic information earlier, telling a press briefing that "this data could have and should have been shared three years ago."

The samples were collected from surfaces at the Huanan seafood market in early 2020 in Wuhan, where the first human cases of COVID-19 were found in late 2019.

Tedros said the genetic sequences were recently uploaded to the world's biggest public virus database by scientists at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

They were then removed, but not before a French biologist spotted the information by chance and shared it with a group of scientists based outside China that's looking into the origins of the coronavirus.

The data show that some of the COVID-positive samples collected from a stall known to be involved in the wildlife trade also contained raccoon dog genes, indicating the animals may have been infected by the virus, according to the scientists. Their analysis was first reported in *The Atlantic*.

"There's a good chance that the animals that deposited that DNA also deposited the virus," said Stephen Goldstein, a virologist at the University of Utah who was involved in analyzing the data. "If you were to go and do environmental sampling in the aftermath of a zoonotic spillover event ... this is basically exactly what you would expect to find."

The canines, named for their raccoon-like faces, are often bred for their fur and sold for meat in animal markets across China.

Ray Yip, an epidemiologist and founding member of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control office in China, said the findings are significant, even though they aren't definitive.

"The market environmental sampling data published by China CDC is by far the strongest evidence to support animal origins," Yip told the AP in an email. He was not connected to the new analysis.

WHO's COVID-19 technical lead, Maria Van Kerkhove, cautioned that the analysis did not find the virus within any animal, nor did it find any hard evidence that any animals infected humans.

"What this does provide is clues to help us understand what may have happened," she said. The international group also told WHO they found DNA from other animals as well as raccoon dogs in the samples from the seafood market, she added.

The coronavirus' genetic code is strikingly similar to that of bat coronaviruses, and many scientists suspect COVID-19 jumped into humans either directly from a bat or via an intermediary animal like pangolins, ferrets or raccoon dogs.

Efforts to determine the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic have been complicated by factors including the massive surge of human infections in the pandemic's first two years and an increasingly bitter political dispute.

It took virus experts more than a dozen years to pinpoint the animal origin of SARS, a related virus.

Goldstein and his colleagues say their analysis is the first solid indication that there may have been wildlife infected with the coronavirus at the market. But it is also possible that humans brought the virus to the market and infected the raccoon dogs, or that infected humans simply happened to leave traces of the virus near the animals.

After scientists in the group contacted the China CDC, they say, the sequences were removed from the global virus database. Researchers are puzzled as to why data on the samples collected over three years ago wasn't made public sooner. Tedros has pleaded with China to share more of its COVID-19 research data.

Gao Fu, the former head of the Chinese CDC and lead author of the Chinese paper, didn't immediately respond to an Associated Press email requesting comment. But he told *Science* magazine the sequences

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are “nothing new. It had been known there was illegal animal dealing and this is why the market was immediately shut down.”

Goldstein said his group presented its findings this week to a WHO advisory panel investigating COVID-19’s origins.

Michael Imperiale of the University of Michigan, a microbiology and immunology expert who was not involved in the data analysis, said finding a sample with sequences from the virus and a raccoon dog “places the virus and the dog in very close proximity. But it doesn’t necessarily say that the dog was infected with the virus; it just says that they were in the same very small area.”

He said the bulk of the scientific evidence at this point supports a natural exposure at the market, and pointed to research published last summer showing the market was likely the early epicenter of the scourge and concluding that the virus spilled from animals into people two separate times. “What’s the chance that there were two different lab leaks?” he asked.

Mark Woolhouse, an infectious diseases expert at the University of Edinburgh, said it will be crucial to see how the raccoon dogs’ genetic sequences match up to what’s known about the historic evolution of the COVID-19 virus. If the dogs are shown to have COVID and those viruses prove to have earlier origins than the ones that infected people, “that’s probably as good evidence as we can expect to get that this was a spillover event in the market.”

After a weeks-long visit to China to study the pandemic’s origins, WHO released a report in 2021 concluding that COVID-19 most probably jumped into humans from animals, dismissing the possibility of a lab origin as “extremely unlikely.”

But the U.N. health agency backtracked the following year, saying “key pieces of data” were still missing. And Tedros has said all hypotheses remain on the table.

The China CDC scientists who previously analyzed the Huanan market samples published a paper as a preprint in February suggesting that humans brought the virus to the market, not animals, implying that the virus originated elsewhere. Their paper didn’t mention that animal genes were found in the samples that tested positive.

In February, the Wall Street Journal reported that the U.S. Department of Energy had assessed “with low confidence” that the virus had leaked from a lab. But others in the U.S. intelligence community disagree, believing it more likely it first came from animals.

Experts say the true origin of the pandemic may not be known for many years — if ever.

Former Air Force officer gets prison term for Capitol attack

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A retired Air Force officer who stormed the U.S. Capitol dressed in combat gear and carried zip-tie handcuffs into the Senate gallery was sentenced on Friday to two years in prison.

Larry Brock, 55, of Grapevine, Texas, joined other rioters on the Senate floor only minutes after then-Vice President Mike Pence, senators and their staff evacuated the chamber to escape the mob attacking the building on Jan. 6, 2021.

U.S. District Judge John Bates also sentenced Brock to two years of supervised release after his prison term and ordered him to perform 100 hours of community service. Brock, who declined to speak in court before the judge imposed his sentence, remains free until he must report to prison at a date to be determined.

Prosecutors had recommended a sentence of five years in prison followed by three years of supervised release.

Bates convicted Brock in November after a trial without a jury. Brock waived his right to a jury trial.

The judge said Brock expressed “very troubling” and violent rhetoric before the Jan. 6 riot. The judge read aloud several of Brock’s social media postings calling it “really pretty astounding” that a former high-ranking military officer expressed those words.

“That’s chilling stuff, and it does reflect a purpose to stop the certification of the election,” Bates said.

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Brock believed baseless conspiracy theories that the 2020 presidential election was stolen from Republican incumbent Donald Trump, prosecutors said.

"When we get to the bottom of this conspiracy we need to execute the traitors that are trying to steal the election, and that includes the leaders of the media and social media aiding and abetting the coup plotters," Brock wrote in a Nov. 9, 2020, post on Facebook.

In a Facebook message to another user on Christmas Eve, Brock outlined what he called a "plan of action if Congress fails to act" on Jan. 6. One of the "main tasks" in his plan was to "seize all Democratic politicians and Biden key staff and select Republicans."

"Begin interrogations using measures we used on al-Qaida to gain evidence on the coup," he wrote.

Brock flew combat missions in Afghanistan before retiring from the Air Force as a lieutenant colonel.

His "plan of action" also called for a "general pardon for all crimes up to and including murder of those restoring the Constitution and putting down the Democratic Insurrection."

"Do not kill LEO unless necessary," he wrote, apparently referring to law enforcement officers.

Brock didn't engage in any violence on Jan. 6, but prosecutors said his behavior was "disturbingly pre-mediated."

"Had the Senate Gallery not been emptied minutes before, Brock could have come face-to-face with the politicians he had fantasized about seizing and interrogating," they wrote in a court filing.

Bates convicted Brock of all six counts in his indictment, including obstruction of an official proceeding, the Jan. 6 joint session of Congress for certifying President Joe Biden's electoral victory, The obstruction charge is a felony; the other five counts are misdemeanors.

Defense attorney Charles Burnham said it is "inconceivable that (Brock) was motivated by anything other than genuine concern for democracy."

"If Mr. Brock was sincerely motivated by high ideals, it significantly reduces his culpability even if the Court should privately disagree with his view," Burnham wrote in a court filing.

Brock attended the "Stop the Steal" rally where Trump addressed a crowd of supporters on Jan. 6. He was wearing a helmet and tactical vest when he joined the mob that attacked the Capitol. He entered the building through Senate wing doors roughly 12 minutes after other rioters initially breached them.

On the floor near the East Rotunda stairs, Brock picked up a discarded pair of zip-tie handcuffs. He held the "flex-cuffs" in his right hand in the Senate gallery. On the Senate floor, he examined paperwork on senators' desks.

"This was consistent with Brock's stated overall mission on January 6, which was intelligence gathering to stop the certification and the transfer of power," prosecutors wrote.

Brock graduated from the Air Force Academy in 1989. He was on active duty until 1998 and served in the reserves until 2014.

In a letter to the judge, a retired Air Force major general praised Brock's military service. The major general, whose name was redacted from public court filings, said Brock risked his life to protect U.S. forces from a Taliban attack, flying below mountain peaks into a valley "saturated with enemy forces."

"The result thwarted enemy advances on U.S. personnel, saved U.S. lives and defused an ever-escalating situation for the forces at that remote base in Afghanistan," the major general wrote.

Brock was employed as a commercial airline pilot on Jan. 6. His lawyer said the Federal Aviation Administration revoked Brock's licenses after his January 2021 arrest.

Approximately 1,000 people have been charged with federal crimes related to the Jan. 6 riot. More than 400 of them have been sentenced, with over half getting terms of imprisonment ranging from seven days to 10 years.

At least 70 of the sentenced rioters have served in the military, according to an Associated Press review of court records.

Also on Friday, a rioter who signed up for the Air Force after assaulting police at the Capitol was sentenced to three years and four months in prison by U.S. District Judge Reggie Walton. Aiden Bilyard was 18 when he sprayed a chemical irritant toward a line of police officers before using a baseball bat to smash a window at the Capitol.

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Bilyard was attending basic training at Lackland Air Force Base near San Antonio, Texas, when the FBI questioned him several months after the riot. He later separated from the Air Force and returned home to Cary, North Carolina. Bilyard, now 20, pleaded guilty to an assault charge last year.

New this week: 'Top Gun,' Lana Del Rey and 'Rabbit Hole'

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's a collection curated by The Associated Press' entertainment journalists of what's arriving on TV, streaming services and music and video game platforms this week.

MOVIES

— The Oscar-nominated "All the Beauty and the Bloodshed" was one of the high points in documentary in the past year. In it, Laura Poitras chronicles the pioneering photographer Nan Goldin, juxtaposing an intimate survey of her groundbreaking work in 1970s and 1980s New York and her contemporary crusade against the Sackler family, owners of the Oxycontin-maker Purdue Pharma. Goldin, who has herself wrestled with addiction, led the campaign to eradicate the Sackler name from many of the world's top museums. Though the film didn't win at the Oscars — something Goldin told me she was surprised to find she wanted — it took the top prize of the Venice Film Festival. In her review, AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr called the film "a holistic portrait of an artist's battle cry." After debuting Sunday, March 19, "All the Beauty and the Bloodshed" is available to stream on HBO Max.

— "Top Gun: Maverick" did come away with an Academy Award, for best sound. But one of the biggest box office hits of the year otherwise struck out at the Oscars. After an uncommonly long run in theaters, a lucrative stop on video on demand and a streaming launch on Paramount+, "Top Gun Maverick" arrives on a larger streaming platform Friday, March 24th, when it touches down on Amazon's Prime Video. In his review, AP Entertainment Writer Mark Kennedy called "Maverick" "a textbook example of how to make a sequel."

— This month, the Criterion Channel has been paying tribute to the greatest comic artist of the 20th century: Buster Keaton. With five features and more than a dozen shorts, the series is an unbeatable feast. You can't go wrong but a few highlights: Keaton's glorious Olympic finale in "College"; his deft ladder balancing act in "Cops"; and his escape, through a high window, from an angry police chief-slash-furious-father in "The Goat." With apologies to Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd, nobody did it better.

— AP Film Writer Jake Coyle

MUSIC

— Fans of Lana Del Rey got two albums in 2021 — "Chemtrails Over the Country Club" and "Blue Banisters" but nothing full-length in 2022. Now she's got "Did You Know That There's a Tunnel Under Ocean Blvd" set to drop Friday, March 24. One of the singles, "A&W," offers a glimpse at the sing-songwriter's bleak poetry: "Puts the shower on while he calls me/Slips out the back door to talk to me/I'm invisible, look how you hold me/I'm a ghost now." The album features Jack Antonoff, Father John Misty, Jon Batiste and more.

— Back in 1984, Phil Collins and Philip Bailey had a hit with the song "Easy Lover." These days, UK pop star Ellie Goulding and Big Sean have a song with the same title that's just as infectiously fun, part of Goulding's 11-track album "Higher Than Heaven." The songs marry her ethereal voice to strong dance hooks, from the '80s-inspired "By the End of the Night" and "Just 4 You" to the modern pop of "Cure for Love."

— Do you have what it takes to be a country music's next big star? Then tune into Apple TV+'s "My Kind of Country," in which Jimmie Allen, Mickey Guyton and Orville Peck search for talented amateur artists and invite them to Nashville, Tennessee, for a showcase. Reese Witherspoon and Kacey Musgraves also are featured in the series, set to premiere globally on Friday, March 24.

— 6lack is 6ack! The Atlanta singer-songwriter and rapper known as 6lack — pronounced "black" — returns with "Since I Have a Lover," his first album in nearly five years. The title track is a airy, sweet ode to love with the lyrics: "Feel like a million bucks or somethin'/ Feel like we need to be up to somethin'/ Not tryna press my luck or nothin'/Don't wanna love you just for fun." The artist, raised in Zone 6 of Atlanta, has been doing a lot of collaborations since his last album, including Lil Tjay's "Calling My Phone" and more

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recently Jessie Reyez's "Forever."

— AP Entertainment Writer Mark Kennedy

TELEVISION

— Fans of shows including "Jack Ryan" and "The Recruit," about low-level government agency workers who get pulled into danger and secret missions, should check out "The Night Agent" on Netflix. It follows an FBI agent tasked with manning an overnight emergency phone that surprisingly rings during one of his shifts. A desperate civilian is on the other end of the call and together, they find themselves embroiled in a major government conspiracy. The series stars Gabriel Russo and Luciane Buchanan and is based on the novel by Matthew Quirk. "The Night Agent" debuts Thursday.

— Mae Whitman, best-known for her roles in "Parenthood" and "Good Girls," demonstrates she can also sing in her new rom-com series "Up Here" for Hulu. Set in 1999 in New York, Whitman plays Lindsay who falls for Miguel — played by Carlos Valdes ("The Flash" and "Gaslit") — and the will-they, won't-they find a happily ever after ensues. The series boasts some major behind-the-scenes musical talent. EGOT winners Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Robert Lopez, behind that little animated film that could "Frozen," are co-executive producers and wrote the show's original music. The show has a whimsical, "Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist"-vibe, plus there are fun late-'90s references including Y2K. All eight-episodes drop Friday, March 24, the same day the soundtrack drops

— Kiefer Sutherland is back with another high-stakes TV drama in "Rabbit Hole" for Paramount+. He plays John Weir, a corporate spy skilled in the art of deception — until he finds the rug pulled out from underneath him and he is framed for murder. Weir goes from having total control to none, and unsure of who can be trusted. "Rabbit Hole" premieres with two episodes on Sunday, March 26.

— Alicia Rancilio

VIDEO GAMES

— Annapurna Interactive has developed a nearly impeccable reputation among connoisseurs of indie video games, from 2017's groundbreaking mystery *What Remains of Edith Finch* to 2022's futuristic cat sim *Stray*. The publisher's latest release is *Storyteller*, a long-brewing project from Argentine designer Daniel Benmergui. The premise is simple: You have a library of characters, objects, events and other plot devices, and your job is arrange them to tell a particular type of tale. It's a puzzle game that pays homage to classic literature, and the graphics ooze charm. Start spinning your own yarns Thursday, March 23, on Nintendo Switch and PC.

— Death, the CEO of Death Inc., is burned out. His top minions — the executives in charge of Natural Disasters, Modern Warfare, Toxic Food-Processing and other misery-producing departments — are going about their business way too enthusiastically, and Death needs them to settle down before he drowns in paperwork. In *Have a Nice Death*, from France's Magic Design Studios, you wield Death's scythe as he hacks and slashes his way through the red tape. The vibrant, angular 2D graphics are reminiscent of the classic *Rayman*, which some members of Magic Design's team worked on. The not-so-grim reaping comes to Nintendo Switch and PC on Wednesday.

Mother: Irvo Otieno was 'brilliant and creative and bright'

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

Irvo Otieno had realized his passion: making hip-hop. He could write a song in less than five minutes. And he was streaming his music under the moniker "Young Vo," while working toward starting his own record label.

"He had found his thing — you know that feeling when you find your thing?" his mother Caroline Ouko told reporters Thursday. "He would go in his room and shut the door. And he had it — he was brilliant and creative and bright."

But, the mother added, "All I'm left with is his voice."

Ouko remembered her son's life at an hourlong news conference that focused primarily on his death March 6 at a state mental hospital in Virginia.

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Ouko had just viewed video of Otieno's final minutes as he was being admitted to Central State Hospital south of Richmond, during which she and her attorneys say sheriff's deputies smothered him, pressing him down until his body was "clearly lifeless." His arms and legs were bound, they said, but he posed no threat to the deputies and hospital employees who've since been charged with second-degree murder.

Otieno's biography is now coming to the fore, not for his music, but because of the shockingly inhumane way in which authorities say he was killed. He was yet another Black man to die in police custody in a case that prominent civil-rights attorney Ben Crump, who is also representing Ouko, said harshly echoes the previous deaths of such men as George Floyd. Crump represented Floyd's family and the relatives of other Black men killed under similar circumstances.

Otieno, who was 28, came to the U.S. from Kenya at the age of 4 but he "was as American as apple pie," his mother said.

As a child in school, he was the type of guy who would invite a student eating lunch alone to join him, and classmates who needed someone to talk to were drawn to him, she said. He was a leader and a listener, someone who took the time to process what was being said and would then "lean back in," Ouko said.

"He cared that people were treated right," she said. "That was at the core of his upbringing in our home. He cared that people were treated equally."

She added that Otieno wasn't afraid to offer different perspectives in conversations, to go the other way "when everybody else is following."

Otieno began dealing with some mental health issues during his last year of high school, his mother said. But she said he also went to college in California, and "had long stretches where you wouldn't even know something was wrong."

There were times, though, when he went "into some kind of distress" and needed to see a doctor, she said. Ouko declined to share her son's diagnosis, saying only that he had gone to a mental health facility before and "came back home."

"That's the question that I'm asking: why he didn't come back home," she said.

Otieno was taken into custody March 3, according to a timeline provided by Henrico County Police, a separate entity from the Henrico County 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.

Mark Krudys, one of Ouko's attorneys, said that Otieno was experiencing a mental health crisis at the time. He said a neighbor called police over concerns about him gathering lawn lights from a yard.

Otieno's mother tried to de-escalate the initial response from police officers, with the moment captured on a neighbor's cellphone, Crump said.

"Caroline is hugging her child, as if she's trying to protect him from these people who might not see him like she sees him," he said.

Added Krudys: "She was imploring them (to) treat him appropriately, bring him to a hospital. And he was vacuumed into the criminal justice system, for which there was no care that was provided, that we saw."

While he was at the hospital, police said he "became physically assaultive toward officers, who arrested him" and took him to a local jail managed by the Henrico Sheriff's Office, where he was charged with several crimes.

While Otieno was in jail, he was denied access to needed medications, the family attorneys said. Crump said he was pepper-sprayed, and Krudys said the video showed officers on March 6 charging into his jail cell, which was covered in feces and where he lay 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 taken to the state hospital, Crump said.

Leon Ochieng, Otieno's older brother, said at Thursday's news conference that his mother can't sleep or eat.

"Our hearts are broken," he said. "But our spirits are strong. And my brother's spirit is not done."

A distraught Ouko said that, "When they took my baby away ... they took him away from his brother."

They took him away from his nieces. They took him away from his friends. And they took him away from a community that cared (for) and loved him.”

Violent protests in France over Macron’s retirement age push

By SYLVIE CORBET and BARBARA SURK Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Angry protesters took to the streets in Paris and other cities for a second day on Friday, trying to pressure lawmakers to bring down French President Emmanuel Macron’s government and doom the unpopular retirement age increase he’s trying to impose without a vote in the National Assembly.

A day after Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne invoked a special constitutional power to skirt a vote in the chaotic lower chamber, lawmakers on the right and left filed no-confidence motions to be voted on Monday.

At the elegant Place de Concorde, a festive protest by several thousand, with chants, dancing and a huge bonfire, degenerated into a scene echoing the night before. Riot police charged and threw tear gas to empty the huge square across from the National Assembly after troublemakers climbed scaffolding on a renovation site, arming themselves with wood. They lobbed fireworks and paving stones at police in a standoff.

On Thursday night, security forces charged and used water cannons to evacuate the area, and small groups then set street fires in chic neighborhoods nearby. French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin told radio station RTL that 310 people were arrested overnight, most of them in Paris.

Mostly small, scattered protests were held in cities around France, from a march in Bordeaux to a rally in Toulouse. Port officers in Calais temporarily stopped ferries from crossing the English Channel to Dover. Some university campuses in Paris were blocked and protesters occupied a high-traffic ring road around the French capital.

Paris garbage collectors extended their strike for a 12th day, with piles of foul-smelling rubbish growing daily in the French capital. Striking sanitation workers continued to block Europe’s largest incineration site and two other sites that treat Paris garbage.

Some yellow vest activists, who mounted formidable protests against Macron’s economic policies during his first term, were among those who relayed Friday’s Paris protest on social media. Police say that “radicalized yellow vests” are among troublemakers at protest marches.

Trade unions organizing the opposition urged demonstrators to remain peaceful during more strikes and marches in the days ahead. They have called on people to leave schools, factories, refineries and other workplaces to force Macron to abandon his plan to make the French to work two more years, until 64, before receiving a full pension.

Macron took a calculated risk ordering Borne to invoke a special constitutional power that she had used 10 times before without triggering such an outpouring of anger.

If the no-confidence votes fail, the bill becomes law. If a majority agrees, it would spell the end of the retirement reform plan and force the government to resign, although Macron could always reappoint Borne to name the new Cabinet.

“We are not going to stop,” CGT union representative Régis Vieceli told The Associated Press on Friday. He said overwhelming the streets with discontent and refusing to continue working is “the only way that we will get them to back down.”

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’s conservative allies in the Senate passed the bill, but frantic counts of lower-house lawmakers Thursday showed a slight risk it would fall short of a majority, so Macron decided to invoke the constitution’s Article 49-3 to bypass a vote.

Getting a no-confidence motion to pass will be challenging — none have succeeded since 1962, and Macron’s centrist alliance still has the most seats in the National Assembly. A minority of conservatives could stray from the Republicans party line, but it remains to be seen whether they’re willing to bring

down Macron's government.

Haaland criticized over 'difficult' choice on Willow project

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In early March, President Joe Biden met with members of Alaska's bipartisan congressional delegation as they implored him to approve a contentious oil drilling project in their state. Around the same time, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland held a very different meeting on the same topic.

Gathering at Interior headquarters a half-mile (0.8 kilometers) from the White House, leaders of major environmental organizations and Indigenous groups pleaded with Haaland, the first Native American Cabinet member, to use her authority to block the Willow oil project. Environmental groups call the project a "carbon bomb" that would betray pledges made by Biden — and Haaland — to fight climate change and have mounted a social media #StopWillow campaign that has been seen hundreds of millions of times.

The closed-door meeting, which was described by two participants who insisted on not being identified because of its confidential nature, grew emotional as participants urged Haaland to oppose a project many believed Biden appeared likely to approve even as it contradicted his agenda to cut planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030.

Haaland, who opposed Willow when she served in Congress, choked up as she explained that the Interior Department had to make difficult choices, according to the participants. Many Native groups in Alaska support Willow as a job creator and economic lifeline.

Less than two weeks later, the Biden administration announced it was approving Willow, an \$8 billion drilling plan by ConocoPhillips on Alaska's petroleum-rich North Slope.

Haaland, who had not publicly commented on Willow in two years as head of the U.S. agency overseeing the project, was not involved in the announcement and did not sign the approval order, leaving that to her deputy, Tommy Beaudreau.

In an online video released Monday night, 10 hours after the decision was made public, Haaland said she and Biden, both Democrats, believe the climate crisis "is the most urgent issue of our lifetime."

She called Willow "a difficult and complex issue that was inherited" from previous administrations and noted that ConocoPhillips has long held leases to drill for oil on the site, in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.

"As a result, we have limited decision space," she said, adding that officials focused on reducing the project's footprint and minimizing impacts to people and wildlife. The final approval reflects a substantially smaller project than ConocoPhillips originally proposed and includes a pledge by the Houston-based oil company to relinquish nearly 70,000 acres (28,000 hectares) of leased land that will no longer be developed, she said.

The video had received more than 100,000 views by Friday.

Haaland declined to be interviewed for this story. But in a statement, the department said Haaland had been "actively involved" in the Willow decision from the start and met with Alaska Natives on both sides of the issue, conservation and other groups and members of Congress.

Dallas Goldtooth, a senior strategist for the Indigenous Environmental Network, called it "problematic" that Haaland's video was the Biden administration's primary voice on Willow. Biden himself has not spoken publicly on the project.

"They use people of color for cover on these decisions," said Goldtooth, a member of Mdewakanton Dakota tribe.

The White House pushed back on the idea, saying in a statement Friday that as interior secretary, "of course the video came from her."

But Haaland's body language — at times looking away from the camera — made her appear "very uncomfortable" in the two-minute video, Goldtooth said.

Haaland's statement "did not seem to be a wholehearted defense of the decision," said Brett Hartl, government affairs director of the Center for Biological Diversity, another environmental group. "It was

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almost an apology.”

Allowing Haaland to be the administration’s public face on Willow strengthens Biden’s expected reelection run by allowing him to avoid public scrutiny on an issue on which some of his most ardent supporters disagree with him, environmentalists said.

“It’s clear-cut D.C. politics,” Goldtooth said. “I’ve seen this play run before,” including when former Biden environmental justice adviser Cecilia Martinez was put forward to address tribal concerns about two other energy projects, the Dakota Access and Line 3 oil pipelines in the upper Midwest.

Asked about Willow on Thursday, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters that the oil company “has a legal right to those leases,” adding: “The department’s options are limited when there are legal contracts in place.”

Goldtooth and others involved in the Willow fight say the project was largely advanced by Beaudreau, Haaland’s deputy, who grew up in Alaska and has a close relationship with the state’s two Republican senators. Beaudreau is especially close to Sen. Lisa Murkowski, a former Senate Energy chair who has cooperated with Biden on a range of issues. Murkowski played a key role in Haaland’s confirmation, and she and Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia teamed up to get Beaudreau installed as deputy after they objected to Haaland’s first choice, Elizabeth Klein.

Murkowski told reporters this week that she and other Alaska officials had long realized that the decision on Willow was likely to be made by the White House, despite repeated comments from Jean-Pierre that the decision was up to Interior.

The senator, who personally lobbied Biden on Willow for nearly two years, said she reminded him, “Cooperation goes both ways.”

Despite the White House involvement, Haaland has been faulted for the decision to approve Willow. New Mexico’s senior Democratic senator, Martin Heinrich, singled her out for criticism in a rare rebuke of a fellow New Mexico Democrat. Haaland represented the state in Congress before becoming Interior secretary.

“The Western Arctic is one of the last great wild landscapes on the planet and as public land it belongs to every American,” Heinrich said in a statement. “Industrial development in this unspoiled landscape will not age well.”

Rep. Melanie Stansbury, D-N.M., who holds Haaland’s former seat in Congress, said she joined millions of people, “including Indigenous leaders, scientists and lawmakers, in opposing the Willow Project.” She urged the Biden administration to reconsider the project and its consequences for global climate change.

Native American tribes in the Southwestern U.S. have been watching Willow closely, concerned about any implications it could have for development in culturally significant areas, including the Chaco Culture National Historical Park in northwestern New Mexico.

A federal appeals court has ruled that the Interior Department failed to consider the cumulative effects of greenhouse gas emissions that would result from the approval of nearly 200 drilling permits near the Chaco site.

Haaland, a member of the Laguna Pueblo, visited Chaco in 2021 and told tribal leaders that the Interior Department’s Bureau of Land Management would work toward withdrawing hundreds of square miles from development. She also committed to taking a broader look at how federal land across the region can be better managed while taking into account environmental effects and cultural preservation.

Mario Atencio, of Diné CARE, a Navajo environmental group, said he understands that the Interior Department faces pressure from GOP lawmakers to increase drilling, as well as conflicting court rulings on a pause ordered by Biden on oil leasing on public land.

“We’re very aware that it’s a game of inches sometimes, and there’s a little discretion in some places, and we are just trying to have just as much visibility as the oil and gas industry has,” said Atencio, who is Navajo.

The Willow project has divided Alaska Native groups. Supporters call the project balanced and say communities would benefit from taxes generated by Willow. But City of Nuiqsut Mayor Rosemary Ahtuanguaruak, whose community of about 525 people is closest to the proposed development, opposes the project and worries about impacts on caribou and her residents’ subsistence lifestyles.

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Hartl, of the biological diversity group, said Willow was approved by the White House for clear political reasons. "They cared more about Lisa Murkowski's vote than frankly they did the climate," he said.

Washington State's March Madness soundtrack? Shania Twain

By DAN GELSTON AP Sports Writer

VILLANOVA, Pa. (AP) — Man, the Washington State women's basketball team has felt like big winners since they adopted Shania Twain's monster 1997 hit "Man, I Feel Like A Woman" as the their theme song on their run into March Madness.

The Cougars sing Twain's song in the locker room before games. And after they unexpectedly won the Pac-12 Tournament title, the opening riff blared on the speakers and the team about drowned out Twain, gleefully singing along about men's shirts, short skirts — and becoming the lowest-seeded team to ever win the conference tourney.

"We truly are a team of karaoke," forward Ula Motuga said Friday. "The bus ride, there's no doubt someone's got a speaker going and then other people will sing along. Some can sing, some cannot. But it's fun. It's something that bring us together."

Motuga, who's from Australia, has even used the opening line, "let's go, girls" as a team anthem.

Twain, on tour and unavailable for comment, has become a fan. The five-time Grammy winner retweeted the Cougars' team account, writing after the Pac-12 title game, "I'm honored to have been a small part of your journey!!"

Why stop at a locker room sing-along? The fifth-seeded Cougars tweeted at Twain that it wants to join her on stage on April 28 when her tour stops in Spokane, Washington, about 75 miles north of campus.

"You feeling a duet with the Cougs that night?" WSU tweeted.

Motuga is feeling confident: "We will be going on stage. She doesn't know it yet, but yes."

Washington State also is feeling some confidence going into its opening-round NCAA Tournament game Saturday against Florida Gulf Coast at Villanova's campus — Wazzu's third straight NCAA appearance.

The Cougs won four games in five days in the Pac-12 Tournament, beating No. 10 seed California, No. 2 seed Utah, No. 3 seed Colorado and finally UCLA. They're the first women's team at Washington State to win a conference championship.

Coach Kamie Ethridge joked that her players are better backup singers.

"They're not shy about singing," Ethridge said. "You'll hear all different tunes and loudness. I don't know that I would say it's great. But I would say it's a blast to watch them enjoy the whole process. "But Shania, Shania is the lead singer."

Twain isn't the only famous fan throwing her support behind the Cougars: President Joe Biden picked them to beat FGCU — though he has the Cougars losing to his national championship pick, Villanova, in the second round.

"President Biden, man!" Motuga said. "I think it's cool to see a bunch of different people and public figures tuning in. It just shows the support they have for women's basketball, especially, and more people are buying into creating a bracket."

____ AP March Madness coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/march-madness> and <https://apnews.com/hub/ap-top-25-womens-college-basketball-poll> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Biden calls for tougher penalties for execs of failed banks

By ZEKE MILLER and FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Friday called on Congress to allow regulators to impose tougher penalties on the executives of failed banks, including clawing back compensation and making it easier to bar them from working in the industry.

Biden wants the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation to be able to force the return of compensation paid to executives at a broader range of banks should they fail, and to lower the threshold for the regulator to impose fines and bar executives from working at another bank.

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He called on Congress to grant the FDIC those powers after the failures of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank sent shockwaves through the global banking industry.

"Strengthening accountability is an important deterrent to prevent mismanagement in the future," Biden said in a statement. "Congress must act to impose tougher penalties for senior bank executives whose mismanagement contributed to their institutions failing."

Currently the FDIC can only take back the compensation of executives at the largest banks in the nation, and other penalties on executives require "recklessness" or acting with "willful or continuing disregard" for their bank's health. Biden wants Congress to allow the regulator to impose penalties for "negligent" executives — a lower legal threshold.

Congress has already begun to address the aftermath of the bank failures.

On Friday, the House Financial Services Committee's top Democrat, Rep. Maxine Waters of California, said in a letter to regulators that while she is crafting legislation to give regulators more authority, "it is critical that your agencies act now to investigate these bank failures and use the available enforcement tools you have to hold executives fully accountable for any wrongful activity."

The Justice Department, Security and Exchange Commission, Federal Reserve, the California state regulator of Silicon Valley Bank and several congressional committees have announced some form of investigation into the bank failure.

Additionally, a group of Senate Democrats on Thursday introduced the Deliver Executive Profits on Seized Institutions to Taxpayers Act, which would claw back profits made by bank executives on the sale of stocks and compensation bonuses earned within 60 days of a bank failure, among other things.

And Sens. Jack Reed (D-R.I.) and Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) reintroduced legislation this week to strengthen the SEC's ability to crack down on violations of securities laws.

The White House highlighted reports that Silicon Valley Bank CEO Gregory Becker sold \$3 million worth of shares in the bank in the days before its collapse, saying Biden wants the FDIC to have the authority to go after that compensation.

The shuttering of Silicon Valley Bank on March 10 and of New York's Signature Bank two days later has revived bad memories of the financial crisis that plunged the United States into the Great Recession about 15 years ago.

Over the weekend the federal government, determined to restore public confidence in the banking system, moved to protect all of the banks' deposits, even those that exceeded the FDIC's \$250,000 limit per individual account.

Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, who chairs the Banking Committee, welcomed Biden's call for congressional action, stating in an email that his committee "will be looking at all the ways we can protect working families' money from risky bets that didn't pay off in Silicon Valley or on Wall Street.

"That includes holding accountable the executives who ran this bank into the ground and the regulators tasked with overseeing them, and it includes working to reform our laws to better protect workers, small businesses, and taxpayers from corporate greed."

John Core, an accounting professor who specializes in executive compensation and corporate governance, questioned whether increasing the authority of regulators was the right move, since "in the case of Silicon Valley, it's not yet even clear who is to blame" for the bank's collapse.

"So many people think it was a regulatory failure, or it was because of rapid increases in interest rates due to inflation," he said.

Dennis Kelleher, president of Better Markets, a nonprofit that advocates for tougher financial regulations, said the White House was right to encourage Congress to act.

"Regulators simply must have a full arsenal to severely punish faithless, irresponsible and reckless bank executives, officers and directors," Kelleher said.

Chauvin, who killed George Floyd, pleads guilty in tax case

By STEVE KARNOWSKI and TRISHA AHMED Associated Press

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MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The former Minneapolis police officer convicted in the 2020 killing of George Floyd pleaded guilty Friday to two tax evasion counts, admitting that he didn't file Minnesota income taxes for two years due to "financial concerns."

Derek Chauvin pleaded guilty specifically to two counts of aiding and abetting, failing to file tax returns to the state of Minnesota for the 2016 and 2017 tax years.

Chauvin appeared in a Minnesota court via Zoom from a federal prison in Tucson, Arizona, where he is serving his sentences on a state murder conviction for killing Floyd and on a federal count of violating Floyd's civil rights.

He stood in a room and paced around before Friday's hearing began. When Washington County Judge Sheridan Hawley asked why he didn't file his Minnesota tax returns, he told the judge: "The true reason is some financial concerns at the time."

He also said: "I had to find significant funds from family to pay a previous year's return and, frankly, I've been playing catch up ever since."

He was sentenced to 13 months in prison on the tax charges, but he has already been incarcerated for longer than that and was given credit for time served.

Floyd died May 25, 2020, after Chauvin, who is white, pressed his knee against the Black man's neck for more than nine minutes. Floyd, who was handcuffed, repeatedly said he couldn't breathe. The killing, which was recorded on video by a bystander, sparked worldwide protests as part of a broader reckoning over racial injustice.

Shortly after Floyd's killing, Chauvin and his then-wife were charged with multiple counts for allegedly underreporting their income to the state of Minnesota and failing to file Minnesota tax returns. The complaints alleged that from 2014 to 2019, the Chauvins underreported their joint income by \$464,433.

With unpaid taxes, interest and fees, the Chauvins, who have since divorced, owe \$37,868 to the state, according to court documents.

The tax investigation began in June 2020, after the Minnesota Department of Revenue received information about suspicious filings by Derek Chauvin. The agency started an internal cursory review and then opened a formal investigation.

The probe ultimately found the Chauvins did not file state tax returns for 2016, 2017 or 2018, and did not report all of their income for 2014 and 2015. When tax returns for 2016 through 2019 were filed in June 2020, the Chauvins did not report all of their income in those years either, the complaints said.

The complaints said Chauvin was required to pay taxes on income from off-duty security work he did at several jobs between 2014 and 2020. Investigators believe that at one job he earned about \$95,920 over those six years that was not reported.

His ex-wife, Kellie May Chauvin, pleaded guilty Feb. 24 to two counts of aiding and abetting their failure to file tax returns for 2016 and 2017. Her plea agreement called for three years of probation and restitution with no more than 45 days of community service. The other charges were dropped. Hawley said she will be sentenced May 12.

Kellie Chauvin filed for divorce shortly after Floyd's death, and a judge approved the divorce last February under terms that were kept sealed. The judge rejected an initial proposed settlement that would have given Kellie Chauvin most of their property and money, which had fueled speculation that the Chauvins were trying to shield their assets.

Documents in the tax case said the couple owned a second home in Florida, and alleged they also failed to pay proper sales tax on a \$100,000 BMW purchased in Minnesota in 2018.

Chauvin was convicted of state murder and manslaughter charges in 2021 and is serving 22 1/2 years in that case. He also pleaded guilty to a federal charge of violating Floyd's civil rights and was sentenced to 21 years. He is serving the sentences concurrently.

Three other officers were convicted of federal charges of violating Floyd's rights. Two of them have also been convicted of a state count of aiding and abetting manslaughter, while the third is waiting for a judge to decide his fate on the state charges.

China's Xi to meet Putin as Beijing seeks bolder global role

By KARL RITTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Chinese President Xi Jinping plans to visit Moscow next week, offering a major diplomatic boost to Russian President Vladimir Putin on the same day the International Criminal Court announced it wants to put the Russian leader on trial for alleged war crimes.

Xi's visit was the latest sign of Beijing's emboldened diplomatic ambitions, and came amid sharpening East-West tensions over the war in Ukraine, now in its 13th month.

The U.S. on Friday said it would oppose any effort by China at the meeting to propose a ceasefire in Ukraine as the "ratification of Russian conquest."

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby encouraged Xi to reach out to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to get his country's perspective on the war and avoid any "one-sided" proposals.

China has sought to project itself as neutral in the conflict, even while it has refused to condemn Moscow's aggression and declared last year that it had a "no-limits" friendship with Russia. Beijing has denounced Western sanctions against Moscow, and accused NATO and the United States of provoking Putin's military action.

Throughout the conflict, China has said the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries should be respected. It remains unclear, however, whether it sympathizes with Moscow's claims to seized Ukrainian territory.

Russian troops remain bogged down in a battle of attrition, focused now on those areas in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region.

Xi's visit would mark his first meeting with Putin since September, when they met on the sidelines of a regional summit in Uzbekistan. Before that, Putin attended the opening of the 2022 Beijing Winter Games and met with Xi shortly before sending troops into Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday that Putin and Xi would have a one-on-one meeting over an informal dinner Monday. Broader talks involving officials from both countries on a range of subjects are scheduled for Tuesday.

Putin's foreign policy adviser, Yuri Ushakov, suggested the talks could yield new approaches to the fighting in Ukraine. "I'm sure that our leader and the Chinese leader will exchange their assessments of the situation" there, he said. "We shall see what ideas will emerge after that."

Kyiv doesn't just want Russia to pull back from areas taken since its February 2022 full-scale invasion. Zelenskyy has demanded that Russia also withdraw from the peninsula of Crimea, which Moscow annexed in 2014 in a move denounced by most of the world as illegal.

But Putin has shown no intention of relinquishing the Kremlin's gains. Instead, he stressed Friday the importance of holding Crimea.

"Obviously, security issues take top priority for Crimea and Sevastopol now," he said, referring to Crimea's largest city. "We will do everything needed to fend off any threats."

On Thursday, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang reached out to his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, saying Beijing was concerned about the war spinning out of control and urging 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." Ukraine has listed Russia's withdrawal from the occupied areas as the main condition for peace.

"I underscored the importance of (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.

China last month called for a cease-fire and peace talks between Kyiv and Moscow. Zelenskyy cautiously

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welcomed Beijing's involvement but the overture appeared to go no further.

Yurii Poita, head of the Asia section at the Kyiv-based New Geopolitics Research Network, believes the Ukrainian government is going along with China's involvement because it is reluctant to make another powerful enemy.

"Do not antagonize the dragon when you are fighting against a bear," Poita told The Associated Press.

Beijing's apparent deeper dive into Ukraine issues follows its success last week in brokering talks between Iran and its chief Middle Eastern rival, Saudi Arabia. Those two countries agreed to restore their diplomatic ties after years of tensions.

The agreement cast China in a leading role in Middle Eastern politics, a part previously reserved for longtime global heavyweights like the U.S.

On the back of that, Xi called for China to play a bigger role in managing global affairs.

Washington has marshaled Western military and diplomatic efforts against Putin.

On Friday, Kirby told reporters, "A ceasefire now is, again, effectively the ratification of Russian conquest." It would "in effect recognize Russia's gains and its attempt to conquer its neighbor's territory by force, allowing Russian troops to continue to occupy sovereign Ukrainian territory."

Russia could use a ceasefire to regroup "so that they can restart attacks on Ukraine at a time of their choosing," he warned.

A spokesman for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said Britain would welcome any genuine effort by China aimed at "restoring sovereignty to Ukraine."

"Any peace deal which is not predicated on Ukraine's sovereignty and self-determination is not a peace deal at all," Sunak's spokesman Jamie Davies said.

Nataliia Butyraska, a Ukrainian political analyst, said Beijing's potential peacemaking role could be clouded by its stance on territorial integrity.

"China does not clearly distinguish between who is the aggressor and who is the victim" in Ukraine, she told The AP.

China has its own territorial issues, with Taiwan, which it claims as its own, to be brought under its control by force if necessary.

U.S.-Russia tensions were further escalated this week with the destruction of a U.S. drone over the Black Sea on Tuesday after an encounter with Russian fighter jets, although that also prompted the first conversations since October between the countries' defense and military chiefs.

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."

Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Friday that Xi and Putin will discuss "bilateral relations and major international and regional issues of common concern...."

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

The arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court at The Hague accused Putin of involvement in abductions of children from Ukraine to Russia. It also issued a warrant for his commissioner for children's rights, Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova.

The court has no police force of its own to enforce warrants, and the Kremlin has said it doesn't recognize the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

Jim Gordon, rock drummer who killed mother, dies at 77

By BETH HARRIS Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Jim Gordon, the rock 'n' roll session drummer who played on classic records by Eric Clapton, George Harrison and The Beach Boys but suffered from growing mental health problems and spent the second half of his life in prison for killing his mother, has died at 77.

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Gordon died Monday at the California Medical Facility in Vacaville, the state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation confirmed Thursday. It's believed he died of natural causes, but the official cause will be determined by the Solano County coroner. Gordon, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia, had been in prison for four decades.

From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, few drummers were more in demand than Gordon, a Los Angeles native and protege of the all-time versatile session man, Hal Blaine. Gordon had been drumming since his teens and — early in his career — was part of Phil Spector's celebrated studio ensemble, "The Wrecking Crew," which featured Blaine.

"When I didn't have the time, I recommended Jim," Blaine told Rolling Stone in 1985. "He was one hell of a drummer. I thought he was one of the real comers."

Gordon eventually played on the Beach Boys' landmark, experimental "Pet Sounds" and the Byrds' "The Notorious Byrd Brothers," Harrison's post-Beatles triple album "All Things Must Pass" and Steely Dan's jazz-rock "Pretzel Logic." He worked with a wide range of top acts, from Joan Baez and Jackson Browne to Merle Haggard and Tom Petty. One of his notable credits was a drum break on the Incredible Bongo Band's "Apache" that has been frequently sampled by rap music artists, among them Jay-Z, Busta Rhymes and Kool Moe Dee.

Gordon also toured with Clapton, bassist Carl Radle and keyboardist Bobby Whitlock: the core of what, in 1970, became Derek and the Dominos, one of rock's greatest one-shot groups.

Their only studio album, the double record "Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs," has often been called the creative peak of Clapton's career. He was tormented at the time by his unrequited love for Harrison's wife, Pattie Boyd, and channeled his despair into such anguished blues and hard rock jams as "Why Does Love Have To Be So Sad?", "Bell Bottom Blues" and the seven-minute title track.

The first half of "Layla" was a high-volume showcase for Clapton and guest guitarist Duane Allman, the second half a mournful piano coda of disputed origins. Gordon was officially credited as co-writer for "Layla," but Whitlock later claimed Gordon took the piano melody from his then-girlfriend, singer Rita Coolidge. In her 2016 memoir "Delta Lady," Coolidge wrote that the song was called "Time" when she and Gordon wrote it. They later played it for Clapton, who — Coolidge alleged — used it for "Layla."

"I was infuriated," Coolidge wrote. "What they'd clearly done was take the song Jim and I had written, jettisoned the lyrics, and tacked it on to the end of Eric's song. It was almost the same arrangement."

By the early 1970s, Gordon was already becoming a danger to others. Coolidge wrote in her memoir that the couple was touring with Joe Cocker when Gordon attacked her one night in a hotel hallway. Gordon hit her in the eye, she wrote, "so hard that I was lifted off the floor and slammed against the wall on the other side of the hallway." She was briefly knocked unconscious.

With two weeks left on the tour, Coolidge performed with a black eye. She didn't file battery charges against Gordon but did sign a restraining order, and their relationship ended.

In June 1983, Gordon attacked his 71-year-old mother, Osa Gordon, with a hammer and fatally stabbed her with a butcher knife. He claimed that a voice told him to do it.

It wasn't until after his arrest for second-degree murder that Gordon was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Gordon was sentenced to 16 years to life in prison with the possibility of parole. However, he was denied parole several times after not attending any of the hearings and remained in prison until his death.

Rural Missouri sheriff, 2 deputies arrested in kidnap plot

By JIM SALTER Associated Press

A rural Missouri sheriff and two deputies are jailed and facing charges accusing them of helping a man in a parental kidnapping plot.

Officers with the Missouri State Highway Patrol on Thursday arrested Iron County Sheriff Jeff Burkett, deputies Matthew Cozad and Chase Bresnahan, and the father of the child, Donald Gaston. All four face multiple charges and were jailed Friday in neighboring Washington County.

Iron County has about 9,500 residents and sits 100 miles (161 kilometers) southwest of St. Louis.

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Burkett's lawyer, Gabe Crocker, said the charges are politically motivated.

"This is small-town politics," Crocker said. "This is the continuation of a long gestating effort to remove this sheriff from office."

Charging documents say that in February, Gaston, 62, sought to take his daughter after an argument with the child's mother. Among the accusations against Burkett: Prosecutors say he lied to a 911 dispatcher to report that the mother had kidnapped the girl, and falsely accused the woman of putting the child in danger. Ultimately, the girl remained with her mother.

The sheriff and deputies also are accused of tracking the woman's whereabouts through her cell phone. All four men were charged with criminal street gang activity since the alleged crime was organized.

Burkett, 46, also is charged with attempted kidnapping, being an accessory to stalking, and other crimes.

Gaston's alleged crimes include stalking and attempted parental kidnapping. Gaston, Cozad and Bresnahan do not yet have attorneys, according to Missouri's online court reporting system.

Burkett is jailed on \$500,000 cash-only bond. The other suspects are jailed on \$400,000 cash-only bond.

Burkett, a Republican, was elected sheriff in 2020 and previously worked as a deputy. Last year, he was hospitalized for nearly four months with COVID-19, including spending time on a ventilator, according to the department's Facebook page. While he was hospitalized, county officials sought to remove him from office but eventually backed off, the posting said.

"It is no secret that Sheriff Burkett is an outsider to many of the current elected officials," the posting stated.

Burkett was hospitalized briefly on March 10 due to lingering COVID-19 "symptoms and complications," the Facebook page stated. The mugshot photo taken after his arrest shows him wearing an oxygen line in his nose.

Prince Harry sues tabloid for defamation over security story

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Lawyers for Prince Harry asked a judge Friday to rule that a tabloid newspaper libeled the British royal with an article about his quest for police protection when he and his family visit the U.K.

Harry is suing Mail on Sunday publisher Associated Newspapers Ltd. over an article alleging he tried to hush up his separate legal challenge over the British government's refusal to let him pay for police security.

During a hearing at the High Court in London, Harry's lead attorney asked Judge Matthew Nicklin either to strike out the publisher's defense or to deliver a summary judgment, which would be a ruling in the prince's favor without going to trial.

Lawyer Justin Rushbrooke said the facts did not support the publisher's "substantive pleaded defense" that the article expressed an "honest opinion."

He said the article was "fundamentally inaccurate."

Harry was not in court for the hearing. The prince, also known as the Duke of Sussex, and his wife, Meghan, lost their publicly funded U.K. police protection when they stepped down as senior working royals and moved to North America in 2020.

Harry's lawyers have said the prince is reluctant to bring the couple's children — Prince Archie, who is almost 4, and Princess Lilibet, nearly 2 — to his homeland because it is not safe.

The 38-year-old prince wants to pay personally for police security when he comes to Britain, but the government said that wasn't possible. Last year, a judge gave Harry permission to sue the government. That case has yet to come to trial.

Harry sued Associated Newspapers over a February 2022 Mail on Sunday article headlined "Exclusive: How Prince Harry tried to keep his legal fight with the government over police bodyguards a secret... then — just minutes after the story broke — his PR machine tried to put a positive spin on the dispute."

Harry claims that the newspaper libeled him when it suggested that the prince lied in his initial public statements about the suit against the government.

In July, Nicklin ruled that the article was defamatory, allowing the case to proceed. The judge has not

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yet considered issues such as whether the story was accurate or in the public interest.

The publisher's lawyer, Andrew Caldecott, said the argument by Harry's attorneys amounted to "strait-jacketing the newspaper's right to comment."

He said it was vital the media speak truth to power, and "speaking opinion to power is every bit (as), if not more, important," as long as the opinion is based on facts.

At the end of the daylong hearing, the judge said he would rule at a later date.

Harry, the younger son of King Charles III, and the former actress Meghan Markle married at Windsor Castle in 2018 but stepped down as working royals in 2020, citing what they described as the unbearable intrusions and racist attitudes of the British media.

Harry's fury at the U.K. press runs through his memoir "Spare," published in January. He blames an overly aggressive press for the 1997 death of his mother, Princess Diana, and also accuses the media of hounding Meghan.

The couple has not hesitated to use the British courts to hit back at what they see as media mistreatment. In December 2021, Meghan won an invasion-of-privacy case against Associated Newspapers over the Mail on Sunday's publication of a letter she wrote to her estranged father.

Harry is also among celebrities suing Associated Newspapers over alleged phone hacking, and he has launched a separate hacking suit against the publisher of another tabloid, the Mirror. ____

Follow the AP's coverage of Prince Harry at <https://apnews.com/hub/prince-harry>

Trump vs. DeSantis: Rivals' very different styles on display

By STEVE PEOPLES and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

DAVENPORT, Iowa (AP) — In his first trip to Iowa this year, Ron DeSantis did not take any questions from voters. He largely ignored the local press. He avoided the diners, pizza parlors and ice cream shops that have helped presidential contenders in the leadoff voting state showcase their personal appeal and charisma for decades.

For DeSantis, a leading Republican presidential prospect, it was simply business as usual.

The hard-charging Florida governor has emerged as a potent force in national politics while eschewing the personal connections, intimate moments and unscripted questions that have long fueled successful White House bids in the states that sit atop the presidential primary calendar. And as DeSantis begins to introduce himself to primary voters in the weeks leading up to his expected announcement, he is showing little interest in changing his ways.

Allies insist he doesn't need to adjust anything, pointing to his dominant 19-point reelection victory last fall. But already, his Republican rivals — led by former President Donald Trump — are working to highlight the governor's go-it-alone approach and impersonal style by leaning into their own personal interactions on the campaign trail.

The risks for DeSantis are becoming increasingly obvious in smaller rural states like Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina, which will host three of the first four presidential primary contests in 2024.

"No one's gotten to know him the way they need to get to know him. I don't know if they ever will," New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, himself a potential candidate, said of DeSantis during a recent interview. "Do you think Ron DeSantis has ever sat down for a cup of coffee with a reporter? No. It's like physically not in him. He can't do it. He doesn't have that social connection with folks."

Perhaps no one is paying closer attention than Trump, who views DeSantis as his only real rival for the Republican presidential nomination.

While DeSantis has taken a cloistered approach, Trump has been maximizing his interactions with voters and the press as he begins to visit early voting states — an effort that aides say is part of a larger push to contrast Trump's strengths with DeSantis' perceived weaknesses.

During his first real day of campaigning in late January, Trump stopped by a beloved fried chicken and burger joint in West Columbia, South Carolina. He posed for photos with patrons and ordered a chocolate-dipped ice cream.

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One of the workers behind the counter offered Trump an impromptu prayer, and the moment went viral. After seeing the extraordinary response, the campaign leaned in.

It quickly planned a visit to East Palestine, Ohio, to meet with residents and local officials affected by a toxic train derailment. Before leaving, Trump stopped at a local McDonald's, where he signed autographs, passed out red "Make America Great Again" caps and ordered food for his staff and first responders.

"I know this menu better than you do," he told the smiling cashier.

In Iowa on Monday, Trump directed his motorcade to make a quick stop at the Machine Shed Restaurant, a longtime fixture in the eastern city of Davenport.

"So, how's the food here?" he boomed as he strolled in, shocking patrons and leaving the staff giggling in delight.

Trump shook hands, slapped backs and posed for pictures with anyone who wanted one.

While such scenes were hardly common during Trump's first two campaigns, the former president is taking a new approach as he wages his third presidential bid. The professional host and career glad-hander relishes personal interactions with supporters, and even longtime critics acknowledge his charisma in one-on-one interactions.

Such stops give voters "a way to see the president in a different light," said Trump spokesperson Steven Cheung.

"Usually they see him on camera or at a rally or in an interview. They don't necessarily get to see him up close," he said. "And this is one way to bridge that gap. And it's also one way to make this campaign more distinct."

Indeed, Trump's personal approach stands as a clear contrast to DeSantis, who is known for being much more guarded — especially when the media is present.

After two presidential campaigns and four years in the White House, Trump is extremely well practiced at taking tough questions from the national press. And his team has been working to make him more accessible to reporters.

He has been inviting small groups to travel aboard his campaign plane. During trips to South Carolina and Iowa, he took questions from local press.

Trump did the same with voters after delivering a long speech Monday in Iowa, answering several questions from a lucky few of the thousands who packed into a downtown Davenport theater. Aides noted that Trump's crowd eclipsed DeSantis', and Trump acknowledged, tongue in cheek, that it was "dangerous" to invite unscripted questions after a well-received speech.

He did it anyway for 20 minutes.

DeSantis' allies strongly disagree with the growing perception that he is insulated and not sufficiently committed to building personal relationships with voters and stakeholders in key states.

They note that he is not a presidential candidate. Should he decide to enter the contest — which he is widely expected to do after his state legislature adjourns in May — he will likely adopt a campaign strategy similar to the one that took him to all of Florida's 67 counties before his November reelection. Over that time, they point out, he regularly made unscripted appearances at restaurants, bars and high school sporting events.

When DeSantis met with New York City law enforcement officials last month, for example, he stopped by a Staten Island bagel shop.

One major difference between DeSantis and Trump is that Trump has welcomed press coverage of his unscripted moments.

While Trump often bashes the media at his raucous rallies, he is also an avid consumer of the news and craves the attention. DeSantis, by contrast, employs a consistent disdain for the mainstream press in public and in private.

It's much the same with fellow Republican governors and business leaders. DeSantis sees little need in developing relationships with Republican peers in other states, major corporations or the mainstream media — aside from a few allies in the conservative press.

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The Florida governor's relationship with the media is strained to say the least.

He regularly schedules press conferences but often holds them outside major media markets with only a few hours' notice, making it virtually impossible for the journalists who best know him and his policies to get there in time to ask tough questions. Usually, he packs such events with supporters.

On Thursday, for example, he hosted a news conference at a restaurant an hour away from Tampa.

He got only a handful of questions, all of which appeared designed for him to highlight his own positions. One journalist asked him about the need for babies to get the "jab," a derisive term conservatives use to describe the COVID-19 vaccine.

Scott Jennings, a Republican political analyst, said DeSantis' contempt for the media is central to the Florida governor's brand. And his cautious approach could help project a more professional operation in contrast to Trump's freewheeling style.

Still, Jennings said, DeSantis' approach is "inherently risky."

"Nobody's ever really done it before," he said. "But my instinct is Republicans are going to love it."

Hogan Gidley, a former Trump aide and veteran of presidential politics, said it's critical for presidential candidates to hone their policies and performances with unscripted moments in key states like Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina before an official announcement.

"A large part of that includes making personal connections with activists, with grassroots leaders, with elected officials — all the ones who will be responsible for the blocking and tackling needed to win a primary in those states," Gidley said. "Anyone who ignores that does so at their own political peril."

Slovakia, after Poland, agrees to give Ukraine Soviet jets

By KAREL JANICEK Associated Press

PRAGUE (AP) — Slovakia's government on Friday approved a plan to give Ukraine its fleet of 13 Soviet-era MiG-29 fighter jets, becoming the second NATO member country to heed the Ukrainian government's pleas for warplanes to help defend against Russia's invasion.

Prime Minister Eduard Heger said during a news conference announcing the decision that his government was "on the right side of history." Earlier, Heger tweeted that military aid was key to ensuring Ukraine can defend itself and all of Europe against Russia.

Poland announced Thursday that it would give Ukraine around a dozen MiG-29s, starting with four expected to be delivered in the coming days. Both Poland and Slovakia had indicated previously they were ready to grant Ukraine's requests for military aircraft, but only as part of a wider international coalition.

Heger said his government's move "is closely coordinated with the Polish side, Ukraine and other allies."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the promised planes were another example of NATO members "raising the level of their direct involvement in the conflict."

"The equipment deliveries naturally won't have any impact on the outcome of the special military operation, but it may bring more misfortune to Ukraine and Ukrainian people," Peskov said during a conference call with reporters.

Slovakia will receive 200 million euros (\$213 million) from the European Union as compensation and unspecified arms from the United States worth 700 million euros (\$745 million) in exchange for giving its MiG-29 fleet to Ukraine, Defense Minister Jaroslav Nad said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has repeatedly asked Western countries for fighter jets, but NATO allies held off, citing concern about escalating the alliance's role in the war.

In response to Poland's announcement on Thursday, the White House said Warsaw's move would have no bearing on President Joe Biden, who has resisted calls to provide U.S. F-16s to Ukraine, and that it was up to other nations to explain their own positions.

Michał Baranowski, managing director of Warsaw-based GMF East, part of the German Marshall Fund think tank, said changing conditions now permit such a move since the initial reluctance to respond to Ukraine's request.

"Many red lines have been crossed since that discussion last year," Baranowski told The Associated Press

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by phone. Sending MiGs now "is not the same difficult political sale that it was last year."

Ukraine will be able to use the MiGs immediately without needing any training.

Zelenskyy appealed directly to Heger for aircraft at an EU summit in Brussels last month.

Slovakia grounded its MiGs in the summer due to a lack of spare parts and expertise to help maintain them after Russian technicians returned home. In the absence of its own aircraft, fellow NATO members Poland and the Czech Republic stepped in to monitor Slovak air space.

Before Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, Ukraine had several dozen MiG-29s it inherited in the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, but it's unclear how many remain in service after more than a year of fighting.

The Slovak government that made the decision to sign a bilateral deal with Ukraine for the jets has only limited powers after a December no-confidence vote brought down the coalition government that was formed after the country's 2020 election.

The next election is set for September, when the opposition stands a good chance of winning. Its leaders include populist former Prime Minister Robert Fico, who opposes military support for Ukraine and EU sanctions on Russia and has said Slovakia's government has no mandate to deliver fighter jets to Ukraine.

Opposition parties including Fico's Smer-Social Democracy party rejected the government's decision Friday, threatening to sue.

Slovakia signed a deal to buy 14 U.S. F-16 Block 70/72 fighter jets, but delivery was pushed back two years to early 2024.

Today in History: March 18, Hitler and Mussolini join forces

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, March 18, the 77th day of 2023. There are 288 days left in the year.

Today's highlight in history:

On March 18, 1940, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini met at the Brenner Pass, where the Italian dictator agreed to join Germany's war against France and Britain. On this date:

In 1766, Britain repealed the Stamp Act of 1765.

In 1922, Mohandas K. Gandhi was sentenced in India to six years' imprisonment for civil disobedience. (He was released after serving two years.)

In 1925, the Tri-State Tornado struck southeastern Missouri, southern Illinois and southwestern Indiana, resulting in some 700 deaths.

In 1937, in America's worst school disaster, nearly 300 people, most of them children, were killed in a natural gas explosion at the New London Consolidated School in Rusk County, Texas.

In 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an executive order authorizing the War Relocation Authority, which was put in charge of interning Japanese-Americans, with Milton S. Eisenhower (the younger brother of Dwight D. Eisenhower) as its director.

In 1963, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Gideon v. Wainwright*, ruled unanimously that state courts were required to provide legal counsel to criminal defendants who could not afford to hire an attorney on their own.

In 1965, the first spacewalk took place as Soviet cosmonaut Alexei Leonov went outside his Voskhod 2 capsule, secured by a tether.

In 1974, most of the Arab oil-producing nations ended their 5-month-old embargo against the United States that had been sparked by American support for Israel in the Yom Kippur War.

In 2002, Brittanie Cecil died two days short of her 14th birthday after being hit in the head by a puck at a game between the host Columbus Blue Jackets and Calgary Flames; it was apparently the first such fan fatality in NHL history.

In 2016, police in Brussels captured Europe's most wanted fugitive, Salah Abdeslam, who was the prime suspect in the deadly 2015 Paris attacks.

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In 2020, the U.S. and Canada agreed to temporarily close their shared border to nonessential travel in the early days of the coronavirus pandemic.

Ten years ago: Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton announced her support for gay marriage in an online video released by the gay rights advocacy group Human Rights Campaign. A mortar shell explosion killed seven Marines from Camp Lejeune and injured eight other people during mountain warfare training at Hawthorne Army Depot in Nevada.

Five years ago: A self-driving Uber SUV struck and killed a pedestrian in suburban Phoenix in the first death involving a fully autonomous test vehicle; Uber suspended its autonomous vehicle testing program in Arizona, California, Pittsburgh and Toronto after the crash. Vladimir Putin rolled to a crushing re-election victory for six more years as Russia's president. The fourth in a series of bombings in Austin, Texas, left two people injured; authorities said it was triggered along a street by a nearly invisible tripwire. "Black Panther" became the first film since "Avatar" in 2009 to top the weekend box office for five weeks in a row.

One year ago: Vladimir Putin appeared at a huge flag-waving rally at a Moscow stadium Friday and lavished praise on his troops fighting in Ukraine, three weeks into the invasion that led to heavier-than-expected Russian losses on the battlefield and increasingly authoritarian rule. Volkswagen recalled more than 246,000 SUVs in the U.S. and Canada because faulty wiring harnesses could make them brake unexpectedly.

Today's Birthdays: Composer John Kander is 96. Actor Brad Dourif is 73. Jazz musician Bill Frisell is 72. Alt-country musician Karen Grotberg (The Jayhawks) is 64. Movie writer-director Luc Besson is 64. Actor Geoffrey Owens is 62. Actor Thomas Ian Griffith is 61. Singer-songwriter James McMurtry is 61. TV personality Mike Rowe is 61. Singer-actor Vanessa L. Williams is 60. Olympic gold medal speedskater Bonnie Blair is 59. Actor David Cubitt is 58. Rock musician Jerry Cantrell (Alice in Chains) is 57. Rock singer-musician Miki Berenyi is 56. Actor Michael Bergin is 54. Rapper-actor-talk show host Queen Latifah is 53. Former White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus is 51. Actor-comedian Dane Cook is 51. Country singer Philip Sweet (Little Big Town) is 49. Rock musician Stuart Zender is 49. Singers Evan and Jaron Lowenstein are 49. Actor-singer-dancer Sutton Foster is 48. Rock singer Adam Levine (Maroon 5) is 44. Rock musician Daren Taylor (Airborne Toxic Event) is 43. Olympic gold medal figure skater Alexei Yagudin is 43. Actor Adam Pally is 41. Actor Cornelius Smith Jr. is 41. Actor Duane Henry (TV: "NCIS") is 38. Actor Lily Collins is 34. Actor-dancer Julia Goldani Telles is 28. Actor Ciara Bravo is 26. Actor Blake Garrett Rosenthal is 19.