

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

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.

Monday, March 20

Senior Menu: Ranch chicken bread, boiled potatoes, broccoli, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.

School Lunch: Taco salads.

The Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

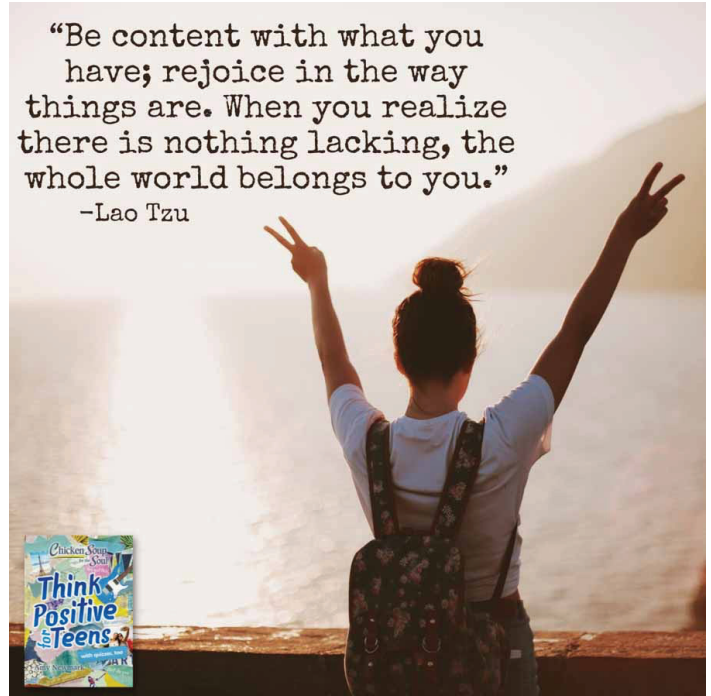
St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.

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

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

"Be content with what you have; rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you."

-Lao Tzu



Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.; Newsletter deadline.

United Methodist: Lent Bible Study with Pastor Brandon, 7 p.m.

1 p.m.: Senior Citizens Meet at the Groton Community Center.

Bates Township Equalization Meeting Notice:

The Bates Township Board of Equalization will meet at the Clerk's home on Tuesday, March 21st, 2023 at 6:30 pm.

All persons disputing their assessments are requested to notify the clerk prior to the meeting.

Betty Geist

Bates Township Clerk

14523 409th Ave

Conde, SD 57434


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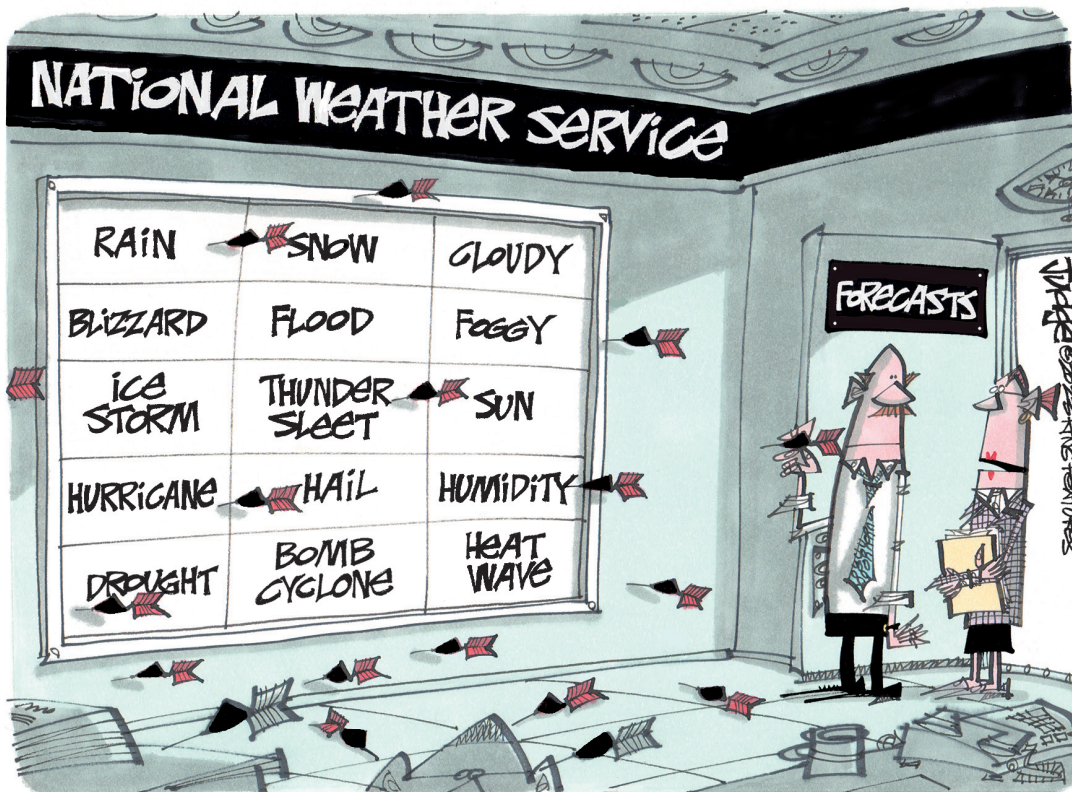
THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

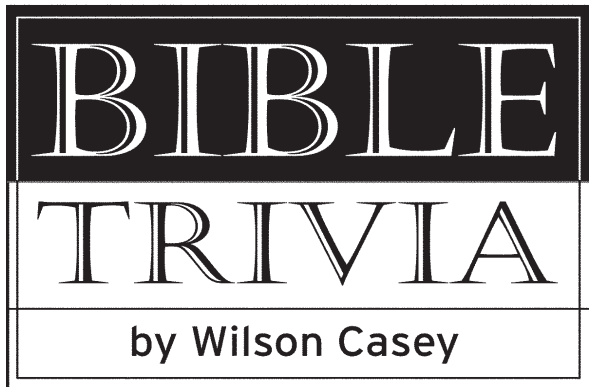
How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, Lord; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.

PSALM 119: 9-13 



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1. Is the book of Colossians (KJV) in the Old or New Testament or neither?

2. Who hid 100 prophets in a cave when Jezebel was trying to kill them? *Obadiah, Achan, Rachel, Joseph*

3. In Revelation 21:1's vision, what will not exist in the world to come? *Sky, Mountain, Sea, Darkness*

4. What's the only animal/creature in the Bible that tells a lie? *Serpent, Camel, Donkey, Dove*

5. In which book is the phrase "The nations are as a drop of a bucket"? *None, Genesis, Isaiah, Romans*

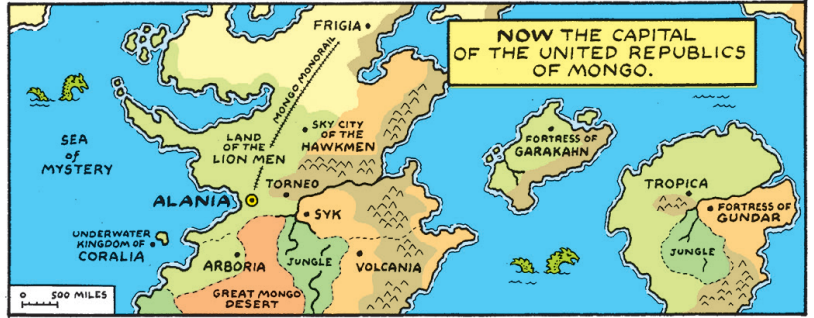
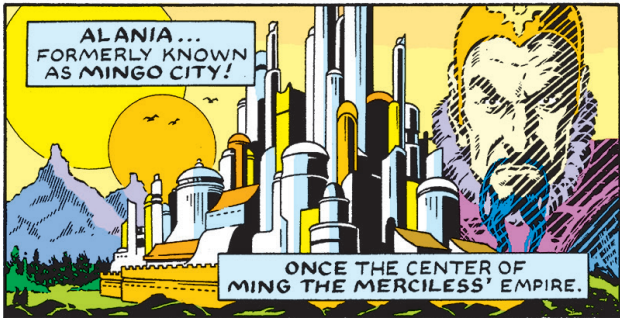
6. Which city was famous for its fallen walls? *Derbe, Jericho, Corinth, Capernaum*

ANSWERS: 1) New, 2) Obadiah, 3) Sea, 4) Serpent, 5) Isaiah 40:15, 6) Jericho

Sharpen your understanding of scripture with Wilson's Casey's latest book, "Test Your Bible Knowledge," available in bookstores and online.

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FLASH GORDON

BY JIM KEEFE

FLASH AND DALE ACCOMPANY KING BARIN TO ALANIA.

THERE THEY MEET UP WITH AN OLD, DEAR FRIEND.

ZARKOV! WHAT BRINGS YOU TO ALANIA?

YOU'D NEVER BELIEVE IT IF I TOLD YOU!

COME!

A SECRET CHAMBER WAS FOUND UNDERNEATH THE PALACE.

APPARENTLY ONE OF MING THE MERCILESS' OLD RESEARCH FACILITIES.

QUITE A SIGHT, AIN'T SHE?

AND FOR A MOMENT, ALL FLASH AND DALE CAN DO IS STARE DUMBSTRUCK AT THE DILAPIDATED CRAFT...

...UNTIL FINALLY...

I DON'T UNDERSTAND. WHAT SHIP IS THIS?

IT WAS BUILT BY ZARKOV IN AN ATTEMPT TO SAVE OUR HOME PLANET, EARTH, FROM ANNIHILATION.

IT WAS THE SHIP THAT FIRST BROUGHT US HERE TO MONGO!

3-19

NEXT: THE WAY IT BEGAN!

Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS

THE BETTER YOUR HANDS WORK IN A UNIFIED FASHION THROUGHOUT THE SWING, THE BETTER THE SHOTS YOU'LL HIT.

POSITIONING THE HANDS PARALLEL TO EACH OTHER ON THE SHAFT PROMOTES UNIFICATION.

"MARRYING" YOUR HANDS ALSO HELPS TO UNIFY THEM.

OVERLAPPING AS YOU SEE HERE (A) IS THE MOST POPULAR METHOD OF LINKING THE HANDS.

HOWEVER, IF YOU HAVE SHORT FINGERS OR SMALL OR WEAK HANDS, TRY MY INTERLOCKING GRIP (B).



Men With Factor V Leiden Can Still Receive Testosterone Therapy

DEAR DR. ROACH: I have Factor V Leiden, but I have been wanting to do testosterone replacement therapy. I have heard that testosterone causes blood clots. Obviously, with FVL, that would be a huge deal for me. Is this true? Does it cause clots, or is it safe for me to do? — *R.C.*

ANSWER: Factor V Leiden is a common genetic variant that increases a person's risk for developing a blood clot. However, a person who has never had a blood clot, but who is identified as heterozygous (meaning they only have one copy of the gene) for factor V Leiden, is still not likely to have a blood clot during their lifetime and is not recommended for treatment to prevent a blood clot.

Testosterone replacement therapy in men with FVL does increase the risk of blood clots in some studies, but not in others. In the studies that have shown an increase in risk, the risk has been estimated as approximately one person per thousand treated with testosterone each year. However, the risk occurs mostly during the first three months, and after two years on treatment, there is no additional risk. Thus, roughly one man per 500 who has FVL and gets treated with testosterone will get a clot, according to the studies that show an increase in risk.

This is a small risk, but a blood clot is a significant potential problem. So, the

go into the discussion about whether to give testosterone replacement to a man with FVL and symptomatic low testosterone levels. Most of the men I have seen with this issue have elected to take the replacement.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I would like to hear your views on the use of medium chain triglycerides (MCT) to slow down memory loss and dementia. Several articles I have read extol the biological process of MCTs, which — when ingested by an individual — are quickly converted into ketones that provide energy to brain cells. It seems logical to provide such neurobiological support to brain cells, to help keep the brain working longer. — *K.J.W.*

ANSWER: There is some evidence that MCTs slow progression of dementia in people with Alzheimer's disease, although the degree of benefit seen was small. There is no evidence that ingesting MCTs will prevent a person from getting dementia in the first place.

Not every treatment that is used to treat a condition will be effective at preventing it. My opinion, based on what is known about what causes Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, is that MCTs are not likely to prevent them, but they may be useful at slowing progression of the disease in people with existing dementia.

I want to emphasize that the benefit appears to be small. Of course, there aren't any treatments right now (not even the prescription medications for Alzheimer's disease) that dramatically improve Alzheimer's, so MCTs may be worth trying. They are generally well-tolerated and can be taken as a powder or an oil, but may cause nausea or diarrhea in a few people who take them.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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Keira Knightley stars as reporter Loretta McLaughlin in "Boston Strangler."

Courtesy of Hulu

"Boston Strangler" (R) -- You might've guessed from the title that this film is based on the true story of the 1960s serial killer the Boston Strangler, who had been linked to the murders of 15 women throughout Boston, Massachusetts. Told through the point of view of reporter Loretta McLaughlin (Keira Knightley), this film follows Loretta as she begins to connect the dots between each murder. As she gathers evidence alongside fellow reporter Jean Cole (Carrie Coon), not only does Loretta try to fight for the perpetrator to be

brought to justice; she must also fight to be heard within her own newsroom and within a male-dominated society. Alessandro Nivola and Chris Cooper also star in "Boston Strangler," out now. (Hulu)

"Puss in Boots: The Last Wish" (PG) -- Has the legendary Puss in Boots finally reached his demise? After the fearless, sword-slinging cat accidentally gets crushed by a bell, his doctor informs him that he only has one of his nine lives left. A now-humbled Puss decides to give retirement a shot, but when he hears about a magical Wishing Star that could possibly return his eight missing lives, he figures he has one last adventure in him. But, as Puss embarks on the journey to the Wishing Star with new friend Perrito and his ex-fiancee Kitty Softpaws, he must outrun Goldilocks and the Three Bears, as well as an assassin wolf who greatly longs to take Puss' last life. Antonio Banderas and Salma Hayek Pinault reprise their roles from the first "Puss in Boots" film, while new additions to the cast include Florence Pugh, Olivia Colman, John Mulaney and Wagner Moura. Out now. (Peacock)

"The Night Agent" (TV-MA) -- This new 10-episode action thriller series follows a low-level FBI agent named Peter Sutherland (Gabriel Basso). Peter is put in charge of manning the phone for night agents, who are a part of the secret investigative Night Action program by the FBI that operates within the White House. Peter is told by the President's Chief of Staff that this phone rarely rings, but one night, it does -- with CEO Rose Larkin (Luciane Buchanan) on the other line. Rose is faced with intruders attempting to assassinate her, and Peter, as her sole protector, must run to her rescue. The two begin working side by side to uncover who is behind the mysterious plot to put Rose's head on a stake, but with all the action that ensues, Peter could be in well over his head. The first two episodes will be available to stream on March 23. (Netflix)

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1. Who released the English translation of "Seemann (Deine Heimat ist das Meer)" in 1960?
2. Who topped the charts with "The Way You Make Me Feel"?
3. Which artist wrote and released "Lean on Me"?
4. Roger Daltrey is the lead singer of which band?
5. Name the song that contains these lyrics: "I'll go it alone, that's how it must be, I can't be right for somebody else if I'm not right for me."

Answers

1. Anne Shelton, who had a Top Ten version with "Sailor (Your Home is the Sea)." Then Anne Murray released a chart topper with her own version.
2. Michael Jackson, in 1987. The song first appeared on his album "Bad."
3. Bill Withers, in 1972. It came in at No. 208 on The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time list in 2010. The list has been updated periodically, most recently in 2021.
4. The Who. Daltrey made his first guitar when he was 13 years old and modeled it after a red Stratocaster.
5. "I've Gotta Be Me," by Sammy Davis Jr., in 1968. The song was used in the musical "Golden Rainbow." In more recent years the song has been used in soda and vehicle commercials.

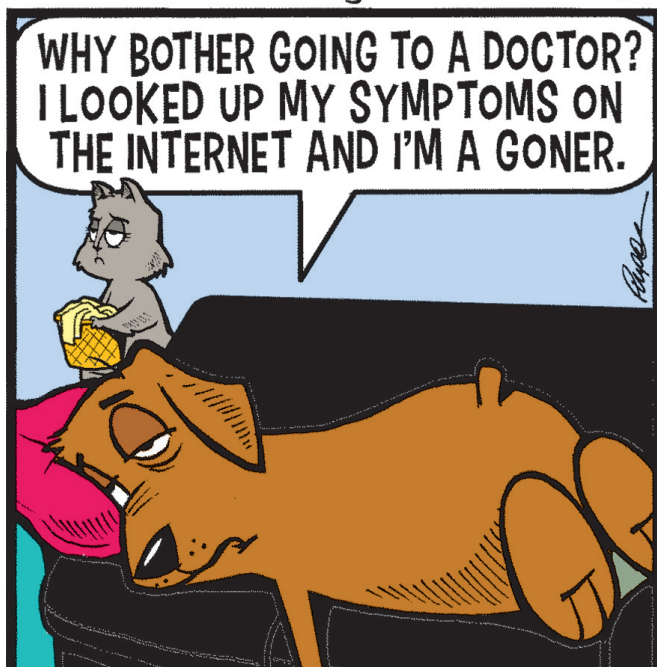
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GRIN and BEAR IT ^{by Wagner}



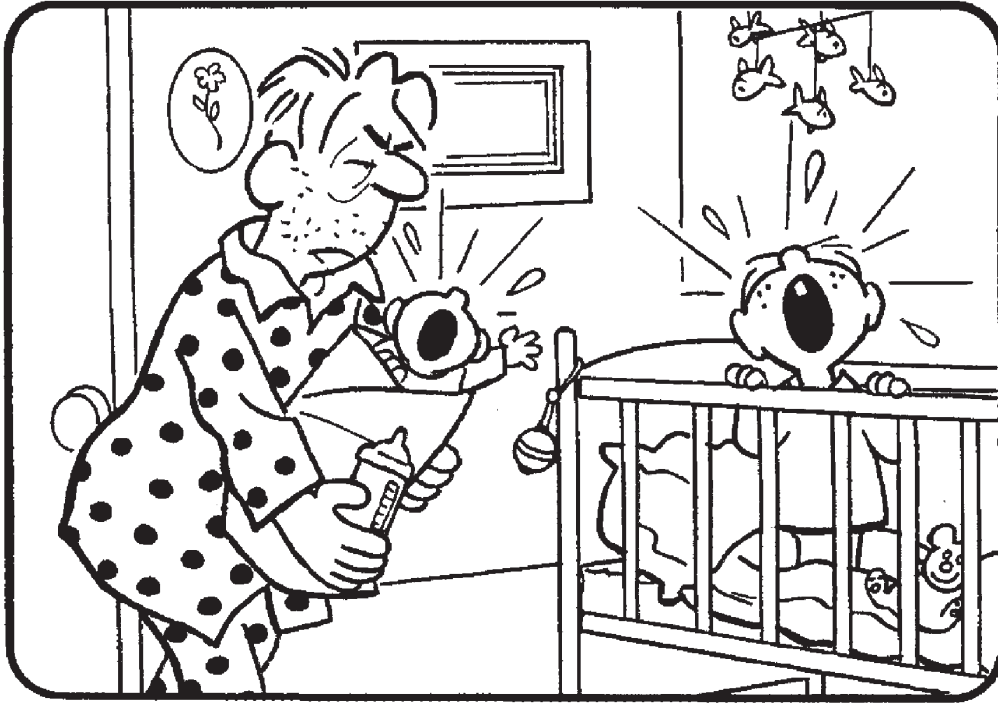
"Congratulations! You made America's most un-wanted."

Just Like Cats & Dogs ^{by Dave T. Phipps}

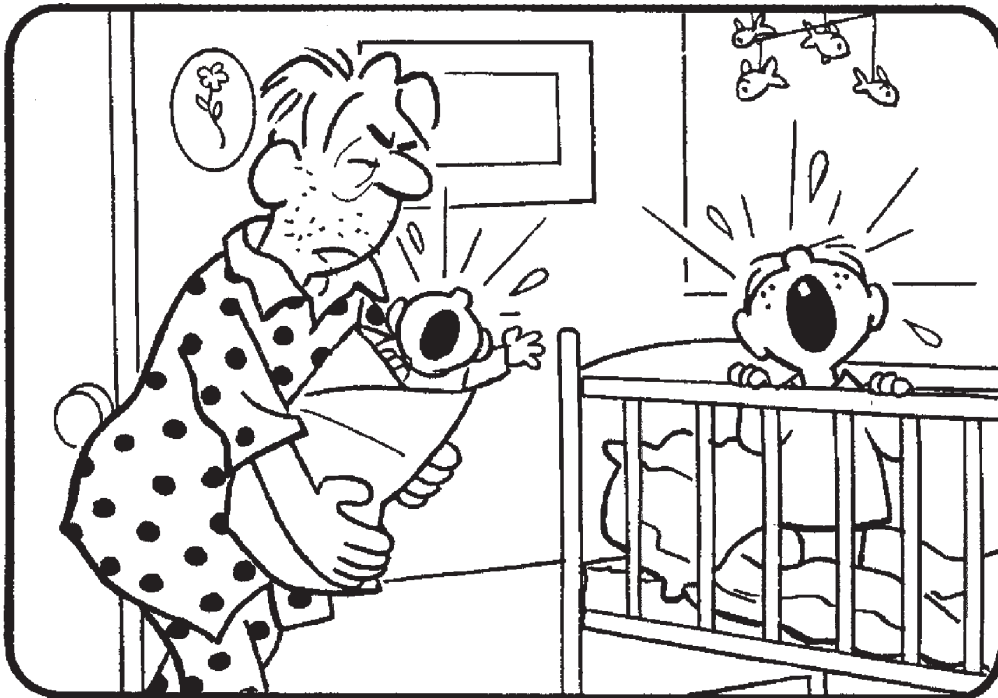


HOCUS-FOCUS

BY
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Flame is different. 2. Sleeve is shorter. 3. Bottle is missing. 4. Rattle is missing. 5. Fish is missing. 6. Teddy bear is missing.

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* The way some items are packaged these days, you need to be Houdini to get into them. When you're dealing with blister packs -- items sealed inside a hard plastic wrapper that looks to be heat crimped on the outsides -- try your can opener. You can run it around the edge of stubborn plastic packages, enough to get the item out. It's more secure than a carpet knife or razor.

* Want to be able to tell at a glance which key belongs to the front door, the shed, your grandma's house, etc.? Raid your (or your wife's or daughter's) stash of nail polish to paint the tops of keys to color code them.

* "Styrofoam trays that come with meat or in the produce area are very handy helpers for lots of little jobs. If yours are clean and unmarred, wash with hot, soapy water, rinse

and dry for later. They are perfect for sending a friend home with leftovers, as you can cover the meal with plastic wrap. There is then no need to return a plate." -- D. in Indiana

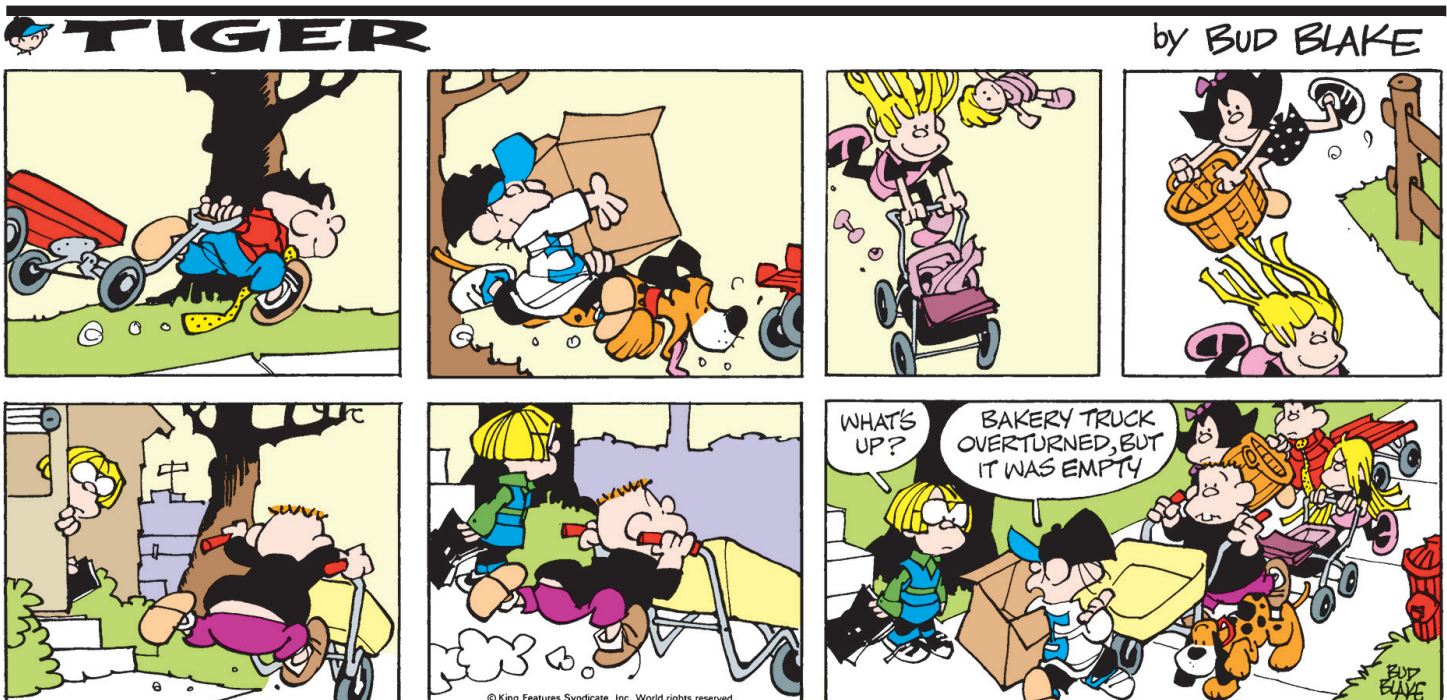
* For a deck of playing cards that has gotten sticky, put it in a bag (paper or plastic) and add a bit of baby powder. Shake vigorously. Take the cards out and shuffle to get off the extra powder. They are likely good as new.

* "Tidy loosely folded electric cords by storing them in cardboard tubes. The tubes can be cut to fit from a paper towel roll, or you can use a smaller, toilet-paper roll. Even long cords can be stored together in a gift-wrap core. Do not overfill a tube, nor wind any electrical cord too tightly." -- O.R. in Nevada

* If you have a juice spill on clothing, try club soda to remove it when the stain is fresh.

Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

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King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Blunder
- 5 Sir's partner
- 9 Witty one
- 12 Massage target
- 13 Lamb alias
- 14 "Evil Woman" gp.
- 15 Dairy aisle purchase
- 17 Zodiac feline
- 18 Indiana city
- 19 TV's DeGeneres
- 21 Rejection
- 22 — buddy
- 24 Bears' hands
- 27 Candy-heart word
- 28 Ashen
- 31 " — Believer"
- 32 Epoch
- 33 Actress Ruby
- 34 Attire
- 36 The whole enchilada
- 37 Barking mammal
- 38 Dark and gloomy
- 40 "I see"
- 41 "Shrek" princess
- 43 Scents
- 47 Adj. modifier
- 48 Canning jar feature
- 51 King, in Cannes

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11
12					13					14		
15				16						17		
18								19	20			
			21			22	23					
24	25	26			27				28		29	30
31					32					33		
34			35		36				37			
		38		39				40				
41	42						43			44	45	46
47					48	49	50					
51					52					53		
54					55					56		

- 52 Tale teller
- 53 "Woe —!"
- 54 World Cup cheer
- 55 China (Pref.)
- 56 Legendary loch
- 8 "This — no sense!"
- 9 Built to last
- 10 Downwind
- 11 Thug
- 16 Punk-rock subgenre
- 20 Prune
- 22 Strapping
- 23 Track shape
- 24 Pot-bellied pet
- 25 Docs' bloc
- 26 "Dunkirk" or "Platoon," e.g.
- 27 Faucet problem
- 29 Meadow
- 30 Snaky fish
- 35 Chignon
- 37 Sure winner
- 39 "Lady Love" singer Lou
- 40 Branch
- 41 Gambling game
- 42 Pedestal occupant
- 43 Sleek, in car lingo
- 44 Inspiration
- 45 \$ dispensers
- 46 Females
- 49 Sundial numeral
- 50 Author Brown

DOWN

- 1 Stare stupidly
- 2 Twice cuatro
- 3 "Hmm, I guess so"
- 4 Criminals
- 5 Office note
- 6 "The Greatest"
- 7 Be sick

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— King Crossword —

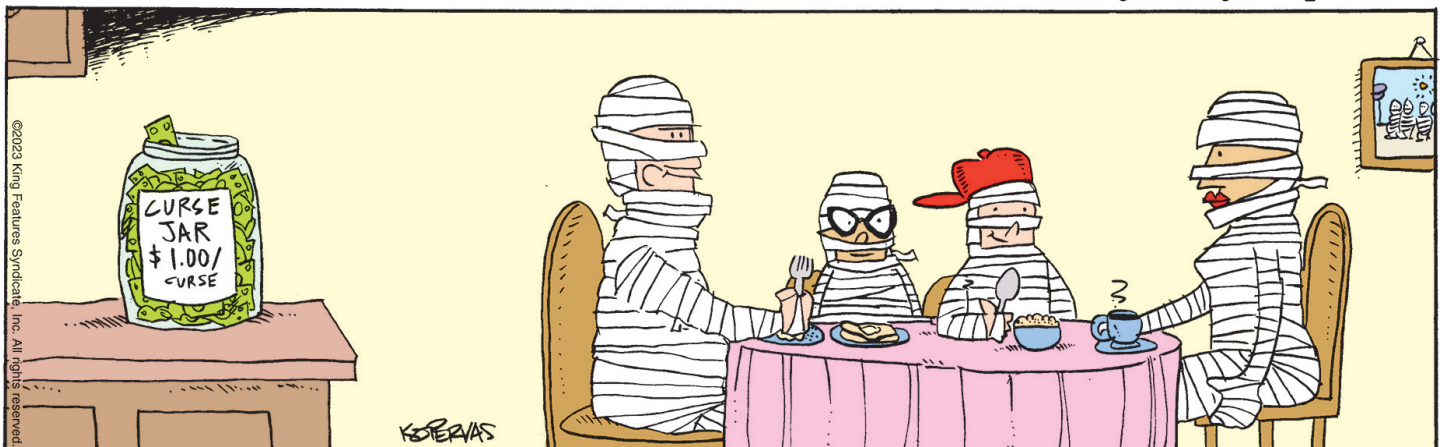
Answers

Solution time: 25 mins.

G	O	O	F		M	A	A	M		W	A	G	
A	C	H	E		E	L	I	A		E	L	O	
W	H	O	L	E	M	I	L	K		L	E	O	
K	O	K	O	M	O				E	L	L	E	N
			N	O		B	O	S	O	M			
P	A	W	S		L	U	V		P	A	L	E	
I	M	A			E	R	A			D	E	E	
G	A	R	B		A	L	L		S	E	A	L	
		M	U	R	K	Y		A	H				
F	I	O	N	A			A	R	O	M	A	S	
A	D	V			W	I	D	E	M	O	U	T	H
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O	L	E			S	I	N	O		N	E	S	S

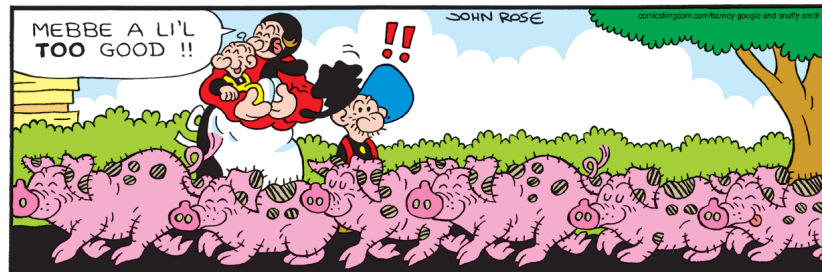
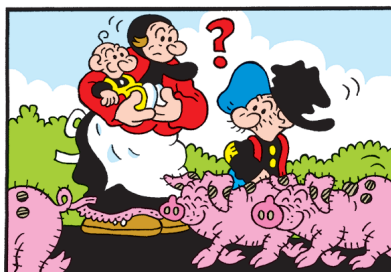
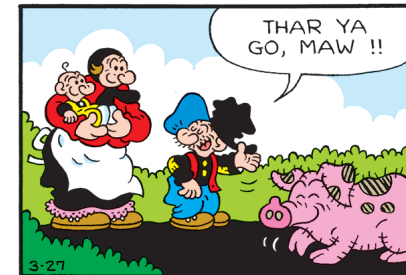
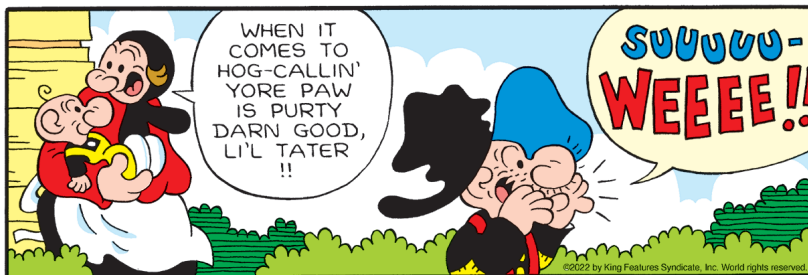
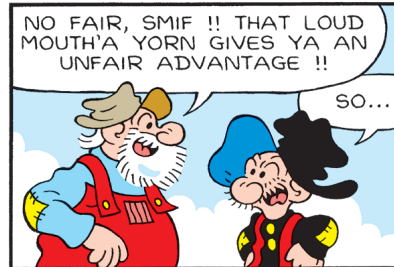
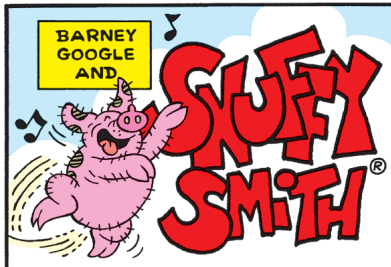
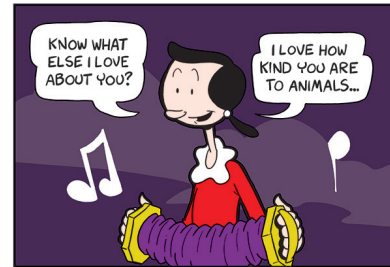
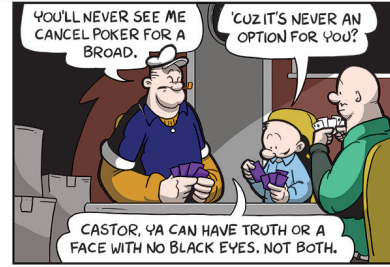
Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



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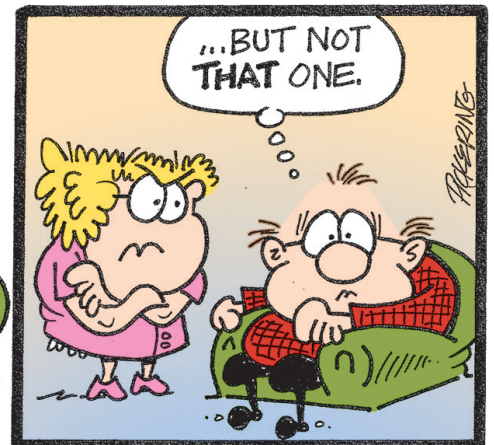
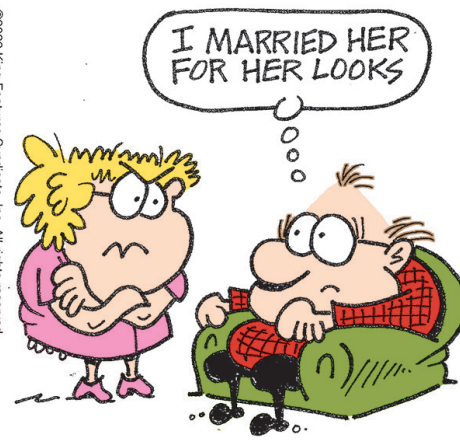
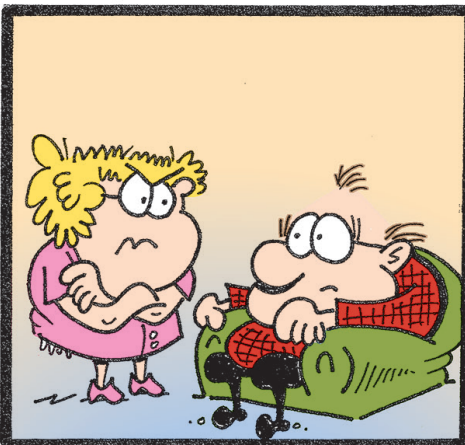
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The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Scam Messages on Cellphones

Somehow my cellphone number ended up on somebody's list. Now I'm receiving daily text messages saying that my Amazon Prime account is about to be canceled for nonpayment -- unless I immediately click the link and give them my credit card number. Some of the messages say the account has already been canceled but I can get it back by -- you guessed it -- giving them my credit card number within an hour.

I don't think so.

I'm on a phone list for Netflix as well. I called Netflix and no, my account is not about to be suspended. Said the representative: "You're on automatic pay. If somehow a payment isn't made, it's our fault for not processing it."

I have a few accounts on auto pay, and I think I'll change some others. Another reason to switch to the auto pay is the horrid mail service lately. The Post Office can't keep people, and the ones they have are spread so thin that we're lucky to get mail delivery three times per week. Which means that bills are late to arrive and mail waiting in the box is late getting picked up, which also means that sometimes a late fee is tacked on to the next month's payment.

If you're getting those "you're late" messages on your cellphone, beware. Don't accidentally touch the link in the message. It will take you to a website that looks real but is not, and just connecting to it can download a virus on your phone. Back out carefully and delete the text message. Take your time.

Don't try to contact the scammers to ask to be taken off their list. It only verifies that yours is a good number and it will be sold to others.

If you want to report these scams, go to reportfraud.ftc.gov.

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1. In April 1969, what Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher recorded the first official save in Major League Baseball history?

2. Lily Tomlin, Jane Fonda, Rita Moreno and Sally Field starred in what 2023 comedy film about four friends who take a trip to Super Bowl LI to see their hero play?

3. Name the LSU gymnast and social media star who said, "As a woman, you're not responsible for how a man looks at you and objectifies you. That's not a woman's responsibility."

4. Who are the only brothers in Major League Baseball history to have pitched no-hitters?

5. What former heavyweight boxing champion served as the referee for the controversial rematch between Muhammad Ali and Sonny Liston in 1965?

6. What Kentucky Wildcats star was selected No. 1 overall in the 2015 NBA Draft by the Minnesota Timberwolves?

7. What object did New York Giants player Phil McConkey find on the field during the postgame celebration at Super Bowl XXI?



by Ryan A. Berenz

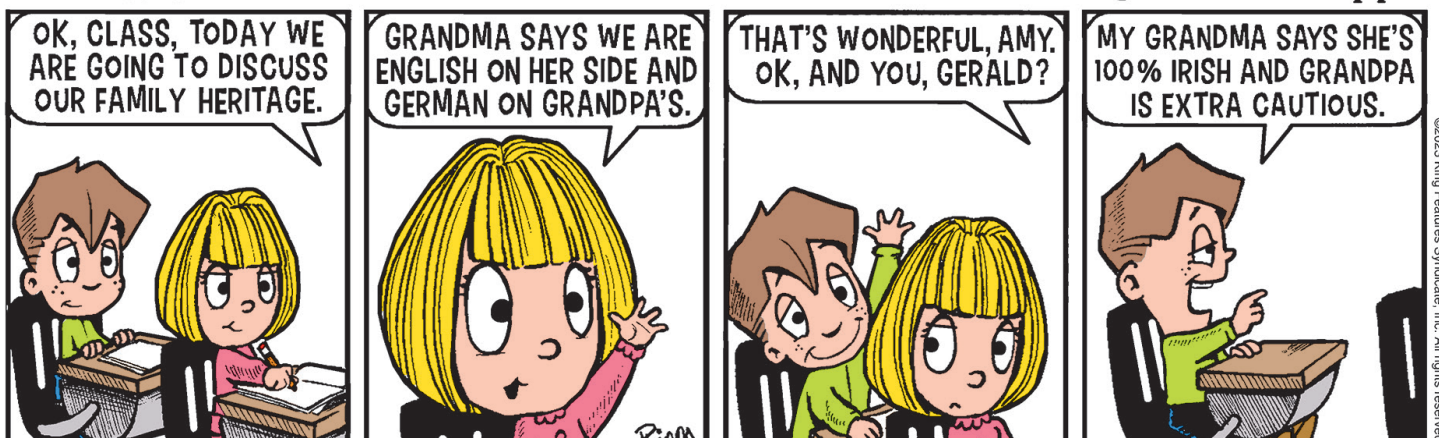
Answers

1. Bill Singer.
2. "80 for Brady."
3. Olivia Dunne.
4. Bob and Ken Forsch.
5. Jersey Joe Walcott.
6. Karl-Anthony Towns.
7. A handgun.

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





How to Stop Dogs From Roughhousing

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: My girlfriend and I moved in together recently, and we each brought a dog with us. I've got a German Shepherd named Mac, and her Golden Retriever is Diz. Both are about 2 years old, and they get along fine. However, in the evenings they roughhouse in the living room. We want them to just settle down so we can watch TV. Is this possible? -- Laura N., Augusta, Georgia

DEAR LAURA: It's very possible, even with younger dogs. And the sooner you establish behavior norms around a schedule, the better.

Diz's playful personality probably balances out Mac's serious working dog persona, so take advantage of this.

Wear them out: Both of these breeds are energetic. It'll be much easier to keep them calm if you take them out for a walk or a romp at a dog park for about an hour before dinner and TV time.

Set the behavior: When it's TV time, bring them into the room and give the "sit" or "lie down" and "stay" commands to each dog. Give them a treat only when they obey the commands.

Correct and redirect: When the dogs begin to wrestle or steal each other's toys, tell them to stop. Call both dogs over and work on the basic commands again, then have them sit or lie down in the original spots.

Separate them: If they begin roughhousing again and no longer respond to commands, take Diz into one room and Mac into another.

This will take time and repetition. The goal is to get them to follow your commands for longer and longer periods until you no longer have to separate them. Be prepared to pause the TV and focus on their training for days or weeks. The long-term reward is worth it.

Send your tips, comments or questions to ask@pawscorner.com.

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Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

* Did you dislike Brussels sprouts in your youth? Turns out they don't taste the same nowadays, thanks to Dutch scientist Hans van Doorn, who figured out which compounds in the sprouts made them bitter, then helped begin the work of selecting seeds that would produce more palatable results.

* The first gun was made in 1,000 AD in China.

* While ostriches can't fly, no bird on Earth can match their speed on land, since they can not only sprint at up to 43 mph, but cover more than 10 feet in a single stride.

* A 50 by 50 foot area of healthy lawn generates enough oxygen to supply a family of four.

* Every year, 1.2 million students drop out of school. That's 7,000 dropouts every day, or one every 26 seconds.

* Notorious gangster and bank robber Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd endeared himself to the American public by destroying mortgage papers at the banks he held up, freeing a lot of folks from their debts.


* The First Gulf War in 1991 technically never ended. There was just a cease-fire. The U.K. used that legal loophole to justify entering the Second Gulf War in 2003.

* In 2000, Sony invented a movie critic named David Manning and used his fictional quotes to promote the company's movies. The ruse backfired when Sony ended up paying over \$1.5 million to moviegoers in a class action lawsuit and over \$300,000 to the state of Connecticut, where "David Manning" supposedly worked at a small weekly paper.

* The throne of Denmark is made of narwhal tusks, which were claimed to be unicorn horns, and is flanked by three life-size silver lions, inspired by the legend of King Solomon's throne.

Thought for the Day: "Go out on a limb -- that's where the fruit is." -- Will Rogers

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- Birds may reject a birdhouse placed near food or water, as these attract raccoons and rats that will eat birds and their eggs.
- Claw marks on the house's surface or nesting material pulled from the entrance will show you these predators are around and can easily reach the birdhouse.
- Try mounting the house away from food and on a metal pole, rather than on a tree trunk or hanging it on a branch. Smear the pole with a petroleum jelly/hot pepper mixture and spread sharp gravel around the base to discourage intruders.

- Brenda Weaver

Source: www.all-birds.com



by Freddy Groves

Stand Downs for 2023

Stand Downs for 2023 are gearing up across the country, with more to take place as the weather warms up.

Stand Downs are one-, two- or three-day events for homeless veterans with varying services offered, depending on the length of the event. A location might have services ranging from medical screenings and dental care, benefits counseling (this can be for Department of Veterans Affairs, Social Security and food stamps) and legal advice, to housing assistance,

clean clothing and showers, job search help, haircuts, substance abuse referrals/recovery and much more.

A wide variety of government agencies, individual groups and veteran service organizations are on hand at each event to provide help to homeless veterans who attend. Some of those groups and agencies include Department of Labor, community service providers, VA medical centers and more.

To see the schedule for this year, go to www.va.gov/homeless/events.asp and either filter by date or state. More will be added as time goes on, so check back if there's nothing in your area right now. You can also check the site for the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (nchv.org/current-stand-downs) for a list of 2023 Stand Downs.

If you find an event and know you want to participate, contact the people listed for that event. If you'll likely need transportation, be sure to tell them and then keep in touch.

And if you can volunteer, sign up soon so event organizers will know how much help they'll have. Can you cook? Can you drive to pick up participants for the event? Are you a barber? Any of those services and more will be welcome.

If you're part of an organization and want to provide services, contact the nearest VA medical center and ask for the VA Stand Down point of contact. Depending on the services you propose to provide, your group might be eligible for a grant to help with costs.

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Wishing Well®

6	5	6	8	7	3	4	8	4	3	4	3	6
W	C	I	A	A	G	S	S	P	L	E	O	S
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H	O	B	E	C	C	E	I	C	V	K	O	I
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G	T	O	R	T	A	Y	H	L	O	F	I	R
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4	6	7	2	8	4	8	2	7	3	8	7	4
E	D	B	R	L	N	E	S	A	H	V	T	T
7	2	3	2	3	8	3	8	3	2	8	3	3
E	E	I	L	L	E	D	N	R	F	T	E	N

HERE IS A PLEASANT LITTLE GAME that will give you a message every day. It's a numerical puzzle designed to spell out your fortune. Count the letters in your first name. If the number of letters is 6 or more, subtract 4. If the number is less than 6, add 3. The result is your key number. Start at the upper left-hand corner and check one of your key numbers, left to right. Then read the message the letters under the checked figures give you.

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1. AD SLOGANS: What company advertises its clothing with the ad slogan, "Quality never goes out of style"?
2. SCIENCE: What is the tallest grass in the world?
3. MOVIES: What is the name of the camp in "Friday the 13th"?
4. GEOGRAPHY: What is the term when two water streams join to form a larger stream?
5. INVENTIONS: What is Tim Berners-Lee credited with inventing?
6. ANATOMY: Where are the quadriceps located?
7. LITERATURE: Which poet wrote a six-volume biography of President Lincoln?
8. TELEVISION: Timothy Lovejoy is a minister on which animated TV series?
9. ANIMAL KINGDOM: Yaks are native to which region?
10. U.S. PRESIDENTS: Before he was elected president, which of the founding fathers attended the coronation of Napoleon at Notre Dame Cathedral?

Answers

1. Levi's.
2. Bamboo.
3. Camp Crystal Lake.
4. Confluence.
5. World Wide Web.
6. Thighs.
7. Carl Sandburg.
8. "The Simpsons."
9. Tibet, China.
10. James Monroe and his wife Elizabeth.

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South Dakota Governor

Kristi Noem



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

Preserving Agriculture, Preserving Patriotism

I talk a lot about the American Dream. Unfortunately, that's unusual these days. To me, the American Dream was an ideal that was embedded in my heart since I was a child. I think that had a lot to do with growing up on the farm. It was tough work, but one of the best lessons my parents taught us kids was that life isn't easy.

The road to success isn't paved by anyone but yourself. Sure, others can help – but you have to work hard to attain it yourself. There is something so inherently American about being self-taught and self-starting – about making decisions and solving problems as you go. As my dad always said, "we don't complain about things, we fix them."

That's the mindset of so many of our farmers across the state of South Dakota. Their job is tiring, it's often thankless, but they still get up every single morning and get to work. Our farmers show what South Dakota grit and grind is all about. They're some of the hardest workers I know. And I figure the least I can do is protect their industry.

I recently had the pleasure of meeting Travis Mockler, a local ag producer near Centerville, South Dakota. Travis grew his independent farming operation into a diversified farming enterprise where he raises corn, soybeans, alfalfa, and stock cows, in addition to providing a custom haying service.

Folks like Travis truly embody the American Dream. But that success comes with its own challenges. Travis' ag operation was previously sued by a liberal activist group with a nuisance complaint. Fortunately, he was able to get back on his feet. I want to prevent South Dakota farmers from having to endure those kinds of struggles in the future.

That's why I signed legislation to preserve agriculture in South Dakota. This new law will keep our farmers protected from frivolous claims that can delay development and increase costs for producers.

South Dakota farmers have built ag into a \$32 billion industry. It accounts for one in every five jobs in the state. We need to make sure we can pass this thriving industry down to our kids and grandkids. That's why This legislation is so important to preserve the future of agriculture.

I hope that future generations can learn the same lessons that my parents taught me on the farm – that our rural way of life continues to instill the value of building the American Dream in so many young hearts. In my experience, I have come to find that preserving agriculture also preserves patriotism. And we need a whole lot of both of those nowadays.

Growing up, I always thought God must really love farmers. Just look at how often sowing and reaping are mentioned in the Bible. Now, I'm more convinced than ever that's true. It does take incredible faith to be in a profession where so much is out of your control. South Dakota farmers are literally feeding America – and the world – every single day. And when I look at our state's rolling hills and ag land and think about the hard work of our people, I'm sure that God has a hand in it all.

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★ SENATE MAJORITY LEADER CASEY ★

CRABTREE

Historic Wins for South Dakota

MADISON—The main stretch of the 2023 Legislative Session is truly one for the history books. With historic tax cuts and investments in the people of South

Dakota, your legislators made a major impact in the lives of our residents. Here are a few highlights and accomplishments of the session.

Visitors. A favorite part of session is welcoming guests to the Capitol. Several school groups, business leaders, associations and interested District 8 citizens visited the Legislature this year.

Teamwork. I'm proud of our Senate team and our colleagues in the House. For nine weeks each year, 105 dedicated public servants roll up their sleeves to sort through the pressing matters of the state. We don't always agree, but we discuss our differences professionally. Each of us brings different perspectives and life experiences to the Legislature, and that results in healthy debate to craft good policies. We work as a team focused on policy rather than politics. The result is a good product of impactful change that will benefit the people of South Dakota well into the future.

Tax Relief. The Legislature came together and approved the largest tax cut in state history. With the passage of HB 1137, the state's sales and use tax rate drops from 4.5 to 4.2 percent—an estimated savings of \$500 million over the next four years. We also reduced unemployment insurance trust fund costs to businesses by \$18 million annually.

Economic Strength. This year, we took steps for economic freedoms and economic strength so that South Dakota remains a business-friendly state. Notably, we passed occupational licensing reciprocity in collaboration with Gov. Noem to make it easy for qualified workers from other states to set roots in South Dakota and add to our economy. We also had an early victory with SB 41 to unlock housing infrastructure dollars. \$200 million is now ready for construction season.

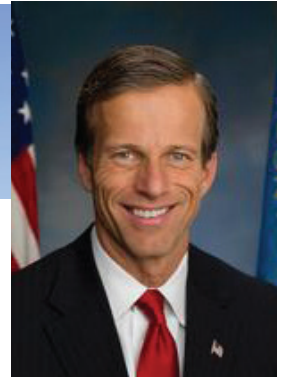
Education. One of my top priorities this year was a tuition freeze at state universities and technical colleges, and we delivered on that promise. It is one of the best investments in workforce development and the sustainability of South Dakota's economy, and it helps reduce student debt and fight inflation. The approved budget also increases K-12 and technical college funding by 7 percent. As lawmakers, we expect local school districts to use this increase to meet the needs of their district and increase teacher pay. We also approved 100 percent tuition reimbursement for National Guard members to attend state schools.

Care Providers. Eleven nursing homes have closed in South Dakota in the last year. To help address this, the organizations dedicated to caring for our vulnerable residents, the elderly and Medicaid patients will now receive state aid reimbursement at 100 percent of methodology—a huge step forward in financial sustainability for care providers, especially in rural areas. This funding is one of the core functions of government, and I'm proud to be part of this historic budget to finally meet the financial needs of those that serve our most vulnerable residents.

Election Integrity. I was proud to help lead the effort to strengthen South Dakota's election laws this year. In total, we passed 10 bills to improve the process and increase voter confidence. We worked hand-in-hand with county auditors to develop a package that helps make South Dakota the gold standard for election integrity.

Thank you to the people of District 8. It is an honor to serve in the State Senate and I am grateful for your support, your prayers and your feedback throughout the session. With the 2023 session behind us, I am already looking ahead to proposals for 2024. The best ideas often don't start in Pierre, but rather from the people of South Dakota. I encourage you to reach out to me with your ideas to make our state even better. Keeping the momentum of the 2023 session, I'm confident South Dakota's best days are still ahead of us and I'm eager to keep working hard for the state we all love.

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



Regulations Have Consequences

Government regulations don't always grab headlines, but they often cause unnecessary headaches for small businesses, farmers, and ranchers. The Biden administration has made aggressive use of its regulatory power, pushing through measures that will collectively saddle Americans with \$360 billion in compliance costs and 220 million hours of paperwork. These numbers are a reminder that regulations have consequences that ripple throughout our economy.

Regulations often have an outsized impact on small businesses. Take, for instance, the Biden administration's proposal to require federal contractors to disclose their greenhouse gas emissions and, in some cases, related emissions from their customers, over which they have no control. If implemented, thousands of small businesses would be affected by this rule and forced to spend valuable time and money just to continue doing business with the federal government. Another rule from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) would threaten small trucking companies with up to \$8,300 in additional costs per truck. A similar rule over a decade ago pushed many smaller trucking operations out of business. This would be problematic at any time, but is especially concerning amid supply chain problems nationwide and sustained inflation.

The Biden EPA has also resurrected the Obama-era Waters of the United States (WOTUS) rule, which would give the federal government sweeping jurisdiction over most bodies of water on private property, like certain ditches, and even prairie potholes. Landowners could face hundreds of thousands of dollars in compliance costs and see the value of their land plummet because of this extension of red tape to farms and ranches. I continue to support efforts to stop WOTUS, and related EPA overreach, through the Congressional Review Act process and the Supreme Court.

President Biden has also used the long arm of executive action to throttle back conventional energy production, starting with cancelling the Keystone XL pipeline and pausing energy development on federal lands during his first week in office. Last year, the president rolled back regulatory reforms that had streamlined permitting processes for energy projects, and he increased fees on oil production. And just recently, President Biden undercut the approval of one development project by significantly restricting drilling for oil in the Arctic.

Fortunately, the president's regulatory power is not unchecked, and congressional Republicans are using our authority under the Congressional Review Act to overturn burdensome regulations. We face an uphill battle, but Republicans have notched some noteworthy wins and remain committed to protecting the American people from these problematic regulations. I also recently introduced legislation to help prevent economically damaging regulations from going into effect in the first place. The Regulatory Transparency Act would require a more transparent and objective analysis of a regulation's impact, and it would require agencies to consider less burdensome options of achieving the same goal.

Regulations have consequences, and the Biden administration's use of the regulatory system to advance its agenda will continue to have negative impacts that ripple throughout our economy and our country. I'll continue to push back against damaging regulations and work to provide regulatory relief for our small businesses, farmers, and ranchers.

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CONGRESSMAN

DUSTY JOHNSON

Representing **SOUTH DAKOTA** at large



Tightening SNAP work requirements lift Americans out of poverty and away from dependence

The Hill

I was that kid on food stamps—I know firsthand how government assistance can both help and hurt. Education, training, and work provide dignity and economic opportunity. Too many Americans are on the sidelines while we are facing a record labor shortage.

We have the jobs, but we don't have the people to fill them. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to this problem, but there are policy areas where government is hurting, rather than helping Americans re-enter the workforce.

During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government waived all existing work requirements for government assistance programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). In the fog of war, this made sense. Government was right to not stand in the way of getting food benefits to Americans who lost their jobs because of the pandemic—quickly.

However, we are three years removed from 2020 and these blanket waivers have gone on far too long. Long before the pandemic, work requirements for welfare programs like SNAP had been abused. As we approach the end of the COVID-19 Emergency Authorization and previous laws go back into effect, it's past time for reform. It's time for my bill, the America Works Act.

Under existing law, Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) are required to work or participate in work-related training or education for at least 20 hours per week in order to receive SNAP benefits. Unfortunately, states have long abused waivers for ABAWDs that allow them to suspend these very modest work requirements.

When the idea of work requirements gets brought up in Congress, many of my colleagues on the other side are quick to call out Republicans for seeking to take away benefits from single mothers with young children and disabled Americans—that is not accurate.

1.36 million ABAWD households recorded zero gross income in 2020—if you have no children, no disabilities, no dependents, and no job—what are you doing with your day? People who can work, should work. Especially if they expect to receive government assistance.

The America Works Act is simple. It restores the integrity of the SNAP state exemption waiver process by repealing language where the United States Department of Agriculture can simply grant a waiver for work requirements if a state "believes" it doesn't have enough jobs to provide employment to an individual. There are nearly 11 million open jobs in the United States, I'd challenge any state to prove with data the "belief" that they can't find an American a job. Additionally, states can currently roll over their waivers from year to year. This has allowed states to rack up thousands of waivers, further abusing the program—my bill removes this rollover provision.

The America Works Act also changes age eligibility for SNAP waivers. Currently, if you are over 49 years old, you can receive SNAP benefits with no need for a waiver. As I approach 49 years old, I know I still have decades left of work ahead of me. My bill changes the maximum age rate of an ABAWD to be 65 years old, consistent with retirement and Medicare age.

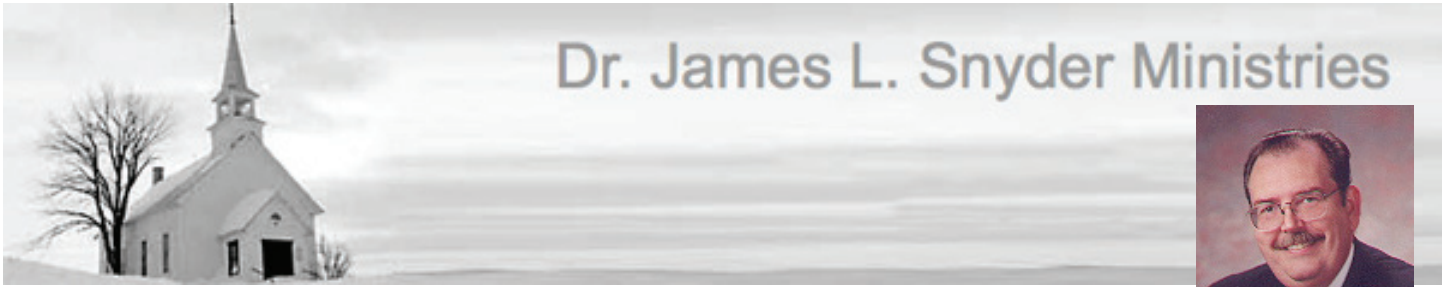
Finally, the America Works Act limits the provision that exempts ABAWDs from work requirements if they have any dependent children to if they have any dependent children under the age of seven years old. By seven years old a child is in school nearly 35 hours a week. If a child can go to school nearly full-time, a parent with no other children under the age of seven can work 20 hours per week.

This bill is commonsense—and it continues to leave waivers in place for areas with certain levels of unemployment.

As Congress weighs solutions to our labor crisis, record government spending, and work requirements in the 2023 Farm Bill, I hope the America Works Act is strongly considered as a solution to lift Americans out of poverty and encourage work rather than government dependence.

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Learning what "Me-Time" is all about

Several months ago, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage said she and her daughter and granddaughter were going to St. Augustine for a week and wondered if I wanted to go along.

I said, "Let me think about it for a while, and I'll get back to you."

I then overheard a conversation between my wife and her daughter concerning their trip to St. Augustine. One phrase that kept coming up in that conversation was "thrift stores." That caught my attention.

If there's a place I do not like to be, it is a thrift store. However, the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage is an expert in everything thrift store.

The week before she went, she asked me if I wanted to go along with them. She smiled and said, "After all, we will be spending a lot of time at the thrift stores in the area."

I was not too fond of her smile on this occasion; I knew exactly what it meant.

Thinking about how to get out of the situation, I told her, "No, I don't think I want to go; there are some things I need to do here, so you girls go and have a great time."

"What is it that you need to do?"

I said as seriously as possible, "I need to spend some Me-Time here by myself."

"Me-Time," she said as she laughed. "Do you need any advice on how to do that activity?"

The week of the "girl's trip" had arrived, and The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage had her Sissy Van packed for the trip. I noticed a large empty spot in the back, but I didn't say anything to her about it. I knew exactly the purpose of that space.

Finally, she said goodbye, kissed me and was out the door to begin the trip to St. Augustine.

Early the following day, I began doing some of my projects for the week. I had some books that needed reading, and started my work.

A little after noon, I checked my watch and wondered where lunch was. Usually, by this time, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage has lunch ready. So I got up and went into the kitchen to see what was holding her up.

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When I got into the kitchen, it dawned on me that I was involved in "Me-Time" for the week. I'm not sure I had included lunchtime in my preparation for this week.

I opened the refrigerator, picked out some things for lunch, and enjoyed my lunch. The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage had prepared many things in the fridge for this week, so I took advantage of her generous preparations.

As I was munching on my lunch, I was thinking about this "Me-Time" that I thought was wonderful. But at least I had lunch, and then I could return to what I was doing.

At suppertime, it was the same routine. As I ate my supper, I couldn't help but think that this "Me-Time" wasn't worth the time. But I was in the middle of it, so there was nothing I could do, but it did help me with an excuse not to go to St. Augustine.

I put in a lot of hard work and finally went to bed.

I must've slept very well that night because before I knew it, morning arrived, and time to get up and have breakfast. I noticed it was empty on the other side of the bed, and I just thought that she had gotten up ahead of me and was getting everything ready for breakfast.

I walked out to the kitchen, and there was nobody in the kitchen. So I wondered where she could have been and how soon she would have breakfast.

Looking out the front window, I noticed her Sissy Van was missing, and then it dawned on me.

She's not here, and I'm on my "Me-Time" misadventure. I'm on my own for today.

The first thing I had to do was to make the coffee. So how can you start a day without coffee?

Looking around, I could not see any coffee, only an empty coffee pot on the counter. Now, I had to figure out how to work that coffee pot.

I found the coffee grounds for the coffee pot. I didn't know how much to put in, so I put in a lot because I like a nice hot cup of coffee. Then I put water where it was supposed to go and thought I had everything well done.

With my fingers crossed, I pressed the start button and the coffee pot, and nothing happened. Now, what was I supposed to do? As I moaned over this, I noticed that the coffee was unplugged. The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage seems to unplug the coffee pot every night before bed.

I sighed a deep sigh and plugged it in and pressed the button in the coffee pot started to work.

That was just the beginning of "Me-Time," and much more was happening.

After two days of this, I realized all the work that The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage did that I was unaware of.

Giving this a lot of thought, I was reminded of the verse of Scripture. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

Maybe instead of focusing on "Me-Time," it would be much better to focus on "We-Time." There is much more advantageous to this.

EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: How are wild tiger populations faring today around the world? – P.K. via email

Wild tigers have been roaming the planet for upwards of a million years—about 600,000 years longer than humans. Tigers can be found across East and South Asia, with most of them lurking in the rainforests of India, Thailand and Nepal. But don't expect to see one anytime soon, as their numbers plummeted during the 20th century from 100,000 worldwide to just 4,500. Hunting has been the main cause of their demise, but threats like habitat loss and global warming could push them to extinction if we don't act fast.



Don't expect to see a tiger in the wild anytime soon, as their numbers plummeted during the 20th C. from 100,000 worldwide to just 4,500.

Credit: Pexels..

Also, demand across Asia for tiger parts—traditional medicine practitioners make use of tiger bones, eyes, whiskers and teeth to treat a wide range of ailments regardless of medical effectiveness—has led to an uptick in recent years of so-called “tiger farming” whereby wildlife poachers capture wild tigers and imprison them to breed. The non-profit WWF reports that over 8,000 tigers (almost double the number living in the wild) are imprisoned in tiger “farms” across East and Southeast Asia.

Climate change is also a big threat. Rising sea levels are threatening the mangrove forests where the Bengal tigers of the Sundarban regions of India and Bangladesh reside. WWF projects that habitat loss could completely decimate the Sundarbans given the sea level rise predicted for the region by 2070.

But it's not all doom and gloom. According to ShareAmerica, tigers have begun to rebound slightly in recent years. The increase can be attributed to the reduction of conflicts over space between humans and tigers and education on the fragile status of these precious creatures (Indonesia's Ministry of Environment and Forestry has trained over 1,200 community members in reducing conflicts between humans and tigers). The 2021 END Wildlife Trafficking Strategic Review states that since 2015, no tigers have been killed over landscape conflicts. Additionally, Nepal, a natural habitat for tigers, saw their 121 tigers back in 2009 skyrocket to around 355. In nearby India, new research has laid the blueprint for conservation and human development to coexist. Dr. Stotra Chakrabarti with Macalester College emphasized “land-sharing,” in which humans and nature both occupy shared areas. Chakrabarti offers a solution to government officials that finds the Goldilocks zone when considering biodiversity and human growth.

Just because you don't live near wild tigers doesn't mean you can't help in their revival. Refuse to purchase illegally harvested tiger products. And if you do reside in an area with wild tigers, support their protection by voting for legislation prioritizing the safety and increase of their population. Tigers have been decimated by human activity over the years, but we can take actions now to assist in their miraculous upswing. Let's all do our part to save our endangered friends.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

COMMENTARY

Veto of lodging tax bill doesn't align with Noem's freedom-loving rhetoric

DANA HESS

Gov. Kristi Noem could often be heard during the pandemic saying that South Dakota's response to COVID-19 was based on freedom. Her message was that the state wasn't going to tell local governments to shut down — that was up to them. It wasn't going to shut down some businesses while designating others as essential because it wasn't the job of government to pick winners and losers. State government, under Noem's leadership, was generally going to leave South Dakota's citizens alone to deal with the pandemic in their own way.

That hands-off strategy, according to the governor, was in part responsible for the booming economy that South Dakota enjoys today. That's a message Noem still touts. In February, she went to Washington, D.C., and spoke at the Cato Institute, a libertarian public policy research organization, about "Government and Healthcare — A Dangerous Policy Cocktail."

(As it turns out, Noem spent a few days in Washington, D.C., speaking on various topics. She also talked to the America First Policy Institute about how states can respond to Communist China and she served as the keynote speaker at the Coolidge Foundation's "Coolidge and the American Project" conference.)

To reiterate: During the pandemic, Noem was all for no state control of business or local governments. That was a great deal of her message at the Cato Institute.

That's what made her recent veto of House Bill 1109 seem so odd. That bill would allow business improvement districts to raise the occupation tax on motel rooms from \$2 to \$4, or to 4% of the rented room charge.

Proponents of the bill pointed out that the last time the tax had been raised was in 2005. They said the money from the tax is used in marketing efforts to attract more events like sports and livestock shows and noted that the biggest users of hotel rooms in South Dakota are out-of-state tourists.

There was no tax increase in the bill. Its passage would only allow business improvement districts to pass a tax increase if they thought there was a need in their area for more money for tourism promotion. It left the decision up to local governments and local businesses. That smells a lot like freedom.

In her veto message, Noem said an increase in lodging occupation taxes would hurt the state's rural residents who have to travel, and sometimes stay overnight, when they visit the state's larger cities for business, medical care or youth sporting events. Her veto message to the House sounded as if the tax would go into effect with the passage of the legislation. That's not the case, but it didn't keep the governor from vetoing the bill in an over-the-top manner.

Noem used a branding iron with the word "VETO" on it to drive her message home. Governors veto bills all the time but rarely go in for so much showmanship. Her branding iron veto was something we'd expect to see from the governor in "Blazing Saddles," not in the South Dakota Capitol.

Perhaps Noem was a bit peckish about dealing with a bill that could possibly raise taxes since, just more than a week before her veto, the Legislature had rejected her signature proposal to eliminate the state's sales tax on groceries.

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Because Noem got out her branding iron early, the House tried to override her veto during the main run of the legislative session. That vote failed 41-29 as veto overrides need a two-thirds majority. In the House, that means it needs 47 votes.

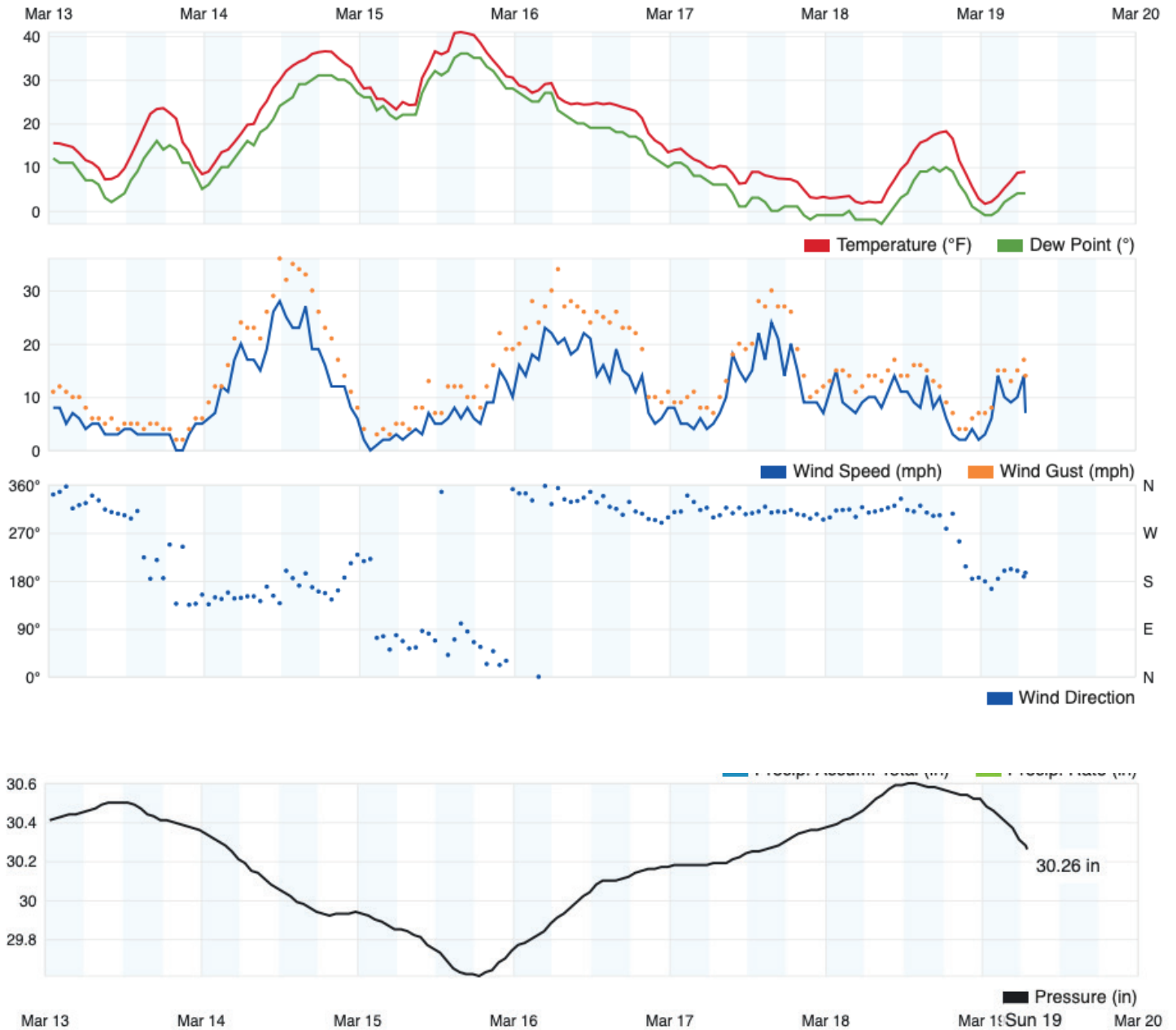
Noem has made her handling of the pandemic part of her resume. As evidenced by her trip to Washington, D.C., she's willing to share that message far and wide. That's why it's odd for the governor to wrap her hands around her branding iron to veto the lodging tax when she claims her hands-off approach during the pandemic was the best thing for the state's local governments, businesses and economy.

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

Groton Daily Independent








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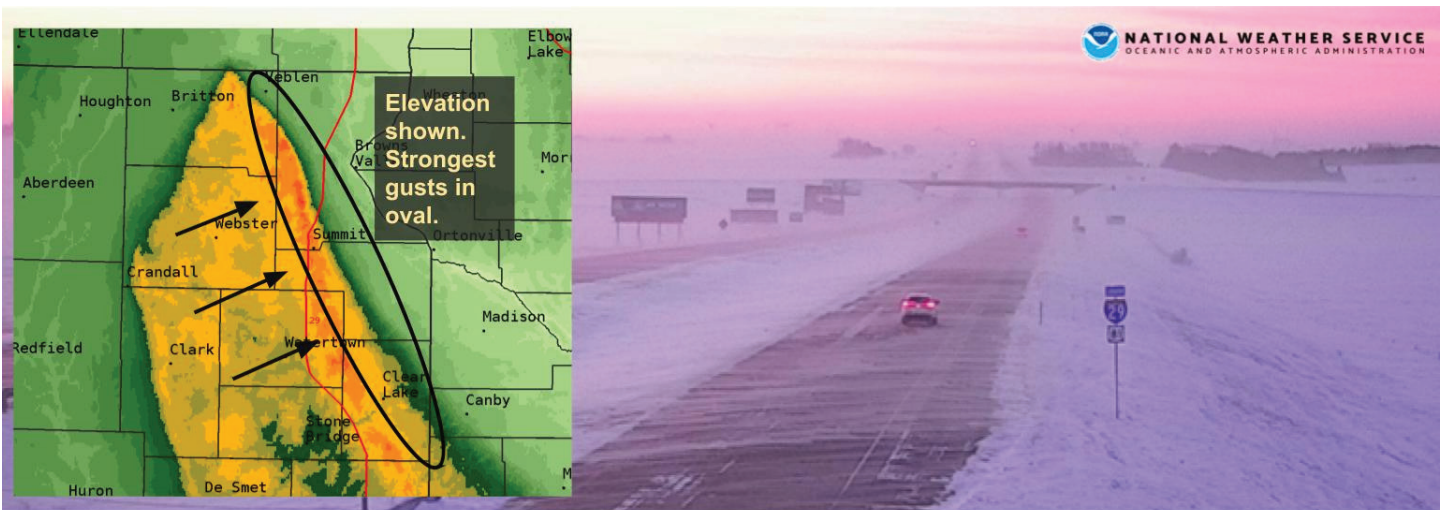
Past Week's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

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Today	Tonight	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday
						
Mostly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	40% → 70% Chance Snow then Snow Likely	50% Chance Snow	20% Partly Sunny then Slight Chance Snow
High: 36 °F	Low: 11 °F	High: 24 °F	Low: 15 °F	High: 30 °F	Low: 18 °F	High: 29 °F



Strong Downslope Winds Sunday

www.weather.gov/abr
March 18, 2023 3:04 PM

What/Where?

Wind gusts over 40 mph, especially in the oval on the map above, combined with cold temperatures and deep snowpack will lead to blowing snow and reduced visibilities including I29 from Summit northward.

When?

Midnight to 3 pm Sunday, March 19

Impacts?

Use caution while traveling! Blowing and drifting snow is likely, visibility may be reduced and roadways may become icy.

Wind gusts over 40 mph, combined with cold temperatures and deep snowpack will lead to localized blowing snow and reduced visibilities across northeast South Dakota, including I29 from Summit northward. Winds will increase overnight and continue through Sunday afternoon. Use caution if traveling in this area!

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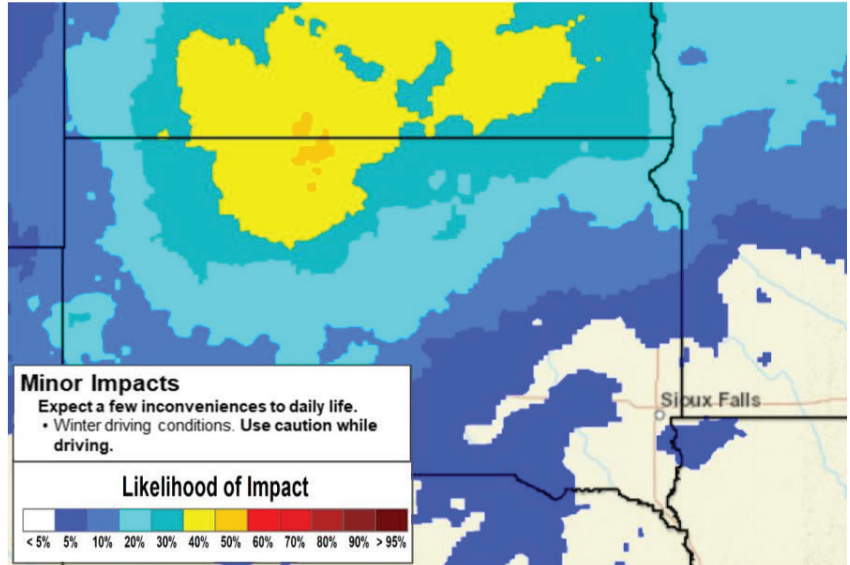


Another Round of Winter Weather

March 19, 2023
3:29 AM

Key Messages

- Precipitation timing: Early Tuesday into early Wednesday
- **Mostly snow** - Can't rule out a wintry mix or locally light freezing drizzle
- Less intense winds with this system
- Low to moderate confidence: Timing & snow accumulation



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

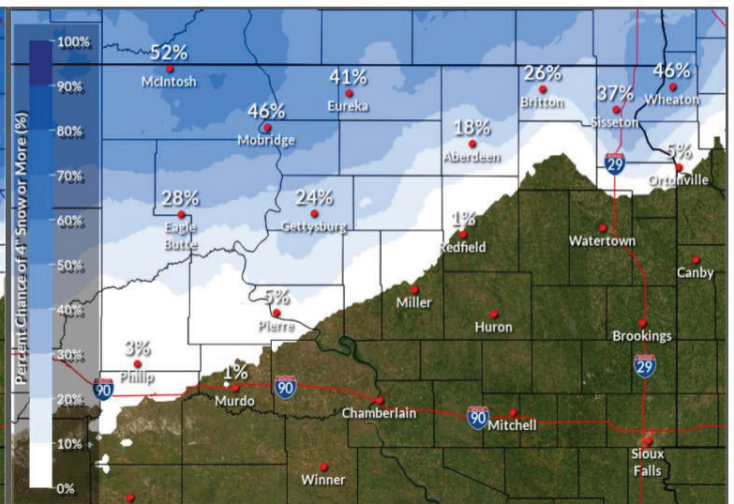
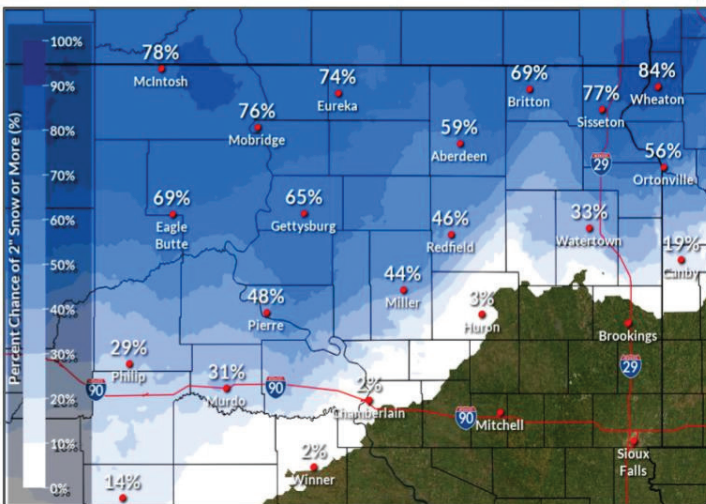


Snowfall Probabilities

March 19, 2023
3:36 AM

Probability of 2 Inches

Probability of 4 Inches



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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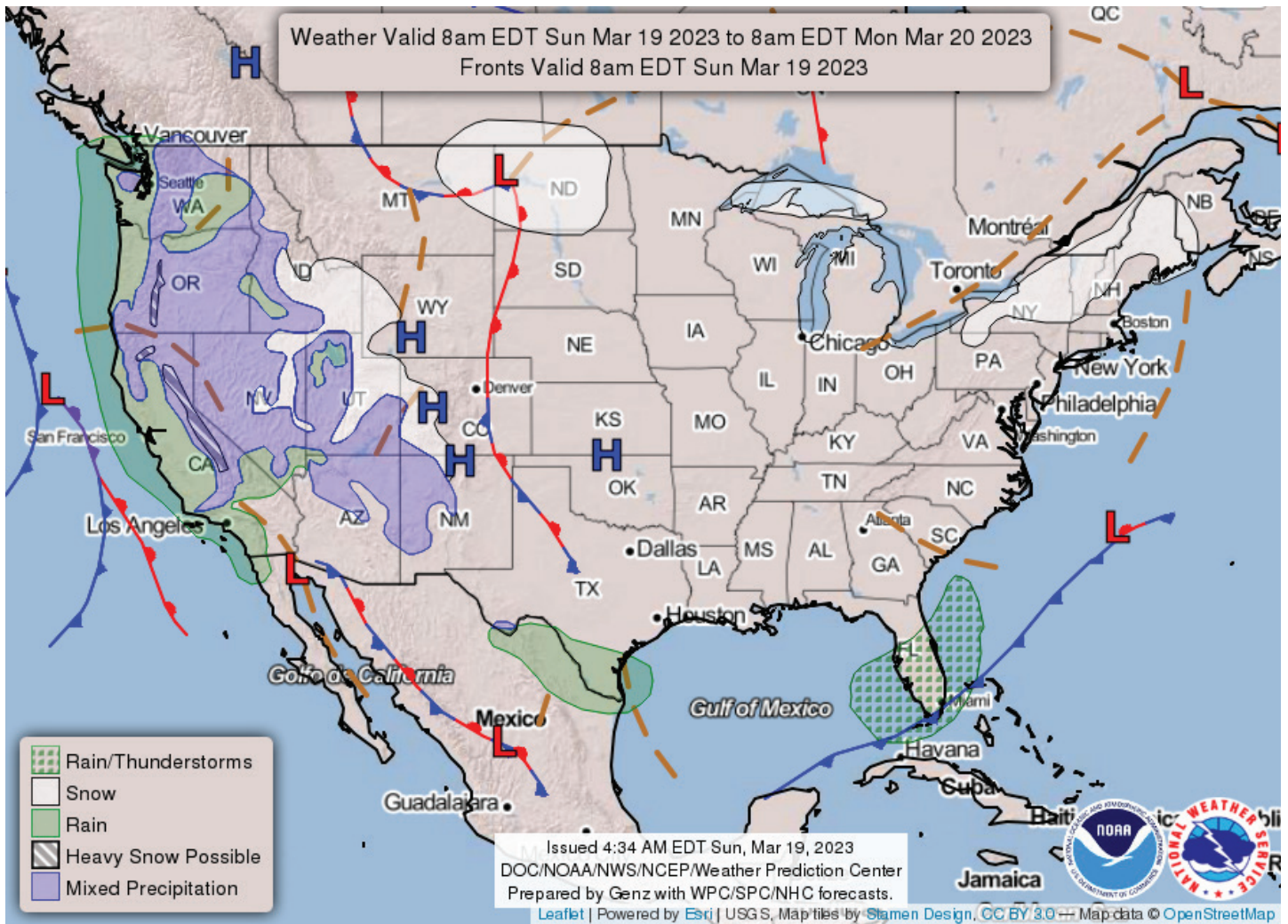
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 18 °F at 5:56 PM
Low Temp: 1 °F at 5:25 AM
Wind: 17 mph at 10:42 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 09 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 73 in 2012
Record Low: -11 in 1965
Average High: 43
Average Low: 21
Average Precip in March.: 0.49
Precip to date in March.: 1.20
Average Precip to date: 1.66
Precip Year to Date: 2.78
Sunset Tonight: 7:44:38 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:33:44 AM



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Today in Weather History

March 19, 1968: During a severe weather event, hail up to 1.75 inches in diameter fell 2 miles south of Brookings. Also, hail 1.00 inch in diameter fell 3 miles northeast of Sioux Falls.

March 19, 2006: Heavy snow of 7 to as much as 20 inches fell on the afternoon of the 18th until around noon on the 20th. The South Dakota Department of Public Safety issued a travel advisory for any travel but especially for the State Basketball Tournament travelers. Interstate-90 was closed on Sunday into Monday morning, with many people stranded. Many cars and trucks were stuck on the roads. Many schools and meetings were postponed or canceled. Snowfall amounts included 8 inches at Blunt, Onida, and Lake Sharpe, 9 inches at Mission Ridge, 10 inches at Pierre, 11 inches at Fort Pierre and near Stephan, 12 inches at Eagle Butte, 14 inches northwest of Presho, 16 inches at Murdo, and 20 inches near Iona.

1907: The highest March temperature in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, was set when the temperature soared to 97 degrees. Dodge City, Kansas, also set a March record with 98 degrees. Denver, Colorado, set a daily record high of 81 degrees.

1948: An estimated F4 tornado moved through Fosterburg, Bunker Hill, and Gillespie, Illinois, killing 33 people and injuring 449 others. 2,000 buildings in Bunker Hill were damaged or destroyed. The total damage was \$3.6 million.

2003: One of the worst blizzards since records began in 1872, struck the Denver metro area and Colorado's Front Range started with a vengeance. Denver International Airport was closed, stranding about 4,000 travelers. The weight of the snow caused a 40-foot gash in a portion of the roof, forcing the evacuation of that section of the main terminal building. Winds gusting to 40 mph produced drifts six feet high in places around the city. Snowfall in foothills was even more impressive. The heavy wet snow caused numerous roofs of homes and businesses to collapse. The estimated cost of property damage alone, not including large commercial buildings, was \$93 million, making it the most costly snowstorm on record for the area. In Denver alone, at least 258 structures were damaged. Up to 135,000 people lost power during the storm, and it took several days for power to be restored. Mayor Wellington Webb of Denver said, "This is the storm of the century, a backbreaker, a record-breaker, a roof breaker." Avalanches in the mountains and foothills closed many roads, including Interstate 70, stranding hundreds of skiers and travelers. The Eldora Ski area 270 skiers were stranded when an avalanche closed the main access road. After the storm, a military helicopter had to deliver food to the resort until the road could be cleared. Two people died in Aurora from heart attacks after shoveling the heavy wet snow. The National Guard sent 40 soldiers and 20 heavy-duty vehicles to rescue stranded travelers along a section of I-70. The storm made March 2003 the snowiest March on record, the fourth snowiest month on record, and the fifth wettest March on record. The total of 22.9 inches is the most significant 24-hour total in March. The storm also broke 19 consecutive months of below-average precipitation for Denver. The 31.8 inches of snow was recorded at the former Stapleton Airport in Denver for its second-greatest snowstorm on record (the greatest was 37.5 inches on 12/4-12/5/1913) with up to three feet in other areas in and around the city and more than seven feet in the foothills. Higher amounts included: Fritz Peak: 87.5 inches, Rollinsville: 87.5 inches, Canin Creek: 83 inches, Near Bergen Park: 74 inches, Northwest of Evergreen: 73 inches, Cola Creek Canyon: 72 inches, Georgetown: 70 inches, Jamestown: 63 inches, Near Blackhawk: 60 inches, Eldora Ski Area: 55 inches, Ken Caryl Ranch: 46.6 inches, Aurora: 40 inches, Centennial: 38 inches, Buckley AFB: 37 inches, Southwest Denver: 35 inches, Louisville: 34 inches, Arvada: 32 inches, Broomfield: 31 inches, Westminster: 31 inches and Boulder: 22.5 inches. This storm was the result of a very moist intense slow-moving Pacific system that tracked across the four corners and into southeastern Colorado, which allowed a deep easterly upslope to form among the front-range.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

ANGER

While completing the last phase of his painting of The Lord's Supper, Leonardo da Vinci became annoyed with a certain man. Finally, his annoyance boiled over, and he lost his temper and lashed out at the man with bitter words in an angry rage.

After the man left his presence, he returned to his canvas where he had been painting the face of Christ. Try as he might, he was unable to make any progress on his work.

After struggling for several hours, he put down his brushes, left his studio, hurried to the man's home and asked his forgiveness. Graciously the man accepted his apology. Leonardo then returned to his studio and was able to finish painting the face of our Lord.

Anger and rage are extremely destructive emotions. They take away our joy and peace and destroy our faith and trust in God. When we lose control of our emotions, it is a sign that we are excluding God from His rightful place in being the judge over others behavior. We attempt to do His work if we try to do what He has reserved for Himself. When this happens, we make matters worse and lose touch with God and the one with whom we are angry.

Whenever we are threatened or treated unfairly, we must turn to God immediately and ask Him to make things right. After all, that is His responsibility - not ours.

Prayer: Lord, it is difficult to remain calm and peaceful when I am tested. I often feel that I am the one to "make things right." May I give the problem to You instead. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper - it only leads to harm. Psalm 37:1-9



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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paypal.me/paperpaul



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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:
03.18.23

35 37 44 45 46 1

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$39,780,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.18.23

8 18 19 29 41 4

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.18.23

1 13 19 22 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.18.23

21 30 34 57 59 8

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.18.23

14 20 30 54 69 11

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$86,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Saturday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class AA State=

Champion=

Yankton 65, Mitchell 61

Consolation Champion=

Pierre T F Riggs High School 68, Harrisburg 67, 2OT

Seventh Place=

Sioux Falls Roosevelt 58, Sioux Falls Washington 56

Third Place=

Sioux Falls Jefferson 65, Sioux Falls Lincoln 56

Class A State=

Champion=

Dakota Valley 54, Sioux Falls Christian 48

Consolation Champion=

Sioux Valley 34, St. Thomas More 33

Seventh Place=

Hot Springs 60, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 50

Third Place=

Hamlin 53, Elk Point-Jefferson 40

Class B State=

Champion=

DeSmet 62, Lower Brule 48

Consolation Champion=

Castlewood 46, Viborg-Hurley 41

Seventh Place=

Faith 75, Ethan 56

Third Place=

Aberdeen Christian 70, White River 65, OT

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

Cornell's Diakomihalis wins 4th title; Penn State wins again

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — Cornell's Yianni Diakomihalis became the fifth Division I wrestler to win four national titles and Penn State won its 10th team title in 12 years on Saturday at the NCAA Division I wrestling championships, with former President Donald Trump in attendance for the evening session.

Trump shook hands and took selfies with fans and greeted several of the national champions. He sat with staff members and U.S. Senator Markwayne Mullin. The crowd stood when he went to the arena floor before the night session began with Mullin and Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt.

Diakomihalis capped the evening by defeating Ohio State's Sammy Sasso 4-2 in the 149-pound final. He joined Kyle Dake, Pat Smith, Logan Stieber and Cael Sanderson — Penn State's coach — as the only four-time champions ever in Division I.

"All those guys are great because they're different," Diakomihalis said. "And, you know, my style is different. I might take bits and pieces from each guy, but when you see the final product, it's its own form."

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Diakomihalis, 23, won national titles in 2018 and 2019. He took an Olympic redshirt year while trying to make Team USA in 2019-20, then couldn't wrestle in college during the 2020-21 season because the Ivy League cancelled winter sports during the COVID-19 pandemic. He came back to win in 2022 and 2023, and now has bigger goals in mind with the Olympics coming in 2024.

"What I did this weekend is far from the best version of myself," he said. "And it's far, far, far from what I need to be an Olympic champion, world champion."

Penn State ran away with the team title, mathematically clinching before the evening session began. The Nittany Lions finished with 137.5 points. Iowa was second with 82.5 points and Cornell placed third with 76.5.

Two Penn State wrestlers won titles for the third straight season — Penn State's Carter Starocci at 174 and Aaron Brooks at 184.

Starocci pinned Nebraska's Mikey Labriola early in the second period. He had defeated Labriola in the Big Ten final and gave him his only two losses of the season. Brooks, the No. 3 seed at 184, defeated top-seeded Parker Keckeisen of Northern Iowa 7-2.

All didn't go as planned for Penn State. Third-seeded Vito Arujau of Cornell defeated Penn State's Roman Bravo-Young — a two-time defending champion and an unbeaten No. 1 seed — 10-4 for the title at 133. Bravo-Young had the nation's longest winning streak at 56 matches.

"The team had a great weekend," Sanderson said. "A lot of gutsy, great performances. It's an individual sport as well as a team sport. So as a coach, you're always -- your heart and mind is with the guys that don't quite reach their goals. But we've got a lot to be happy about and proud of."

Iowa's Spencer Lee was in the running to win his fourth title before losing in the semifinals to Purdue's Matt Ramos at 125 on Friday night. Lee medically forfeited out of Saturday's action and officially finished sixth.

Ramos followed up his stunning upset by facing Princeton's Pat Glory, the unbeaten No. 2 seed who was the runner-up in the class last year. Glory won 3-1 to claim Princeton's first national title since 1951.

Glory expected a battle from Ramos.

"Not everybody goes off and knocks off Spencer Lee like that," Glory said. "It takes cojones, and I knew he would have the same mentality coming into the match. I knew it was going to be dogfight. And I knew it was going to be one opportunity and I needed to capitalize and I knew I was going to be ready for it when it came."

In other finals, at 141, Northern Colorado's Andrew Alirez defeated Iowa's Real Woods 6-4 in a matchup of unbeatens. There was a long delay to sort out a series of moves in the second period, and the challenge by Northern Colorado paid off. It gave Alirez four points for a near fall instead of two and it pushed his lead to 6-2. He went on to claim his school's first national title since 1962.

At 157, North Carolina's Austin O'Connor won his second national title with a 6-2 win over Penn State true freshman Levi Haines. O'Connor, who won at 149 in 2021, is now a five-time All-American. O'Connor got on the board with an escape early in the third, then scored two takedowns to take command.

At 165, Missouri's Keegan O'Toole repeated by defeating Iowa State's David Carr, 8-2. The second-seeded O'Toole avenged two losses to Carr this season by dominating the third period to pull away. Carr, the champ at 157 in 2021, was unbeaten and the No. 1 seed this season.

At 197, Pitt's Nino Bonaccorsi, the No. 1 seed, finished an unbeaten season by defeating South Dakota State's Tanner Sloan 5-3. Sloan, the No. 7 seed, took a 2-0 lead on a takedown in the first period. Bonaccorsi took a 4-3 lead on a takedown in the final minute to take the lead for good. Bonaccorsi lost to Oklahoma State's A.J. Ferrari in the 197 final in 2021.

And at 285, Michigan's Mason Parris completed an unbeaten season with a 5-1 win over Penn State's Greg Kerkvliet, the No. 3 seed. Parris and Kerkvliet had previously split six college matchups. Parris lost to Minnesota's Gable Steveson in the final in 2021.

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March Madness: Clutch performances as women open tourney

By The Associated Press undefined

March Madness has begun! Here is what to know about the women's NCAA Tournament, including the favorites and underdogs as well as key games and how to watch:

TOP SEEDS

The top four seeds in the tournament are South Carolina, Indiana, Virginia Tech and Stanford. Each is in a region, some tougher than others (on paper).

We break them down for you:

SOUTH CAROLINA: The undefeated defending national champions are the No. 1 overall seed they opened with an easy win. The Greenville I Region includes two teams in No. 2 seed Maryland and No. 4 seed UCLA that lost to the Gamecocks earlier this season. South Carolina is loaded, with two-time Southeastern Conference player of the year Aliyah Boston and leading scorer Zia Cooke.

INDIANA: The Hoosiers landed the top seed in the Greenville II Region and won its opener by 30 points. Mackenzie Holmes leads Indiana with 22.3 points and 7.3 rebounds per game. Top challengers include No. 2 seed Utah, No. 3 seed LSU and No. 4 seed Villanova, which is led by scoring sensation Maddy Siegrist. She had 35 points in 'Nova's first-round win.

VIRGINIA TECH: The Hokies won their first ACC Tournament championship and top the Seattle 3 Region. Elizabeth Kitley has stepped things up down the stretch as Virginia Tech won its final eight games. Virginia Tech could have to navigate No. 4 seed Tennessee in the Sweet 16 and No. 2 seed UConn or No. 3 seed Ohio State after that.

STANFORD: The committee looked to Stanford's steadiness for much of the season in giving it the top seed in the Seattle 4 Region. The Cardinal are led by Cameron Brink and Haley Jones, who have combined to score more than 28 points per game this season, though Brink missed the opener with an illness. Look for a potential high-wattage battle for the Final Four against No. 2 seed Iowa, led by national player of the year candidate Caitlin Clark.

GAMES TO WATCH

No. 1 Virginia Tech vs. No. 9 South Dakota State, Sunday, 5 p.m. ET (ESPN2)

Hokies coach Kenny Brooks and top-seeded Virginia Tech will face a different challenge in the second round. After limiting Chattanooga to 33 points in an opening rout, they'll face a player who nearly matched that in South Dakota State's Myah Selland. She scored 29 as the ninth-seeded Jackrabbits beat USC in OT. South Dakota State has won 22 in a row..

No. 3 LSU (29-2) vs. No. 6 Michigan (23-9), Sunday, 7:30 p.m. ET (ESPN)

Call it Kim III. LSU coach Kim Mulkey faces Michigan coach Kim Barnes Arico for the third time. Mulkey has won both prior meetings, then at Baylor, but made an impression on Michigan seniors by complimenting the Wolverines on how hard they played. Mulkey showed a video to her team.

No. 9 Miami (20-12) vs. No. 1 Indiana (28-3), Sunday, 8:40 p.m. ET (TNT)

Miami's reward for an amazing comeback? A game on the home floor of its opponent. The ninth-seeded Hurricanes pulled off the fifth largest comeback in tournament history, coming from 17 points down to beat Oklahoma State, 62-61. Haley Cavinder scored 12 of her 16 points in the second half and made what proved to be the decisive free throw with 8.9 seconds left. Up next is top-seeded Indiana.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

The women's tournament field is filled with stars, including South Carolina's Aliyah Boston, last season's AP player of the year who is back in hopes of winning a second straight national title. She will have plenty of competition for the honor this year, including sharp-shooting Iowa star Caitlin Clark.

There is also center Mackenzie Holmes of top-seeded Indiana and the AP All-America team is also a good place to check out some of the top players in the game. The Cavinder twins, gym rats who are wildly popular on social media, made their first tournament after transferring from Fresno State to Miami.

The field is also remarkable for the high number of international players, a growing trend in women's basketball. Alas, some of the top programs are also dealing with injuries to key players. Notre Dame lost

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star Olivia Miles for the rest of the season and Florida State lost its opener after losing two more players to injuries.

SHINING MOMENTS

The tournament's opening day saw a host of standout performances.

Grace Stone nailed her fifth 3-pointer of the game with 4.7 seconds remaining to lift 10th-seeded Princeton to a 64-63 win over North Carolina State. Alissa Pili had a career-high 33 points, eight rebounds and a career-high eight assists to lead No. 2 seed Utah over Gardner-Webb.

Then there was Myah Selland, who scored 29 points to lead No. 9 seed South Dakota State to a 62-57 overtime win against Southern Cal.

Power forward like Angel Reese had 34 points and 15 rebounds as 3-seed LSU beat Hawaii and fellow All-American Caitlin Clark had 26 points and 12 assists to help 2-seed Iowa beat Southeastern Louisiana.

GO DEEPER

Gun violence has cost lives and disrupted college sports all season, touching some of the top programs in college basketball. Coaches have been thrust into uncertain and unwelcome roles in trying to navigate the topic — as well as the fallout from the Supreme Court decision to overturn Roe vs. Wade.

On a lighter note, the Big Ten is loaded and eager to climb back into the title game. And if you think you know the women's tournament, try this 25-question quiz from AP.

Want to hear from the athletes themselves? UCLA freshman Kiki Rice and injured UConn star Paige Bueckers have each written diaries for AP as they get started on their NCAA tourney journeys.

HOW TO WATCH

The title game will be on a national network — ABC — for the first time since 1996 in a stroke of good news for the game. ABC plans to air at least a half-dozen other games, too.

Beside that, every game of the women's tournament will be available on ESPN's networks or streaming, with fans encouraged to navigate to the "Watch" tab on ESPN's sites. The NCAA will have a women's basketball specific March Madness app by AT&T.

There are multiple sites listing game times and other details, including the NCAA site.

BETTING GUIDE

Who's going to win the national championship? The betting favorites this week to reach the Final Four are (in order): South Carolina, Indiana, UConn, Stanford, LSU and Iowa, according to FanDuel Sportsbook. The Gamecocks are a heavy favorite to become the first repeat champion in the women's tournament since UConn won the last of four straight in 2016.

MARCH MADNESS CALENDAR

Selection Sunday set the brackets for First Four games and first- and second-round games through Monday at campuses across the country.

Sweet 16 weekend brings a twist this year for the women's teams: There will be two regional sites instead of four, with Greenville, South Carolina, and Seattle each hosting eight teams.

Where is the women's Final Four? In Dallas, where the semifinals are March 31 and the championship game is April 2. As it happens, the men's Final Four is a four-hour drive down the road in Houston that same weekend.

Top-seeded Hokies facing different challenge in Round Two

By HANK KURZ Jr. AP Sports Writer

Virginia Tech coach Kenny Brooks and top-seeded Virginia Tech will face a different challenge in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

After limiting Chattanooga to 33 points in an opening rout, they'll face a player that nearly matched that in South Dakota State's Myah Selland. She scored 29 as the ninth-seeded Jackrabbits beat Southern California 62-57 in overtime.

In advance, the coach of the first-time Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament champions is not tipping his hand. These are not your typical Jackrabbits, having challenged themselves all season.

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Among their opponents: Mississippi State, Rutgers, Louisville, Kansas State, UCLA, South Carolina. They won four of those.

"They know that they're not just going to be able to, you know, walk through anything regardless of what the number is beside you. And the teams that are left are always going to be good," Brooks said.

Good as in having won 22 in a row.

But Selland, who averages 16.1 points, said it won't all be about her.

"Any one of us can make shots when we have them." she said. "So really relying on each other will be important because, yeah, they're a good defensive team and we have to be able to match that."

The Hokies, first-time winners of the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament and top seeds for the first time, will be in front of a friendly packed crowd, but that won't be foreign to the Jackrabbits.

"I know how good they are. I watched that game against South Carolina," Brooks said. "They're not afraid of the moment. They're not afraid of whoever they're playing. I watched them play against Louisville in the Bahamas. I watched them play against UCLA in the Bahamas. They're good. And they know they're good. Anybody who is playing at this point in the season is a good team and they know they're good."

Selland welcomes a loud crowd at sold out Cassell Coliseum, even if unfriendly, as a sign of the growth of women's basketball.

"I think we like to embrace these challenges. We are excited for the opportunity," she said. "We know it's going to be obviously a tough opponent in a really fun environment, going to have a lot of fans. So we are just going to try to embrace that and just make the most of the opportunity, but we are excited about it."

Rule allows more hunting in some South Dakota state parks

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A new state rule will allow hunting in some parts of South Dakota state parks where it had previously been banned.

The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission finalized the rule this month that gives the division of parks and recreation the option of opening parts of the parks to hunting during shoulder season in May and September, the Black Hills Pioneer reported.

Al Nedved, director parks and recreation, said in the past firearms were restricted in state parks from May to September to avoid possible conflicts with day users and campers.

The division reviewed the parks to find areas where there is a low possibility of such conflicts and can now designate those areas for hunting for specific times in September and May, he said.

Nedved said the rule change allows park managers to assess each state park separately to determine where hunting will be expanded.

In Chicago mayor's race, 2 hopefuls reflect Democrats' split

By SARA BURNETT Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Before they were rivals to be Chicago's next mayor, Paul Vallas and Brandon Johnson both worked in education, though their career paths — like their views on the city's future — were very different.

Vallas was CEO of Chicago Public Schools, appointed by then-Mayor Richard M. Daley after Illinois lawmakers in the 1990s gave control of the troubled district to City Hall. Vallas came to be known as a turnaround expert in Chicago and in other U.S. school districts, supporting charter schools and voucher programs.

Johnson taught middle and high schoolers before becoming an organizer for the Chicago Teachers Union, mobilizing thousands during a historic 2012 strike and in actions since that focused on strengthening public schools and the communities around them.

It is just one example, but a significant one, of the contrasts between the two men now vying to lead the heavily Democratic city.

Johnson is a progressive county commissioner who last month advanced to an April 4 runoff thanks to heavy support from the teachers union and who is now endorsed by progressive U.S. Sens. Bernie Sanders,

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I-Vt., and Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass. Vallas, who finished first out of nine candidates in the February vote, is a more moderate Democrat who was endorsed by the Chicago police union and has focused strongly on reducing crime. Among his supporters are prominent members of the business community.

Both men defeated Mayor Lori Lightfoot, who tried positioning herself between the two as a middle-of-the-road Democrat. She was the first incumbent to lose reelection in roughly 40 years.

The April contest reflects a broader tension for Democrats nationwide, pitting the candidates and the people and groups supporting them against each other in an increasingly bitter five-week campaign that already has cost millions of dollars. So far, some of the party's leaders — from President Joe Biden to Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker and the state's two U.S. senators — are opting not to endorse either candidate, possibly seeing political risk in picking a side.

For voters in Chicago, the two candidates offer clear distinctions on issues from education to crime and taxes, as well as very different biographies that have shaped their political lives.

Johnson, 46, is Black. The son of a minister, he grew up one of 10 kids in a family he says struggled to pay bills, sometimes having to run a power cord into their home from a neighbor's house to have electricity. An older brother died homeless and addicted.

Now a married father of three, Johnson lives in one of Chicago's most violent neighborhoods and says he has to drive his children to another part of the city to attend a school that offers orchestra.

He speaks of Chicago as a "tale of two cities," where some people — largely in minority neighborhoods that have seen decades of disinvestment — fight to get by, while others have great wealth and live in areas where with grocery stores, libraries and parks.

U.S. Rep. Jesus "Chuy" Garcia, who had strong support from Latino voters as he finished fourth in February, cited Johnson's ability to unite people of color as the congressman announced his former rival last week.

Vallas, 69, is white. He was the only non-Black or Hispanic candidate in the first round, when he was the top vote-getter with 33% to Johnson's 22%.

The grandson of Greek immigrants, Vallas worked in his family restaurant growing up and later was a state legislator and Chicago budget director. He stresses that he comes from a family of public servants, including veterans, teachers and police officers. Two of Vallas' sons were police officers, though one left the force to become a firefighter, he says. Vallas has run for office unsuccessfully several times, including for governor in 2002 and Chicago mayor in 2019, when he finished toward the bottom of the pack.

Vallas says he is running to be mayor "for all of Chicago," and that the fundamental first step is to make the country's third-largest city safer — including by hiring hundreds more police officers — and rebuilding trust between the police department and residents.

He has criticized Johnson as supporting a movement to "defund" the police, which activists across the United States called for after the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in 2020.

Johnson says he would not cut the number of police officers in the department. But as a county commissioner, he sponsored a symbolic resolution to redirect money from law enforcement to social services, such as mental health care. In a 2020 interview, Johnson said defunding was not just a slogan but an "actual political goal."

Asked about the comment during a debate this month, Johnson distanced himself, saying, "I said it was a political goal, I never said it was mine."

Johnson has attacked Vallas as a Republican in disguise, noting that Vallas has made comments about being more of a Republican than a Democrat and accepted the endorsement of the Fraternal Order of Police. The group recently hosted Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, considered a top GOP candidate for president in 2024, though Vallas issued a statement rebuking the Republican.

Vallas' support for abortion rights also has been called into question. Illinois is one of the few places in the central U.S. where abortion is legal, which has made the state, and Chicago, a destination for people seeking the procedure.

On a conservative talk show in 2009, Vallas said he is opposed to abortion, a comment his campaign says was taken out of context. During a recent debate he said it's "nonsense" that he opposes reproduc-

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tive rights. Vallas explained he is Greek Orthodox, a religion that opposes abortion, but that he personally does not — a stance similar to top Democrats who are Catholic.

"I have the same position as Nancy Pelosi or Joe Biden," Vallas said.

Education policy is another dividing line.

Chicago Public Schools canceled classes for five days in January 2022 after union members refused to return to in-person classes due to concerns about COVID-19 safety measures. Vallas said Johnson was partly responsible for that and other closures that shut down "one of the poorest school systems in the country, with devastating consequences," including an increase in crime.

Johnson has criticized Vallas' leadership of schools in Chicago and in subsequent jobs he held in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, in Philadelphia and Connecticut. Vallas' administration punished low-performing schools, including by firing staff in Chicago schools with poor test scores, and under his leadership, many New Orleans schools became independently run charter schools.

Vallas questioned how Johnson would be able to lead the city independently from the Chicago Teachers Union, which has bankrolled much of his campaign. Johnson said that if he is elected mayor, he will no longer be a member of the union, but he will work collaboratively with them.

Vallas' endorsement by the Fraternal Order of Police has drawn criticism from Johnson, who notes the union's leader voiced support for the Jan. 6 insurrectionists. Vallas says he has not taken any money from the union and will not be beholden to the group if elected.

Higher cancer rates found in military pilots, ground crews

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Pentagon study has found high rates of cancer among military pilots and for the first time has shown that ground crews who fuel, maintain and launch those aircraft are also getting sick.

The data had long been sought by retired military aviators who have raised alarms for years about the number of air and ground crew members they knew who had cancer. They were told that earlier military studies had found they were not at greater risk than the general U.S. population.

In its yearlong study of almost 900,000 service members who flew on or worked on military aircraft between 1992 and 2017, the Pentagon found that air crew members had an 87% higher rate of melanoma and a 39% higher rate of thyroid cancer, while men had a 16% higher rate of prostate cancer and women a 16% higher rate of breast cancer. Overall, the air crews had a 24% higher rate of cancer of all types.

The study showed ground crews had a 19% higher rate of brain and nervous system cancers, a 15% higher rate of thyroid cancer and a 9% higher rate of kidney or renal cancers, while women had a 7% higher rate of breast cancer. The overall rate for cancers of all types was 3% higher.

There was some good news reported as well. Both ground and air crews had far lower rates of lung cancer, and air crews also had lower rates of bladder and colon cancers.

The data compared the service members with the general U.S. population after adjusting for age, sex and race.

The Pentagon said the new study was one of the largest and most comprehensive to date. An earlier study had looked at just Air Force pilots and had found some higher rates of cancer, while this one looked across all services and at both air and ground crews. Even with the wider approach, the Pentagon cautioned that the actual number of cancer cases was likely to be even higher because of gaps in the data, which it said it would work to remedy.

The study "proves that it's well past time for leaders and policy makers to move from skepticism to belief and active assistance," said retired Air Force Col. Vince Alcazar, a member of the Red River Valley Fighter Pilots Association, which had lobbied the Pentagon and Congress for help. Alcazar serves on the association's medical issues committee.

The study was required by Congress in the 2021 defense bill. Now, because higher rates were found, the Pentagon must conduct an even bigger review to try to understand why the crews are getting sick.

Isolating potential causes is difficult, and the Pentagon was careful to note that this study "does not im-

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ply that military service in air crew or ground crew occupations causes cancer, because there are multiple potential confounding factors that could not be controlled for in this analysis," such as family histories, smoking or alcohol use.

But aviation crews have long asked for the Pentagon to look closely at some of the environmental factors they are exposed to, such as jet fuels and solvents used to clean and maintain jet parts, sensors and their power sources in aircraft nose cones, and the massive radar systems on the decks of the ships they land on.

When Navy Capt. Jim Seaman would come home from a deployment aboard an aircraft carrier, his gear would reek of jet fuel, his widow Betty Seaman said. The A-6 Intruder pilot died in 2018 at age 61 of lung cancer. Betty Seaman still has his gear stored and it still smells of fuel, "which I love," she said.

She and others wonder if there's a link. She said crews would talk about how even the ship's water systems would smell of fuel.

She said she and others have mixed feelings about finally seeing in data what they have suspected for years about the aviation cancers. But "it has the potential to do a lot of good as far as early communication, early detection," she said.

The study found that when crew members were diagnosed with cancer, they were more likely to survive than members of the general population, which the study suggested was because they were diagnosed earlier due to regular required medical checkups and were more likely to be in better health because of their military fitness requirements.

The Pentagon acknowledged that the study had gaps that likely led to an undercount of cancer cases.

The military health system database used in the study did not have reliable cancer data until 1990, so it may not have included pilots who flew early-generation jets in the prior decades.

The study also did not include cancer data from the Department of Veterans Affairs or state cancer registries, which means it did not capture cases from former crew members who got sick after leaving the military medical system.

"It is important to note that study results may have differed had additional older former service members been included," it said.

To remedy that, the Pentagon is now going to pull data from those registries to add to the total count, the study said.

The second phase of the study will try to isolate causes. The 2021 bill requires the Defense Department not only to identify "the carcinogenic toxicants or hazardous materials associated with military flight operations," but also determine the type of aircraft and locations where diagnosed crews served.

After her husband got sick, Betty Seaman asked him if he would have chosen differently, knowing his service might be linked to his cancer.

"I flat-out asked Jim. And he, without hesitation, said, 'I would have still done it.'"

Russian President Putin visits occupied city of Mariupol

By KARL RITTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin has visited the occupied port city of Mariupol, his first trip to the Ukrainian territory that Moscow illegally annexed in September.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Putin arrived in Mariupol late Saturday after visiting Crimea, a short distance southwest of Mariupol, to mark the ninth anniversary of the Black Sea peninsula's annexation from Ukraine. Mariupol became a worldwide symbol of defiance after outgunned and outmanned Ukrainian forces held out in a steel mill there for nearly three months before Moscow finally took control of it in May.

The visits, during which Putin was shown chatting with local residents in Mariupol and visiting an art school and a children's center in Crimea, were a show of defiance by the Russian leader two days after a court issued a warrant for his arrest on war crimes charges.

Putin has not commented on the arrest warrant, which deepened his international isolation despite the

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unlikely of him facing trial anytime soon. The Kremlin has rejected the move by the International Criminal Court as "legally null and void."

The trip also came ahead of a planned visit to Moscow by Chinese President Xi Jinping this week, expected to provide a major diplomatic boost to Putin in his confrontation with the West.

Putin arrived in Mariupol by helicopter and then drove himself around the city's "memorial sites," concert hall and coastline, Russian news reports said. The state Rossiya 24 channel on Sunday showed Putin chatting with locals outside what looked like a newly built residential complex, and being shown around one of the apartments.

Following his trip to Mariupol, Putin met with Russian military leaders and troops at a command post in Rostov-on-Don, a southern Russian city some 180 kilometers further east, and conferred with Gen. Valery Gerasimov who is in charge of the Russian military operations in Ukraine. Peskov said.

Peskov told reporters that the trip had been unannounced, and that Putin intended to "inspect the work of the (command) post in its ordinary mode of operation."

Speaking to the state RIA agency Sunday, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin made clear that Russia was in Mariupol to stay. He said the government hoped to finish the reconstruction of its blasted downtown by the end of the year.

"People have started to return. When they saw that reconstruction is under way, people started actively returning," Khusnullin told RIA.

When Moscow fully captured the city in May, an estimated 100,000 people remained, out of a prewar population of 450,000. Many were trapped without food, water, heat or electricity. Relentless bombardment left rows upon rows of shattered or hollowed-out buildings.

Mariupol's plight first came into international focus with a Russian airstrike on a maternity hospital on March 9 last year, less than two weeks after Russian troops moved into Ukraine. A week later, about 300 people were reported killed in the bombing of a theater that was serving as the city's largest bomb shelter. Evidence obtained by the AP last spring suggested that the real death toll could be closer to 600.

A small group of Ukrainian fighters held out for 83 days in the sprawling Azovstal steel works in eastern Mariupol before surrendering, their dogged defense tying down Russian forces and coming to symbolize Ukrainian tenacity in the face of Moscow's aggression.

Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, a move that most of the world denounced as illegal, and moved on last September to officially claim four regions in Ukraine's south and east as Russian territory, following referendums that Kyiv and the West described as a sham.

The ICC on Friday accused Putin of bearing personal responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine. U.N. investigators also said there was evidence for the forced transfer of "hundreds" of Ukrainian children to Russia. According to Ukrainian government figures, over 16,000 children have been deported to Russian-controlled territories or Russia itself, many of them from Mariupol.

Peskov reaffirmed on Sunday that Moscow considers "any decisions by the International Criminal Court's legally null and void." While the move by the ICC Friday was welcomed by Kyiv, the chances of Putin facing trial are slim because Moscow does not recognize the court's jurisdiction or extradite its nationals.

In Zimbabwe's rainy season, women forage for wild mushrooms

By FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — Zimbabwe's rainy season brings a bonanza of wild mushrooms, which many rural families feast upon and sell to boost their incomes.

But the bounty also comes with danger as each year there are reports of people dying after eating poisonous fungi. Discerning between safe and toxic mushrooms has evolved into an inter-generational transfer of indigenous knowledge from mothers to daughters. Rich in protein, antioxidants and fiber, wild mushrooms are a revered delicacy and income earner in Zimbabwe, where food and formal jobs are scarce for many.

Beauty Waisoni, 46, who lives on the outskirts of the capital, Harare, typically wakes up at dawn, packs

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plastic buckets, a basket, plates and a knife before trekking to a forest 15 kilometers (9 miles) away.

Her 13-year-old daughter Beverly is in tow, as an apprentice. In the forest, the two join other pickers, mainly women working side by side with their children, combing through the morning dew for shoot-ups under trees and dried leaves.

Police routinely warn people of the hazards of consuming wild mushrooms. In January, three girls in one family died after eating poisonous wild mushrooms. Such reports filter through each season. A few years ago 10 family members died after consuming poisonous mushrooms.

To avoid such a deadly outcome, Waisoni teaches her daughter how to identify safe mushrooms.

"She will kill people, and the business, if she gets it wrong," said Waisoni, who says she started picking wild mushrooms as a young girl. Within hours, her baskets and buckets become filled up with small red and brown buttons covered in dirt.

Women such as Waisoni are dominant players in Zimbabwe's mushroom trade, said Wonder Ngezimana, an associate professor of horticulture at the Marondera University of Agricultural Science and Technology.

"Predominantly women have been gatherers and they normally go with their daughters. They transfer the indigenous knowledge from one generation to the other," Ngezimana told The Associated Press.

They distinguish edible mushrooms from poisonous ones by breaking and detecting "milk-like liquid oozing out," and by scrutinizing the color beneath and the top of the mushrooms, he said. They also look for good collection points such as anthills, the areas near certain types of indigenous trees and decomposing baobab trees, he said.

About one in four women who forage for wild mushrooms are often accompanied by their daughters, according to research carried out by Ngezimana and colleagues at the university in 2021. In "just few cases" — 1.4% — mothers were accompanied by a boy child.

"Mothers were better knowledgeable of wild edible mushrooms compared to their counterparts — fathers," noted the researchers. The researchers interviewed close to 100 people and observed mushroom collection in Binga, a district in western Zimbabwe where growing Zimbabwe's staple food, maize, is largely unviable due to droughts and poor land quality. Many families in the Binga are too poor to afford basic food and other items.

So mushroom season is important for the families. On average, each family made just over \$100 a month from selling wild mushrooms, in addition to relying on the fungi for their own household food consumption, according to the research.

In large part due to harsh weather conditions, about a quarter of Zimbabwe's 15 million people are food insecure, meaning that they're not sure where their next meal will come from, according to aid agencies. Zimbabwe has one of the world's highest rates of food inflation at 264%, according to the International Monetary Fund.

To promote safe mushroom consumption and year-round income generation, the government is promoting small-scale commercial production of certain types such as oyster mushrooms.

But it appears the wild ones remain the most popular.

"They come in as a better delicacy. Even the aroma is totally different to that of the mushroom we do on a commercial aspect, so people love them and in the process communities make some money," said Ngezimana.

Waisoni, the Harare trader, says the wild mushrooms have helped her put children through school and also weather the harsh economic conditions that have battered Zimbabwe for the past two decades.

Her pre-dawn trip to the forest marks just the beginning of a day-long process. From the bush, Waisoni heads to a busy highway. Using a knife and water, she cleans the mushrooms before joining the stiff competition of other mushroom sellers hoping to attract passing motorists.

A speeding motorist hooted frantically to warn traders on the sides of the road to move away. Instead, the sellers charged forward, tripping over each other in hopes of scoring a sale.

One motorist, Simbisai Rusenya, stopped and said he can't pass the seasonal wild mushrooms. But, aware of the reported deaths from poisonous ones, he needed some convincing before buying.

"Looks appetizing, but won't it kill my family?" he asked.

Waisoni randomly picked a button from her basket and calmly chewed it to reassure him. "See?" she said, "It's safe!"

Macron's leadership at risk amid tensions over pension plan

By SYLVIE CORBET The Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — A parody photo appearing on protest signs and online in France shows President Emmanuel Macron sitting on piles of garbage. The image references the trash going uncollected with sanitation workers on strike, but also what many French people think about their leader.

Macron, 45, had hoped his push to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 would cement his legacy as the president who transformed France's economy for the 21st century. Instead, he finds his leadership contested, both in parliament and on the streets of major cities.

His brazen move to force a pension reform bill through without a vote has infuriated the political opposition and could hamper his government's ability to pass legislation for the remaining four years of his term.

Demonstrators hoisted the parody photo at protests after Macron chose at the last minute Thursday to invoke the government's constitutional power to pass the bill without a vote at the National Assembly. He has remained silent on the topic since then.

Since becoming president in 2017, Macron often has been accused of arrogance and being out of touch. Perceived as "the president of the rich," he stirred resentment for telling a jobless man he only needed to "cross the street" to find work and by suggesting some French workers were "lazy."

Now, Macron's government has alienated citizens "for a long time" to come by using the special authority it has under Article 49.3 of the French Constitution to impose a widely unpopular change, Brice Teinturier, deputy director general of the Ipsos poll institute, said.

The situation's only winners are far-right leader Marine Le Pen and her National Rally party, "which continues its strategy of both 'getting respectable' and opposing Macron," and France's labor unions, Teinturier said. Le Pen was runner-up to Macron in the country's last two presidential elections.

As the garbage piles get bigger and the smell from them worse, many people in Paris blame Macron, not the striking workers.

Macron repeatedly said he was convinced the French retirement system needed modifying to keep it financed. He says other proposed options, like increasing the already heavy tax burden, would push investments away and that decreasing the pensions of current retirees was not a realistic alternative.

The public displays of displeasure may weigh heavily on his future decisions. The spontaneous, sometimes violent protests that erupted in Paris and across the country in recent days have contrasted with the largely peaceful demonstrations and strikes previously organized by France's major unions.

Macron's reelection to a second term last April bolstered his standing as a senior player in Europe. He campaigned on a pro-business agenda, pledging to address the pension issue and saying the French must "work longer."

In June, Macron's centrist alliance lost its parliamentary majority, though it still holds more seats than other political parties. He said at the time that his government wanted to "legislate in a different way," based on compromises with a range of political groups.

Since then, conservative lawmakers have agreed to support some bills that fit with their own policies. But tensions over the pension plan, and widespread lack of trust among the ideologically diverse parties, may end attempts at seeking compromise.

Macron's political opponents in the National Assembly filed two no-confidence motions Friday against the government of Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne. Government officials are hoping to survive a vote on the motions set for Monday because the opposition is divided, with many Republicans expected not to support it.

If a motion passes, however, it would be a big blow for Macron: the pension bill would be rejected and his Cabinet would have to resign. In that case, the president would need to appoint a new Cabinet and find his ability to get legislation passed weakened.

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But Macron would retain substantial powers over foreign policy, European affairs and defense. As commander-in-chief of the armed forces, he can make decisions about France's support for Ukraine and other global issues without parliamentary approval.

France's strong presidential powers are a legacy from Gen. Charles de Gaulle's desire to have a stable political system for the Fifth Republic he established in 1958.

The prime minister's future looks less certain. If the no-confidence motions fail, Macron could enact the higher retirement age but try to appease his critics with a government reshuffle. But Borne has given no indication of backing down.

"I'm convinced we'll build the good solutions that our country needs by continuing to seek compromises with workers' unions and employers' organizations," she said, speaking Thursday on French television network TF1. "There are many topics on which we must continue to work in parliament."

Macron plans to propose new measures designed to bring France's unemployment rate down to 5%, from 7.2% now, by the end of his second and final term.

Another option in the hands of the president is to dissolve the National Assembly and call for an early parliamentary election.

That scenario appears unlikely for now, since the unpopularity of the pension plan means Macron's alliance would be unlikely to secure a majority of seats. And if another party won, he would have to appoint a prime minister from the majority faction, empowering the government to implement policies that diverge from the president's priorities.

Mathilde Panot, a lawmaker from the leftist Nupes coalition, said with sarcasm Thursday that it was a "very good" idea for Macron to disband the Assembly and trigger an election.

"I believe it would be a good occasion for the country to reaffirm that yes, they want the retirement age down at 60," Panot said. "The Nupes is always available to govern."

Le Pen said she, too, would welcome a "dissolution."

Silicon Valley Bank collapse concerns founders of color

By KAT STAFFORD and CLAIRE SAVAGE Associated Press

In the hours after some of Silicon Valley Bank's biggest customers started pulling out their money, a WhatsApp group of startup founders who are immigrants of color ballooned to more than 1,000 members.

Questions flowed as the bank's financial status worsened. Some desperately sought advice: Could they open an account at a larger bank without a Social Security Number? Others questioned whether they had to physically be at a bank to open an account, because they're visiting parents overseas.

One clear theme emerged: a deep concern about the broader impact on startups led by people of color.

While Wall Street struggles to contain the banking crisis after the swift demise of SVB — the nation's 16th largest bank and the biggest to fail since the 2008 financial meltdown — industry experts predict it could become even harder for people of color to secure funding or a financial home supporting their startups.

SVB had opened its doors to such entrepreneurs, offering opportunities to form crucial relationships in the technology and financial communities that had been out of reach within larger financial institutions. But smaller players have fewer means of surviving a collapse, reflecting the perilous journey minority entrepreneurs face while attempting to navigate industries historically rife with racism.

"All these folks that have very special circumstances based on their identity, it's not something that they can just change about themselves and that makes them unbankable by the top four (large banks)," said Asya Bradley, a board member of numerous startups who has watched the WhatsApp group grapple with SVB's demise.

Bradley said some investors have implored startups to switch to larger financial institutions to stymie future financial risks, but that's not an easy transition.

"The reason why we're going to regional and community banks is because these (large) banks don't want our business," Bradley said.

Banking expert Aaron Klein, a senior fellow in Economic Studies at the Brookings Institution, said SVB's

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collapse could exacerbate racial disparities.

"That's going to be more challenging for people who don't fit the traditional credit box, including minorities," Klein said. "A financial system that prefers the existing holders of wealth will perpetuate the legacy of past discrimination."

Tiffany Dufu was gutted when she couldn't access her SVB account and, in turn, could not pay her employees.

Dufu raised \$5 million as CEO of The Cru, a New York-based career coaching platform and community for women. It was a rare feat for businesses founded by Black women, which get less than 1% of the billions of dollars in venture capital funding doled out yearly to startups. She banked with SVB because it was known for its close ties to the tech community and investors.

"In order to have raised that money, I pitched nearly 200 investors over the past few years," said Dufu, who has since regained access to her funds and moved to Bank of America. "It's very hard to put yourself out there and time after time — you get told this isn't a good fit. So, the money in the bank account was very precious."

A February Crunchbase News analysis determined funding for Black-founded startups slowed by more than 50% last year after they received a record \$5.1 billion in venture capital in 2021. Overall venture funding dropped from about \$337 billion to roughly \$214 billion, while Black founders were hit disproportionately hard, dropping to just \$2.3 billion, or 1.1% of the total.

Entrepreneur Amy Hilliard, a professor at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, knows how difficult it is to secure financing. It took three years to secure a loan for her cake manufacturing company, and she had to sell her home to get it started.

Banking is based on relationships and when a bank like SVB goes under, "those relationships go away, too," said Hilliard, who is African American.

Some conservative critics asserted SVB's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion were to blame, but banking experts say those claims were false. The bank slid into insolvency because its larger customers pulled deposits rather than borrow at higher interest rates and the bank's balance sheets were overexposed, forcing it to sell bonds at a loss to cover the withdrawals.

"If we're focused on climate or communities of color or racial equity, that has nothing to do with what happened with Silicon Valley Bank," said Valerie Red-Horse Mohl, co-founder of Known Holdings, a Black, Indigenous, Asian American-founded investment banking platform focused on the sustainable growth of minority-managed funds.

Red-Horse Mohl — who has raised, structured and managed over \$3 billion in capital for tribal nations — said most larger banks are led by white men and majority-white boards, and "even when they do DEI programs, it's not a really deep sort of shifting of capital."

Smaller financial institutions, however, have worked to build relationships with people of color. "We cannot lose our regional and community banks," she said. "It would be a travesty."

Historically, smaller and minority-owned banks have addressed funding gaps that larger banks ignored or even created, following exclusionary laws and policies as they turned away customers because of the color of their skin.

But the ripple effects from SVB's collapse are being felt among these banks as well, said Nicole Elam, president and CEO of the National Bankers Association, a 96-year-old trade association representing more than 175 minority-owned banks.

Some have seen customers withdraw funds and move to larger banks out of fear, even though most minority-owned banks have a more traditional customer base, with secured loans and minimal risky investments, she said.

"You're seeing customer flight of folks that we've been serving for a long time," Elam said. "How many people may not come to us for a mortgage or small business loan or to do their banking business because they now have in their mind that they need to bank with a bank that is too big to fail? That's the first impact of eroding public trust."

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Black-owned banks have been hit the hardest as the industry consolidates. Most don't have as much capital to withstand economic downturns. At its peak, there were 134. Today, there are only 21.

But change is on the way. Within the last three years, the federal government, private sector and philanthropic community have invested heavily in minority-run depository institutions.

"In response to this national conversation around racial equity, people are really seeing minority banks are key to wealth creation and key to helping to close the wealth gap," Elam said.

Bradley also is an angel investor, providing seed money for a number of entrepreneurs, and is seeing new opportunities as people network in the WhatsApp group to help each other remain afloat and grow.

"I'm really so hopeful," Bradley said. "Even in the downfall of SVB, it has managed to form this incredible community of folks that are trying to help each other to succeed. They're saying, 'SVB was here for us, now we're going to be here for each other.'"

No. 8 seed Arkansas sends defending champ Kansas home

By The Associated Press undefined

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Kansas' national title defense ended in the second round of the NCAA Tournament on Saturday when Arkansas' Ricky Council IV made five free throws in the closing seconds and the eighth-seeded Razorbacks beat the No. 1 seed Jayhawks 72-71.

Davonte Davis scored 25 points and Council added 21 as Arkansas rallied from a 12-point second-half deficit. Kansas, playing without ailing coach Bill Self, became the second top seed not to escape the tournament's first weekend after Purdue lost on Friday night to No. 16 seed Fairleigh Dickinson.

Arkansas (22-13) and coach Eric Musselman return to the Sweet 16 for the third straight year. The Razorbacks will play either Saint Mary's or UConn in the West Region semifinals in Las Vegas on Thursday.

Self has been with the Jayhawks (28-8) since they arrived in Des Moines and has attended practices and meetings, but he still didn't feel well enough to coach a game after having a heart procedure March 8 to clear clogged arteries.

Davis scored 21 of his points in the second half. He fouled out with 1:56 left, turning things over to the veteran Council, a transfer from Wichita State who scored nine of the Razorbacks' final 11 points.

Jalen Wilson led the Jayhawks with 20 points.

UCLA 68, NORTHWESTERN 63

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Jaime Jaquez Jr. scored 24 points and UCLA withstood a second-half push from Northwestern to get back to the Sweet 16.

The second-seeded Bruins (31-5) turned up the defensive intensity late, holding the seventh-seeded Wildcats to 1-for-12 shooting during a key late-game stretch.

UCLA's David Singleton went down in extreme pain with a right leg injury with 20.3 seconds remaining. He stayed down on the court for a few minutes before getting helped off by teammates and going straight to the locker room. There was no immediate word on the extent of the injury.

UCLA made it to a third straight Sweet 16 for the first time in 15 years. The Bruins will play either Gonzaga or TCU in the West Region semifinals in Las Vegas on Thursday night.

Amari Bailey added 14 points and Tyger Campbell scored 12 for UCLA.

Boo Buie scored 18 points to lead Northwestern (22-12), Matthew Nicholson added 17 and Chase Audige scored all 16 of his points in the second half.

EAST REGION

TENNESSEE 65, DUKE 52

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Olivier Nkamhoua tied his career high with 27 points, including 13 straight for Tennessee during a decisive span in the second half, and the fourth-seeded Volunteers beat Duke to advance to the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2019.

Tennessee (25-10) ended Duke's 10-game winning streak and sent first-year coach Jon Scheyer, charged with replacing Mike Krzyzewski, home after two NCAA Tournament games. These Vols used a brand of "bully ball" to send the fifth-seeded Blue Devils (27-9) packing.

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Tennessee advanced to face Florida Atlantic or Fairleigh Dickinson on Thursday in the East Region semifinals at Madison Square Garden in New York.

Duke didn't handle Tennessee's physical style very well. The Volunteers set the tone early, clearly wanting to push around Kyle Filipowski and get hands in the faces of guards Jeremy Roach and Tyrese Proctor. Filipowski took an elbow to his face and ended up with a small cut under his left eye.

Proctor led Duke with 16 points. Roach and Filipowski chipped in 13 apiece.

SOUTH REGION

SAN DIEGO STATE 75, FURMAN 52

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — San Diego State had little trouble ending the run of March Madness darling Furman, getting 16 points from Micah Parrish to pace a balanced scoring attack.

Darrion Trammell had 13 points, Lamont Butler added 12 and leading scorer Matt Bradley finished with 10 for San Diego State (29-6), which is heading to its first Sweet 16 since 2004. The Aztecs have won 11 of their past 13 games and will play Alabama on Friday in the South Region semifinals in Louisville, Kentucky.

San Diego State is the first Mountain West Conference team to reach the Sweet 16 since Nevada in 2018.

Mike Bothwell led the 13th-seeded Paladins (28-8) with 15 points. Furman had eliminated Virginia in the first round, the initial bracket-busting result in this year's tournament.

ALABAMA 73, MARYLAND 51

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Brandon Miller heated up and so did Alabama, which avoided the fate of two other top NCAA Tournament seeds and brushed aside Maryland behind a dominant second half.

The Crimson Tide (31-5) advanced to their second Sweet 16 in the past three tournaments and ninth overall. Alabama will face fifth-seeded San Diego State in the regional semifinals.

Alabama and Miller got off to a slow start but the All-America freshman and top NBA prospect wound up with 19 points after going scoreless in the first-round game. Miller is nursing a groin injury and missed his first nine shots of the tournament.

Jahvon Quinerly scored 22 points on the one-year anniversary of his left knee injury in a second-round loss to Notre Dame.

Julian Reese had 14 points for Maryland (22-13) before fouling out. Jahmir Young scored 12.

PRINCETON 78, MISSOURI 63

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Blake Peters made five 3-pointers in the second half and Princeton shocked another power conference team to reach the Sweet 16 for the first time in 56 years.

No. 15 seed Princeton (23-8) followed up a first-round win over Pac-12 tournament champion Arizona by dominating seventh-seeded Missouri (25-10) of the Southeastern Conference from the start.

The Ivy League school reached the regional semifinals for the first time since 1967 when only 23 teams even made the tournament. Princeton will play either Baylor or Creighton in Louisville, Kentucky, on Friday night.

This marks the third straight year a team seeded 15th made it to the Sweet 16, following Oral Roberts in 2021 and Saint Peter's last year. The only other time a 15 seed made it this far came in 2013 when Florida Gulf Coast did it.

Ryan Langborg led Princeton with 22 points and Peters added 17.

DeAndre Gholston scored 19 points and Noah Carter added 14 for Missouri, which was seeking its first berth in the Sweet 16 since 2009.

MIDWEST REGION

HOUSTON 81, AUBURN 64

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Marcus Sasser looked just fine, scoring 22 points, and top-seeded Houston stifled local favorite Auburn in the second half.

The Cougars (33-3) overcame a 10-point halftime deficit. Essentially shutting down the lane, Houston played with the desperation of a national championship contender that wasn't ready to suffer the same fate as Purdue and Kansas — No. 1s that already were sent home.

Led by Tramon Mark with 26 points, Houston advanced to face either Indiana or Miami in the Midwest

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Region semifinals in Kansas City, Missouri, on Friday.

Johni Broome and Jaylin Williams each scored 14 points to lead the Tigers (21-13) were doomed by a stretch of more than 10 1/2 minutes without a field goal and finished just 4 of 24 from the field in the second half.

TEXAS 71, PENN STATE 66

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Dylan Disu had a season-high 28 points on 14-for-20 shooting and steadied Texas down the stretch as the Longhorns beat Penn State to reach their first Sweet 16 in 15 years.

The second-seeded Longhorns (28-8) made just one of 13 shots from 3-point land, so Disu turned this one into a mid-range game. He went 5 for 5 over the final 4 1/2 minutes and finished with 10 rebounds.

Sir'Jabari Rice scored 13 points for Texas, which will play the Pittsburgh-Xavier winner on Friday in the regional semifinals.

Camren Wynter had 16 points for the 10th-seeded Nittany Lions (23-14), who were coming off their first NCAA Tournament victory in 20 years. Second-team All-American Jalen Pickett had 11 points and 10 rebounds with seven turnovers.

Trump says he expects to be arrested, calls for protest

By MICHELLE L. PRICE, JILL COLVIN and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump claimed on Saturday that his arrest is imminent and issued an extraordinary call for his supporters to protest as a New York grand jury investigates hush money payments to women who alleged sexual encounters with the former president.

Even as Trump's lawyer and spokesperson said there had been no communication from prosecutors, Trump declared in a post on his social media platform that he expects to be taken into custody on Tuesday.

His message seemed designed to preempt a formal announcement from prosecutors and to galvanize outrage from his base of supporters in advance of widely anticipated charges. Within hours, his campaign was sending fundraising solicitations to his supporters, while influential Republicans in Congress and even some declared and potential rival candidates issued statements in his defense.

In a later post that went beyond simply exhorting loyalists to protest about his legal peril, the 2024 presidential candidate directed his overarching ire in all capital letters at the Biden administration and raised the prospect of civil unrest: "IT'S TIME!!!" he wrote. "WE JUST CAN'T ALLOW THIS ANYMORE. THEY'RE KILLING OUR NATION AS WE SIT BACK & WATCH. WE MUST SAVE AMERICA! PROTEST, PROTEST, PROTEST!!!"

It all evoked, in foreboding ways, the rhetoric he used shortly before the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. After hearing from the then-president at a Washington rally that morning, his supporters marched to the Capitol and tried to stop the congressional certification of Democrat Joe Biden's White House victory, breaking through doors and windows of the building and leaving officers beaten and bloodied.

District Attorney Alvin Bragg is thought to be eyeing charges in the hush money investigation, and recently offered Trump a chance to testify before the grand jury. Local law enforcement officials are bracing for the public safety ramifications of an unprecedented prosecution of a former American president.

In an internal email following Trump's statements, Bragg said law enforcement would ensure that the 1,600 people who work in his office would remain safe, and that "any specific or credible threats" would be investigated.

"We do not tolerate attempts to intimidate our office or threaten the rule of law in New York," he wrote, and added: "In the meantime, as with all of our investigations, we will continue to apply the law evenly and fairly, and speak publicly only when appropriate."

There has been no public announcement of any time frame for the grand jury's secret work in the case. At least one additional witness is expected to testify, further indicating that no vote to indict has yet been taken, according to a person familiar with the investigation who was not authorized to publicly discuss the case and spoke on condition of anonymity.

That did not stop Trump from taking to his social media platform to say "illegal leaks" from Bragg's of-

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fice indicate that "THE FAR & AWAY LEADING REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE & FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, WILL BE ARRESTED ON TUESDAY OF NEXT WEEK."

A Trump lawyer, Susan Necheles, said Trump's post was "based on the media reports," and a spokesperson said there had been "no notification" from Bragg's office, though the origin of Trump's Tuesday reference was unclear. The district attorney's office declined to comment.

Trump's aides and legal team have been preparing for the possibility of an indictment. Should that happen, he would be arrested only if he refused to surrender. Trump's lawyers have previously said he would follow normal procedure, meaning he would likely agree to surrender at a New York Police Department precinct or directly to Bragg's office.

It is unclear whether Trump's supporters would heed his protest call or if he retains the same persuasive power he held as president. Trump's posts on Truth Social generally receive far less attention than he used to get on Twitter, but he maintains a deeply loyal base. The aftermath of the Jan. 6 riot, in which hundreds of Trump loyalists were arrested and prosecuted in federal court, may also have dampened the passion among supporters for confrontation.

The indictment of Trump, 76, would be an extraordinary development after years of investigations into his business, political and personal dealings.

Even as Trump pursues his latest White House campaign — his first rally is set for Waco, Texas, later this month and he shook hands and took selfies with fans during a public appearance Saturday evening at the NCAA Division I wrestling championships in Tulsa, Oklahoma — there is no question an indictment would be a distraction and give fodder to opponents and critics tired of the legal scandals that have long enveloped him.

Besides the hush money inquiry in New York, Trump faces separate criminal investigations in Atlanta and Washington over his efforts to undo the results of the 2020 election.

A Justice Department special counsel has also been presenting evidence before a grand jury investigating Trump's possession of hundreds of classified documents at his Florida estate. It is not clear when those investigations will end or whether they might result in criminal charges, but they will continue regardless of what happens in New York, underscoring the ongoing gravity — and broad geographic scope — of the legal challenges facing the former president.

Trump's post Saturday echoes one made last summer when he broke the news on Truth Social that the FBI was searching his Florida home as part of an investigation into the possible mishandling of classified documents.

News of that search sparked a flood of contributions to Trump's political operation, and on Saturday, Trump sent out a series of fundraising emails to his supporters, including one that claimed, "I'm not worried in the slightest."

After his post, Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy decried any plans to prosecute Trump as an "outrageous abuse of power by a radical DA" whom he claimed was pursuing "political vengeance." Rep. Elise Stefanik, the third-ranking House Republican, issued a statement with a similar sentiment.

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 campaign. Trump also has labeled Bragg, who is Black, a "racist" and has accused the prosecutor of letting crime in the city run amok while he has focused on Trump. New York remains one of the safest cities in the country.

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.

Porn actor Stormy 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.

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Cohen has said that at Trump's direction, he arranged payments totaling \$280,000 to 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 Trump's company paid him \$420,000 as reimbursement 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.

News that law enforcement agencies were preparing for a possible indictment was first reported by NBC News.

From highlands to the coast, quake damages Ecuador, Peru

By GONZALO SOLANO and REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

QUITO, Ecuador (AP) — Juan Vera lost three relatives when a strong earthquake that shook parts of Ecuador and Peru on Saturday brought down his niece's home. The government has offered to pay for the woman's funeral and those of her baby and her partner, but Vera wonders why local authorities allowed his relatives to live in such an old home to begin with.

"Because of its age, that building should have been demolished already," Vera said outside the morgue in Ecuador's community of Machala, where he was waiting for the three bodies to be released. "... I'm sorry, the mayor's office is the entity that has to regulate these things through its planning departments so that the buildings are in good condition to be rented out or inhabited."

The earthquake with about 6.8 magnitude, as reported by the U.S. Geological Survey, killed at least 15 people, injured hundreds and brought down homes and buildings in vastly different communities, from coastal areas to the highlands. But in Ecuador, regardless of geography, many of the homes that crumbled had a lot in common: They housed the poor, were old and did not meet building standards in the earthquake-prone country.

The earthquake centered just off the Pacific Coast, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) south of Guayaquil, Ecuador's second-largest city. One of the victims died in Peru, while 14 others died in Ecuador, where authorities also reported that at least 381 people were injured and dozens of homes, schools and health care centers were damaged.

The office of Ecuadorian President Guillermo Lasso reported that 12 of the victims died in the coastal state of El Oro and two in the highlands state of Azuay.

One of the victims in Azuay was a passenger in a vehicle crushed by rubble from a house in the Andean community of Cuenca, according to the Risk Management Secretariat, Ecuador's emergency response agency.

In El Oro, the agency also reported that several people were trapped under rubble. In the community of Machala, a two-story home collapsed before people could evacuate, a pier gave way and a building's walls cracked, trapping an unknown number of people.

Quito-based architect Germán Narváez said the houses most affected during earthquakes are those with deficient construction and that lack foundation, structure and technical design. He added that the houses are also old and built with materials such as adobe, which was once frequently used in Andean communities.

"At critical moments of seismic movements, they tend to collapse," he said.

Ecuador is particularly prone to earthquakes. In 2016, a quake centered farther north on the Pacific Coast in a more sparsely populated area of the country killed more than 600 people.

In Peru, the earthquake was felt from its northern border with Ecuador to the central Pacific coast.

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Peruvian Prime Minister Alberto Otárola said a 4-year-old girl died from head trauma she suffered in the collapse of her home in the Tumbes region, on the border with Ecuador.

Peruvian authorities also reported that four homes were destroyed and the old walls of an Army barracks collapsed in Tumbes.

Saturday's earthquake destroyed the home of Dolores Vaca in Machala. The moment she felt the first jolt, she said, she ran out into the street while her husband managed to drag their daughter out. Then, "everything fell apart, the house flattened, everything was lost," she said.

Vaca's neighbors were not as lucky. She said five died when the house next to hers collapsed.

In Guayaquil, about 170 miles (270 kilometers) southwest of the capital, Quito, authorities reported cracks in buildings and homes, as well as some collapsed walls. Videos shared on social media show people gathered on the streets of Guayaquil, which anchors a metro area of over 3 million people, and nearby communities.

One video posted online showed three anchors of a show dart from their studio desk as the set shook. They initially tried to shake it off as a minor quake but soon fled off camera. One anchor indicated the show would go on a commercial break, while another repeated, "My God, my God."

A report from Ecuador's Adverse Events Monitoring Directorate ruled out a tsunami threat.

Machala student Katherine Cruz said her home shook so badly that she could not even get up to leave her room and flee to the street.

"It was horrible. I had never felt anything like this in my life," she said. ____

Garcia Cano reported from Caracas, Venezuela. Associated Press writer Franklin Briceño in Lima, Peru, contributed to this report.

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.

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

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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 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

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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."

March Madness: Top seeds fall in battle for Sweet 16 berths

By The Associated Press undefined

March Madness has begun and top teams are already heading home. By Saturday night, two No. 1 seeds, Kansas and Purdue, No. 2 seed Arizona and No. 4 seed Virginia were all gone — and gone with them were millions of busted brackets.

Here is what to know with Sweet 16 bids on the line at the NCAA Tournament, including the favorites and underdogs as well as key games:

TOP SEEDS

The top four seeds in the tournament were given to Alabama, Houston, Kansas and Purdue. Each had its share of headaches to set up what is already proving to be a chaotic tournament. The Boilermakers were the first to fall, ousted in a first-round stunner, and the Jayhawks followed the very next day.

EAST REGION: The Boilermakers got a No. 1 seed for the fourth time, but Purdue was dumped by Fairleigh Dickinson in a near-historic upset. The region appears to be wide open for the likes of No. 2 seed Marquette, Kansas State, Tennessee, Michigan State and more. No. 5 seed Duke was ousted by the Volunteers. FDU or FAU will advance to the Sweet 16 in the bracket's biggest underdog matchup.

SOUTH REGION: Alabama, led by coach Nate Oats in a challenging season, is a No. 1 seed for the first time behind SEC player of the year Brandon Miller, who has armed security on hand after being the subject of threats. The Crimson Tide opened the tourney with an easy win. Potential hurdles could include Baylor and Creighton. Princeton is heading to the Sweet 16 out of the South.

MIDWEST REGION: Houston got a top seed and won its opener before a rugged victory over Auburn even with All-American Marcus Sasser hobbled by a groin injury. Potential hurdles could include No. 2 seed Texas, No. 3 seed Xavier or the winner of a 4-5 matchup between Indiana and Miami.

WEST REGION: Kansas, the defending national champion that was without coach Bill Self in the tournament following a heart procedure, blew an 8-point halftime lead and lost to 8-seed Arkansas. Like the East, the West is now open for the likes of No. 2 seed UCLA, No. 3 Gonzaga and the winner of a juicy 4-5 matchup between UConn and Saint Mary's.

SHINING MOMENTS

The unforgettable plays are piling up.

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Princeton used a late run to earn its first NCAA Tournament win in 25 years by ousting No. 2 seed Arizona and then answered any skeptics by rolling Missouri to lock in its regional semifinal spot. Furman celebrated its first tourney appearance since 1980 with a win over No. 4 seed Virginia on a deep 3-pointer by JP Pegues with 2.4 seconds left.

Then came 16-seed Fairleigh Dickinson's win over Purdue as the 22 1/2-point underdog stifled 7-4 center Zach Edey to advance and join UMBC in the record books.

All that happened before the Razorbacks and shirtless coach Eric Musselman celebrated their win over top-seeded Kansas.

GAMES TO WATCH

No. 16 seed Fairleigh Dickinson (21-15) vs. No. 9 seed FAU (32-3), Sunday, 7:45 p.m. ET (truTV)

One of these unheralded teams is going to the Sweet 16. The underdog Knights of FDU may be the smallest team in the tournament, but after knocking out All-America 7-foot-4 center Zack Edey and Purdue they will now face the ninth-seeded Owls. Florida Atlantic is coming off a thrilling win over Memphis and coach Penny Hardaway.

No. 6 seed Kentucky (22-11) vs. No. 3 seed Kansas State (24-9), Sunday, 2:40 p.m. ET, (CBS)

Wildcats abound! Oscar Tshiebwe pulled down 25 rebounds, the second-most in the tournament since 1973, as Kentucky beat Providence. That's only four fewer rebounds than Kansas State grabbed in its 77-65 win over Montana State. K-State's victory was its first in the tournament since 2018, when it beat ... Kentucky.

No. 7 seed Michigan State (20-12) vs. No. 2 seed Marquette (29-6), Sunday, 5:15 p.m. (CBS)

Quick, name two coaches you think are terrific. Tom Izzo and Shaka Smart need to be in your top 10, but only one will reach the Sweet 16 this tourney. The Spartans ousted Southern Cal behind 17 points from Joey Hauser, and will face a Marquette team to got 18 straight points from Kam Jones in the second half of a 78-61 victory against Vermont.

GO DEEPER

Gun violence has cost lives and disrupted college sports all season, touching some of the top programs in college basketball, including Alabama. Coaches have been thrust into uncertain and unwelcome roles in trying to navigate the topic — as well as the fallout from the Supreme Court decision to overturn Roe vs. Wade.

On a lighter note, if you feel you know March Madness pretty well, try this 25-question trivia quiz put together by AP.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

The NCAA Tournament is filled with great players and the AP All-America team is a good place to get familiar with the names. It's also an event where guys you've never heard of can take a star turn. Guard play is always going to be important (see: Baylor, 2021 title winner) and there are some NBA prospects in the mix.

Bet on this, too: Some player — maybe more than one — will have a chance to join the mustachioed Doug Edert (remember Saint Peters' inspiring run last year?) and find a way to cash in on their celebrity.

HOW TO WATCH

Every game of the men's tournament will be aired — here is a schedule — either on CBS, TBS, TNT or TruTV and their digital platforms. CBS, which also has a handy schedule that includes announcing teams, will handle the Final Four and national title game this year.

The NCAA is streaming games via its March Madness Live option and CBS games are being streamed on Paramount+. Fans of longtime play-by-play announcer Jim Nantz should soak up every moment: It's his final NCAA Tournament.

BETTING GUIDE

Who's going to win the national championship? The betting favorites as of Saturday to reach the Final Four are (in order) Houston, Alabama, UCLA, Texas, UConn and Tennessee, according to FanDuel Sportsbook.

MARCH MADNESS CALENDAR

Selection Sunday set the bracket matchups for the First Four and first- and second-round games that

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stretch from Florida to California. Sweet 16 weekend will see games in New York City (East Region), Las Vegas (West), Kansas City, Missouri (Midwest), and Louisville, Kentucky (South).

Where is the Final Four? In Houston, on April 1, with the championship game on April 3. Basketball aficionados, take note: The women's NCAA Tournament will hold its Final Four in Dallas, a four-hour drive up the road from Houston.

Can't get enough March Madness? Well, there is talk about expanding the tournament despite a host of challenges. Enjoy the 68-team version for now!

Strong earthquake kills at least 14 in Ecuador, 1 in Peru

By GONZALO SOLANO Associated Press

QUITO, Ecuador (AP) — A strong earthquake shook southern Ecuador and northern Peru on Saturday, killing at least 15 people, trapping others under rubble, and sending rescue teams out into streets littered with debris and fallen power lines.

The U.S. Geological Survey reported an earthquake with a magnitude of about 6.8 that was centered just off the Pacific Coast, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) south of Guayaquil, Ecuador's second-largest city. One of the victims died in Peru, while 14 others died in Ecuador, where authorities also reported that at least 126 people were injured.

Ecuadorian President Guillermo Lasso told reporters the earthquake had "without a doubt ... generated alarm in the population." Lasso's office in a statement said 12 of the victims died in the coastal state of El Oro and two in the highlands state of Azuay.

In Peru, the earthquake was felt from its northern border with Ecuador to the central Pacific coast. Peruvian Prime Minister Alberto Otárola said a 4-year-old girl died from head trauma she suffered in the collapse of her home in the Tumbes region, on the border with Ecuador.

One of the victims in Azuay was a passenger in a vehicle crushed by rubble from a house in the Andean community of Cuenca, according to the Risk Management Secretariat, Ecuador's emergency response agency.

In El Oro, the agency also reported that several people were trapped under rubble. In the community of Machala, a two-story home collapsed before people could evacuate, a pier gave way and a building's walls cracked, trapping an unknown number of people.

The agency said firefighters worked to rescue people while the National Police assessed damage, their work made more difficult by downed lines that interrupted telephone and electricity service.

Machala resident Fabricio Cruz said he was in his third-floor apartment when he felt a strong tremor and saw his television hit the ground. He immediately headed out.

"I heard how my neighbors were shouting and there was a lot of noise," said Cruz, a 34-year-old photographer. He added that when he looked around, he noticed the collapsed roofs of nearby houses.

Ecuador's government also reported damages to health care centers and schools. Lasso said he would travel on Saturday to El Oro.

In Guayaquil, about 170 miles (270 kilometers) southwest of the capital, Quito, authorities reported cracks in buildings and homes, as well as some collapsed walls. Authorities ordered the closure of three vehicular tunnels in Guayaquil, which anchors a metro area of over 3 million people.

Videos shared on social media show people gathered on the streets of Guayaquil and nearby communities. People reported objects falling inside their homes.

One video posted online showed three anchors of a show dart from their studio desk as the set shook. They initially tried to shake it off as a minor quake but soon fled off camera. One anchor indicated the show would go on a commercial break, while another repeated, "My God, my God."

Luis Tomalá was fishing with others when the earthquake struck. He said their boat began moving "like a racehorse, we got scared, and when we turned on the radio, we heard about the earthquake." That's when his group, Tomalá said, decided to stay at sea fearing a tsunami could develop.

A report from Ecuador's Adverse Events Monitoring Directorate ruled out a tsunami threat.

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Peruvian authorities said the old walls of an Army barracks collapsed in Tumbes.

Ecuador is particularly prone to earthquakes. In 2016, a quake centered farther north on the Pacific Coast in a more sparsely populated area of the country killed more than 600 people.

Machala student Katherine Cruz said her home shook so badly that she could not even get up to leave her room and flee to the street.

"It was horrible. I had never felt anything like this in my life," she said. _____

Associated Press writers Regina Garcia Cano in Caracas, Venezuela, and Franklin Briceño in Lima, Peru, contributed to this report.

Arkansas ousts defending champ Kansas from March Madness

By ERIC OLSON AP Sports Writer

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Eric Musselman and his players rushed across the floor at the final buzzer to celebrate with their joyfully delirious friends from Arkansas.

The 58-year-old coach jumped onto the press table, ripped off his red polo shirt and waved it over his head, shouting all the while to the fans' delight, as has become his tradition after the biggest of his wins.

And this was a really big one.

Kansas' national title defense ended in the second round of the NCAA Tournament on Saturday when Arkansas' Ricky Council IV made five free throws in the closing seconds and the eighth-seeded Razorbacks beat the No. 1 seed Jayhawks 72-71.

"I would love to lie and say that I felt composed, but we only led for 1:43," he said. "This has been as challenging and as up-and-down a season as I've ever been a part of.

"For these guys to be rewarded for sticking with it and being able to go to Las Vegas and participate with only 16 teams still standing. ... It's really hard to make this tournament. It's really hard to win a game in this tournament. It's really hard to beat defending champions, No. 1 seed. We did it."

Arkansas was playing a No. 1 seed for the third straight year. Last year, the Razorbacks knocked out Gonzaga on the way to their second straight Elite Eight. This time, the Razorbacks survived shaky offensive play early and foul trouble late. They became the first team to beat a No. 1 seed with three players fouling out, according to OptaSTATS.

"That's such an unbelievable win for our program," Musselman said. "I keep telling people that we're getting better. Not many teams can get better this time of year. I've never been prouder of a team like tonight."

Davonte Davis scored 25 points and Council added 21 as Arkansas rallied from a 12-point second-half deficit. Kansas, playing without ailing coach Bill Self, became the second top seed not to escape the tournament's first weekend after Purdue lost on Friday night to No. 16 seed Fairleigh Dickinson.

Arkansas (22-13) is in the Sweet 16 for the third straight year and will play either Saint Mary's or UConn in the West Region semifinals in Las Vegas on Thursday.

Self has been with the Jayhawks (28-8) since they arrived in Des Moines and has attended practices and meetings, but he still didn't feel well enough to coach a game after having a heart procedure March 8 to clear clogged arteries.

Longtime assistant Norm Roberts was acting coach for a fifth straight game in Self's absence.

Kansas, bidding to become the first repeat national champion since Florida in 2006-07, was ahead 35-27 at halftime and lost for the first time in 27 games when entering the second half with a lead. Kansas had been 47-0 in the NCAA Tournament when leading by eight points or more at the half.

"Our guys have been terrific all year," Roberts said. "They fought to the very end, made huge plays. It was tough not having Coach here, but we don't make any excuses. We have to line up and get it done, and we came up a little bit short today."

Davis scored 21 of his points in the second half. He fouled out with 1:56 left, turning things over to the veteran Council, a transfer from Wichita State who scored nine of the Razorbacks' final 11 points.

"This team was struggling and we figured it out," Davis said. "I'm glad we did at the right time. Hopefully we continue to do it."

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Outside the locker room, a sobbing Musselman hugged Davis and shouted, "I (expletive) love you, man!" Council's free throw put Arkansas ahead to stay, 68-67, with 24 seconds left. He then rebounded his own miss of the second free throw and made two more to give the Razorbacks a three-point lead.

The teams traded free throws, and Arkansas sent Kansas' Jalen Wilson to the line with 3 seconds left to prevent a potential tying 3-pointer. Wilson made the first free throw and appeared to try to miss the second intentionally, but it banked hard off the glass and in, and Kansas never regained possession.

Wilson led the Jayhawks with 20 points but lamented grabbing only four rebounds, which he said was a factor in Arkansas holding a 15-2 advantage in second-chance points. No missed rebound hurt more, he said, than when Kansas failed to grab the ball off Council's missed free throw in the waning seconds.

"It always comes down to one play, especially hustle plays like that," Wilson said. "It's just disappointing to end like that, especially with how great our year was. Credit to them for how they played."

Arkansas, which beat Illinois in the first round, was considered a scary matchup for the Jayhawks with its explosive transition game and ability to play lockdown defense.

But circumstances were less than ideal for the Razorbacks. Guard Anthony Black tweaked a nagging ankle injury early and went to the bench to get re-taped and change shoes, and fellow guard and projected high NBA first-round draft pick Nick Smith Jr. picked up two quick fouls and was limited to 10 minutes and no points in the first half. Also, big man Kamani Johnson was ill and played with a sore toe.

The Razorbacks were too eager to shoot 3-pointers early. They missed 8 of 9 in the first half and couldn't get their running game going.

Kansas was in control for stretches but never could put away the Razorbacks.

Davis started a game-turning 11-0 Arkansas run in the middle of the second half and Jordan Walsh's 3-pointer with eight minutes left gave the Razorbacks their first lead since their first basket of the game.

Arkansas neutralized Wilson when it mattered most, allowing the All-American only two shots over a 15-minute stretch of the second half.

Arkansas is in the Sweet 16 for the 14th time. The only lower-seeded Razorbacks team to reach a regional semifinal was the 1996 squad, which was a No. 12 under Nolan Richardson, who led the school to its only national title two years earlier.

If Musselman reaches his first Final Four, he will evoke more memories of those glory years.

Some Trump rivals rally to his side as possible charges loom

By JILL COLVIN and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — Top Republicans, including some of Donald Trump's potential rivals for the GOP's 2024 presidential nomination, rushed to his defense Saturday after Trump said he is bracing for possible arrest.

"The idea of indicting a former president of the United States is deeply troubling to me as it is to tens of millions of Americans," said former Vice President Mike Pence, a likely Trump rival, during a visit to Iowa, an early-voting state. Tech investor Vivek Ramaswamy, campaigning in South Carolina, said he didn't want to live in a country where "the party in power is able to use police force to arrest its political opposition."

The reaction underscores the political risks faced by would-be opponents who are eager to convince voters that it is time to move on from the former president, but who must contend with the fact that he remains the most popular figure in the party. The multiple investigations Trump is facing — his post on social media about the Manhattan district attorney's probe led to the public declarations of support — remain deeply unpopular with his supporters and criticizing Trump too harshly risks alienating his loyal base.

Trump garnered similar support last summer after the FBI searched his Mar-a-Lago club as part of an investigation into his handling of classified documents. The search also proved a fundraising boon.

Among those coming to Trump's defense were House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who said a possible indictment would be "an outrageous abuse of power by a radical DA who lets violent criminals walk as he pursues political vengeance" against Trump.

McCarthy, R-Calif., said he would direct relevant GOP-led House committees "to immediately investigate if federal funds are being used to subvert our democracy by interfering in elections with politically motivated

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prosecutions." McCarthy has not endorsed Trump's White House campaign, but Trump helped McCarthy secure the speakership after a contentious campaign that required multiple rounds of voting.

New York Rep. Elise Stefanik, the third-ranking House Republican and an early Trump endorser, said action by the district attorney would be "unAmerican."

The comments came hours after Trump claimed in a social media post that he expects to be arrested this coming week as New York prosecutor Alvin Bragg mulls charges in an investigation into hush money payments to women who alleged sexual encounters with Trump. A Trump lawyer and spokesman said Saturday that Trump, who has long denied the charges, had been responding in that post to media reports and had no independent knowledge of any pending legal action.

Trump, in a message on his Truth Social network, nonetheless declared that, "THE FAR & AWAY LEADING REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE & FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, WILL BE ARRESTED ON TUESDAY OF NEXT WEEK." He then called on his supporters to "PROTEST, PROTEST, PROTEST!!!" recalling the pleas he made before the deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Any potential violence spurred by Trump's comments could change the tenor of reaction. But on Saturday, several of Trump's declared and potential rivals were quick to blast the district attorney's investigation.

Pence, who has been escalating his criticism of the former president in recent weeks, said the news was particularly troubling, "happening in what appears to be a politically-charged environment in New York where the attorney general and other elected officials literally campaigned on a pledge to prosecute the former president."

"No one is above the law," he added. "I'm confident President Trump can take care of himself. My focus is going to continue to be on the issues that are affecting the American people."

Pence had been noncommittal when asked Thursday if Trump should drop out if he is indicted. "I think it's a free country. Everybody can make their own decisions," he said.

Trump has said he would continue his presidential campaign even if indicted.

Ramaswamy, who is already a declared candidate, earlier called on Bragg to "reconsider."

"A Trump indictment would be a national disaster," Ramaswamy tweeted. "It is un-American for the ruling party to use police power to arrest its political rivals."

Representatives for Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, another potential candidate who is seen as Trump's most serious rival, did not immediately respond to requests for comment Saturday — a decision publicized by a super PAC supporting Trump's candidacy. Former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, another declared candidate, did not address the investigation while campaigning in South Carolina.

Ramaswamy called on Haley and DeSantis to join him in condemning the possible indictment.

Ohio Sen. J.D. Vance, who won his race in 2022 with Trump's endorsement, said he had been asked by multiple reporters if an indictment would lead him to rescind support for Trump's campaign.

"The answer is: hell no. A politically motivated prosecution makes the argument for Trump stronger," he tweeted. "We simply don't have a real country if justice depends on politics."

Prosecutors have been investigating hush money payments made to two women who alleged sexual encounters with Trump decades ago. A grand jury has been hearing from witnesses including former Trump lawyer Michael Cohen, who says he orchestrated payments in 2016 to the women in exchange for their silence.

Trump denies the encounters and has cast the investigation as a "witch hunt" by a Democratic prosecutor bent on sabotaging Trump's latest presidential campaign. Trump has said he believes an indictment would help him in the 2024 race.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., a longtime ally, said he agreed.

"The prosecutor in New York has done more to help Donald Trump get elected," Graham said Saturday at the Vision '24 conference in North Charleston, South Carolina. "They're doing this because they're afraid of Donald Trump."

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Russia, Ukraine extend grain deal to aid world's poor

By KARL RITTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — An unprecedented wartime deal that allowed grain to flow from Ukraine to countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia where hunger is a growing threat and high food prices are pushing more people into poverty was extended just before its expiration date, officials said Saturday.

The United Nations and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced the extension, but neither confirmed how long it would last. The U.N., Turkey and Ukraine had pushed for 120 days, while Russia said it was willing to agree to 60 days.

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov tweeted Saturday that the deal would remain in effect for the longer, four-month period. But Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told Russian news agency Tass that Moscow "agreed to extend the deal for 60 days."

"Any claim that it's prolonged for more than 60 days is either wishful thinking or deliberate manipulation," Russia's deputy ambassador to the U.N., Dmitry Polyansky, said.

Ukraine and Russia are both major global suppliers of wheat, barley, sunflower oil and other affordable food products that developing nations depend on. Two ships carrying more than 96,000 metric tons of corn left Ukrainian ports on Saturday bound for China and Tunisia, according to U.N. data.

This is the second renewal of the agreement that Ukraine and Russia signed with the United Nations and Turkey last July to allow food shipments from three Black Sea ports following a halt to shipping after Russia invaded its neighbor over a year ago on Feb. 24, 2022.

Russia has complained that a separate agreement with the United Nations to overcome obstacles to shipments of its fertilizers that was part of the July package has not produced results.

Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia told the U.N. Security Council on Friday that the United Nations has to recognize it has "no leverage to exempt Russian agricultural export operations from Western sanctions," and therefore Russia would only extend the deal until May 18.

"If Brussels, Washington and London are genuinely interested to continue the export of food from Ukraine through the maritime humanitarian corridor, then they have two months to exempt from their sanctions the entire chain of operations which accompany the Russian agricultural sector," Nebenzia said. "Otherwise, we fail to understand how the package concept of the secretary-general of the United Nations will work through these simple agreements."

The International Rescue Committee expressed disappointment Saturday that the deal is only for 60 days, stressing that countries in East Africa in particular will be entering the lean grain season at the time of its expiration in May, including Somalia which receives over 90% of its grain from Ukraine and is beset by unprecedented drought and on the verge of famine.

Stéphane Dujarric, the spokesman for U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said in a statement that 25 million metric tonnes (about 28 millions tons) of grain and foodstuffs had moved to 45 countries under the initiative, helping to bring down global food prices and stabilizing markets.

"We remain strongly committed to both agreements, and we urge all sides to redouble their efforts to implement them fully," Dujarric said.

The war in Ukraine sent food prices surging to record highs last year and helped contribute to a global food crisis also tied to the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate factors like drought.

The disruption in shipments of grain needed for staples of diets in places like Egypt, Lebanon and Nigeria exacerbated economic challenges and helped push millions more people into poverty or food insecurity. People in developing countries spend more of their money on basics like food.

The crisis left an estimated 345 million people facing food insecurity, according to the U.N.'s World Food Program.

Food prices have fallen for 11 straight months. But food was already expensive before the war because of droughts from the Americas to the Middle East — most devastating in the Horn of Africa, with thousands dying in Somalia. Poorer nations that depend on imported food priced in dollars are spending more as their currencies weaken.

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The agreements also faced setbacks since it was brokered by the U.N. and Turkey: Russia pulled out briefly in November before rejoining and extending the deal. In the past few months, inspections meant to ensure ships only carry grain and not weapons have slowed down significantly.

That has helped lead to backlogs in vessels waiting in the waters of Turkey and a recent drop in the amount of grain getting out of Ukraine.

Ukrainian and some U.S. officials have blamed Russia for the slowdowns, which the country denies.

While fertilizers have been stuck, Russia has exported huge amounts of wheat after a record crop. Figures from financial data provider Refinitiv showed that Russian wheat exports more than doubled to 3.8 million tons in January from the same month a year ago, before the invasion.

Russian wheat shipments were at or near record highs in November, December and January, increasing 24% over the same three months a year earlier, according to Refinitiv. It estimated Russia would export 44 million tons of wheat in 2022-2023.

Haley, Ramaswamy among those taking on 'woke ideology' in SC

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — Republicans who are seeking to lead their party in the 2024 presidential race gathered in South Carolina this weekend with a goal at the forefront of their agenda: taking on "woke ideology."

On Saturday in North Charleston, the group Palmetto Family, which lobbies for what it considers to be "biblical values," hosted Vision '24, described by organizers as "casting the conservative vision" for the next White House race. Several hundred attendees heard from presidential hopefuls, including Nikki Haley, a former South Carolina governor who was Donald Trump's U.N. ambassador, and tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy.

As organizers expected, issues such as gas prices and national security got plenty of attention, with former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson saying that, to fight inflation, "we've got to bring the federal government under control."

But, as anticipated, much of the focus was on the pushback by some across the U.S. against what they perceive as affronts to conservative ways of life by efforts characterized as "woke." It's playing out in state-level debates over classroom instruction, gender-affirming care for minors and collegiate diversity programs.

The catch-all label of "woke" is taking on a leading role within the burgeoning GOP presidential contest, with candidate-in-waiting Ron DeSantis, the Florida governor, emerging as a fierce opponent of policies designed to ensure equity when it comes to race, gender and public health.

Ramaswamy, who entered the race this month, wrote a book on the topic, particularly as it pertains to business: "Woke, Inc.: Inside Corporate America's Social Justice Scam."

The debate has spilled over into the finance space, too.

On Thursday, 19 Republican governors, including DeSantis and South Dakota's Kristi Noem, another possible 2024 contender, signed a letter opposing the Biden administration's support of a federal labor rule allowing retirement plans to consider environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors when making investment decisions. Critics say the efforts are the latest example of the world trying to get "woke," allocating money based on political agendas, like a drive against climate change, rather than on earning the best returns for savers.

DeSantis wasn't on stage in South Carolina, but Ramaswamy and Haley were. Haley has adopted "strong and proud, not weak and woke" on yard signs, shirts and campaign stickers. At the Conservative Political Action Conference earlier this month, she said that "wokeness is a virus more dangerous than any pandemic, hands down." On Saturday, Haley called transgender students competing in sports "the women's issue of our time," adding: "If we don't stop all this woke ideology that's happening in our schools, we will lose them."

For Ramaswamy, being "anti-woke" is central to his political brand. Leaving his biotech company following

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pressures for him “make a statement in favor of the Black Lives Matter movement,” Ramaswamy called at CPAC for “an opportunity for the conservative movement to rise to the occasion and fill that void with a vision of American national identity that runs so deep that it dilutes this woke poison to irrelevance.” He later launched his own firm intended to pressure companies to quit ESG initiatives.

On Saturday, Ramaswamy called “woke” a “cultural cancer” in America, saying that, as president, he would advocate for starting over with agencies that “have become a cancerous rot.”

“We will shut down the FBI and create something new from scratch to take its place,” he said, to big applause.

It’s a similar vein of messaging that South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, yet to announce his own 2024 bid but in attendance Saturday, has been making for years. In a 2021 op-ed, Scott wrote that, due to his status as the Senate’s sole Black Republican, he had long endured critique from “woke folk” because “my ideology does not match that which they prescribe based on my complexion.”

“The radical left is trying to get people hooked on victimhood,” Scott said Saturday in North Charleston, adding that, according to Democrats, “if you’re white you must be an oppressor. If you’re Black or brown, you are the victim.”

Others took on the topic, too.

“I think we should protect children ... sometimes even from themselves,” Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina told attendees, referencing transgender student athletes.

“Woke is their favorite word, woke-ism is their favorite activity & they adhere to DEI and ESG like it’s a religion,” Sen. Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee said of Washington Democrats. “I think that’s why 75% of this country think the country is on the wrong track.”

“Republicans are not perfect,” said Sen. John Kennedy of Louisiana. “But the other side is crazy. ... The American people do not deserve to be governed by deeply woke ... people who hate George Washington, hate Thomas Jefferson ... who think our kids should be able to change genders at recess.”

Former Michigan Rep. Mike Rogers, who told The Associated Press he would determine if he would seek the 2024 GOP presidential nomination by late spring or early summer — said “woke”-minded Washington politicians “are crushing the spirit of American educators and entrepreneurs and the American spirit.”

Former Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, who left the Democratic Party last year, said her former party is being “driven by this motivation of cowardly wokeness” and has leaders who “advocate for the mutilation of children in the name of so called gender affirming care.”

Previewing the event on Friday, South Carolina Democratic Party Chairman Trav Robertson called the push by the “MAGA agenda” a “dog whistle” to some.

“If they’re talking about a culture war and woke, then you’re not paying attention to the fact that your rights and your freedom to make your health care decisions as a woman are being taken away,” Robertson said, referencing pushes for more restrictive abortion laws in a number of states. “They want to talk about woke because they aren’t capable of talking about anything of substance.”

Mysterious streaks of light seen in the sky over California

By JENNIFER McDERMOTT Associated Press

Mysterious streaks of light were seen in the sky in the Sacramento area Friday night, shocking St. Patrick’s Day revelers who then posted videos on social media of the surprising sight.

Jaime Hernandez was at the King Cong Brewing Company in Sacramento for a St. Patrick’s Day celebration when some among the group noticed the lights. Hernandez quickly began filming. It was over in about 40 seconds, he said Saturday.

“Mainly, we were in shock, but amazed that we got to witness it,” Hernandez said in an email. “None of us had ever seen anything like it.”

The brewery owner posted Hernandez’s video to Instagram, asking if anyone could solve the mystery.

Jonathan McDowell says he can. McDowell is an astronomer at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. McDowell said Saturday in an interview with The Associated Press that he’s 99.9% confident

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the streaks of light were from burning space debris.

McDowell said that a Japanese communications package that relayed information from the International Space Station to a communications satellite and then back to Earth became obsolete in 2017 when the satellite was retired. The equipment, weighing 310 kilograms (683 pounds), was jettisoned from the space station in 2020 because it was taking up valuable space and would burn up completely upon reentry, McDowell added.

The flaming bits of wreckage created a "spectacular light show in the sky," McDowell said. He estimated the debris was about 40 miles high, going thousands of miles per hour.

The U.S. Space Force confirmed the re-entry path over California for the Inter-Orbit Communication System, and the timing is consistent with what people saw in the sky, he added. The Space Force could not immediately be reached Saturday with questions.

Israelis protest legal overhaul plans for 11th week

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israelis on Saturday took to the streets in protests, now in their 11th week, against plans by Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-line government to overhaul the country's legal system.

The protesters say the proposed changes undermine the country's democracy by restricting the power of the Supreme Court. Netanyahu and his allies say the plan is needed to curb what they claim are excessive powers of unelected judges.

The main protest in the central city of Tel Aviv drew tens of thousands of people who waved Israeli flags and traffic sign banners that read "Dead End!" and "Risk Ahead!" Smaller protests were reported in other parts of the country.

On Wednesday, Netanyahu swiftly rejected a compromise proposal by Israeli President Isaac Herzog to resolve the standoff, deepening the crisis over a program that has roiled the country and drawn international criticism.

Israeli police deployed a water cannon to disperse protesters gathered at a main junction in Karkur, a town in northern Israel.

A video obtained by The Associated Press showed the water canon spraying at protesters as they chanted "Democracy," in Hebrew. It was not immediately clear if anyone was injured.

Netanyahu and his ultranationalist and religious coalition allies have pledged to plow ahead with the legal changes despite the demonstrations. Business leaders, legal experts and retired military leaders have joined the protests, and Israeli reservists have threatened to stop reporting for duty if the overhaul passes.

In the latest step of the overhaul plans, the Israeli parliament on Monday advanced a bill that would make it harder to oust Netanyahu over the corruption charges against him, as it plowed ahead with the broader plan to overhaul the judiciary.

Prosecutor to release video of death of man in custody

DINWIDDIE, Va. (AP) — Prosecutors plan next week to release the video that led authorities in Virginia to charge seven deputies and three state mental hospital employees with second-degree murder in the death of a handcuffed and shackled man.

The family of Irvo Otieno saw the video of his death Thursday. With their blessing, the footage will be released to the public in the next several days, Dinwiddie County Commonwealth's Attorney Ann Cabell Baskervill told the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

Attorneys for the family described the video to reporters as 12 agonizing minutes of deputies pushing down and smothering Otieno, a Black man whose arms and legs were restrained.

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

Prosecutors said Otieno, 28, didn't appear to be combative and was sitting in a chair when he was pulled down by officers.

The 12-minute video also showed a lack of urgency to help Otieno after the deputies determined "that

he was lifeless and not breathing," Krudys said.

Ten people so far have been charged with second-degree murder in Otieno's death — seven Henrico County Sheriff's deputies and three people employed by the hospital.

Attorneys for the people arrested have not seen the video yet.

"They show the plaintiffs' attorneys the video. But we're representing these people charged with murder that are locked up. It's really disappointing. It seems like it's more important to curry public favor, to try the case in the media, instead of letting the criminal justice process work the way it's supposed to work," defense attorney Peter Baruch told the Richmond newspaper.

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

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

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

Supervisor in Tyre Nichols' death retired before firing

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — The Memphis police supervisor on scene when Tyre Nichols was beaten to death by officers retired with his benefits the day before a hearing to fire him, according to documents filed to revoke his law enforcement certification.

Lt. DeWayne Smith was identified Friday in records obtained by media outlets as the officer that officials said earlier this month had retired before his termination hearing.

Some Memphis City Council members were upset an officer was allowed to retire before steps could be taken to fire them, including the council's vice-chairman JB Smiley Jr., who said it didn't seem fair that the then-unidentified officer could keep pension and other benefits.

"I just don't like the fact that his parents are paying this officer to go on and live and that's troubling," Smiley said.

The attorney for Nichols' family said the department should not have let Smith "cowardly sidestep the consequences of his actions" and retire after 25 years.

"We call for Memphis police and officials to do everything in their power to hold Lt. Smith and all of those involved fully accountable," attorney Ben Crump said.

Seven other Memphis officers were fired after Nichols died following a traffic stop on Jan. 7 and five of them are charged with second-degree murder. Smith is not charged in Nichols' death.

Nichols, 29, was pulled roughly from his car as an officer threatened to shock him with a Taser. He ran, but was chased down. Video showed five officers held him down and repeatedly struck him with their fists, boots and batons as he screamed for his mother.

The decertification documents against Lt. Smith reveal additional details about his actions that night.

Smith heard Nichols say "I can't breathe" as he was propped up against a squad car, but failed to get him medical care or remove his handcuffs, according to the report.

Smith also didn't get reports from other officers about using force and told Nichols' family he was driving under the influence even though there was no information to support a charge, the documents said. Investigators said Smith decided without evidence that Nichols was on drugs or drunk and video captured him telling Nichols "you done took something" when he arrived at the scene.

Additionally, Smith did not wear his body camera — violating police department policy. His actions were captured on the body cameras of other officers, documents said.

The U.S. Department of Justice is currently reviewing the Memphis Police Department policies on the use of force, de-escalation strategies and specialized units in response to Nichols' death.

Wyoming governor signs measure prohibiting abortion pills

By MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon has signed into law the nation's first explicit ban on abortion pills since they became the predominant choice for abortion in the U.S. in recent years.

Gordon, a Republican, signed the bill Friday night while allowing a separate measure restricting abortion to become law without his signature.

The pills are already banned in 13 states that have blanket bans on all forms of abortion, and 15 states already have limited access to abortion pills. Until now, however, no state had passed a law specifically prohibiting such pills, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights.

A group seeking to open an abortion and women's health clinic in Casper said it was evaluating legal options.

"We are dismayed and outraged that these laws would eradicate access to basic health care, including safe, effective medication abortion," Wellspring Health Access President Julie Burkhart said in a statement Saturday.

The clinic, which a firebombing prevented from opening last year, is one of two nonprofits suing to block an earlier Wyoming abortion ban. No arrests have been made, and organizers say the clinic is tentatively scheduled to open in April, depending on abortion's legal status in Wyoming then.

The Republican governor's decision on the two measures 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 the 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 said in a statement.

In a statement, Wyoming ACLU advocacy director Antonio Serrano criticized Gordon's decision to sign the ban on abortion pills.

"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* in June, abortion restrictions have been up to states, and the landscape has shifted quickly. Thirteen states now enforce bans on abortion at any point in pregnancy, and another,

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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.

US Open 'very hopeful' unvaccinated Novak Djokovic can play

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

After Novak Djokovic withdrew from tournaments in Florida and California because he still can't travel to the United States as a foreign citizen who is not vaccinated against COVID-19, a U.S. Tennis Association spokesman said Saturday the group is "very hopeful" the top-ranked player will be allowed into the country for the U.S. Open in August.

"Policies concerning access to the United States are determined by the White House. We are very hopeful that the policy preventing Novak Djokovic from entering the United States will be rescinded, or lapse, in the near future," the USTA's Chris Widmaier wrote to The Associated Press. "No COVID-19 restrictions are in place at the U.S. Open for any player, fan or other attendee. Novak, one of our sport's great champions, would be welcome to compete at the 2023 U.S. Open."

The two-week U.S. Open starts in Flushing Meadows on Aug. 28.

Djokovic, a 35-year-old from Serbia, was unable to get to New York for the season's last Grand Slam tournament in 2022, when he also missed the Miami Open and BNP Paribas Open because he never got the shots for the illness caused by the coronavirus.

A six-time Miami Open champion, Djokovic is out of the field for the event that begins next week, a spokesman for the Miami Open said Saturday.

Djokovic is No. 1 in the ATP rankings and is tied with Rafael Nadal — who is injured and also won't be in Miami — at 22 Grand Slam titles, the record for most won by a man. In 2023, Djokovic is 15-1 with two titles, including at the Australian Open in January.

But he will now have missed the first two Masters 1000 events of the season. He also pulled out of the BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells, California, which ends this weekend.

Back in in April 2020, as the pandemic raged, Djokovic said he was opposed to needing to be vaccinated to travel. He later said he would not get inoculated even if it meant missing tournaments.

In January 2022, he tried to get an exemption to compete at the Australian Open and traveled to Melbourne. But after his case went to court, his visa was revoked and Djokovic was deported from the country.

Pandemic restrictions have been eased in Australia since, and Djokovic returned this year without a problem and won the season's first major championship.

Meanwhile, Nadal has been sidelined since hurting his left hip flexor during a second-round loss at Melbourne Park. He is aiming to return to action at the Monte Carlo Masters next month.

Pope promotes 'humanitarian corridors' for asylum-seekers

By GIANFRANCO STARA Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis met Saturday with thousands of refugees and charity groups hosting them in Italy as he sought to promote legal migration routes to Europe as an alternative to smuggling operations that he said have turned the Mediterranean Sea into a "cemetery."

Francis said "humanitarian corridors," which have operated in Italy since 2016, saved lives and helped newly arrived asylum-seekers get acclimated while church groups provided housing, education and work opportunities.

"Humanitarian corridors not only aim to bring refugees to Italy and other European countries, rescuing them from situations of uncertainty, danger and endless waiting; they also work toward integration," he said.

The Sant'Egidio Catholic charity, the Federation of Evangelical Churches and the Waldensian Church spearheaded the ecumenical humanitarian transfer initiative in Italy, which has brought more than 6,000 people to Europe, Francis was told.

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Under the program, aid workers identify asylum candidates in refugee camps and process initial paperwork to bring them into Italy on humanitarian grounds. Once they arrive, they are then provided with assistance to settle and apply for asylum.

Families from Syria, Afghanistan, Rwanda and Ukraine were in the Vatican auditorium to meet with the pope.

"It was important for me to come here to show the world that humanitarian corridors are one of the most beautiful things this world has to offer for people who deserve" safety and dignity, Oliver Chris I. Kabalisa, a 22-year-old from Rwanda, said. "Because as a refugee, we do not leave our country because we want to, but because we are constrained, we are forced to."

Afghan refugee Nazani Shakvulla said women in her country were suffering, banned from education, work and travel, and need help from the Vatican and charity groups "to support the humanitarian corridors and find a way to evacuate or find a way that girls in Afghanistan get education."

US Open 'very hopeful' unvaccinated Novak Djokovic can play

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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

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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.

Some of the claims pushed by the pro-Russian accounts were verifiably false, such as the suggestion that the news media had covered up the disaster or that environmental scientists traveling to the site had been killed in a plane crash. But most were more speculative, seemingly designed to stoke fear or distrust. Examples include unverified maps showing widespread pollution, posts predicting an increase in fatal cancers and others about unconfirmed mass animal die-offs.

"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 elections 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 Signal 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, Signal 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 Puke 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.

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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.

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

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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 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 Butyrskya, 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," Butyrskya 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

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the opportunities and then it was killed by the hostile West.”

WHAT IS THE VIEW FROM BEIJING?

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."

Facing arrest warrant, Russia's Putin visits annexed Crimea

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin traveled to Crimea to mark the ninth anniversary of the Black Sea peninsula's annexation from Ukraine on Saturday, the day after the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for the Russian leader accusing him of war crimes.

Putin visited an art school and a children's center that are part of a project to develop a historical park on the site of an ancient Greek colony, Russian state news agencies said.

The ICC accused him Friday of bearing personal responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine during Russia's full-scale invasion of the neighboring country that started almost 13 months ago.

Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, a move that most of the world denounced as illegal. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has demanded that Russia withdraw from the peninsula as well as the areas it has occupied since last year.

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."

Putin took a plane to travel the 1,821 kilometers (1,132 miles) from Moscow to Sevastopol, where he took the wheel of the car that transported him around the city, according to Moscow-installed governor Mikhail Razvozhayev.

The ICC's arrest warrant was the first issued against a leader of one of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council. The court, which is based in The Hague, Netherlands, also issued a warrant for the arrest of Maria Lvova-Belova, the commissioner for Children's Rights in the Office of the President of the Russian Federation.

The move was immediately dismissed by Moscow — and welcomed by Ukraine as a major breakthrough. However, the chances of Putin facing trial at the ICC are highly unlikely because Moscow does not recognize the court's jurisdiction or extradite its nationals.

Despite the court's action and its implication's for Putin, the United Nations and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced Saturday that a wartime deal that allowed grain to flow from Ukraine to countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia was extended, although neither said for how long.

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov tweeted that the deal had been renewed for 120 days, the period that Ukraine, Turkey and the U.N. wanted. But Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told Russian news agency Tass that Moscow agreed to a 60-day extension.

Russia and Ukraine are both major global suppliers of wheat, barley, sunflower oil and other affordable food products that developing nations depend on. They signed separate agreements with the U.N. and Turkey last year to allow food to leave Ukraine's blockaded ports.

Russia has complained that shipments of its fertilizers — which its deal was supposed to facilitate — are not getting to global markets. The country briefly pulled out of the agreement in November before rejoining and agreeing to a 120-day renewal.

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Putin signed a law Saturday that imposes stiff fines for discrediting or spreading misleading information about volunteers or mercenaries fighting in Ukraine. The law calls for a fining individuals 50,000 rubles (\$660) for a first offense and up to 15 years in prison for repeated offenses.

The measure mirrors one passed in the early days of the war that applied to speaking negatively about soldiers or the Russian military in general.

Fighters from the Wagner Group, a private Russian military company known for fierce tactics, have taken key roles in Ukraine, particularly in Russia's grinding campaign to seize the eastern Donetsk province town of Bakhmut.

In Ukraine, authorities reported widespread Russian attacks between Friday night and Saturday morning. Writing on Telegram, the Ukrainian air force command said 11 out of 16 drones were shot down during attacks that targeted the capital, Kyiv, and the western Lviv province, among other areas.

The head of the Kyiv city administration, Serhii Popko, said Ukrainian air defenses shot down all drones heading for the capital. Lviv Gov. Maksym Kozytskyi said Saturday that three of six drones were shot down, with the other three hitting a district that borders Poland.

According to the Ukrainian air force, the attacks were carried out from the eastern coast of the Sea of Azov and Russia's Bryansk province, which also borders Ukraine.

The Ukrainian military reported that between Friday morning and Saturday morning, Russian forces launched 34 airstrikes, one missile strike and 57 rounds of anti-aircraft fire. It said falling debris hit southern Ukraine's Kherson province, damaging seven houses and a kindergarten.

Russia is still concentrating the bulk of its offensive operations in Ukraine's industrial east, focusing attacks on Bakhmut and other parts of Donetsk province.

Regional Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said one person was killed and three wounded when 11 towns and villages in the province were shelled Friday.

Further west, Russian rockets hit a residential area overnight in the city of Zaporizhzhia, the regional capital of the partially occupied province of the same name. No casualties were reported, but houses were damaged, Anatoliy Kurtev of the Zaporizhzhia City Council said.

British military officials said Saturday that Russia was likely to expand mandatory conscription to replenish its troops fighting in Ukraine. The U.K. Defense Ministry said in its latest analysis that deputies in the Russian Duma, the lower house of Russia's parliament, introduced a bill to change the draft ages for men to 21-30, from the current 18-27.

The ministry said many Russian men ages 18-21 claim exemptions from military service because they are enrolled in higher education institutions. The wider age range would mean they would have to serve eventually. British officials said the law would likely pass and take effect in January 2024.

Vatican closes embassy in Nicaragua after Ortega's crackdown

By NICOLE WINFIELD and GABRIELA SELSER Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican said Saturday it had closed its embassy in Nicaragua after the country's government proposed suspending diplomatic relations, the latest episode in a yearslong crackdown on the Catholic Church by the administration of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega.

The Vatican's representative to Managua, Monsignor Marcel Diouf, also left the country Friday, bound for Costa Rica, a Vatican official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Vatican action came a week after the Nicaraguan government proposed suspending relations with the Holy See, and a year after Nicaragua forced the papal ambassador at the time to leave. It's not clear what more the proposed suspension would entail in diplomatic terms.

Relations between the church and Ortega's government have been deteriorating since 2018, when Nicaraguan authorities violently repressed anti-government protests.

Some Catholic leaders gave protesters shelter in their churches, and the church later tried to act as a mediator between the government and the political opposition.

Ortega branded Catholic figures he saw as sympathetic to the opposition as "terrorists" who had backed

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efforts to overthrow him. Dozens of religious figures were arrested or fled the country.

Two congregations of nuns, including from the Missionaries of Charity order founded by Mother Teresa, were expelled from Nicaragua last year.

Prominent Catholic Bishop Rolando Álvarez was sentenced to 26 years in prison last month after he refused to board an airplane that flew 222 dissidents and priests to exile in the United States. He also was stripped of his Nicaraguan citizenship.

Pope Francis had remained largely silent on the issue, apparently not wanting to inflame tensions. But in a March 10 interview with Argentine media outlet Infobae, after Alvarez's sentencing, he called Ortega's government a "rude dictatorship" comparable to Hitler's that was led by an "unbalanced" president.

According to Vatican News, the care of the Vatican's embassy, or nunciature, was entrusted to the Italian government, according to diplomatic conventions. The report said diplomats of the European Union, Germany, France and Italy gave Diouf, the chargé d'affaires, a farewell salute before he shuttered the diplomatic post and left.

During the farewell ceremony, Germany's ambassador to Nicaragua, Christoph Bundscherer, expressed regret at the embassy's closure and asked Diouf to share a message with Pope Francis, according to a statement on the German Embassy's Facebook page.

"Together with the Catholic Church, the representatives of the European Union in Nicaragua will also always defend the Christian values of freedom, tolerance and human dignity," Bundscherer said, according to the statement.

The Nicaraguan government, which since September 2018 has banned all opposition demonstrations in the country, also restricted Catholic activities inside churches, including banning the traditional street processions that thousands of Nicaraguans used to celebrate in the lead up to Holy Week and Easter.

The restrictions forced church authorities to hold the Stations of the Cross procession on the grounds of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Managua, as they did Friday.

Japan, German leaders agree to strengthen ties, supply chain

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Saturday held the first round of government consultations in Tokyo and agreed to strengthen economic and defense ties to better cope with China's growing influence and global security concerns.

Kishida told a joint news conference after the talks that the sides agreed to strengthen supply chains in minerals, semiconductors, batteries and other strategic areas, in order to "counter economic coercion, state-led attempts to illegally acquire technology and non-market practices," apparently referring to China.

"Japan and Germany, both industrial nations that share fundamental values, need to take global leadership to strengthen resilience of our societies," Kishida said.

Scholz brought six of the 17 Cabinet members for talks with Japanese counterparts, including economy, finance, foreign, interior, transport and defense ministers. They discussed deepening economic and national security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as China's assertiveness in pressing its maritime territorial claims and its closer ties with Russia.

Germany has similar "government consultations" framework with several countries.

In Tokyo, the two leaders again condemned Russia's war on Ukraine and agreed to continue tough sanctions against Moscow and strong support for Ukraine, Kishida said.

Russia's nuclear threat has made atomic weapons disarmament even more difficult and divided the international community, Kishida said, adding that it's crucial to get China, Russia and other nuclear states to resume discussing nuclear disarmament.

Kishida is an advocate of a world without nuclear weapons, though critics say being under the U.S. nuclear umbrella makes his stance less convincing.

Scholz said the government consultations will "further advance our strategic cooperation, and they're a very important part of giving a new drive to this close cooperation we want to achieve together," German

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news agency dpa reported.

In separate talks, the two defense ministers confirmed the German armed forces' continued engagement in the Indo-Pacific region and a stronger military cooperation between the countries.

Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada and his German counterpart Boris Pistorius agreed to coordinate closely in future regional deployments of the German military and step up joint exercises. They also agreed to seek a legal framework to facilitate increased joint defense activities, as well as cooperation in defense equipment and technology, the Japanese Defense Ministry said in a statement.

Japan, noting growing threats from China and North Korea, has been expanding military cooperation beyond its main ally, the United States, and has developed partnerships with Australia, Britain, European and Southeast Asian nations. Kishida's government last year adopted a new national security strategy under which Japan is deploying long-range cruise missiles to strengthen its strike-back capability, a major break from the country's postwar self-defense-only principle.

Scholtz visited Japan last year before going to China, making a point of prioritizing Germany's economic ties with Tokyo over Beijing. Scholz is pushing to diversify Germany's trade partners, while speaking out against a complete decoupling from China.

Japan, along with the United States, is seeking ways to stand up to increasing Chinese economic influence in the region. Tokyo also wants to reinforce economic security with other democracies in areas such as supply chains and the protection of sensitive technologies, apparently as a counter to China.

But Japan, which is a top U.S. ally and a major trade partner with China, is in a delicate situation and must balance its position between the two superpowers.

For Germany, China was its biggest trading partner in 2021 for the sixth consecutive year, as business ties have flourished even though political relations have turned tense.

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 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

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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 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 made 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.

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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.”

Today in History: March 19, Nevada legalizes casino gambling

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, March 19, the 78th day of 2023. There are 287 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On March 19, 1945, during World War II, 724 people were killed when a Japanese dive bomber attacked the carrier USS Franklin off Japan (the ship was saved). Adolf Hitler ordered the destruction of German facilities that could fall into Allied hands in his so-called “Nero Decree,” which was largely disregarded.

On this date:

In 1859, the opera “Faust” by Charles Gounod premiered in Paris.

In 1931, Nevada Gov. Fred B. Balzar signed a measure legalizing casino gambling.

In 1942, during World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered men between the ages of 45 and 64, inclusive, to register for non-military duty.

In 1977, the series finale of “Mary Tyler Moore” aired on CBS-TV, ending the situation comedy’s seven-season run.

In 1987, televangelist Jim Bakker resigned as chairman of his PTL ministry organization amid a sex and money scandal involving Jessica Hahn, a former church secretary.

In 1991, Polish President Lech Walesa arrived in Washington for his first state visit to the United States.

In 1995, after a 21-month hiatus, Michael Jordan returned to professional basketball with his former team, the Chicago Bulls.

In 1997, artist Willem de Kooning, considered one of the 20th century’s greatest painters, died in East Hampton, New York, at age 92.

In 2003, President George W. Bush ordered the start of war against Iraq. (Because of the time difference, it was early March 20 in Iraq.)

In 2007, a methane gas explosion in a Siberian coal mine killed 110 workers.

In 2020, President Donald Trump focused attention on a malaria drug, chloroquine, as a possible coronavirus treatment; the FDA issued a statement saying that there were “no FDA-approved therapeutics” to treat COVID-19.

Ten years ago: Pope Francis officially began his ministry as the 266th pope, receiving the ring symbolizing the papacy and a wool stole exemplifying his role as shepherd of his 1.2-billion strong flock during a Mass at the Vatican. Insurgents carried out a wave of bombings across Iraq that killed at least 65 people. Harry Reems, 65, co-star of the 1972 adult-film classic “Deep Throat,” died in Salt Lake City.

Five years ago: Speaking in New Hampshire, a state ravaged by opioids, President Donald Trump called for stiffer penalties for drug traffickers, including the death penalty. Former tennis star Martina Navratilova said she was “extremely angry” to learn that the BBC paid John McEnroe at least 10 times more than her for their broadcasting roles at Wimbledon. Former “Sex and the City” star Cynthia Nixon announced that she would challenge New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo in a Democratic primary in September. (Cuomo easily

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beat back the challenge.)

One year ago: Russian forces pushed deeper into Ukraine's besieged and battered port city of Mariupol, where heavy fighting shut down a major steel plant and local authorities pleaded for more Western help. Four U.S. Marines were killed when their Osprey aircraft crashed in a Norwegian town in the Arctic Circle during a NATO exercise unrelated to the Ukraine war. A former Apple employee was charged with defrauding the tech giant out of more than \$10 million by taking kickbacks, stealing equipment and laundering money, federal prosecutors said.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Renee Taylor is 90. Actor Ursula Andress is 87. Singer Clarence "Frogman" Henry is 86. Singer Ruth Pointer (The Pointer Sisters) is 77. Actor Glenn Close is 76. Actor Bruce Willis is 68. Actor-comedian Mary Scheer is 60. Playwright Neil LaBute is 60. Actor Connor Trinneer is 54. Rock musician Gert Bettens (K's Choice) is 53. Rapper Bun B is 50. Rock musician Zach Lind (Jimmy Eat World) is 47. Actor Virginia Williams is 45. Actor Abby Brammell is 44. MLB pitcher Clayton Kershaw is 35. Actor Craig Lamar Taylor is 34. Actor Philip Bolden is 28.