

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Groton Community Calendar

### Tuesday, March 21

Middle School Talent Show, GHS Gym, 7 p.m.  
Senior Menu: Scalloped potatoes with ham, peas, sunset salad, cookie, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: French toast.  
School Lunch: Meatballs, mashed potatoes.  
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.  
The Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.  
City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.  
Cell Phone Navigation Assistance Class, 10:30 a.m. to noon and 12:30 p.m. to 2 p.m., Groton Community Center

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

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

**"Strength will always be with you; you just have to find it."**

ANN-MARIE HEVEY



### Wednesday, March 22

Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, corn, peaches, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Egg omelets.  
School Lunch: Chicken strips, tri taters.  
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm  
St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.; Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Lent Service, 7 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.; Soup Supper, 6 p.m. (League serves), Worship, 7 p.m.  
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Book Study with Lindsey Tietz, 4 p.m.; Confirmation, 4 p.m.

## 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

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

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## Middle School Talent Show Tuesday, March 21, 2023, GHS Gym, 7 p.m.

### *"We Love Rock 'n Roll"*

Directors: Desiree Yeigh and Scott Glodt

*I Love Rock 'n Roll- 6-7 Choir Girls*

*Addison Hoeft- You Say*  
*Vocal Solo*

*Sharp Dressed Man- 6-7 Choir Guys*

*Aurora Washenberger- Jessies's Girl*  
*Flute Solo*

*A President's Childhood- Addison Hoeft,*  
*Ryelle Gilbert, Makenna Krause, Kyleigh Kroll,*  
*Libby Cole, Rylie Rose, Journey Zieroth*

*We Will Rock You- 6-7 Choir Guys*

*Teagan Hanten- Ain't No Mountain High*  
*Enough*

*Dr. ROCKenstein- 6-7 Band*

*Let Her Go- Arianna Dinger, Tenley Frost,*  
*Novalea Warrington, Mrs. Yeigh*  
*Flute Quartet*

*The Invader- Sam Crank and Connor Kroll*  
*Drumline Battle*

*Junior Drumline- Makenna Krause,*  
*Journey Zieroth, Ryelle Gilbert,*  
*Kyleigh Kroll, TC Schuster,*  
*Addison Hoeft, Jordan Schwan*  
*Connor Kroll, Tenley Frost, Sam Crank,*  
*Novalea Warrington, Aurora Washenberger*

A community bank  
with decisions made  
close to the people  
we serve —  
both rural and urban.

**DACOTAH BANK**

BANKING ♦ INSURANCE ♦ MORTGAGE ♦ TRUST

*Thank You!*

**AG APPRECIATION WEEK**

**MARCH 21-27**



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Beekeeper says adulterated honey is a factor in plummeting production

**Drought, pesticide use and habitat loss are also problems**

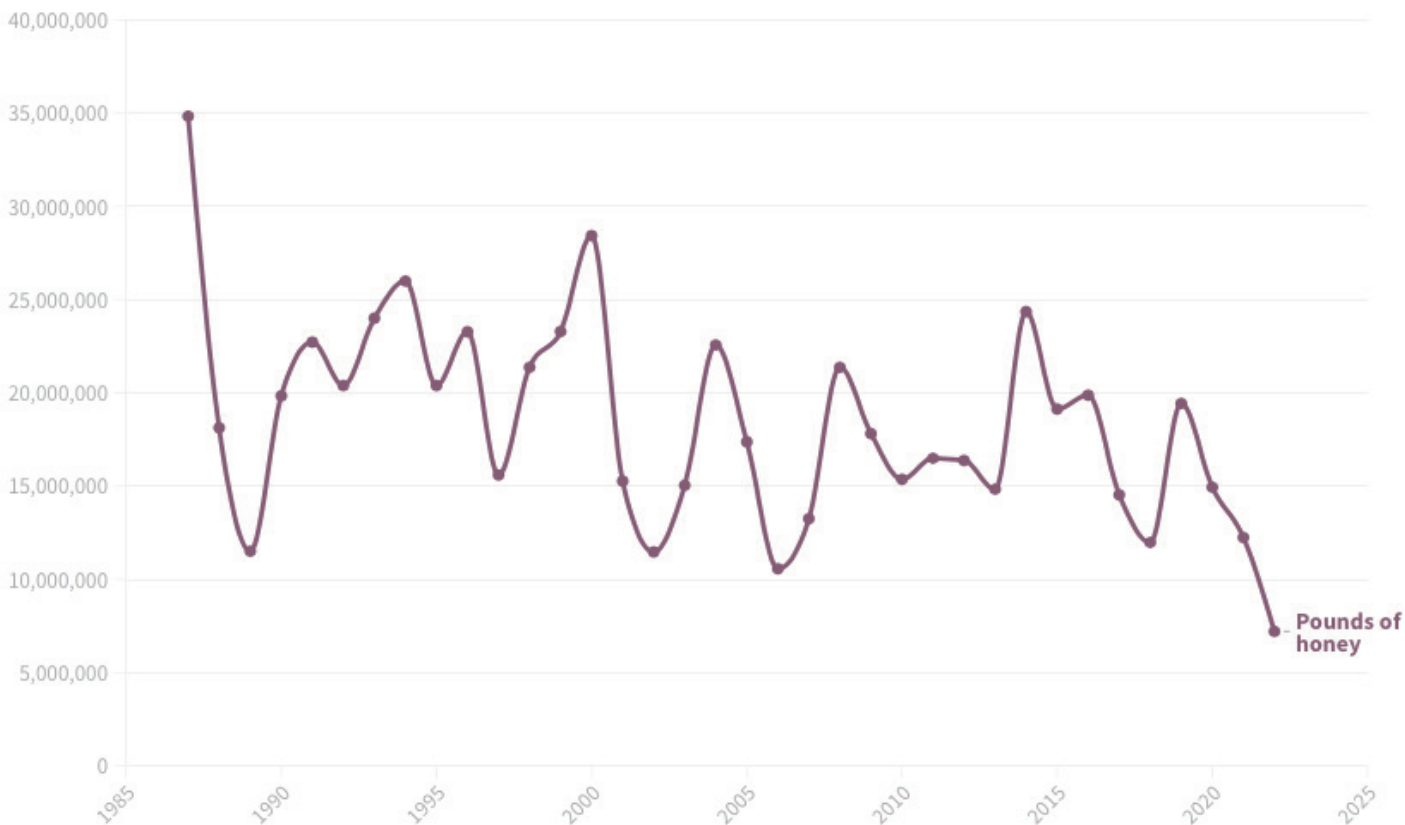
**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 20, 2023 3:08 PM**

One of the nation's largest independent honey producers says adulterated products deserve some of the blame for new numbers that reveal a 41 percent drop in South Dakota honey production.

It's the third straight year of declining production in the state, and the 7.2 million pounds produced last year is South Dakota's lowest value in records dating to 1987. The U.S. Department of Agriculture released the 2022 numbers on Friday.

Beekeeper Bret Adee, with Adee Honey Farms in Bruce, said drought, pesticide use and habitat loss are all factors. And he said another major culprit is adulterated honey.

**Pounds of honey produced in South Dakota**



Source: USDA

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"It's a trend brought on by economics," Adee said. "The biggest economic factor is we're having to compete with 'synthetic,' or what you would call 'adulterated' honey, and it's not really honey."

Adulterated honey is diluted with other ingredients, such as corn syrup or rice sugar. Some brands even contain chemically modified sugars, which make the product look like genuine honey when it's not.

Because adulterated honey is cheaper to produce, those companies can charge a cheaper price at the grocery store – outcompeting genuine honey.

Distinguishing real honey from adulterated honey in the grocery store is difficult, according to Jonathan Lundgren, of Brookings, whose Blue Dasher Farm produces honey. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration says honey products that include additional ingredients must list those ingredients on the label. But some honey producers allege there are adulterated products labeled as pure honey.

Lundgren said the best thing a consumer can do is buy locally produced honey from a trusted beekeeper. "Good news is, there are a lot of them in the state," Lundgren said.

There were 185,000 honey-producing colonies in South Dakota in 2022, down from a high of about 290,000 in 2015.

The average yield in the state last year was 39 pounds of honey per colony, down 10 pounds from 2021.

The total value of honey produced in South Dakota in 2022 was \$18.6 million, down 37% from 2021. The state ranked sixth for honey production in 2022.

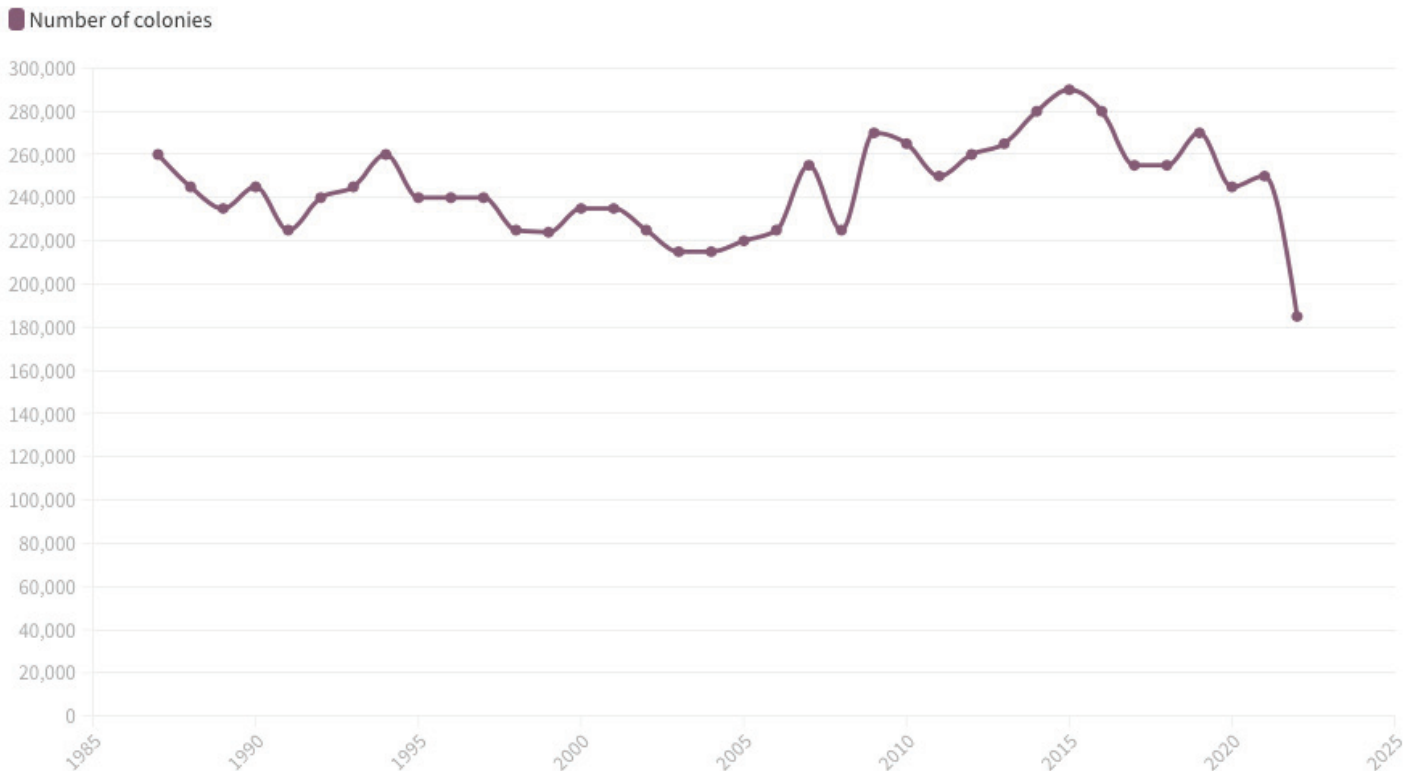
The sharply declining numbers in South Dakota contrast with less severe trends nationally.

United States honey production in 2022 totaled 125 million pounds, down 1 percent from 2021. There were 2.67 million U.S. colonies producing honey in 2022, which was also down 1 percent.

Adee said the adulteration of honey is not only harming beekeepers' livelihoods but is also hurting farmers' crop yields and deceiving consumers.

"The numbers consistently run from 12 to 40% higher soybean yields if you have bees on the ground,"

## Number of honey-producing colonies in South Dakota



Source: USDA

Adee said. "It's incidental pollination, and it's why it's so valuable to have bees out there. But you can't do it if you're competing with fake stuff made from rice sugar."

Adee said the practice of adulterating honey is not new, and beekeepers have been raising concerns about it for years. He hopes this year's significant decline in production brings the issue to the forefront.

"We don't have very good enforcement of our food laws," he said.

Adee wants to see the government do more to inform consumers and protect beekeepers that produce genuine honey.

Adee said pesticides and habitat loss also affect honey production; in fact, he was featured in a 2017 New York Times article that dove into that issue. Pesticides are harmful to bees, affecting their immune systems, and making them more susceptible to disease and other environmental factors. Bees also rely on a diverse range of flowering plants to gather nectar and pollen, but with increased urbanization and large-scale crop farming, the natural habitats of bees are diminishing.

*Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.*

## Noem signs \$7.4 billion budget despite previous threats

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MARCH 20, 2023 5:06 PM**

Gov. Kristi Noem signed the state's fiscal year 2024 budget into law Monday, providing for increased funding to the "Big Three" state obligations and 100% tuition coverage for National Guard members, among other funding decisions.

Noem had made veiled threats in recent weeks to veto the budget because legislators chose to pursue a different tax cut than the one she promised South Dakota voters during her reelection campaign. The Legislature adopted a temporary reduction in the overall state sales tax rate, rather than Noem's proposed repeal of the state sales tax on food.

In a letter to legislators about her approval of the budget, Noem did not mention the sales-tax reduction bill, which she still has under consideration with less than a week until legislators return to Pierre for consideration of her vetoes.

But Noem's letter did express skepticism about the sustainability of the spending levels that legislators adopted.

Noem's recommended budget would have increased funding for the "Big Three" — education, state employees and Medicaid providers — by 5% for education and state employees, while increasing reimbursement rates for some Medicaid providers to 90% of their costs.

Instead, legislators increased funding by 7% for education and state employees, and set a 100% reimbursement rate for community support providers that heavily rely on government funding, such as nursing homes. Other Medicaid providers, such as hospitals, are set to receive a 5% increase.

"I've put significantly more funding into our reserves in recent years," Noem said in her letter. "Only time will tell if it was a wise decision to spend these additional dollars."

The budget for the 2024 fiscal year includes \$7.4 billion in total spending, up 8.8% from the last legislative session's fiscal year 2023 budget.

Noem added that the staggered increases in funding for the "Big Three" — rather than what she described as "a tradition of funding equal inflationary increases" — set a "bad precedent" because one or more of the groups could be "left behind" in future budgets.

The budget also:

Provides 100% tuition assistance for National Guard members to attend technical colleges and public

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universities.

Freezes tuition at South Dakota public universities and technical colleges.

Allocates \$11.4 million for future Medicaid expansion costs.

"I appreciate the Legislature for recognizing that it should fund my administration's priorities to maximize freedom and liberty for the people of the state," Noem said in a written statement.

While the Legislature did pass some of Noem's budget recommendations, lawmakers did not support much of Noem's "Stronger Families" initiative, which unsuccessfully proposed creating a 100% paid family leave program for state employees that private businesses could also buy into, creating scholarship vouchers for children in foster care, and eliminating the state sales tax on groceries.

Legislators passed instead an overall reduction in state sales taxes from 4.5% to 4.2% with a sunset date in 2027. In response, Noem repeatedly threatened to withhold support for the budget, without using the word "veto."

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

When asked what Noem's signature on the budget means for the tax cut bill, spokesman Ian Fury told South Dakota Searchlight that Noem's letter "speaks for itself."

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

## **COMMENTARY**

### **Noem's next move will reveal her level of tax-cut commitment**

**DANA HESS**

Will she or won't she? After she signed the budget bill on Monday, that's what South Dakota lawmakers have to be asking themselves right now as they wonder whether Gov. Kristi Noem will veto the state sales tax reduction they endorsed.

At the end of the legislative session, lawmakers compromised on a state sales tax reduction from 4.5% to 4.2%, estimated to cost the state \$104 million in its first year. The sales tax reduction would sunset after four years.

All the talk about sales tax reductions was started by Noem when she announced, during her reelection campaign, the elimination of the state's 4.5% sales tax on groceries. Her news release announcing the cut was a master class in electioneering. It read as if the governor had magically cut the tax earlier that morning. Shoppers who heard Noem's announcement were probably surprised later in the day when they had to pay a tax on their groceries.

Nowhere in her announcement did the governor mention that her tax cut would have to survive the pesky legislative session. Maybe it's a good thing she left that little detail out, since legislators defeated her grocery sales tax elimination bill in favor of a broader cut in the state sales tax.

It was a surprise that Noem, a Republican, would embrace cutting the sales tax on groceries, an item that has traditionally been on the wish list of the Democratic Party. It seemed like a panicked move at the time, as if a GOP pollster had dropped a decimal point or put a comma in the wrong place making it suddenly look as if Democrat Jamie Smith actually had a chance of upsetting Noem.

What seemed out of character during the election remained a cornerstone of the governor's legislative agenda. And she still has some compelling arguments on her side for cutting the tax on groceries.

While the tax cut that lawmakers endorsed would cost an estimated \$104 million in state revenue, it would remain largely invisible to consumers except for larger purchases. Going from 4.5% to 4.2% means shaving 30 cents off every \$100 of taxable purchases. Taking 4.5% off every grocery bill sure seems like a more definitive way to show taxpayers that government is on their side.

Noem also seems to have the public on her side. During the legislative session, she released polling that shows 75% of South Dakotans support eliminating the sales tax on groceries. According to the poll conducted by Front Porch Strategies, those in favor of a cut in the sales tax on groceries include 75% of Republicans, 76% of Democrats and more than 70% of all income brackets, every age bracket and both genders.

While this argument was not enough to sway the members of the House and Senate, it does add some fiscal questions to the outcome of the 2024 election. The Secretary of State's website lists two potential ballot measures — an initiated measure and a constitutional amendment — aimed at eliminating the state sales tax on groceries. If South Dakotans do back cutting the state sales tax on groceries, like the polling shows, after the 2024 election lawmakers may be faced with figuring out a way to do without another \$100 million in revenue, or raising taxes.

It's obvious that at the moment South Dakota is awash in revenue. While it seems like a truly conservative governor or Legislature would be more cautious about rushing out to cut taxes, that's not the case this year.

The sales tax cut passed unanimously in the House and on a 31-2 vote in the Senate. Both vote totals are above the two-thirds majority needed to sustain a veto. Noem can do the math as well as anyone. Her next move will show just how determined she is to cut the state sales tax on groceries.

*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.*

## Biden signs bill declassifying information on the origin of COVID-19

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 20, 2023 4:51 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. director of national intelligence has three months to declassify information on potential links between China's Wuhan Institute of Virology and the origin of COVID-19, after President Joe Biden signed legislation Monday.

The bill was one of the first Biden has signed since a 118th Congress split between the two parties began in January.

"My Administration will continue to review all classified information relating to COVID-19's origins, including potential links to the Wuhan Institute of Virology," Biden wrote. "In implementing this legislation, my Administration will declassify and share as much of that information as possible, consistent with my constitutional authority to protect against the disclosure of information that would harm national security."

Congress voted unanimously earlier this month to send Biden the legislation that was sponsored by Missouri Sen. Josh Hawley and co-sponsored by Indiana Sen. Mike Braun, Kansas Sen. Roger Marshall, Utah Sen. Mike Lee and Florida Sen. Rick Scott as original co-sponsors. All are Republicans.

The bill requires the director of national intelligence to "declassify any and all information relating to potential links between the Wuhan Institute of Virology and the origin of the Coronavirus Disease 2019" within 90 days.

Biden noted in his signing statement that in 2021 he "directed the Intelligence Community to use every tool at its disposal to investigate the origin of COVID-19, and that work is ongoing."

In August 2021 the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released an unclassified summary of its report, noting that the intelligence community was "divided on the most likely origin of COVID-19," though the intelligence suggested either a "natural exposure to an infected animal" or "a laboratory-associated incident."

Biden pledged Monday to continue looking.

"We need to get to the bottom of COVID-19's origins to help ensure we can better prevent future pan-



demics.”

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

## Virginia senator defends rollback of U.S. banking rules, blames managers for bank failures

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MARCH 20, 2023 4:46 PM

WASHINGTON — The recent bank failures that shocked the markets and caused a speedy government bailout were “basic prudential regulation failure” by management, U.S. Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia said Monday.

The Democratic senator, who sits on the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, told reporters he stands by his position that 2018 banking regulation rollbacks that he supported were not solely to blame and that he finds it “unconvincing” that a stress test would have spotted a run on the California-based Silicon Valley Bank that happened in a matter of hours.

Congress repealed a portion of the Dodd-Frank Act in 2018 that as a result exempted midsize banks from certain stress tests. Several of Warner’s Senate Democratic colleagues have called for those protections to be restored.

“This was \$42 billion in six hours, frankly started by some irresponsible (venture capitalists), crying the equivalent of fire in a crowded theater Wednesday night and Thursday morning. Not sure that’s illegal, but it sure is immoral,” Warner said.

“And you know when you suddenly have a run on the bank — that would by the time Thursday come around (amount to) basically 25 cents on a \$1 for every dollar in the bank — I’m not sure how that is stopped.”

Federal regulators seized the Santa Clara-based bank on Friday, March 10, quickly followed by a state takeover of Signature Bank of New York, which was already under scrutiny for its role in cryptocurrency banking.

U.S. Treasury and Federal Reserve officials took the extraordinary step to guarantee depositors their funds, even above the federally insured limit of \$250,000.

President Joe Biden, in remarks last week, called for bank managers to be “fired.”

Warner said he wants to see the president’s specific proposal but he supports “clawback” provisions by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, which is tasked with buoying confidence in the U.S. financial system.

The senator has joined other Senate Democrats in supporting a measure that would recoup profits and bonuses from bank executives within a 60-day window of a bank’s failure.

Several large U.S. banks on Thursday joined together to give a \$30 billion cash infusion to the First Republic Bank, a San Francisco-based midsize lender that saw its stock plummet following the collapse of SVB.

Warner expressed concern about a runoff of deposits going from midsize to larger U.S. banks, as in the case of First Republic.

“I was kind of nervous over the weekend, I had calls with a bunch of folks. You know, this week could still be choppy with some of these midsize banks,” he said.

Meanwhile, as midsize banks reportedly press the FDIC to insure all deposits above \$250,000 for the next two years, Warner said he’s “open to that.”

“I don’t want to rush because to take that leap is a big leap,” he said.

### Intelligence, TikTok and China

Warner, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, hammered on threats posed by the popular Chinese-owned video app TikTok, citing his concern over user data that could be harvested by the Chinese Communist Party and the risks of the CCP spreading propaganda via the app, including messaging about Taiwan.

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The senator introduced the RESTRICT Act last week along with South Dakota Republican Sen. John Thune. The bill aims to empower the Commerce secretary to limit transactions involving communications and technology companies entirely or partially run by foreign adversaries, including China — and possibly setting the stage for a TikTok ban.

So far the bipartisan bill has attracted 18 co-sponsors, evenly split from each side of the aisle.

"I think our key here, though, is to put in place a rules-based approach, not just for TikTok, but for technologies that threaten national security that come from China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and Cuba and Venezuela," Warner said.

Warner also called on the intelligence community to "lean as forward as possible" in declassifying information about tech companies operated by foreign adversaries.

When pressed on potential as opposed to the proven spying capabilities or harm of TikTok, Warner defended his argument to crack down on the app.

"The potential of whether it's 100 (million) or 150 million young Americans' data being collected for years. Do we really want to wait to see the potential of that exploitation before we say 'Oh my gosh, there could be harm?'" he said. "... I think that potential is of great enough harm and that we need to act."

Warner spoke to reporters at the Monitor Breakfast series, an event hosted by the Christian Science Monitor that brings together lawmakers, newsmakers and journalists.

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

## Feds to send nearly \$200 million to help communities prepare for wildfires

**Mission Volunteer Fire Department in SD is among grant recipients**

**BY: JACOB FISCHLER - MARCH 20, 2023 4:14 PM**

The Biden administration will send \$197 million from the 2021 bipartisan infrastructure law to help communities prepare for wildfires this summer, Vice President Kamala Harris and other administration officials said Monday.

The funding represents the first round of a new \$1 billion Community Wildfire Defense Grant program authorized under the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill that President Joe Biden signed in November 2021. Grants in the first year of the program would be available for more than 100 projects in 22 states, according to a White House fact sheet.

The funding is meant to help communities prepare for wildfires, which Harris said was preferable to responding to fires already wreaking havoc.

"The best time to fight a fire is before it starts," she said on a Monday call with reporters.

The funding announced Monday can be used to write or update wildfire preparedness plans or on other mitigation efforts, such as clearing highly flammable brush.

Among the largest grants was a \$9.9 million disbursement to the Grant Soil and Water Conservation District in eastern Oregon to clear hazardous fuels from evacuation routes on county roads.

The New Mexico nonprofit Cimarron Watershed Alliance also received \$8 million to create defensible space around homes and fuel breaks designed to stop a fire's spread.

Archuleta County, Colorado, will also receive \$1.1 million to remove hazardous fuels over 600 acres.

Harris also cited examples of \$341,000 for Gila County, Arizona, for evacuation planning and clearing flammable brush around buildings and \$1.4 million for North Carolina to help cities and counties develop better plans to prepare for and respond to fires.

Communities in Alaska, Georgia, Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, South Dakota and Wisconsin will also receive grants.

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The remaining roughly \$800 million will be released over the next four years, Harris said. "This is an initial round of funding," Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said. "This is a critical down payment."

The Forest Service, which is part of the Agriculture Department, judged grant applications on three criteria, Vilsack said: communities that have experienced a severe disaster, are at high risk of a wildfire and are low income. All grants announced Monday met at least two of the three criteria and most met all three, he said.

The infrastructure law established the criteria, he said.

## Climate change a culprit

Wildfires have become more destructive in recent decades for a variety of reasons, including hotter and drier weather because of climate change, as well as increased development in areas at high risk of fire.

Harris emphasized that wildfires were a symptom of climate change, which she said was only worsening. A Monday report from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change should be a call to action, she said.

"Our future is not yet written, and the solutions are at hand," Harris said. "Let that be an alarm that lets us know that we must act with haste, and we can actually, right now, have an impact on how this all plays out."

## Prescribed burns to continue

The Forest Service plans to continue using prescribed burns to manage wildfire fuels, despite such a burn leading to massive wildfires in New Mexico last year, Vilsack said.

The Forest Service undertook a comprehensive review of prescribed burns, where firefighters purposely start and control small fires to clear brush and other flammable materials to prevent them from becoming out of control in a wildfire, following the New Mexico blazes, Vilsack said.

The Forest Service would more closely monitor local conditions when assessing whether to conduct controlled burns, but the technique remained "an important tool that we have in terms of making sure that we can reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire," he said.

Forest Service Chief Randy Moore is scheduled to testify this week before the spending subcommittees in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate that write bills funding the Interior Department. The president's budget request for fiscal 2024 includes a 21% increase for Interior Department wildland fire management funding.

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

## Ending a pregnancy in 14 states leaves few options. Some are looking to Europe and India for help.

**States with abortion bans struggle to stop mailed abortion pills from overseas**

**BY: KELCIE MOSELEY-MORRIS - MARCH 20, 2023 12:05 PM**

The pills came in a dark salmon-colored envelope sealed with a plastic covering that traveled more than 7,000 miles, over a dozen time zones from Nagpur, India, in almost exactly one week.

They were placed partially under the doormat of a home in a state with one of the most restrictive abortion bans in the United States, where zero clinics or pharmacies dispense the medication and the closest option for an in-person procedure is at least an hour to four hours away.

It is, advocates say, one of the only options left for those seeking abortions in one of the 14 states with criminal penalties for health care providers who perform the procedure.

The process of ordering the medication from Aid Access, a nonprofit organization founded by Dr. Rebecca Gomperts in 2018, is cobbled together in segments. From the organization's headquarters in Austria,

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Gomperts acts as the prescribing gynecologist for the person ordering the pills on the Aid Access website. It's one of the only services that allows people to order the medication as a "just in case" option, as the pills don't expire for two years with proper storage.

Payment of \$105 (about 98 euros) is made separately via PayPal, and once payment is complete, Gomperts sends her prescription to the pharmacy. There is also an option for financial assistance.

Mifepristone and misoprostol are used in combination to end a pregnancy, typically before 12 weeks of gestation, and the drugs are used to help manage early miscarriages. Mifepristone is taken first to stop the production of the progesterone hormone, which is needed to continue a pregnancy. Misoprostol is then taken to induce contractions in the uterus to expel the pregnancy.

Mifepristone was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 2000, but it is under legal challenges in court and legislatures across the country are attempting to restrict access to the drug. On Friday night, Wyoming's governor signed into law a ban on medication-induced abortions. A lawsuit challenging the FDA's approval process for mifepristone is ongoing in Texas, where a federal judge could order the agency to revoke its approval after more than two decades. Other states are attempting to restrict access by threatening legal action against retail pharmacies and any other suppliers of the drug.

An email notification is sent when the package ships, with detailed instructions about how to take the medication, the potential risks involved, side effects and pain management and when to seek medical attention. The email also includes resources for hotlines with people available for emotional support or to provide answers to medical questions.

The package itself includes a box with one mifepristone pill and four misoprostol pills, and a separate package contains 12 misoprostol pills. The combination box is enough for pregnancies that are less than 12 weeks' gestation, while the 12 pills are designed for pregnancies of more than 12 weeks.

By email, Gomperts told States Newsroom her organization is receiving more than 1,000 emails per day from individuals looking for help. Many of them also cannot afford the full price of the drugs. In February, Gomperts said 57% of those who paid for the drugs were able to pay less than 50 euros, or about \$53.

"It is important to continue this work because the people we help cannot travel to other states to get a safe abortion," Gomperts said.

## **Alabama has already threatened prosecution under different law for taking abortion pills**

Gomperts grew up in the Netherlands and became passionate about providing abortion care during her work for Greenpeace, according to the New York Times. She has worked to provide abortions for women in countries around the world, including Spain, Morocco, Guatemala and Ireland, when the country still had a strict abortion ban.

Christine Ryan, legal director of the Global Justice Center, is from Ireland and told States Newsroom she still lived there when the abortion ban was in place. It was repealed in 2018 after the high-profile case of a woman who died from a septic infection after she was denied abortion care during a miscarriage.

Ryan said witnessing those events and following Gomperts' work is what made her decide to get involved in reproductive rights.

"Rebecca Gomperts has been like a guardian angel to women worldwide for decades," Ryan said.

Gomperts used the same "workaround" to send the drugs to Irish women when it was banned, Ryan said, since she is based in another country.

Thirteen states across U.S. have abortion bans in place, nine of which do not include exceptions for cases of rape or incest. The bans do not have criminal penalties in place for the pregnant person, and while Texas, Oklahoma and Idaho have civil enforcement laws that allow family members or the pregnant person to sue medical providers for their role in an abortion, the suits cannot be brought against the pregnant person.

That has not stopped some states from threatening to prosecute individuals for taking abortion pills under different existing statutes. In January, Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall said the state could prosecute people under a chemical endangerment law that has been used to prosecute women who use illegal substances during pregnancy. It's unclear if that law would apply to mifepristone and misoprostol, which are legal drugs approved by the FDA. The U.S. Department of Justice also issued an opinion in

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December stating the mailing of the drugs to a particular jurisdiction is not sufficient basis for “concluding that the sender intends them to be used unlawfully.”

The Wyoming Legislature also passed a ban on medication abortion in March, which Gov. Mark Gordon signed Friday.

Although Politico and the New York Times reported this month that Walgreens confirmed it would not sell the medication in up to 20 states where attorneys general had threatened legal repercussions for doing so, a Walgreens spokesman told States Newsroom in a statement, “We want to be very clear about what our position has always been: Walgreens plans to dispense Mifepristone in any jurisdiction where it is legally permissible to do so. Once we are certified by the FDA, we will dispense this medication consistent with federal and state laws.”

While that will make it difficult for individuals to receive mifepristone from a pharmacy, Ryan said it won't be as easy to enforce bans on mailed pills.

“The authorities in (states with abortion bans) — who are they going to try to prosecute in terms of the mailing of these pills?” Ryan said.

## **Idaho anti-abortion activist: We need penalties for sending ‘human pesticide’ to women**

Brandi Swindell, founder and president of anti-abortion clinic Stanton Healthcare, told States Newsroom she thinks the mailing of abortion pills is a major problem that she called “creepy” and said reminds her of a drug cartel.

“We have these — not only out-of-state — but out of country groups that are pimping a human pesticide that could have very serious ramifications on a woman physically and emotionally, can impact her mental health, her physical well-being,” Swindell said. “And they are coming into states where we have clear abortion laws, where we have gone through the legal process, the legislative process. ... And they're going to try to sell and pimp these drugs preying on women that are in a potential crisis or unexpected pregnancy situation, a vulnerable situation.”

Idaho has a near-total ban on abortions at any stage of pregnancy, with affirmative court defenses to save the pregnant person's life and for rape and incest if a police report is provided. Swindell said she is working with state lawmakers in Idaho, where Stanton Healthcare is based, to seek an opinion from Idaho Attorney General Raúl Labrador's office about whether the state's abortion ban includes medication abortion.

“There needs to be clarification and enforcement that any organization or individual that is involved in promoting, selling or profiting from attempting to skirt Idaho's law to dispense and sell and profit from the abortion pill, that those entities need to be held accountable,” Swindell said.

If Labrador's office concludes the method is not included in Idaho's law, Swindell said there needs to be legislation introduced as soon as possible to strengthen the existing law before the Idaho Legislature adjourns for the year, which could happen in the next few weeks.

“We're passionately working to make sure that chemical abortions are banned,” Swindell said. “We want to make this a major issue in the 2024 presidential race.”

## **Self-managed abortions at home make pregnant people feel safer, legal advocate says**

The drug's use has become much more common in abortions across the country in the past three years. According to the Guttmacher Institute, as of December, medication abortion made up about 54% of all abortions performed in the United States.

Part of that may be people taking advantage of those legal workarounds with the mail, but Ryan said some pregnant people find home management of an abortion to be empowering and it offers a stronger sense of safety.

“You've had clinics suffering so much violence in the clinic setting, and having to deal with protesters, and the difficulties in arranging transport and financing transport, whereas managing pregnancy in someone's own home is a safe place,” Ryan said. “Also having access to a clinician over the phone and online is something that has shown to be quite powerful.”

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While providers and patients across the United States wait on a ruling from a federal judge in Texas about the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approval of mifepristone, advocates want to stress that options like Aid Access will still be available no matter the outcome of the court case.

Dr. Jennifer Lincoln, an obstetrician-gynecologist who practices in Portland and the executive director of an advocacy organization called Mayday Health, said if state laws become more stringent around policing abortion medication, Aid Access and other internationally based options will become more important.

"The best thing you can do is inform yourself and pass the message along that you'll still be able to get these medications," Lincoln told States Newsroom. "It requires a few more hoops, but you'll still be able to get it."

Ryan doesn't worry about organizations like Aid Access being affected by whatever happens in U.S. courts, but she is worried about state- and county-level prosecutors trying to target people who use the pills at home.

"What I do really see as a particularly challenging (fact) that activists and patients have to deal with in the U.S. that wasn't as pertinent somewhere like Ireland, or even in Mexico and Argentina, is the level of surveillance that exists and the power and zeal of the criminal legal system," Ryan said. "It is a phenomenon that is very much overlapping with the human rights crisis to create this extremely challenging environment for people to exist in."

*States Newsroom National Reproductive Rights Reporter Sofia Resnick contributed to this report.*

*This story has been updated since its original publication to include information about a new anti-abortion law signed by the governor of Wyoming.*

*Kelcie Moseley-Morris is an award-winning journalist who has covered many topics across Idaho since 2011. She has a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Idaho and a master's degree in public administration from Boise State University. Moseley-Morris started her journalism career at the Moscow-Pullman Daily News, followed by the Lewiston Tribune and the Idaho Press.*

## Biden administration details potential cuts in education, food aid and more under GOP plan

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 20, 2023 11:51 AM

WASHINGTON — Federal departments and agencies say U.S. House Republicans' plans to cut federal spending would result in reductions to key programs like food aid, education assistance and wildfire management.

The series of letters from across the federal government released Monday detail exactly how plans to cut at least \$130 billion in domestic spending during the upcoming fiscal year could impact people's everyday lives.

"The draconian cuts would take away the opportunity for 80,000 people to attend college and impact all 6.6 million students who rely on Pell Grants," said House Appropriations ranking member Rosa DeLauro, who requested the letters. "If implemented, 200,000 children will lose access to Head Start, and 100,000 children will lose access to child care, undermining early education and parents' ability to go to work."

"As if that was not enough to deter these harmful cuts, 1.2 million women, infants, and children would lose vital nutrition assistance they receive through WIC," added DeLauro, a Connecticut Democrat, referring to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children that provides grants to states.

Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a California Republican, promised conservatives within his party that he'd cut spending during the upcoming fiscal year, slated to begin Oct. 1, back to the prior year's levels. The promise was one of many McCarthy made to hold-out Republicans in order to become speaker.

Many top ranking U.S. House Republicans have said they won't touch Social Security, Medicare or defense spending, leaving domestic spending, Medicaid and food aid for low-income people on the list for

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potential spending cuts.

While the Democratic Senate and President Joe Biden would have to sign off on any changes, House Republicans are pushing for strict caps on spending levels in exchange for addressing the debt limit.

Those spending cuts, according to the letters from Cabinet secretaries and agency heads, could impact dozens of federal programs and quality of life for many Americans.

Agriculture Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack wrote, "While Congressional Republicans haven't released a specific plan, cuts on the scale suggested would have very real and damaging impacts on our families, our communities, our economy, and our competitiveness — undermining a broad range of critical services the American people rely on in their everyday lives such as food and nutrition security, protection of life and property from catastrophic wildland fires, a safe food supply, and more."

Acting Commissioner of the Social Security Administration Kilolo Kijakazi wrote that if spending were to revert to fiscal 2022 levels, the agency would likely have to close field offices, shorten hours, lay off about 6,000 employees and implement a hiring freeze.

"Cuts on this scale would dramatically undermine our ability to function effectively," Kijakazi wrote.

"It would cut in-person access to our field offices, drive up wait times for initial disability and retirement claims processing, lengthen phone wait times, prohibit development of online tools to compensate for the difficulties to reach us by phone and in-person, and create backlogs across the board," Kijakazi added.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg wrote the spending cuts would likely "require furloughs of essential safety personnel, including air traffic controllers and safety inspectors, and could also require Reductions in Force (RIF)."

"Under this scenario, safety would be undermined for years to come — curtailing vehicle, rail, pipeline and aviation safety inspections, limiting our research programs across these programs, and significantly compromising our transportation operations," Buttigieg wrote.

Interior Department Secretary Deb Haaland wrote the spending cuts could undermine wildfire management, disrupt services and safety at national parks, affect drought mitigation efforts, cut support for tribal nations, and reduce energy and mineral development.

"Visitors to the national parks would feel the impact of funding reductions at parks across the Nation," Haaland wrote.

"Parks would need to reduce hours, close visitor centers, reduce trash collection and facility cleaning, as well as ranger-led programming," she added. "The need to curtail services such as snow plowing would impact decisions including whether to maintain winter access to parks like Yosemite National Park, which welcomed over 336,000 visitors this winter despite record levels of snow."

## **GOP budget resolution**

House Republicans have not yet released their budget resolution for the upcoming fiscal year, though they likely will sometime this spring.

That tax and spending blueprint will give the first look at how much the House GOP wants the federal government to spend on defense and nondefense discretionary programs during fiscal 2024.

The House GOP will then draft the dozen annual appropriations bills for that fiscal year, detailing how much money the party wants to spend on each department and agency that falls within the roughly \$1.7 trillion discretionary budget.

House Republicans will have to successfully negotiate those bills with the Democratically controlled Senate and the Biden administration if they'll have any hope of becoming law.

Senate leaders, who will also move their own appropriations bills through that chamber, are approaching the upcoming appropriations process differently than their House colleagues.

Washington Democratic Sen. Patty Murray, chair of the Appropriations Committee, and Maine Republican Sen. Susan Collins, ranking member on the Appropriations Committee, have released a handful of joint statements this year pledging bipartisanship.

"Now that the President has released his budget, we are pressing forward with the work of writing our

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nation's spending bills as quickly as possible," they said earlier this month. "We have a real opportunity — and an important responsibility — to work together to make our country safer, more competitive, and do some good for the people we all represent back home. The power of the purse rests with Congress, and we take that responsibility seriously."

In the event the two chambers cannot reach a bipartisan agreement on spending by October, they can pass a stopgap spending bill, known as a continuing resolution, that extends current funding levels for months, or they could begin a partial government shutdown.

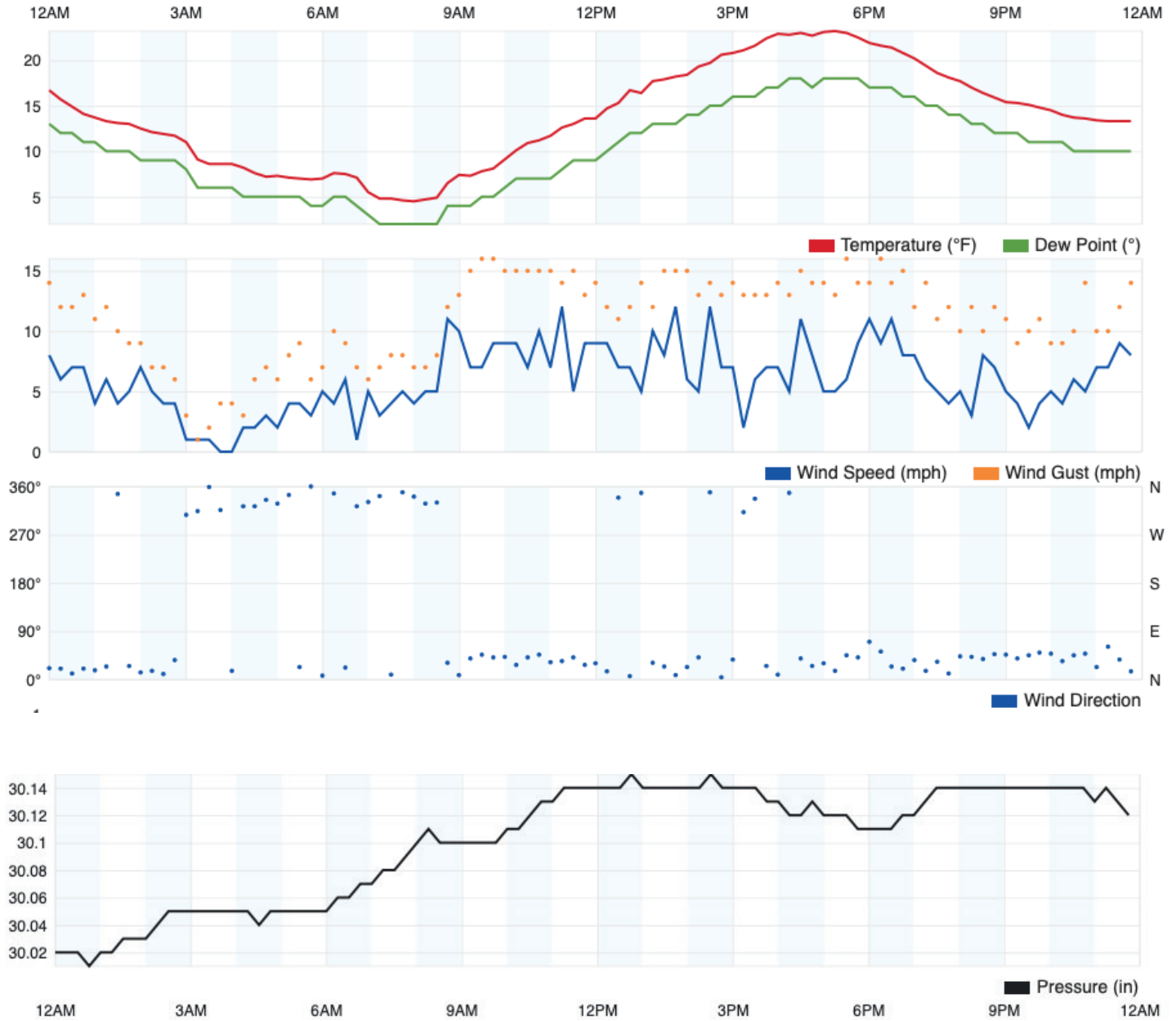
*Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.*



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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## Winter Weather Advisory

**URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE**

**National Weather Service Aberdeen SD**

**500 AM CDT Tue Mar 21 2023**

Traverse-McPherson-Brown-Marshall-Roberts-Edmunds-Day-  
Including the cities of Wheaton, Eureka, Aberdeen, Britton, Sisseton, Ipswich, and Webster  
500 AM CDT Tue Mar 21 2023

...WINTER WEATHER ADVISORY REMAINS IN EFFECT FROM 1 PM THIS AFTERNOON TO 1 AM CDT WEDNESDAY...

\* WHAT...Mixed precipitation expected. Total snow accumulations of 2 to 5 inches and ice accumulations of a light glaze.

\* WHERE...Portions of west central Minnesota and north central and northeast South Dakota.

\* WHEN...From 1 PM this afternoon to 1 AM CDT Wednesday.

\* IMPACTS...Plan on slippery road conditions. The hazardous conditions could impact the evening commute.

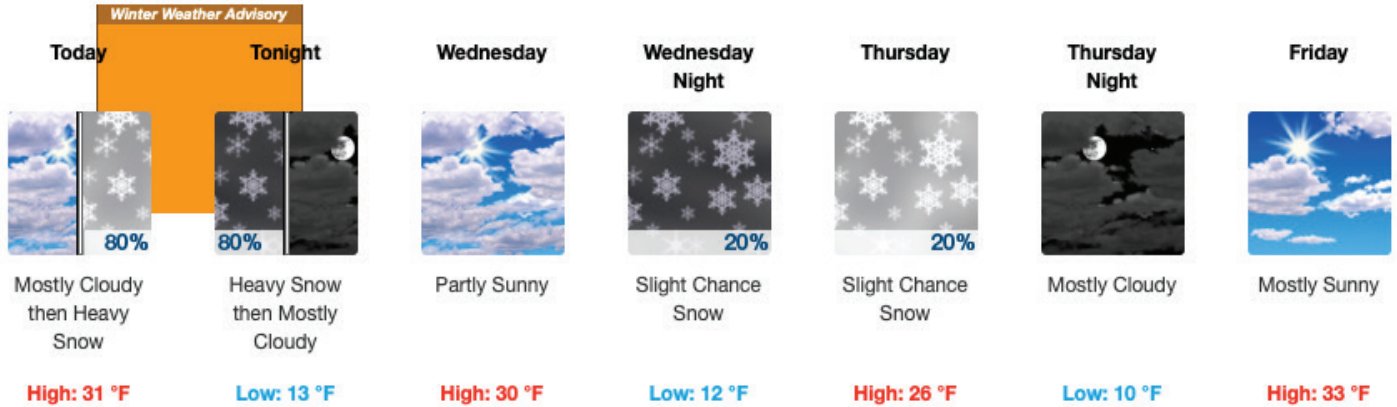
PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

Slow down and use caution while traveling.

In Minnesota, the latest road conditions can be obtained at [511mn.org](http://511mn.org), or by calling 5 1 1. In South Dakota, the latest road conditions can be obtained by calling 5 1 1.

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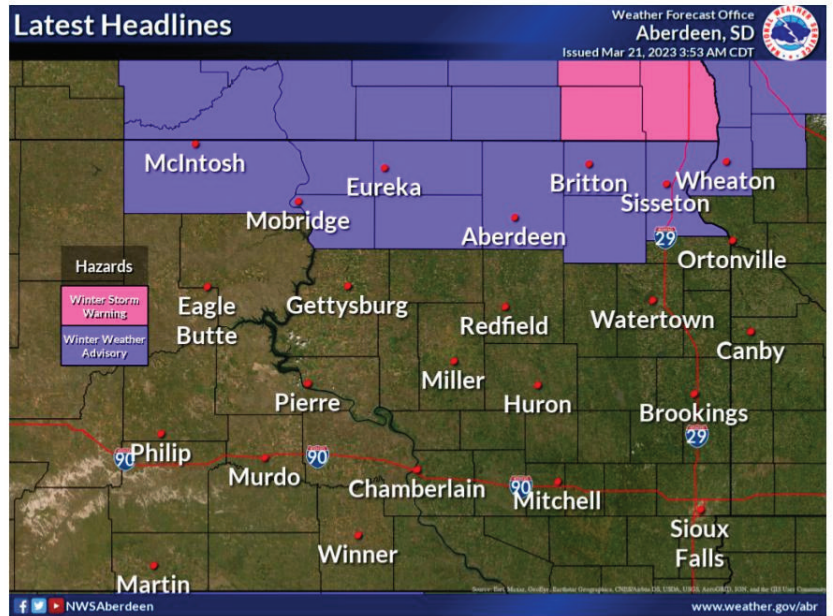
## Wintry Weather Today/This Evening March 21, 2023 4:00 AM

### Key Messages

- Snow Today into early Wednesday: **Most snow falling this afternoon through evening**
- A wintry mix or locally light freezing drizzle possible from south central to northeastern SD
- High snowfall rates near the ND/SD border could create travel impacts this afternoon/evening

### Forecast Changes

- No major changes since last issuance



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Snow is expected again today, mostly this afternoon through this evening. A Winter Weather Advisory is out for northern counties.

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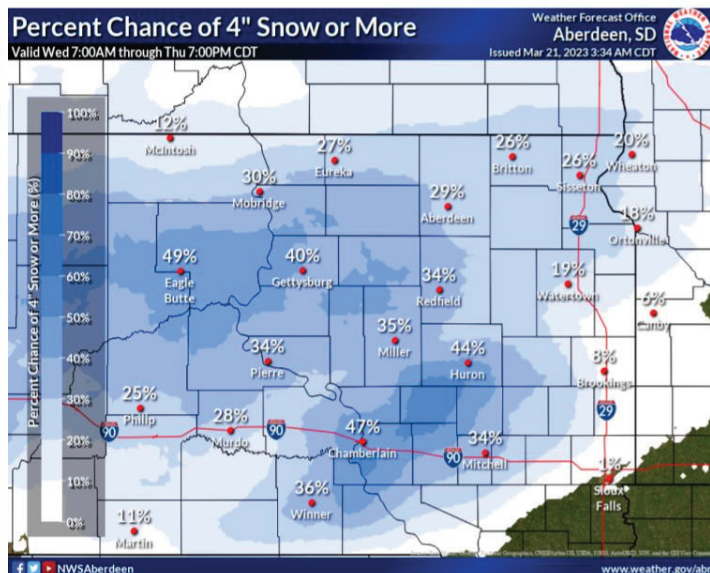
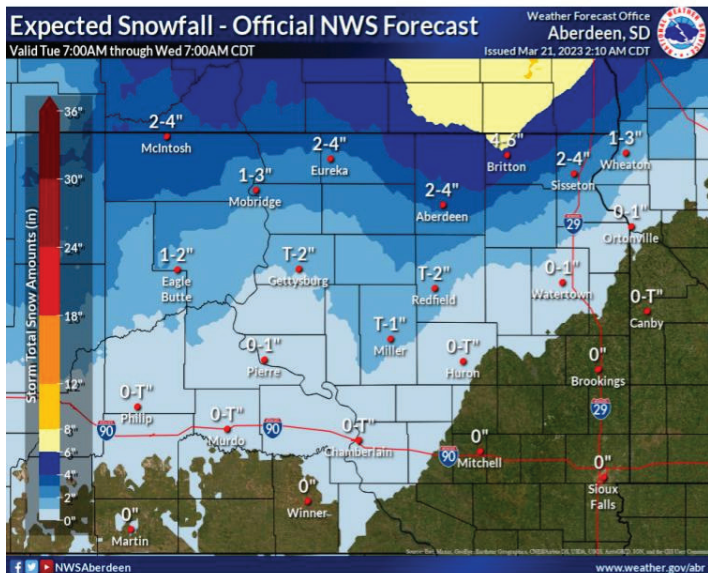


## Snowfall Forecast This Week

March 21, 2023  
4:00 AM

### Snowfall Today through Tonight

### Probability of 4" Snow Wednesday through Thursday



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD



## Timing: Precipitation Type & Intensity

March 21, 2023  
4:00 AM

### Timing

**Most snow falling this afternoon through this evening**

- *This morning:* Light snow mainly west of the Missouri River.
- *This afternoon:* Snow expanding to areas mainly west of the James River.
- *This evening:* Snow mainly over north central to northeastern SD and west central MN. Some light rain or or potentially freezing rain may mix in over eastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota.
- Precipitation ending southwest to northeast during the evening to early overnight hours.

	Weather Forecast																					
	3/21 Tue					3/22 Wed					3/23 Thu											
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
<b>Aberdeen</b>			40%	90%	90%	45%	5%	0%	0%	0%	10%	10%	15%	15%	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	10%	10%	10%
<b>Britton</b>			45%	85%	90%	75%	30%	0%	0%	0%	5%	5%	10%	10%	15%	15%	20%	20%	20%	10%	10%	10%
<b>Eagle Butte</b>	10%	15%	80%	85%	20%	5%	0%	0%	5%	5%	25%	25%	35%	35%	35%	35%	35%	20%	20%	10%	10%	5%
<b>Eureka</b>	10%	5%	40%	90%	90%	35%	5%	0%	0%	0%	5%	5%	15%	15%	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	10%	10%	5%
<b>Gettysburg</b>			55%	90%	55%	15%	0%	0%	5%	5%	20%	20%	35%	35%	35%	35%	35%	25%	25%	10%	10%	10%
<b>Kennebec</b>			60%	70%	20%	0%	0%	0%	10%	10%	30%	30%	45%	45%	45%	40%	40%	15%	15%	5%	5%	5%
<b>McIntosh</b>			60%	95%	85%	25%	0%	0%	0%	10%	10%	20%	20%	25%	25%	25%	15%	15%	10%	10%	5%	
<b>Milbank</b>			25%	50%	100%	80%	25%	0%	0%	0%	10%	10%	20%	20%	25%	25%	25%	20%	20%	10%	10%	10%
<b>Miller</b>			60%	90%	65%	15%	0%	0%	5%	5%	30%	30%	40%	40%	40%	35%	35%	25%	25%	10%	10%	10%
<b>Mobridge</b>	15%	5%	50%	90%	65%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%	10%	10%	20%	20%	25%	25%	25%	20%	20%	10%	10%	5%
<b>Murdo</b>			25%	40%	30%	5%	0%	0%	20%	20%	40%	40%	50%	50%	50%	45%	45%	15%	15%	5%	5%	5%
<b>Pierre</b>			50%	60%	25%	5%	0%	0%	10%	10%	30%	30%	40%	40%	40%	40%	40%	20%	20%	5%	5%	5%
<b>Redfield</b>			40%	90%	85%	30%	0%	0%	0%	0%	15%	15%	30%	30%	35%	35%	35%	25%	25%	10%	10%	10%
<b>Sisseton</b>			40%	70%	95%	85%	30%	5%	0%	0%	5%	5%	10%	10%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	10%	10%	10%
<b>Watertown</b>			15%	55%	85%	55%	10%	0%	0%	0%	10%	10%	30%	30%	30%	30%	30%	20%	20%	10%	10%	10%
<b>Webster</b>			30%	70%	85%	60%	15%	0%	0%	0%	10%	10%	20%	20%	25%	25%	25%	20%	20%	10%	10%	10%
<b>Wheaton</b>			35%	60%	95%	35%	35%	0%	0%	0%	5%	5%	10%	10%	10%	10%	15%	15%	15%	10%	10%	10%

\*Created: 3 am CDT Tue 3/21/2023. Shows most impactful weather for the period beginning at the time shown. Weather symbols display where Probability of Precipitation > 0%.

- Rain +   - Fz Rain +   - Wintry Mix +   - Snow +

NWSAberdeen  
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: 23 °F at 5:17 PM

Low Temp: 4 °F at 8:00 AM

Wind: 16 mph at 9:24 AM

Precip: : 0.00

## Today's Info

Record High: 76 in 1926

Record Low: -12 in 1965

Average High: 44

Average Low: 22

Average Precip in March.: 0.55

Precip to date in March.: 1.20

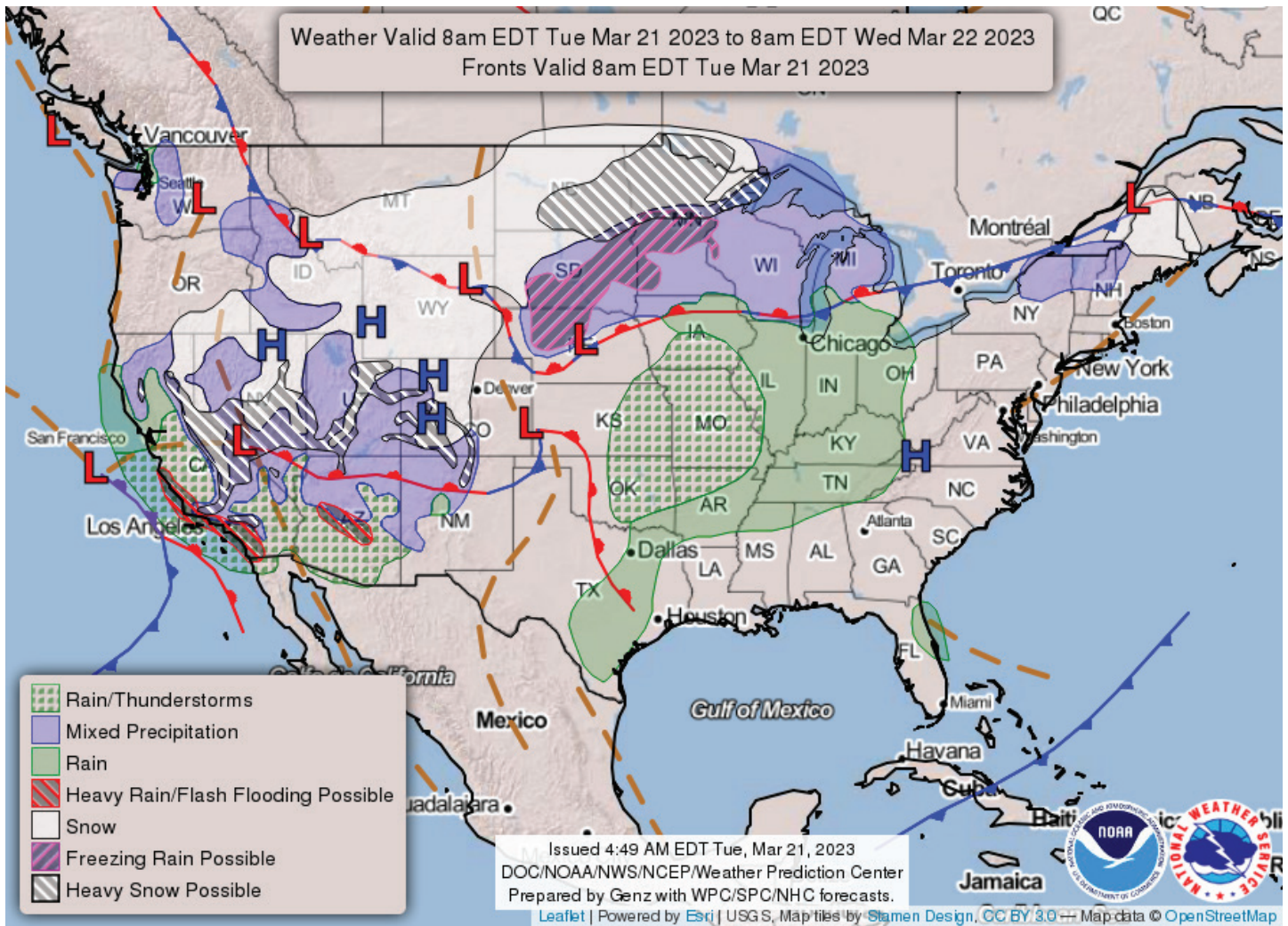
Average Precip to date: 1.72

Precip Year to Date: 2.78

Sunset Tonight: 7:47:16 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:29:56 AM

Day length: 12 hours, 15 minutes



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## Today in Weather History

March 21, 1997: As temperatures began to warm up towards the end of March, the near-record to record winter snowpack over central, north-central, and northeast South Dakota started to melt. The resulting runoff filled up ditches, lakes, creeks, streams, and low-lying areas. The massive amount of water swamped hundreds of sections of county and township roads as well as several state and federal highways. The inundated parts of roads were either broken up or washed out. Tens of culverts were blown out or damaged, and several bridges were either destroyed or washed out by chunks of ice and the high water flow. Road closures were extensive, with rerouting taking place for school buses, mail carriers, farmers, and ranchers. Many spillways and dams received some damage or were washed out. Also, thousands of acres of farmland and pastureland were underwater. Due to the high groundwater, a countless number of homes received water in their basements. A few towns were partially flooded, including Twin Brooks in Grant County, Corona in Roberts County, and Raymond in Clark County. The following week, in the early morning hours of March 27, water flowed into Raymond filling the basements of several homes. In rural areas, several farms were surrounded by water and were inaccessible, leaving some people stranded and livestock marooned. Many other residences and businesses, mainly across northeast South Dakota, received significant damage or were a total loss. As a result, several people had to be evacuated. At the time, many long-term residents said this was the most significant flooding they had seen in their lifetimes. The flooding continued into early to mid-April.

March 21, 2012: Several record high temperatures occurred across the region in March.

1801: The Jefferson Flood hit the Connecticut Valley. The flooding was the greatest since 1692. The Federalists named the flood for the new President, who they blamed for the disaster.

1876: More than 40 inches of snow stopped traffic in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Trains were delayed, and mail carriers resorted to snowshoes.

1932: A tornado swarm occurred in the Deep South. Between late afternoon and early the next morning, severe thunderstorms spawned 31 tornadoes in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and Tennessee. The tornadoes killed 334 persons and injured 1784 others. Northern Alabama was the hardest hit. Tornadoes in Alabama killed 286 persons and caused five million dollars damage.

1951: Antarctica is the windiest place in the world. Port Martin averaged 40 mph winds throughout the year. On this day, the winds averaged 108 mph.

1952 - Severe thunderstorms spawned thirty-one tornadoes across Arkansas, Tennessee, Missouri, Mississippi, Alabama and Kentucky. The tornadoes killed 343 persons and caused 15 million dollars damage. Arkansas and Tennessee each reported thirteen tornadoes. The towns of Judsonia AR and Henderson TN were nearly wiped off the map in what proved to be the worst tornado outbreak of record for Arkansas. A tornado, one and a half miles wide at times, left a church the only undamaged building at Judsonia. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A winter storm in the Northern High Plains Region produced blizzard conditions in western South Dakota. Winds gusted to 70 mph at Rapid City SD, and snowfall totals ranged up to 20 inches at Lead SD. The high winds produced snow drifts six feet high. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Bitterly cold weather prevailed across the northeastern U.S. Portland ME reported their coldest spring day of record with a morning low of 5 above, and an afternoon high of just 21 degrees. Marquette MI reported a record low of 15 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (The Weather Channel)

1989 - Snow blanketed the northeastern U.S. early in the day, with six inches reported at Rutland VT. Morning and afternoon thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds from southwestern Mississippi to southwest Georgia. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - The first full day of spring was a cold one for the eastern U.S. Freezing temperatures damaged 62 percent of the peach crop in upstate South Carolina, and 72 percent of the peach crop in the ridge area of South Carolina. Elkins WV, which a week earlier reported a record high of 82 degrees, was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 16 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### ASKING, SEEKING AND KNOCKING

A little girl was climbing into bed when her mother asked, "Ann, did you remember to say your prayers?"

"Well," she replied, "I got on my knees and started to say them as I do every night. And then all of a sudden I thought, -I'll bet that God gets tired of hearing me pray about the same old things every night.' So, I decided that I would just lay here in bed and tell Him the story of -The Three Bears."

Persistence in prayer and pursuing God's plan and purpose for our lives is very important. It's equally important, however, to understand how He answers our prayers and when He will answer our prayers. We must never allow ourselves to think that God will not accept our prayers or that He will ever forget our prayers. Prayers and praying are a serious and significant part of the life of the Christian. However, we must always remember that He will answer our prayers at the right time, in the right way, in a way that is in our best interests.

We need to remember that He responds to our requests with His wisdom and His never-ending and always compassionate love. When the answer does not come when we expect it, we must hold fast to the fact that "His grace is sufficient" now and into eternity. The answer will come when we need it most and will fulfill His plan for our well-being. When we give up, give in, and quit praying, God knows we are not sincere and that our request was "a passing fancy."

Prayer: Lord, give us a faith that does not falter, a trust that will not tire and persistence that will prevail. May our hope in Your faithfulness and our best interests prevail. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. Matthew 7:7



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

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## 2023 Community Events

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



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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.17.23

26 28 29 39 49 25

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$272,000,000**

NEXT 15 Hrs 34 Mins 9  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.20.23

13 14 22 30 37 3

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$39,830,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 34  
DRAW: Mins 9 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.20.23

1 6 12 31 38 7

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 15 Hrs 4 Mins 10  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.18.23

1 13 19 22 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$20,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 34  
DRAW: Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.20.23

2 18 31 59 60 19

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 33  
DRAW: Mins 9 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.20.23

1 27 32 47 67 14

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$96,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 33  
DRAW: Mins 9 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### South Dakota boosts criminal justice system investments

By AMANCAI BIRABEN Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Republican Gov. Kristi Noem signed legislation Monday that puts more than \$390 million into the state's prison system, with most of that money going toward investments in new prison facilities.

One of the bills signed by Noem allocates \$60 million to build a women's prison in Rapid City. Another sets aside \$54 million for property and design costs for a Sioux Falls men's prison and puts \$270 million into a fund for future men's prisons in the state. Lawmakers widely supported the bills as they made their way through the session.

Hesitations over taxing the state hundreds of millions of dollars for a prison in Sioux Falls were overshadowed by concerns about a current facility, which lacks access for employees and programming opportunities. Lawmakers agreed the current prison was generally outdated.

"We need a correctional facility — not a lock them away and leave them there prison, which is what we have now," Democratic Rep. Linda Duba said.

Noem signed 10 other bills that address criminal justice, from updating rape definitions to removing public access to inmate disciplinary records. She also approved child witness protections and limiting parole for violent offenders.

Some lawmakers opposed that "truth in sentencing" push, arguing that locking up prisoners without possibility for parole would excessively cost the state. Others argued parole reduces recidivism and this would interfere with that public safety goal.

But the majority of lawmakers emphasized it provides clarity for crime victims and deters people from committing violent crimes.

### Minnesota moving to fortify state status as abortion refuge

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Minnesota is moving to fortify its status as a refuge for patients from restrictive states who travel to the state to seek abortions — and to protect providers who serve them.

The state House on Monday passed a bill by a 68-62 vote to prohibit enforcement in Minnesota of laws, subpoenas, judgements or extradition requests from other states against people who get, perform or assist with abortions in Minnesota. The Senate version passed its first committee test last week.

The House lead author, Democratic Rep. Esther Agbaje, of Minneapolis, said at a news conference before the debate that a prime example of what supporters are worried about is a Texas law that deputizes individuals to enforce their state's strict restrictions by allowing them to sue to anyone who helps a patient obtain an abortion elsewhere.

Democratic House Majority Leader Jamie Long, of Minneapolis, said the bill is needed because Texas-style legislation has been introduced in several states that could put Minnesota providers at risk, as well as residents who might help relatives or friends who come to Minnesota for abortions just by picking them up at the airport.

"Before the Dobbs decision last summer, I'd often care for patients from nearby states like the Dakotas or Wisconsin," said Dr. Sarah Trexler, chief medical officer at Planned Parenthood North Central States, which performs 70% of the abortions in Minnesota. "But now, for the first time ever, I regularly care for patients from Texas, Alabama, Wyoming, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and the list goes on and on."

Like Planned Parenthood and other providers, Whole Woman's Health of Minnesota in Bloomington has also seen a sharp increase in patients from out-of-state, more than doubling from 2019 to 26% in 2022.

"The most remarkable change has come from Texas, where we only saw 2 patients from that state in 2019 to 96 from February 2022 to March of 2023," Amy Hagstrom Miller, president and CEO of Whole

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Woman's Health Alliance, said in an email.

Democrats made have abortion rights one of their top priorities for Minnesota's 2023 legislative session. They won a one-seat majority in the state Senate in the November elections while maintaining a wider hold on the House to wind up with pro-choice majorities in both chambers. Democratic Gov. Tim Walz signed a fast-tracked bill in January to enshrine in state statutes abortion rights that had been protected under a 1995 Minnesota Supreme Court decision.

Texas and Oklahoma allow private citizens to sue people they believe have helped someone get an abortion. Minnesota has already adopted some protections that apply to those people under an executive order that Walz signed last June. And Democratic Attorney General Keith Ellison pledged that his office wouldn't cooperate with other states seeking to prosecute women who come to Minnesota for abortions. Several other states, including California and Colorado have also adopted safe haven protections for patients traveling to seek abortions, either by executive order or by statute.

A more contentious bill working its way through the Minnesota House and Senate would repeal a long list of state statutes restricting abortion rights — such as 24-hour waiting period and parental notification requirements — that a district judge declared unconstitutional last July. It's meant to ensure that appellate courts can't restore those restrictions.

Long demurred on when that bill might come up for a House floor vote. Asked if supporters now have the votes to pass it, he replied, "We'll have the votes when we bring it to the floor."

Republican critics of the various bills argue they've already left Minnesota with essentially no restrictions on abortion at all — at any stage of pregnancy. But their efforts to scale back the legislation and maintain some limits have all failed. Republican Rep. Peggy Scott, of Andover, said the bill passed Monday will give Minnesota a "black eye" by making it a destination and sanctuary for people seeking to end their pregnancies.

"We are going to reward breaking the law, we are going to reward behavior that leads to felony convictions in other states. We're going to say, 'Come to Minnesota, we'll have you, we'll take you,'" GOP Rep. Anne Neu Brindley said during the debate. "Folks, it's wrong."

## Ex-caregiver sentenced in pushing death of elderly man

By The Associated Press undefined

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — A former employee at a North Dakota care center was sentenced Monday to two years in prison for the death of an elderly resident.

Rachel Cooper, 60, pleaded guilty to negligent homicide in the August 2021 death of 78-year-old Gary Pearson. In addition to prison time, Cooper was sentenced to two years of supervised probation, court records show.

A phone message left with Cooper's attorney wasn't immediately returned.

Authorities said Pearson was pushed and fell on Aug. 3, 2021, at Maple View Memory Care center. He later died.

A criminal complaint said Cooper was cleaning Pearson's bathroom and that the two appeared to have struggled over the bathroom door.

The complaint said Cooper pushed Pearson with both hands, causing him to fall backward. She later told police Pearson was keeping her from leaving the bathroom. She said she pushed him with one arm, causing him to trip and fall.

## New Gophers coach Plitzuweit has core freshmen 4 staying put

By DAVE CAMPBELL AP Sports Writer

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The four Minnesota freshmen recruited by Lindsay Whalen all decided their loyalty to the home-state program was stronger than the disappointment of seeing their leader — and Gophers legend — depart.

Now that they've got a new head coach, Amaya Battle, Mara Braun, Nia Holloway and Mallory Heyer are

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feeling even better about staying.

When Dawn Plitzuweit was introduced as Whalen's successor at a news conference at the team's practice facility on Monday, the heralded quartet was in attendance as part of a healthy turnout from the current roster.

There will be some departures, with the light of the transfer portal perpetually glowing, but as long as the Twin Cities area natives Battle, Braun, Holloway and Heyer are in place Plitzuweit will have a solid starting point.

"It's been kind of chaotic, a little sad when we first heard about coach Whay, but we understand," Battle said. "We all committed for the reason to turn this program around and since we've been here we've all grown really close, so it's not even just necessarily for the school, for Minnesota, but it's for each other just as well."

Plitzuweit has a six-year contract that will pay her a base salary of \$800,000, about 45% more than Whalen was making, after guiding West Virginia to the NCAA Tournament in her lone season.

"What's really special about them is they have chosen to come to the 'U' to represent themselves, their families, the program, our athletic department, but the entire state of Minnesota in a lot of ways," Plitzuweit said. "You can feel it when you're around them."

The native of West Bend, Wisconsin, who has 16 years of experience as a college head coach and deep ties to the region, had a get-to-know-you meeting with the players on Saturday night that made a strong impression.

"She just radiates energy," Braun said.

Whalen led the Gophers to the Final Four as a senior in 2004. They went to the NCAA Tournament seven times in an eight-year span from 2002 under Brenda Frese (then Oldfield) to 2009 under her successor Pam Borton, winning a total of 10 games. They reached the Sweet 16 in 2003 and 2005.

Borton went just 84-79 over her last five seasons without an NCAA Tournament appearance and was fired in 2014. Marlene Stollings had three 20-win records and two NCAA Tournament appearances in four seasons, but she left for Texas Tech.

That created the opening for Whalen, the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame member who had no previous coaching experience, five years ago. Whalen went 71-76 with Minnesota, including a 32-58 record in Big Ten play and no NCAA Tournament appearances. The Gophers tied for 12th in the Big Ten this season with a 4-12 record, their fewest wins in 12 years.

Whalen's departure was described by Minnesota athletic director Mark Coyle as a mutual decision, but it seemed like she wasn't ready to leave. Plitzuweit said she has "tremendous respect" for Whalen during her prepared remarks.

"Lindsay is one of our own, and I look forward to honoring her and all of our alumni," she said.

Coyle, who sits on the NCAA men's basketball committee and spent last weekend immersed in the selection process for the field of 68 on that side, kept an eye on the West Virginia women's games as much as he could. This hire was bound to be someone with significant experience as a head coach, and the 50-year-old with a career record of 356-141 — including time at South Dakota, Northern Kentucky and Grand Valley State — clearly has that.

"The fact that she has such strong connections back here is just a huge positive," Coyle said. "We felt it was important to find a coach who's won at a high level."

Coyle was asked if he had concern that Plitzuweit stayed at West Virginia for just one season. He said he encouraged her during the interview process by pointing out that he only stayed at Syracuse for one year, after leaving Boise State and before being hired at Minnesota.

The chance to coach in the Big Ten and be closer to family was too strong to pass up.

"This is home for me," she said. "This is a dream opportunity."

## Army of lobbyists helped water down banking regulations

By BRIAN SLODYSKO and KEN SWEET Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — It seemed like a good idea at the time: Red-state Democrats facing grim reelection prospects would join forces with Republicans to slash bank regulations — demonstrating a willingness to work with President Donald Trump while bucking many in their party.

That unlikely coalition voted in 2018 to roll back portions of a far-reaching 2010 law intended to prevent a future financial crisis. But those changes are now being blamed for contributing to the recent collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank that prompted a federal rescue and has stoked anxiety about a broader banking contagion.

The rollback was leveraged with a lobbying campaign that cost tens of millions of dollars that drew an army of hundreds of lobbyists and it was seeded with ample campaign contributions.

The episode offers a fresh reminder of the power that bankers wield in Washington, where the industry spends prodigiously to fight regulation and often hires former members of Congress and their staff to make the case that they are not a source of risk to the economy

“The bottom line is that these banks would have faced a tougher supervisory framework under the original ... law, but Congress and the Trump regulators took an ax to it,” said Carter Dougherty, a spokesman for Americans for Financial Reform, a left-leaning financial sector watchdog group. “We can draw a direct line between the deregulation of the Trump period, driven by the bank lobby, and the chaos of the last few weeks.”

President Joe Biden has asked Congress for the authority to impose tougher penalties on failed banks. The Justice Department and the Securities and Exchange Commission have started investigations. And congressional Democrats are calling for new restrictions on financial institutions.

But so far there is no indication that another bipartisan coalition will form in Congress to put tougher regulations back in place, underscoring the banking industry’s continued clout.

That influence was on full display when the banking lobby worked for two years to water down aspects of the 2010 Dodd-Frank law that had placed weighty regulations on banks designed to reduce consumer risk and force the institutions to adopt safer lending and investing practices.

Republicans had long looked to blunt the impact of Dodd-Frank. But rather than push for sweeping deregulation, Sen. Mike Crapo, an Idaho Republican who led the Senate banking committee, hoped a narrowed focus could draw enough support from moderate Democrats to clear the Senate’s 60-vote filibuster threshold.

Crapo broached the idea with Democratic Sens. Jon Tester of Montana, Joe Donnelly of Indiana and Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota — all on the ballot in 2018 — as well as Mark Warner of Virginia. By the fall of that year, the bipartisan group met regularly, according to a copy of Tester’s office schedule posted to his Senate website.

A lobbying strategy also emerged, with companies and trade groups that specifically mention Crapo’s legislation spending more than \$400 million in 2017 and 2018, according to an Associated Press analysis of the public lobbying disclosures.

The bill was sold to the public as a form of regulatory relief for overburdened community banks, which serviced farmers and smaller businesses. Community bankers from across the U.S. flew in to Washington to meet repeatedly with lawmakers, including Tester, who had 32 meetings with Montana bank officials. Local bank leaders pushed members of their congressional delegation when they returned home.

But the measure also included provisions sought by midsize banks that drastically curtailed oversight once the Trump Fed finished writing new regulations necessitated by the bill’s passage.

Specifically, the legislation lifted the threshold for banks to be considered “too big to fail” — a designation that carries a strict regimen of oversight, including mandatory financial stress testing.

That component, which effectively carved large midsize banks out of more stringent regulation, has come under new scrutiny in light of the failure of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank, whose executives lobbied on behalf of the 2018 rollback.

“The lobbyists were everywhere. You couldn’t throw an elbow without running into one,” Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a Massachusetts Democrat who vehemently opposed the bill, told reporters last week.

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Campaign checks were written. Ads were cut. Mailers went out.

As a reward for their work, Heitkamp (\$357,953), Tester (\$302,770) and Donnelly (\$265,349) became the top Senate recipients of money from the banking industry during the 2018 campaign season, according to OpenSecrets, a nonpartisan group tracking money in politics.

Democratic Senate leader Chuck Schumer freed members to vote for the bill, a move intended to bolster the standing of vulnerable moderate incumbents. But the move also bitterly divided the Democratic caucus, with Warren singling out the moderates as doing Wall Street's bidding.

In the hours before the bill passed the Senate with 17 Democratic votes, Heitkamp took to the chamber floor to inveigh against the "diatribe," "hyperbole" and "overstatement" from opponents of the bill.

Tester, meanwhile, huddled with executives from Bank of America, Citigroup, Discover and Wells Fargo, who were there on behalf of the American Bankers Association.

The American Bankers Association, which helped lead the push, later paid \$125,000 for an ad campaign thanking Tester for his role in the bill's passage, records show.

Less than a month after the bill was passed out of the Senate, Tester met Greg Becker, the CEO for the now-collapsed Silicon Valley Bank, according to his schedule. Becker specifically lobbied Congress and the Federal Reserve to take a light regulatory approach with banks of his size. Lobbyists with the firm the Franklin Square Group, which had been retained by Silicon Valley Bank, donated \$10,800 to Tester's campaign, record show.

Heitkamp was the only member of the group invited to the bill signing ceremony, beaming alongside Trump. Later, Americans for Prosperity, the grassroots conservative group funded by the billionaire industrialist Koch brothers, ran an online ad commending Heitkamp for taking a stand against her party.

In an interview, Heitkamp pushed back against suggestions that the legislation was directly responsible for the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank. She acknowledged, however, that there was an open question about whether new rules put in place by the Fed after the measure was signed into law could have played a role.

"I'm willing to look at the argument that this had something to do with it," Heitkamp said, adding: "I think you will find that (the Fed) was engaged in some level of some supervision. Why that didn't work? That's the question that needs to be resolved."

In a statement issued last week, Tester did not directly address his role in the legislation, but he pledged to "take on anyone in Washington to ensure that the executives at these banks and regulators are held accountable."

Cam Fine, who led the Independent Community Bankers of America trade group during the legislative push, said the overall the bill was a good piece of legislation that offered much needed relief to struggling community banks.

But like any major piece of legislation that moves through Congress, final passage hinged on support from a broad coalition of interests — including those of Wall Street and midsize banks.

"Was it a perfect piece of legislation? No. But there's an old saying in Washington: You can't let the perfect be the enemy of the good," said Fine.

Many of the moderate Democrats who supported the measure did not fare as well.

Of the core group who wrote the bill, only Tester won reelection. Others from red states who supported it, including Claire McCaskill of Missouri and Bill Nelson of Florida, lost.

Tester will be on the ballot again in 2024. Last week he was in Silicon Valley for a fundraiser.

One of the event's sponsors was a partner at a law firm for Silicon Valley Bank.

## Japanese leader arrives in Kyiv as China's Xi visits Russia

By KARL RITTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida arrived in Kyiv for a surprise visit shortly after noon Tuesday, hours after Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in neighboring Russia for a three-day trip. Moscow's invasion will be in the spotlight at both meetings.

Footage shown on Japanese national broadcaster NHK showed Kishida walking on the platform of Kyiv

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Central Station, escorted by a few people who appeared to be Ukrainian officials.

It was uncertain whether either meeting would change the course of the almost 13-month war in Ukraine, but the talks about 800 kilometers (500 miles) apart highlighted the war's repercussions for international diplomacy as countries line up behind rival parties.

They came after a week in which China and Japan both enjoyed diplomatic successes that have emboldened their foreign policy.

Kishida will meet President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the Ukrainian capital, coinciding with Xi's talks with President Vladimir Putin in Moscow.

Kishida will "show respect to the courage and patience of the Ukrainian people who are standing up to defend their homeland under President Zelenskyy's leadership, and show solidarity and unwavering support for Ukraine as head of Japan and chairman of G-7," during his visit to Ukraine, the Japanese Foreign Ministry said in announcing his trip to Kyiv.

At the talks, Kishida will show his "absolute rejection of Russia's one-sided change to the status quo by invasion and force, and to affirm his commitment to defend the rules-based international order," the ministry's statement said.

Putin warmly welcomed Xi to the Kremlin on Monday, starting a three-day visit the two major powers described as an opportunity to deepen their "no-limits friendship."

At a meeting with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin on Tuesday, Xi said that he invited Putin to visit China at some point this year to attend a top-level meeting of China's One Belt, One Road regional initiative, which seeks to extend Beijing's influence through economic cooperation projects.

The invitation comes days after the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Putin. Neither Russia nor China recognize the court's jurisdiction.

Moscow and Beijing have both weathered international condemnation of their human rights record. The Chinese government has been widely condemned for alleged atrocities against Uighur Muslims in its far western Xinjiang region. The allegations include genocide, forced sterilization and the mass detention of nearly 1 million Uighurs. Beijing has denied the allegations.

Japanese public television channel NTV showed Kishida riding a train from Poland heading to Kyiv. His surprise trip to Ukraine comes just hours after he met with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi, and the week after a breakthrough summit with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yoel.

In New Delhi, Kishida called for developing and Global South countries to raise their voices to defend the rules-based international order and help stop Russia's war.

Japan, which has territorial disputes over islands with both China and Russia, is particularly concerned about the close relationship between Beijing and Moscow, which have conducted joint military exercises near Japan's coasts.

Meanwhile, China looks to Russia as a source of oil and gas for its energy-hungry economy, and as a partner in standing up to what both see as U.S. aggression, domination of global affairs and unfair criticism of their human rights records.

Kyiv's Western allies have expressed concern that China might help Russia's war effort, though Beijing insists it is a neutral broker in peace efforts.

Ukraine's military intelligence spokesman late on Monday said that Kyiv is not aware of any Chinese arms transfers to Russia so far. Andriy Yusov said on Ukrainian TV that while Beijing has provided some dual-use technology to Moscow, such as semiconductor chips, "there is no talk about weapons so far, and no such (supplies) have been recorded."

Kishida, who is to chair the Group of Seven summit in May, is the only G-7 leader who hasn't visited Ukraine and was under pressure to do so at home. U.S. President Joe Biden took a similar route to visit Kyiv last month, just before the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Due to limitations of Japan's pacifist constitution, his trip was arranged secretly. Kishida is Japan's first postwar leader to enter a war zone. Kishida, invited by Zelenskyy in January to visit Kyiv, was also asked before his trip to India about a rumor of his possible trip at the end of March, denied it and said nothing concrete has been decided.



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Japan has joined the United States and European nations in sanctioning Russia over its invasion and providing humanitarian and economic support for Ukraine.

Japan was quick to react because it fears the possible impact of a war in East Asia, where China's military has grown increasingly assertive and has escalated tensions around self-ruled Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its territory.

In Beijing, foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said that Beijing's contacts with Russia will help to bring about peace. "President Putin said that Russia appreciates China's consistent position of upholding fairness, objectivity and balance on major international issues," he said. "Russia has carefully studied China's position paper on the political settlement of the Ukrainian issue, and is open to peace talks."

Asked about Kishida's trip to Kyiv, he added, "We hope Japan could do more things to deescalate the situation instead of the opposite."

Kishida is expected to offer continuing support for Ukraine when he meets with Zelenskyy.

Television footage on NTV showed Kishida getting on a train from the Polish station of Przemysl near the border with Ukraine, with a number of officials.

Due to its pacifist principles, Japan's support for Ukraine has also been limited to non-combatative military equipment such as helmets, bulletproof vests and drones, and humanitarian supplies including generators.

Japan has contributed more than \$7 billion to Ukraine, and accepted more than 2,000 displaced Ukrainians and helped them with housing assistance and support for jobs and education, a rare move in a country that is known for its strict immigration policy.

## Los Angeles schools to close as district workers plan strike

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Tens of thousands of workers in the Los Angeles Unified School District planned to walk off the job Tuesday over stalled contract talks, and they will be joined in solidarity by teachers in a three-day strike that will shut down the nation's second-largest school system.

Demonstrations are expected at schools across the city by members of Local 99 of the Service Employees International Union, which represents about 30,000 teachers' aides, special education assistants, bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers and other support staff.

The workers were expected to join picket lines before dawn, demanding better wages and increased staffing. The district has more than 500,000 students from Los Angeles and all or part of 25 other cities and unincorporated county areas.

Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho accused the union of refusing to negotiate and said that he was prepared to meet at any time day or night. He said Monday a "golden opportunity" to make progress was lost.

"I believe this strike could have been avoided. But it cannot be avoided without individuals actually speaking to one another," he said.

Local 99 said Monday evening that it was in discussions with state labor regulators over allegations that the district engaged in misconduct that has impeded the rights of workers to engage in legally protected union-related activities.

"We want to be clear that we are not in negotiations with LAUSD," the union said in a statement. "We continue to be engaged in the impasse process with the state."

Those talks would not avoid a walkout, the statement said.

"We are ready to strike," the union said.

During the strike, about 150 of the district's more than 1,000 schools are expected to remain open with adult supervision but no instruction, to give students somewhere to go. Dozens of libraries and parks, plus some "grab and go" spots for students to get lunches also planned to be open to kids to lessen the strain on parents now scrambling to find care.

"Schools are so much more than centers of education — they are a safety net for hundreds of thousands of Los Angeles families," Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said in a statement Monday. "We will make sure to do all we can to provide resources needed by the families of our city."

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Workers, meanwhile, said striking was the only option they had left.

Instructional aide Marlee Ostrow, who supports the strike, said she's long overdue for a raise. The 67-year-old was hired nearly two decades ago at \$11.75 an hour, and today she makes about \$16. That isn't enough to keep pace with inflation and rising housing prices, she said, and meanwhile her duties have expanded from two classrooms to five.

Ostrow blames the district's low wages for job vacancies that have piled up in recent years.

"There's not even anybody applying because you can make more money starting at Burger King," she said. "A lot of people really want to help kids, and they shouldn't be penalized for wanting that to be their life's work."

The union says district support staffers earn, on average, about \$25,000 per year and many live in poverty because of low pay or limited work hours while struggling with inflation and the high cost of housing in LA County. The union is asking for a 30% raise. Teachers want a 20% pay hike over two years.

Carvalho said the district has offered a wage increase totaling more than 20% over a multiyear period, along with a 3% bonus. In addition, the deal would include a "massive expansion of healthcare benefits," the superintendent told Fox 11 on Monday.

The strike has wide support among union members. Thousands of people, many dressed in red, rallied last Wednesday outside City Hall in the hours before the strike date was announced.

SEIU members have been working without a contract since June 2020, while the contract for teachers expired in June 2022. The unions decided last week to stop accepting extensions to their contracts.

United Teachers Los Angeles, the union representing 35,000 educators, counselors, nurses and other staff, expressed solidarity with their striking co-workers.

"Educators will be joining our union siblings on the picket lines," a UTLA tweet said. The teachers' union is also bargaining with the district.

Teachers waged a six-day strike in 2019 over pay and contract issues but schools remained open.

## 'John Wick' stars honor late co-star Lance Reddick

By KRYSTA FAURIA Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Keanu Reeves and Laurence Fishburne were among the "John Wick: Chapter 4" stars honoring Lance Reddick, their co-star who died unexpectedly last week, at the film's Los Angeles premiere.

"We lost our brother, and in a really sort of very shocking way. I think we're all still in shock. "Life is," the visibly-shaken Fishburne said, pausing briefly before continuing, "hard sometimes."

Many of those who worked on the film wore blue ribbons to honor Reddick, who was a prolific character actor with prominent roles in "The Wire," "Oz" and the "John Wick" film franchise.

"Just to be in his light and to get a chance to work with him, I'll cherish for the rest of my life," Reeves said. "He had such a passion for his work and his craft. He was gracious. He had a dignity to him and a presence."

Reddick, 60, died Friday in Los Angeles of natural causes, his publicist Mia Hansen said. No further details were provided.

Tributes have poured in for the actor, whose roles made him a beloved and recognizable star of television and films. He played Charon, the multi-skilled Continental Hotel concierge who is fond of Wick, an assassin played by Reeves. The latest installment arrives in theaters Friday.

"He's the goodness of this film. He was kind of, in many ways, the heart of the film because his character loved John Wick," Fishburne said.

"You know, it's always hard when you lose someone that you love dearly . . . but you're also incredibly grateful for the time you had together. We were fortunate enough to work with Lance since the very beginning of the 'John Wick' franchise. I mean it's been almost 10 years," director Chad Stahelski said. "I really wish he could be with us tonight, but, you know, life. But we're very fortunate to have known him. And he's a great man, a great artist, a great human, a dear friend."

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Shamier Moore, a newcomer to "Wick" franchise, recalled how Reddick took time to say a kind word on set.

"I grew up watching Lance Reddick. It is a bittersweet moment because he was definitely one of my heroes growing up as an actor, as a Black actor," Moore said. And even though we didn't share screen time together in this film, we shared some time off camera and he was salt of the Earth when he first met me. "He said, 'Shamier, you're incredible. I love your work man,' and like, it melted me like a puddle. "

## Women's Sweet 16 features new format and historic field

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

The Sweet 16 features a new format and a bit of history when it begins later this week.

The NCAA changed its setup for the women's tournament this season, trimming the traditional four regional sites to two. Seattle and Greenville — a city of 71,000 in South Carolina about halfway between Atlanta and Charlotte, North Carolina — will each host eight teams before sending the winners on to Dallas for the Final Four.

It is also just the second time since the tournament expanded to 64 teams in 1994 that two of the No. 1 seeds didn't reach the regional semifinals after Mississippi and Miami knocked out Stanford and Indiana, respectively. It also happened in 1998.

The other top seeds — South Carolina and Virginia Tech — advanced. The Gamecocks, led by star Aliyah Boston, are four wins from completing their own historic journey and back-to-back national championships. They are seeking just the 10th undefeated season ever in women's basketball, and the next steps for coach Dawn Staley's team are just a 90-minute trip from campus.

There are a lot of teams that have ended long Sweet 16 droughts, like the Hokies, Hurricanes, Colorado and Villanova. UConn, on the other hand, will be playing in its 29th consecutive regional semifinal.

Despite the parity that took place during the regular season and the exit of those two No. 1 seeds, it is the second time in the past six years that no double-digit seed reached the round of 16. It's also the first time since the Big 12 was formed in 1996 that no teams from the conference reached the second weekend.

There's plenty of star power across the field with Angel Reese, Maddy Siegrist, Caitlin Clark and Elizabeth Kitley joining Boston in the regional semifinals.

GREENVILLE 1

The Gamecocks are the heavy favorite to come out of this region and, for that matter, to win another title. The regional semifinal opponent is No. 4 seed UCLA. The Bruins gave the Gamecocks a competitive game back in November, leading at halftime by four before losing by nine.

No. 2 seed Maryland will play No. 3 seed Notre Dame in the other semifinal. The Terrapins, led by Diamond Miller, used a strong second half to get by Arizona in the second round. The Fighting Irish overcame season-ending injuries to Olivia Miles and Dara Mabrey to get to the Sweet 16. Notre Dame got a strong effort from post Lauren Ebo, who set a school NCAA tourney record with 18 rebounds in a win over Mississippi State.

GREENVILLE 2

With Indiana losing, the bracket is more open, with Villanova and Siegrist playing the Hurricanes in one of the semifinals. Siegrist, who leads the nation in scoring, has the Wildcats back in the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2003. Miami's drought was even longer, not making it this far since 1992.

The other semifinal in the region pits two of the most talented forwards in the country against each other: LSU's Angel Reese and Utah's Alissa Pili. Reese helped the Tigers reach the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2014. The "Bayou Barbie" had 25 points, an eye-popping 24 rebounds and six blocks in the third-seeded Tigers' rout of Michigan. Second-seeded Utah is back in the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2006 after edging Princeton in the second round.

SEATTLE 3

Second-seeded UConn, which has dealt with injuries all season, will face third-seeded Ohio State in one

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semifinal. The Buckeyes needed a shot in the final few seconds by Jacy Sheldon to advance this far for the fourth straight season.

Top seed Virginia Tech is the newcomer here, making its first appearance in the Sweet 16 since 1999 after two impressive home wins in the first two rounds. Kitley and Co. head across the country for a rematch against Tennessee. The two teams played Dec. 4 and the Hokies came away with a three-point win. The Lady Vols were missing Rickea Jackson for that game and it was the final one that Tamari Key played in before being sidelined for the season with blood clots.

Tennessee has run through the first two rounds, becoming just the fourth team to win each of its first two games by 45 points or more. UConn did it the other three times, according to ESPN.

SEATTLE 4

Ole Miss crashed the party with its upset of Stanford and is back in the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2007. Coach Yolett McPhee-McCuin's defensive-minded squad will face a Louisville team that routed Texas on the Longhorns' home court. Cardinals star Hailey Van Lith grew up in Central Washington, a few hours from Seattle.

The other matchup will feature Clark and her logo-range shooting for Iowa against Colorado. Iowa edged Georgia in the second round, erasing the memory of last season's round of 32 defeat to Creighton. The Hawkeyes will face a Colorado team in the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2003.

## At Ukraine's front, police try to evacuate holdout families

By ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

AVDIIVKA, Ukraine (AP) — Pale and grimy from living in a dank, dark basement for nearly a year, the teenager and his weeping mother emerged to the sound of pounding artillery and headed to a waiting armored police van that would whisk them to safety.

Russian forces were not far from their battered front-line town of Avdiivka in eastern Ukraine, where shells fall daily, ripping through buildings, smashing cars and leaving craters.

Dark, curly hair peeping out from beneath his hoodie, 15-year-old Oleksii Mazurin was one of the last youths still living there. After his evacuation Friday, another 13 remained, said police chief Roman Protsyk.

Before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, about 25,000 people lived in Avdiivka. Despite the shelling, about 2,000 civilians remain, Protsyk said.

For months, authorities have been urging civilians in areas near the fighting to evacuate to safer parts of the country. But while many have heeded the call, others — including families with children — have steadfastly refused.

So it has fallen to police to try to persuade people to leave. A special unit known as the White Angels risk their lives to head into front-line villages and towns, knocking on doors and pleading with the few remaining residents to evacuate.

In early March, the government issued an order for the compulsory evacuation of families with children from combat areas. Under the order, children must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. But it currently applies only to Bakhmut, the hard-hit eastern city where fighting has raged for months.

"The compulsory evacuation order is unfortunately only in force in Bakhmut. In Avdiivka, this law is not adopted," said White Angels policeman Gennadiy Yudin. "We're driving around to all the families. We are warning them, we are informing them about the evacuation."

In Bakhmut itself, the situation is so dangerous that civilian evacuations are exceptionally risky.

"I already think that for Bakhmut, it's too late," Protsyk said. "Here in our region, ... if such a decision would be made now, it would be safe."

But without a compulsory evacuation order, the hands of the police are tied. All they can do is use their powers of persuasion.

For Oleksii's mother, 37-year-old, Svitlana Mazurina, the decision to finally leave was tough.

"It's hard when you've lived in this town from birth," she said. "Now I'm leaving I don't know to where, where no one needs me. I don't know where or what to start with."

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Mazurina had been living in the building's basement with her partner and Oleksii for nearly a year, fearing the bombs less than leaving for an unknown destination and an uncertain future. Her partner still won't leave, saying he fears being drafted into the army.

"I agreed only because I feel sorry for the child," Mazurina said. "I want him to live well."

And living well is no longer possible in Avdiivka. Living at all is a game of chance.

Moments before the evacuation of the mother and son and just a few streets away, another apartment building was hit by an airstrike. The entire corner of the apartment block was gone, reduced to smoldering rubble as flames and black smoke billowed from the gaping hole the bomb left in the 15-story structure.

As Yudin and a fellow White Angels policeman surveilled the damage, the wail of incoming artillery pierced the air. They dived to the ground as the detonation reverberated through the shattered landscape of bombed-out buildings and splintered trees. As the sound died down, they picked themselves up and headed to Mazurina's apartment building.

But not all attempts to evacuate civilians are successful. Protsyk, the police chief, described families hiding their children from authorities, or accusing police of trying to kidnap them.

In the nearby village of Netailove, so close to the front line that the sound of shooting sounded across the fields on the village outskirts, the police tried — and failed — to persuade a teenager's family that it was time to go.

"Drop everything, I cannot imagine it," said Natalya, wiping tears from her eyes. "I just want to die. I can't live without a home."

Her son, 14-year-old Maksim, said he wanted to stay, as did his father, Andreii. Natalya was in favor of evacuation but wouldn't leave them. The family did not give their surname.

Again and again, the police tried to convince them: "What if a shell destroys your house? What if you are injured?"

Natalya replied: "It is better to die fast."

A policeman countered, "But the child will live and live. A child's life is important."

The argument was to no avail. Maksim stood outside his home, his hoodie pulled over his head to ward off the morning cold.

He didn't flinch at the sound of exploding artillery. No one did — the shelling has become the regular backdrop of their lives.

## Garbage: In Paris streets, heaps of it become protest symbol

By ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Garbage. Heaps, mounds and piles of it are growing daily — and in some places standing higher than a human being.

A strike by Paris garbage collectors, which begins its 16th day on Tuesday, is taking a toll on the renowned aesthetics of the French capital, a veritable blight on the City of Light.

"I prefer Chanel to the stink," joked Vincent Salazar, a 62-year-old artistic consultant who lives in a tony Left Bank neighborhood. A pile of garbage sits at the corner of his building overlooking the Luxembourg Gardens.

"I've seen rats," he said.

But like many nonchalant and strike-hardened Parisians, Salazar doesn't mind.

"I'm fortunate to live here, but I'm 200% behind these guys," Salazar said. "They're smelling it all day long," he said, though "it" wasn't precisely the word he used. "They should get early retirement."

He is among the majority of French who, polls show, oppose President Emmanuel Macron's decision to raise the retirement age by two years, from 62 to 64 for most and from 57 to 59 for garbage collectors.

Macron rammed the showcase legislation of his second term through Parliament last week — without a vote, thanks to a special constitutional article. On Monday, the government won two no-confidence motions put forth by angry lawmakers. The bill is now considered adopted.

But garbage got wrapped up in the politics. And neither unions organizing protests nor some citizens

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are prepared to back down.

Posters showing a digitally altered image of Macron atop a garbage heap — or collecting garbage himself — have made the rounds on social networks.

The Socialist mayor of Paris, who supports the strikers, has found herself in a bind. City Hall refused orders to get the trucks out, saying it's not their job. The police prefecture then ordered garages unblocked. Using private companies, garbage has been collected in "highly impacted" districts, City Hall said. There are problems dumping the garbage in blocked incinerator plants. Still, City Hall said that as of Monday, 9,300 tons of rubbish remained on the streets, down from 10,000 days ago.

Workers in numerous sectors, from transportation to energy, have been holding intermittent strikes since January. But it is the garbage in the French capital that has made garbage collectors, long taken for granted, visible — and their anger obvious.

The city's vibrant outdoor culture is feeling the effects. Some of Paris' fabled narrow streets — challenging to negotiate on regular days — are even more choked than usual, forcing people on foot to pass through garbage heaps single file. The scent of rancid, rotting garbage increasingly wafts through the air as spring arrives and the weather grows milder. Seats at some sidewalk cafes located near heaps of rubbish are empty.

A server for the past 26 years at Le Bistro du Dome, adjacent to the famed restaurant Le Dome, said some 50% of diners had disappeared in the past 10 days. Other restaurants are suffering the same fate, said Guillaume, who would identify himself only by his first name.

"It doesn't bother me because it's for a good cause," said Franck Jacquot, 51, standing outside a small bar he runs. Nearby, heaps of garbage loomed. "If we're obliged to go this route — well, we're here," he said.

Two spontaneous protests last week at the huge Place de la Concorde, facing the National Assembly, degenerated when police started evacuating thousands with tear gas and water cannon. Some of those forced out began setting fires to garbage piles along their path through high-end Paris.

On Monday, hundreds of young people demonstrated near the gold-domed Invalides monument, site of Napoleon's tomb, as security forces watched. A union van had blasted proceedings at the National Assembly on a loudspeaker. More is ahead: Unions are planning nationwide marches and strikes for Thursday to pressure the government to withdraw the retirement measure.

Garbage bags and bins have served as fuel for troublemakers, who combed Paris Monday night setting fires, as they've done after recent protests. At least 100 people were detained.

"Garbage is a good way to protest. It has a big impact," said Tony Gibierge, 36, who is opening a restaurant in several months on a street in southern Paris — a street currently heaped with garbage.

He was among those who have peacefully demonstrated through Paris, and other cities, with song and dance in recent weeks. "Now we have to send out the fire, stop dancing," he said. The message: Nothing is over, and much of the garbage isn't going anywhere quite yet.

## Gwyneth Paltrow to stand trial for Deer Valley ski crash

By SAM METZ Associated Press

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — Gwyneth Paltrow is scheduled to stand trial on Tuesday in a lawsuit filed by a retired optometrist who said that the actress-turned-lifestyle influencer violently crashed into him in 2016 while skiing in Utah at one of the most upscale ski resorts in the United States.

Terry Sanderson, 76, said Paltrow was cruising down the slopes so recklessly that they collided, leaving him on the ground as she and her entourage continued their descent down Deer Valley Resort, a skiers-only mountain known for its groomed runs, après-ski champagne yurts and posh clientele.

"Gwyneth Paltrow skied out of control," Sanderson's attorneys claim in the lawsuit, "knocking him down hard, knocking him out, and causing a brain injury, four broken ribs and other serious injuries. Paltrow got up, turned and skied away, leaving Sanderson stunned, lying in the snow, seriously injured."

In a case that has lasted years since the 2016 incident, Sanderson is suing Paltrow for \$300,000 — claiming that the accident in Park City was a result of negligence, and left him with physical injuries and

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emotional distress.

At ski resorts, the skier who is downhill has the right of way, so a central question in the case is who was further down the beginner's run when the collision transpired. Both Paltrow and Sanderson claim in court filings that they were further downhill when the other rammed into them.

Sanderson also accused Deer Valley and its employees of engaging in a "cover up" by not providing complete information on incident reports and not following resort safety policies.

After his initial lawsuit seeking \$3.1 million was dropped, Sanderson amended the complaint and he is now seeking \$300,000. Paltrow — the Oscar-winning actress known for her roles in "Shakespeare in Love" and Marvel's "Iron Man" movies — filed a counterclaim in response, seeking attorney fees and \$1 in damages.

Paltrow has countered that he was actually the culprit in the collision, is overstating his injuries, and trying to exploit her celebrity and wealth. In addition to her acting career, she is also the founder and CEO of the high-end wellness company, goop.

In court filings, her attorneys deny Sanderson's claims and allege that he was the one who crashed into her — a collision in which she sustained a "full body blow." Her counterclaim alleges that members of Paltrow's group checked on Sanderson, who assured them he was fine. It casts doubt on his motive and claims of injury, noting that before the incident, he had 15 documented medical conditions.

"He demanded Ms. Paltrow pay him millions. If she did not pay, she would face negative publicity resulting from his allegations," her attorneys wrote in a 2019 court filing.

The trial in Park City is slated to last longer than a week.

## Miami shocks top-seed Indiana in March Madness

By The Associated Press undefined

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. (AP) — Destiny Harden made a shot in the lane with 3.5 seconds left to send ninth-seeded Miami past top-seeded Indiana 70-68 on Monday night, lifting the Hurricanes to their first Sweet 16 since 1992.

The Hoosiers (28-4) became the second No. 1 seed to be eliminated in two nights. Stanford was upset Sunday on its home court. It's the second time since the bracket expanded to 64 teams in 1994 that two No. 1 seeds didn't make the Sweet 16. It also happened in 1998.

Harden finished with 18 points and Lola Pendade had 19 points for the Hurricanes (21-12), who never trailed.

Indiana tied the score at 68 on Yarden Garzon's 3-pointer with 6.6 seconds left but couldn't get the defensive stop it needed and turned the ball over on the final possession to seal their only home loss of the season.

No. 4 VILLANOVA 76, No. 12 FLORIDA GULF COAST 57

VILLANOVA, Pa. (AP) — Maddy Siegrist scored 31 points and sent the winningest team in Villanova history into the Sweet 16 for the second time in program history with a win over Florida Gulf Coast.

The fourth-seeded Wildcats (30-6) won their record 30th game and celebrated the March Madness milestone in front of another packed house at the Pavilion. Siegrist, the first-team AP All-American, made 13 of 24 shots in what was likely her final home game. The four-year star has left some wiggle room that she could return for a fifth season, but all signs point toward her playing in the WNBA this summer.

One thing is sure, Siegrist is headed to the Sweet 16.

The Wildcats are going for the first time since 2003 -- the coach of that team, Harry Perretta, watched this one from behind the basket -- and they will play winner of Monday's game in Indianapolis between top-seeded Indiana and No. 9 seed Miami.

SEATTLE 3 REGION

No. 4 TENNESSEE 94, NO. 12 TOLEDO 47

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Reserves Sara Puckett and Jillian Hollingshead led five Lady Vols in double figures with 13 points apiece as Tennessee routed Toledo.

This is the first time since 2015 and 2016 that Tennessee (25-11) has reached consecutive Sweet 16s

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and the first in coach Kellie Harper's fourth season. The Lady Vols now have reached the Sweet 16 for the 36th time as the only program to play in all 41 NCAA Tournaments.

Toledo (29-5) snapped a program record 17-game winning streak and missed out on its first Sweet 16. The Rockets lost for the first time since Jan. 18 at Bowling Green, which was avenged in the Mid-American Conference Tournament championship for their first NCAA Tournament berth since 2017.

Quinesha Lockett led Toledo with 19 points.

No. 3 OHIO STATE 71, No. 6 NORTH CAROLINA 69

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Jacy Sheldon made a tiebreaking jumper in the lane with 1.8 seconds left to lift Ohio State to a win over North Carolina and help the Buckeyes advance to the Sweet 16 for the second straight season.

With the game tied, Sheldon took the pass from Eboni Walker and floated in the game-winning score. North Carolina had one final chance, but turned it over with a second remaining.

Ohio State (27-7) saw its 12-point lead with 7:02 to go erased as the Tar Heels went on a 13-2 run midway through the fourth quarter. The Tar Heels did most of that run without star Deja Kelly, who exited midway through the final quarter with a leg injury. She went to the locker room, but returned to the court a short time later.

Trailing 66-63, Kelly made two free throws before Paulina Paris made a layup in transition to give the Tar Heels (22-11) its first lead of the game with 2:09 left.

No. 2 UCONN 77, No. 7 BAYLOR 58

STORRS, Conn. (AP) — Azzi Fudd scored 16 of her 22 points in a decisive third quarter, leading UConn to a win over Baylor and into a 29th straight Sweet 16.

Aaliyah Edwards added 19 points and Nika Muhl had 10 assists for the Huskies (31-5). Dorka Juhasz chipped in with 11 points and Caroline Ducharme added 10.

Ja'mee Asberry scored 15 points and Jaden Owens had 14 for Baylor, which finishes its season 20-13. Bella Fontleroy scored 12 points for the Bears, who made 12 3-pointers after hitting 14 in their first-round win over Alabama.

But the Huskies dominated inside, outscoring the Bears 36-12 in the paint and outrebounding Baylor 42-31.

SEATTLE 4 REGION

No. 5 LOUISVILLE 73, No. 4 TEXAS 51

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Hailey Van Lith scored 21 points and Louisville rolled over Texas on the Longhorns' home court to send the Cardinals to the Sweet 16 for the sixth NCAA Tournament in row.

In a matchup of two teams that began the season in the Top 10 only to all out of the rankings before regrouping late, the Cardinals smothered the Longhorns and standout point guard Rori Harmon all night, stretching a 14-point halftime lead to 21 by end of the third quarter.

Louisville (25-11) led by as much as 27 early in the fourth. The win sends the Cardinals to the Seattle 4 Region to play No. 8-seed Mississippi, which upset No. 1 Stanford on Sunday.

DeYona Gaston scored 12 points to lead Texas (26-10).

No. 6 COLORADO 61, No. 3 DUKE 53

DURHAM, N.C. (AP) — Quay Miller had 17 points and 14 rebounds, and Aaronette Vonleh converted two overtime baskets in the lane after picking up her fourth foul, helping Colorado beat Duke.

Jaylyn Sherrod had 14 points and Vonleh finished with 12 as the Buffaloes (25-8) advanced to the Sweet 16 for the first time in 20 years.

Elizabeth Balogun scored 14 points and Reigan Richardson had 10, but the Blue Devils didn't hit a field goal in overtime. Duke overcame a 13-point deficit in regulation.

Next up for Colorado is Caitlin Clark and Iowa in the Seattle 4 Region semifinals.

Duke lost for the third time in its last four second-round home games in the NCAA tourney.

GREENVILLE 1 REGION

No. 4 UCLA 82, No. 5 OKLAHOMA 73

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Charisma Osborne scored a career-high 36 points in her final game at Pauley Pavilion and UCLA rallied in the fourth quarter after blowing an 18-point lead to defeat Oklahoma.



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The Bruins, who had an 18-point lead in the second quarter, found themselves trailing 54-50 late in the third quarter before Osborne started the comeback. She drove the lane and hit a layup while being fouled by Beatrice Culliton. Osborne made the ensuing free throw to bring them within one.

She had 13 points in the final 10 minutes as the Bruins (26-7) advanced to the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2019. UCLA regained control by going on a 6-1 run at the beginning of the fourth.

Kiki Rice added 14 points for the Bruins, who will face top-ranked South Carolina on Saturday in a Greenville 1 Regional semifinal. UCLA hung tough with the Gamecocks earlier in the season before losing 73-64.

Madi Williams scored 24 points and Ana Llanusa 15 for the Sooners, who end their season 26-7.

## New law puts Wyoming at forefront of abortion pill bans

By MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) — Wyoming has pushed to the front of state efforts to prohibit the most common type of abortion by instituting the nation's first explicit ban on pills that terminate pregnancies.

Medication abortions, which usually involve taking two prescription medications days apart at home or in a clinic, became the preferred method for ending pregnancy in the U.S. even before the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade - and now account for more than half of all abortions according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights.

More than a dozen states now effectively ban abortion pills by prohibiting all forms of abortion, moves made after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned its landmark Roe v. Wade ruling last year.

Fifteen states restrict access to the pills. Of those, six — Arizona, Indiana, Nebraska, North Carolina, North Dakota and South Carolina — require a doctor to administer them in person. Arizona also bans mailing abortion pills.

But before a law signed Friday by Wyoming Republican Gov. Mark Gordon, no state specifically banned abortion pills. The law passed alongside a new abortion ban that seeks to sidestep issues with an earlier state ban that's been held up in court.

With two new abortion laws, the Wyoming Legislature was "kind of trying to cover all its bases" to prohibit abortions, said Elizabeth Nash with the Guttmacher Institute.

Gordon allowed the new broad abortion ban to take effect Sunday without his signature. Whether the abortion pill ban he signed takes effect July 1 as planned remains to be seen. It could be delayed in the courts if an abortion provider in the state sues over it. Meanwhile, a federal judge in Texas is considering a case with implications for abortion pill access nationwide

Here's a look at where abortion stands in Wyoming and elsewhere:

IS ABORTION NOW ILLEGAL IN WYOMING?

Yes. As of Sunday, abortions in all forms are illegal.

The state's lone clinic providing abortions until the ban was in the tourist mountain town of Jackson. Another clinic in Casper was set to open last year before an arson delayed plans. The clinic, Wellspring Health Access, was hoping to open next month but those plans are now uncertain.

Even before the ban, many women in Wyoming drove to Colorado and elsewhere to get abortions because it was more convenient. There's no prohibition on women in Wyoming continuing to go out of state to seek abortions.

WHY DID WYOMING TAKE SUCH AGGRESSIVE ACTION?

Wyoming has long been a deeply conservative state but one that often avoided weighing in on social matters — live and let live is a credo of rural life in the West.

That's changing. With a state Legislature more dominated by Republicans than at any point in a century, leaders are able to delve into culture-war issues with hardly any opposition.

Last year, Gordon signed an abortion ban that took effect a month after the Supreme Court overturned Roe. Within hours, Teton County District Judge Melissa Owens suspended the ban, ruling that a lawsuit's claim it would harm pregnant women and their doctors could have merit.

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The two nonprofits and four women, including two obstetricians, who sued also argued that the ban violated a 2012 state constitutional amendment guaranteeing the right to make one's own healthcare decisions.

Attorneys for the state said that wasn't the intent — the amendment passed in response to the Affordable Care Act seeking to expand healthcare coverage nationwide.

This year, Wyoming lawmakers did an end-run around the lawsuit with a new, blanket abortion ban that specifies abortion is not healthcare and therefore not protected by the state constitution.

## WHAT ARE LAWMAKERS IN OTHER STATES DOING?

Most Republican-controlled states adopted abortion bans or tighter restrictions in anticipation that *Roe v. Wade* would be overturned eventually.

And last year, several Democrat-controlled states adopted protections for abortion access.

But that didn't end the legislative battles.

This month, Utah passed a law to ban abortion clinics, making it the first state to take that action. It came as the state's ban on abortions at all stages of pregnancies is held up by a legal challenge.

In Florida, lawmakers are trying to figure out what bans to put into place. Florida previously put into place a ban after 15 weeks of pregnancy, which is much looser than what other GOP-controlled states have done; a new measure to ban them after six weeks has been advancing through the Legislature. Gov. Ron DeSantis, a possible 2024 presidential candidate, is expected to sign it if it gets to him.

In South Carolina, also GOP-dominated, lawmakers are debating what kind of ban to try next after a ban on abortions after six weeks was rejected by the state's top court.

In Minnesota, a state where last year's election gave Democrats full control of the government, the governor this year signed into law additional protections for abortion access.

## In Trump case, NY grand jury appears near end of its work

By ERIC TUCKER and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A New York grand jury investigating Donald Trump over a hush money payment to a porn star appears poised to complete its work soon as law enforcement officials make preparations for possible unrest in the event of an indictment.

Trump over the weekend claimed without any evidence that he would be arrested on Tuesday, with his representatives later saying he was citing media reports and leaks. There was no indication that prediction would come true, though the grand jury appeared to take an important step forward by hearing Monday from a witness favorable to Trump, presumably so prosecutors could ensure the panel had a chance to consider any testimony that could be remotely seen as exculpatory.

The next steps in a grand jury process shrouded in secrecy remained unclear, and it was uncertain if additional witnesses might be summoned. But a city mindful of the riot by Trump loyalists at the U.S. Capitol more than two years ago took steps to gird itself from any violence that could accompany the unprecedented prosecution of a former president, while fellow Republicans eyeing the 2024 presidential nomination sized up how an indictment might upend the race.

The testimony from Robert Costello, a lawyer with close ties to numerous key Trump aides, appeared to be a final opportunity for allies of the former president to steer the grand jury away from an indictment. He was invited by prosecutors to appear after saying that he had information to undercut the credibility of Michael Cohen, a former lawyer and fixer for Trump who later turned against him and then became a key witness in the Manhattan district attorney's investigation.

Costello had provided Cohen legal services several years ago after Cohen himself became entangled in the federal investigation into the hush money payments. In a news conference after his grand jury appearance, Costello told reporters that he had come forward because he did not believe Cohen, who pleaded guilty to federal crimes and served time in prison, could be trusted.

"If they want to go after Donald Trump and they have solid evidence, then so be it," Costello said. "But

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Michael Cohen is far from solid evidence.”

Responding to Costello’s claims on MSNBC later Monday, Cohen said that Costello was never his lawyer and “he lacks any sense of veracity.”

There were no clear signs that Costello’s testimony had affected the course of the investigation. Cohen had been available for over two hours in case prosecutors wanted him to rebut Costello’s testimony but was told he was not needed, his attorney said Monday.

The testimony came two days after Trump said he expected to face criminal charges and urged supporters to protest his possible arrest. In a series of social media posts through the weekend, the Republican former president criticized the New York investigation, directing particularly hostile rhetoric toward Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, a Democrat.

New York officials have been monitoring online chatter of threats of varying specificity, and even as portable metal barricades were dropped off to safeguard streets and sidewalks, there were no immediate signs that Trump’s calls for protests were being heeded.

Costello briefly acted as a legal adviser to Cohen after the FBI raided Cohen’s home and apartment in 2018. At the time, Cohen was being investigated for both tax evasion and for payments he helped orchestrate in 2016 to buy the silence of two women who claimed to have had sexual encounters with Trump.

For several months, it was unclear whether Cohen, a longtime lawyer and fixer for the Trump Organization who once boasted that he would “take a bullet” for his boss, would remain loyal to the president.

Cohen ultimately decided to plead guilty in connection with the payments to porn actor Stormy Daniels and model Karen McDougal, which he said were directed by Trump. Since then, he has been a vociferous Trump critic, testifying before Congress and then to the Manhattan grand jury.

Trump, who has denied having sex with either woman, has branded Cohen a liar. Costello broke with Cohen before he pleaded guilty, after it became clear he was no longer in Trump’s camp.

In the years since, Costello, a veteran New York attorney, has represented Trump allies including his former political strategist Steve Bannon and his personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani.

Even as the New York investigation pushes toward conclusion, Trump faces criminal probes in Atlanta and Washington that, taken together, pose significant legal peril and carry the prospect of upending a Republican presidential race in which Trump remains a leading contender. Some of his likely opponents have tried to strike a balance between condemning a potential prosecution as politically motivated while avoiding condoning the conduct at issue.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, an expected GOP presidential candidate, criticized the investigation but also threw one of his first jabs at the former president in a move likely to intensify their simmering political rivalry.

“I don’t know what goes into paying hush money to a porn star to secure silence over some kind of alleged affair,” DeSantis said at a news conference in Panama City. “I can’t speak to that.”

But, he added, “what I can speak to is that if you have a prosecutor who is ignoring crimes happening every single day in his jurisdiction and he chooses to go back many, many years ago to try to use something about porn star hush money payments, that’s an example of pursuing a political agenda and weaponizing the office. And I think that’s fundamentally wrong.”

## **Saudi Arabia frees American imprisoned over critical tweets**

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Saudi Arabia on Monday freed a 72-year-old American citizen it had imprisoned for more than a year over old tweets critical of the kingdom’s crown prince, his son said.

Neither Saudi nor U.S. officials immediately confirmed the release of Saad Almadi, a dual U.S.-Saudi citizen and, until his imprisonment in Saudi Arabia, a longtime retiree in Florida. There had been word since last week of progress toward Almadi’s release.

Almadi on Monday night was at home with family members who live in Riyadh, said his son, Ibrahim Almadi, in the United States. Saudi officials dropped all charges against the elder Almadi, Ibrahim Almadi and advocates familiar with the case said. But it was not immediately clear whether the kingdom would

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lift a travel ban it had imposed to follow the prison sentence to allow the elder Almadi to return to the United States.

The Florida man's imprisonment over tweets had been one of several alleged human rights abuses that had soured relations between Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and President Joe Biden. That included Saudi officials' killing of a U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside a Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018, and prison sentences and travel bans that Saudi Arabia under the crown prince's tenure has given Saudi rights advocates and perceived rivals and critics of the powerful crown prince.

Both Prince Mohammed and the Biden administration recently have taken steps toward restoring better relations. The two countries are partners in a decades-old security arrangement in which the U.S. provides security for Saudi Arabia and the oil-rich kingdom keeps global markets supplied with oil.

Saudi Arabia had sentenced Almadi last year to 16 years in prison, saying his critical tweets about how the kingdom was being governed amounted to terrorist acts against it.

As U.S. officials worked to win his release, and after Biden traveled to Saudi Arabia last summer in an attempt to improve relations with the oil-rich nation, a Saudi appeals court increased Almadi's prison sentence to 19 years.

A retired project manager in the United States, Almadi was arrested in 2021 when he arrived for what was to have been a two-week visit to see family in the kingdom. Once in custody, he was confronted by Saudi authorities with tweets he had posted over several years from his home in Florida, his son says.

Almadi's tweets included one noting Prince Salman's consolidation of power in the kingdom, another that included a caricature of the prince, and a tweet that remarked on Khashoggi's killing. US intelligence officials earlier concluded the crown prince authorized the hit team that killed Khashoggi inside a Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

"We are relieved that Saad Almadi has been released, but he should have never spent a day behind bars for innocuous tweets," said Abdullah Alaoudh, Saudi director for the Freedom Initiative, a U.S.-based group that advocates for those it considers unjustly detained in the Middle East.

Alaoudh urged the U.S. to continue to press for the release of all rights advocates and others detained in Saudi Arabia.

Freedom Initiative says least four U.S. citizens and one legal permanent resident already were detained in Saudi Arabia under travel bans, and that at least one other older U.S. citizen remains imprisoned. Many of the travel bans targeted dual citizens advocating for greater rights in the kingdom, such as Saudi women's right to drive.

Ibrahim Almadi said his father had lost extensive weight in prison and that his health had worsened drastically.

## **Bullfighting ban faces critical legislative vote in Colombia**

By MANUEL RÜEDA Associated Press

VILLAPINZON, Colombia (AP) — A 61-year-old matador nicknamed "Little gypsy of America" fell headfirst into the dust when he was headbutted by a bull. He recovered to the applause of the crowd, and later killed the bull with a sword thrust to the back of its neck.

He was among six veteran bullfighters performing for free on a recent Saturday in front of about 150 people at an emerald-green hacienda in Colombia's Andes. The festival was to raise money for a foundation hoping to save the centuries-old tradition from a national ban being pushed by politicians who argue bullfighting is cruel and unethical.

"Colombia's art and culture must endure," the matador, Jelain Fresneda, said after the difficult bout, shaking dust off his tight-fitting suit. "We need to ensure our freedoms are respected."

Colombia is one of just eight countries where bullfights are still legal.

But the tradition has taken some blows around the world recently with courts and municipal governments in cities like Barcelona, Medellin and Mexico City issuing rulings that have discouraged the events.

Colombia's Senate approved a nationwide ban in December. The House of Representatives — which

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narrowly voted down an earlier ban in November — could take up the latest legislation in coming weeks when it returns from its three-month recess.

It will be a closely followed vote in Colombia, where bullfights have been held since colonial times but where public sentiment has shifted against the practice over ethical considerations as has happened elsewhere in the world.

“We are talking about living and feeling beings” said Andrea Padilla, a recently elected senator and longtime animal rights activist who drafted the anti-bullfighting law.

“These are mammals with a nervous system that enables them to feel pain and suffering with the same intensity as humans ... and who shouldn’t be exposed to a slow and painful death.”

Padilla’s law proposes banning all bullfights within three years. It also says that bullfights should be adjusted immediately so that the animals aren’t killed in arenas or attacked with pikes and handheld harpoons called *banderillas*.

Bullfighting aficionados say those measures would effectively end the tradition, where the bull is fought and taunted in three stages that last about six minutes each. First, a horseman injures the bull with a long pike. Then, quick-footed assistants rush up to the bull to push sharp harpoons into the animal’s upper back. Lastly, the bull is finished off with the matador’s sword.

Supporters of bullfights say the ban would obliterate an art form, deprive rural residents of a popular entertainment, and deny livelihoods to street vendors at bullfights. They also argue that politicians like Padilla are trying to impose their beliefs on others.

“Almost every bovine that has been raised by man ends up in a slaughterhouse” said Gonzalo Sanz de Santamaria, a bull breeder who attended the recent festival at the Andean town of Villapinzon, about a two-hour drive northeast of Bogota.

“But the bull dies in a temple, admired, applauded, showing its bravery and fighting for its life.”

Santamaria is a fourth generation breeder and director of the Cultural Freedom Foundation, a group that supports bullfights, cockfights, rodeos and other traditional events that involve animals.

Santamaria said that for breeders like himself bulls are like “gods” that are bred with utmost care in free range pastures, where they are “admired and venerated.”

Surveys suggest bullfighting aficionados like Santamaria are a small share of Colombia’s population. In a November poll by Datexco, 85% of Colombians said they agreed with a ban on bullfights, while 13% said they were against plans to ban the tradition.

However, in Colombia’s House of Representatives many politicians have been reluctant to vote against bullfights. In November a bullfighting ban presented by congressman Juan Carlos Losada was rejected by a narrow margin of just three votes, with some lawmakers saying they preferred a bill that “moderates” bullfights by making some of the weapons used in these events less invasive.

In some parts of Colombia, like the city of Manizales, bullfights still draw thousands of spectators each year. The bullfighting ring in that city is owned by the local chapter of the Red Cross, and the city’s annual bullfighting festival generates thousands of dollars for a childrens’ hospital.

“It’s sad that people who don’t know anything about our sector want to make laws about us,” said Sergio Alzate, 22, an aspiring matador and pupil at the city’s bullfighting school.

Still, Sen. Padilla and thousands of others in Colombia argue that there is no ethical justification for events where animals are killed for entertainment.

“Any society that wants to advance in non violence, in peace and in respect for life, needs to ban these cruel spectacles,” Padilla said. She added that her bill directs the government to help create new sources of income for people working in bullfights.

Some advocates are focused on the future of Colombia’s herd of fighting bulls, whose market value would plummet after a ban, forcing many breeders to sell them to slaughterhouses.

Miguel Aparicio, a businessman who runs a shelter for farm animals outside Bogota says he’s already received eight young bulls from breeders who are downscaling their operations as the number of bullfights in Colombia decreases.

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He said that bull breeding farms should consider reinventing themselves as ecotourism sites or sanctuaries for fighting bulls, so that people can enjoy these animals without seeing them killed.

"Just banning bullfights isn't going to protect the bulls" Aparicio said. "We need to find a solution that looks out for the interests of these animals."

## Japan's Kishida heading to Ukraine for talks with Zelenskyy

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida was heading to Kyiv early Tuesday for talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy that coincide with the Chinese leader's visit to Moscow.

Kishida will "show respect to the courage and patience of the Ukrainian people who are standing up to defend their homeland under President Zelenskyy's leadership, and show solidarity and unwavering support for Ukraine as head of Japan and chairman of G-7," during his visit to Ukraine, the Japanese Foreign Ministry said in announcing his trip to Kyiv.

At the talks, Kishida will show his "absolute rejection to Russia's one-sided change to the status quo by invasion and force, and to affirm his commitment to defend the rules-based international order," the ministry's statement said.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping, meanwhile, is in Moscow. Russian President Vladimir Putin warmly welcomed Xi to the Kremlin on a visit both nations describe as an opportunity to deepen their "no-limits friendship."

Japan's public television NHK showed Kishida riding a train from Poland heading to Kyiv. His surprise trip to Ukraine comes just hours after he met with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi.

Kishida, who is to chair the Group of Seven summit in May, is the only G-7 leader who hasn't visited Ukraine and was under pressure to do so at home. U.S. President Joe Biden took a similar route to visit Kyiv last month, just before the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Due to limitations of Japan's pacifist constitution, his trip was arranged secretly. Kishida is Japan's first postwar leader to enter a war zone. Kishida, invited by Zelenskyy in January to visit Kyiv, was also asked before his trip to India about a rumor of his possible trip at the end of March, denied it and said nothing concrete has been decided.

Japan has joined the United States and European nations in sanctioning Russia over its invasion and providing humanitarian and economic support for Ukraine.

Japan was quick to react because it fears the possible impact of a war in East Asia, where China's military has grown increasingly assertive and has escalated tensions around self-ruled Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its territory.

Kishida is expected to offer continuing support for Ukraine when he meets with Zelenskyy.

Television footage on NHK showed Kishida getting on a train from the Polish station of Przemysl near the border with Ukraine, with a number of officials.

Due to its pacifist principles, Japan's support for Ukraine has also been limited to non-combative military equipment such as helmets, bulletproof vests and drones, and humanitarian supplies including generators.

Japan has contributed to Ukraine more than \$7 billion, and accepted more than 2,000 displaced Ukrainians and helped them with housing assistance and support for jobs and education — a rare move for a country that is known for its strict immigration policy.

## Miami holds off Indiana rally to advance in March Madness

By MICHAEL MAROT AP Sports Writer

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. (AP) — Destiny Harden wanted the ball in her hands.

After losing to eventual national champion South Carolina on the road last March, after helping her team complete a historic comeback two days earlier and after seeing top-seeded Indiana tie the score on a 3-pointer with 6.6 seconds left, Harden wanted to close it out.

She did.

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Following a timeout, she got the ball into the middle of the lane and made the tie-breaking shot with 3.5 seconds left, giving ninth-seeded Miami a 70-68 road victory Monday night and its first Sweet 16 trip since 1992.

"It was the exact same play as last year so I should have known it was coming to me," Harden said. "I just thank the coaches for trusting me, the players for trusting me and it feels good to come through and get to the Sweet 16."

Monday's stunner capped two monumental moments this weekend for Miami (21-12) and a wild second round in the NCAA Tournament with two No. 1 seeds falling in consecutive days. Stanford was upset on its home court Sunday night — marking the first time since 1998 two top seeds were eliminated before the regional semifinals.

It came as a huge shock to the 14,000 fans packed into Assembly Hall. But instead of celebrating the Hoosiers taking another big step forward, the fans watched in disbelief as Miami ran around and rolled around on the Hoosiers home court as All-American center Mackenzie Holmes broke down in tears before the handshake line formed.

The Hurricanes meant no disrespect.

"I tell my players to act like you've been here before, but we haven't been so we were being foolish," longtime Miami coach Katie Meier said. "I looked around for any player who wanted to hug me."

Lola Pendande led Miami with 19 points and seven rebounds.

Harden had 18 points including the biggest basket on a night she scored career point No. 1,000. She also played a key role in Saturday's rally from a 17-point halftime deficit.

The Hoosiers (28-4) never led in front of a raucous crowd that grew increasingly agitated with how the game was called and uneasy about how it played out. Indiana trailed from the moment Miami broke a 2-2 tie until Holmes' layup made it 58-58 with 3:53 left to play and fought its way back from a 12-point halftime deficit.

Yet in the waning moments, they blew two chances to take the lead in the final 40 seconds — a missed layup from Chloe Moore-McNeil and an uncharacteristic errant midrange jumper from Grace Berger before Moore-McNeil finally tied it at 68 with a 3-pointer with 6.6 seconds left.

But the Hoosiers couldn't stop Harden then turned the ball over on their final possession, sealing their first home loss all season and the second for Indiana basketball in two nights to Miami, whose men's team also beat Indiana in the second round.

Holmes had 22 points and nine rebounds after sitting out Saturday with a sore knee. Berger finished with 17 points, six rebounds and six assists in her final home game.

"It's hard to put into words right now. Obviously, I'm very upset," Holmes said, her voice cracking as the tears again flowed. "My last game with Grace, she shouldn't go out like this. It's been great to play with her for four years. It hurts to go out this way."

BIG PICTURE

Miami: The Hurricanes completed an incredible road trip by getting just enough to hold off the hard-charging Hoosiers. A year ago, they fell short against another No. 1 seed in the second round despite holding the Gamecocks to a season-low 49 points. This time, they're harassing defense got the job done.

Indiana: The best season in school history came to a shockingly early end. They won the first outright Big Ten regular-season title in school history, finished a school-best second in the final Associated Press Top 25 poll, picked up their first No. 1 seed ever and expected to be heading to Dallas. Instead, they must contemplate what life without Berger, one of the best players in school history, will look like.

SHE SAID IT

"It will be weird not to see Grace Berger walk through that door," ninth-year coach Teri Moren said, referring to her fifth-year star. "She's helped build this program and you know we're not sitting here today without her. We weren't sitting here a year ago, probably three years ago without Grace Berger on this roster."

UP NEXT

While the Hoosiers begin a long offseason, the Hurricanes head to Greenville, South Carolina, for a

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showdown with fourth-seeded Villanova, which was ranked No. 10 in the final Associated Press Top 25.

## Trump indictment would be unprecedented in US history

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

The decision whether to indict former President Donald Trump over hush-money payments made on his behalf during his 2016 presidential campaign lies with a Manhattan grand jury that has been hearing evidence in secret for weeks.

An indictment of Trump, who is seeking the White House again in 2024, would be an unprecedented moment in American history, the first criminal case against a former U.S. president.

Law enforcement officials are bracing for protests and the possibility of violence after Trump called on his supporters to protest ahead of a possible indictment.

An indictment could also test a Republican Party already divided over whether to support Trump next year, in part due to his efforts to undermine his 2020 election loss.

Trump denies any wrongdoing and has slammed the Manhattan district attorney's office probe as politically motivated.

Here's a look at the hush-money probe, grand jury process and possible ramifications for his presidential campaign:

### WHAT'S THE PROBE ABOUT?

The grand jury has been probing Trump's involvement in a \$130,000 payment made in 2016 to the porn actor Stormy Daniels to keep her from going public about a sexual encounter she said she had with him years earlier. Trump lawyer Michael Cohen paid Daniels, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, through a shell company before being reimbursed by Trump, whose company, the Trump Organization, logged the reimbursements as legal expenses.

Earlier in 2016, Cohen also arranged for former Playboy model Karen McDougal to be paid \$150,000 by the publisher of the supermarket tabloid The National Enquirer, which then squelched her story in a journalistically dubious practice known as "catch-and-kill."

Trump denies having sex with either woman.

Trump's company "grossed up" Cohen's reimbursement for the Daniels payment to defray tax payments, according to federal prosecutors who filed criminal charges against the lawyer in connection with the payments in 2018. In all, Cohen got \$360,000 plus a \$60,000 bonus, for a total of \$420,000.

Cohen pleaded guilty to violating federal campaign finance law in connection with the payments. Federal prosecutors say the payments amounted to illegal, unreported assistance to Trump's campaign. But they declined to file charges against Trump himself.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's team appears to be looking at whether Trump or anyone committed crimes in New York state in arranging the payments, or in the way they accounted for them internally at the Trump Organization.

### BUT CAN A FORMER PRESIDENT BE INDICTED?

In a word, yes. Longstanding Justice Department policy prohibits the federal indictment of a sitting president, but Trump, two years out of office, no longer enjoys that legal shield. And the New York case is not a federal probe anyway.

### WHAT IS THIS GRAND JURY?

A grand jury is made up of people drawn from the community, similar to a trial jury. But unlike juries that hear trials, grand juries don't decide whether someone is guilty or innocent. They only decide whether there is sufficient evidence for someone to be charged. Grand juries exist in the federal court system and in many states.

Proceedings are closed to the public, including the media. There is no judge present nor anyone representing the accused.

Prosecutors call and question witnesses, and grand jurors can also ask questions. In New York, the



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person who could be indicted may ask for a certain witness, though it's up to grand jurors.

New York grand juries have 23 people. At least 16 must be present to hear evidence or deliberate. Twelve have to agree there is enough evidence in order to issue an indictment. The grand jury may also find there is not enough evidence of a crime or direct the prosecutor to file lesser charges.

Centuries-old rules have kept grand juries under wraps to protect the reputations of people who end up not being charged, to encourage reluctant witnesses to testify, to prevent those about to be indicted from fleeing and to guard against outside pressure.

Grand juries have long been criticized as little more than rubber stamps for prosecutors. Former New York Judge Sol Wachtler famously said that prosecutors could convince a grand jury to "indict a ham sandwich." Defenders of the process say it is a crucial safeguard against politically motivated prosecutions.

## WHO HAS TESTIFIED IN THIS CASE?

One of the final witnesses being called was Robert Costello, who was once a legal adviser to Cohen, the government's key witness in the investigation.

The men have since had a falling out, and Costello has indicated that he has information he believes would undercut the credibility of Cohen and contradict his current incriminating statements about Trump.

Costello contacted a lawyer for Trump saying he had information that could be exculpatory for Trump, according to a person familiar with the matter who insisted on anonymity to discuss secret legal proceedings. The lawyer brought it to the attention of the district attorney's office, which last week subpoenaed Costello's law firm for records and invited him to testify.

He was at the building where the jurors were meeting on Monday, invited by prosecutors, ensuring the grand jury had an opportunity to consider testimony or evidence that could weaken the case for indicting.

Trump was also been invited to testify, but his lawyer has said the former president has no plans to participate.

## WHAT ABOUT THE POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS?

Trump says charges would actually help him in the 2024 presidential contest. Longtime ally Lindsey Graham, senator from South Carolina, said Saturday that District Attorney Bragg "has done more to help Donald Trump get elected."

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, considering joining the Republican field, criticizes the Trump investigation as politically motivated, "fundamentally wrong." But he also threw one of his first jabs at the former president in a quip likely to intensify their rivalry. DeSantis said he personally doesn't "know what goes into paying hush money to a porn star to secure silence over some kind of alleged affair."

Comments by other potential rivals, eager to convince voters it is time to move on from the former president but also contending with the fact that he remains the most popular figure in the party:

— During a Saturday visit to Iowa, former Vice President Mike Pence called the idea of indicting a former president "deeply troubling."

— Asa Hutchinson, the former Arkansas governor mulling his own 2024 bid, said he didn't expect Trump to withdraw from the race after an indictment, though that would be the "right" thing to do.

— Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, a declared candidate who also served as Trump's U.N. ambassador, said Monday on Fox News that Bragg's case was an attempt at scoring "political points," adding, "You never want to condone any sort of prosecution that's being politicized."

"At the end of the day, not one single person's opinion of him will be any different after indictment than it was before," veteran GOP operative Terry Sullivan said in an interview. "All of his perceived negatives are already baked into his name ID with voters."

## WHAT ABOUT OTHER TRUMP INVESTIGATIONS?

The New York probe is among many legal woes Trump is facing.

The Justice Department is investigating his retention of top secret government documents at his Florida estate, Mar-a-Lago, after leaving the White House, as well as possible efforts to obstruct that probe. Federal investigators are also still probing the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection and efforts to overturn the election Trump falsely claimed was stolen.

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Portions of a report from a special grand jury in Georgia that investigated whether Trump and his allies illegally interfered in the 2020 election in Georgia shows jurors believed “one or more witnesses” committed perjury and urged local prosecutors to bring charges. The former president never testified, but the report didn’t foreclose the possibility of other charges.

## WHAT’S NEXT IN NEW YORK?

It’s unclear. Trump declared in a social media post over the weekend that he expects to be taken into custody on Tuesday and urged supporters to protest his possible arrest. However, there has been no public announcement of any time frame for the grand jury’s secret work. A Trump spokesperson said there has been no notification from Bragg’s office.

Law enforcement officials have been making security preparations for the possibility of an indictment in coming days or weeks — or a court appearance by the president himself.

## WILL TRUMP BE HANDCUFFED?

Anna Cominsky, a New York Law School professor and former criminal defense lawyer, said that her best guess is that Trump’s lawyers will work out a deal with the prosecutor’s office to avoid the spectacle of an indictment with handcuffs and a perp walk.

“There is a great likelihood that he will self-surrender, which means you won’t see a 5 a.m. knock on Mar-a-Lago’s door, officers swarming his house and arresting him and bringing him out in handcuffs,” she said. “He would appear at the prosecutor’s office voluntarily and then be processed, fingerprinted and his picture taken.”

Cominsky is less sure that Trump would want to avoid a public appearance for his arraignment, which would come within two days of an indictment. At that time a judge lists the charges and asks if the defendant pleads guilty or not guilty.

“He doesn’t shy away from the chaos, so he may want to use this to his advantage,” she said.

## Trump legal woes force another moment of choosing for GOP

By STEVE PEOPLES, FARNOUSH AMIRI and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — From the moment he rode down the Trump Tower escalator to announce his first presidential campaign, a searing question has hung over the Republican Party: Is this the moment to break from Donald Trump?

Elected Republicans have wavered at times — whether it was Trump’s condemnation of John McCain’s war record, his racist attack against a Mexican-American judge, his sexually predatory language caught on video, his alleged extramarital affairs, his decision to side with Russian President Vladimir Putin over U.S. intelligence, his promotion of false allegations of election fraud and his incitement of a violent mob that threatened the lives of lawmakers in both parties.

But after almost eight years of near-constant scandal, Republicans have ultimately rallied behind Trump over and over and over again.

Now, on the eve of a new presidential campaign season, that loyalty is being tested anew as Trump prepares for the possibility that he may soon become the first former U.S. president charged with a crime. New York prosecutors are wrapping up their probe into whether Trump engaged in an illegal hush money scheme involving a porn actress.

“This is another moment — not just this indictment, but the others likely to follow — where Republicans have the opportunity to break with Trump,” said Sarah Longwell, a vocal Republican Trump critic and founder of the Republican Accountability Project. “If they fail to do so, they’ll have no one to blame but themselves when Trump is the nominee again.”

So far, at least, the vast majority of the Republican Party appears to have made its choice.

As charges loom, many party leaders have begun to defend the former president — even as other Republicans with far less baggage line up against him in the nascent 2024 Republican presidential primary.

Former Vice President Mike Pence, a likely presidential contender, said over the weekend that Americans don’t want to see Trump indicted. Another 2024 Republican prospect, New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, said there is a sense that the former president is being unfairly attacked. New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie,

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a frequent Trump critic also eyeing a White House bid, also said New York prosecutors may be unfairly prosecuting Trump.

There are cracks in such support, however.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, Trump's strongest prospective rival, offered a mixed assessment when asked to address the potential indictment on Monday.

"I don't know what goes into paying hush money to a porn star to secure silence over some type of alleged affair," DeSantis said as some in the audience laughed uncomfortably. "But what I can speak to is that if you have a prosecutor who is ignoring crimes happening every single day in his jurisdiction and he chooses to go back many many years ago to try to use something about porn star hush money payments, that's an example of pursuing a political agenda and weaponizing the office. And I think that's fundamentally wrong."

The ordeal has pushed Republicans back into an uncomfortably familiar place -- playing defense for Trump as he grapples with another scandal. The situation dominated the conversation at the House GOP conference in Orlando, where dozens of congressional Republicans gathered this week.

Many hoped to focus on the party's legislative priorities and achievements three months into the House majority. Instead, they faced repeated questions about the implications of Trump's latest legal woes.

Republican lawmakers eager to highlight the party's gain with Hispanic voters were cornered -- in Spanish and English -- by questions about Trump's legal troubles and whether he's still the leader of the party.

"Obviously I have great respect for the former president of the United States," Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, D-Fla., told The Associated Press. "But as far as who the leader of the party is, I will tell you right now, I think the leader of the party is the speaker of the House. It's the highest ranking elected."

But Speaker Kevin McCarthy is making clear that he has Trump's back.

The California Republican called the potential indictment "pure politics" and slammed New York prosecutors for New York City's rising crime rates. Like DeSantis in Tallahassee, Republican lawmakers in Orlando repeatedly attacked New York District Attorney Alan Bragg, calling him a "George Soros-backed" prosecutor.

And instead of using their new clout to advance conservative policy, Republican leaders on Monday announced plans to investigate and interrogate the entities involved in the case against Trump, including the many federal and local prosecutors probing Trump's actions in various jurisdictions. Beyond the New York hush money case, Trump is facing active criminal investigation in Georgia for his efforts to overturn the 2020 election and by federal prosecutors probing his handling of classified documents, among other issues.

In a letter to Bragg on Monday, House Republicans demanded communications, documents, and testimony relating to the "unprecedented abuse of prosecutorial authority and the potential indictment" of Trump.

Trump's legal baggage could prove a political liability in the 2024 general election, but his team has long believed that an indictment could give him a political advantage in the primary by forcing his Republican rivals to come to his defense or risk alienating his fierce political base. They point to the Republican response to the federal raid on Trump's Florida estate, when virtually the entire GOP, including DeSantis, ultimately defended him.

Some of Trump's 2024 rivals have privately acknowledged the political risks should they break from the former president at such a critical moment.

To that end, Trump and his allies seized on DeSantis' approach to Trump's potential arrest as an affront to his MAGA base. The Florida governor said he hoped to stay out of what he called a "manufactured circus."

Donald Trump Jr. condemned DeSantis' response as "pure weakness."

Trump himself attacked DeSantis using his pet nickname for him, "Ron DeSanctimonious" and promoted a decades-old picture of DeSantis posing with young women when he was a high school teacher.

In a message accompanying the photo, Trump mocked DeSantis, going so far as to question his sexuality. The governor, Trump wrote, "will probably find out about FALSE ACCUSATIONS & FAKE STORIES sometime in the future, as he gets older, wiser, and better known, when he's unfairly and illegally attacked by a woman, even classmates that are 'underage' (or possibly a man!). I'm sure he will want to fight these misfits just like I do!"

As his party largely lined up behind Trump, some also tried to draw boundaries — especially as he called

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for large-scale protests. The message evoked similarities with Trump's rhetoric that sparked the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol.

"I don't think people should protest this," McCarthy said. Despite Trump's repeated calls for protests, he added: "I think President Trump, when you talk to him, he doesn't think that either."

Meanwhile, all but a few Republican members of Congress have so far declined to endorse Trump's 2024 presidential bid. And it's unclear if statements of support in the spring of 2023 will translate into formal endorsements when the primary season takes off in the spring of 2024.

Still, Trump's biggest supporters were oozing confidence.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, one of just eight House Republicans who have formally endorsed Trump's third presidential bid, said Americans should be outraged by the so-called political persecution of a former president.

If Trump is indicted, she predicted, Trump will win in a landslide.

House Republican conference chair, Rep. Elise Stefanik, remains one of Trump's strongest supporters in Congress. She said she spoke to the former president earlier Monday.

"I think you'll see his poll numbers go up," predicted Stefanik, who has also signed onto Trump's 2024 bid. "He's never been in a stronger position."

## Biden signs measure nullifying DC criminal code revisions

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Monday signed into law legislation nullifying the recent overhaul of the District of Columbia criminal code, but the fight between Congress and local lawmakers is continuing.

The signature merely marks the end of a raucous first chapter in a saga that has left district lawmakers bitterly nursing their political bruises, harboring fresh resentments against national Democrats and bracing to play defense against an activist Republican-controlled House for at least the next two years.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy hailed the move in a statement, calling it the end of what he labeled a "soft-on-crime criminal code rewrite that treated violent criminals like victims and discarded the views of law enforcement."

But even before the bill was formally sent to Biden, House Republicans were promising a season of direct congressional intervention in local D.C. affairs.

"This is just the beginning," McCarthy, R-Calif., said earlier this month in a celebratory signing ceremony after the vote to cancel the new criminal code passed the Senate with significant Democratic support. "It is a message for the entire nation."

D.C. Council members sound like they fully believe those promises.

"I'm afraid that we're going to see more of this for the remainder of this Congress," D.C. Council Chairman Phil Mendelson said. "Does this raise a concern that there are going to be other issues? Yes."

When congressional passage of the measure appeared inevitable and Biden indicated he would sign it, the D.C. Council withdrew the measure. But the move did not spare Biden a politically charged decision on whether to endorse the congressional action.

Biden did not issue a statement accompanying the signing Monday. But he tweeted earlier this month that while he supported statehood for D.C., "I don't support some of the changes D.C. Council put forward over the mayor's objections — such as lowering penalties for carjackings."

Under terms of Washington's Home Rule authority, the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability essentially vets all new D.C. laws and frequently alters or limits them through budget riders. But the criminal code rewrite is the first law to be completely overturned since 1991.

House Oversight Committee Chairman Rep. James Comer, R-Ky., has pledged that his committee "stands ready to conduct robust oversight of America's capital city."

That robust oversight has already begun. Even before Biden signed the bill, the Oversight Committee sent letters summoning Mendelson, D.C. Councilmember Charles Allen and D.C. Chief Financial Officer Glen

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Lee to testify at a March 29 hearing. The topic of that hearing, according to the letter, is the ominously vague “general oversight of the District of Columbia, including crime, safety, and city management.”

Other House Republicans have already identified areas of interest to target. Rep. Andrew Clyde of Georgia has introduced a resolution to block a police accountability law known as the Comprehensive Policing and Justice Reform Amendment Act.

Most aspects of that law were passed by the D.C. Council on an emergency basis in 2020, amid the protests against police brutality following George Floyd’s murder; it was made permanent in December 2022. It bans the use of chokeholds by police officers, makes police disciplinary files available to the public, weakens the bargaining power of the police union and limits the use of tear gas to disperse protestors.

“Now that Congress has effectively used its constitutional authority to strike down the D.C. Council’s dangerous Revised Criminal Code Act, we must now move to swiftly block this anti-police measure to ensure our nation’s capital city is safe for all Americans,” Clyde said in a statement.

Clyde is a longtime nemesis of D.C. loyalists, having publicly stated that his ultimate goal is to completely end Washington’s Home Rule authority. That sentiment, once a long-shot fringe position, has edged closer to being a mainstream Republican talking point. Former President Donald Trump publicly stated earlier this month that the “federal government should take over control and management of Washington D.C.”

Meanwhile, Oversight Committee member Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., has targeted the D.C. Jail for congressional scrutiny. Greene has demanded access to the jail to visit some two dozen detainees from the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. She’s also seeking a complete overview of the jail’s conditions.

Other aspects of D.C. legislation remain ripe targets for activist Republicans, such as the District’s strict gun control laws or the decision to essentially decriminalize most psychedelics — a move that was approved by D.C. voters in a referendum.

This congressional onslaught of oversight was widely predicted when Republicans took back control of the House in last year’s midterm elections. But most local politicians and activists hoped they could count on Democratic control of both the Senate and the White House as a shield. Those hopes rapidly melted away in a storm of political dynamics that amounted to a humiliating setback for the D.C. Council and the larger hopes of Washington ever achieving statehood.

House Republicans were able to put Biden and Senate Democrats in a political bind. By defending D.C.’s right to self-governance, they would open themselves to charges of being soft on criminals at a time of rising crime both in the nation’s capital and across the U.S.

In the end, Biden signaled before the Senate vote that he would not veto the rejection of the criminal code and 33 Democratic senators voted to overturn it. The moves were regarded by statehood activists as a betrayal that they say exposed the hollowness of Democratic support for D.C. statehood.

For now, the D.C. Council maintains that the city’s criminal code is dangerously obsolete and desperately in need of reform. But after seeing the initial law turned into a national political issue, there appears to be little appetite to try again in the short term.

Mendelson said that changing the aspects that drew criticism, such as the lowering of maximum penalties for crimes like carjacking, would simply lead to other objections from a Republican House that he said is openly looking for a fight.

“I don’t plan on installing a hotline to Republican leadership in the House and the Senate and calling them every week and asking them for permission to move forward,” Mendelson said.

## Missouri to restrict gender-affirming care for minors

By SUMMER BALLENTINE Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Missouri’s Republican attorney general on Monday said he will limit access to gender-affirming care for minors, sidestepping the GOP-led Senate as it struggles to pass a law banning the practice for children completely.

As hundreds of activists rallied at the Capitol to pressure lawmakers to act on the bill, Attorney General Andrew Bailey announced plans to file an emergency rule.

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The rule will require an 18-month waiting period, 15 hour-long therapy sessions and treatment of any mental illnesses before Missouri doctors can provide that kind of care to transgender children, according to Bailey's office.

"I am dedicated to using every legal tool at my disposal to stand in the gap and protect children from being subject to inhumane science experiments," Bailey said.

The emergency rule also requires disclosure of information about puberty blocker drugs, including that they are experimental, not approved by the FDA and that the FDA has warned they can lead to brain swelling and blindness, Bailey said.

While puberty blockers and hormones often prescribed in transgender treatment are not FDA approved for transgender care, they are used in those cases "off-label," which is an accepted and permitted practice.

This is not the first time Bailey has weighed in on transgender health care since taking office in January.

In February, Bailey announced an investigation of a transgender youth clinic in St. Louis run by Washington University, following allegations of abuse by a former employee. He asked the university to shut down the clinic, but it refused.

Bailey's spokeswoman did not say when the new health care rule will be filed and did not provide a copy.

Maysa Akbar, chief diversity officer for the American Psychological Association, called the rule "a disturbing development for transgender and gender-nonconforming youth in Missouri."

"This emergency order flies in the face of the scientific consensus, which is that, with appropriate psychological screening, treatment approaches should affirm an adolescent's gender identity, not deny it," Akbar said. "Research shows that discrimination has adverse effects on the health and well-being of transgender people."

The rule appears to be aimed at helping children who might regret transitioning, said Dr. Jack Drescher, section editor of the gender dysphoria chapter of the DSM-5, the most recent edition of the American Psychiatric Association's mental illness manual.

"However it does so at the expense of those children who would indeed benefit from transition services," Drescher said. "Sacrificing the well being of the latter for the presumed benefit to the former is an ethically troubling intervention by the state into clinical practice."

Missouri LGBTQ-rights group PROMO called Bailey's rule an abuse of power and said his office "does not respect the professional guidelines of every major medical association in our country, who agrees gender-affirming healthcare is the standard of care for transgender Missourians."

The rule comes amid a national push to restrict transgender health care, drag shows, bathroom access and how LGBTQ topics are discussed in schools.

Erin Reed, a researcher who tracks transgender legislation, said Bailey is among Republican elected officials in state executive offices across the nation who are finding ways to limit gender-affirming care when legislatures fail to act.

"An action like this taken to sidestep the legislature and sidestep the democratic process is in and of itself undemocratic and is going to harm trans youth in Missouri," Reed said.

Florida state medical officials last year banned transgender children from receiving hormones or undergoing surgeries to treat gender dysphoria at the urging of Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is widely considered to be weighing a run for the Republican presidential nomination.

Texas went farther than any state last year when Republican Gov. Greg Abbott issued a first-of-its-kind order that instructed child welfare officials to investigate reports of gender-confirming care for kids as abuse.

A couple hundred people rallied Monday at the Capitol in hopes of pushing lawmakers to pass a law to ban all gender-affirming treatment for children, while several came in opposition. The rally featured a diverse collection of speakers, including Republican state officials such as Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft, Christian leaders and several gay and transgender activists who said that only adults should be able to access gender-affirming care.

Catherine Dreher, vice chair of the Missouri Libertarian Party, said her 18-year-old son has dealt with mental health issues, recently left home and wants to transition to a woman, which distresses her. She

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opposes allowing that for minors, calling it "child abuse."

Debate on the Missouri bill stalled when the conservative sponsor, Republican Sen. Mike Moon, struggled to negotiate with Democrats on the legislation. The GOP-led Senate ultimately failed to pass any legislation dealing with the topic before lawmakers left for their annual spring break.

"Protecting Missouri's children is not up for negotiation," Moon wrote in a public letter signed by seven other Republican senators, who vowed to take any action necessary to bring Moon's bill to a vote this week.

The issue threatens to derail the Senate. Several Republican senators on Monday spoke against another Republican lawmaker's attempt to combine Moon's bill with a ban on transgender girls competing on school girls' sports teams, fearing that merging the issues might make the legislation unconstitutional.

Meanwhile, Senate Democrats have indicated that they may filibuster to encourage compromise, a stall tactic that involves senators talking nonstop.

## Hall of Fame coach Rick Pitino accepts job at St. John's

By MIKE FITZPATRICK AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Rick Pitino is back in the Big East Conference.

St. John's hired the Hall of Fame coach Monday to boost a storied program that's been mired in mediocrity for much of this century. The school announced that Pitino will be introduced during a news conference Tuesday at Madison Square Garden.

Following a successful run at nearby mid-major Iona, the 70-year-old Pitino was plucked away to replace Mike Anderson, who was fired after four seasons in charge of the Red Storm without making the NCAA Tournament.

Reports quickly surfaced that St. John's planned to target Pitino, who grew up on Long Island not far from the school's Queens campus in New York City.

"Coach Pitino is one of the most brilliant minds in the history of the game and has won at the highest levels everywhere he has coached," athletic director Mike Cragg said in a press release. "There is no doubt in my mind he will restore a championship-level program and culture for St. John's Basketball."

Pitino has been to seven Final Fours and won a pair of NCAA championships, one each at Kentucky (1996) and Louisville (2013).

He was dismissed at Louisville in 2017 after an FBI investigation into college basketball corruption led to allegations of NCAA violations. It was the third scandal, professional and personal, in an eight-year period with the Cardinals — but Pitino was eventually exonerated in the FBI-related case.

Pitino has been coaching college basketball so long that he was on the opposing bench with Big East rival Providence when St. John's was a national power in the mid-1980s under Lou Carnesecca.

Now, he's tasked with invigorating a Red Storm squad that hasn't won an NCAA Tournament game — or even reached the Big East semifinals — since 2000. The school has made only three NCAA appearances over the past two decades, the most recent coming in 2019 under Chris Mullin.

During that time, through several conference reconfigurations, St. John's has fallen behind Big East foes with similar profiles such as Villanova, Providence and Seton Hall.

"One of my great coaching memories was having the distinct privilege of coaching against Lou Carnesecca and St. John's, a Hall of Fame coach and historic program that I have always respected," Pitino said. "It is surreal to now have this opportunity to bring St. John's back to prominence. I'm honored, humbled and grateful."

The Red Storm went 18-15 during a turbulent 2022-23 season, including 7-13 in Big East play to finish eighth in the conference standings. They blew a 14-point lead against sixth-ranked and top-seeded Marquette in the Big East Tournament quarterfinals, ending the season with a 72-70 loss in overtime that left Anderson with a 68-56 record at St. John's, including 30-46 in Big East regular-season games.

Pitino has a .740 winning percentage in 35 seasons as a college basketball head coach. He has guided five schools to the NCAA Tournament, including Boston University (1983) and Iona (2021, 2023).

He took a surprising Providence team on a memorable run to the 1987 Final Four, but the 2013 national

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title Pitino won at Louisville (then in the Big East) was later vacated by the NCAA after an investigation found that an assistant coach paid escorts and exotic dancers to entertain players and recruits in campus dorms.

After two years coaching in Greece, he got the job at Iona — a small, private Catholic school located in New Rochelle, just north of New York City. And two years ago, he said the only reason he would leave would be to retire.

But his plans changed.

Pitino went 64-22 in three years with the Gaels, guiding them to two regular-season titles in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference and a pair of NCAA Tournament appearances. Seeded 13th this year, they led No. 4 seed UConn at halftime before getting knocked out in the first round with an 87-63 loss that snapped a 14-game winning streak.

Pitino posted tweets thanking Iona administrators and “all those people who touched our lives.”

“To my players, the last three years. All I can say is you know how much I love you,” he tweeted. “Follow up, I’m not sad it ended. I’m so grateful it happened.”

Leading up to Iona’s NCAA Tournament game this year, Pitino said he hopes he can coach for 12 more years.

“But I’ll take six or seven,” he said.

Pitino had two stints in the NBA, one with the New York Knicks that featured a division title and a failed stretch with the Boston Celtics that didn’t produce a playoff appearance.

But in college, he’s endured only one losing season (13-14 at BU in 1980-81).

And now, at a time when Hall of Fame coaching contemporaries like Mike Krzyzewski and Jim Boeheim have reached the end of their road, Pitino is still going strong and getting new jobs.

St. John’s has the ninth-most wins among Division I teams, with 90 winning seasons in its 116-year basketball history.

The school has reached two Final Fours (1952, 1985) and won the NIT a record six times — including back-to-back crowns in the 1940s when that event was often considered the country’s premier postseason tournament.

Anderson plans to file an arbitration lawsuit against St. John’s, first reported by ESPN, over the approximately \$11 million he would have been owed by the school had he not been fired “for cause.”

“I vehemently disagree with the University’s decision to terminate my contract for cause. The ‘for cause’ accusation is wholly without merit and I will be aggressively defending my contractual rights through an arbitration process,” Anderson said in a statement provided to the AP by M Group Strategic Communications CEO Jay Morakis, who confirmed the former Red Storm coach has retained attorney John Singer of Singer Deutsch to handle the case.

St. John’s declined to comment.

## Miami Beach struggles with spring break violence, big crowds

By DAVID FISCHER and CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

MIAMI BEACH, Fla. (AP) — For the third year in a row, Miami Beach finds itself struggling with spring break violence, including two fatal shootings and unruly crowds, despite a massive police presence and activities designed to give people alternatives to drinking alcohol and roaming the streets.

The party-all-the-time vibe in the South Beach section of the popular barrier island city has already led officials to ban alcohol sales at larger clubs after 2 a.m. Police are stationed everywhere, including in mobile towers that give officers a birds-eye view of the streets. Art, music, yoga and volleyball tournaments were added this year to give people something to do, at least during the day.

Yet the violence and street chaos continues at night. All night.

The city imposed an overnight curfew that ended Monday morning but decided at a City Commission meeting not to enact a second curfew next weekend, when the Ultra Music Festival will draw thousands of people to South Beach. It’s the third weekend of spring break when the worst chaos occurs, said Com-



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missioner Kristen Rosen Gonzalez.

"Ultra weekend is not the problem," she said.

Commissioner Ricky Arriola agreed, saying there may need to be metal detectors, security fences or other measures installed next year in certain sections of Miami Beach. He noted that dozens of businesses and their workers depend on the crowds the Ultra event bring in.

"A curfew is not a long-term solution," he said. "We're taking it out on law-abiding businesses."

The panel did decide, as it did last year, to force liquor stores in the South Beach area to close early at 6 p.m. during next weekend. Officials did point out the city manager still has emergency authority to order a 72-hour curfew despite the commission's reluctance.

Mayor Dan Gelber wants the violence and disorder to stop.

"The volume of people in our city, the unruly nature of too many and the presence of guns has created a peril that cannot go unchecked," Gelber said in a video statement issued Sunday. "It is clear that even an unprecedented police presence could not prevent these incidents from occurring."

Gelber added: "We don't ask for spring break in our city. We don't want spring break in our city."

Miami Beach police reported at least 322 arrests on a variety of charges between Feb. 27 and Sunday. Gelber said more than 70 firearms were confiscated in that time. This has been happening despite police officers working up to 14-hour shifts six days a week, according to a city emergency declaration.

The latest shooting happened at around 3:30 a.m. Sunday on Ocean Drive in South Beach, police said. A male was shot and died later at a hospital, and officers chased down a suspect on foot, police said on Twitter. Their identities were not released, nor were any possible charges.

Grainy security footage being shared on social media shows a man pulling a gun from underneath his T-shirt and firing multiple shots, striking another man as crowds quickly scattered.

"Next thing I know, I started hearing about two shots. I got low and got scared," Travis Turner, a bystander from Michigan, told WSVN-TV.

On Friday night, one male victim was killed and another was seriously injured in a shooting that sent panicked crowds scrambling from restaurants and clubs into the streets. Police detained one person at the scene and found four firearms, but no other details have been made available.

David Wallack, owner of Mango's Tropical Cafe, said nightclubs are being unfairly blamed for the shootings, and city officials need to work more closely with business owners to prevent violence in the future.

"What was going on out in the streets was not customers of businesses," Wallack said. "The majority of all those people in the street, they're bringing their own stuff to the party. They don't have the money to pay \$20 a drink."

Tolga Bugdaci, 21, who was visiting South Beach from Dusseldorf, Germany, said he's not surprised the city decided to enact a curfew over the past weekend.

"I can understand it, but it doesn't necessarily have to be this way," Bugdaci said, adding that he did not witness either shooting. "We woke up to it, and everything was yellow on the street. It was crazy, we had never experienced anything like this before. It was a different world to us."

Under the now-expired curfew, people had to leave businesses before midnight, although hotels can operate later only in service to their guests. Restaurants could stay open only for delivery and the curfew won't apply to residents, people going to and from work, emergency services and hotel guests. Some roads will be closed off and arriving hotel guests may have to show proof of their reservations.

Last year, the city imposed a midnight curfew following two shootings, also on Ocean Drive. The year before that, authorities made about 1,000 arrests and confiscated dozens of guns during a rowdy spring break that led Miami Beach officials to take steps aimed at calming the annual festivities.

For some business owners, the crowds have become impossible to manage. Vice Mayor Steven Meiner said there will be a debate in the coming months about how to prepare better for next spring break.

"I don't view any other option at this point other than to do metal detectors. I'm not going to through next year and have dead people on our streets," he said. "I don't understand how we can't make a secure perimeter around this. We're going through the same thing year after year."

## March Madness arrives in Vegas after years of avoiding it

By MARK ANDERSON AP Sports Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — March Madness has long been a huge draw for gamblers who came to Las Vegas to place their bets on the tournament while partying at the city's famed casinos. But they were limited to watching the games on TV; catching one in person here was impossible not that long ago.

That changes this week when UCLA faces Gonzaga and UConn takes on Arkansas at T-Mobile Arena on the Vegas Strip.

The NCAA Tournament avoided the city until very recently because sports gambling is legal here. The governing body for collegiate athletics even had a policy prohibiting its championship events from being played in Nevada.

With legal sports betting spreading across the country, the NCAA now has no qualms about crowning its champions in Las Vegas. The Sweet 16 games scheduled here Thursday are among several championship events the NCAA has awarded to the city.

Others include hockey's Frozen Four in 2026 and the Final Four in 2028.

This no longer is Jerry Tarkanian's Las Vegas, at least in the eyes of the NCAA, which for many years had fought with the late Hall of Fame coach who sued the governing body and settled in 1998 for \$2.5 million.

Between the outlaw image of UNLV's Tarkanian and an overall feeling that sports betting — legal or not — was inherently bad for athletics, Las Vegas was an outsider in the sports world for a decades.

It also was a much smaller city when Tarkanian ruled. Less than 800,000 people lived in the metropolitan area when the Rebels won the 1990 national championship, according to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. That figure last year was 2.3 million.

Professional sports leagues have taken note of the additional potential paying customers and now the NFL and NHL have teams here. The Oakland Athletics are also considering moving here, and an NBA expansion team could be on the way in future years.

Even before the influx of professional teams, Las Vegas began making headway, particularly in basketball. All 30 teams compete in the NBA Summer League in Las Vegas, which also is home to USA Basketball. Five college conferences play their men's and women's basketball tournaments in the area.

Views about legalized sports betting also have evolved dramatically, getting a big assist in 2018 when the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act.

The federal ban blocked states from regulating sports betting, making exceptions for Nevada, Delaware, Montana and Oregon, which already had legal sports wagering in some form. Only Nevada permitted single-game betting.

"Thirty years ago in the Tarkanian era, I'm sure they were pretty skeptical of Las Vegas," said Steve Hill, CEO and president of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. "I think as time passed, they probably mellowed. We've had conference tournaments here and we've had a real partnership, it feels like now, that didn't exist before the change in the law."

The Supreme Court's decision created a path for any state that wanted to legalize sports betting, and soon many would begin the process. That left the NCAA — already showing signs of drifting toward easing its stance on Nevada — with no choice but to allow its championship events even where sports wagering was legal.

"That was the impetus," said Dan Gavitt, NCAA vice president of men's basketball. "Once that changed, we were excited from a basketball championships perspective to bring March Madness to such a great city that has embraced college basketball with conference championships for some time."

Jim Livengood, when he was UNLV's athletic director in 2009-13, worked behind the scenes with his colleagues before the federal ban was overturned to change the NCAA's position on Las Vegas.

Even after retiring in 2013, Livengood remained an advocate for Las Vegas as he moved into consulting.

"I thought the tide was starting to turn in probably '16, '17, '18," Livengood said. "We were making some really serious headway."

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In 2019, the NCAA formally changed its policy regarding championships in Las Vegas — and it couldn't wait to plant a flag.

NCAA officials told Las Vegas representatives to skip the usual process of first bidding on the first two rounds of the NCAA Tournament and go straight for a regional.

"I think that was very unusual, but a reflection of the fact that there was pent-up demand for Las Vegas," Pac-12 Conference Commissioner George Kliavkoff said.

## World on 'thin ice' as UN climate report gives stark warning

By SETH BORENSTEIN and FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Humanity still has a chance, close to the last, to prevent the worst of climate change's future harms, a top United Nations panel of scientists said Monday.

But doing so requires quickly slashing nearly two-thirds of carbon pollution by 2035, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said. The United Nations chief said it more bluntly, calling for an end to new fossil fuel exploration and for rich countries to quit coal, oil and gas by 2040.

"Humanity is on thin ice — and that ice is melting fast," United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said. "Our world needs climate action on all fronts — everything, everywhere, all at once."

Stepping up his pleas for action on fossil fuels, Guterres called for rich countries to accelerate their target for achieving net zero emissions to as early as 2040, and developing nations to aim for 2050 — about a decade earlier than most current targets. He also called for them to stop using coal by 2030 and 2040, respectively, and ensure carbon-free electricity generation in the developed world by 2035, meaning no gas-fired power plants either.

That date is key because nations soon have to come up with goals for pollution reduction by 2035, according to the Paris climate agreement. After contentious debate, the U.N. science report approved Sunday concluded that to stay under the warming limit set in Paris the world needs to cut 60% of its greenhouse gas emissions by 2035, compared with 2019, adding a new target not previously mentioned in six previous reports issued since 2018.

"The choices and actions implemented in this decade will have impacts for thousands of years," the report said, calling climate change "a threat to human well-being and planetary health."

"We are not on the right track but it's not too late," said report co-author and water scientist Aditi Mukherji. "Our intention is really a message of hope, and not that of doomsday."

With the world only a few tenths of a degree away from the globally accepted goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times, scientists stressed a sense of urgency. The goal was adopted as part of the 2015 Paris climate agreement and the world has already warmed 1.1 degrees Celsius (2 degrees Fahrenheit).

This is likely the last warning the Nobel Peace Prize-winning collection of scientists will be able to make about the 1.5 mark because their next set of reports may well come after Earth has either passed the mark or is locked into exceeding it soon, several scientists, including report authors, told The Associated Press.

After 1.5 degrees "the risks are starting to pile on," said report co-author Francis X. Johnson, a climate, land and policy scientist at the Stockholm Environment Institute. The report mentions "tipping points" around that temperature of species extinction, including coral reefs, irreversible melting of ice sheets and sea level rise of several meters (several yards).

"1.5 is a critical critical limit, particularly for small islands and mountain (communities) which depend on glaciers," said Mukherji.

"The window is closing if emissions are not reduced as quickly as possible," Johnson said in an interview. "Scientists are rather alarmed."

Many scientists, including at least three co-authors, said hitting 1.5 degrees is inevitable.

"We are pretty much locked into 1.5," said report co-author Malte Meinshausen, a climate scientist at the University of Melbourne in Australia. "There's very little way we will be able to avoid crossing 1.5 C sometime in the 2030s " but the big issue is whether the temperature keeps rising from there or stabilizes.

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Guterres insisted "the 1.5-degree limit is achievable." Science panel chief Hoesung Lee said so far the world is far off course.

If current consumption and production patterns continue, Lee said, "the global average 1.5 degrees temperature increase will be seen sometime in this decade."

Scientists emphasize that the world or humanity won't end suddenly if Earth passes the 1.5 degree mark. Mukherji said "it's not as if it's a cliff that we all fall off." But an earlier IPCC report detailed how the harms — including even nastier extreme weather — are much worse beyond 1.5 degrees of warming.

"It is certainly prudent to be planning for a future that's warmer than 1.5 degrees," said IPCC report review editor Steven Rose, an economist at the Electric Power Research Institute in the United States.

If the world continues to use all the fossil fuel-powered infrastructure either existing now or proposed, Earth will warm at least 2 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times, the report said.

Because the report is based on data from a few years ago, the calculations about fossil fuel projects already in the pipeline do not include the increase in coal and natural gas use after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It comes a week after the Biden Administration in the United States approved the huge Willow oil-drilling project in Alaska, which could produce up to 180,000 barrels of oil a day.

The report highlights the disparity between rich nations, which caused much of the problem because carbon dioxide emissions from industrialization stay in the air for more than a century, and poorer countries that get hit harder by extreme weather. Residents of poorer climate-vulnerable nations are "up to 15 times more likely to die in floods, droughts and storms," Lee said.

If the world is to achieve its climate goals, poorer countries need a three-to-six times increase in financial help to adapt to a warmer world and switch to non-polluting energy, Lee said. Countries have made financial pledges and promises of a damage compensation fund.

Developed nations "are expected to speed up the fight against climate change and do their decarbonization much faster than developing countries like Brazil. However, this does not take away our responsibility to do our part," Brazil's climate change chief, Ana Toni, said. "It will be our populations in developing countries, which are more vulnerable."

The report offers hope if action is taken, using the word "opportunity" nine times in a 27-page summary. But that word is overshadowed by 94 uses of the word "risk."

"The pace and scale of what has been done so far and current plans are insufficient to tackle climate change," IPCC chief Lee said. "We are walking when we should be sprinting."

Lee said the panel doesn't tell countries what to do to limit worse warming, adding "it's up to each government to find the best solution."

"The solutions are at hand," U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris said in a conference call about wildfires. "So let that be an alarm that lets us know that we must act with haste."

"How many reports that chill us to the bone do we need to read before we make the changes required?" asked Tina Stege, climate envoy for Marshall Islands, which are vulnerable to rising seas. "These changes will require some sacrifice — but aren't they worth it when a liveable future on this planet is what is at stake?"

## Idaho poised to allow firing-squad executions in some cases

By REBECCA BOONE and MICHAEL TARM Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Idaho is poised to allow firing squads to execute condemned inmates when the state can't get lethal-injection drugs, under a bill the Legislature passed Monday with a veto-proof majority.

Firing squads will be used only if the state cannot obtain the drugs needed for lethal injections — and one death row inmate has already had his scheduled execution postponed multiple times because of drug scarcity.

The move by Idaho lawmakers is in line with those by other states that in recent years have scrambled to revive older methods of execution because of difficulties obtaining drugs required for longstanding lethal injection programs. Pharmaceutical companies increasingly have barred executioners from using

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their drugs, saying they were meant to save lives, not take them.

Idaho Republican Gov. Brad Little has voiced his support for the death penalty but generally does not comment on legislation before he signs or vetoes it.

Only Mississippi, Utah, Oklahoma and South Carolina currently have laws allowing firing squads if other execution methods are unavailable, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. South Carolina's law is on hold pending the outcome of a legal challenge.

Some states began refurbishing electric chairs as standbys for when lethal drugs are unavailable. Others have considered — and at times, used — largely untested execution methods. In 2018, Nevada executed Carey Dean Moore with a never-before-tried drug combination that included the powerful synthetic opioid fentanyl. Alabama has built a system for executing people using nitrogen gas to induce hypoxia, but it has not yet been used.

During a historic round of 13 executions in the final months of Donald Trump's presidency, the federal government opted for the sedative pentobarbital as a replacement for lethal drugs used in the 2000s. It issued a protocol allowing firing squads for federal executions if necessary, but that method was not used.

Some lawyers for federal inmates who were eventually put to death argued in court that firing squads actually would be quicker and cause less pain than pentobarbital, which they said causes a sensation akin to drowning.

However, in a 2019 filing, U.S. lawyers cited an expert as saying someone shot by firing squad can remain conscious for 10 seconds and that it would be "severely painful, especially related to shattering of bone and damage to the spinal cord."

President Joe Biden's attorney general, Merrick Garland, ordered a temporary pause on federal executions in 2021 while the Justice Department reviewed protocols. Garland did not say how long the moratorium will last.

Idaho Sen. Doug Ricks, a Republican who co-sponsored that state's firing squad bill, told his fellow senators Monday that the state's difficulty in finding lethal injection drugs could continue "indefinitely" and that he believes death by firing squad is "humane."

"This is a rule of law issue — our criminal system should work and penalties should be exacted," Ricks said.

But Sen. Dan Foreman, also a Republican, said firing-squad executions would traumatize the people who carry them out, the people who witness them and the people who clean up afterward.

"I've seen the aftermath of shootings, and it's psychologically damaging to anybody who witnesses it," Foreman said. "The use of the firing squad is, in my opinion, beneath the dignity of the state of Idaho."

The bill originated with Republican Rep. Bruce Skaug, prompted in part by the state's inability to execute Gerald Pizzuto Jr. late last year. Pizzuto, who now has terminal cancer and other debilitating illnesses, has spent more than three decades on death row for his role in the 1985 slayings of two gold prospectors.

The Idaho Department of Correction estimates it will cost around \$750,000 to build or retrofit a death chamber for firing squad executions.

Agency Director Jeff Tewalt last year told lawmakers there would likely be as many legal challenges to planned firing squad executions as there are to lethal injections. At the time, he said he would be reluctant to ask his staffers to participate in a firing squad.

Both Tewalt and his former co-worker Kevin Kempf played a key role in obtaining the drugs used in the 2012 execution of Richard Albert Leavitt, flying to Tacoma, Washington, with more than \$15,000 in cash to buying them from a pharmacist. The trip was kept secret by the department but revealed in court documents after University of Idaho professor Aliza Cover sued for the information under a public records act.

Kempf was promoted to lead the Correction Department two years later and now is the executive director of the Correctional Leaders Association. He said the execution process is always challenging for all involved, including victims' relatives. Those challenges could be amplified in firing squad executions, he said.

"I've got to say at the same time, my thoughts go to staff members that may have to carry out something, per law, that looks like putting someone to death," Kempf told the AP during a phone interview

earlier this month. "That is nothing I would assume any correctional director would take lightly, asking someone-slash-ordering someone to do that."

Biden pledged during his campaign to work at ending the death penalty nationwide, but he has remained silent on the issue as president. Critics say his hands-off approach risked sending a message that he's OK with states adopting alternative execution methods.

## Biden issues first veto, taking on new Republican House

By ZEKE MILLER and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden issued the first veto of his presidency Monday in an early sign of shifting White House relations with the new Congress since Republicans took control of the House in January — a move that serves as a prelude to bigger battles with GOP lawmakers on government spending and the nation's debt limit.

Biden sought to kill a Republican-authored measure that would ban the government from considering environmental impacts or potential lawsuits when making investment decisions for people's retirement plans. In a video released by the White House, Biden said he vetoed the measure because it "put at risk the retirement savings of individuals across the country."

His first veto represents a more confrontational approach at the midway of Biden's term in office, as he faces a GOP-controlled House that is eager to undo parts of his policy legacy and investigate his administration and his family. Complicating matters for Biden, several Democratic senators are up for re-election next year in conservative states, giving them political incentive to put some distance between them and the White House.

The measure vetoed by Biden would have effectively reinstated a Trump-era ban on federal managers of retirement plans considering factors such as climate change, social impacts or pending lawsuits when making investment choices.

The veto could also help calm some anger from environmentalists who have been upset with the Biden administration for its recent decision to greenlight the Willow oil project, a massive and contentious drilling project in Alaska.

"The president vetoed the bill because it jeopardizes the hard-earned life savings of cops, firefighters, teachers, and other workers," White House spokesperson Robyn Patterson said.

But critics say so-called environmental, social and governance investments allocate money based on political agendas, such as a drive against climate change, rather than on earning the best returns for savers. Republicans in Congress who pushed the measure said environmental or social considerations in investments by the government are just another example of being "woke."

"In his first veto, Biden just sided with woke Wall Street over workers," House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., tweeted on Monday. "Tells you exactly where his priorities lie." He said "it's clear Biden wants Wall Street to use your retirement savings to fund his far-left political causes."

Biden's veto is likely to prevail. Just three Democrats in Congress — one in the House, and two in the Senate — supported Republicans in the matter, making it unlikely a two-thirds majority in both chambers could be assembled to overcome Biden's veto.

Rep. Jared Golden, D-Maine, was the sole Democrat to back the resolution in the House, while Sens. Jon Tester, D-Mont., and Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., supported it in the Senate. Golden is a perennial target of Republicans seeking to oust him from his conservative district, while Tester and Manchin are both up for re-election next year.

"This administration continues to prioritize their radical policy agenda over the economic, energy and national security needs of our country, and it is absolutely infuriating," Manchin said in a statement.

Though Biden swiftly vetoed the investment resolution, other measures coming from Capitol Hill in the weeks and months ahead could be a tougher call for the White House.

The administration initially signaled that Biden would reject a Republican-authored measure that would override a crime measure passed by the District of Columbia Council, but the president later said he would

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sign it and did so Monday. He also signed a bill directing the federal government to declassify intelligence related to the origins of COVID-19.

Biden's immediate predecessor, Donald Trump, vetoed 10 bills during his term in office, while Barack Obama vetoed 12, according to the the American Presidency Project at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Both had one of their vetoes overridden by Congress.

The president with the most vetoes was Franklin Delano Roosevelt — who was elected to four terms before a constitutional amendment limited all presidents to two — with 635 vetoes. Six U.S. presidents never vetoed any legislation in office.

## 'Ted Lasso' visits White House, promotes mental health care

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fictional soccer coach Ted Lasso used a White House visit Monday to encourage people, even in politically divided Washington, to make it a point to check in often with friends, family and co-workers to "ask how they're doing, and listen, sincerely,"

Comedian Jason Sudeikis, who plays the title character — an American coaching a soccer team in London — and other cast members were meeting with President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden to talk about how mental health contributes to overall well-being.

Mental health and looking after one another is a theme of "Ted Lasso," Sudeikis told reporters from the lectern as he helped press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre open her daily White House briefing. The Emmy-winning, feel-good show on Apple TV+ just opened its third season.

"While it's easier said than done, we also have to know that we shouldn't be afraid to ask for help ourselves," Sudeikis said. "That does take a lot, especially when it's something that has such a negative stigma to it, such as mental health and it doesn't need to be that way.

"And if you can ask for that help from a professional, fantastic," he continued. "If it needs to be a loved one, equally as good, in a lot of ways."

Mental health is part of Biden's bipartisan "unity agenda." He has called on lawmakers to direct more resources toward fighting what some say is a crisis, and the administration has surged funding to bolster a new 988 suicide and crisis line and put more mental-health professionals in schools.

Sudeikis said there should be no stigma attached to reaching out for help because everyone knows someone who has needed a shoulder to lean on, or has been that person themselves.

"No matter who you are, no matter where you live, no matter who you voted for, we all probably, I assume, we all know someone who has, or have been that someone ourselves actually, that's struggled, that's felt isolated, that's felt anxious, that has felt alone," he said.

"It's actually one of the many things, believe it or not, that we all have in common as human beings," Sudeikis continued. "That means it's something that we can all, you know, and should, talk about with one another when we're feeling that way or when we recognize that in someone feeling that way."

He issued a special appeal for people in the nation's capital.

"I know in this town a lot of folks don't always agree, right, and don't always feel heard, seen, listened to," Sudeikis said. "But I truly believe we should all do our best to help take care of each other. That's my own personal belief. I think that's something that everyone up here on stage believes in."

The Bidens have seen some of "Ted Lasso" and are familiar with its messages of hope and kindness, according to the White House.

Joining Sudeikis at the daily briefing were cast members Hannah Waddingham, Brett Goldstein, Brendan Hunt and Toheeb Jimoh. The group was given a tour of the president's private living quarters, a White House official said.

As he left the briefing room, Sudeikis was asked if he would do the Joe Biden impression he used to do on "Saturday Night Live," but he declined, saying that "they got the real one here now."

Sudeikis and the cast were the latest entertainers to visit the White House and associate themselves with issues the Democratic president and first lady are raising awareness about.

Singer Olivia Rodrigo visited during the pandemic to help encourage young people like herself to get

vaccinated against COVID-19. BTS, the popular Korean boy band, helped promote Asian inclusion and combat bias against Asian Americans.

Actor Matthew McConaughey delivered a passionate appeal for tighter gun laws last year after the shooting at an elementary school in his hometown, Uvalde, Texas, that killed 19 children and two teachers.

Singer/actors Mary J. Blige and Selena Gomez participated in separate events with Jill Biden focused on cancer awareness and youth mental health, respectively, and singer Sam Smith and Cyndi Lauper performed the day Biden signed gay marriage legislation into law in December.

## **1 dead, 1 hurt in Texas school shooting; suspect arrested**

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — A student opened fire at a Dallas-area school Monday morning, killing one student and injuring another before being arrested on a capital murder charge, police said.

The shooting began on a high school campus in the suburb of Arlington around 6:55 a.m., before many students arrived for the first day back to classes after the spring break, according to police and school district officials.

Arlington police Chief Al Jones said Monday that a male student who was shot died at a hospital and a female victim was receiving medical care after being "grazed" by shrapnel, causing injuries that aren't life threatening. He declined to give their ages or grades.

Another male student was arrested at the scene and charged with capital murder, Jones said at an afternoon news conference. The police chief declined to identify the suspected shooter because he is a minor, but said he is being held at a juvenile detention center in the area.

The gunman ran from the scene without ever entering the Lamar High School building and was taken into custody by responding officers "within minutes," Jones said. He said investigators recovered a gun used in the shooting but the shooter's motive and where he got the weapon remain unclear.

Jones said the police officers normally stationed at the school weren't there during the shooting, which began shortly before the officers were set to start duty.

Arlington Independent School District spokeswoman Anita Foster said the school went into lockdown during the shooting but school buses and other arriving students were diverted from the campus before classes were set to begin. Police said they completed their search of the school at 10:40 a.m.

School staff began reuniting students who'd been sheltering inside the building with their parents or guardians around 11 a.m., according to Superintendent Marcelo Cavazos. He said there would be no classes Tuesday and counselors would be available to students and staff on Wednesday.

In Texas, people convicted of capital murder can be sentenced to death. Prosecutors make the ultimate decision about what charges to pursue in a case, and those are not always the same as the charges brought upon arrest.

## **Bad Bunny's ex-girlfriend files lawsuit seeking \$40M**

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Bad Bunny's ex-girlfriend is suing the superstar for at least \$40 million over a well-known voice recording she provided the singer before he became famous.

Carliz De La Cruz Hernández, whose breathy "Bad Bunny, baby" recording was included in two of the artist's songs, claimed in a lawsuit filed this month in a Puerto Rico court that her voice and the phrase she came up with are being used without her permission.

The lawsuit, which was first reported by online Puerto Rico news site Noticel, notes that the phrase was used in the "Pa Ti," song, which has more than 355 million views on YouTube and more than 235 million reproductions on Spotify. It also was used in the "Dos Mil 16" song, which has more than 60 million views on YouTube and 280 million reproductions on Spotify.

The lawsuit states that De La Cruz's "distinguishable voice" also has been used without her consent for songs, records, promotions, worldwide concerts, television, radio and social and musical platforms.



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"Since then, thousands of people have commented directly on Carliz's social media networks, as well as every time she goes to a public place, about the 'Bad Bunny, baby.' This has caused, and currently causes, that De La Cruz feels worried, anguished, intimidated, overwhelmed and anxious," the lawsuit states.

Also sued is Noah Kamil Assad Byrne, manager for Bad Bunny, whose real name is Benito Martínez Ocasio.

Assad and representatives of Bad Bunny did not immediately respond to a message for comment.

De La Cruz and Martínez first became a couple in 2011. A year later, they began studying at the University of Puerto Rico in the north coastal town of Arecibo while also working at a nearby grocery store. The lawsuit stated that during that time, Martínez was constantly creating songs and rhythms and would seek opinions from De La Cruz, who also was in charge of scheduling his parties and handling invoices and contracts.

The birth of the phrase, "Bad Bunny, baby," came about in 2015, and Martínez asked De La Cruz to record herself saying it. She did so in a bathroom one day while staying with a friend because that's where it was least noisy and then sent it to him, the lawsuit stated.

On Jan. 1, 2016, Martínez asked De La Cruz to marry him, and they made plans to do so in July 2016. But in April 2016, Rimas Entertainment signed Martínez. That same year, De La Cruz was accepted into the University of Puerto Rico's law school, and she ended her relationship with Martínez in May 2016.

They got back together in 2017, but once again went their separate paths.

Then in May 2022, a Bad Bunny representative reached out to De La Cruz, saying he needed to talk to her.

"In that call, (the representative) said, 'I know you don't like to talk about Voldemort (referring to Martínez), but I need to ask you something,'" the lawsuit stated.

He offered her \$2,000 to buy the recording of her voice. De La Cruz declined and then spoke with someone at Rimas Entertainment who also offered to buy it, saying the recording would be used in the upcoming album, "Un Verano Sin Ti," the lawsuit stated.

But a deal was never reached, and the song was published without De La Cruz's consent, according to the lawsuit.

## The big problem for endangered orcas? Inbreeding

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — People have taken many steps in recent decades to help the Pacific Northwest's endangered killer whales, which have long suffered from starvation, pollution and the legacy of having many of their number captured for display in marine parks.

They've breached dikes and removed dams to create wetland habitat for Chinook salmon, the orcas' most important food. They've limited commercial fishing to try to ensure prey for the whales. They've made boats slow down and keep farther away from the animals to reduce their stress and to quiet the waters so they can better hunt.

So far, those efforts have had limited success, and research published Monday in the journal *Nature Ecology and Evolution* suggests why: The whales are so inbred that they are dying younger and their population is not recovering. Female killer whales take about 20 years to reach peak fertility, and the females may not be living long enough to ensure the growth of their population.

While that news sounds grim for the revered orcas — known as the "southern resident" killer whales — it also underscores the urgency of conservation efforts, said Kim Parsons, a geneticist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's NOAA Fisheries who co-authored the study. The population is not necessarily doomed, she said.

"It's not often inbreeding itself that will result in a shortened lifespan or kill an individual," Parsons said. "It's really that inbreeding makes these individuals more vulnerable to disease or environmental factors. We can support the population by supporting the environment and giving them the best chance possible."

The struggles of the charismatic population of orcas that frequent the waters between Washington state and the Canadian province of British Columbia have been well documented — including in 2018, when one grieving mother carried her stillborn calf for 17 days in an apparent effort to mourn or revive it.

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The southern resident population comprises three clans of whales known as the J, K and L pods. They are socially distinct and even communicate differently from other orca populations, including the nearby northern residents, which are listed as threatened and which primarily range from Vancouver Island up to southeast Alaska.

While the southern residents' range overlaps with other populations of killer whales, they haven't regularly interbred in 30 generations, the researchers said.

In the 1960s and 1970s, dozens of Pacific Northwest whales were caught for display in marine theme parks. The whale-capture industry argued that there were many orcas in the sea, and that some could be sustainably caught.

At least 13 orcas died in the roundups, and 45 were delivered to theme parks around the world — reducing the southern resident population by about 40%. The brutality of the captures began to draw public outcry and a lawsuit to stop them in Washington state.

Today only 73 southern residents remain, according to the Center for Whale Research on Washington state's San Juan Island. That's just two more than in 1971. Of those captured, only one — 56-year-old Lolita, at the Miami Seaquarium — survives. The Seaquarium announced last year it would no longer feature Lolita in shows.

Prior studies have suggested that inbreeding was a problem, including a 2018 study that found just two males had fathered more than half the calves born to the southern residents since 1990.

For the new research, NOAA geneticist Marty Kardos, Parsons and other colleagues sequenced the genomes of 100 living and dead southern residents, including 90% of those alive now. Those whales had lower levels of genetic diversity and higher levels of inbreeding than other populations of killer whales in the North Pacific, they found.

The capture of the whales decades ago, as well as the geographic or social isolation of the animals, likely explains the inbreeding, the researchers said.

Meanwhile, conservation efforts have helped other North Pacific orca populations thrive. The northern resident killer whales have increased from about 122 animals in 1974 to more than 300 by 2018. Like the southern residents, they only eat fish, primarily salmon — unlike many other killer whales, which eat mammals such as seals.

The Alaska resident killer whale population is estimated to have doubled from 1984 to 2010. According to the researchers, the southern residents would likely be on a similar trajectory if not for their elevated levels of inbreeding.

Inbreeding has also afflicted other populations of isolated or endangered animals, such as mountain lions in California, gorillas in Africa and bottle nose dolphins off western Australia. In some cases, scientists may be able to improve the gene pool in one population by capturing and introducing animals from another.

That's not the case for orcas, which are massive and free-swimming. Further, the southern residents already have opportunities to interbreed — they just haven't done so, Parsons said.

"We really have to leave it to those whales to mate with whom they choose and support the population in other ways," Parsons said.

## Putin welcomes China's Xi to Kremlin amid Ukraine fighting

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin warmly welcomed Chinese leader Xi Jinping to the Kremlin on Monday, sending a powerful message to Western leaders that their efforts to isolate Moscow over the fighting in Ukraine have fallen short.

Xi's trip — his first abroad since his re-election earlier this month — showed off Beijing's new diplomatic swagger and gave a political lift to Putin just days after an international arrest warrant was issued for the Kremlin leader on war crimes charges related to Ukraine.

The two major powers have described Xi's three-day trip as an opportunity to deepen their "no-limits friendship." China looks to Russia as a source of oil and gas for its energy-hungry economy, and as a

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partner in standing up to what both see as U.S. aggression, domination of global affairs and unfair punishment for their human rights records.

The two countries, among the five U.N. Security Council's permanent members, also have held joint military drills. U.S. officials have picked up indications China is considering supplying Russia with weapons for its fight in Ukraine but have seen no evidence they've actually done so.

The leaders smiled and shook hands before sitting down at the start of their meeting, calling each other "dear friend" and exchanging compliments. Putin congratulated Xi on his re-election and voiced hope for building even stronger ties.

"China has made a colossal leap ahead in its development in recent years," Putin said, adding that "it's causing genuine interest all around the world, and we even feel a bit envious," as Xi smiled.

The Kremlin leader welcomed China's proposals for a political settlement in Ukraine and noted Russia is open for talks.

"We will discuss all those issues, including your initiative that we highly respect," Putin said. "Our cooperation in the international arena undoubtedly helps strengthen the basic principles of the global order and multipolarity."

Both Moscow and Beijing have accused Washington of trying to isolate them and hold back their development as they challenge it for regional and global leadership.

In an increasingly multipolar world, the U.S. and its allies have been unable to build a broad front against Putin. While 141 countries condemned Moscow in a United Nations vote marking the first anniversary of Russian troops rolling into Ukraine, several members of the G-20 — including India, China and South Africa — abstained. Many African nations also have refrained from openly criticizing Russia.

"We hope that the strategic partnership between China and Russia will on the one hand uphold international fairness and justice, and on the other hand promote the common prosperity and development of our countries," Xi said.

In their 4 1/2 hours of talks, along with a dinner that included a Pacific seafood platter and roast venison in cherry sauce, Putin would offer Xi a "detailed explanation" of Moscow's actions in Ukraine, according to Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov. Broader talks on a range of subjects are scheduled Tuesday.

For Putin, Xi's presence is a prestigious, diplomatic boost to show partnership in the face of Western efforts to isolate Russia over Ukraine.

In an article published in the Chinese People's Daily newspaper, Putin described Xi's visit as a "landmark event" that "reaffirms the special nature of the Russia-China partnership" and said the meeting signaled that the two countries aren't prepared to accept attempts to weaken them.

"The U.S. policy of simultaneously deterring Russia and China, as well as all those who do not bend to the American diktat, is getting ever fiercer and more aggressive," he wrote.

China portrays Xi's visit as part of normal diplomatic exchanges and has offered little detail about its purpose, though Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told reporters Monday that China "will uphold its objective and fair position on the Ukrainian crisis and play a constructive role in promoting peace talks." Xi didn't directly mention the Ukraine fighting or his peace plan when he sat down for the talks with Putin.

Beijing's leap into Ukraine issues follows its recent success in brokering talks between Iran and its chief Middle Eastern rival, Saudi Arabia, which agreed to restore their diplomatic ties after years of tensions.

Following that success, Xi called for China to play a bigger role in managing global affairs.

Although they boast of a "no-limits" partnership, Beijing has conducted a China First policy. It has refrained from supplying Russia's military — a move that could worsen relations with Washington and turn important European trade partners against China. On the other hand, it has refused to condemn Moscow's aggression and criticized Western sanctions against Moscow, while accusing NATO and the United States of provoking Putin's military action.

Western pressure has made Russia increasingly reliant on Beijing, observers said.

Alexander Gabuev, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment, noted that Beijing is aiming at "getting Russia as a junior partner deeper into China's pocket."

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Dmitry Oreshkin, professor at Free University in Riga, Latvia, observed that Beijing benefits from tensions between Moscow and the West, by gaining access to cheap Russian energy resources. "It's very convenient for China, which couldn't get such a discount before," he said.

China last month called for a cease-fire and peace talks. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy cautiously welcomed Beijing's involvement, but the overture fizzled.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby urged Xi "to press President Putin directly on the need to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity." He also said the U.S. administration believes Xi could play "a constructive role" by speaking directly with Zelenskyy.

The Kremlin has welcomed China's peace plan, while U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday any proposal that left Russian forces in place in Ukraine would merely let Moscow reequip and otherwise regain strength to resume its offensive.

"Calling for a cease-fire that does not include the removal of Russian forces from Ukrainian territory would effectively be supporting the ratification of Russian conquest," he told reporters in Washington. "The world should not be fooled by any tactical move by Russia, supported by China or any other country, to freeze the war on its own terms."

Kyiv officials say they won't bend in their terms for a peace accord.

Ukraine's allies, meanwhile, are stepping up their support. The State Department announced Monday that the U.S. will send Ukraine \$350 million in weapons and equipment. The latest aid package includes ammunition, such as rockets for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, fuel tanker trucks and riverine boats.

In Brussels, European Union countries endorsed a fast-track procedure to provide Ukraine with artillery shells, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said. He hailed "a historic decision" for the 27-nation bloc and Norway to send Ukraine 1 million 155 mm artillery shells within 12 months.

Xi's trip came after the International Criminal Court in The Hague announced Friday it wants to put Putin on trial for the abductions of thousands of children from Ukraine.

The Kremlin doesn't recognize the court's authority and has rejected its move against Putin as "legally null and void." China, the U.S. and Ukraine also don't recognize the ICC, but the decision tarnished Putin's international standing.

China's Foreign Ministry urged the ICC to "respect the jurisdictional immunity" of a head of state and "avoid politicization and double standards."

Russia's Investigative Committee retaliated Monday by opening a criminal case against a prosecutor and three judges of the ICC over the arrest warrants issued for Putin and his commissioner for children's rights, Maria Lvova-Belova. The committee called the ICC's prosecution "unlawful" because it was, among other things, a "criminal prosecution of a knowingly innocent person."

## The maddest March ever? Underdogs head to the Sweet 16

By JOHN MARSHALL AP Basketball Writer

We know you're upset. Underdogs have blown up every bracket in the country.

An upside of the upsets: perhaps the maddest March ever.

Defending national champion Kansas and fellow No. 1 seed Purdue are gone — the Boilermakers with a slice of unwanted history. The Sweet 16 won't have blue bloods Kentucky, Duke or North Carolina for only the second time since 1979.

In are upstarts like Princeton, Florida Atlantic and a team picked to finish last in the Big 12 Conference. And, this being March, of course there's Tom Izzo.

The bracket has been nearly devoid of the buzzer-beaters that college hoops fans have been accustomed to, but the games have been close. There have been four games decided by one point, the most since there were six in 2017 and three short of the record last matched in 1998.

SOUTH REGION

Alabama has looked every bit the No. 1 overall seed, blowing out Texas A&M-Corpus Christi and Maryland

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despite turmoil swirling around the program.

Waiting for Alabama in Louisville, Kentucky, will be San Diego State. The fifth-seeded Aztecs are old and love to knock around opponents — just ask College of Charleston and Furman.

The second game marks Princeton's first Sweet 16 in 56 years. The No. 15 seed Tigers had the first major March upset by knocking off No. 2 Arizona and proved it was no fluke by taking down Missouri.

They face Creighton, one of three Big East teams to get this far. Inconsistent early, the bombing Bluejays and big man Ryan Kalkbrenner are in the Sweet 16 for the second time in three seasons after bouncing No. 3 seed Baylor.

## EAST REGION

Florida Atlantic won the battle of bracket darlings by knocking off Fairleigh Dickinson, the second No. 16 seed ever to beat a No. 1, taking down Purdue.

The Owls better be ready for some bruises against Tennessee at Madison Square Garden in their first Sweet 16. The third-seeded Vols bullied their way through the first two rounds, pushing around Duke after grinding out a win over Louisiana.

Sharing the Garden marquee will be Michigan State and Kansas State.

The Spartans are at their best in March under coach Izzo, who won his record 16th NCAA Tournament game as a lower seed by bouncing No. 2 seed Marquette.

Jerome Tang is taking underdog Kansas State from one Manhattan to another in his first season in the Little Apple.

Picked last in the Big 12, the Wildcats and undersized but undeterred guard Markquis Nowell shoved aside Montana State and wore down Kentucky for their first Sweet 16 since 2018.

## MIDWEST REGION

Tang said the Wildcats won because they've "got dudes." Houston has a few of its own.

The Midwest's No. 1 seed, the Cougars have played the lockdown defense that made them a Final Four favorite at the start of the season, holding Northern Kentucky to 52 points and Auburn to 64.

The Cougars' bid to play the Final Four at home now heads to Kansas City, Missouri, where they will face Miami.

The speedy, fifth-seeded Hurricanes hit Indiana with a gale force of offensive rebounds, scoring 29 second-chance points to reach the Sweet 16 for the second straight season under Jim Larrañaga.

Another Texas team is still in the mix to reach the Final Four in its home state — the one from Austin.

No. 2 seed Texas overcame the midseason firing of coach Chris Beard to play some outstanding basketball under interim coach Rodney Terry. The Longhorns shut down sweet-shooting Colgate in the first round and earned their first Sweet 16 appearance in 15 years with a 71-66 win over Penn State.

Up next is another coach making the most of an opportunity.

Fired by Arizona two years ago, Sean Miller landed back where he started at Xavier. The Musketeers earned their first Sweet 16 appearance since 2017 with a 84-73 win over Pittsburgh.

## WEST REGION

Losing guard Jaylen Clark has done little to slow down No. 2 UCLA. Now the Bruins hope their lineup isn't depleted further after key guard David Singleton injured his ankle late in a 69-63 victory over Northwestern.

UCLA still has Jaime Jaquez and Tyger Campbell, which will give them at least a shot at beating Gonzaga in Las Vegas.

There were midseason whispers the Zags were in a down year. An eighth straight trip to the Sweet 16 under Mark Few put those to rest.

Two coaches with familiar last names face off in the other Sin City game.

Eric Musselman, son of longtime NBA and college coach Bill Musselman, has shown off his coaching chops by leading Arkansas to the Sweet 16 for the third straight season. The Razorbacks got there with a takedown of top-seeded Kansas that had Musselman taking off his shirt — again.

Danny Hurley's father is a Hall of Fame high school coach, his brother the NCAA's all-time assist leader. Bob's son and Bobby's brother has revitalized UConn, taking the Huskies to the Sweet 16 for the first time in nine years.

## Putin sticks to protocol during Chinese leader Xi's visit

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — President Vladimir Putin wasn't waiting at the end of the red carpet to greet Chinese leader Xi Jinping upon his arrival in Russia on Monday for a high-profile visit.

But it wasn't a snub.

Russia's standard protocol for visiting dignitaries calls for them to be welcomed at the airport by a lower-ranking Cabinet official.

Many observers argue that the fighting in Ukraine has made Russia increasingly dependent on China for support as the country becomes isolated from the West.

But Putin didn't deviate from the script, and the start of Xi's trip was like that of any visiting leader.

Putin sent Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Chernyshenko to the Russian capital's Vnukovo airport to meet Xi after he stepped off his Boeing 747.

The Russian president, meanwhile, was far away in central Moscow busy with other commitments before his high-stakes dinner with Xi in the evening.

Putin began his day by making an appearance at a meeting of the Interior Ministry's top officials. He also addressed a parliamentary conference involving lawmakers from African nations.

Back at the airport, Xi listened as a Russian military band played the national anthems of China and Russia. He then walked past a line of honorary guards accompanied by Chernyshenko.

While Putin didn't break protocol and pamper Xi with a surprise appearance at the airport, the Russian leader showered his Chinese guest with praise when he greeted him inside the Kremlin before a private dinner.

Facing the Chinese leader across a small table after they shook hands, Putin hailed what he described as China's "colossal leap forward" under Xi's leadership, adding that he feels a bit of envy — a remark that drew a thin smile from Xi.

Xi responded in kind, saying he was sure that Putin would receive strong support in the presidential election next year, even though the Russian leader hasn't yet declared his intention to run.

They spent about 4 1/2 hours over a seven-course dinner, which included such offerings as a Pacific seafood platter, a sterlet — or small sturgeon — soup, quail and mushroom pancakes and venison roasted in cherry sauce. Putin got out to see Xi off and they shook hands again.

Before the meeting began, Putin described Xi's visit as a "landmark event" in an article published in China's top People's Daily newspaper, saying it offers a "great opportunity for me to meet with my good old friend with whom we enjoy the warmest relationship." He also wrote in detail about their first meeting in 2010, adding that he and Xi met about 40 times and citing a line from Chinese philosopher Confucius that said: "Is it not a joy to have friends coming from afar!"

Xi's visit offers an important political boost to Putin just days after the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for the Russian leader on charges of alleged involvement in abductions of thousands of children from Ukraine.

Moscow, which doesn't recognize the court's jurisdiction, dismissed the move as "legally null and void," but it further ramped up the pressure on the Russian leader.

After Monday's private dinner, Putin and Xi will hold official talks on Tuesday that will also be attended by top officials from both countries. They are expected to issue conclusive statements after the negotiations.

Analysts say that Western sanctions have made Russia increasingly reliant on China.

"This relationship is increasingly asymmetrical — China has much more leverage," said Alexander Gabuev, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment who has long studied Russia-China ties.

Gabuev noted that Xi could be expected to maintain strong support for Putin amid mounting Western pressure.

"The reality is that China sees absolutely no upsides in dumping Vladimir Putin, because there will be no incentives or no points earned in the relationship with the U.S.," he said.

While most observers say that Beijing will be unlikely to offer Moscow military assistance as the U.S. and other Western allies fear, the alliance with Beijing would allow the Russian leader to pursue his course in Ukraine.

"This helps Russia stay defiant against Western sanctions," tweeted Chris Weafer, CEO and Russian economy analyst at the consulting firm Macro-Advisory. "So long as Russia can trade with China, and other Asian states, it is no danger of running out of money or being forced to concede on the battlefield."

## Pay transparency is spreading. Here's what you need to know

By CORA LEWIS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. employers are increasingly posting salary ranges for job openings, even in states where it's not required by law, according to analysts with several major job search websites.

Following new legislation in New York City, California, Washington, Colorado, and elsewhere, employers across the country are becoming more transparent about pay in order to stay competitive with companies in states that require employers to post salary ranges, experts say. A tight labor market and significant increase in remote work have also contributed to the rise.

The number of U.S. job postings that include salary information more than doubled between February 2020 and February 2023, from 18.4% to 43.7%, according to a new report from job search site Indeed.

Salary visibility is lowest in the southern U.S., which accounted for 18 of the 20 least transparent metro areas, and highest in the western part of the country, which tends to have more regulation.

Advocates say it's a trend that benefits women and people of color, who statistically fare less well in hiring negotiations.

Rather than placing the responsibility on the job-seeker or employee to determine how their pay compares to coworkers, and what fair compensation might be, the laws shift that expectation to the employer.

Kate Bahn, chief economist at the Washington Center for Equitable Growth, says that means employers have less of an upper hand in determining pay. Laws that forbid employers from asking potential hires about salary history in recent years do similar work.

In 2021, the median pay for full-time women workers was about 83% of men's pay, according to federal data, and women make less than their male counterparts in nearly all fields. Black women make 64 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, according to a report by the National Partnership for Women and Families. Latina women make 54 cents and Native American women 51 cents.

Keegan Vance Forte, 37, a freelancer based in Jersey City, New Jersey, is looking for a permanent position either in New York or New Jersey. She said she's noticed more salary listings for open roles in both states during the past several months than she did when job hunting in the past. (New Jersey does not have a law requiring transparency. New York City's law, which requires employers to post a good-faith salary range with every posting, took effect in November.)

"I'm still getting used to it," she said. "When I see a salary posting with a job listing, my eyes widen."

In the past decade, Forte has held roles in business development, marketing and company partnerships, and she says knowing the available range is helpful to avoid wasting both her time and the hiring manager's.

"Instead of dancing around the elephant-in-the-room question at the end, you at least know you're playing in the same ballpark," she said.

Previously, Forte has spent weeks interviewing for a position only to discover the salary wasn't in an acceptable range for her.

"Over a career, that can be very time consuming," she said.

Daniel Zhao, lead economist for job site GlassDoor, said that compliance with the new laws requiring disclosure is already strong in New York City, California, and Washington, and even stronger in Colorado, which has had a law mandating transparency in effect since 2019.

"The additional compliance in Colorado implies it will improve in the other states," he said. "And what we're really noticing is that, since the laws have taken effect, more employers have decided to share salaries nationwide."

Major companies including Microsoft, CitiGroup, and Google have publicly committed to posting salary

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ranges for all jobs across the country, rather than only in the states where it's legally required.

"Companies that are not necessarily in locations that now have laws — they're disclosing that information anyway," said Vicki Salemi, a career expert at job site Monster. "It's becoming more of the norm because job-seekers are expecting it."

Salemi, who also previously worked as a recruiter, said employers tend to compete for job candidates across state lines, including neighboring states that have different laws.

"That means it's in their best interest to start sharing their own ranges, so the job seekers can compare apples to apples," she said. "It's a virtuous feedback loop."

She called the new laws a "game-changer" in reducing the taboo around discussing pay.

In New York City, the NYC Commission on Human Rights is early in its enforcement efforts. But Jose Rios Lua, the commission's executive director of communications, said that the new law has been "life-changing for a lot of folks."

"Before they've gone through what could turn out to be a long application process, they know the salary range, so they know if a position is worth pursuing," he said. "For those in lower-earning jobs, it might mean the difference from living paycheck to paycheck."

A provision of New York City's law also gives companies 30 days to rectify any violation in a job posting — whether that's listing an overly broad salary range or not having a range at all. It's an unusual grace period.

In the first few months, the commission has seen that both employers and prospective employees have been "vigilant about job postings," he said.

Any member of the public can come to the commission and file an inquiry. If a company repeatedly violates the law, they will be subject to penalties including fees. Anyone who encounters a business not complying with the new salary transparency law can file an inquiry at the commission website.

The law is also proving illuminating for some employees who weren't necessarily looking for new jobs.

Kimberly Nguyen, 25, a UX copywriter in a contract role at CitiGroup, noticed a job posting for a comparable role, but as a full-time employee with a significantly higher salary range. She shared it with her fellow contracted copy-writers and tweeted about it. The group brought it to their managers to try to negotiate for higher pay. Nguyen said they're still waiting.

"They told us it's out of their hands, and there's nothing they can do," she said. "The managers said they hadn't even realized the job had been posted."

A spokesperson for CitiGroup said Citi pays the contracting company that employs Nguyen a market-competitive rate for their services, and that the contractor negotiates individual pay rates. The spokesperson said Citi is hiring for a full-time role for an employee with five to eight years of experience, more than Nguyen has, and the salary range reflects that.

Nguyen's experience shows the limits of pay transparency in a highly contracted workforce. For now, she says she's looking for full-time roles with higher pay at other companies, while still advocating for pay increases for contracted workers at Citi. She said she supports pay transparency and sees it as a tool for pay equity.

"It's a hill I'm willing to die on, but I also have to pay rent," she said.

## US: War crimes on all sides in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration announced Monday that it has determined all sides in the brutal conflict in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region committed war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The move carries no immediate U.S. policy implications but lends weight to calls for such allegations to be prosecuted.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced the determination less than a week after he returned from a visit to Ethiopia during which he met with Ethiopian government and Tigrayan officials as well as victims of the conflict, but said little about the U.S. view of prospects for accountability.



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His determination covers members of the Ethiopian and Eritrean national armies as well as the Tigray People's Liberation Front and forces aligned with the Amhara region. Blinken said those responsible for atrocities must be held accountable.

He said after "careful review of the law and facts" he had determined that members of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces, Eritrean Defense Forces, Tigray People's Liberation Front forces and Amhara forces committed war crimes during the conflict in northern Ethiopia.

Members of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amhara forces also committed crimes against humanity, "including murder, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and persecution," Blinken said. "Members of the Amhara forces also committed the crime against humanity of deportation or forcible transfer and committed ethnic cleansing in western Tigray."

Blinken announced the determination as he rolled out the State Department's annual global human rights reports, which cover 2022 and also called out Afghanistan, China, Cuba, Iran, Myanmar and Nicaragua for abuses.

"I condemn the unspeakable violence against civilians and destruction that occurred in northern Ethiopia," he said. "Recognizing the atrocities committed by all parties is an essential step to achieving a sustainable peace. Those most responsible for atrocities, including those in positions of command, must be held accountable."

The formal determination is more measured than his assertion early in the two-year conflict that "ethnic cleansing" was taking place in parts of Tigray.

Last year, a United Nations commission of inquiry said it had turned up evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity by Ethiopian government forces, Tigray forces and Eritrea's military. But the commission also said Ethiopian forces had resorted to "starvation of civilians" as a tool of war and that Ethiopian and Eritrean forces were found to be responsible for "sexual slavery" — while Tigray forces were not.

The conflict, which ended with a peace deal in November, killed an estimated half-million civilians in Tigray alone, according to Ghent University researchers, a death toll echoed by U.S. officials.

Blinken called on all sides to respect the agreement and follow through on pledges "to implement an inclusive and comprehensive transitional justice process."

He said Afghanistan's ruling Taliban, which took power after the U.S. withdrawal from the country two years ago, "relentlessly discriminates against and represses women and girls" and has taken action that threatens humanitarian assistance to all Afghans.

On China, Blinken said Beijing continues abuses, including genocide and crimes against humanity, against Uyghur Muslims in its western Xinjiang area. It also continues the repression of Tibetans and pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong, along with mainland Chinese citizens who have tried to exercise basic freedoms.

In Myanmar, also known as Burma, Blinken said human rights "have further eroded," and in Nicaragua, he said "the authoritarian government continues to detain political prisoners and hold them in appalling prison conditions."

## Arrests as Kenya opposition leads anti-government protests

By EVELYNE MUSAMBI Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — At least three Kenyan legislators and several protesters have been arrested and then released for participating in protests in Kenya's capital, Nairobi, in which opposition supporters demanded the resignation of President William Ruto.

Opposition leader Raila Odinga joined thousands of demonstrators and announced weekly demonstrations until the president resigns or the cost of living goes down.

Odinga's convoy of dozens of cars drove around the city after being blocked from accessing the central business district.

He made public addresses on several stops and his motorcade was teargassed several times by police. In response his supporters pelted stones at the police.

Odinga asserted that his car was shot at by the police and his party spokesperson shared a photo of a shattered windshield online.

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Police did not respond to a request from The Associated Press to comment on the shooting claims. The legislators arrested have been released and are to appear in court on Thursday on charges that have not yet been announced, according to Nairobi police chief Adamson Bungei. He said others arrested in the protests would be released after paying cash bail. Bungei had over the weekend said police had denied the opposition permission to hold their protests and that any congregation would be illegal. The opposition called for protests against Ruto who they say was not validly elected in the August 2022 elections. They are also blaming Ruto's administration for the rising cost of living. Opposition leader Raila Odinga on Sunday insisted that protests would proceed as planned and demonstrators would march to State House, the official residence of the president. Odinga said Kenyan citizens have a constitutional right to demonstrate and the role of the police is to protect them after they issue a notification in advance. Police have been heavily deployed to State House with motorists and pedestrians being stopped from accessing the road there. Most shops in Nairobi's central business district closed on Monday as business owners feared looting. Kenya's deputy president Rigathi Gachagua said the country has lost about 2 billion Kenya shillings (\$15 million) due to Monday's protests. Gachagua urged Odinga to call off the protests and think about the losses to the economy. The leaders who have been arrested include the senate minority leader Stewart Madzayo and members of parliament Opiyo Wandayi and Amina Mnyazi. Other legislators who had turned up at the designated meeting point in the city were dispersed by the police with teargas. They retreated to parliament buildings where they announced that protests would continue through the afternoon. Kenya's opposition has in the past held violent demonstrations in which people have died.

## Will the Credit Suisse bank takeover calm financial fears?

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — In a bid to ease turmoil in the world financial system, Swiss authorities engineered a plan for the UBS bank to acquire its troubled smaller rival Credit Suisse at a marked-down price.

It's another urgent attempt to fight fears that have put the financial world on edge 15 years after the failure of U.S. investment bank Lehman Brothers pitched the global economy into a crisis.

Here are key things to know — and some things that aren't yet known — about the takeover and the wider market anxiety fueled by bank failures in the U.S.

### WHY IS UBS TAKING OVER CREDIT SUISSE?

Swiss authorities pushed UBS to take over its rival after the price of Credit Suisse shares plunged and depositors fled, raising fears that it could fail.

Credit Suisse isn't just any bank. Unlike midsize Silicon Valley Bank, which went under earlier this month in the U.S., it is one of 30 banks classified as globally significant because it could pose a risk of bigger trouble if it collapses, as happened with Lehman.

Credit Suisse's troubles pre-dated Silicon Valley's failure, including a \$5.5 billion loss on its dealings with private investment firm Archegos and a spying scandal.

Then fears about banks fed by the U.S. failures made investors take a closer, less friendly look at banks. When Credit Suisse's biggest investor, Saudi National Bank, refused to put up more money, investors and depositors headed for the exits.

### WILL THE TAKEOVER RESTORE CONFIDENCE IN THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL SYSTEM?

Confidence in banks is shaky right now. That said, economists, bank regulators and stock-market analysts generally say that banks are in better shape than in 2008, with thicker financial buffers against losses and a slew of new regulations.

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And this time, policymakers have been quicker to respond. The U.S. Federal Reserve offered credit to banks that suffered uninsured losses on bond holdings due to rising interest rates.

On Sunday, just ahead of the opening of markets in Asia, other central banks joined the Fed in expanding unlimited dollar credit to any bank that needs it. That was a swift preemptive move used in earlier emergencies such as the pandemic market meltdown of 2020.

Swiss officials balked at letting Credit Suisse just fail, unlike the U.S. government in 2008, when it let Lehman go under, spreading losses and fear across the financial system. Financial institutions had been in trouble since 2007, but it wasn't until two weeks after Lehman that the U.S. Congress came to the system's aid with a \$700 billion emergency economic stabilization act.

Questions have been raised about the technicalities of the Credit Suisse rescue and the decision to insure all depositors at Silicon Valley. But officials are showing that they learned one lesson from Lehman, "namely to act decisively and swiftly, and if needed to run roughshod over any discussion of moral hazard and legal obstacles, both of which can be discussed once the dust settles," said Marc Ostwald, chief economist and global strategist at ADM Investor Services International.

As a result, "some semblance of calm has been restored. This crisis is far from over, but at least some of the immediate risks of an exponential ballooning of contagion effects have been mitigated."

SO WE CAN SOUND THE ALL CLEAR?

Not yet. UBS shares initially plunged Monday on fears that the bank has simply inherited trouble by buying Credit Suisse. The share later turned positive. And the way the takeover was done, by wiping out some of the Credit Suisse's bondholders, rattled markets in those bonds. So new problems could arise.

"Containing crises is a bit like a game of whack-a-mole — with new fires starting as existing ones are extinguished," said Neal Shearing, group chief economist at Capital Economics. "A key issue over the next week will be whether problems arise in other institutions or parts of the financial system."

Among the lingering worries: Did other U.S. banks ignore the risk that interest rates might swiftly rise, as Silicon Valley did? Could there be trouble in other parts of the financial sector that don't take insured deposits, such as investment banks, hedge funds and mortgage brokers?

Said Shearing: "A reasonable base case is that we avoid a system-wide crisis on the scale of 2007-08, but further problems emerge at individual institutions."

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SWISS BANKS?

In the global financial crisis, it was UBS that needed government help, while Credit Suisse did not. Now UBS faces the task of integrating Credit Suisse and sorting out its problems.

Switzerland, which had five big banks 30 years ago, is now left with one very large bank that's "too big to fail."

"That means the government is even more challenged to support any problems in the financial system," said Tobias Straumann, an economic history professor at the University of Zurich.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE GLOBAL ECONOMY?

Analysts say pressure from markets and regulators may now make banks less likely to risk new lending, which could restrict credit for new purchases or investment in new businesses.

If credit is seen to tighten because of fears over banks, central banks such as the Fed, the European Central Bank and the Bank of England might choose to slow down their recent rapid interest rate increases aimed at fighting inflation — or to stop the increases at a lower level than they otherwise would have.

Tighter credit, whether from nervous banks or from central bankers raising rates, tends to counteract inflation.

That was behind European Central Bank head Christine Lagarde's statement last week after the bank raised rates by a half-percentage point. She said further rate decisions would be taken meeting to meeting based on the latest data.

Lagarde said Monday that the current financial tensions "might have an impact on demand and might actually do some of the work that might otherwise be done by monetary policy."

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## Paris aims to keep Olympians cool without air conditioners

By BARBARA SURK and SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

The Paris Olympics is going underground to find a way to keep athletes cool at the 2024 Games without air conditioners.

Organizers are planning to use a water-cooling system under the Athletes Village — much like the one that has helped the Louvre Museum cope with the sweltering heat that broke records last year — to keep temperatures in check for the Olympians and Paralympians who stay there.

The decision is part of the organizing committee's goal to cut the carbon footprint of the Paris Games by half and stage the most sustainable Olympics to date by installing a special technology to use natural sources to keep everyone cool even during a potential heat wave.

"I want the Paris Games to be exemplary from an environmental point of view," said Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo, who has resolved to tackle climate change with an ambitious action plan that aims to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and make the City of Lights carbon neutral by 2050.

Compared to a conventional project, the carbon impact will be reduced by 45% for the Athletes Village during the construction phase and over the entire Olympic cycle, she said.

For two months between July and September 2024, the Athletes Village north of Paris will host 15,600 athletes and sports officials during the Olympics and 9,000 athletes and their supporting teams during the Paralympics. After the games, the 50-hectare (125-acre) site next to the River Seine in the popular district of Seine-Saint-Denis will become a zero-carbon, eco-friendly residential and commercial neighborhood with 6,000 new inhabitants — the first ones moving in as soon as 2025.

In anticipation of hot weather, organizers have been studying heatwaves block by block in the Athletes Village. They have simulated conditions in the parts of the accommodation most exposed to the sun and have tested the effectiveness of the cooling system with an objective to keep the indoor temperature between 23 and 26 degrees Celsius (73 and 79 degrees Fahrenheit).

The geothermal energy system will ensure that the temperature in the athlete apartments in the Seine-Saint-Denis suburb does not rise above 26 degrees Celsius (79 degrees Fahrenheit) at night, including during a potential a heat wave, said Laurent Michaud, the director of the Olympic and Paralympic Villages.

He said organizers have conducted tests in rooms that are located on the highest floors of the residences and are facing south and exposed to direct sun on two sides. They also considered directions of winds in the region and the water temperature in the Seine. They have worked closely with France's national weather agency to develop temperature forecasts.

"Despite outdoor temperatures reaching 41 degrees Celsius (106 degrees Fahrenheit), we had temperatures at 28 degrees (82 degrees Fahrenheit) in most of these rooms," Michaud told The Associated Press, detailing the results of a heatwave simulation. "In other rooms, we clearly had lower temperatures."

In addition to the underfloor cooling, the insulation built into the buildings will enable residents to keep the cold obtained during the night throughout the day, Michaud said. To keep the coolness inside, the athletes will have to follow some basic rules, he added, including making sure the window blinds are shut during the day.

Laurent Monnet, who is in charge of the green transition at Saint-Denis City Hall, Paris' northern suburb where the main Olympic Village will be located, said all rooms should be 6 degrees Celsius (11 degrees Fahrenheit) cooler than the outside temperature, without an AC unit. Although some Olympic hopefuls have already expressed concern about the lack of air conditioning, Monnet said athletes should adapt and help contribute to fight against climate change.

"We need athletes to set an example when they use the buildings," Monnet said. "We can build the most virtuous village we want, it is also the use that will be made of it that will weigh on our carbon footprint."

Eliud Kipchoge, a two-time Olympic champion and marathon world record holder, endorsed the Paris sustainability plan. The Kenyan is one the sport's most vocal proponents of environmental justice and has repeatedly sounded the alarm on climate change and the impact of global warming.

"It's a good thought, because we all need to reduce our carbon," Kipchoge said in an interview with the AP.

He called on fellow athletes to help combat climate change by reducing their carbon impact during com-

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petition, training and their lives in general because “we are all going to go through the same scenario.”

Paris organizers have been in touch with national Olympic committees and said they will have the option of setting up their own AC units in specific cases and on condition that the devices comply with the organizing committee’s technical criteria.

Most national Olympic officials have responded to the plans to keep their athletes cool during the Paris Games with a wait-and-see attitude. Some Olympic officials are not excluding bringing their own air conditioners to France — or paying for one on the spot — depending on the weather at the time.

The Australian Olympic Committee said it will keep an eye on the weather patterns in Paris over the coming year to ensure “the optimal high-performance environment for our athletes, including heat and humidity mitigation that may be required.”

Michaud, the director of the Olympic Village, said organizers want to be kind to the environment, but not endanger the health of athletes. Some athletes, especially in Paralympic events, have difficulty regulating their body’s core temperature and if they reside in rooms in which it proves impossible to keep at 26 degrees Celsius (79 degrees Fahrenheit) at night, national delegations will be able to install a portable AC system.

“It will be on a case-by-case basis, and for health and safety of the athletes,” Michaud said, adding that ventilators vaporizing water droplets could be installed instead of traditional air conditioning units.

Hidalgo, the Paris mayor, is adamantly against turning next year’s event into the bring-your-own-air-conditioning Olympics — health exceptions aside.

“I can assure you that we will not change course and that there will be no changes to the construction program of the village regarding air conditioning,” Hidalgo said.

Regarding the option of organizers providing national teams with an additional cooling mechanism, she said: “I am not in favor of it. We must be consistent with our objectives.”

## School library book bans are seen as targeting LGBTQ content

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE, ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE and SARA CLINE Associated Press  
DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Teri Patrick bristles at the idea she wants to ban books about LGBTQ issues in Iowa schools, arguing her only goal is ridding schools of sexually explicit material.

Sara Hayden Parris says that whatever you want to call it, it’s wrong for some parents to think a book shouldn’t be readily available to any child if it isn’t right for their own child.

The viewpoints of the two mothers from suburban Des Moines underscore a divide over LGBTQ content in books as Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds pushes an especially sweeping crackdown on content in Iowa school libraries. The bill she’s backing could result in the removal of books from school libraries in all of the state’s 327 districts if they’re successfully challenged in any one of them.

School boards and legislatures nationwide also are facing questions about books and considering making it easier to limit access.

“We’re seeing these challenges arise in almost every state of the union,” said Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom. “It’s a national phenomenon.”

Longstanding disagreements about content in school libraries often focus this year on books with LGBTQ themes as policymakers nationwide also consider limiting or banning gender-affirming care and drag shows, allowing the deadnaming of transgender students or adults in the workplace, and other measures targeting LGBTQ people.

The trend troubles Kris Maul, a transgender man who is raising a 12-year-old with his lesbian partner in the Des Moines area and wants school library books to reflect all kinds of families and children. Maul argued that those seeking to remove books take passages out of context and unfairly focus on books about LGBTQ or racial justice issues.

LGBTQ people are more visible than even five years ago, Maul said, and he believes that has led to a backlash from some who hope limiting discussion will return American society to an era that didn’t acknowledge people with different sexualities.

“People are scared because they don’t think LGBTQ people should exist,” Maul said. “They don’t want

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their own children to be LGBTQ, and they feel if they can limit access to these books and materials, then their children won't be that way, which is simply not true and is heartbreaking and disgusting."

In Louisiana, activists fear a push by Republican Attorney General Jeff Landry to investigate sexually explicit materials in public libraries — and recently proposed legislation that could restrict children and teens' access to those books — is being used to target and censor LGBTQ content.

Landry, who is running for governor, launched a statewide tip line in November to field complaints about librarians, teachers, and school and library personnel. Landry released a report in February that listed nine books his office considers "sexually explicit" or inappropriate for children. Seven have LGBTQ storylines.

In Florida, some schools have covered or removed books under a new law that requires an evaluation of reading materials and for districts to publish a searchable list of books where individuals can then challenge specific titles.

The reviews have drawn widespread attention, with images of empty bookshelves ricocheting across social media, and are often accompanied by criticism of Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican expected to run for president.

The state's training materials direct the reviews to target sexually explicit materials but also say that schools should "err on the side of caution" when selecting reading materials and that principals are responsible for compliance.

Florida's largest teachers union is challenging the law, arguing its implementation is too broad and leading to unnecessary censorship. An education department spokesperson did not immediately comment.

DeSantis said the state has not instructed schools to empty libraries or cover books. He said 175 books have been removed from 23 school districts, with 87% of the books identified as pornographic, violent or inappropriate for their grade level.

The Iowa legislation comes amid efforts there to keep a closer eye on public school curriculums and make taxpayer money available to parents for private school tuition. Reynolds, the governor, has made such proposals the core of her legislative agenda, telling a conservative parents group that their work was essential to guarding against "indoctrination" by public school educators.

Under a bill backed by Reynolds, the titles and authors of all books available to students in classrooms and libraries would be posted online, and officials would need to specify how parents could request a book's removal and how decisions to retain books could be appealed. When any district removes a book, the state Education Department would add it to a "removal list," and all of Iowa's 326 other districts would have to deny access to the book unless parents gave approval.

At a hearing on Reynolds' bill, Republican lawmakers, who hold huge majorities in both legislative chambers, said they might change the proposal but were committed to seeing it approved. The bill has passed a Senate committee and is awaiting a floor vote.

"The parents are the governing authority in how their child is educated, period," said Sen. Amy Sinclair. "Parents are responsible for their child's upbringing, period."

Patrick, a mother of two, expressed befuddlement about why anyone would want to make sexually explicit books available to children.

"I have to believe that there are books that cater to the LGBTQ community that don't have to have such graphic sexual content in them," said Patrick, a member of a local chapter of Moms for Liberty, a conservative group that has gained national influence for its efforts to influence school curriculum and classroom learning. "There are very few books that have ever been banned and what we're saying is, in a public school setting, with taxpayer-funding money, should these books really be available to kids?"

Hayden Parris, a mom of two from a suburb only a few miles away, understands the argument but thinks it misses the point.

"A kindergartner is not wandering into the young adults section and picking out a book that is called like, "This Book is Gay," said Hayden Parris, who is leading a parents group opposed to Iowa's proposed law. "They're not picking those books, and the fact that they can pick one out of several thousand books is not a reason to keep it away from everyone."

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Sam Helmick, president of the Iowa Library Association, said communities should decide what's in their libraries and that it's important for children to have access to books that address their lives and questions. Helmick didn't have that ability as a child, and students shouldn't return to that time, she said.

"Can we acknowledge that this will have a chilling effect?" Helmick asked. "And when you tell me that books about myself as an asexual, nonbinary person who didn't have those books in libraries when I was a kid to pick up and flip through, but now publishing has caught up with me and I can see representation of me — those will be behind the desk and that's not supposed to make me feel less welcome, less seen and less represented in my library?"

## **Their world was the oyster: Oldest pearl town found in UAE**

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

SINIYAH ISLAND, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Archaeologists said Monday they have found the oldest pearling town in the Persian Gulf on an island off one of the northern sheikhdoms of the United Arab Emirates.

Artifacts found in this town on Siniyah Island in Umm al-Quwain, likely once home to thousands of people and hundreds of homes, date as far back as the region's pre-Islamic history in the late 6th century. While older pearling towns have been mentioned in historical texts, this represents the first time archaeologists say they have physically found one from this ancient era across the nations of the Persian Gulf.

"This is the oldest example of that kind of very specifically Khaleeji pearling town," said Timothy Power, an associate professor of archaeology at the United Arab Emirates University, using a word that means "Gulf" in Arabic. "It's the spiritual ancestor of towns like Dubai."

The pearling town sits on Siniyah Island, which shields the Khor al-Beida marshlands in Umm al-Quwain, an emirate some 50 kilometers (30 miles) northeast of Dubai along the coast of the Persian Gulf. The island, whose name means "flashing lights" likely due to the effect of the white-hot sun overhead, already has seen archaeologists discover an ancient Christian monastery dating back as many as 1,400 years.

The town sits directly south of that monastery on one of the curling fingers of the island and stretches across some 12 hectares (143,500 square yards). There, archaeologists found a variety of homes made of beach rock and lime mortar, ranging from cramped quarters to more sprawling homes with courtyards, suggesting a social stratification, Power said. The site also bears signs of year-round habitation, unlike other pearling operations run in seasonal spots in the region.

"The houses are crammed in there, cheek by jowl," he added. "The key thing there is permanence. People are living there all year around."

In the homes, archaeologists have discovered loose pearls and diving weights, which the free divers used to quickly drop down to the seabed while relying only on their held breath.

The town predates the rise of Islam across the Arabian Peninsula, making its residents likely Christians. Islam's Prophet Muhammad was born around 570 and died in 632 after conquering Mecca in present-day Saudi Arabia.

Umm al-Quwain's Department of Tourism and Archaeology, UAE University, the Italian Archaeological Mission in the emirate and the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University all took part in the excavation. Umm al-Quwain, the least-populated emirate in the UAE, plans to build a visitor's center at the site.

Today, the area near the marshland is more known for the low-cost liquor store at the emirate's Baracuda Beach Resort. In recent months, authorities have demolished a hulking, Soviet-era cargo plane linked to a Russian gunrunner known as the "Merchant of Death" as it builds a bridge to Siniyah Island for a \$675 million real estate development. Authorities hope that development, as well as other building, will grow the emirate's economy.

However, even this ancient site bears lessons for the Emirates.

The story of pearling, which rapidly collapsed after World War I with the introduction of artificial pearls and the Great Depression, holds particular importance in the history of the UAE — particularly as it faces

a looming reckoning with another extractive industry. While crude oil sales built the country after its formation in 1971, the Emirates will have to confront its fossil fuel legacy and potentially plan for a carbon-neutral future as it hosts the United Nations COP28 climate talks later this year.

Those searching the site found a dumpsite nearby filled with the detritus of discarded oyster shells. People walking across the island can feel those remains crunching under their feet in areas as well.

"You only find one pearl in every 10,000 oyster shells. You have to find and discard thousands and thousands of oyster shells to find one," Power said. "The waste, the industrial waste of the pearling industry, was colossal. You're dealing with millions, millions of oyster shells discarded."

## With overdoses up, states look at harsher fentanyl penalties

By GABE STERN, JAMES POLLARD and GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

RENO, Nev. (AP) — State lawmakers nationwide are responding to the deadliest overdose crisis in U.S. history by pushing harsher penalties for possessing fentanyl and other powerful lab-made opioids that are connected to about 70,000 deaths a year.

Imposing longer prison sentences for possessing smaller amounts of drugs represents a shift in states that in recent years have rolled back drug possession penalties. Proponents of tougher penalties say this crisis is different and that, in most places, the stiffer sentences are intended to punish drug dealers, not just users.

"There is no other drug — no other illicit drug — that has the same type of effects on our communities," said Mark Jackson, the district attorney for Douglas County, Nevada, and president of the Nevada District Attorneys Association, which is pushing for stricter penalties for fentanyl-related crimes.

But the strategy is alarming recovery advocates who say focusing on the criminal angle of drugs has historically backfired, including when lawmakers elevated crack cocaine penalties in the 1980s.

"Every time we treat drugs as a law enforcement problem and push stricter laws, we find that we punish people in ways that destroy their lives and make it harder for them to recover later on," said Adam Wandt, an assistant professor of public policy at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York. He said people behind bars often continue getting drugs — often without receiving quality addiction treatment — then emerge to find it's harder to get work.

Since 2020, drug overdoses are now linked to more than 100,000 deaths a year nationally, with about two-thirds of them fentanyl-related. That's more than 10 times as many drug deaths as in 1988, at the height of the crack epidemic.

Fentanyl mostly arrives in the U.S. from Mexico and is mixed into supplies of other drugs, including cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine and counterfeit oxycodone pills. Some users seek it out. Others don't know they're taking it.

Ingesting 2 milligrams of fentanyl can be fatal, meaning 1 gram — about the same as a paper clip — could contain 500 lethal doses.

That's what's driving some lawmakers to crack down with harsh penalties, along with adopting measures such as legalizing materials to test drug supplies for fentanyl and distributing naloxone, a drug that can reverse overdoses.

Before this year's legislative sessions began, a dozen states had already adopted fentanyl possession measures, according to tracking by the National Conference of State Legislatures.

And in this year, in one legislative chamber of liberal Oregon and one chamber of conservative West Virginia, lawmakers have agreed upon tougher penalties. In her State of the State speech this March, Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey, a Republican, called on lawmakers to adopt a drug trafficking bill that includes tougher fentanyl sentences.

In Nevada, where Democrats control the Legislature, a bill backed by Democratic Attorney General Aaron Ford would give one to 20 years in prison for selling, possessing, manufacturing or transporting 4 grams or more of fentanyl into the state, depending on the amount. It's a change for Ford, who has supported criminal justice reforms including a sweeping 2019 law that, among other provisions, raised the threshold



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for such penalties to 100 grams. It would also remove fentanyl from the state's "Good Samaritan" law, which exempts people from criminal drug possession charges while reporting an overdose.

"What we've learned is that lowering the thresholds for all drugs was overinclusive," Ford said.

Harm reduction advocates are pushing Ford and others to rethink their support, arguing the thresholds for longer penalties can sweep up low-level users — not just the dealers the law is aimed at — as well as some who may not even know they are taking fentanyl. They warn that the state's crime labs test only for the presence of fentanyl, not the exact amount in a mixture of drugs. Thus, people with over 4 grams of drugs containing a few milligrams of fentanyl could be subject to trafficking penalties, they say.

Rosa Johnson runs a needle exchange where she meets people who could face consequences should the stricter fentanyl bill pass. For the dozens of people that show up each day, it is rare for them to cite fentanyl as their "drug of choice." But it's also rare that fentanyl test strips come back negative, with the drug being "laced in a lot of things," Johnson said.

Other lawmakers introduced two bills to create penalties for fentanyl with lower thresholds, though much of the internal debate surrounds the Ford-backed bill. Meanwhile, Nevada's Republican Gov. Joe Lombardo, a former sheriff, has vowed to introduce tougher legislation that would make possession of any amount of fentanyl the same felony threshold as fentanyl trafficking.

Both Republican-led chambers in South Carolina have passed fentanyl trafficking measures with bipartisan support, although lawmakers haven't agreed on which version to send the governor. Senators also unanimously approved a bill allowing alleged drug dealers to be charged with homicide in overdose deaths.

House Minority Leader Todd Rutherford slammed colleagues for selling a "false bill of goods." While Republican Rep. Doug Gilliam said he understood concerns about ambiguity, he said lawmakers had to send a "strong message" to drug dealers.

A Senate subcommittee heard emotional testimony from family members of people who died of a fentanyl overdose. Among them was Holly Alsobrooks, co-founder of an advocacy group that also supports more fentanyl test strips, opioid antidotes and rehabilitation centers. While Alsobrooks said there is no "perfect" solution, she said the fentanyl trafficking measures are the "best" answers she has heard.

"We are fully behind this bill," she said. "And if people go to jail, they're going to go to jail."

Marc Burrows, who leads a Greenville-based harm reduction program that reports it has reversed 700 overdoses through the provision of opioid antidotes, said these bills could increase deaths by creating hesitancy among drug users to report overdoses.

"I just don't know if a policy like this is the way to do it," Burrows said.

## Today in History: March 21, Johann Sebastian Bach is born

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, March 21, the 80th day of 2023. There are 285 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 21, 1965, civil rights demonstrators led by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. began their third, successful march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.

On this date:

In 1685, composer Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, Germany.

In 1935, Persia officially changed its name to Iran.

In 1945, during World War II, Allied bombers began four days of raids over Germany.

In 1952, the Moondog Coronation Ball, considered the first rock and roll concert, took place at Cleveland Arena.

In 1972, the Supreme Court, in *Dunn v. Blumstein*, ruled that states may not require at least a year's residency for voting eligibility.

In 1990, Namibia became an independent nation as the former colony marked the end of 75 years of South African rule.

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In 1997, President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin wrapped up their summit in Helsinki, Finland, still deadlocked over NATO expansion, but able to agree on slashing nuclear weapons arsenals.

In 2006, the social media website Twitter was established with the sending of the first "tweet" by co-founder Jack Dorsey, who wrote: "just setting up my twttr."

In 2007, former Vice President Al Gore made an emotional return to Congress as he pleaded with House and Senate committees to fight global warming; skeptical Republicans questioned the science behind his climate-change documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth."

In 2016, laying bare a half-century of tensions, President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro prodded each other over human rights and the longstanding U.S. economic embargo during an unprecedented joint news conference in Havana.

In 2019, President Donald Trump abruptly declared that the U.S. would recognize Israel's sovereignty over the disputed Golan Heights, a major shift in American policy.

In 2020 during a White House briefing, President Donald Trump doubled down on his support for the malaria drug hydroxychloroquine as a possible treatment for the coronavirus, while Dr. Anthony Fauci said the evidence was "anecdotal."

Ten years ago: On his second day in the Middle East, President Barack Obama insisted "peace is possible" as he prodded both Israelis and Palestinians to return to long-stalled negotiations with few, if any, pre-conditions, softening his earlier demands that Israel stop building settlements in disputed territory.

Five years ago: As a SWAT team moved in on his SUV, Mark Conditt, the suspect in the deadly bombings that had terrorized Austin, Texas for three weeks, used one of his own devices to take his own life. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg apologized for a "major breach of trust;" the apology came after it was revealed that the data mining firm Cambridge Analytica, whose clients included the Trump campaign, may have used data improperly obtained from Facebook users to try to sway elections. The fourth nor'easter in three weeks dumped more than a foot of snow on some parts of the East Coast.

One year ago: A China Eastern Boeing 737-800 with 132 people on board crashed in a mountainous area of southern China, setting off a forest fire visible from space in the country's worst air disaster in nearly a decade. (All 123 passengers and nine crew members would later be confirmed dead.) In her first day of public hearings, Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson pledged to decide cases "without fear or favor" if the Senate confirmed her historic nomination as the first Black woman on the high court. Veteran talk show host Maury Povich announced he was calling it quits, saying he would stop making original episodes of "Maury" after being a daytime mainstay for 31 years.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Kathleen Widdoes is 84. Songwriter Chip Taylor ("Wild Thing") is 83. Folk-pop singer-musician Keith Potger (The Seekers) is 82. Actor Marie-Christine Barrault is 79. Singer-musician Rose Stone (Sly and the Family Stone) is 78. Actor Timothy Dalton is 77. Singer Ray Dorset (Mungo Jerry) is 77. Rock singer-musician Roger Hodgson (Supertramp) is 73. Rock musician Conrad Lozano (Los Lobos) is 72. R&B singer Russell Thompkins Jr. is 72. Comedy writer-performer Brad Hall is 65. Actor Sabrina LeBeauf is 65. Actor Gary Oldman is 65. Actor Kassie Depaiva is 62. Actor Matthew Broderick is 61. Comedian-actor Rosie O'Donnell is 61. Actor Cynthia Geary is 58. Hip-hop DJ Premier (Gang Starr) is 57. Rock musician Jonas "Joker" Berggren (Ace of Base) is 56. Rock MC Maxim (Prodigy) is 56. Rock musician Andrew Copeland (Sister Hazel) is 55. Actor Laura Allen is 49. Rapper-TV personality Kevin Federline is 45. Actor Sonequa Martin-Green (TV: "The Walking Dead") is 38. Actor Scott Eastwood is 37. Tennis player Karolina Pliskova is 31. Actor Jasmin Savoy Brown is 29. Actor Forrest Wheeler is 19.