

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

Saturday, March 25

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

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

All State Band in Sioux Falls

Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center

Sunday, March 26

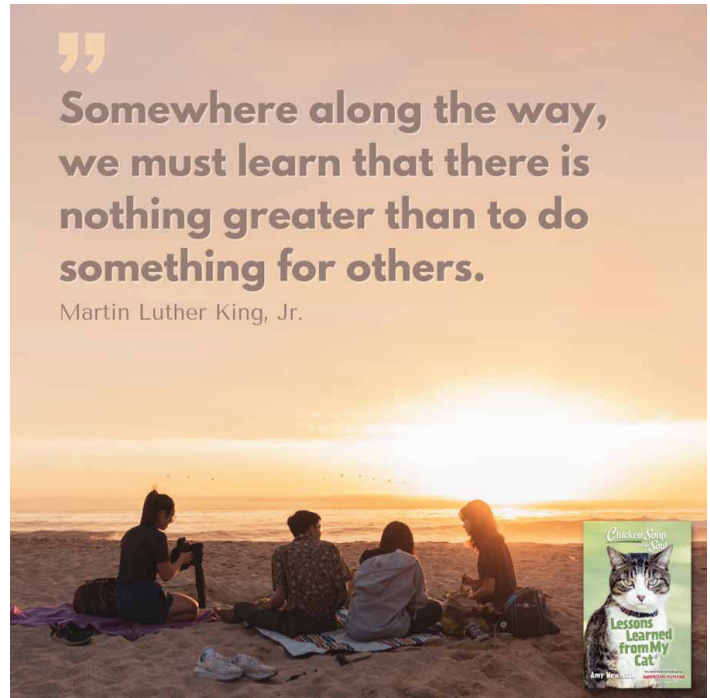
Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday

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.



”

Somewhere along the way,
we must learn that there is
nothing greater than to do
something for others.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

school, 9:45 a.m.; Zion Lutheran worship, 11 a.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Milestone
4 yr olds and juniors; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.;
Choir, 7 p.m.

United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Cof-
fee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.;
Sunday school after children's sermon in worship.

Monday, March 27

Senior Menu: Beef stroganoff noodles, mixed veg-
etables, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Mini waffles.

School Lunch: Oriental chicken, rice.

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

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

United Methodist: Lent Bible Study with Pastor
Brandon, 7 p.m.; PEO Meeting, 7 p.m. (outside
group)

Noon: Senior Citizens Meet at the Groton Com-
munity Center with potluck dinner.

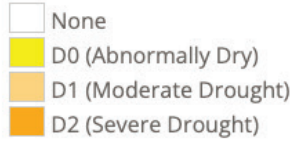
OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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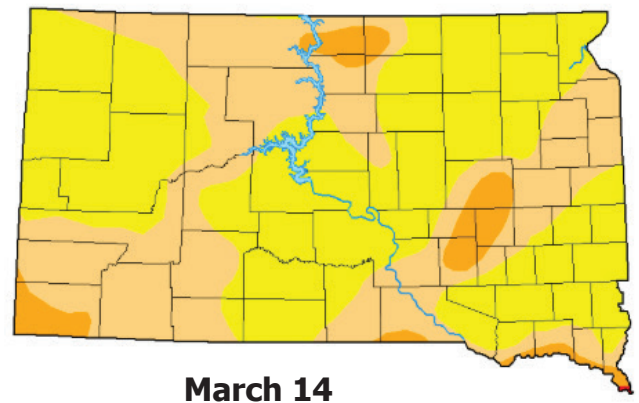
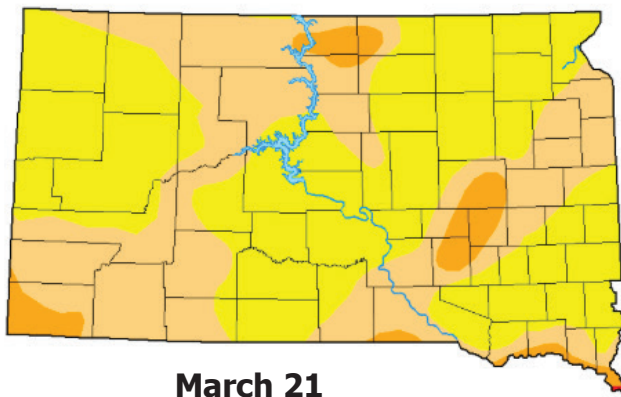
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Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



Temperatures in the High Plains region were mostly below normal for the week. The most significant departures occurred in the Dakotas, where temperatures mainly ranged from 15 to 25 degrees colder than normal outside of southwest South Dakota. Precipitation fell in some of the high elevation areas of Colorado and Wyoming this week; otherwise, the weather was mostly dry in the High Plains region. Moderate and severe drought expanded slightly in southeast Kansas; please see the Midwest paragraph for more details on this. Due to recent snowfall and lessening precipitation deficits, portions of northwest North Dakota saw reductions in moderate and severe long-term drought coverage. Otherwise, ongoing long-term drought was unchanged east of the Rocky Mountains. In north-central South Dakota, stock pond levels and river levels remained low, despite some recent snowmelt, indicative of long-term dryness there. Parts of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and far eastern San Luis Valley saw some improvements due to increased snowpack. Increased recent precipitation in southwest Wyoming allowed for the removal of severe drought.

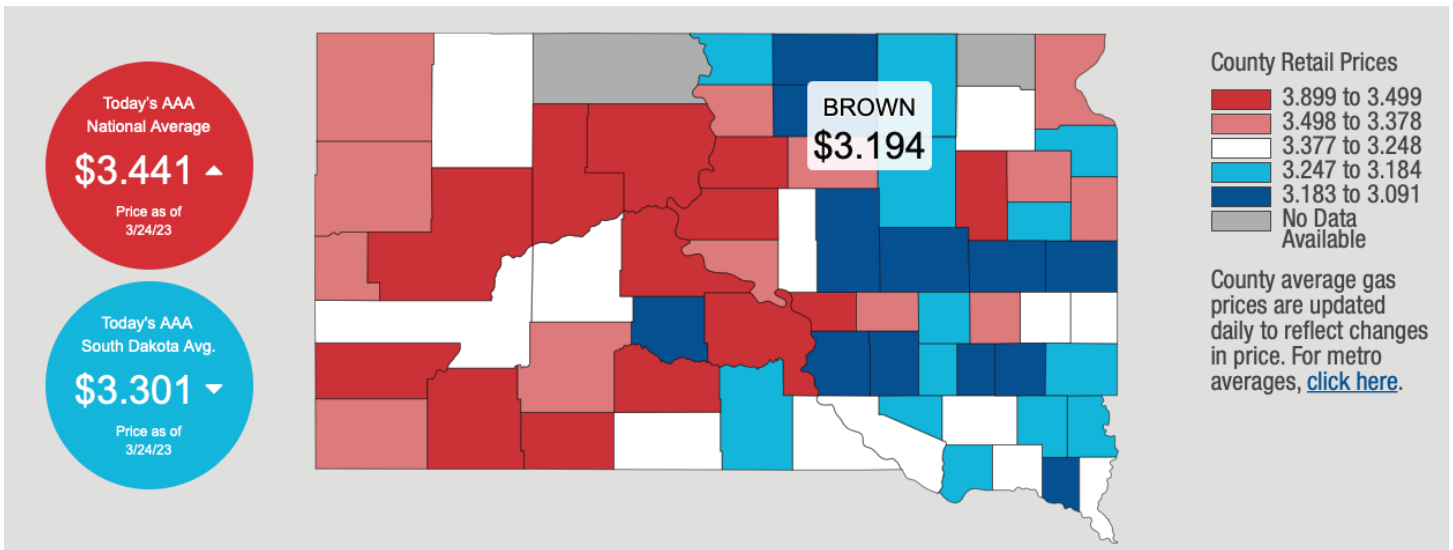
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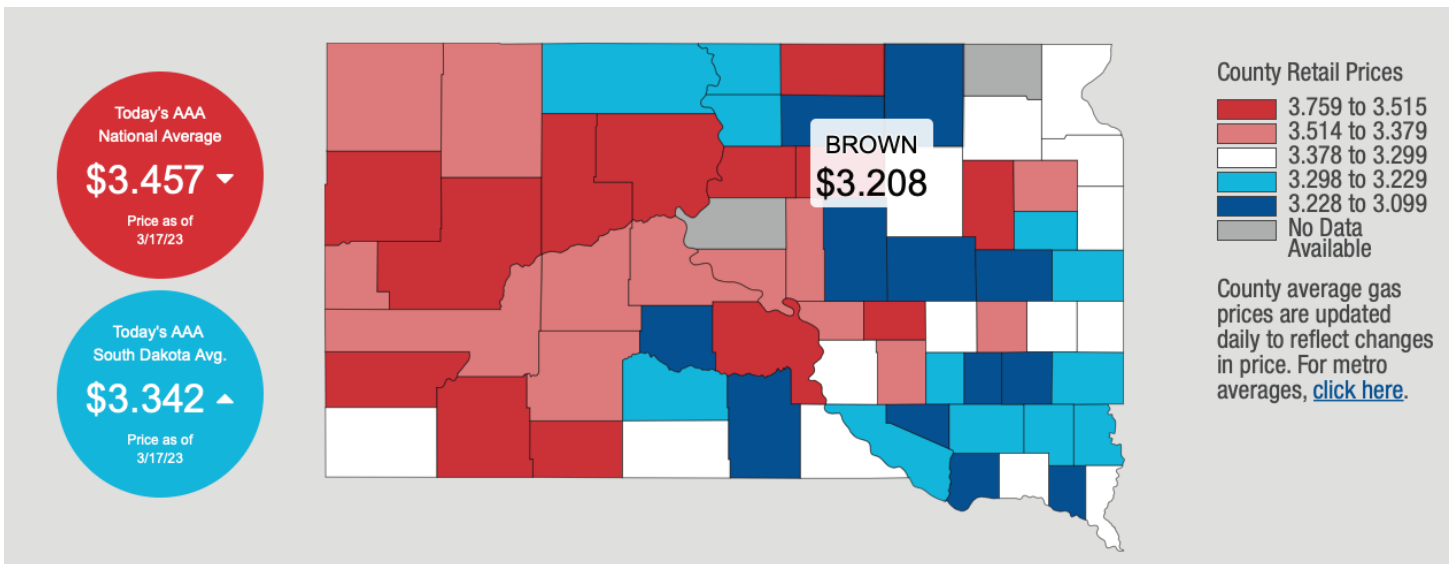
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.301	\$3.452	\$3.902	\$3.966
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.307	\$3.457	\$3.915	\$3.973
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.342	\$3.495	\$3.966	\$4.078
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.314	\$3.493	\$3.987	\$4.243
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.933	\$4.045	\$4.429	\$4.685

This Week



Two Weeks Ago





South Dakota

Soil Health Coalition

Saline soil management: More money with fewer crop acres

By Stan Wise

South Dakota Soil Health Coalition

PIERRE, SD – Salinity areas. Trouble spots. White deserts. Regardless of what they're called, saline soils are a problem for South Dakota. White, salty areas where nothing grows are a common sight in fields across the state.

"The amount of salinity that's in South Dakota, it's just amazing how much there is," longtime Cronin Farms Agronomy Manager Dan Forgey said during a discussion panel at the 2023 Soil Health Conference.

Saline soils have excessive levels of soluble salts in the soil water high enough to negatively affect plant growth, resulting in reduced crop yields, increased input costs, and increased soil erosion. How to manage these areas is an important question because tilling them, applying fertilizer, and planting them not only results in a financial loss on those acres, but can also cause them to grow in size.

One way to deal with saline areas is to take them out of row crop production and plant deep-rooted, salt-tolerant crops to pull water and salts deeper into the soil profile.

"The first thing we'll do is we'll go on with the forage barley or barley and hay it," Forgey said of his approach to saline areas at Cronin Farms near Gettysburg, SD. "Take the forage barley off, come with the rye, and then I'll put it into grass."

"That's how we handle it. We do not farm through it," Forgey said. "Even if it's a three- or four- or five-acre patch, we try to straighten it out."

The approach is designed to make every acre profitable.

Cristin Weber, a precision agriculture and conservation specialist with Pheasants Forever, helps administer the Every Acre Counts program, which provides producers with a free precision profitability analysis.

"With the Every Acre Counts program, we've looked at about 52,000 acres," Weber said. "And any time that I ran a profitability report on a field that has saline acres, and I can visually see the white – like when I look at aerial maps – I've never found one of those acres to be profitable." She said that when producers plant row crops in those areas, "they're literally just putting money down on those acres, and they're not getting a return on their investment."

The analysis provided by Every Acre Counts allows producers to see which areas of their fields are the most profitable and which areas need improvement. "We're using yield data, variable rate maps, and then pairing that information with their input costs. And then once we merge that data, it gives the producer a report, a red-to-green map or visual – it looks like a yield map, but it's actually their profit – and it's showing what acres of the field are doing the best, but then also highlights what areas are at a net loss," Weber said. "And so we're able to edit those boundaries a little bit, take those marginal lands out, and give a what-if analysis. What could happen to your yields over time just by not farming that? How much expense could be reduced every year and how much profit could be increased just by not farming that, but then also enrolling those acres into a conservation program?"

Northville, SD, producer Alex Boekelheide said during the 2023 Soil Health Conference that he started working with Every Acre Counts to pinpoint the troubled acres on his farm and find out exactly how much

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those acres are harming the bottom line.

"The strategy we're starting to deploy is perennials. So, through that program – it's a five-year program – we dormant-seeded some different grass species and alfalfa mixed in to have some diversity there. Our intent is to have the acres that are really in tough shape go into this program for five years and then re-evaluate after year five if we want to bring them back into production or not," Boekelheide said. "It's been remarkable. You finally feel good about those acres. You're making a change before it's a crisis."

He said that he is "starting to see some cover and some growth and starting to see to some more activity on those soils instead of being just barren and white."

Weber said that for landowners in the Prairie Pothole Region, the Soil Health and Habitat program offers a working lands conservation option that would allow producers to hay or graze acres taken out of production from August through April. That program also offers seeding cost-share funds and a land payment. She also said that she can help producers take the first steps with other conservation programs.

However, there are no conservation program requirements to participate in the Every Acre Counts program, and simply managing marginal acres differently can result in increased profitability. Weber said that in 2021 a producer working with the program removed 99.5 acres from corn production in a field and seeded them with an alfalfa/intermediate wheat grass mix. The total profit from corn on the field increased by more than \$4,500 simply by removing the marginal acres from crop production – no conservation program payments were received.

"Sometimes you got to treat every acre different instead of farming it end-to-end like we're all used to doing," Boekelheide said.

The Every Acre Counts program is funded primarily by South Dakota State University Extension, Second Century Habitat Fund, Pheasants Forever, Natural Resources Conservation Service, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks, South Dakota Corn and Purina.

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Those at attendance at the economic development meeting held Friday were Brett Anderson, property owner; Terry Herron, street and water superintendent; Landon Johnson, electric department; Dwight Zerr, waste water superintendent; Paula Jensen, Dakota Resources; Deb and Austin Schuelke, property owners; Laure Swanson, Governor's Office of Economic Development; Doug Heinrich, city finance officer; Mayor Scott Hanlon; Councilman Karyn Babcock; Bruce Babcock, property owner; Councilman Jon Cutler; and Tom Mahan, former member of Groton Development Partnership. (Photo lifted from GDILIVE.COM)

Groton's future - housing - day care - economic director

The future of Groton was the discussion at an economic development meeting held Friday at City Hall. The event was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM.

Laure Swanson, partner relations representative of the Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED), and Paula Jensen, Vice President of Program Development of Dakota Resources were on hand to help answer questions.

Housing, daycare and an economic development director had the bulk of the discussion.

Housing assistance

Swanson pointed out that there are a number of resources available through her office. They help with the Community Development Block Grant which helps with infrastructure projects and also point cities to the Northeast Council of Government (NECOG) for planning. She said their website at sdgoed.com has a community partner page that has several tabs for information to help communities.

Swanson said she started working for GOED about 10 months ago, filling a vacancy that has left Northeast South Dakota void with economic guidance. "I want Northeast South Dakota to prosper," she said.

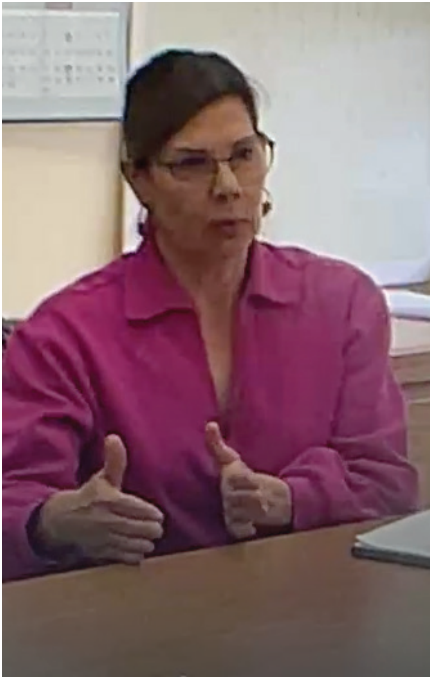
There was a lot of discussion about housing; however, it was pointed out that Groton does not have a housing study. "You need to have data," Jensen said. "Housing is a real issue in Groton. How do you know that besides people saying it. You need that data to back you up and to apply for grants." She said that a market study could be done through a third party. "You're not going to get a housing needs study done in the next 12 months unless you get a third party to do it," Jensen said. "Campbell County did its own study and the SD Housing accepted it. Their director did it and it took a lot of work."

HAPI Homes (Homes Are possible Inc.) out of Aberdeen has been active not only in Aberdeen, but other communities as well. They are currently helping to set up an organization in Mitchell. They just started out lending to people to buy homes, but now they have four different huge housing developments in Aberdeen and are doing a Rehab program." "The rehab program helps keep houses in circulation and in good condition," Swanson said.

Examples of what is happening in other area communities were given.

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Laure Swason, Governor's Office of Economic Development, was on hand to help answer questions. (Photo lifted from GDILIVE.COM)

Grow Spink out of Redfield is building houses in Northville and Mellette. One to two homes a year are being built in Redfield by the corporation because no one is building them. GROW SD is also a partner with them. Once a home is sold, the money is used to build another home.

In Faulkton, there is a coalition of investors and the development corporation. Jensen said that someone donated the land, a TIF was used to put in the infrastructure and they had access to loans to help pay off the TIF (Tax Increment Financing). There are 24 housing lots available.

Chamberlain is giving away lots and so far, they have given away eight of their 11 lots. In addition, they have worked with the town of Pukwana and lots in Pukwana have also been donated to the corporation for housing development.

"Housing developments are popping up in many small towns in South Dakota," Jensen said.

There is a new housing program that came out of the legislature this year where 70 percent of that money is allocated for use by smaller communities.

Deb and Austin Scheulke were at the meeting and they have property that could possibly be developed. Deb said, "It's a catch 22 that we're in. Let's say we want to develop some of our land. We would need the city to put in the infrastructure out there. Until the city commits, we have a tough time pulling the trigger to come up with a development plan."

Jensen said that is exactly what Faulkton went through. The city said no - so they got the TIF and the development corporation put in the infrastructure. "Communities have solved all those problems," Jensen said. "They have come up with ways to work around them."

Day Care Assistance

There there was discussion on day care. "Housing and day care go hand in hand," Swanson said. "Everyone is in the same boat. Aberdeen received a CDGB grant for a day care."

State funded day cares have taken on various shapes, according to Swanson. They talked about Doland and that the city owns, maintains and hires the employees for their day care. "They have 20 kids in a town of 200 people," Swanson said. It has been in operation for 5-6 years.

"It takes a leader," Jensen said. "There needs to be a champion in the community that will rise up." It was said that teachers in Doland were taking their children to day care facilities in Redfield and Clark. Now that there is a day care in Doland, they are bringing their children there and there a good chance those children will also attend school in Doland instead of somewhere else.

Hoven and Gettysburg are partnering to create a third day care facility in Hoven. It was pointed out that a licensed director in Gettysburg is working with Hoven and they are using her license to get the facility going. "The Dept. of Social Services provides grants to day cares for equipment," Swanson said. She also pointed out that there are full ride scholarships for someone who wants to pursue a child development degree.

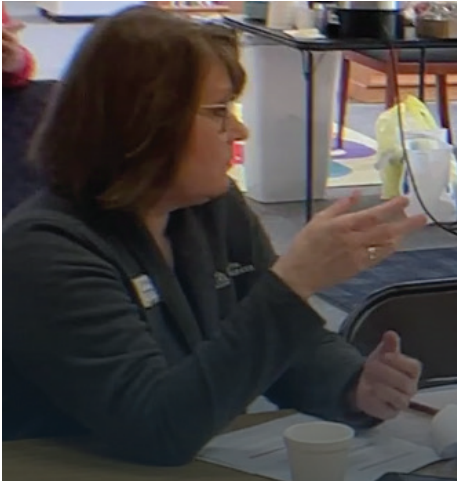
Chamberlain, Brookings and Custer are new Early Learner Sites through the state. Mitchell is providing a building for free to keep the cost down on a day care.

Cheryl Kampa is retiring as a day care provider in Columbia, but a new state licensed person will be stepping in to take over.

Karyn Babcock said, "It would make sense for us to locate a place, easy on easy off the highway, to have a daycare. We need a permanent day care." Property west of SD 37 west of the school was talked about as a good site for a day care.

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Paula Jensen, Vice President of Program Development of Dakota Resources helped to answer questions. (Photo lifted from GDILIVE.COM)

Economic Development Director

Then the third element that was brought up was an economic development director.

"You need to have an economic development director in your community wake up every morning and say my job is to make my community a better place," Jensen said. "Swanson added, "It makes all the difference in a progressive community because it's their job. You could have been a couple of years ahead, possibly, if you would have had an economic development director. Some communities have a regional director." One director in Sioux Falls serves 15 communities. "Regionalism is an option if you can't get one for yourself," Swanson said.

Paying someone in that position is a challenge in smaller communities. Jensen said that a statewide survey was done a couple of years ago and the average statewide salary for a development director is \$55,000. "That's right in the middle. There are communities paying less and some paying a lot more," Jensen said.

Tom Mahan said that it would be best to partner with a few other communities and pay someone a decent salary to serve all of them.

An economic development director would work independent from the city. They would answer to a board. The city could still have a vote at the table, but they would not dictate the duties of the director.

Thirty-nine years ago, the Groton Development Partnership was formed and land was bought at \$700 an acre. There were 28 people in the original partnership. The partnership was dissolved last year (with just 10 members left) and the property they had acquired that was left was sold for \$8,000 an acre. Mahan, a member of the former partnership, said that a corporation was formed. "I would like to see a rekindling of the corporation," he said. Swanson said that money from the corporation could be used to help fund a director in the community, even if it's just part time.

The question was asked if there would be enough work for a director. Swanson said that person would respond to many questions and they would make things happen. They could work on housing concerns, day care concerns, economic development, and the like. "Economic development is not immediate," Swanson said. "It's planning for the future."

Often times, there are naysayers in a community. Mayor Scott Hanlon said when people talk about the pool or baseball, "I tell them it's for the kids. They are our future." Mahan said, "No matter how good of an idea you have - half the people don't want it. And they're the only ones you hear from. You know you're on the right track. Stay on it."

Other things that need to be done are a capital improvement plan and a comprehensive plan, which NECOG could help and should be encouraging communities to do.

Swanson asked, "Who is getting your RFPs?" (Request for Proposals). They come from the state. No one knew if Groton was getting any. A director would help with something like that. "You missed out on opportunities for businesses to come into your community," Swanson said.

For someone new as an economic development director, there are training options available. In fact, many of them. Swanson her office has meetings to help people get in touch with the resources they need. Jensen said there is coaching available through Dakota Resources and GrowSD. "There is a lot of support for new economic development directors," Jensen said.

Now What?

So what now? The last time the city had a serious economic development meeting was November 14, 2021. "We need to have another meeting," said Bruce Babcock, "not just an annual meeting. We need to have another meeting and get after it." Karyn Babcock said meetings like every two weeks or at least monthly should be held. Mayor Hanlon said this meeting was good. "It's nice to talk with you guys," Hanlon said. "It gets us fired up."

Mahan said, "We have some great stuff on the table here. Let's do something with it."



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Limits, application of South Dakota 'stand your ground' law debated before Supreme Court

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 24, 2023 10:00 AM

BROOKINGS — In 2019, Minnesota native Ramon Deron Smith killed a man and wounded two others in a Sioux Falls parking lot during his first visit to the city.

He kept shooting as his targets fled across a busy urban thoroughfare.

After doing so, he drove back to Minneapolis, shaved his head, ditched the vehicle he'd come to Sioux Falls to pick up and stayed in a motel, not his home.

Even so, Smith, now serving a life sentence for second-degree murder in South Dakota, maintained throughout his 2021 trial that he'd only grabbed someone else's gun, walked out to the parking lot and fired because he feared for his life and the lives of others in his company.

A group of people, including Smith's sister, had been feuding over Facebook for hours by then. Snapchat photos of firearms had been sent. Just before the shootings took place, there were several people stationed at either exit of the apartment complex where she and Smith were.

"It was clear that they were trying to block the exit," said Manny de Castro, one of the Sioux Falls defense attorneys who represented Smith at his trial.

De Castro outlined those details Thursday during oral arguments to the South Dakota Supreme Court, which began its day of hearings at South Dakota State University by considering Smith's request to toss his conviction. The court will issue a decision later.

Smith cited several reasons for the request in the legal briefs submitted before the hearing, including that an officer's testimony about Smith's inability to legally use firearms due to his felony criminal history unfairly swayed the jury.

His primary argument, however, hinges on self defense and represents the high court's first opportunity to consider the impact of a law that took effect on July 1, 2021, just weeks before Smith's trial began: South Dakota's stand your ground law.

The law, passed during the 2021 legislative session, bars the criminal prosecution of people who kill when they fear that their own lives are in danger, even in public spaces.

Smith's lawyers argue that his judge should have leaned on that law to allow Smith to argue for immunity before the trial took place.

Legal argument for immunity

Newly adopted laws typically aren't retroactive unless the Legislature specifies that they are. But De Castro doesn't claim that the "stand your ground" law – which took effect after his client's crime, but before the trial – is retroactive in the traditional sense.

Instead, de Castro argued, the law was a "procedural" change, meaning it altered the way in which an existing crime is prosecuted in the criminal justice system. Procedural changes are understood to be retroactive for the court system, according to state Supreme Court precedent.

In other words, once a "procedural" law takes effect, it factors into the way all cases in which it might apply are handled, regardless of when a crime may have taken place.

That's important for Smith, de Castro said, because stand your ground immunity may well have removed a key piece of the prosecution's case against his client.

"One of the elements that the state had to prove was that the killing was not lawful," de Castro said.

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That's why de Castro asked Smith's judge to hold a hearing to determine if the new law applied in the killing of Larry Carr Jr., the homicide victim in the case. The judge, the now-retired Bradley Zell, declined to allow one.

The law wasn't retroactive, Zell said.

The Smith situation is the first for which justices are being asked to decide if the stand your ground law is, in fact, procedural in nature, and therefore retroactive.

If it is, there is another hurdle for Smith. He would need to show that the lack of a statutory immunity hearing on the matter of self defense before a judge – which would have involved the judge weighing the same kinds of evidence that would be heard at a trial – might have led to a different outcome than the jury's guilty verdict.

He would have to prove, in legal terms, that he was "prejudiced" and less likely to win the case because a judge didn't ask the self defense questions first.

Prosecution: Smith not immune

Assistant Attorney General Stephen Gemar argued that the issues raised by Smith amounted to harmless errors.

"He was given his trial by a jury," Gemar told the justices. "He was found guilty. Whether he was justified (in the killing) was a question for the jury."

The question of self defense was an important one. A second-degree murder conviction carries a mandatory sentence of life without parole. In order to prove that particular crime, prosecutors must show not only that one person killed another intentionally, but did so "evincing a depraved mind, without regard for human life."

Were the killing in self-defense, the prosecution could not clear that bar. To that end, de Castro argued that a police officer's testimony that Smith was not lawfully allowed to possess a firearm due to his criminal history made a difference.

During jury selection, jurors were asked how they felt about gun ownership and gun use for self-defense, de Castro said. Most mentioned that they were supportive of that right, as long as the person shooting has the right to possess firearms.

A person's lack of a right to own a firearm does not bar them from using a gun in self-defense from a legal standpoint, but de Castro said "the fact that he unlawfully possessed a firearm changed our burden" near the end of the trial.

Had de Castro been prepared to address questions of Smith's gun rights, he said, he may have made different decisions when striking potential jurors.

As he'd done with the question of a stand your ground hearing, Gemar described that issue as inconsequential for the outcome.

Zell instructed jurors not to consider Smith's gun rights, Gemar said. More persuasive for jurors, he argued, was Smith's behavior before, during and after the confrontation that killed Larry Carr Jr.

"He willingly left a locked apartment with a gun and proceeded to shoot into a group of people," Gemar said.

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

COMMENTARY

\$3 million is on the table for climate action, with only days left for SD to act

KARA HOVING

A new federal program has the potential to transform South Dakota's approach to climate change — should the state be smart enough to take it.

Earlier this month, the U.S. EPA launched the first phase of the Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) program, an initiative created by last year's Inflation Reduction Act to fund local- and state-level climate action strategies.

The new program allocates \$3 million to every state, as well as D.C. and Puerto Rico, to develop plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other harmful air pollutants. Because this is a noncompetitive grant, every state will receive the funds, but only if the governor's office or a designated state agency submits a notice of intent to participate by March 31.

The program also allocates \$1 million in planning grants to each of the nation's 67 largest metropolitan areas, with additional funds available for territorial and tribal governments.

Jurisdictions that participate and complete their climate action plans become eligible to apply for a \$4.6 billion pool of CPRG implementation grants to fund on-the-ground projects and initiatives to execute those plans. EPA will also provide assistance and peer-to-peer learning opportunities to help states leverage other federal funding streams for plan implementation.

In short, participation in the program will unlock millions of dollars in investments to help build home-grown clean industries and address pressing local issues while cutting climate change emissions.

Unlike the much-maligned Clean Power Plan, an Obama-era policy that would have required each state to meet an assigned emissions reduction target for the power sector, the CPRG program allows states and cities flexibility in setting their own goals for sectors of their own choosing, and lines up resources to implement those self-determined strategies.

The program includes requirements for robust public engagement so that local governments, urban and rural communities, tribes, labor, community and faith-based organizations, industry, and the business community all have a chance to weigh in on the plan. Essentially, the CPRG program extends the opportunity for each state to take on climate action in its own image.

A climate plan crafted by South Dakotans, for South Dakotans could look like:

Expanding incentives for our farmers and ranchers to practice conservation and adopt responsible soil management practices.

Investing in smart grid updates to better accommodate our burgeoning renewable energy sector and take full advantage of our state's vast wind and solar resources.

Broadening weatherization assistance so that families can keep heating and energy costs down during our brutal winters.

Investing in research and development of low-carbon technologies, to help South Dakota realize its ambitions of becoming a hub for science and innovation.

The CPRG invites states to engage with climate change issues on their own terms — not through regulations or mandates, but through innovation and investments that will bring real benefits at the community level. But it is up to states to step up and accept that invitation. With our elected officials seemingly allergic to anything climate-related, will South Dakota miss this once-in-a-generation opportunity?

If a state is foolish enough to decline the \$3 million planning grant, those funds will instead be distributed to that state's most populous metropolitan areas. In South Dakota, that means Sioux Falls and Rapid City, who would have until April 28 to either accept or cede the funds to a national pool. Given recent actions by the mayor of Sioux Falls to remove all mentions of "climate change" and "greenhouse gas" from a community-developed sustainability plan, it is unclear whether the leadership exists at any level in South

Dakota to engage with this issue. Without that leadership, South Dakotans will be left behind.

Other states — and not just coastal climate hawks — have already seized this opportunity to invest in a cleaner, more resilient economy. Alabama, Nebraska, Missouri, and North Dakota are among the states that have already opted in. One Nebraska lawmaker voiced support for the program, astutely noting that it didn't make "good business sense" to allow funds designated for Nebraska and provided by Nebraska taxpayers to go to another state.

Despite what you might hear from certain elected officials, nearly 70% of South Dakotans understand that climate change is happening and is caused by human activities, and 53% believe that the governor should be doing more to address it. With a week left to opt into the CPRG program, South Dakota has a choice: begin to engage on real solutions that work for our state, or sit back and watch our neighbors leave us in the dust.

Kara Hoving is a climate equity policy researcher and serves as communications coordinator at SoDak 350, a nonpartisan grassroots organization mobilizing South Dakotans for climate action. She lives in Brookings.

Burn, bury or display: Tribal nations discuss how to treat stolen items from Wounded Knee victims

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MARCH 24, 2023 7:48 AM

Cedric Broken Nose stopped his van every hundred or so miles in a cross country trek from Massachusetts to South Dakota last November.

He'd get out and circle the vehicle in an empty parking lot, smudging sacred herbs and praying as curious bystanders looked on.

The stops added hours to his two-and-a-half day journey, but it was a responsibility that came with the cargo: belongings stripped from hundreds of Lakota men, women and children killed by U.S. cavalry in the Wounded Knee massacre 133 years ago.

Broken Nose was charged with delivering the more than 130 items back home, to the Pine Ridge Reservation. The Founders Museum in Barre, Massachusetts, kept the items for nearly a century. Now, tribal members are beginning a series of meetings to discuss what to do with the items.

Broken Nose is the great-grandson of James Pipe On Head, who survived the massacre at 12 years old. Broken Nose said he is a descendent of Chief Big Foot as well, who died at Wounded Knee.

"Our ancestors were murdered there, but their items were taken away. As they're taken away, their spirit is uneasy and these items need to be there so they make a full circle," Broken Nose said.

Descendants of the Wounded Knee survivors pressured the museum for decades to return their ancestors' items.

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, adopted in 1990, requires government-funded institutions to acknowledge their ownership of Native human remains and sacred objects. The museum chose to return items but was not required to do so, because it is privately funded.

Tribal members received clothing, weapons, pipes and more.

The memory of Wounded Knee is still painful, Broken Nose said. Growing up, he returned to the site of the massacre each year on the Dec. 29 anniversary to pray with his grandmother. Descendants held a ceremony on the 2022 anniversary to officially accept the belongings.

Saturday will be the first of four gatherings, The Si'Tanka Ta' Oyate O'mniceye (The Ancestors' Belongings meeting), to discuss what to do with the items — bury them, burn them or display them in a local museum — but also to pray and grieve, Broken Nose said. Members of the Standing Rock, Cheyenne River and Rosebud tribal nations will attend.

Broken Nose said items such as clothing, which have blood or sweat on them from their wearers, would traditionally be burned in a spiritual ceremony to be returned to the ancestor they belonged to.

Items such as pipes and tomahawks are traditionally passed down to younger family members. But since it would be difficult and costly to find what families the items belong to, the discussion will focus on where

to keep and potentially display such items.

Although it has been proposed to bury items at the site, Broken Nose worries that the items could be dug up again.

"As Lakota people, we have a whole year to go through this bereavement process and then release the items like in a ceremony to release the soul," he said, adding that future meetings will likely follow the astronomical coming of the seasons. "It helps us to grieve and let go at the end."

The meeting will start at 10 a.m. Mountain time on Saturday at the OLC multipurpose building in Kyle with a prayer ceremony for the returned belongings. The discussion about the items will be from 12:30 to 6 p.m. Broken Nose hopes to allow more people to attend virtually through Zoom.

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.

Bipartisan former members of Congress call for boost in funding to secure elections

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 24, 2023 5:41 PM

WASHINGTON — A bipartisan group of former U.S. lawmakers on the National Council on Election Integrity called on Congress on Friday to spend \$400 million on election integrity to insulate the system from foreign interference.

"The Department of Homeland Security designated our election system as critical infrastructure in 2017," the four wrote in a letter. "However, that designation was not accompanied by regular or adequate federal funding."

"In each of the last two years, Congress appropriated just \$75 million for Election Security Grants — a fraction of the funds needed to secure our elections in this dynamic threat environment," they added.

The co-chairs of the council — former Virginia Republican Rep. Barbara Comstock, former Maryland Democratic Rep. Donna Edwards, former Indiana Democratic Rep. Tim Roemer and former Tennessee Republican Rep. Zach Wamp — wrote in the letter they are "deeply concerned that election officials are currently not receiving the federal support that they need to strengthen and secure federal elections in 2024 and beyond."

The National Council on Election Integrity, which began ahead of the 2020 presidential elections, includes about 40 civic and political leaders focused on "defending the legitimacy of our free and fair elections," according to its website.

Funding process

Congress' annual government funding process began earlier this month when President Joe Biden sent his budget request for fiscal 2024 to Capitol Hill.

Lawmakers on the House and Senate Appropriations Committees will spend the next few months holding hearings on the proposal with Cabinet secretaries and agency heads before they turn to writing the dozen annual government funding measures this summer.

Election security grants are just one request among thousands that Democrats and Republicans will weigh throughout the year as the House GOP looks for ways to reduce federal spending without significantly impacting Social Security, Medicare or defense programs.

Efforts to reduce federal spending to the last fiscal year's level emerged in early January when Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a California Republican, negotiated behind closed doors with several conservative members to secure the role of speaker amid ongoing opposition.

McCarthy reportedly made several promises during those meetings, including reducing federal spending to fiscal 2022 levels, though he and conservatives have never made details of their agreements public.

McCarthy has insisted that House Republicans will not raise the nation's borrowing capacity, known as the debt limit, unless Biden signs off on spending cuts.

But Republicans have yet to release their fiscal 2024 budget resolution or any of the dozen appropriations bills that fund account for about one-third of annual federal spending.

House Budget Chair Jodey Arrington, a Texas Republican, told reporters Thursday that he was putting together a "deal sheet" that would detail the spending cuts the House GOP wants in exchange for not defaulting on the nation's debt, according to Bloomberg.

McCarthy said Friday morning that he didn't know what Arrington was talking about, when asked to explain the move during a press conference.

Looking at budgets

House Appropriations Chair Kay Granger, a Texas Republican, said in a written statement Wednesday that "House Republicans made a promise to get our fiscal house in order, and we intend to do exactly that."

"We have the opportunity to take a hard look at department and agency budgets, find ways to reduce spending, and reform federal programs so we can prevent waste, fraud, and abuse," Granger said. "That's reasonable and responsible, and it is our duty to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars. This work will not be easy, but we'll get it done."

The National Council on Election Integrity's request in the Friday letter for \$400 million in election security grants during fiscal 2024 would be a fraction of the \$1.7 trillion that could be spent on discretionary programs during the upcoming fiscal year.

"In the last few years, state and local election officials have had to become experts in cybersecurity, digital communication, and public relations," the former members wrote.

"At the same time, election offices are struggling to bear rising costs for physical security, information requests, and basic necessities like ballot paper," they added. "Because Congress has not provided the funding to meet these obligations, state and local election officials have been saddled with an unfunded mandate."

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.

GOP bill establishing a federal parental bill of rights passed in U.S. House

South Dakota's Johnson votes in favor of legislation

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - MARCH 24, 2023 4:59 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republicans on Friday passed a bill designed to empower parents to inspect books and other teaching materials in local public schools, but Democrats sharply criticized the measure, saying it would censor teachers and ban books.

The legislation, called the Parents Bill of Rights, passed on a 213-208 vote (South Dakota Rep. Dusty Johnson, a Republican, voted in favor of the bill). It would codify federal education law to give parents and legal guardians access to school curricula, library books and other teaching materials, give parents advance notice prior to medical or mental health screenings, and mandate a standard number of parent-teacher meetings.

While Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has vowed the bill will not be taken up in that Democratic-controlled chamber, the parental bill of rights represents a top priority for Republicans in the states and in Congress.

"Sending a child to public school does not terminate parental rights at the door," Rep. Erin Houchin, R-Ind., said.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Julia Letlow, R-La., comes after a wave of recently passed state laws that center on restricting classroom discussion or lessons dealing with sexual orientation, gender identity and race. Florida passed a "Don't Say Gay" bill that has drawn national attention, coupled with conservative

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groups that have pushed for the banning of thousands of books.

Letlow said the bill is about "one simple and fundamental principle," which is to make sure that parents "always have a seat at the table when it comes to their child's education."

"You have a right to get the basic information about your children's education ... the Parents Bill of Rights is an important step towards protecting children and dramatically strengthening the rights of parents," House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said on the House floor.

GOP opponents

Five Republicans voted against the bill: Matt Gaetz of Florida, Andy Biggs of Arizona, Ken Buck of Colorado, Matt Rosendale of Montana and Mike Lawler of New York.

Ten Democrats did not vote.

Lawmakers considered 22 amendments on the House floor, and 12 passed. There were three amendments that Democrats were able to include, but they were all rejected. Two were from Rep. Sara Jacobs, D-Calif. One would amend language in the bill relating to cost and another had to do with reviews of professional development materials.

An amendment by Rep. Suzanne Marie Bonamici, D-Ore., would have created a parental coordinator position in public schools, increase authorization levels for Full-Service Community Schools and establish rules for prohibiting the banning of books and certain curriculum. Full-Service Community Schools provide support and coordination for families and children in rural and high-poverty areas.

Lawmakers debated the bill on Thursday prior to its passage on Friday. Democrats argued that many of the requirements in the measure are already in place at public schools.

For example, parents already have access to a school's budget and are allowed to speak at public school board meetings.

"This bill does not give parents any more rights than they already have," Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon, D-Penn., said.

The top Democrat on the Education and Workforce Committee, Bobby Scott of Virginia, said the legislation is meant "to score political points and scare parents into thinking that schools do not have their best interests at heart."

Schumer, the U.S. Senate leader, called the bill "Orwellian to the core," and said it "will not see the light of day here in the Senate."

The Biden administration said in a statement that it does not support the bill "in its current form because the bill does not actually help parents support their children at school."

Book bans

Most of the debate was on whether the bill would lead to more bans on books, particularly books about the LGBTQ+ community and people of color. Thousands of books from LGBTQ+ authors and authors of color, or stories that feature LGBTQ+ and characters of color, have been banned in schools.

"H.R. 5 threatens to open the floodgates to book bans, more restrictions on what can be said in the classroom, and attempts to rewrite history and censor facts, all at the expense of our students," Scanlon said. "While it sounds benign, this bill will be used to eliminate classroom conversations about racism and the American story or portrayals of LGBTQ people in books."

Republicans pushed back on that criticism. Education and Workforce Committee Chair Virginia Foxx, R-N.C., said that there is nothing in the bill that bans books.

But many Republicans used books about the LGBTQ+ community as examples of books that should not be allowed in schools.

"Parents, is this something you want your children to read?" Rep. Ralph Norman, Republican of South Carolina, asked after he listed several books as an example, all ones that center LGBTQ+ stories such as "This Book is Gay," and "Juliet Takes A Breath."

The top Democrat on the House Rules Committee, Rep. Jim McGovern of Massachusetts, said the bill is going to be "weaponized by far right groups," which he argued is already happening with the banning of thousands of books across the country.

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"It's going to force teachers to decide between staying silent and teaching something that certain politicians in their state don't like," he said. "It's already happening, for God's sake."

During the markup of the bill in early March, which lasted more than 16 hours, Democrats on the House Education and Workforce Committee argued that the bill creates a burden of reporting requirements on schools, diverts resources and personnel away from families and "opens the door to dictate what students can and cannot read or learn."

One of the amendments on the House floor introduced by Rep. Andrew Garbarino, R-N.Y., stated that nothing in the bill "shall be construed as authorizing or granting parents the right or ability to deny any student who is not their child from accessing any books or other reading materials that are otherwise available in the library of their child's school."

Scott of Virginia said that Democrats agree with the amendment, but the nature of the amendment "exposes a problem with the underlying bill."

Scott said that amendment showed the bill bans books.

"You should not be able to ban books for other children or other parents' children," Scott said.

The amendment passed on a voice vote.

Transgender students

Rep. Lauren Boebert, R-Colo., introduced two amendments to the bill specifically aimed at transgender students. One amendment would require that parents are notified if a public school allows a transgender student to compete in an "athletic program or activity that is designated for women or girls."

"Women's sports are under attack," she said, adding that she is a sponsor of H.R. 734, which bans transgender girls from competing in school sports consistent with their gender identity.

That bill passed out of the House Education and Workforce Committee in early March and would amend Title IX to require student athletes to compete in sports in accordance with "a person's reproductive biology and genetics at birth," with the bill's language specifically targeting transgender girls.

Another amendment by Boebert would require parents to be notified if a public school allows a transgender student to use the bathroom that aligns with their gender.

Scott pushed back and said Republicans should stop "disparaging trans youth."

"I don't think we need a federal law to tell students which bathroom to use," Scott said.

Both amendments were accepted by a voice vote.

The amendments specifically tailored toward transgender students are part of a national campaign by Republican lawmakers and conservative groups in the states to restrict the rights of people in the LGBTQ community, particularly transgender youth.

Among other amendments:

Rep. Don Bacon, a Nebraska Republican, added an amendment that would require Local Education Agencies to tell parents or legal guardians how many school counselors an elementary or secondary school has. It passed by a voice vote.

Foxx added an amendment that expresses Congress' "support for parents' fundamental rights to direct the education of their children and that courts should use the strict scrutiny test to evaluate laws involving those rights." It passed by a voice vote.

Rep. Eli Crane, R-Ariz., introduced an amendment that would allow parents to file a civil lawsuit against a public school, or individual such as a teacher, for not complying with the bill. It failed by a recorded vote of 61-365.

Rep. Warren Davidson, R-Ohio, introduced an amendment that would require public schools to have an open enrollment period for students living within and outside the district, to allow parents to have school choice. It failed by a recorded vote of 89-338.

Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, R-Penn., added an amendment that would require a Government Accountability Office report to Congress on the cost requirements of the bill for public schools. It passed by a recorded vote of 386-39.

Rep. Mike Lawler, R-N.Y., added an amendment to exempt private schools from following the require-

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ments of the bill. According to the amendment, "local educational agencies do not have the authority to exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum or program of instruction of non-public elementary or secondary schools." It passed by a voice vote.

Rep. Mark Green, R-Tenn., added an amendment to require public schools to notify parents in a timely manner if there is a cyberattack on the school and if their child's information is compromised. It passed by a recorded vote of 420-5.

Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., introduced an amendment that would end the K-12 portion of the Department of Education. It failed by a recorded vote of 161-265.

Rep. Rich McCormick, R-Ga., added an amendment that would allow parents to address their school board about a violation of parental rights. It passed by a voice vote.

McCormick introduced another amendment that would require public schools to inform parents of non-curriculum-based events. It failed by a recorded vote of 107-317.

Rep. Max Miller, R-Ohio, added an amendment to expand the definition of schools to include secondary career and technical schools. It passed by a voice vote.

Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., added an amendment that requires public schools to notify parents of any videos or records of violent activities "of which they are aware." It passed by a voice vote.

What's in the bill?

The legislation passed by the U.S. House would add language to the federal Education and Secondary Education Act of 1965, stating that parents, or legal guardians who have children in publicly funded schools have the right to:

- Review curriculum.

- Know if a state changes educational standards.

- Review a school's budget.

- Review a list of books and materials in the school library.

- Address the school board.

- To be informed about violent activity at the school.

- To be informed of any plans to eliminate "gifted or talented programs," according to the bill.

- Meet with teachers twice a year.

The bill would also add language to the 1974 Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act to:

- Require parental consent "for the use of technology in the classroom for purposes of educating the student," according to the bill.

- Make available to parents for inspection all instructional materials, teacher's manuals, books and films, among other items.

- Prohibit schools from using student information for marketing and other non-educational uses.

- Require notice and consent from parents for any school medical examinations, which is defined as a screening that "involves the exposure of private body parts, or any act during such examination or screening that includes incision, insertion, or injection into the body, or a mental health or substance use disorder screening," with the exceptions of hearing, vision or scoliosis screenings, the bill states.

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.

Native American agricultural leaders detail farm bill priorities at U.S. Senate hearing

South Dakotans provide testimony to committee

BY: ADAM GOLDSTEIN - MARCH 24, 2023 2:48 PM

WASHINGTON — A roundtable of Native American agricultural leaders at a recent U.S. Senate hearing lobbied for increased sovereignty and social justice in the coming farm bill by expanding tribes' jurisdiction over U.S. Department of Agriculture programs.

It's called "638" authority and refers to Public Law 93-638, which gives tribes the power to manage certain federal programs that benefit their communities. The authority is administered via contracts and compacts, and has been used to delegate control of health care and infrastructure services to Native peoples in past years.

It has more recently been applied to Native nutrition and wildfire management through two USDA pilot programs, created in the 2018 farm bill.

Democratic Sen. Brian Schatz of Hawaii said that the 2018 farm bill was the first in which Native communities "had a meaningful seat at the table."

Schatz said that the point of the March 22 hearing was to generate a set of consolidated, bipartisan recommendations to be submitted to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry by the end of March.

"The 2018 farm bill broke barriers, but more work needs to be done," Schatz said. "The next farm bill is another opportunity for us to collaborate and build on this incredible progress, and to further advance federal agricultural policy that includes Native priorities."

The Indigenous leaders also talked about investing in on-reservation USDA work training initiatives and regional meat processing, along with increasing access to credit and federal farm programs.

The farm bill is a multiyear omnibus spending law which authorizes an array of agricultural and food programs, including federal crop insurance, food stamp benefits and farm resource conservation.

The roughly \$500 billion bill is renewed close to every five years, and includes mandatory spending that must be in line with previous farm bills.

Food program said to be effective

Senate committee members and speakers touted the effectiveness of the USDA's Self Determination Demonstration Project, a 638 pilot program which allowed tribes to substitute parts of USDA nutrition plans for Native-procured foods. The project was set up through the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations in the 2018 farm bill.

Participants in the first round of the program included eight tribes across Alaska, Michigan, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Washington and Wisconsin. Another round of funding for tribal nutrition projects is expected to be announced this summer.

Mary Greene Trottier, president of the National Association of Food Distribution Programs on Indian Reservations, said the Self Determination Demonstration Project has been a "success story," especially amid high demand for food during the COVID-19 pandemic.

She added that the program created training opportunities to teach Native seniors how to preserve their foods through "brutal" winters.

Madeline Soboleff Levy, general counsel for the Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, said that the program has helped the Tlingit and Haida tribes expand distribution of culturally significant foods, like Tlingit potatoes and seal.

Other panelists advocated for the expansion of 638 applicability to all USDA nutrition, forestry and food safety inspection programs.

Trenton Kisse, the director of agriculture and natural resources for Muscogee Creek Nation in Oklahoma, said the Intertribal Agriculture Council hopes to see an expansion of 638 contracts to all USDA programs and offices. He emphasized the prospects of expanding these contracts to Food Safety and Inspection

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Services, given a lack of regional access to food inspectors.

In response to a question from Democratic Sen. Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico, Vincent Cowboy, the chief operations officer for the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry in New Mexico, said USDA inspectors have limited experience with Native crops like blue cornmeal and sumac berries.

Cowboy added that inspection fees and a lack of access to USDA employees have been a barrier for the Navajo tribe's domestic sales over the past six years.

Ryan Lankford of Island Mountain Development Group in Montana said tribal colleges and the Federally-Recognized Tribes Extension Program represent great opportunities for integrating USDA work training programs, especially for food inspection and meat processing.

Kissee added that establishing a tribal self-governance office in the agency could help oversee a successful expansion of the 638 program, given a lack of clarity over what services can be contracted out.

"I think if there was a touch point there," Kissee said, "that would go a long way in effecting that change."

Limited access to credit, programs

Democratic Sen. Tina Smith of Minnesota asked Lankford about Native access to lines of credit and risk management being complicated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, given that a lot of Native agricultural land is held in trust by the Department of the Interior.

Lankford said that given banks will not make loans using tribal operating land or equipment as collateral, a robust crop insurance program with high baseline subsidies remains a priority for Native farmers, as some banks will account for their insurance plans as a collateral asset on loans.

Dustin Schmidt, a South Dakota rancher and member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, added that there is limited tribal enrollment in risk management programs due to the cost of participating.

He added that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric drought monitor, which many programs base their payouts upon, is a "huge problem" for the functionality of these programs.

"We've been in a severe drought for two years, and we haven't had any according to our drought monitor," Schmidt said. "In order to enroll into those programs, we've got to get that fixed."

Kelsey Scott, also of South Dakota and a director of programs at the Intertribal Agriculture Council, said that it is important to note that banks can collateralize tribal land and equipment, but will not do so.

"I think that we could really reflect on the fact that the historical under-service and lack of access to USDA programs has helped to perpetuate that void of wealth in many of these communities," Scott said.

She pointed to the "great job" that Native community development financial institutions are doing to fill this gap, and the need to develop Native-specific risk management infrastructure.

Lankford and other producers also spoke to the need to get Native producers on trade missions abroad.

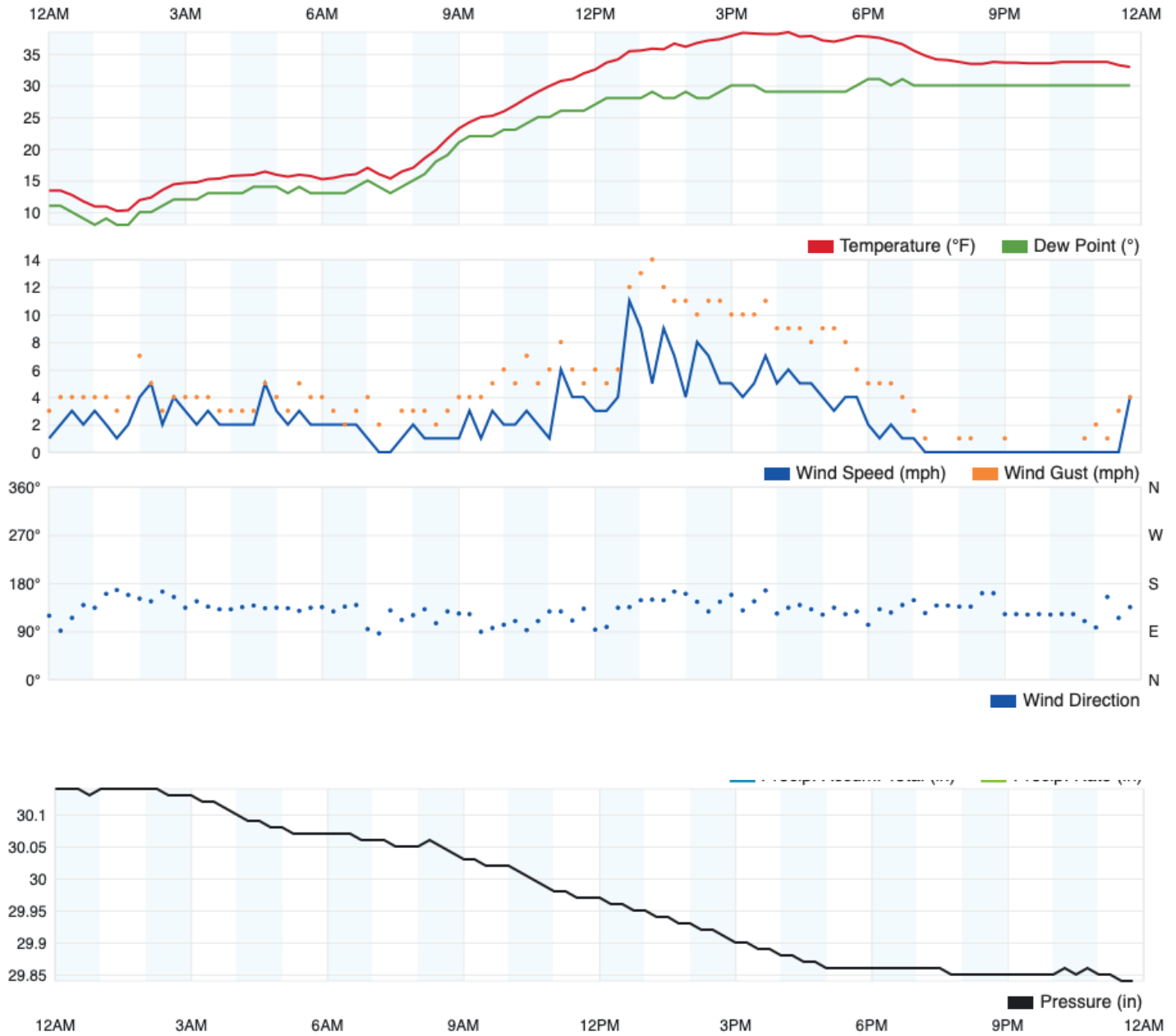
"That's key to being sovereign, is that we can expand and reach out for ourselves," Lankford said.

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

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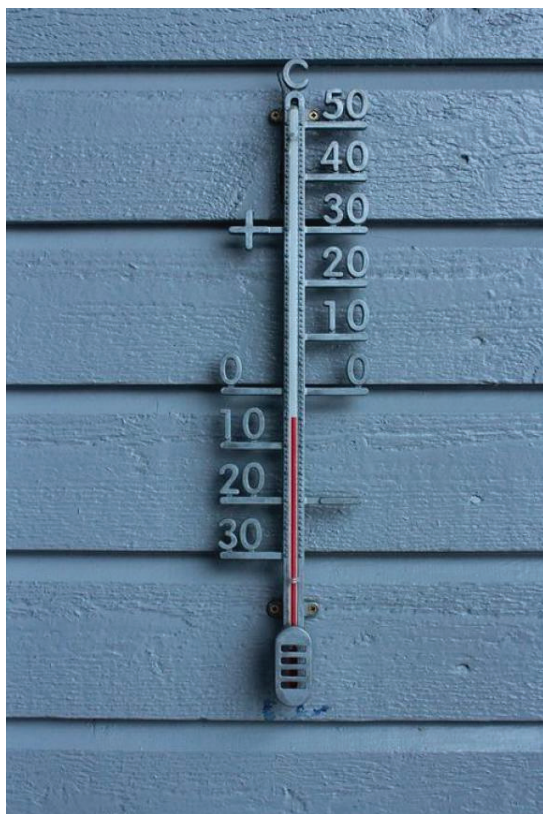
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
						
Areas Fog then Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 30 °F	Low: 5 °F	High: 23 °F	Low: 9 °F	High: 23 °F	Low: 0 °F	High: 24 °F



Weekend Forecast

Saturday



Highs: 28 - 36°F

Lows: 5 - 21°F

Sunday



Highs: 23 - 37°F

Lows: 9 - 19°F

According to the calendar, we are on full day number 5 of spring. Clearly the temperatures have not received the message. After the fog dissipates this morning, expect cloudy skies. Temps will be 15 to 20 degrees below average this weekend, but winds will be light.

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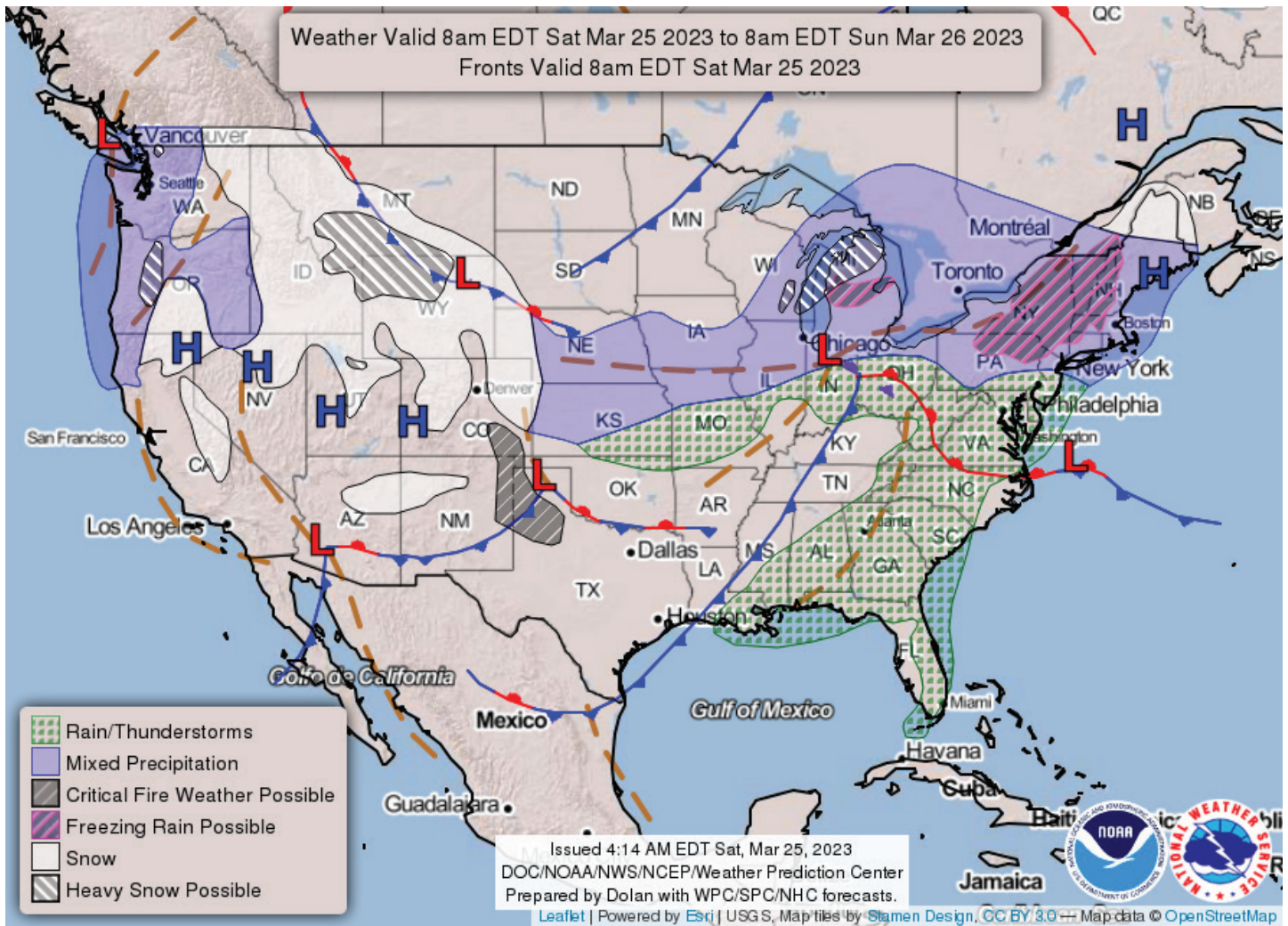
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 39 °F at 4:18 PM
Low Temp: 10 °F at 1:39 AM
Wind: 14 mph at 12:47 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 28 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 81 in 1925
Record Low: -10 in 1894
Average High: 47
Average Low: 23
Average Precip in March.: 0.67
Precip to date in March.: 1.60
Average Precip to date: 1.84
Precip Year to Date: 3.18
Sunset Tonight: 7:52:29 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:22:19 AM



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Today in Weather History

March 25, 2009: Rapid snowmelt and ice jamming caused the Elm River near Westport to rise -above flood stage on March 20th. The Elm River reached an all-time record level of 22.69 feet on March 25th almost 9 feet above flood stage. The previous record was 22.11 feet set on April 10th, 1969. The flood stage for the Elm River at Westport is 14 feet. The city of Westport was evacuated with the flood waters causing damage to many homes and roads in and around Westport. Also, many other roads and agricultural and pastureland along the river were flooded. The Elm River slowly receded and fell below flood stage on March 30th. The flood waters from the Elm River flowed south and into the northern portion of Moccasin Creek. Subsequently, the Moccasin Creek rose as the water flowed south into the city of Aberdeen. Flooding became a concern for Aberdeen and areas along the creek north of Aberdeen. The Governor signed an emergency declaration which allowed the state to help with flood response efforts, including sending 50,000 sandbags to the area. Also, the National Guard was activated to move a variety of heavy equipment. Some sandbagging and a falling Elm River kept the Moccasin Creek from causing any significant flooding in and north of Aberdeen. The creek flooded some township and county roads. Click [HERE](#) for pictures of the Elm and Maple Rivers.

1843 - A second great snowstorm hit the northeastern U.S. The storm produced snow from Maine all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. Natchez MS received three inches of snow, and up to 15 inches buried eastern Tennessee. Coastal Maine received 204 inches of snow that winter. (David Ludlum)

1901: More than 20 people were killed by an estimated F3 tornado that moved across parts of Birmingham, Alabama. The twister cut a 15-mile path from the south side of the city to Avondale and Irondale.

1914 - Society Hill, SC, was buried under 18 inches of snow, establishing a state record. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1934 - A spring storm produced 21 inches of snow at Amarillo TX in 24 hours. However, much of the snow melted as it fell, and as a result, the snow cover was never any deeper than 4.5 inches. (David Ludlum)

1935: Suffocating dust storms frequently occurred in southeast Colorado between the 12th and the 25th of the month. Six people died, and many livestock starved or suffocated. Up to six feet of dust covered the ground. Schools were closed, and tenants deserted many rural homes.

1948 - For the second time in less than a week airplanes were destroyed by a tornado at Tinker AFB in Oklahoma City OK. A March 20th tornado destroyed fifty planes at Tinker AFB causing more than ten million dollars damage, and the March 25th tornado destroyed another thirty-five planes causing six million dollars damage. The first tornado struck without warning, and caused more damage than any previous tornado in the state of Oklahoma. The second tornado was predicted by Fawbush and Miller of the United States Air Force, and their accurate tornado forecast ushered in the modern era of severe weather forecasting. (The Weather Channel) (Storm Data) (The National Severe Storms Forecast Center)

1975 - The town of Sandberg reported a wind gust to 101 mph, a record for the state of California. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Heavy rain left rivers and streams swollen in Kansas and Nebraska, causing considerable crop damage due to flooding of agricultural areas. The Saline River near Wilson Reservoir in central Kansas reached its highest level since 1951. March rainfall at Grand Island NE exceeded their previous record of 5.57 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - An early season heat wave prevailed in the southwestern U.S. The high of 93 degrees at Tucson, AZ, was a new record for March. Windy conditions prevailed across the central and eastern U.S. Winds gusted to 60 mph at Minneapolis MN, and reached 120 mph atop Rendezvous Peak WY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A Pacific storm brought wet weather to much of the western third of the country, with heavy snow in some of the higher elevations. La Porte CA was drenched with 3.56 inches of rain in 24 hours. Up to 24 inches of snow blanketed the Sierra Nevada Range. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Temperatures dipped below zero in the Northern Rocky Mountain Region. Hardin MT was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 10 degrees below zero. Freezing drizzle was reported in the Southern Plains Region, with afternoon highs only in the 30s from the Southern High Plains to Missouri and Arkansas. (The National Weather Summary)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE?

"Wire-walkers" are known for their death-defying performances. These well-prepared and highly skillful entertainers are known for walking on thin wires that are suspended high in the air over dangerous sites. Normally they use a long pole for balance.

There was one "high-wire walker" who decided to use a wheelbarrow filled with 200 pounds of bricks for his balance as he crossed Niagara Falls. After he accomplished his feat, a crowd of reporters gathered around him and began to ask questions. After he answered the last question, he pointed to one of them and asked, "Do you believe that I can take this wheelbarrow that is now filled with bricks back to the other side?"

"Certainly," came the reply.

"Good!" The wire-walker then dumped the bricks on the ground and said to the reporter, "Get in and I'll take you to the other side."

Mark tells the story of a father who brought his demon-possessed boy to the disciples for healing. They failed. Then, he took his son to Jesus, and said, "Do something if you can." And Jesus said, "If I can? Anything is possible if you believe. But, do you believe?"

And the father replied, "Lord, help my unbelief!"

Our faith only grows when we pray, give our fears to God, and trust in Him alone.

Prayer: Father, remove our doubts and fears and fill our minds and hearts with a faith that completely relies on You for all things. Please, remove our unbelief. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The father instantly cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!" Mark 9:24



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:
03.24.23

14 17 33 42 66 15

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$322,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.22.23

14 18 21 50 51 3

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$39,880,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 29 Mins
50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.24.23

1 8 30 31 43 17

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 59 Mins 51
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.22.23

4 9 12 22 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 29 Mins 51
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.22.23

3 32 58 59 61 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 28 Mins 51
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.22.23

27 28 37 50 57 5

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$112,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 28 Mins 51
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Indigenous artists help skateboarding earn stamp of approval

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Years ago, skateboarding was branded as a hobby for rebels or stoners in city streets, schoolyards and back alleys. Those days are long gone.

Skateboarding, which has Native Hawaiian roots connected to surfing, no longer is on the fringes. It became an Olympic sport in 2020. There are numerous amateur and professional skateboarding competitions in the U.S. And on Friday, the U.S. Postal Service is issuing stamps that laud the sport — and what Indigenous groups have brought to the skating culture.

Di'Orr Greenwood, 27, an artist born and raised on the Navajo Nation in Arizona whose work is featured on the new stamps, says it's a long way from when she was a kid and people always kicked her out of certain spots just for skating.

"Now it's like being accepted on a global scale," Greenwood said. "There's so many skateboarders I know that are extremely proud of it."

The postal agency ceremoniously unveiled the "Art of the Skateboard" stamps in a Phoenix skate park as a skateboarding competition was going on nearby.

The stamps feature skateboard artists from around the country, including Greenwood and Crystal Worl, who is Tlingit Athabascan. William James Taylor Jr., an artist from Virginia, and Federico "MasPaz" Frum, a Colombian-born muralist in Washington, D.C., round out the quartet of featured artists. Everyone but Taylor was in attendance.

"Over time skateboards themselves have become works of art highlighting artists' creativity, boldness and energy," William Zollars, of the USPS Board of Governors, told an audience of city officials and supporters. "As an American institution older than the country itself, the Postal Service is always looking for ways to highlight and honor stories and histories that are unique to the United States."

The stamps underscore the prevalence of skateboarding, especially in Indian Country where the demand for skate parks is growing.

The artists see the stamp as a small canvas, a functional art piece that will be seen across the U.S. and beyond.

"Maybe I'll get a letter in the mail that someone sent me with my stamp on it," said Worl, 35, who lives in Juneau, Alaska. "I think that's when it will really hit home with the excitement of that."

Antonio Alcalá, USPS art director, led the search for artists to paint skate decks for the project. After settling on a final design, each artist received a skateboard from Alcalá to work on. He then photographed the maple skate decks and incorporated them into an illustration of a young person holding up a skateboard for display. The person is seen in muted colors to draw attention to the skate deck.

Alcalá used social media to seek out artists who, besides being talented, were knowledgeable about skateboarding culture. Worl was already on his radar because her brother, Rico, designed the Raven Story stamp in 2021, which honored a central figure in Indigenous stories along the coast in the Pacific Northwest.

The Worl siblings run an online shop called Trickster Company with fashions, home goods and other merchandise with Indigenous and modern twists. For her skate deck, Crystal Worl paid homage to her clan and her love of the water with a Sockeye salmon against a blue and indigo background.

She was careful about choosing what to highlight.

"There are certain designs, patterns and stories that belong to certain clans and you have to have permission even as an Indigenous person to share certain stories or designs," Worl said.

The only times Navajo culture has been featured in stamps is with rugs or necklaces. Greenwood, who tried out for the U.S. Women's Olympic skateboarding team, knew immediately she wanted to incorporate her heritage in a modern way. Her nods to the Navajo culture include a turquoise inlay and a depiction of eagle feathers, which are used to give blessings.

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"I was born and raised with my great-grandmother, who looked at a stamp kind of like how a young kid would look at an iPhone 13," Greenwood said. "She entrusted every important news and every important document and everything to a stamp to send it and trust that it got there."

Skateboarding has become a staple across Indian Country. In Oregon, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs will reopen a refurbished skate park March 29 thanks to a partnership with pro skateboarder Tony Hawk's nonprofit, The Skatepark Project. Skateboarders on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation in eastern Arizona recently got funding from there, too. A skate park opened in August on the Hopi reservation. Youth-organized competitions take place on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

Dustinn Craig, a White Mountain Apache filmmaker and "lifer" skateboarder in Arizona, has made documentaries and short films on the sport. The 47-year-old remembers how skateboarding was seen as dorky and anti-establishment when he was a kid hiding "a useless wooden toy" in his locker. At the same time, Craig credits skateboarding culture as "my arts and humanities education."

So he is wary of the mainstream's embrace, as well as the sometimes clique-ish nature, of today's skateboarding world.

"For those of us who have been in it for a very long time, it's kind of insulting because I think a lot of the popularity has been due to the proliferation of access to the visuals of the youth culture skateboarding through the internet and social media," Craig said. "So, I feel like it really sort of trivializes and sort of robs Native youth of authenticity of the older skateboard culture that I was raised on."

He acknowledges that he may come off as the "grumpy old man" to younger Indigenous skateboarders who are open to collaborating with outsiders.

The four skateboards designed by the artists will eventually be transferred to the Smithsonian National Postal Museum, said Jonathan Castillo, USPS spokesperson.

The stamps, which will have a printing of 18 million, will be available at post offices and on the USPS website beginning Friday. For the artists, being part of a project that feels low-tech in this age of social media is exciting.

"It's like the physical thing is special because you go out of your way to go to the post office, buy the stamps and write something," Worl said.

Terry Tang is a member of The Associated Press' Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/ttangAP>

Suspect in Iowa woman's killing arrested in South Dakota

SHELDON, Iowa (AP) — A suspect in an Iowa killing was arrested Friday outside a marijuana dispensary in South Dakota, authorities said.

Nathaniel Byron Kessel, 41, of Rock Rapids, Iowa, is now awaiting extradition. He was taken into custody on the first-degree murder warrant after the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe police chief noticed a vehicle that Iowa officials were seeking at the Royal River Casino and Hotel in South Dakota, KDLT-TV reports.

The police chief then alerted other agencies and Kessel was apprehended outside the Native Nations Cannabis Dispensary, a spokesman for the tribe said.

Kessel also is accused in the arrest warrant of being a felon in possession of a firearm, the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation said in a news release.

The search for him began after a 911 caller alerted authorities about the slain woman late Wednesday afternoon. Officers responded and found her body inside her Sheldon, Iowa, home.

The woman's name and cause of death weren't immediately released. The release said that an autopsy is scheduled for Saturday.

Tribe urges Army to speed up return of child's 1879 remains

By MARK SCOLFARO Associated Press

Federal authorities expect to return a 13-year-old boy's remains to his Native American tribe in South Dakota this fall, they said Friday. The statement comes days after the tribe urged for a faster return of the child who died at a federal boarding school for Indigenous children in 1879.

The Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate wrote to the head of the U.S. Army's cemetery office this week, demanding movement on their effort to have the remains of Amos LaFromboise repatriated from a graveyard at the Carlisle Barracks, a military facility in Pennsylvania.

The letter from three lawyers with the Native American Rights Fund to Army Cemeteries Executive Director Karen Durham-Aguilera describes the child as the son of one of the tribe's most celebrated leaders, Chief Joseph LaFromboise, who signed an 1867 treaty that established their current reservation boundaries.

The Office of Army Cemeteries emailed a statement saying that Amos LaFromboise's disinterment was approved a year ago and that the Army also told the boy's family and the tribe's chair last summer that his remains will be returned in 2023. His disinterment will be entirely at the Army's expense, the office said.

"The Army currently plans to conduct the disinterment of Amos this September and the required Federal Register Notice will be published in the next 60 days," according to the statement.

The tribe argues that the Army has been requiring repatriation standards that are more demanding than those in the federal Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, mandating a signed affidavit from the child's closest living relative, which can be difficult or impossible for 19th century remains.

"Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate expected Amos to return home from Carlisle Indian Industrial School," they wrote, "to lead his people like his father and serve as a model for future generations of Tribal leaders."

Lawyers for the tribe said Friday their request stands to have Amos LaFromboise repatriated under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and that the tribe is willing to discuss the next steps.

Amos LaFromboise died 20 days after his arrival at Carlisle the year the school opened. The tribe's letter says the Army has previously dug up and reburied his remains at least three times in three different locations. The Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate want to bury him next to his father on the Lake Traverse Reservation in northeast South Dakota.

Tribe historians say six children of tribal leaders were sent to Carlisle in 1879. Three of the boys died there and a fourth passed away shortly after he returned home.

At a ceremony two years ago to return nine disinterred remains of Rosebud Sioux children, U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland said forced assimilation practices at Indian schools stripped away the children's clothing, language and culture.

The Carlisle school put children through harsh conditions that sometimes resulted in their deaths. Founded by an Army officer, the school cut their braids, dressed them in military-style uniforms and punished them for speaking their native languages. European names were forced upon them.

More than 10,000 Native American children were taught there and endured harsh conditions that sometimes led to death from such diseases as tuberculosis. There have been several rounds of disinterment and repatriation at Carlisle in recent years.

Coroner: 7 dead in tornado that ripped through US South

ROLLING FORK, Miss. (AP) — A powerful tornado tore through rural Mississippi and Alabama on Friday night, killing at least seven people, destroying buildings and knocking out power as severe weather that produced hail the size of golf balls moved through several southern states and prompted authorities to warn some in its path that they were in a "life-threatening situation."

The National Weather Service confirmed a tornado caused damage about 60 miles (96 kilometers) northeast of Jackson, Mississippi. The rural towns of Silver City and Rolling Fork were reporting destruction as the tornado continued sweeping northeast at 70 mph (113 kph) without weakening, racing towards Alabama through towns including Winona and Amory into the night.

At least seven people were killed by the tornado in Mississippi, Sharkey County Coroner Angelia Easton

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told ABC News. Rolling Fork is located in Sharkey County.

ABC News early Saturday reported an additional six deaths, including three in Carroll County, two in Monroe County and one in Humphreys County, citing the county coroners and a Mississippi Highway Patrol trooper. The Associated Press was not immediately able to confirm those fatalities.

The National Weather Service issued an alert as the storm was hitting that didn't mince words: "To protect your life, TAKE COVER NOW!"

"You are in a life-threatening situation," it warned. "Flying debris may be deadly to those caught without shelter. Mobile homes will be destroyed. Considerable damage to homes, businesses, and vehicles is likely and complete destruction is possible."

Cornel Knight told The Associated Press that he, his wife and their 3-year-old daughter were at a relative's home in Rolling Fork when the tornado struck. He said the sky was dark but "you could see the direction from every transformer that blew."

He said it was "eerily quiet" as that happened. Knight said he watched from a doorway until the tornado was, he estimated, less than a mile away. Then he told everyone in the house to take cover in a hallway. He said the tornado struck another relative's home across a wide corn field from where he was. A wall in that home collapsed and trapped several people inside. As Knight spoke to AP by phone, he said he could see lights from emergency vehicles at the partially collapsed home.

Rolling Fork mayor Eldridge Walker told WLBT-TV he was unable to get out of his damaged home soon after the tornado hit because power lines were down. He said emergency responders were trying to take injured people to hospitals. He did not immediately know how many people had been hurt.

A former mayor of Rolling Fork, Fred Miller, told the television station a tornado blew the windows out of the back of his house.

Storm chaser Reed Timmer posted on Twitter that Rolling Fork was in immediate need of emergency personnel and that he was heading with injured residents of the town to a Vicksburg hospital.

The Sharkey-Issaquena Community Hospital on the west side of Rolling Fork was damaged, WAPT reported.

The Sharkey County Sheriff's Office in Rolling Fork reported gas leaks and people trapped in piles of rubble, according to the Vicksburg News. Some law enforcement units were unaccounted for in Sharkey, according to the newspaper.

Rolling Fork and the surrounding area has wide expanses of cotton, corn and soybean fields and catfish farming ponds. More than a half-dozen shelters were opened in the state by emergency officials.

Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves said in a Twitter post Friday night that search and rescue teams were active and that officials were sending more ambulances and emergency assets to those affected.

"Many in the MS Delta need your prayer and God's protection tonight," the post said. "Watch weather reports and stay cautious through the night, Mississippi!"

This was a supercell, the nasty type of storms that brew the deadliest tornado and most damaging hail in the United States, said University of Northern Illinois University meteorology professor Walker Ashley. What's more this a night-time wet one which is "the worst kind," he said.

Meteorologists saw a big tornado risk coming for the general region, not the specific area, as much as a week in advance, said Ashley, who was discussing it with his colleagues as early as March 17. The National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center put out a long-range alert for the area on March 19, he said.

Tornado experts like Ashley have been warning about increased risk exposure in the region because of people building more.

"You mix a particularly socioeconomically vulnerable landscape with a fast-moving, long-track nocturnal tornado, and, disaster will happen," Ashley said in an email.

Earlier Friday a car was swept away and two passengers drowned in southwestern Missouri during torrential rains that were part of a severe weather system. Authorities said six young adults were in the vehicle that was swept away as the car tried to cross a bridge over a flooded creek in the town of Grovespring.

Four of the six made it out of the water. The body of Devon Holt, 20, of Grovespring, was found at 3:30

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a.m., and the body of Alexander Roman-Ranelli, 19, of Springfield, was recovered about six hours later, Missouri State Highway Patrol Sgt. Thomas Young said.

The driver told authorities that the rain made it difficult to see that water from a creek had covered the bridge, Young said.

Meanwhile, the search continued in another southwestern Missouri county for a woman who was missing after flash flooding from a small river washed a car off the road. The Logan Rogersville Fire Protection District said there was no sign of the woman. Two others who were in the car were rescued. Crews planned to use boats and have searchers walking along the riverbank.

When a woman's SUV got swept up in rushing flood waters Friday morning near Granby, Missouri, Layton Hoyer made his way through icy-cold waters to rescue her.

Some parts of southern Missouri saw nearly 3 inches (8 centimeters) of rain Thursday night and into Friday morning as severe weather hit other areas. A suspected tornado touched down early Friday in north Texas.

Matt Elliott, warning coordination meteorologist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma, said the severe weather was expected across several states.

The Storm Prediction Center warned the greatest threat of tornadoes would come in portions of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee. Storms with damaging winds and hail were forecast from eastern Texas and southeastern Oklahoma into parts of southeastern Missouri and southern Illinois.

More than 49,000 customers had lost power in Arkansas, Mississippi and Tennessee as of Friday night, according to poweroutage.us.

In Texas, a suspected tornado struck about 5 a.m. in the southwest corner of Wise County, damaging homes and downing trees and power lines, said Cody Powell, the county's emergency management coordinator. Powell said no injuries were reported.

The weather service had not confirmed a tornado, but damage to homes was also reported in neighboring Parker County, said meteorologist Matt Stalley.

Associated Press writer Emily Wagster Pettus in Jackson, Mississippi, Jim Salter in O'Fallon, Missouri, Lisa Baumann in Bellingham, Washington, Robert Jablon in Los Angeles, and Jackie Quinn in Washington, D.C. contributed to this report.

Berlin vote could turbocharge German capital's climate plans

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Voters in Berlin go to the polls this weekend to decide on a proposal that would force the city government to drastically ramp up the German capital's climate goals.

Sunday's referendum, which has attracted considerable financial support from U.S.-based philanthropists, calls for Berlin to become climate neutral by 2030, meaning that within less than eight years the city would not be allowed to contribute further to global warming. An existing law sets the deadline for achieving that goal at 2045, which is also Germany's national target.

The center-right Christian Democratic Union, which won a recent local election in the capital and is likely to lead its new government, opposes the earlier target but would be bound to implement it if the referendum passes.

Jessamine Davis, a spokesperson for the grassroots group that initiated the vote, said Berlin's current target isn't in line with the 2015 Paris climate accord, which aims to cap global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) compared with the pre-industrial average.

"This is a very ambitious target, we're clear about that. And it won't be easy," she said of the plan to cut almost all emissions by 2030. "But the climate crisis is an even bigger challenge."

Davis pointed to the flood disaster in western Germany two years ago that killed more than 180 people and caused tens of billions of euros (dollars) in economic damage. Scientists say such disasters could become more likely as the planet warms. By contrast, redesigning Berlin's city-wide heating network so it becomes carbon neutral is estimated to cost 4 billion euros, she said.

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Polls show Berliners are narrowly in favor of the proposal, but the law also requires that it win the support of at least 25% of the city's 2.4 million eligible voters to pass — something that could be harder to achieve on a day when no elections or other votes are taking place.

To draw attention to the referendum, Davis' group has conducted a large-scale advertising campaign, helped by donations of almost 1.2 million euros (\$1.3 million). While about 150,000 euros came from crowdfunding, most of the money was provided by philanthropic organizations and individuals.

The biggest chunk — over 400,000 euros — came from German-American investors Albert Wenger and Susan Danziger.

In emails to The Associated Press, Wenger said the U.S.-based couple had "a long history of supporting climate movements and making investments in innovative solutions to the climate crisis."

"The Berlin ballot initiative demonstrates that citizens in a democratic process are demanding faster and stronger climate action," he said. "This is a replicable model for the rest of the world and could result in achieving climate neutrality by 2030 before major tipping points are crossed."

Stefan Evers, a senior lawmaker for the Christian Democrats, said his party acknowledges the "historic challenge" of climate change and the impacts it is already having on Berlin and its 3.7 million inhabitants.

The party has proposed increasing the budget for climate-related measures by 5 to 10 billion euros, but Evers said the investments required if the referendum passes would break the bank.

"Everybody who votes 'yes' on Sunday needs to ask themselves: Do we want to make drastic savings on kindergartens, schools, public sports facilities, homeless aid and social housing because of this referendum, or not," he told fellow lawmakers Thursday.

Evers warned that if estimates of a 100 billion-euro price tag for the measures are accurate, "then in a few years Berlin won't be climate-neutral but bankrupt."

Strong criticism of the plan has also come from newspapers owned by German media giant Axel Springer. Its biggest shareholder is American investment firm KKR, which has sizeable financial interests in the fossil fuel industry.

In a statement, Axel Springer dismissed as "absurd" any suggestion that its publications could be influenced by the interests of its owners. "Economic interests or those of third parties don't play a role in the coverage by our media," it said.

Davis said she's optimistic about the referendum's chances, "but what really counts now is that everybody goes to the polls." Days before the referendum her group complained that many voters who requested postal ballots had not received them.

'What can we do?': Millions in African countries need power

By MOGOMOTSI MAGOME Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — From Zimbabwe, where many must work at night because it's the only time there is power, to Nigeria where collapses of the grid are frequent, the reliable supply of electricity remains elusive across Africa.

The electricity shortages that plague many of Africa's 54 countries are a serious drain on the continent's economic growth, energy experts warn.

In recent years South Africa's power generation has become so inadequate that the continent's most developed economy must cope with rolling power blackouts of eight to 10 hours per day.

Africa's sprawling cities have erratic supplies of electricity but large swaths of the continent's rural areas have no power at all. In 2021, 43% of Africans — about 600 million people — lacked access to electricity with 590 million of them in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the International Energy Agency.

Investments of nearly \$20 billion are required annually to achieve universal electrification across sub-Saharan Africa, according to World Bank estimates. Of that figure nearly \$10 billion is needed annually bring power and keep it on in West and Central Africa.

There are many reasons for Africa's dire delivery of electricity including ageing infrastructure, lack of government oversight and a shortage of skills to maintain the national grids, according to Andrew Law-

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rence, an energy expert at the Witwatersrand University Business School in Johannesburg.

A historical problem is that many colonial regimes built electrical systems largely reserved for the minority white population and which excluded large parts of the Black population.

Today many African countries rely on state-owned power utilities.

Much attention has focused in the past two years on the Western-funded "Just Energy Transition," in which France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union are offering funds to help poorer countries move from highly polluting coal-fired power generation to renewable, environmentally-friendly sources of power. Africa as a region should be among the major beneficiaries in order to expand electricity access on the continent and improve the struggling power grids, said Lawrence.

"The transition should target rural access and place at the forefront the electrification of the continent as a whole. This is something that is technically possible," he said.

The Western powers vowed to make \$8.5 billion available to help South Africa move away from its coal-fired power plants, which produce 80% of the country's power.

As a result of its dependence upon coal, South Africa is among the top 20 highest emitters of planet-warming greenhouse gases in the world and accounts for nearly a third of all of Africa's emissions, according to experts.

South Africa's plan to move away from coal, however, is hampered by its pressing need to produce as much power as possible each day.

The East African nation of Uganda for years has also grappled with power cuts despite massive investment in electricity generation.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, has grappled with an inadequate power supply for many years, generating just 4,000 megawatts though the population of more than 210 million people needs 30,000 megawatts, say experts. The oil-rich but energy-poor West African nation has ramped up investments in the power sector but endemic corruption and mismanagement have resulted in little gains.

In Zimbabwe, electricity shortages that have plagued the country for years have worsened as the state authority that manages Kariba, the country's biggest dam, has limited power generation due to low water levels.

Successive droughts have reduced Lake Kariba's level so much that the Kariba South Hydro Power Station, which provides Zimbabwe with about 70% of its electricity, is currently producing just 300 megawatts, far less than its capacity of 1,050 megawatts.

Zimbabwe's coal-fired power stations that also provide some electricity have become unreliable due to aging infrastructure marked by frequent breakdowns. The country's solar potential is yet to be fully developed to meaningfully augment supply.

This means that Harare barber Omar Chienda never knows when he'll have the power needed to run his electric clippers.

"What can we do? We just have to wait until electricity is back but most of the time it comes back at night," said Chienda, a 39-year-old father of three. "That means I can't work, my family goes hungry."

In Nigeria's capital city of Abuja, restaurant owner Favour Ben, 29, said she spends a large part of her monthly budget on electricity bills and on petrol for her generator, but adds that she gets only an average of 7 hours of power daily.

"It has been very difficult, especially after paying your electricity bill and they don't give you light," said Ben. "Most times, I prepare customers' orders but if there is no light (power for a refrigerator), it turns bad the next day (and) I have lost money for that."

Businesses in Nigeria suffer an annual loss of \$29 billion as a result of unreliable electricity, the World Bank said, with providers of essential services often struggling to keep their operations afloat on generators.

As delegates gathered in Cape Town this month to discuss Africa's energy challenges, there was a resounding sentiment that drawn-out power shortages on the continent had to be addressed urgently. There was some hope that the Western-funded "Just Energy Transition" would create some opportunities, but many remained skeptical.

Among the biggest critics of efforts to have countries like South Africa to transition quickly from the use of coal to cleaner energy is South Africa's Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy Gwede Mantashe.

He is among those advocating that Africa use all sources available to it to produce adequate power for the continent, including natural gas, solar, wind, hydropower and especially coal.

"Coal will be with us for many years to come. Those who see it as corruption or a road to whatever, they are going to be disappointed for many, many years," said Mantashe. "Coal is going to outlive many of us."

AP journalists Chinedu Asadu in Abuja, Nigeria; Farai Mutsaka in Harare, Zimbabwe; and Rodney Muhumuza in Kampala, Uganda, contributed.

Trump rallying supporters in Waco ahead of possible charges

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WACO, Texas (AP) — Staring down a possible indictment, a defiant Donald Trump is hoping to put on a show of force Saturday as he holds the first rally of his 2024 presidential campaign in a city made famous by deadly resistance against law enforcement.

The former president will gather with supporters at an airport in Waco, which will mark the 30th anniversary of the Waco massacre next month. In 1993, an attempted raid by law enforcement of a compound belonging to the Branch Davidians, a religious cult, resulted in a shootout that led to a 51-day siege, ending in a blaze that left dozens dead.

The rally comes as Trump has berated prosecutors, encouraged protests and raised the prospect of possible violence should he become the first former president in U.S. history to face criminal charges. Some of his recent rhetoric has echoed language he used before the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol by a mob of his supporters seeking to stop the transfer of power.

"What kind of person can charge another person, in this case a former President of the United States ... and leading candidate (by far!) for the Republican Party nomination, with a Crime, when it is known by all that NO Crime has been committed, & also known that potential death & destruction in such a false charge could be catastrophic for our Country?" Trump wrote on his social media site early Friday.

Trump's campaign insisted the location and timing of the event had nothing to do with the Waco siege or anniversary. Instead, a spokesperson said the site was chosen because it was conveniently situated near four of the state's biggest metropolitan areas — Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston, Austin and San Antonio — and has the infrastructure to handle a sizable crowd.

"This is the ideal location to have as many supporters from across the state and in neighboring states attend this historic rally," said Trump spokesperson Steven Cheung.

The city is part of McLennan County, which Trump won in 2020 by more than 23 points. The airport where the rally is being held is 17 miles from the Branch Davidian compound.

The rally had already been in the works before it became clear that a grand jury in New York was drawing closer to a possible indictment as it investigates hush money payments made to women who alleged sexual encounters with Trump during the height of his 2016 campaign. Trump has denied the women's claims.

But the timing will give Trump an opportunity to demonstrate his continued popularity with the GOP base and to portray himself as the victim of a politically motivated "witch hunt" as he campaigns for a second term in the White House.

The grand jury investigating the hush money payment is expected to meet again Monday in New York.

Trump has spent weeks now railing against the investigation. In a move that seemed designed to preempt a formal announcement and to galvanize his loyal base, he claimed last Saturday that he would be arrested the following Tuesday. While that did not happen, Trump has used the days since to try to shape public perception, claiming, for instance, that the Manhattan district attorney's office had plunged into "Total disarray," though there was no evidence to suggest prosecutors were backing away from the case.

His efforts echoed a strategy the former president has used before, including during special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation.

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Trump has also launched a series of increasingly personal attacks against Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, calling him "a danger to our Country" who "should be removed immediately," and using increasingly racist and dehumanizing rhetoric.

On Thursday, he sought to tie Bragg, Manhattan's first Black district attorney, to George Soros, a liberal billionaire donor who doesn't know Bragg and hasn't donated directly to him. "A SOROS BACKED ANIMAL," Trump wrote of Bragg, adding, "THIS IS NO LEGAL SYSTEM, THIS IS THE GESTAPO." He also shared an article that juxtaposed a picture of Bragg with a photo of Trump swinging a baseball bat in Bragg's direction.

The former president has also repeatedly involved violence. Last Saturday, he called on his supporters to "PROTEST, TAKE OUR NATION BACK!" And on Thursday, he bemoaned, "OUR COUNTRY IS BEING DESTROYED, AS THEY TELL US TO BE PEACEFUL!"

On Friday, a powdery substance was found with a threatening letter in a mailroom at Bragg's offices, authorities said. Officials later determined the substance wasn't dangerous.

Bragg's office sent an internal email to staff last Saturday saying, "We do not tolerate attempts to intimidate our office or threaten the rule of law in New York." After the powder was discovered, Bragg sent another email to staffers telling them their safety was the top priority.

"We will continue to apply the law evenly and fairly, which is what each of you does every single day," he wrote Friday.

Even before the threatening letter was sent to Bragg's office, Democrats warned that Trump's remarks had the potential to incite violence.

"The twice-impeached former president's rhetoric is reckless, reprehensible and irresponsible. It's dangerous, and if he keeps it up he's going to get someone killed," House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries said earlier Friday.

The Manhattan case focuses on a \$130,000 payment that Trump's longtime lawyer and fixer, Michael Cohen, made to porn actor Stormy Daniels as Trump was in the throes of the 2016 campaign. Trump later reimbursed Cohen and his company logged the reimbursements as a legal expense. Cohen has already served time in prison after pleading guilty to campaign finance charges and lying to Congress, among other crimes.

Trump is also facing an investigation in Georgia over his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election as well as federal probes into his handling of classified documents and possible obstruction, as well as his efforts on Jan. 6.

Associated Press writers Michael R. Sisak and Sagar Meghani contributed to this report from Washington.

Pennsylvania chocolate plant blast kills 2, leaves 9 missing

WEST READING, Pa. (AP) — An explosion at a chocolate factory in Pennsylvania Friday killed two people and left nine people missing, authorities said.

Several other people were injured by the explosion at the R.M. Palmer Co. plant, said West Reading Borough Police Department Chief of Police Wayne Holben, who did not confirm the exact number of injured.

The explosion just before 5 p.m. sent a plume of black smoke into the air, destroying one building and damaging a neighboring building that included apartments.

"It's pretty leveled," West Reading Borough Mayor Samantha Kaag said of the explosion site. "The building in the front, with the church and the apartments, the explosion was so big that it moved that building four feet forward."

The cause of the blast in the community about 60 miles (96 kilometers) northwest of Philadelphia was under investigation, Holden told reporters.

Eight people were taken to Reading Hospital Friday evening, Tower Health spokeswoman Jessica Bezler said.

Two people were admitted in fair condition and five were being treated and would be released, she said

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in an email. One patient was transferred to another facility, but Bezler provided no further details.

Kaag said people were asked to move back about a block in each direction from the site of the explosion but no evacuations were ordered.

Dean Murray, the borough manager of West Reading Borough, said some residents were displaced from the damaged apartment building.

Kagg said borough officials were not in immediate contact with officials from R.M. Palmer, which Murray described as "a staple of the borough."

The company's website says it has been making "chocolate novelties" since 1948 and now has 850 employees at its West Reading headquarters.

Bank failures and rescue test Yellen's decades of experience

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Working against the clock to stop a developing banking crisis, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen had until sunset on Sunday, March 12, to come up with a plan to calm the U.S. economy.

She quickly turned to someone who had been through the fire before, and on a much larger scale: Hank Paulson.

Paulson, who ran the Treasury Department during the financial crisis in 2008, counseled immediate government action. "It's really hard to stop or even slow down a bank run. And to do that requires a powerful and quick government response," Paulson said, recounting what he told Yellen.

A bank run on Silicon Valley Bank had begun earlier in the week. Regulators took it over by that Friday afternoon. The move panicked shareholders and depositors, stirring stark reminders of earlier failures that triggered the Great Recession.

Perhaps no treasury secretary has come to the office with Yellen's ample resume, including service as the chair of the Federal Reserve and a lifetime of studying economics and finance. That experience was put to a severe test as she worked to assure multiple constituencies, including financial markets, balky Republicans in Congress and President Joe Biden's White House economic team.

Yellen spent that crucial period two weeks ago assembling Federal Reserve officials; regulators at the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. and the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency; lawmakers, including congressional leaders on banking — Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, and Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C.; and Wall Street executives such as Jamie Dimon, the chief executive of J.P. Morgan & Chase.

But few could relate as well as Paulson, who had asked Congress for authority to buy up \$700 billion in distressed mortgage-related assets from private firms to save the larger U.S. financial system.

His words to Yellen as she navigated the bank collapses: "We are fighting for the survival of our regional banks."

The Fed defines regional banks as those with total assets between \$10 billion to \$100 billion, not as small as community banks and not as large as national ones. Regional and community banking organizations constitute the largest number of banking institutions supervised by the Federal Reserve.

The crisis became apparent on Wednesday, March 8. Silicon Valley Bank's chief executive officer, Greg Becker had sent a letter to shareholders stating that the bank would need to raise \$2.25 billion to shore up its finances after suffering significant losses.

The bank held an unusually high level of uninsured deposits, and many investments in long-term government bonds and mortgage-backed securities had tumbled in value as interest rates rose. That caused depositors on Thursday, March 9, to rush to withdraw their funds en masse. It triggered a bank run.

On the next afternoon, Yellen spoke with Fed Chair Jerome Powell, FDIC head Martin Gruenberg, acting head of the OCC Michael Hsu and San Francisco Fed chair Mary Daly. Regulators rushed to place Silicon Valley Bank into FDIC receivership.

That weekend, staff from Treasury, the Fed, and FDIC began the search for a potential buyer for the bank. Yellen and other federal officials met to ensure the bank could make payroll by the coming Monday, and that no taxpayer money would be used to fund the rescue. And do it all before Asian markets opened

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for the week.

Yellen also had to assuage Republicans in Congress. She talked with McHenry and other lawmakers who wanted to know whether the actions would lead to more regulation. McHenry did not respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press, but said at an American Bankers Association event this past week that he supported the government's decision to make depositors whole.

By Sunday evening, March 12, the Treasury, the Federal Reserve, and FDIC sent a joint statement announcing that New York-based Signature Bank had also failed and was being seized. Officials also said that an emergency lending package would ensure that all depositors at Silicon Valley Bank and New York-based Signature Bank would be protected.

In a matter of days, a third bank, First Republic was fortified by \$30 billion from 11 big banks to prevent more regional institutions from collapsing.

Yellen came up with the idea of using bank funds to save First Republic and first raised it with Powell, Gruenberg and other regulators. Then she had a call with Dimon and broached the idea. After that call, Dimon reportedly said "we have our marching orders" and proceeded to build a coalition of banks, according to two people briefed on the matter, speaking anonymously because they were not authorized to discuss details of a private conversation.

A representative from Dimon's office did not respond to a request for comment.

This account of Yellen's actions during that weekend is based on more than a dozen interviews.

A former Federal Reserve governor, Sarah Bloom Raskin, said Yellen and other policymakers will now have to determine "how two banks that many didn't think would pose a systemic risk to the banking system" could so threaten the nation's financial health.

A year ago, she withdrew her name as a Fed governor nominee after not receiving enough Senate support. She had previously served from 2010 to 2016 and took her oath of office at the same time as Yellen, a vice chair at the time.

Brown, who urged President Barack Obama to nominate Yellen to succeed Ben Bernanke as Fed chair, said people "realize how competent she is and in how she's charged with doing big things in the administration."

Now, Yellen has to respond to accusations that the Biden administration is bailing out risky banks. Some Republicans have put the blame on Biden administration spending, which they say triggered 40-year high inflation, forcing the the Fed to raise interest rates to tame prices, in turn impacting banks and their investments.

Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., said at an American Bankers Association event last week that "when you go to a 40-year high level of inflation, the truth of the matter when inflation is that high, you should immediately go into action, the Fed doesn't have a scalpel, it has a hammer and it hurts."

Biden has since called on Congress to strengthen the rules for banks to prevent future failures and to allow regulators to impose tougher penalties on the executives of failed banks, including clawing back compensation and making it easier to bar them from working in the industry.

Paulson said "we're really fortunate to have a smart, experienced treasury secretary," describing Yellen as "one who reaches out to gets a range of opinions and talks to market participants on a real time basis."

But her test is not over.

She called a meeting of the Financial Stability Oversight Council on Friday, to discuss, in part, the developments at Deutsche Bank, the German multinational investment bank whose stock was tumbling.

Crazy Eight: No top seeds among last 8 in March Madness

By JOHN MARSHALL AP Basketball Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — March has gone from madness to unprecedented.

With Miami's win over Houston and San Diego State's takedown of Alabama on Friday night, the men's NCAA Tournament will not have a No. 1 seed in the Elite Eight for the first time since seeding began in 1979.

"There's not a lot of difference between the best team in the country and the worst team in the country," San Diego State coach Brian Dutcher said. "You're seeing that on this stage."

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Purdue, Kansas, Houston and Alabama are all gone, ensuring the Final Four will not have a No. 1 team for the first time since 2011 and the third overall. The four teams deemed by the NCAA to be the best in the country combined to win five tournament games this year, the fewest by three among No. 1 seeds since the field expanded to 64 teams in 1985.

Texas is the lone No. 2 seed remaining after bouncing Xavier out of the bracket 83-71 Friday night under interim coach Rodney Terry. The fewest combined No. 1-2 seeds in the Elite Eight before this year was two (three times).

How crazy has it been? The national title game is guaranteed to have at least one of these teams: San Diego State, Creighton, Florida Atlantic or Kansas State. The Aztecs, Bluejays and Owls have never been to the Elite Eight. The Wildcats were picked to finish last in the Big 12.

It's also a lock the winning coach will be a first-time champion.

"It's a lot of really good programs in the country that have lost — I mean, we could go down the list of them," Alabama coach Nate Oats said. "That's what makes the NCAA Tournament the NCAA Tournament. They're all good teams."

The madness started in the opening round of the East Region, when fairytale Fairleigh Dickinson wrecked brackets around the world by becoming the second No. 16 seed to beat a No. 1.

Goodbye, Purdue.

Arkansas was the next giant killer, taking down reigning national champion and West Region No. 1 seed Kansas in the second round.

The Sweet 16 turned sour on Friday for Alabama, the bracket's No. 1 overall seed. The Crimson Tide were no match for Dutcher's ball-and-body-hawking San Diego State Aztecs in a 71-64 South Region loss in Louisville, Kentucky. San Diego State is the first Mountain West Conference school to reach the Elite Eight.

Miami capped the No. 1 carnage in the Midwest Region by taking apart one of the nation's stingiest defenses in a 89-75 win over Houston in Kansas City, Missouri that had Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga dancing in the locker room.

"Unfortunately, one off-night and you go home in this tournament," Cougars coach Kelvin Sampson said. On to an Elite Eight unlike any other.

AP Sports Writer Josh Dubow contributed to this report.

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

Bolsonaro's legal woes deepen with undeclared diamond gifts

By ELÉONORE HUGHES and MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Undeclared diamond jewelry brought into Brazil from Saudi Arabia has deepened the legal jeopardy of former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro. An investigation into two sets of jewels reportedly worth millions is only the latest scandal threatening the far-right politician. But an extensive paper trail and even videos could make the case particularly daunting for Bolsonaro.

WHAT HAPPENED WITH THE DIAMONDS?

Federal police and prosecutors are investigating whether Bolsonaro tried to sneak two sets of expensive diamond jewelry into Brazil without paying taxes — and whether he improperly sought to prevent the items from being incorporated into the presidency's public collection. Authorities are also looking into whether he enlisted public officials to try to bypass customs.

The first set of jewels, composed of earrings, a necklace, a ring and a watch by Swiss brand Chopard, arrived in Brazil in October 2021 through Sao Paulo's international airport with an adviser to the then minister for mines and energy, Bento Albuquerque, according to the newspaper O Estado de S.Paulo, which first reported the case in early March.

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Customs authorities seized the jewels, which are reportedly worth \$3 million. A video released by television network Globo shows Albuquerque at customs later the same day stating that the jewels were for Bolsonaro's wife, Michelle.

A second set of jewels, also made by Chopard and including a watch, a pen, a ring, cuff links and a piece resembling a rosary, slipped past authorities and ended up in Bolsonaro's possession. The watch is worth about \$150,000, the newspaper Folha de S.Paulo reported.

A government watchdog on March 22 ordered Bolsonaro to turn the jewelry over to the state-owned Caixa Economica Federal bank, as well as firearms he received as a gift from authorities in the United Arab Emirates. Bolsonaro's representatives did so on Friday.

Brazil requires its citizens arriving by plane from abroad to declare goods worth more than \$1,000 and, for any amount above that exemption, pay a tax equal to 50% of their value. The two sets of jewelry would have been exempt from tax had they been a gift from the state of Saudi Arabia to the nation of Brazil, but would not have been Bolsonaro's to keep.

Bruno Dantas, a member of Brazil's government watchdog, said a president could receive a gift for personal use without paying taxes as long as it was of low value, such as a T-shirt of a country's national football team. Expensive jewelry does not meet the criteria, he said.

The watchdog said it will audit all gifts received by Brazil's presidency during Bolsonaro's term.

WHAT DID BOLSONARO DO ABOUT THE CONFISCATED JEWELS?

Documents and video footage appear to show Bolsonaro making multiple unsuccessful attempts to retrieve the seized jewelry.

A letter from the presidential office was sent to Albuquerque requesting that the jewels be released, O Estado de S.Paulo reported. The ministries of foreign affairs and mines and energy also sent letters pressuring customs authorities. Then Bolsonaro sent a personal letter to customs, O Estado de S.Paulo said.

A last attempt came in the closing days of Bolsonaro's presidency. According to a document viewed by O Estado de S.Paulo, on Bolsonaro's orders a sergeant took a military plane to Sao Paulo's airport in a failed effort to force the release. Globo released a video of the sergeant speaking with custom authorities.

WHAT LEGAL ISSUES HAS THE CASE RAISED?

The Senate's transparency commission is investigating whether the sale of a refinery by Brazil's state-controlled oil giant Petrobras to the United Arab Emirates' Mubadala Capital was related to the jewels. Mubadala didn't respond to a request for comment sent Friday.

Petrobras completed the sale for \$1.65 billion one month after the first set of jewels was seized in Sao Paulo. The price was "way below" fair market value, an oil workers' union said in a recent statement.

Rodrigo Sánchez Rios, a law professor at Pontifical Catholic University in the city of Curitiba, said Bolsonaro could potentially face trial on several counts, including influence peddling, embezzlement, money laundering and corruption.

"This is potentially the crime with the most evidence currently implicating Bolsonaro," said legal expert Wallace Corbo from the Getulio Vargas Foundation, a think tank and university.

WHAT HAS BOLSONARO SAID ABOUT THE JEWELRY?

"There was no intention on our part to disappear with this material," Bolsonaro told television network Record on Wednesday during an event in Florida. He previously told CNN Brasil that he neither asked for nor received the confiscated jewelry.

Bolsonaro's attorney Frederick Wassef said in a statement on March 7 that the former president "officially declared personal property received on trips," and is the target of political persecution.

WHAT ARE BOLSONARO'S OTHER LEGAL PROBLEMS?

The former president has denied any wrongdoing in all of the various cases under investigation, most recently whether he incited the Jan. 8 riots in which his supporters ransacked the Supreme Court, the presidential palace and Congress one week after leftist Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was inaugurated as president.

Bolsonaro is the subject of a dozen investigations by Brazil's electoral court into his actions during the presidential election campaign, particularly related to his unsubstantiated claims that Brazil's electronic

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voting system is susceptible to fraud. If Bolsonaro were found guilty in any of those cases, he would lose his political rights and be unable to run for office in the next election.

Separately, Bolsonaro and his allies are also under investigation in a sprawling Supreme Court-led investigation on the spread of alleged falsehoods and disinformation in Brazil.

Federal police are also investigating Bolsonaro and his administration for alleged genocide of the Indigenous Yanomami people in the Amazon rainforest by encouraging illegal miners to invade their territory and thereby endangering their lives. He has called the accusation a "hoax from the left."

Savarese reported from Sao Paulo.

Greene's DC jail visit pulls GOP closer to Jan. 6 rioters

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene swept into the District of Columbia jail to check on conditions for the Jan. 6 defendants, with Republican lawmakers handshaking and high-fiving the prisoners, who chanted "Let's Go Brandon!" — a coded vulgarity against President Joe Biden — as the group left.

A day earlier Speaker Kevin McCarthy met with the mother of slain rioter Ashli Babbitt, a Navy veteran who was shot and killed by police as she tried to climb through a broken window during the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol.

And the House Republican leader recently gave Fox News' Tucker Carlson exclusive access to a trove of Jan. 6 surveillance tapes despite the conservative commentator's airing of conspiracy theories about the Capitol attack.

Taken together, the House Republicans can be seen as working steadily but intently to distort the facts of the deadly riot, which played out for the world to see when Donald Trump's supporters laid siege to the Capitol, and in the process downplay the risk of domestic extremism in the U.S.

In actions and legislation, the Republicans are seeking to portray perpetrators of the Capitol riot as victims of zealous federal prosecutors, despite many being convicted of serious crimes. As Trump calls for the Jan. 6 defendants to be pardoned, some House Republicans are attempting to rebrand those who stormed the Capitol as "political prisoners."

The result is alarming to those who recognize a dangerously Orwellian attempt to whitewash recent history. "There's no question Marjorie Taylor Greene and other Republicans are attempting to rewrite history," said Heidi Beirich, the co-founder of the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism. "They're making light of what was a serious attack on our democracy."

The tour Greene led at the local jail Friday comes as nearly 1,000 people have been charged by the Justice Department in the attack on the Capitol — leaders of the extremist Oath Keepers convicted of seditious conspiracy. The 20 or so defendants being held at the jail, many in pretrial detention on serious federal charges, are among those who battled police at the Capitol, officials said, in what at times was a gruesome bloody scene of violence and mayhem.

Greene told The Associated Press the idea she's trying to rewrite history is the "stupidest thing" she's ever heard of, especially since the assault on the Capitol has been captured in the 41,000 hours of video that McCarthy made available to Fox News.

"We can't rewrite it — it's all on video," Greene told the AP.

"You can't change the history, but what we can do is expose the truth. That's what we need to do," Greene said.

The country has been here before — in the aftermath of the Civil War, when the Lost Cause movement sought to reframe the battle over ending slavery in the U.S. as one of states' rights, and again in the years following the Civil Rights movement as critics of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. questioned his transformative legacy.

In the House under Republican control this year, the new leadership openly questions what happened on Jan. 6 as well as how the federal government is investigating and prosecuting extremists. Outside groups

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are raising money and rallying to the aid of Jan. 6 defendants.

This past week, a Republican-led Judiciary subcommittee probed the federal government's treatment of parents protesting school board policies — sometimes violently — as unfair. Next week, the new Republican committee on the "weaponization" of the federal government will delve into First Amendment free speech rights on social media.

McCarthy warned that the federal government is labeling parents as "domestic terrorists" for showing up at school board meetings, even though such prosecutions are extremely rare.

His was a reference to a 2021 Justice Department memo from Attorney General Merrick Garland responding to the National School Board Association's concerns about violent protesters at school board meetings. Garland had directed federal law enforcement to address what he called a "disturbing spike" in harassment of school officials.

Probing the matter, the Republican-led House Judiciary Committee released a report showing that in one federal investigation, the FBI interviewed a mom for allegedly telling a local school board "we are coming for you." In another, the FBI investigated a dad who opposed COVID mask mandates after a tipster to a federal hotline said he "fit the profile of an insurrectionist" because he "rails against the government" and "has a lot of guns and threatens to use them."

"Parents should have a right to go to school board meetings and not be called terrorists," McCarthy said.

While Greene has said the Capitol attack was wrong, at the jail visit Friday she said she believes there's a "two-tiered" justice system and that the Jan. 6 defendants are being "treated as political prisoners" for their beliefs.

Democrats on the tour said that is categorically false. While the local jail came has long been the subject of complaints — the U.S. Marshals made plans to relocate 400 detainees after a surprise 2021 inspection found parts of the facility "do not meet the minimum standards" — the Jan. 6 defendants have been housed in a newer wing that was not cited as problematic in the Marshals' statement.

The two Democrats who joined the tour as members of the House Oversight Committee said they both had visited detention facilities before. "It's probably as good as a jail can be," said Rep. Jasmine Crockett, D-Texas, a former public defender.

Democratic Rep. Robert Garcia of California noted the way the Republicans led by Greene treated the Jan. 6 defendants as celebrities — shaking their hands and slapping backs when the lawmakers arrived in the jail facility.

As they left, the defendants chanted the "Let's Go Brandon!" phrase against Biden, he said in a tweet.

"What is most important to remember is that while Marjorie Taylor Greene and others want to treat these folks as pseudo celebrities, some of these folks are insurrectionists," Garcia told reporters. "And we can't forget that."

Texas police: Migrants found 'suffocating' in train; 2 dead

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — Two migrants were found dead and at least 10 were hospitalized Friday after police in South Texas received a call that they were "suffocating" in a freight train traveling near the U.S.-Mexico border.

The Uvalde Police Department said Border Patrol was informed of the phone call and able to stop the train. About 15 migrants were found inside, according to a statement from the department.

Union Pacific railroad said in a statement that the people were found in two cars on the train traveling east from Eagle Pass bound for San Antonio: 12 in a shipping container and three in a hopper car. The two people who died were in the shipping container, the statement said.

At least four people were air-lifted to San Antonio, authorities said, while others were taken to local hospitals.

The condition of all of those hospitalized was not immediately known. University Health in San Antonio tweeted that it had received two male patients, one in critical condition and one in serious condition.

Uvalde Police Chief Daniel Rodriguez told the San Antonio-Express News that dispatchers received a

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911 call about 3:50 p.m. from an unknown person seeking help. The train was stopped near the town of Knippa, which is less than 100 miles (161 kilometers) from the southern border.

"We're still trying to determine if it was from someone inside the car," Rodriguez said. "We're assuming it was from inside one of the cars."

Uvalde police said that Union Pacific railroad would lead the investigation.

In a statement, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas suggested the deaths and injuries were linked to human trafficking and pledged to hold those responsible accountable.

"We are heartbroken to learn of yet another tragic incident of migrants taking the dangerous journey," Mayorkas said on Twitter. "Smugglers are callous and only care about making a profit."

A cause of death Friday was not immediately clear. Highs in the area neared 90 degrees (32.2 Celsius), and shipping containers often get much hotter than the surrounding temperature.

Last summer, more than 50 migrants died after dozens of people were found in the back of a sweltering tractor-trailer that had been abandoned on the outskirts of San Antonio. The tragedy was the nation's deadliest smuggling episode on America's southern border, which led to officials vowing to step up policing efforts.

Migrants routinely travel through Uvalde, leading to high-speed vehicle pursuits that put schools in the area on lockdown. After the Robb Elementary School massacre in Uvalde last May, when a gunman killed 19 children and two teachers, Texas lawmakers concluded in a report that the frequency of the lockdowns may have led to a "diminished sense of vigilance" about security.

Union Pacific said it was "deeply saddened by this incident and the tragedies occurring at the border. We take the safety of all individuals seriously and work tirelessly with law enforcement partners to detect illegal items and people riding inside or on our rail cars."

On the other side of Texas, a 17-year-old was charged Friday with kidnapping two migrants whose rescue this week from a Houston hotel by FBI agents ended in gunfire that killed another suspect.

The migrants were stopped on a highway northwest of Houston on Saturday and were forced into another vehicle by the kidnapers, according to a prosecutor. Officials have said little about what happened between then and Thursday morning, when the FBI says its agents rescued two migrants following the shooting in north Houston.

DEA overseas review barely mentions corruption scandals

By JIM MUSTIAN and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — After nearly two years and at least \$1.4 million spent, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration on Friday released an external review of its overseas operations that barely mentions recent corruption scandals and offers recommendations that critics dismissed as overly vague.

Much of the 50-page report outlines the DEA's sprawling, 69-country "foreign footprint," while lauding its efforts to plug gaping holes in the oversight of undercover money laundering operations and special vetted units overseas.

"This report is stunningly vague in its actual evaluation of known problems at the DEA and remedies to fix them," said Sen. Chuck Grassley, an Iowa Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee. "This speaks to the agency's broader effort to evade oversight. The agency has attempted to dodge my oversight inquiries but I intend to push forward."

The external probe was announced in 2021 following reporting by The Associated Press on the crimes of José Irizarry, a disgraced former DEA agent now serving a 12-year federal prison sentence after confessing to laundering money for Colombian drug cartels and skimming millions from seizures and informants to fund an international joyride of fine dining, parties and prostitutes.

Irizarry told the AP last year that DEA agents have come to accept that there's nothing they can do to make a dent in the flow of illegal cocaine and opioids into the United States that has driven more than 100,000 overdose deaths a year.

"The drug war is a game," Irizarry said. "It was a very fun game that we were playing."

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Irizarry's case got one paragraph in the external review. An ongoing federal grand jury inquiry into some of his jet-setting former DEA colleagues was mentioned in a footnote. Also, Irizarry's lawyer told AP he offered to make his client available for an interview for the review but was never contacted.

"Interviews and documents demonstrated that the DEA has already largely implemented the recommendations from the DOJ OIG to enhance the oversight of compliance risks arising out of the agency's foreign operations," the review concluded, referring to the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Inspector General.

The probe found fault with the bureaucracy it said bogs down the assignment of agents to foreign divisions and recommended putting incentives in place to attract "top talent to hard-to-fill offices." It also blamed the "corrupting influence" of cartels for instances of "individual misconduct by DEA personnel."

"DEA also could do more to ensure supervisors are effectively evaluated and ultimately held accountable for compliance-related issues," the review found.

Other recommendations included more regular audits of foreign offices and vetted police units, and stricter controls on expenses.

The external review was conducted by former DEA administrator Jack Lawn and Boyd Johnson, a former federal prosecutor who handled international drug cases. Public records show the no-bid contract was awarded to the law firm WilmerHale, where Johnson works, at a cost of \$1.4 million. Johnson did not respond to emails seeking comment.

The report made little mention of the turmoil that has roiled DEA operations in Mexico, where law enforcement cooperation collapsed amid the tenure of a regional director who was quietly ousted from his post for having improper contact with lawyers for narcotraffickers.

AP reported earlier this year that Nicholas Palmeri served just 14 months in the post and retired before an Office of Inspector General report found he sought government reimbursement to pay for his own birthday party.

"For a report that cost the government over \$1.4 million, it does not seem to recommend the types of changes that would actually prevent another Irizarry or other misconduct," said Bonnie Klapper, a former federal prosecutor in New York. "While the report is very thorough in laying out DEA's role and responsibilities, it mentions only a very few examples of misconduct, and its recommendations don't go far enough."

Palmeri arrived to Mexico in the wake of one of the biggest setbacks in recent years in the U.S.-led drug war: the botched arrest of former Mexican Defense Secretary Salvador Cienfuegos. The retired general was nabbed on a sealed U.S. drug warrant upon arrival at the Los Angeles airport in 2020 only to be released a few weeks later under pressure from Mexico's leftist president, who retaliated by disbanding an elite police unit that was a key DEA ally.

Neither the Cienfuegos incident nor the arrest of another prominent U.S. ally in Mexico — ex-security chief Genaro Garcia Luna — are mentioned in the report.

"The report's key takeaway about improving information sharing and breaking down internal silos couldn't be more commendable," said John Feeley, a retired U.S. diplomat who worked alongside the DEA in numerous postings overseas. "But the biggest silo that needs to be dismantled from an operations perspective is the DEA's failure to communicate to front offices and ambassadors when it's investigating senior officials of host nations."

DEA Administrator Anne Milgram, who has declined repeated interview requests, said in a statement that the agency would implement all 17 of the report's recommendations.

"DEA is committed to meeting the challenges presented by today's global drug threats and ensuring that our work is conducted at the highest level possible," she said.

Goodman reported from Miami. Contact AP's global investigative team at Investigative@ap.org.

Los Angeles schools, union leaders reach deal after strike

By ROBERT JABLON Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The Los Angeles Unified School District and union leaders said Friday they reached a deal on pay raises for bus drivers, custodians and other support staff after a three-day strike that shut down the nation's second-largest school system.

The deal includes a series of retroactive raises going back to 2021 as well as pay bumps this coming July and January that will collectively hike worker pay by about 30%, said Max Arias, executive director of SEIU Local 99.

The deal also sets the district's minimum wage at \$22.52; provides a one-time \$1,000 raise for any worker who was employed in 2020 in appreciation of their work during the COVID-19 pandemic; and creates a \$3 million educational and professional development fund for union members, district Superintendent Alberto Carvalho said at a news conference.

Free health care will be provided for any employee working at least four hours a day and their families, he added, calling the deal historic and unprecedented in the nation.

"This agreement's going to make a lot of superintendents very nervous," he said. "And that's a good thing. ... Elevate the bar and, in the process, elevate the people."

The deal "elevates the dignity, the humanity of our workforce, respects the needs of our students, but also guarantees the fiscal viability of our district for years to come," Carvalho said.

He announced the deal alongside Arias and Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass. Both sides credited Bass, who took office in December, with helping reach the agreement.

The mayor has no authority over the schools but she does have a grandson in the district.

The deal must still be voted on by the school board and the full union, which represents about 30,000 workers also including cafeteria employees, special education assistants and other support staff. However it gives them most if not all of what they demanded and is expected to pass handily.

Those workers walked off the job Tuesday through Thursday amid stalled talks, and classes for some 500,000 students resumed Friday.

Members of United Teachers Los Angeles, the union representing 35,000 educators, counselors and other staff, joined the picket lines in solidarity, lending muscle to the walkout.

Teachers waged a six-day strike in 2019 over pay and contract issues, but support staff didn't join and schools remained open.

This time Carvalho had warned parents that classrooms would close for safety reasons because both instructors and support staff were taking part. The strike ended up snarling schedules for many parents because schools had to find alternate ways to provide daycare and the meals offered on campuses.

The strike has shone a spotlight on the issue of underpaid workers who serve as the backbone of schools across the country.

The union said district support staffers earn, on average, about \$25,000 per year and many live in poverty or must work several jobs because of low pay or limited hours while struggling with inflation and the area's high cost of housing.

Carvalho agreed that what he called indispensable workers were being underpaid.

The deal came just days after the union accused the district of engaging in unfair labor practices. Arias noted that another contract must be negotiated next year but added: "There is no strike planned for the foreseeable future."

"Thanks to the parents of Los Angeles and the students of Los Angeles and everyone who stood shoulder to shoulder with our members," he said.

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.

Miami beats No. 1 seed Houston; all four top NCAA seeds out

By ERIC OLSON AP Sports Writer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Knocking No. 1 seed Houston out of the NCAA Tournament made Jim Larrañaga feel like dancing.

Much to his players' delight, the 73-year-old Miami coach busted moves straight out of the disco era in the locker room Friday night to celebrate an 89-75 Sweet 16 victory that left the tournament without a No. 1 seed among its final eight teams for the first time since seeding began in 1979.

Larrañaga is known to dance in the locker room after his biggest wins, and this one in the Big Dance surely qualified.

"We were all hyped up," Jordan Miller said. "We love when Coach L dances. That's probably the best celebration we could look forward to."

Nijel Pack and Miami (28-7) hit shots from near and far against the stingiest defense in the country as the Hurricanes became only the fifth team this season to score at least 70 points against Houston (33-4).

"We just wanted it really bad," Miller said. "We came into this game as the underdogs. We had a lead throughout the whole game. I wouldn't say a comfortable lead, but a lead, and we just didn't want to let up."

The fifth-seeded Hurricanes made their second straight Elite Eight and will play second-seeded Texas or No. 3 seed Xavier in the Midwest Region final. Larrañaga is seeking his first Final Four with Miami and second overall — he took George Mason there as an 11 seed in 2006.

About 30 minutes before Houston's loss, top overall seed Alabama fell to San Diego State in Louisville, Kentucky. Fellow No. 1 seeds Purdue and Kansas lost during the tournament's first weekend.

The Cougars simply couldn't stop a multifaceted Miami offense led by Pack's 3-point shooting. He had season highs of seven 3-pointers on 10 attempts and 26 points.

Isaiah Wong's mid-range game helped get the 'Canes out to a fast start, and he finished with 20 points. Miller hurt the Cougars with his penetration and had 13 points, and Norchad Omier was his usual rugged self under the basket while recording his 16th double-double with 12 points and 13 rebounds.

"We emphasized moving the ball and finding the open man, and the guys did such a fantastic job from start to finish," Larrañaga said. "We only ended up with six turnovers. So that's the name of the game. And we tied them in rebounding. A great performance by our guys."

It was Pack who hit big shot after big shot, some from near the logo. He was comfortable inside T-Mobile Arena, where he played five games during his two seasons at nearby Kansas State.

"It's a blessing to be back in this arena for sure," Pack said. "My teammates found me early and kept me going. They instilled confidence in me from the jump ball. They kept feeding me and telling me to shoot the ball, and I shot it with a lot of confidence, and they were able to go in."

Houston was in the Sweet 16 for a fourth straight time, had won 15 of its last 16 games and had the season-long goal of playing in next week's Final Four in its home city.

"Unfortunately, one off-night and you go home in this tournament," Cougars coach Kelvin Sampson said. "We just never could get a foothold. We kept climbing, and we'd get ahead of them, and then we just couldn't put stops together."

Miami used a 16-5 run spanning the halves to go up by double digits, with Omier's three-point play and Miller's short bank-in with the left hand making it 47-36 and prompting Sampson to call timeout less than two minutes into the second half.

Houston battled back to make it a two-point game, but then Pack made three 3s and Miller and Wooga Poplar hit one each to fuel a 16-2 run that put the Canes ahead 70-53. The lead grew to as much as 17 points, and Houston never got closer than 11 the rest of the way.

Walker led the Cougars with 16 points. Jamal Shead added 15 and All-American Marcus Sasser and Tramon Mark had 14 apiece for the Cougars, who shot just 37% overall and 29% from distance.

"It was an amazing run," Sasser said. "Came up short, but the time that we got to spend throughout these months, I couldn't have asked for nothing better."

Houston — which came into the game as a 7.5-point favorite, according to FanDuel Sportsbook — found

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itself behind at half for the second straight game after the Hurricanes played their sharpest half of the tournament.

Miami turned the ball over just once the first 20 minutes, converted Miami's six turnovers into 15 points and shot 6 of 14 from distance against the second-best 3-point defense in the country.

Pack made four of them, and all were timely. His first three gave Miami leads and his fourth broke a 31-all tie.

"The Pack kid, some of the shots he made were shots you hope he takes," Sampson said. "The problem was he made them. Some of those were Howitzers."

BIG DAY FOR THE U

The Hurricanes reached the regional final just a few hours after Miami's ninth-seeded women's team hung on to beat Villanova and advance to the Elite Eight for the first time. Miami and UConn are the only schools with teams remaining in both tournaments.

Oh, about that dance Larrañaga did. He said it was to the Commodores' 1985 song "Nightshift."

Miller gave his coach's moves a grade of A.

"Not an A-plus — it was a little stiff," Miller said. "But he's still very mobile for his age."

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

Darcelle, world's oldest working drag queen, dies at 92

By CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Walter Cole, better known as the iconic drag queen who performed for decades as Darcelle XV and a fearless advocate for Portland's LGBTQ+ community, has died of natural causes in Portland, Oregon. He was 92.

Darcelle, who died Thursday, was crowned the world's oldest working drag performer in 2016 by the Guinness Book of World Records and was regaling audiences until the very end. As a performer, Darcelle was known for hosting the longest-running drag show on the U.S. West Coast. Off stage, Cole, an Army veteran, championed LGBTQ+ rights and charitable work in Portland.

The nightclub that Darcelle opened more than 50 years ago in downtown Portland, Darcelle XV Showplace, posted a statement on Facebook expressing grief and asking for privacy and patience.

The club, which had become a Portland cultural institution by the 1970s, was listed in 2020 on the National Register of Historic Places, making it the first site in Oregon to be nominated specifically for its significance in LGBTQ+ history. In the venue's early days in the 1970s and 1980s, it was seen as taboo and protesters picketed outside, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported.

It provided a lifeline for many in the city's LGBTQ community, including Cole, he told the newspaper in a 2010 interview. Cole preferred female pronouns when performing, but told The Oregonian he preferred male pronouns off-stage.

"If I hadn't admitted who I was, I'd probably be dead now," he told the paper. "I'd be sitting on a couch retiring from ... management. Not for me."

"She touched the lives of so many, not only through her performances but also through her fearless community advocacy and charitable works," said Todd Addams, the interim executive director of Basic Rights Oregon, speaking of Darcelle. "She was nothing short of an icon."

Writer Susan Stanley described the club a place of "warmth and affection" where performers were "glittering in sequins and satin and a shimmering froth of feathers," in what's credited as the first profile of Darcelle XV, published in Willamette Week in 1975.

When speaking of Darcelle, Cole, a gay man, referred to his persona in the third person using female pronouns. "I'm an entertainer with a capital E," Cole told Stanley. "Darcelle is a character — like in a play — and I work very hard at her."

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Stanley wound up briefly working at the club and becoming Cole's close friend. She described the performer not only as a talented artist, who also sewed many of the club's costumes, but as a caring person deeply invested in the LGBTQ+ community and the fight against the social stigma of the time.

"(Darcelle) was just a very, very nurturing person. She encouraged other guys to perform and get out of their shells," Stanley told the AP in a phone interview.

After decades of advocacy by LGBTQ+ activists organizing for civil rights and freedoms, Stanley said she was saddened to see how drag has become so polarized in today's political climate.

"It bespeaks a really, really big misunderstanding," she said. "Politicians wanting to step back decades in attitudes ... it's mystifying and horrifying to me at the same time."

Cole was born in 1930 and raised in Portland's Linnton neighborhood. He served in the U.S. Armed Forces and was discharged in the late 1950s, according to the club's website, which says he used money he received from the military to start his first business.

After dabbling in a coffee store and a jazz club, Cole purchased the space that would become the Darcelle XV Showcase in 1967.

Two years later, he had developed the "alter ego" named Darcelle and came out as gay, according to a profile on the club's website.

He left his wife and began a relationship with his artistic director. During the 1970s, the Showplace became a popular destination for cabaret and drag performance.

In 1999, Darcelle became the oldest drag performer on the West Coast, after the closing of San Francisco's drag venue Finocchio's Club.

On Friday, fans including Portland's mayor mourned Cole's death on social media. Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden said in a social media post that "Darcelle carved out an unforgettable chapter in Portland's history" with "pioneering courage."

Darcelle XV Showplace said that details of a public memorial will be announced and all shows will go on as scheduled, per Darcelle's wishes.

"Please join us and celebrate her legacy and memory, thank you in advance for your continued support," the club's statement said.

Claire Rush is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues. You can follow Rush on Twitter @ClaireARush.

Gwyneth Paltrow insists Utah ski collision wasn't her fault

By SAM METZ Associated Press

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — Gwyneth Paltrow insisted Friday on the witness stand that a 2016 ski collision at an upscale Utah ski resort wasn't her fault, claiming it began when the man suing her ran into her from behind.

The actor-turned-lifestyle influencer testified that the crash shocked her — and the way the man's skis veered between her two legs made her worry at first that she was being "violated," she said.

"There was a body pressing against me and a very strange grunting noise," she said.

"My brain was trying to make sense of what was happening," she continued. Paltrow later clarified that after her split-second panic, she realized that the sudden collision wasn't sexual in nature.

After sitting in court for four days, Paltrow remained calm and collected for more than two hours on the witness stand. Members of the Park City jury sat transfixed while she categorically denied fault for the collision.

Terry Sanderson, the retired optometrist who is suing her, is expected to give an opposing account of the crash when he takes the stand first on Monday.

Throughout Paltrow's heavily anticipated testimony, the founder-CEO of Goop calmly and repeatedly said that Sanderson, sitting several feet away in court, ran into her — causing the two skiers to end up

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splayed out on the beginner run with Paltrow on top and Sanderson beneath her. In the seconds after the collision, Paltrow acknowledged that she yelled at Sanderson and didn't stop to ask if he was OK. Paltrow testified that she stood nearby on the mountain as one of her family's four ski instructors promised to give Sanderson her contact information and file an incident report.

In an exchange that touched on recurring themes of the trial, Sanderson's attorneys attempted to depict the decision as reflective of celebrity carelessness, while Paltrow insisted that she — not the 76-year-old man suing her — was the wounded party.

"You have to keep in mind, when you're the victim of a crash, your psychology is not necessarily thinking about the person who perpetrated it," she said.

To draw the jury's attention to Paltrow's wealth, Sanderson's lawyers probed Paltrow about the price of ski instructors at posh Deer Valley Resort and her decision to leave the mountain to get a massage the day of the crash.

Sanderson and his multiple-member legal team at one point dispersed themselves across the courtroom to possibly reenact the crash for the jury, whose members perked up after days of yawning through jargon-dense medical testimony about his broken ribs, concussion and brain damage.

Paltrow's attorneys objected to her participation in such a reenactment, leaving her sitting on the witness stand watching the lawyer questioning her take on the role of the Oscar-winning actor.

Next week, Paltrow's team may call her back to the stand, as well as medical experts, ski instructors and her two children, Moses and Apple.

The trial has touched on themes ranging from skier's etiquette to the power — and burden — of celebrity. The amount of money at stake for both sides pales in comparison to the typical legal costs of a multiyear lawsuit, private security detail and expert witness-heavy trial.

Throughout the week in Utah, Paltrow's legal team has asked for special restrictions, including limiting photography both in the courtroom and in the public parking lot outside — where a rope cordons off Paltrow's entrance and exit paths. Unlike most trials, the court has not published a witness list.

Paltrow's attorneys argue both that she didn't cause the crash and that the extent of Sanderson's injuries is exaggerated. They've raised questions about Sanderson's motivation for suing Paltrow, probing his family members about his post-crash communications about her celebrity and his proximity to it.

They've asked two of Sanderson's daughters whether their father thought it was "cool" to collide with a celebrity like Paltrow — characterizations they've denied.

After the collision, Sanderson sent his daughters an email with the subject line: "I'm famous ... At what cost?" The oldest daughter, Shae Herath, wrote back: "I also can't believe this is all on GoPro."

On Friday, Herath attempted to clarify the record amid questions about the possibility that the crash was recorded on a bystander's helmet camera that have intrigued both the Park City jury — and online viewers who've tuned into live footage of the movie star's trial.

Herath testified Friday that she didn't know whether footage existed and said her email referred to an earlier phone conversation in which her father told her he assumed there must be footage of the collision from someone on the crowded run with a GoPro. The camera is a common accessory for skiers at resorts like Deer Valley.

While Sanderson's attorneys have focused on their client's deteriorating health, Paltrow's legal team has intrigued the jury with recurring questions about the mysterious, missing GoPro footage. No video footage has since been located or entered as evidence.

GoPro cameras are commonly worn by outdoor athletes including skiers to capture action sports.

The proceedings have delved deep into the 76-year-old Sanderson's medical history and personality changes, with attorneys questioning whether his deteriorating health and estranged relationships stemmed from the collision or natural process of aging.

After a judge threw out Sanderson's earlier \$3.1 million lawsuit, Sanderson then claimed damages of "more than \$300,000." Paltrow has countersued for a symbolic \$1 and attorney fees, and one of her attorneys has repeatedly waved a \$1 bill toward the jury.

Sanderson's attorneys likened the symbolic action of suing for \$1 to a 2017 countersuit filed by Taylor

Swift against a radio host for the same amount in an effort to draw attention to Paltrow's celebrity. When asked whether she's friends with Swift over a parade of objections from her attorney, Paltrow said no, but that she was "friendly" with the singer.

Associated Press writer Anna Furman contributed reporting from Los Angeles.

Missouri man makes harrowing rescue in flash flood

By BEATRICE DUPUY Associated Press

As heavy rains and flash floods doused southwestern Missouri Friday, Layton Hoyer wanted to get a closer look at the rising river levels. That is when he noticed an SUV caught in the flash floods near Granby.

At first, Hoyer thought the car might have been abandoned, but flashing brake lights caught his eye. The lights were blinking as if someone was intentionally tapping the brakes. He got on top of the train tracks near the ditch where the SUV was trapped and saw someone inside.

"I could see this elderly woman lying in this car trying to stay in the air bubble," he said.

The 33-year-old quickly called 911, but he said the woman didn't have much time left as the car continued to sink. Hoyer tried to reach her car from the passenger side, but the current was too strong. He then waded through the cold water before he too was submerged and then lunged, grabbing onto her car.

"I got a hold of the back door and started trying to pull the door open. But the vacuum on the door was so tight," he said.

He said he was able to break the seal at the top of her window jam and open the door.

"I swear there was only a foot of air gap left in the back part of her car," he said. "I just grabbed her by both arms and pulled her out of there."

Hoyer rushed to get them both inside his truck to warm up.

Jim Channel, assistant Granby fire chief, was responding to a call of an 80-year-old woman trapped in a car when he arrived on the scene. Channel had been called to water rescues by Old Ritchey Road before, but he wasn't surprised to see who was there.

"I've known the young man all his life, and he will do it again tomorrow," Channel said of Hoyer. "He didn't even think about what he was doing."

Channel said he along with other rescue workers attempted to save the woman's three dogs inside the car, who were trapped in cages, but they couldn't reach them in time before getting called to another water rescue.

Hoyer didn't get a chance to get the woman's full name. But he said he would like to see her again.

"I would love to put my arms around her 'cause she just cried in my arms and told me how thankful she was when the ambulance got there," he said. "I was so thankful that God put me there to help her."

US, Canada end loophole that let asylum-seekers cross border

By WILSON RING Associated Press

ST. JOHNSBURY, Vermont (AP) — U.S. President Joe Biden and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Friday announced a plan to close a loophole to an immigration agreement that has allowed thousands of asylum-seeking immigrants to move between the two countries along a back road linking New York state to the Canadian province of Quebec.

So many migrants since early 2017 have walked into Canada on Roxham Road outside Champlain, New York, that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police staffed a reception center to process them, less than five miles (8 kilometers) from the official border crossing.

Mounties have warned the migrants at the end of the narrow two-lane road bordered by forests and farm fields that they would be arrested if they crossed the border. But once on Canadian soil, they have been allowed to stay and pursue asylum cases that can take years to resolve.

The new policy says that asylum seekers without U.S. or Canadian citizenship who are caught within 14 days of crossing anywhere along the 3,145-mile (5,061-kilometer) border will be sent back. That includes

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people walking on Roxham Road.

The deal was set to take effect at 12:01 a.m. Saturday — a quick implementation aimed at avoiding a surge of refugee claimants trying to cross, according to Canadian officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the deal in advance.

Some of the last migrants to make it through before the Biden-Trudeau announcement were about eight people in two families — one from Haiti, the other from Afghanistan — who arrived at the U.S. end of Roxham Road just after dawn on Friday. Both said they took circuitous routes to get there.

Gerson Solay, 28, carried his daughter Bianca up to the border. He said he didn't have the proper documents to remain in the United States. "That is why Canada is my last destination," he said before he was taken into custody for processing.

It's unclear how Roxham Road became a favorite route, but it's just a taxi ride from where Interstate 87 approaches the Canadian border, and for southbound migrants, it's a relatively short distance to New York City.

These migrants have taken advantage of a quirk in a 2002 agreement between the U.S. and Canada that says asylum seekers must apply in the first country they arrive in. Migrants who go to an official Canadian crossing are returned to the U.S. and told to apply there. But those who reach Canadian soil somewhere other than a port of entry — like the center near Roxham Road — are allowed to stay and request protection.

The agreement was immediately criticized by some who feel it could endanger the safety of asylum seekers by preventing them from getting needed support from both governments.

"We urge President Biden to strongly reconsider this deal and to work with Congress to restore access to asylum and support policies that recognize the dignity of all those arriving at our borders," said Danilo Zak, associate director for policy and advocacy for the humanitarian group CWS, also known as Church World Services. The organization advocates for people across the world who have been forced from their homes.

The agreement comes as the U.S. Border Patrol responds to a steep increase in illegal southbound crossings along the wide-open Canadian border. Nearly all happen in northern New York and Vermont along the stretch of border nearest Canada's two largest cities, Toronto and Montreal.

While the numbers are still tiny compared to the U.S.-Mexico border, it's happening so frequently now that the Border Patrol increased its staffing in the region and has begun releasing some migrants into Vermont with a future date to appear before immigration authorities.

As part of the deal, Canada also agreed to allow 15,000 migrants from the Western Hemisphere to seek asylum on a humanitarian basis over the course of the year.

Meanwhile, southbound migrants are straining U.S. border officials.

U.S. Border Patrol agents stopped migrants entering illegally from Canada 628 times in February, more than five times the same period a year earlier. Those numbers pale compared to migrants entering from Mexico — where they were stopped more than 220,000 times in December alone — but it is still a massive change in percentage terms.

In the Border Patrol's Swanton Sector, which stretches across New Hampshire, Vermont and a portion of upstate New York, agents stopped migrants 418 times in February, up more than 10 times from a year earlier. About half entering from Canada have been Mexicans, who can fly visa-free to Canada from Mexico.

About an hour south of the border, the police chief in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, population 6,000, alerted state officials that the Border Patrol had dropped off a vanload of immigrants with just a few minutes notice at the community's welcome center. The same thing happened several times before within the last few weeks.

In a statement, U.S. Customs and Border Protection said the migrants dropped off in St. Johnsbury had been apprehended along the border after entering the U.S. without authorization, and were given a notice to appear for later immigration proceedings.

They were dropped off in St. Johnsbury because it has a station where migrants can take a bus to a larger city.

"In such circumstances, USBP works in tandem with local communities to ensure the safety of all par-

ties—both community members and migrants—and to ensure stability in the community’s resources,” the statement said.

But local officials said they weren’t given time to prepare. State officials are now working to set up a system to provide migrants services they might require.

On Thursday, a Haitian couple and their children, boys aged 17 and 9 and a 15-year-old girl, were dropped off at the welcome center. The family, who did not want to give their names, wanted to take a bus to Miami.

They said they’d been in Canada for two months, but wouldn’t talk about what prompted them to keep moving.

They missed the Thursday bus that would allow them to connect to a bus to Boston, where they could catch another bus to Miami. A team of local volunteers spent the day getting them something to eat, finding them a place to stay the night and arranging for them to take the bus on Friday.

Police chief Tim Page said St. Johnsbury wants to help these migrants, but not on the fly.

“We need to get something down so we know what we are going to do when these families arrive,” he said. “We don’t have a system set yet, so when we do I am sure this will all go a little smoother.”

Associated Press contributors include Rob Gillies in Ottawa, Ontario, and AP photographer Hasan Jamali from Roxham Road.

A look at the US military mission in Syria and its dangers

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When an Iranian drone struck a U.S. base in northeastern Syria, killing a contractor and wounding several U.S. troops, it was just the latest in a growing number of attacks on American forces in Syria. But its lethality was rare. In most recent cases, no U.S. forces have been hurt in such attacks.

The strike on Thursday — by a small, suicide drone — set off a series of retaliatory bombings, and the top U.S. commander for the Middle East, Gen. Erik Kurilla, quickly warned that the U.S. was prepared to launch more attacks if needed.

American troops have been in Syria since 2015, but the latest casualties highlight what has been a consistent, but often quiet, U.S. counterterrorism mission, aimed at countering Iranian-backed militias and preventing the resurgence of the Islamic State group.

A look at the U.S. troop presence in Syria.

IT ALL BEGAN WITH THE ISLAMIC STATE GROUP

On any given day there are at least 900 U.S. forces in Syria, along with an undisclosed number of contractors. U.S. special operations forces also move in and out of the country, but are usually in small teams and are not included in the official count.

They are trying to prevent any comeback by the Islamic State group, which swept through Iraq and Syria in 2014, taking control of large swaths of territory.

For years, the U.S. and its coalition allies battled IS in Iraq and Syria, partnering with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces. By 2019, the U.S. declared the Islamic State caliphate destroyed, but remnants of the group remain a threat, including about 10,000 fighters held in detention facilities in Syria and tens of thousands of their family members living in refugee camps.

U.S. forces advise and assist the SDF, including in securing the detention facilities, and they also conduct counterterror missions against the Islamic State group and other al-Qaida-affiliated militants, and carry out strikes on Iran-backed militias that have attacked U.S. facilities.

Russia, an ally of the Syrian government, is also active in the country, but Washington and Moscow have used a deconfliction phone line in an effort to avoid conflict there.

IRAN IS ANOTHER REASON THE U.S. REMAINS IN SYRIA

Tehran’s political influence and militia strength throughout the region have created a security concern for the U.S. Since the defeat of the Islamic State group, Iran-backed fighters have expanded their influence in the region.

The presence of American forces in Syria makes it more difficult for Iran to move weapons into Lebanon,

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for use by its proxies, including the Lebanese Hezbollah, against Israel.

For example, the al-Tanf garrison in southeastern Syria is located on a vital road that can link Iranian-backed forces from Tehran all the way to southern Lebanon — and Israel's doorstep. So troops at the U.S. garrison can disrupt what could be an uncontested land bridge for Iran to the eastern Mediterranean.

The oil-rich Deir el-Zour province in eastern Syria, where some of the latest U.S. strikes hit, sits along that strategic route. Syrian government forces and allied Iran-backed groups are deployed on the west bank of the Euphrates River in Deir el-Zour, while American troops support their allies, the SDF, largely along the east bank.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE LATEST ATTACK?

A small suicide — sometimes called a kamikazi — drone flew low over fencing into the base and struck a maintenance facility where U.S. troops and contractors were working. It did not fire a weapon, but exploded when it hit.

One American contractor was killed, and five U.S. service members and another contractor were wounded. One service member returned to duty and the other wounded taken out of Syria for medical treatment. Contractors often are used to help with maintenance and logistical support.

U.S. officials blame Iran, pointing to remnants of the drone, multiple intelligence threat streams and the fact that the attack was so similar to previous ones by the militants. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military operations.

In retaliation, U.S. F-15 fighter jets from al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar struck locations near Deir el-Zour, targeting the Iran-backed militias believed responsible for the attack. The number of reported casualties varied, and the U.S. would not confirm any numbers.

In an apparent response to those U.S. airstrikes, 10 rockets were fired Friday at a U.S. base known as Green Village. No one was injured. Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon press secretary, said the rockets were fired by groups affiliated with Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, but he stopped short of blaming Tehran for the U.S. deaths and injuries.

AREN'T U.S. TROOPS PROTECTED?

The U.S. maintains security at all of its bases but steadfastly declines to provide much detail. Reporters traveling in Syria, including from The Associated Press, have frequently seen a range of security measures, ranging from fencing and other barricades to more high-tech radars and other sensors.

Asked about information that one of the radars at the base was not working, Ryder said there was not a total gap in radar capabilities: "There was a complete sight picture in terms of radar."

But Iranian drones represent a serious — and expanding — threat in Syria. Kurilla told Congress that Tehran is building increasingly sophisticated drones, and now has an arsenal that ranges from small, short-range systems "to long-range one-way attack platforms."

Iran has also provided drones to Russia for use in its ongoing war in Ukraine.

PREVIOUS SKIRMISHES

One of the deadliest flare-ups between the U.S. and Iran-backed groups occurred in December 2019, when U.S. military strikes in Iraq and Syria killed 25 fighters and wounded others from the Iran-backed Kataeb Hezbollah Iraqi militia. The U.S. said the strike was in retaliation for the killing of an American contractor in a rocket attack on an Iraqi military base that it blamed on the group.

In August 2022, the U.S. carried out strikes targeting Iran-backed militias in Deir el-Zour province. The Pentagon said the attacks were meant to send a message to Iran, which the U.S. blamed for a number of drone attacks, including one that targeted the al-Tanf garrison. That base was also hit in January, when three suicide drones struck, wounding two Syrian opposition fighters. The U.S. again said Iran-backed groups were responsible.

Israel has also struck Iranian targets in eastern Syria, although it rarely claims responsibility. In November 2022, airstrikes targeted tanker trucks that crossed from Iraq into eastern Syria. The convoy was reportedly carrying fuel and weapons to militias in Deir el-Zour. The U.S. denied involvement, and an Israeli military official later strongly suggested that Israel was behind the strike. ____

Associated Press writers Bassem Mroue, Kareem Chehayeb and Abby Sewell in Beirut and Tara Copp in Washington contributed to this report.

Why murder defendant was free before killings in Washington

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Kirkland Warren was out on bail pending a long-delayed murder trial in Arkansas. But when he was arrested in southwestern Washington state early this month on charges that he assaulted his ex-girlfriend and fired a gunshot into her apartment, he quickly posted bond and was released again.

Just a few days later, his ex-girlfriend, Meshay Melendez, 27, and her 7-year-old daughter, Layla Stewart, vanished. Police named Warren a person of interest in their disappearance.

The discovery of their bodies in thick brush down a road embankment on Wednesday has raised questions about why someone facing a murder charge in another state would be released from custody after being arrested for a serious domestic violence offense.

Cymer Tadlock, the deputy prosecutor who handled Warren's case in a 2017 killing in Jefferson County, Arkansas, said the Vancouver Police Department in Washington notified her on March 2 that they had arrested Warren for drive-by shooting and other charges, stemming from an incident in December. They also told her the next day that Warren had a court appearance and his bail was set at \$100,000.

It wasn't until March 14, after she had received official paperwork from Clark County, Washington, that she filed a motion to revoke Warren's bail in the 2017 murder case. In the meantime, he posted bail and was released from custody March 8 — four days before Melendez and her daughter vanished.

Had his Arkansas bail been revoked sooner, it's possible Warren would have remained in custody as a fugitive pending his extradition to face trial in Arkansas. But Tadlock said the time it took to obtain an order revoking his bail was typical.

"I wish everything could happen more quickly," Tadlock told The Associated Press. "I wish his murder case could have been resolved by now. It's had delay after delay, and now it's had a tragedy."

Even before a man walking his dog reported seeing what resembled two "life-sized mannequins" in a rural area east of Washougal, Washington, on Wednesday morning, the family and friends of Melendez and Stewart had asserted the criminal justice system let them down.

Melendez's brother, Miguel Melendez, and stepdad, Kendrick Taylor, along with Stewart's grandfather, told The Columbian newspaper of Vancouver that they couldn't believe Warren had been released on bail after shooting at her apartment, especially considering his pending murder trial in Arkansas.

But except in cases of aggravated murder, Washington law presumes someone will be released from custody until they are tried and convicted. Courts can impose conditions — such as bail or electronic monitoring — to help ensure public safety and to keep defendants from fleeing.

Complicating matters is that when Warren was released, he was not ordered to wear a GPS ankle bracelet — despite a recent state law that allows courts to order people accused of domestic violence to wear them. Under that law, the victim can use a mobile phone app to be alerted if their abuser is near. Police receive the notifications as well and can respond.

Vancouver Police Department spokesperson Kim Kapp said Friday that officers were concerned about Warren being released at all, considering the danger he posed. Kapp said the department may urge lawmakers to make the GPS bracelets mandatory for domestic violence defendants deemed high risk.

Warren was charged with killing an acquaintance in his vehicle in 2017 and leaving the body in a roadside ditch. He told police the passenger was asking him for money and he shot him because he feared for his safety.

His family got him released from custody pending trial by putting up 10% of his \$250,000 bond, said his attorney in that case, Mark Hampton, and Warren subsequently moved to Washington state with the knowledge of his lawyer and prosecutors.

The case has been delayed pending psychological evaluations, discovery disputes, the pandemic and most recently by a fall that Hampton's 91-year-old mother took, resulting in a broken hip.

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Vancouver police previously investigated Warren in 2020 for possession of a stolen gun, and in 2021 for lying on a federal form required to purchase a firearm by saying he was not facing felony charges, according to court records.

Under Arkansas legal rules, judges must find reasonable cause that the defendant has committed a felony before revoking bail, according to Tadlock, who said "we had to have a finding by another court" because the allegations occurred in another jurisdiction.

Warren's March 2 arrest stemmed from a December episode during which police said he assaulted Melendez and then fired a gunshot into her apartment. He has pleaded not guilty to those charges and hasn't been charged thus far in the deaths of Melendez or Stewart.

At Warren's initial court appearance on March 3, prosecutors noted he posed an extreme risk to Melendez, The Columbian reported. The court set bail at \$100,000 and ordered him to have no contact with her, but prosecutors did not request GPS monitoring in the event of his release.

The Clark County Prosecutor's Office did not respond to emailed questions about the case.

Warren was the last person seen with the mother and daughter before they disappeared, according to charging documents. On the night of March 11, a friend told police, she had been babysitting Stewart when Warren arrived to pick her up. Melendez was unresponsive in the car, naked from the waist down.

The friend reported Melendez missing on March 18. Melendez's mother also reported her missing, saying the family had not heard from her for a week. The next day, police arrested Warren again. With his bail in Arkansas revoked, and his bail in Washington increased to \$1 million, he has been in custody since.

Former 'Family Feud' contestant charged in wife's slaying

QUINCY, Ill. (AP) — A former contestant on the long-running television game show "Family Feud" has been charged with first-degree murder and home invasion in the slaying of his estranged wife in western Illinois.

Timothy Bliefnick, 39, pleaded not guilty Friday afternoon at his arraignment in Adams County Circuit Court in Quincy, according to court records.

Bliefnick was indicted Thursday by a county grand jury, KHQA-TV reported.

The body of Rebecca Bliefnick, 41, was found by a family member inside her Quincy home after she failed to pick up her children from school. She had been shot multiple times.

Timothy Bliefnick was arrested March 13. His Quincy home was searched March 1.

The couple was separated and going through divorce proceedings, the television station reported from court records.

A restraining order had been filed against Timothy Bliefnick, who also filed one against his estranged wife.

In 2020, Timothy Bliefnick and some of his family members appeared on ABC's "Family Feud," KHQA reported.

One of the questions asked by host Steve Harvey was, "What was the biggest mistake you made at your wedding?" Bliefnick answered "I do." He immediately told Harvey "not mine to say, not mine to say. I love my wife." He also said, "I'm going to get in trouble for that, aren't I?" Harvey responded, "It's going to be a lot of hell to pay at your house." Bliefnick's answer was second on the board with 20 out of 100 people polled giving the same answer. Getting "sloshed" was No. 1 with 30 answers.

A status conference will be held April 12 and a motion hearing has been scheduled for April 20.

The Associated Press left a message Friday afternoon seeking comment from Timothy Bliefnick.

4 ex-cops charged in Tyre Nichols' death barred from police

By JONATHAN MATTISE Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Four of five former Memphis police officers charged in the killing of Tyre Nichols, a Black man who was handcuffed, brutally beaten and ignored by first responders for crucial minutes despite being barely conscious, can no longer work as law enforcement in Tennessee.

The Peace Officer Standards & Training Commission, or P.O.S.T., voted Friday to decertify Demetrius

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Haley, Emmitt Martin and Justin Smith. The state panel also approved the decision by Desmond Mills to surrender his certification.

The former officers have 30 days to appeal.

The beating of the 29-year-old Black man happened during a late-night traffic stop Jan. 7. The commission subsequently released documents showing that Haley dragged Nichols from his vehicle and never explained why he was stopped, and that he also took photos of Nichols slumped against the car after he was pummeled by officers and sent the pictures to colleagues.

Nichols died at a hospital Jan. 10.

Early police accounts minimized the violence of the traffic stop — accounts since disproven by witness statements and police and surveillance video — and their specialized unit was disbanded. Two Memphis Fire Department emergency medical workers and a lieutenant were also fired.

The five former police officers charged with second-degree murder have all pleaded not guilty.

The Memphis Police Department requested the decertification of seven of the former Memphis officers involved, including one who retired before he could be fired.

None of the fired officers or their attorneys attended their hearings before the commission on Thursday or its vote on Friday.

Mills' attorney said his client had been wrongly indicted and was "focusing on his freedom."

"It's a waste of time," attorney Blake Ballin said of the decertification attempt. "It is meaningless to him at this stage in his life."

An attorney for Haley declined to comment on the decertification vote. Attorneys for Martin and Smith did not immediately respond to phone messages seeking comment.

In a letter included in the file seeking his decertification, Smith defended his conduct, stating that Nichols was "violent and would not comply."

The fifth former officer charged, Tadarrius Bean, has not yet had his decertification hearing before the commission. Neither have two former officers who were not charged: Preston Hemphill, who was terminated after firing a stun gun at Nichols during the traffic stop; and Dewayne Smith, the supervising lieutenant who arrived on scene after the beating, who retired instead of being fired.

A seventh police employee who was fired has not been publicly named.

During Nichols' funeral, Vice President Kamala Harris urged lawmakers to approve the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, a broad package of reforms that includes a national registry for police officers disciplined for misconduct, a ban on no-knock warrants and other measures.

Associated Press reporter Adrian Sainz in Memphis, Tennessee, contributed to this report.

For more on the killing of Tyre Nichols: <https://apnews.com/hub/tyre-nichols>

Principal resigns after complaints on 'David' statue nudity

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — A Florida charter school principal has been forced to resign after a parent complained sixth graders were exposed to pornography during a lesson on Renaissance art that included Michelangelo's "David" sculpture.

The Tallahassee Democrat reported that the principal, Hope Carrasquilla, of Tallahassee Classical School resigned this week after an ultimatum from the school board's chairman.

One parent complained the material was pornographic and two other parents said they wanted to be notified of the lesson before it was given to their children, Carrasquilla said. The instruction also included Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam" painting and Botticelli's "Birth of Venus."

"It saddens me that my time here had to end this way," Carrasquilla told the paper.

The "David" statue's nudity has been part of a centuries-old debate about art pushing boundaries and the rules of censorship. In the 1500s, metal fig leaves covered the genitals of statues like David when the Roman Catholic Church deemed nudity as immodest and obscene.

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The kerfuffle in Florida also prompted social media users to point out similarities to a 1990s episode of "The Simpsons" where characters debate the censorship of the "David" statue.

Russians, American delayed in space to return in September

MOSCOW (AP) — Two cosmonauts and an astronaut who were supposed to leave the International Space Station this month will be brought back to Earth in late September, doubling their time aboard the orbiting laboratory to more than a year, Russia's space agency announced Friday.

The return of Russians Sergey Prokopyev and Dmitri Petelin, and NASA's Frank Rubio was delayed after the Soyuz capsule they planned to ride in developed a coolant leak while docked to the space station.

An empty Soyuz was sent to the station in late February to serve as a rescue capsule. The three-person replacement crew that was originally scheduled to be aboard that capsule is now set to head for the space station on Sept. 15, the Roscosmos space agency said.

Prokopyev, Petelin and Rubio are to return on Sept. 27; they launched into space on Sept. 21, 2022.

Amid massive demonstrations, Macron delays Charles' visit

By SYLVIE CORBET and THOMAS ADAMSON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Ongoing unrest across France and calls for a new round of demonstrations against President Emmanuel Macron's pension plan persuaded officials to postpone a planned state visit next week by Britain's King Charles III.

While a clear disappointment to the royal palace, the decision is also a bad sign for Macron. The 45-year-old leader is increasingly detested by protesters and contested in parliament, and seen as oblivious to France's souring mood as he sticks to his positions. And that's now hurting his global image, too.

Charles had been scheduled to arrive in France on Sunday to celebrate France and Britain's renewed friendship. But the protests and strikes against Macron's decision to raise France's retirement age from 62 to 64 promised to impact his visit, with some workers refusing to roll out the red carpet for the king's arrival.

Violence soared during Thursday's ninth union-organized nationwide marches. Over 450 protesters were arrested in Paris and beyond, and hundreds of police and demonstrators were injured, as gatherings nationwide drew more than a million people.

There were scattered protest actions on Friday. Train traffic was slowed, rows of trucks blocked access to Marseille's port for several hours and debris littered the streets of Paris.

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

Anger over the plan has increasingly turned into broader opposition to Macron's leadership. His insistence this week that the retirement measure be implemented by the end of the year prompted critics to describe him as "self-satisfied" and "out of touch."

During his first term, Macron's government made other changes it said would make France's labor market more flexible and revitalize the economy. Those included making it easier to hire and fire workers, cutting business taxes, and making it more difficult for the unemployed to claim benefits.

Critics argue the changes fray a social safety net seen as central to France's way of life.

Countries across Europe have been raising pension ages. Retirement rules vary widely from country to country, making direct comparisons difficult. The official retirement age in the U.S. is now 67.

Macron's plan involves multiple adjustments to France's complex pension system. It would also require French people to work 43 years to earn a full pension, or wait until they turn 67, as the law now calls for. Opponents have proposed other solutions, including higher taxes on the wealthy or companies.

The government refused to consider those, however, and forced the bill through parliament last week, using a constitutional power, and the text is now being reviewed by France's Constitutional Council. The forced passage further angered Macron's critics.

Macron condemned the violent behavior at some protests, saying "violence has no place in a democracy."

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He said "common sense and friendship" required delaying King Charles' visit, adding that it likely would have become a protest target, creating a "detestable situation."

It wouldn't be reasonable "to hold a state visit in the middle of protests," the French leader told a news conference after a summit in Brussels. He said he took the initiative to call Charles on Friday morning, and that the visit likely would be rescheduled for the summer.

Charles and Queen Consort Camilla planned to visit both France and Germany during the king's first trip abroad as Britain's monarch. He still plans to go to Germany.

Charles had been scheduled to visit the city of Bordeaux on Tuesday, coinciding with the tenth round of nationwide strikes and protests. The heavy wooden door of the elegant Bordeaux City Hall was destroyed by fire Thursday night by people taking part in an unauthorized demonstration.

Bordeaux wine industry officials expressed regret that Charles would not visit next week, but were glad the visit would still happen.

"We are of course disappointed Charles won't come now but we clearly understand why," said Cecile Ha of the Bordeaux Wine Council. "We are looking forward to welcoming him at the end of summer, which is great time for the vineyards as they are very lively at this time of year before the harvests."

French authorities have blamed radicals for the protest destruction. But Europe's main human rights body, the Council of Europe, the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), and media watchdog Reporters Without Borders also raised concern Friday about violence by police against what has been a largely peaceful movement.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said Friday that investigations are under way into 11 complaints of excessive violence by police this week.

He added that 1,000 trash bins were set on fire in the French capital; overflowing garbage cans have become a symbol of the protests during a weeks-long strike by sanitation workers.

Fires in Paris that were intentionally lit in narrow or inaccessible alleys on Thursday night alarmed both city officials and residents. Firefighters and residents worked to tame the flames that rose to the second story of an apartment building in the chic Palais Royal area.

Oil refineries have been another target. On Friday, emboldened protesters blockaded the Fos-sur-mer oil depot near Marseille to stop trucks from entering and leaving. However, fuel supplies to Paris from the large Gonfreville-L'Orcher refinery in Normandy resumed after police intervened.

Fearing disruptions in coming days, France's Civil Aviation Authority requested the cancellation of one-third of flights at Paris' second airport, Orly, on Sunday, and 20% on Monday.

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Danica Kirka in London and Samuel Petrequin in Brussels contributed to this report.

Trump lawyer in court after being forced before grand jury

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A lawyer for Donald Trump was back in court Friday after being ordered to answer questions before a grand jury investigating the possible mishandling of classified documents at the former president's Florida estate.

M. Evan Corcoran entered federal court in the District of Columbia early Friday morning, one week after a federal judge ruled in favor of the Justice Department in forcing Corcoran to answer additional questions before a grand jury that has been hearing testimony for months. He did not make any comments as he arrived at the building, and left several hours later without saying anything.

The interest by prosecutors in Corcoran's testimony reinforces the legal dangers confronting Trump, making clear the department's continued focus on whether the ex-president or any of his representatives obstructed government efforts to recover hundreds of classified documents taken from the White House to Mar-a-Lago at the end of his term. A search warrant affidavit released last August showed that investigators were examining potential violations of multiple crimes, including obstruction and the willful retention of national defense information.

Corcoran is relevant to the investigation because he drafted a letter that was given to the department last June asserting that a "diligent search" for classified documents had been done in response to a subpoena and that all records responsive to that subpoena were being provided. The letter was accompanied by the return of roughly three dozen documents with classified markings.

But prosecutors have said in court filings that they developed evidence showing that additional classified documents remained at the property. The FBI returned with a search warrant on Aug. 8 and removed roughly 100 additional classified documents, the filings show.

Attorney-client privilege traditionally shields lawyers from being forced to share details of their conversations with prosecutors. Corcoran invoked that privilege during an earlier appearance before the grand jury when he declined to answer certain questions.

But prosecutors can get around attorney-client privilege if they can convince a judge that a client was using legal representation in furtherance of a crime, a principle known under the law as the crime-fraud exception.

The Justice Department made that argument in this case, and secured a sealed order last week from U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell that required Corcoran to appear again before the grand jury to answer additional questions. A federal appeals court this week, also in a sealed order, directed Corcoran to turn over documents to prosecutors.

Another Trump lawyer, Timothy Parlatore, confirmed in an interview with The Associated Press on Friday that he had voluntarily testified for about six hours or seven hours before the grand jury in December to answer questions about the Trump team's compliance with Justice Department efforts to reclaim the classified documents. His appearance was earlier reported by ABC News.

The Mar-a-Lago investigation is being led by a Justice Department special counsel, Jack Smith, who is also examining attempts by Trump and his allies to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. Trump faces a separate investigation by the Manhattan district attorney's office — into hush money payments during the 2016 campaign — that appears to be close to wrapping up, as well as an investigation in Atlanta into efforts to reverse Trump's election loss in Georgia.

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

Unwelcome spotlight falls on NHL team Pride night events

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Hockey Writer

Pride nights, held annually for several years by National Hockey League teams to show support for the LGBTQ+ community, are in the spotlight following several high-profile incidents this season.

A handful of players have objected to participating in pregame warmups that included Pride-themed jerseys, most recently Florida's Eric and Marc Staal on Thursday night. On Wednesday, the Chicago Blackhawks decided against having players wear Pride-themed warmup jerseys for their upcoming Pride night, citing an anti-gay law in Russia.

WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIONS?

The Staal brothers and San Jose's James Reimer — who are Canadian — and Philadelphia's Ivan Provorov, who is Russian, all pointed to their religious beliefs for refusing to take part in warmups.

"We carry no judgement on how people choose to live their lives, and believe that all people should be welcome in all aspects of the game of hockey," Eric and Marc Staal said in a statement. "Having said that, we feel that by us wearing a Pride jersey, it goes against our Christian beliefs."

The Blackhawks said they acted out of concern that the safety of their Russian player and two others with connections to Russia could be jeopardized by the law when they return home because it expands restrictions on supporting LGBTQ+ rights.

Chicago coach Luke Richardson said he and his players were disappointed.

"It's an unfortunate situation," Richardson said. "I don't think we can control the world issues, so that takes it out of our hands."

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The New York Rangers and Minnesota Wild decided not wear Pride-themed jerseys during warmups after advertising that they would. While each team has at least one star Russian player on its roster, neither specified the reason for the change.

IS THIS RELATED TO RUSSIA'S WAR IN UKRAINE?

Somewhat. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the anti-gay law signed by President Vladimir Putin in December have combined to pose some problems for the NHL and its 32 teams.

No North American professional sports league has as many Russian players as the NHL. The Russian contingent includes some of the league's best athletes.

There are currently 45 Russia-born players spread across 28 teams, or about 6.4% of all players. They include No. 2 career goal-scorer Alex Ovechkin of the Washington Capitals, Tampa Bay's two-time Stanley Cup-winning goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy, Lightning teammate and 2019 MVP Nikita Kucherov and reigning Vezina Trophy winner Igor Shesterkin of the New York Rangers.

The top five highest-earning Russian players receive an average annual salary of \$11.1 million this season. Sergei Bobrovsky, a two-time Vezina Trophy-winning goaltender who is making \$12 million, participated in Florida's warmup in a Pride-themed jersey.

Russian players almost never discuss the war, in part out of concern for the safety of their loved ones at home. It was not clear if there was any credible threat behind the Blackhawks' decision.

WHAT'S THE NHL'S HISTORY WITH PRIDE?

The Stanley Cup first appeared at a Pride parade in 2010 when then-Blackhawks defenseman Brent Sopel brought it to the celebration in Chicago. A few years later, in 2013, the league partnered with the You Can Play Project, which advocates for LGBTQ+ participation in sports. The NHL added team Pride ambassadors in 2016-17.

Rainbow Pride stick tape debuted with the Edmonton Oilers in 2016. Now all 32 teams hold a Pride night, though many do so without themed jerseys. The Boston Bruins and Columbus Blue Jackets call theirs "Hockey Is For Everyone" night.

Pride nights, like other themed events, are planned and staged by individual teams, not the NHL.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE REACTION?

The You Can Play Project responded to Reimer's decision by saying it was disappointed.

"Religion and respect are not in conflict with each other, and we are certainly disappointed when religion is used as a reason to not support our community," the organization said.

Nashville Predators prospect Luke Prokop, who in 2021 made history as the first player signed to an NHL contract to come out as gay, called the Pride night incidents a "step back" for hockey.

WHAT DID LEAGUE OFFICIALS SAY?

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman, defending teams' handling of the situation, said the boycotts were not about accepting bigotry.

"Whether or not you choose to embrace and make a statement on behalf of a cause affirmatively, if you choose not to do that, it doesn't necessarily make you a bigot," Bettman said last month. "I'm sure you don't endorse every single charity that solicits you, and you don't participate in every social cause. You pick and choose the ones that are important to you."

The league declined to comment on the Blackhawks' decision.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Teams with Pride nights coming up have some decisions to make. The Buffalo Sabres are set to host their event on Monday, and the Vancouver Canucks on March 31. Each team has at least one Russian player.

It was not clear if players would wear Pride jerseys in warmups, as the teams have done in the past.

AP NHL: <https://apnews.com/hub/nhl> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Deutsche Bank shares drop amid global jitters over banks

By DAVID McHUGH Associated Press

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — Shares in Deutsche Bank fell sharply Friday, dragging down other major European banks and leading German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to express confidence in the country's largest lender after fears about the global financial system sent fresh shudders through the market.

Deutsche Bank shares closed down 8.5% on the German stock exchange after falling as much as 14%. That followed a steep rise in the cost to insure bondholders against the bank defaulting on its debts, known as credit default swaps.

Rising costs on insuring debt were also a prelude to Swiss lender Credit Suisse's government-backed rescue by rival UBS. That hastily arranged takeover Sunday aimed to stem the upheaval in the global financial system after the collapse of two U.S. banks and jitters about Credit Suisse's long-running troubles led its shares to tank and customers to pull out their money.

Asked whether Deutsche Bank could be the next Credit Suisse, Scholz said, "There is no reason to worry." "Deutsche Bank has thoroughly modernized and reorganized its business and is a very profitable bank," Scholz said after a European Union summit in Brussels.

Like Credit Suisse, Deutsche Bank is one of 30 globally significant financial institutions, with international rules requiring it to hold higher levels of capital reserves because its failure could cause widespread losses.

Other major European banks also fell Friday, with Germany's Commerzbank closing down 5.45%, France's Societe Generale off 6%, and Austria's Raiffeisen down 7.9%.

Markets have been rattled by fears that other banks may have unexpected troubles like U.S.-based Silicon Valley Bank, which went under after customers pulled their money and it suffered uninsured losses because of higher interest rates.

Credit Suisse's troubles, including a \$5.5 billion loss on dealings with a private investment fund, predated the collapses of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank, but depositors and investors fled after the U.S. failures focused less-friendly attention on banks and a key Credit Suisse investor refused to put up more money.

Deutsche Bank has turned in 10 straight quarters of profit, including 5.7 billion euros (\$6.1 billion) last year, improving its fortunes under CEO Christian Sewing.

Before that, the bank went through a long stretch of low profitability and troubles with regulators going back to the 2008 global financial crisis, including a \$7.2 billion penalty from U.S. authorities for misleading buyers of complex mortgage-backed securities that later went sour.

Despite the rebound under Sewing, the bank was "a natural candidate" for a market selloff because of its previous troubles, large, sometimes complex holdings and market skepticism about its future profits, said Sascha Steffen, professor of finance at the Frankfurt School of Finance & Management.

The market values the bank at less than the assets on its balance sheet, he said: "That means investors are still very worried about what are the risks that the bank has on its balance sheet or its earnings potential going forward, and that's not good."

Big global banks have sold off more than smaller ones in recent financial turmoil, he said.

"It's contagion — it's lack of confidence, a lack of trust," Steffen said.

The selloff "might also be more emotionally driven, so to speak, rather than based on facts, but this is something that had to be expected" based on its history and performance after the global financial crisis, he said.

Davide Oneglia at investment strategy research provider TS Lombard said it wasn't surprising that "the next bank in the firing line is now Deutsche Bank." It was associated with Credit Suisse in the past because of "managerial/strategic failures and involvement in many financial scandals" despite its recent profits.

"Whether this is just a reflection of investors' anxiety at the end of a very stressful week, some technical market factor, or signs of more problems to come for the weakest European banks, it's still too early to say," he said.

However, the selloff of European bank shares "continues to appear more related to lack of confidence

than fundamentals.”

Stuart Graham and Leona Li, analysts at global financial research firm Autonomous, said that “Deutsche is in robust shape.”

“We are relatively relaxed in view of Deutsche’s robust capital and liquidity positions,” they said.

Its holdings of derivatives — often complex investments whose price is tied to other assets — are “well known” and “just not very scary, in our view,” Graham and Li said.

European officials say banks in the European Union’s regulatory system — which doesn’t include Credit Suisse — are resilient and have no direct exposure to Silicon Valley and little to Credit Suisse.

Efforts to strengthen banking regulation in recent years “puts us all in a position to say that European banking supervision and the financial system are robust and stable and that we have resilient capitalization of European banks,” Scholz said.

European leaders, who played down any risk of a possible banking crisis at a summit Friday, say the financial system is in good shape because they require broad adherence to tougher requirements to keep ready cash on hand to cover deposits.

International negotiators agreed to those rules following the 2008 global financial crisis triggered by the failure of U.S. investment bank Lehman Brothers. U.S. regulators exempted midsize banks, including Silicon Valley Bank, from those safeguards.

The reassurances, however, have not stopped investors from selling the shares amid more general concerns about how global banks will weather the current climate of rising interest rates.

Though higher interest rates should increase bank profits by boosting what they can earn over what they pay on deposits, some long-term investments can sharply lose value and cause losses unless the banks took precautions to hedge those investments.

AP reporter Geir Moulson contributed from Berlin.

A sex trafficking case, a plea deal and a mother’s pain

By JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Irma Reyes changed clothes in the back seat of the pickup: skirt, tights, turtle-neck, leather jacket. All black. She brushed her hair and pulled on heels as her husband drove their Chevy through predawn darkness toward a courthouse hundreds of miles from home.

She wanted to look confident — poised but hellbent. The outfit was meant to let Texas prosecutors know just what kind of formidable mother they’d be crossing that morning.

Weeks earlier, Reyes learned about the plea deal. State lawyers planned to let the two men charged with sex trafficking her daughter walk free.

She’d barely been able to eat or brush her teeth since, her mind racing: Why are they doing this? Can I get the judge to stop it? Don’t they know my daughter matters?

Reyes’ daughter was 16 in 2017, when men she knew only as “Rocky” and “Blue” kept her and another girl at a San Antonio motel where men paid to have sex with them. Now, the cases against Rakim Sharkey and Elijah Teel — the men police identified as the traffickers — have seen years of delay, a parade of prosecutors, an aborted trial and, ultimately, a stark retreat by the government.

They are among thousands of cases under a cloud of dysfunction at the office of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, who has risen to national prominence fighting court battles that affect people nationwide even while facing legal troubles including a criminal investigation by Justice Department officials. Trafficking cases in particular have cast doubt on how the agency uses millions of state tax dollars on an issue that Republican leaders trumpet as a priority while attacking Democrats’ approach to border security.

For Reyes, her daughter, and other victims and families, the politics take a backseat to their pain. To them, the plea deal is a case study in how the agency’s troubles are undercutting justice for vulnerable victims.

A spokeswoman for the attorney general’s office, Kristen House, declined to answer questions about the deal, the actions of prosecutors, and other details of the case involving Reyes’ daughter.

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"It's like a nightmare that I can't wake up from," Reyes told The Associated Press.

The case was ready for trial years before that January day Reyes and her husband made their way to the San Antonio courthouse, said Kirsta Leeburg Melton.

"You will not find a stronger corroborated case," said Melton, who oversaw the attorney general's human trafficking unit until late 2019 and now runs the Institute to Combat Trafficking. "And I'm sick. It's wrong."

In the courthouse, Reyes' stomach churned as she thought of the deal for the two men: five years of probation. The original charges carried potential sentences of decades in prison.

"I need to puke," said Reyes, 45, her heels clicking down the hallway to the bathroom.

Inside the crowded courtroom, she waited on a back bench for hours, watching people charged with drug crimes and drunken driving draw harsher sentences.

One of the defendants walked in and sat for a while on the same bench. Just one person separated them, but he seemed not to recognize Reyes. She squeezed her husband's hand.

When the judge got to their case, she summarized its twists and turns: years lost to the pandemic, delays due to "turnover in the attorney general's office," days of testimony last year only for several people to catch COVID-19 and prompt a mistrial.

A defense attorney for Sharkey said his client was in a "strong position" for acquittal but would accept the deal to put the case behind him. Reyes listened in disbelief as the new prosecutor told the judge that Reyes' daughter — now a 22-year-old with whom she keeps up a steady stream of text messages — was "on the run."

Sharkey and Teel pleaded "no contest" to aggravated promotion of prostitution. The judge, Velia Meza, sentenced the men to seven years of probation, despite prosecutors recommending five, adding that they'd be strictly supervised but wouldn't have to register as sex offenders.

Then, it was Reyes' turn. Meza would allow a victim impact statement.

Reyes walked slowly to the front of the court, clutching her handwritten statement. She thought of her daughter: a beautiful soul who blasts Beyoncé and loves her dogs, a fighter who overcame a lifetime of struggles to get sober, a woman who took the witness stand just months earlier against the man charged with trafficking her.

Reyes reached the waiting bailiff. She took the microphone.

Reyes' daughter lost a brother when she was young. Then her estranged father died. She was bullied at school.

The AP is withholding the young woman's name, in keeping with its policy to avoid identifying victims of sexual assault and other such crimes. Reyes told AP she spoke about this story with her daughter, who did not want to comment or be interviewed directly.

Reyes said that as a girl, her daughter would run away from the large family's South Texas home. By her teens, she started using drugs and getting psychological care through the juvenile justice system. In September 2017, she was sent to a rehabilitation center.

Court records show it was only days after Reyes' daughter and another girl ran away from rehab that their photos were advertised online for "dates" out of a motel room off the interstate. They met "Blue" outside a motel, where they couldn't afford a night's stay. He introduced them to "Rocky." The pair rented the girls a room, helped set up meetings with men who'd pay for sex, and collected half the money at the end of each day, according to the records.

Reyes' daughter later testified that when one of the men hit her, she got scared and called her mom. Reyes found the phone number advertised on Backpages, a classifieds website later shut down by law enforcement. She called police; officers found the girls at the motel that night.

Ten days after running away, Reyes' daughter was in a juvenile lockup talking to a detective who would spend months tracking down the men.

"We're able to get the surveillance video. We were able to get room receipts. We were able to get cell-phones, which were extracted for data," detective Manuel Anguiano told AP. "I don't think I've ever worked

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a case that had more evidence.”

Several people who worked on the case told AP they were outraged by the attorney general’s office’s final resolution.

“It’s absolutely an unfortunate outcome,” said Cara Pierce, who oversaw the agency’s human trafficking unit until August 2022. “This was a triable case when I left.”

Sharkey’s lawyer, Jason Goss, maintains the jury would have acquitted his client but told AP he had no choice but to plead no contest to the reduced charge because the potential sentence of 25 years to life was too risky. Teel’s attorney, Brian Powers, didn’t respond to phone messages and emails seeking comment.

After getting out of the detention facility, Reyes’ daughter lived away from home for a while, then returned to her mother’s house on a quiet, residential block.

She barely left her spartan bedroom, Reyes said, and couldn’t talk about what had happened. Reyes in turn got anxious when her daughter was around men. They avoided crowds.

Reyes coaxed her back into the world. She brought her treats – Flamin’ Hot Cheetos and Limón Lays – and the book “Women Who Run with the Wolves.”

Gradually, they ventured out, taking morning walks in a nature preserve, watching the birds while eating lunch in Reyes’ car. But the young woman still had panic attacks, sometimes shutting herself in the bathroom.

That’s where she was when Connie Spence, a prosecutor who signed on to the case in summer 2020, arrived to talk, Reyes said. Spence got down on the floor, speaking calmly as the young woman hyperventilated.

After that, Reyes said, her daughter began weekly counseling. She started volunteering at a library and museum. She reenrolled in school and, last June, mother and daughter drove together to San Antonio to testify.

“They built a bond somehow,” Reyes said. “Connie gave her hope.”

On the witness stand, Reyes’ daughter struggled to breathe and had difficulty recalling details from years before. But over hours of testimony she recounted how she came to be having sex at the motel to pay “Rocky.” She testified that he got mad after she spoke to other men there, taking her into a room and hitting her across the face.

Asked to identify “Rocky,” the young woman pointed across the courtroom at Sharkey.

Four days later, Reyes and her daughter were relaxing in the summer heat on their patio when Spence called to tell them the judge had declared a mistrial because four people in the courtroom caught COVID-19.

They told themselves testifying would be easier the second time. All three women agreed to go back to court as many times as needed.

But it would be the last time they spoke to Spence.

She left the attorney general’s office the following month, according to personnel files obtained under public records laws. Spence’s resignation letter gives no reason. She didn’t respond to calls and messages seeking comment.

Spence left amid a wave of seasoned prosecutors quitting over practices they said were meant to slant legal work, reward loyalists and drum out dissent. The next month, the office dropped a separate series of trafficking and child sexual assault cases after losing track of one of the victims.

In October, Reyes was introduced to new lead lawyer James Winters — the last of eight prosecutors to handle the case for the attorney general’s office, court records show. Reyes said her daughter told Winters she would testify again.

The lawyer later asked that the case be postponed again, but the judge refused. Reyes didn’t hear from prosecutors again until early January, when Winters called about the plea deal. It was a couple weeks after her daughter had left home.

In the silence, she’d grown pessimistic about the case. They had a fight, Reyes said. The young woman went to stay with a friend’s family.

Reyes worried about her daughter and whether she might turn to old habits. She spent Christmas with the family, but left soon after.

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Still, a victim's advocate told prosecutors that Reyes could get her daughter to court, internal office messages obtained by AP show. Reyes doesn't understand why Winters later told the judge her daughter was "on the run."

Winters, who referred emailed questions to an attorney general's spokesman, submitted his resignation letter three weeks after appearing in court for the plea deal, which was first reported by Texas Public Radio.

In San Antonio, Reyes clutched her jacket around her shoulders as she reached the front of the courtroom and took the microphone for her victim impact statement.

She'd spent lunch writing out what she wanted to say, but rage got the better of her planning. She looked at the men accused of trafficking her daughter and two other girls, at the lawyers flanking their clients, at men who'd also gotten probation on charges of soliciting and paying the girls for sex.

Reyes began speaking quietly, the statement still crumpled under her jacket.

"Rakim, can you look at me?" she said, as Sharkey examined his hands. "You have daughters. Going on your third. Exactly the number of victims."

She told one of the men who'd paid for sex that she's glad his family left him.

And she gestured at Winters, the prosecutor. "He doesn't represent me. I represent myself right now. I'm not afraid of you."

Reyes spoke for nearly five minutes, her voice rising as she turned to face the courtroom and beseeched people who were being trafficked to come forward.

"There are victims out there that this minute are being pimped by these types of guys, this type of trash," she said. "And the trash is supposed to be disposed. But they're lucky today."

Reyes' voice broke.

"What these people do to their victims — nothing will ever fix that," she said. "We just try to hold on."

Reyes cried on the way home, but the drive otherwise passed in silence. Her husband, who doesn't speak much English, hadn't followed everything in court. Reyes didn't know how to explain.

She also didn't know how to tell her daughter, who'd already lost hope the men would go to prison.

Reyes wanted her to come home, to talk in person. But her daughter's bedroom was empty.

Reyes felt isolated and got little rest, with violent nightmares. She kept the blinds drawn. She struggled to breathe and fantasized about feeling nothing.

Two days after the hearing, Reyes sat alone in her bedroom, where crosses line the walls. She felt abandoned by the prosecutors, by the judge, by her family, by God. She thought about how she would take her own life. The idea seemed soothing. Her thoughts grew specific. But then she thought of her children and called a crisis hotline.

"I just swim into my thoughts," she said. "It's like a big ocean once you let your mind wander. But pulling yourself back up, that's where I have to be aware that I don't dive too deep."

Reyes turned 46 the next week. She spent her birthday at the doctor's office. She cried uncontrollably. The doctor prescribed anti-anxiety medicine.

Reyes is in therapy. She's signed up for dance classes and walks her dogs in the nature preserve, hoping her daughter will join them soon.

She's still grasping for closure. Reyes filed complaints with the attorney general's office, the state bar association and the U.S. Department of Justice, although none will reopen the criminal case. Perhaps her best hope from the legal system is a civil lawsuit that she hopes her daughter will one day be ready to bring.

She and her daughter talk more lately. Their texts are filled with worry but also jokes and photos.

One day, Reyes' son shook her awake at 3 a.m. A sheriff's deputy was on the phone and said her daughter had called 911 having a panic attack; she said she wanted to go home.

I've lived this before, Reyes thought. She asked the deputy to wait with her daughter.

Then she pulled on shoes, climbed into the pickup and drove out into the night.

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EDITOR'S NOTE — This story includes discussion of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

Associated Press photographer Eric Gay and videojournalist Lekan Oyekanmi contributed to this report.

Debt, expenses stress lower income households: AP-NORC poll

By CORA LEWIS and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Personal finances are a major source of stress for about half of the lower income households in the U.S., a new poll shows, illustrating the toll of high inflation and economic uncertainty on those who can least afford it.

About half of U.S. adults in households earning less than \$60,000 annually and about 4 in 10 of those in households earning \$60,000 to \$100,000 say they're very stressed by their personal finances, according to the new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. That compares with only about a quarter of those in higher income households.

Beverly Lucas, 76, of Cary, North Carolina, said she sees how inflation has hemmed in the lives of her fellow seniors on fixed incomes.

"There's no comfort zone in their finances — no vacation. They're just getting by," she said. "Medications are expensive. Groceries. No one's living large or having fun. They should be having fun."

Lucas, a retired Christian education teacher who lives off social security and a pension, said she is moving to downsize and save \$500 a month. If she had stayed in the two-bedroom where she had lived, she said, her expenses would have gone up this year.

About three-quarters of adults across income groups say their household expenses are higher now than they were a year ago, but those in households earning less than \$100,000 a year are more likely than those in higher income households to say they also have higher debt. Those facing a combination of rising debt and expenses overwhelmingly say their financial situation is a major source of stress.

The poll also finds that people in households earning at least \$100,000 annually were more likely than lower income earners to predict their finances will improve in the year ahead, 39% to 26%. By contrast, people in lower income households were more likely than those earning more to expect their financial situation to worsen, 28% to 18%.

Tyronda Stringer, 28, who works as a truck loader at Walmart in Banks, Alabama, said her debt has increased in the past year due to medical expenses she's still paying off. Stringer, a single mother of two, said the stimulus payments and child tax credits during the pandemic had helped her financial situation, but that now inflation and the cost of childcare have her back living paycheck to paycheck. She's also struggling with high medical bills.

"I used to do three grocery trips a month," she said. "Now it's one and a half at the most. We're just gonna have to cut back on a lot of things. I can see that. Things we're used to or things we need, we'll be getting different brands and things. The only thing I can think of."

The AP-NORC poll finds that just 1 in 10 of those in households making less than \$60,000 a year say their savings have increased over the past year, while about 6 in 10 say their savings have decreased.

Only 20% of adults in that group say they are very confident they can keep up with their expenses, compared with 30% of those making between \$60,000 and \$100,000 and 46% in households making more than that. Four in 10 adults in lower income households say they are not confident they can keep up with their expenses. About 6 in 10 are at least somewhat confident.

Alexander Nye, 26, a graduate student in geology in Provo, Utah, falls into the first category. Nye, who is married with a child, with another due in April, said he has some student loans to cover his graduate degree, but that he feels financially secure.

"We're in a position where we don't have to travel a ton, so gas and car expenses aren't huge," he said. "With our family growing, we do feel inflation in the cost of diapers, food, and clothes. We've just had to adjust to keep things in our budget. We work around it as much as we can."

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Gregory Coney, 60, of Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, said he's hopeful the national economy will improve over the next year. Coney, who is currently unemployed, had worked in customer service for Merrill Lynch and Bank of America and is raising two children. He's currently interviewing for jobs he's optimistic may pay more.

"I do think it's possible the price of food will go down slightly in the next year," Coney said. "Right now I'm saving for college for two kids, but we'd like to be able to travel, to get money for the kids to go away. And potentially have a new or bigger home."

Fingerhut reported from Washington.

The Associated Press receives support from Charles Schwab Foundation for educational and explanatory reporting to improve financial literacy. The independent foundation is separate from Charles Schwab and Co. Inc. The AP is solely responsible for its journalism.

The poll of 1,081 adults was conducted Mar. 16-20 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.0 percentage points.

Brazil's Bolsonaro turns in undeclared jewels to authorities

By CARLA BRIDI Associated Press

BRASILIA, Brazil (AP) — A representative of Brazil's former President Jair Bolsonaro on Friday handed a set of diamond jewelry he received during his presidency over to a state bank, as ordered by a government watchdog amid an investigation into the gifts.

Federal police and prosecutors are investigating whether the goods brought into the country from Saudi Arabia were public gifts that Bolsonaro improperly tried to prevent from being incorporated into the presidency's public collection, or private gifts that Bolsonaro tried sneak into Brazil without paying taxes.

The Senate's transparency commission also is investigating whether the sale of a refinery by Brazil's state-controlled oil giant was related to the jewels.

The state bank Caixa Economica Federal received the box of precious stones Friday at one of its branches in capital Brasilia, the bank's press office told The Associated Press. A representative also turned in firearms Bolsonaro received as a gift from authorities in the United Arab Emirates, according to the federal police's press office.

A federal watchdog on Wednesday had given Bolsonaro five days to hand over the precious stones and guns that he had received while president.

Brazilian media started reporting on the set of jewels earlier this month, along with another set that was seized earlier at the international airport in Sao Paulo. The confiscated set, composed of earrings, a necklace, a ring and a watch by Swiss brand Chopard, is estimated to be worth several million dollars. Neither set was declared to tax authorities.

Documents and video footage published by local press appear to show supposed emissaries of Bolsonaro making multiple unsuccessful attempts to retrieve the seized jewelry, up until just days before the end of his presidency.

Bolsonaro, who denies any wrongdoing connected to the gifts, has been in the United States since late-December, just days before the end of his presidential term.

The gifts add to the legal jeopardy already surrounding the right-wing populist politician. He is also under investigation for any involvement in a rampage by his supporters through the national capital after he left office and for numerous actions during the presidential election campaign he lost last fall.

House GOP passes parents' rights bill in clash over schools

By STEPHEN R. GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans on Friday narrowly passed legislation that would fulfill a campaign promise to give parents a role in what's taught in public schools. It has little chance in the Democrat-run Senate and critics said it would propel a far-right movement that has led to book bans, restrictions aimed at transgender students and raucous school board meetings across the country.

Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif. who made the Parents' Bill of Rights Act a priority during the early weeks of his tenure, said Republicans were "keeping our promise, our commitment to America, that parents will have a say in their kids' education." The bill passed 213-208, with five Republicans — mostly members of the House Freedom Caucus — voting against it.

It would require schools to publish course studies and a list of books kept in libraries, as well as affirm parents' ability to meet with educators, speak at school board meetings and examine school budgets.

In the Senate, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., promised that the legislation would face a "dead end." He said it was further evidence that the House GOP had been overtaken by "hard right MAGA ideologues" — referencing former President Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" campaign slogan.

The bill was an early test of unity for the 222 House Republicans and their thin majority. The measure showed how the adoption of an open amendment process in the House — a concession McCarthy made to win hard-line conservatives' support for his speakership — holds the potential to send legislation down unpredictable twists and turns.

Rep. Lauren Boebert, R-Colo., successfully added amendments that would require schools to report when transgender girls join girls' athletics teams and if trans girls are allowed to use girls' school restrooms or locker rooms. The bill would also require elementary and middle schools get parents' consent to change a child's gender designation, pronouns or name.

Advocates for LGBTQ people said the proposal poses a threat to LGBTQ students by potentially forcing them to come out to their families, which can sometimes lead to abuse or abandonment.

"It's part of a pattern of attempts we're seeing where the right wing of the Republican Party is really trying to marginalize LGBTQ people," said David Stacy, the government affairs director for Human Rights Campaign.

House Freedom Caucus members unsuccessfully tried to add provisions that called for abolishing Department of Education programs in schools and endorsed vouchers that would send public funds to private schools.

Rep. Thomas Massie, R—Kentucky, pointed to the 100-plus Republicans who supported his amendment to terminate the department's authority and said "it adds a lot of momentum."

In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic and racial justice protests, conservatives' intense focus on parental control over public school classrooms has migrated from local school board fights to Republican-held statehouses and now to the floor of the U.S. House.

"Parents want schools focused on reading, writing and math, not woke politics," Rep. Mary Miller, R-Ill., said during earlier debate.

Public school education in the U.S. has long invited concern among some parents — usually conservative — over what children are taught. Historically, the term "parents' rights" has been used in schoolhouse debates over homeschooling, sex education and even the teaching of languages other than English.

Recently, Republicans have tapped into frustrations over remote learning and mask mandates in schools, as well as social conservatives' opposition to certain teachings on race that are broadly labeled as critical race theory, a way of thinking about America's history through the lens of racism.

Republican Glenn Youngkin was elected as Virginia's governor in 2021 on the slogan "Parents matter" and political action committees have poured millions of dollars into school board races nationwide.

McCarthy made the bill a big part of his 2022 election pitch to voters to give Republicans a House majority. But the GOP's expectation of a sweeping victory never materialized, and even in school board races, conservative groups' goal of electing hundreds of "parents' rights" activists largely fell short.

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But McCarthy pressed ahead with the bill, making a public appeal earlier this month at an event that featured a chalkboard, schoolchildren and parents who have been on the frontlines of the cause.

When asked about the five Republican votes against the bill, McCarthy contended that "Democrats are too extreme to believe that parents should have a say" in their children's education.

Democrats said they want to foster parental involvement, but said the bill caters to a vocal minority set on controlling and politicizing classrooms. They derided it as the "Politics over Parents Act."

Attempted book bans and restrictions at school and public libraries surged to their highest number in 2022 since the American Library Association began keeping data 20 years ago, according to a new report the organization released this week.

"We'll fight against this legislation. We'll fight against the banning of books, fight against the bullying of children from any community, and certainly from the LGBTQ+ community," House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries said.

Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, D-Ore. offered alternative legislation that she argued would foster parental involvement, encourage collaboration with educators and make schools welcoming places to families, including those with LGBTQ students.

"We want parents to be involved — peacefully," she said.

Associated Press writers Lisa Mascaro and Kevin Freking contributed to this report.

Ukraine using Soviet-era choppers to pummel Russia from afar

DONETSK REGION, Ukraine (AP) — Skimming the treetops, three Soviet-era attack helicopters bank and swoop down on a field after an early-morning mission to the front lines in the fight against Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Each day, they might fly three or four sorties, says the commander, whose two-crew Mi-24 helicopter, built about 40 years ago, is older than he is.

"We are carrying out combat tasks to destroy enemy vehicles, enemy personnel, we are working with pitch-up attacks from a distance from where the enemy can't get us with their air defense system," said the commander, who spoke on condition of anonymity for operational security reasons, in line with military regulations.

The conflict in Ukraine is largely an artillery war, with territory being fought for inch by inch under a barrage of shells and missiles. But Ukraine's aviation capabilities play a significant role in the fight, the pilot said.

"The importance of the helicopters is huge," said the commander, who is part of Ukraine's 12th Army Aviation Brigade.

Footage from a camera attached to the helicopter during a recent combat mission shows it flying over fields pockmarked with craters from artillery bombing, and firing missiles at Russian trenches that cut through the landscape.

"We are shooting from the big distance and hit the target clearly, like there's a cross on the target and (the missiles) go by themselves where they should go," the commander said.

He would, however, like to fly a newer model.

"We need to master something new, something from abroad," the commander said. "It has better characteristics. You can maneuver more on it, there are more rockets on it and the weapons are more powerful. We can do more tasks with better quality and with less risk for us."

Several countries, including the United States and Britain, have pledged to send, or have already sent, helicopters to Ukraine as part of military aid since the start of the war sparked by Russia's invasion in Feb 2022.

Follow AP's coverage of the war in Ukraine: <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

Why executions by firing squad may be coming back in the US

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — The image of gunmen in a row firing in unison at a condemned prisoner may conjure up a bygone, less enlightened era.

But the idea of using firing squads is making a comeback. Idaho lawmakers passed a bill this week seeking to add the state to the list of those authorizing firing squads, which currently includes Mississippi, Utah, Oklahoma and South Carolina.

Fresh interest comes as states scramble for alternatives to lethal injections after pharmaceutical companies barred the use of their drugs.

Some, including a few Supreme Court justices, view firing squads as less cruel than lethal injections, despite the violence involved in riddling bodies with bullets. Others say it's not so cut-and-dry, or that there are other factors to consider.

A look at the status of firing squads in the United States:

WHEN WAS THE LAST EXECUTION BY FIRING SQUAD?

Ronnie Lee Gardner was executed at Utah State Prison on June 18, 2010, for killing an attorney during a courthouse escape attempt.

Gardner sat in a chair, sandbags around him and a target pinned over his heart. Five prison staffers drawn from a pool of volunteers fired from 25 feet (about 8 meters) away with .30-caliber rifles. Gardner was pronounced dead two minutes later.

A blank cartridge was loaded into one rifle without anyone knowing which. That's partly done to enable those bothered later by their participation to believe they may not have fired a fatal bullet.

Utah is the only state to have used firing squads in the past 50 years, according to the Washington, D.C.-based Death Penalty Information Center.

WHAT HAS CAUSED THE LETHAL DRUG SCARCITY?

Under Idaho's bill, firing squads would be used only if executioners can't obtain the drugs required for lethal injections.

As lethal injection became the primary execution method in the 2000s, drug companies began barring use of their drugs, saying they were meant to save lives, not take them.

States have found it difficult to obtain the cocktail of drugs they long relied on, such as sodium thiopental, pancuronium bromide and potassium chloride. Some have switched to more accessible drugs such as pentobarbital or midazolam, both of which, critics say, can cause excruciating pain.

Other states have reauthorized the use of electric chairs and gas chambers — or are at least considering doing so. That's where firing squads come in.

ARE THEY MORE HUMANE?

Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor is among those who say firing squads are a more humane method of execution.

That idea is based on expectations that bullets will strike the heart, rupturing it and causing immediate unconsciousness as the inmate quickly bleeds to death.

"In addition to being near instant, death by shooting may also be comparatively painless," Sotomayor wrote in a 2017 dissent.

Her comments came in the case of an Alabama inmate who asked to be executed by firing squad. A Supreme Court majority refused to hear his appeal. In her dissent, Sotomayor said lethal drugs can mask intense pain by paralyzing inmates while they are still sentient.

"What cruel irony that the method that appears most humane may turn out to be our most cruel experiment yet," she wrote.

BUT IS DEATH BY FIRING SQUAD REALLY PAINLESS?

In a 2019 federal case, prosecutors submitted statements from anesthesiologist Joseph Antognini, who said painless deaths by firing squads are not guaranteed.

Inmates could remain conscious for up to 10 seconds after being shot depending on where bullets strike, Antognini said, and those seconds could be "severely painful, especially related to shattering of bone and

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damage to the spinal cord.”

Others note that killings by firing squad are visibly violent and bloody compared with lethal injections, potentially traumatizing victims’ relatives and other witnesses as well as executioners and staffers who clean up afterward.

ARE FIRING SQUADS MORE RELIABLE?

If reliability means the condemned are more likely to die as intended, then one could make that argument.

An Amherst College political science and law professor, Austin Sarat, studied 8,776 executions in the U.S. between 1890 and 2010 and found that 276 of them were botched, or 3.15%.

The executions that went wrong included 7.12% of all lethal injections — in one notorious 2014 case in Oklahoma, Clayton Lockett writhed and clenched his teeth after midazolam was administered — as well as 3.12% of hangings and 1.92% of electrocutions.

By contrast, not a single one of the 34 firing squad executions was found to have been botched, according to Sarat, who has called for an end to capital punishment.

The Death Penalty Information Center, however, has identified at least one firing squad execution that reportedly went awry: In 1879, in Utah territory, riflemen missed Wallace Wilkerson’s heart and it took 27 minutes for him to die.

WERE FIRING SQUADS EVER IN WIDE USE?

Firing squads have never been a predominant method of carrying out civilian death sentences and are more closely associated with the military, including the execution of Civil War deserters.

From colonial days through 2002, more than 15,000 people were put to death, according to data compiled by death penalty researchers M. Watt Espy and John Ortiz Smykla. Just 143 died by firing squad, compared with 9,322 by hanging and 4,426 by electrocution.

HAS THE SUPREME COURT WEIGHED IN?

High court rulings have required inmates who oppose an existing execution method to offer an alternative. They must prove both that the alternative is “significantly” less painful and that the infrastructure exists to implement the alternative method.

That has led to the spectacle of inmate attorneys bringing multiple cases in which they argue the merits of firing squads.

In 2019, the Supreme Court ruled in *Bucklew v. Precythe* that some pain does not automatically mean a method of execution constitutes “cruel and unusual” punishment, which is prohibited by the Eighth Amendment.

The Constitution “does not guarantee a prisoner a painless death — something that, of course, isn’t guaranteed to many people,” Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote for the 5-4 majority.

Key factors in deciding whether a method is “cruel and unusual” include whether it adds extra pain “beyond what’s needed to effectuate a death sentence,” Gorsuch said.

___ Follow Michael Tarm on Twitter at @mtarm.

Today in History: March 25, Fire kills 146 garment workers

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, March 25, the 84th day of 2023. There are 281 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On March 25, 1931, in the so-called “Scottsboro Boys” case, nine young Black men were taken off a train in Alabama, accused of raping two white women; after years of convictions, death sentences and imprisonment, the nine were eventually vindicated.

On this date:

In 1634, English colonists sent by Lord Baltimore arrived in present-day Maryland.

In 1894, Jacob S. Coxey began leading an “army” of unemployed from Massillon (MA'-sih-luhn), Ohio, to Washington D.C., to demand help from the federal government.

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In 1911, 146 people, mostly young female immigrants, were killed when fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Co. in New York.

In 1915, the U.S. Navy lost its first commissioned submarine as the USS F-4 sank off Hawaii, claiming the lives of all 21 crew members.

In 1947, a coal-dust explosion inside the Centralia Coal Co. Mine No. 5 in Washington County, Illinois, claimed 111 lives; 31 men survived.

In 1954, RCA announced it had begun producing color television sets at its plant in Bloomington, Indiana.

In 1960, Ray Charles recorded "Georgia on My Mind" as part of his "The Genius Hits the Road" album in New York.

In 1965, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. led 25,000 people to the Alabama state capitol in Montgomery after a five-day march from Selma to protest the denial of voting rights to Blacks. Later that day, civil rights activist Viola Liuzzo, a white Detroit homemaker, was shot and killed by Ku Klux Klansmen.

In 1987, the Supreme Court, in Johnson v. Transportation Agency, ruled 6-3 that an employer could promote a woman over an arguably more-qualified man to help get women into higher-ranking jobs.

In 1990, 87 people, most of them Honduran and Dominican immigrants, were killed when fire raged through an illegal social club in New York City. (An arsonist set the fire after being thrown out of the club following an argument with his girlfriend; Julio Gonzalez died in prison in 2016.)

In 1996, an 81-day standoff by the anti-government Freemen began at a ranch near Jordan, Montana.

Ten years ago: U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Afghan President Hamid Karzai made a show of unusual unity between their two nations in Kabul as the U.S. military ceded control of its last detention facility in Afghanistan, ending a long-standing irritant in relations.

Five years ago: In an interview with "60 Minutes," adult film star Stormy Daniels said she had been threatened and warned to keep silent about an alleged sexual encounter with Donald Trump in 2006. A fire at a shopping mall in a Siberian city in Russia killed more than 60 people, including 41 children. Gun manufacturer Remington filed for bankruptcy reorganization amid years of slumping sales and legal and financial pressure from the Sandy Hook school massacre in Connecticut. Linda Brown, who as a young girl in Kansas became embroiled in a landmark 1954 Supreme Court case that challenged segregation in public schools, died at the age of 75.

One year ago: Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin announced his intention to support the nomination of Ketanji Brown Jackson to serve on the Supreme Court, pushing her one step closer to confirmation. Sheriff's officials in Florida said a 14-year-old boy fell to his death from a ride at an Orlando amusement park. New Orleans' school board unanimously reversed a little known but century-old ban on jazz.

Today's Birthdays: Film critic Gene Shalit is 97. Former astronaut James Lovell is 95. Feminist activist and author Gloria Steinem is 89. Singer Anita Bryant is 83. Actor Paul Michael Glaser is 80. Singer Sir Elton John is 76. Actor Bonnie Bedelia is 75. Actor-comedian Mary Gross is 70. Actor James McDaniel is 65. Movie producer Amy Pascal is 65. Rock musician Steve Norman (Spandau Ballet) is 63. Actor Brenda Strong is 63. Actor Fred Goss is 62. Actor-writer-director John Stockwell is 62. Actor Marcia Cross is 61. Author Kate DiCamillo is 59. Actor Lisa Gay Hamilton is 59. Actor Sarah Jessica Parker is 58. Baseball Hall of Famer Tom Glavine is 57. TV personality Ben Mankiewicz is 56. Olympic bronze medal figure skater Debi Thomas is 56. Actor Laz Alonso is 52. Singer Melanie Blatt (All Saints) is 48. Actor Domenick Lombardozzi is 47. Actor Lee Pace is 44. Actor Sean Faris is 41. Comedian-actor Alex Moffat (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 41. Former auto racer Danica Patrick is 41. Actor-singer Katharine McPhee is 39. Comedian-actor Chris Redd (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 38. Singer Jason Castro is 36. Rapper Big Sean is 35. Rap DJ-producer Ryan Lewis is 35. Actor Matthew Beard is 34. Actor-singer Aly (AKA Alyson) Michalka (mish-AL'-kah) is 34. Actor Kiowa Gordon is 33. Actor Seychelle Gabriel is 32.