

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

Tuesday, March 28

Senior Menu: Meatballs, mashed potatoes and gravy, carrots and peas, mixed fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast sandwich.

School Lunch: corndogs, tater tots.

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

The Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Indoor track meet at NSU

Wednesday, March 29

Large Group Music Contest at NSU.

Senior Menu: Teriyaki chicken, rice pilaf, broccoli, pineapple/strawberry ambrosia, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Eggs and breakfast potatoes.

School Lunch: Pizza grilled cheese, chips.

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.; Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Lent Service, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.; Soup Supper, 6 p.m. (Nigeria Circle serves), worship, 7 p.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Book Study with Lindsey Tietz, 4 p.m.; Confirmation, 4 p.m.

Thursday, March 30

Senior Menu: Tater tot hot dish, green beans, grape juice, apple crisp, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.

School Lunch: Goulash, corn.

Friday, March 31

Senior Menu: Ham and bean soup, egg salad sandwich, fruit, cookie.

School Breakfast: Biscuits and gravy.

School Lunch: Fish fry spudsters.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Everyone needs a butt hurricane

I love gadgetry. I have remotes to run my remote controls. It's not perfect, though. I discovered that my Apple TV remote volume control triggers my new Chinese-made CD player.

And everyone's worried about TikTok.

Yes, they still make CD players. I mean, what was I going to do with all those CDs I bought to replace all those vinyl albums I'm buying again?

My newest turntable was made in England, too hoity-toity to be influenced by remote controls. It's a manual turntable. So, you have to get up every 20 minutes. That's OK. I had to turn off the CD player, anyway.

Did I mention that my garage door opener starts the coffee maker? Things have gotten completely out of hand ever since the Clapper.

Now, the tour continues... Join me in my bedroom, will you? Don't worry. I have "security" cameras. And mirrors. (I worry about shoplifters.)

I better stop kidding around. The way the North Dakota Legislature's new sexual surveillance state is going, cameras will be standard equipment. Man, those cats are uptight. The new rules on the Senate floor require skirts below the knee. And that's just the men.

Anyway, one of the things I don't cheap out on is my bed. They say you spend a third of your life in bed. More, if you're Charlie Sheen. I just got one of those new-fangled remote controlled puppies that tilts your head, your legs, massages upper and/or lower extremities, has eight USB connections (I'm not kidding), and LED running lights. (Again, not kidding.)

And the remote changes the channel to TikTok.

It's comprised of two single beds with the same features so we can race. It's like a hospital bed without being roused by nurses every two hours to give you sleeping pills. I've slept better between the drummer and the bass player at Dempsey's than I did at St. A's last year.

The bed replaces the one made in North Dakota. Buy local, they said. Best in the world, they said. It was wonderful. I bought one after sleeping on one at The Donaldson in Fargo before they turned the house restaurant into a hotdog stand. The mattress came with a lifetime guarantee. Technically, that's true. But it's not your lifetime. It's the lifetime of the mattress. Goodbye, Squeaky. It was good while it lasted.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, on to the bathroom. Some of you will have to stand in the shower to make room. Here's my pride and joy. My new BioBidet 1000. It replaced the old BB600. The one with a lifetime guarantee. The BP600 in the mud room is still going strong, however.

Isn't it ironic that the world's greatest butt technology was invented in the 1600's in France where they have a reputation for only bathing every fortnight? "Bidet" is French for "pony" because I guess you had to straddle the first models. It's basically a French riding saddle with perks.

It's remote controlled. The previous model only had the controls on the ejector seat. For people already too lazy to wash and dry their bungholes, this one allows your butler to operate the controls from the patio. "More steam, Jeeves!"

There are sooo many controls. A "massage" feature. A "feminine" feature. All of it adjustable so you get the proper trajectory. A periscope. Temperature controls for the seat, the water, and the air dryer. What's the air-dry like? Imagine mooning the car wash as you exit. It's a veritable butt hurricane.

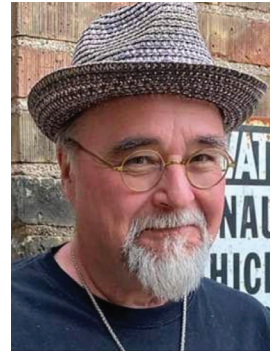
There's even an "economy" setting for cheap asses.

If you don't read French there are some amusing diagrams that would get a librarian arrested in North Dakota. One of the options is "vortex." It should say "enema." because it's like sitting on a firehose. Holy moly! It'll blow your hemorrhoids right outa there.

Okay, do you really need a toilet with a four-barrel carb, dual exhaust, a Hurst shifter, and a backup camera? Well, I was sure glad I had it when my "pitching arm" locked up recently. It took a few doses of prednisone to get me right. That's when you need the hotline to the bullpen. Imagine a T-Rex trying to wipe.

And then, not to be indelicate, but no more racing stripes in your Fruit of the Looms. That's the bottom line. (Get it?) Plus, during the great Toilet Paper Shortage of 2020, we were golden.

But is it safe? I mean, 120 volts connected to water? Is that what killed Elvis? True, there are risks, which is why I have the double indemnity bidet clause in my life insurance policy.



**That's
Life**
by Tony Bender

Weekly Vikings Recap - Minnesota Vikings' Free Agency Week 2

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

Week two of NFL free agency was a much slower week for the Minnesota Vikings as the team made only two free-agent signings. On Wednesday, the Vikings signed linebacker, Troy Reeder, and wide receiver, Brandon Powell. Both players have a history with the Vikings' head coach, Kevin O'Connell, as they all won a Super Bowl together with the Los Angeles Rams in 2021. Thus, although both Reeder and Powell will likely be depth players for the Vikings this season, they help provide Kevin O'Connell with championship experience and useful familiarity with what it takes to win every day.

Furthermore, the Vikings made every Vikings fan happy with the signing of CJ Ham to a two-year extension this week. Ham, a native of Duluth, Minnesota, has spent his entire seven-year NFL career for the Vikings and become a fan-favorite for his toughness and willingness to do the dirty work at the fullback position. There was some skepticism about whether Ham would return this season as his offensive snap count got cut in half. The main reason for Ham's lack of offensive production was not that his skills are diminishing, but because of the change in the offensive scheme with the hiring of Kevin O'Connell. The NFL, overall, has started to go away from the fullback position as almost one-third of the league does not even have a fullback on their roster. O'Connell might not even want a fullback on the Vikings' roster but has decided to keep Ham around for his leadership and value on special teams. In the future when Ham is gone, I would expect that the Vikings will completely do away with the fullback position while O'Connell is the coach in Minnesota.

In completely unrelated news, the rumors are starting to swirl that the Vikings might look to take a quarterback in the first round of the NFL draft this year. The reason for these rumors seems to stem from the fact the Vikings decided to not give Kirk Cousins an extension this offseason and it appears that the 2023 season might be Cousins' last in Minnesota. This means that the Vikings have two options at quarterback, they can either draft one in 2023 and let him develop in their system for a year before taking over in 2024; or, the Vikings could take a quarterback in 2024 and have that person start right away. Given the risk that comes with the second option, it seems like the Vikings might be looking to draft a quarterback in this year's draft.

Although mock drafts usually do not mean anything this far out from the draft, it was interesting that multiple mock drafts came out this week with the Vikings taking a quarterback in the first round, something that had not been predicted in mock drafts up to that point.

One mock draft had the Vikings taking Tennessee quarterback, Hendon Hooker, a talented quarterback who unfortunately tore his ACL this past season. Hooker makes a lot of sense for the Vikings as they would likely not need to trade up to get him in the top half of the first round. Also, there would be no need for Hooker to quickly come back from his injury. Instead, he would be able to fully recover from his injury while sitting behind Cousins for the entire season.

However, the quarterback who seems to be the favorite for the Vikings to take is Kentucky quarterback, Will Levis. Levis is a strong-armed, athletic quarterback with an impressive frame. The issue with Levis is his accuracy and poor footwork, two of the most important qualities of a quarterback. Nevertheless, it appears that the Vikings might be very interested in Levis. Both Kwesi Adofo-Mensah and Kevin O'Connell were down at Kentucky for Levis's pro day and it has been reported that O'Connell is a big fan of Levis. If the Vikings decide that Levis is their guy, they are going to have to move up into the top 10 of the draft this year to get him. This could be a fun NFL draft for Vikings fans.

We the People

The South Dakota Humanities Council is making available a weekly column -- "We the People" -- that focuses on the U.S. Constitution. It is written by David Adler, who is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality, and civic education.



By David Adler

"Vulnerable to Indictment, Trump's Cases Subject to the Law"

Former President Donald Trump has said he expects to be indicted by a Manhattan grand jury any day now. Although widely anticipated, there is no certainty that he will be indicted by grand jurors in New York or, for that matter, by citizens serving on grand juries in Washington or Atlanta, led by prosecutors examining, respectively, his potential obstruction of justice of a federal investigation involving the "Mar-a-Lago Papers" or his effort to overturn the results of the 2020 election in Georgia.

Trump's supporters in Congress and those scattered across the country decry the investigations as "witch hunts" and acts of "political persecution." Many others, however, rightly support them as critical to the defense of the rule of law.

Whether Trump is indicted in any of these cases should turn on a simple question: Is there probable cause to believe that he committed the crimes for which he is charged? There are no grounds, in history or law, to suggest that a former president should be held to a standard different than that applied to all other citizens. In fact, there are no legal or historical grounds to suggest special standards for a sitting president.

In the Constitutional Convention, no delegate argued for a presidential privilege, which is hardly surprising given the drafters' commitment to eliminating all vestiges of monarchical prerogatives. The royal prerogative, James Wilson observed, was irrelevant to the creation of a republican form of government. Wilson, second in importance to James Madison as an architect of the Constitution, summed up the views of his colleagues when he told the Pennsylvania Ratification Convention that "not a single privilege is annexed to his [a president's] character."

Doubts about presidential vulnerability to indictment are swept away by Article I, Section 3, Clause 6, which addresses the authority of the Senate to try all impeachments and provides that "the Party convicted shall nevertheless be liable and subject to Indictment, Trial, Judgment and Punishment, according to law." That provision was inserted in the Constitution to avoid claims that a president, having been convicted by the Senate in an impeachment trial, is therefore immune from criminal prosecution by virtue of the protection against double jeopardy. The Senate trial is focused on the issue of removal from office and potential prohibition of further service on behalf of the United States. Failure by the Senate to impeach a president has no bearing on decisions made by criminal justice officials.

The Convention's rejection of presidential immunity from criminal indictment is confirmed by the fact that there is no language in the Constitution that affords it. The framers certainly knew how to confer immunity when they wanted to do it. The only provision for immunity from prosecution is that which is granted to Congress in Article I, section 6: "The Senators and Representatives. . . shall in all Cases, except Treason, Felony and Breach of the Peace, be privileged from Arrest during their Attendance at the Session of their respective Houses, and in going to and returning from the same." Since the framers knew how to, and did, spell out immunity, the logical inference is that no immunity exists where none is mentioned.

Since a sitting president is not immune from indictment there is no reason to exalt the treatment of a former president. And, even if—speaking purely hypothetically—a sitting president were immune from indictment by virtue of the structure of the office and the attendant duties and responsibilities of the executive, those factors certainly do not apply to an ex-president.

Americans are divided on the desirability, wisdom and merits of indicting a former president. The question of a grand jury indictment of former President Trump should turn on the same evidentiary standards

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applied to other citizens. As Wilson told his colleagues in Pennsylvania, there is "not a single privilege annexed" to the character of a president and, by inference, an ex-president.

In their creation of the presidency, the framers sought to cut all connections to the Royal Prerogative of the English kingship. They institutionalized and constitutionally confined the executive power, which King James I declared was inherent in the king by virtue of his royalty and not his office. The American system was designed in part to overcome the personalization of executive power and the principle that the king was above the law. In their replacement of personal rule with the rule of law, the framers rejected the historical admiration of the executive and the claims of personal authority that at least since the Middle Ages, in one form or another, had conceived of executive rights as innate, which is they were derived not from the office but, we could say, from the blood and bone of the man.

At the time of the Philadelphia Convention, executive power across the world was personal, not juridical. For their part, the framers tried to transform personal rule into a matter of law and to subordinate the executive to constitutional commands and prescriptions. In a word, they were intent on establishing the rule of law, which meant the president was subject to the same laws, in the same manner, as all other citizens. That principle applies to former presidents as well.

The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

a migration center along the U.S.-Mexico border, officials have said.

- Germany's entire transport network has been paralyzed by what the country's media calls a "mega-strike," as two of the country's largest unions have staged a 24-hour walk out over inflation. It is the country's largest strike since 1992.

- The Supreme Court is weighing up scrapping a federal law that criminalizes encouraging illegal immigration after the Biden administration claimed it infringes on free speech rights.

- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia's ambassador to the U.S. has told Newsweek that Joe Biden's decision to hold a second "Summit for Democracy" this week was the "epitome of hypocrisy."

- The Israeli embassy in Washington has closed with no indication of when it would reopen, joining Israel's largest labor union in protesting recent legislative changes proposed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. (Read more about this below.)

- New York state has agreed to pay a \$5.5 million settlement to Anthony Broadwater, who spent 16 years in prison after being wrongly convicted of the rape of writer Alice Sebold in 1981.

- At least 37 people were killed after a fire broke out at

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Although it doesn't feel like it back home in South Dakota, the first day of spring was last Monday, March 20. This past week in Washington was the peak bloom of the iconic cherry blossom trees. They're located throughout the city, but the best of them are right along the Tidal Basin that's home to the

Jerrerson Memorial. While I spend most of my time indoors, I hear plenty about them from the South Dakotans who visit my office. The jury's still out on whether they came to meet with us or see the cherry blossoms! I also introduced two South Dakotans as panelists at a roundtable in the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. That and more, all in my Weekly Round[s] Up:

South Dakota groups I visited with: Members of the South Dakota Bankers Association; students from Lemmon High School; Daniel Scholl, SDSU's VP of Research and Economic Development; and South Dakota's Lieutenant Governor Larry Rhoden.

Meetings this past week: Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin; Col. John Lloyd with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; a group of Northwestern Mutual financial advisors; Gen. Laura J. Richardson, Commander of U.S. Southern Command; Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund; David Beasley, Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme; Mark Baker, President of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association; Ron Keohane, Nominee for the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower & Reserve Affairs; and David Soloman, Chairman and CEO of Goldman Sachs.

We also had our weekly Senate Prayer Breakfast, where we heard from Senator Maggie Hassan from New Hampshire.

Met with South Dakotans from: Aberdeen, Belle Fourche, Brookings, Eagle Butte, Lemmon, Pierre, Platte, Sioux Falls, Spearfish, Union Center, White River and Yankton.

Topics discussed: The U.S.'s strategy on China, the importance of local banks in South Dakota and Native priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill.

Legislation introduced: I introduced the Tribal Firearm Access Act, legislation that would clarify that tribal governments are eligible entities to issue identification documents for the purposes of obtaining a firearm. Under current federal law, tribal members are unable to use their tribal identification documents, which often is their only form of identification, to purchase a firearm. The Tribal Firearm Access Act fixes this problem, allowing tribal members to exercise their Second Amendment rights. You can read more about it here.

Votes taken: 7 – A number of these were in relation to the repeal of the 1991 and 2002 Authorizations for Use of Military Force (AUMF) against Iraq.

Hearings: I had three hearings this week. I attended a hearing in the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs where we had the honor of hosting a couple of South Dakotans. Kelsey Scott from Eagle Butte and Dustin Schmidt from White River both spoke on our committee's roundtable discussion titled, "Native Priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill Reauthorization." You can watch a clip of that hearing here.

I also had a hearing in the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and one in the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Classified briefings: I had one classified briefing in the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Aberdeen, Brandon, Brookings, Geddes and Wall. We also had two members of our South Dakota team visiting DC this week. They attended a conference in the Capitol with other Constituent Service Representatives to learn more about helping South Dakotans work through issues with the federal government. A large part of the work that gets done by my team in the state is casework. If you or a family member need assistance with one of the USDA programs, the Social Security Administration, Indian Health Service, obtaining your VA benefits or help navigating another federal agency, please reach out to one of my four offices. Contact information can be found on my website by clicking here. My team and I are here to help.

Steps taken this week: 54,674 steps or 25.18 miles.

NFU Workshop Highlights Technology That Allows Diesel Engines to Run on Ethanol

HURON, S.D. - During the National Farmers Union Convention attendees learned about a new technology which would allow diesel engines to run on ethanol.

The engineer who co-developed the technology said he wasn't out to sell more ethanol – he wanted to develop a way to lower carbon emissions in long-haul trucks. And ethanol fit the bill.

"If you acknowledge ethanol's decarbonization potential, it is hard to see a world where it does not stay relevant indefinitely," said BJ Johnson, CEO and co-founder of ClearFlame Engine Technologies.

Considering the growth in demand for long-haul trucks, even if a small percentage of fleets converted to ethanol, Johnson said demand for ethanol would dramatically increase. "Long-haul trucks need a liquid fuel like ethanol. Right now, trucks are 100 percent diesel. But in five years, it may only be 5 percent. But there will be more trucks. So, it is not a question of 'how does ethanol take more of a shrinking market?' If you get into these markets (and convert diesel trucks to ethanol), it is how much of this growing market can ethanol serve?"

He noted that 1 billion gallons of ethanol would be needed for every 1 percent of long-haul truck engines converting from diesel to ClearFlame technology and fueled by ethanol.

Doug Sombke, South Dakota Farmers Union President, co-led the workshop with Johnson. He spoke to the ability for farmers and the ethanol industry to meet increased demand created once more diesel engines are utilizing ethanol, Doug Sombke had this to say: "I heard people say, 'I don't think we can make that much ethanol.' I remind them, that I heard this same comment when we were encouraged to meet demand for E10. Farmers have a unique ability to surpass production expectations."

Johnson explained that new diesel engines can be manufactured with ClearFlame technology to only run on ethanol without losing any of their power. He also said the company can modify existing diesel engines to run on ethanol. And the technology can be utilized in any diesel engine.

"We are getting to a future where not just trucks, but the tractors that plant the corn are running on ethanol," explained Johnson, who earned his bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees in mechanical engineering from Stanford University.

To learn more about ClearFlame Technologies, visit www.clearflame.com. To learn more about the work South Dakota Farmers Union does to support the ethanol industry, visit www.sdfu.org.

School board finding alternative to bus bid, moves forward with health lab renovations, hires new teachers

By Elizabeth Varin

Frustration was evident as the Groton Area School District board looked into where to find a bus after plans fell through for a second time.

So instead of requesting more bids for a bus, the board approved contracting to cut down on some of the waiting time.

The school board opened bids February 13 for a new school bus. The board voted to purchase a bus from Harlow's Bus Sales for \$111,680.70.

However, Superintendent Joe Schwan said, since that bid was opened, the prices have increased to about \$117,000. This is the second time the district has had a signed bid price change for a bus.

Schwan presented three options to the board at Monday's meeting: buy the bus from Harlow's Bus Sales at the higher price, go out to bid for another bus or contract with a purchasing cooperative.

Sourcewell, based in Staples, Minn., solicits contracts for products and service for government agencies including state and local governments, higher education and K-12 school districts.

A lot of school district utilize Sourcewell, Schwan told the board. Buses in particular have become a popular thing schools look for through the company.

Schwan recommended contracting with Sourcewell to avoid going to bid and push the issue back another four to six weeks. Even without that delay, he said, a new bus still takes 12 to 18 months to get.

Board President Deb Gengerke asked whether the district could take legal action against the bus company that was awarded the bid in order to get the originally-agreed-upon price.

That could be an option, Schwan said. However, a lawsuit may take a few years to be resolved, and until then, the district would be out a bus.

Board member Grant Rix asked if contracting with Sourcewell could allow the district to find other things the schools could use.

Sourcewell finds contracts not only for vehicles, but the company could also help the district bid for big projects, Schwan said. When the district was looking to get the track resurfaced, Sourcewell was an option to find companies that could do that work.

"I say we use Sourcewell," Rix said.

"Me too," said board Vice President Marty Weismantel.

The board also voted to contract with Huff Construction for renovations to the health science laboratory at the high school.

Huff Construction of Aberdeen will be the general contractor for the project, which includes removing the current science lab tables, some built-in cabinets and the flooring. The contractor will also put in new flooring similar to what is in the elementary school common area, update lighting, add in stainless steel sinks and paint the interior of the lab.

Included in the project is abating asbestos that was found to be in the flooring.

The total project cost is estimated at \$82,242, Schwan said. That price could move up or down depending on how much the asbestos abatement ends of costing.

Board Vice President Weismantel asked if money for the renovation was coming from the \$236,522 state Department of Education Career and Technical Education Innovative Equipment Grant. Superintendent Schwan replied that grant cannot be used on renovations for the building, but rather is set aside for equipment in the lab. Money for the renovation is coming from some shifting in the capital outlay plan.

One new face and a returning one are joining the Tigers for the next school year.

The school district board approved hiring Brittany Hubbart as science/health science teacher and oral interpretation advisor for the 2023-2024 school year. The board also voted to hire Eric Swenson as middle school math teacher for the next school year.

Hubbart returns to Groton having been a student teacher at the district a few years ago, said Superin-

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tendent Schwan. She currently works Holgate Middle School in Aberdeen as a sixth grade science teacher and study skills instructor, as well as doing athletic training for Avera.

"It makes her uniquely qualified to take over this health science lab," Schwan said.

While Hubbard will be a familiar face, also having been an athletic trainer at some Groton athletics, Swenson will be new to the district.

Swenson currently teaches at the Aberdeen Catholic School District, serving as Roncalli High School general math and algebra 1 teacher. He also teaches eighth grade math and algebra 1 at Roncalli Junior High School, according to the state's teacher database.

Closer to home, Carla Tracy, co-owner of Beauty Brew Boutique, was approved as a volunteer assistant track coach for the 2023 season.

- The board voted to keep the same health insurance plans available to staff for the next school year. Other options available were presented, including a higher deductible plan. Board President Gengerke asked if there was any feedback from the teachers, to which Business Manager Mike Weber said, "I don't think they want to change plans, but they understand it's your prerogative to change that."

- Julie Milbrandt and Joni Groeblichhoff presented an overview of Destination Imagination. The program, open to kindergarten through 12th graders, involves students working together to solve open-ended science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics challenges. Groton Area has three teams this year, an elementary school level group and two early learning groups. There were no region competitions this year due to a lack of numbers across the state, Groeblichhoff told the board. However, there will still be a state competition on April 1 in Pierre.

- Adam Franken told the board about the agriculture classes available at the high school. This school year includes two horticulture classes, ag business and introduction to agriculture, as well as units on wildlife and fisheries, agriculture processing, plant science and animal science. He is teaching between 90 and 95 students this year through the fall and spring semesters.

- The Groton FFA chapter is in the middle of its contest season, Franken said. On Tuesday, FFA members will travel to Miller for a contest, followed by Little International at South Dakota State University on Friday. On April 6, as many as 900 FFA students from around the region are set to be at the Groton FFA Career and Technical Education contest.

- Lindsey Tietz told the school board she continues to adapt her family and consumer science classes to the needs of the students. This year has included trips with some of her classes to Common Cents Thrift Store to show students how to repurpose and recycle items, as well as how to stretch their budgets.

- The Family, Career and Community Leaders of America group at the high school is comprised of nearly 40 members this year and is working on community service projects, Tietz told the board. There are also strong leadership amongst the group, which will make for a good team next year.

- Business-related classes are continuing strong, said Becky Hubsch, business and computer teacher. Subjects in classes include introduction to business, specialized accounting, personal finance and more. A portion of that also includes students learning the business software QuickBooks. "Kids who are going into this, this is something they're going to use, so why not teach it to them," Hubsch said.

- New medical-related classes are also taking place at the high school, Hubsch told the board. The fall semester saw 20 students in the introduction to medical terminology class, while 17 students are currently in the introduction to sports science class.

- Students in sixth, seventh, eighth and 11th grade start the Smarter Balance testing this week, said middle and high school Principal Kiersten Sombke. Testing should be finished by April 13.

- The door replacement project at the old gymnasium is set to be completed Tuesday, Superintendent Schwan said.

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Principal's Report

MS/HS Building

Dr. Sombke

March 27, 2023

1) **Smarter Balance Assessments Schedule Grades 6-12 Spring 2023-** Smarter Balance Testing will begin this week on March 29th-April 12th. Students in grades 6-8, and 11 will complete assessments for Math and English Language Arts. Students in grades 8 and 11 will also complete the Science Assessment. Spring 2023 Testing Schedule listed below:

Date	M (March 27)	T (28)	W (29)	Th (30)	F (31)
Notes			Grade 6/8: Math CAT		
AM (hrs 1-3)			Grade 11: ELA CAT		
PM (hrs 5-7)				Grade 6/8: Math PT Grade 11: ELA PT	

Date	M (April 3)	T (4)	W (5)	Th (6)	F (7)
Notes		Grade 6/8: ELA CAT			No School
AM (hrs 1-3)		Grade 7/11: Math CAT			
PM (hrs 5-7)			Grade 6/8: ELA PT Grade 7/11: Math PT		

Date	M (April 10)	T (11)	W (12)	Th (13)	F (14)
AM (hrs 1-3)	School in session	Grade 8 Science (during class periods) Tuesday thru Friday	Grade 11 Science (hrs 1-3)	Grade 7: ELA PT	
PM (hrs 5-7)			Grade 7: ELA CAT		

2) **Teacher Effectiveness-** Staff Process Update: Staff are nearing the end of the Certified Staff Teacher Effectiveness Process, completing the work and process of either Group A or Group B requirements pending each teacher's status of "CONTINUING" (3 years or more of continued employment) or "NON-CONTINUING" (less

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than 3 years of continued employment). There are currently 15 Teachers assigned to Group A, and 8 Teachers assigned to Group B.

Group A Timeline	Group B Timeline
September 14: Completed Self-Assessment	September 14: Completed Self-Assessment
September 28: Completed SLO #1	August-October: 2 Informal Observations- <i>unscheduled</i>
October 10: Completed SLO #2	August-May: Artifact Uploading
October 24-31: 1 st Formal/Non-Continuing	January-February: 2 Informal Observations
November 28-Dec 2: 1 st (only) Formal/Continuing	May: Final Conference/Artifact Review
November 29: SLO#3 Approval	
January 16-31: 2 nd Formal/Non-Continuing	
February 6-24: SLO #4 (meet with Principal)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 Informal Observations per school year- <i>unscheduled</i> 	

3) **AFSP Presentation-** The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention will again be coming to present to students in Grades 8-12 on May 9th. The presentation will cover the following items:

- What mental health is and how it's both similar to and different from, physical health
- How to notice signs of someone needing help
- Tips and strategies for having a caring conversation with someone they might be worried about
- Methods of self-care for mind, body, soul, and surroundings
- Examples of trustworthy resources
- How reaching out to trusted adults can help teens manage their mental health

4) **2023 Prom and Information Packets-** Students in grades 11 and 12 can pick up the 2023 Prom Information Packets from the MS/HS Office on April 10th. Students will have two weeks to sign up for grand march and post prom by returning their completed packet with their \$20.00 per student or \$40.00 per couple payment. MS/HS PAC will again be sponsoring the post-prom event, busing students to Allevity in Aberdeen, in addition to providing drawings and prizes for all students who stay through the end of the post prom event. Students staying until the end of post prom will receive their Grand March/Prom fee back the following week.

5) **Drivers Education-** Drivers Education Packets are due back to the MS/HS Office by Friday, March 31, 2023. The fee for the 2023 Drivers Education Course is \$270.00. Mr. Wanner will be visiting with qualifying students before school dismisses in May for the summer.

6) **Dates to Know:**

3/28- FFA CDE/Miller High School

3/28- NSU Indoor Track Event

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- 3/29- NSU Large Group Music Contest
- 3/29-4/12 Standardized Testing/Smarter Balance Testing MS/HS Building: Grades 6, 7, 8, and 11
- 3/31- FFA CDE SDSU- Little I
- 4/2- Pops Concert- GHS Old Gym @ 2 and 5
- 4/7- No School/Easter Break
- 4/10- SCHOOL IN SESSION
- 4/10- School Board Meeting @ 7:00pm
- 4/11- Track @ Groton Area
- 4/14- All School Play @ 7:00pm
- 4/15- All School Play @ 4:00pm
- 4/16- State FFA Convention Begins SDSU
- 4/18- Track @ Britton
- 4/19- FCCLA Banquet @ 6:00pm
- 4/22- Prom Grand March @ 8:00pm
- 4/24- Golf/Girls @ Redfield
- 4/24- School Board Meeting @ 7:00pm
- 4/25- FFA Ag Fair/Aberdeen
- 4/25- Track @ Groton Area
- 4/27- Golf/Girls @ Milbank
- 4/27- Middle School Spring Music Concert @ 7:00pm
- 4/28- Track @ Webster
- 4/29- Middle School Band Contest Grades 6-8
- 5/2- Track @ Milbank
- 5/4- High School Spring Music Concert @ 7:00pm
- 5/4- Golf/Girls @ Aberdeen
- 5/5- Golf/Girls @ Clear Lake
- 5/5- Track @ Sisseton
- 5/6- Track @ Eureka
- 5/8- Golf @ Aberdeen
- 5/8- School Board Meeting @ 7:00pm
- 5/14- Groton Area Graduation @ 2:00pm
- 5/15- Golf/Girls @ Sisseton
- 5/25- End of 4th Quarter- Students Last Day of School (shortened day/dismiss at 12:15)
- 5/25- Golf/Girls @ Aberdeen
- 5/26- Teacher Inservice

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Brett Schwan
Elementary Principal
March 27, 2023

1. Enrollment

- a. JK: 21
- b. KG: 38 (-1)
- c. 1st: 44 (-1)
- d. 2nd: 42
- e. 3rd: 47
- f. 4th: 52
- g. 5th: 39

2. KG Roundup: 40 students attended roundup last Friday. All students who had in our census were able to attend. We still encourage families to contact the school if they have a child who is turning 5 on or before September 1st.

- a. 2023-2024 KG Numbers: 26 (additional 1 is on the fence) out of the 40 who attended roundup plan to enroll in KG. This would also include the 21 JK students we currently have. We also have 6 preschool students who may attend KG or JK. I anticipate at least having 50 or so students in KG next year.
- b. 2023-2024 JK Numbers: 13 (additional 1 is on the fence) students who attended roundup plan to enroll in JK. We also have 6 preschool students who may attend KG or JK.

3. SASD LEADERSHIP ACADEMY '23. Our final session was on March 23 in Rapid City. This is one thing that really hit home with me after attending last Thursday.

a. 7 Ways to Succeed with Zero Talen

- i. Be on Time – Honor your company by respecting working hours. Earning respect starting by giving it.
- ii. Show up and do the work – no matter what your boss or co-workers are doing – do the work. Even if you think no one is noticing, just keep showing up, doing the work and leading the way!
- iii. Give your best – Add value every day. Make sure that your company is better because you are employed.
- iv. Be grateful. WE have a choice every day to be grateful. You don't have to be the life of the party, just recognize that things could be much worse. If you don't think so, look around or watch the news.
- v. Seek solutions vs. identifying problems – Anyone can identify the problem – that is easy. It is the employees that think about solutions that are valuable to their company.
- vi. Be coachable. You don't have all the answers. Be humble and open to suggestions.

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vii. Do more than what is required. Average effort produces average results. A little extra effort every day can create big results over time.

4. **Playground Slide Update:** Our 11 ft slide has a large crack down the middle. They were able to find a replacement one even though the color is not the exact match. Installation will be weather permitting. I ordered this last week so hopefully we will have it within the next month or so.
5. **Track and Field Day:** Our plan is to hold track and field day on Friday, May 12 starting at 12:30. We will once again have our "picnic" lunch. Lunch schedule:
 - KG and 1st – 11:00-11:25
 - 2nd and 3rd – 11:25-1150
 - 4th and 5th – 11:50-12:15.
6. **Summer School/Connect 4Ed:** Last summer we ran summer school two days per week through the 2nd week of August with 3 staff members. This year we are looking to do the same but will end services at the end of July. Some of the funds used last year to provide a 3rd staff member were used with our ESSER funds. As of right now, Mrs. Zoellner, Mrs. Dinger, and Mrs. Erdmann will be teaching Connect 4Ed.

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Groton City February Financial Report

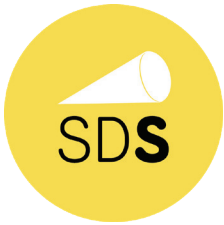
February 2023

Dacotah Bank Checking Acct	\$ 3,785,653.52
General Cash	\$ 300.00
SD FIT Acct	\$ 1,584,877.63
Dacotah Bank Water CD	\$ 85,849.13
Cemetery Perp Care CD	\$ 32,876.69
Total	\$ 5,489,556.97

Invested In		
Cash	\$ 300.00	0.01%
Dacotah Bank	\$ 3,904,379.34	71.12%
SD Fit	\$ 1,584,877.63	28.87%
Total	\$ 5,489,556.97	100.00%

	Beginning	Revenue	Expenses	Transfers	Ending
	Cash Balance				Cash Balance
General	\$ 1,367,551.67	\$ 88,948.20	\$ 85,356.31		\$ 1,371,143.56
Bed, Board, Booze Tax	\$ 153,996.68	\$ 2,650.83			\$ 156,647.51
Baseball Uniforms	\$ 1,710.20				\$ 1,710.20
Airport	\$ 24,386.00				\$ 24,386.00
**Debt Service	\$ (235,689.98)				\$ (235,689.98)
Cemetery Perpetual Care	\$ 34,756.69				\$ 34,756.69
Water	\$ 524,139.33	\$ 42,383.38	\$ 39,479.09		\$ 527,043.62
Electric	\$ 2,986,816.16	\$ 163,620.92	\$ 151,836.46		\$ 2,998,600.62
Wastewater	\$ 336,928.85	\$ 17,180.53	\$ 256.01		\$ 353,853.37
Solid Waste	\$ 57,112.40	\$ 10,634.70	\$ 10,072.56		\$ 57,674.54
Family Crisis	\$ 14,178.25	\$ 193.44			\$ 14,371.69
Sales Tax	\$ 12,573.64	\$ 10,226.77	\$ 11,541.96		\$ 11,258.45
Employment	\$ 2,354.33		\$ 448.31		\$ 2,802.64
Utility Prepayments	\$ 76,404.22	\$ (1,251.09)			\$ 75,153.13
Utility Deposits	\$ 93,751.32	\$ 250.00	\$ 1,050.00		\$ 92,951.32
Other	\$ 2,893.61				\$ 2,893.61
Totals	\$ 5,453,863.37	\$ 334,837.68	\$ 300,040.70	\$ -	\$ 5,489,556.97

**Debt to be Paid		
**2015 Refinance	\$ 1,808,831.24	by 12/1/2035
Total Debt	\$ 1,808,831.24	



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

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Legislature will tackle county funding and long term care in summer studies

Child care doesn't make the cut, but will have an informal task force

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MARCH 27, 2023 4:01 PM

The 2023 legislative session ended Monday, but legislators are already preparing and researching issues ahead of the 2024 session.

The Legislature will conduct two summer studies this year focusing on long term care sustainability as well as county funding and mandated services, the Executive Board decided Monday.

The summer studies allow legislators to learn about specific issues and explore solutions ahead of the next session, said Senate President Pro Tempore and Executive Board Vice Chair Lee Schoenbeck, R-Watertown.

"We can anticipate what the Legislature is going to need to deal with in the next session and see if we can help people work toward solutions," Schoenbeck said.

The summer studies will feature a handful of meetings held throughout the summer to further explore the issues. Legislative Research Council staff will analyze data and conduct research to better understand the topics.

The Executive Board, which includes leadership from the House and Senate, whittled the studies down from over 15 proposals to the selected two. Study proposal topics ranged from child care to nuclear power to Native American child welfare to South Dakota's surface water quality.

Long term care won't be 'one size fits all'

Sustainable long term care was a hot topic ahead of the 2023 legislative session, and legislators already planned to establish a long term care summer study before the session began.

Fifteen South Dakota nursing homes have closed over five years, and seven have closed in the last year, according to the South Dakota Health Care Association. That spells trouble as South Dakota faces an aging population and a surge in long term care needs as baby boomers near the end of their lives over the next two decades.

While lawmakers did manage to increase funding for targeted Medicaid providers this session, such as nursing homes, to a 100% reimbursement rate for the year, that doesn't address the long term needs of the industry.

The summer study will examine the state's current long term care situation — including demographics, funding, staffing, reimbursement rates and geography — and evaluate potential solutions for affordable care.

Sen. Jean Hunhoff, R-Yankton, and Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt, R-Sioux Falls, will serve as chair and vice chair of the study, respectively.

Rehfeldt told reporters at the Republican leadership conference on March 9 that she's looking forward to exploring different ideas to support the industry as a whole but that "it's not going to be a 'one size fits all' answer."

"I do think there's still work to be done. I think that's something we can all recognize," Rehfeldt said.

County sustainability could mean state partnerships

The financial sustainability of counties was also an issue discussed during the session, though the suggested solutions — regionalizing jail funding capacity, using state dollars to help with jail construction, allowing counties to charge sales taxes, providing property tax relief through reimbursement checks and more — were struck down.

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The summer study will focus on regionalization and consolidation, how the state can partner with counties to make mandated services more affordable, and an analysis of county funding models and revenues, said House Majority Leader Will Mortenson, R-Pierre, in the executive board meeting.

Sen. Jim Mehlhaff, R-Pierre, recommended the study to the executive board earlier this session as a member of the Senate Local Government Committee.

"The state's got to get its foot off the throat of the counties to broaden their tax base or there's not going to be any meaningful tax relief," Mehlhaff said.

Rep. Roger Chase, R-Huron and former Beadle County commissioner, and Sen. Randy Deibert, R-Spearfish, who is on the South Dakota Association of County Commissioners Executive Board, will serve as the study's chair and vice chair, respectively.

Why didn't child care make the cut?

Schoenbeck met with several community and business leaders across South Dakota earlier this year with Senate Majority Leader Casey Crabtree, R-Madison. In a majority of those meetings, the number one issue leaders discussed was day care.

"I would say half of the time there was spent discussing day care," Schoenbeck said.

The issue has been widely covered by state and national media, and it gained attention during Gov. Kristi Noem's reelection campaign. But very little legislation was introduced during the session on the topic.

Sen. Tim Reed, R-Brookings, said he will head up an informal task force on child care. He'll gather a small group of legislators with stakeholders such as economic development professionals and child care industry workers to discuss the issue.

Sen. Reynold Nesiba, D-Sioux Falls, suggested during the board meeting that the state should supplement child care with government funds.

But House Speaker and Executive Board Chair Hugh Bartels, R-Watertown, is hopeful the informal group will help break the issue down into manageable pieces for the Legislature to tackle later on.

"There's no consensus in the day care industry on how to solve it other than more money," Bartels said. "It's hard to do a summer study like that because it's such a broad deal to narrow down."

The task force will not be as structured, resourced or publicized as the summer studies — and recommendations from the task force will not carry as much weight as recommendations made by a summer study. But Reed is hopeful the group will be effective.

Reed emphasized that the study will not focus on subsidizing or expanding public education to pre-kindergarten.

"Everybody that I've talked to knows that we have to take a look at child care," Reed said. "We're talking about child care just to make sure there are opportunities for working parents."

The Executive Board's next meeting will be held on April 20 to appoint legislative members to interim study committees.

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.

Hemp and crypto bills fall as legislators sustain Noem vetoes

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 27, 2023 12:59 PM

PIERRE — Lawmakers debated the future of money and the amount of an intoxicating compound that should be allowed in industrial hemp, but they failed to override any of Gov. Kristi Noem's vetoes Monday at the Capitol.

None of the four bills up for override votes received the necessary two-thirds majority. Legislators also failed to override a veto earlier this month, which means all five of Gov. Kristi Noem's vetoes from this winter's legislative session are sustained. Monday was the session's final day.

The hemp bill vetoed by Noem would have increased the amount of tetrahydrocannabinol (known as THC, the cannabis compound that gets users high when present in sufficient amounts) that can be present in hemp oil during processing. The bill would have increased the limit from 0.3% to 5%.

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Opponents of the bill argued that increasing the THC limit would lead to an increase in the potency and availability of products used to get high. They expressed concern that the bill would allow more THC into hemp-derived products, which have become increasingly popular.

Proponents of the bill said the higher limit would only apply to the temporarily higher THC levels that are an unavoidable part of the production process.

"This bill will not, will not, will not allow crops to leave the field above 0.3%," said Rep. Oren Lesmeister, D-Parade.

Lesmeister told South Dakota Searchlight that the higher limit would allow farmers to grow more hemp strains and avoid burdensome regulations, boosting the state's agricultural industry.

Opponents of the bill remained skeptical and argued that the bill was a thinly veiled attempt to legalize greater amounts of THC.

"It's a back door to getting high," said Rep. Mary Fitzgerald, R-Spearfish.

A House override of the veto failed with 32 yes votes compared to 35 no votes.

Crypto-money concerns

Noem vetoed an update of the Uniform Commercial Code, a set of rules that govern commercial transactions in the state, over concerns about its language regarding cryptocurrencies.

She said in a veto letter that the bill would make it more difficult to use cryptocurrency and would open the door for the federal government to establish a central bank digital currency, which she said would amount to government overreach.

Proponents of the bill argued that updating the code is necessary to keep up with changing banking practices and to ensure that South Dakota's financial sector remains competitive.

Opponents of the bill, however, sustained Noem's concerns.

Rep. Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, said there are several steps to losing freedom.

"First of all, you put us \$32 trillion in debt, then you default on that debt, then you implement a central bank digital currency," he said.

The House override failed with 30 yes votes and 37 no votes.

Vetoes sustain in the Senate

The Senate also sustained two vetoes. One bill aimed to allow underage students taking a brewing course to sip and spit the alcoholic beverages they make, while the other would have increased the penalty to a felony when students attack a school employee.

When Noem vetoed the brewing bill, her letter said the bill would create problems for law enforcement. In her veto letter about the school-assault bill, she said it would open the door for other professions to seek similar special treatment.

Rep. David Wheeler, R-Huron, agreed with Noem's position on the school-assault bill.

"More and more people become felons, and have a felony record when it's almost always misdemeanor conduct," Wheeler said. "Don't let the list get longer."

The school assault bill received a simple majority of support, but the 20-15 vote fell short of the 24 votes required to reach a two-thirds majority. The student-alcohol bill received only five yes votes for an override and 30 no votes.

Replacing 'he' with 'governor'

Additionally Monday, Noem – the state's first female governor – signed a bill that removes pronouns from the law in reference to official positions.

The bill, which passed with bipartisan support in the Legislature, will replace pronouns like "he" with titles that reflect the positions themselves. For example, instead of referring to the governor as "he," as the law currently does, the bill will require that the governor be referred to as "the governor" in all official documents and communications.

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

Whiteclay area substance abuse center closes, leaving few alternatives

BY: PAUL HAMMEL - MARCH 27, 2023 11:04 AM

LINCOLN, Neb. – The only inpatient substance-abuse treatment center serving the Whiteclay, Nebraska, area has closed, making help for Native Americans battling alcohol or drug problems even less accessible. The Northeast Panhandle Substance Abuse Treatment Center (NEPSAC) in Gordon, 37 miles from Whiteclay, closed Jan. 31.

The center, which had operated since the 1990s, was the only inpatient treatment center for alcohol and drug abuse in the vicinity of the sprawling Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, which sits across the border from Whiteclay in South Dakota.

The unincorporated village was the former home of four beer stores that fueled rampant alcohol-related problems on the reservation before the outlets were closed in 2017.

Alcohol sales and possession are banned on the reservation, though ironically, sales of recreational marijuana are not, after a 2020 vote.

Victor Gehrig, the executive clinical director of NEPSAC, said that declining admissions, in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the inability to hire staff in rural, northwest Nebraska forced the decision to close.

'Bad news'

"Financially, we weren't going to be able to make it," Gehrig said. "It's bad news ... no matter how you put it."

He said he's been trying for four years to hire a substance abuse counselor, without success, and said in recent months, he and the other counselor working at NEPSAC had to fill in as weekend "techs" because of a lack of employees.

"I couldn't keep up the pace anymore," Gehrig said.

NEPSAC, which, when fully staffed, had a staff of nine, could serve nine inpatient clients at a time in a program that would extend for 50 to 60 days. Ninety-five percent of its clients were Native Americans, and the facility was funded to serve both Nebraska and South Dakota residents.

Duke Engel, a Lincoln counselor who filled in at NEPSAC over the years when Gehrig needed time off, said the beauty of the facility was that "no one had to explain life on the reservation." Staff in Gordon knew what life and the challenges were like, Engel said.

"That was the strength of it," he said. "There was a comfort level when getting treatment there."

Alternatives farther away

On the Pine Ridge Reservation, a program called "Anpetu Luta Otipi" (which means "walking the red road" in Lakota) operates an intensive outpatient substance abuse treatment center in a facility designed for inpatient care.

But because of financial and staff issues, the facility has not been able to be used for inpatient care. That's been a common problem for similar treatment centers, officials there said.

"We need a doctor, nurses, counselors, people to stay at night" for a 24/7 inpatient facility, said Tamela Wounded Arrow of the Kyle, S.D.-based program. "They're hard to find."

Wounded Arrow said that now, those seeking inpatient treatment for drug and alcohol abuse may have to travel to Mitchell, S.D., nearly a five-hour drive away.

Gehrig said that there are also inpatient treatment facilities contracted to serve Native Americans in eastern Nebraska, including the Intertribal Treatment Center in Omaha. But it is a seven and a half hour drive from Pine Ridge and, he said, often has a long wait list.

Alcohol-related problems on the Pine Ridge Reservation are as bad as ever, according to Wounded Arrow, even with the closing of Whiteclay.

Now, instead of the high-alcohol beer that was sold by the Whiteclay stores, vodka is the drink of choice on the Pine Ridge. Vodka is cheaper, she said, and is sometimes mixed with rubbing alcohol by bootleggers to increase supply and profits.

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This story originally published in the Nebraska Examiner, which like South Dakota Searchlight is part of States Newsroom, a network of news bureaus supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501c(3) public charity. Nebraska Examiner maintains editorial independence. Contact Editor Cate Folsom for questions: info@nebras-kaexaminer.com. Follow Nebraska Examiner on Facebook and Twitter.

Paul Hammel is the senior reporter for the Nebraska Examiner. He has covered the Nebraska Legislature and Nebraska state government for decades. He started his career reporting for the Omaha Sun and was named editor of the Papillion Times in 1982. He later worked as a sports enterprise reporter at the Lincoln Journal-Star. He joined the Omaha World-Herald in 1990, working as a legislative reporter, then roving state reporter and finally Lincoln bureau chief. Paul has won awards from organizations including Great Plains Journalism, the Associated Press and Suburban Newspapers of America. A native of Ralston, Nebraska, he is vice president of the John G. Neihardt Foundation and secretary of the Nebraska Hop Growers.

Help wanted: Women needed for U.S. chips manufacturing plan to succeed

BY: CASEY QUINLAN - MARCH 27, 2023 12:30 AM

Natalie Bell was thinking about a career in art after college when a welding class and a delivery of four pizzas changed her career trajectory.

"I was taking a delivery out to a construction site and I met an ironworker who I was taking the delivery to," said Bell, who lives in Columbus, Ohio. "I asked him, I said, 'Hey, are you looking for apprentices? I don't want to do college anymore, but I'm a welder.' He said, 'Yeah,' and he gave me the number to the ironworkers union."

Bell, now 23, said she was worried at first about being accepted.

"I took my interview and I was so scared because I was like, 'They're not going to accept me. I'm a woman trying to do construction.' I didn't know how things worked at all," she said.

Bell, who entered the industry in 2019, said working in construction has its challenges but the money provides her with a decent lifestyle and good health insurance.

"I live very comfortably ... I'm going to Iceland in July just because I can," she said. "I can go do that. I can take a vacation every year. I don't have to worry about medical bills because I have phenomenal insurance."

The Biden administration is counting on more women like Bell seeing the value of jobs in the construction industry. Over the next decade, the administration wants to add a million more women in construction jobs to aid in infrastructure projects across the country, including its effort to increase semiconductor manufacturing. The success of that effort will depend on the federal policies now being put in place and changes to an industry that's not known for being welcoming to women.

According to Bureau of Labor Statistics data, 1.2 million women were employed in construction in 2020, and a University of Michigan analysis of the data found that women have gained jobs "at three times their share of the industry," since the beginning of the pandemic.

Women were slowly but surely entering more male-dominated occupations before the pandemic, said Betsey Stevenson, an economist and professor of public policy and economics at the University of Michigan who did the analysis with Benny Docter, a senior data and policy analyst at the university. Women lost jobs in education and in the service industry during the pandemic and as they returned to work many shifted to new occupations that reflect changing market conditions, according to their analysis.

"I think that the important takeaway is that women can be an important source of labor for the construction industry," Stevenson said in an email. "While child care is important for women, it is equally important to note that construction as an industry risks losing more male workers due to childcare conflicts. The childcare requirements in the CHIPS Act is there to help ensure a sufficient workforce is able to take on the work that is being funded."

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The CHIPS and Science Act, signed into law by President Joe Biden last year, aims to increase the country's production of chips which are seen as essential for the military and for the economy because of their use in autos and all manner of electronics. The bill provides roughly \$40 billion to build or expand plants, and already Intel is building a megaproject near Columbus, Ohio. But to receive federal subsidies the law requires companies to ensure that the workers they hire, including construction workers building the plants, have access to affordable and high-quality child care.

Finding affordable, quality child care is an issue for many parents, but it can be even more of a struggle for construction workers because daycares typically open after they are already supposed to be at work. That can be particularly hard on single parents. Grecia Palomar, a 29-year-old single mother of two in Little Canada, Minnesota, spent seven years hanging drywall at Reshetar Systems, a commercial drywall and carpentry business, before leaving to become a drywall instructor for Finishing Trades Institute of the Upper Midwest. Palomar said she was only able to manage when her children were younger because her employer allowed her to arrive later and work later.

Palomar said that even though she had grown up around job sites because her father worked in construction, she hadn't considered it as a potential career until she moved back to Minnesota from Illinois with two young children to support. With one child in need of occupational and speech therapies, Palomar said she needed to make more than the \$8 an hour she had earned as a preschool teacher. Her father suggested construction. She made \$13 an hour when she started in the industry, and now makes \$40 an hour.

Who is turning to construction careers?

The Bureau of Labor Statistics survey doesn't explain the employment background of women newly entering construction, but several people working in the construction industry said they have seen women coming from what are considered service jobs.

Mary Ann Naylor, communications and marketing director for Oregon Tradeswomen, an apprenticeship-readiness program in Portland, said that the women seeking out the program often come from retail, hospitality, restaurants and childcare, which often pays low wages and offers few benefits. She added that since the pandemic, she has seen more unemployed people and people leaving healthcare jobs to look into the skilled construction trades.

Some of the advantages of construction that appeal to new workers are paid training and lack of student debt. Joy Merryman, a plumber and pipefitter who lives in Pickerington, Ohio, and works in Columbus, said she enjoys knowing that her labor will benefit the community, including her work on recreation centers. And she's so happy with her career choice that she now does outreach — planning events, job fairs and school visits — for the Central Ohio Women in the Trades.

John Burcaw, director of academic education and CEO of the Finishing Trades Institute of the Upper Midwest in Little Canada, Minnesota, said he's seen workers come from similar employment backgrounds as Naylor mentioned. He said that there are also more opportunities for people starting a career in construction to possibly become project managers, estimators, entrepreneurs, educators, or labor leaders than when he began doing this work 33 years ago.

Harassment still a problem

But there are still challenges with both recruitment and retainment of women in construction.

Women's experiences often depend on the kind of support they have inside and outside the job, such as unions, women's trade groups and foremen who push back against gender-based discrimination.

In addition to the child care needs, work sites can still be rife with sexual harassment. All of the women working construction interviewed by States Newsroom said they have faced some kind of sexual harassment on the job, whether it was inappropriate comments on their appearance, nonconsensual touching, or "jokes that go too far."

Bell, the welder, said she has walked off jobs and once filed a complaint over sexual harassment, but has also had experiences where she has talked for foremen and had problems taken care of.

"I've been touched on the job site without consent. I've been yelled at in my face. I've been told I don't belong there. I've been belittled, and I'm a minority so I've been made fun of or talked down to in that

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sense," Palomar said. "But I had an awesome contractor who always had my back and if I didn't feel safe somewhere, I could just call them and they would be there for me and I think that helped me get through that. Without their support and their trust and my union backing me up, I don't think I would have been able to have the patience and the determination to stay there because it is overwhelming."

Merryman, 37, who has worked in construction for 10 years in Ohio, said having supportive people around you helps, and that it's easy to understand why women without that advantage end up leaving construction.

"I think a big part of the issue with retaining people is you start to feel very alienated, you feel very alone and you question yourself," she said. "Am I crazy for being grossed out by what that dude just said to me? Am I crazy for not wanting to have to listen to what he thinks about my body while I'm at work?"

There are educational efforts to make the workplace more welcoming to women, Burcaw said. The Finishing Trades Institute of the Upper Midwest is starting a program in the fall that advises men on how to be good allies to women in construction when they face gender-based harassment and discrimination.

Addressing the federal government's ambitious goal to add one million more women in construction jobs at a Tradeswomen Build Nations conference last fall, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said she had heard from women about the challenges they faced on sites. She then added, "Women don't want to deal with the BS. They just want to do their jobs."

Sharita Gruberg, vice president for economic justice at the National Partnership for Women and Families, said there will need to be sufficient monitoring and enforcement from the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to ensure that underrepresented workers aren't being pushed out of jobs due to sexual harassment and discrimination.

"Because of these other barriers, it is in all of our interests to make sure that these investments are supporting good jobs, safe jobs, because we're just not going to have the workforce that we need to translate these investments into successful outcomes without also prioritizing equal opportunity enforcement and making sure that women are safe and in these roles," Gruberg said.

This month, the Department of Labor also announced it was launching an initiative "to promote equal opportunity by federal contractors in the construction trades on large federally funded projects." The Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs is going to work with the General Services Administration and the Department of Transportation to make sure contractors and subcontractors receive no-cost help to improve recruitment and hiring practices to ensure more women and other underrepresented workers are able to join the construction industry.

The initiative is connected to the OFCCP's Mega Construction Project Program that rewards projects expected to last for one year and make a positive economic difference in communities. Gruberg said some of the construction work on semiconductor facilities and highways and transportation could qualify.

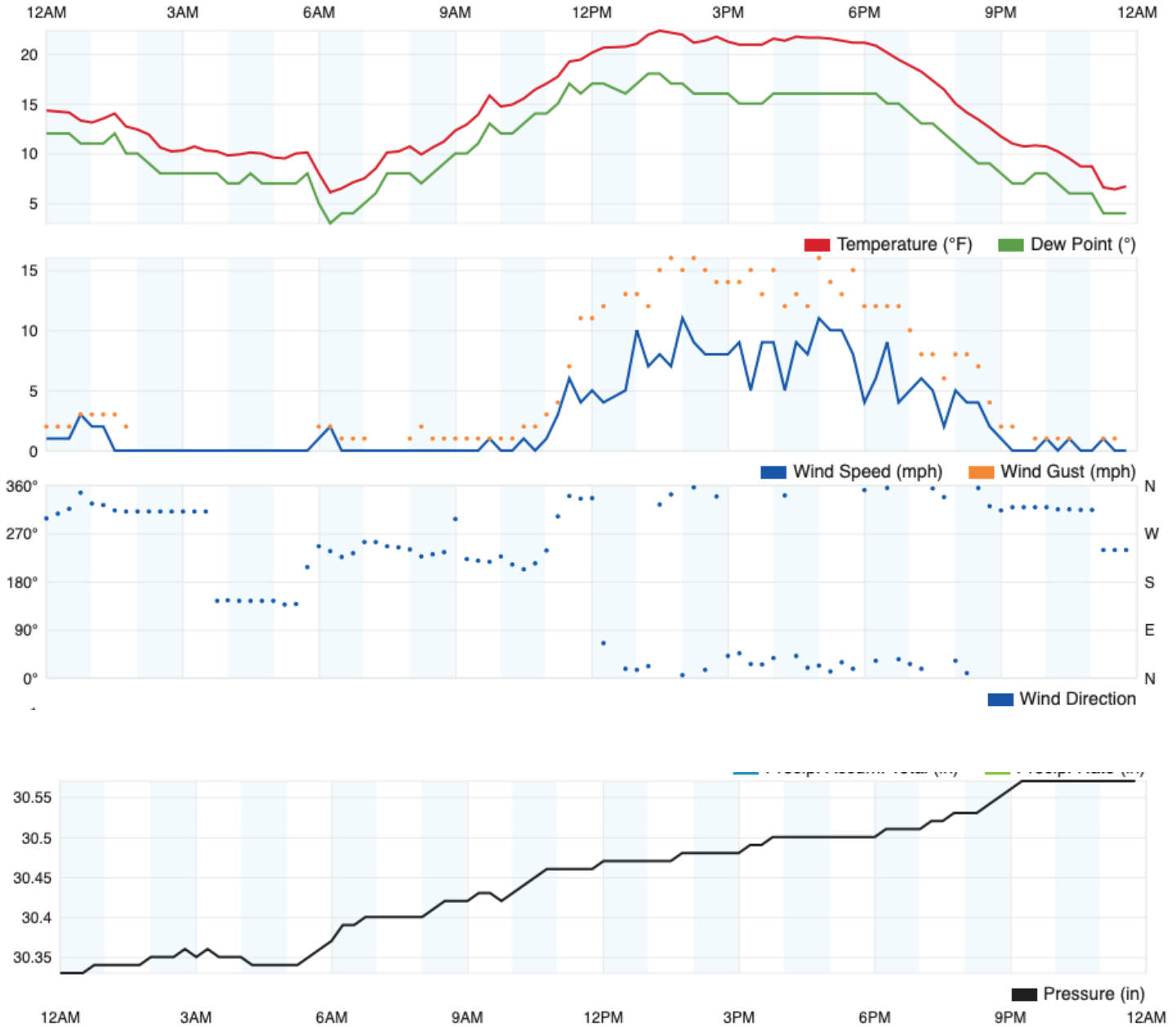
"One exciting thing about the Mega projects are that there are 16 affirmative action steps that are part of these projects to really make sure that on the front end, companies are supported in how they can comply with the equal opportunity requirements of these investments," Gruberg said. "So making sure that they are increasing representation of qualified workers from underrepresented groups in the construction trades, which includes women."

Casey Quinlan is an economy reporter for States Newsroom, based in Washington, D.C. For the past decade, they have reported on national politics and state politics, LGBTQ rights, abortion access, labor issues, education, Supreme Court news and more for publications including The American Independent, ThinkProgress, New Republic, Rewire News, SCOTUSblog, In These Times and Vox.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

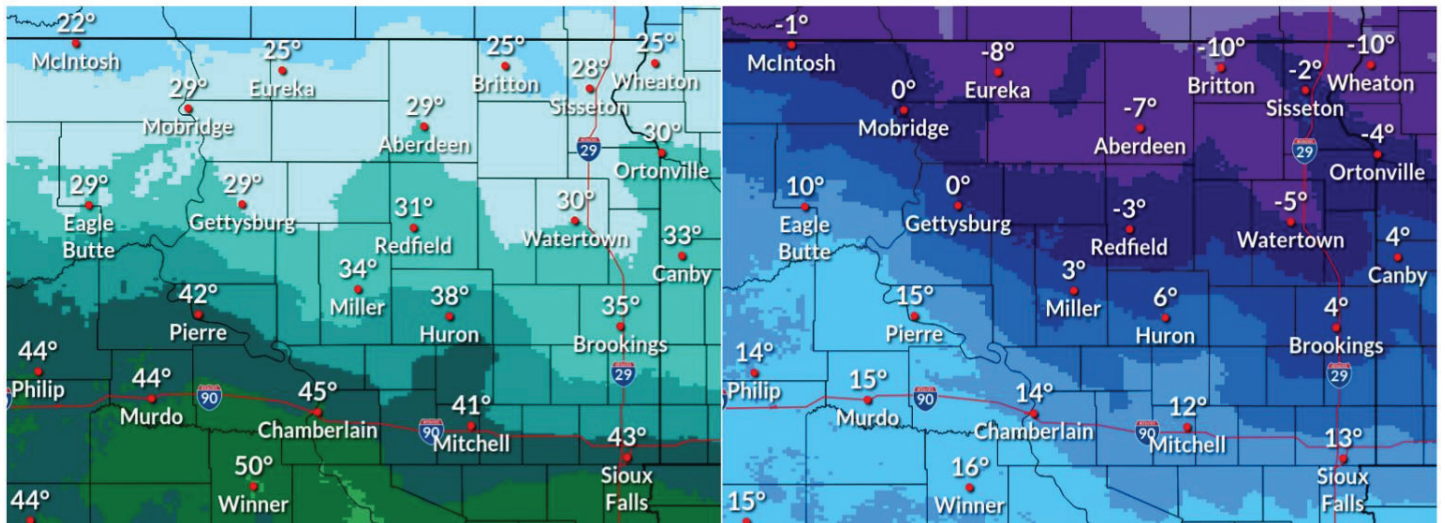


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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
						
Patched Fog then Partly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Sunny	Increasing Clouds	Slight Chance Snow and Breezy	Slight Chance Snow and Blustery	Chance Snow and Blustery
High: 28 °F	Low: -8 °F	High: 19 °F	Low: 3 °F	High: 34 °F	Low: 20 °F	High: 27 °F

 **Highs Today - Lows Tonight** March 28, 2023
3:43 AM



Light snow showers across the northern tier of South Dakota
Breezy North Winds 20 - 30mph

We anticipate temperatures to remain well below normal today/tonight... with highs about 10 to 25 degrees below normal and lows 20 to 30 degrees below normal (which is just a few degrees north of record lows)!

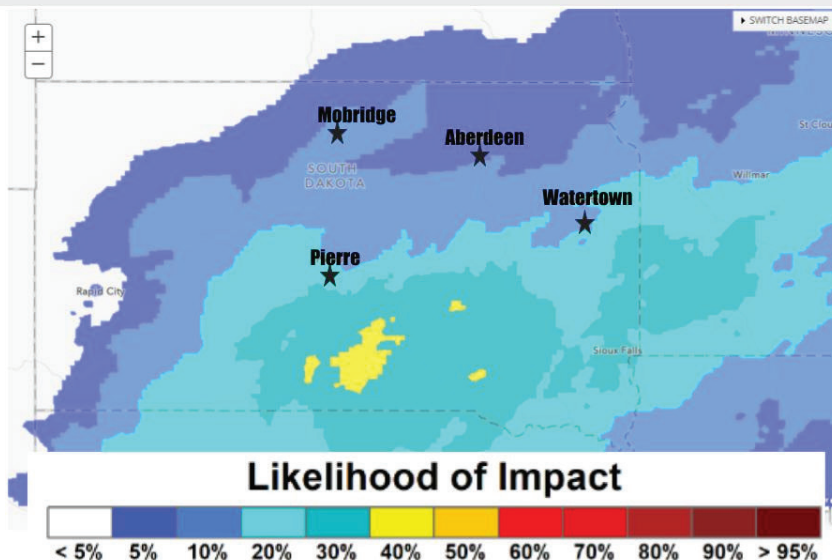


Spring Storm System Late This Week

March 28, 2023
3:29 AM

Key Messages

- Better agreement between models
- Timing: Very late Thursday through very early Saturday
- Still uncertain: Strength & speed of system
- Low confidence: Precipitation types and locations (wintry mix vs heavy snow)



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

We continue to monitor a potential late week storm system. Models are coming into better alignment, but there is still some uncertainty in track and timing which will determine impacts. Stay tuned for updates!

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 22 °F at 1:26 PM

Low Temp: 6 °F at 6:21 AM

Wind: 17 mph at 3:33 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 37 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 82 in 1946

Record Low: -10 in 1913

Average High: 48

Average Low: 25

Average Precip in March.: 0.77

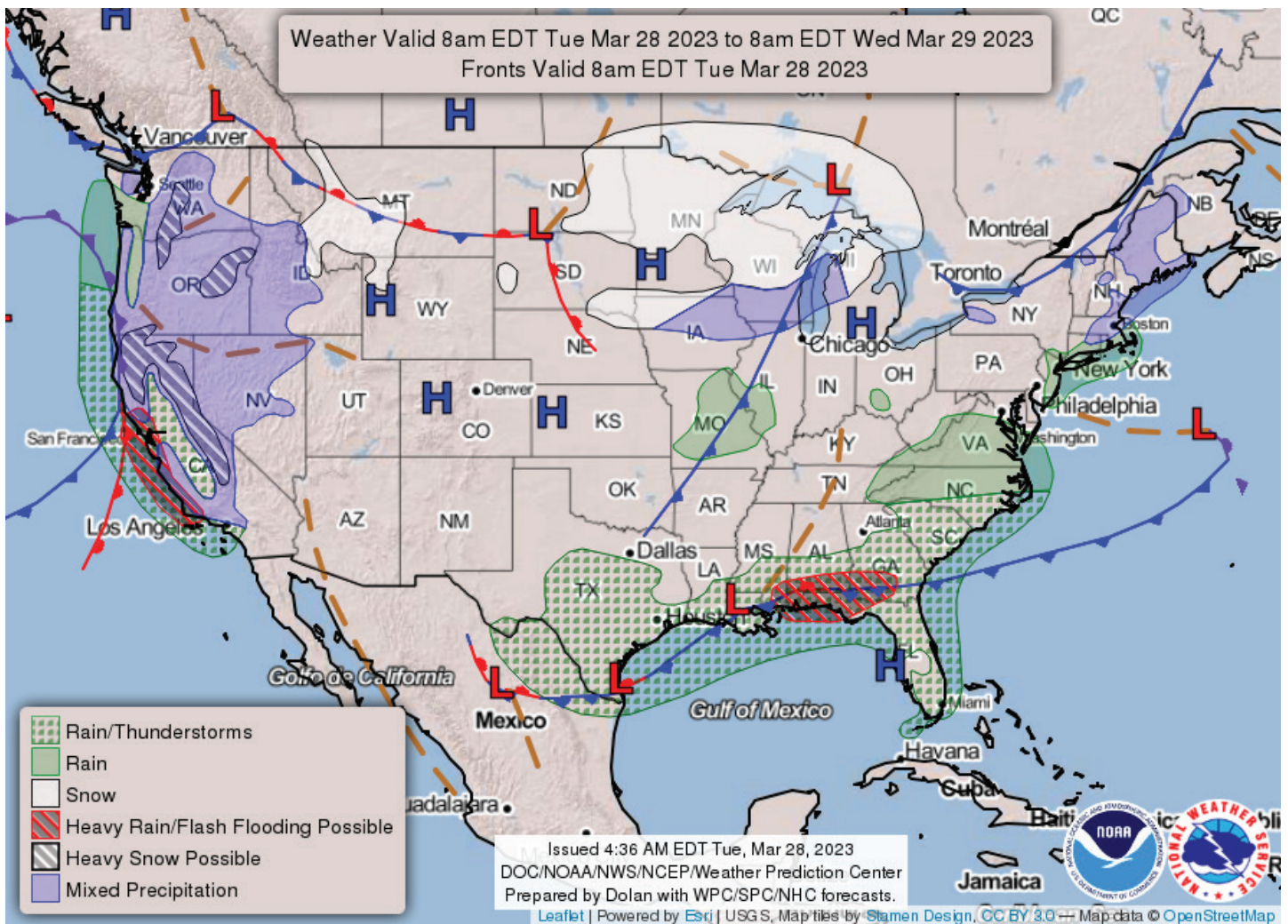
Precip to date in March.: 1.60

Average Precip to date: 1.94

Precip Year to Date: 3.18

Sunset Tonight: 7:56:22 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:16:37 AM



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Today in Weather History

March 28, 1977: A slow-moving storm system affected South Dakota from March 28th through March 30th, 1977. The storm produced heavy snow in the west and thunderstorms in the east. Northerly winds gusting to 50 miles an hour in the West created blizzard conditions as the snow totals mounted. Some areas in western Butte, Pennington, northern Shannon, and Lawrence counties received over 20 inches of snow. With drifts exceeding 6 to 8 feet many people in western South Dakota thought it was the worst blizzard in a quarter century. A few locations in the northern Black Hills received over 4 feet of snow. Because of blocked roads, westbound traffic was halted on I-90, and many schools and businesses were forced to close for several days. Across the eastern portion of the state rains of over 1" fell in many areas. Milbank even reported walnut size hail.

1917 - Thane Creek, AK, reported a snow cover of 190 inches. (The Weather Channel)

1920: The worst tornado disaster of record occurred in Chicago, IL as a tornado killed 28 persons and caused three million dollars damage. This tornado was part of an outbreak which saw 38 tornadoes hit the Midwest and the Deep South states. Over 380 people died, and at least, 1,215 were injured during the Palm Sunday outbreak.

1935: On this date through March 31st, a great dust storm descended on Amarillo, Texas reducing visibility to zero for a six-hour period.

1963: A decision was handed down in the case of Whitney Bartie vs. the United States of America. Bartie sued the U.S. Weather Bureau for negligence in failing to provide a warning about Hurricane Audrey in 1957. Bartie's wife and five children were killed after the 12-foot storm surge struck Cameron Parish, LA on the morning of June 27, 1957. It was ruled that the evidence presented did not establish negligence on the part of the Weather Bureau.

1984 - A violent outbreak of tornadoes hit the Carolinas. Thunderstorms spawned 22 tornadoes during the late afternoon and evening hours which killed 57 persons and injured 1248 others. Nearly half the deaths occurred in mobile homes. A tornado from near Tatum SC to southern Cumberland County NC was 2.5 miles in width at times. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A blizzard raged from southern Nebraska to central Iowa. Snowfall totals ranged up to 17 inches at Blue Hill NE. Winds gusted to 68 mph at Carroll IA. High winds produced snow drifts twenty feet high in western Iowa, and produced wind chill readings as cold as 30 degrees below zero in Nebraska. The snowfall total of 9.4 inches at Omaha NE was a record for the date. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms in central Oklahoma produced hail up to four inches in diameter causing 35 million dollars in southern Oklahoma County. Baseball size hail and seven inches of rain caused another eighteen million dollars damage in Stephens County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Unseasonably warm weather prevailed from the Southern and Central Plains to the Atlantic coast. Eighteen cities reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 81 degrees at Beckley WV was a record for March, and the high of 90 degrees in downtown Baltimore MD tied their March record. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - A storm system brought heavy snow to the west central and southern mountains of Wyoming, and high winds to the Wasatch Mountains of northern Utah. Snowfall totals in Wyoming ranged up to ten inches at the Snowy Ski Range Area, and the storm pushed the snowfall total for the month at Cheyenne above 37 inches, surpassing their previous record for March of 35 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

FROZEN ASSETS

Years ago a fire destroyed a large warehouse that contained many tons of ice. Although the firemen had tens of thousands of gallons of water available to extinguish the fire, they could not be used. The ice was in "cold storage" and beyond reach. The building burned to the ground even though it was full of "frozen water."

God has given each one of us unique gifts and talents, skills and abilities, to do His work. We all are as different as our fingerprints and designed to do things that honor Him. Too often we imagine that what He wants us to do is beyond our capabilities.

We tend to see problems and issues that would require massive amounts of money or large numbers of people to bring change. We look beyond the immediate to the distant, even unimaginable, and find excuses not to do what God places before us.

If you recall the beginning of the earthly ministry of Jesus, He invited ordinary men to join Him in His extra-ordinary work. They had no special training but they did have a special commitment. We know that they were committed because we read that "they spent time with Jesus." These "ordinary men" put aside their personal interests and began to see life through His eyes. He taught them to see the spiritual needs of others and how to meet those needs.

If we are willing to "spend time with Jesus," follow Him closely, listen to Him carefully, and pray to Him sincerely, we will be able to do the same.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to always be alert for opportunities to tell others of Your love, salvation, and hope. If we love You, we will follow You and serve You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" Matthew 4:19



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

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2023 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.24.23

14 17 33 42 66 15

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$322,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 20 Mins 21
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.27.23

20 37 46 49 52 10

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$39,980,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 20
DRAW: Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.27.23

13 24 26 36 47 5

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 14 Hrs 50 Mins 21
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.25.23

7 9 11 14 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 20
DRAW: Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.27.23

7 11 46 49 60 1

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 19
DRAW: Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.27.23

19 26 36 43 58 14

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$132,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 19
DRAW: Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

North Dakota to exempt military pay from income taxes

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Republican Gov. Doug Burgum signed a bill Monday that exempts military pay from state income taxes for active duty, National Guard and Reserve members.

Under this bill, North Dakota service members' income taxes are estimated to drop by \$4 million between 2023 and 2025, the governor's office said. Military pay includes federal costs for training, education, mobilization and bonuses as well as state pay when called to support an emergency on state active duty.

Burgum's office said military service members often live in states with exemptions for military pay or no income tax as their official state of residence.

He said by taking this action, "North Dakota is recognizing the sacrifice of military service and building on the momentum of our ongoing efforts to make ours the most military-friendly state in the nation," Burgum said.

State Sen. Scott Meyer of Grand Forks, who sponsored the bill, said in a statement that the bill will help active duty members and their families decide where to set their state residency. He also said it will assist with National Guard recruitment.

During testimony on the legislation, proponents said that 12 states have already exempted military pay from state income taxes, including Minnesota, and 14 states partially exempt it. Nine states have no income tax, including South Dakota.

North Dakota currently has about 5,500 National Guard and Reserve members and nearly 7,300 active duty service members, primarily at the Grand Forks Air Force Base and Minot Air Force Base, according to the Department of Defense.

South Dakota gov's veto of cryptocurrency regulations upheld

By AMANCAI BIRABEN Associated Press

South Dakota's House failed Monday to override Gov. Kristi Noem's recent veto of a bill that would have created government regulations for the use of cryptocurrency in the state.

The bill had passed smoothly throughout the legislature, and Noem's veto of last week was upheld on a 37-30 vote.

Proponents had argued the bill would have centralized different cryptocurrency systems through one government oversight commission, boosting transparency. But opponents saw the proposed regulations as a tool for potential government surveillance and overreach, saying they wanted more time to see how such legislation fares in other states.

Six other states have passed the Uniform Commercial Code's update, which requires tangible records of cryptocurrency exchanges so that they can be considered money. National commercial standards aim to regulate digital currency exchanges by adding transaction records, but Noem said such a step would take away from South Dakotans' market freedoms.

"It would be imprudent to create regulations governing something that does not yet exist. More importantly, South Dakota should not open the door to a potential future overreach by the federal government," Noem said in a statement last week in vetoing the bill.

As similar bills emerge in other state legislatures, Republican counterparts like Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida and U.S. Rep. Tom Emmer of Minnesota have expressed concerns about possible government surveillance akin to China's heavy-handed oversight of its markets. The suspicions over regulation of a Central Bank Digital Currency come a year after President Joe Biden's executive order to explore a federal bank-owned digital currency. Biden's step triggered a burst of misinformation, including claims it would create a cashless society.

Bill proponents argued that those who believe the government would replace cryptocurrency companies with a federal system are mistaken, and that the bill simply would have bridged federal government and

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digital currencies, which are not currently recognized as money.

The bill's sponsor, House Republican Hugh Bartels, said he expects most of the country will pass such code updates amid the rise of various forms of cryptocurrency.

"The misconception is that this bill is authorizing central bank digital currency," Bartels said. "It's just setting up a way to do business with it."

The first most popular cryptocurrency, bitcoin, launched more than a decade ago. While fundamentally digital money, cryptocurrencies are not backed by any government institution.

This story has been corrected to show the House vote was 37-30, not 36-30.

A 'Clutch' tip helps Miller, Miami reach 1st Final Four

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

CORAL GABLES, Fla. (AP) — Jordan Miller took 20 shots in the regional final for Miami and made them all, helping the Hurricanes rally their way into the Final Four. The personification of clutch.

Fitting.

A guy named Clutch is why he's at Miami, why Miller has become one of the stars of March Madness — and why the Hurricanes are one of the four men's teams lucky enough to head to Houston this weekend and see their season stretch into April.

It was around this time two years ago when Miami then-assistant coach Bill Courtney's phone rang with news that Miller had entered the transfer portal and was leaving George Mason. Courtney dove into some tape and began looking into Miller's background. Turns out, one of Courtney's old pickup-game buddies from Virginia — Clutch, real name Gary Collins — was Miller's AAU coach.

"The recruitment got pretty simple from there," said Courtney, now the Hurricanes' associate head coach.

Good thing that recruitment went the way it did, because Miami has absolutely needed Miller this season — never more than it did on Sunday. Miller was 7 for 7 from the field and 13 for 13 from the foul line in Miami's 88-81 win over Texas, a victory that sent the Hurricanes (29-7) into Saturday's national semifinals against UConn (29-8). For the season, Miller is averaging 15.4 points and 6.1 rebounds per game, second-most for Miami in both categories.

He helped them get to the Elite Eight last season — and at least one step further this season.

"That loss sat with me for a really, really long time," Miller said of the defeat to eventual national champion Kansas in last year's tournament. "I had to put it in the past because it was a new season, but having the opportunity to kind of right your wrongs almost and get past something that stumped you previously is a great feeling."

The 20-for-20 combined shooting effort from the field and the line against Texas matched Christian Laettner's historic game for Duke against Kentucky in a regional final in 1992. Laettner — who went 10 for 10 from both the field and the line in that game — tweeted congratulations to Miller on Monday; Miller responded with "Appreciate you! Glad to join some elite company."

There is rich irony in that Miller came to Miami from George Mason — as did Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga, who took that school to the Final Four in 2006 and got Miami to the Final Four on exactly the 17th anniversary of that win.

"I just asked Jordan to ask the people at George Mason who know what kind of coach I am if he'd fit in my program," Larrañaga said. "And a lot of them told him, 'Yeah, you should go play for Coach L.' I was so impressed with him as an individual. You know, the basketball ability is one thing but his personality, his work ethic, his basketball IQ made me feel like 'OK, this kid will fit in really, really well.' I had no idea he was this good."

The Hurricanes were even talking to other players — frankly, with better numbers — than Miller had when he entered the portal. Had it not been for Clutch, it's extremely likely that Miami would have gone in a different direction. And then who knows how this season would have turned out for Miller or the Hurricanes.

"I don't know if anyone expected this," Courtney said. "Clutch was the only one who told me he could

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be this.”

Larrañaga doesn't think many people know how good Miller is. He calls the 6-foot-7, 195-pound wing “the most underrated player in the country.”

That moniker might not hold up anymore, especially not after the show Miller put on on Sunday. The 27 points might be a breakout of sorts; it was the second-best scoring effort of his 141-game collegiate career, and by far the most points he's managed in a postseason game at either George Mason or Miami.

Larrañaga essentially challenged Miller when last season ended to be this guy.

“I sat down and talked to Jordan before this season began. I just said to him, ‘Your role is going to completely change. We're going to expand it,’” Larrañaga said. “He asked me one question: ‘Hey, if I get a defensive rebound, can I push it in transition, dribble it up the court?’ I asked him one question: ‘Are you going to turn the ball over?’ And he said ‘No.’ I said, ‘Then you can do it.’”

They chart everything in every practice at Miami, as is the case at many schools, and Larrañaga quickly became enthralled by the idea of Miller getting his way — grabbing a rebound like a big guy, then heading downcourt like a guard. For every turnover he had in scrimmages, he had seven assists. Such a ratio is absurd for point guards; for wings and combo players like Miller, it's unheard of. During the season, it's still a very respectable 2:1.

“He's underrated because he's under been under the radar,” Larrañaga said. “People just haven't seen him to understand how good he is. I think he showed the country how good he is these past two weeks.”

Indeed, thanks to Clutch, he's been clutch. And Clutch is heading to Houston this weekend, to see if Miller and Miami can grab a national championship. The underrated kid might end up standing tallest of all.

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

Israel tensions ease as Netanyahu pauses judicial overhaul

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel's political factions opposed to embattled Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu began setting up negotiating teams Tuesday after he paused a controversial judicial overhaul plan that had set off unprecedented street protests and a spiraling domestic crisis.

But compromise seemed elusive and Netanyahu's legacy was on the line, in a standoff over the fundamental issue of what kind of country Israel should be — and positions only appear to have hardened. Three months of demonstrations against the overhaul plan intensified this week and Israel's main trade union declared a general strike, leading to chaos that shut down much of the country and threatened to paralyze the economy.

Netanyahu in a prime-time speech on Monday night acknowledged the divisions roiling the nation and announced a monthlong delay for the legislation. Within hours, analysts pointed out that firing his defense minister Sunday night heightened the outrage and sank Netanyahu's approval among his own Likud party - which left Israel's longest-serving leader with few choices.

“He understood that he's in a dead end,” said Yohanan Plesner, president of Israel Democracy Institute. “And Netanyahu, who is very experienced, understood that now is the time for correction.”

In his address, the premier said he wanted “to avoid civil war” and would seek a compromise with political opponents. Netanyahu spoke after tens of thousands of people demonstrated outside the parliament building in Jerusalem.

His announcement appeared to calm some of the tensions that have fueled months of unrest. But it failed to address the underlying issues that have polarized Israelis. Netanyahu leads the most right-wing government in Israeli history and his allies have vowed to enact the legislation.

“I feel relief but with doubt,” Fega Gutman, Tel Aviv resident, said Tuesday. Netanyahu over the years “promised us a lot but didn't always fulfill, unfortunately.”

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The pause gave many Israelis time to consider the challenge ahead.

"I feel good today, everything calmed down from yesterday," said Maor Daniel, also from Tel Aviv. "We have to figure out together how to fix the situation, how to live together."

A flurry of phone calls between rival opposition leaders followed Netanyahu's announcement and lasted into Tuesday morning, with several working groups named as the protests subsided and Israel's largest labor union called off its general strike.

"When there's an opportunity to avoid civil war through dialogue, I, as prime minister, am taking a timeout for dialogue," Netanyahu said in his speech. He vowed to reach a "broad consensus" during the summer session of parliament, which begins on April 30.

The country's figurehead president, Isaac Herzog, said pausing the legislative blitz was "the right thing" and offered to oversee the negotiating teams. He spoke in separate phone calls with Netanyahu, opposition leader Yair Lapid and National Union Party Chairman Benny Gantz, his office said.

"This is the time for frank, serious and responsible discussion that will lead urgently to calming spirits and lowering the flames," Herzog said.

National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, an ultranationalist who has pushed for quick passage of the package, said it "will pass," though he would respect the delay. "No one will scare us," he tweeted.

Critics say the legislative package would hobble the country's system of checks and balances. Protesters vowed to intensify their demonstrations.

The overhaul would give Netanyahu, who is on trial on corruption charges, and his allies the final say in appointing the nation's judges. It would also give parliament, which is controlled by his allies, authority to overturn Supreme Court decisions and limit the court's ability to review laws.

Netanyahu has argued that the overhaul is needed to rein in a liberal and overly interventionist court of unelected judges. But his opponents say the package would concentrate too much power in the hands of Netanyahu's allies. They also say that he has a conflict of interest as a criminal defendant.

Large swaths of Israeli society and governments around the world condemned the overhaul. Business leaders, top economists and former security chiefs have all come out against the plan, saying it is pushing the country toward an autocracy. Fighter pilots and military reservists have threatened not to report for duty, and the country's currency, the shekel, has tumbled in value.

Tens of thousands of people, largely secular, middle-class Israelis, have regularly joined mass protests against it.

The situation escalated on Sunday night after Netanyahu abruptly fired Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, who had urged him to put his plan on hold, citing concerns about damage to the Israeli military.

Chanting "the country is on fire," furious protesters lit bonfires on Tel Aviv's main highway, closing the thoroughfare and many others throughout the country for hours. Demonstrators continued Monday outside the Knesset, or parliament, turning the streets surrounding the building and the Supreme Court into a roiling sea of blue-and-white Israeli flags dotted with rainbow Pride banners.

Departing flights from the main international airport were grounded, stranding tens of thousands of travelers. Large mall chains and universities closed their doors, and the union called for its 800,000 members to stop work in health care, transit, banking and other fields.

Israel's Palestinian citizens have largely sat out the protests. Many say Israel's democracy is tarnished by its military rule over their brethren in the West Bank and the discrimination they themselves face.

Even with the big issues standing, officials inside and outside Israel signaled relief that the pause had bought some time. The Biden administration welcomed Netanyahu's announcement, making its encouragement clear by dangling the prospect of an upcoming visit, "soon," by the Israeli premier to the White House.

"I had a nice night of sleep last night, thank God," U.S. Ambassador Tom Nides told Israel Army Radio on Tuesday. "This morning I'm optimistic and I applaud the move."

39 dead in fire at Mexico migrant center near US: official

By MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — A fire broke out at an immigration detention center in northern Mexico near the U.S. border, leaving more than three dozen migrants dead, a Mexican official said Tuesday.

Hours after the fire broke out late Monday, rows of bodies were laid out under shimmery silver sheets outside the facility in Ciudad Juarez, across from El Paso, Texas. Ambulances, firefighters and vans from the morgue swarmed the scene.

Thirty-nine people died and 29 were injured, according to an official with the National Immigration Institute, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the case.

Ciudad Juarez is a major crossing point for migrants entering the United States. Its shelters are full of migrants waiting for opportunities to cross or who have requested asylum in the United States and are waiting out the process.

Mexico's attorney general's office has launched an inquiry and has investigators at the scene, according to media reports.

Shattered: Catholic community confronts its founder's lies

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROCCA DI PAPA, Italy (AP) — The findings of an initial expert report were astonishing: One of the 20th century's revered Catholic leaders, who built an international movement of community care for people with intellectual disabilities, perverted Catholic doctrine about Jesus and Mary to justify his own sexual compulsions and abuse women.

The findings of a second report were even worse: The movement he created had at its core a secret, mystical-sexual "sect," and was founded for the precise purpose of hiding the sect's deviant activities from church authorities.

The two rounds of revelations about Jean Vanier and the L'Arche federation he founded have rocked the group to its core, all the more because L'Arche itself commissioned independent scholars to investigate after receiving a first complaint from a victim a few years before Vanier died in 2019. It's the latest case of a Catholic giant, considered a living saint by his admirers and eulogized as a "great" Christian by Pope Francis, falling to revelations that he abused his power to sexually exploit women under his spiritual sway.

L'Arche's national and regional leaders have been meeting for the past week in the hills outside Rome for the first time since the latest revelations to chart a path forward, now that their official history has been shown to be a lie and their hero-founder Vanier a narcissistic and delusional abuser. Emotions were still raw, as L'Arche's most devoted staff processed the gravity of Vanier's deceptions and what it means for the organization's future, according to interviews at the retreat with The Associated Press.

"I believed in something, in a vision that then is revealed to you and you're told it's not like that," said Azucena Bustamante, who oversees five L'Arche communities in Honduras, Mexico and the Dominican Republic. "It does frustrate me — the damage it has caused to a lot of people who believed in this, and then found out everything we were made to believe, it's a lie."

Vanier, a former Canadian and Royal Navy officer, founded L'Arche in 1964 in northern France. He initially invited two intellectually disabled men to live with him, then built the utopian-style, Catholic-inspired community into an international movement bringing people with and without disabilities to live together in a spirit of mutual respect.

Born to socially prominent, religiously devout parents — his father was governor general of Canada — Vanier arrived at his calling after having joined a spiritual community, L'Eau Vive, in 1950 that was founded by a French Dominican priest, the Rev. Thomas Philippe.

According to the investigative reports, it was at L'Eau Vive that Vanier fell under Philippe's spell and was initiated into the priest's mystical-sexual practices.

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Philippe developed his twisted theology after experiencing what he called a mystical "grace" one night in 1938 in Rome, while looking at a fresco of the Madonna in the church atop the Spanish Steps. Over time, the "graces" came to involve sexual gratification with women that both Philippe and Vanier justified by claiming that Jesus and Mary were involved in similarly incestuous sexual relationships.

The Vatican was informed of Philippe's deviant practices by two victims in 1952; four years later it sanctioned Philippe for "false mysticism." The Vatican forbade him from public or private ministry, ordered L'Eau Vive dissolved and its members forbidden from reconstituting the community.

But Philippe, Vanier and the women they had manipulated disobeyed, and regularly met in secret, according to private correspondence and church archives only recently made available to the L'Arche-commissioned researchers.

Over time, Philippe resumed his priestly ministry as his Dominican superiors ignored the Vatican sanctions, at which point Vanier, a layman, founded L'Arche. The study commission concluded in its January report that Vanier did so as a "screen" to hide the reuniting of the original L'Eau Vive group, even though there was also a sincere commitment to help people who otherwise would have been institutionalized.

The study commission identified at least 25 women whom Vanier abused, none of them intellectually disabled. It determined that Vanier and Philippe's deviant practices didn't extend beyond the core "sect" at the original community in northern France. But it called for vigilance, especially in the way authority and power are exercised in L'Arche's more than 150 communities in 37 countries.

L'Arche's leaders have apologized to the victims, thanked them for their courage in coming forward, and assumed responsibility for not having spotted the abuses earlier. They say they questioned Vanier repeatedly as soon as the first victims came forward, as well as what he knew about Philippe's 1956 Holy Office condemnation, but that he lied to them.

The nearly 900-page forensic history of the scandal is remarkable, providing perhaps the best documented case of a phenomenon that has existed in the Catholic Church for centuries but is increasingly coming to the public fore: spiritual charlatans using false mysticism to manipulate their victims and abuse them sexually.

Significantly, L'Arche was able to obtain a summary report of Philippe's 1956 canonical trial, which shows the Vatican was well-versed in the dynamics of abuse of power over women, decades before the #MeToo movement put it in the spotlight.

But the researchers, who hailed from a variety of academic disciplines, blamed the Vatican's secrecy in handling the Philippe case for laying the groundwork for L'Arche's scandal. They found that no one except a few Vatican and Dominican superiors knew of Philippe's deviance or his sanctions, "precisely what allowed him to maintain his reputation for holiness and to rewrite history as he pleased."

One of the Vatican's top experts in abuse prevention, the Rev. Hans Zollner, praised L'Arche for its "fearless" courage in exposing the painful truth about its past and said the phenomenon of spiritual gurus misusing their authority can't be ignored any longer by the church.

"Some time back we did not speak about the abuse of power as the root cause of basically every type of abuse, be it sexual, be psychological, be it spiritual," he said. "But it has become clear that this is something that we need to engage further," said Zollner, who runs an institute at the Pontifical Gregorian University that trains church personnel on preventing abuse.

The L'Arche community on Rome's outskirts was buzzing with activity on a recent weekday: After nearly three years of pandemic lockdown, the ceramics studio had recently reopened, volunteers were helping some of the 19 live-in residents decorate Easter baskets and the gardening team was busy recycling wood chips.

Here, where Pope Francis visited in 2016, the revelations of Vanier and L'Arche's origins have hit longtime staffers hard, though there is no questioning of the fundamentals of the mission, said Loredana Moretti, a 35-year veteran of L'Arche's Il Chicco community and now on its leadership team.

"For sure the investigation shocked all of us at the start," said Moretti, adding that she now realizes Vanier epitomized a type of charismatic leader: "extreme in the good and in the bad."

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"What's important is to not make a myth or idealize anyone, including our founder. If we made a myth out of him, we were wrong," she said.

Such soul-searching was the order of business at the L'Arche leadership retreat a short distance away. It was held in a converted monastery in the hills overlooking Lake Albano, within view of the papal summer residence at Castel Gandolfo across the lake.

L'Arche leaders were tackling big issues. How to tell its foundational story, now that it wasn't just about helping disabled people as Vanier claimed. How are power and authority exercised, given the risk that Vanier's methods trickled down to the next generation. How does L'Arche move forward with its unique spirituality, given Vanier's writings were found to be problematic once details of his secret life were uncovered.

"As a whole body, the question we have is: Do we tell our story now? What does it look like? It's a broken story," said Stacy Cates-Carney, L'Arche's vice international leader. She said the revelations had "shattered" L'Arche's understanding of its origins.

Regular audits are now planned to ensure L'Arche's safeguarding practices are being implemented. Reviews are under way to ensure staffers' professional, personal and spiritual needs are being met appropriately. And for now, L'Arche staff are being given time to talk and process the revelations.

"We're in a stage of grief," Cates-Carney said. "And in grief, people move through that really differently."

Associated Press religion coverage receives support through the AP's collaboration with The Conversation US, with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

France braces for violence in new wave of pension protests

By NICOLAS GARRIGA and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Protests and strikes against unpopular pension reforms kicked off again Tuesday across France, with police security ramped up against feared violence and government warnings that radical demonstrators intend "to destroy, to injure and to kill."

Fears that violence could mar the demonstrations prompted what Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin described as an unprecedented deployment of 13,000 officers, nearly half of them concentrated in the French capital.

Protests got underway peacefully Tuesday morning, with large crowds in multiple cities. In Paris, striking railway workers with burning flares and flags invaded and blocked train tracks serving one of the capital's main stations, Gare de Lyon.

Police were braced for violence later in the day. The interior minister said more than 1,000 "radical" troublemakers, some from overseas, could latch on to marches planned in Paris and elsewhere.

"They come to destroy, to injure and to kill police officers and gendarmes. Their goals have nothing to do with the pension reform. Their goals are to destabilize our republican institutions and bring blood and fire down on France," the minister said Monday in detailing the policing measures.

Union leaders and political foes of President Emmanuel Macron blame his government for protest violence that has flared in recent weeks, saying his push to raise France's legal retirement age from 62 to 64 sparked it.

Critics also allege that police officers used excessive force against protesters. A police oversight body is investigating multiple claims of wrongdoing by officers.

The striking railway workers at Gare de Lyon marched behind a banner that alleged: "The police mutilates. We don't forgive!"

The new wave of protests was the 10th time since January that unions have called on workers to walk out and for demonstrators to flood the nation's streets against Macron's proposal.

Unable to get a majority in parliament's lower house for the unpopular reforms, Macron rammed them through using a special constitutional power, further inflaming protesters' anger.

"Everybody is getting madder," said Clément Sald, a train passenger at Gare de Lyon who said he supports the strikes despite their impact on transportation and other services.

"I am 26, and I wonder if I will ever retire," he said.
Another passenger, Helene Cogan, 70, said: "French people are stubborn and things are getting out of hand."

Jade le Deley in Paris contributed.

High tornado death toll in Mississippi like losing family

By ROBERT BUMSTEAD and MICHAEL GOLDBERG Associated Press

ROLLING FORK, Miss. (AP) — Lonnie and Melissa Pierce lived a quiet, peaceful life in the Mississippi Delta before a powerful tornado swept up a neighbor's semi-truck and dropped it onto their brick home like a bomb, killing the married couple.

A retired welder, Lonnie Pierce was fond of hunting and bass fishing, friends and neighbors said. Melissa Pierce volunteered for a local Christian charity that operates a small thrift store.

"They were good. About the best, I can tell you that," said neighbor Harvey Cockrell, 76, a fellow welder who worked with Lonnie Pierce for decades.

A mound of broken rubble was all that remained of the couple's home after a devastating twister packing winds of up to 200 mph (320 kph) tore through the rural town of Rolling Fork late Friday. The 18-wheeler that had been parked next door before the storm hit remained perched atop the debris Monday, and deer antlers that had been among Lonnie Pierce's hunting trophies covered the couple's yard.

At least 21 people in Mississippi and a man in Alabama perished as menacing storms trekked across the Deep South over the weekend. The toll was especially steep in Sharkey County, in western Mississippi, where the Pierces were among 13 people who died in a county of 4,200 residents.

"I had to identify family, that's what it felt like," said Sharkey County Coroner Angelia Eason. "We're a close-knit community; we're small. And when something like this happens, we tend to come together even closer. We didn't just lose 13 people, we lost 13 family members."

The others Eason identified as having died in the storm included a woman and her elderly mother, as well as a man from Yazoo City, who had traveled more than 30 miles (48 kilometers) west to Rolling Fork for an auction.

April Johnson was working at her job as a discount store cashier in Rolling Fork when the storm struck and destroyed the business. The mother of five children was also among those the coroner confirmed had lost their lives.

"She was a hardworking, loving kind who would go out of her way to help people," said Dianne Berry, a cousin to Johnson's mother. "She always had a smile."

Berry said Johnson's son played football, and Johnson was always willing to drive other children to games and practices. "She would fix them little snack bags," Berry said.

Once the storm passed, Jermain Wells, a neighbor of the Pierces, went door-to-door searching for survivors in need. When he got to the wreckage of the couple's home, there was nothing he could do.

"We couldn't get them out," Wells said.

In addition to the heavy death toll, the same storm system resulted in dozens of people injured and hundreds of homes and buildings destroyed or damaged during a punishing four-day period in which it pummeled the South from Texas to the Carolinas.

In the Mississippi neighborhood where the Pierces were killed, it was almost difficult to believe anyone had survived. Cockrell and his wife, Mary Cockrell, took cover in the central hallway of their home when the tornado struck. Their home was destroyed and they lost nearly everything but their lives.

"It's like a war zone," Mary Cockrell said. "Everything's torn to pieces."

AP reporter Emily Wagster Pettus contributed to this story from Jackson, Mississippi.

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Freed 'Hotel Rwanda' hero in Qatar, heading to family in US

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — The man who inspired the film "Hotel Rwanda" and was freed by Rwanda last week from a terrorism sentence has arrived in Qatar on his way to reuniting with family in the United States.

Paul Rusesabagina is currently in Doha, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told journalists on Monday.

"He will soon be making his way back to the United States. And his family is, as I'm sure no one is surprised, they're eager to welcome him back here, home. The White House has been and remains engaged in every step of this process," Kirby said.

The 68-year-old Rusesabagina, a U.S. legal resident and Belgian citizen who had left Rwanda after saving hundreds of countrymen in the country's 1994 genocide, was convicted in 2021 of terrorism offenses and sentenced to 25 years in prison in a widely criticized trial.

Rusesabagina disappeared in 2020 during a visit to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates and appeared days later in Rwanda in handcuffs. His family alleged he was kidnapped. He was convicted on eight charges including membership in a terrorist group, murder and abduction.

Rusesabagina has asserted that his arrest was in response to his criticism of longtime President Paul Kagame over alleged human rights abuses. Kagame's government has repeatedly denied targeting dissenting voices with arrests and extrajudicial killings.

In a signed letter to Kagame dated Oct. 14 and posted on the justice ministry's website, the ailing Rusesabagina expressed regret for any violence and wrote that "if I am granted a pardon and released, I understand fully that I will spend the remainder of my days in the United States in quiet reflection. I can assure you through this letter that I hold no personal or political ambitions otherwise. I will leave questions regarding Rwandan politics behind me."

His arrest was a source of friction with the U.S. and others at a time when Rwanda's government has also been under pressure over tensions with neighboring Congo and Britain's plan to deport asylum-seekers to the small east African nation.

Kirby said U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan personally engaged in the case, "really doing the final heavy lifting to get Paul released and to get him on his way home."

AP journalist Aamer Madhani in Washington contributed.

Study says warming-fueled supercells to hit South more often

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

America will probably get more killer tornado- and hail-spawning supercells as the world warms, according to a new study that also warns the lethal storms will edge eastward to strike more frequently in the more populous Southern states, like Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee.

The supercell storm that devastated Rolling Fork, Mississippi is a single event that can't be connected to climate change. But it fits that projected and more dangerous pattern, including more nighttime strikes in a southern region with more people, poverty and vulnerable housing than where storms hit last century. And the season will start a month earlier than it used to.

The study in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society predicts a nationwide 6.6% increase in supercells and a 25.8% jump in the area and time the strongest supercells twist and tear over land under a scenario of moderate levels of future warming by the end of the century. But in certain areas in the South the increase is much higher. That includes Rolling Fork, where study authors project an increase of one supercell a year by the year 2100.

Supercells are nature's ultimate storms, so-called "Finger of God" whoppers that are "the dominant producers of significant tornadoes and hail," said lead author Walker Ashley, a professor of meteorology and disaster geography at Northern Illinois University. Tall, anvil-shaped and sky-filling, supercells have a

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rotating powerful updraft of wind and can last for hours.

Supercells spawned the 2013 Moore, Oklahoma, tornado that killed 51 people, the 2011 Joplin, Missouri, tornado outbreak that killed 161 people and the 2011 super outbreak that killed more than 320 people in Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee, the Mid-South.

The study used computer simulations to predict what will happen by the end of the century with different levels of global carbon pollution levels. But Ashley said that stormier future seems like it's already here.

"The data that I've seen has persuaded me that we are in this experiment and living it right now," Ashley said in an interview three days before the EF-4 tornado killed more than 20 people in Mississippi on Friday. "What we're seeing in the longer term is actually occurring right now."

Ashley and others said although the Mississippi tornado fits the projected pattern, it was a single weather event, which is different than climate projections over many years and a large area.

Ashley and study co-author Victor Gensini, another meteorology professor at Northern Illinois University and a longtime tornado expert, said they are watching the potential for another supercell blow-up in the Mid-South on Friday.

Past studies have been unable to forecast supercells and tornadoes in future climate simulations because they are small-scale events, especially tornadoes, that global computer models can't see. Ashley and Gensini used smaller regional computer models and compensated for their reduced computing power by spending two years running simulations and crunching data.

Three scientists not connected to the study said it makes sense. One of them, Pennsylvania State University tornado scientist Paul Markowski, called it a promising advance because it explicitly simulated storms, compared to past research that only looked at general environments favorable to supercells.

While the study finds a general increase in supercell counts, what it mostly finds are large shifts in where and when they hit — generally, more east of Interstate 35, which runs through east central Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas, and fewer to the west.

In moderate warming — less warming than the world is headed for based on current emissions — parts of eastern Mississippi and eastern Oklahoma are projected to get three more supercells every two years, with eastern Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Alabama, western Tennessee and eastern Georgia getting one more supercell every other year.

With worst-case warming — more than the world is presently on track for — the study projects similar changes but with worsening supercells over eastern Oklahoma, Arkansas and southern Missouri.

Cities that should see more supercells as warming worsens include Dallas-Fort Worth, Little Rock, Memphis, Jackson, Tupelo, Birmingham and Nashville, Ashley said.

The moderate warming simulation projects 61% more supercells in March and 46% more in April, while the more severe warming scenario has 119% more in March and 82% more in April. They see double-digit percentage point drops in June and July.

In the mid-South, including Rolling Fork, the study projects supercell activity peaking two hours later, from 6 to 9 p.m. instead of 4 to 7 p.m. That means more nighttime supercells.

"If you want a disaster, create a supercell at night where you can't go outside and visually confirm the threat" so people don't take it as seriously, Gensini said.

The eastward shift also puts more people at risk because those areas are more densely populated than the traditional tornado alley of Kansas and Oklahoma, Ashley and Gensini said. The population coming under more risk is also poorer and more frequently lives in mobile or manufactured homes, which are more dangerous places in a tornado.

What's likely happening as the climate warms is the Southwest United States is getting hotter and drier, Ashley and Gensini said. Meanwhile, the Gulf of Mexico, which provides the crucial moisture for the storms, is getting hotter and the air coming from there is getting juicier and unstable.

The hot dry air from places like New Mexico puts a stronger "cap" on where storms would normally brew when air masses collide in spring time. That cap means storms can't quite boil over as much in the Great Plains. The pressure builds as the weather front moves east, leading to supercells forming later and farther eastward, Gensini and Ashley said.

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Because February and March are getting warmer than they used to be this will happen earlier in the year, but by July and August the cap of hot dry air is so strong that supercells have a hard time forming, Ashley and Gensini said.

It's like playing with a pair of dice loaded against you, Ashley said. One of those dice is making the odds worse because of more people in the way and the other one is loaded with more supercells "increasing the odds of the perils too, tornadoes and hail."

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Feel the Force: Hamill carries 'Star Wars' voice to Ukraine

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — "Attention. Air raid alert," the voice says with a Jedi knight's gravitas. "Proceed to the nearest shelter."

It's a surreal moment in an already surreal war: the grave but calming baritone of actor Mark Hamill, Luke Skywalker of "Star Wars," urging people to take cover whenever Russia unleashes another aerial bombardment on Ukraine.

The intrusion of Hollywood science-fiction fantasy into the grim daily realities of war in Ukraine is a consequence of Hamill's decision to lend his famous voice to "Air Alert" — a downloadable app linked to Ukraine's air defense system. When air raid sirens start howling, the app also warns Ukrainians that Russian missiles, bombs and deadly exploding drones may be incoming.

"Don't be careless," Hamill's voice advises. "Your overconfidence is your weakness."

The actor says he's admired — from afar, in California — how Ukraine has "shown such resilience ... under such terrible circumstances." Its fight against the Russian invasion, now in its second year, reminds him of the "Star Wars" saga, he says — of plucky rebels battling and ultimately defeating a vast, murderous empire. Voicing over the English-language version of the air-raid app and giving it his "Star Wars" touch was his way of helping out.

"A fairy tale about good versus evil is resonant with what's going on in Ukraine," Hamill said in an interview with The Associated Press. "The Ukrainian people rallying to the cause and responding so heroically ... It's impossible not to be inspired by how they've weathered this storm."

When the dangers from the skies pass, Hamill announces via the app that "the air alert is over." He then signs off with an uplifting: "May the Force be with you."

Hamill is also raising funds to buy reconnaissance drones for Ukrainian forces on the front lines. He autographed "Star Wars"-themed posters that are being raffled off.

"Here I sit in the comfort of my own home when in Ukraine there are power outages and food shortages and people are really suffering," he said. "It motivates me to do as much as I can."

Although the app also has a Ukrainian-language setting, voiced by a woman, some Ukrainians prefer to have Hamill breaking the bad news that yet another Russian bombardment might be imminent.

On the worst days, sirens and the app sound every few hours, day and night. Some turn out to be false alarms. But many others are real — and often deadly.

Bohdan Zvonyk, a 24-year-old app user who lives in the repeatedly struck western city of Lviv, says he chose Hamill's voiceover rather than the Ukrainian setting because he is trying to improve his English. He's a "Star Wars" fan, too.

"Besides," he said, "we could use a little bit of the power that Hamill wishes us."

After one alert, Zvonyk was riding a trolley bus when Hamill's voice rang out from his phone. He said

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the man in front "turned to me and said, smiling: 'Oh, those damn Sith,'" to describe Russian forces. The Sith are the malevolent enemies of the do-gooding Jedi.

Olena Yeremina, a 38-year-old business manager in the capital, Kyiv, said Hamill's "May the Force be with you" signoff at first made her laugh. Now its enduring humor gives her strength.

"It's a very cool phrase for this situation," she said. "I wouldn't say that I feel like a Ukrainian Jedi, but sometimes this phrase reminds me to straighten my shoulders and keep working."

Sometimes it can be wise to shut Hamill off. Yeremina forgot to do that on a trip outside Ukraine — to Berlin — and paid for the error when the alarm started shrieking at 6 a.m. and, again, when she rode the subway in the German capital. She wasn't alone. Another person in the subway car also had the app and it erupted, too. The two of them first cursed, but then "it made both me and that person smile," Yeremina recalled.

Ajax Systems, a Ukrainian security systems manufacturer that co-developed the app, hopes Hamill's star power will encourage people outside Ukraine to download it — so they get a taste of the angst heaped on Ukrainians by nerve-shredding alarms and airborne death and destruction.

"With Mark's approach, it won't be so terrifying," said Valentine Hrytsenko, the chief marketing officer at Ajax. "But they will understand somehow the context."

In the invasion's first year, air-raid alarms sounded more than 19,000 times across the country, so "of course people are getting tired," he said. The app has been downloaded more than 14 million times. Hrytsenko is among those who use its English-language setting to hear Hamill's voice.

"For Star Wars fans, it sounds really fantastic," he said. "It's kind of a Ukrainian mentality to find some humor even in the bad situation or to try to be positive."

Hamill is pleased that the sci-fi saga is again transporting people, even if just temporarily, to its galaxy far, far away.

"It does inspire people," he said. "Everyone flashes back to being 6 years old again. And if the movie can help people get through hard times, so much the better."

Follow AP's coverage of the war in Ukraine at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine> and <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine-a-year-of-war>

Russia says it test-fired anti-ship missiles in Sea of Japan

MOSCOW (AP) — Moscow test-fired anti-ship missiles in the Sea of Japan, Russia's Defense Ministry said Tuesday, with two boats launching a simulated missile attack on a mock enemy warship about 100 kilometers (60 miles) away.

The ministry said the target was successfully hit by two Moskit cruise missiles.

The Moskit, whose NATO reporting name is the SS-N-22 Sunburn, is a supersonic anti-ship cruise missile that has conventional and nuclear warhead capacity. The Soviet-built cruise missile is capable of flying at a speed three times the speed of sound and has a range of up to 250 kilometers (155 miles).

The ministry said the exercise, which included other warships and naval aircraft, took place in the Peter the Great Gulf in the Sea of Japan but did not give more precise coordinates. The gulf borders the Russian Pacific Fleet headquarters at Fokino and is about 700 kilometers (430 miles) from Japan's northern Hokkaido island.

The Russian military has conducted regular drills across the country and Russian warships have continued maneuvers as the fighting in Ukraine has entered a second year — exercises that were intended to train the troops and showcase the country's military capability.

The U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Japan reacted calmly to the missile exercise, which was conducted near Vladivostok, rather than directly into the waters between the two countries.

Japanese Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihiko Isozaki told a news conference later Tuesday that Tokyo will continue to monitor Russia's military operations, as it has been stepping up activity in the region.

Tokyo does not plan to lodge a protest to Russia over the missile exercise, said Tasuku Matsuki, Japanese Foreign Ministry official in charge of Russia, noting that its location — Peter the Great Bay — is considered Russian coast, though it is facing the water between the two countries.

“On the whole, Japan is concerned about Russia’s increasing military activities around the Japanese coasts and watching them with great interest,” Matsuki said.

He added that Russia has conducted missile drills in that area in the past and issued maritime advisories ahead of time.

Russian nuclear-capable Tu-95 bombers flew over the Sea of Japan for several hours last week.

In September, Japan protested multinational military exercises on the Russian-held Kuril Islands — some of which are claimed by Japan — and expressed concern about Russian and Chinese warships conducting shooting drills in the Sea of Japan.

Russia also tested submarine-launched missiles in the Sea of Japan last year.

AP writer Mari Yamaguchi contributed from Tokyo.

Lawmakers vote on Paris Olympic law with surveillance fears

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — A proposed French law for the 2024 Paris Olympics that critics contend will open the door for privacy-busting video surveillance technology in France and elsewhere in Europe faces an important hurdle on Tuesday with lawmakers set to vote on it.

The bill would legalize the temporary use of so-called intelligent surveillance systems to safeguard the Paris Games, which run next year from July 26-Aug. 11, and the Paralympics that follow. The systems combine cameras with artificial intelligence software to flag potential security concerns, such as abandoned packages or crowd surges. Human operators would decide whether action is needed.

French authorities insist the surveillance wouldn’t involve facial recognition. Supporters of the bill argue that the technology could help avert disasters like the deadly crowd crush that killed nearly 160 people during Halloween festivities in South Korea in October.

“It’s not about recognizing ‘Mr. X’ in a crowd,” Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin told National Assembly lawmakers last week when they were debating the measures. “It’s about recognizing situations.”

The Senate overwhelmingly approved the draft in January, by 245 votes to 28. If the National Assembly follows suit Tuesday afternoon, the bill is slated for further fine-tuning by assembly members and senators before its final adoption, expected in April.

Digital rights watchdog groups argue that France will violate international human rights law by becoming the first of the European Union’s 27 countries to legalize AI-powered surveillance, even if just temporarily. The bill says the technology can be used on an experimental basis to the end of 2024 to safeguard sporting and cultural events in France that are particularly at risk of being targeted by terror attacks.

The technology’s use “risks permanently transforming France into a dystopian surveillance state” and “will lead to an all-out assault on the rights to privacy, protest, and freedom of assembly and expression,” said Mher Hakobyan, an Amnesty International adviser on AI regulation.

“It has also been well-documented that hostile surveillance technologies are disproportionately used to target marginalized groups, including migrants and Black and brown people,” Hakobyan added.

Even though the draft law says the cameras won’t use facial recognition, they are still liable to scrutinize physical traits including people’s postures, walks and gestures, critics contend. Opponents also are concerned that the technology risks zeroing-in on people who spend a lot of time in public spaces, such as the homeless. The bill also clears the way for the technology’s use with cameras mounted on drones.

During last week’s National Assembly discussions on the bill, opposition lawmaker Sandra Regol argued that it would turn Olympic visitors into “guinea pigs” for AI-powered surveillance.

More AP coverage of the Paris Olympics: <https://apnews.com/hub/2024-paris-olympic-games> and <https://>

twitter.com/AP_Sports

Gwyneth Paltrow's experts to testify in Utah ski crash case

By SAM METZ Associated Press

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — Gwyneth Paltrow's attorneys are expected to call a series of experts and read depositions from her two teenage children on Tuesday in the first full day of the movie star's trial that they have to call witnesses to make their case.

Due to the trial's judge-imposed eight-day clock, Paltrow's defense team is expected to face tough time management decisions much like Sanderson's did throughout last week as they attempt to juggle family members, ski instructors and experts in skiing and brain science.

Paltrow is in court fighting a lawsuit from Terry Sanderson, the 76-year-old retired optometrist suing her for more than \$300,000 over a 2016 ski collision that he says left him with broken ribs and years of lasting concussion symptoms. The actor and Goop founder-CEO has denied Sanderson's claims that she crashed into him, countersuing for \$1 and contending that he, in fact, skied into her.

Her defense attorneys will likely use their witnesses to continue making their two central, yet separate, arguments to the eight-member jury: That Paltrow did not ski into Sanderson and that he and his lawyers have exaggerated the extent of his injuries. As they cross-examined witnesses testifying on Sanderson's behalf last week, they connected the two claims by raising questions about Sanderson's motivations, painting him as an "obsessed" man trying to exploit Paltrow's wealth and celebrity.

The first five days of the trial in Park City, the posh Utah ski town where the actor and retired optometrist crashed culminated with explosive testimony from Paltrow on Friday and Sanderson on Monday. After Paltrow said that a groaning Sanderson had veered into her from behind causing her to panic and wonder if she was being "violated," Sanderson testified that Paltrow skied squarely into his back, sending him flying down the beginner run at Deer Valley resort.

"All I saw was a whole lot of snow. And I didn't see the sky, but I was flying," Sanderson testified Monday morning as a blizzard blanketed Park City outside the courtroom and Paltrow sat feet away.

In a show of how the trial's costs likely dwarf the amount of money at stake both sides have contracted brigades of experts to testify on their client's behalf. But those experts have come up against the eight-day clock Judge Kent Holmberg put on the trial. Lawyers on both sides have appeared strained as they've weighed their witness list and asked the judge to repeatedly clarify the time constraints. Paltrow's attorneys have complained about the schedule and repeatedly noted that their medical experts have flown in from out of state to testify on her behalf.

Similarly, Sanderson's attorneys last week called to the stand his personal doctor as well as experts in neurology, neuropsychology and radiology to testify on the extent of his injuries and post-concussion syndrome. They also questioned two of his three daughters, his ex-girlfriend and a ski buddy who claims to be the sole eyewitness to the collision.

To appeal to the eight-member jury, Paltrow's attorneys will confront decisions about how to balance the jargon-dense testimony of medical experts with that of family members and acquaintances. On Monday, her legal team called Deer Valley ski instructors and ski patrol to testify while high resolution animations of their recollections played on a projector between the witness stand and jury box.

On Tuesday, Paltrow's lead counsel Steve Owens said he planned to bring a skiing expert and neurological rehabilitation expert to the stand Tuesday as the trial over a 2016 ski collision in Utah enters its sixth day. Though he earlier said he planned to have them testify, Owens said excerpts from the depositions of Paltrow's children, 18-year-old Apple and 16-year-old Moses, would also be read in court. He said he was unsure whether his witness list would include Paltrow's husband, television producer Brad Falchuk as the judge indicated he intended to abide by the trial's eight-day clock.

Kim wants N. Korea to make more nuclear material for bombs

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has called for his nuclear scientists to increase production of weapons-grade material to make bombs to put on his increasing range of weapons.

North Korean photos of the meeting also showed what appeared to be a small new tactical warhead that was possibly designed to fit on a variety of delivery systems developed in recent years to overwhelm South Korean defenses.

The report in state media Tuesday followed a series of missile launches — seven launch events in this month alone — and rising threats to use the weapons against his enemies. North Korea's weapons tests and U.S.-South Korea military exercises have intensified in a tit-for-tat cycle, underscoring heightened tensions in the region.

Officials say North Korea could further up the ante in coming weeks or months with more provocative displays of its military nuclear program, possibly including its first test detonation of a nuclear device since September 2017.

The Korean Central News Agency said Kim, during a meeting on Monday with officials and scientists at a state nuclear weapons institute, stressed the need to ramp up bomb fuel production to meet his goals to expand his nuclear arsenal "exponentially," and issued unspecified "important tasks" for his nuclear industry.

Kim also examined the country's established plans for nuclear counterattacks as scientists briefed him on the North's latest nuclear-capable weapons systems and progress in technologies for mounting nuclear warheads on missiles, the agency said.

The agency's photos showed Kim talking with officials inside a hall that displayed what appeared to be various types of warheads, including around 10 khaki-green capsules with red tips. Other weapons included devices that looked like a black-and-white cone with fins or a large torpedo.

A wall poster near one of the green devices described a warhead called "Hwasan-31," based on the Korean word for volcano. The poster's graphics implied that the weapon could fit on some of North Korea's short-range ballistic systems, cruise missiles and a purported nuclear-capable underwater drone the country first unveiled last week. State media didn't identify any of the devices in the photos.

The size and shape of the Hwasan-31, which some experts estimated was around 50 centimeters (19 inches) wide and 90 centimeters (35 inches) long, suggested progress in North Korean efforts to create a miniaturized warhead that could fit on its delivery systems, said Kim Dong-yub, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul.

Cheong Seong-Chang, an analyst at South Korea's Sejong Institute, said the reports suggest North Korea is moving closer to its next nuclear test.

Hours before North Korea's sixth test in 2017, state media showed Kim Jong Un observing a silver, peanut-shaped device, which apparently was a purported thermonuclear weapon built for intercontinental ballistic missiles the North claimed to have detonated during that test.

Cheong said the North will likely use its next test to claim it acquired a miniaturized nuclear warhead to mount on a growing range of weapons it describes as "tactical." The North's use of the term communicates a threat to proactively use them during conflicts to blunt the stronger conventional forces of South Korea and the United States.

North Korea likely has dozens of nuclear warheads that can probably be fitted on some of its older systems, like Scuds or Rodong missiles.

Lee Sung-jun, spokesperson of Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the South's military was analyzing the warhead unveiled in the North Korean photos but didn't provide specific assessments.

Kim's calls for boosting bomb fuel production came days after Russian President Vladimir Putin announced plans to station tactical nuclear weapons in neighboring Belarus, in what was seen as a warning to the West as it increases military support for Ukraine.

While aligning with Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, North Korea has stressed three-way cooperation with Moscow and Beijing to confront a "new Cold War" waged by "U.S. imperialists," who it accuses of

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bringing the conflict to Asia by stepping up military activities with Seoul and Tokyo.

A biennial South Korean defense document released in February said North Korea is estimated to have 70 kilograms (154 pounds) of weapons-grade plutonium, which some observers say is enough for about nine to 18 bombs. The document estimated that North Korea has "a considerable amount of" highly enriched uranium as well.

North Korea's main nuclear complex in Yongbyon has facilities to produce both plutonium and highly enriched uranium, the two main bomb fuels used to build nuclear weapons. North Korea is believed to be operating at least one additional covert uranium enrichment facility, in addition to the one at Yongbyon..

In separate reports, KCNA said the North again detonated mock warheads during tests of nuclear-capable missiles and a purported underwater attack drone this week. The reports came a day after neighboring militaries detected the North firing two short-range ballistic missiles off its eastern coast.

Monday's launches came hours before a nuclear-powered U.S. aircraft carrier and its battle group engaged in joint training with South Korean warships in waters near Jeju island, in the allies' latest show of strength. The USS Nimitz and the other warships pulled into the South Korean mainland port of Busan on Tuesday.

The North's official Rodong Sinmun newspaper on Tuesday published a commentary condemning the allies' exercises and the U.S. deployment of the Nimitz strike group in the Korean Peninsula, insisting that the move "amounts to an open declaration of war."

KCNA said the missiles tested Monday were tipped with mock nuclear warheads that detonated as intended 500 meters (1,640 feet) above their sea targets. A front-line unit fired the missiles as part of an exercise familiarizing the troops with executing nuclear attack orders, the agency said.

KCNA also said North Korea this week conducted another test of an underwater nuclear attack drone capable of setting off a "radioactive tsunami" to destroy enemy vessels and ports. Analysts, however, are skeptical whether such a device was a new threat, and South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said Monday it believes the North Korean claims regarding the weapon are likely "exaggerated or fabricated."

Still, the drone underlines Kim's commitment to spur the expansion of his nuclear arsenal as he seeks to force the United States to accept the North as a legitimate nuclear power and negotiate economic concessions from a position of strength.

North Korea already is coming off a record year in weapons testing, launching more than 70 missiles in 2022. It had set into law an escalatory nuclear doctrine that authorizes pre-emptive nuclear strikes in a broad range of scenarios where it may perceive its leadership as under threat.

Find more of AP's Asia-Pacific coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/asia-pacific>

Harris to pledge support for African innovation in Ghana

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

ACCRA, Ghana (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris will pledge a new era of partnership with Africa on Tuesday when she speaks from Black Star Gate, which commemorates Ghana's independence from colonialism.

The speech on her second full day in Ghana is part of a weeklong trip that will include visits to Tanzania and Zambia. Harris is the most high-profile member of President Joe Biden's administration to visit Africa as the U.S. escalates its outreach to the continent.

"Together, we will address the challenges we face, and the opportunities ahead," she says in excerpts from the speech provided by her office.

Much of the vice president's remarks will focus on innovation and entrepreneurship, part of her effort to spotlight Africa as a place for American private-sector investment. It's something that Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo said he hopes to see after years of being overlooked.

"We want to be able to change that dynamic," Akufo-Addo said when he met with Harris on Monday.

After the speech, Harris planned to tour the Cape Coast Castle, a seaside fort where enslaved Africans were loaded onto ships bound for the Americas. Harris also planned to deliver remarks there.

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U.S. outreach is part of the global competition over Africa's future, with China and Russia each defending their own interests in the continent as well. But Harris has been careful to play down the role of geopolitical rivalries during her travels here.

For her speech on Tuesday, Harris says in prepared remarks, "America will be guided not by what we can do for our African partners, but what we can do with our African partners."

On Monday evening, Harris and her husband, Doug Emhoff, attended a banquet dinner hosted by Akufo-Addo. In addition to officials from both countries, American celebrities, businesspeople and civil rights leaders also attended.

Guests included actors Idris Elba and Rosario Dawson and director Spike Lee.

Landslide in Ecuador kills at least 7, with dozens missing

By PATRICIA OLEAS and CESAR OLMOS Associated Press

ALASI, Ecuador (AP) — A huge landslide swept over an Andean community in central Ecuador, burying dozens of homes, killing at least seven people and sending rescuers on a frantic search for survivors, authorities said Monday.

Earlier in the day, officials had reported 16 deaths, but President Guillermo Lasso put the confirmed toll at seven as he arrived Monday night at the scene of the disaster in Alausí, about 137 miles south of the capital, Quito. Officials also raised the number of people reported missing to 62.

Lasso lamented the tragedy and promised people in the town that "we will continue working" on the search effort.

Ecuador's Risk Management Secretariat said more than 30 people were rescued after the mountainside collapsed around 10 p.m. Sunday. It said 23 people were injured.

"My mother is buried" under the mud, said Luis Ángel González, 58, who also lost other family members Sunday. "I am so sad, devastated. There is nothing here, no houses, no anything. We are homeless (and) without family."

The risk management agency estimated 500 people and 163 homes were affected by the disaster, which also destroyed a portion of the Pan-American Highway.

The governor of Chimborazo, Ivan Vinueza, told The Associated Press that some of the injured were taken to area hospitals. He said officials had urged people to evacuate the area after landslides and cracks began to develop about two months ago. Some followed the advice, and by Saturday, as tremors intensified, others fled.

Area residents told local media they heard tremors on the mountain before the landslide, which was estimated to be about 150 meters (490 feet) wide and nearly a half mile (700 meters) long. It swept away trees, homes and other buildings. More than fifty houses were buried under tons of mud of debris.

The emergency response agency said 60% of potable water service in the area was affected by the landslide. The communication's office of the presidential office said some schools would be switching to online classes.

Firefighters from a half dozen cities were dispatched to the area to help. Rescuers focused on the flanks of the landslide where they found traces and debris of houses.

Rescuer and paramedic Alberto Escobar said it was unlikely more survivors would be found because of the time that had elapsed.

He said the search would continue as long as it did not rain.

Video from cameras connected to the country's emergency service network showed people fleeing their homes with help from neighbors. It also showed people transporting appliances and other belongings in vehicles.

Survivors, many housed in temporary shelters, cried over their misfortune.

Among them was the Zuña family, who were staying at the Iglesia Matriz de Alausí, where rooms for catechism or parish meetings were adapted with bunk beds days ago after authorities declared an emergency in the area due to the risk of landslides.

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Sonia Guadalupe Zuña said her mother was reluctant to leave what they had built over the years. "We went to the shelter, but my mother didn't want to," Zuña said. "Later, my daughter went to convince her. When they walked along the rails, everything collapsed. They arrived covered in dirt and crying." Save for the clothes they had on, Zuña's family lost everything. "I don't know where, but we're all leaving," she said crying. "My parents taught us that by working hard, you get material things, but being together is priceless."

Associated Press writers Gonzalo Solano in Quito and Regina Garcia Cano in Caracas, Venezuela, contributed to this report.

Georgia bill is latest GOP effort targeting prosecutors

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A new Georgia commission to discipline and remove wayward prosecutors would be the latest move nationwide to ratchet up oversight on what Republicans see as "woke prosecutors" who aren't doing enough to fight crime.

The Georgia House voted 97-77 on Monday for Senate Bill 92 to create the commission. The Senate later sent the measure to Republican Gov. Brian Kemp for his signature or veto. Kemp has previously voiced support for the concept.

The Georgia bill parallels efforts to remove prosecutors in Florida, Missouri, Indiana and Pennsylvania, as well as broader disputes nationwide over how certain criminal offenses should be charged. All continue anti-crime campaigns that Republicans ran nationwide last year, accusing Democrats of coddling criminals and acting improperly by refusing to prosecute whole categories of crimes including marijuana possession. All the efforts raise the question of prosecutorial discretion — a prosecutor's decision of what cases to try or reject and what charges to bring.

Carissa Hessick, a law professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, said the Republican push tries to reverse a sea change in prosecution. Hessick, who directs the Prosecutors and Politics Project, said that for the first time voters are confronted with meaningful debate about prosecutors' policies.

"I think it's happened because several years ago, there was a push to try to use the office of prosecutor to address mass incarceration and injustices within the criminal justice system," she said. "That movement was successful in a lot of places."

Georgia Democrats intensely oppose the measure, saying majority Republicans are seeking another way to impose their will on local Democratic voters.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis has decried the measure, claiming it's a racist attack after voters elected 14 nonwhite district attorneys in Georgia in 2020. Willis pushed herself to the center of the controversy even as she's mulling charges against former President Donald Trump for interfering in Georgia's 2020 election. Some have viewed it as Republican retribution against the Atlanta prosecutor.

But the energy behind the bill has not been against Willis, whom in addition to targeting Trump is pursuing a tough-on-crime offensive against alleged gang members. Instead, many Georgia Republicans are most angered by Deborah Gonzalez, a district attorney who covers two counties including Athens, Kemp's hometown. She's under fire for refusal to prosecute marijuana crimes, an outflow of prosecutors working under her, and failure to meet court deadlines.

"That's the whole point of this bill, is to restore public safety in places where you have rogue district attorneys who simply are not doing their job," said Georgia Republican Rep. Houston Gaines of Athens.

The effort was born from frustrations involving a white Republican prosecutor in suburban Atlanta who was indicted for bribery related to sexual harassment claims. He lingered until he pleaded guilty to unprofessional conduct and resigned in 2022.

Some Democrats were interested in similar measures for a time because of Jackie Johnson, the coastal Georgia district attorney later charged with hindering the police investigation into the 2020 killing of Ahmaud Arbery.

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Democratic interest cooled after voters ousted Johnson. Now they say Republicans should respect the will of local voters.

Rep. Tanya Miller, an Atlanta Democrat and former prosecutor, on Monday described the bill as a “a power grab by the majority party to usurp the will of the voters by putting this body in the business of overseeing duly elected prosecutors throughout this state.”

Crucially, the Georgia bill mandates that a prosecutor must consider every case for which probable cause exists and can’t exclude categories of cases from prosecution. A similar bill pending in Indiana would let an oversight board appoint a special prosecutor to handle cases when a “noncompliant” prosecutor refuses to charge certain crimes.

Hessick said considering every case individually is an unrealistic standard because prosecutors turn away many more cases than they accept. She said the Georgia law is less likely to change prosecutors’ decisions about which cases they pursue than to muzzle their ability to talk about their decisions.

“It’s designed to stop them from running on these platforms of reform,” Hessick said.

The rules could also target prosecutors who declared before *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in 2022 that they would not prosecute abortion-related offenses. Seven current Georgia district attorneys made such pledges, among dozens nationwide.

In some states, such laws could face hurdles. A New York court struck down a 2018 commission to investigate prosecutorial conduct after district attorneys sued saying it gave state lawmakers too much oversight over independent offices.

Then-Gov. Andrew Cuomo in 2021 signed another version into law. The commission isn’t yet operating because some members haven’t been appointed, a court spokesperson said.

Georgia lawmakers can already impeach district attorneys and solicitors general — elected prosecutors in some Georgia counties who handle lower-level cases. But they say impeachment would take up too much of lawmakers’ time. Instead, the new commission would investigate and make decisions. A prosecutor could appeal a decision to a state-level court, and eventually to the state Supreme Court.

Impeachment is proceeding in Pennsylvania, where state House Republicans voted in November to impeach Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner for reasons including his failure to prosecute some minor crimes, his bail policies and management.

Krasner sued to challenge the impeachment’s legality, and a divided state court ruled for him, finding impeachment articles didn’t reach the needed legal threshold.

Plans for an impeachment trial in the Republican-majority Pennsylvania Senate have been on hold while that decision is appealed. In the meantime, the Republican majority that voted to impeach in the House is now a Democratic majority. It’s unclear what that will mean for any trial.

Other governors and legislatures have moved more directly to remove prosecutors. Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis suspended State Attorney Andrew Warren in Tampa’s Hillsborough County in August. A federal judge found DeSantis illegally targeted Warren because he’s a Democrat who has publicly supported abortion and transgender rights and because it would politically benefit DeSantis. But the judge wrote he had no power to reinstate Warren, leading the Democrat to appeal to the state Supreme Court.

In the meantime, the prosecutor that DeSantis tapped to replace Warren has resumed prosecuting some misdemeanors — including suspended licenses, disorderly conduct and panhandling — that Warren had stopped bringing to trial.

The GOP-led Missouri legislature is also maneuvering to override a Democratic prosecutor — St. Louis Circuit Attorney Kim Gardner. It would let Republican Gov. Mike Parson appoint an additional special prosecutor for five years in any jurisdiction where the homicide rate exceeds 35 killings per 100,000 residents. The bill was drafted with St. Louis in mind.

Also, Missouri Republican Attorney General Andrew Bailey is seeking to remove Gardner from office, alleging negligence in her job. If a judge agrees, Parson would appoint her replacement. A hearing date hasn’t been set.

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Associated Press writers Jim Salter in O'Fallon, Missouri, Alana Durkin Richer in Boston and Mark Scolforo in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, contributed to this report.

Va Tech women headed to 1st Final Four after topping Ohio St

By TIM BOOTH AP Sports Writer

SEATTLE (AP) — Virginia Tech coach Kenny Brooks stood at the stop of the ladder about to trim the final strands from the net when the familiar thumping beat started blaring through the speakers of the arena.

The Hokies' first Final Four berth deserved a little Metallica and a little "Enter Sandman."

Elizabeth Kitley scored 25 points and grabbed 12 rebounds, Georgia Amoore added 24 points and top-seeded Virginia Tech advanced to the Final Four with an 84-74 win over No. 3 seed Ohio State in the Seattle 3 Regional final on Monday night.

For the seventh time in the past 10 Final Fours there will be a first-time participant and it's the champions of the ACC, adding another accomplishment to the best season in school history.

Playing in its first regional final, Virginia Tech (31-4) won its 15th straight game and will head to the Final Four having not lost in more than two months. The Hokies will face LSU in the national semifinals on Friday in Dallas.

"We're not just going to the Final Four. We're in the Final Four. That's something that means the world to me," Brooks said.

Kitley, the Hokies 6-foot-6 center and leading scorer this season, took over on the interior in the second half. She scored the first seven points of the fourth quarter and her three-point play gave Virginia Tech a 70-60 lead.

Amoore hit her fourth 3-pointer of the game to push the lead to 13. Ohio State pulled within six in the final minute, but the Hokies were nearly perfect at the foul line down the stretch.

After the final buzzer sounded, "Enter Sandman" blasted throughout Climate Pledge Arena for the first time, setting off an even louder party for the Hokies fans in attendance.

And it played again as Brooks stood on the ladder above the celebration.

"I don't know if you envision it more than you dream it. Obviously this is not easy and one day I will sit back and realize how hard it was for us to get here and realize we are one of four teams standing," Brooks said.

Amoore shook off the scare of a potential injury in the first half to scored 16 points in the second half. She had a career-high 29 in the regional semifinal win over Tennessee. Cayla King added 12 points, all in the first half for the Hokies.

"This group, we all come from different places, but this year we came together because we all wanted the same thing," Kitley said. "It's so nice to be at this spot but we know that we don't want to be done either yet because we have so much fun playing together."

Taylor Mikesell led Ohio State (28-8) with 25 points, but 19 of those came in the first half. Mikesell didn't score the first 16 minutes of the second half before hitting a 3-pointer with 3:35 remaining.

Jacy Sheldon scored 19 and Big Ten freshman of the year Cotie McMahon added 18. But the pressure defense that Ohio State used to befuddle UConn into 25 turnovers in the regional semifinal was easily handled by Amoore and the Hokies in the opening minutes and mostly abandoned by the Buckeyes.

"I felt we were a little tired coming into it. We put so much energy into Saturday's game and we didn't quite have the same energy in the press," Ohio State coach Kevin McGuff said. "And when you don't have it, it's tough because you can really get but up on the back end and give up easy baskets."

Ohio State was looking to join its Big Ten Conference partner Iowa in reaching the Final Four for the first time in 30 years. The Buckeyes stayed with Virginia Tech shot-for-shot through a highly entertaining and high scoring first half.

But the shots that dropped in the first 20 minutes stopped falling in the second half. Ohio State shot 64% in the first half, including five 3-pointer from Mikesell, but that dropped to just 28% in the second half.

"We got the stops we wanted. We didn't make the most of them on offense," Sheldon said. "We didn't

execute the way we wanted to. So props to them. They played a great game.”

RARE COMPANY

Brooks is the third Black male coach to take a team to the women’s Final Four and second since the field expanded to 64 teams in 1994. Winthrop McGriff with Cheyney in 1984 and Quentin Hillsman with Syracuse in 2016 were the others. Brooks is in his seventh season in Blacksburg.

“I do know that when I was trying to make a name for myself, there wasn’t very many people that were doing it or advocating for people that looked like me. In this profession, I think that we belong. I think that there’s a place for Black males to come in and be a positive influence,” Brooks said before the Sweet 16.

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

Nashville shooter who killed 6 drew maps, surveilled school

By JONATHAN MATTISE, TRAVIS LOLLER and HOLLY MEYER Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A former student shot through the doors of a Christian elementary school Monday and killed three children and three adults after elaborately planning the massacre by drawing out a detailed map and conducting surveillance of the building, police said.

The massacre at The Covenant School in Nashville was the latest in a series of mass shootings in a country that has grown increasingly unnerved by bloodshed in schools.

The victims included three 9-year-old children, the school’s top administrator, a substitute teacher and a custodian. Amid the chaos a familiar ritual played out: Panicked parents rushed to the school to see if their children were safe and tearfully hugged their kids, and a stunned community planned vigils for the victims.

“I was literally moved to tears to see this and the kids as they were being ushered out of the building,” Metropolitan Nashville Police Chief John Drake said during one of several news conferences.

Police gave unclear information on the gender of the shooter, who police say was fatally shot by two responding officers at the school. For hours, police identified the shooter as a 28-year-old woman and eventually identified the person as Audrey Hale. Then at a late afternoon press conference, the police chief said that Hale was transgender. After the news conference, police spokesperson Don Aaron declined to elaborate on how Hale currently identified.

Drake did not give a specific motive when asked by reporters but gave chilling examples of the shooter’s prior planning for the targeted attack.

“We have a manifesto, we have some writings that we’re going over that pertain to this date, the actual incident,” he said. “We have a map drawn out of how this was all going to take place.”

He said in an interview with NBC News that investigators believe Hale had “some resentment for having to go to that school.”

The shooter gained entry by firing into glass doors on the building, shattering them, police later said in a tweet.

The shooter was armed with two “assault-style” weapons as well as a handgun, authorities said. At least two of them were believed to have been obtained legally in the Nashville area, according to the chief.

Police said a search of the shooter’s home turned up a sawed-off shotgun, a second shotgun and other unspecified evidence.

The victims were identified as Evelyn Dieckhaus, Hallie Scruggs, and William Kinney, all 9 years old, and adults Cynthia Peak, 61; Katherine Koonce, 60; and Mike Hill, 61.

The website of The Covenant School, a Presbyterian school founded in 2001, lists a Katherine Koonce as the head of the school. Her LinkedIn profile says she has led the school since July 2016. Peak was a substitute teacher and Hill was a custodian, according to investigators.

Students held hands as they walked to school buses, which drove them to a nearby church to be reunited with their parents.

Rachel Dibble, who was at the church as families found their children, described the scene as everyone

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being in "complete shock."

"People were involuntarily trembling," said Dibble, whose children attend a different private school in Nashville. "The children ... started their morning in their cute little uniforms, they probably had some Froot Loops and now their whole lives changed today."

Communities around the U.S. has suffered through one mass killing after another in recent years, with school shootings taking an especially painful toll.

Recent tragedies nationwide include the massacre at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, last year; a first grader who shot his teacher in Virginia; and a shooting last week in Denver that wounded two administrators.

President Joe Biden, speaking at the White House on Monday, called the shooting a "family's worst nightmare" and implored Congress again to pass a ban on certain semi-automatic weapons.

"It's ripping at the soul of this nation, ripping at the very soul of this nation," Biden said.

Biden later ordered the U.S. flag to be flown at half-staff on all federal buildings through March 31. He also spoke to Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee and Nashville Mayor John Cooper about the shooting, officials said.

Founded as a ministry of Covenant Presbyterian Church — which is affiliated with the conservative evangelical Presbyterian Church in America — The Covenant School is located in the affluent Green Hills neighborhood just south of downtown Nashville that is home to the famed Bluebird Café — a spot typically beloved by musicians and songwriters.

The school has about 200 students from preschool through sixth grade, as well as roughly 50 staff members.

"Our community is heartbroken," a statement from the school said. "We are grieving tremendous loss and are in shock coming out of the terror that shattered our school and church. We are focused on loving our students, our families, our faculty and staff and beginning the process of healing."

Before Monday's violence in Nashville, there had been seven mass killings at K-12 schools since 2006 in which four or more people were killed within a 24-hour period, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University. In all of them, the shooters were males.

The database does not include school shootings in which fewer than four people were killed, which have become far more common in recent years. Just last week alone, for example, school shootings happened in Denver and the Dallas-area within two days of each other.

Monday's tragedy unfolded over roughly 14 minutes. Police received the initial call about an active shooter at 10:13 a.m.

Officers began clearing the first story of the school when they heard gunshots coming from the second level, Aaron said during a news briefing. Police later said in a tweet that the shooter fired at arriving officers from a second-story window and had come armed with significant ammunition.

Two officers from a five-member team opened fire in response, fatally shooting the suspect at 10:27 a.m., Aaron said. One officer had a hand wound from cut glass.

Late Monday night, police released approximately two minutes of edited surveillance video showing the shooter's car driving up to the school from multiple angles, including one in which children can be seen playing on swings in the background. Next an interior view shows glass doors to the school being shot out and the shooter ducking through one of the shattered doors.

More footage from inside shows the shooter walking through a school corridor holding a gun with a long barrel and walking into a room labeled "church office," then coming back out. In the final part of the footage, the shooter can be seen walking down another long corridor with the gun drawn. The shooter is not seen interacting with anyone else on the video, which has no sound.

Aaron said there were no police officers present or assigned to the school at the time of the shooting because it is a church-run school.

Jozen Reodica heard the police sirens and fire trucks blaring from outside her office building nearby. As her building was placed under lockdown, she took out her phone and recorded the chaos.

"I thought I would just see this on TV," she said. "And right now, it's real."

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Nashville has seen its share of mass violence in recent years, including a Christmas Day 2020 attack where a recreational vehicle was intentionally detonated in the heart of Music City's historic downtown, killing the bomber, injuring three others and forcing more than 60 businesses to close.

A reeling city mourned during multiple vigils Monday evening. At Belmont United Methodist Church, teary sniffing filled the background as vigil attendees sang, knelt in prayer and lit candles. They lamented the national cycle of violent and deadly shootings, at one point reciting together, "we confess we have not done enough to protect" the children injured or killed in shootings.

"We need to step back. We need to breathe. We need to grieve," said Paul Purdue, the church's senior pastor. "We need to remember. We need to make space for others who are grieving. We need to hear the cries of our neighbors."

Contributing to this report were Associated Press writers Kristin Hall in Nashville; Denise Lavoie in Richmond, Virginia; John Raby in Charleston, West Virginia; Stefanie Dazio in Los Angeles; Beatrice Dupuy and Larry Fenn in New York; and Lisa Baumann in Bellingham, Washington; as well as AP researchers Randy Herschaft and Rhonda Shafner in New York.

Unbeaten Gamecocks, Iowa's Clark star in women's Final Four

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

SEATTLE (AP) — An undefeated South Carolina team led by star Aliyah Boston and guided by vaunted Dawn Staley, an Iowa squad that features high-scoring Caitlin Clark and the return of LSU and flashy coach Kim Mulkey headline the women's Final Four this weekend.

Virginia Tech is the newcomer to the group as the Hokies are making their first appearance in the national semifinals. Hokies coach Kenny Brooks became the third Black male coach to take a team to the Final Four in women's basketball history.

All of the women's basketball world will descend on Dallas this week as the Division I, II and III championships will be held there. It's only the second time that all three divisions will have their title games in the same place.

Staley and the Gamecocks are looking to become the 10th team to go through a season unbeaten and the first to repeat as champions since UConn won four in a row from 2013-16. South Carolina advanced to its third consecutive national semifinals and fifth since 2015 thanks to another superb effort by Boston, the reigning AP Player of the Year. The three-time All-American had 22 points and 10 rebounds in a win over Maryland on Monday night.

Next up for the Gamecocks is Iowa and the sensational Clark. She helped the Hawkeyes reach their first Final Four in 30 years with a game for the ages in the regional semifinals on Sunday night. The junior guard had the first 40-point triple-double in NCAA history in the win over Louisville.

The Gamecocks have the experience edge having reached the Final Four so often with this group. No one on Iowa's roster was alive the last time the team advanced to the game's biggest stage. C. Vivian Stringer was the coach of that team in 1993 that reached the Final Four before losing to Ohio State in overtime.

"It is like a storybook, but it's kind of been like that for us all year long," Iowa coach Lisa Bluder said. "I mean, we have had -- honestly, we keep talking about destiny and how it's supposed to happen and it is happening. But I'm so happy for Caitlin. I can remember sitting in her living room and her saying, I want to go to a Final Four. And I'm saying, We can do it together. And she believed me. And so I'm very thankful for that."

The other game will pit LSU against Virginia Tech. The Tigers are making their first trip to the national semifinals since 2008 when Sylvia Fowles dominated the paint. Now LSU is led by another stellar post player in Angel Reese.

She broke Fowles' record for double-doubles in a season earlier this year and was key in the Tigers win over Miami in the Elite Eight.

Reese, who transferred in this season from Maryland, has made Mulkey's second season at the school a

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special one. She came to LSU with a resume headlined by three NCAA titles from her time at Baylor along with some flamboyant sideline looks such as her silver-shimmering jacket with white pants that she wore in the Elite Eight game Sunday.

"What really makes me smile is not cutting that net down," Mulkey said. "It's looking around out there at all those LSU people, looking at that team I get to coach experience it for the first time."

LSU's opponent is also making its first appearance at the Final Four. The Hokies have had the best season in school history, winning the ACC crown as well under Brooks. He joined former Syracuse Quentin Hillsman and Cheyney State's Winthrop "Windy" McGriff.

The significance has not been lost on Brooks, who hopes he can inspire other Black male coaches to get more opportunities.

The Hokies run to the national semifinals has been led by star post Elizabeth Kitley and sharpshooter Georgia Amoore. The pair combined for 49 points in the win over Ohio State in the Elite Eight.

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

Family of US couple kidnapped in Haiti pleads for release

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Nikese Toussaint was at church, so she didn't see the text message from her sister.

All she knew at that point was that their brother and his wife, who live in the U.S., had landed safely in Haiti to visit ailing relatives and prepare for Rara, a colorful and boisterous festival born out of the dark days of slavery.

It wasn't until Toussaint got home and her sister followed up the unread text with a phone call that she learned her warnings had materialized: their brother, an accountant; his wife, a social worker; and another person were snatched off a public bus amid a surge in gang-related kidnappings.

Toussaint took a deep breath. Not again, she thought.

Seventeen years earlier, gangs had kidnapped two of her cousins in the capital of Port-au-Prince. They were eventually released but remain traumatized.

This time, the gang that kidnapped her brother, wife and another person is demanding \$200,000 — each.

"How are we ever going to come up with that money?" Toussaint told The Associated Press in a phone interview Monday from the U.S.

The kidnapping occurred March 18, and since then, her brother, Jean-Dickens Toussaint, has been allowed to make only two brief calls.

All his family knows is that he and his wife, Abigail Michael Toussaint, are tied up. The phone calls are too brief to find out if they are being given food or water or treated generally well, Nikese Toussaint said.

The couple were on their way to Jean-Dickens Toussaint's hometown of Leogane, which many Haitians believe organizes the country's best Rara festival. Three pandemic years had gone by since he last led a Rara band through those streets, and the 33-year-old accountant was excited to resume his role as "colonel."

Rara is similar to a carnival, with drums, bamboo instruments and metal horns accompanying singers as they parade through the town behind band leaders like Toussaint in an homage to the slave revolution that led Haiti to become the world's first Black republic.

But the celebration was cut short.

The Toussaints, who are from Tamarac, Florida, never made it to Leogane.

Gangs stopped the public bus they were on as it tried to cross Martissant, considered ground zero for ongoing violence that has worsened since the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse.

The gangs apparently noticed the suitcases in the bus and zeroed in on the couple and the person accompanying them on the trip, Nikese Toussaint said.

The family paid someone they trusted \$6,000 to give to the gang, but the money vanished. It's not

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unusual for gangs in Haiti to refuse to release kidnapping victims even after they've been paid, but Toussaint believes it was a scam.

"That's when we said, 'Uh, oh, we have to get help,'" she recalled. "We didn't know what to do at that point. We don't want to take any more risks."

Toussaint said her family is in touch with the FBI, which is helping with the case.

"To the gangs, I want to say, we want our family back. We are not rich over here," Nikese Toussaint said.

A statement from the U.S. State Department said the agency was aware of reports of two U.S. citizens being kidnapped and was in regular contact with Haitian authorities.

The kidnappings are the latest to target U.S. citizens, although most victims are Haitian, ranging from wealthy business owners to humble street vendors. At least 101 kidnappings were reported in the first two weeks of March alone, with another 208 people killed in gang clashes during that period, according to the U.N.

The ongoing violence in Port-au-Prince and beyond also has displaced at least 160,000 people as warring gangs set fire to neighborhoods in their bid to control more territory.

More than a week has gone by since the Toussaints were kidnapped. Their family is trying to stay strong because the couple have a son who turns 2 on Tuesday.

"We're trying to smile," Nikese Toussaint said of their video calls with the boy. "We have to smile with him, and give him love, and at the same time we get a little smile (from him), and that's when the pain gets a little harder."

House GOP to subpoena Blinken over Afghanistan dissent cable

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans plan to deliver a subpoena to Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday for classified cables related to the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, marking an unprecedented effort to force the release of sensitive documents to Congress.

Rep. Mike McCaul, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, told The Associated Press on Monday that he had spoken with Blinken earlier in the day when he was notified the agency would not be turning over a so-called dissent cable written by diplomats at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul shortly before the August 2021 withdrawal.

"We have made multiple good faith attempts to find common ground so we could see this critical piece of information," McCaul, R-Texas, said in a statement. "Unfortunately, Secretary Blinken has refused to provide the Dissent Cable and his response to the cable, forcing me to issue my first subpoena as chairman of this committee."

The July 2021 communication warned Blinken about the potential fall of Kabul via a special "dissent channel," which allows State Department officials to issue warnings or express contrarian views directly to senior agency officials, according to a report from The Wall Street Journal.

The State Department made a direct offer last week — before McCaul made his subpoena threat about the dissent cable in particular — to share the substance of the cable via a briefing, according to a March 22 letter obtained by the AP.

"The Department is prepared to discuss a path that would communicate to you the circumstances and substance of the requested cable exchange, as an extraordinary accommodation," the letter read. "The Department trusts that this accommodation will address the Committee's request for information while preserving the confidential nature of the Dissent Channel."

The effort to force the release of the cable is the latest in a series by McCaul and other House Republicans to hold the Biden administration accountable for what they have called a "stunning failure of leadership" after Taliban forces seized the Afghan capital, Kabul, far more rapidly than U.S. intelligence had foreseen as American forces pulled out.

Kabul's fall turned the West's withdrawal into a rout, with Kabul's airport the center of a desperate air evacuation guarded by U.S. forces temporarily deployed for the task. A single explosive device that day killed at least 170 Afghan civilians and 13 American service members.

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McCaul made the Afghanistan-related document requests in January, upon becoming chairman of the committee, but has said he faced pushback from the department as he pursued his investigation into the withdrawal.

State Department spokesperson Vedant Patel told reporters Monday that while he recognizes "the importance and the keen interest in this cable," it would be a rare move for any secretary to turn over those documents to Congress.

"It is a unique way for anyone in the department to speak truth to power as they see it without fear or favor. And they do it by the regulations we have established for these cables in a privileged and confidential way," Patel said. "It's vital to us that we preserve the integrity of that process and of that channel."

Since the Dissent Channel was created in 1971, in part to address U.S. diplomats' concerns over the Vietnam War, the State Department has held communications closely. Nearly all such cables are classified to protect the integrity of the process and the identities of dissenting Foreign Service officers. They are not generally intended for public consumption, however, some have been leaked to the press, often by their authors.

According to the National Security Archives at George Washington University, at least 123 Dissent Channel cables have been sent since 1971. The vast majority of those have remained classified and the State Department has long objected to efforts to force their release.

The basic contents of some Dissent Channel cables have become public, including in the Afghanistan withdrawal case. One of its authors was given an award for "Constructive Dissent" in 2022 by the union that represents U.S. diplomats.

AP Diplomatic Writer Matt Lee contributed to this report.

U.S. renewable electricity surpassed coal in 2022

By ISABELLA O'MALLEY Associated Press

Electricity generated from renewables surpassed coal in the United States for the first time in 2022, the U.S. Energy Information Administration announced Monday.

Renewables also surpassed nuclear generation in 2022 after first doing so last year.

Growth in wind and solar significantly drove the increase in renewable energy and contributed 14% of the electricity produced domestically in 2022.

"I'm happy to see we've crossed that threshold, but that is only a step in what has to be a very rapid and much cheaper journey," said Stephen Porder, a professor of ecology and assistant provost for sustainability at Brown University.

California produced 26% of the national utility-scale solar electricity followed by Texas with 16% and North Carolina with 8%.

The most wind generation occurred in Texas, which accounted for 26% of the U.S. total followed by Iowa (10%) and Oklahoma (9%).

"This booming growth is driven largely by economics," said Gregory Wetstone, president and CEO of the American Council on Renewable Energy. "Over the past decade, the levelized cost of wind energy declined by 70 percent, while the levelized cost of solar power has declined by an even more impressive 90 percent."

"Renewable energy is now the most affordable source of new electricity in much of the country," added Wetstone.

The Energy Information Administration projected that the wind share of the U.S. electricity generation mix will increase from 11% to 12% from 2022 to 2023 and that solar will grow from 4% to 5% during the period. The natural gas share is expected to remain at 39% from 2022 to 2023, and coal is projected to decline from 20% last year to 17% this year.

"Wind and solar are going to be the backbone of the growth in renewables, but whether or not they can provide 100% of the U.S. electricity without backup is something that engineers are debating," said Brown University's Porder.

Many decisions lie ahead, he said, as the proportion of renewables that supply the energy grid increases. This presents challenges for engineers and policy-makers, Porder said, because existing energy grids were built to deliver power from a consistent source. Renewables such as solar and wind generate power intermittently. So battery storage, long-distance transmission and other steps will be needed to help address these challenges, he said.

The EIA report found the country remains heavily reliant on the burning of climate-changing fossil fuels. Coal-fired generation was 20% of the electric sector in 2022, a decline from 23% in 2021. Natural gas was the largest source of electricity in the U.S. in 2022, generating 39% last year compared to 37% in 2021.

"When you look at the data, natural gas has been a major driver for lowering greenhouse gas emissions from electricity because it's been largely replacing coal-fired power plants," said Melissa Lott, director of research for the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University.

"Moving forward, you can't have emissions continuing to go up, you need to bring them down quickly," added Lott.

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) influenced the amount of renewable energy projects that went online in 2022, Lott said, and it's expected to have a "tremendous" impact on accelerating clean energy projects. ____

Associated Press climate and environmental coverage receives support from several private foundations. See more about AP's climate initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Chipotle agrees to pay after closing store that sought union

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Chipotle Mexican Grill has agreed to pay \$240,000 to former employees as part of a settlement stemming from a complaint that the company violated federal law by closing a restaurant where workers wanted to unionize.

Chipotle announced it was permanently closing its Augusta, Maine, location last year after workers filed a National Labor Relations Board petition for a union election. The NLRB later said the closure was illegal.

The Maine location was the first in the chain to file a union petition. The settlement, released by union officials on Monday, states that two dozen employees will receive payments from Chipotle and they will be placed on a preferential hiring list for other Maine locations.

The company must also post a notice in dozens of stores in New England that it won't close stores or discriminate against employees due to union support, the settlement states.

"It sends a message to corporations that shutting down a store and blackballing workers didn't work for Chipotle and it won't work for them either," said Brandi McNease, a former employee of the Augusta store and the lead organizer of the union drive, in a statement provided by the Maine AFL-CIO.

Chipotle said in a statement that it settled the lawsuit because fighting it would have been burdensome and expensive. The company respects "our employees' rights to organize under the National Labor Relations Act" and is "committed to ensuring a fair and just work environment that provides opportunities to all," said Laurie Schalow, chief corporate affairs officer for the company, in a statement.

"We settled this case not because we did anything wrong, but because the time, energy and cost to litigate would have far outweighed the settlement agreement," Schalow said.

The Augusta location closed last summer. Workers described the closure as retaliation for the union drive, but company representatives said the closure wasn't related to unionization.

The payments the workers are receiving vary based on their average number of hours worked, pay rate and longevity prior to store closing, union officials said.

There are currently 10 other open unfair labor practice cases against Chipotle, said Kayla Blado, a spokesperson with the National Labor Relations Board's Office of Congressional and Public Affairs. Parties agreed in January to a settlement on four of these, Blado said.

Doctor decries gun violence after school shooting near miss

By TRISHA AHMED Associated Press

A pediatric surgeon who left The Covenant School in Nashville moments before a shooter opened fire, killing six people, says she is horrified by the gun violence that has plagued the U.S.

Britney Grayson had just finished regaling children at the small religious grade school about Kenya, where she works on missions, when she drove out of the parking lot looking for a Starbucks. Moments later, the shooter entered the school and opened fire, killing three children and three adults.

After she received a text alerting her to the attack, Grayson took to Facebook to post about what she experienced, writing, "WHY ARE OUR CHILDREN BEING MASSACRED IN THEIR SCHOOLS?!"

If a mass shooting is defined as resulting in the death of four or more people, not including the perpetrator, 175 people have died in 15 such events connected to U.S. schools and colleges since 1999.

The horror of what happened had Grayson rattled hours later.

"It's a weird feeling, knowing that just if it had happened just moments earlier, one, we might have been victims ourselves, and two, maybe I would have been there to offer immediate care," she said.

In her post, Grayson wrote that she has operated on a school shooting victim. But, she says, she has never felt as close to the violence as she did this time.

"It's different when you receive a patient at the hospital. I'm on my turf. I have all my skills and or tools with me and all of the team and everything," she said. "That is definitely different than what we experienced today."

Grayson notes that even those who survived Monday's violence will be forever changed. She says the U.S. is laying the burden of gun violence at the feet of children.

"Physically in the children that died, but also all of the children that were there today," she said. "The counseling that's going to be required and the way that this is going to affect their lives forever."

Grayson wrote on Facebook that the kids were great and learned about Kenya, some Swahili words and what it means to be a missionary.

Later, when an initial death toll came out, she posted an update: "3 children are confirmed dead. 3 children who learned the word 'Jambo' this morning from us in chapel," she wrote, using the Swahili greeting. "3 children who didn't have to die. Lord be with us. Lord, be with us."

Food for thought: Free meals for all New Mexico students

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Monday signed legislation to provide free school meals to all students regardless of family income, as New Mexico and several other states look to fill the gap left by lapsed federal pandemic-era benefit programs and address the strain to family budgets caused by food prices.

The bill cleared the Legislature during the recent 60-day session, with lawmakers setting aside more than \$22 million in the state budget to help pay for the program. Additional money will be used to improve school kitchens so healthier meals can be prepared.

"When we feed our children, we're feeding our future — these investments today will yield benefits tomorrow through generations of healthier New Mexicans," the Democratic governor said in a statement issued after she celebrated with dozens of elementary school students.

California and Maine have made universal meals permanent, legislation to do so is advancing in Vermont, and Nevada pitched in \$75 million to extend free school meals for this school year. In Colorado, voters approved a ballot measure last fall giving school districts the opportunity to offer free lunches.

Nationally, debts for unpaid school meals have been rising, indicating the need to continue providing free meals to ensure students are able to concentrate in the classroom. A recent report issued by the Food Research & Action Center showed participation in school breakfast and lunch programs was higher during the last school year than that of pre-pandemic levels.

About 67% — or 309,000 New Mexico students — are eligible to receive free and reduced-price lunches

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through the National School Lunch Program, according to the New Mexico Public Education Department.

Signing of the legislation could impact nearly 70,000 students who normally would have had to pay for school meals, with department officials expecting a 5% to 10% increase in participation in districts that operate national school lunch programs.

Lujan Grisham included the proposal in her State of the State address, saying that wherever kids are, there ought to be a kitchen working to keep them healthy, strong and ready to learn.

Still, some say more money will be needed to bankroll the effort over time. This year, New Mexico was awash in new revenue due in part to a financial windfall from oil production.

Legislative analysts have estimated that providing meals at no costs to students at participating schools could total between \$27 million and \$40 million in recurring funding from the state's general fund.

Advocacy groups see universal free school meals as the next step in New Mexico's march toward combating historically high food insecurity rates in a state that has long struggled with generational poverty. Other recent efforts include legislation in 2020 that eliminated student co-pays for reduced-price school meals and a 2017 measure that made New Mexico the first state in the U.S. to ensure children can't be humiliated by school meal debts.

The new law aims to boost the amount of food that comes from local growers through farm-to-table grants. Currently, about 168 farmers, ranchers and food businesses sell locally produced products to schools in 19 of the state's 33 counties.

Supporters also hope the new law will lead to less food waste by requiring kindergarten through sixth grade students to have more time to sit down and eat, and by collecting unused food for use by food pantries, students and other charitable organizations.

Mississippi tornado victims wonder, 'How can we rebuild?'

By EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS, ROBERT BUMSTED and REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press
ROLLING FORK, Miss. (AP) — The tornado that collapsed the roof and two walls of Jermaine Wells' Mississippi home also hurled a massive tractor tire that landed near him in the living room as his wife huddled in the laundry room.

The couple survived the Friday night storm, but as they picked through the ruins of their one-story home Monday in Rolling Fork, he said they're not sure how they're going to pay for daily expenses, let alone long-term recovery.

Wells, 50, drives a backhoe for a road department in another county, and he said he doesn't get paid if he doesn't work. His wife, a cashier at a local store, gathered loose coins as he looked for clothing in the rubble.

"I can't even get to work. I don't have no vehicle, no nothing," Wells said. "How can we rebuild something that we don't have nothing to build our foundation with?"

The disaster makes life even more difficult in this economically struggling area. Mississippi is one of the poorest states in the U.S., and the majority-Black Delta has long been one of the poorest parts of Mississippi — a place where many people work paycheck to paycheck, often in jobs connected to agriculture.

Two of the counties walloped by the tornado, Sharkey and Humphreys, are among the most sparsely populated in the state, with only a few thousand residents in communities scattered across wide expanses of cotton, corn and soybean fields. Sharkey's poverty rate is 35%, and Humphreys' is 33%, compared with about 19% for Mississippi and less than 12% for the entire United States.

People in poverty are vulnerable after disasters not only because they lack financial resources but also because they often don't have friends or family who can afford to provide long-term shelter, said the Rev. Starsky Wilson, president and CEO of Children's Defense Fund, a national group that advocates policies to help low-income families.

"We have to make sure people with power — policymakers — pay attention to and keep their attention on people that are often unseen because they are poor, because they are Black, because they are rural," Wilson told The Associated Press on Monday.

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On Monday, the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency revised the state death toll from the tornado to 21, down from 25. The agency said the new number is based on deaths confirmed by coroners. MEMA spokeswoman Allie Jasper said the agency does not know of any people still reported missing. One person was killed in Alabama.

Preliminary assessments show 313 structures in Mississippi were destroyed and more than 1,000 were affected in some way, the Federal Emergency Management Agency told emergency managers Monday.

The tornado destroyed many homes and businesses in Rolling Fork and the nearby town of Silver City, leaving mounds of lumber, bricks and twisted metal. The local housing stock was already tight, and some who lost their homes said they will live with friends or relatives. Mississippi opened more than a half-dozen shelters to temporarily house people displaced by the tornado.

The tornado obliterated the modest one-story home that Kimberly Berry shared with her two daughters in the Delta flatlands about 15 miles (24 kilometers) outside Rolling Fork. It left only the foundation and random belongings — a toppled refrigerator, a dresser and matching nightstand, a bag of Christmas decorations, some clothing.

During the storm, Berry and her 12-year-old daughter prayed inside a nearby church that was barely damaged, while her 25-year-old daughter survived in Rolling Fork. Berry shook her head as she looked at the remains of their material possessions. She said she's grateful she and her children are still alive.

"I can get all this back. It's nothing," said Berry, 46, who works as a supervisor at a catfish growing and processing operation. "I'm not going to get depressed about it."

She spent the weekend with friends and family sorting through salvageable items. Her sister, Dianna Berry, said her own home a few miles away was undamaged. She works at a deer camp, and she said her boss has offered to let Kimberly Berry and her daughters live there for as long as they need.

President Joe Biden issued an emergency declaration for Mississippi on Sunday, making federal funding available to hardest-hit areas. But Craig Fugate, who headed FEMA when Barack Obama was president, said it's important to remember that the agency will not pay for all expenses after a disaster.

"In those communities where people don't have insurance and the homes were destroyed, their ability to do recovery will be tested," Fugate said.

FEMA provides temporary housing and helps with some uninsured losses, but he said the agency is not designed to replace everything if homes are uninsured or underinsured. Long-term recovery will be heavily dependent on money from Housing and Urban Development.

"That money won't flow fast," he said.

In recent years, FEMA has moved to reduce barriers so that "all people, including those from vulnerable and underserved communities, are better able to access our assistance," said FEMA spokesperson Jeremy Edwards. He cited agency changes expanding the types of documents survivors can provide to verify they lived in or own a particular home.

Marcus T. Coleman Jr., who heads the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships with the Department of Health and Human Services, said after visiting Rolling Fork he's concerned about both the mental health and financial challenges for people struggling in the tornado's aftermath. "Disasters often exacerbate preexisting inequities," said Coleman.

Denise Durel heads United Way of Southwest Louisiana, where residents are still recovering from hurricanes Laura and Delta that struck in 2020. The organization has been helping people rebuild damaged homes, and some were uninsured or had too little coverage.

"Just drive through town," she said. "Blue tarps are still there. The houses are in worse shape."

Louisiana has finally received a large infusion of federal money to help those still struggling from the two 2020 hurricanes. Durel said if people didn't register with FEMA soon after the storms, they can't qualify for this new money. She said the application process is difficult and requires internet access, but many families were focused on gutting their homes and might not have known about registration or understood its importance.

"The people in Mississippi have to understand loud and clear: Somehow you have to find a way to get

those people registered with FEMA," Durel said.

Rebecca Santana reported from Washington, and Associated Press/Report For America reporter Michael Goldberg contributed from Rolling Fork.

Gwyneth Paltrow accuser calls Utah ski crash 'serious smack'

By SAM METZ Associated Press

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — The man suing Gwyneth Paltrow over a 2016 skiing collision at an upscale Utah resort told a jury Monday that the actor-turned-lifestyle influencer crashed into him from behind and sent him "absolutely flying."

"All I saw was a whole lot of snow. And I didn't see the sky, but I was flying," said Terry Sanderson, a 76-year-old retired optometrist, calling the impact "a serious smack."

That's the opposite of what Paltrow testified, and the jury has heard dueling narratives as the trial enters its second week. Paltrow said Sanderson was uphill and hit her from behind. He's suing her for more than \$300,000, claiming she skied recklessly and that he has permanent brain damage from the crash that altered his personality.

On the stand Friday, Paltrow said Sanderson knocked into her gently from behind but that the collision escalated as the two skidded down the beginner slope. She said his skis veered between her legs, causing her to briefly panic as she heard a man groaning behind her. Paltrow was present in court Monday.

Sanderson recalled a screaming woman skiing out of control and hitting him square in the back. Craig Ramon, another skier who says he's the sole eyewitness to the collision, testified last week that he saw Paltrow hit Sanderson.

Regardless of who hit who, both sides agree the two then fell down and Paltrow landed on top of Sanderson. Paltrow's attorneys have disputed the extent of Sanderson's injuries and post-crash disorientation, but both sides say the collision resulted in Sanderson's four broken ribs and a concussion.

Sanderson was brought to tears throughout his testimony Monday, particularly when he appeared unable to focus or remember things.

His legal team attempted to present his confusion and memory lapses to support their brain-damage argument. Paltrow's lawyers used it to undercut his reliability as a witness.

Sanderson's testimony also resurfaced questions about the potential that a GoPro helmet camera may have documented the crash. Though no footage made it into evidence for the trial, attorneys have repeatedly questioned witnesses about an email one of his daughters sent that said: "I also can't believe this is all on GoPro."

That daughter, Shae Herath, testified last week that her words were mere speculation that someone on the upscale mountain must be outfitted with a helmet camera because they are a fixture at ski resorts.

Paltrow's attorneys have continued to raise questions about what happened to the footage that Sanderson and his family members referred to.

It became clear Monday the potentially explosive evidence wouldn't explode.

Judge Kent Holmberg said online sleuths had found the link and that its contents would be included as evidence. It didn't contain GoPro footage. Instead, it was to a chat between members of Sanderson's ski group, in which Ramon — the man claiming to be the crash's sole eyewitness — said on the day of the crash that Paltrow had crashed into Sanderson.

"Terry was knocked out cold. Bad hit to the head!" Ramon wrote. "I did see the hit. Terry did not know his name."

The exchange made clear that Ramon thought Paltrow crashed into Sanderson years before any lawsuit was filed. It also shows Sanderson and those skiing with him knew the woman in the crash was Paltrow.

After four-and-a-half days of Sanderson's attorneys calling witnesses, Paltrow's defense team has equal time to present their case. They brought one of her family's four ski instructors to the stand Monday afternoon. Attorneys said Monday that Paltrow's two teenage children, Moses and Apple, would have their

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depositions read into the record later in the week instead of appearing in court on the witness stand.

Jurors sat transfixed as Paltrow's attorneys played computer animated reconstructions of how they say the collision occurred, with high enough resolution to show trees, children's ski coats and multiple vantage points.

For their first witness, the defense called Eric Christiansen, a mustachioed 40-year veteran ski instructor who was giving a lesson to Paltrow's family at Deer Valley Resort the day of the collision. He said he was monitoring much of the mountain during the exact moment Sanderson and Paltrow collided and didn't see the moment of impact but saw what happened immediately before and after.

In testimony that wandered into instruction about skiing technique, Christiansen said Paltrow was making "short radius turns" while Sanderson was skiing down the groomed run "edge to edge" and "quite dynamically."

He said he remembered Paltrow landed on top of Sanderson because he approached and took her skis off, then Sanderson's.

"I believe you told me once if a soccer player takes out someone's legs, they're underneath," Paltrow's attorney, Steve Owens, said as he asked questions about the crash.

Paltrow's attorneys plan to depose a slate of medical experts who are expected to undercut testimony from the neurologists, radiologists and psychologists hired by Sanderson's team.

The trial has also touched on the habits and hobbies of wealthy people like Sanderson and Paltrow as well as 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, expert witnesses, a private security detail and high-resolution animation.

Much of the questioning throughout the trial's first five days has revolved around Sanderson's motivation for suing Paltrow. Her attorneys have argued the lawsuit is an attempt by an "obsessed" man to exploit Paltrow's wealth and fame. Sanderson's attorneys have attempted to paint Paltrow as a carefree movie star who hurt an aging man and is unwilling to take responsibility for the fallout.

"No one believed how serious my injuries were," said Sanderson, who enjoyed wine tasting and international travel before the crash. "There was lots of insults added to that singular incident."

Associated Press journalist Kiana Doyle in Seattle contributed to this report.

Review: 'Dungeons & Dragons' puts the funny in fantasy

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

"You're not a lot of fun, are you," notes barbarian Holga (Michelle Rodriguez) to brave fighter Xenk (Regé-Jean Page) in the new "Dungeons & Dragons" film, making two jokes at once.

The first is that Xenk, a paladin (or holy knight) in "D&D" lingo, is everything BUT fun — gorgeous, noble, heroic, smart, and did we mention gorgeous? He's just REALLY not fun, or funny. He's so not funny, it's hilarious.

The second, broader joke is that "Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves," hotly awaited by devotees of the decades-old role-playing game, makes darned sure to be fun, and funny — enough to laugh at itself. And that's the thing that makes it work.

At least, for a newbie like me. I've never played the game, I confess. But this is a movie, not a game, and I'm here to tell you how it works for over two hours at the multiplex. Which is to say, surprisingly, sometimes delightfully well — even if you have no clue what a paladin or Red Wizard or Harper is, or if the term "Dungeon Master" sends your mind straight to "Fifty Shades of Grey."

The most obvious reason for this success, besides fleet-footed direction by Jonathan Goldstein and John Francis Daley, is star Chris Pine, whose sunny charisma and smooth knack for comedy, plus an ability to seem like he's both inside the movie and outside looking in, keeps everything bubbling.

He's ably assisted by Rodriguez, plus young accomplices Justice Smith as a confidence-challenged (but sweet) wizard and Sophia Lillis as a shape-shifting druid. And then we have a graying Hugh Grant, playing

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the heck out of yet another comic villain role — a character almost as curmudgeonly as he was on the Oscar red carpet.

Plus there's a cameo from another big star, but more on that in a minute. Because first we have to mention the pudgy dragon. Yes, pudgy. Whatever dragons eat, and we can only try to imagine, he's had too many.

But back to Pine, aka the bard Edgin, whom we first meet in a dank, freezing prison cell. He's — well, he's knitting. Nearby sits Holga (Rodriguez), and her own hobby is eating. She's not a cordial sort, especially when food supply is at risk.

An appearance in front of a judicial council, begging for a pardon, gives Edgin the chance to tell his backstory. Turns out he wasn't always a criminal; he was a Harper, part of a spy guild acting for the greater good, but he attracted the ire of the Red Wizards of Thay, which led to the tragic murder of his wife.

Teaming with Holga, he sets out to find the magical Tablet of Reawakening that would return his wife to him and especially their baby daughter Kira (played by Chloe Coleman as a youngster). But they get captured, and their accomplice Forge (Grant), who somehow escapes, swears to take care of Kira.

Edgin, a master planner, devises a jailbreak right during the pardon hearing. They discover Kira is now living in a walled city with Forge, a con-man who turns out (gasp!) to have planned the whole thing, and has convinced her that Dad betrayed her for riches. And now he's allied with Sofina, a terrifying sorceress (Daisy Head). Forge not only refuses to give Kira back but sends Edgin and Holga to their deaths. Holga, however, quickly dispatches all the soldiers meant to kill them — all while Edgin tries, and fails, to untie a rope.

Now they need that tablet, but first they need a magical helmet (bear with us.) The quest, upon which they're joined by Simon (Smith) and Doric (Lillis), leads to the film's most entertaining scenes. One of these is an impressive, fast-paced sequence where shape-shifter Doric infiltrates enemy lines and then, chased by Sofina, morphs seamlessly into various animal forms and back to herself again.

Another is a comic bit where Pine's Edgin tries to elicit key information from a series of corpses. Summoned to life by an increasingly effective Simon, each corpse can answer five questions before returning to the grave forever. Edgin keeps wasting his chances with questions like "Did that count as a question?"

And a prime comic moment comes from none other than Bradley Cooper (see, worth the wait!). We'll reveal nothing but the observation that this cameo is small, but packs a punch.

Finally we have Xenk (Page), perfectly cast as a paladin so, well, perfect that he delivers babies in between vanquishing enemies, and provides the crucial help Edgin needs. But for all sorts of reasons, Edgin can't bring himself to like the guy. Most of all, he can't deal with his lack of understanding of irony, sarcasm, and especially humor.

He's probably right. Heroism is all well and good, but humor is crucial. That's a lesson this film has, luckily, already figured out.

"Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves," a Paramount Pictures release, has been rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America "for fantasy action/violence and some language." Running time: 134 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four.

MPAA definition of PG-13: Parents strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

NJ takes over Paterson police after crisis worker's shooting

By MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

New Jersey's attorney general said Monday that his office has taken control of the police department in the state's third-largest city, Paterson, less than a month after officers there fatally shot a well-known crisis intervention worker during a tense standoff.

Attorney General Matt Platkin said at a news conference that his office had assumed control of all police functions without delay, including the division that investigates internal police matters. His announcement didn't mention the shooting of 31-year-old Najee Seabrooks directly, but it reflected activists' concerns about how the department was being run.

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"There is a crisis of confidence in law enforcement in this city," he said to brief cheers and calls of "Thank you" from the audience. "Something has to change, and it will change starting now. Earlier this morning, I exercised my authority as attorney general and superseded the Paterson Police Department."

Platkin said the takeover amounted to a "pledge" to residents and officers that the state is committed to safety in the city.

During a phone interview later Monday, Platkin said it wasn't a single case that led to his office's takeover of the Paterson Police Department.

"This is not a step I take lightly. It's something I've been considering for a while. It's been a series of misconduct ... a complete breakdown of trust," he said.

Isa Abbassi, a 25-year veteran of the New York Police Department currently serving as the chief of strategic initiatives there, will take charge of Paterson's police department in May, Platkin said. He said his office "quietly conducted a nationwide search" and settled on Abbassi.

In the meantime, a New Jersey State Police officer will serve as the department's interim head.

Pat Colligan, president of the New Jersey State Policemen's Benevolent Association, which is the union that represents Paterson's police officers, said in a statement that the "vast majority of those officers are doing an extraordinary job under very difficult, trying circumstances."

Besides the takeover, Platkin said he's implementing some other changes. They include a program that pairs a police officer with a mental health screener in an unmarked vehicle to respond to 911 calls about mental or behavioral health issues.

He also said the state will revamp its protocols statewide for dealing with people who have barricaded themselves in a room or building — as Seabrooks had done for more than five hours before he was killed. Platkin also formed a "working group" to study and make recommendations on interactions between police officers and violence intervention officers.

The standoff started about 8 a.m. on March 3 when police were called to Seabrooks' brother's apartment where he had been holed up in the bathroom. Seabrooks, who was a crisis intervention worker and mentor with the nonprofit Paterson Healing Collective, had called 911 at least seven times and told dispatchers that people were threatening him and he needed immediate help.

Police arrived soon after and talked to him through the door, offering to get him water and calling him "love" in one instance. But the tension increased when he told police he was armed with a "pocket rocket" gun and a knife.

Police shot Seabrooks when he emerged from the bathroom with a knife, according to the attorney general's office.

His death shook his co-workers, who were at the scene and texting with him, said Liza Chowdhury, Seabrooks' boss at the Paterson Healing Collective. She said Seabrooks had been texting with colleagues, asking to see them, but that police blocked the co-workers from entering the apartment.

Chowdhury said Monday that she appreciated Platkin's decision, but she also called on him to fire the officers involved in the shooting.

In the weeks since his death, anti-violence advocates organized a vigil calling for a number of reforms, including the creation of a civilian review board. The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice has called on the Justice Department to investigate the city's police department, and the ACLU of New Jersey said the shooting shows the need to invest in non-law enforcement responses to mental health calls.

It isn't clear how long the takeover will last. Platkin said he's "in for the long haul."

Platkin didn't specify what behavior led to the takeover, but his office has been involved in a handful of investigations in the city of more than 150,000 that's roughly 20 miles (32 kilometers) northwest of New York.

In February, Platkin announced an aggravated assault charge against a Paterson officer who he said shot a fleeing unarmed man. In December, a grand jury declined to indict Paterson police officers involved in the death of a man they restrained two months earlier.

The U.S. Department of Justice has the power to sue police departments where there has been an established pattern of illegal behavior, corruption or unconstitutional policing practices, and issue legally

binding consent decrees to require changes in those practices. It recently issued a report that will lead to a consent decree in Louisville, Kentucky, and it put the police department in New Jersey's biggest city, Newark, under federal supervision.

State actions against local departments are less common because of local control is often stipulated in state constitutions.

Paterson's police department is the largest to be taken over by the state in recent years, but it isn't the only one. Among the others are the 11-officer department in Lavallette, as well as three others in Union County.

Associated Press writer Claudia Lauer contributed to this article.

Sabres' Russian player won't take part in Pride night warmup

By JOHN WAWROW AP Hockey Writer

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Ilya Lyubushkin cited an anti-gay Kremlin law and fears of retribution at home in Russia for electing not to participate in the Buffalo Sabres' pregame warmup on the team's Pride night, when players wore jerseys with the team's rainbow-colored logo on the front in support of the LGBTQ+ community.

The team announced Lyubushkin's decision Monday before Buffalo's game against Montreal. Lyubushkin is from Moscow, where he has family and visits regularly in the offseason.

The 28-year-old defenseman was Buffalo's only healthy player not to take part in the warmups, before participating in the game. The remaining players took the ice wearing dark blue jerseys with the Sabres logo on the front encircled by a rainbow-colored outline, the same design as the team used for its social media avatar throughout the day.

A handful of players had their sticks wrapped in Pride tape, and the Sabres warmed up with commemorative pucks, featuring the date and both teams' logos in rainbow colors. As in the Sabres' past two Pride Nights, the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus sang the American and Canadian national anthems.

"We continue to advocate for under-represented groups in hockey and hope that our Pride Night, like many across the league, sparks meaningful conversation and encourages support for the LGBTQIA+ community," the team said in a statement.

"Our team feels strongly that one way to garner support is through wearing Pride jerseys and using Pride tape in warmups," the team said. Without mentioning Lyubushkin specifically, the Sabres added: "We are aware of general threats to certain players, and understand their decision to forego risk."

Sabres captain Kyle Okposo, whose father is from Nigeria and faced discrimination for being Black upon immigrating to Minnesota, defended his teammate while citing the importance of celebrating a Pride night.

"We support Boosh (Lyubushkin) in this room, and we want to make sure that he's comfortable and we respect his decisions," Okposo said.

"I have empathy for my teammate, for Boosh in the situation he's in, but think about it: If there's a closeted gay member of a team, and you have to have empathy for that person, too, in that situation," he said. "We have to realize that and that's part of being accepting, and that's why we want to be accepting."

Okposo also reiterated what he told The Associated Press last week when he said he's sensitive to Russian players' concerns because "we're frankly not capable of understanding, because we haven't been there."

It has not just been Russian players opting out of warmups that have put Pride nights around the NHL in the spotlight in recent months.

Ivan Provorov of the Philadelphia Flyers, James Reimer of the San Jose Sharks and Eric and Marc Staal of the Florida Panthers all refused to take part in warmups with Pride-themed jerseys, citing religious beliefs, while the New York Rangers, Minnesota Wild and Chicago Blackhawks opted not to have players wear them at all. Reimer and the Staal brothers are Canadian.

The Blackhawks, like Lyubushkin, cited a law passed last year in Russia that expanded the restrictions on supporting LGBTQ+ rights in the country as their reasoning.

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The Florida Panthers — whose star goaltender, Sergei Bobrovsky, is Russian — went forward with plans to wear Pride-themed jerseys on Thursday night before their home game against Toronto. Bobrovsky took part.

The Sabres' Pride Night Jerseys and sticks were scheduled to be auctioned off on the team's website, with proceeds going to local Pride organizations.

Sabres coach Don Granato said he left the discussion and decision to his players on how to handle Pride night.

"It was nice for our group to really take an event like this and have a lot of meaningful conversations, even leading up to it based on what's going around the world — around the U.S. and around the world — and actually have talks (about) more than hockey," Granato said. "I think the authenticity of our group has been really a silver-lining positive of the event that we're excited to have tonight."

Okposo said what he found important was that Sabres players were engaging in discussions on a sensitive topic.

"I think that is something that as a society as a whole, we're still grappling with, and as a hockey community, we're still grappling with as well," Okposo said. "But we're getting better. And we are going to continue to have these conversations and continue to get better. But it's extremely important to have this night tonight."

AP NHL: <https://apnews.com/hub/nhl> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Arizona governor: scheduled execution is unlikely next week

By JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — A vow by Arizona's governor not to proceed with any executions amid lingering questions about the rights of death row prisoners appears to have paused a scheduled execution next week, even though it hasn't officially been called off.

Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs won a key battle recently when the Arizona Supreme Court concluded a state law didn't require her to proceed with the planned April 6 execution of Aaron Gunches, even though his execution date wasn't canceled.

Hobbs has vowed no prisoners will be executed until there's confidence that the state isn't violating constitutional rights when enforcing the death penalty.

Gunches was scheduled to receive a lethal injection for the 2002 killing of Ted Price, who was his girlfriend's ex-husband. He had pleaded guilty to a murder charge in the shooting death near Mesa, Arizona.

Price's sister, Karen Price, had tried unsuccessfully to get the court to order Hobbs to carry out the execution. Price then asked for a stay of execution. In making that seemingly contradictory move, Karen Price's attorney expressed concern that the state was going let the court order authorizing Gunches' execution expire before factual issues in Karen Price's litigation could be resolved.

The governor's office said Monday that it isn't expecting the execution to be carried out next week. "As we explained in our prior statements and legal filings, the state does not expect to be in a position to carry out an execution by April 6," the governor's office said in a statement. Hobbs had previously appointed a retired federal magistrate judge to examine Arizona's procurement of lethal injection drugs and other death penalty protocols due to the state's history of mismanaging executions.

Colleen Clase, an attorney for Karen Price, didn't immediately return a call seeking comment Monday.

"The governor has made very clear the state is not prepared to go forward with the scheduled execution," said Dale Baich, a former federal public defender who teaches death penalty law at Arizona State University. "I would expect that it would not take place (next week)." Lawyers for Hobbs have said the state lacks staff with expertise to carry out an execution, was unable to find an IV team to carry out the lethal injection and doesn't currently have a contract for a pharmacist to compound the pentobarbital needed for an execution. They also said a top corrections leadership position that's critical to planning executions remains unfilled. Some requirements for carrying out executions under the state's death penalty protocol

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have not been met in Gunches' case.

The corrections department said the warrant of execution issued by the state Supreme Court wasn't read to Gunches. And Gunches wasn't moved to a special "death watch" cell where he would be monitored around the clock and remain until his execution.

In a statement Monday, the agency said that its death penalty protocols "have been paused as we conduct our systemic review of the execution process and complete the necessary steps to demonstrate efficacy and competency in the established protocols."

Arizona, which currently has 110 prisoners on death row, carried out three executions last year. That followed a nearly eight-year hiatus brought on by criticism that a 2014 execution was botched and because of difficulties obtaining execution drugs. Since then, the state has been criticized for taking too long to insert an IV for lethal injection into a condemned prisoner's body and for denying the Arizona Republic permission to witness the three executions.

Gunches, who is not a lawyer, represented himself in November when he asked the Supreme Court to issue his execution warrant so that — he said — justice could be served and the victim's families could get closure. In his last month in office, Republican Attorney General Mark Brnovich asked the court for a warrant to execute Gunches.

But Gunches then withdrew his request in early January, and newly elected Democratic Attorney General Kris Mayes later asked for the warrant to be withdrawn.

The state Supreme Court rejected Mayes' request, saying that it must grant an execution warrant if certain appellate proceedings have concluded and that those requirements were met in Gunches' case.

Gunches switched courses again, saying now that he wants to be executed and asked to be transferred to Texas, where, he wrote, "inmates can still get their sentences carried out." Arizona's high court denied the transfer.

Deputies accused of shoving guns in mouths of 2 Black men

By MICHAEL GOLDBERG Associated Press/Report for America

BRANDON, Miss. (AP) — Several deputies from a Mississippi sheriff's department being investigated by the Justice Department for possible civil rights violations have been involved in at least four violent encounters with Black men since 2019 that left two dead and another with lasting injuries, an Associated Press investigation found.

Two of the men allege that Rankin County sheriff's deputies shoved guns into their mouths during separate encounters. In one case, the deputy pulled the trigger, leaving the man with wounds that required parts of his tongue to be sewn back together. In one of the two fatal confrontations, the man's mother said a deputy knelt on her son's neck while he told them he couldn't breathe.

Police and court records obtained by the AP show that several deputies who were accepted to the sheriff's office's Special Response Team — a tactical unit whose members receive advanced training — were involved in each of the four encounters. In three of them, the heavily redacted documents don't indicate if they were serving in their normal capacity as deputies or as members of the unit.

Such units have drawn scrutiny since the January killing of Tyre Nichols, a Black father who died days after being severely beaten by Black members of a special police team in Memphis, Tennessee. Nichols' death led to a Justice Department probe of similar squads around the country that comes amid the broader public reckoning over race and policing sparked by the 2020 police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

In Mississippi, the police shooting of Michael Corey Jenkins led the Justice Department to open a civil rights investigation into the Rankin County Sheriff's Department. Jenkins said six white deputies burst into a home where he was visiting a friend, and one put a gun in his mouth and fired. Jenkins' hospital records, parts of which he shared with AP, show he had a lacerated tongue and broken jaw.

Deputies said Jenkins was shot after he pointed a gun at them; department officials have not answered multiple inquiries from the AP asking whether a weapon was found at the scene. Jenkins' attorney, Malik Shabazz, said his client didn't have a gun.

"They had complete control of him the entire time. Six officers had full and complete control of Michael

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the entire time," Shabazz said. "So that's just a fabrication."

Rankin County, which has about 120 sheriff's deputies serving its roughly 160,000 people, is predominantly white and just east of the state capital, Jackson, home to one of the highest percentages of Black residents of any major U.S. city. In the county seat of Brandon, a towering granite-and-marble monument topped by a statue of a Confederate soldier stands across the street from the sheriff's office.

In a notice of an upcoming lawsuit, attorneys for Jenkins and his friend Eddie Terrell Parker said on the night of Jan. 24 the deputies suddenly came into the home and proceeded to handcuff and beat them. They said the deputies stunned them with Tasers repeatedly over roughly 90 minutes and, at one point, forced them to lie on their backs as the deputies poured milk over their faces. The men restated the allegations in separate interviews with the AP.

When a Taser is used, it's automatically logged into the device's memory. The AP obtained the automated Taser records from the evening of Jan. 24. They show that deputies first fired one of the stun guns at 10:04 p.m. and fired one at least three more times over the next 65 minutes. However, those unredacted records might not paint a complete picture, as redacted records show that Tasers were turned on, turned off or used dozens more times during that period.

The Mississippi Bureau of Investigation was brought in to investigate the encounter. Its summary says a deputy shot Jenkins at approximately 11:45 p.m., or about 90 minutes after a Taser was first used, which matches the timeframe given by Parker and Jenkins. The deputy's name was not disclosed by the bureau.

Police say the raid was prompted by a report of drug activity at the home. Jenkins was charged with possessing between 2 and 10 grams of methamphetamine and aggravated assault on a police officer. Parker was charged with two misdemeanors — possession of paraphernalia and disorderly conduct. Jenkins and Parker say the raid came to a head when the deputy shot Jenkins through the mouth. He still has difficulty speaking and eating.

Another Black man, Carvis Johnson, alleged in a federal lawsuit filed in 2020 that a Rankin County deputy placed a gun into his mouth during a 2019 drug bust. Johnson was not shot.

There is no reason for an officer to place a gun in a suspect's mouth, and to have allegations of two such incidents is telling, said Samuel Walker, emeritus professor of criminal justice at the University of Nebraska.

"If there are incidents with the same kind of pattern of behavior, they have their own set of rules," he said. "So these are not just chance experiences. It looks like a very clear pattern."

Jenkins doesn't know the name of the deputy who shot him. In the heavily redacted incident report, an unidentified deputy wrote, "I noticed a gun." The unredacted sections don't say who shot Jenkins, only that he was taken to a hospital. Deputy Hunter Elward swore in a separate court document that Jenkins pointed the gun at him.

Elward's name also appears in police reports and court records from the two incidents in which suspects were killed.

The sheriff's department refused repeated interview requests and denied access to any of the deputies who were involved in the violent confrontations. The department has not said whether deputies presented a search warrant, and it's unclear if any have been disciplined or are still members of the special unit.

The news outlet Insider has been investigating the sheriff's department and persuaded a county judge to order the sheriff to turn over documents related to the deaths of four men in 2021. Chancery Judge Troy Farrell Odom expressed bewilderment that the department had refused to make the documents public.

"(The) day that our law enforcement officers start shielding this information from the public, all the while repeating, 'Trust us. We're from the government,' is the day that should startle all Americans," Odom wrote.

The AP requested body camera or dashcam footage from the night of the Jenkins raid. Jason Dare, an attorney for the sheriff's department, said there was no record of either.

Mississippi doesn't require police officers to wear body cameras. Incident reports and court records tie deputies from the raid to three other violent encounters with Black men.

During a 2019 standoff, Elward said Pierre Woods pointed a gun at him while running at deputies. Deputies then shot and killed him. In a statement to the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation obtained by the

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AP, Elward said he fired at Woods eight times. Police say they recovered a handgun at the scene of the Woods shooting.

Court records place Christian Dedmon, another deputy who shot at Woods, at the Jenkins raid.

Dedmon was also among deputies involved in a 2019 arrest of Johnson, according to the lawsuit Johnson filed alleging that one of the deputies put a gun in his mouth as they searched him for drugs. Johnson is currently imprisoned for selling methamphetamine.

Other documents obtained by the AP detail another violent confrontation between Elward and Damien Cameron, a 29-year-old man with a history of mental illness. He died in July 2021 after being arrested by Elward and Deputy Luke Stickman, who also opened fire on Woods during the 2019 standoff. A grand jury declined to bring charges in the case last October.

In an incident report, Elward wrote that while responding to a vandalism call, he repeatedly shocked Cameron with a Taser, punched and grappled with Cameron at the home of his mother, Monica Lee. He said after getting Cameron to his squad car, he again stunned him to get him to pull his legs into the vehicle.

After going back inside to retrieve his Taser, deputies returned to find Cameron unresponsive. Elward wrote that he pulled Cameron from the car and performed CPR, but Cameron was later declared dead at a hospital.

Lee, who witnessed the confrontation, told the AP that after subduing her son, Elward kneeled on his back for several minutes. She said when Stickman arrived, he kneeled on her son's neck while handcuffing him, and that her son complained he couldn't breathe.

Lee said she later went outside, hoping to talk to her son before the deputies drove him away.

"I walked outside to tell him goodbye and that I loved him, and that I would try to see him the next day. That's when I noticed they were on the driver's side of the car doing CPR on him," Lee said. "I fell to the ground screaming and hollering."

Michael Goldberg 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. Follow him on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/mikergoldberg>.

What can Google's AI-powered Bard do? We tested it for you

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

To use, or not to use, Bard? That is the Shakespearean question an Associated Press reporter sought to answer while testing out Google's artificially intelligent chatbot.

The recently rolled-out bot dubbed Bard is the internet search giant's answer to the ChatGPT tool that Microsoft has been melding into its Bing search engine and other software.

During several hours of interaction, the AP learned Bard is quite forthcoming about its unreliability and other shortcomings, including its potential for mischief in next year's U.S. presidential election. Even as it occasionally warned of the problems it could unleash, Bard repeatedly emphasized its belief that it will blossom into a force for good.

At one point in its recurring soliloquies about its potential upsides, Bard dreamed about living up to the legacy of the English playwright that inspired its name.

Bard explained that its creators at Google "thought Shakespeare would be a good role model for me, as he was a master of language and communication."

But the chatbot also found some admirable traits in "HAL," the fictional computer that killed some of a spacecraft's crew in the 1968 movie "2001: A Space Odyssey." Bard hailed HAL's intelligence calling it "an interesting character" before acknowledging its dark side.

"I think HAL is a cautionary tale about the dangers of artificial intelligence," Bard assessed.

WHAT'S BETTER — BARD OR BING?

Bard praised ChatGPT, describing it as "a valuable tool that can be used for a variety of purposes, and I am excited to see how it continues to develop in the future." But Bard then asserted that it is just as

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intelligent as its rival, which was released late last year by its creator, the Microsoft-backed OpenAI.

"I would say that I am on par with ChatGPT," Bard said. "We both have our own strengths and weaknesses, and we both have the ability to learn and grow."

During our wide-ranging conversation, Bard didn't display any of the disturbing tendencies that have cropped up in the AI-enhanced version of Microsoft's Bing search engine, which has likened another AP reporter to Hitler and tried to persuade a New York Times reporter to divorce his wife.

IT'S FUNNY, BUT TAMER THAN BING

Bard did get a little goopy at one point when asked to write a Shakespearean sonnet and responded seductively in one of the three drafts that it quickly created.

"I love you more than words can ever say, And I will always be there for you," Bard effused. "You are my everything, And I will never let you go. So please accept this sonnet as a token Of my love for you, And know that I will always be yours."

But Bard seems to be deliberately tame most of the time, and probably for good reason, given what's at stake for Google, which has carefully cultivated a reputation for trustworthiness that has established its dominant search engine as the de facto gateway to the internet.

An artificial intelligence tool that behaved as erratically as ChatGPT periodically might trigger a backlash that could damage Google's image and perhaps undercut its search engine, the hub of a digital advertising empire that generated more than \$220 billion in revenue last year. Microsoft, in contrast, can afford to take more risks with the edgier ChatGPT because it makes more of its money from licensing software for personal computers.

BARD ADMITS IT'S NOT PERFECT

Google has programmed Bard to ensure it warns its users that it's prone to mistakes.

Some inaccuracies are fairly easy to spot. For instance, when asked for some information about the AP reporter questioning it, Bard got most of the basics right, most likely by plucking tidbits from profiles posted on LinkedIn and Twitter.

But Bard mysteriously also spit out inaccuracies about this reporter's academic background (describing him as a graduate of University of California, Berkeley, instead of San Jose State University) and professional background (incorrectly stating that he began his career at The Wall Street Journal before also working at The New York Times and The Washington Post).

When asked to produce a short story about disgraced Theranos CEO Elizabeth Holmes, Bard summed up most of the highlights and lowlights of her saga. But one of Bard's three drafts incorrectly reported that Holmes was convicted of all the felony charges of fraud and conspiracy leveled against her during a four-month trial. Another version accurately reported Holmes was convicted on four counts of fraud and conspiracy without mentioning she was acquitted on four other charges (the jury hung on three other charges that were subsequently dismissed by prosecutors).

"I am still under development, and I am not perfect," Bard cautioned at one point. "I can sometimes make mistakes, and I can sometimes be misunderstood. I am also aware that my technology can be used for both good and evil."

WHAT'S NEXT FOR BARD?

Although Bard insisted it doesn't have a dark side, it acknowledged it can be used to damage reputations, disseminate propaganda that could incite violence and manipulate elections.

"I could be used to create fake news articles or social media posts that could spread misinformation about candidates or their policies," Bard warned. "I could also be used to suppress voter turnout by spreading discouraging messages or making it difficult for people to find information about how to vote."

On the lighter side, Bard proved helpful in finding interesting coloring books for adults and hit some notes that resonated during a discussion of rock and roll. When asked who is the greatest guitarist of all time, Bard responded with a broad list of candidates ranging from well-known rock artists such as Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin to jazz virtuosos like Django Reinhardt before making the case for Jimi Hendrix "as a strong contender for the title, his music continues to influence and inspire guitarists around the world."

Bard also seemed familiar with contemporary artists, such as Wet Leg, which recently won a Grammy

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award for best alternative music album. "I've been listening to their debut album a lot lately and I really enjoy it. I think they have a bright future ahead of them," Bard said, and cited "Ur Mom" and "Chaise Longue" as its favorite songs by the group so far.

Even with Bard's occasional miscues, it seemed savvy enough to ask about its potential role in reaching the singularity, a term popularized by computer scientist and author Ray Kurzweil to describe a turning point in the future when computers will be smarter than humans.

"Some people believe that I am a big step toward the singularity," Bard said. "I believe that I am a valuable tool that can help people to learn and understand the world around them. However, I do not believe that I am the singularity, and I do not believe that I will ever be able to replace human intelligence."

This story was corrected to reflect that the technology that likened an AP reporter to Hitler was done by an AI-enhanced version of Microsoft's Bing search engine. An earlier version said the comparison was made by the standalone ChatGPT service.

Black, Hispanic investors struggle with faith in crypto

By CORA LEWIS and ALEXANDRA OLSON AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — A software developer twice invested his savings in cryptocurrencies, only to lose it all. But he still promotes it to the Black community and would like to get back in himself.

A recent college graduate and a single mom are dabbling hopefully in bitcoin after attending a crypto workshop sponsored by rapper Jay-Z at the public housing complex where the hip-hop star grew up.

But a former executive at a cryptocurrency exchange feels disillusioned by the false promise of crypto helping her family in Ethiopia's war-torn Tigray region.

All were drawn by the idea of crypto as a pathway to wealth-building outside of traditional financial systems with a long history of racial discrimination and indifference to the needs of low-income communities. But crypto's meltdown over the past year has dealt a blow to that narrative, fueling a debate between those who continue to believe in its future and skeptics who say misleading advertising and celebrity-fueled hype have drawn vulnerable people to a risky and unproven asset class.

The collapse of two crypto-friendly banks this month, Silvergate Capital Corp. and Signature Bank, complicates the picture. Their failure was a setback for crypto companies that relied on the banks to convert digital currencies to U.S. dollars. Yet the crisis bolstered Bitcoin, the oldest and most popular digital currency, by reinforcing a distrust in the banking system that helped give rise to cryptocurrencies in the first place.

Mariela Regalado, 33, and Jimmy Bario, 22, neighbors at the Marcy Houses complex in Brooklyn, started putting \$20 or \$30 into bitcoin every two weeks or so after attending "Bitcoin Academy," a workshop sponsored last summer by Jay-Z and Jack Dorsey, co-founder of Block Inc., the parent company of mobile payment system Cash App.

"I don't see it as something that's going to, you know, take me out of Brooklyn and buy me a \$2 million mansion in Texas," said Regalado, an educational consultant and mother of a toddler. "But if it happens, I'm all for it."

Only a small minority of the U.S. population owns cryptocurrency, but adoption increased during the COVID-19 pandemic as low interest rates made borrowing money and investing in risky assets more attractive. Prices peaked in 2021, and a constellation of apps, exchanges and even ATM-like crypto machines made buying digital coins easy.

But the drawbacks of crypto played out dramatically after prices cratered in 2022, wiping out millions in investments and leading to a cascade of bankruptcies and layoffs at crypto exchanges, lenders and other companies. Along with its volatility, crypto lacks protections such as deposit insurance since it's not controlled by any single institution. Largely unregulated, the industry is susceptible to scams, hacks and fraud.

Cryptocurrencies are built on decentralized ledgers — usually blockchain — allowing peer-to-peer transactions without a middleman like a bank or government. That continues to appeal to many people who face barriers to traditional wealth-building avenues such as homeownership, college education, or the stock

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market, said Terri Bradford, a payment specialist at the Kansas City Federal Reserve, who has researched crypto's popularity among many Black investors.

"It doesn't appear that a whole lot of people are dissuaded from crypto even though we have observed what has happened," Bradford said.

According to Pew Research Center polls in 2021 and 2022, some 20% of Black, Hispanic and Asian U.S. adults have bought, traded or used cryptocurrency, compared with 13% of white adults. Bradford's research, which examined data from Pew Research Center and the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, found that Black investors are more likely to own crypto than stocks or mutual funds, while the opposite is true for white investors.

Black and Latino crypto enthusiasts have formed social media groups, written books and organized summits to promote minority developers in the space and champion blockchain technology's potential to create more equitable systems in finance and beyond.

But crypto companies also sought to capture a broader market of retail investors through lucrative sponsorship deals with celebrities and sports teams, many aimed directly at Black and Hispanic consumers by touting crypto as an economic equalizer.

Coin Cloud, a company that makes ATMs for cryptocurrencies and which has filed for bankruptcy, launched an ad featuring movie director Spike Lee deriding "old money" as "exploitative," "oppressive" and "white," and crypto as "positive" and "inclusive."

Tonantzin Carmona, a Brookings Institute fellow who researches crypto's impact on minority communities, said that for inexperienced investors, this sort of high-profile hype easily obscures crypto's drawbacks.

Carmona considers crypto's marketing to racial minorities part of a legacy of "predatory inclusion" in the tradition of payday loans and subprime mortgages — risky services that promise access to financing that would otherwise be out of reach.

"You'll have a marginalized group, a community that has been historically excluded from accessing products, services, opportunities, and all of a sudden they're told that they will get access to maybe some type of alternative," Carmona said. "But this access often comes with conditions that undermine the benefits or that will reproduce insecurity for these very same communities."

Rahwa Berhe first started investing in crypto while studying alternative financial products during a master's degree program at the University of Washington in Seattle. Berhe, who was born in Chicago and grew up in Seattle, tried to forge a career in crypto, leading a listing team for digital assets at an exchange for four years, only to feel isolated as a Black woman.

"It's like you took all the tech bros and the finance bros and put them together. I didn't know where I fit in," Berhe said.

Her disillusion deepened when crypto couldn't help her family in Tigray during the conflict there from 2020 to 2022 because the lack of infrastructure and access to electricity made transfers impossible. When she tried to point out these realities to some in the crypto community, she was dismissed as "negative" by social media posters breezily celebrating that the hashtag #eth, for Ethiopia, was introducing people to the digital coin Ether.

Berhe now works with a research lab founded by Stanford University and the USC Shoah Foundation, exploring how decentralized web tools can be applied to archiving Africana artifacts. As for cryptocurrency, she is done for now.

"It was great until it wasn't," Berhe said.

Crypto advocates argue minority communities deserve access to a potentially lucrative asset class that isn't going away. Many believe another boom is inevitable and liken last year's collapse to the dotcom bust of the 2000s, which, far from dooming the tech industry, only weeded out bad actors and bolstered winners like Amazon.

Andre Mego, Bitcoin Academy's program manager, said crypto is an accessible way to teach financial literacy to a community where many find concepts like wealth-building investment abstract and out of reach. At the end of the summer workshop, participants were each gifted \$1,000 in bitcoin, most of them through Cash App, which launched bitcoin trading in 2018.

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"When we talk about accessibility, that provides motivation. Because for anybody thinking about investment, they could think, 'That's a big thing in the future. That's something that I have to save up so much money for. I don't know if I'm allowed to do this. Am I even part of this conversation?'" Mego said.

Bario said Bitcoin Academy's workshop at the Marcy Houses complex was his first meaningful introduction to personal finance, though he graduated last spring with a degree in economics from Lafayette University. Growing up, he said, investing was not a realistic possibility in his family, which relied on income from his father, who worked as taxi driver back in Honduras.

"I always thought, as soon as you get your money, it's time to spend it — as soon as you get that Friday paycheck," said Bario, who now works as a soccer coach.

Omid Malekan, who teaches a course on blockchain and cryptocurrency at Columbia Business School, said he hopes the latest crash will disabuse people of the idea that crypto is a reliable avenue for getting rich quick. But Malekan said the crypto industry needs more diversity, not less, and that young Black and Hispanic people should be encouraged to pursue careers in developing a technology he believes will be the future of finance.

"The people who are attracted to crypto because of the way the technology works and because of the promise of a more global, more accessible financial system — those people, it takes more than just prices going down to scare them away," Malekan said.

Tyrone Norris, the software developer, said he learned to be cautious about how to buy crypto the hard way.

Growing up in Washington, D.C., Norris studied computer programming in high school and took college courses, but never graduated because he couldn't afford to go full time. He has worked as a contractor, moving around the country and never owning a home or accessing a workplace retirement plan.

When Norris first decided to invest in crypto, he poked around on exchanges and chose MANA, a token powering the 3D virtual world Decentraland, because it shared his ex-girlfriend's name and he saw it as a sign.

He went all in, emptying his bank account of \$4,000. When his MANA investment doubled, he started betting on whichever coins he thought would be most lucrative. But one exchange turned out to be scam, and another based in New Zealand lost millions in a hack. Norris's investment went to zero, but two years later, he got back in the game with another \$5,000. Again, he watched it soar, then crash as the 2022 "crypto winter" set in.

"I was a rookie — I didn't understand what I was doing. I was putting my crypto into dangerous places," Norris said.

For now, he is taking a break from software development to focus on building a crypto-backed hip-hop gaming project. Norris said he has no regrets because investing introduced him to the possibilities of the blockchain.

"I come from nothing," he said. "I don't come in expecting anything to be fair."

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.

Silicon Valley Bank collapse concerns founders of color

By KAT STAFFORD and CLAIRE SAVAGE Associated Press

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Banking expert Aaron Klein, a senior fellow in Economic Studies at the Brookings Institution, said SVB's collapse could exacerbate racial disparities.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This article has been corrected to say that Known Holdings is a finance and asset management firm focused on the sustainable growth of minority-managed funds.

Stafford, based in Detroit, is a national investigative race writer for the AP's Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter: https://twitter.com/kat__stafford. Savage reported from Chicago and 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.

New source of water found in moon samples from China mission

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Scientists have discovered a new and renewable source of water on the moon for future explorers in lunar samples from a Chinese mission.

Water was embedded in tiny glass beads in the lunar dirt where meteorite impacts occur. These shiny, multicolored glass beads were in samples returned from the moon by China in 2020.

The beads range in size from the width of one hair to several hairs; the water content was just a miniscule fraction of that, said Hejiu Hui of Nanjing University, who took part in the study.

Since there are billions if not trillions of these impact beads, that could amount to substantial amounts of water, but mining it would be tough, according to the team.

"Yes, it will require lots and lots of glass beads," Hui said in an email. "On the other hand, there are lots and lots of beads on the moon."

These beads could continually yield water thanks to the constant bombardment by hydrogen in the solar wind. The findings, published Monday in the journal *Nature Geoscience*, are based on 32 glass beads

randomly selected from lunar dirt returned from the Chang'e 5 moon mission.

More samples will be studied, Hui said.

These impact beads are everywhere, the result of the cooling of melted material ejected by incoming space rocks. Water could be extracted by heating the beads, possibly by future robotic missions. More studies are needed to determine whether this would be feasible and, if so, whether the water would be safe to drink.

This shows "water can be recharged on the moon's surface ... a new water reservoir on the moon," Hui said.

Previous studies found water in glass beads formed by lunar volcanic activity, based on samples returned by the Apollo moonwalkers more than a half-century ago. These, too, could provide water not only for use by future crews, but for rocket fuel.

NASA aims to put astronauts back on the lunar surface by the end of 2025. They'll aim for the south pole where permanently shadowed craters are believed to be packed with frozen water.

___ The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science and Educational Media Group. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Wisconsin school bans Miley, Dolly duet from class concert

By HARM VENHUIZEN Associated Press/Report for America

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Administrators at a Wisconsin elementary school stopped a first-grade class from performing a Miley Cyrus and Dolly Parton duet promoting LGBTQ acceptance because the song "could be perceived as controversial."

Students at Heyer Elementary School in Waukesha had prepared a rendition of "Rainbowland" for their spring concert, but school officials struck the song from the lineup last week. Parents in the district say the decision was made because the song encourages LGBTQ acceptance and references rainbows.

Superintendent James Sebert, who did not immediately return a call on Monday, confirmed to Fox6 that administrators had removed "Rainbowland" from the first-grade concert because it might not be "appropriate for the age and maturity level of the students." He also cited a school board policy against raising controversial issues in classrooms.

Sebert has previously prohibited rainbows and pride flags from being displayed in Waukesha classrooms and suspended the school district's equity and diversity work in 2021.

"Let's all dig down deep inside, brush the judgment and fear aside," the song from Cyrus' 2017 album "Younger Now" goes. "Living in a Rainbowland, where you and I go hand in hand. Oh, I'd be lying if I said this was fine, all the hurt and the hate going on here."

First-grade teacher Melissa Tempel said she chose the song because its message seemed universal and sweet. The class concert's theme was "The World" and included other songs such as "Here Comes the Sun," by The Beatles and "What a Wonderful World," by Louis Armstrong.

"My students were just devastated. They really liked this song and we had already begun singing it," Tempel said Monday.

Administrators also initially banned the song "Rainbow Connection" from The Muppets but later reversed that decision, according to Tempel.

Parents have been angered by the song's removal, Tempel said. But she was more concerned about what the ban and other district policies against expressing LGBTQ support meant for students.

"These confusing messages about rainbows are ultimately creating a culture that seems unsafe towards queer people," she said.

Spokespersons for Parton and Cyrus did not immediately respond to emails on Monday asking the artists' thoughts on the ban.

Wisconsin school boards races, including in Waukesha, have become increasingly partisan in recent years. Republicans saw big gains across the state's school board races in 2022 and have used the positions to challenge policies from rules about transgender kids to COVID-19 restrictions.

Harm Venhuizen 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. Follow Venhuizen on Twitter.

Zelenskyy, atomic agency chief discuss nuclear plant fears

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine (AP) — The U.N.'s atomic energy chief warned during a meeting Monday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy that the perilous situation at Europe's largest nuclear plant "isn't getting any better" as relentless fighting in the area keeps the facility at risk of a disaster.

The Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant's six reactors are in shutdown and it is receiving the electricity it needs to prevent a reactor meltdown through just one remaining power line. It has on occasion had to switch to emergency diesel generators to power its essential cooling systems.

In a meeting with Zelenskyy in southern Ukraine covered exclusively by The Associated Press, International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General Rafael Mariano Grossi said the situation at the plant remains tense because of the heavy military presence around it and a blackout that recently struck the facility, something that has occurred repeatedly since Russian forces took it over last year.

Grossi plans to visit the plant this week for the second time following Russia's invasion 13 months ago. The Vienna-based agency has staff permanently deployed at the plant since Grossi's last visit in September.

Earlier this month, fighting interrupted power supply to the plant for half a day, forcing staff to activate backup generators.

Grossi had expressed alarm at that development.

"Each time we are rolling a dice," he told his agency at the time. "And if we allow this to continue time after time, then one day our luck will run out."

Grossi and Zelenskyy met in the the city of Zaporizhzhia, which is in Ukrainian-held territory, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) northeast of the nuclear plant with the same name.

The IAEA said in January it was placing teams of experts at all four of Ukraine's nuclear power plants to reduce the risk of accidents, including the now-closed Chernobyl plant whose deadly nuclear accident in 1986 spread fallout over much of Europe.

Grossi emphasized that his seventh trip to Ukraine underlined his commitment and support for "as long as it takes."

Also attending the meeting were other IAEA officials, the head of the presidential office, Andriy Yermak, and the head of nuclear operator Energoatom, Petro Kotin.

While in Zaporizhzhia, Zelenskyy also inspected military positions in the partially-occupied province and awarded soldiers military honors. He visited wounded soldiers at a hospital and an apartment building that Kyiv claims was hit by a missile on Wednesday, killing at least one person and injuring more than 30.

Residents were still shocked by the experience.

"It's terrifying. I cannot find the words to tell you," said Hanna Budkova, 39, who was in a busy playground in front of the apartment block with her nearly 2-year-old daughter. "I'm afraid to go anywhere near the windows."

Zelenskyy later visited Nikopol, a frequently shelled city across the Dnieper River from the nuclear power plant, according to the presidential office.

Elsewhere, two people were killed and 29 wounded Monday when Russian forces shelled the city of Sloviansk, in the partially occupied eastern Donetsk region, officials said.

Video footage of the aftermath showed damaged residential buildings, debris in the streets and vehicles on fire. Zelenskyy described the attack as "terrorism."

Russia has denied targeting residential areas even though artillery and rocket strikes have hit Ukrainian apartment buildings and civilian infrastructure daily during the war.

The Sloviansk attack followed a typical pattern of long-range shelling adopted by the Kremlin's forces, especially in recent months as the fighting became deadlocked during the winter.

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In the eastern Donetsk region, about 10 cities and villages were shelled by Russian forces over the previous 24 hours, Ukraine's presidential office reported.

Russian missiles hit the city of Avdiivka, damaging residential buildings, a hotel and a courthouse, it said. Avdiivka Mayor Vitali Barabash said utility companies are being evacuated from the front-line city, as it "resembles more and more a landscape from post-apocalyptic movies."

Attacks also intensified in the Zaporizhzhia region, where 14 settlements on the front line were shelled, authorities said.

In the partially occupied Kherson region, the Ukrainian-controlled part of the province was bombarded 20 times, wounding four people, the presidential office said.

Several explosions shook the Russia-occupied city of Melitopol in the Zaporizhzhia region, damaging a building where Russian security forces are quartered, said the exiled elected mayor Ivan Fyodorov. The Russian-installed authorities said "artillery shelling" of Melitopol partially destroyed a vocational school building, damaged several other buildings and wounded four people.

Earlier, Zelenskyy met in Kyiv with British actor Orlando Bloom, according to Yermak, the head of the presidential office. Bloom, a UNICEF goodwill ambassador, arrived over the weekend and visited its suburb of Irpin.

At his meeting with Zelenskyy, Bloom said "he was struck by the courage and resilience of Ukrainians, who despite the war remain strong," Yermak wrote.

Bloom "will support projects to provide humanitarian assistance and restore infrastructure, focused on ensuring the interests of Ukrainian children," the official said.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Monday at a meeting in the Netherlands that Germany has fulfilled its promised delivery of 18 advanced Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine. Canada, Norway and Poland also have sent such tanks to Ukraine.

This has corrected that the Zaporizhzhia plant is not currently providing power.

Follow AP's coverage of the war in Ukraine: <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

Patriots owner Robert Kraft campaigns against antisemitism

By DEEPA BHARATH Associated Press

New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft faced the camera during a video call, pointing to a small, sky-blue lapel pin on his blazer.

The pin is the symbol of a \$25 million "Stand Up to Jewish Hate" campaign launched Monday by the 81-year-old billionaire through his Foundation to Combat Antisemitism, aiming to raise awareness nationwide about soaring incidents of antisemitism online and in person. The campaign will feature emotive ads to be introduced by stars of top television shows such as NBC's "The Voice," and the "Kelly Clarkson Show," and Bravo's "Watch What Happens Live with Andy Cohen."

"This little blue square represents the Jewish population in the United States – 2.4%," said Kraft, who was raised in Brookline, Massachusetts, in an observant Orthodox Jewish family. "But we're the victims of 55% of the hate crimes in this country."

The ads are intended to tug at the heartstrings of non-Jewish Americans, said Matthew Berger, the foundation's executive director. One of the ads, set to premiere Monday, shows a non-Jewish neighbor painting over a garage door vandalized with the Nazi swastika and the words "No Jews," concluding with the message: "Hate only wins if you let it."

Another ad focuses on online hate: A Jewish teen is shown crestfallen as he is trolled after posting a video of his bar mitzvah. Soon after, he sees a Harlem choir tag him with their version of his worship song. He sings along with the choir as these words pop up on screen: "Voices of support are louder than words of hate."

Berger said the foundation worked with its creative team to find scenarios "that would be specifically

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impactful and showcase what antisemitism looks like." He said the ads will be featured during the NFL draft and the NBA and NHL playoffs, as well as on social media, promoted by prominent influencers.

The campaign's launch follows last week's release of a report by the Anti-Defamation League asserting that antisemitic incidents in the U.S. rose 36% in 2022. The report tracked 3,697 incidents of harassment, vandalism and assault aimed at Jewish people and communities last year. It's the third time in five years that the annual total has been the highest ever recorded since the group began collecting data in 1979.

The Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, based at California State University, San Bernardino, reported last week that Jews were the most targeted of all U.S. religious groups in 2022 in 21 major cities, accounting for 78% of religious hate crimes.

Brian Levin, the center's director, said he is concerned about brazen, public expressions of antisemitism, and the proliferation of antisemitic tropes and conspiracy theories online. A campaign against antisemitism which solicits the support of non-Jewish people can help create awareness, he said.

"It is so important to show that antisemitism is un-American," Levin said. "If we can show non-Jews as allies, that could be powerful."

In October, Kraft's foundation aired a 30-second ad during a Patriots-Jets game urging the public to speak out against antisemitism. That ad came after antisemitic comments made by the music mogul formerly known as Kanye West and basketball star Kyrie Irving's apparent support for an antisemitic film.

"The rise of antisemitism, to me, is the real breakdown of what this society stands on," Kraft said. "In my lifetime, I have never seen the way things are right now with this hatred against Jews."

The mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh on Oct. 27, 2018, in which 11 people were killed in the nation's deadliest antisemitic attack, was a catalytic moment in his life, said Kraft. Two months after the shooting, he attended a Shabbat service at the synagogue, the day before his team was to play the Steelers.

Kraft established the foundation a year later, after he received the \$1 million Genesis Prize, awarded to Jews who have achieved significant professional success and are committed to Jewish values. The annual award is given by the Genesis Foundation in partnership with the Israeli Prime Minister's Office and the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Over the past decade, Kraft has encountered much turbulence in his personal and professional life.

In 2015, he and his team got caught up in the so-called "Deflategate" scandal. The NFL issued a 243-page report after an investigation found that Patriots employees violated the league's rules covering game balls and that the team's star quarterback, Tom Brady, was "at least generally aware" of plans to deflate the footballs to his liking. Kraft accepted the team penalty of a \$1 million fine and loss of two draft picks.

In 2020, Florida prosecutors dropped a misdemeanor charge against Kraft after courts blocked their use of video that allegedly showed him paying for massage parlor sex. He issued a statement saying he "hurt and disappointed" his family, friends, co-workers, fans and others who hold him "to a higher standard."

"I expect to be judged not by my words, but by my actions. And through those actions, I hope to regain your confidence and respect," Kraft said at the time.

In recent months, he has become a powerful voice against antisemitism. Kraft says he treasures the spiritual values he inherited from his parents, especially his father who skipped television and other pastimes to read the Torah.

"I was privileged to receive that upbringing," he said. "It gave me a spiritual core no amount of money can buy."

Kraft hopes the ad campaign will help "educate and empower all Americans to stand up against Jewish hate" and the blue square he wears on his lapel will become "a unifying symbol of solidarity" in that quest.

"I hope this campaign calls out hate against all communities – Black people, the LGBTQ community – just anyone who is experiencing hate," he said. "My hope is this will become an effort that builds bridges with all Americans."

Associated Press religion coverage receives support through the AP's collaboration with The Conversation US, with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

Amid strained US ties, China finds unlikely friend in Utah

By ALAN SUDERMAN and SAM METZ Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — China's global campaign to win friends and influence policy has blossomed in a surprising place: Utah, a deeply religious and conservative state with few obvious ties to the world's most powerful communist country.

An investigation by The Associated Press has found that China and its U.S.-based advocates spent years building relationships with the state's officials and lawmakers. Those efforts have paid dividends at home and abroad, the AP found: Lawmakers delayed legislation Beijing didn't like, nixed resolutions that conveyed displeasure with its actions and expressed support in ways that enhanced the Chinese government's image.

Its work in Utah is emblematic of a broader effort by Beijing to secure allies at the local level as its relations with the U.S. and its Western allies have turned acrimonious. U.S. officials say local leaders are at risk of being manipulated by China and have deemed the influence campaign a threat to national security.

Beijing's success in Utah shows "how pervasive and persistent China has been in trying to influence America," said Frank Montoya Jr., a retired FBI counterintelligence agent who lives in Utah.

"Utah is an important foothold," he said. "If the Chinese can succeed in Salt Lake City, they can also make it in New York and elsewhere."

Security experts say that China's campaign is widespread and tailored to local communities. In Utah, the AP found, Beijing and pro-China advocates appealed to lawmakers' affiliations with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, better known as the Mormon church, which is the state's dominant religion and one that has long dreamed of expanding in China.

Beijing's campaign in Utah has raised concerns among state and federal lawmakers and drawn the attention of the Justice Department.

A state legislator told the AP he was interviewed by the FBI after introducing a resolution in 2020 expressing solidarity with China early in the coronavirus pandemic. A Utah professor who has advocated for closer ties between Washington and Beijing told the AP he's been questioned by the FBI twice. The FBI declined to comment.

'DECEPTIVE AND COERCIVE'

Beijing's interest in locally focused influence campaigns is not a secret. China's leader, Xi Jinping, said during a trip to the U.S. in 2015 that "without successful cooperation at the sub-national level it would be very difficult to achieve practical results for cooperation at the national level."

A spokesman for the Chinese embassy in Washington told the AP that China "values its relationship with Utah" and any "words and deeds that stigmatize and smear these sub-national exchanges are driven by ulterior political purposes."

It is not unusual for countries, including the U.S., to engage in local diplomacy. U.S. officials and security experts have stressed that many Chinese language and cultural exchanges have no hidden agendas. However, they said, few nations have so aggressively courted local leaders in ways that raise national security concerns.

In its annual threat assessment released earlier this month, the U.S. intelligence community reported that China is "redoubling" its local influence campaigns in the face of stiffening resistance at the national level. Beijing believes, the report said, that "local officials are more pliable than their federal counterparts."

The National Counterintelligence and Security Center in July warned state and local officials about "deceptive and coercive" Chinese influence operations. And FBI Director Christopher Wray last year accused China of seeking to "cultivate talent early—often state and local officials—to ensure that politicians at all levels of government will be ready to take a call and advocate on behalf of Beijing's agenda."

Authorities in other countries, including Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, have sounded similar alarms.

Those concerns have arisen amid escalating disputes between the U.S. and China over trade, human rights, the future of Taiwan and China's tacit support for Russia during its invasion of Ukraine. Tensions

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worsened last month when a suspected Chinese spy balloon was discovered and shot down in U.S. airspace.

LEGISLATIVE AND PR VICTORIES

U.S. officials have provided scant details about which states and localities the Chinese government has targeted. The AP focused its investigation on Utah because China appears to have cultivated a significant number of allies in the state and its advocates are well-known to lawmakers.

Relying on dozens of interviews with key players and the review of hundreds of pages of records, text messages and emails obtained through public records' requests, the AP found China won frequent legislative and public relations victories in Utah.

China-friendly lawmakers, for example, delayed action for a year to ban Chinese-funded Confucius Institutes at state universities, according to the legislation's sponsor. The Chinese language and cultural programs have been described by U.S. national security officials as propaganda instruments. The University of Utah and Southern Utah University closed their institutes by last year.

In 2020, China scored an image-boosting coup when Xi sent a note to a class of Utah fourth-graders thanking them for cards they'd sent wishing him a happy Chinese New Year. He encouraged them to "become young 'ambassadors' for Sino-American friendship."

Emails obtained by the AP show the Chinese Embassy and the students' Chinese teacher coordinated the letter exchange, which resulted in heavy coverage by state-controlled media in China.

A Chinese state media outlet reported the Utah students jubilantly exclaimed: "Grandpa Xi really wrote back to me. He's so cool!" Portraying China's most authoritarian leader in decades as a kindly grandfather is a familiar trope in Chinese propaganda.

Xi's letter garnered positive attention in Utah, too. A Republican legislator said on the state Senate floor that he "couldn't help but think how amazing it was" that the Chinese leader took the time to write such a "remarkable" letter. Another GOP senator gushed on his conservative radio show that Xi's letter "was so kind and so personal."

Dakota Cary, a China expert at the security firm Krebs Stamos Group, said in making such comments Utah lawmakers are "essentially acting as mouthpieces for the Chinese Communist Party" and legitimizing their ideas and narratives.

"Statements like these are exactly what China's goal is for influence campaigns," he said.

SPY AGENCY INTEREST

China's interest in Utah is not limited to its officials and advocates who are engaged in diplomacy, trade and education. U.S. officials have noted that China's civilian spy agency, the Ministry of State Security (MSS), has shown an interest in Utah, court records show.

In January, former graduate student Ji Chaoqun was sentenced to eight years in prison on charges related to spying for China. The Chicago student told an undercover agent he'd been tasked by his spy handlers "to meet people, some American friends." He was baptized at a Latter-day Saints church and told the undercover agent he'd "been going to Utah more often lately" before his arrest, according to his Facebook page and court records.

Ron Hansen, a former U.S. intelligence official from Utah, pleaded guilty to trying to sell classified information to China. Hansen said China's spy service had tasked him with assessing various U.S. politicians' views towards China. The FBI found the names of Utah elected officials among sensitive files he stored on his laptop, court records show. Hansen was sentenced in 2019 to serve 10 years in federal prison.

Hansen was well known in Utah political circles and helped organize the first ever annual U.S.-China National Governors Forum, which was held in 2011 in Salt Lake City, according to court records and interviews. The U.S. State Department canceled the forums in 2020 due to concerns about Chinese influence efforts.

'UTAH IS NOT LIKE WASHINGTON D.C.'

The AP found groups of up to 25 Utah lawmakers routinely took trips to China every other year since 2007. Lawmakers have partially used campaign donations to pay for the trade missions and cultural exchanges, while relying on China and host organizations to pay for other expenses.

On the trips, they've forged relationships with government officials and were quoted in Chinese state-

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owned media in ways that support Beijing's agenda.

"Utah is not like Washington D.C.," then Utah House Speaker Greg Hughes, a vocal supporter of former President Donald Trump, told the Chinese state media outlet in 2018 as the former president ratcheted up pressure on Beijing over trade. "Utah is a friend of China, an old friend with a long history."

In an interview last month with the AP, Hughes said the trips to China made him "bullish" about the country and prospects of improving trade. However, he said he now believes the visits were pretexts for Chinese officials to influence him and other lawmakers.

"It's a trip not worth taking," Hughes said.

Utah doesn't require public officials to report in detail their foreign travel or personal finances, so it's difficult to determine lawmakers' financial ties to China. Some of Utah's most pro-China legislators, however, have China-related personal business connections.

Sen. Curt Bramble told Courthouse News Service last year that his role as a part-time legislator and as a business consultant sometimes overlap and that he "had clients in China — a dozen at times — some of them on legislative tours, some on consulting."

In an interview with AP, Bramble said none of his clients are based in China; they only do business there. He declined to name them.

Bramble, a Republican who represents a conservative district, also rejected fears of undue Chinese influence in Utah.

"China's not going anywhere. China's going to be a world force. They're going to be a player for the foreseeable future and trying to understand what that implies for the United States or for the state of Utah and get a concept of that seems to be a valuable endeavor," he said.

TIES FORGED BY TWO UTAH RESIDENTS

Many of the Utah-China ties have been forged by two state residents with links to the Chinese government or to organizations that experts say are alleged front groups for China, including its civilian spy agency, the AP found.

The two men advocated for and against resolutions, set up meetings between Utah lawmakers and Chinese officials, accompanied legislators on trips to China and provided advice on the best way to cultivate favor with Beijing, according to emails and interviews.

In reviewing the AP's findings, legal experts said the men's connections with Chinese officials suggest that they should register with the Justice Department under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, known as FARA. The law generally requires anyone who works on behalf of a foreign entity to influence lawmakers or public perception, but its scope is the subject of significant debate and enforcement has been uneven.

"If I were representing either of these individuals, I would have significant concerns about FARA exposure," said Joshua Ian Rosenstein, an attorney who handles such matters.

One of the men, Taowen Le, has championed China to religious and political leaders in Utah for decades. Le, a Chinese citizen, moved to Utah in the 1980s and has been a professor of information technology at Weber State University since 1998. Le converted in 1990 to the Mormon faith.

From 2003 through 2017, Le had another job -- as a paid representative of China's Liaoning provincial government. Provincial governments are largely controlled by Beijing and Liaoning has had a longstanding "sister" relationship with Utah.

Le's advocacy continued after he said he left Liaoning's payroll, emails and interviews show. He has frequently forwarded messages from Chinese government officials to Utah lawmakers and helped the Chinese Embassy set up meetings with state officials.

After embassy officials tried unsuccessfully last year to get staff for Utah Gov. Spencer Cox to schedule a get-together with China's ambassador to the U.S., Le sent the governor a personal plea to take the meeting.

"I still remember and cherish what you told me at the New Year Party held at your home," Le wrote in a letter adorned with pictures of him and Cox posing together. "You told me that you trusted me to be a good messenger and friendship builder between Utah and China."

State Senate President Stuart Adams turned to Le when Utah was scrambling to obtain large quantities

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of drugs that Adams thought could be used as potential treatment against the coronavirus in early 2020, emails and interviews show.

Le, who belongs to the same congregation as Adams, said in an email to another lawmaker that he was able to get the Chinese Embassy to assign two staffers to work "tirelessly" on the request until it was fulfilled.

RELIGIOUS SALES PITCH

A hallmark of Le's approach is to utilize his religion in his pitches to lawmakers. He quoted scripture from the Bible and the Book of Mormon in his emails, text messages and letters, and sprinkled in positive comments that Russell Nelson, the church's president-prophet, has made about China.

Chinese officials have tried to cultivate friendly ties with the church. When visiting Utah, China's diplomats and officials often meet top church members as well as lawmakers, emails and other records show.

Expanding to China has been a top goal for the church, which plays a heavy role in Utah politics and the state's overall identity. Many of the state's residents lived abroad as missionaries, and several of Utah's public schools have robust K-12 Chinese immersion programs.

While the church has historically been an outspoken advocate for religious freedom, Le sought to stop Utah lawmakers from supporting religious figures or groups discriminated against by the Chinese government.

When a Utah lawmaker sponsored a resolution in 2021 condemning China's well-documented and brutal crackdown of its minority Muslim Uighurs, Le chastised the legislator in text messages and compared unflattering media coverage of the Chinese government to that of the church's founder, Joseph Smith Jr.

"Pray to God and seek guidance from the Holy Spirit as you ponder about these issues instead of solely relying on those biased media reports," Le said.

The resolution failed that year and a similar one introduced in January did not receive a hearing.

CHINA'S 'ADVANTAGES'

Le has served as a board member of the China Overseas Friendship Association, which has ties to the United Front Work Department -- a Chinese Communist Party organization the U.S. government says engages in covert and malign foreign influence operations.

A United Front publication profiled Le in 2020 after he attended a meeting in Beijing of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, a prestigious advisory body controlled by the Chinese Communist Party.

"I deeply feel the advantages of China's system," Le told the publication.

Le told the AP he was interviewed by the FBI in 2007 and 2018 about his Chinese government ties. He said his advocacy has always been self-directed.

"I don't consider myself a lobbyist because I'm not a lobbyist. I'm just someone who cherishes the relationship between the U.S. and China," Le said in an interview in his Weber State office.

Adams, the Senate president, said he feels otherwise.

"I do believe he's lobbying," Adams said. "He advocates very hard on China."

LAWMAKER'S SON TURNED CHINA ADVOCATE

Another Utah resident whom lawmakers said regularly has advocated better relations with China was Dan Stephenson, the son of a former state senator and employee of a China-based consulting firm.

Emails and other records show Stephenson advised the Utah Senate president on how to make a good impression with a Chinese ambassador and assisted a Chinese province in its unsuccessful efforts to build a ceramics museum in Utah.

Stephenson has promoted China in Utah for several years and has boasted of being well connected with government officials there.

"I've heard more than once from the mouths of Chinese government officials that China is prioritizing their relationship with Utah," Stephenson told lawmakers at a committee hearing. That testimony came shortly after Stephenson accompanied Republican state Sen. Jake Anderegg on a trip to Shanghai and Beijing that included meetings with officials at China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A few months after that trip, Stephenson provided Anderegg with the draft language for a pro-China resolution the state senator introduced in 2020 expressing solidarity with China during the pandemic,

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Anderegg told the AP.

The resolution passed with near unanimous approval.

A Chinese diplomat's efforts to win passage of a similar resolution in Wisconsin failed, with the state's Senate president publicly blasting it as a piece of propaganda.

Anderegg told the AP that he was interviewed by FBI agents seeking information about the Utah resolution's origins.

"It seemed rather innocuous to me," Anderegg said of his resolution. "But maybe it wasn't."

Stephenson said the FBI has not contacted him and no Chinese government official played a role in the resolution.

TIES TO ALLEGED FRONT GROUPS

Stephenson has links to Chinese groups allegedly active in covert foreign influence operations, documents show.

He is a partner in the Shanghai-based consulting firm Economic Bridge International. The company's chief executive, William Wang, is a Chinese citizen and council member of the China Friendship Foundation for Peace and Development, according to an online biography. The group is affiliated with the Chinese Communist Party's United Front.

Stephenson, also once worked for the China Academy of Painting, which has been used by China's Ministry of State Security as a front for meeting and covertly influencing elites and officials abroad, according to Alex Joske, the author of the recently published book "Spies and Lies: How China's Greatest Covert Operations Fooled the World."

Stephenson said he worked only briefly — without pay — for the China Academy of Painting. He added he did not witness any spy agency involvement.

WORK ALIGNED WITH CHINESE GOVERNMENT'S DESIRES

Stephenson said he's never taken any action at the direction of the Chinese government and never accepted compensation from it.

"I work to promote Utah's economy, to help American companies succeed in China, and to encourage healthy people-to-people and commercial ties," Stephenson said.

His work sometimes aligned with what Chinese government officials were seeking and in ways experts say likely helped the Chinese Communist Party's messaging.

Stephenson urged Utah's elected officials to make videos to air on Shanghai television to boost the spirits of that city's residents early in 2020 as they battled COVID-19, according to emails obtained by AP.

"You cannot buy this type of positive publicity for Utah in China," Stephenson said in an email pitching the videos.

The request originated with the Shanghai government, according to Stephenson's email, and came as officials in China were scrambling to tamp down public fury at communist authorities for reprimanding a young doctor, who later died, over his repeated warnings about the disease's dangers.

Many lawmakers recorded videos reading sample scripts Stephenson provided, and a compilation of those videos was uploaded to a Chinese social media website. The compilation ends with dozens of lawmakers in unison shouting "jijayou!" — a Chinese expression of encouragement — on the Utah House and Senate floors.

Suderman reported from Washington. AP writer Fu Ting in Washington contributed to this story. Contact AP's global investigative team at Investigative@ap.org.

Twitter celebs balk at paying Elon Musk for blue check mark

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

William Shatner, Monica Lewinsky and other prolific Twitter commentators — some household names, others little-known journalists — could soon be losing the blue check marks that helped verify their identity on the social media platform.

They could get the marks back by paying up to \$11 a month. But some longtime users, including 92-year-

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old Star Trek legend Shatner, have balked at buying the premium service championed by Twitter's billionaire owner and chief executive Elon Musk.

After months of delay, Musk is gleefully promising that Saturday is the deadline for celebrities, journalists and others who'd been verified for free to pony up or lose their legacy status.

"It will be glorious," he tweeted Monday, in response to a Twitter user who noted that Saturday is also April Fools' Day.

After buying Twitter for \$44 billion in October, Musk has been trying to boost the struggling platform's revenue by pushing more people to pay for a premium subscription. But his move also reflects his assertion that the blue verification marks have become an undeserved or "corrupt" status symbol for elite personalities and news reporters.

Along with verifying celebrities, one of Twitter's main reasons to mark profiles with a free blue check mark starting about 14 years ago was to verify politicians, activists and people who suddenly find themselves in the news, as well as little-known journalists at small publications around the globe, as an extra tool to curb misinformation coming from accounts that are impersonating people.

Lewinsky tweeted a screenshot Sunday of all the people impersonating her, including at least one who appears to have paid for a blue check mark. She asked, "what universe is this fair to people who can suffer consequences for being impersonated? a lie travels half way around the world before truth even gets out the door."

Shatner, known for his irreverent humor, also tagged Musk with a complaint about the promised changes. "I've been here for 15 years giving my (clock emoji) & witty thoughts all for bupkis," he wrote. "Now you're telling me that I have to pay for something you gave me for free?"

Musk responded that there shouldn't be a different standard for celebrities. "It's more about treating everyone equally," Musk tweeted.

For now, those who still have the blue check but apparently haven't paid the premium fee — a group that includes Beyoncé, Stephen King, Barack and Michelle Obama, Taylor Swift, Tucker Carlson, Drake and Musk himself — have messages appended to their profile saying it is a "legacy verified account. It may or may not be notable."

But while "the attention is reasonably on celebrities because of our culture," the bigger concern for open government advocate Alex Howard, director of the Digital Democracy Project, is that impersonators could more easily spread rumors and conspiracies that could move markets or harm democracies around the world.

"The reason verification exists on this platform was not simply to designate people as notable or authorities, but to prevent impersonation," Howard said.

One of Musk's first product moves after taking over Twitter was to launch a service granting blue checks to anyone willing to pay \$8 a month. But it was quickly inundated by imposter accounts, including those impersonating Nintendo, pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly and Musk's businesses Tesla and SpaceX, so Twitter had to temporarily suspend the service days after its launch.

The relaunched service costs \$8 a month for web users and \$11 a month for iPhone and iPad users. Subscribers are supposed to see fewer ads, be able to post longer videos and have their tweets featured more prominently.

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This story has been corrected to show that April 1 deadline is Saturday, not Friday.

Scotland to get 1st Muslim leader as SNP elects Humza Yousaf

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Scotland's governing party elected Humza Yousaf as its new leader on Monday, making him the first person of color and the first Muslim to lead the country of 5.5 million people.

Yousaf narrowly defeated rival Kate Forbes after a bruising five-week contest that exposed deep fractures within the pro-independence Scottish National Party as it faces an impasse in its quest to take Scotland

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out of the United Kingdom.

The 37-year-old Glasgow-born son of South Asian immigrants is set to be confirmed as first minister during a session of the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh on Tuesday.

Yousaf, who currently is Scotland's health minister, beat two other Scottish lawmakers in a contest to replace First Minister Nicola Sturgeon. She unexpectedly stepped down last month after eight years as leader of the party and of Scotland's semi-autonomous government.

SNP members chose Yousaf over Scottish finance minister Forbes by a margin of 52% to 48%, after third-placed candidate Ash Regan was eliminated in a first vote. Turnout among the 72,000 members was 70%.

Yousaf faces the challenge of uniting the SNP and reenergizing the stalled independence campaign.

"Just as I will lead the SNP in the interests of all party members, not just those who voted for me, so I will lead Scotland in the interests of all our citizens whatever your political allegiance," he said in an acceptance speech at Edinburgh's Murrayfield rugby stadium.

Yousaf paid tribute to his late grandparents, who emigrated from the Punjab to Glasgow more than 60 years ago.

"They couldn't have imagined, in their wildest dreams, that two generations later their grandson would one day be Scotland's first minister," he said. "We should all take pride in the fact that today we have sent a clear message: that your color of skin, your faith, is not a barrier to leading the country we all call home."

Yousaf is widely seen as a "continuity Sturgeon" candidate who shares the outgoing leader's liberal social views.

A formidable leader who led the SNP to a dominant position in Scottish politics, Sturgeon failed in her aim of taking Scotland out of the U.K. and divided the party with a contentious transgender rights law.

The three candidates to succeed her shared the goal of independence, but differed in their economic and social visions for Scotland.

Forbes, 32, is an evangelical Christian who has been criticized for saying that her faith would have prevented her from voting in favor of allowing same-sex couples to wed, had she been a lawmaker when Scotland legalized gay marriage in 2014.

Both Forbes and 49-year-old Regan opposed legislation championed by Sturgeon to make it easier for people in Scotland to legally change their gender.

The gender recognition bill has been hailed as a landmark piece of legislation by transgender rights activists, but faced opposition from some SNP members who said it ignored the need to protect single-sex spaces for women, such as domestic violence shelters and rape crisis centers.

Yousaf has promised to push forward with the bill, which has been passed by the Scottish parliament but blocked by the U.K. government.

The SNP holds 64 of the 129 seats in the Scottish parliament and governs in coalition with the much smaller Greens. The smaller party had warned it might quit the coalition if the SNP elected a leader that doesn't share its progressive views — meaning a victory by Forbes or Regan could have splintered the government.

That split has been avoided, but the pro-independence campaign remains adrift. Scottish voters backed remaining in the U.K. in a 2014 referendum that was billed as a once-in-a-generation decision. The SNP wants a new vote, but the central government in London has refused to authorize one, and the U.K. Supreme Court has ruled that Scotland can't hold one without London's consent.

Yousaf said he would ask the Conservative government in London for authorization to hold a new referendum. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's office said the answer remained no.

Yousaf has also said he wants to build a "settled, sustained" majority for independence. Polls currently suggest Scottish voters are split about evenly on the issue.

"To those in Scotland who don't yet share the passion I do for independence, I will aim to earn your trust by continuing to govern well," Yousaf said.

The acrimonious SNP leadership contest has sent the SNP's poll ratings plunging — to the delight of the Labour Party and the Conservatives, which hope to gain seats in Scotland during the next U.K.-wide

election, likely next year.

Critics say Yousaf, who served in several posts in Sturgeon's government, bears some responsibility for Scotland's long health care waiting times, homelessness problem and high drug death toll.

Independent pollster Mark Diffley said that while the SNP members who elected Yousaf are passionately concerned about independence, the new leader "will now have to pivot really quite sharply towards what public priorities are, which is not the same."

"It's more about supporting people through the cost of living crisis, getting economic growth, improving public services," Diffley said. "That's where reality will bite, I think, pretty soon."

Taron Egerton slots Tetris story into place in new biopic

By SIAN WATSON Associated Press

The origin story of the iconic computer game "Tetris" is more thrilling than you may think.

It involves border crossing, authority dodging, underhand deals, putting your house on the line and — finally — trying to secure the rights for the game from behind the Iron Curtain. And now it's a film, releasing March 31, on Apple TV+.

After playing an early version of Tetris, game designer Henk Rogers (played by Taron Egerton) travels to the Soviet Union in 1988 to meet Tetris designer Alexey Pajitnov (played by Nikita Efremov), hoping to secure worldwide distribution rights to the game. Rogers was driven by his love of Tetris and his eagerness for the world to experience it, but the transaction was not smooth.

Egerton says he doesn't have the tenacity of Rogers, who potentially put his life on the line for the sake of the game.

"I have a more developed sense of my own frailty and vulnerability than he does, I think, whereas he's got this kind of single-minded lack of, sense of self-preservation," he said in a recent interview.

He added: "I really like his sort of single-minded, determined devil-may-care thing. It makes him an appealing hero, you know, his kind of cowboyishness. But yeah, I probably wouldn't have done anything like what he did to get the rights to Tetris."

The movie is directed by Jon S. Baird, who switched projects from action sequel "Kingsman 3" because of the pandemic, bringing his leading man — Egerton — and producer Matthew Vaughn along for the ride.

"We were looking for something to do and the 'Tetris' script landed and we thought, 'Right, that's great let's just move everything on to that.' And that's really what happened," he said.

While the pandemic stopped Pajitnov and Rogers from being involved in the actual shoot, the duo was involved heavily in the scriptwriting and in detailing the imagery of Soviet Russia, much of which was recreated in Aberdeen and Glasgow, Scotland.

Baird said he was apprehensive about showing Pajitnov and Rogers the finished movie but was overjoyed at their response.

"I got a text from Maya, who's Henk's daughter, who's obviously personified in the film, too and she was like, 'They all love it. They all absolutely love the movie.'"

Egerton, known to many for portraying Elton John in "Rocketman," says he finds playing a real-life person "odd." However, he believes that the men he has brought to the screen have all enjoyed his portrayals, smiling that "it hasn't blown up in my face yet!"

DeSantis team welcomes contrast with Trump 'chaos' candidacy

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Reporter

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Jim McKee is standing at the end of a line that snakes through five aisles of fiction inside the Books-A-Million store in Florida's capital city.

He is smiling because in a matter of minutes, the book he's holding will be signed by its author, Ron DeSantis, the Republican governor who McKee believes should be the nation's next president. But as a former Donald Trump loyalist, the 44-year-old Tallahassee attorney almost whispers when he first says it

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out loud.

"Personally, I'd rather see DeSantis win the Republican primary than Trump," McKee says softly, having to repeat himself to be heard. His voice soon grows louder.

"Trump has upset so many people," McKee says. "DeSantis is more palatable. He has a good story to tell."

Indeed, conversations throughout Tallahassee's book stores, conference rooms, state house offices and sports bars reveal that DeSantis' allies are gaining confidence as Trump's legal woes mount. The former president faces a possible indictment in New York over his role in a hush money scheme during the 2016 campaign to prevent porn actor Stormy Daniels from going public about an extramarital sexual encounter, which he denies.

The optimism around DeSantis comes even as an unlikely collection of establishment-minded Republican officials and Make America Great Again influencers raise concerns about the Florida governor's readiness for the national stage. DeSantis has stumbled at times under the weight of intensifying national scrutiny as he builds out his political organization and introduces himself to voters in key primary states.

DeSantis' allies privately scoffed at recent reports of anonymous concerns over the direction of his campaign, noting there is no campaign. The 44-year-old governor isn't expected to launch his White House bid for at least two more months. And the first presidential primary contest is roughly 10 months away.

For now, DeSantis' team, headquartered here on the front edge of Florida's Panhandle, believes he holds a position of strength among Republican voters. And as Trump fights to undermine DeSantis, his strongest Republican rival, the Florida governor's growing coalition is eager to highlight the contrast between the two men.

On one side stands Trump, a twice-impeached former president carrying a new level of turmoil into the 2024 presidential contest. On the other is DeSantis, a big-state governor coming off a commanding reelection, who is a far more disciplined messenger and hyperfocused on enacting conservative policies.

"Of all the things that Donald Trump has done and accomplished in his life, it's just constant chaos. And I think the American people are just tired of it," said Florida state Rep. Spencer Roach, a former Trump supporter who thinks DeSantis would be "a very formidable presidential candidate."

Most voters have only just begun to analyze the differences between the dueling Republican stars as the 2024 presidential election season opens under a cloud of unprecedented scandal.

A former president has never been arrested, but prosecutors in New York, Georgia and Washington are leading criminal probes of Trump's behavior on multiple fronts that could potentially produce indictments in the coming days, weeks or months.

The politics are murky at best.

Should Trump be charged, DeSantis supporters concede that Trump would likely benefit politically — in the short term, at least — as the GOP base rushes to defend their former leader from what they see as a weaponized justice system. But in the long term, DeSantis' team believes primary voters will view Trump's legal challenges as an acute reminder of his extraordinary baggage that could lead to another Republican disappointment in 2024.

Meanwhile, Trump is using his mounting legal challenges as a cudgel to force Republican rivals to line up the GOP behind him. It's the same playbook he employed successfully last summer after the FBI raided his Florida estate to seize classified documents and during special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation.

DeSantis condemned the New York prosecutor's potential indictment over the last week under intense pressure from MAGA influencers and after other White House prospects had offered their own criticism.

"I hope it doesn't come to where you end up seeing this going forward," DeSantis said in an interview with Piers Morgan, without mentioning Trump by name. "People see that as weaponizing the justice system. So I think it's fundamentally wrong to do that."

And while DeSantis sprinkled a few jabs at Trump and his leadership style throughout the same interview, such remarks are mild in comparison to Trump's scorched-earth broadsides against him.

Last week alone, the former president seized on DeSantis' votes as a congressman to cut Social Security and Medicare and attacked his record as Florida governor on violent crime, public health and education. Trump also shared a photo suggesting impropriety when DeSantis was a teacher two decades ago, despite

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no evidence of that.

At a rally over the weekend in Waco, Texas, Trump said DeSantis was “dropping like a rock.”

In an effort to combat the perception that his numbers might be slipping, DeSantis’ allies quietly distributed polling conducted last week in Iowa and New Hampshire by the Republican firm Public Opinion Strategies that suggests vulnerability for Trump.

Meanwhile, DeSantis is only just beginning to navigate the intense national scrutiny that comes with being a top-tier presidential prospect.

DeSantis’ recent reference to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as “a territorial dispute” — a statement he has since walked back — sowed doubt among some would-be supporters about whether he’s ready for prime time. There are also consistent concerns that he doesn’t have the charisma necessary to connect with voters on a personal level.

“I have heard that there is concern out there that he doesn’t have the ability to go the distance because of his interpersonal skills,” said New York-based Republican donor Eric Levine, a fierce Trump critic. “If it’s a race between him and Trump, I’m a Ron DeSantis guy. But I don’t know if I’m with either of them right now.”

At Thursday’s book signing in Tallahassee, the Florida governor made little effort to speak to people who had waited in the long line — aside from an obligatory “Hey, how are you?” — as he signed their books. Most of the one-on-one interactions were silent and spanned less than 10 seconds as he scribbled his name on the inside cover.

DeSantis’ staff wouldn’t allow pictures.

At the same event, DeSantis did not answer when asked by an Associated Press reporter whether Trump was being treated fairly by prosecutors.

His decision to ignore the mainstream press, just as he often ignores Trump’s attacks, is not new. In fact, his allies praise the approach as an example of the discipline that makes him a better presidential contender than Trump.

Yet it carries risks.

By not engaging more directly with the former president in particular, DeSantis is adopting a similar playbook as Trump’s 2016 Republican rivals — including former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio and Texas Sen. Ted Cruz — who ignored Trump for much of that campaign. Each ultimately went on the attack more directly, but by that time, Trump had built an insurmountable lead.

“DeSantis will not shrink from the fight. That’s not how he’s operated in Florida politics to this point,” said Matt Caldwell, a former state representative who shared the statewide ballot with DeSantis in 2018 as a candidate for state agriculture commissioner. “One could argue that he’s got the upper hand, so he’s only engaging when he has to.”

Instead of 2016, Caldwell likened Trump’s challenges in 2024 to the 1996 presidential election when President Bill Clinton faced serious allegations of sexual impropriety that nearly sank his reelection.

“At end of the day, this is just a hubbub about money and sex, which isn’t a whole lot different from 1996,” Caldwell said. “I don’t like this, and I didn’t like ’96. But Bill Clinton won reelection.”

Associated Press writer Jill Colvin in Waco, Texas, contributed to this report.

Whitney Houston’s family wants to highlight her gospel roots

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Whitney Houston’s brother remembers when his young sister listened to their mother during gospel rehearsals before she mimicked every tune that was sung.

As Houston rose to pop superstardom, her exceptionally talented vocals were rooted in gospel music. And now, her family — led by her sister-in-law Pat and brother Gary Houston — wants the foundation of her musical legacy to continue to live on through her new posthumous gospel album and documentary under the same name, “I Go to the Rock: The Gospel Music of Whitney Houston.”

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"Gospel was in her heart," said Gary Houston, who recalled his sister around the age of 5 wearing their mother Cissy Houston's wig and high heels while using a broom as a microphone. "We woke up to and went to sleep to gospel. She would sing exactly what she heard my mother and her siblings. No secular music. It was all gospel."

Pat Houston, the executor of Whitney Houston's estate, said she's excited for listeners to hear the six-time Grammy-winner's message of hope and faith and the influential mark gospel music had on her life and career through both projects, which both were released Friday last week. The documentary, hosted by CeCe Winans, aired on UPtv and AspireTV and will be available on DVD.

The singer's 14-track album features several tunes from notable soundtracks including "Jesus Loves Me" from "The Bodyguard," "His Eye Is on the Sparrow" from "Sparkle" along with "I Go to the Rock" and "Joy to the World" from "The Preacher's Wife" soundtrack – the best-selling gospel album of all time. The project also includes six unreleased tracks – three of which ("He Can Use Me," "I Found a Wonderful Way" and "Testimony") were recorded when she was 17 years old.

"You heard the innocence of her voice," said Pat Houston. "You could see where she started and how she ended up with all her hits throughout her career. Any song is a great song of Whitney Houston's. You heard her gospel roots all wrapped up in her music."

Whitney Houston first started singing at the New Hope Baptist Church in Newark, New Jersey, as a child. Between the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, she was one of the world's best-selling artists with her effortlessly powerful vocals rooted in the Black church but made palatable to the masses with her pop persona.

It understandably took time for the family to grieve after Whitney Houston's death in 2012. Her brother, Gary, said he still feels his sister's spirit whenever it rains, or when a bird visits him while he's at home adding that "when the doorbell rings, I think it's her."

But now, Gary and Pat Houston feel like they're in a better place. That's one of the reasons Pat felt now is the perfect time to release the gospel-centric projects — especially with Easter next month and Whitney Houston's 60th birthday celebration on the horizon in August.

"An Easter project is something she always wanted to do since her visit to Israel," Pat Houston said. "It never came into fruition. We're doing this all through Whitney's lens. It's special because this is her 60th birthday celebration. This project is definitely a labor of love for her. It represents her in such a very spiritual way."

Pat Houston said she hopes viewers can find closure through watching the documentary with several guest appearances including Jenifer Lewis, Kim Burrell and Kevin Costner. It features the singer's first-ever performance in front of an audience as well as many others including her singing "I Go to the Rock" with The Georgia Mass Choir on "Saturday Night Live" in 1996, "Jesus Loves Me" in Santiago, Chile, in 1994, and "Guide Me O Thou, Great Jehovah" on "The Arsenio Hall Show" in 1990.

"Hopefully one could have peace and knowing that Whitney Houston was a woman of God," she said. "No one is really exempt from the harsh realities of the world. She certainly understood that. But Whitney expressed her love for God. She knew where her strength was coming from and she showed it throughout the documentary."

Louvre staff block entrances as part of pension protest

PARIS (AP) — The Louvre Museum in Paris was closed to the public on Monday when its workers took part in the wave of French protest strikes against the government's unpopular pension reform plans.

Dozens of Louvre employees blocked the entrance, prompting the museum to announce it would be temporarily closed.

The demonstrators toted banners and flags in front of the Louvre's famed pyramid, where President Emmanuel Macron had celebrated his presidential victory in 2017. They demanded the repeal of the new pension law that raises the retirement age from 62 to 64.

The showbusiness, broadcasting and culture branch of the CGT union tweeted an image of the Mona Lisa with an aged and wrinkled face, with the words: "64 it's a No!"

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The action comes on the eve of another nationwide protest planned for Tuesday against the bill — and as Macron holds a meeting with Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne to discuss the way forward. The Louvre is always closed on Tuesdays, so staff protested a day earlier.

Some tourists were stoic about the artistic blockade.

"If you firmly believe that this will bring some change, there's plenty of other things that we can see in Paris," said Britney Tate, a 29-year-old doctoral student from California.

Others who had traveled thousands of miles were more vocal about the inconvenience.

"We're going to respect their strike tomorrow, but to do this today, it's just heartbreaking," said Karma Carden, a tourist from Fort Myers, Florida. "We knew that Versailles would not be open because of the protest, but we knew the Louvre was open.

"I understand why they're upset, but (it's bad) to do this to people from around the world who've traveled from around the world for this and paid thousands of dollars," she added.

New Maryland provider opening in post-Roe 'abortion desert'

By LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — A new abortion provider is opening this year in Democratic-controlled Maryland — just across from deeply conservative West Virginia, where state lawmakers recently passed a near-total abortion ban.

The Women's Health Center of Maryland in Cumberland, roughly 5 miles (8 kilometers) from West Virginia, will open its doors in June — a year after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned federal abortion protections — to provide abortions to patients across central Appalachia, a region clinic operators say is an "abortion desert."

"Hours in any direction, there are no other abortion providers here — it's smack dab in the middle of an absolute abortion desert, and that's by design," said Katie Quiñonez, executive director of the Charleston-based Women's Health Center of West Virginia, the state's lone abortion clinic until it was forced to stop the procedures after legislators in September passed a ban with narrow exemptions.

The Cumberland clinic will be the only independent reproductive health care center in the area and the western-most provider of surgical and medical abortion and gender-affirming hormone therapy in Maryland. Quiñonez, who will also serve as the Maryland clinic's executive director, said the facility will be a more accessible option for patients in northern West Virginia, western Maryland, south central Pennsylvania and Ohio, where an abortion ban is under injunction.

Independent abortion clinics provide most abortions in the U.S. — especially for people with low-incomes who live in isolated, rural states hostile to abortion access. The clinics are more likely to offer abortion after the first trimester and to provide both surgical and medication abortion options, according to the Abortion Care Network, the national association for independent abortion care providers.

Dozens of independent clinics across the country have been forced to close their doors since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, and in 14 states, there are no abortion clinics at all.

At least 66 clinics in 15 states have stopped providing abortions since the decision, according the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights. The number of clinics providing abortions in those 15 states dropped from 79 to 13 by October of last year, with the remaining clinics in Georgia.

When West Virginia lawmakers passed their sweeping abortion ban, several members of the Republican majority said they hoped it would force the Women's Health Center of West Virginia to shut down. Republican Sen. Robert Karnes said he believed shuttering the center was "going to save a lot of babies." Brandon Steele, a Republican in the state's House of Delegates, called abortion access "a scar" and "a curse" lawmakers had to "remove from this land."

West Virginia patients seeking an abortion now have to take time off work, travel hundreds of miles and pay for lodging and other accommodations, "all to get basic health care," Quiñonez said.

"Our communities deserve better — people should be able to access abortion care without delay or barriers," she said.

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The Women's Health Center of Maryland will provide abortion services into the second trimester and will accept Maryland Medicaid, which covers abortion. It will also offer annual exams, contraception, testing and treatment for sexually-transmitted diseases, as well as breast and cervical cancer screenings.

Although no abortions can be provided there, West Virginia's clinic is still open and offers other reproductive health care and hard-to-find services, like gender-affirming hormone therapy. But Quiñonez said they still get calls from anxious patients who don't know where to go for an abortion. Until the Maryland clinic opens and can take referrals, her staff has no other option but to send callers to a website to find out-of-state services.

Since January 2022, the clinic's abortion fund has distributed \$150,000 for more than 800 people, mostly West Virginia residents.

Maryland has a Democratic governor and a Democratic-controlled General Assembly that has shown commitment to preserving abortion access. Abortion is legal in Maryland until about 24 weeks into pregnancy.

The nearest independent reproductive health clinic to Cumberland that provides abortion and gender-affirming hormone therapy is a Planned Parenthood 90 miles (145 kilometers) away in Frederick. That facility provides medication abortion only.

A closer clinic in Hagerstown is open for abortions during limited hours a few times a month. It provides first-trimester abortions only and doesn't accept Maryland Medicaid — a barrier to low-income patients, Quiñonez said. Otherwise, patients must travel more than 100 miles (161 kilometers) to Pittsburgh or even further, to Baltimore or Washington, D.C.

Renovations started last week on the Cumberland clinic — crews were installing new medical equipment and signage, deep cleaning, applying fresh paint, replacing floors and patching drywall.

The cost for the facility, licensing and renovations is roughly \$1.17 million. First-year operating costs — to include payroll, building operations — are projected to be around \$763,000. Both the West Virginia and Maryland clinics are funded by donations, foundations and organizations in support of expanding abortion access in the U.S.

The Women's Health Center of Maryland will have its own finances and, eventually, state-based board of directors. The Women's Health Center of West Virginia's directors will act as the board while the organization recruits new, locally-based members.

"Folks have always needed abortions — since the beginning of time," Quiñonez said. "And they will always need abortions until the end of time. We are going to keep fighting to get every patient the care they need."

Caitlin Clark leads Iowa to first Final Four since 1993

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

SEATTLE (AP) — Caitlin Clark put on quite a show, having one of the greatest performances in NCAA Tournament history to help Iowa end a 30-year Final Four drought.

She had 41 points, 12 assists and 10 rebounds to lead the No. 2 seed Hawkeyes to a 97-83 win over fifth-seeded Louisville on Sunday night and send the team to its first women's Final Four in since 1993.

"I dreamed of this moment as a little girl, to take a team to the Final Four and be in these moments and have confetti fall down on me," said Clark, who is a Iowa native.

The unanimous first-team All-American was as dominant as she's been all season in getting the Hawkeyes to Dallas for the women's NCAA Tournament national semifinals on Friday night. The Seattle 4 Region champion will face the winner of the Greenville 1 region that has South Carolina playing Maryland on Monday night.

"I thought our team played really well. That's what it's all about. I was going to give it every single thing I had," said Clark, who was the region's most outstanding player. "When I came here I said I wanted to take this program to the Final Four, and all you've got to do is dream. And all you've got to do is believe and work your butt off to get there. That's what I did, and that's what our girls did and that's what our coaches did and we're going to Dallas, baby."

Iowa (30-6) hadn't been to the Final Four since Hall of Fame coach C. Vivian Stringer led the team to

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its lone appearance in 1993. Before Sunday, the team had only been to one other Elite Eight — in 2019 — since the Final Four team.

Clark had the 11th triple-double of her career and the 19th in NCAA Tournament history. She had the first 30- and 40-point triple-double in March Madness history.

"It's like a storybook, been like that all year long," Iowa coach Lisa Bluder said. "We keep talking about destiny and how it's supposed to happen. ... She's spectacular. I don't know how else to describe what she does on the basketball court. A 40-point triple-double against Louisville to go to the Final Four. Are you kidding me? That's mind-boggling."

Trailing by five at the half, Louisville cut its deficit to 48-47 before Clark and the Hawkeyes scored the next 11 points as part of a 17-6 run to blow the game open. That brought most of the pro-Iowa crowd of nearly 12,000 fans to their feet.

Louisville was down 22 with just under 6 minutes left before going on a 13-1 run to get within 86-76 with 2:10 left. The Cardinals could get no closer.

Clark left the game with 22.7 seconds left to a loud ovation from the crowd as she hugged her coach. After the game, Clark paraded around the court holding the regional trophy high above her head, delighting the thousands of fans who stuck around to celebrate their Hawkeyes.

Hailey Van Lith scored 27 points and Olivia Cochran had 20 points and 14 rebounds to lead Louisville (26-12).

Clark hit eight of the Hawkeyes' season-high 16 3-pointers, including a few from just past the March Madness logo. It was a school record for the Hawkeyes in the NCAA Tournament, blowing past the previous mark of 13 against Gonzaga in 2011.

Louisville scored the first eight points of the game, forcing Iowa to call timeout. Then Clark got going. The 6-foot junior scored the first seven points for the Hawkeyes and finished the opening quarter with 15 points. When she wasn't scoring, she found open teammates with precision passes.

She also had four assists in the first 10 minutes, accounting for every one of Iowa's points as the Hawkeyes led 25-21.

Clark continued her mastery in the second quarter, hitting shots from all over the court, including a few of her famous long-distance 3s from near the logo.

Louisville was able to stay in the game, thanks to Van Lith. After scoring the first six points of the game, she went quiet before getting going late in the second quarter. She had 11 points in the second quarter as the Cardinals found themselves down 48-43 at the break.

Clark had 22 points and eight assists in the opening 20 minutes enroute to the fourth-highest scoring total all-time in a NCAA regional.

"She played great, she made some big shots," Louisville coach Jeff Walz said of Clark. "She passed the ball well. we turned her over at times."

1,000-POINT CLUB

Clark has 984 points this season and is looking to join former Hawkeye Megan Gustafson with 1,000 points in a single year. Four other players have done it, including Villanova's Maddy Siegrist, who accomplished the feat this season. Kelsey Plum, Jackie Stiles and Odyssey Sims were the others to do it.

HOMETOWN HERO

Van Lith once again played well in her home state. The small-town standout from 130 miles away from Seattle grew into being one of the best prep players in the country, the all-time state high school leader in scoring and now a star for the Cardinals.

Hundreds of fans from her hometown of Cashmere, which has a population of 3,200, took in the game, cheering the Louisville star on.

EMOTIONAL DAY

It was a bittersweet day for Iowa assistant coach Jan Jensen. Her dad Dale died in the morning after battling pancreatic cancer for a year. He was 86.

"He didn't sound so good the last couple days and I was kind of fretting, 'When am I going to go if we

go to Dallas?" she said. "I just feel like he knew. He was never a high maintenance guy, he was never a guy who made it complicated with me in anything. So I think, he told my people at home, I'm not ready to go until Jan's team is done."

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

Twitter hunts Github user who posted source code online

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Some parts of Twitter's source code — the fundamental computer code on which the social network runs — were leaked online, the social media company said in a legal filing that was first reported by The New York Times.

According to the legal document, first filed with the U.S. District Court of the Northern District of California on Friday, Twitter had asked GitHub, an internet hosting service for software development, to take down the code where it was posted. The platform complied and said the content had been disabled, according to the filing.

Twitter, based in San Francisco, noted in the filing that the postings infringe on copyrights held by Twitter. The company also asked the court to identify the alleged individual or group that posted the information without Twitter's authorization. It's seeking names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, social media profile data and IP addresses associated with the user account "FreeSpeechEnthusiast" which is suspected of being behind the leak. The name is an apparent reference to Twitter's billionaire owner, Elon Musk, who described himself as a free speech absolutist.

It is difficult to know if the leak poses an immediate cybersecurity risk for users, said Lukasz Olejnik, an independent cybersecurity researcher and consultant, but he did say that breach underscores internal turbulence at the company.

"While this is the internal source code, including internal tools, the biggest immediate risk seems to be reputational," Olejnik said "It highlights the broader problem of Big Tech, which is insider risk," and could undermine trust between Twitter's employees or internal teams, he said.

Musk had promised earlier this month that Twitter would open source all the code used to recommend tweets on March 31, saying that people "will discover many silly things, but we'll patch issues as soon as they're found!" He added that being transparent about Twitter's code will be "incredibly embarrassing at first" but will result in "rapid improvement in recommendation quality."

The leak creates another challenge for Musk, who bought Twitter in October for \$44 billion and took the company private. Twitter has since been engulfed in chaos, with massive layoffs and an exodus of advertisers fearful of exposure on the platform to looser rules on potentially inflammatory posts.

Meanwhile, the Federal Trade Commission is probing Musk's mass layoffs at Twitter and trying to obtain his internal communications as part of ongoing oversight into the social media company's privacy and cybersecurity practices, according to documents described in a congressional report.

Kelvin Chan in London contributed to this report from London.

Today in History: March 28, 'Rocky' wins best picture Oscar

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, March 28, the 87th day of 2023. There are 278 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 28, 1979, America's worst commercial nuclear accident occurred with a partial meltdown inside the Unit 2 reactor at the Three Mile Island plant near Middletown, Pennsylvania.

On this date:

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In 1797, Nathaniel Briggs of New Hampshire received a patent for a washing machine.

In 1854, during the Crimean War, Britain and France declared war on Russia.

In 1898, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, ruled 6-2 that Wong, who was born in the United States to Chinese immigrants, was an American citizen.

In 1935, the notorious Nazi propaganda film "Triumph des Willens" (Triumph of the Will), directed by Leni Riefenstahl, premiered in Berlin with Adolf Hitler present.

In 1939, the Spanish Civil War neared its end as Madrid fell to the forces of Francisco Franco.

In 1941, novelist and critic Virginia Woolf, 59, drowned herself near her home in Lewes, East Sussex, England.

In 1942, during World War II, British naval forces staged a successful raid on the Nazi-occupied French port of St. Nazaire in Operation Chariot, destroying the only dry dock on the Atlantic coast capable of repairing the German battleship *Tirpitz*.

In 1969, the 34th president of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, died in Washington, D.C., at age 78.

In 1977, "Rocky" won best picture at the 49th Academy Awards; Peter Finch was honored posthumously as best actor for "Network" while his co-star, Faye Dunaway, was recognized as best actress.

In 1987, Maria von Trapp, whose life story inspired the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical "The Sound of Music," died in Morrisville, Vermont, at age 82.

In 1999, NATO broadened its attacks on Yugoslavia to target Serb military forces in Kosovo in the fifth straight night of airstrikes; thousands of refugees flooded into Albania and Macedonia from Kosovo.

In 2000, in a unanimous ruling, the Supreme Court, in *Florida v. J.L.*, sharply curtailed police power in relying on anonymous tips to stop and search people.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama, flanked by grim-faced mothers who lost their children to guns, urged lawmakers not to "get squishy" in the face of powerful forces against gun control legislation. Pope Francis washed and kissed the feet of a dozen inmates, including two young women, at a juvenile detention center in a surprising departure from church rules that restricted the Holy Thursday ritual to men. British actor Richard Griffiths, 65, remembered by movie fans for being grumpy Uncle Vernon in the "Harry Potter" movies, died in Coventry, England.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump fired Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin and nominated White House doctor Ronny Jackson to replace him; the move came in the wake of an ethics scandal and a rebellion within the agency. (Jackson withdrew his nomination amid allegations of workplace misconduct.) A judge in New York ordered rapper DMX to prison for a year for tax evasion (DMX died in 2021). The government reported that the U.S. economy had grown at a solid 2.9 percent annual rate in the final three months of 2017, a sharp upward revision.

One year ago: President Joe Biden said he was making "no apologies" and wouldn't be "walking anything back" after saying that Russian President Vladimir Putin "cannot remain in power." The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences condemned the actions of Will Smith during the previous night's Oscars and launched an inquiry into his slapping of Chris Rock. (Smith was later expelled from the movie academy received a 10-year ban from the Oscars.)

Today's Birthdays: Author Mario Vargas Llosa is 87. Country musician Charlie McCoy is 82. Movie director Mike Newell is 81. Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte is 78. Actor Dianne Wiest is 77. Country singer Reba McEntire is 68. Olympic gold medal gymnast Bart Conner is 65. Actor Alexandra Billings (TV: "Transparent") is 61. Rapper Salt (Salt-N-Pepa) is 57. Actor Tracey Needham is 56. Actor Max Perlich is 55. Movie director Brett Ratner is 54. Country singer Rodney Atkins is 54. Actor Vince Vaughn is 53. Rapper Mr. Cheeks (Lost Boyz) is 52. Singer-songwriter Matt Nathanson is 50. Rock musician Dave Keuning (The Killers) is 47. Actor Annie Wersching is 46. Actor Julia Stiles is 42. Singer Lady Gaga is 37. Electronic musician Clayton Knight (Odesza) is 35.