

# Groton Daily Independent

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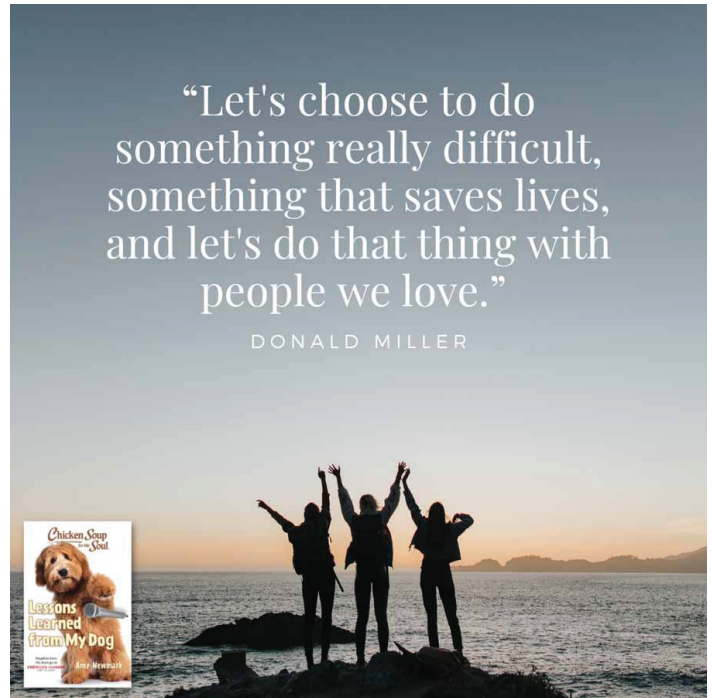
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## Groton Community Calendar

### 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  
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.

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



### 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.

### Saturday, April 1

Easter Egg Hunt at the Groton Area Elementary School, 10 a.m. (alternate date is April 8)  
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Questioning Confirmands, 5 p.m.  
Dueling Duo at Groton Legion, 6 p.m.  
State DI Tournament in Pierre

## **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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## The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

### World in Brief

this week, warning that letting her transit through the U.S. would be a "provocation.

- Musk announces that Twitter will promote only paid subscribers' tweets, in the latest push to get people to pay \$84 yearly subscription costs.
- Disgraced FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried has been indicted for allegedly bribing Chinese government officials to the tune of \$40 million to unfreeze his financial assets.
- France has deployed a record number of police officers as protests against President Emmanuel Macron's pension reforms enter their 11th day.
- U.K.'s intelligence agency MI5 raised the terror threat in Northern Ireland to "severe," meaning an attack is "likely," just days before a possible trip to the country by President Joe Biden.
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, the Russian-occupied city of Melitopol in southern Ukraine lost its power supply after it was bombarded by Ukrainian armed forces. No casualties were reported in the shelling.

- Audrey Hale, the shooter who killed six people at a Nashville school on Monday, left a manifesto and purchased at least seven guns legally, stockpiling them in her parents' house without their knowledge, investigators say.

- A lawyer for Donald Trump has claimed the hush money investigation into him is "dead," one week from the day the former president claimed he would be arrested as part of the probe.

- China has threatened retaliation if Taiwan's president Tsai Ing-wen meets U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy



## 2022-23 Girls Basketball Banquet

“Culture changing” Seniors: Head coach Matt Locke credited the Senior players’ for their leadership in creating a team culture of “guts, dedication, loyalty, and toughness”.

All three seniors were also honored with the Academic All-State Award. Requirements for the Academic All-State Award is minimum of a 3.5 GPA and a minimum of three years of participation in high school basketball.

Seniors are Brooke Gengerke, Aspen Johnson, and Gracie Traphagen. (Courtesy Photo)

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**Individual Awards — Sydney Leight: second team All-NEC and Offensive MVP; Jerica Locke: Defensive MVP; Brooke Gengerke: Tiger Award (team focus, character, role model, integrity, and sportsmanship despite adversity) and B103 Senior All-Star; Aspen Johnson: Hustle and Heart Award (positive and relentless attitude, pushes self and teammates to do their best).**

(Courtesy Photo)

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**Letter winners — Back row: Emily Clark, Rylee Dunker, Aspen Johnson, Gracie Traphagen, Faith Traphagen, Jaedyn Penning, Brooklyn Hansen, Sydney Leight. Front row: Liz Flihs, Talli Wright, Brooke Gengerke, Jerica Locke, Laila Roberts, Carly Gilbert, Kennedy Hansen. Not pictured: Mia Crank.** (Courtesy Photo)

## Antonsen places third at Miller CDE

The Groton CDE team went to Miller on Tuesday where Kaleb Antonsen placed third in Ag Business Management. The Horse Evaluation team placed fourth and the Agronomy team placed sixth.

### Ag Business Management

Kaleb Antonsen – 3rd Place  
Ethan Gengerke – 15th Place

### Ag Mechanics

Nick Morris – 58th

### Agronomy – 6th Place Team

Kellen Antonsen – 10th Place  
Payton Mitchel – 30th Place  
Logan Warrington – 33rd Place

### Horse Evaluation – 4th Place team

Jayla Jones – 5th Place  
Delayne Jones – 7th Place  
Austin Aberle – 36th Place

### Livestock Evaluation

Lexi Osterman – 23rd Place

### Milk Quality

Layne Hanson – 10th Place  
Hannah Monson – 13th Place

### Natural Resources

Charlie Frost – 68th Place

### Vet Science

Ashlyn Sperry – 10th Place  
Ava Wienk – 42nd Place

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## Groton Community April Calendar

### Saturday, April 1

Easter Egg Hunt at the Groton Area Elementary School, 10 a.m. (alternate date is April 8)

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

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

St. John's Lutheran: Questioning Confirmands, 5 p.m.

Dueling Duo at Groton Legion, 6 p.m.

State DI Tournament in Pierre

### Sunday, April 2

PALM SUNDAY

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m. (Procession of Palms), No Sunday school Choir, 7 p.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.; Hymn Sign/Night of worship with cookies/bars to follow, 6 p.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.; SEAS Confession, 4-5 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m., and Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday school, 9:45 a.m.

United Methodist: Worship with communion at Conde, 8:30 a.m. and at Groton, 10:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Dessert Auction for Mission, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School sing in worship, 10:30 a.m.; Family Feast following worship RSVP Pastor Brandon, 11:30 a.m.

POPS Concert, 2 p.m. and 5 p.m.

### Monday, April 3

School Breakfast: Egg bake.

School Lunch: Pepperoni pizza, green beans.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 12:00 noon, 7:00 - 8:00 pm

Senior Menu: Sloppy Joe on bun, oven roasted potatoes, mixed vegetables, ice cream sundae.

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6 p.m.

### Tuesday, April 4

School Breakfast: Egg and cheese wraps.

School Lunch: Tacos

Senior Menu: Chicken Alfredo, broccoli and cauliflower, peaches, whole wheat bread.

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

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

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid LWML, 1 p.m.

### Wednesday, April 5

School Breakfast: Hashbrown pizza.

School Lunch: Garlic cheese bread, cooked carrots.

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes, carrots and peas, Mandarin oranges, pineapple, whole wheat bread.

Living Stations at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church, 7 p.m.; SEAS Confession after Living Stations.

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; Confirmation and League attend Stations of the Cross at SEAS, 6:30 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.

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

Chamber Meeting, noon, at City Hall

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## Thursday, April 6

School Breakfast: Oatmeal.  
School Lunch: Pasta and meat sauce.  
Senior Menu: BBQ Chicken breast, rice pilaf, mixed vegetables, fruit, cookie.  
Catholic: Holy Thursday Mass 7:00 pm with Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament until 10:00 pm  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.; Worship with communion, 7 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Maundy Thursday Service with Communion, 7 p.m.  
FFA Career Development Event in Groton, 9 a.m.

## Friday, April 7

Good Friday  
City Hall Closed, No School  
Ecumenical Service at Methodist Church, 7 p.m.  
Catholic: Liturgy of the Passion 7:00 pm  
St. John's Lutheran: Good Friday Service, 7 p.m.  
Track at Hitchcock-Tulare, 11:30 a.m.

## Saturday, April 8

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

## Sunday, April 9

EASTER SUNDAY  
Groton CM&A: Breakfast, 9:30 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Sunrise Service with communion, 7 a.m.; Breakfast between services; Worship with communion, 9:30 a.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Worship at Zion, 7:30 a.m., and at St. John's, 9 a.m.  
United Methodist: Groton Sunrise service, 7 a.m.; Groton Breakfast, 8 a.m.; Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Easter egg hunt after breakfast, 8:30 a.m.

## Monday, April 10

City Hall Closed  
Senior Menu: Hamburger cabbage roll hot dish, corn, pears, muffins.  
School Breakfast: Cereal.  
School Lunch: Chicken and dumpling soup.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6 p.m.  
United Methodist: PEO meeting (outside group), 7 p.m.  
Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.  
School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

## Tuesday, April 11

Senior Menu: Pork cutlet, creamy noodles, mixed vegetables, blushing pears, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: French toast.  
School Lunch: Lasagna hot dish, corn.  
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.  
The Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Council, 7 p.m.  
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.  
Groton Area Track Meet, 11 a.m.

## Wednesday, April 12

Senior Menu: Roast beef, mashed potatoes and gravy, broccoli, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Egg omelets.  
School Lunch: Nachos.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.  
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Book Study with Lindsey Tietz, 4 p.m.; Confirmation, 4 p.m.

## Thursday, April 13

Senior Menu: Hamburger on bun with lettuce, tomato and onion, potato salad, cucumber salad, fresh fruit.  
School Breakfast: Muffins.  
School Lunch: Chicken sandwich, fries.

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## DID YOU KNOW . . .

You can use the GDI Fitness Center by paying by the month and you can cancel any time without penalty. Call/Text Paul at 605-397-7460 for details!



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## Friday, April 14

Senior Menu: Potato soup, ham salad sandwich, tomato spoon salad, carrot bars  
School Breakfast: Eggs and sausage.  
School Lunch: Pizza crunchers, peas.  
All School Play, 7 p.m.

## Saturday, April 15

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.; Easter Vigil 7:30 pm  
Emmanuel Lutheran worship at Rosewood Court, 10 a.m.  
All School Play, 4 p.m.

## Sunday, April 16

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday school, 10:15 a.m.; Worship at Avantara, 3 p.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m., and Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday school, 9:45 a.m.  
United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday school after children's sermon in worship, 10:30 a.m.  
State FFA Convention at SDSU, Brookings

## Monday, April 17

Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potatoes, carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Waffles  
School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, tater tots.  
Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle,

7:30 p.m.

State FFA Convention at SDSU, Brookings

## Tuesday, April 18

Senior Menu: Creamed chicken, buttermilk biscuit, winter bled vegetables, cookie, apricots.  
School Breakfast: Breakfast sandwich.  
School Lunch: Sub sandwiches, chips  
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.  
The Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.  
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.; Conde Ad Council  
State FFA Convention at SDSU, Brookings  
Track at Britton-Hecla, 2 p.m.

## Wednesday, April 19

Senior Menu: Ham, au gratin potatoes, cauliflower, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Eggs and breakfast potatoes.  
School Lunch: Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.  
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Book Study with Lindsey Tietz, 4 p.m.; Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.  
FCCLA Banquet, 6 p.m.

## Thursday, April 20

Senior Menu: Baked cod, macaroni and cheese, spinach salad, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.  
School Lunch: Hamburgers, fries.  
United Methodist: Newsletter times due.

## Friday, April 21

Senior Menu: Bratwurst on bun, sauerkraut, 3 bean salad, chocolate pudding with bananas.  
School Breakfast: Biscuits and jelly.  
School Lunch: Pizza, green beans.



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## Saturday, April 22 - EARTH DAY

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

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

GHS Prom, 8 p.m.

Firemen's Spring Social, 7 p.m.

## Sunday, April 23

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

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday school, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m., and at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday school, 9:45 a.m.

United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday school after children's sermon in worship, 10:30 a.m.

## Monday, April 24

Senior Menu: Ranch chicken breast, boiled potato, mixed vegetables, pineapple tidbits, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg bake.

School Lunch: Taco salads.

Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center with potluck at noon.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6 p.m.

United Methodist: PEO meeting (outside group), 7 p.m.

Girls Golf at Redfield Golf Course, 10 a.m.

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

## Tuesday, April 25

Senior Menu: Beef stroganoff noodles, squash, cookie, apple sauce.

School Breakfast: Egg omelets.

School Lunch: Meat balls, mashed potatoes.

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

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

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Ag Fair in Aberdeen.

Groton Area Track Meet, 11 a.m.

## Wednesday, April 26

Senior Menu: Meat loaf, scalloped potatoes, creamed peas, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Hashbrown pizza.

School Lunch: Chicken strips, sweet potato puffs.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.

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

Baseball, Softball, T-Ball Parent Meeting at the Groton Legion, 7:30 p.m.

## Thursday, April 27

Senior Menu: Beef stew, biscuit, tossed salad, rainbow sherbert.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal.

School Lunch: Hot dogs, baked beans.

Girls Golf Meet at Milbank Golf Course, 10 a.m.

Middle School Spring Concert, 7 p.m.

## Friday, April 28

Senior Menu: Chicken pasta salad, grape juice, breadstick, apple crisp.

School Breakfast: Cereal.

School Lunch: Mac and cheese, peas.

Track at Webster Area, 10 a.m.

## Saturday, April 29

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

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

Middle School Band Contest at GHS Gym.

## Sunday, April 30

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

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m., and at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday school, 9:45 a.m.

United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday school after children's sermon in worship, 10:30 a.m.

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## Stary has music clinic with Groton Area students



Ron Stary is a retired band director from Brookings. I brought him in as a clinician to work with the kids on their contest music. He was also one of our judges for the Lake Region Marching Festival this past fall.

The 8-12 Band got a special treat by having a session with Mr. Ron Stary. He taught the band a new warmup routine and pushed them with their Contest Pieces that they will be performing today. Groton Band plays at 10:05 am at NSU in the JFAC Theatre.

Ron Stary wrote on his Facebook Page: "Always the biggest honor to be invited into a fellow band directors room as a guest clinician.

"It such an enjoyable one because 1) all the work Dez Yeigh has put into building a great culture at Groton and 2) successfully hitting a number of the goals we have for running any band clinic. Love when it clicks!

"\*Reinforcing and emphasizing all the hard work and goals the Band Director has set out to accomplish

"\*Motivate and inspiring students to go next level! \*Push them in a fun way that can get momentarily lost in the day to day routines

"\*Give away tangible axioms, exercises, and rehearsal strategies that can be easily integrated in the band Directors daily routine seamlessly cause it resonates!

" It's positivity electrifying to stand in front of your group feeling trust, musicality, and confidence grow in students! "





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### State regulators approve partial rollback of natural gas price increase

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 28, 2023 5:11 PM**

MidAmerican Energy's 6% natural gas rate increase in South Dakota will be rolled back to 5.4%. The over 100,000 South Dakotans who get natural gas from the company can expect the change to take effect in May. The rate change will affect commercial customers as well as residential.

MidAmerican proposed the 6% increase last May. The Public Utilities Commission and its staff had six months to investigate and make a decision before the company temporarily implemented the rate increase in November, but the three-member commission did not declare its decision in that timeframe.

The commission subsequently had another six months to make a retroactive decision, but meanwhile, the requested rate went into effect as an "interim rate hike." That's something the Public Utilities Commission describes as standard procedure.

"We do receive some criticism on, 'Can't you get this done within this period of time?'" Commissioner Gary Hanson said during Tuesday's hearing. "People simply don't appreciate the amount of work that goes into these."

The reduced rate hike of 5.4% was reached through discussions among the company, PUC staff and a MidAmerican customer, Steve Wegman, whose standing as a formal intervenor in the rate case allowed him to participate in the process. Customers can expect refunds to make up for the extra portion of the higher temporary increase that's already been collected.

Commissioner Kristie Fiegen said the rate hike is primarily due to safety investments in southeastern South Dakota, like replacing old steel infrastructure.

Public Utilities Commission adviser Greg Rislov asked MidAmerican if the company is requesting a rate hike in other states. "The answer is no," replied a MidAmerican spokesperson.

As part of the new rate-increase agreement, MidAmerican cannot request another rate adjustment for three years.

*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.*

#### **COMMENTARY**

### Open space is at the mercy of development and tax policy in the Black Hills

**CHARLES MICHAEL RAY**

We're all lucky to live in the Black Hills for its outdoor beauty. Those who enjoy driving through the Hills may not realize that in many cases the idyllic meadows, timber stands, and meandering streams on either side of the road are private land, very often designated as agricultural.

Tree farms, or family owned and managed forests, comprise more than 20,000 acres in the Black Hills. This open space provides immense value to society.

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Tree farms protect wildlife, by providing vital habitat. They protect water and fisheries by providing filtration for our fragile aquifers that supply water to our homes. They improve recreation like hunting, fishing, off roading, and hiking. They are vital for our timber economy.

In some years, 25% of the timber milled in the Hills comes from private land. Maybe most importantly, tree farms provide fire protection. A wildfire in a well managed 300-acre timber stand is much easier to stop than one burning through 900 homes in a similar wildland-urban space.

But the sad truth is the open space we all enjoy in the Black Hills is not a given for future generations. Of course, public lands are vital and should be cherished, but private land makes up a large portion of sensitive and critical habitat in our part of the country. As population booms here, pressure to develop these open spaces in and around the Hills will continue.

The urban sprawl along the front range of the Rockies and associated gentrification and parcelization should be a warning for us here in the Hills. In many cases, ag producers can no longer afford to stay on the land as outsiders gobble up properties for development.

In some towns in Colorado, there are few workers left, as only the ultra-wealthy can afford to live in these gorgeous areas. Our beloved communities in the Hills may soon share the same fate without protection for local landowners and agricultural property.

We prize landowner rights in our state, and someone should always be able to develop if they choose, but landowners should not be forced to develop or sell out because the tax system leaves them no other choice; unfortunately, that's happening too often today.

The 2021 state legislative session saw bills to strip many tree farmers of their ag tax status, which would have been catastrophic for the open spaces in the Black Hills, had it passed in full. This issue of expanding land values will only continue to put pressure on ag producers in coming years. To save the Black Hills from overdevelopment, we should be making it easier to achieve ag land tax status, not harder.

I was lucky to grow up in the Black Hills. I'm lucky to have spent much of my life here. I'm amazed at how many areas in the Hills I hiked through, or haunted through, or fished through as a kid have since been turned into housing developments. Regardless of politics, I think we all want future generations to be able to enjoy the same quality of life we've been fortunate to have.

I hope we can build broad coalitions of individuals and groups in the Black Hills to advocate for protection of landowner rights, agriculture, and preservation of open spaces for many years to come.

*Charles Michael Ray is a tree farmer in the Black Hills and board chair of the South Dakota Family Forests Association, an organization advocating for family foresters across the state.*

## State election officials at U.S. Senate hearing discuss threats to workers, call for funding

**BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - MARCH 28, 2023 6:20 PM**

WASHINGTON — Election officials on Tuesday detailed to the U.S. Senate Rules Committee how their states countered threats to election workers and worked to combat misinformation and disinformation during the 2022 midterm election.

With the 2024 presidential election closely approaching, Senate Rules Committee Chair Sen. Amy Klobuchar said she was concerned about threats to election workers and disinformation campaigns that aim to undermine elections.

Klobuchar, a Minnesota Democrat, said it was important to hear from election officials from those states — North Carolina, South Carolina, New Mexico and Nebraska — to help prepare for the 2024 elections.

"In the face of these challenges, it is important as ever that we continue to support election officials as they do their jobs to uphold our democracy," she said.

Sen. Alex Padilla, a California Democrat, said the "big lie" has had an effect on election workers, because many have left due to threats and harassment.

During the 2020 presidential election, former President Donald Trump falsely stated that the election

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was stolen, which led to the Jan. 6 insurrection on the U.S. Capitol where a mob of pro-Trump supporters tried to stop Congress from certifying the presidential election.

"It's not just a matter of capacity that's being lost as a result, but the tremendous talent and experience that's lost while threats and challenges to our elections are only on the increase," Padilla said.

One in six election workers has faced threats.

"We know the impact that the big lie has had through the sowing of disinformation throughout about our elections in the minds of a lot of the American people," Padilla said.

Padilla previously served as California's secretary of state.

Klobuchar asked Howard Knapp, the executive director of the South Carolina State Election Commission, how his state has worked to combat misinformation and disinformation about elections.

Misinformation is false or inaccurate information, while disinformation is deliberately spreading false or misleading content with the purpose of causing harm.

"The reality is there is a segment of the population that's not going to believe anything we say no matter what we say, and that's not who I'm speaking to," Knapp said. "I'm speaking to the other 90% of the population, that all they hear is the screaming and the misinformation."

Knapp said that transparency is key to combating those attacks.

"At some point, Americans have to decide, do you believe the election officials or not? And so this is our best shot at trying to be as transparent as possible, and that's really something I've tried to hit home during my tenure is transparency," he said.

He said that after the 2020 presidential election, his agency published a guide on how elections run in South Carolina, from information about how voting machines work to how voting audits are conducted.

## 2022 challenges

Klobuchar asked New Mexico Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver, a Democrat, what major issues she saw emerging in 2022.

Toulouse Oliver said a challenge in the most recent election was the "weaponization of public records requests."

She said some counties have an office consisting of only two workers.

"When they're being bombarded with literally hundreds of requests for thousands of documents, many of which are not actually relevant to the conduct of elections ... that's really challenging," she said.

Toulouse Oliver said another challenge is hiring and retaining officials because "mis and disinformation has generated a lot of threatening and harassing activity."

Election security experts warned members of Congress last year about potential misinformation and disinformation campaigns that would target the 2022 elections.

Toulouse Oliver said the federal government can aid states by providing federal funding for upgrading outdated equipment and technology and addressing staffing issues, among other things.

"More consistent federal funding for elections allows election administrators to better plan for short-, medium-, and long-term goals that benefit all voters," she said.

Derek Bowens, the director of elections for Durham County Board of Elections in North Carolina, said while he was proud of how the county handled the 2022 midterm elections, officials throughout the state were often harassed, threatened and intimidated "by people who did not understand the elections process and did not like the outcome of our certified elections."

Bowens said he has concerns about the upcoming 2024 presidential election.

"I know that threats against and harassment of election officials continue," he said. "With this in mind, I hope Congress will consider providing financial support directly to my colleagues who administer elections at the local level, many of whom may not be able to implement critical physical or cybersecurity measures necessitated by today's threat environment."

## Poll workers

Freshman Sen. Katie Britt, Republican of Alabama, asked all the witnesses how their offices have encouraged people to become poll workers.

Bowens said Durham County was able to financially compensate poll workers, but added that not every

county in North Carolina has the funds to do so.

Knapp said that paying poll workers is a great way to get more people involved.

Nebraska Secretary of State Robert Evnen said in his state, recruitment efforts went back to 2020, when the state did a campaign urging Nebraskans to step up due to the coronavirus pandemic because many of the poll worker volunteers were elderly.

"Nebraskans take care of each other," he said, adding that the campaign asked "the next generation to step forward, and they did."

Toulouse Oliver said one way New Mexico tries to get people involved is by allowing 16 and 17-year-old volunteers to serve as poll workers.

"We are seeing a lot of success with that," Toulouse Oliver said.

## Voter ID Laws

Evnen, a Republican, detailed how the state is moving to implement new voter identification requirements after voters adopted an amendment for the requirements in the 2022 election. He said these laws make voters feel more secure about their vote.

He said his office estimates that about 98% of registered voters have a state-issued photo ID.

While several election officials raised concerns about disinformation and misinformation surrounding elections, Evnen declined to talk about disinformation campaigns.

"(Disinformation campaigns) are highly significant but not something that elections officials have much ability to affect beyond cautioning voters to be cautious about their sources of information and to think critically about claim they hear," he said in his testimony.

Evnen said one of the biggest threats to election security is early voting, a frequent target for Republicans.

"The threats that come with early voting include the opportunity to pressure or intimidate voters, and the possibility of vote buying efforts," he said. "The potential for this sort of fraud is intensifying as these early voting methods become more ubiquitous. In my view we ought to focus our attention on these matters."

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

## USDA secretary battles with U.S. House Republicans over costs of federal nutrition programs

BY: ADAM GOLDSTEIN - MARCH 28, 2023 5:51 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republicans tussled with Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Democratic committee members over work requirements in federal nutrition programs as well as spending levels for those programs at a Tuesday hearing.

Republican members of the House Agriculture Committee charged Vilsack with evading bipartisan oversight in the USDA's 2021 redesign of the Thrifty Food Plan, one of four food plans that the department creates and which is directly tied to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits for low-income Americans.

Republicans during the lengthy hearing also criticized nutrition's "outsized" proportion of farm bill spending as they lobbied for tightened allocations to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is the predominant federal nutrition safety net for low-income Americans. The program, formerly known as food stamps, cost \$233 billion overall in 2021 and 2022 while serving more than 41 million people nationwide, according to the USDA.

The USDA's update to the plan is expected to increase meal benefits by 40 cents per meal for every enrollee. The update, authorized in the 2018 farm bill, is also expected to add roughly \$250 billion in spending to the USDA budget over the next 10 years, according to a recent CBO report.

Republican Pennsylvania Rep. Glenn "GT" Thompson said Vilsack and his department authorized a revision that "upended congressional consensus," and didn't account for its effects in relation to record farm sector debt and a diminished safety net.

"When parties begin to act unilaterally, trust begins to erode," Thompson said. "Unfortunately, this ad-

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ministration has consistently upended congressional consensus through a series of unilateral executive decisions that will resonate for decades.”

Democratic members, in contrast, spoke to the moral imperative to support needy populations through expanding access to SNAP.

They credited the department’s redesign of the Thrifty Food Plan as a long-overdue update to a tool that lifts communities out of poverty, and upholds democracy.

Democratic Rep. David Scott of Georgia, the ranking member of the committee, said in his opening testimony that he is worried about a nutrition work requirement bill introduced by Republican Rep. Dusty Johnson of South Dakota. Scott said that would put the SNAP benefits of an estimated 10.5 million people at risk.

The bill, if passed, would require able-bodied adults without dependents ages 18 through 65 to work or participate in a work training or education program for at least 20 hours per week to receive continuous SNAP support.

Johnson’s legislation would also remove states’ ability to request a waiver for the work requirement from USDA if states lack enough available jobs to hire enrollees.

“I’m very concerned about the impact that certain pieces of legislation (are) having on SNAP,” said Scott. “Let us make this farm bill sing into the night with a song for our veterans, our poor, those who need our help.”

Vilsack, a former governor of Iowa, said that his department was “excited” to use the updated food plan to increase food security across the country while bolstering the connections between these families and the farm community.

## Republicans defend expanded work rules

Republican lawmakers questioned Vilsack about the demographic makeup of enrollees in the SNAP program, and expressed concerns over perceived fraud and inefficient spending.

Johnson, in response to Scott’s opening statement, said that “fearmongering” over tightened work requirements in SNAP would not help Americans get the help they need. He added that Scott’s comments “demonized” a past bipartisan commitment to work in SNAP dating back to 1996.

“Work is not punishment, work is opportunity,” Johnson said. “There is no pathway out of poverty that doesn’t include some mixture of work, education and training. And we want to lift up those families that need that work and that education and that training.”

Republican Rep. Austin Scott of Georgia pressed Vilsack on current spending levels for farm commodity programs and the farm safety net, which represent 12% of the farm bill, in contrast to the roughly 81% spent on nutrition programs.

“I think everybody in America that is watching this is smart enough to recognize that the volume of food, as we’ve seen with eggs, there are supply-and-demand issues there,” Scott said. “No matter how much you give somebody in SNAP benefits, the cost of groceries continues to go up because of inflation and bad policy, and then they have less food to eat at the end of the day.”

Republican Tennessee Rep. Scott DesJarlais asked Vilsack to provide a percentage estimate of the number of “illegals” who were enrolled in SNAP, referring to undocumented immigrants.

“I think that there’s no one in this room that can’t look at the news and agree that we have a problem at our southern border, with illegals flowing in,” DesJarlais said.

“I’m not sure that illegal people can qualify for SNAP,” Vilsack responded.

“There’s about 11 exceptions to those rules, and I’m sure you’re aware of them,” DesJarlais said.

“I would say that there may be exceptions to this rule,” Vilsack responded. “But for the vast, vast, vast majority of those 41 million, you’re probably talking about American citizens or people who are getting those benefits legitimately.”

“There’s estimates of 20 to 30 million people living here illegally, and the Center for Immigration Studies shows that 45% of non-citizen households are on SNAP benefits, and 21% of citizen households are on SNAP benefits,” DesJarlais said, citing a group that advocates for lower immigration levels.

"I think that it's fair to say that anywhere between 10 and 20% of the SNAP benefits are going to people here illegally, and no one's given me the information I've asked for yet to disprove that."

Republican Rep. Barry Moore of Alabama asked Vilsack if USDA is attempting to track undocumented immigrants enrolled in the program, and why roughly 81% of the farm bill went to SNAP with only 20% going to producers.

"Let me ask you a question, Congressman," Vilsack replied. "What do you think about the fact that there are working men and women with children who require SNAP because they're working for \$7.50 an hour? Do you think we should increase the minimum wage?"

"No, you can't increase the minimum wage," Moore responded. "It doesn't work. When you increase the minimum wage, everything else in the economy goes up. Every time we print dollars in D.C., basically, we are creating inflation. And that's the problem the American farmers are facing right now."

Democrats decry 'beating up on poor people'

Democratic members of the committee stood firm against cuts to SNAP, saying they target the nation's vulnerable populations and access to nutritious food is a fundamental human right.

"I don't know why, but as we're getting to do a farm bill here, we have people coming out of the woodwork again beating up on poor people," said Democratic Rep. Jim McGovern of Massachusetts. "If we want a farm bill, we ought not to screw around with SNAP."

McGovern said that recent studies have shown work requirements do not positively impact the employment or income of program enrollees.

Democratic Connecticut Rep. Jahana Hayes said that increases in SNAP benefits from the reevaluated Thrifty Food Plan kept nearly 2.3 million people out of poverty last year.

She pointed out that undocumented immigrants are not eligible for SNAP benefits, and people who have received asylum are here in the country legally.

Rep. Jonathan Jackson of Illinois asked Vilsack what the benefits of SNAP are that Congress should be aware of.

"There's data that indicates obviously that SNAP is one of the most effective poverty-reducing programs, if not the most effective, poverty-reducing program, we have," Vilsack said.

Democratic Ohio Rep. Shontel Brown added that spending in SNAP does not have to be offset in cuts to other programs.

"It is misguided to suggest that investing in families comes at the expense of our investing in our farmers," she said. "No one is exempt from the call to feed the hungry."

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

## Members of U.S. Senate panel press financial regulators on massive bank failures

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MARCH 28, 2023 3:10 PM

WASHINGTON — Financial regulators promised a full review of Silicon Valley Bank's massive failure as members of a key U.S. Senate panel on Tuesday interrogated the officials about what led to the second-largest bank collapse in U.S. history.

Members of the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs asked if the Federal Reserve could have done more to prevent the collapse and whether the government's quick decision to insure all deposits — even above the \$250,000 limit — was fair and could negatively impact smaller banks in the future.

Officials from the Federal Reserve, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and the Treasury Department defended their joint decision to prevent panic from spreading through the markets and pledged that a comprehensive review — that will include policy recommendations — is underway and will be available



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by May 1.

The failure of Silicon Valley Bank in early March, quickly followed by Signature Bank of New York's collapse, roused Democrats who blamed regulation rollbacks and Republicans who pointed to a Fed that they accused of being preoccupied with "a social agenda," as ranking member and Florida GOP Sen. Rick Scott characterized it.

In a matter of hours on March 9, SVB's depositors pulled \$42 billion out of the bank. By March 10, bank executives anticipated outflows would reach \$100 billion — an amount that the bank could not meet after the Fed's aggressive interest rate hikes began tanking SVB's investments in the bond market.

## Stress tests

Some Democrats are calling to restore regulations that were repealed in 2018, exempting midsize banks — like SVB at the time — from certain required financial stress tests.

But not all agree those rollbacks triggered the record-setting run on SVB.

"I've got real questions," said Democratic Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia. "Was this a regulatory and bank management failure or was it, as some on my side of the aisle have indicated, a statutory failure? If it was a statutory failure and an additional test or activity was needed, I'm all for putting it in place."

"But my operating premise at this point is if this had been not a \$200 billion bank, but a \$5 billion bank, that management's mistakes — not having a chief risk officer or other items and failure of basic prudential regulations — (management) should have caught this," Warner said.

The Fed's Michael Barr, the Board of Governors' vice chairman for supervision, told Warner that the rapid failure was a "textbook case of bank mismanagement."

"The risk the bank faced, the interest rate risk and liquidity risk, those are bread-and-butter banking issues," Barr said. "The firm was quite aware of those issues. They had been told by regulators. Investors were talking about problems with interest rates and liquidity risk publicly. And they didn't take the action necessary."

Democratic Sen. Jon Tester of Montana placed the blame on regulators, who witnessed SVB's rapid growth and warned the bank as early as November 2021. The bank more than tripled its assets from \$71 billion in 2019 to over \$200 billion in 2022.

"For over a year regulators were saying to this bank 'Straighten up and fly right' and they never did a damn thing about it," Tester said. "And the regulators didn't make it so damn miserable — which my understanding is regulators are pretty good at that when they want to be — that these folks would adjust their business plan to take care of the risk that was in their bank."

Sen. Mike Crapo, an Idaho Republican, argued that even with the 2018 amendment to the Dodd-Frank Act — a law put in place after the 2008 global financial crisis — the Fed still had the authority, at its discretion, to stress test SVB.

"Was there any statutory restriction faced by the (Fed) as it issued its regulations on tailoring that would have prohibited them from applying the strictest standards they could to address the prudential needs of our banking system?" Crapo asked.

"I agree with you, there was substantial discretion under that act for the Federal Reserve to put in place (rules) that were different from the tailoring rules it put in place in 2019," Barr said. "... That's one of the areas we'll be looking at in our review."

## Fairness and clawbacks

Senators on both sides of the aisle questioned the fairness of the government quickly shelling out the money to protect uninsured deposits.

Costs to the FDIC for SVB's collapse totaled \$20 billion, and Signature's clean-up totaled \$2.5 billion, according to hearing remarks prepared by FDIC Chair Martin Gruenberg.

Any losses to FDIC's deposit insurance fund will be repaid by a special assessment on banks, Gruenberg told the panel.

"I think it's important that we use the term bailout, and I know that some of you don't like that term, but I think it's the only term that applies fairly here because we — using excess fees on community banks

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all across the country — effectively chose to bail out the uninsured depositors of Silicon Valley Bank,” said Ohio’s Republican Sen. J.D. Vance.

Barr defended the decision: “We were thinking about the risk to the broader financial system, not to the particular depositors at one or two institutions ... We were hearing concerns from bankers and depositors around the country.”

But Vance pressed further.

“What I worry about is the fundamental unfairness here, that we’ve drawn a line — and I don’t know whether it stops at SVB, maybe it goes much further — where if you’re systemically important, which is a term impossible for anybody here to define with confidence, your uninsured deposits are effectively unlimited in their insurance” Vance continued.

“Whereas if you’re not systemically important, if you’re a regional bank in Ohio, there’s a very good chance that your uninsured depositors will not receive that bailout, and I think that uncertainty is a really, really big problem with what you guys have done.”

Georgia Democrat Sen. Raphael Warnock recalled the bailed-out bankers of 2008’s crisis who “played games with our economy.”

“Not only did they not go to jail, they got to keep their jobs and their multi-million-dollar salaries. I feel that in a particular way as someone who pastors and moves in communities where poor and marginalized people have the weight of the law come down on them for the smallest of infractions,” he said.

Warnock pressed the officials to “claw back” any financial benefits SVB executives reaped just before the bank collapsed.

A current proposal from Democrats would recoup profits and bonuses from bank executives within a 60-day window of a bank’s failure.

“It was mentioned earlier, and I think it’s appropriate that we do not have explicit clawback authority in regard to compensation. We can get at that issue through our existing authorities,” including civil penalties, Gruenberg said.

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

## Infant formula crisis could recur, former FDA official tells Congress

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 28, 2023 11:54 AM

WASHINGTON — U.S. lawmakers on Tuesday debated if enough has changed to prevent a repeat of the infant formula shortage, more than a year after a nationwide crisis began.

The U.S. House Oversight and Accountability Committee’s Subcommittee on Health Care and Financial Services heard from two experts that while the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has made some structural changes, infant formula manufacturers are still not required to notify the FDA if they detect certain types of bacteria at their facilities.

“The state of the infant formula industry today is not much different than it was then — the public health surveillance system for this pathogen remains insufficient, the necessary safeguards have not been advanced at an adequate pace to prevent future illnesses and the infant formula supply chain continues to lack serious resilience,” said Frank Yiannas, former deputy commissioner of the FDA Office of Food Policy & Response from 2018 to 2023.

“In other words, the nation remains one outbreak, one tornado, one flood, or cyberattack away from finding itself in a similar place to that of February 17, 2022,” Yiannas added.

Subcommittee Chairwoman Lisa McClain, a Michigan Republican, criticized the FDA for its response to the 2022 infant formula crisis, saying it “underscores a major problem with the FDA.”

“The FDA is responsible for 78% of the U.S. food supply, but the FDA is not prioritizing food safety,” McClain said.

McClain rebuked FDA leadership for holding onto a whistleblower complaint about unsafe and unsanitary conditions at Abbott Nutrition’s infant formula facility in Sturgis, Michigan for about four months before it

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inspected the site.

In a hearing last year, the head of the FDA, Robert Califf, told Congress he found no evidence of intentional delay or malfeasance within the agency — though it took months to act on the whistleblower report of what he called “egregiously unsanitary” conditions at the Sturgis plant. No current FDA official testified at Tuesday’s hearing.

California Democratic Rep. Katie Porter, the ranking member on the panel, questioned if such a delay would happen now if another whistleblower report made its way to the FDA. She also asked if the infant formula supply chain within the United States has diversified enough to handle one plant shutting down.

“This is partially an FDA problem, but it is also partially a big business problem. And Republicans and Democrats can’t pick and choose who to hold accountable,” she said.

Porter said while she expected many lawmakers to bash the FDA during the hearing, “discrediting an agency without figuring out what went wrong and how to fix it is simply malpractice.”

“I’m not afraid to say that the FDA has a lot of work to do, no matter who that offends. At the same time, I’m not afraid to say that Congress is part of the problem. We have to empower the FDA for it to succeed,” Porter said.

Abbott Nutrition and other food suppliers, Porter added, are ultimately “responsible for producing safe products.”

Porter charged that Congress must “stop turning a blind eye to consolidation in our food markets,” noting that “Abbott is one of three companies that control 90% of the formula market.”

“They have very few incentives to self regulate when they are so powerful, but that doesn’t mean we can let Abbott off the hook for its negligent behavior,” Porter said.

Peter Lurie, president and executive director for the Center for Science in the Public Interest, said that if lawmakers were looking for a spot to place blame, “the best place to start is at the Abbott Nutrition plant that produced the formula.”

“It was there that infant formula with Cronobacter was destroyed years before the outbreak without FDA being notified,” Lurie said, noting the whistleblower report detailed lax cleaning, falsified records, and relevant information hidden from FDA inspectors.

Preventing and managing future food crises, Lurie said, would require changes to the FDA’s authority, funding and organizational structure.

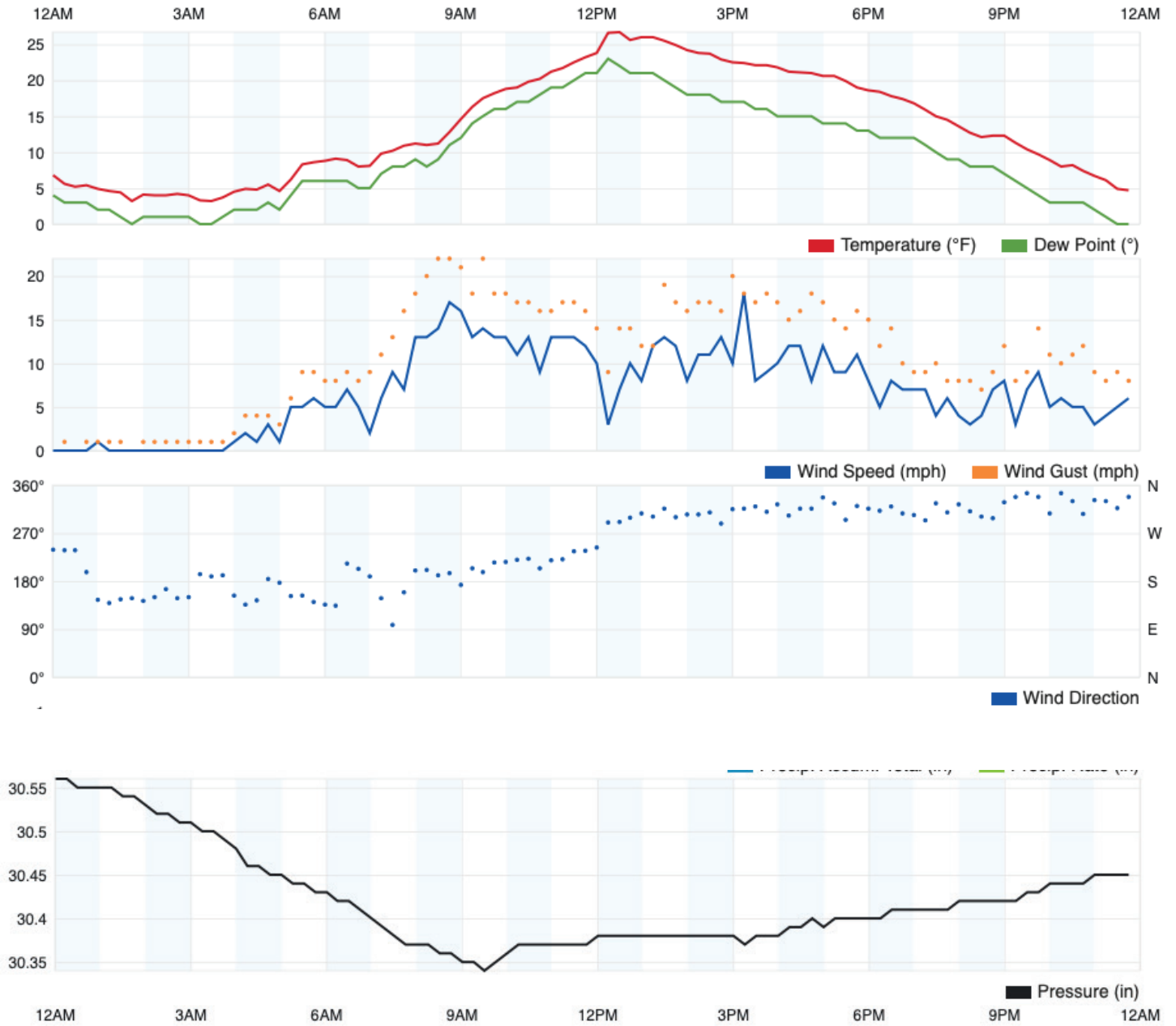
“No mother, no father, should ever again face a desperate store-by-store search for a product, simply to nourish their infants.”

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

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



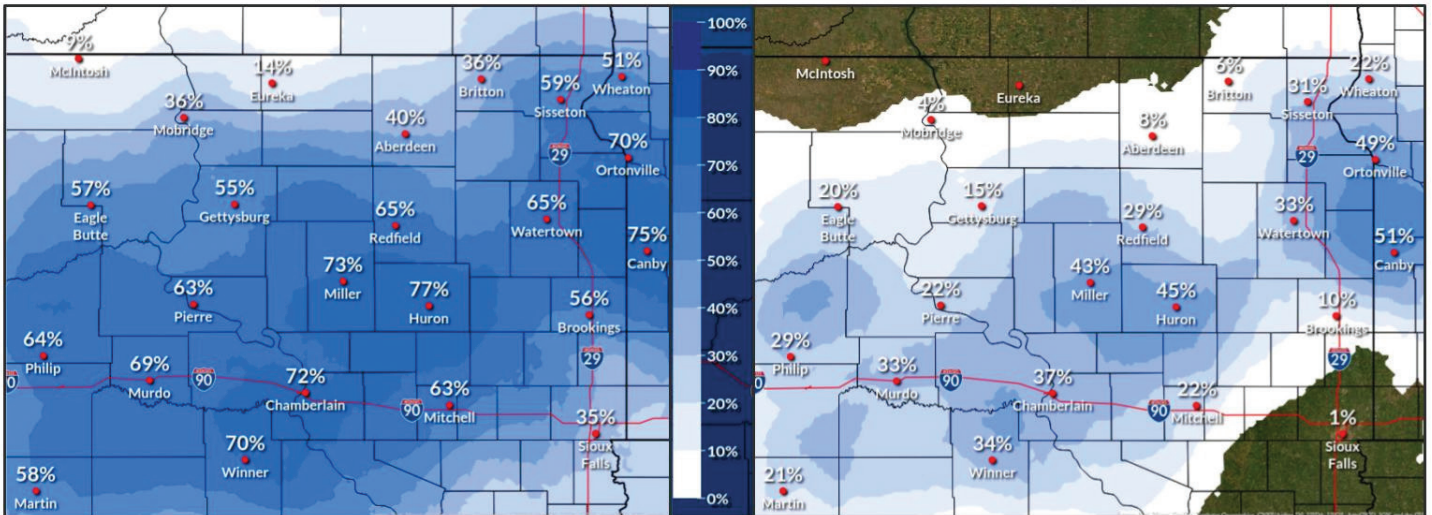
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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
						
Patched Fog then Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Cloudy then Chance Wintry Mix and Blustery	Chance Snow and Blowing Snow	Blowing Snow and Windy	Sunny
High: 19 °F	Low: 4 °F	High: 33 °F	Low: 21 °F	High: 28 °F	Low: 2 °F	High: 31 °F

## Snowfall Potential Friday

March 29, 2023 3:56 AM



- Axis of heavy snow potential may shift as storm is still 2-3 days out
- Initially precipitation may fall as freezing rain/drizzle or a mix
- Winds and blowing snow potential Friday



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

We continue to watch for winter weather impacts Friday...including the potential for mixed precipitation, heavy snow, high winds and hazardous travel conditions.

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## Preliminarily Timing: Precipitation Type & Intensity

March 29, 2023  
4:04 AM

- Expect shifts as models come into alignment
- Precipitation timing confidence increasing

	Weather Forecast															
	3/30 Thu					3/31 Fri					4/1 Sat					
	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am
Aberdeen						25%	25%	50%	50%	50%	35%	35%				
Britton		20%	20%	25%	25%	30%	30%	50%	50%	50%	35%	35%				
Eagle Butte						40%	40%	45%	45%	45%						
Eureka						30%	30%	40%	40%	40%	20%	20%				
Gettysburg						40%	40%	60%	60%	60%	30%	30%				
Kennebec						45%	45%	65%	65%	65%	40%	40%				
McIntosh				25%	25%	50%	50%	50%	30%	30%						
Milbank		20%	20%	30%	30%	30%	30%	65%	65%	65%	60%	60%	30%	30%		
Miller						40%	40%	70%	70%	70%	50%	50%				
Mobridge						30%	30%	40%	40%	40%						
Murdo						60%	60%	60%	60%	60%	30%	30%				
Pierre						45%	45%	60%	60%	60%	35%	35%				
Redfield						35%	35%	65%	65%	65%	50%	50%				
Sisseton		20%	20%	25%	25%	30%	30%	50%	50%	50%	45%	45%	20%	20%		
Watertown				25%	25%	35%	35%	65%	65%	65%	60%	60%	30%	30%		
Webster						30%	30%	60%	60%	60%	50%	50%	20%	20%		
Wheaton		25%	25%	25%	25%	25%	20%	50%	50%	50%	45%	45%	20%	20%		

\*Created: 3 am CDT Wed 3/29/2023. Shows most impactful weather for the period beginning at the time shown. Weather symbols display where Probability of Precipitation ≥ 20%.

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



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Precipitation Timing & Intensity...though anticipate this may shift slightly as the storm gets closer to our region



## Preliminarily Timing: Wind Direction & Speeds

March 29, 2023  
4:06 AM

- Expect shifts as models come into better alignment
- **Potential for blowing snow**
  - Greatest risk during periods of heavy snow & across Sisseton hills region...
  - Potential for hazardous travel

	Maximum Wind Gust Forecast																							
	3/29 Wed					3/30 Thu					3/31 Fri					4/1 Sat								
	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am									
Aberdeen	7	9	10	12	14	15	23	28	30	29	24	20	24	29	36	46	51	48	48	49	48	35	20	12
Britton	7	10	12	12	14	16	20	23	25	25	25	23	22	25	32	45	46	46	46	45	44	35	18	10
Eagle Butte	14	18	21	25	30	33	36	38	38	31	23	24	25	26	30	35	37	38	39	36	25	15	13	13
Eureka	6	12	15	16	21	23	29	36	36	35	25	22	21	25	33	40	41	43	41	39	33	20	10	10
Gettysburg	10	14	17	20	23	26	32	39	39	36	28	22	24	25	28	37	38	40	41	40	37	23	14	14
Kennebec	10	13	17	21	28	28	30	35	35	31	23	17	21	20	26	36	38	40	43	44	40	25	15	9
McIntosh	12	15	17	18	22	26	30	30	30	23	20	21	21	24	26	30	32	33	32	25	18	13	13	15
Milbank	9	8	10	8	10	10	13	15	21	26	25	18	15	17	23	30	36	43	45	49	49	45	37	25
Miller	8	9	13	14	20	23	28	33	37	33	26	20	18	23	31	38	41	41	43	41	43	29	16	12
Mobridge	9	14	16	18	21	22	26	30	31	25	21	20	21	23	26	32	35	36	36	37	29	15	9	13
Murdo	13	15	20	23	31	32	35	36	35	30	22	21	25	22	28	32	38	38	39	39	31	17	12	10
Pierre	10	13	15	22	26	29	30	31	31	28	21	21	23	20	24	28	31	36	39	39	33	17	8	9
Redfield	7	6	9	12	18	22	26	32	36	33	26	20	18	25	33	41	46	46	46	48	45	32	21	13
Sisseton	10	10	10	9	13	13	15	16	20	24	18	18	18	18	25	32	36	41	44	45	45	41	29	17
Watertown	5	6	7	8	12	15	20	25	29	31	29	21	17	21	28	38	44	47	51	51	47	38	29	17
Webster	6	6	7	10	16	20	24	32	36	36	38	23	21	23	31	44	49	52	55	53	49	41	25	14
Wheaton	9	10	10	10	10	12	15	20	23	26	26	22	18	16	22	29	36	39	41	45	45	39	29	20



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 28 °F at 12:22 PM

Low Temp: 3 °F at 3:21 AM

Wind: 24 mph at 8:19 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 41 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 81 in 2021

Record Low: -9 in 1969

Average High: 49

Average Low: 25

Average Precip in March.: 0.81

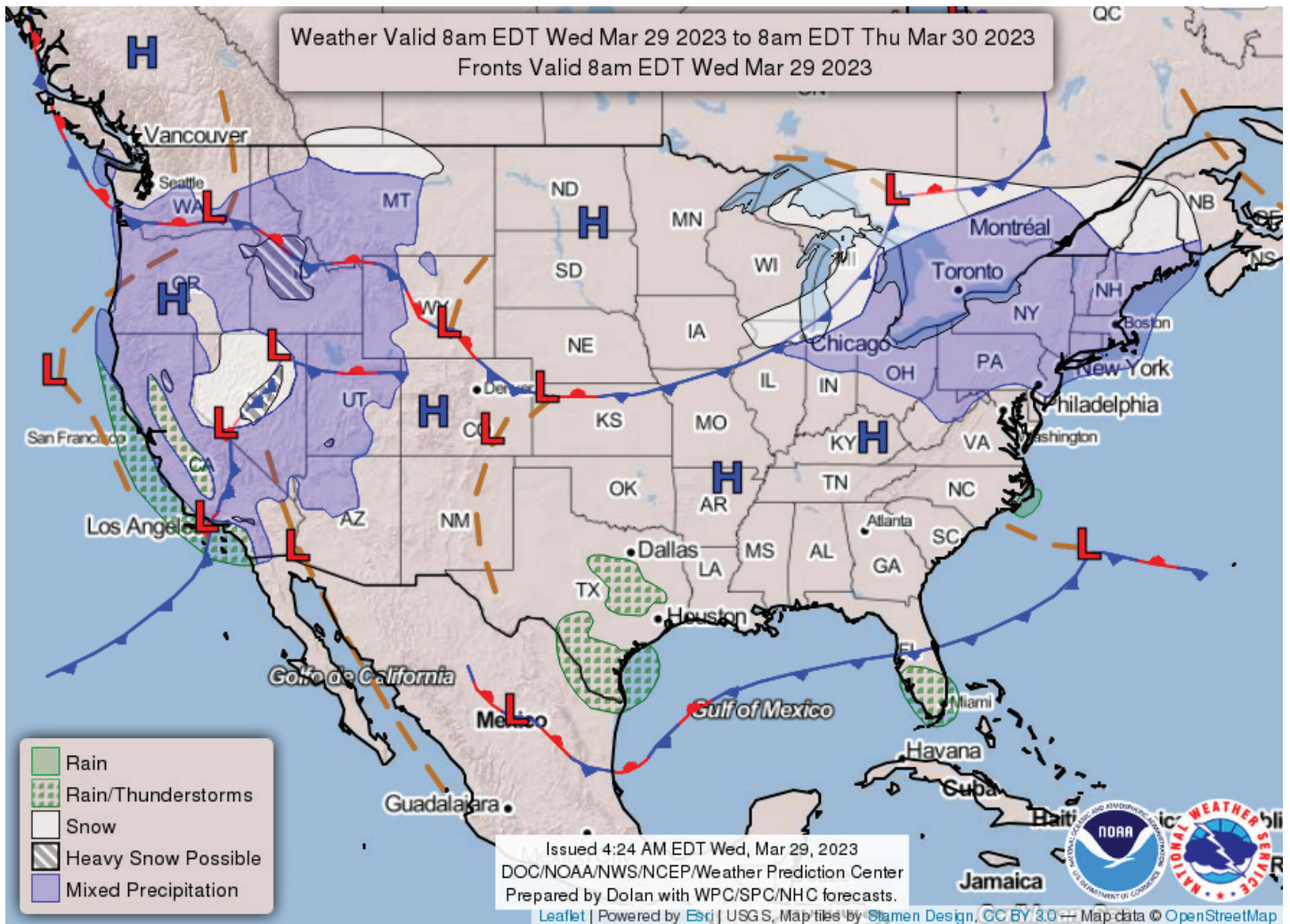
Precip to date in March.: 1.60

Average Precip to date: 1.98

Precip Year to Date: 3.18

Sunset Tonight: 7:57:40 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:57:40 PM



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## Today in Weather History

March 29, 1982: An early season Tornado briefly touched down at Swett, South Dakota (11 miles west of Martin). The tornado overturned and heavily damaged a mobile home. One person was slightly injured, and another barely escaped injury, as he left the trailer just seconds before the storm struck.

March 29, 1998: A supercell thunderstorm produced 13 tornadoes across southern Minnesota. The strongest tornado was an F4. Two people died during this tornado event.

1848: Niagara Falls eased to a trickle during the late afternoon and then became "silent" for 30 hours. Most people noticed the silence on the morning of the 30th. This is the only time in recorded history that both Falls stopped flowing. An ice jam at the neck of Lake Erie and the Niagara River entrance between Fort Erie, Ontario Canada, and Buffalo, NY, was caused by the wind, waves, and lake currents. People even ventured into the gorge, discovering relics like weapons from War of 1812.

1886: Rainfall amounts of 6-12 inches occurred over northwest Georgia in a 3-day period from March 29 through April 2. This caused record flooding on the Oostanaula and Etowah Rivers that merge to form the Coosa River. Floodwaters, up to 11 feet deep covered portions of Broad Street in Rome with extensive record flooding. The stage height reached 40.3 feet. Flood stage is 25 feet. This record flood and another major flood in 1892 prompted the citizens of Rome to raise the town by 12 feet. This feat was accomplished by bringing in thousands of wagon loads of dirt. An official rainfall amount of 7.36 inches was recorded on this day in Atlanta. The 7.36 inches is the most Atlanta has seen in one day since record-keeping began in 1878.

1920 - Clear Spring, MD, received 31 inches of snow in 24 hours to establish a state record. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1921 - The temperature in Washington D.C. dropped from 82 degrees to 26 degrees thus ending an early spring. (David Ludlum)

1935 - A severe duststorm blanketed Amarillo, TX, for 84 hours. During one six hour period the visibility was near zero. (28th-31st) (The Weather Channel)

1942: A slow-moving low-pressure system brought 11.5 inches of snow to the nation's capital on March 29, 1942. It still stands as the highest March snowfall on record in Washington, D.C. on a single calendar day. Also, Baltimore, Maryland recorded an imposing total of 21.9 inches of snow on the same day. On the flip side, eight days later, the temperature in D.C. soared to 92 degrees on April 6, 1942, and it remains the highest temperature on record for April 6. Click [HERE](#) for a video about the weather conditions during this event from the Weather Prediction Center.

1945 - Providence, RI, hit 90 degrees to establish a March record for the New England area. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms spawned tornadoes in Mississippi, and produced high winds and heavy rain in Louisiana. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 92 mph at Houma LA, and caused a million dollars damage in Terrebonne Parish. Avondale LA was deluged with 4.52 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms in the Lower Mississippi Valley spawned a tornado which injured two persons at Bunkie LA, and produced high winds which down a large tree onto a trailer at Bastrop LA claiming the life of one child and injuring another. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced torrential rains in northeastern Texas and southwestern Arkansas. Longview TX reported 14.16 inches of rain. More than eleven inches of rain at Henderson TX caused a dam to give way, and people left stranded in trees had to be rescued by boat. Total damage in northeastern Texas was estimated at 10 to 16 million dollars. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced severe weather in southeastern Texas and southern Louisiana. Thunderstorms spawned seven tornadoes, including one which injured seven persons at Gray LA. Thunderstorms also produced golf ball size hail and wind gusts to 70 mph at Port O'Conner TX, and produced up to six inches of rain in Beauregard Parish LA. (Storm Data)

2007 - Eighteen year old Corey Williams is killed by a lightning bolt in Carbondale, IL, at the Community High School's first home track meet of the season.



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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### GOD-LOVE

Perhaps there is no one word that is more confusing, more misunderstood, more diminished in its significance or abused than the word "love." Although it contains feelings, it is much more than feelings. Although it includes emotions, many times emotions are abused and misused. While it includes sentiments, it is more than sentimental desires that fluctuate from day to day.

Feelings, emotions, and sentiments change from moment to moment and day to day because life is dynamic, and every situation different. True love, God-love, must be seen, observed, lived, and expressed in the behavior of a Christian.

What I do with and to and for someone is what matters most in demonstrating and describing love. If we have any questions about this type of love, we simply need to look at the life of Jesus and meditate on His words: "God so loved this world that He gave His one and only begotten Son!" This is not a sentimental love, nor an emotional or feeling type of love. It is a love that was initiated by God, demonstrated in the life of Jesus and to be seen today in and through the lives of Christians today.

This love is the foundation of all relationships: first for our relationship with God and then our relationships with others. "God-love" will keep a relationship strong and healthy and bring individuals together in a common bond. In fact, this love will unite people in spite of flaws and faults, failures and foolish deeds. As Christians, we are obligated to "demonstrate God-love."

Prayer: Father, fill our hearts with God-love, a love that has no limits, never gives up, puts others first, always demonstrates compassion, and proves our concern. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16



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

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## 2023 Community Events

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

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.28.23

2 3 18 32 68 24

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$355,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 34  
DRAW: Mins 51 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 15 Hrs 34 Mins 51  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.28.23

7 9 16 28 30 5

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 15 Hrs 4 Mins 50  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.25.23

7 9 11 14 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$20,000**

NEXT 15 Hrs 34 Mins  
DRAW: 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.27.23

7 11 46 49 60 1

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 15 Hrs 33 Mins 51  
DRAW: 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 15 Hrs 33 Mins 51  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### Company recalls pasta dish sold at Midwest grocery chain

WEST DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A company announced Tuesday that it is recalling a packaged pasta dish sold in HyVee grocery stores in eight Midwestern states.

Chester, Illinois-based Gilster-Mary Lee Corp. said it was recalling HyVee Hamburger Chili Macaroni Skillet Meals produced at a plant in Steeleville, Illinois, because of undeclared milk in the product. The milk could be dangerous to people who have an allergy or severe sensitivity to milk.

The recall is for lots packaged in 5.2 ounce cartons that have a best by date of Feb. 8, 2024. The food was sold at HyVee and Dollar Fresh Market stores in Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

People can return packages to HyVee stores for a refund or can discard it. Hy-Vee is based in West Des Moines, Iowa.

### Russia launches drills of its nuclear missile forces

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — The Russian military conducted drills of its strategic missile forces Wednesday, deploying mobile launchers in Siberia in a show of the country's massive nuclear capability amid the fighting in Ukraine.

As part of the drills, the Yars mobile missile launchers will maneuver across three regions of Siberia, Russia's Defense Ministry said. The movements will involve measures to conceal the deployment from foreign satellites and other intelligence assets, the ministry said.

The Defense Ministry didn't say how long the drills would last or mention plans for any practice launches. The Yars is a nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missile with a range of about 11,000 kilometers (over 6,800 miles). It forms the backbone of Russia's strategic missile forces.

The Defense Ministry released a video showing massive trucks carrying the missiles driving out from a base to go on patrol. The maneuvers involve about 300 vehicles and 3,000 troops in eastern Siberia, according to the ministry.

The massive exercise took place days after Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a plan to deploy tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus, Russia's neighbor and ally.

Tactical nuclear weapons are intended for use on the battlefield and have a relatively short range and a much lower yield compared to the long-range strategic missiles fitted with nuclear warheads that are capable of obliterating whole cities.

Putin's decision to put the tactical weapons in Belarus followed his repeated warnings that Moscow was ready to use "all available means" — a reference to its nuclear arsenal — to fend off attacks on Russian territory.

Russian officials have issued a barrage of hawkish statements since their troops entered Ukraine, warning that the continuing Western support for Ukraine raised the threat of a nuclear conflict.

In remarks published Tuesday, Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of Russia's Security Council, which Putin chairs, warned the United States and its allies against harboring hopes for Russia's defeat in Ukraine.

Patrushev alleged that some American politicians believe the U.S. could launch a preventative missile strike on Russia to which Moscow would be unable to respond, a purported belief that he described as "short-sighted stupidity, which is very dangerous."

"Russia is patient and isn't trying to scare anyone with its military superiority, but it has unique modern weapons capable of destroying any adversary, including the United States, in case of a threat to its existence," Patrushev said.

## Ukraine's Zelenskyy: Any Russian victory could be perilous

By JULIE PACE and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

ON A TRAIN FROM SUMY TO KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned Tuesday that unless his nation wins a drawn-out battle in a key eastern city, Russia could begin building international support for a deal that could require Ukraine to make unacceptable compromises. He also invited the leader of China, long aligned with Russia, to visit.

If Bakhmut fell to Russian forces, their president, Vladimir Putin, would “sell this victory to the West, to his society, to China, to Iran,” Zelenskyy said in an exclusive interview with The Associated Press.

“If he will feel some blood — smell that we are weak — he will push, push, push,” Zelenskyy said in English, which he used for virtually all of the interview.

The leader spoke to the AP aboard a train shuttling him across Ukraine, to cities near some of the fiercest fighting and others where his country's forces have successfully repelled Russia's invasion. The AP is the first news organization to travel extensively with Zelenskyy since the war began just over a year ago.

Since then, Ukraine — backed by much of the West — has surprised the world with the strength of its resistance against the larger, better-equipped Russian military. Ukrainian forces have held their capital, Kyiv, and pushed Russia back from other strategically important areas.

But as the war enters its second year, Zelenskyy finds himself focused on keeping motivation high in both his military and the general Ukrainian population — particularly the millions who have fled abroad and those living in relative comfort and security far from the front lines.

Zelenskyy is also well aware that his country's success has been in great part due to waves of international military support, particularly from the United States and Western Europe. But some in the United States — including Republican Donald Trump, the former American president and current 2024 candidate — have questioned whether Washington should continue to supply Ukraine with billions of dollars in military aid.

Trump's likely Republican rival, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, also suggested that defending Ukraine in a “territorial dispute” with Russia was not a significant U.S. national security priority. He later walked that statement back after facing criticism from other corners of the GOP.

Zelenskyy didn't mention the names of Trump or any other Republican politicians — figures he might have to deal with if they prevailed in 2024 elections. But he did say that he worries the war could be impacted by shifting political forces in Washington.

“The United States really understands that if they stop helping us, we will not win,” he said in the interview. He sipped tea as he sat on a narrow bed in the cramped, unadorned sleeper cabin on a state railway train.

The president's carefully calibrated railroad trip was a remarkable journey across land through a country at war. Zelenskyy, who has become a recognizable face across the world as he doggedly tells his side of the story to nation after nation, used the morale-building journey to carry his considerable clout to regions close to the front lines.

He traveled with a small cadre of advisers and a large group of heavily armed security officials dressed in battlefield fatigues. His destinations included ceremonies marking the one-year anniversary of the liberation of towns in the Sumy region and visits with troops stationed at front-line positions near Zaporizhzhia. Each visit was kept under wraps until after he departed.

Zelenskyy recently made a similar visit near Bakhmut, where Ukrainian and Russian forces have been locked for months in a grinding and bloody battle. While some Western military analysts have suggested that the city is not of significant strategic importance, Zelenskyy warned that a loss anywhere at this stage in the war could put Ukraine's hard-fought momentum at risk.

“We can't lose the steps because the war is a pie — pieces of victories. Small victories, small steps,” he said.

Zelenskyy's comments were an acknowledgement that losing the 7-month-long battle for Bakhmut — the longest of the war thus far — would be more of a costly political defeat than a tactical one.

He predicted that the pressure from a defeat in Bakhmut would come quickly — both from the international community and within his own country. “Our society will feel tired,” he said. “Our society will push me to have compromise with them.”

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So far, Zelenskyy says he hasn't felt that pressure. The international community has largely rallied around Ukraine following Russia's Feb. 24, 2022, invasion. In recent months, a parade of world leaders have visited Zelenskyy in Ukraine, most traveling in on trains similar to the ones the president uses to crisscross the country.

In his AP interview, Zelenskyy extended an invitation to Ukraine to one notable and strategically important leader who has not made the journey — Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"We are ready to see him here," he said. "I want to speak with him. I had contact with him before full-scale war. But during all this year, more than one year, I didn't have."

China, economically aligned and politically favorable toward Russia across many decades, has provided Putin diplomatic cover by staking out an official position of neutrality in the war.

Asked whether Xi would accept an invitation from Zelenskyy — or whether one had been officially extended — Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told reporters she had no information to give. She did say that Beijing maintains "communication with all parties concerned, including Ukraine."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, asked whether a meeting between Xi and Zelenskyy would be useful to resolve the conflict in Ukraine, said Russian authorities "highly appreciate" China's balanced position on the issue and "have no right to come up with any advice" on whether the two should meet. "The Chinese leader himself decides the appropriateness of certain contacts," Peskov said during his daily conference call with reporters Wednesday.

Xi visited Putin in Russia last week, raising the prospect that Beijing might be ready to provide Moscow with the weapons and ammunition it needs to refill its depleted stockpile. But Xi's trip ended without any such announcement. Days later, Putin announced that he would be deploying tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus, which neighbors Russia and pushes the Kremlin's nuclear stockpile closer to NATO territory.

Zelenskyy suggested Putin's move was intended to distract from the lack of guarantees he received from China.

"What does it mean? It means that the visit was not good for Russia," Zelenskyy speculated.

The president makes few predictions about the biggest question hanging over the war: how it will end. He expressed confidence, however, that his nation will prevail through a series of "small victories" and "small steps" against a "very big country, big enemy, big army" — but an army, he said, with "small hearts."

And Ukraine itself? While Zelenskyy acknowledged that the war has "changed us," he said that in the end, it has made his society stronger.

"It could've gone one way, to divide the country, or another way — to unite us," he said. "I'm so thankful. I'm thankful to everybody — every single partner, our people, thank God, everybody — that we found this way in this critical moment for the nation. Finding this way was the thing that saved our nation, and we saved our land. We are together."

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Julie Pace is senior vice president and executive editor of The Associated Press. Hanna Arhirova is a Ukraine-based AP correspondent. Follow AP's coverage of the war in Ukraine: <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

## Reparations for Black Californians could top \$800 billion

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — It could cost California more than \$800 billion to compensate Black residents for generations of over-policing, disproportionate incarceration and housing discrimination, economists have told a state panel considering reparations.

The preliminary estimate is more than 2.5 times California's \$300 billion annual budget, and does not include a recommended \$1 million per older Black resident for health disparities that have shortened their average life span. Nor does the figure count compensating people for property unjustly taken by the government or devaluing Black businesses, two other harms the task force says the state perpetuated.

Black residents may not receive cash payments anytime soon, if ever, because the state may never adopt

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the economists' calculations. The reparations task force is scheduled to discuss the numbers Wednesday and can vote to adopt the suggestions or come up with its own figures. The proposed number comes from a consulting team of five economists and policy experts.

"We've got to go in with an open mind and come up with some creative ways to deal with this," said Assembly member Reggie Jones-Sawyer, one of two lawmakers on the task force responsible for mustering support from state legislators and Gov. Gavin Newsom before any reparations could become reality.

In an interview prior to the meeting, Jones-Sawyer said he needed to consult budget analysts, other legislators and the governor's office before deciding whether the scale of payments is feasible.

The estimates for policing and disproportionate incarceration and housing discrimination are not new. The figures came up in a September presentation as the consulting team sought guidance on whether to use a national or California-specific model to calculate damages.

But the task force must now settle on a cash amount as it nears a July 1 deadline to recommend to lawmakers how California can atone for its role in perpetuating racist systems that continue to undermine Black people.

For those who support reparations, the staggering \$800 billion amount economists suggest underscores the long-lasting harm Black Americans have endured, even in a state that never officially endorsed slavery. Critics pin their opposition partly on the fact that California was never a slave state and say current taxpayers should not be responsible for damage linked to events that germinated hundreds of years ago.

Task force recommendations are just the start because ultimate authority rests with the state Assembly, Senate and the governor.

"That's going to be the real hurdle," said Sen. Steven Bradford, who sits on the panel. "How do you compensate for hundreds of years of harm, even 150 years post-slavery?"

Financial redress is just one part of the package being considered. Other proposals include paying incarcerated inmates market value for their labor, establishing free wellness centers and planting more trees in Black communities, banning cash bail and adopting a K-12 Black studies curriculum.

Gov. Newsom signed legislation in 2020 creating the reparations task force after national protests over the death of George Floyd, a Black man, at the hands of Minneapolis police. While federal initiatives have stalled, cities, counties and other institutions have stepped in.

An advisory committee in San Francisco has recommended \$5 million payouts, as well as guaranteed income of at least \$97,000 and personal debt forgiveness for qualifying individuals. Supervisors expressed general support, but stopped short of endorsing specific proposals. They will take up the issue later this year.

The statewide estimate includes \$246 billion to compensate eligible Black Californians whose neighborhoods were subjected to aggressive policing and prosecution of Black people in the "war on drugs" from 1970 to 2020. That would translate to nearly \$125,000 for every person who qualifies.

The numbers are approximate, based on modeling and population estimates. The economists also included \$569 billion to make up for the discriminatory practice of redlining in housing loans. Such compensation would amount to about \$223,000 per eligible resident who lived in California from 1933 to 1977. The aggregate is considered a maximum and assumes all 2.5 million people who identify as Black in California would be eligible.

Redlining officially began in the 1930s when the federal government started backing mortgages to support homebuying, but excluded majority Black neighborhoods by marking them red on internal maps. The racial gap in homeownership persists today, and Black-owned homes are frequently undervalued. Redlining officially ended in 1977, but the practice persisted.

Monetary redress will be available to people who meet residency and other requirements. They must also be descendants of enslaved and freed Black people in the U.S. as of the 19th century, which leaves out Black immigrants.

In their report, the consultants suggest the state task force "err on the side of generosity" and consider a down-payment with more money to come as more evidence becomes available.



"It should be communicated to the public that the substantial initial down-payment is the beginning of a conversation about historical injustices, not the end of it," they said.

## Taiwan leader's US meeting plans draw Chinese threat

BEIJING (AP) — China threatened "resolute countermeasures" over a planned meeting between Taiwan's president and the United States House speaker during an upcoming trip through Los Angeles.

Diplomatic pressure against Taiwan has ramped up recently, with Beijing poaching Taipei's dwindling number of diplomatic allies while also sending military fighter jets flying toward the island on a near daily basis. Earlier this month, Honduras established diplomatic relations with China, leaving Taiwan with only 13 countries that recognize it as a sovereign state.

President Tsai Ing-wen framed the trip as a chance to show Taiwan's commitment to democratic values on the world stage, as she left Taiwan Wednesday afternoon to begin her 10-day tour of the Americas.

"I want to tell the whole world democratic Taiwan will resolutely safeguard the values of freedom and democracy, and will continue to be a force for good in the world, continuing a cycle of goodness, strengthening the resilience of democracy in the world," she told reporters before she boarded the plane. "External pressure will not obstruct our resolution to engage with the world."

Tsai is scheduled to transit through New York on March 30 before heading to Guatemala and Belize. On April 5, she's expected to stop in Los Angeles on her way back to Taiwan, at which time the meeting with U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy is tentatively scheduled.

The U.S. stops are the most closely watched of her trip.

Spokesperson for the Cabinet's Taiwan Affairs Office Zhu Fenglian at a news conference Wednesday denounced Tsai's stopover on her way to diplomatic allies in Central America and demanded that no U.S. officials meet with her.

"We firmly oppose this and will take resolute countermeasures," Zhu said. The U.S. should "refrain from arranging Tsai Ing-wen's transit visits and even contact with American officials, and take concrete actions to fulfill its solemn commitment not to support Taiwan independence," she said.

Speaking later Wednesday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said China would "closely follow the development of the situation and resolutely defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity."

"The United States should stop claiming to set up guardrails for China-U.S. relations while conducting dangerous activities that undermine the political foundation of bilateral ties," Mao told reporters at a daily briefing.

Transit visits through the United States by Taiwanese presidents have been routine over the years, senior U.S. officials in Washington and Beijing have underscored to their Chinese counterparts.

In such unofficial visits in recent years, Tsai has met with members of Congress and Taiwanese-American civic groups, and has been welcomed by the chairperson of the American Institute in Taiwan, the U.S. government-run nonprofit that carries out unofficial relations with Taiwan.

Tsai transited through the United States six times between 2016 and 2019 before slowing international travel with the coronavirus pandemic. In reaction to those visits, China lashed out rhetorically against the U.S. and Taiwan.

However, the planned meeting with McCarthy has triggered fears of a heavy-handed Chinese reaction amid heightened frictions between Beijing and Washington over U.S. support for Taiwan, trade and human rights issues.

Following a visit by then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan in 2022, Beijing launched missiles over the area, deployed warships across the median line of the Taiwan Strait and carried out military exercises in a simulated blockade of the island. Beijing also suspended climate talks with the U.S. and restricted military-to-military communication with the Pentagon.

McCarthy, R-Calif., has said he would meet with Tsai when she is in the U.S. and has not ruled out the possibility of traveling to Taiwan in a show of support.

Beijing sees official American contact with Taiwan as encouragement to make the island's decades-old

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de facto independence permanent, a step U.S. leaders say they don't support. Pelosi, D-Calif., was the highest-ranking elected American official to visit the island since then-Speaker Newt Gingrich in 1997. Under the "One China" policy, the U.S. acknowledges Beijing's view that it has sovereignty over Taiwan, but considers Taiwan's status as unsettled. Taipei is an important partner for Washington in the Indo-Pacific.

U.S. officials are increasingly worried about China attempting to make good on its long-stated goal of bringing Taiwan under its control by force if necessary. The sides split amid civil war in 1949 and Beijing sees U.S. politicians' visits as conspiring with Tsai's pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party to make the separation permanent and stymie China's rise as a global power.

The 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, which has governed U.S. relations with the island, does not require Washington to step in militarily if China invades but makes it American policy to ensure Taiwan has the resources to defend itself and to prevent any unilateral change of status by Beijing.

Tensions spiked earlier this year when President Joe Biden ordered a Chinese spy balloon shot down after it traversed the continental United States. The Biden administration has also said U.S. intelligence findings show that China is weighing sending arms to Russia for its ongoing war in Ukraine, but has no evidence Beijing has done so yet.

China, however, has provided Russia with an economic lifeline and political support, and President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping met in Moscow earlier this month. That was the first face-to-face meeting between the allies since before Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine more than a year ago.

The Biden administration postponed a planned visit to Beijing by Secretary of State Antony Blinken following the balloon controversy but has signaled it would like to get such a visit back on track.

The Foreign Ministry's Mao said the blame for tensions laid squarely on Washington for boosting relations with Tsai. Beijing has frozen almost all contacts with Tsai's administration since shortly after she was elected to the first of her two terms in 2016.

"It is not that China overreacts. It is that the U.S. kept emboldening Taiwan independence forces, which is egregious in nature," she said.

Tsai's state visits coincide with a 12-day trip to China by her predecessor, Ma Ying-jeou, of the pro-unification Nationalist Party, in an appeal to voters whose descendants arrived with Chiang Kai-shek's defeated forces in 1949.

Ma has been visiting sites in the former Nationalist capital of Nanjing and emphasizing historical and cultural links between the sides, while avoiding the politically sensitive topics of China's determination to eliminate Taiwan's international presence and refusal to recognize its government.

Tsai is barred from seeking a third term and her party is widely expected to nominate Vice President Lai Ching-te to run for the presidency in January.

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AP reporter Huizhong Wu in Taipei, Taiwan, contributed to this report.

## Mass shootings seldom shift partisan policies despite outcry

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

Public outrage is swift following mass shootings, such as the killing of six people at a Christian elementary school in Nashville. Sorrow and sympathy are widespread. But what comes next from policymakers is likely to depend on which political party is in charge of a state.

Don't expect new gun controls in Republican-led states, such as Tennessee or Texas.

But when similar tragedies occur in Democratic-led states, more gun limits are likely — even if they already have restrictive laws.

Mass shootings generally don't seem to change a state's basic political makeup.

"Democratic-led states tend to focus more on firearm restrictions whereas Republican-led states do not and often emphasize lessening regulations on guns," said Jaclyn Schildkraut, executive director of the Regional Gun Violence Research Consortium at the Rockefeller Institute of Government.

The fact that responses seem predicated by Republican and Democratic labels is perhaps an indication

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of the nation's political polarization — and of differing viewpoints that pin the problem primarily on violent individuals or their easy access to weapons.

## TENNESSEE SHOOTING RESPONSE

Following Monday's shooting at The Covenant School in Nashville, tensions ran high among state lawmakers meeting across town in the state Capitol. Democrats called for action on gun control — and got their microphones cut off by Republican leadership for criticizing their GOP colleagues' love of the Second Amendment.

"Prayers are good, but faith without works is dead," Democratic state Sen. Raumes Akbari implored with a biblical reference. "Let's not let another preventable tragedy unfold without this legislature taking real action."

Any action from Republican lawmakers, however, is more likely to move in a different direction. Republicans this year have introduced bills that would make it easier to arm teachers and allow college students to carry weapons on campus.

On the same day as the Nashville shooting, a federal judge approved a legal settlement lowering the minimum age to carry handguns without a permit in Tennessee from 21 to 18. That came just two years after a new law set the age at 21.

## BLUE STATES

Michigan's new Democratic legislative majority took its first steps earlier this month toward passing a sweeping gun safety package.

The Senate voted along party lines for a red-flag law that would allow guns to temporarily be removed from people with potentially violent behavior. It also passed measures requiring anyone purchasing a rifle or shotgun to undergo a background check, which is currently only required for handgun purchases, and to store guns safely where they cannot be accessed by minors.

Much of the package was crafted by Democrats nearly 15 months ago following a shooting at Oxford High School. But the bills saw little movement until Democrats won control of the Legislature from Republicans in last fall's elections. They've gained momentum after a gunman killed three people last month at Michigan State University, not far from the state Capitol.

In Colorado, the Democratic-led Legislature was pursuing a variety of new gun restrictions after five people were killed last November at an LGBTQ nightclub in Colorado Springs. After another shooting injured two administrators a Denver high school last week, Democratic majorities are pushing through hours of Republican filibusters to send several gun control bills to Democratic Gov. Jared Polis.

The bills would expand who can petition to temporarily remove a firearm from someone who poses a danger, raise the minimum age for purchasing a firearm from 18 to 21 and institute a three-day waiting period when buying a gun. While Polis supports those three bills, he has demurred from questions around a fourth bill that would ban semi-automatic firearms. That bill faces a steeper battle to become law.

## RED STATES

Republican-led Florida responded to a 2018 shooting that killed 14 students and three staff members at a Parkland school by passing laws that raised the gun-buying age to 21, imposed a three-day waiting period for purchases and authorized red-flag laws to temporarily remove guns from people. But that marked a bit of an exception for Republican states.

In Texas, minority party Democrats have filed numerous gun-control bills after a shooter killed 19 children and two teachers last May at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde. Relatives of some of the victims have joined Democratic lawmakers at Capitol rallies urging action. Some proposals would raise the age for owning so-called assault weapons, limit firearm transfers among people and create requirements for safe firearm storage.

But GOP state leaders have made clear from the start that these bills do not have the necessary votes to pass.

Instead, Texas officials responded last summer with about \$105 million for school safety and mental health initiatives. The Senate also passed a bill earlier this month that would require the reporting of court-

mandated mental health hospitalizations to the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System for people as young as 16. That bill now is pending in the House.

Students from Central Visual Arts and Performing Arts High School in St. Louis, where a gunman killed two and injured seven others last fall, also have traveled to the Missouri Capitol to urge greater gun-control measures. But Democratic-sponsored bills to create a red-flag law allowing temporary gun removals have yet to receive a hearing in the Republican-led Legislature.

Instead, the Legislature approved \$20 million for safety grants to schools across the state in response to the shooting, and is considering more money for the program. A House committee also recently endorsed budget amendments that would provide several hundred thousand dollars for mental health care, art supplies and musical instruments at the school.

— Lieb reported from Jefferson City, Missouri. Associated Press writers Jesse Bedayn in Denver; Joey Cappelletti in Lansing, Michigan; Acacia Coronado in Austin, Texas; and Kimberlee Kruesi in Nashville contributed to this report. Bedayn and Cappelletti are corps members 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.

## 38 dead in Mexico fire after guards didn't let migrants out

By FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ and MORGAN LEE Associated Press

CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico (AP) — When smoke began billowing out of a migrant detention center in the Mexican border city of Ciudad Juarez, Venezuelan migrant Viangly Infante Padrón was terrified because she knew her husband was still inside.

The father of her three children had been picked up by immigration agents earlier in the day, part of a recent crackdown that netted 67 other migrants, many of whom were asking for handouts or washing car windows at stoplights in this city across the Rio Grande from El Paso, Texas.

In moments of shock and horror, Infante Padrón recounted how she saw immigration agents rush out of the building after fire started late Monday. Later came the migrants' bodies carried out on stretchers, wrapped in foil blankets. The toll: 38 dead in all and 28 seriously injured, victims of a blaze apparently set in protest by the detainees themselves.

"I was desperate because I saw a dead body, a body, a body, and I didn't see him anywhere," Infante Padrón said of her husband, Eduard Caraballo López, who in the end survived with only light injuries, perhaps because he was scheduled for release and was near a door.

But what she saw in those first minutes has become the center of a question much of Mexico is asking itself: Why didn't authorities attempt to release the men — almost all from Guatemala, Honduras, Venezuela and El Salvador — before smoke filled the room and killed so many?

"There was smoke everywhere. The ones they let out were the women, and those (employees) with immigration," Infante Padrón said. "The men, they never took them out until the firefighters arrived."

"They alone had the key," Infante Padrón said. "The responsibility was theirs to open the bar doors and save those lives, regardless of whether there were detainees, regardless of whether they would run away, regardless of everything that happened. They had to save those lives."

Immigration authorities said they released 15 women when the fire broke out, but have not explained why no men were let out.

Pope Francis on Wednesday offered prayers at the end of his general audience for the victims who died in the "tragic fire."

Surveillance video leaked Tuesday shows migrants, reportedly fearing they were about to be moved, placing foam mattresses against the bars of their detention cell and setting them on fire.

In the video, later confirmed by the government, two people dressed as guards rush into the camera frame, and at least one migrant appears by the metal gate on the other side. But the guards don't appear to make any effort to open the cell doors and instead hurry away as billowing clouds of smoke fill

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the structure within seconds.

"What humanity do we have in our lives? What humanity have we built? Death, death, death," thundered Bishop Mons. José Guadalupe Torres Campos at a Mass in memory of the migrants.

Mexico's National Immigration Institute, which ran the facility, said it was cooperating in the investigation. Guatemala has already said that many of the victims were its citizens, but full identification of the dead and injured remains incomplete.

U.S. authorities have offered to help treat some of the 28 victims in critical or serious condition, most apparently from smoke inhalation.

For many, the tragedy was the foreseeable result of a long series of decisions made by leaders in places like Venezuela and Central America, and by immigration policymakers in Mexico and the United States, as well of residents in Ciudad Juarez complaining about the number of migrants asking for handouts on street corners.

"You could see it coming," more than 30 migrant shelters and other advocacy organizations said in statement Tuesday. "Mexico's immigration policy kills."

Those same advocacy organizations published an open letter March 9 that complained of a criminalization of migrants and asylum-seekers in Ciudad Juarez. It accused authorities of abusing migrants and using excessive force in rounding them up, including complaints that municipal police questioned people in the street about their immigration status without cause.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador offered sympathy Tuesday, but held out little hope of change. He said the fire was started by migrants in protest after learning they would be deported or moved.

"They never imagined that this would cause this terrible misfortune," López Obrador said.

Immigration activist Irineo Mujica said the migrants feared being sent back, not necessarily to their home countries, but to southern Mexico, where they would have to cross the country all over again.

"When people reach the north, it's like a ping-pong game — they send them back down south," Mujica said.

"We had said that with the number of people they were sending, the sheer number of people was creating a ticking time bomb," Mujica said. "Today that time bomb exploded."

The migrants were stuck in Ciudad Juarez because U.S. immigration policies don't allow them to cross the border to file asylum claims. But they were rounded up because Ciudad Juarez residents were tired of migrants blocking border crossings or asking for money.

The high level of frustration in Ciudad Juarez was evident earlier this month when hundreds of mostly Venezuelan migrants tried to force their way across one of the international bridges to El Paso, acting on false rumors that the United States would allow them to enter the country. U.S. authorities blocked their attempts.

After that, Ciudad Juarez Mayor Cruz Pérez Cuellar started campaigning to inform migrants there was room in shelters and no need to beg in the streets. He urged residents not to give money to them, and said authorities removed migrants intersections where it was dangerous to beg and residents saw the activity as a nuisance.

For the migrants, the fire is another tragedy on a long trail of tears.

About 100 migrants gathered Tuesday outside the immigration facility's doors to demand information about relatives. In many cases, they asked the same question Mexico is asking itself.

Katuska Márquez, a 23-year-old Venezuelan woman with her two children, ages 2 and 4, was seeking her half-brother, Orlando Maldonado, who had been traveling with her.

"We want to know if he is alive or if he's dead," she said. She wondered how all the guards who were inside made it out alive and only the migrants died. "How could they not get them out?"

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Verza reported from Mexico City. Associated Press videojournalist Alicia Fernández and writers Guadalupe Peñuelas in Ciudad Juarez, Mark Stevenson in Mexico City, Sonia Pérez D. in Guatemala City and Elliot Spagat in San Diego contributed to this report.

## Hawaii authorities say 33 swimmers were harassing dolphins

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Hawaii authorities on Tuesday say they have referred 33 people to U.S. law enforcement after the group allegedly harassed a pod of wild dolphins in waters off the Big Island.

It's against federal law to swim within 50 yards (45 meters) of spinner dolphins in Hawaii's nearshore waters. The prohibition went into effect in 2021 amid concerns that so many tourists were swimming with dolphins that the nocturnal animals weren't getting the rest they need during the day to be able to forage for food at night.

The rule applies to areas within 2 nautical miles (3.7 kilometers) of the Hawaiian Islands and in designated waters surrounded by the islands of Lanai, Maui and Kahoolawe.

The state Department of Land and Natural Resources said in a news release that its enforcement officers came upon the 33 swimmers in Honaunau Bay on Sunday during a routine patrol.

Aerial footage shot by drone shows snorkelers following dolphins as they swim away. The department said its video and photos showed swimmers "who appear to be aggressively pursuing, corralling and harassing the pod."

Enforcement officers contacted the group while they were in the water, and told them about the violation. Uniformed officers met the swimmers on land where state and federal officials launched a joint investigation.

Hawaii's spinner dolphins feast on fish and small crustaceans that surface from the ocean's depths at night. When the sun rises, they head for shallow bays to hide from tiger sharks and other predators.

To the untrained eye, the dolphins appear to be awake during the day because they're swimming.

But because they sleep by resting half of their brains and keeping the other half awake to surface and breathe, they may be sleeping even when they're maneuvering through the water.

## King Charles III makes world debut as tour starts in Germany

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's new king will make his debut on the world stage Wednesday, three days later and 550 miles (885 kilometers) northeast of where he had intended.

Although King Charles III will be greeted with a hearty "willkommen" in Berlin rather than "bienvenue" in Paris, his goals remain the same: to cement Britain's improving relations with Europe and show that he can help the U.K. win hearts and minds abroad just as his mother did so successfully for seven decades.

But the decision to cancel the first leg of his trip due to protests over planned pension changes in France may make it harder for Charles to make his mark during his first big international mission as monarch. And first impressions matter as Charles, 74, prepares for his coronation on May 6.

"Charles will have fewer opportunities to present himself," said Arianne Chernock, a royal expert and professor of modern British history at Boston University. "This means that he'll need to be very disciplined about using those opportunities available to maximize his impact — there won't be many second chances on this trip."

Charles, who ascended the throne after the death of Queen Elizabeth II in September, had something bigger in mind when this coming out party as king was announced.

Billed as a multi-day tour of the European Union's two biggest countries, the trip was designed to underscore British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's efforts to rebuild relations with the bloc after six years of arguments over Brexit and highlight the countries' shared history as they work together to combat Russian aggression in Ukraine.

Now everything rests on Germany.

The truncated trip starts Wednesday in Berlin, where German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier will welcome Charles and Camilla, the queen consort, at the historic Brandenburg Gate.

The king is scheduled to give a speech to the Bundestag, Germany's parliament, on Thursday. He will also meet Chancellor Olaf Scholz, talk to Ukrainian refugees and meet with British and Germany military

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personnel who are working together on joint projects.

The royal couple go to Hamburg on Friday, where they will visit the Kindertransport memorial for Jewish children who fled from Germany to Britain during the Third Reich, and attend a green energy event before returning to the U.K.

The king was urged to make the trip by Sunak, who during his first six months in office negotiated a settlement to the long-running dispute over post-Brexit trading rules for Northern Ireland and reached a deal with France to combat the people smugglers ferrying migrants across the English Channel in small boats. Sunak hopes goodwill created by a royal visit can help pave the way for progress on other issues, including Britain's return to an EU program that funds scientific research across Europe.

This is the first big test of whether Charles can be an effective conduit for the "soft power" the House of Windsor has traditionally wielded, helping Britain pursue its geopolitical goals through the glitz and glamor of a 1,000-year-old monarchy.

The Windsors are among the most recognizable people on the planet. While their formal powers are strictly limited by law and tradition, they draw attention from the media and the public partly because of the historic ceremonies and regalia that accompany them — and also because the public is fascinated by their personal lives.

The late Queen Elizabeth II was the embodiment of this — the monarch everyone wanted to meet for tea, if for no other reason than that she'd been around so long.

Elizabeth's influence stemmed in part from the fact that she made more than 100 state visits during her 70 years on the throne, meeting presidents and prime ministers around the world in a reign that lasted from the Cold War to the information age.

But questions remain about whether Charles has the same star power as his mother, dubbed "Queen of the World" by one biographer, Robert Hardman.

Charles has fewer years to make his mark and will not try to copy her, said Bronwen Maddox, who heads the Chatham House public affairs think tank in London.

"He's getting this (opportunity) towards the end of his life, and it's very much a chance to make the best of it without claiming that it is the same, in any way, as his mother," she said. "I think he will find his own way to do it."

Charles, a former naval officer who is the first British monarch to earn a university degree, is expected to insert heft where his glamorous mother once wielded star power.

As Britain's head of state, the king meets weekly with the prime minister and retains his mother's role as leader of the Commonwealth.

His visit to Germany will showcase these roles while also giving him an opportunity to highlight the causes he holds dear, like sustainability and the environment.

But there will also be a full dose of the pomp and circumstance that screams royal visit, starting with a ceremonial welcome at the Brandenburg Gate, the neoclassical landmark in the center of Berlin that has provided the backdrop to so much of German history. White tie and tiaras are expected to be on display during a state dinner at Schloss Bellevue, the German president's official residence.

There will be plenty, therefore, to attract the crowds in Germany and demonstrate to people back home that Charles has eased into the role of monarch and chief diplomat.

"In some ways, Charles does not have to do very much for people to follow him because there's the mystique of the institution," Chernock said. "I think people are fascinated by his family and all of the drama surrounding it. So he could stand perfectly still and not utter a word and he would still draw crowds."

## Spain clean energy case shakes confidence in EU investment

By JENNIFER O'MAHONY Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Renewable energy investors who lost subsidies promised by Spain are heading to a London court to try to claw back \$125 million from the government — a decadelong dispute with ramifications for clean energy financing across the European Union.

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The outcome will be closely watched by investors after the U.S. passed a new law offering incentives for homegrown green technology. Experts say the Inflation Reduction Act is already drawing clean energy investment away from EU countries like Spain, leaving the 27-nation bloc much less competitive globally.

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, has proposed its own rules on allowing state aid and incentives for green investment. But those changes would not affect court cases already underway.

The lawsuit in London's Commercial Court this week involves investors from the Netherlands and Luxembourg who poured millions into a solar plant in southern Spain in 2011. The Spanish government offered subsidies to encourage growth in renewable energy production, then controversially slashed the payments without notice as it cut costs after the 2008 financial crisis.

Spain has been sued internationally more than 50 times over the retroactive changes. It has not paid out despite losing more than 20 cases so far, according to U.N. data on international investment disputes. The EU backs Spain's position.

"Those renewable investors — multibillion-dollar companies — are very concerned about the attitude of Spain and Europe looking forward," said Nick Cherryman, one of the lawyers leading the case against Spain. "Why should they take risks investing in Europe given the track record?"

Spain now ranks alongside Venezuela and Russia as countries with the most unpaid debts over commercial treaty violations, according to a recent ranking compiled by Nikos Lavranos, a Netherlands-based expert in investment arbitration and EU law.

Most of the cases allege that Spain broke agreements it agreed to honor under the international Energy Charter Treaty, a legally binding agreement between 50 countries to protect companies from unfair government interference in the energy sector.

Environmental campaigners have criticised the treaty for protecting fossil fuel investment because financiers can also sue over policy changes aimed at scaling back polluting projects. However, for Spain, almost all cases relate to renewable energy.

"If you take the bigger picture, the EU is shooting itself in the foot by supporting Spain in this," Lavranos said. "You cannot trust that they can follow through with their agreements, so I think you do shake investors' confidence."

He also questioned how leaving investors in the lurch over initiatives to ramp up renewable energy production aligned with recent EU initiatives like the Green New Deal, a goal for carbon neutrality by 2050 and relaxation of subsidy rules.

"It's very contradictory," Lavranos said.

In 2013, the investors in Spain brought a case before the World Bank-backed International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes, an arbitration body between governments and investors.

Spain in 2018 was ordered to compensate investors over its subsidy changes. Despite being told to pay out more than \$1 billion by the international body, Spain has refused, citing EU rules.

Spain's Ecological Transition Ministry said the payments "may be contrary to EU law and constitute illegal state aid." When the government is told to make a payout, it says it notifies Brussels but that "Spain cannot pay before the commission's decision, so it is faithfully complying with its legal obligations."

The European Commission said the Energy Charter Treaty does not apply in disputes between member states like the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Spain, arguing EU law takes precedence. The commission says the decision to compensate investors over lost Spanish subsidies is still being studied and "the preliminary view is that the arbitration award would constitute state aid."

Cherryman, the investors' lawyer, said the EU thinks it "should be superior to international treaty law." After waiting for payment for a decade and given the EU position, his team is trying to seize part of a \$1 billion settlement awarded to Spain over a 2002 oil spill.

Starting Wednesday, the London court will hear Spain's arguments that the investors should not be allowed to seize those assets in lieu of compensation they have yet to be paid.

José Ángel Rueda, a Spanish international arbitration lawyer who has represented several renewable energy investors against Spain, said the country's reputation is at stake. Other EU members like Germany



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and Hungary have paid out after international disputes, opting to maintain a positive image, he said.

"Spain is not like Russia or Venezuela. It was expected to be a serious country. But the awards remain unpaid," Rueda said. "Investors can see that Spain might not be a reliable state in terms of the rule of law."

Following years of legal wrangling, the EU is now considering a coordinated withdrawal from the energy treaty, though that would not affect pending disputes.

"It is not possible to modernize the treaty to make it compatible with the objectives of the Paris agreement and the European Green Deal," Spain's Ecological Transition Ministry said.

The European Commission agreed, saying a withdrawal was "the most pragmatic way forward."

That might simply nudge investors to look across the Atlantic, Cherryman said.

"America has been nimble, and it introduced very favorable legislation to encourage renewable investment," he said. "They will respect my investment. Or I can take risk and go into Europe, go into Spain."

The risk was the loss of more money for renewables, which are "a win for everybody," Cherryman said. "We all want to see renewables being invested in and we all want a greener environment that is a safer future for our children."

## Harris out to reframe US views on Africa, foster partnership

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and FRANCIS KOKUTSE Associated Press

ACCRA, Ghana (AP) — If U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris has a favorite number on her trip to Africa, it's undoubtedly 19. That's the median age on this continent, and she repeats the fact at every opportunity.

For Harris, it's not a piece of trivia but the driving force behind the United States' reenergized outreach to Africa. Washington is racing to build partnerships on the oldest inhabited continent with the youngest population, a test that could reshape the economy here and, by extension, the rest of the world.

As part of that effort, Harris plans to unveil more than \$1 billion in public and private funding for women's economic empowerment on Wednesday, according to her office. The money is expected to come from a mix of nonprofit foundations, private companies and the federal government, and it's intended to expand access to digital services, provide job training and support entrepreneurs.

The American vice president is scheduled to make the announcement during a meeting with six Ghanaian female entrepreneurs, her final event in Ghana before continuing her weeklong tour in Tanzania and Zambia.

Harris is the most high-profile member of President Joe Biden's administration to visit Africa this year as the U.S. steps up its outreach amid global rivalry over the continent. She's paid particular attention to economic development and young people during her time in Ghana.

Harris has visited a skate park and recording studio, released a Spotify playlist of African musicians, spoken to a crowd of thousands of young people, and invited a coterie of celebrities, civil rights leaders and businesspeople to join her at a banquet in her honor.

It's a carefully calibrated campaign to reframe how Americans view opportunities in Africa. New investments could not only benefit U.S. businesses but also alleviate one of the most pressing challenges here.

"If we don't find jobs — because that's what it's about — for this growing young population, it will be dangerous for the political stability on the continent," said Rama Yade, senior director of the Atlantic Council's Africa Center. "Because they will attack the institutions if they don't have the means for living."

The desire for investment was on full display Monday evening at the presidential palace known as the Jubilee House, where Washington officials ditched their usual staid attire for vibrant dresses and sharp tuxedos for the state banquet. Hollywood stars Spike Lee, Idris Elba and Rosario Dawson were among the attendees.

Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo entered with Harris, he in a dark, double-breasted suit and she in a white gown and cape adorned with a purple flower on the right shoulder.

Although the atmosphere was festive, the message was all business. A large screen at the far end of the banquet tent showed a computer-generated animation of future development in Accra, a vision of a modern African metropolis.

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"We're encouraged by the fact that more American companies than ever are looking to invest in Ghana," Akufo-Addo said. "And we will continue to create and maintain the conducive investment atmosphere that will not only guarantee the safety of their investments, but good returns on those investments as well."

By diversifying the country's economy beyond exporting natural resources, Akufo-Addo said, he envisioned "a Ghana beyond aid."

Ghana is being squeezed by skyrocketing inflation and a bulging debt burden, and Akufo-Addo noted the impact of "pernicious developments" like the war in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We want to work together to change the African narrative, which has been characterized largely by a concentration on disease, hunger, poverty and illegal mass migration," he said. "Together, we must help make Africa the place for investment, progress and prosperity."

It's a change that Harris is eager to help foster.

"While we face real challenges, I look around tonight and I am truly more optimistic than ever," Harris said in her own toast. "And I know that by working together, the United States and Ghana, alongside the diaspora and the people of this beautiful continent, will share and share our future for the better."

Harris' husband, Doug Emhoff, joined the effort as well. He went to a girls' basketball clinic and spoke with students at a town hall discussion with the cast of the local television series "You Only Live Once," which addresses public health issues and other challenges facing Ghanaian youth.

Emhoff said the message was about "having confidence in yourself to know that you can do whatever you want to do in this world."

But that hope for the future isn't necessarily widespread.

Adwoa Brentuo, who graduated four years ago with a degree in information science, is one of many who fear their education was no help.

"I have now given up about getting a job because they are nonexistent," she said. "I have also realized that writing applications have become a waste of time."

Ghana's minister of youth and sports, Mustapha Yussif, estimated that only one out of 10 college graduates gets a job.

"The rest will not be able to get any employment for a long time," Yussif said.

It's a problem across the continent. The African Development Bank estimates that there are on average about 11 million people entering the job market while at the same time only about 3 million jobs are created.

Harris' stops in Ghana included an Accra youth center that features a skate park and recording studio. Young skaters glided back and forth as she arrived, their boards occasionally clattering against the pavement.

Inside, a staff member said that teenagers can learn topics like accounting in addition to playing music.

"We are all learning from scratch," the staff member told Harris. "Let us hope for the next generation in here."

## **Palestinian teachers' strike grows, reflecting deep crisis**

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

AL-AZZA REFUGEE CAMP, West Bank (AP) — In schools across the world, children are halfway into their second semester. But in a Palestinian refugee camp south of Jerusalem, kids wake up at 1 p.m. They kick soccer balls, hang out in barbershops and aimlessly scroll through TikTok. They watch television until dawn, just to wake up late and laze around all over again.

Palestinian public schools in the West Bank have been closed since Feb. 5 in one of the longest teachers' strikes in recent memory against the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority. Teachers' demands for a pay raise have escalated into a protest movement that has vexed the increasingly autocratic Palestinian self-rule government as it plunges deeper into an economic crisis.

But the strike isn't just about money. As the largest group of government employees in the West Bank after security forces, teachers are also calling for a democratically elected union. The authority hasn't budged, fearing its rivals, like the Islamic militant group Hamas, could use their movement against the

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ruling Fatah party.

"Everything is chaos," said Sherin al-Azza, a social worker and mother of five in a refugee camp called al-Azza, which has become a neighborhood of the West Bank city of Bethlehem. Determined that her children have an education, she cobbled together \$200 in savings to hire private tutors and send her eldest son to after-school classes during the strike — an impossibility for most of the refugee camp, she said.

President Mahmoud Abbas' Palestinian Authority, which rules parts of the West Bank not controlled by Israel, accuses striking teachers of holding around a million schoolchildren hostage to their demands for better pay.

But teachers who have felt undervalued for decades say they have no choice but to walk out.

"I feel terrible for the kids," said Mohammed Brijeah, a 44-year-old Arabic teacher for the past 23 years. "But the way (the Palestinian Authority) treats us is insulting. I want to live with some dignity."

For years, teachers across the West Bank have struggled to make ends meet with salaries of some \$830 a month — considerably less than other professions requiring a comparable education. Now, a year and a half after the Palestinian Authority slashed the income of government employees by 20% to cope with a budget shortfall, teachers say they've had enough.

The crisis started in January, when teachers expected to receive a 15% pay raise along with back pay based on an agreement that ended a shorter strike last May. That deal also promised changes to their system of representation, allowing for long-sought union elections. But as the year started, teachers said one look at their pay slip broke their trust in officials.

"They lied to us," said Yousef Ijha, a 37-year-old history teacher in Bethlehem. He and other teachers pressing to form their own independent elected union are pushing back against the current syndicate stacked with supporters of Fatah. Their movement has mobilized through an anonymous Telegram channel with nearly 20,000 followers and galvanized huge, angry crowds for two sit-ins in the city of Ramallah, the seat of the authority.

In response, the authority has threatened mass firings and even arrests, drawing fresh attention to what critics describe as its crackdown on civil society groups and freedom of expression.

A lawsuit filed by the Ministry of Education on March 13 lists the names of 151 outspoken teachers who would be dismissed if they continued their strike and detained if they put up further resistance.

"Not only are we not getting our salaries, we're literally not allowed to speak up," said Ijha, whose name is on the list.

Before a protest in Ramallah earlier this month, Palestinian security forces set up checkpoints and roadblocks on the way to the city, according to teachers who attended, diverting them through rocky hills.

The heavy security struck a darkly familiar chord for Palestinians living under Israeli occupation.

"They made us feel like criminals," said 50-year-old science teacher Omar Mhisen, who said Palestinian police stopped him and made him show ID as he drove from the West Bank city of Hebron.

Analysts say that the increasingly unpopular authority — widely seen as a collaborator with Israel — worries opposition groups like Hamas could gain control of the teachers' freely elected union, wielding power over a vast and vital swath of the public workforce and fueling instability in the territory. Hamas violently wrested control of the Gaza Strip from Abbas' authority in 2007.

"The opposition's ability to win is an outcome of the decline of the Palestinian Authority's ability to fulfill its obligations," said Ghassan Khatib, a former Palestinian peace negotiator and Cabinet minister.

On Monday, after the teachers' movement rejected the PA's latest offer to gradually compensate for their salary cuts over an undetermined period of time, the Ministry of Education said it's preparing to recruit over 45,000 teachers on short-term contracts to replace all the strikers next month. Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh pleaded with the teachers to return to schools.

"We must meet our responsibility to ensure the right to education for our sons and daughters," Shtayyeh said at Monday's Cabinet meeting.

The self-rule government, limping along as it struggles with an economic slowdown and soaring debt, argues it cannot afford to pay all its employees. Earlier this year, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netan-

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yahu's far-right government further crippled the authority when it decided to deduct an additional 50 million shekels (over \$14 million) each month from the tax revenues it collects on the Palestinians' behalf, among other punitive measures.

"We are facing dangers from declining donor support and an enemy that denies our existence and perpetuates our financial crisis with unfair cuts," said government spokesman Ibrahim Melhem. "We have done everything we can."

Many teachers are skeptical. Refusing to back down, the movement warned it would pitch tents in Ramallah's main square and camp out for the rest of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

As the standoff deepens, parents fret that their children are falling far behind and won't be prepared for university entrance exams or even next semester.

"This is our lost generation," said Ahmad, a 43-year-old lawyer and father of six, who gave only his first name for fear of reprisals.

It was past noon in his sunlit apartment and his pajama-clad kids were rubbing sleep from their eyes as they staggered into the kitchen and played on their phones. With him and his wife working all day and his kids left alone, he said he couldn't get them to stick to a set schedule or bedtime.

"As a father, I am suffering," he said.

His 15-year-old son, Athal, was perfectly content. "I never want to go back to school," he said.

## Nashville shooting highlights security at private schools

By HOLLY MEYER and ANNIE MA Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — An alarm blared and lights flashed as a heavily armed assailant stalked the hallways of The Covenant School.

Surveillance footage of the shooting Monday at the private Christian school in Nashville showed many familiar security measures, including the double set of locked glass doors the killer shot their way through before fatally shooting three children and three school employees.

"It's just next to impossible to stop someone with an AR-17 coming through the door," said George Grant, a leader with the Nashville Presbytery, which is connected with the school. Grant said the presbytery doesn't have a formal security program for its churches and schools but that members have worked together to share best practices and improve safety.

Around the U.S., private schools generally do not face as many requirements as public schools for developing security plans. In Tennessee, laws requiring schools to develop and submit safety plans do not apply to private schools, an emailed statement from the state Department of Education said.

Private schools also sometimes lack access to government programs to bolster security, though private schools in some states are eligible for state money to bolster security with staff, equipment and technology. Some federal grants also are available to private schools for security aid.

Generally, private schools don't have access to the police many public schools have assigned to their campuses, said Mo Canady, executive director of the National Association of School Resource Officers. He said some private schools have arranged to hire recently retired officers.

"I would imagine after this horrific situation in Nashville that there may be more attempts by private schools to try to not only bolster security but to get school resource officers."

Still, amid widespread concerns about mass shootings, experts say private schools have invested similarly to public schools in violence prevention.

Private schools were among institutions that invested most heavily in security in the aftermath of the 2012 shooting that killed 26 people at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut. Today, private schools have some of the highest-paid security specialists, including retired federal agents, said Michael Dorn, who has been involved in assessing security at thousands of schools as executive director of Safe Havens International, a nonprofit school safety center.

Security protocols for private schools are similar to those for public schools, but they are more tailored to each school's location and circumstances, said Myra McGovern of the National Association of Independen-

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dent Schools.

Security such as metal detectors may not be as visible at private schools, which also have considerations including boarding students and, in some cases, the children of heads of state to look after, she said.

"Attention to security is similar, but the way that it manifests is perhaps different," McGovern said.

The quality of safety plans for private schools also varies widely, as it does for public schools, Dorn said.

"We see schools that are pretty behind and some that are exceptional," he said.

In Tennessee, an executive order last year by Gov. Bill Lee on school safety measures directed the state to conduct a report on the use of armed guards in nonpublic schools and assess their need for active-shooter training.

Most U.S. school systems conduct active-shooter and lockdown trainings, and the Nashville school had in fact undergone active-shooter training in 2022, which prevented further loss of life during Monday's shooting, city police spokesperson Brooke Reese said.

Private or not, shootings are more common at middle and high schools than at elementary schools like Covenant, which are less likely to have assigned security officers. Educators also are wary of unsettling young learners with more heavy-handed security measures.

The Covenant School has about 200 students from preschool through sixth grade. The school and the Covenant Presbyterian Church are connected with the Nashville Presbytery, which includes congregations in the Presbyterian Church in America, across Middle Tennessee and southwestern Kentucky.

"Over the last several years, most of our churches have undergone training and have really scrutinized their security arrangements," said Grant, the immediate past moderator for the Nashville Presbytery. "It's not an official sort of presbytery-wide initiative, but it has just sort of grown out of relationships."

Grant said Franklin Classical School, a school under the spiritual oversight of his church, Parish Presbyterian Church in Franklin, Tennessee, has lockdown procedures and security codes in place. The school always has a former police officer on site when school is in session. It is unknown whether The Covenant School had a security officer.

Grant said his church's security team has called for a review of security protocols and already had training planned for the week after Easter.

"This is just a good reminder that we live in a broken, fallen world," he said. "And we need to be vigilant to care for one another as best we can."

\_\_\_ Ma reported from Washington, D.C. Associated Press writers Jonathan Mattise in Nashville and Michael Melia in Hartford, Conn., contributed to this report.

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## Poll: Cut federal spending — but not big-ticket programs

By JOSH BOAK and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the federal budget standoff, the majority of U.S. adults are asking lawmakers to pull off the impossible: Cut the overall size of government, but also devote more money to the most popular and expensive programs.

Six in 10 U.S. adults say the government spends too much money. But majorities also favor more funding for infrastructure, health care and Social Security — the kind of commitments that would make efforts to shrink the government unworkable and politically risky ahead of the 2024 elections.

These findings from a new poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research show just how messy the financial tug-of-war between President Joe Biden and House Republicans could be. At stake is the full faith and credit of the federal government, which could default on its obligations unless there is a deal this summer to raise or suspend the limit on the government's borrowing authority.

Biden this month proposed a budget that would trim deficits by nearly \$3 trillion over 10 years, but his plan contains a mix of tax increases on the wealthy and new spending that led GOP lawmakers to declare it dead on arrival. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., is insisting on budget talks with the White

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House but has not produced a plan of his own to cut deficits, which Biden has said is a prerequisite for negotiations.

The new poll finds U.S. adults are closely divided over whether they want to see a bigger government offering more services or a smaller government offering fewer services. But a clear majority — 60% — say they think government is spending too much altogether. Just 16% say the government is spending too little, while 22% say spending levels are about right.

U.S. adults were previously less supportive of spending cuts, a possible sign of how the pandemic and a historic burst of aid to address it have reshaped politics. Compared with 60% now, 37% called for spending cuts in February 2020, as COVID-19 was beginning to spread throughout the U.S. By May, even fewer, 25%, wanted less spending, after the virus had forced major disruptions to public life, the economy and the health care system.

Retiree Peter Daniluk acknowledged the tensions over the federal budget by saying the government might be “a little too” large, but “you’ve got to spend money in order to make things better.” The 78-year-old from Dryden, New York, voted for Biden and believes there should be more funding for the environment and military, while also preserving Social Security and Medicare.

“The rich don’t pay enough of the taxes — that’s the problem,” he said. “They know how to get out of paying their proper share.”

Inflation jumped as the U.S. economy recovered from the pandemic. GOP lawmakers have blamed Biden’s \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package for rising prices as they’ve pushed for spending cuts, while the president says inflation reflects global factors involving supply chains and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Federal expenditures are expected to be equal in size to roughly 24% of all U.S. economic activity for the next several years, a figure that will likely grow as an aging population leads to more spending on Social Security and Medicare. Government spending accounted for just 20.5% of U.S. gross domestic product a decade ago, according to the White House Office of Management and Budget.

Even if a majority of adults desire a tightened budget, the challenge for lawmakers trying to hash out an agreement is that the public also wants higher spending on a wide range of programs. While Biden rolled out a budget that would trim deficits largely through tax increases on the wealthy, GOP lawmakers have struggled so far to gel around a set of spending cuts — and even if they did, the White House is betting that their plan would upset voters.

Roughly 6 in 10 adults say the government is spending too little on education, health care, infrastructure and Social Security, as well as assistance to the poor and Medicare. About half say government is spending too little on border security, child care assistance, drug rehabilitation, the environment and law enforcement.

By comparison, a wide majority — 69% — say the U.S. is spending too much on assistance to other countries. But slashing foreign aid would have almost no impact on the overall size of the government, as it accounts for less than 1% of all federal spending, and major programs such as Social Security and Medicare are causing the government to grow in size over the next decade.

Glenn Cookinham, 43, of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, said inflation and health care expenses are major problems confronting the U.S. as a country right now. A Republican who views Biden as “OK,” Cookinham feels as though the U.S. could pull back on military funding to focus on its own internal challenges.

“I don’t think we should be the police for the rest of the world, really,” he said.

About a third of U.S. adults say spending on the military is too little and nearly as many say it’s too much; an additional third say it’s about right.

Bipartisan majorities back more spending on infrastructure and Social Security. But wide differences across party lines on other priorities could be a sticking point in budget talks.

Most Republicans say too much is spent on assistance to big cities (65% vs. just 19% of Democrats), and about half say too much is spent on the environment (51% vs. just 6% of Democrats). Republicans are more likely than Democrats to indicate that the military, law enforcement and border security are underfunded. By comparison, far more Democrats say too little is spent on aid for the poor (80% vs. 38% of Republicans), the environment (73% vs. 21% of Republicans), child care assistance (71% vs. 34% of Republicans), drug rehabilitation (67% vs. 36% of Republicans), and scientific research (54% vs. 24% of

Republicans).

There is also a generational breakdown in terms of priorities. Young adults are more likely than older adults to say too little is spent on the environment and assistance to big cities, while more older adults say too little is spent on infrastructure, the military, law enforcement and border security. Young adults are especially likely to think too much is spent in those areas.

For those between the ages of 30-44, who are especially likely to have school-age children, there is a desire for the government to spend more on education.

The poll of 1,081 adults was conducted Mar. 16-20 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.0 percentage points.

## Basic training without yelling: Army recruits get 2nd chance

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Last August, Daysia Holiday decided to try one more time to join the Army.

She'd taken the academic test and failed three times. So, when she was offered a slot in a new Army prep course to help improve her scores and qualify for basic training, she jumped at the chance.

Seven months later, Pvt. 2nd Class Holiday is a proud graduate of Army basic training, and is finishing her advanced instruction at Fort Lee, Virginia, to become a power generation specialist who will maintain engines and other equipment for the service.

Holiday is an early beneficiary of the new program, which gives lower-performing recruits up to 90 days of academic or fitness instruction to help them meet military standards. In place for only eight months, it is already making a significant difference for both the Army and those who want to serve in it.

So far, 5,400 soldiers have made it through the prep course since it started in August at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. That's an important boost since the Army fell dramatically short of its recruiting goals last year, due to low unemployment and general wariness about military service. And at least one other military service, the Navy, took notice and is setting up a similar course.

For those who make it through the program, it can be life-changing. Holiday, 23, said many of her peers in her hometown of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, didn't make it out of high school, with some "dead or in jail." Sitting outside the class building in her Army fatigues last summer, she talked about trying to pass the academic test for two years with no success.

She said she wanted to set an example, especially for her younger siblings. The prep course gave her a second chance. She raised her academic score by more than 20 points.

The course, she said, was like "basic training without the yelling." It also allowed her to bond with fellow students. "We helped each other out throughout basic training, so it was easy," she said. "All of us actually passed, so it was a good experience. And we all keep in touch."

Army leaders say the program — it involves classroom instruction and training ranging from how to wear the uniform and properly make a bed to fitness and discipline — gives recruits like Holiday an advantage.

"I think an interesting thing we've seen is that the kids coming out of that course, who go into basic, actually seem to have a little bit of a leg up," said Army Secretary Christine Wormuth. "During basic training, certain young individuals who show a little bit more leadership skills than others get selected to have leadership positions. And what we're seeing is the kids coming out of the prep course are often the ones who are being chosen for that."

As of March 17, nearly 8,400 people had been admitted to the prep course and more than 5,400 had graduated and gone on to basic training. Army Lt. Col. Randy Ready, spokesman for the Army Center for Initial Military Training, said about 6% of those recruits don't make it through basic and advanced individual training, about the same attrition rate as for those who don't go through the prep course.

Ready said almost 4,000 of the graduates were in the academic track and about 1,400 were in the fitness track. Students in the academic program increased their test scores by an average of 19 points, he said.

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"It has been largely very, very successful," said Maj. Gen. Johnny Davis, head of Army Recruiting Command, adding that students who go through the prep course come out more prepared. "It instills a level of positivity and confidence in those future soldiers."

Gen. James McConville, Army chief of staff, told a House committee on Tuesday that students in the program are improving their academic scores and losing 4% to 6% of their body fat.

"We're really giving them discipline," he said. "They're getting in shape. We're giving them a head start. So when going into initial military training, where they were at the lowest category, they're actually excelling and in some ways exceeding the standards — becoming the student leaders."

Once in the program, recruits are tested every week. And every three weeks they can move into basic training if they pass the military's academic test — the Armed Services Voluntary Aptitude Battery — or if they meet the physical standards. If they don't pass or meet the standards after the first three weeks, they can stay on and keep testing for up to 90 days, but they have to leave the Army if they haven't succeeded by then.

Army leaders initially thought they might open as many as four locations for the prep course, but they haven't seen the need. Instead, they doubled the capacity at Fort Jackson and created a smaller, similar program at Fort Benning, Georgia, which gives young soldiers a chance to raise their academic scores if they want to qualify for higher-skilled jobs or bonuses.

The program got the Navy's attention. Late last November, Navy Capt. Frank Brown and several others visited Fort Jackson, and as a result will open a new sailor fitness prep course next month. Brown said recruits who are 6% above the body composition requirements will take a three-week fitness course, and can repeat it for up to 90 days to meet the standards and go on to boot camp.

Brown, the director of operations for training at Naval Station Great Lakes in Illinois, said 60 to 80 recruits will start the course on April 10. He said the Navy is also planning a pilot program for an academic course, likely this summer, to allow lower-scoring recruits to improve so they can qualify for higher-skilled jobs.

Air Force officials said they haven't ruled out doing a prep program, but are currently using other ways to boost recruiting.

"We are focusing our efforts on eliminating unnecessary or outdated policy barriers to recruiting, adapting our outreach strategy, and adjusting our recruiting approach" to better reach potential recruits, said Maj. Gen. Ed Thomas, commander of the Air Force Recruiting Service.

As for Holiday, when she graduates Wednesday she will head to her first post, in Fort Carson, Colorado. "I'm very much glad that I did it," she said. "It's been a good journey for me."

And she's got bigger ambitions.

"I still want to try to do the Green Beret (course)," she said. "And, I want to do other courses — airborne and stuff like that. And I want to also try to become an officer as well."

## Senate poised to vote on repeal of Iraq war powers

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate is poised to vote Wednesday to repeal the 2002 measure that green-lighted the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, which would end more than 20 years of authorization for U.S. presidents to use force in that country and return those war powers to Congress.

The Iraq War ended years ago and the repeal is not expected to affect any current troop deployments. About 2,500 U.S. troops remain in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi government and assist and advise local forces.

The bipartisan legislation would also repeal the 1991 measure that sanctioned the U.S.-led Gulf War.

Lawmakers in both parties are increasingly seeking to claw back congressional powers over U.S. military strikes and deployments, and some lawmakers who voted for the Iraq War two decades ago now say it was a mistake.

Iraqi deaths are estimated in the hundreds of thousands, and nearly 5,000 U.S. troops were killed in the war after President George W. Bush's administration falsely claimed that Saddam Hussein was stockpiling



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weapons of mass destruction.

"Americans want to see an end to endless Middle East wars," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, adding that passing the repeal "is a necessary step to putting these bitter conflicts squarely behind us."

Supporters, including almost 20 Republican senators, say the repeal is crucial to prevent future abuses and to reinforce that Iraq is now a strategic partner of the United States. Opponents say the repeal could project weakness as the U.S. still faces conflict in the Middle East.

"Our terrorist enemies aren't sunseting their war against us," said Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who is at home recovering from a fall earlier this month and will miss the vote. "When we deploy our servicemembers in harm's way, we need to supply them with all the support and legal authorities that we can."

While it is expected to easily pass the Senate on Wednesday, the repeal's future is uncertain in the House, where 49 Republicans joined with Democrats in supporting a similar bill two years ago. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., has suggested he is open to supporting a repeal even though he previously opposed it, but Rep. Michael McCaul of Texas, the Republican chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, has indicated he would like to instead replace it with something else. It is unclear what that would be.

Sens. Tim Kaine, D-Va., and Todd Young, R-Ind., said they believe that a strong bipartisan vote would send a powerful message to Americans who believe their voices should be heard on matters of war and peace. The two men have been pushing to repeal the measures for several years.

"I think that the more time goes by the more people realize that a whole lot of mischief can happen with authorizations that just stay on the books," Kaine said. "And so it's been slow, but I've always felt like I was picking up more bipartisan support every year, slowly."

President Donald Trump's administration cited the 2002 Iraq war resolution as part of its legal justification for a 2020 U.S. drone strike that killed Iranian Gen. Qassim Soleimani, but the two war powers resolutions have otherwise rarely been used as the basis for any presidential action. A separate 2001 authorization for the global war on terror would remain in place under the bill, which President Joe Biden has said he will support.

The October 2002 votes to give Bush broad authority for the invasion were a defining moment for many members of Congress as the country debated whether a military strike was warranted. The U.S. was already at war then in Afghanistan, the country that hosted the al-Qaida plotters responsible for the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, something Iraq played no part in.

The Bush administration had drummed up support among members of Congress and the American public for invading Iraq by promoting what turned out to be false intelligence claims about Saddam's weapons of mass destruction. And after the initial March 2003 invasion, American ground forces quickly discovered that the allegations of nuclear or chemical weapons programs were baseless.

The U.S. overthrow of Iraq's security forces precipitated a brutal sectarian fight and violent campaigns by Islamic extremist groups in Iraq. Car bombings, assassinations, torture and kidnapping became a part of daily life in Iraq for years.

Some GOP senators opposing the repeal, including McConnell, raised concerns about recent attacks against U.S. troops in Syria. A drone strike last week killed an American contractor and wounded five troops and another contractor, then a rocket attack wounded another service member. Iranian-backed militants are believed responsible for the attacks.

Biden and his administration have argued that the repeal would not affect any response to Iran. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, both said at a Senate hearing last week that American troops are authorized to protect themselves and respond to attacks, including under Article 2 of the Constitution, which gives the president the authority to protect troops from attack.

The pushback from McConnell comes amid a growing rift in the Republican Party on the U.S. role in the Middle East, with some echoing Trump's "America First" message to argue against military intervention abroad. Other Republicans are concerned Congress is giving too much leeway to the president in matters of war.

"I think a lot of lessons have been learned over the last 20 years," said Young, the Indiana senator who is the lead Republican sponsor of the repeal. He said that those supporting the legislation "want to ensure that the American people can hold us accountable, rather than delegating those important authorities to an executive branch and then lamenting the unwitting wisdom of the executive branch if things don't go well."

Associated Press writer Lolita C. Baldor contributed to this report.

## Army quickly plans new ads after Jonathan Majors' arrest

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Army is working to quickly pull together some new recruiting ads to air during the NCAA's Final Four basketball games this weekend, after being forced to yank commercials that featured actor Jonathan Majors, in the wake of his arrest last Saturday.

Army leaders had been excited to feature Majors in the ads, as a key part of their new campaign aimed at reviving the service's struggling recruiting numbers — which fell far short of their enlistment goal last year. They believed the ads would capitalize on Majors' popularity coming off his recent movies "Creed III" and "Ant-Man and The Wasp: Quantumania" — hoping it would help them reach the youth audience.

Last weekend, however, they pulled the ads off the air when Majors was arrested in New York on charges of strangulation, assault and harassment. New York City police said the actor was involved in a domestic dispute with a 30-year-old woman. But a lawyer for Majors, Priya Chaudhry, has said there is evidence clearing Majors and that the actor "is probably the victim of an altercation with a woman he knows."

Maj. Gen. Alex Fink, head of Army marketing, told The Associated Press Tuesday that in the past week the Army was able to avoid any loss of the planned \$70 million advertising buy, either by postponing ads or replacing them with other pre-existing commercials that were quickly updated.

The ads were set to appear on television, online on places such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and on digital and physical billboards, including on buses. That ad purchase was the main portion of the campaign, which had a total cost of \$117 million.

"We are absolutely able to utilize a majority of what we have invested," Fink said in an interview. "We think that we'll have some brand new creative ads in time for the Women's Final Four on Friday."

He said that the Army gathered "an enormous amount" of content and footage for the two commercials — titled "Overcoming Obstacles" and "Pushing Tomorrow" — that featured Majors as the narrator.

"A majority of that content did not contain our main narrator. ... So we have a ton of content to go back to, to create basically new commercials new ads, if we need to," Fink said. "The campaign is full steam ahead."

The Army launched a new ad campaign earlier this month with a big event at the National Press Club as part of the plan to revive the Army's popular "Be All You Can Be" slogan, which dominated its recruiting ads for two decades starting in 1981. The two new ads highlighted the history of the Army and some of the many professions that recruits can pursue. They ran from March 12 until they were pulled from the air by the Army on the 25th.

Last year was the Army's worst recruiting year in recent history, falling 25% short of its goal to enlist 60,000 recruits.

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill Tuesday raised the advertising issue and peppered Army Secretary Christine Wormuth and Gen. James McConville, the Army's chief of staff, with questions about how the service intends to fix the recruiting problems.

"I see you had a bit of bad luck on your 'Be All You Can Be' commercial," said Rep. Ken Calvert, R-Calif., the chairman of the House Appropriations defense subcommittee. "Hopefully you're cutting a new commercial and getting it online as quickly as possible."

Wormuth said the Army has a number of new programs, including bonuses, referral initiatives and a future soldier prep course that gives underperforming recruits a chance to take an academic or fitness course to try and meet enlistment standards.

"We're trying to do everything we can think of because this is really a fundamental thing that the Army has got to solve if we're going to continue to be the world's greatest army," she said.

## Video shows guards walking away during fire that killed 38

By MARÍA VERZA and MORGAN LEE Associated Press

CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico (AP) — After migrants in northern Mexico placed mattresses against the bars of their detention cell and set them on fire, guards quickly walked away and made no apparent attempt to release the men before smoke filled the room and killed 38 men, surveillance video showed Tuesday.

Hours after the fire broke out late Monday, rows of bodies were laid out under shimmering silver sheets outside the immigration detention facility in Ciudad Juarez, which is across the U.S. border from El Paso, Texas, and a major crossing point for migrants.

Authorities originally reported 40 dead, but later said some may have been counted twice in the confusion. Twenty-eight people were injured and were in "delicate-serious" condition, according to the National Immigration Institute.

At the time of the blaze, 68 men from Central and South America were being held at the facility, the agency said. The institute said almost all were from Guatemala, Honduras, Venezuela and El Salvador.

In the video, two people dressed as guards rush into the camera frame, and at least one migrant appears by the metal gate on the other side. But the guards did not appear to make any effort to open the cell doors and instead ran away as billowing clouds of smoke filled the structure within seconds.

Adán Augusto López, Mexico's interior secretary, confirmed the authenticity of the video in an interview with local journalist Joaquín López Doriga.

Immigration authorities identified the dead and injured as being from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador, according to a statement from the Mexican attorney general's office.

Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said the fire was started by migrants in protest after learning they would be deported.

"They never imagined that this would cause this terrible misfortune," López Obrador said.

The deaths forced the government to rent refrigerated trailers to hold the migrants' bodies, Chihuahua state prosecutor Cesar Jáuregui told reporters.

The detention facility is across the street from Juárez's city hall.

At a nearby hospital, Viangly Infante Padrón, a 31-year-old Venezuelan migrant seeking asylum in the U.S. with her husband and three children, waited for her husband, who was being treated for smoke inhalation. The previous evening, she was waiting outside the detention center for his release when the fire broke out.

"There was smoke everywhere. The ones they let out were the women, and those (employees) with immigration," she said. "The men, they never took them out until the firefighters arrived."

She saw several dead bodies before finding her husband in an ambulance. "I was desperate because I saw a dead body, a body, a body, and I didn't see him anywhere."

Earlier, about 100 migrants gathered Tuesday outside the immigration facility's doors to demand information about relatives.

Katuska Márquez, a 23-year-old Venezuelan woman with her two children, ages 2 and 4, was seeking her half-brother, Orlando Maldonado, who had been traveling with her.

"We want to know if he is alive or if he's dead," she said. She wondered how all the guards who were inside made it out alive and only the migrants died. "How could they not get them out?"

Authorities did not immediately answer that question.

Márquez and Maldonado were detained Monday with the children and about 20 others. They had been in Juárez waiting for an appointment from U.S. authorities to request asylum. They were staying in a rented room where 10 people were living, paying for it with the money they begged in the street.

"I was at a stoplight with a piece of cardboard asking for what I needed for my children, and people were helping me with food," she said. Suddenly agents came and detained everyone.

Everyone was taken to the immigration facility but only the men were placed in the cells. Three hours

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later, the women and children were released.

Tensions between authorities and migrants had apparently been running high in recent weeks in Ciudad Juarez, where shelters are full of people waiting for opportunities to cross into the U.S. or for the asylum process to play out.

More than 30 migrant shelters and other advocacy organizations published an open letter March 9 that complained of a criminalization of migrants and asylum seekers in the city. It accused authorities of abusing migrants and using excessive force in rounding them up, including complaints that municipal police questioned people in the street about their immigration status without cause.

The high level of frustration in Ciudad Juarez was evident earlier this month when hundreds of mostly Venezuelan migrants tried to force their way across one of the international bridges to El Paso, acting on false rumors that the United States would allow them to enter the country. U.S. authorities blocked their attempts.

After that, Juarez Mayor Cruz Pérez Cuellar started campaigning to inform migrants there was room in shelters and no need to beg in the streets. He urged residents not to give money to them and said authorities would remove them from intersections where it was dangerous to beg and allegedly a nuisance to residents.

Migrant advocates who recently denounced more aggressive tactics said Tuesday that the immigration facility was over capacity and that the site of the fire was small and lacked ventilation.

"You could see it coming," the advocates' statement said. "Mexico's immigration policy kills."

The national immigration agency said Tuesday that it "energetically rejects the actions that led to this tragedy" without any further explanation.

The "extensive use of immigration detention leads to tragedies like this one," Felipe González Morales, the United Nations special rapporteur for human rights of migrants, said via Twitter. In keeping with international law, immigration detention should be an exceptional measure and not generalized, he wrote.

Mexico's immigration lockups have seen overcrowding, protests and riots from time to time.

In October, a group of mostly Venezuelan migrants rioted inside an immigration center in Tijuana. In November, dozens of migrants rioted in Mexico's largest detention center in the southern city of Tapachula near the border with Guatemala. No one died in either incident.

Mexico has emerged as the world's third most popular destination for asylum-seekers, after the United States and Germany. But it is still largely a country that migrants pass through on their way to the U.S.

Asylum-seekers must stay in the state where they apply in Mexico, resulting in large numbers being holed up near the country's southern border with Guatemala. Tens of thousands are also in border cities.

At a Mass celebrated in memory of the migrants, Bishop Mons. José Guadalupe Torres Campos lamented the sudden grief that had descended upon the migrant community.

"The shout, the cry of everyone is enough, enough of so much pain, enough of so much death," he said.

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This story has been correct to show the age of Viangly Infante Padrón is 31.

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Verza reported from Mexico City. Associated Press videojournalist Alicia Fernández and writers Guadalupe Peñuelas in Ciudad Juarez, Mark Stevenson in Mexico City, Sonia Pérez D. in Guatemala City and Elliot Spagat in San Diego contributed to this report.

## Court backs victim's family in Adnan Syed's 'Serial' case

By BRIAN WITTE and LEA SKENE Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) — A Maryland appellate court on Tuesday reinstated Adnan Syed's murder conviction and ordered a new hearing in the case, marking the latest development in the protracted legal odyssey chronicled in the hit podcast "Serial."

Though Syed's conviction has been reinstated, he will not immediately be taken back into custody.

In a 2-1 decision released Tuesday, the Appellate Court of Maryland ruled a lower court failed to give sufficient notice to the victim's family when it scheduled the September hearing that vacated Syed's con-

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viction and allowed him to regain his freedom after more than two decades behind bars.

The intermediate court's order does not go into effect for 60 days, which delays any immediate consequences and allows the parties time to decide whether to appeal and schedule upcoming proceedings accordingly.

Syed's attorney Erica Suter said they will ask the state supreme court to review the case.

Maryland law provides victims with the right to prior notice of conviction vacatur hearings, and that right was violated in the case of Hae Min Lee's brother, the appellate court ruled. Syed was convicted in 2000 of killing Lee, his high school ex-girlfriend whose body was found in a makeshift grave after her disappearance in 1999.

Baltimore prosecutors moved to vacate Syed's conviction in September after they reviewed the case and found alternative suspects and unreliable evidence used at trial. The lower court then quickly scheduled a hearing on the state's motion to vacate.

Lee's brother, Young Lee, was notified on a Friday afternoon that the hearing would take place the following Monday. Giving him only one business day before the hearing was "insufficient time to reasonably allow Mr. Lee, who lived in California, to attend the hearing in person," instead requiring him to attend remotely, the appellate court ruled.

Young Lee attended the hearing via Zoom after the judge denied his request to postpone the proceedings one week to allow his in-person attendance.

The Lee family spent decades believing justice had been served, only to be treated as an afterthought when prosecutors decided their case was actually flawed from the beginning, their attorneys have argued. The appellate court largely agreed.

"Allowing a victim entitled to attend a court proceeding to attend in person, when the victim makes that request and all other persons involved in the hearing appear in person, is consistent with the constitutional requirement that victims be treated with dignity and respect," the court ruled.

The court also said the new hearing should be more transparent, requiring that "evidence supporting the motion to vacate is presented, and the court states its reasons in support of its decision."

David Sanford, an attorney representing Young Lee, said that piece of the ruling in particular has serious implications because it means there will be "evidence for the world to see and examine."

"We are delighted that the court agrees with Mr. Lee," he said. "Decisions made by courts should not be based on secret evidence."

But Suter said "there is no basis for re-traumatizing Adnan by returning him to the status of a convicted felon."

"For the time being, Adnan remains a free man," Suter said.

After Syed's conviction was vacated, Baltimore prosecutors had 30 days to decide whether to retry him. They announced their decision to drop the charges eight days before the deadline was up — while an appeal from the Lee family was pending.

The appellate judges interrogated that timeline and concluded the state acted "with the purpose ... of preventing Mr. Lee from obtaining a ruling on the appeal," which Syed's attorneys later argued was moot because there were no underlying charges.

During oral arguments last month, the three-judge panel focused much of their questioning on whether the appeal should be considered moot.

The judges also considered whether crime victims or their representatives have a "right to be heard" at conviction vacatur hearings, as the Lee family asserted in their appeal. The judges said they were not persuaded by that argument, ruling victims have no right to substantive participation in such hearings, which could include presenting evidence. They said a ruling to the contrary would "result in a huge shift in practice."

What happens next remains somewhat unclear.

The Baltimore State's Attorney's Office is reviewing the ruling.

Their position is further complicated by a recent change in leadership. The current state's attorney, Ivan Bates, took office in December — not long after his predecessor, Marilyn Mosby, decided to drop the

charges against Syed, saying additional DNA testing had excluded him as a suspect. That was after her office conducted a yearlong review of the case and found prior prosecutors made significant missteps. Prosecutors knew about two alternative suspects but failed to disclose that information to the defense, Mosby's office wrote.

Her decision to re-examine the case came after Syed's appeals were repeatedly denied. Even after the "Serial" podcast raised numerous questions about the evidence that resulted in Syed's conviction and garnered a massive following of supporters, Syed remained behind bars for several more years. In social media posts Tuesday, many of his supporters asked whether the appellate court decision would ultimately return Syed to prison.

Mosby issued a statement saying that the "decision sets a dangerous precedent over a prosecutor's ability to reverse an injustice."

"We notified the victim's family in line with Maryland law and best practices, and they attended virtually and spoke," she said. "To now send this case back to court prolongs the pain for the Lee family, and leaves a cloud hanging over a man who deserves to be free, Adnan Syed."

## **Police: Nashville shooter fired indiscriminately at victims**

By JONATHAN MATTISE Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The shooter who killed three students and three staff members at a Christian school in Nashville legally bought seven weapons in recent years and hid the guns from their parents before carrying out the attack by firing indiscriminately at victims and spraying gunfire through doors and windows, police said Tuesday.

The violence Monday at The Covenant School was the latest school shooting to roil the nation and was planned carefully. The shooter had drawn a detailed map of the school, including potential entry points, and conducted surveillance of the building before carrying out the massacre, authorities said.

The suspect, Audrey Hale, 28, was a former student at the school. Hale did not target specific victims — among them three 9-year-olds and the head of the school — but did target "this school, this church building," police spokesperson Don Aaron said at a news conference Tuesday.

Hale was under a doctor's care for an undisclosed emotional disorder and was not known to police before the attack, Metropolitan Nashville Police Chief John Drake said at the news conference.

If police had been told that Hale was suicidal or homicidal, "then we would have tried to get those weapons," Drake said. "But as it stands, we had absolutely no idea who this person was or if (Hale) even existed."

Tennessee does not currently have a "red flag" law, which lets police step in and take firearms away from people who threaten to kill.

On Tuesday night, Tennessee's governor said one of the victims, 61-year-old substitute teacher Cynthia Peak, was a close friend of his wife, Maria, and that the two had been scheduled to have dinner after Peak taught that day.

"Maria woke up this morning without one of her best friends," Gov. Bill Lee said, adding that his wife once taught with Peak and another victim, Katherine Koonce, and the women and "have been family friends for decades."

Hale legally bought seven firearms from five local gun stores, Drake said. Three of them were used in Monday's shooting. Police spokesperson Brooke Reese said Hale bought the guns between October 2020 and June 2022.

Hale's parents believed their child had sold one gun and did not own any others, Drake said, adding that Hale "had been hiding several weapons within the house."

Hale's motive is unknown, Drake said. In an interview with NBC News on Monday, Drake said investigators don't know what drove Hale but believe the shooter had "some resentment for having to go to that school."

Drake, at Tuesday's news conference, described "several different writings by Hale" that mention other locations and The Covenant School.

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Asked at a Senate hearing whether the Justice Department would open an investigation into whether the shooting was a hate crime targeting Christians, U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland said federal officials were working with local police to identify a motive.

Police have released videos of the shooting, including edited surveillance footage that shows the shooter's car driving up to the school, glass doors being shot out and the shooter ducking through one of them.

Additional video, from Officer Rex Engelbert's bodycam, shows a woman meeting police outside as they arrive and telling them that all the children were locked down, "but we have two kids that we don't know where they are."

The woman then directs officers to Fellowship Hall and says people inside had just heard gunshots. Three officers, including Engelbert, search rooms one by one, holding rifles and announcing themselves as police.

The video shows officers climbing stairs to the second floor and entering a lobby area, followed by a barrage of gunfire and an officer yelling twice: "Get your hands away from the gun." Then the shooter is shown motionless on the floor.

Police identified Engelbert, a four-year member of the force, and Michael Collazo, a nine-year member, as the officers who fatally shot Hale. The White House said President Joe Biden spoke Tuesday with Drake, Engelbert and Callazo to thank them for their bravery.

Police response times to school shootings have come under greater scrutiny after the attack in Uvalde, Texas, in which 70 minutes passed before law enforcement stormed the classroom. In Nashville, police said about eight minutes passed from the initial call to when officers arrived at the scene.

Surveillance video shows a time stamp of just before 10:11 a.m., when the attacker shot out the doors. Police said they got the call about a shooter at 10:13. Aaron said in an email Tuesday that dispatch records show officers arrived on campus shortly before 10:22.

At about 10:24, officers engaged the suspect, the chief said during the news conference. Within two minutes of that, the suspect was down, according to the dispatch records.

"There were police cars that had been hit by gunfire. As officers were approaching the building, there was gunfire going off," Drake said.

"We feel, our response right now, from what I've seen, I don't have a particular problem with it. But we always want to get better. We always want to get there in two or three minutes," he said, adding that traffic was "locked down" at the time.

Traffic was indeed stopped along a nearby two-lane road with a turning lane as police tried to weave their way to the school.

Police have given unclear information on Hale's gender. For hours Monday, police identified the shooter as a woman. Later in the day, the police chief said Hale was transgender. After the news conference, Aaron declined to elaborate on how Hale identified.

In an email Tuesday, police spokesperson Kristin Mumford said Hale "was assigned female at birth. Hale did use male pronouns on a social media profile." Later Tuesday, at the news conference, Drake referred to Hale with female pronouns.

Authorities identified the dead children as Evelyn Dieckhaus, Hallie Scruggs and William Kinney. The adults were 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.

Koonce was remembered as someone who would run toward danger, not away from it.

"I guarantee you if there were kids missing (during the shooting), Katherine was looking for them," friend Jackie Bailey said. "And that's probably how she got in the way — just trying to do something for somebody else. She would give up her own life in order to save somebody else's."

Founded as a ministry of Covenant Presbyterian Church, the school is in the affluent Green Hills neighborhood just south of downtown Nashville. It has about 200 students from preschool through sixth grade and roughly 50 staff members.

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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. Last week alone, for example, school shootings happened in Denver and the Dallas area within two days of each other.

Contributing to this report were Associated Press writers Denise Lavoie in Richmond, Virginia, John Raby in Charleston, West Virginia, and Stefanie Dazio in Los Angeles.

## Elephant in the dining room: Startup makes mammoth meatball

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

AMSTERDAM (AP) — Throw another mammoth on the barbie?

An Australian company on Tuesday lifted the glass cloche on a meatball made of lab-grown cultured meat using the genetic sequence from the long-extinct pachyderm, saying it was meant to fire up public debate about the hi-tech treat.

The launch in an Amsterdam science museum came just days before April 1 so there was an elephant in the room: Is this for real?

"This is not an April Fools joke," said Tim Noakesmith, founder of Australian startup Vow. "This is a real innovation."

Cultivated meat — also called cultured or cell-based meat — is made from animal cells. Livestock doesn't need to be killed to produce it, which advocates say is better not just for the animals but also for the environment.

Vow used publicly available genetic information from the mammoth, filled missing parts with genetic data from its closest living relative, the African elephant, and inserted it into a sheep cell, Noakesmith said. Given the right conditions in a lab, the cells multiplied until there were enough to roll up into the meatball.

More than 100 companies around the world are working on cultivated meat products, many of them startups like Vow.

Experts say that if the technology is widely adopted, it could vastly reduce the environmental impact of global meat production in the future. Currently, billions of acres of land are used for agriculture worldwide.

But don't expect this to land on plates around the world any time soon. So far, tiny Singapore is the only country to have approved cell-based meat for consumption. Vow is hoping to sell its first product there — a cultivated Japanese quail meat — later this year.

The mammoth meatball is a one-off and has not been tasted, even by its creators, nor is it planned to be put into commercial production. Instead, it was presented as a source of protein that would get people talking about the future of meat.

"We wanted to get people excited about the future of food being different to potentially what we had before. That there are things that are unique and better than the meats that we're necessarily eating now, and we thought the mammoth would be a conversation starter and get people excited about this new future," Noakesmith told The Associated Press.

"But also the woolly mammoth has been traditionally a symbol of loss. We know now that it died from climate change. And so what we wanted to do was see if we could create something that was a symbol of a more exciting future that's not only better for us, but also better for the planet," he added.

Seren Kell, science and technology manager at Good Food Institute, a nonprofit that promotes plant- and cell-based alternatives to animal products, said he hopes the project "will open up new conversations about cultivated meat's extraordinary potential to produce more sustainable foods, reduce the climate impact of our existing food system and free up land for less intensive farming practices."

He said the mammoth project with its unconventional gene source was an outlier in the new meat cul-



tivation sector, which commonly focuses on traditional livestock — cattle, pigs and poultry.

“By cultivating beef, pork, chicken, and seafood, we can have the most impact in terms of reducing emissions from conventional animal agriculture and satisfying growing global demand for meat while meeting our climate targets,” he said.

The jumbo meatball on show in Amsterdam — sized somewhere between a softball and a volleyball — was for show only and had been glazed to ensure it didn’t get damaged on its journey from Sydney.

But when it was being prepared — first slow baked and then finished off on the outside with a blow torch — it smelled good.

“The folks who were there, they said the aroma was something similar to another prototype that we produced before, which was crocodile,” Noakesmith said. “So, super fascinating to think that adding the protein from an animal that went extinct 4,000 years ago gave it a totally unique and new aroma, something we haven’t smelled as a population for a very long time.”

Associated Press reporter Laura Ungar contributed from Louisville, Kentucky.

## Who was uphill? Gwyneth Paltrow trial spotlights skier code

By SAM METZ and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — Skiers have likely noticed signs at mountain resorts across the country saying, “Know the code.” They refer to universal rules of conduct that apply to people who partake in inherently risky snow sports that involve navigating down crowded slopes, often at high speeds.

But whether they actually understand the code is another question. For those unfamiliar with skiing and snowboarding, it’s likely something they’ve never heard of.

That’s all changing as actor Gwyneth Paltrow’s highly publicized ski collision trial is live-streamed from the courtroom. The actor-turned-lifestyle-influencer was accused of crashing into a fellow skier during a 2016 family trip to the upscale, skiers-only Deer Valley Resort in Utah. The celebrity trial is on day six and expected to conclude Thursday.

For a week, the trial has shone a spotlight on the unspoken rules that govern behavior on the slopes. Testimony has repeatedly touched on skier’s etiquette — especially sharing contact information after a collision, and ski turn radiuses — in the most high-profile ski collision trial in recent history.

There are about a hundred code-related lawsuits playing out now outside the spotlight. Most cases are settled before going to trial.

Throughout Paltrow’s trial, the word “uphill” has emerged as synonymous with “guilty,” as attorneys have focused on one of the code’s main tenets: The skier who is downhill or ahead on a slope has the right of way.

Rather than focus solely on the question of who hit who, attorneys have questioned nearly every witness — from Paltrow’s private ski instructors to doctors for the man suing Paltrow — about which skier was downhill at the time of the collision.

After initially suing Paltrow for \$3.1 million, retired optometrist Terry Sanderson is now suing for at least \$300,000 in damages. Paltrow has countersued for \$1 and attorney fees, claiming Sanderson ran into her.

In court, attorneys on both sides have repeated the term “downhill” to try to persuade the jury that their client had the right of way.

The question has become a focal point of the trial, as both sides call legions of family members, friends and doctors to testify in Park City — the posh Rocky Mountain resort town that draws a throng of celebrities each year for the Sundance Film Festival.

Paltrow’s position on the slope was central to the questioning of her teenage children — 16-year-old Moses and 18-year-old Apple Martin.

In depositions read by attorneys in court on Tuesday, the children both testified that they didn’t see the moment of the crash. Before it happened Moses Martin said he saw a man uphill from his mother.

“I was following my instructor but didn’t know what was going on,” Moses Martin, who was nine at the

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time, said.

His instructor testified that he didn't witness the moment of the crash either but approached Paltrow and Sanderson afterward.

Apple Martin, then 11, remembered that her mother was in a "state of shock" after the collision and that she used an expletive to say that a man hit her on the run.

To support Paltrow's version of events, specifically that she was downhill when the crash happened, her defense team commissioned artists to render advanced animations.

Because no video footage was included as evidence, the recollections of a ski buddy of Sanderson's who claims to be the sole eyewitness has become a sticking point for Paltrow's team. In addition to sharing animations, Paltrow's team undercut the man's testimony by calling on experts arguing that Paltrow was downhill.

Over objections from Sanderson's attorneys, the court has allowed Paltrow's team to play three of the seven high-resolution animations on a projector positioned between witnesses and the jury box — showing the pruning on Deer Valley's aspen trees, childrens' ski coats and groomed snow on the beginner run where Sanderson and Paltrow crashed.

Irving Scher, a biomechanical engineer hired by Paltrow's defense team, drew stick figures and line graphs on a white board, as well as jotted down equations calculating force and torque to argue that science supported Paltrow's account.

"Ms. Paltrow's version of events is consistent with the laws of physics," Scher testified Tuesday.

In an equally theatrical display last week, Sanderson's lawyers tried but failed to rope Paltrow into a reenactment of events, when the judge put the kibosh on it.

While there are minor differences in state laws when it comes down to finding fault, "in court it becomes a question of who was the uphill skier," said Denver attorney Jim Chalat, who has litigated cases in Utah and Colorado.

"It's the uphill skier who is almost always in a position to cause the crash," Chalat said. "If you're skiing too fast for your own ability and you can't carve out a turn, and you hit someone, you're going to be in trouble."

Still, crashes between skiers are rare. Most incidents resulting in injuries or death occur when skiers or snowboarders slam into stationary objects, usually trees. Collisions involving people represent only about 5% of skier injuries, Chalat said.

Experts at the Paltrow trial have argued that the National Ski Areas Association's more than 60-year-old code is ubiquitous, with similar etiquette in Canada, Australia and parts of Europe.

The responsibility code was recently updated to urge skiers involved in a collision to share contact information with each other and a ski area employee. Last week, Paltrow was grilled by Sanderson's attorneys for leaving the collision without first exchanging information with Sanderson. She said she knew one of the family's ski instructors handled that for her.

Very few cases target the ski resorts where crashes occurred because of the inherent dangers that come with skiing and snowboarding, Los Angeles attorney John Morgan of the firm Morgan & Morgan said.

The mountain where the Paltrow-Sanderson collision happened, Deer Valley, was removed from the lawsuit in part because skiers absolve resorts of responsibility by agreeing to a set of rules on the back of every lift ticket.

"It's like going to a baseball game and you get hit in the head by a foul ball. You know by sitting there that there's some risk of that happening," he said.

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Weber reported from Los Angeles. AP writer Anna Furman in Los Angeles contributed.

## Boy Scouts' \$2.4 billion bankruptcy plan upheld by judge

By RANDALL CHASE Associated Press

DOVER, Del. (AP) — A \$2.4 billion bankruptcy plan for the Boy Scouts of America has been upheld by a federal judge, clearing an important hurdle in the legal challenge by certain insurance companies and dissenting sex abuse survivors.

The plan would let the Texas-based organization keep operating while it compensates tens of thousands of men who say they were sexually abused as children while involved in Scouting.

The ruling released Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Delaware rejected arguments that the bankruptcy plan wasn't proposed in good faith and improperly strips insurers and survivors of their rights.

More than 80,000 men have filed claims saying they were abused as children by troop leaders around the country. Plan opponents say the staggering number of claims, when combined with other factors, suggest the bankruptcy process was manipulated.

Judge Richard Andrews said he found no fault with the plan's initial approval by a federal bankruptcy judge in September, although he agreed with the previous judge that it was "an extraordinary case by any measure."

"The appellants have failed to put forth evidence that would demonstrate clear error in the bankruptcy court's careful findings of facts," the judge wrote.

A spokesperson for lawyers representing several non-settling insurance companies had no immediate comment, but attorneys have previously suggested the case could eventually reach the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Boy Scouts issued a statement describing the ruling as "a pivotal milestone" that "solidifies a path forward for both survivors and Scouting."

"We look forward to the organization's exit from bankruptcy in the near future and firmly believe that the mission of Scouting will be preserved for future generations," the statement said.

Under the plan — which the Boy Scouts describe as a "carefully calibrated compromise" — the organization itself would contribute less than 10% of the proposed settlement fund. The local Boy Scout councils, which run day-to-day operations for troops, offered to contribute at least \$515 million in cash and property, conditioned on certain protections for local troop sponsoring organizations, including religious entities, civic associations and community groups.

The bulk of the compensation fund would come from the Boy Scouts' two largest insurers, Century Indemnity and The Hartford, which reached settlements calling for them to contribute \$800 million and \$787 million, respectively. Other insurers agreed to contribute about \$69 million.

The Boy Scouts' largest insurers negotiated settlements for a fraction of the billions of dollars in potential liability exposure they faced.

Other insurers, many of which provided excess coverage above the liability limits of the underlying primary policies, refused to settle. They argued that the procedures for distributing funds from a proposed compensation trust would violate their contractual rights to contest claims, set a dangerous precedent for mass tort litigation, and result in grossly inflated payments.

They also noted that a plaintiffs' attorney had acknowledged that some 58,000 claims probably couldn't be pursued in civil lawsuits because of the passage of time.

When it sought bankruptcy protection in February 2020, the Boy Scouts had been named in about 275 lawsuits and told insurers it was aware of another 1,400 claims. According to plan opponents, the huge number of claims filed in the bankruptcy was the result of a nationwide marketing effort by personal injury lawyers working with for-profit claims aggregators to drum up clients.

Insurers opposing the plan contend that Boy Scouts of America is contractually obligated to assist them in investigating, defending and settling claims, as it did before the bankruptcy. They say the organization, desperate to escape bankruptcy, colluded with claimants' lawyers to inflate both the volume and value of claims in order to pressure insurers for large settlements, then transferred its insurance rights to the settlement trust. The insurers argue that if the Boy Scouts transfers its rights under insurance policies to the settlement trustee, it must also transfer its obligations under those policies.

Under the Boy Scouts' plan, insurance companies, local Scout councils and troop sponsoring organizations would receive broad liability releases protecting them from future sex abuse lawsuits in exchange for contributing to the victims' compensation fund – or even for just not objecting to the plan.

Some abuse survivors argued that releasing their claims against non-debtor third parties without their consent would violate their due process rights. The U.S. bankruptcy trustee, the government's "watchdog" in Chapter 11 bankruptcies, argued that such releases are not allowed under the bankruptcy code, and that the scope of the proposed releases in the Boy Scout plan was unprecedented because it potentially extends to tens of thousands of entities.

## **AP sources: Judge rules Pence must testify before grand jury**

By JILL COLVIN and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge has ruled that former Vice President Mike Pence will have to testify before a grand jury in the Justice Department's investigation into efforts by former President Donald Trump and his allies to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

That's according to two people familiar with the decision, who spoke Tuesday on condition of anonymity because the ruling remains under seal.

The ruling says Pence will not have to answer questions about his actions on Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob of Trump's supporters stormed the Capitol building as Republican Pence was presiding over a joint session of Congress to certify Democrat Joe Biden's victory, according to one of the people. However, he would have to testify about any potential illegal acts committed by the former president, the person said.

Pence and his attorneys had cited constitutional grounds in challenging a grand jury subpoena issued weeks ago. They argued that, because he was serving in his capacity as president of the Senate that day, he was protected from being forced to testify under the Constitution's "speech or debate" clause, which is intended to protect members of Congress from questioning about official legislative acts.

Trump's lawyers had also objected to Pence complying, citing executive privilege.

A Trump spokesman criticized the decision in a statement, accusing the Justice Department of "continuously stepping far outside the standard norms in attempting to destroy the long accepted, long held, constitutionally based standards of attorney-client privilege and executive privilege."

"There is no factual or legal basis or substance to any case against President Trump," they added, but did not respond to questions about how Trump's legal team might respond.

Pence said Tuesday evening that his team was evaluating the judge's ruling and would make a decision whether to appeal in the coming days.

"I'm pleased that the court accepted our argument and recognized that the Constitution's provision about speech and debate does apply to the vice president," Pence said during an appearance on Newsmax. "But how they sorted that out and what other testimony might be required, we're currently reviewing."

The sealed ruling from U.S. District Judge James "Jeb" Boasberg sets up the unprecedented scenario of a former vice president being compelled to give potentially damaging testimony against the president he once served. And it comes as Pence has been inching closer to announcing a run for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination — a decision that would put him in direct competition with his former boss.

In addition to the Justice Department probes, Trump is under investigation in Georgia and in New York, where a grand jury has been hearing testimony about hush money paid to women on Trump's behalf during the 2016 campaign. That grand jury will not take up the inquiry again this week, two people familiar with the matter said Tuesday, meaning any potential vote on a possible indictment will not happen until next week at the earliest.

In Washington, Pence was subpoenaed earlier this year to appear before the federal grand jury investigating election interference. In public appearances, he has cast that action as unconstitutional and unprecedented and has said he would pursue the matter as far as the Supreme Court.

Still, he told ABC's "This Week" that he might be open to testifying about matters not directly related to his congressional role.

"I've actually never asserted that other matters unrelated to January 6 would otherwise be protected by speech and debate," he told the network. "We're gonna make that case, but I promise you we'll respect the decisions of the court."

A Justice Department special counsel, Jack Smith, is investigating attempts by Trump and his allies to overturn Biden's win in the 2020 presidential election to keep Trump in the White House. Multiple Trump aides have already appeared before the federal grand jury, as well as before a separate panel examining allegations of Trump mishandling classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida.

A spokesman for the special counsel's office declined to comment. A lawyer for Pence did not return messages seeking comment.

Pence has spoken extensively about Trump's pressure campaign urging him to reject Biden's victory in the days leading up to Jan. 6, including in his book, "So Help Me God." Pence, as vice president, had a ceremonial role overseeing the counting of the Electoral College vote, but did not have the power to impact the results despite Trump's contention otherwise.

Pence has said that Trump endangered his family and everyone else who was at the Capitol that day and history will hold him "accountable."

Colvin reported from New York.

## **Carlson, Hannity among potential witnesses at Fox News trial**

By DAVID BAUDER and RANDALL CHASE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Tucker Carlson, Sean Hannity and Bret Baier are among the stars who both Fox News and the voting machine company suing it for defamation have signaled could testify if the case heads to trial next month.

They are among the names submitted this week as potential witnesses by Fox and Dominion Voting Systems, although it doesn't guarantee that they will appear in court. It still isn't certain there will be a trial. Delaware Superior Court Judge Eric Davis is expected to make a summary judgment ruling in favor of either side or to go forward with a trial.

Dominion has accused Fox of airing false allegations that the company was engaged in voter fraud during the 2020 election even though many at the network doubted the claims were true. Fox says it was lawfully reporting on newsworthy developments.

Carlson, Hannity and Baier all worried privately after the election that Fox's early declaration that Democrat Joe Biden had won the key state of Arizona had damaged the network in the eyes of viewers who supported former President Donald Trump, according to documents revealed as part of the case.

Fox submitted the names of 35 potential live witnesses to the court this week, while Dominion offered 54 names. Dominion's list included Fox News founder Rupert Murdoch and his son Lachlan, chief executive officer of Fox Corp. Dominion also has reserved the right to call former House Speaker Paul Ryan, who is on the Fox Corp. board of directors.

Fox has suggested testimony that the 92-year-old Rupert Murdoch has already given in a deposition would suffice.

Davis noted in a court hearing Tuesday that Murdoch had recently become engaged and talked about traveling to his different properties across the country.

"That doesn't sound like someone who can't go from New York to Wilmington," said Davis, who has the authority under Delaware law to compel Murdoch, as a director of Fox Corp., to appear in court.

Matthew Carter, an attorney for the Fox defendants, said they have not argued that Murdoch is infirm or unavailable to travel. Rather, Carter said there is no reason to force him to testify live if he already has spoken under oath for seven hours at his deposition.

Colorado-based Dominion also said it wants former Fox News producer Abby Grossberg to testify. Grossberg has filed suit against Fox, alleging that its lawyers had coached her to give misleading testimony when questioned in a deposition in the Dominion case. Fox has denied that and fired Grossberg last Friday.

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In a statement, Fox said Dominion's "needlessly expansive" witness list "is yet another attempt to generate headlines and distract from the many shortcomings of its case. Ultimately, this case is about the First Amendment protections of the media's absolute right to cover the news."

Dominion, in reply, said it believes in the First Amendment but it "does not shield broadcasters that knowingly or recklessly spread lies."

Also Tuesday, the judge granted a joint request from both sides to allow each to have six preemptory challenges in selecting jurors, instead of the usual three. Davis sided with Fox in ruling there would be six alternate jurors. Dominion wanted 12.

Chase reported from Dover, Del.

## AP sources: No more action from Trump grand jury this week

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The Manhattan grand jury investigating hush money paid on Donald Trump's behalf is not expected to take up that inquiry again this week, meaning any potential vote on an indictment probably won't happen until next week at the earliest, two people familiar with the matter said Tuesday.

The panel did meet Monday, and a longtime Trump friend and potential key witness in the investigation was seen leaving the building where the grand jury has been meeting.

The grand jury has been meeting regularly Monday and Wednesday afternoons, but did not hold last Wednesday's session and met last Thursday for other unrelated matters.

Trump himself has ratcheted up anticipation that an indictment could be near by posting on his social media platform that he expected to be arrested imminently. His representatives later said that they had not received any such indication on timing from Manhattan prosecutors.

The Manhattan district attorney's office, which is leading the investigation, has taken several steps seen as signaling that it could be close to wrapping up, including inviting Trump to testify.

Still, the exact status of the probe remained unclear, and it's possible that the schedule could be complicated by the Passover holiday next week.

The people who confirmed that no additional action related to Trump was expected this week were not authorized to speak publicly about secretive grand jury proceedings and did so on condition of anonymity. A message left with the district attorney's office was not immediately returned.

NBC News was first to report the development.

## Planets on parade: 5 will be lined up in night sky this week

By MADDIE BURAKOFF AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Keep an eye to the sky this week for a chance to see a planetary hangout.

Five planets — Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Uranus and Mars — will line up near the moon.

WHERE AND WHEN CAN YOU SEE THEM?

The best day to catch the whole group is Tuesday. You'll want to look to the western horizon right after sunset, said NASA astronomer Bill Cooke.

The planets will stretch from the horizon line to around halfway up the night sky. But don't be late: Mercury and Jupiter will quickly dip below the horizon around half an hour after sunset.

The five-planet spread can be seen from anywhere on Earth, as long as you have clear skies and a view of the west.

"That's the beauty of these planetary alignments. It doesn't take much," Cooke said.

DO I NEED BINOCULARS?

Maybe. Jupiter, Venus and Mars will all be pretty easy to see since they shine brightly, Cooke said. Venus will be one of the brightest things in the sky, and Mars will be hanging out near the moon with a reddish glow. Mercury and Uranus could be trickier to spot, since they will be dimmer. You'll probably need to grab a pair of binoculars.

If you're a "planet collector," it's a rare chance to spot Uranus, which usually isn't visible, Cooke said. Look out for its green glow just above Venus.

DOES THIS HAPPEN OFTEN?

Different numbers and groups of planets line up in the sky from time to time. There was a five-planet lineup last summer and there's another one in June, with a slightly different makeup.

This kind of alignment happens when the planets' orbits line them up on one side of the sun from Earth's perspective, Cooke said.

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## Man charged with firebombing Wisconsin anti-abortion office

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — After nearly a year of searching, investigators used DNA pulled from a half-eaten burrito to capture the man they believe firebombed a prominent Wisconsin anti-abortion lobbying group's office.

The U.S. attorney's office in Madison announced that police arrested 29-year-old Hridindu Sankar Roychowdhury at Boston's Logan International Airport on Tuesday. He was charged via the complaint with one count of attempting to cause damage by means of fire or an explosive.

He made an initial appearance in federal court in Boston on Tuesday. U.S. Magistrate Judge Donald L. Cabell set a detention hearing for Thursday. Roychowdhury's attorney, Brendan O. Kelley, who is listed in online court records as a federal public defender, declined comment when reached by phone after Tuesday's hearing.

Federal agents have been searching for almost a year for whoever tossed a pair of Molotov cocktails into the Wisconsin Family Action office in Madison on May 6. One of the firebombs failed to ignite; the other set a bookcase on fire. The message "If abortions aren't safe then you aren't either" was spray-painted on the building's exterior. No one was in the office at the time.

The attack came about a week after a draft opinion suggesting the Supreme Court would overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the decision that legalized abortion, leaked. The release sparked abortion rights supporters to mount protests across the country. Two Catholic churches in Colorado were vandalized in the days leading up to the Madison firebombing. And someone threw Molotov cocktails into an anti-abortion organization's office in a suburb of Salem, Oregon, several days later.

The court officially overturned *Roe v. Wade* in June, putting Wisconsin's 1849 ban on abortion back into play.

According to the criminal complaint against Roychowdhury, investigators pulled DNA samples from three individuals from evidence at the scene of the Wisconsin attack. But the samples didn't match any profiles in the U.S. Department of Justice's DNA database.

As time went on, Wisconsin Family Action President Julaine Appling offered a \$5,000 reward for any information leading to an arrest. She accused Democratic Gov. Tony Evers and Madison Police Chief Shon Barnes of being more interested in empathizing with abortion rights activists than bringing any suspects to justice.

This past January, police assigned to protecting the state Capitol building in Madison reviewed surveillance video of a protest against police brutality. The footage showed several people spray-painting graffiti on Capitol grounds. The graffiti resembled the graffiti at the Wisconsin Family Action office.

The footage showed two people leaving the area in a white pickup truck, which investigators tracked to Roychowdhury's residence in Madison, according to the complaint. Police began following him.

On March 1, he pulled into a Madison park-and-ride and threw away a bag of fast food. After he left, police retrieved the bag from the trash can. DNA on a burrito in the bag matched DNA taken from the Wisconsin Family Action office, according to the complaint.

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The U.S. attorney's office said in a statement that Roychowdhury traveled from Madison this month to Portland, Maine. He had a one-way ticket for a flight from Boston to Guatemala City, Guatemala, that was scheduled to depart Tuesday morning when he was arrested, the office said.

Investigators have been unable to match the other two DNA profiles from the scene to anyone, the complaint said.

Appling had no comment Tuesday on Roychowdhury's arrest.

"I'm very proud of the tireless and determined efforts the combined federal, state and local team put in to identify and arrest this individual," said William McCrary, the special agent in charge of the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives' St. Paul Field Division, which handles crimes in Wisconsin. "It is very satisfying to me to see that this alleged perpetrator has been placed in custody."

## **Their stories were lost to slavery. Now DNA is writing them**

By MADDIE BURAKOFF AP Science Writer

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — In the 1700s, a boy was born into slavery in Colonial America. He spent his life working in the coastal city of Charleston, South Carolina. And when he died in middle age, he was buried alongside 35 other slaves.

That's the likely history that researchers have uncovered for the man — there's no written record for him or the others buried at the long-forgotten site. Their names have been lost, along with any details of their lives. But their stories are now being told through what was left behind: bones, teeth and, especially, DNA.

In recent decades, advances in DNA research have allowed scientists to use ancient remains and peer into the lives of long-dead people. In Charleston, that's meant tracing some of the African roots that were cut off by slavery.

"We're bringing their memory back to life," said Raquel Fleskes, an anthropologist at the University of Connecticut who studied the remains. "This is a way of restoring dignity to individuals that should've always had this dignity."

The Charleston project started a decade ago, when construction workers unearthed the remains beneath the grounds of the Gaillard Center, an arts venue in the city that was going through an expansion.

Dating back to the second half of the 18th century, the remains are believed to be mostly from enslaved people of African descent who lived nearby. A few of them were likely among the estimated 175,000 Africans brought through Charleston's port, a hub for the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The city reburied the remains at the site, where a memorial fountain is planned. But with few recorded details available, community members were also interested in using science to learn more about the people, Fleskes said.

So, the Anson Street African Burial Ground Project was born, and researchers started looking for clues.

Artifacts from the site showed that the bodies were buried with care, explained Theodore Schurr, an anthropologist at the University of Pennsylvania who worked on the research. Some of them had beads in their hair or coins over their eyes. Minerals in their teeth showed only a few had been born in Africa, while most had likely been born into slavery in Charleston or nearby.

Scientists also coaxed DNA from the centuries-old skeletons — drilling small samples of bones and teeth, grinding them up into powder, mixing them into a solution and filtering out everything but the human DNA. They were able to get some genetic material for most of the 36 and full genomes for half of them, which were compared with the genetic makeup of people in Africa today.

Results showed that they had ties to many different places along the West African coast, from Gambia to Gabon. They were mostly male, and largely died as adults. Their ages ranged from a child under 3 to a man over 50.

Their DNA showed they were unrelated, aside from one possible mother-child pair.

Researchers also offered DNA tests to 78 African Americans living in the Charleston area today, said La'Sheia Oubré, who led community education for the project. So far, they haven't found any direct rela-



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tives of those buried at Anson Street.

Still, Oubré — who took a DNA test — said she and other community members consider them family. “They have such a story to tell,” she said. “And because they’re not related to us by blood, it doesn’t mean that it’s not our moral responsibility to take care of them.”

Since it became possible to sequence DNA from ancient remains, the technology has taken us back to the days of Neanderthals and mammoths.

Some researchers have been using ancient DNA to fill gaps in our more recent history. That includes cases like Charleston as well as the New York African Burial Ground Project, which revealed new details about Africans and their descendants in 18th century Manhattan.

There aren’t many records for these people from the time, said Michael Blakey, an anthropologist who served as the scientific director on the New York project. The records that are available focuses on things like how much enslaved people cost and what kinds of laws were used to control them, he said.

Oubré said it’s been powerful to have DNA reveal some of the “stolen history” of those buried in her city. “To be able to know all of this, it’s still mind-blowing to me,” Oubré said. “It still just warms my heart that we’re able to find out where we come from — where we really come from.”

In some cases, ancient DNA research has also challenged the history that’s been written about certain communities.

Growing up in Puerto Rico, anthropologist Maria Nieves-Colon was taught that the Indigenous peoples of the islands were quickly wiped out by European colonization, and didn’t pass on their genes to people on the island today. But after looking at ancient remains from the island in a 2020 study, Nieves-Colon found genetic links did exist between those Indigenous groups and modern-day Puerto Ricans.

Research like this shows “we need to think more critically about what was left in the historical record,” said Nieves-Colon, who is now at the University of Minnesota.

While ancient DNA can be a powerful tool for uncovering history, it needs to be used with caution, researchers note, especially when it comes to vulnerable groups.

Unlike research on living subjects, work on recovered human remains doesn’t require scientists to get consent, explained Krystal Tsosie, a geneticist at Arizona State University. And in the past, most researchers haven’t consulted with groups like Native tribes or African descendants before studying the remains of possible ancestors.

But this kind of work does impact living communities and they should be part of the conversation, researchers said.

“In many ways, it’s about power,” Blakey said. “The right to tell your story.”

In Charleston, project leaders asked community members for their permission before every step, Oubré said. The names of the 36 had been lost to history and the team gave them new ones — like Coosaw, Welela, Isi and Kuto — so they wouldn’t be just numbers on a burial plot, said Joanna Gilmore, director of research and interpretation with the Anson Street project.

Now, the new memorial is set to honor the lives of these 36 individuals, as well as the thousands of enslaved people who helped build Charleston, project leaders said.

The memorial will be at the Gaillard Center, where a small plaque now marks the site where the remains were uncovered. It will include a fountain circled by pairs of bronze hands cast from current residents, and a base made of soil from other African burial grounds across the city, Gilmore explained.

Last month at an art studio, residents created a copy of their hands, leaning elbow-deep into buckets of pink goo that hardened into molds. Artist Stephen Hayes poured liquid plastic into the molds to make shiny white replicas.

Adrian Swinton got her hands cast to represent a woman given the name Tima. Swinton is descended from slaves herself, and said the memorial was a powerful way to remember their sacrifices.

“Her legacy hasn’t gone unnoticed,” Swinton said. “And she wasn’t property. She was a human. She was part of my Black history.”

Retiree Ervin McDaniel Jr. was giddy as he held up his freshly made plastic hands, which will be cast in

bronze to represent the boy born into slavery who was given the name Fumu.

"They lived, they worked, they died — and now they're being remembered forever," McDaniel said

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## **AP sources: Two groups formally submit bids for Commanders**

By ROB MAADDI and STEPHEN WHYNO AP Sports Writers

PHOENIX (AP) — Dan Snyder's departure from the NFL is moving closer to reality.

A group led by Josh Harris and Mitchell Rales and another group led by Canadian billionaire Steve Apostolopoulos have formally submitted fully financed bids for the NFL's Washington Commanders, according to a person with knowledge of the situation.

Two people confirmed the bid from Harris. Both spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity Tuesday because details of the bid have not been publicly announced.

The Harris/Rales group includes basketball Hall of Famer Magic Johnson. Houston Rockets owner Tilman Fertitta also has been in the running.

ESPN reported both bids came in at Snyder's \$6 billion asking price. Snyder had yet to accept an offer when the league's finance committee met Monday so his future wasn't openly discussed.

"The information is very little to none in terms of the 31 of us (owners), and probably even the league office right now," Indianapolis Colts owner Jim Irsay said.

That quickly changed in less than 24 hours.

Harris, who owns the NBA's Philadelphia 76ers and NHL's New Jersey Devils, brought on Rales, a billionaire who also grew up in Maryland, just outside Washington, earlier this year. Johnson, who has ownership experience with Major League Baseball's Los Angeles Dodgers and others, later joined the group.

Apostolopoulos is a Toronto native who went to Harvard and is the founder of a private equity venture company.

Three-quarters of the owners would need to approve the sale. A vote could take place at the league meetings in May in Minnesota if Snyder accepts an offer soon, though it's more likely the process will take longer to finalize with both groups involving several owners.

Last fall, with multiple investigations ongoing into the team's workplace culture and finances, Snyder and his wife Tanya hired a firm to explore selling part or all of the team. That decision came two weeks after Irsay said there was "merit to remove" Snyder, which would take an unprecedented vote of 24 of the other 31 owners.

Selling the team would avoid going down that road, though Snyder has angered some of his colleagues by demanding that owners and the league indemnify him against future legal liability and costs if he sells the team, a person told the AP.

"There would be no reason for us to give any sort of unusual indemnification," Irsay said.

Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones said Snyder's situation has changed their relationship.

"I think that it's a little more formal, but I think it's that way because of the various issues that are involved here," Jones said. "It's not 'lovey-dovey,' but it's not really strained in any way."

Snyder and the team are still under investigation by former U.S. Attorney Mary Jo White, who was retained by the league to look into various aspects of the organization stemming from a congressional review into workplace misconduct that also included a referral to the Federal Trade Commission for potential business improprieties.

A spokesperson declined to comment when asked if Snyder had refused to speak with White, saying it's a confidential matter between the club and the league.

The sale allows Snyder to avoid speaking to White, but NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell previously said the findings of White's report will be made public at the conclusion of her investigation. One person said the report will still be released even if Snyder sells the Commanders.

In a statement responding to news of bids being submitted for the Commanders, lawyers for more than 40 former team employees said their clients want an assurance from the league that the report will be released.

Attorneys Lisa Banks and Debra Katz said, "Allowing him to sell the team at what will certainly be a large premium without full accountability for his misconduct would be a travesty of justice."

Dozens of former employees detailing incidents of sexual harassment from their time with Washington beginning in the summer of 2020 prompted the first league investigation by Beth Wilkinson, which led to a \$10 million fine and Snyder stepping away from day-to-day operations for a period of time. A lack of a written report sparked the investigation by the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform, which found Snyder played a role in the organization's toxic workplace culture.

Whyno reported from Washington.

AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/hub/nfl> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_NFL](https://twitter.com/AP_NFL)

## Russia convicts father of teen who drew antiwar picture

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — A Russian court on Tuesday convicted a single father over social media posts critical of the war in Ukraine and sentenced him to two years in prison — a case brought against him after his daughter's drawing at school opposed the invasion, according to his lawyer and activists.

But Alexei Moskalyov fled house arrest before his verdict was delivered in his Russian hometown of Yefremov and is at large, court officials said. His 13-year-old daughter Maria, who has been taken from him by the authorities, wrote him a supportive letter for his trial from the orphanage where she is living, according to his lawyer, telling him, "Daddy, you're my hero."

Moskalyov's case has drawn international attention and was a grim reminder that the Kremlin is intensifying its crackdown on dissent, targeting more people and handing out harsher punishments for any criticism of the war. The broad government campaign of repression has been unseen since the Soviet era.

Moskalyov, 54, was accused of repeatedly discrediting the Russian army, a criminal offense in accordance to a law Russian authorities adopted shortly after sending troops into Ukraine.

He was indicted for a series of social media posts about Russian atrocities in Ukraine and referencing the "terrorist" regime in Moscow that he insists he didn't make. But, according to his lawyer and activists who supported him throughout the case and trial, his troubles started last spring after his 13-year-old daughter, Maria, drew an antiwar picture at Yefremov School No. 9 that depicted missiles flying over a Russian flag at a woman and child and said, "Glory to Ukraine."

In April 2022, Moskalyov was fined for critical comments on social media. His apartment was raided in December and a criminal case was opened against him this month. He was placed under house arrest and his daughter was placed into the orphanage.

At the trial, which concluded in one day on Monday, three teachers and the director of Maria's school testified that they found Moskalyov's "discrediting" social media posts at random and that Maria's drawing had nothing to do with the case — contradicting the accounts of his lawyer and other supporters. Men in military uniforms and medals showed up at the courthouse Monday, apparently in support of the authorities.

Moskalyov rejected the accusations and insisted he had nothing to do with the social media posts in question.

In a short closing statement, Moskalyov said he was "against" what the Kremlin insists on calling a "special military operation."

"How can one feel about death, about people who are dying? Adults are dying, children. ... Only negatively — how else can one feel about a war?" he was quoted as saying by Russia's independent news site Mediazona.

Court officials said Moskalyov fled house arrest overnight from his apartment in Yefremov, about 300

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kilometers (about 186 miles) south of Moscow and a similar distance north of the Ukrainian border. He had been wearing a bracelet that tracked his movements but apparently had taken it off.

When an official announced in court Tuesday that Moskalyov had fled, some in attendance shouted, "Bravo!"

Moskalyov's lawyer Vladimir Biliyenko said he learned of his client's disappearance at the hearing. Moskalyov was scheduled to appear in court again next week on a petition to restrict his parental rights.

Biliyenko told The Associated Press the authorities' petition to restrict Moskalyov's parental rights was based almost solely on his political views and his prosecution for discrediting the army, which they said posed a threat to his daughter.

The officials have also accused Moskalyov of being a negligent parent because Maria stopped attending school after her drawing was reported to the police and she was questioned. According to Biliyenko and Moskalyov's supporters, she was scared to go back after that and studied at home.

The lawyer described the prosecution of Moskalyov as "bullying of the family."

The lawyer visited Maria in the orphanage Tuesday and told reporters that while he wasn't able to see her, local administrators allowed him to photograph a letter she wrote to her father, which ended with, "Daddy, you're my hero." Biliyenko also was given two drawings Maria made, depicting a dog and rabbits.

Olga Podolskaya, a member of Yefremov's municipal council who has been helping Moskalyov, told AP that father and the daughter clearly love each other, and the decision to take Maria away was politically motivated. Maria's mother left when the girl was 3 and has another family in a different city, Podolskaya told AP by phone.

Podolskaya said the news that Moskalyov escaped house arrest shocked her.

"We're all really worried, including Alexei's lawyer," she said, adding that the hope now was for other relatives to seek custody of Maria.

Biliyenko said after the hearing that he tried calling Moskalyov after his visit to the orphanage, but he wasn't answering his phone. "I thought that he was being brought here (to the courthouse), because they usually arrive in advance," he said.

Russian human rights activists say the Kremlin has ramped up pressure on those who disagree with the war. The OVD-Info rights group that tracks political cases and provides legal aid this month has registered an increase in prison sentences for people prosecuted for their antiwar stance, said Daria Korolenko, the group's lawyer and analyst.

"Repressions are picking up speed," Korolenko told AP in a phone interview, adding that the numbers are expected to continue growing.

Also on Tuesday, a court in St. Petersburg continued a hearing in the case against Irina Tsibaneva, 60, who is charged with desecrating a grave. In October she left a note on the grave of President Vladimir Putin's parents that said, among other things: "You raised a monster and a killer." She faces up to five years in prison if convicted.

Earlier this month, a court in the nearby region of Tver sentenced a married couple to 6 1/2 and 7 years in prison on charges of vandalism and spreading false information about the army. According to OVD-Info, Alexander Martynov and Lyudmila Razumova were charged after critical social media posts and antiwar and antigovernment slogans they allegedly wrote on buildings.

In Moscow last week, police raided two bars suspected of raising funds for Ukraine's military. According to media reports, police played patriotic songs and forced the guests to sing along during the raid. At least 40 people were briefly detained.

Another recent raid in the capital targeted an event dedicated to the jailed artist Sasha Skochilenko, who is on trial for spreading false information about the army. The event's participants reported being beaten by police or threatened with rape.

In the far eastern city of Vladivostok, a court reversed the acquittal of a feminist artist who was tried on charges of disseminating pornography after she shared artwork online of women's bodies. Yulia Tsevtkova's case drew international outrage and ended in a rare acquittal last year after fears she would be sent to prison. Tsevtkova has since left Russia; a new trial has been ordered for her case.

In Yefremov, Yelena Agafonova, an activist who has been helping the Moskalyov family, told AP after the trial that anyone can run afoul of authorities these days with their comments.

"Perhaps your children will express their opinion somewhere. Perhaps your children will laugh at something somewhere, and they will be in exactly the same situation in which this family is now," she said. "Perhaps a neighbor, who thinks they saw something (untoward), will report on you. So while you are lying on the couch, this will all happen more, and more, and more."

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

## Fed official: Bank rules under review in wake of SVB failure

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve's bank supervisors warned Silicon Valley Bank's management as early as the fall of 2021 of risks stemming from its unusual business model, a top Fed official said Tuesday, but its managers failed to take the steps necessary to fix the problems.

The Fed official, Michael Barr, the nation's top banking regulator, said during a Senate Banking Committee hearing that the Fed is considering whether stronger bank rules are needed to prevent a similar failure in the future.

Silicon Valley Bank's management was deficient, Barr said. In particular, he said, the interest rate model the bank used "was not at all aligned with reality."

The timeline that Barr laid out for when the Fed had alerted Silicon Valley's management to the risks it faced is earlier than the central bank has previously said the bank was on its radar screen.

Tuesday's hearing was the first formal congressional inquiry into the March 10 collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and the subsequent failure of New York-based Signature Bank, the second- and third-largest bank failures in U.S. history.

The failures set off financial tremors in the U.S. and Europe and led the Fed and other government agencies to back all deposits at the two banks, even though nearly 90% of both banks' deposits exceeded the \$250,000 insurance threshold. The Fed also established a new lending program to enable banks to more easily raise cash if needed.

Late Sunday, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. said that resolving the two banks, including reimbursing depositors, would cost its insurance fund \$20 billion, the largest such impact in its history. The FDIC plans to recoup those funds through a levy on all banks, which will likely be passed on to consumers.

Sen. Sherrod Brown, the Ohio Democrat who leads the committee, suggested that the government's rescue of SVB's depositors, which included wealthy venture capitalists and large tech companies, had caused "justified anger" among many Americans.

"I understand why many Americans are angry — even disgusted — at how quickly the government mobilized, when a bunch of elites in California were demanding it," Brown said.

Republican members of the committee focused their fire on the Fed and other regulators for failing to prevent SVB's failure. The Fed has been criticized by advocacy groups for not adequately responding to red flags about the bank's management.

"I hope to learn how the Federal Reserve could know about such risky practices for more than a year and failed to take definitive, corrective action," said Sen. Tim Scott, Republican from South Carolina. "By all accounts, our regulators appear to have been asleep at the wheel."

Several senators have introduced bills that would tighten bank regulation or raise the FDIC's \$250,000 threshold. But given the partisan divisions in Congress on those issues, few expect such proposals to become law.

Silicon Valley's deposits were heavily concentrated in the high-tech sector, which made it particularly vulnerable to a downturn in a single industry. It had bought long-term Treasuries and other bonds with those funds.

The value of those bonds fell as interest rates rose. When the bank was forced to sell those bonds to repay

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depositors as they withdrew funds, Silicon Valley absorbed heavy losses and couldn't pay its customers. Barr said that depositors withdrew \$42 billion — equal to about a quarter of the bank's assets — on the Thursday before the bank failed. On Friday morning, it faced an additional \$100 billion in withdrawal requests.

Barr said the Fed's review of Silicon Valley's collapse will consider whether stricter regulations are needed, including whether supervisors have the tools needed to follow up on their warnings. The Fed will also consider whether tougher rules are needed on liquidity — the ability of the bank to access cash — and capital requirements, which govern the level of funds a bank needs to hold.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell has said he will support any regulatory changes that are proposed by Barr.

Last September, before the banks' collapse, Barr had said he was conducting a "holistic review" of the government's capital requirements. He suggested that he might support toughening those requirements, which prompted criticism from the banking industry and Republican senators.

Barr also said in prepared remarks that the Fed will review whether a 2018 law that weakened stricter bank rules also contributed to the financial turmoil.

"SVB's failure is a textbook case of mismanagement," Barr said.

At the hearing, some Senate Republicans questioned whether new rules were needed and noted that the Fed had had the authority to force Silicon Valley to address its shortcomings.

"I can't think of another rule, or law, or regulation, that you needed," said Sen. Cynthia Lummis, a Republican from Wyoming.

Martin Gruenberg, chairman of the FDIC, and Nellie Liang, the Treasury undersecretary for domestic finance, also testified Tuesday. On Wednesday, all three will testify to a House committee.

Gruenberg said the FDIC, which insures bank deposits, and the Fed and Treasury took steps to protect the two banks' depositors to prevent a broader bank run, in which customers swiftly withdraw their funds and which can cause even healthy banks to buckle.

"I think there would have been a contagion," Gruenberg said, "and I think we would have been in a worse situation today."

Gruenberg said that the top 10 depositors at Silicon Valley held \$13.3 billion in their accounts. That is an enormous figure that reflects the wealth of many of its customers, which included large companies such as Roku, the streaming video company, which held about \$500 million in an SVB account.

The banking turmoil has intensified questions about whether the \$250,000 deposit cap, which was enacted after the 2008 financial crisis, should be increased or eliminated entirely.

Joseph Brusuelas, chief economist at the tax advisory firm RSM, argued Tuesday that the current limit disadvantages small and mid-size banks because only the biggest banks are perceived as "too big to fail." Many financial firms have shifted their money to larger banks to take advantage of that, Brusuelas said.

"Policymakers need to address ways to expand deposit insurance as soon as possible to prevent a wider crisis," he said.

Simon Johnson, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist who co-wrote a book about the 2008-2009 financial crisis, said there could be bipartisan support for proposals to raise the \$250,000 insurance limit for the bank deposits of companies that must meet payrolls and pay bills.

Such an expansion, Johnson said, is "quite doable and entirely reasonable. It's a good idea."

Democratic senators charged that the failures can be attributed, to some extent, to the 2018 softening of the stricter bank regulations that were enacted by the 2010 Dodd-Frank law.

The 2018 law exempted banks with assets between \$100 billion to \$250 billion — Silicon Valley's size — from requirements that it maintain sufficient cash, or liquidity, to cover 30 days of withdrawals. It also meant that banks of that size were subject less often to so-called "stress tests," which sought to evaluate how they would fare in a sharp recession or a financial meltdown.

AP Economics Writer Paul Wiseman contributed to this report.

## MLB The Show breaks barrier with Negro League players

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — MLB The Show has broken a video game barrier: For the first time, the franchise will insert some of the greatest Negro League players — from Satchel Paige to Jackie Robinson — into the 2023 edition of the game as playable characters.

Video gamers are now able to venture into a storyline mode involving eight Negro League legends through MLB The Show 23, which releases Tuesday. The narrative experience will feature short videos about the players along with gameplay focused on the epic moments of their careers.

Along with Robinson and Paige, the game also features other players including Buck O'Neil, Rube Foster, Hilton Smith, John Donaldson, Hank Thompson and Martin Dihigo.

"This made sense on multiple levels," said Bob Kendrick, the narrator of storyline experience and president of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, which is located in Kansas City, Missouri. Along with the museum, he partnered with Sony for the historic Black players' insertion into the game.

"The way the Negro League players played, it fits perfectly for a video game," he said. "There were so many gaming fans who have been clamoring for the inclusion of the Negro Leagues. People were popping into my timeline on social media. This has been stirring for several years.

"I never really dreamt this would become reality. And I didn't really think it would happen with arguably the biggest baseball video game of them all. This is something we are inherently proud of."

Kendrick said the multi-year partnership is a "gigantic step in keeping the legacy alive" for the Negro Leagues. The last time Negro League players were featured in a video game was on EA Sports MVP Baseball 2005 that included Robinson, Paige and Bob Gibson as legendary figures.

"For the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, this is all about creating relevancy," he said. "How do I establish a relevant connection with an ever-changing generation of young people? I can't sit back and wait for them to come to me at the doors of the museum. I have to go to them in the mode of which they are getting information. If it's a video game, then so be it."

Ramone Russell was the first to pitch Sony executives the concept of breathing life into the Negro League players through the franchise's popular video game. He's been mulling over the idea for more than a decade as a mainstay for the development and marketing team for the MLB The Show series.

"This is a project I've always wanted to do," said Russell, the product development communications and brand strategist for Sony Interactive Entertainment. He played a vital role in working across multiple teams who did a "tremendously smart job" in creating the mode.

"So many of our fans — even when they hear the word 'Negro Leagues' — they have no context of what the Negro League is and what it represents," Russell continued. "I've been asked 'Hey, when are you going to have the Negro Leagues?' My answer would be, 'As soon as we can find the right way to do it.' As you know, perfection is the enemy of progress. But about two years ago, I felt like now is the time."

Not a lot of game footage from the Negro Leagues exists, so game creators gathered archive video and photos from the museum and family members of the deceased players to collect as much as they could. That helped nail down the fine animation details for each player, jerseys and the stadiums where games were held.

Russell said the process was a tedious one, but it couldn't have fully come together without the expertise of Kendrick — who he says knows the real history of the Negro Leagues and players "more than anyone else." He said Kendrick was the perfect person to narrate the storyline mode, because of his well-rounded knowledge about player's greatness.

Even though Jackie Robinson was the first African American player to play in a Major League Baseball game in 1947, Kendrick said during his narration in the mode that Robinson was not the best player from the Negro Leagues. He said the league had such a rich talent pool where players played with in a "bold, brash way" and was "fast and daring."

"It's not to disparage Jackie at all, but this is how great the talent was in the Negro Leagues," Kendrick said. "I tell people all the time that the talent in the Negro Leagues would not take a backseat to any league. We're talking about some of the greatest athletes to ever put on a baseball uniform. And unfortu-

nately, the majority of the public, they don't know these names. But they should for both from a baseball perspective as well as a historical perspective."

Sony's San Diego Studio will donate \$1 to the Negro Leagues Museum for every MLB The Show 23 Collector's Edition is sold.

Kendrick said having the Negro League storyline in the game will hopefully inspire young Black kids and others of color to learn more about their heritage. He wants the visibility of the video game to help bring more awareness to the museum.

"Through animation and a project like this, you can bring them to life," he said. "It's a beautiful way to convey everything the Negro Leagues represents. I was amazed by people who didn't know night baseball originated from the Negro Leagues. They just didn't get their just due. It's not there in the pages of an American history book. ... Now, we have a chance to let people know."

## Visitors flock to see David sculpture after Florida uproar

By TRISHA THOMAS Associated Press

FLORENCE, Italy (AP) — Visitors flocked to see Michelangelo's David sculpture in Florence on Tuesday, following an uproar over a Florida school's decision to force the resignation of the principal over complaints about a lesson featuring the Renaissance masterpiece.

Tourists, many of them Americans on spring break or studying abroad, posed for selfies in front of the giant marble statue, which features the Biblical David, naked with a sling over his shoulder and a rock in his hand, ready for battle with Goliath.

Florence's Galleria dell'Accademia, which houses the sculpture, reopened Tuesday after its weekly Monday closure, and both tourists and locals alike couldn't get over the controversy.

"It's part of history," said Isabele Joles from Ohio, who is studying French and Italian art with her school group. "I don't understand how you can say it's porn."

She and other visitors were reacting to the decision by Tallahassee Classical School board to pressure Principal Hope Carrasquilla to resign last week after an image of the David was shown to a sixth-grade art class.

Carrasquilla believes the board targeted her after three parents complained because they weren't notified in advance that a nude image would be shown, while a third called the iconic statue, which is considered the height of Renaissance sculpture, pornographic. The school has a policy requiring parents to be notified in advance about "controversial" topics being taught.

Over the weekend, both Florence's mayor and the museum director voiced incredulity over the ruckus and issued invitations for the ousted principal and the school community to come and see the sculpture for themselves.

"We are talking about the roots of Western culture, and 'David' is the height, the height of beauty," museum director Cecilie Hollberg said in an interview Tuesday, as tourists brushed past her snapping selfies with the statue.

The controversy wasn't only a topic of conversation in Florence. On Monday night in Tallahassee, a large crowd showed up for a school board meeting with public comment on the issue of the David statue controversy lasting over an hour, the Tallahassee Democrat reported. Some parents and teachers criticized the board and even asked chairman Barney Bishop to step aside.

"Given the dissatisfaction of all these parents with your leadership, would you be willing to lead us by integrity by resigning?" asked teacher Ben Steigner.

Bishop refused, saying he intends to remain as chairman through the end of his term in May and then another year on the board, the newspaper reported. The five trustees are elected by themselves, not the parents, and serve three-year-terms. New Principal Cara Wynn told the school board that nine students had left the school since the David controversy began, but that three had enrolled.

Tallahassee Classical is a charter school. While it is taxpayer-funded and tuition-free, it operates almost entirely independently of the local school district and is sought out by parents seeking an alternative



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to the public school curriculum. About 400 students from kindergarten through 12th grade attend the three-year-old institution, which is now on its third principal. It follows a curriculum designed by Hillsdale College, a conservative Christian school in Michigan frequently consulted by Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis on educational issues.

The Florida Department of Education, however, has distanced itself from the controversy and the school's decision.

"The Statue of David has artistic and historical value. Florida encourages instruction on the classics and classical art, and would not prohibit its use in instruction," the department said in a statement. "The matter at the Tallahassee Classical School is between the school and an employee, and is not the effect of state rule or law."

At the museum on Tuesday, tourist Brian Stapley from Seattle Washington said he was sad for the school's children.

"It's one of the most incredible parts of our history," he said as he waited on line to get into the museum. "I feel incredibly sorry for the children that don't get to see it." \_\_\_\_\_

Terry Spencer in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. and Nicole Winfield in Rome contributed.

## US makes corporate transparency commitment with 20 nations

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen affirmed America's commitment to enhancing corporate transparency along with more than 20 other countries participating in this week's Summit for Democracy.

While the Biden administration is already working to establish a new database on small business ownership, Yellen pledged Tuesday that her department would maintain the database, known as the beneficial ownership registry, and would ensure that law enforcement will have access and that individuals' personal data will be protected.

"The beneficial ownership database will deter dirty money from entering the U.S.," Yellen said in a speech before the summit began.

The registry will contain personal information on the owners of at least 32 million U.S. businesses as part of an effort to combat corruption.

Colombia, Malta and Japan are some of the countries included in the commitment.

"Unmasking shell corporations is the single most significant thing we can do to make our financial system inhospitable to corrupt actors," Yellen said. She added that efforts with allies over the last year to track sanctioned Russian assets have "underscored our vulnerability" in tracking business ownership.

The United States is making the push to combat illicit finance, in part, as a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as the U.S. tries to more easily identify wealthy Russians who are accused of hiding stolen money and assets in the United States and around the world.

The two-day summit opens Wednesday. The U.S. is co-hosting it with the governments of Costa Rica, the Netherlands, South Korea and Zambia.

Last September, Treasury began rulemaking to create the small business ownership database. The rule will require most American businesses with fewer than 20 employees to register with the government as of Jan. 1, 2024.

"We have seen corrupt foreign officials bury stolen funds in U.S.-based shell companies; kleptocrats launder kickbacks through anonymous purchases of foreign real estate; and elites move corrupt proceeds through complicit or unwitting financial gatekeepers like attorneys or wealth managers," Yellen said.

The National Small Business Association filed a lawsuit in November to stop the U.S. database from being created, arguing that it is unduly burdensome on small firms and infringes on states' rights to regulate businesses.

Nate Sibley, a research fellow with Hudson Institute's Kleptocracy Initiative said the "beneficial ownership registry, properly implemented, is an essential and long overdue tool for tackling money laundering and sanctions evasion."

"It's absurd that the U.S. promulgates the most aggressive global sanctions and law enforcement campaigns but can't see who is burying money in its own backyard," Sibley said.

Ian Gary, executive director of the Financial Accountability and Corporate Transparency Coalition said the Biden administration should also move to "put in place new regulations to tackle the scourge of money laundering in the \$50 trillion U.S. real estate sector."

During a panel after Yellen's speech, Lakshmi Kumar, policy director at the Global Financial Integrity think tank, said governments should begin pursuing "gate-keepers" of illicit finance, which includes lawyers, accountants and money-managers of suspected criminals. "We've seen white-shoe law firms either willingly, knowingly or inadvertently support criminal organizations, arms traffickers" and other bad actors, Kumar said.

Last year, the Biden administration supported the ENABLERS Act, which would expand the definition of the Bank Secrecy Act — and would require accountants, lawyers and other professionals to conduct due diligence checks on their clients' money, to ensure it doesn't come from money laundering. Right now, the Bank Secrecy Act only applies to financial institutions, however, professional organizations successfully lobbied to keep the legislation from becoming law through the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act.

## Pirates board oil tanker with 16 crew in Gulf of Guinea

By SAM MEDNICK and JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Pirates have boarded a Liberian-flagged oil tanker with 16 crew members in West Africa's Gulf of Guinea, the Danish vessel owner said Tuesday.

The attack took place southwest of Port Pointe-Noire, Congo.

The Monjasa Reformer "experienced an emergency situation" late Saturday, Monjasa, the Denmark-based company that owns the ship, said in a statement.

The crew sought refuge in a citadel — a safe area on the ship — in line with the on board anti-piracy emergency protocol, said company spokesman Thorstein Andreasen.

The nationalities of the crew members and the pirates were not immediately known. Communication channels with the ship are down and international authorities have been alerted, said the statement.

The exact location of the tanker is not known. The last position was transmitted Sunday without any updates since, said Martin Kelly, senior analyst with the London-based EOS Risk group, a security company operating in the area.

The Gulf of Guinea is the world's most dangerous spot for attacks on ships. In June, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution strongly condemning piracy, armed robbery and hostage-taking in the area. This hijacking took place further south in an area that is not typically attacked by pirates.

"This is worrying since it's rare in this area compared to the Gulf of Guinea, for example, where multiple ship hijackings take place every year," said Rida Lyammouri, senior fellow at the Policy Center for the New South, a Moroccan-based think tank.

"Hopefully we are not witnessing a new trend and (this) is just an isolated incident. This also could be explained by increased security measures in the Gulf of Guinea and pirates are looking into new areas of operations," he said.

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Olsen reported from Copenhagen, Denmark.

## 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

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the electricity produced domestically in 2022. Hydropower contributed 6%, and biomass and geothermal sources generated less than 1%.

"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.

## **IAEA head: Deal to protect Ukrainian nuclear plant 'close'**

By ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

DNIPRO, Ukraine (AP) — A deal to protect Europe's largest nuclear power plant from a catastrophic accident due to fighting in Ukraine could be "close," the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency said Tuesday, but warned that intensified combat in the area has increased risks to the facility.

In an interview with The Associated Press a day before he was to cross the front lines for a second time to visit the plant, IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi said he felt it was his duty to ramp up talks aimed at safeguarding the facility. He met Monday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and said he would "most probably" head to Russia in the coming days.

"There is an increased level of combat, active combat" in the area of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, Grossi said. "My teams there report daily about the attacks, the sound of heavy weaponry. This is

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practically constant.”

Grossi has long called for a protection zone to be set up around the plant, which is very near the front line of the war. But so far, an agreement has been elusive.

“It is a zone of extreme volatility. So the negotiations are, of course, affected by the ongoing military operations,” Grossi said. “I would not characterize the process for the last few months as one that has not led to any progress.”

The nuclear agency head said he has maintained a professional dialogue with both Russian and Ukrainian officials as he seeks a deal “to ensure ... that there is no radiological accident, major catastrophic accident, in Europe.”

“I think it’s close,” he said of the possibility of a deal. “Obviously, obviously, I need a political commitment, political decision. And in this case, what I want to stress is that what they would be agreeing is on the protection of the plant. They are not agreeing with each other. They are agreeing with the IAEA. They are agreeing with nuclear safety and security. This is a very important element which I believe should be taken into consideration.”

The negotiations are specific to preventing a nuclear disaster at the plant and not aimed at securing a broader cease-fire, Grossi stressed.

“What we are doing, the way we are presenting things is as a series of principles or commitments that the IAEA presents and everybody would be able to support,” he said. “So in my opinion this should make an agreement possible, not impossible, not utopian, not something for which we should be waiting for months and months on end.”

The head of the nuclear agency said he sees “an increased level of danger” due to the fighting. “I think the principle here is to avoid an accident, and the possibility of having it is increasing. This is a matter of fact.”

The U.N.’s atomic energy watchdog, which is based in Vienna, Austria, has a rotating team permanently based at the plant. The power station’s six reactors are in shutdown and the plant has received the electricity it needs to prevent a reactor meltdown through one remaining functioning power line.

Plant personnel have had to switch to emergency diesel generators six times during the 13-month war to power essential cooling systems. When backup power supplies might be needed again is “absolutely unpredictable,” Grossi said.

“It’s because of the shelling, it’s because of the drone, it’s because of an attack, it’s because of an offensive operation or a defensive operation. So it’s not something that you can really plan for,” he noted. “It is occurring, has been occurring. And if we base ourselves on what we have been seeing, it’s going to happen again.”

Military analysts expect the fighting between invading Russian troops and Ukrainian forces to further escalate as spring progresses and the now muddy ground hardens, allowing heavy military machinery to advance on the battlefield.

“There is talk about offensives, counter-offensives,” Grossi said. “The concentration of troops, concentration of military equipment, heavy weaponry has grown exponentially in the area near to the plant, which of course, makes us believe that the possibility of an accident, of a renewed attack ... could grow.”

While the last direct shelling of the plant occurred in November, the surrounding area was still being hit, the nuclear agency chief said, noting that “we have far more military activity, and more is announced.”

The IAEA head said he has discussed the situation at the highest levels with both sides and was still discussing “different scenarios that could lead” to the creation of a protection zone around the plant.

“This proposal is about preventing a nuclear accident. It is not to create any situation which may have a military advantage or disadvantage or a legitimization of the situation,” he said.

“So I have to walk this fine line talking to both, trying to make it so that both understand very well that a radiological accident ... here and also on the Russian side, would be extremely serious, and it’s something that we really need to avoid.”

Grossi’s return to Zaporizhzhia to visit the power plant also aims “to consolidate the presence of the IAEA, which is indispensable, to provide technical assistance of nuclear safety and security, to give an

objective, impartial impression of what is really happening here," he said. \_\_\_\_

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

## **Poll: Religious service attendance a bit down after pandemic**

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

A "stable share" of Americans has participated in religious services in some way – virtually or in person – during the coronavirus pandemic, though in-person attendance is slightly lower than before the COVID-19 outbreak.

Those are among the key findings in a comprehensive report released Tuesday by the Pew Research Center titled: "How the Pandemic Has Affected Attendance at U.S. Religious Services." The poll surveyed 11,377 U.S. adults in November last year. Its margin of error for the full sample of respondents is plus or minus 1.5 percentage points.

The poll found that the share of U.S. adults typically attending religious services at least once a month dropped from 33% in 2019, before the COVID-19 outbreak, to 30% in 2022. About 20% of Americans say they now attend in person less often than they did before the pandemic.

But the survey also found that the percentage of U.S. adults who take part in religious services in some way each month -- in person, virtually or both -- remained steady since the early days of the pandemic.

Researchers based their analysis on five surveys conducted since the start of the pandemic. They show that "a remarkably steady share of Americans – about 40% – say they have participated in religious services in the prior month one way or the other (either in person or virtually, i.e., by streaming online or watching on TV)."

When asked whether they now attend religious services more or less often than they did before COVID-19, more Americans say that their attendance has declined.

In San Francisco, the historic Old St. Mary's Cathedral struggled to stay open during the pandemic. The 160-year-old Catholic church, which is heavily dependent on older worshippers and tourists, lost most of its revenue after parishes closed during the pandemic. The ranks of regular parishioners dropped from 300 before COVID-19, to about 200 now, said the Rev. John Ardis, who had to dismiss most of the lay staff and close the parish preschool.

"About 40% of our regular parishioners have chosen not to return," Ardis said, adding that most parishioners are elderly and those who returned are still wearing masks at services. The pandemic "has been a big and continual hit," he said.

Thomas Groome, professor of theology and religious education at Boston College, said he wasn't surprised by the survey's findings.

"There are some signs that attendance is coming back, but it'll probably never come back to where it was before the pandemic," he said.

"I think people learned how to nurture their spiritual lives and faith without necessarily going to their local church every Sunday," he added. "I know some of them went there virtually by Zoom...many read the scriptures themselves or they got together with neighbors or they bonded into family groups."

By November 2022, 20% of respondents said they were attending in person less often, while 7% said they were going in person more often. And 15% said they were participating in services virtually more often, while 5% said they were watching services online or on TV less often.

At least 100 parishioners died from COVID-19 at the 17,000-strong Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic church in New York City's borough of Queens.

The number of parishioners who attended its regular services fell, but then rebounded and is now at the same or even higher than before the pandemic, said the Rev. Manuel Rodriguez, the pastor of the mostly Latino congregation.

"But that's not the case, unfortunately, in other churches where attendance is falling," he said.

The biggest decline in in-person attendance was found among Black Protestants, according to Pew. As of November, it found that 46% of them said they attended religious services at least once a month,

down from 61% in 2019.

The report focused on major Christian and Jewish denominations. Pew researchers said the report could not analyze the attendance patterns of Buddhists, Hindus Muslims, and other smaller non-Christian religious groups due to sample size limitations.

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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.

## 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 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."

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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>

## Honda recalls more than 330,000 vehicles due to mirror issue

Honda is recalling more than 330,000 vehicles because heating pads behind both side-view mirrors may not be bonded properly, which could lead to the mirror glass falling out and increase the risk of a crash.

Vehicles included in the recall are 2020-2022 Odyssey, 2020-2022 Passport, 2020-2021 Pilot and 2020-2021 Ridgeline.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said that the vehicles don't comply with the necessary rear visibility requirements.

Honda dealers will replace the side-view mirrors on impacted vehicles free of charge.

Owner notification letters are expected to be sent out on May 8. Vehicle owners may contact Honda customer service at 1-888-234-2138 or the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Vehicle Safety Hotline at 1-888-327-4236.

## Today in History: March 29, US combat troops leave Vietnam

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, March 29, the 88th day of 2023. There are 277 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On March 29, 2004, President George W. Bush welcomed seven former Soviet-bloc nations (Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Latvia and Estonia) into NATO during a White House ceremony.

On this date:

In 1861, President Abraham Lincoln ordered plans for a relief expedition to sail to South Carolina's Fort Sumter, which was still in the hands of Union forces despite repeated demands by the Confederacy that it be turned over.

In 1867, Britain's Parliament passed, and Queen Victoria signed, the British North America Act creating the Dominion of Canada, which came into being the following July.

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In 1943, World War II rationing of meat, fats and cheese began, limiting consumers to store purchases of an average of about two pounds a week for beef, pork, lamb and mutton using a coupon system.

In 1951, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were convicted in New York of conspiracy to commit espionage for the Soviet Union. (They were executed in June 1953.)

In 1971, Army Lt. William L. Calley Jr. was convicted of murdering 22 Vietnamese civilians in the 1968 My Lai (mee ly) massacre. (Calley ended up serving three years under house arrest.) A jury in Los Angeles recommended the death penalty for Charles Manson and three female followers for the 1969 Tate-La Bianca murders. (The sentences were commuted when the California state Supreme Court struck down the death penalty in 1972.)

In 1973, the last United States combat troops left South Vietnam, ending America's direct military involvement in the Vietnam War.

In 1974, eight Ohio National Guardsmen were indicted on federal charges stemming from the shooting deaths of four students at Kent State University. (The charges were later dismissed.)

In 1984, under cover of early morning darkness, the Baltimore Colts football team left its home city of three decades and moved to Indianapolis.

In 2002, Israeli troops stormed Yasser Arafat's headquarters complex in the West Bank in a raid that was launched in response to anti-Israeli attacks that had killed 30 people in three days.

In 2010, two female suicide bombers blew themselves up in twin attacks on Moscow subway stations jam-packed with rush-hour passengers, killing at least 40 people and wounding more than 100.

In 2020, country singer Joe Diffie, who had a string of hits in the 1990s, died at 61 from what a spokesman said were complications from COVID-19.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama promoted a plan to create construction and other jobs by attracting private money to help rebuild roads, bridges and other public works projects during a visit to a Miami port that was undergoing \$2 billion in upgrades paid for with government and private dollars. A 16-story building that was about to be completed collapsed in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, killing 36 people, most of them laborers or bystanders.

Five years ago: Russia announced the expulsion of more than 150 diplomats, including 60 Americans, and said it was closing a U.S. consulate in retaliation for Western expulsions of Russian diplomats over the poisoning of an ex-spy and his daughter in Britain. Malala Yousafzai returned home to Pakistan for a four-day visit, the first by the 20-year-old Nobel laureate since she was shot by the Taliban five years earlier for speaking out in support of education of girls. The 2018 baseball season began with a home run from Ian Happ of the Chicago Cubs on the season's first pitch, while Giancarlo Stanton hit two homers in his debut with the New York Yankees.

One year ago: Russia announced it would significantly scale back military operations near Ukraine's capital and a northern city, as the possibility of a deal to end the grinding war came into view. (The talks would not lead to a deal and the war would continue). President Joe Biden signed a bill into law making lynching a federal hate crime, more than 100 years after such legislation was first proposed. The Foo Fighters canceled all upcoming concert dates four days after the death of the band's drummer, Taylor Hawkins.

Today's Birthdays: Author Judith Guest is 87. Former British Prime Minister Sir John Major is 80. Comedian Eric Idle is 80. Basketball Hall of Famer Walt Frazier is 78. Singer Bobby Kimball (Toto) is 76. Actor Bud Cort is 75. Actor Brendan Gleeson is 68. Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Earl Campbell is 68. Actor Marina Sirtis is 68. Actor Christopher Lambert is 66. Rock singer Perry Farrell (Jane's Addiction) is 64. Comedian-actor Amy Sedaris is 62. Model Elle Macpherson is 60. Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, D-Nev., is 59. Actor Annabella Sciorra is 59. Movie director Michel Hazanavicius (mee-SHEHL' ah-zah-nah-VEE'-see-oos) is 56. Rock singer-musician John Popper (Blues Traveler) is 56. Actor Lucy Lawless is 55. Country singer Brady Seals is 54. Actor Sam Hazeldine is 51. International Tennis Hall of Famer Jennifer Capriati is 47. R&B singer PJ Morton is 42. Actor Megan Hilty is 42. Pop singer Kelly Sweet is 35.