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There will be no school at Groton Area on Friday, March 31 and the FFA trip to Brookings is canceled.

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Groton Community Calendar

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

"Mistakes are a fact of life. It is the response to error that counts."

NIKKI GIOVANNI



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.

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

compromised my integrity," the actress said.

- So-called "QAnon Shaman" Jacob Chansley, who was sentenced to 41 months prison in November 2021 for his role in the Capitol riot, has been transferred from a federal prison complex to a halfway house in Arizona.
- Pope Francis will leave the hospital on Saturday and could participate in Easter week celebrations, a top cardinal told Italian news agency Adnkronos.
- The number of immigrants nearly tripled in the nation's 20 most populous counties from 2021 to 2022, as immigration returned to pre-pandemic levels nationally.
- The Miami Seaquarium has reached a deal with animal welfare groups to release Lolita, a 5,000-pound orca held in captivity since 1970, back into the wild.
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, the U.S. said it is "deeply concerned" over the arrest of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, claiming Washington is "actively working to secure consular access" for him.

- Turkey has approved Finland's application to join NATO while continuing to block Sweden from joining the Western alliance. The Finnish president vowed his country will be a "strong and capable" ally.

- A federal judge in Texas has struck down Affordable Care Act provisions requiring insurers to offer free preventative services, including HIV drugs and cancer screenings.

- Gwyneth Paltrow has been found not guilty in the 2016 ski collision at a Utah ski resort after being sued for injuries by a retired optometrist. "Acquiescing to a false claim

Governor Noem Closes State Government Offices for Winter Storm

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem ordered state government executive branch offices in certain counties to be closed Friday, March 31, because of the winter storms in South Dakota. Freezing rain, snow, and high winds will occur across much of the state.

State offices are closed all day Friday in the following counties: Brown, Buffalo, Campbell, Clark, Codington, Corson, Day, Deuel, Dewey, Edmunds, Faulk, Grant, Hamlin, Hand, Hughes, Hyde, Jones, Lyman, Marshall, McPherson, Potter, Roberts, Spink, Stanley, Sully, and Walworth Counties. These counties will be in either blizzard warnings or ice storm warnings throughout the day starting in the early morning hours on Friday.

While executive branch offices in these counties will be closed, state employees will be working remotely.

Citizens should be prepared to stay home if possible. If South Dakotans must travel, they should check the sd511.org or the SD511 mobile app.



U.S. bank closures raise concerns in South Dakota

Stu Whitney

South Dakota News Watch

At first glance, the forced closure of California-based Silicon Valley Bank and New York's Signature Bank on March 10 – and the government action to quell the ensuing financial crisis – seemed worlds away from South Dakota's regional banks.

Silicon Valley and Signature were coastal entities servicing mainly technology startups, with billions of dollars in deposits from venture capitalists vested in long-term government bonds, a far cry from the business model of most Great Plains community lenders.

But fiscal tremors have spread wide enough to put South Dakota bankers and politicians in a tough position, vouching for the security of the state's financial systems and mindful of the notion that when it comes to potential bank runs, perception is reality.

"The key thing is for people to remain calm," South Dakota Bankers Association president Karl Adam said from Washington, D.C., where he met with Sens. Mike Rounds and John Thune as part of a previously scheduled banking summit. "This is no time to take out your money to bury in your backyard or put it under your mattress."

South Dakota banks respond proactively to California failures

That message gained urgency on March 13, the Monday after the banks failed. State treasurer Josh Haeder got a call from First Premier Bank in Sioux Falls, the state's bank for more than two decades.

First Premier bankers assured Haeder that general fund deposits were safe and highlighted the differences between the portfolios of Silicon Valley and Signature and South Dakota's 41 state-chartered banks.

Those institutions, with combined assets of nearly \$23 billion, range in size from First Bank & Trust in Brookings, which has \$4.2 billion in total assets, to Andes State Bank in Lake Andes with \$23.3 million. The number of South Dakota-based banks grows to 57 when including nationally chartered institutions such as Sioux Falls-headquartered Citibank and Wells Fargo.

Nationally chartered banks – which also include Pathward (formerly Metabank) in Sioux Falls and Cor-Trust Bank in Mitchell – have a permit granted by the federal government, while state-chartered banks are overseen by the South Dakota Division of Banking. Both offer FDIC insured deposits and are federally regulated, but administrative and consumer protection matters are handled by the Division of Banking for state-chartered institutions.

The call to Haeder was not the only one First Premier made. The state's sixth-largest bank, with more than \$3.5 billion in total assets, contacted all depositors with accounts of greater than \$250,000, the ceiling set by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) to have deposits automatically insured.

"We have about 30,000 checking accounts, and of those we have 429 above the \$250,000 limit," said First Premier CEO Dana Dykhouse. "We wanted to assure them that the California bank (Silicon Valley) was an outlier and completely opposite of what we're doing. None of them opted to pull out."

Review shows South Dakota banks are stable

A News Watch review of South Dakota's largest banks shows all of them are above the federal requirement for risk-based capital ratio, a measurement of whether an institution has enough liquid capital on hand to sustain operating losses.

Under the Dodd-Frank Act of 2010, on the heels of the Great Recession, the permanent floor requirement for Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio is 4.5%, while banks are considered "well-capitalized" with a ratio of 8% or higher. Tier 1 capital refers to a bank's core capital, including equity and disclosed reserves.

Among South Dakota's 20 largest banks, the average Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio is 14.84%, ranging

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from First National Bank in Fort Pierre (24.04%) to First National Bank in Yankton (9.85%), according to FDIC data.

But Adam, whose banking career began nearly 30 years at Dakota State Bank in Blunt, knows that the trickle-down nature of bank failures means everyone must stay vigilant to avoid downturns in public confidence.

There's also concern of "over adjustments" by regulators that will place new burdens on banks as well as added responsibility for insuring FDIC deposits as part of the government response.

"This situation is rattling to all Americans who have banking relationships," said Adam. "We understand the importance of a strong financial system; it's what we hang our hat on every day. We would be remiss not to dig into this and pay close attention while making it clear to people that the safest place for their money is in the bank."

Larger banks 'too big to fail'

Rounds, who serves on the Senate Banking Committee, told News Watch that the fallout for South Dakota banks could come not from the Silicon Valley/Signature failures but political and regulatory aftershocks.

The Banking Committee will hold a March 28 hearing to assess management missteps and determine how the San Francisco Fed and state bank regulators missed signs that Silicon Valley was in trouble. Rounds said he also wants more information on government efforts to cover depositors' losses and how that might affect smaller banks.

To forestall panic in the aftermath of the bank failures, the FDIC used a "systemic risk" exception to guarantee all deposits, regardless of the amount. The money for that action comes from fees generated from assessments to banks. But there are unanswered questions about a "special assessment" invoked by the FDIC and how much banks will be charged.

"That's a really important part that has to be addressed," said Rounds, adding that separate investigations into the bank failures are forthcoming from the General Accountability Office and the Federal Reserve Inspector General.

The problem for some smaller South Dakota banks is that businesses or nonprofits with more than \$250,000 in deposits might look to move their accounts into larger national banks that are seen as "too big to fail" because "the full faith and credit of the federal government will stand behind them and deposits will be protected, one way or another," said Rounds. Some of those conversations took place when news spread of the bank closures, he added.

"A number of banks had (large depositors) that came and expressed concern about whether their deposits would be covered," Rounds said. "It appeared that if those mid-sized to large businesses started pulling out of the small banks, it could be detrimental to those community or regional banks. I think that's the issue for South Dakotans that needs to be addressed."

Different from Great Recession when 1 South Dakota bank failed

The most recent bank failure in South Dakota occurred in July 2009. The South Dakota Division of Banking closed BankFirst in Sioux Falls for operating with impaired capital amid the mortgage loan crisis and Great Recession.

It was one of 140 banks closed nationally in 2009, to be followed by 157 in 2010, compared to zero in 2021 and 2022. The first South Dakota bank to close prior to that came in 1992, meaning the state has had one bank closure in the past three decades.

"The concern right now is much different than the Great Recession that started in 2008," said Adam. "That was a capital issue, with bad loans and bad assets. What these two institutions (Silicon Valley and Signature) had was a mismatch of their securities portfolio from a duration point of view and a liquidity run."

Silicon Valley and Signature had a flood of tech-based deposits fueled by COVID stimulus funds and, because they weren't making loans, invested a large percentage of that money in 30-year government bonds, normally a sound investment.

But rising interest rates from the Fed reduced the current value of those bonds, so when the tech companies started to struggle and sought to withdraw funds, SVB didn't have enough liquidity and started to

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cash in bonds at a loss, which alarmed depositors even more and led to a run on the bank.

"It wasn't like the days of George Bailey in 'It's a Wonderful Life,' where people were standing outside the bank and you could mitigate it by locking the door," said Adam. "There was social media paranoia, people were texting each other, and they had phone apps that allowed them to move money and move it very quickly. In one day, there was more than \$40 billion that was moved out of that institution."

Communication with customers is key

Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen moved quickly to stem the tide by ensuring that all depositors would be made whole.

Some in Congress want to take things further by temporarily insuring every bank deposit in the country through a broadened insurance program similar to action taken after the 2008 financial crisis, while others have broached the idea of stiffening the FDIC's risk-based capital requirements.

Haeder, a former regional director for Rounds who is in his second term as state treasurer, wants hearings and investigations to take place before new legislation emerges.

"Some folks just want to hurry up and get something passed because they see a problem," he said. "The component you always have to look at is human error. Let's say the feds overlooked this. You could have the best bills and best laws in the world, but if people are looking away or not paying attention for some reason, that becomes a problem."

Adam agrees with that assessment but also knows that pointing fingers elsewhere won't help build confidence in South Dakota banks.

He sees communication as the key, explaining to customers the different types of banking portfolios and strategies, how banks undergo "stress tests" to show they can handle operating losses, and letting taxpayers know that they won't be on the hook for any insurance programs used to protect deposits.

"There was trauma to the system, nobody liked it, and now we need to slow this train down a little bit and find a path forward," said Adam. "We have the best financial system in the world, and we want to continue to protect and improve upon it. We're going to make it very clear that from our point of view and perspective, slow and steady wins the race."

— This article was produced by South Dakota News Watch, a non-profit journalism organization located online at sdnewswatch.org.

TIER 1 RISK-BASED CAPITAL RATIO FOR SOUTH DAKOTA'S LARGEST BANKS

(Ratio compares core equity capital of a bank to its risk-weighted assets)

First National Bank (Fort Pierre) 24.04%

1st Financial Bank (Dakota Dunes) 21.10%

First Savings Bank (Beresford) 19.32%

First Premier Bank (Sioux Falls) 17.96%

Pioneer Bank & Trust (Belle Fourche) 17.14%

One American Bank (Centerville) 16.19%

Citibank (Sioux Falls) 15.44%

First Fidelity Bank (Burke) 14.66%

First National Bank (Sioux Falls) 14.12%

Security Savings Bank (Canton) 13.16%

Pathward (Sioux Falls) 13.09%

Dacotah Bank (Aberdeen) 12.76%

Reliabank (Estelline) 11.98%

Wells Fargo (Sioux Falls) 11.95%

Cortrust Bank (Mitchell) 11.85%

BankWest (Pierre) 11.50%

American Bank & Trust (Sioux Falls) 11.18%

First Dakota National Bank (Yankton) 9.85%

The FDIC's permanent floor requirement for Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio is 4.5%, while banks are considered "well-capitalized" with a ratio of 8% or higher. Note: Some banks are not listed because they use other measures such as Tier 1 Leverage Ratio as their federal reporting requirement.

Source: FDIC



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Trump indicted by Manhattan grand jury, according to reports

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - MARCH 30, 2023 5:25 PM

WASHINGTON — A New York criminal grand jury has indicted former President Donald Trump, the Manhattan District Attorney's Office confirmed following news reports.

A former president has never been indicted before. Trump is also a Republican candidate in the 2024 race for the presidency.

"This evening we contacted Mr. Trump's attorney to coordinate his surrender to the Manhattan D.A.'s Office for arraignment on a Supreme Court indictment, which remains under seal," a spokesperson for Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg wrote in a statement. "Guidance will be provided when the arraignment date is selected."

Trump released a statement Thursday evening alleging the indictment is "election interference at the highest level in history."

"Never before in our Nation's history has this been done," Trump wrote, blasting the prosecutor and Democrats.

"I believe this Witch-Hunt will backfire massively on Joe Biden," Trump added. "The American people realize exactly what the Radical Left Democrats are doing here. Everyone can see it."

The New York Times and Washington Post reported Bragg has been investigating alleged payments Trump paid to adult film actor Stormy Daniels in return for her silence during the 2016 election about an affair.

Trump has denied having an affair with Daniels.

Trump inaccurately predicted his possible arrest on March 21, but it never materialized.

Members of Congress quickly began to react, along partisan lines, as news reached them Thursday.

Republicans said the indictment was politically motivated and accused Bragg of skewing justice to punish the former Republican president.

Florida Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, a potential top rival to Trump for the GOP presidential nomination next year, said he would direct Florida authorities not cooperate with New York officials to extradite Trump to face charges. Trump, a New York native and longtime resident of the city, listed Florida as his official residence in 2019.

"The weaponization of the legal system to advance a political agenda turns the rule of law on its head," DeSantis tweeted.

"Florida will not assist in an extradition request given the questionable circumstances at issue with this Soros-backed Manhattan prosecutor and his political agenda."

House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, a Louisiana Republican, called the indictment "outrageous."

"The sham New York indictment of President Donald Trump is one of the clearest examples of extremist Democrats weaponizing government to attack their political opponents," Scalise wrote on Twitter.

Many House Republicans who have allied themselves with the former president took aim at Bragg. Reps. Tim Walberg of Michigan, Andy Biggs of Arizona and Matt Gaetz of Florida accused Bragg of targeting the former president.

"A majority of Americans know Alvin Bragg's witch hunt is a politically motivated prosecution," Gaetz wrote on Twitter.

Ohio Republican Rep. Jim Jordan, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, tweeted, "Outrageous."

Colorado GOP Rep Lauren Boebert tweeted the indictment "is another political witch hunt targeting the people's President."

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Fourth-ranking House Republican Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York called the indictment a "dark day" for America but said the criminal indictment has "energized" voters.

"Tens of millions of patriotic Americans have never been so energized to exercise their constitutional rights to peacefully organize and VOTE at the ballot box to save our great republic by electing Donald J. Trump in 2024," she wrote in a statement posted to Twitter.

California Democratic Rep. Adam Schiff, who led one of the impeachment trials against Trump, wrote on Twitter the "indictment of a former president is unprecedented."

"But so too is the unlawful conduct in which Trump has been engaged," Schiff wrote. "A nation of laws must hold the rich and powerful accountable, even when they hold high office. Especially when they do. To do otherwise is not democracy."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, said Trump should face "the same laws as every American."

"He will be able to avail himself of the legal system and a jury, not politics, to determine his fate according to the facts and the law," Schumer said in a statement. "There should be no outside political influence, intimidation or interference in the case. I encourage both Mr. Trump's critics and supporters to let the process proceed peacefully and according to the law."

North Carolina Democratic Rep. Alma Adams released a statement saying that the promise that "no one is above the law" in the United States was kept with Trump's indictment.

"Mr. Trump, like every other American, is entitled to due process," Adams wrote. "That is another core promise of our Constitution. The State of New York has spent years meticulously building their case, and they secured an indictment not from political power brokers or the media, but from a grand jury of ordinary citizens."

Sen. Thom Tillis, a North Carolina Republican, wrote on Twitter that he was skeptical of the indictment.

"This is the same District Attorney who is notorious for letting violent criminals off the hook in Manhattan, but has been laser-focused on pursuing a politicized prosecution of a former president," he wrote. "Politics should never tip the scales of justice, and Congress has every right to investigate the conduct and decision-making of the Manhattan D.A.'s office."

The New York case is one of several investigations Trump is facing.

The U.S. House Committee to Investigate the January 6, 2021, Attack on the U.S. Capitol made a criminal referral to the Justice Department at the tail end of its two-year probe that found Trump culpable for that day's insurrection.

Federal authorities are also looking into Trump's storage of classified materials at his Mar-a-Lago estate in South Florida after his presidency.

In his March 21 prediction, Trump called on his supporters to "PROTEST, TAKE OUR NATION BACK!" but did not issue a similar exhortation Thursday.

The indictment follows more than a week of public sniping between Bragg and congressional Republicans.

Three U.S. House committee chairmen, Jordan, Oversight Chairman James Comer of Kentucky and Administration Chairman Bryan Steil of Wisconsin, all Republicans, sent Bragg a letter last week calling the prospective indictment "an unprecedented abuse of prosecutorial authority."

Bragg's office shot back that prosecutors would "not be intimidated by attempts to undermine the justice process, nor will we let baseless accusations deter us from fairly applying the law."

Jennifer Shutt, Ariana Figueroa and Ashley Murray contributed to this report.

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

County commissioner: Carbon pipelines should outfit volunteer fire departments

Local, state cooperation would frame response to incidents

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 30, 2023 4:19 PM

A Minnehaha County commissioner wants volunteer firefighters in the state's most populous county to ask for safety equipment from two carbon pipeline companies for use in the event of a pipeline failure — something the companies say they're willing to do.

The suggestion from Commissioner Joe Kippley came last week on the heels of a meeting in Baltic with rural fire chiefs, in reference to the companies behind the proposed pipelines: Summit Carbon Solutions and Navigator CO2 Ventures.

"Just putting that on the record that we're having those conversations," Kippley said. "I think that it's important to make sure all of our emergency fire departments have what they need, but especially volunteers. The last thing that I want to do is degrade the willingness and ability of people to do that type of civic engagement."

Some fire chiefs contacted by South Dakota Searchlight expressed doubt that an influx of new equipment would help them respond to a pipeline rupture. Officials with the city of Sioux Falls Fire Rescue said it's too early to tell what their needs might be, given the uncertainty surrounding the projects' future.

But Kippley's suggestion points to an animating concern for opponents of the pipelines: a catastrophic failure. The explosion of a carbon pipeline in Mississippi in 2019 — which killed no one but led to the evacuation of 200 people and saw 45 people seek medical attention — has been a frequently shared anecdote at local and state-level meetings on the projects.

Minnehaha County commissioners heard from opponents concerned about the potential of emergencies on the same day Kippley made his remarks.

"If there's a problem, if there were an emergency with that pipeline, it would be catastrophic for our farming operation," said Bruce Burkhardt, who raises hogs and grows crops near the proposed Navigator pipeline route, as does his son. "It would be an insurmountable financial loss, plus catastrophic for the family farm that we have with kids and grandkids and livestock on our farm."

The question of emergency response is important for rural states like South Dakota, where first responders for the majority of the land area tend to be unpaid volunteer firefighters. Their departments often struggle to outfit their firefighters with gear like self-contained breathing apparatuses, which can cost thousands of dollars and come with expiration dates.

That's one reason counties ink mutual aid agreements with neighboring departments.

In Minnehaha County, departments lean on those, as well as on the South Dakota Office of Homeland Security's South Dakota Taskforce 1, which pulls together firefighters with specialized training and expertise from Aberdeen, Rapid City, Sioux Falls and Watertown for missing persons searches, structure collapses and a host of other emergency situations.

It could be years before any carbon pipeline is built, if one is built at all, but those agreements could signal the way communities might respond to a severe incident.

"We can work independently, or we can work collectively as a team," said Battalion Chief Mark Bukovich of Sioux Falls Fire Rescue. "We can grow the resources and the personnel larger if we need to, depending on what the incident size is or the location of it."

Pipeline companies: emergency response built in

Representatives from the companies proposing the two carbon pipelines say they've met with emergency managers in every county along the routes and told South Dakota Searchlight they'll provide equipment as needed.

The projects from Navigator CO2 Ventures and Summit Carbon Solutions have similar goals: to capture carbon produced by Midwestern ethanol plants, liquefy it, and pump it through underground pipelines for sequestration in Illinois and North Dakota, respectively. Pumping carbon underground keeps it out of the

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atmosphere, where it's a heat-trapping gas contributing to climate change. Sequestering carbon can also qualify ethanol plants for tax credits.

Carbon pipelines carry safety risks. The companies characterize the risk as low and the likelihood of severe and catastrophic risk as even lower.

Both pipelines would be monitored remotely 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and each would have emergency shutoff protocols in place to prevent hazardous releases.

Even so, the companies say they take safety seriously and are prepared to invest as necessary to insure local first responders are prepared.

"As part of Navigator's plan to develop this infrastructure safely and to last, our goal is to work with communities across the project's footprint," Navigator spokesperson Andrew Bates said via email. "Navigator will provide the equipment and training needed and we are working with these departments to assess their needs. If a department identifies a need for additional resources, Navigator will work to provide said resources."

Summit spokesperson Courtney Ryan offered a similar response.

"The company will supply the response equipment needed to aid in protecting the public and trainings will be conducted as we move closer to operations," she wrote.

The companies also shared fact sheets on safety that characterize carbon pipelines as proven and safe technology – another point of contention during public meetings on the projects.

Finally, each company's representative noted that any updated federal safety regulations for design and response would be incorporated into final project design.

The federal government is reviewing safety standards for carbon pipelines, and California legislators passed a law barring the construction of new underground CO2 pipelines until those standards are finalized.

Some South Dakota residents are concerned that approval of the pipelines in their state before regulations are finalized would mean lower safety standards – something the companies deny.

"There is not 'grandfathering' of existing infrastructure when it comes to safety compliance," Bates wrote. "If/when new regulations are finalized, we will update the infrastructure to comply."

Critics: Nothing we can do

Those words have not swayed outspoken critics like Don Johnson, chief of the Valley Springs Volunteer Fire Department.

Carbon gas is not flammable or explosive, but it can be poisonous at high concentrations, and a large enough plume can keep vehicles from operating.

The federal Department of Transportation report on the pipeline incident in Mississippi spells out some of the hazards to human health.

"Carbon dioxide is considered minimally toxic by inhalation and is classified as an asphyxiant, displacing the oxygen in air. Symptoms of CO2 exposure may include headache and drowsiness. Individuals exposed to higher concentrations may experience rapid breathing, confusion, increased cardiac output, elevated blood pressure, and increased arrhythmias," the report says. "Extreme CO2 concentrations can lead to death by asphyxiation."

If the worst were to happen, Johnson said, "there ain't a damned thing we can do about it."

"They've got nothing to give me," Johnson said. "I went to one of their safety classes already. He said, 'It'll kill you.' I already knew that."

Johnson's 25 volunteers respond to between 115 and 130 calls a year. The department gets some funding from the county and the city, but still struggles to keep up with gear replacements. Each firefighter gets a self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) for use during fires or when responding to emergencies involving hazardous gasses.

Those items are expensive, but Johnson contends that even new gear wouldn't be enough if a cloud of carbon were to escape in spite of pipeline protocols.

"What, are you going to buy SCBAs for everybody in the county?" Johnson said. "And those things have an expiration date."

Hartford Volunteer Fire Chief Bryon Shumaker isn't a vocal critic of the pipelines, but he's aware of the

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new potential for danger a pipeline could bring. If there's a disaster, as he understands it, "there's absolutely nothing we could do for it except try to evacuate."

"It's really unknown, because there's not too many instances where we've ever had to deal with it," said Shumaker, whose 36 firefighters respond to around 400 calls a year.

Partnerships aid in emergencies

It's too early on in the approval process for the pipelines for first responders to dive too deeply into plans for a pipeline rupture, Sioux Falls Emergency Manager Regan Smith and Captain Bukovich said.

"It would be premature to do any purchase of any additional equipment or training at this point," Smith told South Dakota Searchlight last week. "If it came to fruition, we would get into those details."

A carbon pipeline wouldn't represent Minnehaha County's only pressure point for potential disaster, though. For structure fires, metro area fire departments have a "tender task force" to truck water from "water tenders" to rural areas without fire hydrants. For larger incidents, hazmat teams from the South Dakota Taskforce 1 can be called in to deal with chemical threats.

Service area boundaries go out the window if a train derails, an explosion occurs or a massive fire breaks out across them, Bukovich said.

"As far as jurisdictional boundaries go, if someone needs help, we can go," Bukovich said.

Area departments have summoned the assistance of Taskforce 1 several times in recent years, as well. In 2006, officials in Sioux Falls had to evacuate 200 people after a tanker truck exploded on West 12th Street and leaked 8,500 gallons of gasoline.

In 2004, an ammonia leak at Smithfield Foods in Sioux Falls sent 76 people to area hospitals.

"We had to go in with their incident management team, their hazmat teams to deal with that. There was some sheltering in place, that type of thing," Smith said. "That was a significant event for our community."

For pipelines in particular, there's an extra layer of training. The South Dakota Pipeline Association, a collaborative group of companies that operate pipelines in the state, meets annually to conduct "tabletop exercises," which are essentially emergency management role-playing games that walk players through the steps of a disaster.

If it earns approval from the various permitting authorities from state and federal regulators, Summit Carbon Solutions says it will "conduct tabletop exercises and training to ensure communities are able to effectively respond in the unlikely event of a release."

That's not enough for some critics, who point to the slow response from the Texas-based operator of the Mississippi carbon pipeline, which drew a \$4 million fine.

"This is something new. There's never been CO2 pipelines that are this long built any place in the world," said Dennis Anderson of Valley Springs. "We are concerned about our safety."

From Emergency Manager Smith's perspective, though, the state's emergency response teams are prepared to do their part to be as ready as they can be.

"If it comes to fruition, we would definitely look a lot harder and reach out to other communities," Smith said. "They've had a similar system up in North Dakota for 20 years, a 100-mile CO2 pipeline. So we would talk to those fire departments up there, and ask them to share their experience and their plans."

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

Board reviews 'minors on campus' policy in response to drag show

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 30, 2023 1:02 PM

The state Board of Regents reviewed a draft policy Thursday in Aberdeen responding to public concerns about minors attending a drag show on a college campus.

"I think we are at a good place here, but we expect some tweaks around the margins," said Nathan Lukkes, the board's chief of staff. "The policy essentially establishes the guardrails."

Drag shows were not mentioned during the meeting and are not specifically mentioned in the draft policy, but the effort is a response to concerns about a drag show that was advertised as "kid friendly" last year by a student organization at South Dakota State University in Brookings.

The board directed staff to begin developing the policy in December. The board approved the first reading of the policy Thursday and will give it final consideration at a later meeting.

Despite the public outcry that motivated the policy and the presence of a large crowd at a prior meeting where it was discussed, not one person – online or in-person – offered a comment on the policy during Thursday's public comment period.

According to the board, the draft policy is intended to "take affirmative steps to safeguard and protect the well-being of minors visiting campus, attending university-sponsored events and programs, or participating in external organization programs and activities that utilize campus facilities." The policy would add some new requirements for universities and codify some practices that are already in place.

Language in the policy bars non-student minors from attending programs that include "content that is patently offensive to prevailing community standards in the adult community as a whole with respect to what is suitable material for minors."

The policy says non-student minors generally cannot be in university facilities without a valid purpose or express permission, except if accompanied by an authorized chaperone. And if they fail to comply, they may be immediately removed.

The policy says programming attended by non-student minors may not include activities sexual in nature, obscene live conduct, or anything deemed harmful to minors.

Authorized adults participating in university programs with non-student minors must not have one-on-one contact with minors, except in limited circumstances and in the open. Additionally, they must not take pictures of minors except for official pictures of the program and only with parental or legal guardian consent.

The policy also declares that a "program leader" must be appointed for any program involving non-student minors. They are responsible for ensuring the policy is obeyed, including certifying background checks have been conducted for adults involved in the program.

For youth programs, all authorized adults must pass a criminal background check and a sex offender registry check.

Non-compliance with the policy may result in program suspension, discontinuation, or cancellation.

"This is our first read, and there is an opportunity for input," Board of Regents Chair Pam Roberts said. Celebrating tuition freeze, other bills

The board also approved keeping 2024 tuition rates at their 2022 levels for a second year in a row. The decision affects students taking courses during the upcoming year at the state's public universities.

The board applauded legislators for their work during this year's recently concluded legislative session in Pierre, citing the tuition freeze, a 7% pay raise for state employees (including university employees), upping the state Opportunity Scholarship to \$7,500, and a bill awarding free college tuition to National Guard members.

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.

White House calls on financial regulators to bring back safeguards for regional banks

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MARCH 30, 2023 3:40 PM

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration, placing blame on Trump-era rollbacks, Thursday called on federal banking regulators to reinstate safeguards for regional banks after the record-setting collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank of New York earlier this month.

The White House wants the agencies to revive regular stress testing at banks in the \$100- to \$250-billion size range and impose stricter capital requirements to buffer against market shocks.

The administration also wants agencies to guarantee that community banks do not bear the costs of making whole the uninsured depositors at SVB and Signature that benefited from an extraordinary emergency increase in the amount covered by the government's Deposit Insurance Fund.

"We think that these are common-sense steps that regulators can take under their existing authority that would really strengthen the stability and resilience of the system," a White House official told reporters Thursday.

The administration maintains that each of the recommendations can be implemented under current law and will not require congressional action.

A 2018 change to the Dodd-Frank Act — a law enacted after the 2008 global financial crisis — relaxed the rules that applied to banks with less than \$250 billion in assets, the official, speaking on background, said.

"Remember both Signature Bank and Silicon Valley Bank were in the asset size category that was targeted for rule rollbacks under the Trump administration. Our view is that that vulnerability should be addressed with reinstating those rules and taking the other additional steps that we discussed today," the official told reporters on a call. "The context and backstory here is important."

The administration wants federal regulators to reimpose liquidity requirements ensuring that regional banks "hold sufficient high-quality liquid assets to cover expected net outflows during a stress period," according to a fact sheet distributed by the White House Thursday.

The administration also wants to see regional banks again required to "submit plans describing how they could be wound down without transmitting stress to the rest of the banking system."

After SVB's historic run of \$42 billion in withdrawals in just a matter of hours on March 9, quickly followed by the collapse of Signature Bank, the Federal Reserve, Treasury Department and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation issued a swift joint decision to insure all deposits — even above the \$250,000 threshold — in an effort to prevent panic in the markets.

Lawmakers on a key U.S. Senate panel Tuesday questioned officials from the three agencies about the cause of the SVB and Signature failures — the second and third-largest in U.S. history.

The regulators promised a full review by May 1 and called SVB's rapid failure a "textbook case of bank mismanagement," according to testimony given by the Fed's Michael Barr, the Board of Governors' vice chairman for supervision.

Barr told lawmakers that the bank had been "quite aware" of liquidity risks posed by rising interest rates. The bank had been told as early as November 2021, he said.

Several members of the Senate Committee on Banking — including Democratic Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, and GOP Sens. Mike Crapo of Idaho and John Kennedy of Louisiana — probed whether the 2018 rollbacks stood in the way of federal regulators who still had some power to stress test the banks at their discretion. Crapo was an original sponsor of the 2018 amendment, which Warner supported.

The legislation language states that the Fed "shall, on a periodic basis, conduct supervisory stress tests" on banks with assets between \$100 billion and \$250 billion.

"I agree with you, there was substantial discretion under that act," Barr told Crapo. "... That's one of the areas we'll be looking at in our review."

The White House deferred questions about that discretion to the Fed.

President Joe Biden said in a short address March 13 that money in American banks remained safe and

that any depositors of SVB and Signature “can rest assured they will be protected and they’ll have access to their money as of (March 13).”

He also called for the bank managers to be fired and for Congress to reverse the 2018 rollbacks.

When asked whether Biden still wants Congress to act, the White House official said: “I don’t want today’s announcement to be taken to mean that no congressional action is necessary on any of those topics. What we are saying is that under existing law, there are a lot of important steps that we think regulators can take ... and we are urging the regulators to take those steps.”

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

U.S. House passes sweeping energy bill pushing back against Biden climate policies

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - MARCH 30, 2023 2:12 PM

WASHINGTON – The U.S. House on Thursday approved a bill packed with Republican energy priorities meant to counteract the Biden administration’s approach and boost U.S. oil and gas production.

Numbered H.R. 1 as a signal that energy policy is the House majority’s top legislative priority, the bill includes a package of GOP proposals, ranging from reforming the process for gaining federal approvals for energy projects to condemning President Joe Biden’s cancellation of the Keystone XL crude oil pipeline.

“Voters awarded House Republicans with the majority in Congress to fight President Biden’s radical energy policies and lower costs for American families, and today, we are working to make that a reality,” House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, a Louisiana Republican who was the bill’s lead sponsor, said in a statement following the vote.

Four Democrats, Jared Golden of Maine, Marie Gluesenkamp Perez of Washington state and Henry Cuellar and Vicente Gonzalez of Texas, joined almost all Republicans present in voting for the bill. Pennsylvania’s Brian Fitzpatrick was the sole Republican to oppose the bill. The final tally was 225-204.

House debate stretched throughout the week on the bill, which has virtually no chance of becoming law as written. It would need 60 votes in the U.S. Senate — meaning at least 11 Democrats and independents would have to support it. Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York pronounced it “a partisan, dead-on-arrival, and unserious proposal for addressing America’s energy needs” in a March 15 floor speech.

Biden has also pledged to veto the bill.

The measure would repeal parts of Democrats’ massive climate change law from last year, including a methane pollution fee that funds grants for clean-energy projects to benefit low-income communities. It would also require the federal Bureau of Land Management to hold quarterly auctions for oil and gas leases.

Focus on prices

Congressional Republicans have touted the bill as a crucial measure to reduce energy prices and ease inflation. The package is meant to spur production and cut bureaucratic delays, Republican leaders have said. Increased domestic production would lower costs for consumers, they have said.

Energy and utility prices have risen in the last two years as Democrats held unified control of Washington and put policies in place to slow domestic production, Republicans, including U.S. Rep. Garret Graves, a Louisiana Republican who authored the part of the bill to speed energy permitting, have argued.

“My friends across the aisle have refused to produce American energy,” Graves said on the House floor. “It’s a supply-and-demand issue.”

Democrats blast ‘love letter’ to polluters

Despite the four-moderate defection, most House Democrats have been strongly against the measure, which they say is a thinly disguised giveaway to oil and gas and mining interests.

Arizona Democrat Raúl Grijalva, the ranking member on the House Natural Resources Committee, said the bill looked more like a “love letter to polluting industry than a serious legislative effort.”

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The bill ignored the warning in the United Nations' climate report this month that the world must transition away from fossil fuel production as soon as possible to avoid the worst consequences of climate change.

"We have a lot to do and very little time to do it before the ticking climate bomb we're living in goes off," Grijalva said on the House floor Tuesday.

House Energy and Commerce ranking Democrat Frank Pallone of New Jersey said the bill's provisions on federal permitting would do little to speed construction of wind and solar projects.

"It's a sweetheart deal to expedite polluting projects at the expense of Americans' health and safety," he said in a statement.

Message to voters

With little chance of becoming law, the bill seemed more aimed at showing voters Republicans would prioritize fossil fuel production above climate concerns. And House Republicans spent much time this week promoting the package as the antidote to Biden's climate-focused energy policy.

"H.R. 1 prioritizes the American people over this radical climate agenda," House Energy and Commerce Committee Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington state said on the House floor Wednesday.

The Keystone XL pipeline provision, for example, would only declare Congress' dissatisfaction with Biden's order to nix the project. Nothing in the bill would restore the pipeline, which was proposed to carry crude oil from Canada, through Montana and the Midwest.

House Republicans also criticized another early Biden administration move to pause oil and gas leasing on public lands.

Biden has "waged war on American producers, shutting down oil and gas leasing, banning mineral development in certain areas, and insisting on keeping our federal regulations permanently stuck in the past," House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Bruce Westerman, an Arkansas Republican, said on Tuesday.

But, after a federal judge reversed an early Biden administration order to pause leases on federal lands, the administration has already resumed lease sales, including a \$264 million lease sale on Wednesday for offshore production in the Gulf of Mexico.

Permitting a possibility

Biden and top Senate Democrats have voiced support for a bill to speed up the permitting process for energy projects, and that portion of the House bill could serve as a starting point for negotiations for a bipartisan permitting reform proposal.

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chair Joe Manchin III of West Virginia could see the House bill forming the basis of a bipartisan permitting measure, spokeswoman Sam Runyon said in a statement Thursday.

"Senator Manchin is taking a close look at HR1 and is hopeful there might be a pathway to permitting legislation that could gain bipartisan support," Runyon said.

McMorris Rodgers said this week House Republicans would work with Manchin, a centrist Democrat, on a permitting bill.

"We will go to work with the Senate on permitting. Sen. Manchin I know is anxious to go to work on it," she said at a Tuesday event hosted by a think tank associated with former President Donald Trump. "We're anxious to get a real permitting bill in place."

But Graves said in an interview after the vote that divorcing the permitting legislation from the rest of the bill was "a flawed approach," calling for Schumer to reconsider his position on the entire bill.

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

U.S. judge rules insurers don't have to cover many free preventive health services

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT, ARIANA FIGUEROA AND ASHLEY MURRAY - MARCH 30, 2023 1:53 PM

WASHINGTON — Health insurance companies may no longer need to cover a wide swath of preventive health care services that were required by the 2010 Affordable Care Act, under a federal judge's ruling issued Thursday in Texas.

The decision could affect millions of Americans' access to no-cost preventive health care — including pregnancy-related care, cancer screenings, HIV prevention pharmaceuticals and more — that a federal agency given new powers under Obamacare required health insurance companies to cover.

It was not immediately clear when or how the decision could take effect in consumer insurance plans. The Biden administration is likely to appeal the case.

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer called for an immediate stay and appeal of the ruling and for insurance providers to "publicly commit they will retain free preventive care."

"This ruling is not only misguided, it is outright dangerous and could cost lives," Schumer, a New York Democrat, said in a statement.

New Jersey Democratic Rep. Frank Pallone, ranking member on the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee, said in a written statement the judge's decision "imperils access to lifesaving care including mammograms, lung cancer and skin cancer screenings, screenings for pregnant women and newborns, and PrEP."

"It has no basis in the law, will unnecessarily cause confusion, and will put lives at risk if people are forced to forgo routine screenings and treatment," he added. "The Department of Justice should immediately move to appeal this reckless decision and have it stayed so that Americans do not lose access to care."

The U.S. Justice Department and the Department of Health and Human Services did not respond to requests for comment Thursday morning on the case, *Braidwood Management v. Becerra*. The White House also did not return a request for comment on the ruling.

Judge Reed O'Connor, from the U.S. District Court in the Northern District of Texas, wrote in his ruling that preventive services required by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force to be covered are unlawful because they violate the Appointments Clause.

That section of the Constitution requires the president to nominate certain positions, sometimes referred to as principal officers, that the U.S. Senate then confirms.

Government officials whose positions are generally considered "inferior" are often left for the president, Cabinet secretaries, or others in the executive branch to hire without Senate involvement.

The conservative Christian business owners who filed the lawsuit argue the preventive care measure mandates are unconstitutional, due to a lack of oversight on how recommendations are made by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force.

The business owners argue that because the ACA does not allow the secretary of HHS — or other leaders of the agency — to reject recommendations made by that committee, it has insufficient oversight.

O'Connor, nominated by former president George W. Bush, sided in his ruling with the businesses owners, who want to provide health insurance without coverage for "PrEP drugs, the HPV vaccine, contraceptives, and screenings and behavioral counseling for STDs and drug use." They argued their employees had no need for such coverage and that it violated their religious beliefs under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

PrEP, also known as pre-exposure prophylaxis, are drugs that have a 99% prevention rate for HIV, and are used by all Americans, but primarily by men who have sex with men. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found the drugs "played a part in recent decreases in new HIV infections." The CDC estimates that 1.2 million Americans are eligible for PrEP.

The business owners argue that requiring health insurance to cover preventive HIV medication, such as

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PrEP, violates their faith. They also argue it's unconstitutional for the federal government to recommend covered preventive services.

O'Connor wrote in Thursday's ruling that Braidwood Management Inc. and Kelley Orthodontics, as well as others "need not comply with the preventive care coverage recommendations of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force issued on or after March 23, 2010, because the members of the Task Force have not been appointed in a manner consistent with Article II's Appointments Clause." The Affordable Care Act was signed into law on that date.

Numerous medical groups — the American Medical Association, The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Women's Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the National Medical Association and the Infectious Diseases Society of America — warned against revoking no-cost preventive care services in a brief filed in November.

"Ultimately, if this Court invalidates the Task Force's recommendations nationwide, physicians and health-care professionals will be left in an untenable situation," they wrote.

"Amici will struggle to encourage their patients to accept services that they know will save lives and to help their patients navigate a new and confusing insurance situation," they added. "Amici will see many of their patients, including some of their most vulnerable, turn down medically indicated services because of the very financial barriers that Congress sought to remove."

"The past ten years have shown the benefits of no-cost preventive coverage, and amici ask that the Court hesitate before ordering a remedy that could upset that substantial progress," they said.

The preventive care services in question receive either an "A" or "B" rating from the Preventive Services Task Force. They include domestic violence counseling, postpartum depression counseling, breastfeeding support, and treatment for heart disease.

Some of the screenings for cancer include breast, colorectal, ovarian, lung and skin for patients as young as 6 months to 24-year-olds with fair skin.

HHS estimated in 2020 that nearly 152 million people had access to preventive care services under the law. That breaks down to about 58 million women, 57 million men, and 37 million children, according to HHS data.

Health experts weigh in

Health policy experts at the Kaiser Family Foundation said during a briefing Thursday afternoon the ruling's impacts aren't likely to be immediate, since health insurance companies typically set plans for a full year and the Biden administration is expected to both request a stay of the ruling and appeal it to the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals.

In the event the case is appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court and the justices side with this judge's ruling, Larry Levitt, executive vice president for health policy, said health insurance companies will likely keep coverage for prevention activities covered under the ruling, but that patients could have to pay some of the cost.

How much someone pays for one of those health care services would depend on the type of insurance they have, their deductible and several other factors.

Laurie Sobel, associate director of women's health policy, said it wouldn't be especially challenging for Congress to fix the issue at the heart of the lawsuit.

"The main argument is that the agency, that Health and Human Services, has no power to approve or reject the recommendations by USPSTF, so a fix could be that you just include that (HHS has) to approve the recommendations," Sobel said. "So it makes it clear that USPSTF is in an advisory role and not actually determining what has to be covered."

Levitt, however, noted that the ACA is a "political lightning rod," making any changes in a divided Congress somewhat unlikely.

"It does not require a lot of words to fix this in legislation, but it potentially requires very difficult politics," Levitt said.

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Alina Salganicoff, senior vice president and director of women's health policy, said because the judge's ruling didn't impact the Health Resources and Services Administration, or the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices there are still several preventive services that insurance companies must cover.

"An important message is that mammograms will likely still be covered without cost sharing, so people shouldn't fear that they won't have coverage for their mammogram at this point," Salganicoff said, noting those are under the Health Resources and Services Administration recommendations.

There are also several other cancer screenings and types of preventive care that will be covered, since the judge's ruling applies to recommendations the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force made on or after March 23, 2010.

One issue with that is health care providers have updated the types of screenings available as well as timing in the 13 years since.

Sexually transmitted infection testing is one of the recommendations, Salganicoff said, that pre-dates March 2010, though public health experts have tweaked and adjusted it over the years.

"These are updated every five years, so those will likely still be covered," Salganicoff said.

"I think it's too soon to tell how insurance plans are going to respond to some of the tweaks over time," Salganicoff added. "My anticipation would be that clinicians and plans do want to have coverage to current standards rather than requirement to standards set based on research that was conducted 13 years ago or before."

Other legal challenges to ACA coverage

Several cases challenging whether employers should have to comply with the ACA's birth control mandate have come before the U.S. Supreme Court. Thursday's ruling does not change that section of the ACA.

In 2020 the court granted a victory to those opposed to offering health plans that cover contraception.

In a 7-2 decision, with an opinion written by Justice Clarence Thomas, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Little Sisters of the Poor, which challenged that the mandate violated its rights under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

The case brought by the nonprofit Catholic religious organization, which operates homes for the elderly, upheld a Trump administration expansion of an exemption under the ACA that allowed private employers to object to the birth control mandate for religious or moral reasons.

The Trump administration widened the exemptions in November 2018.

In 2016, the Supreme Court unanimously returned a case brought by a Pittsburgh-based Catholic priest to the lower court level.

Bishop David Zubik, the main plaintiff, had argued that religious freedoms were violated by the contraceptive mandate. Zubik argued that a special carve-out exemption for religious organizations did not go far enough and therefore burdened the exercise of their religious freedoms. The Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh and Erie, as well as the nonprofit Catholic Charities, joined as plaintiffs.

In 2014, Hobby Lobby, a Christian-owned craft supply retailer, won at the Supreme Court level after it became the first high-profile plaintiff to challenge coverage of birth control under the ACA.

In a 5-4 decision, Justice Samuel Alito wrote in the majority opinion that a requirement for "closely held" for-profit corporations to provide employees with access to no-cost contraception under ACA plans violated the Religious Freedom and Restoration Act.

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.

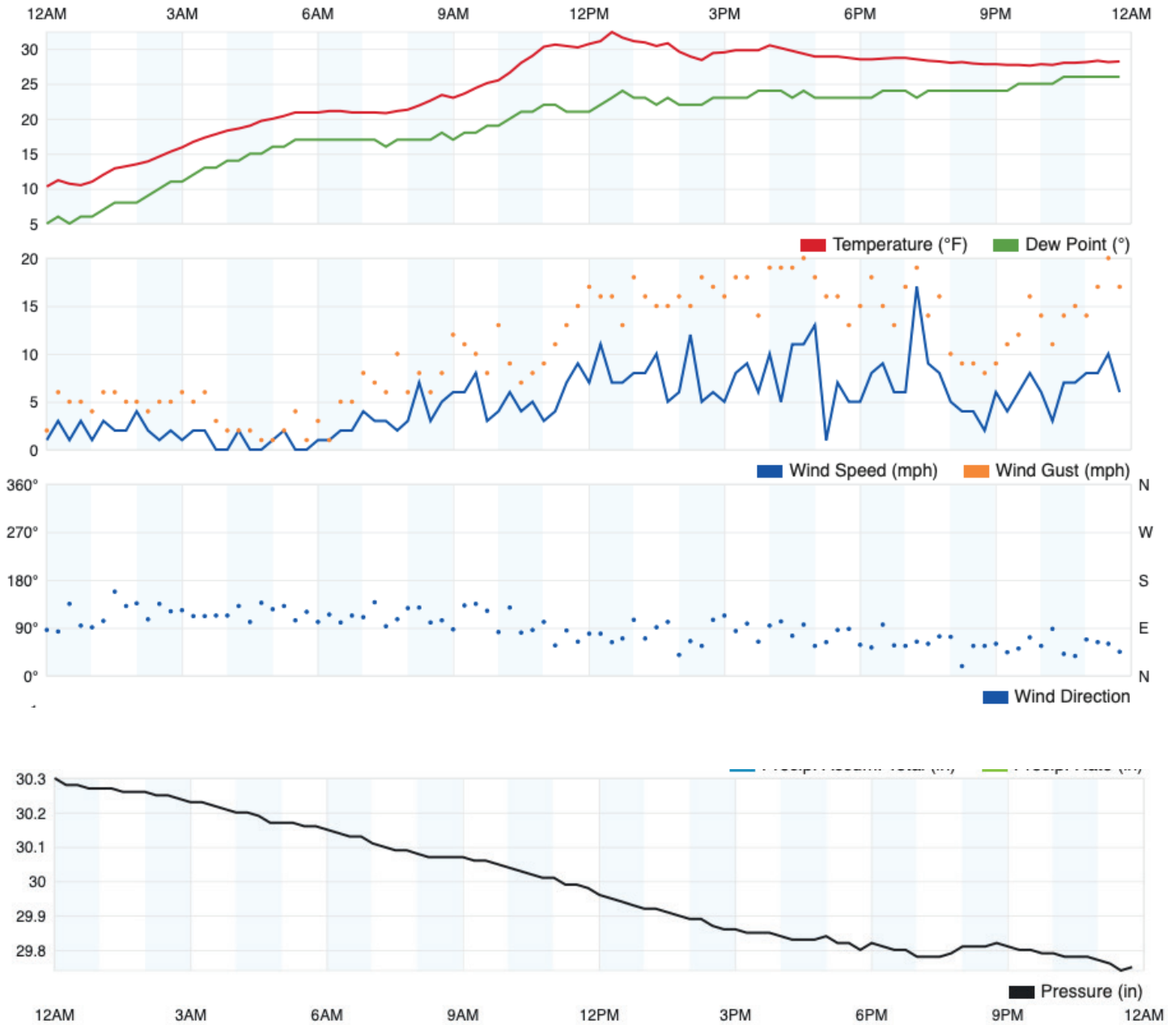
Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.

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

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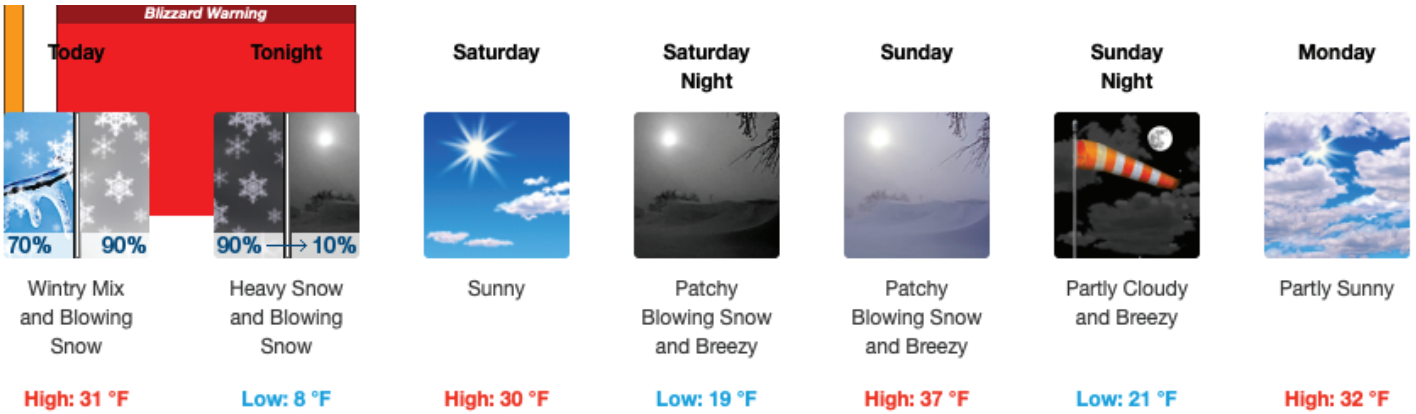
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

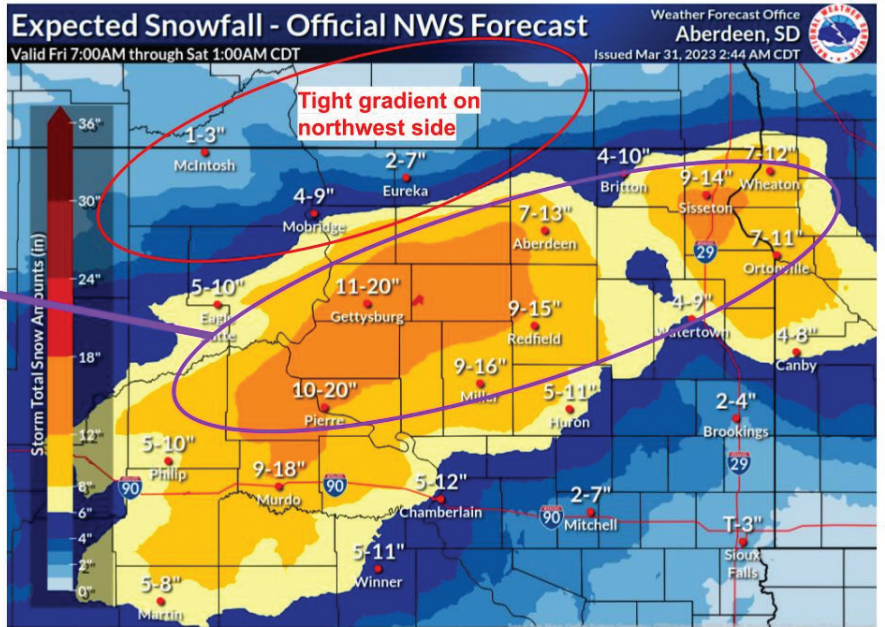
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Snow Accumulation Today and This Evening March 31, 2023 4:56 AM

Overview

- Snow will develop and intensify across central SD this morning.
- **A several hour period of 1-2+ inch per hour snowfall rates expected in the heaviest snow areas late this morning into the afternoon.**
- Greatest uncertainty in amounts across north central SD where the edge of the storm resides.
 - ◆ **Sharp gradient in snowfall amounts on northwest side**
- Also uncertainty in the Watertown region where icing will be a greater threat.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Heavy snow will develop across the area today, with it falling at 1 to 2 inch per hour rates this afternoon into early evening across portions of the area. Strong northerly winds will also increase, creating blowing and drifting snow, with blizzard conditions becoming likely. Total snowfall accumulations will range from 6 to 12 inches for most locations, with higher amounts expected in the Pierre, Gettysburg, Faulkton, Ipswich areas.

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Freezing Rain and Icing Potential

March 31, 2023
5:01 AM

Significant icing possible over east central SD

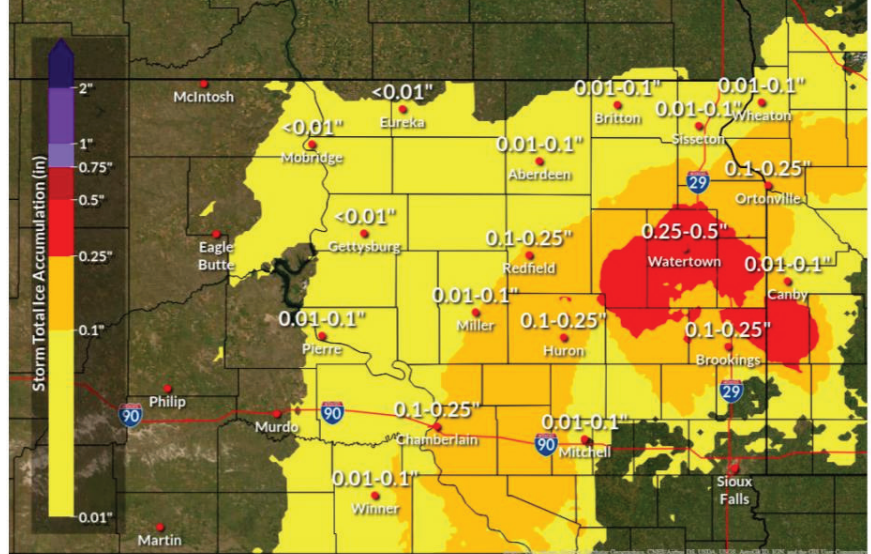
Overview

- Freezing drizzle this morning will lead to slick roads in many locations.
- East central South Dakota will receive the greatest ice accumulations, as freezing rain remains into the afternoon hours before turning to snow (mid-late afternoon for Watertown area).
- Ice accumulations in east central SD may lead to tree damage and power outages, in addition to difficult to impossible travel.

Storm Total Ice Accumulation

Valid Fri 7:00AM through Sat 1:00AM CDT

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Mar 31, 2023 2:44 AM CDT



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

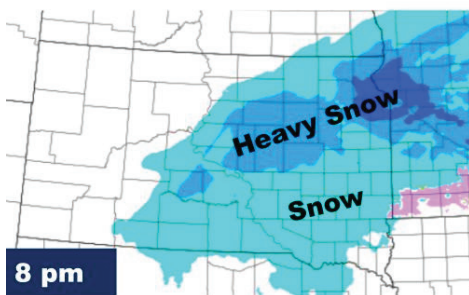
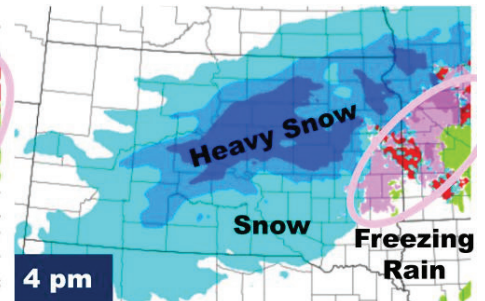
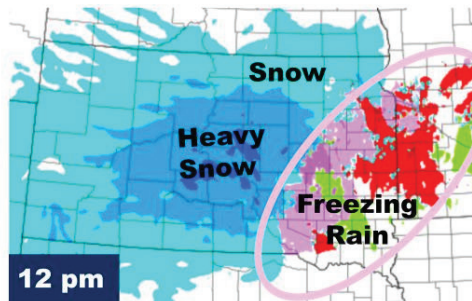
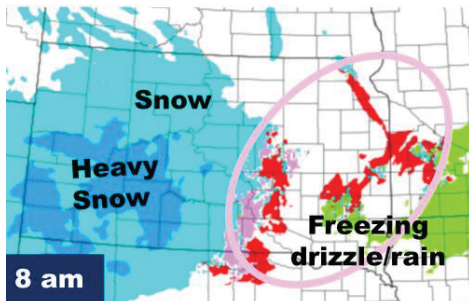
Freezing drizzle is expected across much of the area this morning before changing over to snow. Over east central SD, the precipitation is expected to stay as freezing rain through the mid-late afternoon. This will allow for the potential of significant icing in the Watertown to Brookings region.



Precipitation Type & Intensity Timing

March 31, 2023
5:04 AM

For Today, Friday March 31st



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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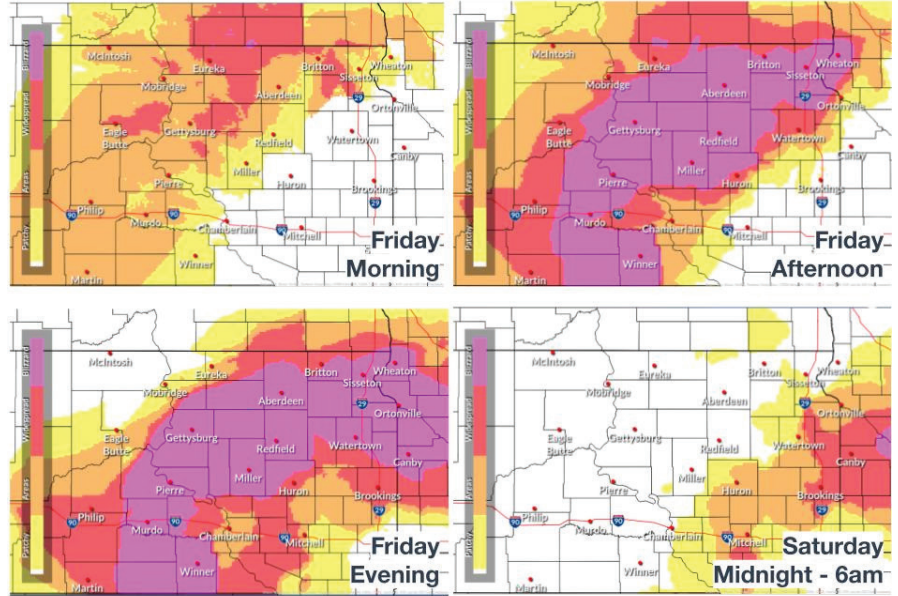
Blowing Snow Potential

March 31, 2023
5:09 AM

Blizzard Conditions expected late this morning into this evening

Overview

- As winds and snow increase today, visibilities from the snow and blowing snow will decrease.
- In areas highlighted in **red and pink** in the images to the right, are expected to have **blizzard conditions**, with visibilities down to 1/4 mile or less expected.
- As the snow and winds come to an end from west to east late this evening and overnight, the blowing snow will diminish.



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

Minor ☁️
Patchy Blowing Snow with reduced visibilities expected

Moderate ☁️☁️
Areas of Blowing Snow with reduced visibilities expected

Significant ☁️☁️☁️
Widespread Blowing Snow and greatly reduced visibilities expected

Blizzard ☁️☁️☁️☁️
Significant Blowing Snow possible, travel may be impossible

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Blizzard Warning

URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE
National Weather Service Aberdeen SD
253 AM CDT Fri Mar 31 2023

Brown-
Including the city of Aberdeen

...WINTER WEATHER ADVISORY IN EFFECT UNTIL 9 AM CDT THIS MORNING...

...BLIZZARD WARNING REMAINS IN EFFECT FROM 9 AM THIS MORNING TO 4 AM CDT SATURDAY...

* WHAT...For the Winter Weather Advisory, mixed precipitation. Additional snow accumulations of up to one inch and ice accumulations of a light glaze. Winds gusting as high as 40 mph.

For the Blizzard Warning, blizzard conditions expected. Total snow accumulations of 4 to 12 inches. Winds gusting as high as 55 mph.

* WHERE...Brown County.

* WHEN...For the Winter Weather Advisory, until 9 AM CDT this morning. For the Blizzard Warning, from 9 AM this morning to 4 AM CDT Saturday.

* IMPACTS...Travel could be very difficult to impossible. Widespread blowing snow could significantly reduce visibility. The hazardous conditions could impact the morning or evening commute.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

Slow down and use caution while traveling.

Travel should be restricted to emergencies only. If you must travel, have a winter survival kit with you. If you get stranded, stay with your vehicle.

The latest road conditions can be obtained by calling 5 1 1.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 32 °F at 12:31 PM

Low Temp: 10 °F at 12:00 AM

Wind: 20 mph at 4:05 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 47 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 86 in 1946

Record Low: 0 in 1899

Average High: 50

Average Low: 26

Average Precip in March.: 0.89

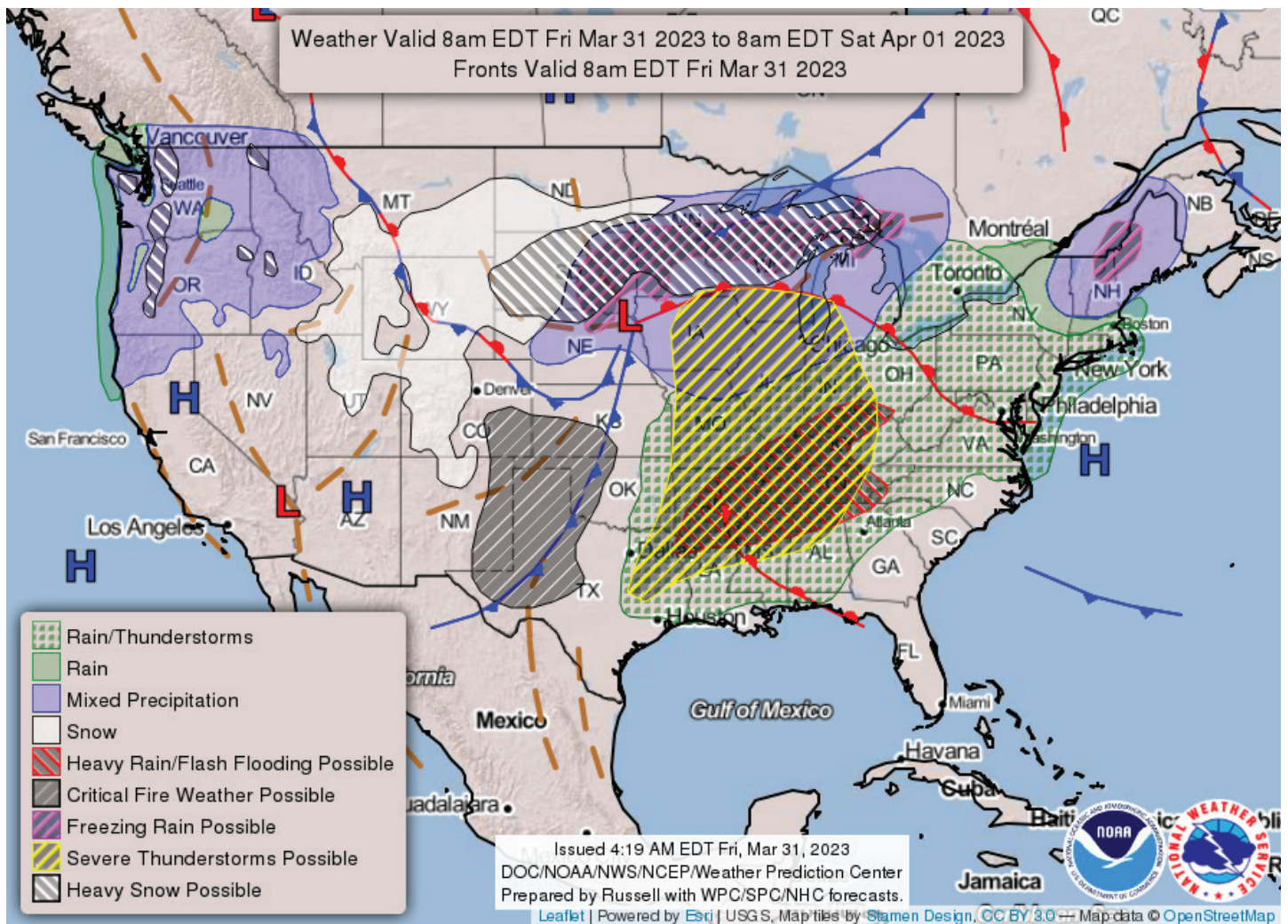
Precip to date in March.: 1.60

Average Precip to date: 2.06

Precip Year to Date: 3.18

Sunset Tonight: 8:00:15 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:10:56 AM



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Today in Weather History

March 31, 1967: Heavy snow of 6 to 15 inches combined with 30 to 50 mph winds, caused blizzard conditions across most of northeast South Dakota. Many people were stranded, especially along Interstate-29 and Highway 12. In Hamlin County, a man was injured when his snowmobile struck a snowplow in Bryant in the early evening. Also, in the early afternoon, 4 miles west of Lake Norden on Highway 28, a car crossed the lane and hit a semi. The car was destroyed with thousands of dollars of damage to the semi. The driver of the car was injured. Many schools were let out early on the 31st and were canceled for April 1st. Many activities and sports events were either postponed or canceled. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Doland, Conde, and Castlewood, 7 inches at Turton and Clear Lake, 8 inches at Clark and Britton, 9 inches at Bryant and Webster, 10 inches near Peever, and 11 inches at Summit. Snowfall amounts of a foot or more included, 12 inches at Watertown and Big Stone City, 13 inches at Victor, the Waubay NWR, and Sisseton, 14 inches at Wilmot, and 15 inches at Milbank.

March 31, 2014: A strong surface low-pressure area moving across the region brought mixed precipitation to all of the area including rain, freezing rain, sleet, snow along with some thunder. As the precipitation changed to over to all snow, northwest winds increased substantially to 30 to 40 mph with gusts to 50 to 60 mph causing widespread blizzard conditions. Much of the area received a coating of ice with trace amounts up to a tenth of an inch with several locations receiving up to 2 inches of sleet. Snowfall amounts from 2 to as much as 10 inches occurred with this storm. The precipitation changed over to snow in the morning out west and into the late afternoon hours across the east. The light snow did not end in the eastern portion of South Dakota until the early morning hours of April 1st. Many schools, government offices, and businesses were closed or canceled early. Travel was not advised across much of region with Interstate-29 being closed for a time from Brookings to the North Dakota border.

1890 - Saint Louis, MO, received 20 inches of snow in 24 hours. It was the worst snowstorm of record for the St Louis. (David Ludlum)

1942: 107 inches of rain fell during the month at Puu Kukui at Maui, Hawaii to set the U.S. record for rainfall in one month. The same place also holds the annual rainfall record for the United States with 578 inches in 1950.

1954 - The temperature at Rio Grande City, TX, hit 108 degrees, which for thirty years was a U.S. record for the month of March. (The Weather Channel)

1962: A tornado struck the town of Milton, Florida killing 17 persons and injuring 100 others. It was the worst tornado disaster in Florida history.

1973: A devastating tornado took a nearly continuous 75-mile path through north-central Georgia causing more than 104 million dollars damage.

1987 - March went out like a lion in the northeastern U.S. A slow moving storm produced heavy snow in the Lower Great Lakes Region, and heavy rain in New England. Heavy rain and melting snow caused catastrophic flooding along rivers and streams in Maine and New Hampshire. Strong southerly winds ahead of the storm gusted to 62 mph at New York City, and reached 87 mph at Milton MA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Afternoon thunderstorms produced severe weather from North Carolina to Pennsylvania. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 76 mph at Cape Henry VA. While squalls blanketed northwest Pennsylvania with up to 9 inches of snow, thunderstorms in eastern Pennsylvania produced golf ball size hail at Avondale. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - The month of March went out just as it came in, like a lamb. Marquette MI, which started the month with a record high of 52 degrees, equalled their record for the date with a reading of 62 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

2010 - Jacksonville, Florida's, record streak of days with high temperatures below 80 degrees comes to an end at 105 days. It was also Jacksonville's first 80 degree reading of the year. The previous latest first 80 degree day was on March 14, 1978.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

HIDDEN BY MASKS

Early in the history of Greek drama, the theaters had no scenery, and the actors wore no costumes. When they performed, the actors would carry a mask on stage, and when it was time for their part, they would hold the mask in front of their faces and speak.

The word "hypocrisy" came from Greek drama and refers to -one who is expressing feelings, beliefs and values that belong to someone else." In Scripture the hypocrite is a pretender: one who is acting a part, one who is false, tells lies or is godless. They are with us today - speaking, acting and expressing words they do not believe - and behaving differently from who they really are. Times have changed but hypocrites have not.

Jesus despised hypocrites with a passion. He spoke of the hypocrites who loved to pray publicly so others could see them and think that they were living a religious life. On another occasion, He told the hypocrites to get the log out of their own eyes and stop criticizing others for having a speck in theirs. He also spoke of the Pharisees and advised people to beware of their self-righteous, hypocritical, and spiritless behavior.

John wrote, "If someone says 'I belong to God' but does not obey His commands he is a liar." If what we do or say is not consistent with what God requires of us, we must ask God for forgiveness, repent, and change. There is no room for hypocrites in the Kingdom of God.

Prayer: Forgive us, Father, when we have disobeyed Your commands and professed what we did not possess. May our lives be as honest as was Your Son's life. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: If someone says 'I belong to God' but does not obey His commands he is a liar. 1 John 2:4



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 15 Hrs 28 Mins
DRAW: 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.29.23

19 24 38 45 46 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$40,030,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 28
DRAW: Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.30.23

10 27 34 36 48 13

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 14 Hrs 58 Mins 51
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.29.23

2 15 16 19 21

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 28
DRAW: Mins 51 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.29.23

1 20 39 47 49 23

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 27
DRAW: Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.29.23

4 9 24 46 66 7

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$147,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 27
DRAW: Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

North Dakota governor vetoes transgender pronouns bill

By MARGARET STAFFORD Associated Press

North Dakota's Republican governor vetoed a bill that would generally prohibit public schools teachers and staff from referring to transgender students by pronouns other than those reflecting the sex assigned to them at birth.

The state Senate voted 37-9 to override the veto Thursday afternoon, just hours after Gov. Doug Burgum's office announced his decision.

The House, which will convene Friday, must still vote on the override, The Bismarck Tribune reported. The House approved the bill 60-32 in February, three votes short of the two-thirds majority needed to override the veto.

If the bill became law, public school teachers and employees would be barred from using a transgender student's preferred pronoun unless they have permission from the student's parents as well as a school administrator.

The bill would also prohibit government agencies from requiring employees to use a transgender colleague's preferred pronoun.

The proposal comes as Republican lawmakers across the U.S. have drafted hundreds of laws this year to push back on LGBTQ+ freedoms, particularly seeking to regulate aspects of transgender people's lives, including gender-affirming health care, bathroom use, athletics and drag performances.

Although the bill also addresses state employees, Burgum's veto message focused on its potential impact on public schools.

"The teaching profession is challenging enough without the heavy hand of state government forcing teachers to take on the role of pronoun police," Burgum said in a letter to state Senate leaders. "Parents, teachers and administrators using compassion, empathy and common sense can address individual and infrequent situations that may arise."

The First Amendment already protects teachers from speaking contrary to their beliefs, the governor added in his letter. He said existing law also protects the free speech rights of state employees, who cannot be required to use preferred pronouns.

Lawmakers who support the vetoed bill have said in debates it would free teachers from worrying about how to address each student and create a better learning environment.

Opponents said it targeted already vulnerable transgender students.

"For trans youth, especially those who cannot be safe at home, school may be one of the few places to be themselves," ACLU of North Dakota spokesperson Cody Schuler, said in a statement. "Trans youth thrive when they are affirmed in their gender identity, which includes being called by a name and pronouns that reflect who they are."

Schuler praised Burgum's veto in the statement Thursday, saying such bills are motivated by "ignorance, misinformation and fear."

Republican Senate Majority Leader David Hogue, of Minot, did not immediately return a message seeking comment.

In 2021, Burgum vetoed a bill that would have barred transgender girls from playing on girls' teams in public schools.

Lawmakers didn't override the veto. But they are considering new legislation this session to replicate and expand that bill, including at the college level. Two bills passed the House with veto-proof majorities. The Senate considered them on Monday.

Vatican: Pope to leave hospital on Saturday, eats pizza

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis is expected to be discharged on Saturday from the Rome hospital where he is being treated for bronchitis as his recovery proceeds in a “normal” way, even had pizza for dinner and will be in St. Peter’s Square for Palm Sunday Mass, the Vatican said.

Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni gave the update in a written statement on Friday. In a subsequent statement, Bruni said that Francis was expected to be in the square for the Mass, which marks the start of Holy Week and ushers in a series of solemn public ceremonies that culminate on Easter on April 9.

Francis, 86, was hospitalized on Wednesday at Gemelli Polyclinic, where doctors said the pontiff was receiving antibiotics intravenously to treat his bronchitis.

“Yesterday went well, with a normal clinical recovery,” Bruni said. “In the evening (of Thursday), Pope Francis had dinner, eating a pizza, together with all those who are assisting him in these days of the hospital stay,” the spokesman said, including doctors, nurses, assistants and Vatican security personnel.

On Friday morning, the pope read newspapers and resumed his work after breakfast.

The pontiff’s return to the Vatican hotel where he lives “is expected for tomorrow, as a result of the last tests of this morning,” Bruni said.

The spokesman later added that, given the pope was expected to return to the Vatican on Saturday, Francis was expected to be present in the square for Palm Sunday Mass. He didn’t indicate whether Francis would deliver a homily during the ceremony, a particularly long service.

Medical staff decided to hospitalize him on Wednesday after he returned to his Vatican residence following his customary weekly public audience in St. Peter’s Square. The Vatican reported he had experienced difficult breathing in the previous days.

Bruni on Thursday evening said that antibiotic treatment for bronchitis had resulted in a “marked” improvement in his health.

The hospitalization came four days before Palm Sunday, the start of Holy Week.

Francis had already largely stopped celebrating Mass at major Catholic Church holy days because of a chronic knee problem, but had continued to preside at the ceremonies and deliver homilies.

Italian Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re said Friday that Francis would be able to preside over — but not celebrate — Holy Week ceremonies.

The Holy Week appointments include a stamina-taxing late night Way of the Cross procession marked by prayers on Good Friday at the Colosseum in Rome and Easter Mass on April 9, which is traditionally followed by a long papal speech delivered from the central balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica.

During Wednesday’s hour-long public audience, Francis at times appeared visibly in pain when he moved about and was helped by aides.

Russia sends bombs as Ukraine marks grim Bucha anniversary

By ELENA BECATOROS and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

BUCHA, Ukraine (AP) — Russia used its long-range arsenal to bombard anew several areas of Ukraine on Friday, killing at least two civilians and damaging homes as Ukrainians commemorated the anniversary of the liberation of Bucha.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Bucha, a town near Kyiv, stands as a symbol of the atrocities the Russian military has committed since its full-scale invasion began in February 2022.

“We will never forgive,” Zelenskyy said in a post on his Telegram channel. “We will punish every perpetrator.”

Zelenskyy attended an official ceremony in Bucha, where he was joined by the president of the Republic of Moldova and the prime ministers of Croatia, Slovakia and Slovenia.

The Kremlin’s forces occupied Bucha weeks after they invaded Ukraine and stayed for about a month. When Ukrainian troops retook the town, they encountered horrific scenes: bodies of women, young and old men, in civilian clothing, lying in the street where they had fallen or in yards and homes.

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Other bodies were found in a mass grave. Over weeks and months, hundreds of bodies were uncovered, including some of children.

Russian soldiers on intercepted phone conversations called it "zachistka" — cleansing, according to an investigation by The Associated Press and the PBS series "Frontline."

Such organized cruelty — used by Russian troops in past conflicts as well, notably in Chechnya — was later repeated in Russia-occupied territories across Ukraine.

More than 1,400 civilian deaths, including 37 children, were documented by Ukrainian authorities, Zelenskyy said.

More than 175 people were found in mass graves and alleged torture chambers, Zelenskyy said. Ukraine and other countries, including the U.S., have demanded that Russia answer for war crimes.

Prosecutor General Andriy Kostin alleged Friday that many of the dead civilians were tortured. Almost 100 Russian soldiers are suspected of war crimes, he said on his Telegram channel, and indictments have been issued for 35 of them.

Two Russian servicemen have already been sentenced by a Ukrainian court to 12 years in prison for illegal deprivation of liberty of civilians and looting.

"I am convinced that all these crimes are not a coincidence. This is part of Russia's planned strategy aimed at destroying Ukraine as a state and Ukrainians as a nation," Kostin said.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, unexpectedly called for a cease-fire in Ukraine.

A truce, he said in his state-of-the-nation address in Minsk on Friday, must be announced without any preconditions and all movement of troops and weapons must be halted.

"It's necessary to stop now until an escalation begins," Lukashenko said, adding that an anticipated Ukrainian counteroffensive using Western-supplied weapons would bring "an irreversible escalation of the conflict."

But Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov responded that Russia has to keep fighting, claiming Ukraine has rejected any talks under pressure from its Western allies.

Peskov also dismissed Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's remarks about the European Union mulling the deployment of sending peacekeeping troops to Ukraine as "extremely dangerous."

Russia has maintained its bombardment of Ukraine with the war already into its second year.

As well as killing at least two civilians in Ukraine, 14 other civilians were wounded early Friday as Russia launched missiles, shells, exploding drones and gliding bombs, the Ukraine presidential office said.

Two Russian missiles hit the city of Kramatorsk in the eastern Donetsk region, damaging eight residential buildings. Throughout the Donetsk region, one civilian was killed and five others wounded by the strikes, the office said.

Nine Russian missiles struck Kharkiv, damaging residential buildings, roads, gas stations and a prison. The Russians also used exploding drones to attack the Kharkiv region.

Russian forces also shelled the southern city of Kherson, killing one resident and wounding two others. The village of Lviv in the Kherson region was struck by gliding bombs that damaged about 10 houses.

The barrage also hit the city of Zaporizhzhia, and its outskirts, causing major fires.

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

Stroman commits 1st of 14 pitch-clock violations on 1st day

By JAY COHEN AP Baseball Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — Marcus Stroman is getting used to Major League Baseball's new pitch clock. And it's no small deal for the Chicago Cubs right-hander.

"It's tough," he said. "It's a big adjustment."

Stroman committed baseball's first regular-season pitch-clock violation Thursday in the third inning of the Cubs' 4-0 victory over Milwaukee on opening day. It was the first of 14 violations in 15 games on a

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day the average game time was 2 hours, 45 minutes.

Five violations were by batters, eight by pitchers and one by a catcher as all MLB teams opened on the same day for the first time since 1968.

Stroman took a long look at rookie Brice Turang leading off second base with no outs and Christian Yelich batting at Wrigley Field. Just as Stroman turned his attention back to Yelich, plate umpire Ron Kulpa called the violation for taking too long to deliver a pitch. Kulpa pointed to his wrist in announcing the call, and the automatic ball made it a 2-2 count against Yelich. Stroman didn't argue.

"You've got to be looking at the clock. You're trying to worry about the pitch. You're trying to worry about the guys on base. You're trying to worry about your grip," Stroman said. "There's so many things going on now.

"So it definitely adds another layer to the game that's tough, to be honest with you. It's definitely not easy to be a pitcher out there and to feel rushed at times."

Several more violations followed on the first day of regular-season games since MLB introduced a slate of rules changes this season — including a clock for a sport that famously existed for decades without any timers.

Boston Red Sox star slugger Rafael Devers earned an unpleasant spot in the record book as the first batter to strike out via violation. Devers was looking down and kicking debris off his cleats in the eighth inning when Lance Barksdale signaled a violation that resulted in strike three.

"There's no excuse," Boston manager Alex Cora said. "They know the rules."

J.D. Davis of the San Francisco Giants became the first hitter called for a pitch-clock violation in any count during the ninth inning of a game at Yankee Stadium.

Meanwhile in Washington, Atlanta Braves reliever Collin McHugh put his arms out wide after being called for a violation by umpire Dan Bellino in the eighth inning against Washington. That put batter Jeimer Candelario ahead 1-0, and McHugh followed with three more balls — a three-pitch walk, essentially.

"I didn't even realize it happened, quite honestly," Atlanta manager Brian Snitker said. "It's going to happen."

The opening day rollout was mostly smooth, but a few issues arose in Miami.

In the fifth inning, New York Mets ace Max Scherzer stared down the Marlins' Bryan De La Cruz until the clock hit zero. De La Cruz began shouting "Ball! Ball! Ball!" — as in, call an automatic ball. But plate umpire Larry Vanover thought the hitter was calling for a timeout. Scherzer escaped without the automatic ball and later induced a popup from De La Cruz.

The next inning, Vanover angered Mets All-Star Jeff McNeil with a violation he did call. McNeil was waiting for baserunner Pete Alonso to retreat to first after a foul ball when Vanover dinged him for an automatic strike. That prompted an argument with McNeil and Mets manager Buck Showalter, who seemed irritated that the pitch clock began before Alonso returned to first.

It worked out anyway for McNeil — he grounded an RBI single a few pitches later.

"I love the pace," Scherzer said. "I don't like the clock. I'll double down on that. I think the umpire should have discretion to turn the clock off."

In Seattle, J.P. Crawford was gifted a ball on an 0-2 count in the eighth inning when Cleveland reliever James Karinchak was called for a pitch-clock violation. Crawford eventually walked and came around to score on Ty France's three-run homer as the Mariners beat the Guardians 3-0 in a game that took just 2 hours, 14 minutes.

And there was an unusual violation at Dodger Stadium, where plate umpire Marvin Hudson called an automatic ball because Arizona reliever Kevin Ginkel went into the stretch before Will Smith got into the batter's box.

MLB introduced the pitch clock this season to speed the pace of play. Players have 30 seconds to resume play between batters. Between pitches, pitchers have 15 seconds with nobody on and 20 seconds if there is a baserunner. Batters must be in the box and alert to the pitcher with at least eight seconds on the clock.

When a pitcher fails to throw a pitch in time, the penalty is an automatic ball. When a batter isn't ready

in time, it's an automatic strike.

San Diego Padres star Manny Machado committed the first pitch-clock violation during spring training. Players were overwhelmingly encouraged by the new rules rollout during the preseason, when the average time of games fell 26 minutes to 2 hours, 35 minutes over the first three weeks.

Other changes this year include bigger bases to improve player safety, plus limits on infield shifts and pitcher disengagements to encourage more action.

AP Baseball Writer Ronald Blum in New York and AP Sports Writers Howard Fendrich in Washington, Kyle Hightower in Boston, Alanis Thames in Miami, Tim Booth in Seattle and Beth Harris in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

AP MLB: <https://apnews.com/hub/MLB> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

36 bodies found inside well after collapse at Indian temple

By ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Thirty-six bodies have been found inside a well at a Hindu temple in central India after dozens of people attending a festival fell into the muddy water when its cover collapsed, officials said Friday.

Video of Thursday's collapse at the temple complex in Indore in Madhya Pradesh state showed chaos afterward, with people rushing away. An excavator pulled down a wall of the decades-old temple to help people flee.

Nearly 140 rescuers, including army personnel, used ropes and ladders to pull the bodies from the well after pumping out the water. A narrow path and debris in the well made the task difficult.

"We have recovered 36 bodies and everybody is accounted for now," Pawan Kumar Sharma, commissioner of the local municipal corporation, told The Associated Press.

The secretary of the temple board was among the dead and the president is recovering from injuries, Sharma said.

Police brought a case of culpable homicide not amounting to murder, but no arrests have been made so far, he said.

Witnesses said a large crowd of devotees had thronged the temple to perform a fire ritual and celebrate the festival for the deity Rama.

Dozens of people fell into the water when the structure collapsed and were covered by falling debris, police Commissioner Makrand Deoskar said.

Kantibhai Patel, president of a residents' association, told reporters that authorities were slow to react and the first ambulance reached the spot an hour after the alert.

The structure apparently caved in because it could not handle the weight of the large crowd, said the state's top elected official, Shivraj Singh Chauhan. He ordered an investigation.

A team of army rescuers joined the operation on Thursday night. The Times of India newspaper reported the rescue work was expedited after underwater cameras showed bodies floating in the muddy waters of the well.

Chauhan said 33 of the bodies had been identified. Sixteen of the people who were injured remained hospitalized Friday.

Sobbing relatives claimed the bodies of the victims and visited the hospital where the injured were being treated.

Temple authorities had stopped using the well years ago and covered the mouth with iron grills and tiles. Municipal authorities in January ordered the temple owners to remove the covering of the well because it was an unsafe and unauthorized structure, but temple authorities ignored the warning, the newspaper said.

Building collapses are common in India because of poor construction and a failure to observe regulations. In October, a century-old cable suspension bridge collapsed into a river in the western state of Gujarat,

sending hundreds of people plunging into the water and killing at least 132 in one of the worst accidents in the country in the past decade.

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

Death scene in burned ferry moves Filipino rescuers to tears

BY JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — A Philippine coast guard commander said Friday that the tragic scenes of death his team saw aboard a gutted ferry, including bodies of adults clutching children, had moved them to tears and sparked fears other passengers could be found dead in the still-smoldering ship.

At least 29 of more than 250 people onboard the M/V Lady Mary Joy 3 were killed in the blaze that raged through the ferry Wednesday while it was on an overnight trip from the southern Zamboanga city to Jolo town in Sulu province. At least seven passengers, including two army soldiers, remained missing in the country's deadliest sea disaster this year, the coast guard said.

Basilan Governor Jim Hataman initially reported 31 deaths Thursday but later reduced the toll to 29 after search and rescue groups crossed-checked their figures.

All 35 crew members survived, including the captain, who issued an abandon-ship order when the fire hit close to midnight and then ran the ferry aground on an island off Basilan province to give remaining passengers a better chance to survive, coast guard officials said.

Many passengers jumped into the sea in panic without life jackets and were saved by rescuers but at least 11 drowned. When a team of coast guard personnel, including Bureau of Fire officers, boarded the burned ferry on Baluk-baluk island's coast, they discovered the bodies of 18 passengers scattered on the uppermost open-air economy deck and another floor below, coast guard Commander Chadley Salahuddin said.

The passengers, including an adult clutching a child by the railing, could have easily jumped into the sea and survived like many others but failed to do so for unclear reasons. Two passengers, apparently siblings who were among the missing, were found holding each other in a bathroom, he said.

"When I first saw that scene, I was moved to tears with some of my men," Salahuddin told The Associated Press by telephone. "It was a short journey. Why did so many have to die?"

"What if my mother or my other loved ones were the ones who were trapped here? They were just a step away from the open sides but why did they not jump off like the others?" Salahuddin asked.

The passengers, some of whom were burned beyond recognition, could have been overcome by smoke and passed out or could have been immobilized injuries. Some survivors said they heard a series of firecracker-like blasts during the fire but Salahuddin said all of those details could only be confirmed by investigators.

He feared more bodies could be found in the lower enclosed decks, which remained dangerously hot and could not be inspected on Thursday by his team.

His team found a partly burned rifle, which may have been left by a police officer who was among the passengers who survived, Salahuddin said, adding that there was no sign of a bomb explosion at least in the upper decks that they managed to inspect.

The steel-hulled ferry could accommodate up to 430 people and was not overcrowded, said another coast guard official, Commodore Rejard Marfe.

According to the manifest, it was carrying 205 passengers and a 35-member crew, Marfe said. In addition, it had a security contingent of four coast guard marshals, who all survived. Eight soldiers were traveling to Sulu.

Threats posed by Muslim insurgents, including those aligned with the Islamic State group, remain a security issue in the southern Philippines, where cargo and passenger ships are provided extra security by the coast guard and other law enforcement agencies in vulnerable regions.

Marfe said officials are investigating whether the 33-year-old ferry was seaworthy, if there were pas-

sengers not listed on the manifest, and whether the crew properly guided passengers to safety.

Sea accidents are common in the Philippines because of frequent storms, badly maintained vessels, overcrowding and spotty enforcement of safety regulations, especially in remote provinces.

In December 1987, the ferry Dona Paz sank after colliding with a fuel tanker, killing more than 4,300 people in the world's worst peacetime maritime disaster.

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

Parents of woman killed by Oscar Pistorius oppose his parole

By MOGOMOTSI MAGOME and GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

PRETORIA, South Africa (AP) — The parents of Reeva Steenkamp, the woman Oscar Pistorius shot dead 10 years ago, still believe he is lying about their daughter's killing and opposed the former Olympic runner's application for parole, their lawyer said Friday.

"Unless he comes clean, they don't feel that he is rehabilitated," lawyer Tania Koen told reporters outside the Atteridgeville Correctional Centre prison in Pretoria, where Pistorius has been incarcerated since 2016 and where his parole hearing took place Friday.

"He's the killer of their daughter. For them, it's a life sentence," Koen said before the hearing.

Pistorius, a double-amputee runner and multiple Paralympic champion who made history by competing against able-bodied athletes at the 2012 Olympics, was convicted of murder for the Valentine's Day 2013 shooting of Reeva Steenkamp at his home.

Pistorius has always claimed he shot his girlfriend in error after mistaking her for a dangerous intruder. He said he didn't realize that she got out of bed and went to the bathroom. But her parents, Barry and June Steenkamp, have said they still believe he killed her intentionally in anger in a late-night argument.

Pistorius fired four shots with his licensed 9 mm pistol through a toilet cubicle door in his upscale Pretoria villa to kill the 29-year-old Steenkamp, a model and reality TV star, in the pre-dawn hours of Feb. 14, 2013.

Pistorius, who is now 36, was ultimately sentenced to 13 years and five months in prison for murder in 2017 after a series of appeals in his case. He is eligible for parole after having served half his sentence.

Pistorius has served more than seven years taking into account time served from late 2014 while his initial manslaughter conviction was overturned after an appeal by the prosecution and replaced with a murder conviction.

Steenkamp's mother, June Steenkamp, submitted written and oral statements at Friday's hearing opposing Pistorius' application to be released from prison, the parents' lawyer said. Koen said June Steenkamp addressed the parole board in a separate room to Pistorius. The parole board said that a decision would be made later Friday, Koen said.

June Steenkamp earlier sat grim-faced in the back seat of a car nearby while Koen spoke to reporters outside the prison gates ahead of the hearing. June Steenkamp and Koen were then driven into the prison in a Department of Corrections vehicle.

"She doesn't feel that he must be released," Koen said. A decade after their daughter's killing, Koen said time "hasn't healed" the grief for Barry and June. "For them, it's 10 missed birthdays, 10 Mother's Days, 10 Father's Days, 10 Christmases."

Barry Steenkamp met face-to-face with Pistorius last year in what's known in South Africa as a victim-offender dialogue and which is part of the pre-parole process. That meeting was "traumatic," Koen said.

Submissions from a victim's relative are just one of the factors a parole board takes into account.

According to guidelines, the board will also consider the offense Pistorius was convicted of, his conduct in prison, whether he took part in educational or other training courses, his mental and physical state, whether he's likely to "relapse into crime" and the risk he poses to the public.

Of all the factors, legal experts say that the behavior of Pistorius while in prison would likely be the most important consideration.

Pistorius' parole lawyer, Julian Knight, has previously said Pistorius has been a "model prisoner." He didn't

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respond to messages seeking comment ahead of the parole hearing.

A number of options are available to the parole board: Pistorius could be released on full parole or placed on day parole, where he would be allowed to live and work in the community during the day but have to return to prison at night. He could also be placed under correctional supervision, which means he would be released but have to spend some of his time during the week at a correctional center.

Pistorius' parole could be denied, where the board usually asks the offender to reapply at a later stage.

Any parole would likely come with conditions, legal expert Marius du Toit said, such as restrictions on Pistorius' movements.

Once hailed as an inspirational figure for overcoming the adversity of his disability, Pistorius' murder trial and downfall captivated the world. His conviction eventually led to him being sent to the Kgosi Mampuru II maximum security prison, one of South Africa's most notorious.

He was moved to the Atteridgeville prison in 2016 because that facility is better suited to disabled prisoners. Pistorius's lower legs were amputated when he was a baby because of a congenital condition and he walks with prosthetics.

There have been glimpses of his life in prison, with reports claiming he had at one point grown a beard, gained weight and taken up smoking and was unrecognizable from the world-famous athlete he once was.

He has spent much of his time working in an area of the prison grounds where vegetables are grown, sometimes driving a tractor, and has reportedly been running bible classes for other inmates.

There have also been flashes of trouble. Pistorius sustained an injury in an altercation with another inmate over a public telephone at the prison in 2017. A year earlier, Pistorius received treatment for injuries to his wrists, which his family denied were a result of him harming himself and were a result of him falling in his cell.

If Pistorius is released, he is expected to live at his uncle's mansion in the Pretoria suburbs. He lived there under house arrest for a time during his murder trial.

Imray reported from Cape Town, South Africa.

52 years after capture, orca Lolita may return to Pacific

By FREIDA FRISARO and GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — More than 50 years after the orca known as Lolita was captured for public display, plans are in place to return her from the Miami Seaquarium to her home waters in the Pacific Northwest, where a nearly century-old, endangered killer whale believed to be her mother still swims.

An unlikely coalition involving the theme park's owner, an animal rights group and an NFL owner-philanthropist announced the agreement during a news conference Thursday.

"I'm excited to be a part of Lolita's journey to freedom," Indianapolis Colts owner Jim Irsay said. "I know Lolita wants to get to free waters."

Lolita, also known as Tokitae, was about 4 years old when she was captured in Puget Sound in summer 1970, during a time of deadly orca roundups. She spent decades performing for paying crowds before falling ill.

Last year the Miami Seaquarium announced it would no longer stage shows with her, under an agreement with federal regulators. Lolita — now 57 years old and 5,000 pounds (2,267 kilograms) — currently lives in a tank that measures 80 feet by 35 feet (24 meters by 11 meters) and is 20 feet (6 meters) deep.

The orca believed to be her mother, called Ocean Sun, continues to swim free with other members of their clan — known as L pod — and is estimated to be more than 90 years old. That has given advocates of her release optimism that Tokitae could still maybe have a long life in the wild.

"It's a step toward restoring our natural environment, fixing what we've messed up with exploitation and development," said Howard Garrett, president of the board of the advocacy group Orca Network, based on Washington state's Whidbey Island. "I think she'll be excited and relieved to be home — it's her old neighborhood."

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The agreement among Irsay; Eduardo Albor, who heads The Dolphin Company, which owns the Seaquarium; and the Florida nonprofit Friends of Toki, co-founded by environmentalist Pritam Singh; still faces hurdles to gaining government approval.

The time frame for moving the animal could be 18 to 24 months away, the group said, and the cost could reach \$20 million.

The plan is to transport Lolita by plane to an ocean sanctuary in the waters between Washington and Canada, where she will initially swim inside a large net while trainers and veterinarians teach her how to catch fish.

She will also have to build up her muscles, as orcas typically swim about 100 miles (160 kilometers) per day, said Raynell Morris, an elder of the Lummi Indian Tribe in Washington who also serves on the board of Friends of Toki.

"She was 4 when she was taken, so she was learning to hunt. She knows her family song," Morris said. "She'll remember, but it will take time."

The orca would be under 24-hour care until she acclimates to her new surroundings.

Caretakers at the Seaquarium are already preparing her for the journey, officials said.

The Dolphin Company took ownership of the Seaquarium in 2021. It operates some 27 other parks and habitats in Mexico, Argentina, the Caribbean and Italy.

The legacy of the whale roundups of the 1960s and '70s continues to haunt a distinct group of endangered, salmon-eating orcas that are known as the southern resident killer whales and spend much of their time in the waters between Washington and Canada.

At least 13 orcas died in the roundups and 45 were delivered to theme parks around the world, reducing the Puget Sound resident population by about 40% and helping cause problems with inbreeding that remain a problem today.

Today only 73 remain in the southern resident population, which comprises three familial groups called pods, according to the Center for Whale Research on Washington state's San Juan Island. That's just two more animals than in 1971.

Animal rights advocates including People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals have long fought for Toki to spend her final years back home in a controlled setting.

Activists often protest along the road that runs by the Seaquarium, which they've referred to as an "abusement park." PETA says it doesn't want Lolita to suffer the same fate as her partner Hugo, who died in 1980 from a brain aneurysm after ramming his head repeatedly into the tank's walls.

Albor said Thursday that back when his company was acquiring the Seaquarium, he and his daughter visited as tourists. He said his daughter became upset while watching Lolita's show, even as many other in the crowd were squealing in delight.

His daughter told him "this place is too small for Lolita" and made him promise to help the orca if his company bought the park.

"It has always been our commitment at The Dolphin Company that we place the highest priority on the well-being of the animals above all else," Albor said. "Finding a better future for Lolita is one of the reasons that motivated us to acquire the Miami Seaquarium."

Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava called the relocation plan historic, saying, "So many have hoped and prayed for this result for many, many years."

The Seaquarium opened in 1955 on Virginia Key east of downtown Miami. It features a variety of creatures including dolphins, sea lions, manatees, reef fish and sharks, and was the filming location for 88 episodes of the "Flipper" TV series as well as movies in the 1960s.

Johnson reported from Seattle.

Biden heads to Mississippi town ravaged by deadly tornado

By COLLEEN LONG and MICHAEL GOLDBERG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Friday will visit a Mississippi town ravaged by a deadly tornado even as a new series of severe storms threatens to rip across the Midwest and the South.

Last week's twister destroyed roughly 300 homes and businesses in Rolling Fork and the nearby town of Silver City, leaving mounds of wreckage full of lumber, bricks and twisted metal. Hundreds of additional structures were badly damaged. The death toll in Mississippi stood at 21, based on deaths confirmed by coroners. One person died in Alabama, as well.

Biden and first lady Jill Biden will survey the damage, meet with homeowners impacted by the storms and first responders and get an operational briefing from federal and state officials. They are expected to be joined by Gov. Tate Reeves, Mississippi Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith and Rep. Bennie Thompson, along with local leaders.

In a statement after the tornado, Biden pledged that the federal government would "do everything we can to help."

"We will be there as long as it takes," he said. "We will work together to deliver the support you need to recover."

Presidents regularly visit parts of the U.S. that have been ravaged by natural disasters or suffered major loss of life from shootings or otherwise, although Biden has been criticized for not yet making a trip to the site of a toxic chemical spill in a small Ohio town. He also has to decide whether to visit Nashville after three children and three adults were shot and killed at Covenant School.

Last week's severe weather makes life even more difficult in an area already struggling economically. Mississippi is one of the poorest states, and the majority-Black Delta has long been one of the poorest parts of the state — a place where many people live paycheck to paycheck, often in jobs connected to agriculture.

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

Biden approved a disaster declaration for the state, which frees up federal funds for temporary housing, home repairs and loans to cover uninsured property losses. But there's concern that inflation and economic troubles may blunt the impact of federal assistance.

Biden has spoken in separate phone calls with Reeves, Sen. Roger Wicker, Hyde-Smith and Thompson.

An unusual weather pattern has set in, and meteorologists fear that Friday will be one of the worst days, with much more to come. The National Weather Service said 16.8 million people live in the highest-risk zone, and more than 66 million people overall should be on alert Friday.

According to a new study, the U.S. will see more of these massive storms as the world warms. The storms are likely to strike more frequently in more populous Southern states including Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee.

The study in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society predicts a nationwide 6.6% increase in tornado- and hail-spawning supercell storms and a 25.8% jump in the area and time the strongest storms will strike, under a scenario of moderate levels of future warming by the end of the century.

But in certain areas in the South the increase is much higher. That includes Rolling Fork, where study authors project an increase of one supercell a year by 2100.

Goldberg reported from Jackson, Miss.

Pirates hold hostage some crew of oil tanker off West Africa

By JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Several members of the 16-man crew on a Liberia-flagged tanker are being held hostage by pirates who boarded the ship in West Africa's Gulf of Guinea last week, the Danish shipper that owns the vessel said Friday.

Pirates boarded the Monjasa Reformer southwest of Port Pointe-Noire, Congo, on March 25 and five days later, the French Navy that was patrolling the area, found the ship off the small island nation of Sao Tomé and Príncipe north of where it had been attacked.

In a statement, company spokesman Thorstein Andreassen said that "the pirates had abandoned the vessel and brought a part of the crew members with them." It did not say how many had been kidnapped or how they were taken. The online shipping magazine Trade Winds said it was three crew members.

After the pirates had boarded the tanker, the crew sought refuge in a citadel — a safe area on the ship — in line with the onboard anti-piracy emergency protocol. However, the pirates somehow managed to take some of them hostage. The nationalities of the crew members has not been announced, nor were details given as to where they are being held or whether any were injured.

Andreassen was not available for further details.

In the statement, he said that the crew members who were not taken hostage "are all in good health and safely located in a secure environment and receiving proper attention following these dreadful events."

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.

Andreassen said that there is no damage reported to the ship or its cargo.

The Monjasa Reformer is used in West Africa as part of Monjasa's global marine fuels operations and was carrying marine gas oil, very low sulphur fuel oil and high sulphur fuel oil products on board, the shipper said.

1 year ago, scenes of horror emerged from Ukraine's Bucha

BUCHA, Ukraine (AP) — The cratered roads have been repaved and the damaged houses are gradually being repaired. But the scenes that emerged from this town near Kyiv a year ago, after it was retaken from Russian forces, have indelibly linked its name to the savagery of war.

On the northwestern fringes of the Ukrainian capital, Bucha had been occupied by Russian troops for about a month, taken as they swept toward Kyiv at the start of the invasion of Ukraine that began in late February 2022. When they withdrew, they left behind scenes of horror.

Bodies of civilians lay where they had fallen, beside their bicycles, in their cars, on the sides of roads, in yards, buildings and homes.

"They were bodies of people in civilian clothing — women, old men, younger men" scattered in the streets, said Associated Press photographer Vadim Ghirda, one of the first journalists to enter Bucha right after the Russian withdrawal.

Many appeared to not have been dead for very long, looking almost as if they were sleeping, Ghirda said. Others seemed to have been executed, found with their hands tied behind their backs.

Over the next few days, AP photographers documented scenes of devastation in Bucha, where the events are being investigated as war crimes. Stunned residents emerged from their basements to find destroyed tanks and military vehicles littering the streets.

More bodies were found inside homes, others were unearthed from a mass grave. In the following weeks and months, hundreds of bodies were uncovered, including some of children. Not all have been identified.

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

Members of exiled Chinese church detained in Thailand

By TIAN MACLEOD JI and DAVID RISING Associated Press

PATTAYA, Thailand (AP) — More than 60 members of a Chinese Christian church have been detained in Thailand, supporters said Friday, raising fears they may be returned to their home country, where they face possible persecution.

Deana Brown, one of two American supporters detained along with the church members, told The Associated Press that Thai authorities in the coastal city of Pattaya detained the 63 church members, many of whom are children, Thursday.

Thirty-two adult Chinese nationals were charged with overstaying their visas, said Col. Tawee Kutthalaeng, chief of the Pattaya-area Nong Prue police station. Children were not charged, he said. The two American citizens were not placed under arrest, he said.

Members of the Shenzhen Holy Reformed Church, also called the Mayflower Church, came to Thailand in 2022 seeking asylum. The current status of their request was not immediately clear.

They fled China in 2019 alleging that their members were being persecuted by government security forces, initially settling on South Korea's Jeju Island. They left South Korea for Thailand after meetings with local and U.S. officials made it clear that prospects for refuge there were dim.

Brown, CEO of the Texas-based Freedom Seekers International, an organization whose mission statement says it seeks to rescue "the most severely persecuted Christians in hostile and restrictive countries," said the group had been told that they would be given a court date later Friday.

Brown said she is working to resettle the church members in Tyler, Texas, where her organization is based, but that they had run into problems with their visas in Thailand. She said she assumed that she and the other American, a nurse, had been detained because they were there at the time the church members were taken into custody.

She said that as the group looked into renewing their visas, they had been told that there was a new requirement that any Chinese citizen renewing a visa in Thailand must report to the Chinese Embassy first.

"When they told us that we knew that nobody could get their visas," said Brown, who was allowed to keep her phone while in detention.

"There was no way, because as soon as they walk into the Chinese Embassy they're gone, we would not see them again. They've been hiding out since then."

The press section at the Chinese Embassy in Bangkok did not answer its telephone and the embassy did not immediately respond to an e-mailed request for comment.

The U.S. Embassy said it had no immediate comment on the case.

Upon their arrival in Thailand, church members told reporters that they had been stalked, harassed and received threatening calls and messages even while they were in South Korea. They said relatives in China had been summoned, interrogated and intimidated.

At that time, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said the matter was "not a diplomatic question" and declined to comment further.

In China, Christians are legally allowed to worship only in churches affiliated with Communist Party-controlled religious groups, but for decades, the authorities largely tolerated independent, unregistered "house churches." They have tens of millions of worshippers, possibly outnumbering those in the official groups.

However, in recent years, house churches have come under heavy pressure, with many prominent ones shut down. Unlike previous crackdowns, such as Beijing's ban on Falun Gong, a spiritual movement it labels a cult, the authorities have also targeted some believers not explicitly opposed to the Chinese state.

Most members of the Shenzhen Holy Reformed Church are young, married middle-class couples, with their children making up about half the group.

Bob Fu, founder of ChinaAid, another Texas Christian group helping the church, told the AP that American lawmakers were pressing the U.S. State Department to get involved.

In a statement on his website, Fu said that time was of the essence. "Before the Chinese government demands repatriation, the international community can help prevent this tragedy from happening," he said.

Dake Kang contributed to this story from Bo'ao, China. Rising reported from Bangkok

Finland's NATO membership: What's next?

The Associated Press undefined

HELSINKI (AP) — Finland received the green light to join NATO when Turkey ratified the Nordic country's membership late Thursday, becoming the last country in the 30-member Western military alliance to sign off. All NATO members must vote unanimously to admit a new country into the alliance. The decision by the Turkish parliament followed Hungary's ratification of Finland's bid earlier in the week.

The addition of Finland, which shares a 1,340 kilometer (832 miles) border with Russia, will more than double the size of NATO's border with Russia.

However, a few more steps and procedures are required before the northern European nation becomes the 31st full NATO member:

ACCEPTANCE LETTERS

Turkey and Hungary dispatch acceptance letters to the United States which is the depositary, or safe-keeper, of NATO under the alliance's 1949 founding treaty. The letters will be filed in the archives of the U.S. State Department, which will notify NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg that the conditions for inviting Finland to become a member were met.

INVITATION

NATO sends a letter signed by Stoltenberg inviting Finland to join the military alliance.

SIGNATURES

Finland sends its own acceptance document, signed by Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto, to the U.S. State Department. Finnish President Sauli Niinistö authorized Haavisto to sign the document. Either the Finnish Embassy in Washington or a Finnish government official will deliver the document.

FULL MEMBERSHIP

Once Finland's membership acceptance document reaches the State Department in Washington, the country officially becomes a NATO member.

FINLAND-SWEDEN

Finland and neighboring Sweden jointly applied for NATO membership in May 2022. The countries, which have close cultural, economic and political ties, planned to enter the alliance simultaneously.

Sweden's bid, however, has stalled due to opposition from Turkey, whose president has said his country wouldn't ratify membership before disputes between Ankara and Stockholm were resolved. The Turkish government has accused Sweden of being too soft on groups that it deems to be terror organizations.

Hungary's parliament also has yet to ratify Sweden's accession to NATO, and it remains unclear when it will do so.

Review: Sandler, Aniston reteam in 'Murder Mystery 2'

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

You would have a hard time defending the limp plotting, the bland action-adventure set pieces or the Agatha Christie-light whodunit twists of the first "Murder Mystery." And, yet, it was kind of good.

"Murder Mystery," one of Netflix's most-streamed films, was chock full of exotic settings and mysterious murders. But the only thing that mattered, really, was the banter between Jennifer Aniston and Adam Sandler. Though "Murder Mystery" could be said to epitomize that very modern kind of passive and painless viewing experience on streaming platforms, their married couple was a throwback to a long-ago movie era. Audrey and Nick Spitz, a pair of working-class New Yorkers turned semi-amateur detectives, might

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as well be Nick and Nora Charles, the 1930s cocktail-swilling crime solvers.

"Murder Mystery" and its new sequel don't have anywhere near the sparkle of the "The Thin Man" movies, with William Powell, Myrna Loy and their wire fox terrier Asta. But like those films, everything in "Murder Mystery" and "Murder Mystery 2" is secondary, and distantly so, to the comic and sweet rapport between the Spitzes, a bickering but lovingly connected married couple. Like its predecessor, "Murder Mystery 2" is built on old-fashioned star power and the interplay between Sandler and Aniston. They're good company to be in, and sometimes that's enough.

Whether "Murder Mystery 2" meets that somewhat low bar will probably depend on just how casually you're watching it. For many, it may be enough to say that "Murder Mystery 2," which debuts Friday on Netflix, fits the bill as amiable background noise.

And this one, in which Jeremy Garelick (writer of "The Hangover") takes over directing with James Vanderbilt returning to write the screenplay, starts out like a new season to a TV series, with a narrated recap of what the Spitzes have been up to since the last film. After their luck solving their first case, they've made themselves full-time private eyes. The clients aren't lining up, though, so it's welcome news when a friend from the first film, the Maharajah (Adeel Akhtar), calls up to invite them to his wedding and fly them out to his private island and then to Paris.

For those who have accused Sandler of using movies as an excuse to hang out with friends in beautiful locales, the "Murder Mystery" movies won't disappoint. This time, the action has been turned up a notch, especially once the Maharajah is kidnapped and an MI6 hostage negotiator (Mark Strong) shows up. Strong's potent presence lends some credibility to the mayhem, mostly in Paris, but he also gives Sandler and Aniston a straight man to bounce their jokes off of. Some of the gags are pretty dusty, even by "Thin Man" standards, including one Sandler line comparing marriage to hostage negotiations and a dance scene at an Indian wedding that's unlikely to draw any comparisons to "RRR."

All of this may lend some scale to "Murder Mystery 2" but it's no help to the comedy. Despite that, good comic chemistry can be hard to come by, and Aniston — who's been wonderful in these films — and Sandler keep these films more entertaining than they should be.

Especially in recent years — a chilly period for big-screen comedies — the movies have struggled to figure out what do with bright, funny women like Aniston despite their abundant talent. Even in these decent-at-best comedies, her natural sense of timing is sharp and lively, and she and Sandler make a charming, easy-flowing duo. All they really need, to borrow a trick from Nick and Nora, is a dog.

"Murder Mystery 2," a Netflix release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for violence, bloody images, strong language, suggestive material and smoking. Running time: 91 minutes. Two stars out of four.

Follow AP Film Writer Jake Coyle on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/jakecoyleAP>

Trump indictment throws 2024 race into uncharted territory

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The historic indictment of former President Donald Trump thrust the 2024 presidential election into uncharted territory, raising the remarkable prospect that the leading contender for the Republican nomination will seek the White House while also facing trial for criminal charges in New York.

In an acknowledgment of the sway the former president holds with the voters who will decide the GOP contest next year, those eyeing a primary challenge to Trump were quick to criticize the indictment. Without naming Trump, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis called the move "un-American." Former Vice President Mike Pence, whose life was threatened after Trump incited an insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, told CNN the charges were "outrageous."

That posture speaks to the short-term incentives for Republicans to avoid anything that might antagonize Trump's loyal base. But the indictment raises profound questions for the GOP's future, particularly as Trump faces the possibility of additional charges soon in Atlanta and Washington. While that might

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galvanize his supporters, the turmoil could threaten the GOP's standing in the very swing-state suburbs that have abandoned the party in three successive elections, eroding its grip on the White House, Congress and key governorships.

Trump has spent four decades managing to skirt this type of legal jeopardy and expressed confidence again late Thursday, blaming the charges on "Thugs and Radical Left Monsters."

"THIS IS AN ATTACK ON OUR COUNTRY THE LIKES OF WHICH HAS NEVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE," Trump wrote on his social media site.

Trump is "ready to fight," his attorney, Joe Tacopina, said on Fox News,

Trump is expected to surrender to authorities next week on charges connected to hush money payments made during the 2016 presidential campaign to women who alleged extramarital sexual encounters. For now, it remains unclear how the development will resonate with voters. Polls show Trump remains the undisputed frontrunner for the Republican nomination, and his standing has not faltered, even amid widespread reporting on the expected charges.

Trump's campaign and his allies have long hoped an indictment would serve as a rallying cry for his supporters, angering his "Make America Great Again" base, drawing small dollar donations and forcing Trump's potential rivals into the awkward position of having to defend him — or risk their wrath.

Indeed, Trump's campaign began fundraising off the news almost immediately after it broke, firing an email to supporters with the all-caps subject line "BREAKING: PRESIDENT TRUMP INDICTED."

At Trump's first rally of the 2024 campaign, held in Texas over the weekend, supporters expressed widespread disgust with the investigation and insisted the case wouldn't affect his chances.

"It's a joke," said Patti Murphy, 63, of Fort Worth. "It's just another way of them trying to get him out of their way."

Others in the crowd said their support for Trump had been waning since he left the White House, but the looming indictment made them more likely to support him in 2024 because they felt his anger had been justified.

At the same time, there is little chance a criminal trial will help Trump in a general election, particularly with independents, who have grown tired of his constant chaos. That has provided an opening for alternatives like DeSantis, who are expected to paint themselves as champions of the former president's policies, but without all his baggage.

But there were no immediate signs the party was ready to use the indictment to move past him. Instead, Republicans, including members of Congress and Trump's rivals, rushed to his defense en masse. In addition to DeSantis, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, who has already declared her candidacy, blasted the indictment as "more about revenge than it is about justice." Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who is mulling a run, accused Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg of "undermining America's confidence in our legal system," while also sending a fundraising text off the news.

Trump, meanwhile, has tried to turn the public against the case. Early on March 18, amid reports that police in New York were preparing for a possible indictment, he fired off a message on his social media site in which he declared that he expected to be arrested within days.

While that never came to pass (and his aides made clear it had not been based on any inside information), Trump used the time to highlight the case's widely-discussed weaknesses and to attack Bragg with a barrage of deeply personal — and at times racist — attacks.

Trump also sought to project an air of strength. The night of his post, he traveled with aides to a college wrestling championship, where he spent hours greeting supporters and posing for photos. On the way home, the assembled entourage watched mixed martial arts cage fighting aboard his plane.

And last weekend, Trump held a rally in Waco, Texas, where he railed against the case in front of thousands of supporters.

People who have spoken with Trump in recent weeks have described him as both angry and unbothered about the prospect of charges. Freshman Republican Rep. Mark Alford of Missouri said Trump was "upbeat" at a fundraiser at Mar-a-Lago the night before he warned of his arrest.

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Indeed, Trump has at times appeared in denial about the gravity of the situation. He and his aides were caught off-guard by the news Thursday. And during the plane ride home from his Texas rally, Trump told reporters he believed the case had been dropped.

"I have no idea what's going to happen, but I can tell you that they have no case. So I think the case is — I think they've already dropped the case, from what I understand. I think it's been dropped," he said.

Still, Trump responded with anger when pressed, even as he insisted he was not frustrated.

Beyond the Manhattan case, Trump is facing several other investigations, including a Georgia inquiry into his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election and a federal probe into his alleged mishandling of classified documents.

It remains unclear how the public might respond if Trump ends up facing charges in additional cases, particularly if some lead to convictions and others are dismissed.

An indictment — or even a conviction — would not bar Trump from running for president or serving as the Republican nominee.

___ Associated Press writers Paul Weber in Waco, Texas, and Lisa Mascaro in Orlando contributed to this report.

Dangerous storms, tornadoes forecast for US Midwest, South

By MICHAEL GOLDBERG and LISA BAUMANN Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Meteorologists are urging people in parts of the Midwest and southern U.S. to be ready Friday for dangerous weather including tornadoes, saying the conditions are similar to those a week ago that unleashed a devastating twister that killed at least 21 people in Mississippi.

An outbreak of severe thunderstorms has the potential to cause hail, damaging wind gusts and tornadoes that could be strong and move on the ground over long distances, according to the National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center.

The major population centers at greatest risk for storms starting Friday afternoon include Memphis, Tennessee, Jonesboro, Arkansas, and Cedar Rapids, Iowa, as of Thursday afternoon's forecast. But people throughout eastern Iowa, western and northern Illinois, Missouri and Arkansas should also be prepared, said Northern Illinois meteorology professor and tornado expert Victor Gensini.

"There will be lots of thunderstorms ... tornadoes, damaging winds, and large hail," he said.

People in those areas should stock emergency supplies, prepare for power outages, avoid getting stranded in places vulnerable to falling trees or severe hail, and park vehicles in garages if possible, meteorologists said.

Last Friday night, a vicious tornado in Mississippi killed at least 21 people, injured dozens and flattened entire blocks as it carved a path of destruction for more than an hour. About 2,000 homes were damaged or destroyed, according to the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency.

The toll was especially steep in western Mississippi's Sharkey County, where 13 people were killed in a county of 3,700 residents. Winds of up to 200 mph (322 kph) barreled through the rural farming town of Rolling Fork, reducing homes to piles of rubble, flipping cars and toppling the town's water tower.

President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden are scheduled to visit Rolling Fork on Friday.

Gensini said Friday's atmospheric setup is similar to the conditions that were present during Mississippi's deadly storm.

The hazardous forecast is a result of strong southerly winds transporting copious amounts of moisture from the Gulf of Mexico north, where they will interact with the strengthening storm system.

The weather service is forecasting another batch of intense storms next Tuesday in the same general area as last week. At least the first 10 days of April will be rough, Accuweather meteorologist Brandon Buckingham said earlier this week.

Bill Bunting, the weather service's Storm Prediction Center chief of forecasting operations, said people need to have a severe weather plan in place that includes multiple ways to receive storm warning information.

"We've all seen the coverage of the heartbreaking situations in other parts of the country. Our fervent

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hope is that people pay attention to the forecasts that have been out for several days now regarding Friday's threat," Bunting said.

Baumann reported from Bellingham, Washington. AP writer Isabella O'Malley contributed from Philadelphia.

Donald Trump indicted; expected to surrender next week

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, ERIC TUCKER and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump has been indicted by a Manhattan grand jury, a historic reckoning after years of investigations into his personal, political and business dealings and an abrupt jolt to his bid to retake the White House.

The exact nature of the charges was unclear Friday because the indictment remained under seal, but they stem from payments made during the 2016 presidential campaign to silence claims of an extramarital sexual encounter. Prosecutors said they were working to coordinate Trump's surrender, which could happen early next week. They did not say whether they intended to seek prison time in the event of a conviction, a development that wouldn't prevent Trump from seeking and assuming the presidency.

The indictment, the first against a former U.S. president, injects a local district attorney's office into the heart of a national presidential race and ushers in criminal proceedings in a city that the ex-president for decades called home. Arriving at a time of deep political divisions, the charges are likely to reinforce rather than reshape dueling perspectives of those who see accountability as long overdue and those who, like Trump, feel the Republican is being targeted for political purposes by a Democratic prosecutor.

Trump, who has denied any wrongdoing and has repeatedly assailed the investigation, called the indictment "political persecution" and predicted it would damage Democrats in 2024. In a statement confirming the charges, defense lawyers Susan Necheles and Joseph Tacopina said Trump "did not commit any crime. We will vigorously fight this political prosecution in court."

A spokesman for the Manhattan district attorney's office confirmed the indictment and said prosecutors had reached out to Trump's defense team to coordinate a surrender. Tacopina said Trump is "likely" to turn himself in on Tuesday.

Trump was asked to surrender Friday but his lawyers said the Secret Service needed additional time as they made security preparations, two people familiar with the matter told The Associated Press. The people spoke on condition of anonymity because they couldn't publicly discuss security details.

District Attorney Alvin Bragg left his office Thursday evening without commenting.

The case centers on well-chronicled allegations from a period in 2016 when Trump's celebrity past collided with his political ambitions. Prosecutors for months scrutinized money paid to porn actor Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal, whom he feared would go public with claims that they had extramarital sexual encounters with him.

The timing of the indictment appeared to come as a surprise to Trump campaign officials following news reports that criminal charges were likely weeks away. The former president was at Mar-a-Lago, his Florida estate, on Thursday and filmed an interview with a conservative commentator earlier in the day.

For a man whose presidency was defined by one obliterated norm after another, the indictment sets up yet another never-before-seen spectacle — a former president having his fingerprints and mug shot taken, and then facing arraignment. For security reasons, his booking is expected to be carefully choreographed to avoid crowds inside or outside the courthouse.

The prosecution also means that Trump will have to simultaneously fight for his freedom and political future, while also fending off potentially more perilous legal threats, including investigations into attempts by him and his allies to undo the 2020 presidential election as well as into the hoarding of hundreds of classified documents.

In fact, New York was until recently seen as an unlikely contender to be the first place to prosecute Trump, who continues to face long-running investigations in Atlanta and Washington that could also result in charges. Unlike those inquiries, the Manhattan case concerns allegations against Trump that occurred

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before he became president and are unrelated to his much-publicized efforts to overturn the election.

The indictment comes as Trump seeks to reassert control of the Republican Party and stave off a slew of one-time allies who may threaten his bid for the presidential nomination. An expected leading rival in the race, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, called the indictment "un-American" in a statement Thursday night that pointedly did not mention Trump's name.

In bringing the charges, Bragg, the Manhattan district attorney, is embracing an unusual case that was investigated by two previous sets of prosecutors, both of which declined to take the politically explosive step of seeking Trump's indictment. The case may also turn in part on the testimony of a key witness, Trump's former lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen, who pleaded guilty to federal charges arising from the hush money payments, including making false statements.

The probe's fate seemed uncertain until word got out in early March that Bragg had invited Trump to testify before a grand jury, a signal that prosecutors were close to bringing charges.

Trump's attorneys declined the invitation, but a lawyer closely allied with the former president briefly testified in an effort to undercut Cohen's credibility.

Trump himself raised anticipation that he would be indicted soon, issuing a statement earlier this month in which he predicted an imminent arrest and called for protests. He did not repeat that call in a fresh statement Thursday, but the New York Police Department told its 36,000 officers to be fully mobilized and ready to respond to any potential protests or unrest.

Late in the 2016 presidential campaign, Cohen paid Daniels \$130,000 to keep her silent about what she says was a sexual encounter with Trump a decade earlier after they met at a celebrity golf tournament.

Cohen was then reimbursed by Trump's company, the Trump Organization, which also rewarded the lawyer with bonuses and extra payments logged internally as legal expenses. Over several months, Cohen said, the company paid him \$420,000.

Earlier in 2016, Cohen also arranged for the publisher of the supermarket tabloid the National Enquirer to pay McDougal \$150,000 to squelch her story of a Trump affair in a journalistically dubious practice known as "catch-and-kill."

The payments to the women were intended to buy secrecy, but they backfired almost immediately as details of the arrangements leaked to the news media.

Federal prosecutors in New York ultimately charged Cohen in 2018 with violating federal campaign finance laws, arguing that the payments amounted to impermissible help to Trump's presidential campaign. Cohen pleaded guilty to those charges and unrelated tax evasion counts and served time in federal prison.

Trump was implicated in court filings as having knowledge of the arrangements — obliquely referred to in charging documents as "Individual 1" — but U.S. prosecutors at the time balked at bringing charges against him. The Justice Department has a longtime policy against indicting a sitting president in federal court.

Bragg's predecessor as district attorney, Cyrus Vance Jr., then took up the investigation in 2019. While that probe initially focused on the hush money payments, Vance's prosecutors moved on to other matters, including an examination of Trump's business dealings and tax strategies.

Vance ultimately charged the Trump Organization and its chief financial officer with tax fraud related to fringe benefits paid to some of the company's top executives.

The hush money matter became known around the D.A.'s office as the "zombie case," with prosecutors revisiting it periodically but never opting to bring charges.

Bragg saw it differently. After the Trump Organization was convicted on the tax fraud charges in December, he brought fresh eyes to the well-worn case, hiring longtime white-collar prosecutor Matthew Colangelo to oversee the probe and convening a new grand jury.

Cohen became a key witness, meeting with prosecutors nearly two-dozen times, turning over emails, recordings and other evidence and testifying before the grand jury.

Trump has long decried the Manhattan investigation as "the greatest witch hunt in history." He has also lashed out at Bragg, calling the prosecutor, who is Black, racist against white people.

The criminal charges in New York are the latest salvo in a profound schism between Trump and his hometown — a reckoning for a one-time favorite son who grew rich and famous building skyscrapers,

hobnobbing with celebrities and gracing the pages of the city's gossip press.

Trump, who famously ruffed in 2016 that he "could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody" and "wouldn't lose voters," now faces a threat to his liberty in a borough where more than 75% of voters — many of them potential jurors — went against him in the last election.

Tucker and Long reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Bobby Caina Calvan, Jill Colvin and Jennifer Peltz contributed to this report.

Shadowy brokers walk off with billions in Venezuelan oil

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — One startup lists as its address a small home in a working-class district in Venezuela's capital whose owner has never heard of the firm. Another is a Hong Kong-based shell company created in 2020. Yet another belongs to a Spanish commodities trader indicted in the U.S. for allegedly helping Russian oligarchs launder ill-gotten profits.

They are among the dozens of obscure middlemen and go-betweens at the center of a new crackdown in Venezuela on corruption in the state-run oil industry that has government insiders scurrying for cover. At the same time, regular Venezuelans are asking how more than \$20 billion in proceeds from oil shipments seemingly vanished.

The purge began this month when authorities arrested 21 people, including business executives, senior officials and a lawmaker, as part of an investigation into missing payments for oil shipments. In a sign of the government's desire to promote its anti-corruption crusade, state media this week were filled with images of the defendants dressed in orange jumpsuits walking into their initial judicial hearing.

Corruption has long plagued Venezuela — the OPEC nation was the fourth-most corrupt in the world in the latest rankings by Transparency International — but those in positions of power are rarely held accountable.

And when high profile arrests do take place, Venezuelans tend to view them as the result of a behind-the-scenes tug of war among rival heavyweights in the ruling socialist party, and not any impartial meting out of justice in a country where most institutions lack independence.

An entrenched culture of corruption and the inherently opaque nature of trading illegal crude oil take malfeasance to another level.

"These are two things that come together at the same time," said Francisco Monaldi, a Venezuelan economist who heads the Latin America energy program at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy. "It would be very difficult for even a much less corrupt state to implement all the necessary controls."

While the fallout from the scandal continues, it already has felled one major power broker — Tarek El Aissami, the country's oil czar. He quit in the wake of the arrests, which included the detention of a close associate, Joselit Ramirez, who had been serving as Venezuela's cryptocurrency regulator. The U.S. already considered both of them fugitives from justice.

While Venezuelan authorities have not mentioned El Aissami as a target in the investigation, most of the shady transactions at state-run oil giant Petroleos de Venezuela SA occurred under his watch and while Asdrubal Chávez, a cousin of the late President Hugo Chávez, served as president of the company, known widely as PDVSA.

"As a revolutionary militant, I place myself at the disposal of the socialist party leadership to support this crusade against the anti-values that we are obliged to fight, even with our lives," El Aissami tweeted to announce his surprise resignation as oil minister.

Internal PDVSA documents obtained by The Associated Press show the state oil company was owed \$10.1 billion as of August 2022 from 90 mostly unknown trading companies that have emerged as major buyers of Venezuelan crude since the U.S. imposed economic sanctions in a campaign to oust President Nicolás Maduro.

An additional \$13.3 billion, corresponding to 241 tanker shipments, is owed directly to the national

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government as a result of an October accounting maneuver by PDVSA that reassigned responsibility for collecting the unpaid invoices directly to the Maduro administration in lieu of cash royalties. That is more than the entire foreign currency reserves held at Venezuela's central bank.

All the oil cargoes were sold on consignment at a deep discount owing to the sanctions, which have dissuaded more established traders from doing business with Venezuela.

PDVSA's reliance on intermediaries surged in 2020, when the Trump administration expanded sanctions with the threat to lock out of the U.S. economy any individual or company, regardless of nationality or location, that did business with Maduro's government.

The punishing action, combined with a pandemic-induced global slump in demand for oil, led PDVSA's production that summer to drop to as little as 350,000 barrels a day — just 10% of what it produced when Chávez took office in 1999.

To sell what little is being produced, Maduro, with the help of allies Russia and Iran — themselves under U.S. sanctions — has had to rely on a complex network of intermediaries. Most are shell companies, registered in jurisdictions known for secrecy like Panama, Belize and Hong Kong. The buyers deploy so-called ghost tankers that hide their location and hand off their valuable cargoes in the middle of the ocean before they reach their final destination, usually in Asia.

To get around Western banks, Venezuela started accepting payments in Russian rubles, bartered goods or cryptocurrency.

But not everyone paid.

The internal documents show that uncollected payments owed to PDVSA by the go-between brokers range from as little as \$526 to \$1.2 billion as of August.

Among those on the delinquent list is Walker International DW-LLC, which owes PDVSA about \$77 million, according to the internal documents. The company is registered in the United Arab Emirates but lists as its Venezuela address a modest house almost at the foot of the mountain range that separate Caracas from the Caribbean Sea.

The owner of the home, Andres Muzo, expressed shock that his home could somehow be connected to a case of international corruption.

"I'm finding about this right now," Muzo said after seeing his address in Dubai corporate records, which were first unearthed in a November report by the Venezuelan investigative news website Armando.info. He shook his head and said he would ask the people who rent his adjacent garage for a car wash and oil-change business if they knew anything.

"They have tools in there, but no, we don't know anything," Muzo said standing outside the home with decorative clay tiles on the roof and brown ceramic tiles on the weathered façade. "They must be clandestine companies, I would say. They have nothing, nothing under my name, not even a piece of paper."

A small lock keeps shut the rolling garage door with a message that instructs drivers not to block it.

At least 15 of the 90 defaulters accumulated debts for two consecutive years.

The broker with the largest debt is M and Y Trading Co. Little is known about the company, which was registered in Hong Kong in late 2020. But it owes PDVSA more than \$1.2 billion, according to the internal documents, which someone knowledgeable about the transactions shared with AP on the condition that they remain anonymous.

Another preferred vendor was United Petroleo Corp, which was registered in Panama in 2021 and owes more than \$468 million to PDVSA. One of United's cargoes — a 600,000-barrel shipment last September — is at the center of a controversy on the Dutch Caribbean island of Curacao, where the Venezuelan crude is being stored at a facility tied to U.S. investors in possible defiance of sanctions.

Yet another of PDVSA's go-to partners was Treseus International. The commodities broker took possession of only \$16 million worth of oil from PDVSA, almost all of which it has paid. But the company, which did not respond to an email seeking comment, stands out for the alleged criminal activity of its chief executive officer, Juan Fernando Serrano.

Serrano, a commodities trader, was indicted last year on money laundering charges in a New York fed-

eral court for conspiring to smuggle oil on behalf of wealthy Russian businessmen. That court also wants El Aissami and Ramirez on charges of violating U.S. sanctions stemming from El Aissami's 2017 designation by Washington as a "drug kingpin" for allegedly helping cartels smuggle multiple cocaine shipments through Venezuela.

Venezuelan authorities have yet to say how much money may be missing, nor has the government mentioned specific companies it is investigating. But Maduro has used some of his recent evening appearances on state TV to warn ministers and other officials against corruption and urge them to do their jobs. Ruling party supporters even gathered for an anti-corruption protest in Caracas.

"I think it's a horrible thing. One trusts people and doesn't know they are a lion in sheep's clothing," said Lidia Rondón, a housewife who participated in the demonstration. "This destroys us all."

Past crackdowns — like the arrest of a former PDVSA president in 2017 — did little to clean up the Venezuelan oil industry, which is responsible for almost all of the country's hard currency earnings. Many analysts suspect Maduro is looking to finally address critical cash flow problems and stabilize the economy before next year's presidential election.

"Coffers are bare and the country is entering an election year in which Maduro wants to convey a message that Venezuela is getting back on track," said Geoff Ramsey, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council. "The more it becomes clear that the economy remains in dire straits, the more Maduro will look for people to take the fall."

Goodman reported from Miami.

Dior transforms Mumbai's Gateway of India into fashion ramp

By RAFIQ MAQBOOL Associated Press

MUMBAI, India (AP) — In a glittering splash of luxury fashion, Dior transformed Mumbai's grand, historic Gateway of India monument into a runway laden with celebrity, beauty and craftsmanship.

Flanked by the brightly lit, iconic Taj Mahal Palace hotel, the spectacular decor turned the heritage site into India's entertainment and business capital into a blend of color and style as the models lined up Thursday to showcase the Paris fashion house's 2023 pre-fall collection.

The runway, lined with traditional Indian floral designs, reverberated with fusion beats from live musicians as Indian artistry and craftsmanship took center stage in creative director Maria Grazia Chiuri's collection.

The lineup featured silk dresses, evening coats and sari-inspired skirts that referenced traditional Indian silhouettes. The show opened with an array of neutrals, subtly transitioning to forest green before giving way to a blaze of bright colors and patterns. Throughout it all, most of the models sported strings of pearls wound around their necks.

"I personally wanted to celebrate and showcase the incredible knowledge India offers to the international world of fashion in the field of embroidery, the mastery of the artisans who continue to work on this craft, and the commitment of Chanakya's founders to preserving India's history and culture, portrayed by each embroidery technique," Chiuri said in an Instagram post.

Dior has had a long association with India through the Mumbai-based atelier Chanakya, which works with artisans and underprivileged women. The show brought the spotlight back on India's luxury fashion market where major Western fashion brands like Pierre Cardin, Yves Saint Laurent and Valentino have presented their collections in the past.

India, now the world's fifth-largest economy, has always been known for its intricate embroidery art, opulent textiles and embellishments. With a young and aspirational middle class that has easy access to internet — and a rising number of uber-rich — it is fast emerging as a key consumer market for international fashion labels.

Many Indian designers have also opened stores in the global fashion capitals like New York and Dubai and have been showcasing their collections during international fashion weeks.

To flesh out the guest list, Dior drew on a range of A-list invitees from India and elsewhere. Bollywood

actors in attendance included the legendary Rekha, fashion icon Sonam Kapoor Ahuja and Anushka Sharma, accompanied by her husband, Indian cricketer Virat Kohli.

Western celebrities of Indian origin or descent — like Freida Pinto, Simone Ashley of “Bridgerton”, sitarist Anoushka Shankar and Vanity Fair editor-in-chief Radhika Jones — took in the show. Other guests included actor Maisie Williams from “Game of Thrones” and Thai actors Mile and Apo from “KinnPorsche.”

Russia arrests Wall Street Journal reporter on spying charge

By The Associated Press undefined

Russia’s security service arrested an American reporter for The Wall Street Journal on espionage charges, the first time a U.S. correspondent has been detained on spying accusations since the Cold War. The newspaper denied the allegations and demanded his release.

Evan Gershkovich, 31, was detained in Yekaterinburg, Russia’s fourth-largest city, about 1,670 kilometers (1,035 miles) east of Moscow. Russia’s Federal Security Service accused him of trying to obtain classified information.

Known by the acronym FSB, the service is the top domestic security agency and main successor to the Soviet-era KGB. It alleged that Gershkovich “was acting on instructions from the American side to collect information about the activities of one of the enterprises of the Russian military-industrial complex that constitutes a state secret.”

The Journal “vehemently denies the allegations from the FSB and seeks the immediate release of our trusted and dedicated reporter, Evan Gershkovich,” the newspaper said. “We stand in solidarity with Evan and his family.”

The arrest comes at a moment of bitter tensions between the West and Moscow over its war in Ukraine and as the Kremlin intensifies a crackdown on opposition activists, independent journalists and civil society groups.

The sweeping campaign of repression is unprecedented since the Soviet era. Activists say it often means the very profession of journalism is criminalized, along with the activities of ordinary Russians who oppose the war.

Earlier this week, a Russian court convicted a father over social media posts critical of the war and sentenced him to two years in prison. His 13-year-old daughter was sent to an orphanage.

Gershkovich is the first American reporter to be arrested on espionage charges in Russia since September 1986, when Nicholas Daniloff, a Moscow correspondent for U.S. News and World Report, was arrested by the KGB. Daniloff was released without charge 20 days later in a swap for an employee of the Soviet Union’s United Nations mission who was arrested by the FBI, also on spying charges.

At a hearing Thursday, a Moscow court quickly ruled that Gershkovich would be kept behind bars pending the investigation.

While previous American detainees have been freed in prisoner swaps, a top Russian official said it was too early to talk about any such deal.

In Washington, the Biden administration said it had spoken with the Journal and Gershkovich’s family. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre condemned the arrest “in the strongest terms” and urged Americans to heed government warnings not to travel to Russia.

The State Department was in direct touch with the Russian government and seeking access to Gershkovich, Jean-Pierre said. The administration has no “specific indication” that journalists in Russia are being targeted, she said.

Gershkovich, who covers Russia, Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations as a correspondent in the Journal’s Moscow bureau, could face up to 20 years in prison if convicted of espionage. Prominent lawyers noted that past investigations into espionage cases took a year to 18 months, during which time he may have little contact with the outside world.

The FSB noted that Gershkovich had accreditation from the Russian Foreign Ministry to work as a journalist, but ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova alleged that Gershkovich was using his credentials as

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cover for "activities that have nothing to do with journalism."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters: "It is not about a suspicion, it is about the fact that he was caught red-handed."

Gershkovich speaks fluent Russian and had previously worked for the French news agency Agence France-Presse and The New York Times. He was a 2014 graduate of Bowdoin College in Maine, where he was a philosophy major who cooperated with local papers and championed a free press, according to Clayton Rose, the college's president.

His last report from Moscow, published earlier this week, focused on the Russian economy's slowdown amid Western sanctions imposed after Russian troops invaded Ukraine last year.

Ivan Pavlov, a prominent Russian defense attorney who has worked on many espionage and treason cases, said Gershkovich's case is the first criminal espionage charge against a foreign journalist in post-Soviet Russia.

"That unwritten rule not to touch accredited foreign journalists, has stopped working," said Pavlov, a member of the First Department legal aid group.

Pavlov said the case against Gershkovich was built to give Russia "trump cards" for a future prisoner exchange and will likely be resolved "not by the means of the law, but by political, diplomatic means."

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov ruled out any quick swap.

"I wouldn't even consider this issue now because people who were previously swapped had already served their sentences," Ryabkov said, according to Russian news agencies.

In December, WNBA star Brittney Griner was freed after 10 months behind bars in exchange for Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout.

Another American, Paul Whelan, a Michigan corporate security executive, has been imprisoned in Russia since December 2018 on espionage charges that his family and the U.S. government have said are baseless.

"Our family is sorry to hear that another American family will have to experience the same trauma that we have had to endure for the past 1,553 days," Whelan's brother David said in an emailed statement. "It sounds as though the frame-up of Mr. Gershkovich was the same as it was in Paul's case."

Jeanne Cavalier, of the press freedom group Reporters Without Borders, said Gershkovich's arrest "looks like a retaliation measure of Russia against the United States."

"We are very alarmed because it is probably a way to intimidate all Western journalists that are trying to investigate aspects of the war on the ground in Russia," said Cavalier, head of Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk at the Paris-based group.

Another prominent lawyer with the First Department group, Yevgeny Smirnov, said that those arrested on espionage and treason charges are usually held at the FSB's Lefortovo prison, where they are usually placed in total isolation, without phone calls, visitors or even access to newspapers. At most, they can receive letters, often delayed by weeks. Smirnov called these conditions "tools of suppression."

Smirnov and Pavlov both said that any trial would be held behind closed doors. According to Pavlov, there have been no acquittals in treason and espionage cases in Russia since 1999.

FBI documents give new view into Las Vegas shooter's mindset

By RIO YAMAT and KEN RITTER Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — The high-stakes gambler who carried out the deadliest mass shooting in modern America, killing 60 and injuring hundreds more in Las Vegas, was apparently angry over how the casinos were treating him despite his high-roller status, according to a fellow gambler.

An FBI interview with the gunman's fellow gambler is detailed in hundreds of pages of documents made public this week. The gambler, whose name is redacted in the documents, said he believed the stress could have easily caused gunman Stephen Paddock "to snap." Paddock, 64, was a video poker player who relied on gambling as his main source of income.

The revelation comes years after the FBI in Las Vegas and the local police department concluded their investigations without a definitive motive, although both agencies said Paddock burned through more

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than \$1.5 million, became obsessed with guns, and distanced himself from his girlfriend and family in the months leading up to the massacre.

In a statement Thursday, Las Vegas police defended their inconclusive findings and dismissed the importance of the documents released this week in response to an open-records request from the Wall Street Journal.

"We were unable to determine a motive for the shooter," the statement said. "Speculating on a motive causes more harm to the hundreds of people who were victims that night."

Still, the cache of documents offer a new view into the gunman's mindset through interviews with neighbors, acquaintances and employees of the Las Vegas casinos he frequented.

Those interviewed by the FBI described Paddock as a "strange" introvert who never made eye contact and only wanted to talk about gambling, while the gunman's fellow gambler told the FBI that Paddock was "very upset" that the red-carpet treatment for high rollers seemed to be fading.

According to the gambler, casinos had previously treated high rollers like Paddock to free cruises, flights, penthouse suites, rides in "nice cars" and wine country tours. But in the years before the Oct. 1, 2017, mass shooting in Las Vegas, the gambler said casinos had begun banning some high rollers "for playing well and winning large quantities of money." Paddock himself had been banned from three Reno casinos, according to the documents.

Kelly McMahill, a former Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department official who headed the agency's criminal investigation into the shooting, said there was no strong indication that Paddock's actions were driven by resentment toward the casino industry.

"There's no way that LVMPD would have hidden any potential motive from our victims and survivors for five years," McMahill said.

The 10-minute massacre unfolded on the final night of the three-day Route 91 Harvest Music Festival across the street from the Mandalay Bay resort, where Paddock was staying on the 32nd floor.

Authorities have said Paddock unleashed a barrage of bullets into the crowd of 22,000 people from his corner suite with a commanding view of the Strip and the concert grounds.

His gambling habits made him a sought-after casino patron. Mandalay Bay employees gave him the \$590-per-night suite for free and let him use a private service elevator to take up his multiple suitcases. Hidden inside those suitcases were the guns he'd use for the massacre.

A dozen of Paddock's weapons were modified with rapid-fire "bump stocks," attachments that effectively convert semi-automatic rifles into fully automated weapons. Some had bipod braces and scopes. Authorities said his guns had been legally purchased.

But before setting up his perch in the Mandalay Bay, Paddock also researched other large venues. He booked rooms overlooking Chicago's Lollapalooza festival in August 2017 and the Life is Beautiful festival in downtown Las Vegas near the Strip.

"What we know from (Paddock's internet) search history is that he was looking for a large crowd of people, which, of course, he ended up finding," said McMahill, the former Las Vegas police official.

A spokesperson for the FBI in Las Vegas declined to comment. In the agency's final report released in 2019, it said Paddock had sought notoriety in the attack and maybe wanted to follow in his father's criminal footsteps. The report also said his physical and mental health was declining as his wealth diminished.

Paddock acted alone, killed himself as SWAT officers closed in and left no note about his motive for the rampage.

"If we ever discover a motive, whether it's 10 years from now, 20 years from now, I have faith that LVMPD would contact victims first before making something public," McMahill said. "It's the right thing to do."

911 calls reveal terror at Nashville school during attack

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, TRAVIS LOLLER and ADRIAN SAINZ Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Authorities released 911 recordings on Thursday that capture the terror inside a Nashville elementary school during a mass shooting this week, as callers pleaded for help in hushed voices while sirens, crying and gunfire could be heard in the background.

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Police released recordings of about two-dozen emergency calls made during Monday's attack at The Covenant School, in which three children and three adults were killed. They include the voices of teachers and school officials, some whispering while hiding in classrooms, closets, bathrooms and offices, as alarms rang loudly. One teacher tells an operator she is with 17 children in a classroom and hearing "so many shots."

In another call, 76-year-old retired church member Tom Pulliam tells the dispatcher he is with a group, including several children, walking away from the Christian school. Although Pulliam remains calm, the tension and confusion of the situation are clear, with several adults speaking over each other and children's voices in the background.

When the dispatcher requests a description of the shooter, Pulliam asks a second man to get on the line. "All I saw was a man holding an assault rifle shooting through the door. It was — he's currently in the second grade hallway, upstairs" the man says, noting that the assailant was dressed in camouflage.

Asked about how many shots were fired, a woman responds, "I heard about 10, and I left the building."

Pulliam, who was driving with his wife near the church when the attack happened, told The Associated Press on Thursday that he is struggling to make sense of it. He said he mostly recalls the children and how calm they seemed, not "yelling and screaming or anything."

"Up there for a normal day of school, these young children," he said. "Now, there's difficult days to go through."

In another call that started just before 10:13 a.m., a woman tells a dispatcher that she can hear a pause in the gunshots from her hiding spot in an art room closet.

Asked if it is a safe spot, the woman answers, "I think so," as children can be heard in the background.

The teacher then says she can hear more gunshots, begging the dispatcher, "Please hurry."

In another call, lead pastor Chad Scruggs, whose daughter was killed in the attack, identifies himself and tells the operator he's outside the building and heading toward the gunshots.

"I'm getting calls from the inside," he says.

One woman, who hid under a desk in a nursery, tells a dispatcher the school, which is attached to the Covenant Presbyterian Church, sometimes has some staff members carry firearms but does not have dedicated security guards.

"We do have a school person, or two, I'm not sure, who would be packing — whose job it is for security," she says. "We don't have security guards, but we have a staff."

A spokesman for the police department did not immediately respond to a message asking who from the school might have been armed for security. A school spokesperson said the school didn't immediately have comment on the question.

Authorities say the attack ended when police shot and killed the assailant, a former student they identified as 28-year-old Audrey Hale.

The release of the recordings came as protesters gathered at the Tennessee Capitol to demand the Republican-led Legislature tighten gun controls.

Chants of "Save our children!" echoed in the hallways between the Senate and House chambers, with protesters setting up inside and outside the building. Some silently filled the Senate chamber's gallery, including children who held signs reading "I'm nine" — a reference to the age of the kids who died. Most protesters were removed from the gallery after some began yelling down at the lawmakers, "Children are dead!"

The three students who were killed were Evelyn Dieckhaus, Hallie Scruggs and William Kinney. The three adults were Katherine Koonce, 60, the head of the school, substitute teacher Cynthia Peak, 61, and Mike Hill, a 61-year-old custodian. Funeral plans for the six victims were announced, with the first service scheduled on Friday, for Evelyn. Evelyn's obituary urged mourners to wear joyful colors as a tribute to her "light and love of color."

The protests followed a Wednesday night candlelight vigil in Nashville where Republican lawmakers stood alongside first lady Jill Biden, Democratic lawmakers and musicians including Sheryl Crow. The speakers read the victims' names and offered condolences but refrained from political statements.

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Absent from the vigil was Tennessee's Republican governor, Bill Lee, who has avoided public appearances this week and has not proposed any steps his administration might take in response to the shooting. Lee has been an advocate for less restrictive gun laws along with greater school security.

As with similar responses to gun violence, the state's Republican leaders have avoided calling for tighter gun restrictions and instead have thrown their support behind bolstering school security.

In a letter to Lee, Republican Lt. Gov. Randy McNally called for securing windows and glass in school buildings, adding magnetic locks on doors, modernizing camera systems, and increasing armed guards. McNally said later that he also is in favor of red flag laws like one in Florida.

Meanwhile, Tennessee's U.S. senators, Republicans Marsha Blackburn and Bill Hagerty, were pushing for legislation that would create a \$900 million grant program to "harden" schools and hire safety officers.

Police have said Hale drove up to the school on Monday morning, shot out the glass doors, entered and began firing indiscriminately. Metropolitan Nashville Police Chief John Drake has not said what investigators think the shooter's motive was, only noting that the assailant didn't target specific victims and had "some resentment for having to go to that school."

Drake said the shooter had drawn a detailed map of the school, including potential entry points, and conducted surveillance before carrying out the attack.

Police have said Hale was under a doctor's care for an undisclosed "emotional disorder." However, authorities haven't disclosed a link between that care and the shooting. Police also said Hale was not on their radar before the attack.

Social media accounts and other sources indicate that the shooter identified as a man and might have recently begun using the first name Aiden. Police have said Hale "was assigned female at birth" but used masculine pronouns on a social media profile. However, police have continued to use female pronouns and the name Audrey to describe Hale.

Sainz reported from Memphis. Associated Press writer Kristin M. Hall in Nashville contributed.

High inflation pushes poverty rate even higher in Argentina

By DÉBORA REY and DANIEL POLITI Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — One of the world's highest inflation rates is making it more difficult to make ends meet in Argentina, where at the end of last year nearly four of every 10 people were poor, official figures revealed Thursday.

Poverty increased to 39.2% of the population in the second half of 2022, a three percentage point increase from the first six months of the year, said Argentina's national statistics agency, INDEC. Among children under age 15, the poverty rate increased more than three percentage points to 54.2%.

In a poor neighborhood in Argentina's capital, those who run a soup kitchen don't need the statistics to tell them what they have been seeing amid an economy wracked by inflation that reached 94.8% last year.

"There's more poverty than before," said Graciela Gamarra, who runs the soup kitchen in the Fraga district that hands out more than 800 portions of food every weekday afternoon.

"After the pandemic, everything got worse," she said. "Most have precarious jobs, they don't have fixed employment to say that they're sure about how much they'll make each month."

Rosa Guerrero, 76, was one of the people who went to the soup kitchen with her plastic container to get food on a recent afternoon.

"If it weren't for the soup kitchen, what would become of me?" Guerrero said, noting that more people from outside the neighborhood had been arriving recently to ask for food.

Experts say inflation has hit lower middle class families particularly hard as the price of food has increased more than other items.

"If the inflationary question isn't resolved, it will be very difficult to recover purchasing power and lower the poverty level," said Eduardo Donza, a researcher at the Social Debt Observatory at Catholic University of Argentina.

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Even if inflation were to magically disappear, though, "it wouldn't be enough, because the poverty level is associated with a very precarious job market," Donza added.

The percentage of Argentina's population considered destitute — those whose income won't even cover basic, minimal food needs — decreased slightly to 8.1% from 8.8%.

The decline was largely due to welfare programs, without which the destitution rate would be around 18%, Donza estimated.

The government's efforts to cool inflation have been made even more difficult by a devastating drought that has increased costs even further. The annual rate of inflation rose above 100% in February.

Although the poverty rate has decreased slightly from 42% in the second half of 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, it will undoubtedly be one of the main issues in the presidential campaign ahead of October elections. President Alberto Fernández has still not said whether he will seek reelection.

Members of the opposition were quick to criticize the government when the latest poverty figures came out.

"More than 18 million Argentines are poor," former Buenos Aires Gov. María Eugenia Vidal wrote on Twitter. "And you know what the worst part is? This information is already outdated. The situation in 2023 is even more serious."

For now, many Argentines don't have much faith that things could improve, even with new leadership.

"All the politicians promise, promise, and once they're there, they don't see you, they don't listen to you," said Gamarra, at the soup kitchen. "Most people here think the same way — just promises they don't fulfill."

Trump indictment and hush money investigation, explained

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

Donald Trump has become the first former president to be indicted in a criminal case after a grand jury investigation into hush money payments made on his behalf during the 2016 presidential campaign.

The unprecedented indictment comes as the Republican faces other legal investigations and launches a bid to return to the White House in 2024.

The indictment will test the Republican Party already divided over whether to support Trump next year, in part due to his efforts to undermine his 2020 election loss.

Trump has denied any wrongdoing and accuses prosecutors of engaging in a politically motivated "witch hunt" to damage his campaign.

Here's a look at the hush money case, the grand jury investigation and possible ramifications for Trump's presidential campaign:

WHAT'S THIS CASE ABOUT?

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

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

Trump denies having sex with either woman.

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

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

WHAT ARE THE CHARGES?

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The indictment has not yet been unsealed, so it's not totally clear.

Some experts have said they believe Trump could be charged with falsifying business records, which can be a misdemeanor or a felony under New York law. To secure a conviction on the felony charge, prosecutors would have to prove that records were falsified with the intention of committing or concealing a second crime. It's not clear what prosecutors may allege as the second crime.

WHAT HAS TRUMP'S LAWYER SAID?

Trump's lawyer, Joe Tacopina, said Thursday that the former president didn't commit any crime and vowed to "vigorously fight this political prosecution in court."

Tacopina has accused prosecutors of "distorting laws" to try to take down the former president. He has described Trump as a victim of extortion who had to pay the money because the allegations were going to be embarrassing to him "regardless of the campaign."

"He made this with personal funds to prevent something from coming out — false, but embarrassing to himself, his family, his young son. That's not a campaign finance violation, not by any stretch," Tacopina said on ABC's "Good Morning America" before the indictment.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Law enforcement officials have been making security preparations for days for the possibility of an indictment and a court appearance by the president.

Trump was expected to surrender to authorities next week, though details were still being worked out, according to a person familiar with the matter who was not authorized to discuss a matter that remained under seal.

WHAT'S THIS GRAND JURY AND WHO TESTIFIED?

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

Proceedings are closed to the public, including the media. New York grand juries have 23 people. At least 16 must be present to hear evidence or deliberate and 12 have to agree there is enough evidence in order to issue an indictment.

David Pecker, a longtime Trump friend and the former chief executive of the parent company of The National Enquirer, returned to the courthouse this week where the grand jury was meeting.

Pecker's company, American Media Inc., secretly assisted Trump's campaign by paying \$150,000 to McDougal in August 2016 for the rights to her story about an alleged affair with Trump. The company then suppressed McDougal's story until after the election.

The grand jury also heard from Cohen, as well as Robert Costello, who was once a legal adviser to Cohen.

The men have since had a falling out, and Costello indicated he has information he believes undercuts Cohen's credibility and contradicts his incriminating statements about Trump. Costello testified at the invitation of prosecutors, presumably as a way to ensure that the grand jury had an opportunity to consider any testimony or evidence that might weaken the case for moving forward with an indictment.

Trump was also invited to testify, but didn't.

WHAT ARE THE POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS FOR TRUMP?

Neither the indictment itself nor a conviction would prevent Trump from running for or winning the presidency in 2024.

Last week in Waco, Texas, Trump took a defiant stance at a rally by disparaging the prosecutors investigating him and predicting his vindication as he rallied supporters in a city made famous by deadly resistance against law enforcement.

"You will be vindicated and proud," Trump said in a speech brimming with resentments and framing the probes as political attacks on himself and his followers. "The thugs and criminals who are corrupting our justice system will be defeated, discredited and totally disgraced."

Before the charges were handed down, many party leaders had also already begun to defend the former president.

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During a visit this month to Iowa, former Vice President Mike Pence called the idea of indicting a former president “deeply troubling.” Another 2024 Republican prospect, New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, has said there is a sense that the former president is being unfairly attacked.

Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, a declared candidate who also served as Trump’s U.N. ambassador, has called Bragg’s case an attempt at scoring “political points,” adding, “You never want to condone any sort of prosecution that’s being politicized.”

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is considering joining the 2024 Republican field, slammed the investigation as politically motivated. But he also threw one of his first jabs at the former president in a quip likely to intensify their rivalry. DeSantis said he personally doesn’t “know what goes into paying hush money to a porn star to secure silence over some kind of alleged affair.”

WHAT ABOUT OTHER TRUMP INVESTIGATIONS?

The New York case is just one of many legal woes Trump is facing.

The Justice Department is also investigating his retention of top secret government documents at his Florida estate, Mar-a-Lago, after leaving the White House. Federal investigators are also still probing the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and efforts to overturn the 2020 election that Trump falsely claimed was stolen.

In Georgia, Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis has been investigating whether Trump and his allies illegally meddled in the 2020 election. The foreperson of a special grand jury, which heard from dozens of witnesses, said last month that the panel had recommended that numerous people be indicted, and hinted Trump could be among them. It is ultimately up to Willis to decide whether to move forward.

Gwyneth Paltrow won her ski case. Here’s how it played out

By SAM METZ and ANNA FURMAN Associated Press

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — When two skiers collided on a beginner run at an upscale Utah ski resort in 2016, no one could foresee that seven years later, the crash would become the subject of a closely watched celebrity trial.

But Gwyneth Paltrow’s live-streamed trial over her collision with Terry Sanderson, a 76-year-old retired optometrist, in Park City emerged as the biggest celebrity court case since actors Johnny Depp and Amber Heard faced off last year — spawning memes, sparking debate about the burden of fame, and making ski etiquette rules of who was uphill and who had the right of way relevant beyond those who can afford resort chairlift tickets.

On Thursday, Paltrow won her court battle after a jury decided the movie star wasn’t at fault for the crash. Here is a look back at highlights from the two-week trial:

LIFESTYLES OF THE RICH AND THE FAMOUS

For seven days, attorneys highlighted — and downplayed — Paltrow and Sanderson’s extravagant lifestyles.

Sanderson’s attorneys sought more than \$300,000 in damages, but the money at stake for both sides paled in comparison to the typical legal costs of a multiyear lawsuit. Both sides marshalled brigades of expert witnesses, including a biomechanical engineer and collision expert.

Paltrow’s legal team attempted to represent Sanderson as an angry, aging man who continued to travel internationally after the collision. They introduced photos into evidence of Sanderson camel riding in Morocco, trekking the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu in Peru, and taking a continent-wide loop through Europe with stops in the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, France and Belgium.

Sanderson’s attorneys questioned Paltrow about that day’s \$8,890 bill for private ski instructors for four children accompanying her, as well as her decision to leave the slope after the crash to get a massage. They said the accident caused Sanderson to grow distant from friends and family, and they called his ex-girlfriend to testify about how their relationship deteriorated because he “had no joy left in his life.”

To keep jurors engaged, Paltrow’s team shared a series of advanced, high-resolution animations to ac-

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company their witnesses' recollections. The renderings reflected the financial investment Paltrow and her defense team devoted to the case.

THE BURDEN OF FAME

Attorneys on both sides tapped into the power of celebrity to make their cases that reputations and moral principles were what was at stake in the trial.

Sanderson's side tried to characterize Paltrow, the actor-turned-lifestyle influencer, as clumsy, out of touch and evading accountability. They likened her decision to file a \$1 countersuit against Sanderson to Taylor Swift, who filed a similar counterclaim in a lawsuit in 2017 — drawing attention to Paltrow's testimony that she was "not good friends" with Swift but just "friendly."

Paltrow's defense team called the highly publicized case an attempt to exploit her fame and suggested she is vulnerable to unfair, frivolous lawsuits. They questioned witnesses about Sanderson's "obsession" with the case and homed in on an email subject line in which Sanderson wrote after the collision: "I'm famous."

"To become famous, he will lie," one of Paltrow's attorneys said. "I'm not into celebrity worship," Sanderson later rebutted.

FACTORY OF MEMES

Though the trial tested the jury's endurance as its eight members gradually sunk deeper into their chairs through hours of expert-witness testimony, it titillated spectators worldwide, became late-night television fodder and fed the internet's insatiable appetite for memes.

Viewers tuning into proceedings on CourtTV saw Paltrow complain about losing a half-day of skiing after the crash and heard a radiologist testify that Sanderson could no longer enjoy wine tasting. They compared the spectacle to "The White Lotus" — an HBO series that satirizes the petty grievances of rich, white vacationers — and, in a reflection of the courtroom theatrics and rapt public attention, likened Paltrow's defense to the Salem witch trials of Arthur Miller's "The Crucible."

Photographs of Paltrow entering and exiting the courtroom — often shielding her face, perp-walk style, with a blue GP-initialed notebook — also have gone viral on social media.

UTAH'S POSHEST SKI TOWN

The proceedings have drawn the world's attention to Park City, Utah, the silver boomtown-turned posh ski resort where Paltrow and Sanderson crashed and the trial was held. The city annually hosts the Sundance Film Festival, where early in her career Paltrow would appear for the premieres of her movies, including 1998's "Sliding Doors," at a time when she was known primarily as an actor, not a celebrity wellness entrepreneur.

The jury and local residents who have braved blizzards to get to the courthouse each day nodded along as attorneys referenced local landmarks like The Montage Deer Valley, the slope-side luxury resort where Paltrow got a massage after the crash.

The all-white jury was drawn from registered voters in Summit County, where the average home sold for \$1.3 million last month and residents tend to be less religious than the rest of Utah, where the majority of the population belongs to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Unlike the high-powered Hollywood attorneys that become household names at celebrity trials, both sides were represented by local lawyers. Paltrow's team specializes in medical malpractice lawsuits, while Sanderson's lead counsel, Bob Sykes, is known in Salt Lake City for his work suing police departments. Sykes attempted to play up his folksiness, referring to himself as "just a country lawyer" more than six times during the trial. After jurors were sent home Wednesday, both legal teams joked about the trial lawyer gimmick.

THE MYSTERIOUS MISSING GOPRO

Paltrow's attorneys intrigued the jury with questions about the collision potentially being captured on a helmet-cam video, though no footage was included as evidence in the trial.

Sanderson's daughter testified this week that an email she sent the day of the accident referring to a GoPro didn't imply footage existed. She said she and her father speculated that on a crowded beginner run, someone wearing a camera must have turned to look at the crash after hearing Paltrow scream.

Internet sleuths following the trial later found and sent attorneys the link included in the email. Rather than revealing GoPro footage though, it contained a chatroom discussion between members of Sanderson's ski group, including the man claiming to be the sole eyewitness who testified Paltrow crashed into Sanderson.

THE VERDICT

Paltrow looked to her attorneys with a pursed-lips smile when the judge read the eight-member jury's verdict in the Park City courtroom.

The jury awarded her \$1; however, the attorney fees she asked for in her countersuit were not included in the verdict, leaving the bulk of the final award for the Park City judge to decide.

Paltrow thanked the judge and jury for their work.

"I felt that acquiescing to a false claim compromised my integrity," the actor said in a statement released by her representatives.

As Paltrow left court, she touched Sanderson's shoulder and told him, "I wish you well," Sanderson told reporters outside court. He responded, "Thank you, dear."

Furman reported from Los Angeles.

Gwyneth Paltrow gets vindication at ski collision trial

By SAM METZ Associated Press

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — Gwyneth Paltrow wasn't to blame for a 2016 collision with a retired optometrist on a beginner run at a posh Utah ski resort during a family vacation, a jury decided Thursday following a live-streamed trial that became a pop culture fixation.

A jury awarded Paltrow \$1 — a symbolic amount she asked for in order to show it wasn't about money — and delivered her the vindication she sought when she opted to take it to trial rather than settle out of court.

"I felt that acquiescing to a false claim compromised my integrity," Paltrow said in a statement released by her representatives that she also posted as an Instagram story for her 8.3 million followers. She also thanked the judge and jury for their work.

As Paltrow left court she touched Terry Sanderson's shoulder and told him, "I wish you well," he told reporters outside court. He responded, "Thank you dear."

Paltrow's attorney, Steve Owens, added in a statement he read outside court that "Gwyneth has a history of advocating for what she believes in — this situation was no different and she will continue to stand up for what is right."

Paltrow, an actor who in recent years has refashioned herself into a celebrity wellness entrepreneur, looked to her attorneys with a pursed lips smile when the judge read the eight-member jury's verdict in the Park City courtroom. She sat intently through two weeks of testimony in what became the biggest celebrity court case since actors Johnny Depp and Amber Heard faced off last year.

After the verdict was read, the judge polled the jury, which was unanimous on the decision. In civil court in Utah, only three-fourths of jurors need to agree on a verdict. The attorney fees Paltrow asked for in her countersuit were not included in the jury's verdict, leaving the bulk of the final award for the Park City judge to decide.

Addressing reporters after the verdict, Sanderson questioned whether the lawsuit was worth it and said he believed that people tend to naturally trust celebrities like Paltrow.

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"You get some assumed credibility from being a famous person," Sanderson said. "Really, who wants to take on a celebrity?"

The dismissal concludes two weeks of courtroom proceedings that hinged largely on reputation rather than the monetary damages at stake in the case. Paltrow's attorneys described the complaint against her as "utter B.S." and painted the Goop founder-CEO as uniquely vulnerable to unfair, frivolous lawsuits due to her celebrity.

Paltrow took the witness stand during the trial to insist that the collision wasn't her fault, and to describe how she was stunned when she felt "a body pressing against me and a very strange grunting noise."

Throughout the trial, the word "uphill" became synonymous with "guilty," as attorneys focused on a largely unknown skiing code of conduct that stipulates that the skier who is downhill or ahead on the slope has the right of way.

Worldwide audiences followed the celebrity trial as if it were episodic television. Viewers scrutinized both Paltrow and Sanderson's motives while attorneys directed questions to witnesses that often had less to do with the collision and more to do with their client's reputations.

The trial took place in Park City, a resort town known for hosting the annual Sundance Film Festival, where early in her career Paltrow would appear for the premieres of her movies including 1998's "Sliding Doors," at a time when she was known primarily as an actor, not a lifestyle influencer. Paltrow is also known for her roles in "Shakespeare in Love" and the "Iron Man" movies.

The jury's decision marks a painful court defeat for Sanderson, the man who sued Paltrow for more than \$300,000 over injuries he sustained when they crashed on the ski slope at Deer Valley Resort.

"He never returned home that night as the same man. Terry has tried to get off that mountain but he's really still there," attorney Robert Sykes said during closing arguments.

Both parties blamed the other for the collision. Sanderson, 76, broke four ribs and sustained a concussion after the two tumbled down the slope, with Paltrow landing on top of him.

He filed an amended complaint after an earlier \$3.1 million lawsuit was dismissed. In response, Paltrow countersued for \$1 and attorney fees, a symbolic action that mirrors Taylor Swift's response to a radio host's defamation lawsuit. Swift was awarded \$1 in 2017.

Paltrow's defense team represented Sanderson as an angry, aging and unsympathetic man who had over the years become "obsessed" with his lawsuit against Paltrow. They argued that Paltrow wasn't at fault in the crash and also said, regardless of blame, that Sanderson was overstating the extent of his injuries.

AP writer Anna Furman contributed from Los Angeles.

Funerals set for Nashville school shooting's 6 victims

By TRAVIS LOLLER and ADRIAN SAINZ Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Funeral arrangements were disclosed Thursday for the six people killed in this week's school shooting in Nashville, as the grieving city mourns the victims of the horrific attack that transformed what should have been a normal day of school on a bright, sunny morning into wrenching tragedy.

Heartbreaking new details continued to emerge about the lives of the three adults and three 9-year-old students who police say were killed during the shooting Monday at The Covenant School. The children have been identified as Evelyn Dieckhaus, Hallie Scruggs and William Kinney. Also killed were Katherine Koonce, 60, the head of the school; Mike Hill, 61, a custodian; and Cynthia Peak, 61, a substitute teacher.

A funeral service for Evelyn was scheduled for Friday at Woodmont Christian Church in Nashville, with a private reception to follow, according to an obituary provided to The Associated Press by a family friend. Funeral guests are invited to wear pink or other joyful colors "in tribute to Evelyn's light and love of color," according to the obituary. She will be laid to rest on Saturday in a private family burial.

Hallie's family planned a private funeral for her Saturday at Covenant Presbyterian Church, where her father is the lead pastor. On Thursday, members of Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church, including the

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girl's grandparents, were planning to pray the rosary for Hallie and for all those affected by the shooting, according to a Facebook post from the church.

The funeral for Hill has been set for Tuesday morning at 11 a.m. at Stephens Valley Church in Nashville, with visitation beginning at 10 a.m., pastor Jim Bachmann said.

A visitation for Koonce was scheduled for Tuesday from 5-8 p.m. at Christ Presbyterian Church, with a service the following day at 1 p.m.

The service for Kinney was set for 2:30 p.m. Sunday at Christ Presbyterian.

Peak's visitation was scheduled for Saturday at 10:30 a.m., also at Christ Presbyterian, with a service at noon.

The funeral plans were announced as new information about Evelyn and some of the others was released.

In the obituary given to the AP by a family friend, Evelyn was described as "a constant beacon of joy" who loved art, music, animals and snuggling with her older sister on the couch.

"With an unwavering faith in the goodness of others, Evelyn made people feel known, seen, but never judged," the obituary said. "Her adoring family members agree that she was everyone's safe space."

In preschool, Evelyn "would often position herself between two younger babies, intuitively offering comfort by patting their backs." She would greet people with open arms and an infectious laugh, the obituary said.

Evelyn enjoyed crafting and drawing, and her teachers "would observe Evelyn studying the world around her with curiosity, eagerness, and clarity," according to the obituary.

She also liked to sing along to tunes by Taylor Swift and from the Broadway show "Hamilton." She also loved her dogs, Mable and Birdie, and wanted a rat for her 10th birthday present.

"Strong but never pushy, she had self-composure and poise beyond her years," the obituary said. "This girl could read a room."

As Evelyn's loved ones prepared for her funeral, William Kinney's youth baseball league was taking steps to remember a teammate and friend.

The night after the shooting, a coach at the Crieve Hall Baseball park led a prayer and a moment of silence for the boy. The tribute was posted on the park's Facebook page.

William had played baseball at the park in the past and his team this season was the Reds, said Steve Cherrico, director of Crieve Hall youth athletics. Players and their families have been encouraged to wear red in the field and in the stands, and red ribbons have been placed at the field where William played.

"We've covered everything in red," Cherrico said. "We have put plenty of memory pieces on the ballpark itself."

Cherrico said league members were heartbroken at the loss of William and the others who were killed. Cherrico said it was not the first time that Crieve Hall has lost a player.

"The league has always stepped up and come together as a family," he said.

In response to the park's tribute, Major League Baseball's Cincinnati Reds posted the following on Instagram: "'Sending all of our love from Cincinnati,'" with a heart emoji at the end.

Loller reported from Nashville; Sainz reported from Memphis, Tennessee; Ben Finley contributed to this report from Norfolk, Virginia.

Donald Trump was just indicted. Here's what happens next

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Every day, hundreds of people are taken into law enforcement custody in New York City. Former President Donald Trump is expected to become one of them as early as next week.

Trump was indicted by a Manhattan grand jury, prosecutors and defense lawyers said Thursday, after an investigation into payments made during his 2016 presidential campaign to silence claims of an extramarital sexual encounter. The indictment itself remains sealed for now in the first criminal case ever brought against a former U.S. president.

Trump — a Republican who assailed the case Thursday as a Democratic prosecutor's "political persecution"

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of “a completely innocent person” — is expected to turn himself in to authorities next week, according to a person familiar with the matter but not authorized to discuss it publicly. The person said the details of a surrender are still being worked out.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg’s office said it had contacted Trump’s lawyer to coordinate his surrender and arraignment.

For any New York defendant, poor or powerful, answering criminal charges means being fingerprinted and photographed, fielding basic questions such as name and birthdate, and getting arraigned. All told, defendants are typically detained for at least several hours.

There can be differences in where the different steps happen, how long they take, whether handcuffs come out and other particulars. A lot depends on the severity of the case and whether defendants arrange to turn themselves in.

But there is no playbook for booking an ex-president with U.S. Secret Service protection. Agents are tasked with the protection of former presidents unless and until they say they don’t need it. Trump has kept his detail, so agents would need to be by his side at all times.

“This would be a unique outlier,” said Jeremy Saland, a defense lawyer and former prosecutor in Manhattan.

If Trump indeed turns himself in, expect a carefully choreographed and relatively quick process and release without bail (as is common in New York) — and with a focus on security. A former president isn’t likely to be paraded in cuffs across a sidewalk or through a crowded courthouse hallway, Saland predicts.

“It’s a public forum, but safety is also paramount,” he notes.

If defendants are notified of an indictment or an impending arrest, they often arrange to turn themselves in. Doing so can smooth the process and strengthen arguments for bail by showing that they aren’t evading the case.

For example, when the former finance chief of Trump’s company, Allen Weisselberg, was indicted in Manhattan on tax fraud charges in 2021, he was able to turn himself in at a courthouse side door before normal workday hours.

The aim was “to reduce the likelihood that the surrender would become a media frenzy,” his lawyers wrote in a subsequent court filing.

Weisselberg arrived around 6:15 a.m. and was taken to what his attorneys described as a “holding room” for booking, an interview about potential release, and other procedures. To pass the time, he’d brought a book — “Chicken Soup for the Baseball Fan’s Soul” — and his lawyers supplied him with a snack, a face mask, breath mints and other items, according to the filing.

Weisselberg was arraigned and released about eight hours later, after being walked into a courtroom past a phalanx of news cameras in the hallway. (Weisselberg eventually pleaded guilty to dodging taxes on job perks including a free apartment and school tuition for his grandchildren.)

Disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein, on the other hand, turned himself in at a Manhattan police station in 2018 to face rape and criminal sex act charges. He was briefly in a stationhouse cell, flipping through a biography of famed film director Elia Kazan, before being led out in handcuffs and taken to court under the gaze of journalists on the sidewalk — and other suspects in a courthouse booking area, where some hollered, “Yo, Harvey!”

Within about three hours after his surrender, Weinstein was arraigned and released on electronic monitoring and \$1 million bail. (Weinstein was eventually convicted; his appeal is now before New York’s highest court. He’s also been convicted on similar charges in Los Angeles.)

But even a scheduled arrest is still an arrest. Defendants have to give up cellphones and some other personal items for safekeeping (and, in some cases, potential evidence), and lawyers generally aren’t allowed to accompany their clients through the process. Attorneys often advise traveling light and staying mum.

“Don’t make any statements. Because you think you’re helping your situation, but they can just use your statements against you — because you get caught up in the moment, you get nervous,” says Gianni Karmily, a defense lawyer who practices in New York City and on Long Island.

Many arrests in New York City aren’t preplanned. That can be a very different experience for defendants,

even prominent ones.

When a hotel housekeeper accused then-International Monetary Fund chief and potential French presidential contender Dominique Strauss-Kahn of sexually assaulting her in 2011, he was pulled off a plane at Kennedy Airport.

Strauss-Kahn, who said his encounter with the woman was consensual, spent about 36 hours being questioned, arrested, undergoing various exams and waiting in such spots as a courthouse holding pen before being arraigned and jailed without bail. After several days at the city's notorious Rikers Island jail, Strauss-Kahn was allowed out on \$1 million bail, under house arrest with armed guards.

Manhattan prosecutors eventually dropped the criminal case against Strauss-Kahn, who later settled a civil suit brought by his accuser.

Associated Press writers Michael R. Sisak in New York and Colleen Long in Washington contributed to this report.

Arrest orders issued for 6 in Mexican detention center fire

By MARÍA VERZA and MARK STEVENSON Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — A Mexican court issued arrest orders Thursday for six people in relation to the fire that killed 39 migrants at a detention facility this week in the border city of Ciudad Juarez, according to the federal prosecutor leading the investigation.

Sara Irene Herrerías said they include three officials from the National Immigration Institute, two private security guards contracted by the agency and the detained migrant accused of starting the fire. She said five of the six had already been arrested and would face charges of homicide and causing injuries.

At least 39 migrants died after apparently starting a fire inside a holding cell at the facility Monday night. More than two dozen others were injured.

Federal Public Safety Secretary Rosa Icela Rodríguez said 27 migrants remained hospitalized, all of them in either serious or critical condition. One other migrant had been discharged, she said. The migrant accused of starting the fire suffered only slight injuries and has already been released from the hospital, presumably into custody.

Rodríguez also said the private security firm involved, which she identified as Grupo de Seguridad Privada CAMSA, had a federal contract to provide security at immigration facilities in 23 states. She said it would have its operating permit revoked and face a fine.

Forty-eight federal agents would take over security duties at migrant facilities in the state of Chihuahua, where the fire occurred, Rodríguez said.

A video from a security camera inside the Ciudad Juarez facility showed guards walking away when the fire started inside the cell holding migrants and not making any attempt to release them. It was not clear whether those guards had keys to the cell doors.

On Wednesday, a complaint filed with federal investigators from the federal Attorney General's Office accused the state's top immigration official of knowing about the fire but ordering that the migrants not be released.

The complaint filed by lawyer Jorge Vázquez Campbell said retired Navy Rear Adm. Salvador González Guerrero, the Chihuahua state delegate for the National Immigration Institute, "gave the order by way of a phone call that under no circumstances should the migrants 'housed' inside the place where the fire started be released."

The agency did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the allegations nor to a request to speak with González.

Campbell said he would not reveal his clients' identities for their protection, beyond saying they were connected to the case.

Mexican authorities announced Wednesday that eight suspects who worked at the facility were under investigation, as well as the migrant accused of starting the fire. Herrerías said then that González was

not one of the eight officials called in to give statements about the incident.

Herrerías, the prosecutor, said Thursday that their investigation would include the entire chain of command for the immigration facility to determine what actions or omissions could be punishable.

Asked directly whether González had been called in to give a statement, Rodríguez said that prosecutors would not say anything which could jeopardize the case, but that the investigation would go where it needed to.

Campbell said his clients told him that one of the detained migrants asked a guard for a cigarette and a lighter and then five migrants who had been detained that day began to protest.

"The officials made fun of them, they got irritated, and two of them (migrants) set a mattress on fire," Campbell said.

That was the moment, Campbell said, that immigration agents at the facility notified González of the fire and he "told them not to do anything and under no circumstances should they let them leave."

Herrerías said Wednesday that prosecutors had not yet seen any evidence that such a call was made, but the investigation was continuing.

Authorities in the region have known that foam mattresses in such facilities are easily set alight and can cause thick clouds of dangerous smoke, ever since a similar fire at a state-run home for troubled youths in Guatemala killed 41 girls in 2017.

"That is part of the investigation, the question of why those mattresses caught fire," Rodríguez said Thursday. "We will look at why these mattresses ignited, when that shouldn't have happened."

Rodríguez refused to answer questions about the cell being locked, the location of the keys and where the lighter came, saying those issues were all part of the investigation.

Mexico's immigration detention centers have been plagued for years by accusations of corruption and bad conditions.

The circumstances of the fire have angered families across the region who were still awaiting confirmation of whether their loved ones were dead or alive.

Late Wednesday, hundreds of migrants walked across the border in Ciudad Juarez in protest and turned themselves over to U.S. authorities.

Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Thursday that he had told the attorney general to not give anyone special consideration and that impunity would not be permitted.

What to know about Alvin Bragg, Manhattan district attorney

By The Associated Press undefined

A New York grand jury that voted to indict former President Donald Trump on charges involving payments made during the 2016 presidential campaign to silence claims of an extramarital sexual encounter has refocused attention on the Manhattan district attorney steering the case. Alvin Bragg's decision to convene the grand jury early this year led to the first criminal charge against a former U.S. president.

Here's what you need to know about Bragg:

WHO IS THE MANHATTAN DISTRICT ATTORNEY?

Alvin Bragg became Manhattan's first Black district attorney in 2022, following his election in November 2021.

AS DISTRICT ATTORNEY, WHAT IS BRAGG'S JOB?

The office prosecutes nearly all criminal cases in Manhattan, staffed by about 500 lawyers. The district attorney also is a key political figure, overseeing cases that often involve defendants with immense wealth, fame and influence.

Manhattan district attorney is one of the most high-profile prosecution jobs in the world, dramatized on TV shows like "Law & Order" and "Blue Bloods." Robert M. Morgenthau, who held the job for 35 years, was the model for the fictional character Adam Schiff on "Law & Order," one of the series' original leads played by actor Steven Hill.

The office has a budget of about \$150 million and has used a separate \$800 million forfeiture fund

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bankrolled by Wall Street settlements for grants to criminal justice and community organizations and big initiatives, such as testing backlogged rape kits.

ARE DISTRICT ATTORNEYS ELECTED?

Bragg is one of five elected district attorneys in New York City — one for each of the city's five boroughs. Bragg won a tough Democratic primary and then the general election to become Manhattan's district attorney. He took over for retiring District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr.

Bragg is just the fourth elected district attorney in Manhattan in the last eight decades. Frank Hogan served for 31 years. Robert Morgenthau was in office for 34 years, until he was 90. Vance retired at the end of 2021 after 12 years.

WHAT IS BRAGG'S LEGAL BACKGROUND?

Bragg's career includes time as a federal prosecutor, an assistant attorney general for the state of New York and a civil rights attorney who represented Eric Garner's mother as she pressured New York City officials for more accountability against the officers and commanders involved in her son's 2014 death by a police chokehold.

Bragg's campaign included promises to change the culture of the office and allied him with other progressive prosecutors aiming to eliminate cash bail. Shortly after taking office, he released a public memo promising the district attorney would no longer prosecute some low-level misdemeanor crimes.

Bragg, who grew up in Harlem, graduated from Harvard Law School.

HOW WAS BRAGG INVOLVED WITH THE TRUMP INDICTMENT?

Bragg inherited a yearslong grand jury investigation into hush money paid on Trump's behalf during his 2016 presidential campaign.

After taking office, Bragg slowed down his office's move toward an indictment against Trump and said he had concerns about the strength of the case. That sparked a public protest by two prosecutors who were leading the investigation and resigned.

But Bragg convened a new grand jury early this year after successfully convicting Trump's family company for tax fraud. He called that result a "strong demarcation line" for proceeding with other parts of the probe.

In general, the grand jury process is seen as extremely favorable to prosecutors.

Proceedings are closed to the public and there is no judge. Prosecutors call and question witnesses and grand jurors — people drawn from the community — can ask questions. Grand jurors can either agree there is enough evidence to issue an indictment, find there is not enough evidence or tell the prosecutor to file lesser charges.

Joint Base Andrews lifts lockdown; no armed suspect found

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joint Base Andrews, one of the nation's most sensitive military bases and home to Air Force One, emerged from a lockdown Thursday evening after officials were unable to confirm reports of a man carrying an "assault-style" rifle on the base, authorities said.

No shots were fired and no suspect was found after hours of searching, according to a statement from the Maryland base.

The person was reportedly seen near the base's housing area around 2:30 p.m. Officials allowed a limited release from lockdown at 5 p.m., and the full lockdown was lifted an hour later.

Joint Base Andrews, a few miles outside Washington, houses the fleet of blue and white presidential aircraft, including Air Force One.

The base has faced security issues previously, including when an intruder reached the housing complex last month. A resident opened fire on the trespasser.

Two years ago, a man breached several spots on the base — including a military checkpoint — and climbed into a C-40, a transport jet primarily used by members of the Cabinet, Congress and military combatant commanders.

— Dazio reported from Los Angeles.

Trump's legal worries extend far beyond charges in New York

By The Associated Press undefined

The hush money case in New York that has led to criminal charges against Donald Trump is just one of a number of investigations that could pose legal problems for the former president.

Joe Tacopina, a lawyer for Trump, confirmed Thursday that he had been informed that the former president had been indicted on charges involving payments made during the 2016 campaign to silence claims of an extramarital sexual encounter. The specific charges were not immediately made public.

Trump faces a string of other inquiries as he campaigns for another term in 2024, including a criminal investigation over top secret documents found at his Florida estate, a probe in Washington into his efforts to undo the results of the 2020 presidential election, and an investigation in Georgia looking into whether he and his allies illegally interfered in the state's 2020 election.

Trump, a Republican, has denied any wrongdoing and says he is being targeted by Democrats trying to keep him from reclaiming the White House.

Here's a look at the probes underway in various states and venues:

MAR-A-LAGO

Of all the inquiries Trump faces, a Justice Department probe into the retention of top secret government documents at his Florida estate, Mar-a-Lago, could present the most significant legal jeopardy, with investigators saying in court filings last year that they were examining potential violations of multiple felony statutes.

As part of that inquiry, agents and prosecutors have spent months interviewing multiple people close to Trump, including an aide who was seen on surveillance video moving boxes of documents at the property, as they examine whether Trump or his representatives sought to obstruct the classified documents probe.

Federal officials obtained a search warrant last year to search his home, convincing a Florida judge there was probable cause of criminal activity there, including the willful retention of national defense information – a statute that by itself carries a penalty of up to 10 years in prison.

A grand jury in Washington has been hearing evidence in the investigation. Prosecutors last year granted limited immunity to one close Trump ally to secure his testimony and more recently were able to compel the testimony of a Trump lawyer said to have drafted a document stating that a diligent search for classified records had been conducted.

Attorney General Merrick Garland in November named Jack Smith, a veteran war crimes prosecutor who previously led the Justice Department's public integrity section, to serve as special counsel for the Mar-a-Lago investigation and key aspects of a separate probe into efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

2020 ELECTION AND CAPITOL RIOT

Smith has also been leading a team investigating efforts by Trump and his allies to overturn the election that Trump falsely claimed was stolen.

Federal prosecutors have been especially focused on a scheme by Trump allies to put forth a slate of fake presidential electors in key battleground states who falsely declared that Trump, not Democrat Joe Biden, had won the 2020 election. They have issued subpoenas to a number of state Republican Party chairs.

Federal prosecutors have brought multiple Trump administration officials before that grand jury for questioning, including the former Trump White House counsel and a top aide to Vice President Mike Pence. A federal judge recently ruled that Pence would have to testify before the grand jury, though his team was still deciding Thursday whether to appeal.

In a sign of the expanding nature of the investigation, election officials in multiple states whose results were disputed by Trump have received subpoenas asking for past communications with or involving Trump and his campaign aides.

A House committee that investigated the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol has recommended that the Justice Department bring criminal charges against Trump and associates who helped him launch a wide-ranging

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pressure campaign to try to overturn his 2020 election loss.

GEORGIA

After his 2020 election loss, Trump called Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger and urged him to "find 11,780 votes" — just enough to overtake Biden and overturn Trump's narrow loss in the state.

That Jan. 2 phone call was part of a monthslong effort by a special grand jury in Atlanta investigating whether crimes were committed as part of the pressure campaign to overturn Trump's defeat.

Among those questioned by the special grand jury were Rudy Giuliani, the former New York mayor and Trump lawyer; Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, and Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp.

Prosecutors have advised Giuliani and Georgia Republicans who served as fake electors that they are at risk of being indicted. The fake electors signed a certificate asserting Trump had won the election and declaring themselves the state's electors, even though Biden had won the state and Democratic electors had already been certified.

Trump and his allies have denied wrongdoing, and he has repeatedly described his phone call to Raffensperger as "perfect."

It's up to Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis, a Democrat, to decide whether to convene a regular grand jury and pursue criminal charges in the case. The foreperson on the special grand jury that investigated the case at Willis' request indicated publicly in February that the panel had recommended multiple indictments.

NEW YORK

New York Attorney General Letitia James has sued Trump and the Trump Organization, alleging they misled banks and tax authorities about the value of assets including golf courses and skyscrapers to get loans and tax benefits.

That lawsuit could lead to civil penalties against the company if James, a Democrat, prevails. She is seeking a \$250 million fine and a ban on Trump doing business in New York. Manhattan prosecutors investigated the same alleged conduct but did not pursue criminal charges.

A civil trial is scheduled in state court for October.

In a separate civil case in federal court in New York, Trump has been accused of raping a former magazine columnist in a dressing room in the mid-1990s. That case is scheduled to go to trial on April 25.

Trump has repeatedly insisted he never met the columnist, E. Jean Carroll, at the store and has dismissed her rape claims, saying, "Physically she's not my type." During an October deposition, he misidentified a decades-old photograph of her as one of his ex-wives.

Turkey's parliament ratifies Finland's membership in NATO

By SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Turkey's parliament on Thursday ratified Finland's application to join NATO, lifting the last hurdle in the way of the Nordic country's long-delayed accession into the Western military alliance.

All 276 lawmakers present voted in favor of Finland's bid, days after Hungary's parliament also endorsed Helsinki's accession.

"This will make the whole NATO family stronger & safer," NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg wrote on Twitter in welcoming Turkey's action.

Alarmed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine a year ago, Finland and Sweden abandoned their decades-long policy of nonalignment and applied to join the alliance.

Full unanimity is required to admit new members into the 30-member alliance, and Turkey and Hungary were the last two NATO members to ratify Finland's accession.

Sweden's bid to join the alliance, meanwhile, has been left hanging, with both Turkey and Hungary holding out on giving it the green light despite expressing support for NATO's expansion.

Turkey's government accuses Sweden of being too lenient toward groups it deems to be terrorist organizations and security threats, including militant Kurdish groups and people associated with a 2016 coup attempt.

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More recently, Turkey was angered by a series of demonstrations in Sweden, including a protest by an anti-Islam activist who burned the Quran outside the Turkish Embassy.

Hungary's government contends some Swedish politicians have made derisive statements about the condition of Hungary's democracy and played an active role in ensuring that billions in European Union funds were frozen over alleged rule-of-law and democracy violations.

Turkish officials have said that unlike Sweden, Finland fulfilled its obligations under a memorandum signed last year under which the two countries pledged to address Turkey's security concerns.

"As a NATO member, we naturally had some expectations and requests regarding the security concerns of our country," Akif Cagatay Kilic, a legislator from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's governing party, told parliament before the vote. "I would like to underline the concrete steps and their implementation by Finland, which supported and shaped the decision we are taking here."

Kilic added: "I'm aware that there is a large number of people watching us from Finland. ... We can say to them: 'Welcome to NATO.'"

Some opposition parties were critical of the Turkish government's position toward the two Nordic countries.

"Unfortunately, (Erdogan's ruling party) turned the right to veto Finland and Sweden's membership bids into a tool for blackmail and threat. We do not approve of it," said Hisyar Ozsoy, a legislator from the pro-Kurdish party. "We find the bargaining process (to press for) the extradition of Kurdish dissident writers, politicians and journalists ... to be ugly, wrong and unlawful."

Asked earlier this week about Sweden's NATO membership, Erdogan told reporters: "There are certain things we expect of them. They must be fulfilled first."

Sweden, which made constitutional changes to pass tougher anti-terrorism laws, has expressed hope that it will be able to join before NATO's July summit in Vilnius, Lithuania.

"Sweden faces more significant obstacles in its bid," Hamish Kinnear, Middle East and North Africa analyst at the risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft, wrote in emailed comments.

"Turkey is unlikely to approve its acceptance into the alliance before the election in May. The Quran burning incident sparked popular rage in Turkey and President Tayyip Recep Erdogan won't want to risk angering his conservative base ahead of the polls," Kinnear said.

The accession of Finland, which has a 1,340-kilometer (832-mile) border with Russia, has geographic and political importance for NATO, said Mai'a Cross, professor of political science at Northeastern University.

"Finland is at a very important strategic location and having that kind of shift from neutrality to respond to Russia's aggression is bolstering the demonstration of the political will of NATO," she said.

Cross added that the delay gave Finland more of a chance to prepare.

"Finland is already sitting in the meetings with NATO. It's already revamping its armed forces," she said. "So when it steps into NATO formally, it can actually hit the ground running."

American detained in Russia a 'brave, committed' journalist

By The Associated Press undefined

Working as a journalist in Moscow seemed a natural fit for Evan Gershkovich, the son of immigrants from the Soviet Union who grew up speaking Russian at home in Princeton, N.J.

After he graduated in 2014 from Bowdoin College, one of the country's most selective schools, however, "it took me awhile to figure out that journalism was the career for me," he said in a 2020 interview on the school's website.

Now Russia's Federal Security Service says the 31-year-old American reporter for The Wall Street Journal has been arrested on charges of espionage. The FSB, the country's top security agency and successor to the KGB, said Gershkovich was collecting information on an enterprise of the military-industrial complex.

The Journal denied the allegations and demanded his release.

Sarah Conly, a retired philosophy professor at Bowdoin, recalled that Gershkovich was unafraid to speak up while other students hung back.

"He was lively and outspoken and not afraid to express his views," she said in an email. "I have followed

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his career with admiration and am horrified at this outcome.”

After college, Gershkovich worked for an environmental organization in Southeast Asia, then moved to New York and worked as a cook until joining The New York Times as a clerk on the foreign desk.

Two years later, excited by what he'd learned at the Times, he wanted to get reporting experience and found a slot in 2017 at the Moscow Times, an English-language news site in the Russian capital.

“When you start reporting in Russia, you often hear that it will be very hard to get people to talk,” he said in the Bowdoin interview. “And while that may be true of Russian officialdom — though not all of it — I have found that if you go looking for the right people, many of them want to tell their stories.

“Of course, some will want their comments to be from an unnamed source, which means, as a reporter, you have to make sure you speak to them over encrypted channels and protect their identities. But they're out there,” he said.

Gershkovich later moved to the French news agency Agence France-Presse and then to the Journal.

Friends and colleagues were shocked by the news and took to social media to describe him as a committed journalist, dismissing the allegations as bogus and ridiculous.

“Journalism is not a crime,” they posted.

Henry Foy, the Financial Times' European diplomatic correspondent based in Brussels, tweeted: “Evan is an exemplary foreign correspondent, a brilliant reporter and a wonderful, kind-hearted friend.”

Joshua Yaffa, a Russia-Ukraine reporter for The New Yorker, posted: “Evan was not unaware or naïve about the risks. It's not like he was in Russia because no one bothered to tell him it was dangerous. He is a brave, committed, professional journalist who traveled to Russia to report on stories of import and interest.”

Oliver Carrol, a foreign correspondent for The Economist, tweeted that he hopes Gershkovich's bravery “carries through in these very dark hours. It's something you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. Let alone Evan, who is one of the nicest guys in journalism.”

Many foreign journalists pulled out of Russia after the country enacted laws to punish anyone who discredits Russian forces in Ukraine, and the U.S. State Department has repeatedly advised all Americans to leave the country.

The new law has left many of the remaining journalists uncertain about what would be considered crossing the line. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, “those carrying out normal journalistic activity will obviously keep working, if they have proper accreditation. There will be no problems with that.”

Russian political analyst Tatiana Stanovaya tweeted that “the problem is that the recently updated legislation and the FSB's interpretation of espionage today allow for the imprisonment of anyone who is simply interested in military affairs.”

Gershkovich is the first American reporter to be arrested on espionage charges in Russia since 1986, when Nicholas Daniloff of U.S. News and World Report was arrested by the KGB. Daniloff was released without charge 20 days later in a swap for an employee of the Soviet Union's U.N. mission who was arrested by the FBI, also on spying charges.

One other American is in prison on a spying conviction: former Marine and corporate security executive Paul Whelan, arrested in 2018 on charges the United States and his family say were trumped-up.

For Whelan's brother David, Gershkovich's arrest is painful.

“Our family is sorry to hear that another American family will have to experience the same trauma that we have had to endure for the past 1,553 days,” he said in a statement.

How 'swatting' calls spread as schools face real threats

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

A spate of threats and false reports of shooters have been pouring into schools and colleges across the country for months, raising concerns among law enforcement and elected leaders.

Schools in Pennsylvania and Utah were the latest targeted by so-called swatting. Computer-generated calls on Wednesday made claims about active shooters, but it was all a hoax. One day earlier, nearly 30 Massachusetts schools received fake threats.

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School officials are already on edge amid a backdrop of deadly school shootings, the latest Monday at a Christian school in Nashville.

Here is a look at the issues involved:

WHAT IS SWATTING?

Hundreds of cases of swatting occur annually, with some using caller ID spoofing to disguise their number. The goal is to get authorities, particularly a SWAT team, to respond to an address.

An FBI official said in November that they believe the wave of false threats focused on schools may be coming from outside of the country.

Officials said at the time that they had identified calls to about 250 colleges, 100 high schools and several junior high schools just since early June falsely reporting explosive devices being planted at the schools or saying that a shooting was imminent.

The FBI said in a statement Thursday that the agency was monitoring the situation as the swatting cases continued to wreak havoc at schools.

"While we have no information to indicate a specific and credible threat, we will continue to work with our local, state, and federal law enforcement partners to gather, share, and act upon threat information as it comes to our attention," the statement said.

WHERE ARE SWATTING CALLS HAPPENING?

Few regions of the country have been spared from such calls and the disruptions they cause.

The false calls Wednesday in Pennsylvania led to lockdowns or evacuations in several counties, according to state police. Law enforcement had to take each one seriously no matter how dubious it seemed.

Police in Pittsburgh, for instance, searched every room at Central Catholic High School, even after getting word that a report of people being hurt inside wasn't true within a minute, said Thomas Stangrecki, the interim police chief.

"We treated it as a real incident," Stangrecki said. Another threat at a nearby Catholic school had worried parents gathered outside.

At one Utah school, a social media post sought to reassure families: "Repeat: This is a hoax. No students have been harmed."

In Iowa, so many schools were targeted earlier this month that Gov. Kim Reynolds complained at a news conference about the toll it was taking to confirm the terror-inducing calls are fake.

"It's what no governor, it's what no parent or anybody — superintendent, teachers, kids — want to hear," Reynolds said. "And we're grateful and just so thankful that is what it was."

And in Minnesota, the state's Bureau of Criminal Apprehension issued a warning last month after fake calls forced eight schools into lockdown over two days.

DO FAKE THREATS HINDER RESPONSE TO REAL SHOOTINGS?

Authorities are grappling with the false alarms in a country where mass shooters have killed hundreds of people throughout history. Shooters have attacked in places like stores, theaters and workplaces, but it is in schools and colleges where the carnage reverberates perhaps most keenly.

At U.S. schools and colleges, 175 people have been killed in 15 mass shootings that resulted in the deaths of four or more people, not including the perpetrator — from 1999's Columbine High School massacre to Monday's shooting in Nashville, Tennessee. That's according to a database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University, in addition to other AP reporting.

DO EVEN FALSE THREATS POSE A RISK?

Such calls have proven dangerous and even outright deadly.

In 2017, a police officer in Wichita, Kansas, shot and killed a man while responding to a hoax emergency call. Just this month, the city agreed to pay \$5 million to settle a lawsuit, with the money to go to the two children of 28-year-old Andrew Finch.

The hoax call that led to his death began as a feud between two online gamers. One of the gamers recruited Tyler Barriss to "swat" the other gamer. But the address used was old, leading police to Finch, who was not involved in the dispute or playing the video game.

Barriss was sentenced to 20 years in federal prison, while the other two gamers were sentenced to 15-

and 18-month terms.

Police in Maryland also shot a 20-year-old Maryland man in the face with rubber bullets after a fake hostage situation was reported at his home.

The FBI in Pittsburgh nodded to the risk, noting in a statement about the school threat cases that it "takes swatting very seriously because it puts innocent people at risk."

Peter Smith in Pittsburgh, Ron Todt in Philadelphia, Marc Levy in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and Lindsay Whitehurst in Washington contributed to this report.

9 killed in Army Black Hawk helicopter crash in Kentucky

By SHARON JOHNSON, REBECCA REYNOLDS and DYLAN LOVAN Associated Press

FORT CAMPBELL, Ky. (AP) — U.S. Army investigators are trying to determine what caused two Black Hawk medical evacuation helicopters to crash during a routine nighttime training exercise in Kentucky, killing all nine soldiers aboard. No one was hurt on the ground.

Nondice Thurman, a spokesperson for Fort Campbell, said the deaths happened Wednesday night in southwestern Kentucky during a routine training mission.

A statement from Fort Campbell said the two HH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, part of the 101st Airborne Division, crashed around 10 p.m. Wednesday in Trigg County in southwest Kentucky. The 101st Airborne confirmed the crash about 30 miles (48 kilometers) northwest of Fort Campbell.

One helicopter had five people aboard and the other had four, Brig. Gen. John Lubas, the 101st Airborne deputy commander, said Thursday. The helicopters crashed in a field near a residential area with no injuries on the ground, Lubas said.

An Army spokesperson declined to comment on whether the helicopters collided in the air.

"At this time, there is no determination on the specifics regarding the accident," Daniel Matthews, a public affairs officer for the 101st Airborne Division, said in an emailed statement Thursday afternoon. Matthews said an aviation safety team from Fort Rucker, Alabama, will investigate the accident.

Lubas said it is unclear what caused the crash.

"This was a training progression, and specifically they were flying a multi-ship formation, two ships, under night vision goggles at night," Lubas said. He said officials believe the accident occurred when "they were doing flying, not deliberate medical evacuation drills."

The helicopters have something similar to the black boxes on passenger planes, which records the performance of aircrafts in flight and are used by investigators to analyze crashes.

"We're hopeful that will provide quite a bit of information of what occurred," Lubas said.

Speaking a news conference Thursday morning, Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said the state would do everything it can to support the families of those killed.

"We're going to do what we always do. We're going to wrap our arms around these families, and we're going to be there with them, not just for the days, but the weeks and the months and the years to come," Beshear said.

The Black Hawk helicopter is a critical workhorse for the U.S. Army and is used in security, transport, medical evacuations, search and rescue and other missions. The helicopters are known to many people from the 2001 movie "Black Hawk Down," which is about a violent battle in Somalia eight years earlier.

Black Hawks were a frequent sight in the skies over Iraq and Afghanistan during the wars conducting combat missions and are also used by the Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment. They were also often used to ferry visiting senior leaders to headquarters locations in the Iraq and Afghanistan war zones.

Fort Campbell is located near the Tennessee border, about 60 miles (97 kilometers) northwest of Nashville, and the crash occurred in the Trigg County, Kentucky, community of Cadiz.

Nick Tomaszewski, who lives about a mile from where the crash occurred, said he saw two helicopters flying over his house moments before the crash.

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"For whatever reason last night my wife and I were sitting there looking out on the back deck and I said "Wow, those two helicopters look low and they look kind of close to one another tonight,"" he said.

The helicopters flew over and looped back around and moments later "we saw what looked like a firework went off in the sky."

"All of the lights in their helicopter went out. It was like they just poofed ... and then we saw a huge glow like a fireball," Tomaszewski said.

Flyovers for training exercises happen almost daily and the helicopters typically fly low but not so close together, he said.

"There were two back to back. We typically see one and then see another one a few minutes later, and we just saw two of them flying together last night," he said.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin offered his condolences to the families of those killed.

"My heart goes out to the families of these servicemembers and to the members of the 101st Airborne Division who bravely and proudly serve our country each and every day," Lloyd said in a statement.

In the Kentucky House and in the Senate, members stood for a moment of silence Thursday morning in honor of the crash victims. Kentucky state Rep. Walker Thomas said the crash occurred about 15 to 20 minutes from his home.

"They're there to protect us," Thomas said. "And we're constantly seeing these helicopters flying over our communities."

Thomas spoke about how connected Fort Campbell soldiers and their families are to the communities near the Army post.

"The Fort Campbell soldiers that live in our communities, go to our churches ... they go to our schools, their kids do," he added. "And this really hurts."

By Thursday morning, word of the crash was spreading through the community of Clarksville, Tennessee, just outside Fort Campbell.

Chatterra Watts, a former Army soldier who was stationed at Fort Campbell from about 2015 to 2019, said once she heard about the crash, she jumped on social media to try to find out more and if she knew any of the victims.

"I pray for their friends and their families and just hope that we can all come together as a community and that something positive will come out of something so tragic," Watts said.

Last month, two Tennessee National Guard pilots were killed when their Black Hawk helicopter crashed along an Alabama highway during a training exercise.

Lovan and Reynolds reported from Louisville, Kentucky. Associated Press writers Bruce Schreiner in Frankfort, Kentucky; Lolita Baldor in Washington and Denise Lavoie in Richmond, Virginia; contributed to this report. AP researcher Rhonda Shafner in New York also contributed.

Judge's ruling undercuts US health law's preventive care

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A federal judge in Texas who previously ruled to dismantle the Affordable Care Act struck down a narrower but key part of the nation's health law Thursday that requires most insurers to cover preventive services that include screenings for cancer, diabetes and mental health.

Other no-cost services, including HIV screenings, are also impacted under the ruling by U.S. District Judge Reed O'Connor that opponents say will jeopardize preventive care for millions of Americans.

Experts cautioned that insurers are unlikely to stop any coverage immediately. The Biden administration was expected to appeal and seek a stay of the ruling.

"This is not the potential fatal blow to the ACA like previous court cases, but it would limit a very popular benefit that tens of millions of people use," said Larry Levitt, executive vice president for health policy at the Kaiser Family Foundation.

The decision comes more than four years after O'Connor, a nominee of former President George W.

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Bush, ruled that the entire health care law also known as "Obamacare" was unconstitutional. The U.S. Supreme Court overturned that ruling.

This time O'Connor blocked only the requirement that most insurers cover a range of preventive care — including screenings for multiple types of cancer — siding with plaintiffs who include a conservative activist in Texas and a Christian dentist who opposed mandatory coverage for contraception and an HIV prevention treatment on religious grounds.

The requirements for coverage are driven by recommendations by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, which is made up of volunteers. O'Connor ruled that enforcing the recommendations was "unlawful" and a violation of the Constitution's Appointment Clause, which lays out how government officials can be appointed.

Dr. Michael Barry, chairman of the federal task force, said in a statement following the ruling that people with low incomes have been able to get services they need as care has expanded over the past decade because of the law.

"Fundamentally, people across the country deserve the opportunity to receive these important preventive services that have been proven to help them live longer and healthier lives," Barry said.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Human Services were reviewing the ruling, but called the case "yet another attack" on the health care law that has been in place for 13 years and survived multiple legal challenges.

The Biden administration previously told the court that the outcome of the case "could create extraordinary upheaval in the United States' public health system." More than 20 states, mostly controlled by Democrats, had urged O'Connor against a sweeping ruling that would do away with the preventive care coverage requirement entirely.

The ruling applies to recommendations made by the task force after March 2010, when the Affordable Care Act was enacted. Some of the nation's largest medical groups came out against the lawsuit, warning that insurers in the future could impose cost-sharing on patients for screenings that are now fully covered.

Levitt said if O'Connor's ruling is allowed to stand, insurers are likely to look at changes in coverage beginning in the next calendar year, since existing contracts are already in effect.

Although the ruling impacts a broad spectrum of preventive care, it does not wipe out coverage for all preventive screenings. For instance, experts said the decision would not overturn coverage for preventive women's health services that were approved outside the task force.

Some cancer screenings approved before 2010 would also not be affected, including screenings for cervical and colorectal cancer, said Alina Salganicoff, senior vice president and director for women's health policy at the Kaiser foundation. But she said screenings for lung and skin cancer, which were more recently approved, could be affected.

In September, O'Connor ruled that required coverage of the HIV prevention treatment known as PrEP, which is a pill taken daily to prevent infection, violated the plaintiffs' religious beliefs. That decision also undercut the broader system that determines which preventive drugs are covered in the U.S., ruling that a federal task force that recommends coverage of preventive treatments is unconstitutional.

Employers' religious objections have been a sticking point in past challenges to former President Barack Obama's health care law, including over contraception.

The lawsuit is among the attempts by conservatives to chip away at the Affordable Care Act — or wipe it out entirely — since it was signed into law in 2010. The attorney who filed the suit was an architect of the Texas abortion law that was the nation's strictest before the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in June and allowed states to ban the procedure.

Associated Press reporters Amanda Seitz and Seung Min Kim in Washington contributed to this report.

Has *T. rex* lost its bite? Menacing snarl may be wrong

By MADDIE BURAKOFF AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The *Tyrannosaurus rex* is often shown baring massive, sharp teeth, like the ferocious

creature in "Jurassic Park." But new research suggests that this classic image might be wrong.

The teeth on T. rex and other big theropods were likely covered by scaly lips, concludes a study published Thursday in the journal *Science*. The dinosaur's teeth didn't stick out when its mouth was closed, and even in a wide open bite, you might just see the tips, the scientists found.

The research is the latest in a long back-and-forth over how dinosaur mouths really looked.

Recent depictions show big teeth jutting out of the dinosaurs' jaws, even when closed. Some thought the predators' teeth were just too big to fit in their mouths, said study author Thomas Cullen, a paleontologist at Auburn University in Alabama.

When researchers compared skulls from dinosaurs and living reptiles, though, they found this wasn't the case. Some large monitor lizards actually have bigger teeth than T. rex compared to their skull size, and can still fit them under a set of scaly lips, Cullen said.

The scientists also found clues in the pattern of wear and tear on tooth surfaces.

For a creature like a crocodile, whose teeth stick out of its mouth, the exposed part gets worn down quickly — "like someone's taken a sander to the side of the tooth," said another study author Mark Witton, a paleoartist at England's University of Portsmouth.

But when researchers analyzed a tooth from a Daspletosaurus, a T. rex relative, they found it was in good condition and it didn't show that uneven damage pattern.

With this evidence and other clues from the dinosaurs' anatomy, the study makes a good case for lipped tyrannosaurs, said University of Maryland paleontologist Thomas Holtz, who was not involved with the study. Still, "we're not talking kissy lips," he pointed out — they'd be thin and scaly like those of the Komodo dragon, a large lizard.

It's not the first time our depictions of dinosaurs have been called into question: Other research has shown that T. rex was more hunched over than we used to think, and that fierce velociraptors probably sported feathers. Most of what we know about dinosaurs comes from their bones, but it can be harder to get clear answers about soft tissues like skin, which usually aren't preserved as fossils.

Adding lips may make dinosaurs look a little less ferocious, but it also makes them feel more realistic, Witton said.

"You don't really see a monster," he said. "You see an animal."

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science and Educational Media Group. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Canada mass shooting inquiry identifies many police failings

TRURO, Nova Scotia (AP) — A public inquiry has found widespread failures in how Canada's federal police force responded to the country's worst mass shooting and recommends that the government rethink the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's central role in the country's policing.

In a seven-volume report released Thursday, the Mass Casualty Commission also says the RCMP missed red flags in the years leading up to the Nova Scotia rampage on April 18-19, 2020, which left 22 people slain by a denture maker disguised as an RCMP officer and driving a replica police vehicle.

The assailant, Gabriel Wortman, was killed by two Mounties at a gas station in Enfield, Nova Scotia, 13 hours into his rampage. Disguised as a police officer, Wortman shot people in their homes and set fires in a killing spree that included 16 crime scenes in five rural communities across the Canadian province of Nova Scotia.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called it one of the darkest chapters in Canadian history and said he hopes the report is one of the many steps toward ensuring a tragedy like that never happens again. Trudeau attended the report's release in Nova Scotia and said his government will examine it closely. "There is no question that there needs to be changes and there will be," Trudeau said.

Among other things, the commission says the national police force is badly disorganized. Its review of the RCMP's 5,000 pages of policies and procedures found the force's own members were unclear on proper

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responses to critical incidents and communication with the public.

The report delves deeply into the causes of the mass shooting. These include the killer's violence toward his spouse and the failure of police to act on it, and "implicit biases" that seemed to blind officers and community members to the danger a white, male professional posed.

In response, the commissioners call for a future RCMP where the current 26-week model of training is scrapped — as it's no longer sufficient for the complex demands of policing. The academy would be replaced with a three-year, degree-based model of education, as exists in Finland.

The document begins with an account of the police errors in the years before the killings, and the events of April 18 and 19.

The report's summary says that soon after the shooting started in Portapique, Nova Scotia, RCMP commanders disregarded witness accounts, and senior Mounties wrongly assumed residents were mistaken when they reported seeing the killer driving a fully marked RCMP cruiser.

"Important community sources of information were ignored," it says.

In addition, the report says police failed to promptly send out alerts to the public with a description of the killer until it was too late for some of his victims.

Having laid out a litany of shortcomings, the inquiry calls for a fresh external review of the police force. It says the federal minister of public safety should then establish priorities for the RCMP, "retaining the tasks that are suitable to a federal policing agency, and identifying what responsibilities are better re-assigned to other agencies."

"This may entail a reconfiguration of policing in Canada and a new approach to federal financial support for provincial and municipal policing services," the report says.

Michael Duheme, the interim RCMP commissioner, said he hasn't had time to go through the recommendations despite the RCMP getting a copy of the report on Wednesday.

Duheme said he was "deeply sorry" for the pain and suffering endured by families of the victims. "I can't even imagine what you have endured," he said, adding that the RCMP "must learn and we are committed to do just that."

Dennis Daley, the head of the RCMP in Nova Scotia, said to the families that he knows that the response "wasn't what you needed to be. And for that I am deeply sorry."

The victims in Canada's worst mass shooting included an RCMP officer, a teacher, health-care workers, retirees, neighbors of the shooter and two correctional officers killed in their home. The rampage started when Wortman attacked his spouse.

"Nothing will bring my brother back or any of the other people in this horrible ordeal," said Scott McLeod, the brother of victim Sean McLeod. "If this report makes a positive change nationwide it will be appreciated, I know, by families."

The report details Wortman's history of domestic violence in his relationships with women, including his spouse Lisa Banfield. In particular, the report notes the experience of Brenda Forbes, a neighbor in Portapique who informed the RCMP of Wortman's violence toward Banfield. He never faced any consequences, but she dealt with years of stalking, harassment and threats from Wortman, prompting her to leave the province.

Jessica Zita, lawyer for Banfield, read a statement from her client in which she says she hopes there will be meaningful changes from the recommendations especially those involving domestic violence.

Mass shootings are relatively rare in Canada. The country overhauled its gun-control laws after gunman Marc Lepine killed 14 women and himself at Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique college in 1989. Before the Nova Scotia rampage, that had been the country's worst,

Gun injuries in US surged during pandemic, CDC study shows

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — For every American killed by gunfire, an estimated two or more more survive, often with terrible injuries — a fact that public health experts say is crucial to understanding the full impact of guns on society.

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A new government study highlights just how violent America's recent past has been by showing a surge in gunfire injuries during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the number of people fatally shooting each other — and themselves -- also increased.

The number of people injured by gunfire was nearly 40% higher in 2020 and 2021, compared with 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a study published Thursday. In 2022, gun injuries tapered off, but were still 20% higher than before the pandemic.

Gun injuries rose similarly for men and women over the past three years, while the largest proportional increase occurred among children younger than 15, a subset that remains a small fraction of the overall problem.

Experts say the CDC gun injury study, which uses data from hospital emergency departments, helps provide a more comprehensive picture of gun violence in America than simply measuring homicides and suicides.

"Hospitals are a great place to keep the pulse on who is being shot, and when and where," said Catherine Barber, a senior injury researcher at Harvard University's school of public health.

The CDC study results came from more than 2,200 U.S. hospital emergency departments, which represent the bulk of the nation's ERs, said Thomas Simon, one of the authors of the new study.

The study suggests that the number of gunshot-related ER visits at hospitals in the study rose from around 50,000 in 2019 to more than 72,000 in 2020. Because more than a quarter of U.S. hospital emergency departments were not involved in the study, the actual number is likely significantly higher.

Experts believe a variety of factors contributed to the pandemic surge in gun violence, including a rise in guns purchased, more time spent inside homes where guns are present and mental health struggles stemming from social isolation and economic hardships.

The CDC study shows a rise in gun injuries around mid-March 2020, after a pandemic emergency was declared and lockdowns and other measures were put into place. A sharper jump occurred a couple of months later, in the second half of May, when protests and civil unrest followed the Minneapolis police killing of George Floyd.

While the CDC study did not differentiate between injuries caused by assaults or accidents, other research has shown that about 3 out of 4 gunshot wounds are intentional.

The CDC says more than 45,000 people died from gun-related injuries in the U.S. in 2020, and more than 47,000 in 2021.

The country's gun violence problem was thrust into the national conversation again this week after a shooter killed 3 children and 3 adults at a Christian school in Tennessee; nobody who was shot survived. The shooter was killed by police.

"We are in a week when people are paying attention to this issue again, sadly, after a mass shooting in Nashville" said Nina Vinik, executive director of Project Unloaded, an advocacy group focused on the impact of gun violence on children. "Hopefully this paper will add new data to that conversation."

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science and Educational Media Group. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Pope showing 'marked improvement,' could leave hospital soon

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis showed a "marked improvement" Thursday after being given intravenous antibiotics for a bronchitis infection and could be released from the hospital in the coming days, the Vatican and his doctors reported.

The 86-year-old pontiff, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, ate breakfast, read the newspapers, rested and worked from his hospital room at Rome's Gemelli hospital, according to Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni.

An additional update provided late Thursday by doctors revealed Francis had been diagnosed with bron-

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chitis. The infection "required the administration of antibiotic therapy on an infusion basis which produced the expected effects with a marked improvement in his state of health," the doctors' statement said.

"Based on the expected course, the Holy Father could be discharged in the coming days," it concluded.

The timeframe brought into question Francis' participation in Palm Sunday Mass in St. Peter's Square this weekend, as well as his presence during Holy Week activities. They include Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday on April 9.

Francis was hospitalized Wednesday after having trouble breathing in recent days.

It was the first time he had back to Gemelli since he had 33 centimeters (13 inches) of his colon removed and spent 10 days there in July 2021.

Despite his absence, the Holy See was abuzz with activity Thursday: Two Vatican offices issued a historic statement repudiating the "Doctrine of Discovery," the legal theory backed by 15th century papal bulls that legitimized the colonial-era seizure of Native lands and form the basis of some property law today.

And there was continued fallout over the sudden resignation of a founding member of the pope's sex abuse prevention board, with Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley pushing back against Rev. Hans Zollner's critiques in his remarkable resignation statement issued the previous day.

He said soon after the intestinal surgery that he had recovered fully and could eat normally. But in a Jan. 24 interview with The Associated Press, Francis said his diverticulosis, or bulges in the intestinal wall, had "returned."

Francis has used a wheelchair for over a year due to strained ligaments in his right knee and a small knee fracture, though he had been walking more with a cane of late.

Francis has said he resisted having surgery for the knee problems because he didn't respond well to general anesthesia during the 2021 intestinal surgery.

FACT FOCUS: No 'incredible rise' in transgender shooters

By SOPHIA TULP Associated Press

Moments after the assailant who killed six people at a Nashville private school was identified as transgender, a baseless narrative emerged: that there has been an incredible rise in transgender or nonbinary mass shooters in recent years.

Some pundits and political influencers on social media went further, suggesting that movements for trans rights are radicalizing activists into terrorists.

The data tells a different story, according to gender and criminology experts. Mass casualty shootings perpetrated by someone identifying as trans or nonbinary are rare, and in fact, those groups are far more likely to be the victims of violence. Here's a closer look at the facts.

CLAIM: Four recent shootings show there has been an "incredible rise" in transgender or nonbinary mass shooters in the past few years, making the group "by far the largest group committing as a percentage of the population."

Donald Trump Jr. spread the narrative widely on Twitter, claiming the supposed "incredible rise" and later saying there was a clear trend forming. The idea was amplified by hundreds of other social media users. Trump Jr. did not respond to a request for comment.

THE FACTS: While specific data on transgender and nonbinary mass shooters can be hard to isolate, available information shows that the overwhelming majority of assailants in mass shootings are cisgender males.

In making the claim, social media users are citing four examples over the past five years in which the assailant in a shooting identified as trans or nonbinary: the November killing of five at a gay nightclub in Colorado Springs, Colorado; a 2019 shooting at a Denver-area school by two shooters, one of them a trans man, that left one student dead and eight wounded; a 2018 shooting at a Maryland warehouse that left four dead, including the shooter; and the shooting Monday in Nashville.

The number of mass shootings committed by those identifying as trans or nonbinary — and their ratio compared to mass shootings committed by other groups — is hard to quantify. It depends on the database

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used, how the act is defined and how gender identity is recorded — for example, transgender males may statistically be counted as just men. But experts agree that the most reputable information still shows a clear pattern that cisgender males are the most likely to commit such an act of mass violence.

Using the Gun Violence Archive, and a definition for mass shooting meaning “at least four gun injuries,” there have been 3,561 mass shootings since the beginning of 2016.

Laura Dugan, a professor of human security and sociology at Ohio State University, said the four widely cited examples out of the 3,561 shootings translates to 0.11% being perpetrated by someone who is not cisgender — a very low number relative to the number of mass shootings total.

“We cannot statistically make any claim of a trend,” she said.

Dugan also pointed out that there are some doubts about the nonbinary identity asserted by the Colorado Springs shooter.

James Alan Fox, a statistician and professor of criminology, law and public policy at Northeastern University, helps maintain the Associated Press-USA TODAY-Northeastern database of mass killings in the U.S., which does not contain full data on perpetrators’ gender. The claims on social media this week amount to extreme cherry-picking of data, he said.

“There are a lot of mass shootings, hundreds of mass shootings, and to cherry-pick four of them and say here’s a trend, that’s wrong,” Fox said. “You can’t make a conclusion that that’s significant. It is not significant in any statistical sense.”

Olivera Jokić, the director of the gender studies program at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, referred to a National Institutes of Justice database that tracked U.S. mass shootings — defined as a shooting that kills four or more people — from 1966 to 2019. The research found that of the 172 people who committed public mass shootings covered in the database, 97.7% were male. The data makes no distinction between transgender and cisgender perpetrators.

“The political rhetoric using ‘statistical information’ about gender identification of mass shooters is wrong,” she said, “and seems to serve to distract from existing discussions about mass shootings as a public health problem.”

The claims come amid a flood of legislation nationwide targeting transgender people. Conservative lawmakers are pushing dozens of proposals in statehouses to restrict transgender athletes, gender-affirming care and drag shows. Last week, a pair of laws passed in Iowa that restrict the bathrooms transgender students can use and ban gender-affirming medical care. Other legislative proposals in at least eight states could prevent transgender people from changing their driver’s licenses and birth certificates.

Against that backdrop, studies also show trans people are more than four times more likely than cisgender people to be victims of violent crime, according to a report by the Williams Institute, an LGBTQ think tank at the University of California, Los Angeles.

“This is capitalizing on tragedy for political purposes,” Fox said. “One should not conclude that being trans or nonbinary, they should be more likely to commit a crime like this.”

This is part of AP’s effort to address widely shared misinformation, including work with outside companies and organizations to add factual context to misleading content that is circulating online. Learn more about fact-checking at AP.

College ends partnership with school over the David issue

HILLSDALE, Mich. (AP) — A Michigan college has ended its partnership with a Florida charter school whose principal was forced to resign after a parent complained sixth graders were exposed to pornography during a lesson on Renaissance art that included Michelangelo’s David sculpture.

A Hillsdale College spokesperson said Tallahassee Classical School no longer is affiliated with the small, Christian classical liberal arts college in southern Michigan, MLive.com reported Thursday.

“This drama around teaching Michelangelo’s ‘David’ sculpture, one of the most important works of art in existence, has become a distraction from, and a parody of, the actual aims of classical education,” spokesperson Emily Stack Davis wrote in a statement. “Of course, Hillsdale’s K-12 art curriculum includes

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Michelangelo's 'David' and other works of art that depict the human form."

Tallahassee Classical School was licensed to use Hillsdale's classical education curriculum, but its license was "revoked and will expire at the end of the school year," Davis said.

Hillsdale provides K-12 curriculum in partnership with dozens of charter schools across the country.

The Florida school's principal Hope Carrasquilla resigned last week following an ultimatum from the school board's chairman.

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

Tallahassee Classical School did not immediately respond to phone messages left Thursday seeking comment.

After Carrasquilla resigned, the Florence museum housing the David on Sunday invited parents and students from Tallahassee Classical School to visit the statue in person. Florence's mayor also tweeted an invitation to Carrasquilla so he could personally honor her.

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

US: Russia seeks arms-for-food deal with North Korea

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House on Thursday said it has new evidence that Russia is looking again to North Korea for weapons to fuel the war in Ukraine, this time in a deal that would provide Pyongyang with needed food and other commodities in return.

It's the latest accusation that Russia, desperate for weaponry and restricted by sanctions and export controls, is turning to "rogue" nations to help it continue to prosecute the 13-month-old war.

"As part of this proposed deal, Russia would receive over two dozen kinds of weapons and munitions from Pyongyang," White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said. "We also understand that Russia is seeking to send a delegation to North Korea and that Russia is offering North Korea food in exchange for munitions."

The administration has previously declassified intelligence to present evidence that Iran sold hundreds of attack drones to Russia over the summer and that the Wagner Group, a private Russian military company, has taken delivery of arms from North Korea to help bolster its forces as they fight side-by-side with Russian troops in Ukraine.

Experts believe the food situation in North Korea is the worst it has been under Kim Jong Un's 11-year rule, but they still say they see no signs of imminent famine or mass deaths. Kim vowed to strengthen state control over agriculture and take a spate of other steps to increase grain production, North Korean state media reported earlier this month.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said last month that U.S. intelligence suggested China was considering providing arms and ammunition to Russia, though White House officials have said they have yet to see evidence of Beijing following through with weapons delivery.

The publicizing of Russia's efforts to get weapons from North Korea is just the latest example of the Biden administration loosening restrictions on intelligence findings and making them public over the course of the grinding war in Ukraine.

The administration has said it has sought to disseminate the intelligence findings so allies and the public remain clear-eyed about Moscow's intent and Russian President Vladimir Putin thinks twice about his actions.

Earlier Thursday, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control announced sanctions against a Slovakian national, Ashot Mkrtychev, alleging he attempted to facilitate arms deals between Russia and North Korea.

Kirby said Mkrtychev is at the center of the new North Korea-Russia deal, which has yet to be consum-

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mated. He added that the U.S. does not have evidence that Mkrtychev was involved in the earlier transfer of weapons to Russia's Wagner Group, whose mercenaries have been in the center of a monthslong battle for the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut.

Between the end of 2022 and early 2023, Treasury said Mkrtychev worked with North Korean officials to obtain over two dozen kinds of weapons and munitions for Russia in exchange for commercial aircraft, raw materials and commodities to be sent to North Korea.

Mkrtychev worked with a Russian citizen to find commercial aircraft to deliver goods to North Korea in the exchange.

"Russia has lost over 9,000 pieces of heavy military equipment since the start of the war, and thanks in part to multilateral sanctions and export controls, Putin has become increasingly desperate to replace them," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a statement. "Schemes like the arms deal pursued by this individual show that Putin is turning to suppliers of last resort like Iran and the DPRK."

North Korea, an outlier on the global stage, has sought to enhance relations with Russia since its invasion of Ukraine brought an avalanche of sanctions from the West and broad international condemnation.

Any arms deal with Russia would be a violation of U.N. resolutions that ban North Korea from exporting to or importing weapons from other countries.

North Korea is the only nation aside from Russia and Syria to recognize the independence of Russia-backed separatist territories, Donetsk and Luhansk, in eastern Ukraine.

Responding to Indigenous, Vatican rejects Discovery Doctrine

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican on Thursday responded to Indigenous demands and formally repudiated the "Doctrine of Discovery," the theories backed by 15th-century "papal bulls" that legitimized the colonial-era seizure of Native lands and form the basis of some property laws today.

A Vatican statement said the papal bulls, or decrees, "did not adequately reflect the equal dignity and rights of Indigenous peoples" and have never been considered expressions of the Catholic faith.

The statement, from the Vatican's development and education offices, marked a historic recognition of the Vatican's own complicity in colonial-era abuses committed by European powers. It was issued under history's first Latin American pontiff, who was hospitalized Thursday with a respiratory infection, exactly one year after Francis met at the Vatican with Indigenous leaders from Canada who raised the issue.

On Thursday, these Indigenous leaders welcomed the statement as a first good step, even though it didn't address the rescinding of the bulls themselves and continued to take distance from acknowledging actual Vatican culpability in abuses. The statement said the papal documents had been "manipulated" for political purposes by competing colonial powers "to justify immoral acts against Indigenous peoples that were carried out, at times, without opposition from ecclesial authorities."

It said it was right to "recognize these errors," acknowledge the terrible effects of colonial-era assimilation policies on Indigenous peoples and ask for their forgiveness.

The statement was a response to decades of Indigenous demands for the Vatican to formally rescind the papal bulls that provided the Portuguese and Spanish kingdoms the religious backing to expand their territories in Africa and the Americas for the sake of spreading Christianity.

Those decrees underpin the "Doctrine of Discovery," a legal concept coined in a 1823 U.S. Supreme Court decision that has come to be understood as meaning that ownership and sovereignty over land passed to Europeans because they "discovered" it.

It was cited as recently as a 2005 Supreme Court decision involving the Oneida Indian Nation written by the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

During Pope Francis' 2022 visit to Canada, where he apologized to Indigenous peoples for the residential school system that forcibly removed Native children from their homes, he was met with demands for a formal repudiation of the papal bulls.

Two Indigenous women unfurled a banner at the altar of the National Shrine of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré

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on July 29 that read: "Rescind the Doctrine" in bright red and black letters.

Before that, Michelle Schenandoah of the Oneida Nation had called for the Vatican to rescind the papal bulls when she delivered the closing remarks of the First Nations delegation that met with Francis during a weeklong visit last year by Native groups from Canada. On Thursday, she called the Vatican statement "another step in the right direction," but noted that it didn't mention the rescinding of the bulls themselves.

"I think what this does is it really puts the responsibility on nation states such as the United States, to look at its use of the Doctrine of Discovery," she said in a interview from Syracuse, New York, where she is a professor of Indigenous law at Syracuse University's College of Law. "This goes beyond land. It really has created generation upon generation of genocidal policies directed towards Indigenous peoples. And I think that it's time for these governments to take full accountability for their actions."

In the statement, the Vatican said: "The Catholic Church therefore repudiates those concepts that fail to recognize the inherent human rights of Indigenous peoples, including what has become known as the legal and political 'doctrine of discovery.'"

Phil Fontaine, a former national chief of the Assembly of First Nations in Canada who was also part of the First Nations delegation that met with Francis at the Vatican, said the statement was "wonderful," resolved an outstanding issue and now puts the matter to civil authorities to revise property laws that cite the doctrine.

"The church has done one thing, as it said it would do, for the Holy Father. Now the ball is in the court of governments, the United States and in Canada, but particularly in the United States where the doctrine is embedded in the law," he told The Associated Press.

The Vatican offered no evidence that the three papal bulls (Dum Diversas in 1452, Romanus Pontifex in 1455 and Inter Caetera in 1493) had themselves been formally abrogated, rescinded or rejected, as Vatican officials have often said. But it cited a subsequent bull, Sublimis Deus in 1537, that reaffirmed that Indigenous peoples shouldn't be deprived of their liberty or the possession of their property, and were not to be enslaved.

Cardinal Michael Czerny, the Canadian Jesuit whose office co-authored the statement, stressed that the original bulls had long ago been abrogated and that the use of the term "doctrine" — which in this case is a legal term, not a religious one — had led to centuries of confusion about the church's role.

The original bulls, he said, "are being treated as if they were teaching, magisterial or doctrinal documents, and they are an ad hoc political move. And I think to solemnly repudiate an ad hoc political move is to generate more confusion than clarity."

He stressed that the statement wasn't just about setting the historical record straight, but "to discover, identify, analyze and try to overcome what we can only call the enduring effects of colonialism today."

It was significant that the repudiation of the "Doctrine of Discovery" came during the pontificate of history's first Latin American pope. Even before the Canadian trip, the Argentine pope had apologized to Native peoples in Bolivia in 2015 for the crimes of the colonial-era conquest of the Americas.

Felix Hoehn, a property and administrative law professor at the University of Saskatchewan, said the Vatican statement would have no legal bearing on land claims in Canada today, but would have symbolic value.

"The most that any papal repudiation of the doctrine (or the bulls, for that matter) can do in relation to Canadian law is to apply pressure on the Supreme Court of Canada to renounce the doctrine as part of Canadian law," he said.

Beyond that, though, is the hope that the statement could show that the Catholic Church wants to be an ally with Indigenous peoples as they fight for their human rights and their land, and to protect it, said the Rev. David McCallum, an American Jesuit who has worked with Indigenous peoples in the Syracuse area and was consulted during the drafting of the statement.

"So now for the church to not only acknowledge the damage, but also to repudiate the whole mindset of cultural superiority, of racial superiority to, in a sense, renounce that whole way of thinking and say that forever forward the church wants to be an active ally in protecting Indigenous human rights along

with all human rights, I think it's a big statement," he said.

Rob Gillies contributed to this report from Toronto.

Used car prices are surging. Here's why you should buy now

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

Well, it was nice while it lasted.

For nearly a year, the average used vehicle in the United States had been edging toward affordable again for millions of people. The relief felt belated and relatively slight, but it was welcome nonetheless.

From an eye-watering peak of \$31,400 in April of last year, the average price had dropped 14% to \$27,125 early this month.

Now, with the supply of used vehicles failing to keep up with robust demand, prices are creeping up again, with signs pointing to further increases ahead. So many buyers have been priced out of the new-car market that fewer trade-ins are landing on dealer lots. Deepening the shortage, fewer used vehicles are coming off leases or being off-loaded by rental car companies.

Average list prices for used car have edged up by about \$700 in the past month, and Alex Yurchenko, chief data officer for Black Book, which tracks prices, expects them to keep rising at least into summer.

"If you have to buy a used vehicle," he suggested, "right now would be a good time."

Pete Catalano, a dealer in Independence, Missouri, near Kansas City, has been struggling to get his hands on enough affordably priced cars. Typically, Catalano and his daughter, who co-own Stadium Auto, would have about 50 vehicles on their used-car lot near Arrowhead Stadium. They now have only about half as many. Some of their rival dealers, Catalano said, enjoy a competitive advantage because they can afford to offer financing to buyers with poor credit.

Squeezed by higher prices for gasoline, groceries and utilities, many of Catalano's customers can't afford either new or late-model used vehicles. Some would-be buyers he knows are using tax refunds just to make ends meet instead of buying a needed car.

"A used inexpensive car is now becoming more and more of a luxury," Catalano said. "What the market wants right now is not available, and that's \$3,000, \$4,000 and \$5,000 cars."

Behind the vehicle shortage and inflated prices is simple supply and demand. Much of the problem stems from the surging prices of new cars. In February, according to Edmunds, the average new vehicle in the United States sold for nearly \$48,000 — beyond the reach of many consumers.

Though the supply of new vehicles has inched up, they remain relatively scarce and expensive. Automakers still lack sufficient computer chips to produce enough vehicles to meet demand, a lingering consequence of pandemic-related supply shortages. Sales of new vehicles last year were about 3 million below normal levels. Fewer new-car sales mean fewer trade-ins, which mean fewer used vehicles for sale.

With used prices rising again, analysts say buyers who can afford to do so should buy soon. Auto loan rates may continue rising this year as the Federal Reserve keeps raising interest rates.

On used lots these days, bargains are hard to find. Even after accounting for the price drops of the past year, the average used vehicle remains about 35% above where it was before the pandemic erupted three years ago. At that time, the average price was \$20,425.

Once the government sent stimulus checks to most American households, demand for autos rose as many people spent their money. As they did, the supply of used vehicles fell and prices surged. By early last year, the average used-vehicle price was more than 50% above its pre-pandemic point.

Worsening the shortfall was a scarcity of affordable new vehicles. Automakers were using their tight supply of computer chips to build pricier and more profitable SUVs and pickups. They built fewer affordable new models — a trend that sent more buyers to used-car lots. The result was increased demand and higher prices for used vehicles.

All of which left people like Carol Rice struggling to find a decent affordable used vehicle. Rice, 65, endured a long period of frustration while shopping for a used small pickup for her farm near Carbondale,

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Kansas. For six months, she found little.

"I'm retired, and I can't afford to buy a new vehicle," she said. "There weren't that many used vehicles, and if there were used vehicles, they were quite expensive."

Last month, she finally found a 2003 Ford Ranger on Catalano's website that she liked and could afford. She bought it for \$7,700. Though it's 20 years old and has 140,000 miles on it, the Ranger is in solid condition and has the all-wheel-drive that Rice wanted.

"It was a good-looking vehicle, and the price was right," she said.

In the immediate future, few analysts expect price declines for used vehicles. Catalano doesn't foresee any sustained price drops for perhaps the next year or two.

Others say it's hard to predict. Amy Gieffers, a senior vice president at Vroom, an online auto buying site, notes that some market forces could continue to keep supply down and prices up: Fewer trade-ins, less leasing, lower fleet sales by rental car companies.

On the other hand, she says, more expensive vehicles and higher loan rates could depress buyer demand. Eventually, dealers might be forced to cut prices.

"It's really complex right now," she said, "because you have some competing forces."

Both Yurchenko of Black Book and Charlie Chesbrough, a senior economist at Cox Automotive, say they expect used-vehicle prices to rise through summer before easing slightly as part of a normal late-year depreciation cycle.

At the start of this year, Chesbrough said, he thought higher loan rates would chase away buyers from both the new and used markets. Instead, robust demand from affluent buyers for pricey late-model used vehicles has strengthened sales in the United States.

Many of these buyers are paying cash to avoid higher interest rates. Edmunds.com says the average loan rate on a used vehicle is now 11.3%, up from 8.1% when the Fed started raising rates a year ago.

Because demand is intense and vehicle supplies short, Chesbrough doesn't foresee sales dropping even if the economy were to slide into a recession. Though many buyers with lower credit scores have left the market, sales remain solid.

With used-car inventories likely to remain crimped for the foreseeable future, Chesbrough doesn't expect prices to ever fall back to near their pre-pandemic levels

"We just haven't been creating enough personal transportation in the last couple of years," Chesbrough said.

CNN preaches patience as ratings tank during turnaround

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — CNN's leadership is preaching patience even though thousands of viewers are abandoning the network during its attempted turnaround, with no indication yet whether it will be rewarded.

Cable news ratings are down across the board compared to 2022, when Russia's invasion of Ukraine was fresh in the news. CNN's dip is most dramatic — 61% in prime time in March, with Fox News Channel down 27% and MSNBC off by 12%, according to the Nielsen company.

Fox averaged 2.09 million viewers in prime time in March, with MSNBC at 1.14 million and CNN at 473,000, Nielsen said. In the key 25-54 age demographic for advertisers, CNN is seeing some of its lowest numbers in decades.

CNN is a year into new corporate management with Warner Bros. Discovery, which hired ex-CBS producer Chris Licht to run the network. The chief goal has been to rebuild trust as a non-partisan news brand after years of criticism by former President Donald Trump and his followers, at a time Fox and MSNBC have profited handsomely by appealing to specific points of view.

Licht's biggest programming move to date, a revamp of "CNN This Morning," hasn't borne fruit in the ratings and has been beset by bad publicity, including co-host Don Lemon's ham-fisted reference to a woman's prime years.

Changes to CNN's daytime look are imminent. Licht's vision for prime time is months away, though, and

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only beginning to take shape.

His plans are to couple news coverage with hosts from different worlds, including entertainment, who can talk about the news without a specific partisan take. Licht is exploring several possibilities, and CNN is reportedly close to deals with CBS' Gayle King and former NBA star turned sportscaster Charles Barkley for shows that will air once a week, although the network wouldn't confirm that.

If Licht's bet pays off, CNN will strengthen its reputation as a news brand while also attracting viewers who are now watching Netflix or HGTV — not just competing news networks.

As those plans develop, CNN's prime-time lineup has largely been in flux after Anderson Cooper's hour at 8 p.m. Eastern. The network has experimented with some interviews, events and subject-focused hours at 9 p.m. Eastern. They include talks with first lady Jill Biden and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and town halls with Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin and one focused on the Ohio train derailment.

The news hours that follow, at least for now, are led by Alisyn Camerota and Laura Coates.

"Viewers are a bit confused with all of the changes, particularly in the prime-time lineup," said Jennifer Thomas, a former CNN producer who now teaches journalism at Howard University. She said CNN needs more news that impacts viewers and less analysis.

CNN expresses pride in some of the efforts, while admitting some are duds. Last Friday, for example, only 295,000 people watched Jake Tapper's interview with "Ted Lasso" star Jason Sudeikis. It was less than a quarter of the people who saw Alex Wagner's MSNBC show at the same 9 p.m. Eastern time slot, Nielsen said.

David Zaslav, president and CEO of Warner Bros. Discovery, delivered a pep talk to hundreds of CNN managers earlier this month to reinforce the message that he wanted to see a network focused on the news that didn't lean any way politically.

CNN saw strong ratings under the leadership of Licht's predecessor, Jeff Zucker, and Zaslav said he recognized that a more partisan approach could bring more viewers and money, but that "it's not what I came here to do," according to a transcript of Zaslav's speech.

He said he hoped the network would be able to figure out what is working and what isn't. He urged the managers to not worry about outside noise.

"Ratings be damned," he said. "Let's focus on who we are. This is our mission. This is our legacy. And this is our journey together."

The question for Licht and his team, as it is often in similar situations, is "how much time do they really have?" said Mark Whitaker, a former executive at CNN and NBC News.

Strong ratings mean more revenue, and more money to spend on programming, Whitaker said.

Cable news viewership is often very habit-driven, with viewers drawn to personalities they know and trust, he said. For the first three days this week, CNN's 9 p.m. Eastern hour had three different hosts — Erin Burnett, Pamela Brown and Kaitlan Collins.

CNN must wonder whether viewers will lose the habit of tuning in while waiting for the network's true personality to emerge under Licht. A new prime-time schedule is not likely until the fall.

It doesn't help that many CNN viewers have long considered the network a utility to be used primarily when there are big stories, and it's a relatively quiet period now. An important test will be how many viewers will reflexively turn to CNN during big news events, where it has often dominated the ratings.

MSNBC, in touting its biggest audience advantage over CNN in nearly four years, said that its viewers watched the network an average of 381 minutes per week during the first three months of 2023, compared to 183 minutes for CNN.

"They're fighting against the toughest foe they can fight," said Rick Kaplan, a former CNN president. "They're fighting against short attention spans. They're fighting against the fact that we're such a divided people, so angry at each other, that if you don't reflect that anger, the people don't have time for you."

Continued poor ratings "eats away at the fabric of the network, if you're doing great shows and nobody is watching," he said.

Kaplan said he believes CNN has the right executive in Licht, who has a strong track record as a suc-

successful programmer.

"If there's a right way, he'll find it," he said.

Philippine ferry fire kills 31 people; at least 7 missing

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — A fire broke out on a ferry in the southern Philippines and raged overnight for eight hours, killing at least 31 of the approximately 250 passengers and crew, officials said Thursday.

Many of the more than 200 people who survived the blaze jumped off the MV Lady Mary Joy 3 and were rescued from the dark sea by the coast guard, navy, a nearby ferry and local fishermen, said Gov. Jim Hataman of the southern island province of Basilan. Rescuers were still searching Thursday for at least seven missing people, he said.

Hataman said the burned ferry was towed to Basilan's shoreline, where the bodies of 18 of the 31 victims were discovered in a budget section of the passenger cabin.

"These victims perished on board due to the fire," Hataman said by telephone. He said more people may have been on the ferry who were not listed on its manifest.

The ferry's skipper, however, told coast guard officials that he tried to run the burning ferry aground on the nearest shore to allow more people to survive or be rescued, regional coast guard commander Rejard Marfe said. The fire raged for about eight hours, he said.

The ferry was traveling to Jolo town in Sulu province from the southern port city of Zamboanga when it caught fire off Basilan close to midnight, Hataman said. At least 23 passengers were injured and taken to hospitals.

"Some of the passengers were roused from their sleep due to the commotion caused by the fire. Some jumped off the ship," Hataman said.

The steel-hulled ferry could accommodate up to 430 people and was not overcrowded, Marfe said. According to the manifest, it was carrying 205 passengers and a 35-member crew, he said. In addition, it had a security contingent consisting of four coast guard marshals and an unspecified number of soldiers who were not listed on the manifest for their protection, Marfe said.

He said officials are investigating whether the 33-year-old ferry was seaworthy, if there were passengers not listed on the manifest, and whether the crew properly guided passengers to safety.

Sea accidents are common in the Philippines because of frequent storms, badly maintained vessels, overcrowding, and spotty enforcement of safety regulations, especially in remote provinces.

In December 1987, the ferry Dona Paz sank after colliding with a fuel tanker, killing more than 4,300 people in the world's worst peacetime maritime disaster.

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

Today in History: March 31, Jews ordered expelled from Spain

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, March 31, the 90th day of 2023. There are 275 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On March 31, 1991, the Warsaw Pact military alliance came to an end.

On this date:

In 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain issued an edict expelling Jews from Spanish soil, except those willing to convert to Christianity.

In 1814, Paris was occupied by a coalition of Russian, Prussian and Austrian forces; the surrender of the French capital forced the abdication of Emperor Napoleon.

In 1917, the United States took formal possession of the Virgin Islands from Denmark.

In 1931, Notre Dame college football coach Knute Rockne (noot RAHK'-nee), 43, was killed in the crash

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of a TWA plane in Bazaar, Kansas.

In 1968, at the conclusion of a nationally broadcast address on Vietnam, President Lyndon B. Johnson stunned listeners by declaring, "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President."

In 1993, actor Brandon Lee, 28, was accidentally shot to death during the filming of a movie in Wilmington, North Carolina, when he was hit by a bullet fragment that had become lodged inside a prop gun.

In 1995, baseball players agreed to end their 232-day strike after a judge granted a preliminary injunction against club owners.

In 2004, four American civilian contractors were killed in Fallujah, Iraq; frenzied crowds dragged the burned, mutilated bodies and strung two of them from a bridge.

In 2005, Terri Schiavo (SHY'-voh), 41, died at a hospice in Pinellas Park, Florida, 13 days after her feeding tube was removed in a wrenching right-to-die court fight.

In 2009, Benjamin Netanyahu took office as Israel's new prime minister after the Knesset approved his government.

In 2019, rapper Nipsey Hussle was fatally shot outside the clothing store he had founded to help rebuild his troubled South Los Angeles neighborhood; he was 33.

In 2020, Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan officially stepped down from duties as members of the royal family.

Ten years ago: Pope Francis marked Christianity's most joyous day at the Vatican with a passionate plea for world peace as he celebrated his first Easter Sunday as pontiff. The Houston Astros, coming off consecutive 100-loss seasons in the National League, made an impressive debut in the American League, trouncing the Texas Rangers 8-2 on opening night.

Five years ago: Amid tight security, Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai and her family returned to her hometown in Pakistan for the first time since she was shot in the head in 2012 for her work as an advocate for young women's education. The Mormon church injected some diversity into what had been an all-white leadership panel by selecting the first-ever Latin American apostle and the first-ever apostle of Asian ancestry. Hundreds of well-wishers lined the streets of Cambridge, England, as a hearse carried the remains of physicist and author Stephen Hawking to a private funeral.

One year ago: Russian troops began leaving the Chernobyl nuclear plant after soldiers got "significant doses" of radiation from digging trenches at the highly contaminated site, Ukraine's state power company said. President Joe Biden ordered the release of 1 million barrels of oil per day from the nation's strategic petroleum reserve for six months in a bid to control spiking energy prices. Scientists announced they had finally finished deciphering the full genetic blueprint for human life.

Today's Birthdays: Actor William Daniels is 96. Actor Richard Chamberlain is 89. Actor Shirley Jones is 89. Musician Herb Alpert is 88. Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., is 83. Former U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., is 83. Actor Christopher Walken is 80. Comedian Gabe Kaplan is 79. Sen. Angus King, I-Maine, is 79. Rock musician Mick Ralphs (Bad Company; Mott the Hoople) is 79. Former Vice President Al Gore is 76. Author David Eisenhower is 75. Actor Rhea Perlman is 75. Actor Ed Marinaro is 73. Rock musician Angus Young (AC/DC) is 68. Actor Marc McClure is 66. Actor William McNamara is 58. Alt-country musician Bob Crawford (The Avett Brothers) is 52. Actor Ewan McGregor is 52. Actor Erica Tazel is 48. Actor Judi Shekoni is 45. Rapper Tony Yayo is 45. Actor Kate Micucci is 43. Actor Brian Tyree Henry is 41. Actor Melissa Ordway is 40. Musician and producer Jack Antonoff (Fun, Taylor Swift) is 39. Actor Jessica Szohr is 38.