

# Groton Daily Independent

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"Each time we face our fear, we gain strength, courage, and confidence in the doing."

-Theodore Roosevelt

## Groton Community Calendar

### Monday, April 3

- School Breakfast: Egg bake.
- School Lunch: Pepperoni pizza, green beans.
- Catholic: SEAS Confession, 12:00 noon, 7:00 - 8:00 pm
- Senior Menu: Sloppy Joe on bun, oven roasted potatoes, mixed vegetables, ice cream sundae.
- The Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6 p.m.

### Tuesday, April 4

- School Breakfast: Egg and cheese wraps.
- School Lunch: Tacos
- Senior Menu: Chicken Alfredo, broccoli and cauliflower, peaches, whole wheat bread.
- Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
- The Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.
- St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid LWML, 1 p.m.

### Wednesday, April 5

- School Breakfast: Hashbrown pizza.
- School Lunch: Garlic cheese bread, cooked carrots.
- Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes, carrots and peas, Mandarin oranges, pineapple, whole wheat bread.
- Living Stations at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church, 7 p.m.; SEAS Confession after Living Stations.
- Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm
- Emmanuel Lutheran: Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; Confirmation and League attend Stations of the Cross at SEAS, 6:30 p.m.
- St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.
- United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Book Study with Lindsey Tietz, 4 p.m.; Confirmation, 4 p.m.
- Chamber Meeting, noon, at City Hall

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

**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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## BLACK HILLS SNOW COURSE READINGS

April 1, 2023

Site Name	Elevation (ft)	Current Snow Depth (in)	Current SWE (in)	30-yr Median (1991-2020) SWE (in)	Last Year's SWE (in)	Current Percent of 30 Year Median SWE (%)
Bear Lodge Divide	4680	14.5	4.8	1.1	0.0	436
Blind Park (S)	6870	31.0	8.7	7.0	1.0	124
Cole Canyon (S)	5870	28.0	8.1	5.2	2.6	156
Ditch Creek	6880	29.1	6.0	3.6	1.0	167
Little Bear Run	6240	25.8	5.2	2.5	0.0	208
Mallo	6420	35.3	9.5	5.9	0.6	161
Mount Tom	5560	24.0	5.8	2.9	0.0	200
North Rapid Creek (S)	6250	27.0	7.6	6.6	4.2	115
Reuter Canyon	6280	34.3	10.1	7.0	1.1	144
Upper Spearfish	6500	32.5	9.8	5.8	1.1	169

### Notes:

This data is provisional and subject to revision

(S) = Snotel Station

SWE = Snow Water Equivalent

This chart shows how much snow the Black Hills has; and how much moisture is in that snow. (USDA)

## **Black Hills snow moisture above normal**

RAPID CITY, S.D. (KOTA) - "Moisture is looking good" in the Black Hills, according to the most recent snow course readings by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The report, issued Friday, shows an increase in moisture over last year; and even above the 30-year median. Moisture at the 10 sites measured anywhere from 4.8 inches of snow water equivalent to up to more than 10 inches.

Last season, there was no snow water equivalent measured at Bear Lodge Divide. This season it is listed at 4.8 inches. Upper Spearfish site has 9.8 inches of moisture, second only to Reuter Canyon with 10.1 inches.



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**The city public works department personnel were out early this morning hauling off the snow off the downtown district.**

## “Hindered by pain in your heel?”

If you have pain on the bottom of your foot at the heel, especially when you take your first steps of the day, you likely have plantar fasciitis. One of the most common causes of foot pain, plantar fasciitis pain can subside with time, but sometimes the pain keeps people from doing what they love, whether that be running, walking, or other pleasures of life. I once saw a young woman suffering from plantar fasciitis who got some relief from an injection. A few years later she returned wanting another injection so she could dance pain-free at her own wedding.



Based on Science, Built on Trust



**Andrew Ellsworth, MD.**

later she returned wanting another injection so she could dance pain-free at her own wedding.

The bottom of the foot has thick, white fibers called the plantar fascia. On one end it connects to the heel bone, and on the other the fibers connect to each of the toes. This helps support the foot, tightening as we walk and keeping the arch of the foot elevated like the bowstring maintaining the curve of the bow.

Pain can arise from stress on the plantar fascia where it connects to the heel bone, the tuberosity of the calcaneus. This spot, right by the heel on the underside of the foot, can be quite tender to touch when plantar fasciitis is active. It often is most painful when first walking in the morning or after periods of rest. The pain can linger for months or years.

Sometimes referred to as heel spurs, on x-ray this spot may show calcifications in the fascia that have formed from years of stress or inflammation. The presence of these heel spurs does not necessarily mean someone will have pain. Some have pain from plantar fasciitis without heel spurs, and some with heel spurs do not have pain.

Causes of plantar fasciitis include poor fitting shoes, starting a new exercise routine such as running, obesity, prolonged running or standing, flat feet, and more. The exact cause remains unclear.

Initial treatments include avoiding activities that make it worse, stretching exercises that may include pointing the toes upward and stretching the calf muscles, avoiding the use of flat shoes, avoiding walking barefoot, heel shoe inserts, a short term trial of NSAIDs like ibuprofen, or possibly a steroid injection. Later, if needed, molded inserts, night splints, immobilization in a boot or cast, or even surgery may be considered. Thankfully, even without treatment, plantar fasciitis may often go away on its own within a year.

Plantar fasciitis may only be a spot on the bottom of the foot, but I do not envy those who are reminded of it with every step.

Andrew Ellsworth, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at [www.prairiedoc.org](http://www.prairiedoc.org) and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



## The Life of LaVonne Helmer

Memorial services for LaVonne Helmer, 95, of Groton will be 11:30 a.m., Tuesday, April 11th at St. John's Lutheran Church, Groton. Rev. Jeremy Yeadon will officiate. Inurnment will take place in Hillside Cemetery, Langford at a later date under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

Visitation will be held at the chapel on Monday, April 10 from 5-7 p.m. with a prayer service at 7:00 p.m.

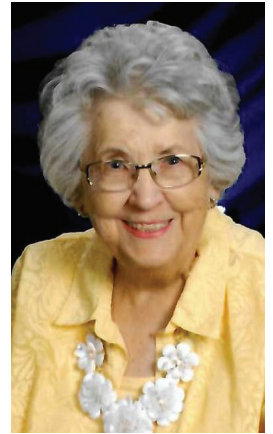
LaVonne passed away March 30, 2023 at Avantara Groton.

Julia LaVonne Jones Helmer was born on March 24, 1928, to Newton and Iva (Colcord) Jones at Langford, SD. LaVonne grew up on the family farm north of Langford. She attended country school and Langford High School graduating in 1946 as salutatorian. After graduation, she attended Northern State University as a business major, but later switched to education. While in college she worked at Jackson Hardware in Aberdeen. In 1948 she moved to Arizona for health reasons but returned to South Dakota a year later. She taught in Wetonka one year, Draper two years and Langford one year. On September 20, 1953, LaVonne was united in marriage to Richard Helmer at the Presbyterian Church in Langford. They lived in Andover briefly and then purchased a farm near Andover. LaVonne became an active member of Zion Lutheran Church and established many lifelong friendships during this time. To this union, four children were born, Deborah, Richard, Pamela, and Cheryl. LaVonne returned to teaching elementary school in Groton in 1963. She earned her two-year elementary education degree in 1963 and her bachelor's degree in 1967. She returned to Northern to earn her first master's degree in 1976 in Elementary Education and earned a second master's degree in School Counseling in 1983. LaVonne taught briefly at NSU as an adjunct instructor in the School of Education and worked one year as a school counselor in Bristol. After retiring from teaching, LaVonne worked as a newspaper writer and authored two books. She loved her time writing for the Groton Independent because it allowed her the opportunity to visit with others and hear their stories. She participated on the Day County Historical Preservation Committee and facilitated the publication of the Day County History book. She enjoyed traveling across the United States and to Europe. She especially enjoyed meeting relatives when she visited Wales because she was very proud of her Welsh heritage. LaVonne enjoyed reading, playing Bridge, bowling, dancing, and visiting with everyone she encountered, but her favorite thing was spending time with family. She felt blessed to have such wonderful children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. LaVonne followed her grandchildren and great-grandchildren in their sports and school activities. She traveled with Pam to all her grandchildren's high school graduations and most of their college graduations. LaVonne relished her time as a teacher and counselor and loved hearing from former students. LaVonne was a strong advocate for education and supported each of her children as they completed their college degrees. She was instrumental in helping her son-in-law, Bruce, launch his farming career as well.

LaVonne was currently a member of St. John's Lutheran Church in Groton. Throughout her life, LaVonne was active in numerous organizations and kept detailed notes of her participation. She was a member of Kappa Delta Pi, Phi Kappa Delta, South Dakota Education Association, Aberdeen Area Retired Teachers, Eventide Study Club (President and Vice President), Parent Teacher Association (State President), American Association of University Women, Lutheran Women's Missionary League (delegate to national convention), American Legion Auxiliary (Local and District President), General Federation of Women's Clubs (District President), Metropolitan Club of Greater Aberdeen, and the Day County Republican Committee. (Delegate to state convention).

LaVonne is survived by her children Deborah (Robert) Utecht, Naperville, IL, Richard (Dee) Helmer, Geneva, IL, Pamela (Bruce) Merkel, Andover, SD and Cheryl Wold, Aberdeen, SD, grandchildren Eric Utecht, Brad (Claire) Utecht, Nicholas (Maggie) Helmer, Lanny (Becki) Merkel, Brett (Micaela) Merkel, Julia Wold and Jordan Wold, and great grandchildren Henry Utecht, Penelope Helmer, Sebastian Helmer, Justin Merkel and fiancé Lorelei Bohlin, Lillian Merkel, Mac Merkel and Olivia Merkel, and one sister, Jean (Bruce) Likness, Langford, and many beloved nieces, nephews, and cousins.

She was preceded in death by her parents, two brothers, Ramon Jones and Keith Jones, sister-in-law, Rebecca (Keith) Jones, and son-in-law, Daniel Wold.



## Weekly Vikings Recap - Minnesota Vikings' Free Agency Week 2

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

With the NFL draft less than a month away, let's look at the Minnesota Vikings' current draft picks and what the team might do with them. Currently, the Vikings have five picks in the NFL draft this year: a first-round pick (23rd overall), a third-round pick (87th overall), a fourth-round pick (119th overall), a fifth-round pick (158th overall), and a sixth-round pick (211th overall). If the Vikings were to make only five picks in this year's draft, it would be the fewest picks they have made in a draft since 2009. However, the likelihood of the Vikings making only five picks in the draft is slim to none. Over the past four NFL drafts, the Vikings have made an average of 12 draft picks each year, which is the most in the NFL over that time.

With so little draft capital this year, it seems very likely that the Vikings are going to trade multiple times throughout the draft to acquire more picks. It has become evident in Kwesi Adofo-Mensah's short tenure with the Vikings that he is not afraid to make trades when it comes to draft picks. In Adofo-Mensah's first draft as an NFL general manager last year, every single one of the Vikings' ten draft picks was received via trade.

If the Vikings do decide that they want to acquire more draft picks this year, the main way to do so will be through trading back in the draft. Although trading back is not the most exciting thing from a fan's perspective, the analytics show that it is the smart thing to do. Simply put, if you think of the draft as a dartboard, the more picks you have means the more darts you can throw at the dartboard to try to hit a bullseye and get a star player.

This year might not be the worst year to move back in the draft as this year looks to have a deep class of players. For a team like the Vikings who have so many holes on the defensive side of the ball, it might be wise for the team to trade out of the first round and acquire more middle-round defensive players. Currently structured, one first-round defensive player is not going to be able to change the Vikings' defensive identity.

Furthermore, having the 23rd overall pick in the draft does not exactly guarantee the Vikings that a player with the talent to start right away this season will be available by the time the Vikings are on the clock. If you look at the NFL draft, history shows that there is not a significant difference between a player drafted in the late first round to a player drafted in the second round. For example, in the 2016 NFL draft, the Vikings used their 23rd overall pick to take Laquon Treadwell, who if we all remember had quite a disappointing career with the Vikings. What makes it worse is that eight future pro-bowlers went in the second round that year. Instead of taking Treadwell, the Vikings could have traded back into the second round and had their pick of Chris Jones, Xavien Howard, Michael Thomas, and even future hall-of-famer Derrick Henry.

Therefore, although it might disappoint all the Vikings fans who show up at the Vikings' draft party on April 27th to watch the entire first round of the draft without the Vikings making a pick, history shows that trading back into the second round might be the smart thing for the Vikings to do.



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## Another snowpocalypse

As I gaze out at a nine-foot gash through my driveway from which a semi-domesticated jackrabbit is able to peer into my second floor window, my neighbor is heroically pushing snow off the gravel with his loader tractor.

And another wall of snow is coming our way.

In winters like this, it's tough for blade operators to keep up. It'd take nerves of steel to do that job. And brains of mush.

I know I'm supposed to cheer you up, but at this point, just be dang glad the paper arrived. Next to the snowplow operators and farmers in the calving barn, mail route drivers are my heroes. Their motto is, "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds."

I don't know who wrote that, but I guarantee they're not from North Dakota.

I list my cell phone as an "emergency contact." However, I often field post-blizzard calls from subscribers if the paper isn't there that exact usual second. The good news is they really miss their paper. The bad news is, in typical Kraut fashion, they yell first and shoot later.

I prefer the Finns.

It's a cultural thing. Finns are passive-aggressive. Germans From Russia? Aggressive-aggressive. Not even the on-hold music, "Peace in the Valley," soothes them. They haven't gotten to the New Testament, yet. Their's is a "vengeful, wretched, spiteful, straight-razor totin' God." I think that's from Deuteronomy. Or Tony Joe White.

Me: "Uh, maybe you noticed most roads were shut down for nineteen days this month."

Hulda: "That's no excuse."

Typically, it's a delivery snag. Not that we don't make mistakes. Which are invisible until it's in print, in the hands of thousands, and recorded for posterity. Subscribers instinctively know it's a delivery problem, but we have fewer bureaucratic levels than the USPS, so they call us. We pick up, they yell. One-stop yelling.

Their plan's for me to mail more copies at \$4 a pop (First Class) into the teeth of tomorrow's blizzard. We will e-mail them out immediately. Otherwise, I quote the mail carrier's code and pray to that vengeful God for delivery on the third day. Instead of 40 days and 40 nights.

I think the reason I'm so Biblical today is because Mom invited us to miss Easter with her on Sunday. Also, to appease the state legislature which has been out-godding God this session. I'm writing this in a bathrobe and don't know for sure if I'm drag-queening or not. That last sentence alone will keep me out of libraries.

Someone in Bismarck actually decided, "We've met the enemy and it's the library." Good news for librarians, though. A winter assault's unlikely.

Oh, yeah. Winter. Folks, here's what's not helping: Saying, "Well, it could be worse." Or, "It keeps the riff-raff out." Sure, but it keeps them here, too. They couldn't extradite our legislators even if someone wanted them.

I don't wanna hear about the Winter of 1997 or the Winter of 1966, either. Why don't you remind me of the time my favorite dog died while you're at it?

This, this, people, is The Winter of Our Discontent.

I had a routine blood test last week and the topic of weather inevitably arose, and my nurse, who outwardly appeared sane, told me she was thrilled that Bismarck might break the snowfall record—97 inches. "I should be stabbing you," I said.

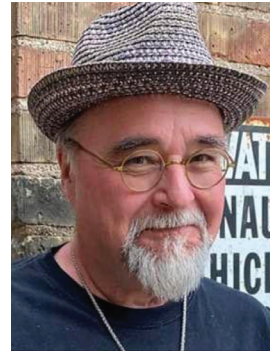
So, enough with the cheerfulness. Not that it's been much of a problem. Have you visited Facebook, lately? They're all acting like subscribers. I posted that I'd made an August appointment to switch my truck back to summer tires and they called me an optimist.

You'll know before you get this issue—unless you're an online reader—whether the predicted doozy of a storm actually doozied. Here, we're as prepared as we can be. Got a standby generator and a backup backup generator. The freezer's full, pantry's full, and we have enough dried goods procured during COVID to last us until spring. Of 2024.

After that, Mr. Jackrabbit, all bets are off. Unless you really can lay eggs.

Fortunately, the Bobcat's back in action after a stint on life support. It got pretty dicey. We got flowers from Melroe and the Last Rites from Carquest. I've never seen a mechanic give mouth to tailpipe resuscitation before. He kept screaming, "Stay away from the light!"

You, too. And stay out of the ditches.



**That's  
Life**  
by Tony Bender

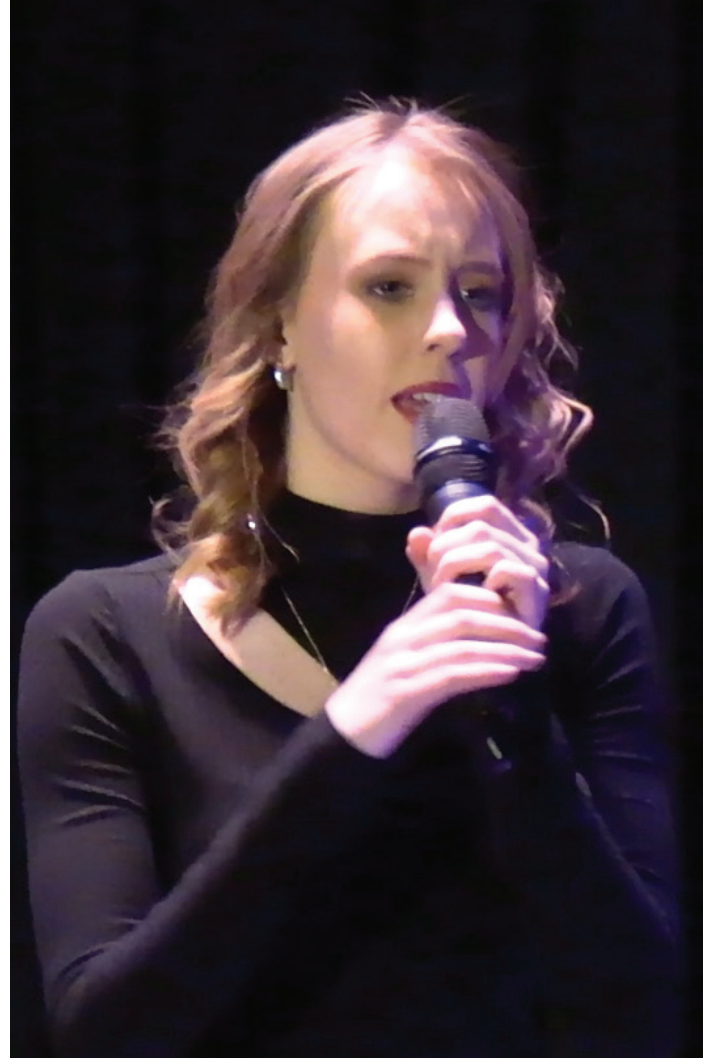
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## 2023 POPS Concert (Photos lifted from GDILIVE.COM video)



Emcees: Cadance Tullis & Jaeger Kampa



ANNA BISBEE: Broken



KAMRYN FLIEHS: Sweet Creature



FLEX BAND: Music from Aladdin, We Don't Talk About Bruno, Pirates of the Caribbean and Mission Impossible



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ASHTYN BAHR, CAMRYN KURTZ, & ELLIANA WEISMANTEL: Stay



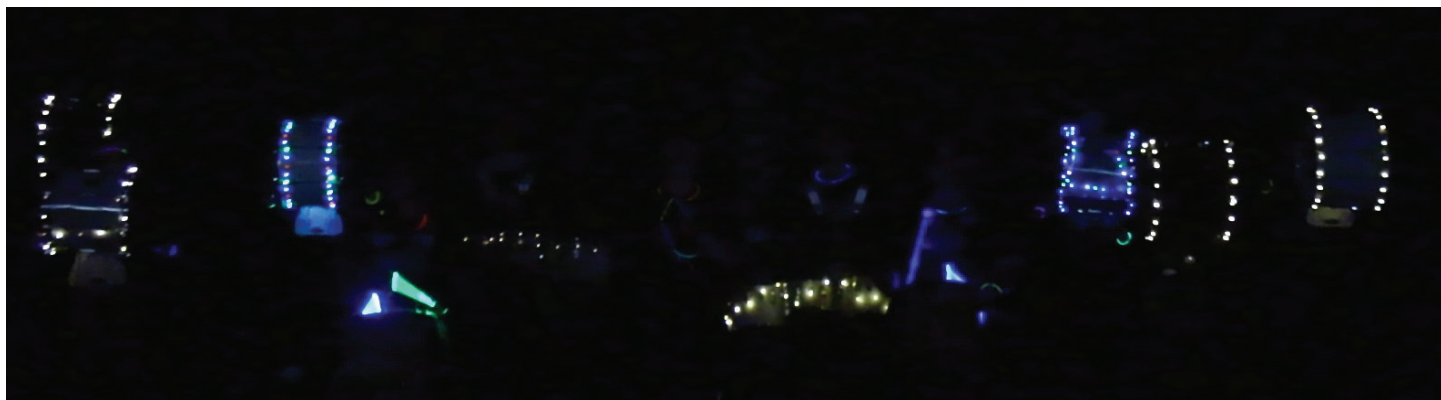
CARTER BARSE: My Way



NATALIA WARRINGTON: The Rose Song

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SENIOR DRUMLINE: The Train/Beat Cafe



CADANCE TULLIS: If I Ain't Got You



ASHTYN BAHR: Good 'Ol Fashioned Lover Boy



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ELLIANA WEISMANTEL: To Build A Home  
(Page turner: Emily Clark)



SHAYLEE PETERSON:  
Always Remember Us This Way



CAMRYN KURTZ: Landslide



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CLASS OF 2023 BAND SENIORS: Skyfall



SHOW CHOIR: Bring Me To Life, Dark Horses, Misguided Ghosts, Not Gonna Die, Victorious





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## ORDER OF PROGRAM

### FLEX BAND

ANNA BISBEE  
KAMRYN FLIEHS  
ASHTYN BAHR, CAMRYN KURTZ, & ELLIANA WEISMANTEL  
NATALIA WARRINGTON  
CARTER BARSE

### INTERMISSION

SENIOR DRUMLINE  
CADANCE TULLIS  
ASHTYN BAHR  
ELLIANA WEISMANTEL  
CAMRYN KURTZ  
CLASS OF 2023 BAND SENIORS  
SHAYLEE PETERSON

### SHOW CHOIR

### Our Performers

Emcees: Cadance Tullis & Jaeger Kampa

### FLEX BAND

**Flute:** Gretchen Dinger **Clarinet:** Natalia Warrington, Kira Clocksene **Alto Sax:** Carter Barse, Cadence Feist  
**Tenor Sax:** Kamryn Flihs, Kianna Sander **Trumpet:** Jayden Schwan, Kyleigh Kroll  
**Mellophone:** Jackson Dinger, Carlee Johnson **Baritone:** Ethan Clark **Tuba:** Blake Lord  
**Trombone:** Gavin Kroll, Brody Lord, Logan Clocksene **Drum Set:** Jacob Lewandowski **Bass:** Elliana Weismantel  
**Mallets:** Emily Clark, Teagan Hanten **Auxiliary Percussion:** Ashtyn Bahr, Axel Warrington, Teagan Hanten

### SHOW CHOIR

**Girls:** +Ashtyn Bahr, +Cadance Tullis, \*Elliana Weismantel, \*Anna Bisbee, +Camryn Kurtz, Rebecca Poor, Kianna Sander, Cambria Bonn, Natalia Warrington, ReAnn Dennert, Kira Clocksene, Mya Feser  
**Boys:** +Carter Barse, Coda Feser, Jaeger Kampa, Axel Warrington, Kolton Dockter, Jacob Tewksbury, Gavin Kroll

### PIT CREW

Tyler Beck (Guitar), Jacob Lewandowski (Trap Set), Emily Clark (Piano), Cadence Feist (Alto Sax), Kamryn Flihs (Bass Keyboard), and Dez Yeigh (Trumpet)

### TECH CREW

Gretchen Dinger, Raelee Lilly, Corbin Weismantel

### DIRECTORS:

**Head Director-** Amy Warrington

**Pit Director-** Tyler Beck

+Soloists for Show Choir

**Assistant Director-** Scott Glodt

**Assistant Pit Director-** Desiree Yeigh

\*Dance Captain

Music from Aladdin  
We Don't Talk About Bruno  
Pirates of the Caribbean  
Mission Impossible

Broken  
Sweet Creature  
Stay  
The Rose Song  
My Way

The Train/Beat Cafe  
If I Ain't Got You  
Good 'Ol Fashioned Lover Boy  
To Build A Home  
Landslide  
Skyfall  
Always Remember Us This Way

Bring Me To Life  
Dark Horses  
Misguided Ghosts  
Not Gonna Die  
Victorious



## South Dakota Republicans criticize program that provided \$3.8B to state

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

South Dakota's Republican congressional delegation and GOP Gov. Kristi Noem supported funding measures signed by President Donald Trump that provided more than \$10 billion in federal funding to the state to battle and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

But they're not so willing to praise a program approved by Democratic President Joe Biden that's pumping nearly \$4 billion more in pandemic relief money into the state and its communities, paying for projects as diverse as water and sewer systems, workforce housing infrastructure and programs to aid Native American tribes.

In congressional funding packages passed on a bipartisan basis between March and December 2020, South Dakota was allocated about \$10.1 billion in coronavirus stimulus funding that helped keep state residents and the economy alive. Some of the money went directly to state government, while the majority was used to support businesses, individuals, health care providers and schools and universities during the pandemic.

But when it comes to the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) enacted by Biden and congressional Democrats in March 2021, Republicans from South Dakota have been extremely critical of the program, even though it will provide an estimated \$3.8 billion to the state through December 2026.

Of that total, about \$1.4 billion in ARPA money is being given directly to the state, cities and counties for a wide range of programs to "support households, small businesses, impacted industries, essential workers and hardest-hit communities," according to a state fiscal report obtained exclusively by South Dakota News Watch. The report also indicates that "these funds can also be used to make necessary investments in water, sewer and broadband infrastructure."

### Sen. Rounds called ARPA funding a 'liberal wish list'

U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds, R-S.D., voted against the \$1.9 trillion ARPA program, at the time calling it a "liberal wish list" and asserting that the spending program included "many giveaways to left-wing causes."

Rounds told News Watch in a recent interview that ARPA, which included some funding for extended unemployment benefits as well as funding capital projects and numerous other government programs, led to an "overheating of the economy" that set the stage for increases in the national inflation rate. "Money went directly into bank accounts," Rounds said.



**South Dakota Rep. Dusty Johnson, Sen. Mike Rounds and Sen. John Thune greet President Donald Trump in Sioux Falls in 2018.** Photo: Argus Leader file photo



**Sen. Mike Rounds**

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**Significant funding from the American Rescue Plan Act also went to help South Dakota municipalities improve their sewer and water systems.** Photo: News Watch file

down the state during the height of the pandemic.

"Who knows where our nation would be without South Dakota as the counter-example," Fury wrote. "The federal government bailed out other states for their unconstitutional decisions, and the American people are paying the price every day at the grocery store, at the gas pump and with every purchase they make."

## **States have to use federal funding or lose it**

ARPA included a state-driven funding mechanism that allowed for significant local control over how the money was spent, Rounds said. However, if states reject the funding or don't spend it prior to the deadline, the money will be returned to the U.S. Treasury and reallocated to other states.

The Idaho Legislature did that in early March when appropriators cut \$28 million in ARPA funds from a program aimed at stabilizing economically challenged child-care centers. Lawmakers said they had questions about the state agency that was distributing the funds to day care providers; the funding was ultimately approved.

In South Dakota, ARPA funds continue to pay for a wide range of projects and programs. According to the state fiscal report, direct ARPA funds available through 2026 will pay for nearly \$1 billion in program costs by the state, \$172 million by counties, \$38 million by Sioux Falls and Rapid City, \$65 million by other cities, \$275 million in other local projects and \$115 million in other capital projects statewide.

Federal documents also show that ARPA provides up to \$2 billion to be divided among eligible tribal governments across the country, including in South Dakota, with the Treasury calling it the "single largest infusion of federal funding into Indian Country."

State Sen. Reynold Nesiba, D-Sioux Falls, minority leader in the Senate, said the state has been able to make "once-in-a-generation investments" in a number of projects due to the ARPA funding. In an email to News Watch, Nesiba pointed out that ARPA funds are being used in part to build a new \$70 million state health lab in Pierre, a new 48,000-square-foot Lincoln Hall building on the campus of Northern State University and multiple sewer and water projects across the state.

"None of these major investments would have been possible without President Biden's American Rescue Plan Act," Nesiba wrote.

He pointed out that no Democrat was invited to a bill-signing ceremony held by Noem when she gave final approval to a \$200 million loan and grant fund to build infrastructure for new workforce housing projects in the state, \$50 million of which came from ARPA funding.

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-S.D., also voted against ARPA and said in an email to News Watch that the measure was enacted after the major impacts of the pandemic had subsided, and that money provided to citizens was "put into savings accounts or spent on non-essentials."

"The American Rescue Plan was passed when our economy was already recovering well and American families had record savings," he wrote.

Republican Gov. Kristi Noem blasted the ARPA program as "wasteful spending" that was falsely described as aid to states to fight COVID-19.

"Gov. Noem absolutely believes that the federal government's wasteful spending, much of it at the behest of President Biden, was not necessary to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and is the single largest cause of the inflation that our nation now finds itself in," Noem spokesman Ian Fury wrote to News Watch in an email in late February.

Fury went on to praise Noem's decision to not lock



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"She failed to invite any Democratic legislators, although one quarter of the funds were from Biden's ARPA, and every Democratic legislator in both houses voted for it," Nesiba wrote. "The only opposition to this housing bill was from Republicans."

## **While some politicians opposed ARPA, they don't want to return funds**

Rounds said he does not think it's wise for South Dakota to return any ARPA funding, as congressional approval of the funding is now a matter of "water under the bridge."

Instead, Rounds told News Watch that the state and other government entities should now focus on spending the billions of dollars on projects that will aid the overall state economy in a long-term context.

"Once the decision was made on a partisan basis that they were going to do it, then it's a matter of each state responsibly spending the money they do have," Rounds said. "You want to be able to use it to build your economy long-term. ... If you invest it into South Dakota's infrastructure, you're probably helping do something that will help build the economy."

Round said sensible uses of the money would be for internet accessibility, roads and bridges, and electric and water projects.

State Sen. Helene Duhamel, R-Rapid City, said she hopes to use ARPA funds to pay for millions of dollars in projects to enhance distribution of water to communities across the state.

She was the lead sponsor of Senate Bill 156, which began as an effort to use \$100 million in ARPA funding to help build a pipeline from the Missouri River to the fast-growing Rapid City area. That bill was later amended to make funding available for water projects statewide and to reduce funding to \$50 million, but the measure died on a close House vote on the final day of the legislative session.

"I'm in the camp that if we don't use this money and send it back, it's not going to lower the federal debt, it will just go to other states," Duhamel said. "You may agree or disagree whether we should have all this money out there. But it's out there now, so South Dakota needs to take this golden opportunity to do everything we can to get our house in order because going forward, it could be a rocky road."

U.S. Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., the second-highest ranking Republican, said Congress needs to maintain a close eye on how ARPA and other COVID-19 relief funds are being spent.

"As we continue the important oversight of these tax dollars at the federal level, Republicans in Congress will continue to root out waste, fraud and abuse throughout the various COVID-19 programs to ensure Americans know exactly where their hard-earned dollars have been spent," Thune wrote to News Watch in late February.

— This article was produced by South Dakota News Watch, a non-profit journalism organization located online at [sdnewswatch.org](http://sdnewswatch.org).



**ARPA funds are being used in part to help build a new 48,000-square-foot Lincoln Hall building on the campus of Northern State University.** Illustration: Northern State University



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Congressional Roundup: Thune proposes permanent estate tax repeal

BY: SETH TUPPER - APRIL 2, 2023 7:00 AM

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the latest installment in a series of periodic updates on the activities of South Dakota's congressional delegation.

Sen. John Thune, R-South Dakota, introduced legislation last week to repeal the federal estate tax, which he calls the "death tax."

The bill is supported by 40 Republican cosponsors, but no Democrats.

The estate tax is applied to the transfer of property upon a person's death. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 doubled the individual estate and gift tax exclusion so that it now stands at \$12.9 million. But that provision – which exempts estates worth up to that amount from a tax obligation – expires at the end of 2025.

Thune wants to eliminate the estate tax permanently.

"Family-owned farms and ranches often bear the brunt of this tax, which makes it difficult and costly to pass these businesses down to future generations," Thune said in a news release.

#### Shipping reform

Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, introduced a bill last week to "crack down on the Chinese Communist Party's attempts to influence America's supply chain."

The Ocean Shipping Reform Implementation Act would prohibit U.S. ports from using a specific brand of Chinese software, Johnson said. It would also allow the Federal Maritime Commission to investigate foreign shipping exchanges such as the Shanghai Shipping Exchange to look for improper business practices. And it would authorize the commission to streamline data standards for maritime freight logistics.

In a news release, Johnson said the bill would give the commission the authority it needs to protect U.S. ports, shippers and manufacturers from China's influence.

"Fair trade practices benefit all parts of the supply chain from producer to manufacturer, shipper to consumer," Johnson said.

The legislation builds on Johnson's earlier Ocean Shipping Reform Act, which became law last year. He described that effort as the first major update to shipping regulations since 1998. It was a response to reports during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic that foreign ocean carriers were leaving American



**U.S. Sen. John Thune, R-South Dakota, speaks after a Republican policy luncheon at the U.S. Capitol on March 28, 2023, in Washington, D.C.** (Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images)



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agriculture export products behind at U.S. ports and heading back to Asia empty, which exacerbated supply chain problems.

Johnson has worked with Democratic Rep. John Garamendi of California on both pieces of legislation.

## How they voted

In other notable congressional action last week:

The House voted 225-204, with Johnson voting yes, to pass a bill packed with Republican energy priorities meant to counteract the Biden administration's approach and boost U.S. oil and gas production (the bill now goes to the Senate).

The Senate voted 53-43, with Thune and Sen. Mike Rounds, R-South Dakota, voting yes, to pass a repeal of the Biden administration's expansion of federally regulated wetlands (it now goes to the president, who's expected to veto it).

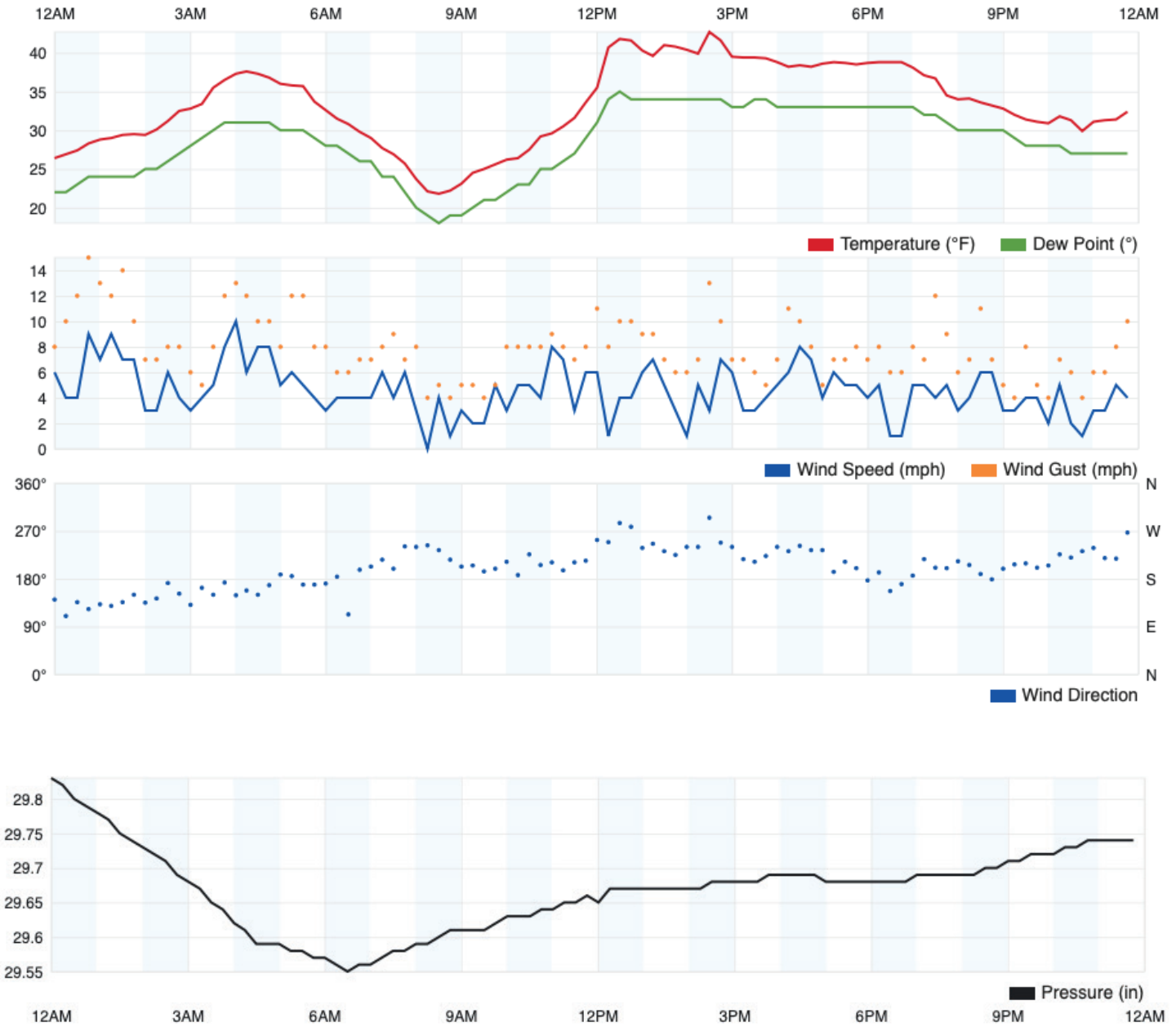
The Senate voted 66-30, with Thune and Rounds voting no, to revoke approvals for the Gulf and Iraq wars (the measure now goes to the House; Rounds told South Dakota Public Broadcasting, "We still have young men and women in Iraq today," and "I don't want to be in a position where we don't have the authorities in place to protect them").

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

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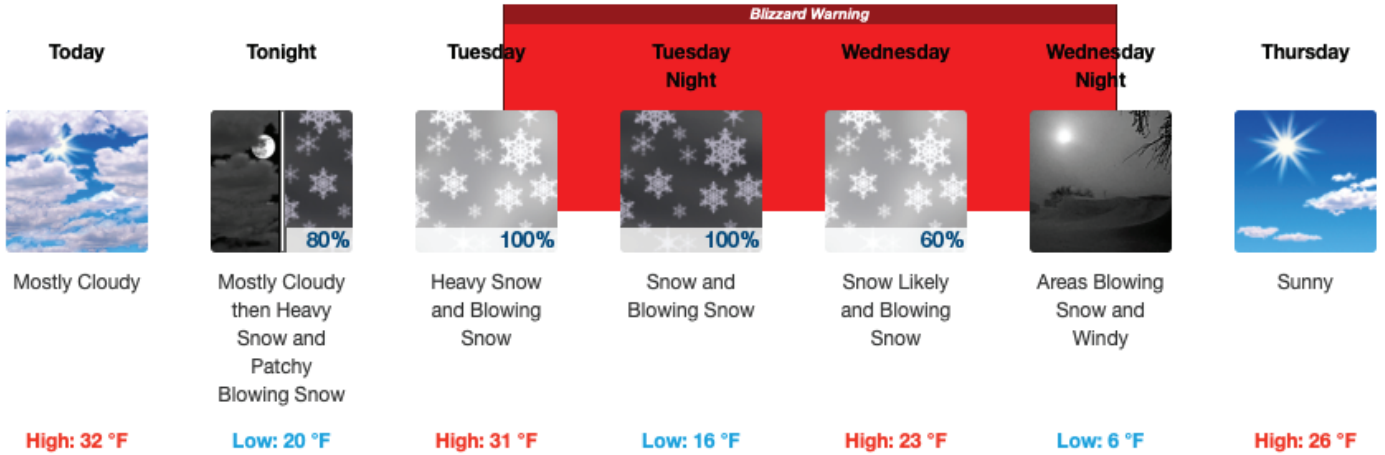
## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





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## Major Storm System Tue/Wed

Widespread Impacts Expected

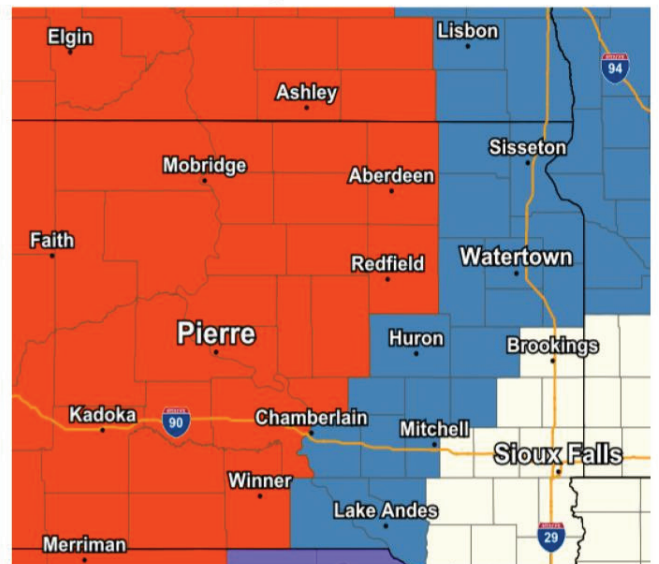
April 3, 2023 4:59 AM

### Key Messages

- Widespread 2-3 day long impacts are expected with a powerful late season winter storm.
- Snow will start late Monday night, spreading from southwest to northeast becoming moderate to heavy through Tuesday and Wednesday.
- Widespread strong winds with gusts in excess of 50 - 60 mph are expected Tuesday afternoon through Wednesday morning.
- Widespread dangerous to impossible travel conditions expected Tuesday & Wednesday.**



### Winter Watches Warnings and Advisories



### NEW What Has Changed

- Slight shift west in storm track. Better chance for mixed precipitation south and east of Watertown. Tight gradient in snow accumulations on the south side of the storm.

### Next Scheduled Update

- Monday Afternoon.

Graphic Created  
April 3rd, 2023  
4:10 AM CDT



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

We continue to monitor the progress of a major winter storm headed towards the region. We anticipate blizzard conditions to develop early Tuesday across the west with an expansion east. Uncertainty exists over precipitation types in the Watertown area with some freezing rain possible before a changeover to snow.

# Broton Daily Independent

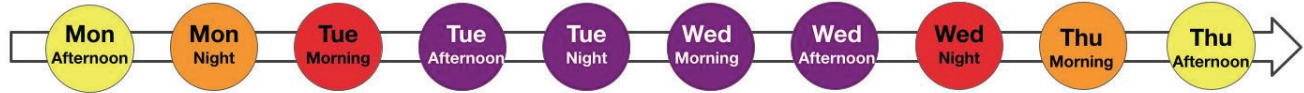
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## Winter Storm Timeline

April 3, 2023  
5:03 AM

Prepare Now for Potential Impacts



**Mon Afternoon**  
Light snow will begin over parts of southwest and south central South Dakota

**Mon Night**  
Light to moderate snow

Freezing rain possible for east central South Dakota

Increasing northeast winds with gusts up to 45 mph Tuesday morning

**Tue Afternoon**  
Moderate to heavy snow

Widespread and persistent strong winds with gusts in excess of 50 - 60 mph

Zero visibility, impossible travel

**Tue Night**  
Snow gradually ending

Winds gradually decreasing from west to east overnight Wednesday to Thursday morning

**Wed Morning**  
Snow has ended

Winds continue to decrease from west to east across the region

Risk Levels

Little to None

Minor

Moderate

Major

Extreme



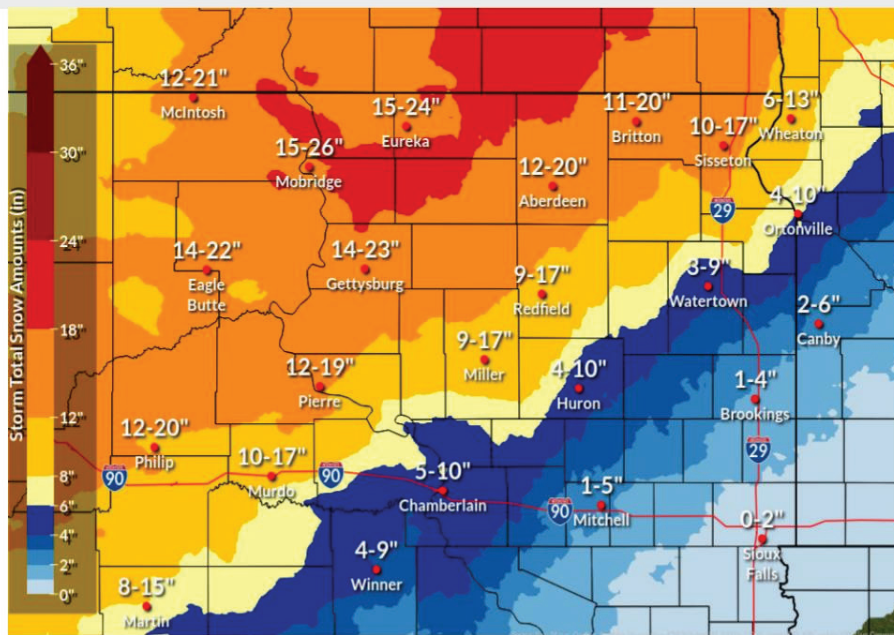
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD



## Accumulation Potential

April 3, 2023  
5:04 AM



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

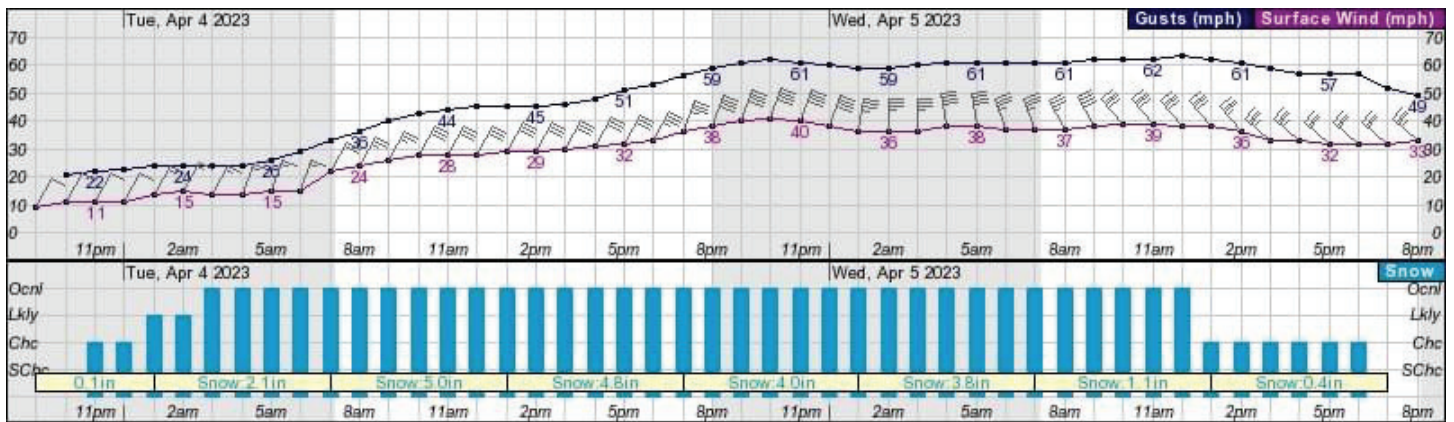


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For cities in Brown, SD County

Location	Snow Amount Potential			Chance of Seeing More Snow Than							
	Low End Snowfall	Expected Snowfall	High End Snowfall	>=0.1"	>=1"	>=2"	>=4"	>=6"	>=8"	>=12"	>=18"
Aberdeen, SD	12	21	25	100%	99%	99%	98%	97%	94%	85%	55%
Groton, SD	11	20	25	100%	99%	99%	98%	97%	94%	83%	50%
Warner, SD	12	21	25	100%	99%	99%	98%	97%	94%	84%	54%
Columbia, SD	12	21	26	100%	99%	99%	98%	97%	95%	85%	57%
Hecla, SD	12	21	25	100%	99%	99%	98%	97%	94%	85%	56%
Frederick, SD	12	22	26	100%	99%	99%	98%	97%	95%	86%	58%



# Blizzard Warning

**URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE**  
**National Weather Service Aberdeen SD**  
**332 AM CDT Mon Apr 3 2023**

Brown-Faulk-Stanley-Sully-Hughes-Jones  
Including the cities of Aberdeen, Faulkton, Fort Pierre, Onida, Pierre, and Murdo  
332 AM CDT Mon Apr 3 2023 /232 AM MDT Mon Apr 3 2023/

**...BLIZZARD WARNING IN EFFECT FROM 1 PM CDT TUESDAY TO  
1 AM CDT THURSDAY...**

- \* **WHAT...**Blizzard conditions expected. Total snow accumulations of 8 to 16 inches. Winds gusting as high as 60 mph.
- \* **WHERE...**Portions of central, north central and northeast South Dakota.
- \* **WHEN...**From 1 PM CDT /noon MDT/ Tuesday to 1 AM CDT /midnight MDT/ Thursday.
- \* **IMPACTS...**Travel will be very difficult to impossible. Widespread blowing snow will significantly reduce visibility. The hazardous conditions will impact the morning and evening commute. Very strong winds could cause extensive damage to trees and power lines.

## **PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...**

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.

## **Hazardous Weather Outlook**

**National Weather Service Aberdeen SD**  
**457 AM CDT Mon Apr 3 2023**

Corson-Campbell-McPherson-Brown-Walworth-Edmunds-Dewey-Potter-Faulk-Spink-Stanley-Sully-Hughes-Hyde-Hand-Jones-Lyman-Buffalo

This Hazardous Weather Outlook is for central South Dakota, north central South Dakota and northeast South Dakota.

**.DAY ONE...**Today and tonight. One to four inches of snow are possible later tonight, especially west of the James River valley.

**.DAYS TWO THROUGH SEVEN...**Tuesday through Sunday.  
Heavy snowfall and strengthening winds on Tuesday will promote blizzard conditions, starting out across portions of central and north central South Dakota Tuesday morning into early Tuesday afternoon, before gradually spreading over into the James River valley late in the day. Blizzard or near blizzard conditions will persist Tuesday night into Wednesday before any improvement can be expected.

## **.SPOTTER INFORMATION STATEMENT...**

Spotter activation will likely be needed. Weather spotters are encouraged to submit reports to the National Weather Service in Aberdeen. The public can submit reports on our web page, Facebook page, or our Twitter feed.



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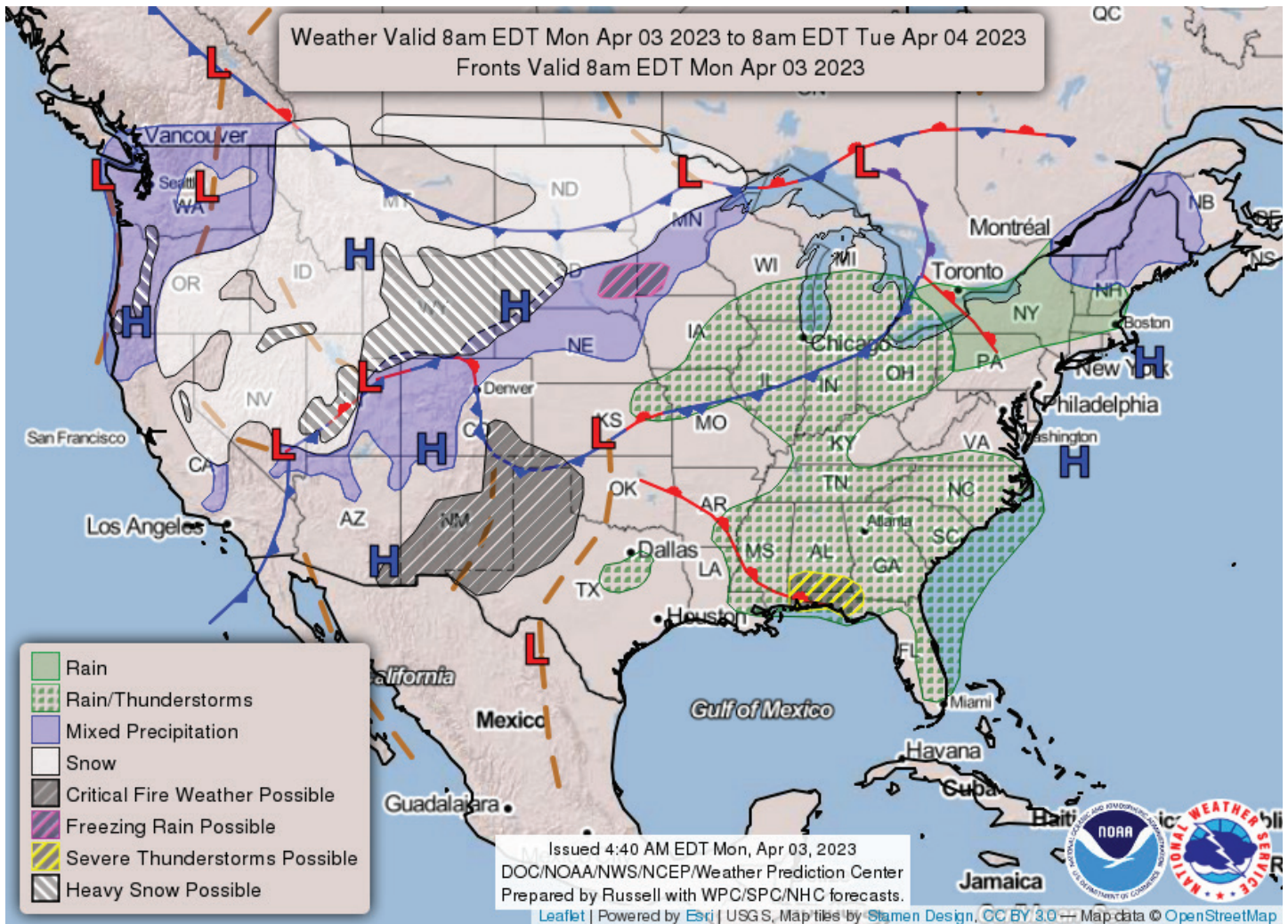
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 43 °F at 2:30 PM**  
**Low Temp: 22 °F at 8:37 AM**  
**Wind: 16 mph at 12:34 AM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 12 hours, 56 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 83 in 1921  
Record Low: -2 in 2018  
Average High: 52  
Average Low: 27  
Average Precip in April.: 0.12  
Precip to date in March.: 2.35  
Average Precip to date: 2.18  
Precip Year to Date: 3.93  
Sunset Tonight: 8:04:08 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:05:18 AM



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## Today in Weather History

April 3, 1968: Heavy snowfall, up to ten inches, was accompanied by winds of over 60 mph in parts of South Dakota. Snowdrifts of up to 4 feet were reported, and many roads were closed. Aberdeen was one of the hardest hit areas with 10.5 inches of snow and wind gusts of 62 mph. The strong winds and localized areas of icing caused considerable damage to utility lines.

April 3, 2003: Dry vegetation, along with windy conditions, caused a grassland burn northeast of Bath, near the James River in South Dakota, to get out of control during the early afternoon hours. Strong north to northeast winds of 20 to 35 mph caused the fire to spread quickly south along the James River. The fire became one and a half miles wide and burned six miles to the south before it was brought under control. A total of 4,000 acres were consumed. The smoke from the fire could be seen from miles around and lowered visibilities enough to close State Highway 12 two different times. At one point, traffic had to be diverted on Highway 12 for six hours due to the low visibility in smoke. Also, the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe Railroad was delayed in Bristol and Andover on April 3rd because of the smoke. Twenty-one fire departments with around 250 people worked to bring the fire under control.

April 3, 2007: A sharp frontal boundary along with an upper-level disturbance brought an unusual band of heavy snow across northern South Dakota. Snowfall amounts of 6 to 12 inches occurred from Eureka to Summit. Roads became snow covered or slushy making travel difficult. Due to the poor road conditions, several vehicles ended up in the ditch. Several schools and events were either postponed or canceled. Snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Eureka and Milbank, 7 inches at Conde, 8 inches at Hosmer, Columbia, Summit, and Britton, 10 inches at Webster, and 12 inches at Waubay.

April 3, 2009: An area of low pressure moved across the Central Plains producing widespread snow over central and north central South Dakota. Along with the snow came strong north winds of 15 to 30 mph causing areas of blowing snow and reduced visibilities. The snow and reduced visibility caused some travel problems. Snowfall amounts ranged from a few inches to almost a foot of snow. Some of the snowfall amounts included; 6 inches near Presho and Okaton, Fort Thompson, and Timber Lake; 7 inches in Murdo and 16 S Ree Heights; 8 inches 14 NNE Isabel and 11 inches 3 NW Parade and 6 E Hayes.

1898: An avalanche near Chilkoot Pass, Alaska in the Yukon during the Gold Rush buried 142 people and killed 43 others.

1964: KAUZ in Wichita Falls, Texas broadcast the first live television pictures of an F5 tornado moving through the city. Seven people were killed, 111 injured and 225 homes were destroyed during the twisters 5 to a 6-mile path. Extensive damage was done at Sheppard Air Force Base where three tanker planes, a hanger, the power plant, and the chapel were all destroyed. Damage estimates exceeded \$15 million.

1974: A "Super-Outbreak" of tornadoes ravaged the Midwest and the eastern U.S. Severe weather erupted early in the afternoon and continued through the next day. Severe thunderstorms spawned 148 tornadoes from Alabama to Michigan, most of which occurred between 1 PM (CST) on the 3rd and 1 AM on the 4th. The tornadoes killed 315 persons, injured 5300 others, and caused 600 million dollars damage. Alabama, Kentucky, and Ohio were especially hard hit in the tornado outbreak. One tornado destroyed half of the town of Xenia, Ohio killing 34 persons. Another tornado, near the city of Stamping Ground, Kentucky produced a path of destruction a record five miles in width. A tornado raced through Guin, Alabama at a speed of 75 mph. Two powerful tornadoes roared across northern Alabama during the early evening hours, killing fifty persons and injuring 500 others. Some rescue vehicles responding to the first tornado were struck by the second.

1987: An extensive, slow-moving low-pressure system produced very heavy snows over the Appalachian Region lasting through April 5th. 60 inches fell at Newfound Gap in western North Carolina, the most substantial single storm snowfall in the state's history. Up to 36 inches was reported in southeastern Kentucky. The total of 25 inches at Charleston, WV easily surpassed its previous record for the entire month of April of 5.9 inches. The 20.6 inch total at Akron, OH established an all-time record for that location. Snow closed interstate 40 for the first time since it was opened in 1967. Lightning and thunder accompanied the snow in some areas while a trace fell as far south as Mobile. The snow was the first snow ever reported in April in Mobile since records began in 1872. The storm became known unofficially as the "Dogwood Snowstorm" as many trees had fully bloomed.



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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### KEEPING SCORE

In the great game of baseball, victory is not determined by hits - only by runs. It is not decided by double plays or even a no-hit performance by a pitcher - only by runs.

A player may hit the ball, slide safely into the third base but get no further and not score. He will be remembered as being "left stranded." He will not be recognized for "three-quarters of a run."

This is true of everything in life. Few people are ever recognized for how well they start. Normally, they are remembered for how well they finish. We may run hard, overcome obstacles, work our way through difficult situations, but unless we accomplish our goals and "score," we are normally forgotten unless we finish well.

There is a sad verse in Paul's letter to Timothy. He speaks of Demas, and writes that he "has deserted me because he loves the things of life." A former co-worker of Paul's, he exchanged his calling from God for worldly pleasures and values. Perhaps Demas never counted the cost of serving Christ. Maybe he became weary in well doing and lost his enthusiasm. We do not know the reason, but we see the results. And here is the lesson for each of us: Rather than condemn or criticize him, let's look for the "Demas" that may be in each of us.

Prayer: Lord, never let us lose our love for You or the life You have called us to live. May we be faithful, fruitful, truthful, loyal, and never forsake or desert You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Demas has deserted me because he loves the things of this life and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus has gone to Dalmatia. 2 Timothy 4:10



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 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
- 04/08/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
- 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:  
03.31.23

16 26 27 42 61 23

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$385,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 9  
DRAW: Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.01.23

2 38 43 46 51 7

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$2,000,000**

NEXT 17 Hrs 9 Mins 39  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.02.23

3 6 18 22 40 5

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 16 Hrs 39 Mins  
DRAW: 40 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.01.23

6 7 11 26 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$20,000**

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 9  
DRAW: Mins 40 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.01.23

3 14 34 56 57 2

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 17 Hrs 8 Mins 39  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.01.23

11 19 21 29 52 17

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$159,000,000**

NEXT 17 Hrs 8 Mins 39  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### Members of Congress on TikTok defend app's reach to voters

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rep. Jeff Jackson of North Carolina has used it to explain the complex fight over raising the debt limit. Rep. Robert Garcia of California has used it to engage with members of the LGBTQ+ community. And Sen. Bob Casey of Pennsylvania has used it to give an overview of Election Day results.

As pressure against TikTok mounts in Washington, the more than two dozen members of Congress — all Democrats — who are active on the social media platform are being pushed by their colleagues to stop using it. Many defend their presence on the platform, saying they have a responsibility as public officials to meet Americans where they are — and more than 150 million are on TikTok.

"I'm sensitive to the ban and recognize some of the security implications. But there is no more robust and expeditious way to reach young people in the United States of America than TikTok," Democratic Rep. Dean Phillips of Minnesota told The Associated Press.

Yet the lawmakers active on TikTok remain a distinct minority. Most in Congress are in favor of limiting the app, forcing a sale to remove connections to China or even banning it outright. The U.S. armed forces and more than half of U.S. states have already banned the app from official devices, as has the federal government. Similar bans have been imposed in Denmark, Canada, Great Britain and New Zealand, as well as the European Union.

Criticism of TikTok reached a new level last week as CEO Shou Zi Chew testified for more than six hours at a contentious hearing in the House. Lawmakers grilled Chew about the implications of the app for America's national security and the effect on the mental health of its users. And the tough questions came from both sides of the aisle, as Republicans and Democrats alike pressed Chew about TikTok's content moderation practices, its ability to shield American data from Beijing and its spying on journalists.

"I've got to hand it to you," said Rep. August Pfluger, R-Texas, as members questioned Chew over data security and harmful content. "You've actually done something that in the last three to four years has not happened except for the exception of maybe (Russian President) Vladimir Putin. You have unified Republicans and Democrats."

While the hearing made plain that lawmakers view TikTok as a threat, their lack of first-hand experience with the app was apparent at times. Some made inaccurate and head-scratching comments, seemingly not understanding how TikTok connects to a home Wi-Fi router or how it moderates illicit content.

Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wis., who is active on the app and opposes a nationwide ban, called the hearing "cringeworthy."

"It was just so painful to watch," he told the AP on Friday. "And it just shows the real problem is Congress doesn't have a lot of expertise, whether it be social media or, for that matter, more importantly, technology."

Garcia, who said he uses TikTok more as a consumer, said most of his colleagues who are proposing a nationwide ban told him they had never used the app. "It gets hard to understand if you're not actually on it," the freshman Democrat said. "And at the end of the day, a lot of TikTok is harmless people dancing and funny videos."

"It's also incredibly rich educational content, and learning how to bake and learning about the political process," he said.

Rep. Jamaal Bowman, D-N.Y., who has more than 180,000 followers on the app, held a news conference with TikTok influencers before the hearing. He accused Republicans of pushing a ban on TikTok for political reasons.

"There are 150 million people on TikTok and we are more connected to them than Republicans are," Bowman said. "So for them, it's all about fear-mongering and power. It's not TikTok, because, again, we've looked the other way and allowed Facebook and other platforms to do similar things."

Critics of TikTok in Congress say their opposition is rooted in national security, not politics. TikTok is a



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wholly owned subsidiary of Chinese technology firm ByteDance Ltd., which appoints its executives. They worry Chinese authorities could force ByteDance to hand over TikTok data on American users, effectively turning the app into a data-mining operation for a foreign power. The company insists it is taking steps to make sure that can never happen.

"The basic approach that we're following is to make it physically impossible for any government, including the Chinese government, to get access to U.S. user data," general counsel Erich Andersen said during an interview with the AP on Friday at a cybersecurity conference in California.

TikTok has been emphasizing a \$1.5 billion proposal to store all U.S. user data on servers owned and maintained by the software giant Oracle. Access to U.S. data would be managed by U.S. employees through a separate entity run independently of ByteDance and monitored by outside observers.

Republican Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina took the unusual step of releasing a public statement urging all members of Congress to stop using TikTok, including from his home state — seemingly a jab at Jackson, who is one of the more active members with more than 1.8 million followers.

"I was just saying if we're having a discussion about TikTok then I think we ought to at least reduce the pull factor by elected officials who can simply come off of it," Tillis said this week, when asked about his statement. "I don't have a TikTok account. So that was an easy separation for me."

Loud warnings about TikTok have also been coming from President Joe Biden's administration. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and FBI Director Christopher Wray have told Congress in recent weeks that TikTok is a national security threat. Blinken told lawmakers the threat "should be ended one way or another."

But some members are unconvinced.

"It's like turning your cell phone off on an airplane. You're supposed to do. And if it was super dangerous, I don't think we will be allowed to have the phone on the plane," Rep. Greg Landsman, D-Ohio, said Wednesday, "So if it was super dangerous for members of Congress to have this app on their phone, you have to imagine the administration or our government would say absolutely not, you can't have it on a government phone."

Concerns about what kind of content Americans encounter online, or how their data is collected by technology companies, also aren't new. Congress has been wanting to curtail the amount of data tech companies collect on consumers through a national privacy law, but those efforts have stalled repeatedly over the years.

Supporters of TikTok on Capitol Hill are urging their colleagues to educate themselves about social media as a whole so Congress can pass legislation that deals with broader issues of data privacy, instead of hyper-focusing on a ban of TikTok, which could risk political backlash and a court fight over the reach of the First Amendment.

"We are uninformed and misinformed. We don't even understand how social media works. We don't know anything about data brokers and how data brokers sell our data to foreign countries and foreign companies right now," Bowman said. "So ban TikTok tomorrow, this stuff is still going to be happening."

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Associated Press writer Haleluya Hadero in Sausalito, California, contributed to this report.

## Snoop Dog steps in at last second during WrestleMania

By JOE REEDY AP Sports Writer

INGLEWOOD, Calif. (AP) — Leave it to Snoop Dogg to emerge as the Most Valuable Performer of WrestleMania 39.

During a weekend that saw World Wrestling Entertainment set a two-night attendance record for their signature event, rumors of a possible sale and Roman Reigns remaining the undisputed champion, the iconic rapper stepped up in an emergency.

Snoop Dogg was co-hosting a segment between matches on Sunday at SoFi Stadium with wrestler Mike "The Miz" Mizanin when he goaded Mizanin into an impromptu match with Shane McMahon, who made his appearance at a WWE event for the first time in 14 months. McMahon and Mizanin traded punches

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before McMahon tore his quad when he did a leapfrog maneuver while trying to avoid Mizanin.

Doctors checked on McMahon before he was helped out of the ring. Snoop Dogg then came back into the ring to continue the match, as he punched "The Miz" twice, then stole a page from "The Rock" and landed a people's elbow to secure the win.

"My hat's off to Snoop, just picking it up and like, 'oh man, he's hurt? That's alright, I'll fix that.' Just a natural born entertainer," said WWE head of creative Paul "Triple H" Levesque. "I've known Snoop for years in this environment and what kind of a fan he is, but tonight he put himself on a different playing field and respect factor for me. I know a lot of guys that have been in business a long time; if that happened, they'd go, 'what do we do?' It was amazing."

Besides co-hosting with "The Miz" both nights, Snoop drove Rey Mysterio out to the stage in a lowrider before his match against son Dominik Mysterio.

The Doggfather stepping in as a pinch wrestler continued the trend of celebrities coming in and not looking out of place.

Social media star Logan Paul participated in a WrestleMania match for the second straight year on Saturday. San Francisco 49ers tight end George Kittle came out of the stands and was part of a match between former Indianapolis Colts punter Pat McAfee and "The Miz." Rapper Bad Bunny made a cameo during the match between the Mysterios.

"They have no right to be this good," Levesque said of the celebrities stepping into the ring. "What's awesome about it is the grind and the level of what they're willing to put into this because they respect the business, respect for the WWE superstars and what we do and the people that came before them. It's cool to see them do that, but also awe-inspiring to see how good they are at it and how it raises the bar for everyone else."

Paul, who lost to Seth Rollins, did high-flying stunts and moves as if he had performed for more than 10 years. McAfee was a WWE announcer for 17 months (April 2021-September 2022) and participated in a match at last year's WrestleMania, while Kittle has been a long-time wrestling fan.

Bad Bunny, who took part in a tag team match at WrestleMania two years ago, will host WWE's next premium live event on May 6, which will take place in San Juan, Puerto Rico. It is the first time since 2005 that WWE is going to Puerto Rico.

Bad Bunny could also take part in a match that night. On Saturday, he was doing commentary in Spanish during Mysterio's match when he stopped Dominik from using a steel chain he would hit his father with. Rey Mysterio capitalized on the distraction and would hit his finishing move to get the win and set up a possible storyline between Bad Bunny and the younger Mysterio.

Outside the ring, attendance for both days was 161,892 and set stadium single-day records on both nights. The first WrestleMania in Los Angeles since 2005 is expected to generate record gate and sponsorship revenue when final figures are announced Monday morning.

The record revenues also come when WWE could be nearing a sale with UFC owner Endeavor. CNBC was the first to report that the two sides were nearing an agreement, but Levesque did not comment on those reports Sunday night.

One of the weekend's biggest surprises was Reigns continuing his 900-day-plus reign as champion. Cody Rhodes had all the momentum going into the match, and all indications pointed to a title change. Still, WWE's creative forces have decided to continue Reigns' dominance atop the company.

Barring injury or a giant surprise, Reigns will become the first WWE wrestler to reach 1,000 days as champion in early June. At this point, Reigns will likely keep the title through Summerslam in early August in Detroit, or he could still be the champion by next year's WrestleMania in Philadelphia.

"I want somebody to step up and take this ball from us," Reigns said. "Because if you don't, we're just going to keep a chokehold on this."

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## 'We'll kill you': Troops film boys' killings in Burkina Faso

By SAM MEDNICK and MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso (AP) — It was a walk 16-year-old Adama had done countless times, feeding the cows not far from his grandmother's house in northern Burkina Faso. But one day in mid-February, the teen who dreamed of becoming an imam didn't come home.

The next time his family saw him, it was in a harrowing cellphone video circulating on social media in the days after his disappearance. Adama lay alongside six other bloodied boys, their hands bound and most stripped to the waist. They were surrounded by about a dozen men, many in military fatigues, walking among the bodies, some taking video.

Sprinting through the frame, one man came to a halt over Adama and slammed a rock onto his head. As blood streamed from the jagged wound, the man shooting the video chuckled.

"This one ... was still alive," said the man, referring to Adama, whose last name is being withheld by The Associated Press out of concern for the safety of his family. "Good-for-nothing! You don't have anything to do but to kill people. We'll kill you one after another."

Burkina Faso's military has denied responsibility for the killings, which are a potential war crime under international law.

A frame-by-frame analysis of the 83-second video by the AP and an examination of satellite imagery shows the killings happened inside a military base about 2 kilometers (1 1/4 miles) northwest of Ouahigouya, a regional capital close to where Adama lived. From their uniforms and vehicles, the AP also determined troops in the video were members of Burkina Faso's security forces, which until recently received military training and hardware from the United States and European Union.

Through exclusive interviews with Adama's mother and uncle, the AP was also able to reconstruct his final hours. In response to a request for comment about the AP's findings, the U.S. government condemned the killings as "horrific" and called for the perpetrators to be held accountable.

Burkina Faso is at the epicenter of Islamic extremist violence cutting across Africa. For seven years, the landlocked country has been wracked by violence linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group that has killed thousands, displaced about 10% of the country's 20 million people and destabilized the nation.

Frustration at the government's inability to stem the violence led to two coups last year by military juntas vowing to stamp out the insurgency. Yet little has changed, with Burkina Faso overtaking Afghanistan as the nation with the most deaths globally from extremist violence, according to a recent report by the Global Terrorism Index.

A former French colony that won its independence in 1960, Burkina Faso is a majority Muslim country that was initially spared jihadi violence that began in neighboring Mali 10 years ago. France sent troops into the region to drive back the Islamic militants in 2013. The violence has since swept across the Sahel region, the vast semiarid area south of the Sahara.

Despite the jihadi violence, some civilians say they are now more afraid of Burkina Faso's security forces, who they accuse of extrajudicial killings and the disappearance of untold numbers of others accused of supporting the militants. Too often children are victims of the conflict.

The killings have grown under the junta led by Capt. Ibrahim Traore, who seized power in September. Traore promised to stem the violence, but people say they fear the repressive regime as security in the country deteriorates.

Part of the junta's strategy has been to recruit some 50,000 volunteer fighters to serve alongside the military, but residents say this has only contributed to civilian killings as the volunteers round up anyone they suspect of ties to the extremists.

Often those swept up by government forces are ethnic Fulani, a largely Muslim group who make up less than 10% of the population and mostly live in the north, where fighting has been most intense. The Fulani are perceived to be working with the militants, who target them for recruitment in part because of their historic grievances with the state and the fact that they live in regions where the militants have



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seized large areas.

On the day that Adama, who was Fulani, disappeared his grandmother combed their village searching for him. Hours later she learned the truth: Her grandson and a fellow cattle herder the family identified only as Ousseni had been seized and blindfolded by six men on motorbikes and taken to a military base. Ousseni, who is not Fulani, told her the security forces briefly questioned him before releasing him.

Ousseni said while the boys were locked up he overheard the troops accuse them of being jihadis. Fearful for his life, Ousseni fled the country soon after speaking to Adama's grandmother.

The video showing Adama's head crushed by a rock began circulating on WhatsApp chat groups around Feb. 14. A few days later, the teen's body was found on a roadside several kilometers (miles) from the military base where the video was filmed.

The AP spoke to members of Adama's family who fled their homes after he disappeared. Adama's uncle heard his nephew was abducted by security forces from the boy's grandmother, who recounted what Ousseni had told her. Adama's mother heard separately about her son's seizure from a relative, who saw him grabbed by security forces. Neither Adama's uncle nor his mother wanted their names used for fear of reprisal.

During an interview with the AP last month, the 40-year-old uncle shook his head as he replayed the video showing his nephew's lifeless body.

"No one can escape death, but it is the way you die that makes a difference. This way of dying is so horrible," he said. He recognized his nephew from the blue shorts he was wearing and his body, he said.

Adama's mother has not seen the video; the family has kept it from her to spare her further anguish. His body was buried by neighbors.

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Nearly 300 civilians have been killed in attacks involving Burkina Faso security forces between October and February, compared to about 100 during the same period a year ago, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, or ACLED. The violence has also taken a sharp ethnic turn, with the Fulani, including children, increasingly targeted by security forces because they are suspected of supporting the jihadis, according to rights organizations.

"During sweep operations as part of the fight against terrorism, most of the children arrested are Fulani. Those children generally tend the cattle," said Dr. Daouda Diallo, a pharmacologist and general secretary of the Collective Against Impunity and Stigmatization of Communities, a local rights group.

He said security forces mistakenly suspect the children of being "spies who inform the terrorists. And that's why they're ... arrested."

Amid the violence against civilians and ethnic divisions, the junta is trying to project an image of national unity.

Murals of soldiers mingling with residents and calling for an end to extremist violence line the capital's streets. In one, a soldier and a civilian raise a torch over the words, "Overcoming terrorism together." In another, a large red "X" is painted under the words "No to stigmatization."

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Jean-Emmanuel Ouedraogo, a spokesman for Burkina Faso's government, denied its military was responsible for the deaths of the boys shown in the video. He told the AP that militants often disguise themselves as security forces and film their actions in order to blame the government.

"The training of our soldiers and our (volunteers) include a large component on human rights and in all units we have provost marshals who keep watch," he said.

But using visual evidence from the video, the AP was able to match the location it was filmed to a military base named Camp Zondoma northwest of Ouahigouya, not far from where Adama was reported abducted. The buildings and trees in the video are consistent with recent satellite images of a compound within the base. The shadows cast by objects in the video puts the time at around 11 a.m.

Analysis of the soldiers' uniforms and their vehicles show they are consistent with those used by Burkina Faso's armed forces. To aid the fight against the Islamic State group and al-Qaida, the U.S. and EU have

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provided Burkina Faso with tens of millions of dollars worth of military training and equipment, including armored vehicles, drones, communications gear, uniforms, helmets and body armor.

Two camouflaged pickup trucks shown in the video are Toyota Land Cruiser Series 70s with seats for troops mounted in the back. They are the same model supplied to Burkina Faso by the U.S. and EU.

A larger troop carrier seen in the video is a Mercedes-Benz Atego. The U.S. Defense Department delivered 10 trucks of that model and color to Burkina Faso in 2014.

Four security force members in the video wore shirts with the Burkina Faso flag on the left arm, and the boots some wore appeared to be Mil-Tecs, the same German brand the EU recently provided to Burkina Faso's military.

Documents indicate Camp Zondoma is home to the 12th Commando Infantry Regiment of the Burkinabe army, though the AP was unable to conclusively link the uniforms worn by the men to that specific unit.

The AP shared its findings with the Human Rights Center at the University of California, Berkeley, which conducts research on war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. The center concurred that the visual evidence shows the video was filmed at the military base outside Ouahigouya and that the uniforms and trucks are consistent with those used by government troops in Burkina Faso.

In a response to the AP, U.S. State Department spokesperson Vedant Patel said foreign assistance to Burkina Faso has been restricted since the military overthrew the democratically elected government in January 2022. U.S. officials have repeatedly raised the importance of protecting and respecting human rights with Burkina Faso's leaders, he said.

"We strongly condemn the horrific violence as portrayed in the video," Patel said. "Allegations of human rights violations and abuses must be investigated fairly and those determined to be responsible held accountable."

EU support for Burkina Faso's security and defense sector has specifically focused on human rights and international humanitarian law and no lethal weapons have been delivered or financed, said Nabila Massrali, an EU spokesperson. The EU is also investing in Burkina Faso's military justice system and the military police to fight impunity, she said.

While the AP cannot verify the exact date the video was recorded, a former Burkinabe government official and a soldier said the boys were killed after an attack by militants on a volunteer fighter outpost on Feb. 13, the day before the video first appeared on social media. They spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Security reports gathered by ACLED, the data analysis group, show that Islamic militants attacked the volunteers that day, killing at least one and injuring two. According to the former government official, army reinforcements arrived soon after, and the killings in the video were carried out by security forces.

On Feb. 15, the day after the video appeared online, the chief of staff for Burkina Faso's armed forces issued an order for soldiers to stop disseminating images of operations on social networks, according to a copy obtained by the AP.

"These disseminations of controversial images could have negative consequences and influence on the dynamics" of the security forces, it said.

As security deteriorates in Burkina Faso, children are bearing the brunt from all sides, rights groups say. Three times more children were killed during the first nine months of 2022 than in the same period a year earlier, according to UNICEF. Most died from gunshot wounds during attacks on their villages or from improvised explosive devices or other remnants of war, it said.

"We are concerned by the impact of counter-terrorism measures on children associated with armed groups while preventing and combatting threats to national security," said Virginia Gamba, special representative of the U.N. secretary-general for children and armed conflict. Children associated with armed forces and groups should be treated as victims in line with international juvenile justice standards, she said.

Despite the Burkinabe government's claim that their forces were not responsible for the deaths, conflict experts said militants don't typically commit atrocities and blame state security forces. Nor do they kill

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children, for fear of alienating local populations.

"Jihadists usually carry (out) public executions against those collaborating with the state or opposition groups and will claim responsibility to send a message. They also don't execute children so they could maintain popularity among the population," said Rida Lyammouri, senior fellow at the Policy Center for the New South, a Moroccan-based think tank.

Stephen Rapp, who served as the U.S. Ambassador at Large for War Crimes Issues during the Obama administration, said the killings of Adama and the other boys in the video were war crimes under the Geneva Conventions and could be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court, of which Burkina Faso is a party.

"This would be a war crime even if the children had helped jihadis or had been child soldiers themselves," said Rapp, the chief prosecutor in the trial of the former Liberian dictator Charles Taylor, who was convicted in 2012 of war crimes committed during the bloody civil war in Sierra Leone.

"Persons not taking part in hostilities as well as detained combatants are entitled to humane treatment and killing them is murder as a war crime under international law," Rapp said. "As such these soldiers could be prosecuted in the ICC."

Adama's mother said there was no sign her son had become radicalized when he returned to Ouahigouya a year ago after spending a decade studying at a Quranic school in the western town of Nouna. While he was at the school she had no contact with her son except for occasional phone calls.

Their reunion last year was supposed to be the start of a new life together, she said.

"We were thinking of building a common life and living together in joy. He would get married and build a home. Unfortunately, we didn't have that chance," the 52-year-old woman said. Dressed in a long veil with matching silver bracelets on each arm, she lit up every time she spoke of her son's life and the dreams they had, but quickly turned somber when she remembered his death.

An energetic child, Adama learned to walk before even crawling and was always innovative, playing make-believe with his younger siblings, she said.

After returning to Ouahigouya, he lived with his grandmother. But whenever Adama visited, his mother said, they'd stay up for hours talking about her life as a girl and his plans for the future. He wanted to be an imam and educate people, she said.

She recalled him studying the Quran, often by candlelight at night and quizzing neighbors about its teachings, always clutching his white prayer beads. He had the beads with him on the day he was seized, family members said.

The last time Adama's mother saw him was in October, when he spent several weeks at her home. As he left, she warned him to be careful because the situation had become dangerous, and never to stray far from his grandmother's house. When they last spoke in February, shortly before he was killed, they were making plans to reunite for the Muslim holiday of Ramadan.

Adama's family has been too afraid to visit his grave, worried about being targeted by security forces.

"If he had lived long, I am sure he would have helped develop our community," his mother said. "He would have become an imam to teach people to be good Muslims. He would have helped people live together and he would have supported the needy."

AP Global Investigative Reporter Michael Biesecker reported from Washington.

Follow AP West Africa Correspondent Sam Mednick at [twitter.com/sammednick](https://twitter.com/sammednick) and Biesecker at [twitter.com/mbieseck](https://twitter.com/mbieseck)



## Russia blames Ukraine for bomb that killed military blogger

By The Associated Press undefined

Russia's top counterterrorism agency said Monday that the bombing attack that killed a well-known Russian military blogger was staged by Ukrainian security agencies.

Russian officials said Vladlen Tatarsky, 40, was killed Sunday as he was leading a discussion at a cafe on the banks of the Neva River in the historic heart of St. Petersburg. Over 30 people were wounded by the blast, and 10 of them remain in grave condition, according to the authorities.

The National Anti-Terrorist Committee, a state structure that coordinates counterterrorism, said that the attack on Tatarsky was "planned by Ukrainian special services" with the involvement of people who have cooperated with an anti-corruption foundation created by jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. It noted that the arrested suspect was an "active supporter" of Navalny's group.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below.

Russian police on Monday arrested a woman suspected of delivering a bomb that killed a well-known military blogger who fervently supported Moscow's war in Ukraine.

Russian officials said Vladlen Tatarsky, 40, was killed Sunday as he was leading a discussion at a cafe on the banks of the Neva River in the historic heart of St. Petersburg. Over 30 people were wounded by the blast, and 10 of them remain in grave condition, according to the authorities.

Investigators believe that the bomb was hidden in a bust of the blogger that the suspect had given to him as a gift just before the explosion.

Russia's Investigative Committee, the top state criminal investigation agency, said that Darya Tryopova was arrested on suspicion of involvement in Tatarsky's killing. Tryopova, a 26-year-old St. Petersburg resident who had been previously detained for taking part in anti-war rallies.

The Interfax news agency initially reported her arrest late Sunday, but later said that she was on the run while her mother and sister were summoned for questioning. Some media reports suggested that Tryopova could have been unaware that the bust contained an explosive device and was used by those who staged the attack to deliver it.

Witnesses said that the suspect asked questions and exchanged remarks with Tatarsky during the discussion. One witness, said the woman told Tatarsky that she had made a bust of the blogger but that guards asked her to leave it at the door, suspecting it could be a bomb. They joked and laughed, and then she went to the door, grabbed the bust and presented it to Tatarsky.

A video showed Tatarsky making jokes about the bust and putting it on the table next to him just before the explosion.

Russia's Investigative Committee, the state's top criminal investigation agency, opened a probe on charges of murder.

No one publicly claimed responsibility, but military bloggers and patriotic commentators immediately blamed Ukraine for the attack and compared the bombing to last August's assassination of nationalist TV commentator Darya Dugina, who was killed when a remotely controlled explosive device planted in her SUV blew up as she was driving on the outskirts of Moscow.

Russian authorities blamed Ukraine's military intelligence for Dugina's death, but Kyiv denied involvement.

Dugina's father, Alexander Dugin, a nationalist philosopher and political theorist who strongly supports the invasion of Ukraine, hailed Tatarsky as an "immortal" hero who died to save the Russian people.

Reacting to Tatarsky's death, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said his activities "have won him the hatred of the Kyiv regime" and noted that he and other Russian military bloggers have long faced Ukrainian threats.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Russian millionaire owner of the Wagner Group military contractor spearheading Moscow's offensive in eastern Ukraine, said he owned the cafe and handed it over to a patriotic group for meetings. He said he doubts the Ukrainian authorities' involvement in the bombing, saying the attack was likely launched by a "group of radicals" unrelated to the government in Kyiv.

Since the fighting in Ukraine began Feb. 24, 2022, Ukrainian authorities have refrained from claiming responsibility for various fires, explosions and apparent assassinations in Russia. At the same time, officials

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in Kyiv have jubilantly greeted such events and insisted on Ukraine's right to launch attacks in Russia.

A top Ukrainian government official cast the explosion that killed Tatarsky as part of internal turmoil.

"Spiders are eating each other in a jar," Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak wrote in English on Twitter late Sunday. "Question of when domestic terrorism would become an instrument of internal political fight was a matter of time."

Tatarsky, who had filed regular reports from Ukraine, was the pen name for Maxim Fomin, who had accumulated more than 560,000 followers on his Telegram messaging app channel.

Born in the Donbas, Ukraine's industrial heartland, Tatarsky worked as a coal miner before starting a furniture business. When he ran into financial difficulties, he robbed a bank and was sentenced to prison. He fled from custody after a Russia-backed separatist rebellion engulfed the Donbas in 2014, weeks after Moscow's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. Then he joined separatist rebels and fought on the front line before turning to blogging.

## Oil prices soar on producer output cuts; World shares higher

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — Oil prices soared nearly 6% on Monday after Saudi Arabia and other major oil producers said they will cut production by 1.15 million barrels per day from May until the end of the year. Shares in Asia were mixed.

U.S. benchmark crude oil rose \$4.24 to \$79.91 per barrel, or 5.6%, in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It rose \$1.30 to \$75.67 per barrel on Friday, ahead of the weekend meeting where members of the so-called OPEC+ group of oil exporting countries decided on the cuts, which are in addition to a reduction announced last October that infuriated the Biden administration.

Brent crude, the pricing basis for international oils, gained \$4.35 to \$84.24 per barrel, or 5.4%.

The cuts in oil output immediately pushed prices higher and were expected to boost gas prices, adding to strains in many countries where high fuel prices are a heavy burden. Higher oil prices also will complicate the efforts by central banks to rein in inflation.

"This will create both political waves across Europe and even higher general inflation in the USA, leading to renewed pressure on the Federal Reserve to keep hiking rates aggressively," Clifford Bennett, chief economist at ACY Securities, said in a report.

European shares opened higher. Germany's DAX added 0.2% to 15,665.63 and the CAC40 in Paris climbed 0.5% to 7,356.77. Britain's FTSE 100 surged 0.8% to 7,694.79.

The future for the S&P 500 slipped 0.2% while the contract for the Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 0.3%.

In Asian trading, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index gained 0.5% to 28,188.15, even after a quarterly survey by the Bank of Japan showed business sentiment among big Japanese manufacturers falling in the first quarter of this year. The headline measure of the "Tankan" showed positive sentiment falling to 1 from 7 in December, the worse quarterly result since since December 2020.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng edged 9 points higher to 20,409.18, while the Shanghai Composite index rose 0.7% to 3,296.40. In South Korea, the Kospi fell 0.2% to 2,472.34.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 advanced 0.6% to 7,223.00. Shares rose in Taiwan but edged lower in Bangkok.

Surveys of purchasing managers in emerging Asian markets declined last month as export orders weakened, adding to signs of fragility in the global economy.

"With global growth set to remain weak in the coming quarters, we expect manufacturing output in Asia to remain under pressure," Shivaan Tandon of Capital Economics said in a commentary.

On Friday, the S&P 500 gained 1.4% Friday, rising 3.5% for the month, with tech stocks leading the way. Friday's gains came after a report showed inflation slowed in February, though it was still high on a historical basis. A slowdown in inflation could give the Federal Reserve more leeway to take it easier on interest rates.

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The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 1.3%, while the Nasdaq composite climbed 1.7%. Big leaps for technology stocks drove a Nasdaq gain of 16.8% for the quarter.

High rates can undercut inflation but only by bluntly slowing the entire economy, which raises the risk of a recession. They also drag down prices for stocks, bonds and other investments.

Expectations for an easier Fed have helped Big Tech stocks in particular because high-growth stocks are seen as some of the biggest beneficiaries of lower rates. That's helped to prop up the S&P 500, where Big Tech stocks play an outsized role because of their massive size. Apple, Microsoft and Google's parent Alphabet each posted double-digit gains for March.

Adding to challenges for the Fed, the second- and third-largest U.S. bank failures in history rocked markets after depositors rushed to pull their money out of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank. The runs have pushed investors to cast harsher scrutiny on banks globally in the hunt for seemingly weak links.

The banking industry's troubles also could act like hikes to interest rates if they cause banks to pull back on lending, stifling hiring and growth for the economy.

In other trading Monday, the U.S. dollar rose to 133.50 Japanese yen from 133.28 yen late Friday. The euro strengthened to \$1.0848 from \$1.0844.

## Trump faces setbacks in other probes as NY case proceeds

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Donald Trump faces the most urgent legal challenge of his life this week in New York, where he's set to be arraigned Tuesday on charges arising from hush money payments during his 2016 campaign.

But as much of the attention will be on the courthouse in lower Manhattan, investigations from Atlanta to Washington will press forward, underscoring the broad range of peril he confronts as he seeks to reclaim the presidency.

The vulnerability Trump faces in Washington alone has become clear over the past month, as judges in a succession of sealed rulings have turned aside the Trump team's efforts to block grand jury testimony — including from his own lawyer and his former vice president — from witnesses who were, or still are, close to him and who could conceivably offer direct insight into key events.

The rulings directing advisers and aides to testify don't suggest that the Justice Department is close to bringing criminal charges, nor do they guarantee that prosecutors can secure testimony valuable to a potential prosecution. But they're nonetheless a key, closed-door win for the government as it investigates whether classified documents were criminally mishandled at Trump's Florida home and the possible obstruction of that probe, as well as efforts by Trump and his allies to undo the results of the 2020 presidential election.

"I do think when you're talking about an attempted insurrection and the kinds of issues that we're talking about there, there's going to be a lot of arguments on DOJ's side" to get the testimony, said Randall Eliason, a former federal prosecutor and a George Washington University law professor.

Meanwhile, the district attorney in Atlanta is continuing to investigate attempts by Trump and his allies to undo his election loss in Georgia. A special grand jury in February said it believed "one or more witnesses" committed perjury and urged local prosecutors to bring charges.

The former president never testified before the special grand jury, meaning he is not among those who could have perjured themselves. But the report doesn't foreclose the possibility of other charges, and the case still poses particular challenges for Trump, in part because his actions in Georgia were so public.

Overall, the number of sealed disputes over the scope of grand jury testimony is unusual but perhaps befitting for hugely consequential probes like one concerning a former president. It also stands in contrast to the last special counsel investigation involving Trump, when he was president and when Robert Mueller and his team of prosecutors sought to determine whether Trump's 2016 campaign had colluded with Russia to tip the election.

In that probe, a lawyer inside the White House, Ty Cobb, facilitated voluntary interviews of White House



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staff — without subpoenas — in hopes that cooperation would hasten the investigation toward conclusion.

“If I could figure out a way to cooperate and still preserve executive privilege, it would speed things up, which in my judgment ... was imperative to the president and to the country,” Cobb said in a recent interview. “We were able to accelerate getting them all of the information.”

Trump in that investigation was protected by the power of his office and by Justice Department legal opinions that say a sitting president cannot be indicted. No longer president, Trump has lost that shield, raising the stakes of his criminal exposure. And as prosecutors have sought to question people close to him — whether to better understand Trump’s state of mind and possible defenses, or to gather potentially damaging testimony — Trump’s lawyers have repeatedly objected, often in vain.

Perhaps the most vivid example came last month when the then-chief judge of the D.C. federal court ordered that Trump’s lawyer, M. Evan Corcoran, had to give more grand jury testimony in the Mar-a-Lago investigation. He had invoked attorney-client privilege in an earlier appearance before the grand jury in declining to answer more questions, but prosecutors pressed for more testimony.

They cited what’s known as the crime-fraud exception to attorney client privilege, which allows prosecutors to compel testimony from a lawyer if they can convince a judge that a client was using legal services in furtherance of a crime. U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell ruled that Corcoran had to return before the grand jury, and he was in court a week later.

Another instance came last week when a different federal judge, James Boasberg, ruled that former Vice President Mike Pence had to give some testimony in a Justice Department special counsel probe into efforts to undo the election.

The decision rejected the Trump team’s arguments of executive privilege, though Boasberg did give Pence a victory by accepting his lawyers’ arguments that, for constitutional reasons, he could not be questioned about his actions on Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob of Trump’s supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol as Republican Pence was presiding over a joint session of Congress to certify Democrat Joe Biden’s victory.

A Trump spokesman did not respond to a request for comment on this story but responded to the ruling in the Pence matter in a statement saying that the Justice Department “is continuously stepping far outside the standard norms in attempting to destroy the long accepted, long held, Constitutionally based standards of attorney-client privilege and executive privilege.”

Other former Trump aides, including Stephen Miller and former national security adviser Robert O’Brien, have also recently been ordered by a judge to offer testimony despite Trump team objections of executive privilege.

The ability of Justice Department prosecutors in multiple instances to convince judges that there’s a basis to secure the testimony is significant to the extent that it shows that “there’s a there there” with respect to the investigations, Eliason said.

But he cautioned from reading too much into it, given that the threshold for prevailing in a fight over executive privilege or attorney-client is lower than the burden needed to win a criminal case at trial.

“It’s a far cry from being able to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt in a contested trial,” Eliason said. “It would be quite a leap to go from there and be able to say that they’ve got a criminal case locked up.”

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

## ‘Son of a Sinner’ Jelly Roll reigns at CMT Music Awards show

By KRISTIN M. HALL AP Entertainment Writer

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — “Son of a Sinner” singer Jelly Roll was the big winner at the CMT Music Awards, as the rapper-turned-country singer took home three awards on Sunday as an outsider who won over fans with his confessional songs.

The tattooed singer got emotional during the show in Austin, Texas, which aired on CBS, as he thanked the country radio industry for its acceptance and shouted out to those who felt like him.

“You can be whatever you want to be. I promise you that. I told them that I wanted to be a country

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singer and I am standing here at the CMT Awards with the male video of the year, baby," he shouted.

Earlier in the night, he brought a choir out for his prayer-themed song "Need a Favor" and got the crowd to raise their hands to the roof.

The show started off with a somber tone as country singer and co-host Kelsea Ballerini read off the names of six victims of a school shooting killed Monday in Nashville, Tennessee. She noted how she shared their pain, explaining that in 2008 she witnessed a school shooting in her hometown high school cafeteria in Knoxville and prayed for "real action" that would protect children and families. Earlier in the evening, country artists wore black ribbons on the red carpet to honor victims of the shooting.

But the show prioritized nostalgia overall as performances merged rock, blues and country straight from the heart of Texas, mixing in tributes and covers alongside newer artists and fan-favorite hit songs.

Country superstar and five-time Grammy winner Shania Twain was given the Equal Play Award, recognizing her for being a "visible and vocal advocate" for diverse voices in country music. Texas native and Grammy-winning rapper Megan Thee Stallion introduced Twain and the pair danced and hugged to Twain's hit, "Man, I Feel Like a Woman."

The lyrics to the song became an undercurrent to a decades-long career of advocacy, Twain said.

"I promise I will continue to champion the many outstanding country artists that are not currently played, they are not currently streamed, toured, signed or awarded at the level they deserve," Twain said. "I believe in an all-inclusive country music."

Lainey Wilson won twice with female video of the year for "Heart Like a Truck" and collaborative video of the year for "Wait in the Truck" with HARDY.

"My heart is 'bout to beat right out my chest, I'll be honest with y'all," Wilson said after winning female video of the year, calling the hit song an anthem for surviving the "scratches, the dents and the bumps along the way."

Co-host Kane Brown took home the last award of the night with his wife, Katelyn, winning video of the year for their duet, "Thank God."

"This is all so new to me. And when we recorded this song a year ago, I never in my life would ever think this was ever going to happen," Katelyn Brown said.

Later in the show Ballerini took to the stage flanked by drag artists, as states across the country consider legally limiting drag show performances. The Tennessee native sang "If You Go Down (I'm Going Down Too)" and danced with Kennedy Davenport, Jan Sport, Manila Luzon and Olivia Lux, all stars of the show "RuPaul's Drag Race."

Tennessee was the first state to place strict limits on drag show performances, which were set to take effect this month. The law has been temporarily blocked after a lawsuit was filed earlier this week.

Collaborations took center stage for most of the three-hour show. Country Music Hall of Famer Wynonna Judd and Ashley McBryde performed a cover of Foreigner's "I Want to Know What Love is" while heavy fog rolled over the stage and into the crowd.

Pop singer Stefani performed her No Doubt mid-1990s pop-punk hit "Just a Girl" alongside country singer Carly Pearce. Rocker Alanis Morissette brought more of the '90s rock to the stage with a group performance of "You Oughta Know" featuring Wilson, Ingrid Andress, Madeline Edwards and Morgan Wade.

Carrie Underwood, the most-awarded artist in CMT history with 25 awards, performed "Hate My Heart" as fireworks lit up the Austin night. Four-time Grammy winner Clark Jr. performed a tribute to the late Texas guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughn at the top of the show.

Southern rockers Lynyrd Skynyrd were honored with a tribute performance following the death in March of the last original member, Gary Rossington. ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons, Slash of Guns N' Roses and the Allman Brothers' Warren Haynes and Chuck Leavell wrapped the show with singers Paul Rodgers and Cody Johnson and backup vocals from LeAnn Rimes and Judd.

Follow Kristin M. Hall at <https://twitter.com/kmhall>

## Pension protests raise tension between police, demonstrators

By ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French authorities see the police as protectors who are ensuring that citizens can peacefully protest President Emmanuel Macron's contentious retirement age increase. But to human rights advocates and demonstrators who were clubbed or tear-gassed, officers have overstepped their mission.

In the months since mass protests against the proposed pension changes began roiling France, some law enforcement officers have been accused of resorting to gratuitous violence. A man in Paris lost a testicle to an officer's club, and a police grenade took the thumb of a woman in Rouen. A railroad worker hit by grenade fragments lost an eye.

"Where is your humanity?" a woman shouted at officers who knocked an apparently homeless man to the ground in Paris, kicked him and used vulgar language while ordering him to get up and go. In a video posted on Twitter, another passerby helped the man to his feet at the scene last month near the Place de la Bastille.

The violence adds to the anger in the streets and complicates efforts to invite dialogue between the government and labor unions, who are planning an 11th round of mass demonstrations Thursday.

The protests, which began in January, gained momentum after Macron's decision last month to push a bill to raise the retirement age through the lower house of parliament without a vote. The common French reference to law enforcement officers as "forces of order" has been turned on its head. Now the question is whether police represent force or order.

Jarred by the bad publicity, authorities have shifted to damage control by offering accolades for security forces.

"There is no police violence," Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said Wednesday on RTL radio while condemning "individual acts" of officers who use disproportionate force. "Can't we occasionally thank the forces of order?" he pleaded.

The concerns about police brutality have reverberated beyond France. Amnesty International, the International Federation of Human Rights and the Council of Europe — the continent's main human rights body — were among the organizations that cited excessive police violence during what has been a largely peaceful protest movement.

French police are sent into demonstrations with weapons that are prohibited in most European countries, including stun grenades and rubber bullets, according to Sebastian Roche, an expert on security forces with France's National Center for Scientific Research.

Demonstrations and potentially mutilating weapons are a combustible combination, Roche said, because "the temptation will be very big to use these armaments" especially when police come under a cascade of objects hurled at them, including Molotov cocktails.

The strategy is "at once very violent" and in some aspects illegal, Roche said, citing cases in which demonstrators were detained en masse and then released without charges the next morning. Lawyers' and magistrates' associations have said such practices are an abuse of the law.

Jonas Cardoso, a 20-year-old student, was among more than 100 people detained during a March 23 protest in Paris.

"I spent hours in a cell for four people with nine other protesters. I slept on the floor," he told The Associated Press. Cardoso denied any wrongdoing and was released without charges.

Worse, Cardoso said, is that violence may beget more violence.

"If the government doesn't listen to us, the violence will rise. Our worst fear is that someone will die while protesting," the young man said.

Videos of police brutality posted on social media largely fail to capture the presence of black-clad ultra-leftists or anarchists who have infiltrated the protest marches, destroyed property and attacked police officers.

"There are troublemakers, often extreme left, who want to take down the state and kill police and ultimately take over the institutions," Darmanin said after a protest in March that turned especially violent.



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The ranks of these provocateurs have grown, bolstered by opportunists and some leftist students. The intruders work in small, highly mobile groups, appearing and disappearing in formations known as black blocs.

Black blocs are not a new phenomenon, but they represent a danger to police. In one dramatic video posted on social networks, an officer is seen crashing to the ground after being hit with a paving stone. Colleagues dragged him away.

Violence by and against police is not limited to Paris, or to protests over Macron's retirement plan.

Gendarmes and militants opposed to an artificial water basin recently clashed in rural France. Four people — two gendarmes and two protesters — were hospitalized in serious condition.

According to French policing rules, the use of force "must be absolutely necessary, strictly proportionate and graduated."

"Of course, the police response is proportionate," Paris Police Chief Laurent Nunez insisted in a television interview. Police intervene only when black blocs move into action, he said.

"Without police, demonstrations wouldn't take place," he said, insisting on their role as guardians of peace.

However, some protesters have found themselves trapped by police tactics such as encirclement, in which officers surround marchers so police can chase down troublemakers. But protesters stuck inside the police bubble can't escape tear gas fumes.

Roche said the latest tensions show that France has "an accumulation of (police) crises that no other European country has."

He cited the 2018-2019 Yellow Vest protests for social and economic justice where a brutal police response left two people dead, and multiple protesters lost eyes. Next came a debacle during last year's Champions League Cup final when British soccer fans were gassed by police at the Stade de France.

Amnesty International's France chief, Jean-Claude Samouiller, said last week at a news conference that France should improve its policing strategy and cited "a doctrine of de-escalation and dialogue" that is observed in Germany, Belgium and Sweden.

Compared with other European countries, Samouiller said, the two protest deaths in France in recent years put the nation at the bottom of the class, in the category of "bad student."

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Associated Press writers Jade Le Deley and Lori Hinnant in Paris contributed to this report.

## **Analysis: Saudi prince pivots to peace after years of war**

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — In the years since Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman catapulted to power, it has been hard to find a controversy in the Middle East that doesn't somehow involve the 37-year-old heir to the throne. Now he's pivoting to his next audacious plan: Giving peace a chance.

The moves toward reaching a détente with Iran, reestablishing ties to Syria and ending the kingdom's yearslong war in Yemen could extricate Prince Mohammed from some of the thorniest regional issues he faces.

Whether it succeeds will have profound impacts on the wider Middle East and on his expansive plans to reshape the kingdom away from oil and further into his image. Failure threatens not only his impending rule over a nation crucial to global energy supplies, but a wider region shaken by years of tensions, inflamed in part by his decisions.

Prince Mohammed's rise accelerated in 2015 after his father, King Salman, appointed him as deputy crown prince. That year saw Mohammed, also the country's defense minister at the time, plunge Saudi Arabia into a military campaign in Yemen, a civil war that grew into a regional proxy battle still continuing today. Riyadh supports Yemen's exiled government against the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels who hold Sanaa, the country's capital.

The tensions with Iran, at the time still in a nuclear deal with world powers, escalated with Saudi Arabia's execution of a prominent Shiite cleric in 2016. Protesters stormed Saudi diplomatic posts in Iran, and

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Riyadh broke off ties to Tehran.

In 2017, Saudi Arabia joined three other Arab nations in boycotting Qatar, which maintains ties to Iran. The same year, the prince made what appeared to be a heavy-handed attempt to break Iranian-backed Hezbollah's domination of Lebanon's government by inviting Lebanon's prime minister to the kingdom and then allegedly forcing him to announce his resignation. The attempt failed and Saudi Arabia's influence in Lebanon has been diminished ever since.

Prince Mohammed days later launched a purported anti-corruption campaign that saw the Saudi elite locked in the Ritz Carlton until they handed over billions in assets. The slaying of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul, believed by the United States and others to be at the prince's orders, followed in 2018.

But an attack that followed likely changed the prince's calculations. In September 2019, a barrage of cruise missiles and drones struck at the heart of Saudi Arabia's oil industry, temporarily halving production.

While the Houthis initially claimed the assault, the West and Saudi Arabia later blamed the attacks on Tehran. Independent experts also linked the weapons to Iran. Though Tehran still denies carrying out the attack, even United Nations investigators said that "the Houthi forces are unlikely to be responsible for the attack."

Saudi Arabia never retaliated publicly for the attack, nor did the U.S. under President Donald Trump as the longtime security guarantor for the Gulf Arab states. That, as well as America's later chaotic 2021 withdrawal from Afghanistan, led to a reconsideration in the region of how much to rely on U.S. promises.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia maintained a close relationship with Russia as part of the OPEC+ group. The organization's oil production cuts, even as Moscow's war on Ukraine boosted energy prices, angered President Joe Biden and American lawmakers. China, emerging from the coronavirus pandemic, also wants to secure its supply of Saudi oil.

Both Russia and China offer Saudi Arabia and Prince Mohammed the cachet of being respected by the world's great powers without the persistent human rights concerns of the West. Prince Mohammed has hosted and spoken by phone with both Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russia's Vladimir Putin.

The Chinese-mediated deal on the kingdom reestablishing ties with Iran also provides Prince Mohammed with a new opportunity to show the U.S. that others can shape Mideast politics. It also offers a needed lull to allow the prince to instead focus on his planned \$500 billion futuristic desert smart city project called Neom in the kingdom's northwest, and the Mukaab in Riyadh — a 400-meter-high (523-yard) cube-shaped mini-city full of holograms and entertainment venues — to anchor a new downtown in the Saudi capital, likely to cost billions more if completed.

A lull in tensions is desperately sought by Iran as well, particularly in the wake of the Mahsa Amini protests that represent one of the greatest challenges to its theocracy since the chaotic years after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. U.S. sanctions over Tehran's collapsed nuclear deal as well still choke Iran's economy.

For Prince Mohammed, the time must have appeared right to make the move. Already, Saudi Arabia led efforts to reestablish ties to Qatar in 2021. Easing tensions with Iran may provide him the avenue to finally fully pull out of the Yemen war.

Still, Prince Mohammed instructing Saudi officials to sit down with Iranian counterparts to reopen embassies represents a dramatic change for a leader who in 2018 said: "I believe the Iranian supreme leader makes Hitler look good."

Meanwhile, talks are ongoing on restoring ties with Syria, still under Iranian-backed President Bashar Assad after years of civil war. An upcoming Arab League summit being hosted by the kingdom in May could see Syria formally brought back into the fold. Even Lebanon, beset by crises ranging from fiscal to even time keeping, could benefit from a Saudi-Iran rapprochement.

The kingdom will also face a transition in the future. King Salman is already 87. His predecessor, King Abdullah, was the oldest Saudi monarch when he died at the age 90. Prince Mohammed likely will be the youngest ever to take the throne — and could have decades more to make his mark on the kingdom.

What that mark will be depends just as much on him as it does on whether he can cool the tensions

he helped kindle.

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — Jon Gambrell, the news director for Gulf Arab countries and Iran for The Associated Press, has reported from each of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Iran and other locations across the world since joining the AP in 2006. Follow him on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/jongambrellAP](https://www.twitter.com/jongambrellAP).

## **WSJ: McDonald's to close offices briefly ahead of layoffs**

NEW YORK (AP) — A report says McDonald's has closed its U.S. offices for a few days as the company prepares to inform employees about layoffs.

The Wall Street Journal cited an internal email from the Chicago-based fast-food giant saying U.S. corporate staff and some employees overseas should work from home while the company notifies people of their job status.

McDonald's did not immediately reply to emailed requests for comment. The report said McDonald's would inform its employees this week about staffing decisions that are part of a wide restructuring of the company announced earlier.

Though the U.S. labor market remains strong, layoffs have been mounting, mainly in the technology sector, where many companies over-hired after a pandemic boom. IBM, Microsoft, Amazon, Salesforce, Facebook parent Meta, Twitter and DoorDash have all announced layoffs in recent months.

Policymakers at the Federal Reserve have forecast the unemployment rate may rise to 4.6% by the end of this year, a sizable increase historically associated with recessions.

McDonald's has more than 150,000 employees in corporate roles. About 70% of those employees are based outside the United States.

The company reported its global sales rose nearly 11% in 2022, while sales in the U.S. climbed almost 6%. Total restaurant margins rose 5%. In its latest annual report, it cited difficulties in adequately staffing some of its outlets.

In January, McDonald's said its "Accelerating the Arches" program would focus on "deliveries, Drive Thru, digital and development."

"We're performing at a high level, but we can do even better," CEO Chris Kempczinski said in a Jan. 6 letter to employees. He said the company was divided into silos and that the approach was "outdated and self-limiting."

As the company reshapes its strategy, he said, "we will evaluate roles and staffing levels in parts of the organization and there will be difficult discussions and decisions ahead."

## **Jury selection begins in Idaho trial of slain kids' mother**

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Hundreds of people are expected to gather at an Idaho courthouse Monday morning as attorneys begin selecting 18 potential jurors for the trial of a woman charged in what prosecutors say was a doomsday-focused plot.

Prosecutors charged Lori Vallow Daybell and her husband, Chad Daybell, with conspiracy, murder and grand theft in connection with the deaths of Vallow Daybell's two youngest children: 7-year-old Joshua "JJ" Vallow and big sister Tylee Ryan, who was last seen a few days before her 17th birthday in 2019. Prosecutors also have charged the couple in connection with the October 2019 death of Chad Daybell's late wife, Tammy Daybell.

Both defendants have pleaded not guilty, but only Vallow Daybell's trial begins Monday. The cases have been severed and Chad Daybell's trial is still months away. Vallow Daybell faces up to life in prison if convicted.

The investigation garnered worldwide attention and was closely followed in the rural eastern Idaho community where the bodies of the children were found buried in Chad Daybell's yard. As a result, Seventh



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District Judge Steven Boyce moved the trial more than 200 miles (320 kilometers) east to the city of Boise.

Prosecutors say the Daybells espoused strange doomsday-focused beliefs to further their alleged plan to kill the kids and Tammy Daybell to collect life insurance money and the children's social security and survivor benefits.

Police documents detailed interviews with family members and friends who said the couple led a group that met to pray, believing they could drive out evil spirits and seek revelations from "beyond the spiritual veil." Vallow Daybell's close friend Melanie Gibb told investigators that the couple believed people became "zombies" when they were possessed by evil spirits.

The group would spend time praying to get rid of the zombies and believed, if they were successful, the possessed person would physically die, freeing their trapped soul from "limbo." Vallow Daybell called JJ and Tylee "zombies" several times before they died, Gibb told investigators.

Authorities summoned 1,800 potential jurors to the courthouse in late March, requiring each of them to complete a 20-page questionnaire in hopes of winnowing out anyone unable to fairly try the case. Defense attorneys and prosecutors have spent the last few days reviewing the questionnaires and will begin questioning the remaining jury pool members Monday in an effort to pick 12 jurors and six alternates to hear the case. The process could take days.

Idaho law enforcement officers started investigating the couple in November 2019 after extended family members reported the children were missing. During that period, police say the couple lied about the children's whereabouts. The children's bodies were found buried on Chad Daybell's property in rural Idaho.

The couple married two weeks after Chad Daybell's previous wife died unexpectedly. Tammy Daybell's death was initially reported as resulting from natural causes, but investigators had her body exhumed after suspicions grew when Chad Daybell quickly remarried.

Vallow Daybell is separately charged with conspiracy to commit murder in Arizona in connection with the July 2019 death of her previous husband, Charles Vallow. He was shot by Vallow Daybell's brother, Alex Cox, who claimed the killing was self-defense.

The Arizona case is on hold during the Idaho proceedings.

## Immigration reform stalled decade after Gang of 8's big push

By WILL WEISSERT and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Ten years ago this month, Sen. Chuck Schumer declared, "We all know that our immigration system is broken, and it's time to get to work on fixing it." Sen. John McCain quoted Winston Churchill. But it was Lindsey Graham who offered the boldest prediction.

"I think 2013 is the year of immigration reform," the South Carolina Republican said.

It wasn't. And neither has any year since those "Gang of Eight" senators from both parties gathered in a Washington auditorium to offer hopeful pronouncements. In fact, today's political landscape has shifted so dramatically that immigrant advocates and top architects of key policies over the years fear that any hope of an immigration overhaul seems further away than ever.

Many Republicans now see calling for zero tolerance on the border as a way to animate their base supporters. Democrats have spent the last decade vacillating between stiffer border restrictions and efforts to soften and humanize immigration policy — exposing deep rifts on how best to address broader problems.

"There are big questions about whether or not anything in the immigration family — anything at all — has the votes to pass," said Cecilia Muñoz, who served as President Barack Obama's top immigration adviser and was a senior member of Joe Biden's transition team before he entered the White House.

The last extensive package came under President Ronald Reagan in 1986, and President George H.W. Bush signed a more limited effort four years later. That means federal agents guarding the border today with tools like drones and artificial intelligence are enforcing laws written back when cellphones and the internet were novelties. Laying the problem bare in the deadliest of terms was a fire last month at a detention center on the Mexican side of the border that killed 39 migrants.

Congress came the closest to a breakthrough on immigration in 2013 with the Gang of Eight, which in-

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cluded Schumer, a New York Democrat who is now Senate majority leader, and Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla. Their proposal cleared the Senate that June and sought a pathway to citizenship for millions of people in the country illegally and expanded work visas while tightening border security and mandating that employers verify workers' legal status.

Democrats cheered a modernized approach to immigration. Republicans were looking for goodwill within the Latino community after Obama enjoyed such strong support from Hispanic voters while being reelected in 2012.

Prominent supporters of the proposal were as diverse as the powerful AFL-CIO labor union and the pro-business U.S. Chamber of Commerce. There was more momentum than there had been for large immigration changes that fizzled in 2006 and 2007 under President George W. Bush.

Still, Republican House Speaker John Boehner gauged support for the Gang of Eight bill in the GOP-controlled chamber in January 2014 and said too many lawmakers distrusted the Obama administration. By that summer, the bill was dead.

Obama then created a program protecting from deportation migrants brought illegally to the U.S. as children. The Supreme Court has previously upheld it, but the court's relatively recent 6-3 conservative majority could pose long-term threats.

Years after the creation of Obama's program, President Donald Trump called for walling off all of the nation's 2,000-mile southern border, and his administration separated migrant children from their parents and made migrants wait in Mexico while seeking U.S. asylum.

Biden endorsed a sweeping immigration package on his Inauguration Day, but it went nowhere in Congress. His administration has since softened some Trump immigration policies and tightened others, even as his party has seen Republican support rise among Hispanic voters.

Officials have continued to enforce Title 42 pandemic-era health restrictions that allowed for migrants seeking U.S. asylum to be quickly expelled, though they are set to expire May 11. The Biden White House is also considering placing migrant families in detention centers while they wait for their asylum cases, something the Obama and Trump administrations did.

Gil Kerlikowske, who was commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection under Obama, said "a lot of things are coming together at once," including Title 42 possibly ending, a spike in the number of South American migrants crossing through the treacherous rainforests of the Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama, and a 2024 presidential election ratcheting up the political pressure.

"Two and a half years into the administration, there really hasn't been any announcement of what is our immigration policy," Kerlikowske said. "Getting laws passed is almost impossible. But what's been the policy?"

The League of United Latin American Citizens is so desperate for meaningful progress that it has begun advocating for a full moratorium of up to six months on U.S. asylum as a way of calming things at the border. Its president, Domingo Garcia, said that migrants know they are processed and allowed to remain in the U.S. for years fighting for asylum in court, and that authorities need to "turn off the faucet" to help strained border cities.

"We need a total reset," said Garcia, whose group is the nation's oldest Latino civil rights organization. "I think that people on the far left are just as wrong as those who believe they should close the border and let no one in."

Biden's administration announced in early January that it would admit up to 30,000 people a month from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela for two years with authorization to work when they apply online. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas argues that the new rules are designed to weaken cartels who help migrants cross into the U.S. illegally.

"Our model is build lawful, safe and orderly pathways for people to reach the United States to claim asylum and to cut out the smuggling organizations," Mayorkas said recently.

It appears to be working, for now. After federal authorities detained migrants more than 2.5 million times at the southern border in 2022 — including more than 250,000 in December, the highest monthly total on record — the number of encounters with migrants plummeted during the first two months of this year.

But fewer crossings has created a backlog of thousands of migrants hoping to seek U.S. asylum wait-

ing on the Mexican side of the border. Last month's fire at a Mexican government facility began amid a protest by migrants fearing deportation. Some of those being held said they'd been attempting to apply online when they were rounded up by Mexican authorities.

Meanwhile, warmer months often see major increases in the number of migrants at the U.S. border. And activists say that Biden has sent mixed signals by continuing to enforce Title 42 and considering reopening family detention centers — a possibility that even top Democrats are now decrying.

"We urge you to learn from the mistakes of your predecessors and abandon any plans to implement this failed policy," Schumer and 17 other Senate Democrats recently wrote in a letter to Biden that called family detention policies "morally reprehensible and ineffective as an immigration management tool."

Republicans have blasted Biden's "border crisis" and, since Trump's rise, made gains among voters in some heavily Latino areas. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, widely expected to be the leading alternative to Trump in next year's Republican presidential primary, flew migrants from Texas to Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts, arguing that Democrats around the country were ignoring the crush of migrants on the U.S.-Mexico border.

In Miami, Nery Lopez was among a group of activists who recently mobilized to oppose a state bill that would punish people who transport migrants in the country illegally. Now 27, she was brought to the U.S. as a 4-year-old from Mexico and is protected from deportation by the Obama-era program.

Lopez said advocates were counting on the Biden administration to counter Republicans' hard-line immigration policies.

"People feel defeated. I feel defeated," Lopez said. "It's like we are going into the same cycle."

Weissert reported from Washington.

## Explosion in Russian cafe kills prominent military blogger

By The Associated Press undefined

An explosion tore through a cafe in Russia's second-largest city Sunday, killing a prominent military blogger who had supported the fighting in Ukraine and was speaking at a patriotic discussion event.

Russian news reports said blogger Vladlen Tatarsky was killed in the explosion at the Street Food Bar No. 1 cafe in St. Petersburg. Twenty-five people were wounded, and 19 of them were hospitalized, according to the regional governor, Alexander Beglov.

Russia media and military bloggers said Tatarsky was meeting with members of the public and that a woman presented him with a box containing a statuette that apparently exploded. A patriotic Russian group that organized the event said it had taken security precautions, but added that "regrettably, they proved insufficient."

The reports did not mention any claim of responsibility. The Interior Ministry said everyone at the cafe at the time of the blast was being "checked for involvement."

Since the fighting in Ukraine began on Feb. 24, 2022, various fires, explosions and apparent assassinations have occurred in Russia without any clear connection to the conflict.

Tatarsky had filed regular reports from Ukraine. Tatarsky is the pen name for Maxim Fomin who had accumulated more than 560,000 followers on his Telegram messaging app channel. He was known for his blustery pronouncements and ardent pro-war rhetoric.

After the Kremlin's annexation of four regions of Ukraine last year, Tatarsky posted a video in which he vowed: "That's it. We'll defeat everybody, kill everybody, rob everybody we need to. It will all be the way we like it. God be with you."

Many countries have condemned the annexation as illegal.

A top Ukrainian government official speculated that internal Russian opposition to the Kremlin's invasion was behind the blast.

"Spiders are eating each other in a jar," Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak wrote in English on Twitter. "Question of when domestic terrorism would become an instrument of internal political fight



was a matter of time.”

Last August, Darya Dugina, a 29-year-old commentator with a nationalist Russian TV channel, died when a remotely controlled explosive device planted in her SUV blew up as she was driving on the outskirts of Moscow. She and her father — a philosopher, writer and political theorist — strongly supported Russian President Vladimir Putin’s decision to send troops into Ukraine.

Russian authorities blamed Ukraine for the attack, but Kyiv denied involvement.

## Immigration reform stalled decade after Gang of 8’s big push

By WILL WEISSERT and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Ten years ago this month, Sen. Chuck Schumer declared, “We all know that our immigration system is broken, and it’s time to get to work on fixing it.” Sen. John McCain quoted Winston Churchill. But it was Lindsey Graham who offered the boldest prediction.

“I think 2013 is the year of immigration reform,” the South Carolina Republican said.

It wasn’t. And neither has any year since those “Gang of Eight” senators from both parties gathered in a Washington auditorium to offer hopeful pronouncements. In fact, today’s political landscape has shifted so dramatically that immigrant advocates and top architects of key policies over the years fear that any hope of an immigration overhaul seems further away than ever.

Many Republicans now see calling for zero tolerance on the border as a way to animate their base supporters. Democrats have spent the last decade vacillating between stiffer border restrictions and efforts to soften and humanize immigration policy — exposing deep rifts on how best to address broader problems.

“There are big questions about whether or not anything in the immigration family — anything at all — has the votes to pass,” said Cecilia Muñoz, who served as President Barack Obama’s top immigration adviser and was a senior member of Joe Biden’s transition team before he entered the White House.

The last extensive package came under President Ronald Reagan in 1986, and President George H.W. Bush signed a more limited effort four years later. That means federal agents guarding the border today with tools like drones and artificial intelligence are enforcing laws written back when cellphones and the internet were novelties. Laying the problem bare in the deadliest of terms was a fire last month at a detention center on the Mexican side of the border that killed 39 migrants.

Congress came the closest to a breakthrough on immigration in 2013 with the Gang of Eight, which included Schumer, a New York Democrat who is now Senate majority leader, and Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla. Their proposal cleared the Senate that June and sought a pathway to citizenship for millions of people in the country illegally and expanded work visas while tightening border security and mandating that employers verify workers’ legal status.

Democrats cheered a modernized approach to immigration. Republicans were looking for goodwill within the Latino community after Obama enjoyed such strong support from Hispanic voters while being reelected in 2012.

Prominent supporters of the proposal were as diverse as the powerful AFL-CIO labor union and the pro-business U.S. Chamber of Commerce. There was more momentum than there had been for large immigration changes that fizzled in 2006 and 2007 under President George W. Bush.

Still, Republican House Speaker John Boehner gauged support for the Gang of Eight bill in the GOP-controlled chamber in January 2014 and said too many lawmakers distrusted the Obama administration. By that summer, the bill was dead.

Obama then created a program protecting from deportation migrants brought illegally to the U.S. as children. The Supreme Court has previously upheld it, but the court’s relatively recent 6-3 conservative majority could pose long-term threats.

Years after the creation of Obama’s program, President Donald Trump called for walling off all of the nation’s 2,000-mile southern border, and his administration separated migrant children from their parents and made migrants wait in Mexico while seeking U.S. asylum.

Biden endorsed a sweeping immigration package on his Inauguration Day, but it went nowhere in Con-

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gress. His administration has since softened some Trump immigration policies and tightened others, even as his party has seen Republican support rise among Hispanic voters.

Officials have continued to enforce Title 42 pandemic-era health restrictions that allowed for migrants seeking U.S. asylum to be quickly expelled, though they are set to expire May 11. The Biden White House is also considering placing migrant families in detention centers while they wait for their asylum cases, something the Obama and Trump administrations did.

Gil Kerlikowske, who was commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection under Obama, said "a lot of things are coming together at once," including Title 42 possibly ending, a spike in the number of South American migrants crossing through the treacherous rainforests of the Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama, and a 2024 presidential election ratcheting up the political pressure.

"Two and a half years into the administration, there really hasn't been any announcement of what is our immigration policy," Kerlikowske said. "Getting laws passed is almost impossible. But what's been the policy?"

The League of United Latin American Citizens is so desperate for meaningful progress that it has begun advocating for a full moratorium of up to six months on U.S. asylum as a way of calming things at the border. Its president, Domingo Garcia, said that migrants know they are processed and allowed to remain in the U.S. for years fighting for asylum in court, and that authorities need to "turn off the faucet" to help strained border cities.

"We need a total reset," said Garcia, whose group is the nation's oldest Latino civil rights organization. "I think that people on the far left are just as wrong as those who believe they should close the border and let no one in."

Biden's administration announced in early January that it would admit up to 30,000 people a month from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela for two years with authorization to work when they apply online. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas argues that the new rules are designed to weaken cartels who help migrants cross into the U.S. illegally.

"Our model is build lawful, safe and orderly pathways for people to reach the United States to claim asylum and to cut out the smuggling organizations," Mayorkas said recently.

It appears to be working, for now. After federal authorities detained migrants more than 2.5 million times at the southern border in 2022 — including more than 250,000 in December, the highest monthly total on record — the number of encounters with migrants plummeted during the first two months of this year.

But fewer crossings has created a backlog of thousands of migrants hoping to seek U.S. asylum waiting on the Mexican side of the border. Last month's fire at a Mexican government facility began amid a protest by migrants fearing deportation. Some of those being held said they'd been attempting to apply online when they were rounded up by Mexican authorities.

Meanwhile, warmer months often see major increases in the number of migrants at the U.S. border. And activists say that Biden has sent mixed signals by continuing to enforce Title 42 and considering reopening family detention centers — a possibility that even top Democrats are now decrying.

"We urge you to learn from the mistakes of your predecessors and abandon any plans to implement this failed policy," Schumer and 17 other Senate Democrats recently wrote in a letter to Biden that called family detention policies "morally reprehensible and ineffective as an immigration management tool."

Republicans have blasted Biden's "border crisis" and, since Trump's rise, made gains among voters in some heavily Latino areas. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, widely expected to be the leading alternative to Trump in next year's Republican presidential primary, flew migrants from Texas to Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts, arguing that Democrats around the country were ignoring the crush of migrants on the U.S.-Mexico border.

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Lopez said advocates were counting on the Biden administration to counter Republicans' hard-line immigration policies.

"People feel defeated. I feel defeated," Lopez said. "It's like we are going into the same cycle."

Weissert reported from Washington.

## Twitter pulls check mark from main New York Times account

By The Associated Press undefined

Twitter has removed the verification check mark on the main account of The New York Times, one of CEO Elon Musk's most despised news organizations.

The removal comes as many of Twitter's high-profile users are bracing for the loss of the blue check marks that helped verify their identity and distinguish them from impostors on the social media platform.

Musk, who owns Twitter, set a deadline of Saturday for verified users to buy a premium Twitter subscription or lose the checks on their profiles. The Times said in a story Thursday that it would not pay Twitter for verification of its institutional accounts.

Early Sunday, Musk tweeted that the Times' check mark would be removed. Later he posted disparaging remarks about the newspaper, which has aggressively reported on Twitter and on flaws with partially automated driving systems at Tesla, the electric car company, which he also runs.

Other Times accounts such as its business news and opinion pages still had either blue or gold check marks on Sunday, as did multiple reporters for the news organization.

"We aren't planning to pay the monthly fee for check mark status for our institutional Twitter accounts," the Times said in a statement Sunday. "We also will not reimburse reporters for Twitter Blue for personal accounts, except in rare instances where this status would be essential for reporting purposes," the newspaper said in a statement Sunday.

The Associated Press, which has said it also will not pay for the check marks, still had them on its accounts at midday Sunday.

Twitter did not answer emailed questions Sunday about the removal of The New York Times check mark.

The costs of keeping the check marks ranges from \$8 a month for individual web users to a starting price of \$1,000 monthly to verify an organization, plus \$50 monthly for each affiliate or employee account. Twitter does not verify the individual accounts to ensure they are who they say they are, as was the case with the previous blue check doled out to public figures and others during the platform's pre-Musk administration.

While the cost of Twitter Blue subscriptions might seem like nothing for Twitter's most famous commentators, celebrity users from basketball star LeBron James to Star Trek's William Shatner have balked at joining. Seinfeld actor Jason Alexander pledged to leave the platform if Musk takes his blue check away.

The White House is also passing on enrolling in premium accounts, according to a memo sent to staff. While Twitter has granted a free gray mark for President Joe Biden and members of his Cabinet, lower-level staff won't get Twitter Blue benefits unless they pay for it themselves.

"If you see impersonations that you believe violate Twitter's stated impersonation policies, alert Twitter using Twitter's public impersonation portal," said the staff memo from White House official Rob Flaherty.

Alexander, the actor, said there are bigger issues in the world but without the blue mark, "anyone can allege to be me" so if he loses it, he's gone.

"Anyone appearing with it=an imposter. I tell you this while I'm still official," he tweeted.

After buying Twitter for \$44 billion in October, Musk has been trying to boost the struggling platform's revenue by pushing more people to pay for a premium subscription. But his move also reflects his assertion that the blue verification marks have become an undeserved or "corrupt" status symbol for elite personalities, news reporters and others granted verification for free by Twitter's previous leadership.

Along with shielding celebrities from impersonators, one of Twitter's main reasons to mark profiles with a blue check mark starting about 14 years ago was to verify politicians, activists and people who suddenly find themselves in the news, as well as little-known journalists at small publications around the globe, as an extra tool to curb misinformation coming from accounts that are impersonating people. Most "legacy blue checks" are not household names and weren't meant to be.



One of Musk's first product moves after taking over Twitter was to launch a service granting blue checks to anyone willing to pay \$8 a month. But it was quickly inundated by impostor accounts, including those impersonating Nintendo, pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly and Musk's businesses Tesla and SpaceX, so Twitter had to temporarily suspend the service days after its launch.

The relaunched service costs \$8 a month for web users and \$11 a month for users of its iPhone or Android apps. Subscribers are supposed to see fewer ads, be able to post longer videos and have their tweets featured more prominently.

## Police reforms tested in city where officer killed Black man

By COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

The Rev. James Stokes remembers Grand Rapids following the slaying of George Floyd, when demonstrations devolved into rioting that left businesses damaged and scores of people arrested.

Stokes and other leaders in the western Michigan city desperately wanted to avoid a similar outbreak of violence when a white Grand Rapids police officer fatally shot Patrick Lyoya, a Black motorist, last April. After video of that shooting was publicly released, outrage in the community grew, and some feared a violent response. But the protests — while loud and angry — were peaceful. No buildings were burned. No shops were looted.

City leaders say policing reforms and outreach to Grand Rapids' Black community, including the clergy, helped to keep the peace after Lyoya's slaying. Others believe the reform efforts have been slow and their impact superficial at best.

"We knew what potentially could have happened," said Stokes, pastor of New Life Tabernacle church. "As pastors, we got out in front of it right away, talking to our congregations, holding press conferences. The world was watching and everybody understood Grand Rapids had to get this right."

Grand Rapids police have a history of heavy-handed encounters with Black people, who account for 18% of the city's population. Stokes said no one has forgotten how officers detained five Black youths at gunpoint in 2017 and, about 16 months later, officers stopped and pointed guns at three Black children, including two 11-year-olds — both prompted by reports of Black kids with guns.

The killing in 2020 of Floyd, a Black man, by a white Minneapolis police officer, touched off demonstrations and riots against racist policing across the U.S., including in Grand Rapids, where more than 100 businesses were damaged, seven police vehicles were set on fire and the mayor declared a civil emergency.

Then, last April 4, Grand Rapids officer Christopher Schurr pulled over Lyoya, a 26-year-old from Nigeria, ostensibly because the license tags on his car didn't match the vehicle. When Schurr asked for his license, Lyoya ran, but Schurr caught him and the two wrestled on the ground.

Schurr's bodycam footage appears to show Lyoya reaching for the officer's Taser. They tussle until Schurr fires one shot into the back of Lyoya's head. A passenger in Lyoya's car filmed the shooting with his cellphone.

There was collective anger and grief from a "vast majority of our community" following Lyoya's death, said City Commissioner Kelsey Perdue, who is Black. She said change isn't coming quickly enough.

"Folks are losing a bit of patience," Perdue said. "When you have tragedy strike, it always is kind of a wake-up call that do we have enough in place to prevent this from happening again?"

Schurr was fired last year and charged with second-degree murder. His trial is scheduled to start in October.

"It feels like with law enforcement and policing, our country and community continually takes two steps forward with reform and then steps backward with use-of-force incidents," said Mark Washington, who is Black and was hired in 2018 as Grand Rapids city manager.

Public anger over the Grand Rapids police interactions with the Black youths in 2017 and 2018 led to more officer training and the introduction of a youth interaction policy. Washington developed the city's Office of Oversight and Public Accountability in 2019 to liaise between law enforcement and residents. The city rolled out a program that puts Black pastors with officers in patrol cars to help deescalate volatile

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situations in their neighborhoods.

Washington said the city has also invested nearly \$1 million in the Cure Violence program, which has people who served prison sentences working with youths to help them avoid making similar mistakes.

"We're looking at policing differently," he said. "It's unfortunate that the challenges ... around police incidents have defined us more than the progress that we've made."

Grand Rapids' programs mirror efforts elsewhere to smooth community relations.

Baltimore police began making changes in 2017 through court-ordered reforms following the 2015 death of Freddie Gray in police custody. Federal investigators had found a pattern of unconstitutional and discriminatory policing practices, especially against Black residents.

In Connecticut in 2021, a state police officer and training council approved a required use-of-force training program for all police officers.

More recently, the fatal beating of Black motorist Tyre Nichols in Memphis, Tennessee, renewed demands for police reforms. Of the seven Memphis officers fired in Nichols' death, five have been charged with second-degree murder. All of the officers charged are Black.

"We're seeing a lot of cities start to create things like civilian-led oversight boards," said Kirby Gaherty, a program director at the Washington-based National League of Cities. "While those things are great, if they don't have any teeth or don't allow for residents or citizens to be part of decision-making at the very beginning, they could be seen as more informative than helpful."

Eric Cumberbatch, senior vice president of Policy & Community Engagement at the Center for Policing Equity, questions the efficacy of community outreach programs.

Officers meet Black clergy, play basketball with children and attend cookouts, but that "lacks real depth in creating systematic and institutional change," said Cumberbatch, whose organization uses data to help communities achieve safer policing outcomes.

Since Lyoya's death, Grand Rapids police have not fatally shot any community members, although state police determined Patrick Jones, a Black homicide suspect, fatally shot himself in December after exchanging gunfire with officers.

Police training must be ongoing, said Jamarhl Crawford, a Boston-based community activist and former member of a police reform task force.

"It's difficult to legislate or control human behavior," Crawford said. "They're never going to create a system where officers are not going to (mess) up. What has to be done is to put in a system and mechanism about what happens when they do — transparent and independent investigations."

The police training and reforms in Grand Rapids are "nothing revolutionary" and "really like more of the same — looking for new ways to intrude, to interrogate and impose themselves on the community," said Victor Williams, president of the neighborhood association where Lyoya was killed.

"People would rather self-police. They don't trust police in this neighborhood," Williams said.

Still, Frank Stella, director of the Interfaith Dialogue Association in Grand Rapids, believes "it was a minor miracle that cooler heads prevailed" after Lyoya's death.

"There are people who will disagree with me — a group that is extremely vocal and extremely disruptive who will claim Grand Rapids has not taken a step forward," Stella said. "I understand their passion and frustration, but I see progress."

Williams is a member of AP's Race & Ethnicity team.

## New York, city of Trump's dreams, delivers his comeuppance

By MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — His name has been plastered on this city's tabloids, bolted to its buildings and cemented to a special breed of brash New York confidence. Now, with Donald Trump due to return to the place that put him on the map, the city he loved is poised to deliver his comeuppance.

Rejected by its voters, ostracized by its protesters and now rebuked by its jurors, the people of New York have one more thing on which to splash Trump's name: Indictment No. 71543-23.

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"He wanted to be in Manhattan. He loved Manhattan. He had a connection to Manhattan," says Barbara Res, a longtime employee of the former president who was a vice president at the Trump Organization. "I don't know that he has accepted it and I don't know that he believes it, but New York turned on him."

None of Trump's romances have lasted longer than his courtship of New York. No place else could match his blend of ostentatious and outlandish. His love of the city going unrequited is Shakespearean enough, but Trump took it a step further, rising to the presidency only to become a hometown antihero.

Trump was born and raised in Queens to a real estate developer father whose projects were largely in Queens and Brooklyn. But the younger Trump ached to cross the East River and make his name in Manhattan. He gained a foothold with his transformation of the rundown Commodore Hotel into a glittering Grand Hyatt and ensured a spotlight on himself by appearing at the side of politicians and celebrities, popping up at Studio 54 and other hot spots and coaxing near-constant media coverage.

By the greed-is-good 1980s, he was a New York fixture. And in a city that prides itself as the center of the world, Trump saw himself as king.

"Trump grew up with a great deal of resentment toward others who he thought had more fame, wealth, or popularity," says David Greenberg, a Rutgers University professor who wrote "Republic of Spin: An Inside History of the American Presidency." "Making it in Manhattan — building Trump Tower and becoming a fixture of the Manhattan social scene in the 1980s — meant a lot to him."

The feeling was never truly mutual, though. Trump left a trail of unpaid bills, jilted workers and everyday New Yorkers who saw through his shameless self-promotion.

He may have been a singular character, but in a city of 8 million stories, his was just another one.

So, for years, Trump's life here continued as the city raced on around him. Marriages came and went. Skyscrapers rose. Bankruptcies were filed. Trump flickered in and out of fame's upper echelon.

He may never have been a common New Yorker, packed in the subway on the morning commute or grabbing a hot dog from a street vendor, but for many he remained a benign, if outsized, presence.

That began changing with years of bizarre, racially-fueled lies about Barack Obama's birthplace, and by the time he descended the golden escalator at Trump Tower on June 16, 2015, to announce his presidential bid, many in his hometown had little patience for the vitriol he spewed.

Rockefeller Center played host to a weekly "Saturday Night Live" that made him a mockery, and at a Waldorf-Astoria gala, he elicited groans. In vast swaths of the city, distaste for Trump turned to hatred.

Even among Republicans, many saw him as believable as a Gucci bag on Canal Street. Trump won the state's Republican primary, but couldn't convince GOP voters in Manhattan.

"He's no longer just this TV show charlatan. People see this man is actually going to lead the country and the world in the wrong direction," says Christina Greer, a political scientist at Fordham University.

On Election Night 2016, tears flowed at the Javits Center, where Hillary Clinton's victory party never materialized, while giddy supporters of Trump reveled in his surprise win across town in a Hilton ballroom. New Yorkers' rebuke of their native son meant nothing. His face was projected unto the face of the Empire State Building as locals digested the fact that he would be president.

In the days that followed, a curious parade of politicians and celebrities journeyed to Trump Tower to meet the president-elect and, for weeks after, predictions about his presidency were rampant.

Among the musings of observers was speculation of a commuter president shuttling between New York and Washington. When word emerged that his wife and young son wouldn't immediately move to the White House, it gave credence to the idea that Trump could never fully part with the city that made him.

But Trump continued being Trump, his presidency gave way to one controversy and broken norm after another, and New York became a capital of the resistance, giving birth to persistent mass protests.

The city of his dreams was no longer a place he could call home.

"New York has gone to hell," he said as Election Day 2020 neared.

When the ballots were counted, Manhattan had seven times as many supporters of Joe Biden than those for Trump, and this time the Electoral College followed. When Trump's presidency ended and he left Washington after the violent insurrection he incited, it was clear New York would be inhospitable.

Like droves of New Yorkers before him, he retired to Florida.



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When he returns north now, he spends most of his time at his club in Bedminster, New Jersey. The man who long tried to eschew his bridge-and-tunnel past is again separated from Manhattan by a river.

On his first return to Manhattan after leaving office, the New York Post reported a single person waited outside Trump Tower to catch a glimpse. Even protesters couldn't be bothered with him anymore.

His rebuke came from New Yorkers taking part in a rite-of-passage for city dwellers, jury duty, and if it fit the mold of prior grand juries, it brought together a quintessential Manhattan cross-section, from neighborhoods, incomes and backgrounds different enough to ensure a cast of characters fit for TV.

With word of Trump's indictment now out, the story of his deteriorating romance with New York is gaining a sense of finality. Even the Post, part of the Rupert Murdoch media empire that helped Trump win the White House to begin with, has abandoned him. The paper that once documented his affair with a screaming "Best Sex I've Ever Had" headline beside Trump's smirking face, last week called him "deranged" on a front page on which he was branded "Bat Hit Crazy" in huge letters.

Trump once bragged he could shoot someone in the middle of Fifth Avenue and remain popular. Today, he could hand out fifties in New York and still not win the support of most locals.

He has dismissed the grand jury's actions as a "scam" and a "persecution" and denied he did anything wrong. Democrats, he says, are lying and cheating to hurt his campaign to return to the White House.

Outside the courthouse that awaits him, the spectacle has largely been confined to the hordes of media. Among the few regular New Yorkers to make the trip there was Marni Halasa, a figure skater who showed up in a leopard print leotard, cat ears and wads of fake bills strung into a "hush money" boa. She stood alone outside Friday to celebrate the indictment of one of her city's most famous sons.

"New Yorkers are here in spirit," she says, "and I feel like I'm representing most of them."

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Associated Press writer Bobby Caina Calvin contributed to this report.

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## LSU wins 1st NCAA title, Mulkey's 4th, beating Clark, Iowa

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

DALLAS (AP) — Kim Mulkey returned home to Louisiana wanting to bring LSU its first basketball championship. The Hall of Fame coach did just that in only her second year at the school.

Her Tigers used a record offensive performance to beat Caitlin Clark and Iowa 102-85 on Sunday and win the first basketball title, men's or women's, in school history.

"I turn around and look at the Final Four banners (in the home arena), nowhere did it say national champion," Mulkey said. "That's what I came home to do."

The victory made Mulkey the first women's coach to win national titles at two different schools. She won three at Baylor before leaving for LSU two years ago.

"Coaches coach a lifetime and this is the fourth time I've been blessed," Mulkey said. "Never in the history of LSU basketball, men or women, has (anybody) ever played for a championship."

The feisty and flamboyantly dressed Mulkey, who wore a sparkly, golden, tiger-striped outfit, now has the third-most national titles behind Geno Auriemma's 11 and Pat Summitt's eight. Mulkey has never lost in a championship game.

"My tears are tears of joy," she said. "I'm so happy for everybody back home in Louisiana."

Clark, The Associated Press national player of the year, couldn't lead the Hawkeyes to their first national title despite one of the greatest individual performances in NCAA Tournament history. The junior finished with 30 points. She scored 40 in the semifinals to knock out unbeaten South Carolina one game after she had the first 40-point triple-double in NCAA history in the Elite Eight.

The dazzling guard set the NCAA record for points in a tournament, passing the 177 that Sheryl Swoopes scored in 1993 en route to leading Texas Tech to the title. Clark ended her tournament with 191.

The 102 points broke the previous high for a championship game, surpassing the 97 that Texas scored

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against Southern California in 1986.

"So much for preaching defense and rebounding," Mulkey said, laughing.

Taking in the game was first lady Jill Biden, who sat in a suite above the court with tennis great Billie Jean King.

Mulkey said she hadn't met the first lady yet but told the AP that if the team was invited to the White House, she'd go.

Jasmine Carson scored 22 points, Alexis Morris added 21 and Angel Reese had 15 points and 10 rebounds for LSU (34-2).

"It's no one-man show around here. When I go down, the next man is up," said Reese, who was honored as the Most Outstanding Player of the Final Four. "Every single time, every time I go out or Alexis goes out, everybody always comes to step up."

Trailing by 21 points early in the third quarter, Iowa started hitting from the outside to go on a 15-2 run, hitting four 3-pointers and converting a 3-point play to get within 65-57.

The Hawkeyes (31-7) trailed 73-64 with 1:03 left in the third quarter when Clark was called for a technical foul. She swatted the ball away on the floor after a foul call against a teammate. That counted as a personal foul for her, her fourth of the game.

"I thought they called it very, very tight," Clark said. "Hit with a technical foul for throwing the ball under the basket — sometimes that's how things go."

Clark played the entire fourth quarter with four fouls but couldn't get the Hawkeyes much closer.

"They really played well, they were ready to go. They did a great job. I'm just so proud of my team," Iowa coach Lisa Bluder said. "This is brutal, it's really tough to walk out of that locker room today and not be able to coach Monika (Czinano) and McKenna (Warnock) again. I'm very thankful for the season we had and don't want to take anything away from that."

After Katari Poole hit a 3-pointer in front of the LSU bench, Mulkey started weeping.

"With about 1:30 to go, I couldn't hold it. I got very emotional," Mulkey said. "That's not like me, but I knew we would hold on and win this game. I don't what it was, but I lost it. Very emotional and tears of joy. Don't know if it's the mere fact that we're doing it in my second year back home or that I am back home."

A few seconds later after another LSU basket, Reese taunted Clark by putting her hand in front of her face with a "you can't see me" gesture and then pointed to her ring finger.

As the final seconds ticked off, Mulkey and Reese hugged, setting off a wild celebration by the Tigers.

The game was tight for the first 15 minutes before Carson got hot from the outside. She made all six of her shots in the second quarter, including four 3-pointers. After one of them, she threw her hands in the air, which Mulkey mimicked on the sidelines.

For good measure, the graduate student banked in a shot just before the halftime buzzer to give the Tigers a 59-42 lead at the break. It was the most points ever in the first half of a championship game, breaking the record held by Tennessee since 1998.

LSU shot 58% from the field in the opening 20 minutes, including going nine for 12 from behind the arc. The Tigers finished the game shooting 54% from the field, including making 11 of 17 3-pointers.

Clark had 16 points and five assists before picking up her third foul with 3:56 to go in the half, which didn't go over well with the sellout crowd of more than 19,000 fans.

Before Sunday, Carson had gone scoreless in five of her seven postseason games in her career. She had 11 points in this NCAA Tournament before the finale.

"I would definitely say this is the game of my life because I won a national championship on the biggest stage possible in college," Carson said. "When I woke up I just wanted to win — do anything my team needed in this game, whether it was defense, rebounding, supporting them. I scored tonight and that's what pushed us and got us momentum."

More AP coverage of March Madness: <https://apnews.com/hub/march-madness> and <https://apnews.com/>

hub/womens-college-basketball and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Top25](https://twitter.com/AP_Top25)

## Finland prime minister ousted, conservatives win tight vote

By JARI TANNER Associated Press

HELSINKI (AP) — Finland's main conservative party claimed victory in parliamentary elections Sunday in a tight three-way race that saw right-wing populists take second place, leaving Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Social Democratic Party in third, dashing her hopes for reelection.

The center-right National Coalition Party (NCP) claimed victory with all of the votes counted, coming out on top at 20.8%. They were followed by right-wing populist party The Finns with 20.1%, while the Social Democrats garnered 19.9%.

With the top three parties each getting around 20% of the vote, no party is in position to form a government alone. Over 2,400 candidates from 22 parties were vying for the 200 seats in the Nordic country's parliament.

"Based on this result, talks over forming a new government to Finland will be initiated under the leadership of the National Coalition Party," said the party's elated leader Petteri Orpo, as he claimed victory surrounded by supporters gathered in a restaurant in the capital, Helsinki.

Marin, who at age 37 is one of Europe's youngest leaders, has received international praise for her vocal support of Ukraine and her prominent role, along with President Sauli Niinistö, in advocating for Finland's successful application to join NATO.

The 53-year-old Orpo, Finland's former finance minister and likely new prime minister, assured that the Nordic country's solidarity with Kyiv would remain strong during his tenure.

"First to Ukraine: we stand by you, with you," Orpo told the Associated Press at NCP's victory event. "We cannot accept this terrible war. And we will do all that is needed to help Ukraine, Ukrainian people because they fight for us. This is clear."

"And the message to (Russian President Vladimir) Putin is: go away from Ukraine because you will lose," Orpo said.

Finland, which shares a long border with Russia, cleared the last hurdles of becoming a NATO member earlier in the week as alliance members Turkey and Hungary signed off the country's membership bid.

NCP's share of votes translates into 48 seats in the Eduskunta, Finland's Parliament, while The Finns, a nationalist party running largely on an anti-immigration and anti-European Union agenda, is to get 46 seats and Marin's Social Democrats 43 seats respectively.

Observers say the result means a power shift in Finland's political scene as the nation is now likely to get a new center-right government with nationalist tones. The government will replace the center-left Cabinet by Marin, a highly popular prime minister at home and abroad since 2019.

Government formation talks led by the NCP are expected to start in the coming days with goal of putting together a Cabinet enjoying a majority at the Parliament.

"I trust the Finnish tradition of negotiating with all parties, and trying to find the best possible majority government for Finland," Orpo told the AP.

"And you know what is important for us? It's that we are an active member of the European Union. We build up NATO-Finland, and we fix our economy. We boost our economic growth and create new jobs. These are the crucial, main, important issues we have to write into the government program," he said.

The positions of Marin's party on the Finnish economy emerged as a main campaign theme and were challenged by conservatives, who remain critical of the Social Democrats' economic policies and are unlikely to partner with them.

Orpo had hammered on Finland's growing government debt and the need to make budget cuts throughout the election. NCP is open to cooperation with The Finns as the two parties largely share view on developing Finland's economy though have differences in climate policies and EU issues.

While Russia's invasion of Ukraine prompted Finland to seek NATO membership in May 2022, neither the historic decision to abandon the nation's non-alignment policy nor the war emerged as major campaign



issues as there was a large consensus among the parties on membership.

Finland, which is expected to join NATO in the coming weeks, is a European Union member.

The initial voter turnout in the election was 71.9%, slightly down from the 2019 election.

Kostya Manenkov and David Keyton in Helsinki contributed to this report.

## 32 dead as tornadoes torment from Arkansas to Delaware

By ADRIAN SAINZ, ANDREW DeMILLO and BEN FINLEY Associated Press

WYNNE, Ark. (AP) — Residents across a wide swath of the U.S. raced Sunday to assess the destruction from fierce storms that spawned possibly dozens of tornadoes from the South and the Midwest into the Northeast, killing at least 32 people.

The storms tore a path through the Arkansas capital and also collapsed the roof of a packed concert venue in Illinois, stunning people throughout the region with the scope of the damage.

The number of deaths continued to grow Sunday.

"While we are still assessing the full extent of the damage, we know families across America are mourning the loss of loved ones, desperately waiting for news of others fighting for their lives, and sorting through the rubble of their homes and businesses," President Joe Biden said in a statement.

Biden earlier declared broad areas of the country major disaster areas, making federal resources and financial aid available for recovery.

Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders in Arkansas, where at least five people were killed, already had declared a state of emergency and activated the National Guard.

Confirmed or suspected tornadoes in 11 states destroyed homes and businesses, splintered trees and laid waste to neighborhoods.

The National Weather Service confirmed Sunday that a tornado was responsible for damage to several homes near Bridgeville, Delaware. One person was found dead inside a house heavily damaged by the storm Saturday night, Delaware State Police reported.

It may take days to confirm all the recent tornadoes. The dead included at least nine in one Tennessee county, five in Indiana and four in Illinois.

Other deaths from the storms that hit Friday night into Saturday were reported in Alabama and Mississippi.

Residents of Wynne, Arkansas, a community of about 8,000 people 50 miles (80 kilometers) west of Memphis, Tennessee, woke Saturday to find the high school's roof shredded and its windows blown out. At least four people died.

Ashley Macmillan said she, her husband and their children huddled with their dogs in a bathroom as a tornado passed, "praying and saying goodbye to each other, because we thought we were dead." A falling tree seriously damaged their home, but they escaped unhurt.

Chainsaws buzzed, as bulldozers plowed into debris. Utility crews restored power as some neighborhoods began recovery.

Tennessee recorded at least 15 deaths, including nine fatalities in McNairy County, east of Memphis, according to Patrick Sheehan, director the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency.

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee drove to the county Saturday to tour the destruction and comfort residents. He said the storm capped the "worst" week of his time as governor, coming days after a school shooting in Nashville that killed six people including a family friend whose funeral he and his wife just attended.

"It's terrible what has happened in this community, this county, this state," Lee said. "But it looks like your community has done what Tennessean communities do, and that is rally and respond."

Rachel Milam lived in the basement with her 6-year-old daughter, while her mother and her mother's boyfriend lived upstairs in their home on the outskirts of Waynesboro, Tennessee.

All squeezed into the bathroom of the cinder block basement Friday night as the tornado approached and made whooshing sounds like a washing machine.

"As it ripped the roof off, the shower curtain fell," Milam, 26, said Sunday. "So I'm trying to dig through

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the shower curtain and see. I saw darkness and then rain started to fall.”

Then absolute terror.

“And the house — I watched it pick up and move ... about six inches and then pick up and it was gone.”

“I was just thinking it’s gonna take the tub, like we’re going to be gone,” she said.

A piece of wood fell over them. So did a mirror. “We were fine and just thankful that we made it out alive,” Milam said.

Milam, who works as a nurse, soon joined other neighbors in digging people out from wrecked homes. One woman had a laceration to her face and other parts of her body and was flown out by a helicopter. Another man was freed from the rubble of his home by rescuers who used chainsaws to slice through the debris.

Jeffrey Day said he called his daughter after seeing on the news that their community of Adamsville was being hit. Huddled in a closet with her 2-year-old son as the storm passed over, she answered the phone screaming.

“She kept asking me, ‘What do I do, daddy?’” Day said, tearing up. “I didn’t know what to say.”

After the storm passed, his daughter crawled out of her destroyed home and drove to nearby family.

Elsewhere, Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker traveled Sunday to Belvidere to visit the Apollo Theatre, which partially collapsed as about 260 people were attending a heavy metal concert.

Frederick Livingston, Jr., was pulled from the rubble but didn’t survive. He had gone to enjoy the concert with his son, Alex.

“I couldn’t save him,” his son told WLS-TV. The father and son were standing side by side when debris began raining down. “It happened so fast.”

The governor said 48 others were treated in hospitals, with five in critical condition.

Pritzker also planned to visit Crawford County, about 230 miles (370 kilometers) south of Chicago, where three people were killed and eight injured when a tornado hit around New Hebron.

“We’ve had emergency crews digging people out of their basements because the house is collapsed on top of them, but luckily they had that safe space to go to,” Sheriff Bill Rutan said at a news conference.

That tornado was not far from where three people died in Indiana’s Sullivan County, about 95 miles (150 kilometers) southwest of Indianapolis. Several people were rescued overnight, with reports of as many as 12 people injured.

DeMillo reported from Little Rock and Finley from Norfolk, Virginia. Associated Press writers around the country contributed to this report, including Kimberlee Kruesi in Adamsville, Tennessee, Harm Venhuizen in Belvidere, Illinois, Corey Williams in Detroit, and Ron Todt in Philadelphia.

## Saudis, other oil giants announce surprise production cuts

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Saudi Arabia and other major oil producers on Sunday announced surprise cuts totaling up to 1.15 million barrels per day from May until the end of the year, a move that could raise prices worldwide.

Higher oil prices would help fill Russian President Vladimir Putin’s coffers as his country wages war on Ukraine and force Americans and others to pay even more at the pump amid worldwide inflation.

It was also likely to further strain ties with the United States, which has called on Saudi Arabia and other allies to increase production as it tries to bring prices down and squeeze Russia’s finances.

The production cuts alone could push U.S. gasoline prices up by roughly 26 cents per gallon, in addition to the usual increase that comes when refineries change the gasoline blend during the summer driving season, said Kevin Book, managing director of Clearview Energy Partners LLC. The Energy Department calculates the seasonal increase at an average of 32 cents per gallon, Book said.

So with an average U.S. price now at roughly \$3.50 per gallon of regular, according to AAA, that could mean gasoline over \$4 per gallon during the summer.

However, Book said there are a number of complex variables in oil and gas prices. The size of each

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country's production cut depends on the baseline production number it is using, so the cut might not be 1.15 million. It also could take much of the year for the cuts to take effect. Demand could fall if the U.S. enters a recession caused by the banking crisis. But it also could increase during the summer as more people travel.

Even though the production cut is only about 1% of the roughly 100 million barrels of oil the world uses per day, the impact on prices could be big, Book said.

"It's a big deal because of the way oil prices work," he said. "You are in a market that is relatively balanced. You take a small amount away, depending on what demand does, you could have a very significant price response."

Saudi Arabia announced the biggest cut among OPEC members at 500,000 barrels per day. The cuts are in addition to a reduction announced last October that infuriated the Biden administration.

The Saudi Energy Ministry described the move as a "precautionary measure" aimed at stabilizing the oil market. The cuts represent less than 5% of Saudi Arabia's average production of 11.5 million barrels per day in 2022.

Iraq said it would reduce production by 211,000 barrels per day, the United Arab Emirates by 144,000, Kuwait by 128,000, Kazakhstan by 78,000, Algeria by 48,000 and Oman by 40,000. The announcements were carried by each country's state media.

Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak meanwhile said Moscow would extend a voluntary cut of 500,000 until the end of the year, according to remarks carried by the state news agency Tass. Russia had announced the unilateral reduction in February after Western countries imposed price caps.

All are members of the so-called OPEC+ group of oil exporting countries, which includes the original Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries as well as Russia and other major producers. There was no immediate statement from OPEC itself.

The cuts announced in October — of some 2 million barrels a day — had come on the eve of U.S. mid-term elections in which soaring prices were a major issue. President Joe Biden vowed at the time that there would be "consequences" and Democratic lawmakers called for freezing cooperation with the Saudis.

Both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia denied any political motives in the dispute.

Since those cuts, oil prices have trended down. Brent crude, a global benchmark, was trading around \$80 a barrel at the end of last week, down from around \$95 in early October, when the earlier cuts were agreed.

Analysts Giacomo Romeo and Lloyd Byrne at Jefferies said in a research note that the new cuts should allow for "material" reductions to OPEC inventory earlier than expected and could validate recent warnings from some traders and analysts that demand for oil is weakening.

Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, a Gulf expert at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, said the Saudis are determined to keep oil prices high enough to fund ambitious mega-projects linked to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 plan to overhaul the economy.

"This domestic interest takes precedence in Saudi decision-making over relationships with international partners and is likely to remain a point of friction in U.S.-Saudi relations for the foreseeable future," he said.

Saudi Arabia's state-run oil giant Aramco recently announced record profits of \$161 billion from last year. Profits rose 46.5% when compared to the company's 2021 results of \$110 billion. Aramco said it hoped to boost production to 13 million barrels a day by 2027.

The decades-long U.S.-Saudi alliance has come under growing strain in recent years following the 2018 killing of Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi, a U.S.-based journalist, and Saudi Arabia's war with the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen.

As a candidate for president, Biden had vowed to make Saudi Arabia a "pariah" over the Khashoggi killing, but as oil prices rose after his inauguration he backed off. He visited the kingdom last July in a bid to patch up relations, drawing criticism for sharing a fistbump with Crown Prince Mohammed.

Saudi Arabia has denied siding with Russia in the Ukraine war, even as it has cultivated closer ties with both Moscow and Beijing in recent years. Last week, Aramco announced billions of dollars of investment



in China's downstream petrochemicals industry.

## Hutchinson launches GOP 2024 bid, calls on Trump to drop out

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Asa Hutchinson, who recently completed two terms as Arkansas governor, said Sunday he will seek the Republican presidential nomination, positioning himself as an alternative to Donald Trump just days after the former president was indicted by a grand jury in New York.

Hutchinson said Trump should drop out of the race, arguing "the office is more important than any individual person."

Hutchinson, who announced his candidacy on ABC's "This Week," said he was running because "I believe that I am the right time for America, the right candidate for our country and its future." He added: "I'm convinced that people want leaders that appeal to the best of America and not simply appeal to our worst instincts."

He is the first Republican to enter the race since Trump became the only former U.S. president to ever face criminal charges. Hutchinson's candidacy will test the GOP's appetite for those who speak out against Trump. Others who have criticized Trump, including former Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, have opted against a campaign, sensing the difficulty of prevailing in a primary.

Hutchinson, in an Associated Press interview later Sunday, said it was important for voters to have an alternative leader and "not simply go by default to somebody who is really wrapped around what happened in the past."

"I don't think you have to be blustery. I think you can be honest and authentic, and that's what I want to be able to offer," he said.

In a sign of Trump's continued grip on the Republican base, most in the party — even those considering challenging him for the nomination — have defended him against the New York indictment. Hutchinson, notably, had said Friday that Trump should "step aside," calling the charges a "distraction."

In addition to Trump, Hutchinson joins a Republican field that also includes former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is expected to jump into the race in the summer, while U.S. Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and former Vice President Mike Pence are among those considering bids.

"I think I stand out by stating my convictions and my vision for the country," Hutchinson told the AP. "I think that is illustrated in the last week, in how I've handled the Trump indictment, how I've handled how we need to move forward as a party and a country."

The formal campaign announcement will come April 26 in Bentonville, his hometown and also the home of Walmart's headquarters. He will be campaigning in the coming weeks in Iowa, Indiana and Kentucky.

He said he could be very competitive in places like Iowa, where campaigning involves "retail politics" like chatting with potential voters in diners. He also said he believed he would be financially competitive, though, "certainly it's not going to be at the level of the Donald Trumps of the world."

Hutchinson, 72, left office in January after eight years as governor. He has ramped up his criticism of the former president in recent months, calling another Trump presidential nomination the "worst scenario" for Republicans and saying it will likely benefit President Joe Biden's chances in 2024.

The former governor, who was term-limited, has been a fixture in Arkansas politics since the 1980s, when the state was predominantly Democratic. A former congressman, he was one of the House managers prosecuting the impeachment case against President Bill Clinton.

Hutchinson served as President George W. Bush's head of the Drug Enforcement Administration and was an undersecretary of the Department of Homeland Security.

As governor, Hutchinson championed a series of income tax cuts as the state's budget surpluses grew. He signed several abortion restrictions into law, including a ban on the procedure that took effect when the U.S. Supreme Court struck down *Roe v. Wade* last year. Hutchinson, however, has said he regretted that the measure did not include exceptions for rape or incest.

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Hutchinson earned the ire of Trump and social conservatives last year when he vetoed legislation banning gender-affirming medical care for children. Arkansas' majority-Republican Legislature overrode Hutchinson's veto and enacted the ban, which has been temporarily blocked by a federal judge.

Trump called Hutchinson a "RINO" — a Republican In Name Only — for the veto. Hutchinson's successor, former White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders, has said she would have signed the legislation.

Since taking office, she's signed legislation aimed at reinstating the currently blocked ban by making it easier to sue providers of such care to minors.

Hutchinson, who endorsed Sanders and signed other restrictions on transgender youth into law, said the Arkansas ban went too far and that he would have signed the measure if it had focused only on surgery.

Although he has supported Trump's policies, Hutchinson has become increasingly critical of the former president's rhetoric and lies about the 2020 presidential election. He said Trump's call to terminate parts of the Constitution to overturn the election hurt the country.

Hutchinson also criticized Trump for meeting with white nationalist leader Nick Fuentes and the rapper Ye, who has praised Adolf Hitler and spewed antisemitic conspiracy theories. Hutchinson has contrasted that meeting to his own background as a U.S. attorney who prosecuted white supremacists in Arkansas in the 1980s.

An opponent of the federal health care law, Hutchinson after taking office supported keeping Arkansas' version of Medicaid expansion. But he championed a work requirement for the law that was blocked by a federal judge.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Hutchinson tried to push back against misinformation about the virus with daily news conferences and a series of town halls he held around the state aimed at encouraging people to get vaccinated.

The former governor is known more for talking policy than for fiery speeches, often flanked by charts and graphs at his news conferences at the state Capitol. Instead of picking fights on Twitter, he tweets out Bible verses every Sunday morning.

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Associated Press writer Michelle L. Price in New York contributed to this report.

## Russia to put nukes near Belarus' western border, envoy says

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Russian tactical nuclear weapons will be deployed close to Belarus' borders with NATO neighbors, the Russian ambassador to Belarus said Sunday amid simmering tensions between Russia and the West over Moscow's war in Ukraine.

Ambassador Boris Gryzlov's comment followed Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent statement about plans to station tactical nuclear weapons on the territory of Russia's neighbor and ally. The announcement marked another attempt by the Russian leader to dangle the nuclear threat to discourage the West from supporting Ukraine.

Putin has said that construction of storage facilities for tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus will be complete by July 1 and added that Russia has helped modernize Belarusian warplanes to make them capable of carrying nuclear weapons.

The two neighbors have an agreement envisioning close economic, political and military ties. Russia used Belarusian territory as a staging ground for invading Ukraine and has maintained a contingent of troops and weapons there.

Gryzlov, speaking in remarks broadcast late Sunday by Belarusian state television, said the Russian nuclear weapons will be "moved up close to the Western border of our union state" but did not give any precise location.

"It will expand our defense capability, and it will be done regardless of all the noise in Europe and the United States," he said in a reference to Western criticism of Putin's decision.

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Belarus shares a 1,250-kilometer (778-mile) border with NATO members Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. Tactical nuclear weapons, which are intended to destroy enemy troops and weapons on the battlefield, have a relatively short range and a much lower yield compared with nuclear warheads fitted to long-range strategic missiles that are capable of obliterating whole cities.

The deployment of Russian tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus would put them closer to potential targets in Ukraine and NATO members in Eastern and Central Europe.

Belarus' authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko said Friday that some of Russia's strategic nuclear weapons might be deployed to Belarus along with part of Russia's tactical nuclear arsenal.

## More Ecuadorians move to US, spared many others' hurdles

By MICHAEL WEISSENSTEIN and GONZALO SOLANO Associated Press

SPRING VALLEY, New York (AP) — Kléver Ortega and Cristina Lema had a good life until COVID-19 crippled Ecuador's economy.

Ortega was a house-painting contractor and there was work until demand dried up in the pandemic. The entrepreneurial couple launched a pair of food stands. "Then the pandemic hit those, too," Lema said.

With unemployment, instability and crime rising, they decided to leave for the U.S., following many friends, family and acquaintances.

"We used to hear it in the street: 'They left. Look who else abandoned their business and took off,'" Lema said. "That's when we, too, told ourselves, 'We aren't earning enough to survive or pay debts.'"

Ecuador — long known for remarkably low rates of crime, despite sitting in South America's cocaine heartland — is earthquake-prone and has been struggling economically, fighting higher violence and losing its people in record numbers. Like Ortega and Lema, many are headed to the U.S.; the number of Ecuadorians detained near the border with Mexico has spiked.

Biden administration policies introduced in January have sharply reduced illegal U.S. border crossings by targeting migrants from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela and getting Mexico to take them back. Migrants from Ecuador and some other countries don't face the same hurdles, and are generally allowed to stay in the U.S. while they pursue asylum — part of the piecemeal nature of U.S. immigration policy.

\_\_\_ This is part of an occasional series on how the United States became the world's top destination for asylum-seekers. \_\_\_

The journey can be perilous. In February, a bus crash in Panama killed dozens of migrants, many from Ecuador, as they plunged off a hillside after crossing the notorious Darien Gap from Colombia. And on Monday, a fire at a detention center in the border city Ciudad Juarez killed at least 39 migrants, almost all from Guatemala, Honduras, Venezuela and El Salvador.

The administration wants to be able to send all migrants back to Mexico if they travel through that country to reach the U.S. border, cross illegally and don't qualify for exemptions. That proposal, though almost certain to face legal challenges, may be a serious deterrent for Ecuadorians and other non-Mexicans.

In Ecuador, the economy has been further damaged by strikes against government cutbacks. The economic woes fueled a rise first in minor crimes by those who couldn't get by. Over time, violent crime escalated too — worsened by the country's proximity to the cocaine trade.

"Violence got so bad that you couldn't walk peacefully in the street," Ortega said at his family's new apartment in Spring Valley, New York, where they arrived last year.

Ecuadorians dominated the mix of migrants detained by Mexico for the first time in January, according to the Washington Office on Latin America. The reports from Mexico of migrants detained near the border provide some of the best data on the country of origin of those headed to the U.S. — typically a mix of Mexicans, Venezuelans and Central Americans.

On the U.S. side, officials stopped Ecuadorians 12,000 times at the border in November, about triple the number three months earlier and nearly 20 times the number from the same period last year, U.S. Customs and Border Protection figures show.

Like many migrants, Ecuadorians typically followed the pattern of single men moving first to establish



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a foothold. Now, many of the Ecuadorians migrating to the New York area are families. CBP figures show that families with children have grown to about 60% of arrivals, from 15% in fiscal year 2020.

The relative ease of current migration is fueling that increase, said Diana Loja, Sleepy Hollow's liaison to the Latino community.

"It used to take months to get here. Now it takes days," she told The Associated Press as she drove through Sleepy Hollow, pointing out home after home rented by Ecuadorians. Half of the village's 10,000 people are Latino, with the majority hailing from Ecuador, according to census data.

By some estimates, Sleepy Hollow — about an hour from midtown Manhattan — has the most Ecuadorians per capita in the U.S.

In nearby Spring Valley, Ortega and Lema live in a ground-floor apartment. Last May, they took 26 days to travel from Quito to New York. They remember nearly drowning in a river in Nicaragua, mother and daughter struggling to stay afloat on a raft fashioned of empty plastic bottles. Today, Ortega does repair work in a local pizzeria. Lema makes potatoes, chicken and other food for a restaurant.

In recent years, Loja said, Ecuadorians considering their own migration see a growing number of people to follow in the New York area: "They start to see their neighbors, their friends, their own families."

Like many migrants, Ecuadorians have stayed closely abreast of migratory rules that allow them to travel to nations on the route to the U.S. Until last year, some 45,000 Ecuadorians had traveled to Nicaragua, which had no requirements for Ecuadorian travelers. Mexico also was an easy destination for Ecuadorians, until September 2021.

Ortega and Lema said they started their trip by paying a smuggling network \$8,500 a person and tried to travel to Nicaragua, but were turned down because they didn't have the right documents. The network flew them to Panama, where they boarded buses to Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico. They crossed the Rio Grande into the U.S. and took a bus to New York.

Ortega and Lema plan to apply for asylum with their 7-year-old daughter, Sofia, in federal court in Manhattan in June.

The factors that drove them to the U.S. continue to drive thousands more Ecuadorians north, although some are waiting in Mexico for the latest U.S. migration-rule tightening to pass, said Dr. Fredy Rivera, a security analyst at the School of Latin American Social Science in Quito.

"Many people are still in Mexico," he said of a dip in CBP figures in recent months from the latest record highs. "It's temporary."

For Ortega, their journey will pay off when their daughter has a better life than she would in Ecuador, where the family sees no sign things will improve anytime soon.

"That was my dream, is my dream," he said, "For her to get an education here. It's for that that we came here."

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Solano reported from Quito, Ecuador. Elliot Spagat in San Diego contributed to this report.

## Harris finds new connections in Africa as historic figure

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

LUSAKA, Zambia (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris may have traveled halfway around the world to reach this corner of Africa, but she was welcomed as a "daughter of our own country" when she sat down with Zambia's leader.

The visit, President Hakainde Hichilema said, was "like a homecoming."

It was a reference to a childhood trip to Zambia when Harris' grandfather worked here, but she heard similar refrains throughout her weeklong trip to Africa that ended Saturday.

In Ghana, President Nana Akufo-Addo told Harris "you're welcome home." In Tanzania, a sign in Swahili told Harris to "feel at home."

The greetings were a reflection of the enduring connections between the African diaspora in the United States and Africans themselves, something that America's first Black vice president fostered during her trip.

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Although her historic status has led to extreme scrutiny and extraordinary expectations in Washington, it was a source of excitement over the past week.

"She is the ambassador we need at the moment," said Tracy Sharpley-Whiting, who chairs African American and Diaspora Studies at Vanderbilt University. "That's a joyous thing."

Harris' background did not spare her from difficult conversations about U.S. foreign policy and she was pressed in Africa about visas, private investment and funding to deal with climate change. There's also skepticism over whether the United States will follow through with its commitments and over its attempts to rival China's own influence in Africa.

But at every stop, Harris was warmly embraced.

"Kamala Harris! Kamala Harris!" young girls shouted on the tarmac when she landed in Lusaka on Friday. She approached them with her hand on her chest in gratitude. "The VP is here! The VP is here!"

The last week produced none of the unfortunate viral moments that dogged Harris on previous foreign trips, such as when she laughed off a question about visiting the U.S. border with Mexico or when she said the U.S. had an "alliance with the Republic of North Korea."

Instead, the trip to Africa was largely overshadowed by a cascade of U.S. news, including a school shooting in Nashville, Tennessee, and the indictment of former President Donald Trump.

But anyone tuning in would have seen Harris hanging out with actor Idris Elba and actor-singer Sheryl Lee Ralph at a recording studio in Accra, Ghana's capital, or collecting business cards from young entrepreneurs in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, or walking through rows of peppers at a farm outside of Lusaka. Sometimes she felt comfortable enough to discard her prepared remarks, a rarity for a politician who sticks closely to the script in Washington.

Although Africa remains a poor continent with almost half the population lacking access to electricity, Harris' itinerary was aimed at portraying it as young, dynamic, innovative — and primed for American business opportunities, particularly with leaders from the diaspora.

The most glamorous event was a state banquet at the Ghanaian presidential palace known as the Jubilee House, where Black American celebrities, business people and civil rights activists gathered.

In her toast, Harris paid tribute to attendees who "represent the glorious beauty of the African diaspora" and she spoke about "our shared destiny."

Akufo-Addo, the president, honored Harris with a local touch.

"Since you were born on a Tuesday, I'm sure you would not mind the Ghanaian name Abena, the Akan name for all Tuesday born females, to your name," he said.

Raising his glass, Akufo-Addo toasted "the honorable Kamala Devi Abena Harris."

Marc Morial, president of the National Urban League, said there was a "festive and family" atmosphere to be there with the first Black vice president in U.S. history.

"It's a moment of pride," he said. "And it's a moment of opportunity."

The trip could be Harris' last foray overseas before the 2024 campaign begins in earnest. President Joe Biden is expected to announce his reelection run, and Harris will be a prime target for Republican attacks.

Some of that is the result of Biden's age — he would be 82 when starting a second term in 2025 — and Harris' status a heartbeat away from the presidency.

But like President Barack Obama before her, Harris has faced racism and questions when it comes to her heritage.

Her father was born in Jamaica, where most Black citizens trace their heritage to Africa through the slave trade, making it likely that Harris' own ancestors were enslaved.

Her mother was born in India, and the vice president was raised in California, contributing to a multi-cultural background that defies easy characterization. (It was her mother's Indian father who worked in Zambia decades ago, helping to settle refugees in the newly independent African country.)

But Harris wrote in her book, "The Truths We Hold," that her mother was clear-eyed about what it meant to raise two daughters in the United States. "She knew that her adopted homeland would see Maya and me as black girls, and she was determined to make sure we would grow into confident, proud black women," Harris wrote.

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Harris wrote that when she arrived at Howard University in Washington, a predominantly Black institution that has educated generations of Black political and cultural leaders, she thought, "This is heaven."

"There were hundreds of people, and everyone looked like me," Harris wrote. "The campus was a place where you didn't have to be confined to the box of another person's choosing."

Harris was San Francisco's district attorney while Obama was running for president, and she defended him when his racial identity was questioned. He's the son of a white American mother and a Kenyan father, and he spent part of his youth in Indonesia.

She told the San Francisco Chronicle that Obama "is opening up what has been a limited perspective of who is an African American."

"We are diverse and multifaceted," Harris said. "People are bombarded with stereotypical images and so they are limited in their ability to imagine our capacity."

Harris faced the same strain of commentary during her own presidential campaign in 2020.

"I think they don't understand who Black people are. I'm not going to spend my time trying to educate people about who Black people are," she said in a radio interview at the time.

The relationship between the African diaspora and Africans on the continent has been complicated by the history of slavery. African Americans often aren't sure of their roots because their ancestors were kidnapped and traded. According to the vice president's office, Harris hasn't traced her heritage back here, either.

Nevertheless, Sharpley-Whiting said the bond to Africa remains strong for many Black Americans.

"They recognize it as the place where their ancestors started, and they recognize the resilience of those ancestors," she said.

Harris confronted that history when she visited Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, one of dozens of forts in West Africa where enslaved Africans were imprisoned and then loaded onto ships bound for the Americas. The Caribbean — including Jamaica — was one of the destinations.

"I'm still processing a lot of it," she told reporters the following day. She lingered on the experiences of pregnant women who were imprisoned there — their babies were taken from them and the women were sent off across the ocean.

"The brutality, the inhumane treatment of human beings is profound," she said. "And the lasting trauma of that cannot be denied."

But she soon turned to another topic when asked what she wanted Black Americans to take away from her trip to Africa.

The message, she said, wasn't just about "how the diaspora came to be."

It's about "the resilience, the strength, fortitude, the brilliance, the excellence."

## **\$90 cream and \$10 toothpaste: Companies target big spenders**

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) —

Companies from toothpaste makers to even discounters are adding more premium items like designer body creams and services as they reach out to wealthier shoppers who are still spending freely even in the face of higher inflation and a volatile economic environment.

Think \$10 toothpastes and \$90 creams on supermarket shelves.

Retailers and consumer product companies felt justified in raising prices to offset higher costs from gnarled supply chains and Russia's war in Ukraine last year. But as those financial pressures ease, some are looking for new ways to pump up sales and profits by focusing on premium items amid an overall sales slowdown.

"If you want to hedge against the economic challenges, you hedge your bets by chasing after the upper income," said Marshal Cohen, chief industry adviser at market research firm Circana.

Many companies that normally cater to middle-income shoppers are unleashing a bevy of premium items in an attempt to grab consumers with more money to spare. But that could leave fewer options for consumers with less money to spare.

Walmart, for instance, features high-end \$90 creams in its beauty aisles at select stores. Ketchup maker



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Heinz released a line of chef-inspired condiments called Heinz 57, including a 11.25-ounce container of infused honey with black truffle that costs roughly \$7. Last year, Colgate-Palmolive made some waves by announcing its \$10 three-ounce stain remover toothpaste, its first in the U.S. at this price, noting that premium products were essential to raising prices.

Meanwhile, Five Below — a chain known for selling toys and other impulse items for \$5 and below — is creating a new store-within-a-store prototype: Five Beyond, which sells items at \$6 and higher. Last year, the Philadelphia chain converted 250 of its 1,300 stores to include its higher-priced section and plans to expand that conversion to another 400 stores this year.

Five Below CEO Joel Anderson told analysts on a call in January that those who buy Five Beyond items spend more than twice as much as those who buy only Five Below items.

Some like Chipotle Mexican Grill have even publicized they are not pursuing discount-loving shoppers. The restaurant chain has been frank over the past year about how its price increases have scared off lower-income consumers. Last fall, it introduced Garlic Guajillo Steak, a limited-time offering that was pricier than regular steak.

In a conference call with investors in February, Chipotle Chairman and CEO Brian Niccol said the chain — which raised prices by 13.5% in its most recent quarter — is seeing higher-income customers visit more often.

“We made the decision not to go chasing people with discounts,” Niccol said. “That’s not what our brand is and that’s not what we’re going to do.”

Critics like Rakeen Mabud, chief economist at left-leaning The Groundwork Collaborative, believe such moves will only increasingly shut out the less economically fortunate.

“As products get more expensive and companies are focused more on the wealthier segments of our population or our consumers, everyday people are increasingly underserved and increasingly unable to afford the products they need,” Mabud said.

When AMC Entertainment, the world’s largest cinema chain, announced in February it was rolling out a new three-tier pricing system at all its locations by year end that would require customers to pay more for better seats, actor Elijah Wood — best known for his portrayal of Frodo Baggins in “The Lord of the Rings” film trilogy — blasted the move on Twitter.

“The movie theater is and always has been a sacred democratic space for all and this new initiative by AMCTheatres would essentially penalize people for lower income and reward for higher income,” he wrote.

The gap between the haves and have nots has only gotten wider during the pandemic.

Households with annual income of more than \$156,000 make up 20.7% of the U.S. population, according to research firm GlobalData. However, they accounted for around 38.3% of all retail spending last year, up from 37.5% in 2021. Excluding food and other essentials, those shoppers in that bracket accounted for 41.7% of spending last year, up from 39.5% in 2021.

On the other end of the spectrum are lower-income households who are spending down the savings accumulated during the pandemic at a faster rate than anyone else. Households with incomes below \$50,000 have depleted their savings by about half from a peak reached when the last stimulus check was sent in March 2021, according to data from the Bank of America Institute. Households with income above \$250,000 have reduced their larger savings by just about 15%.

Low and middle-income shoppers have also been hurt by the Federal Reserve’s inflation-fighting campaign to hike interest rates that have made using a credit card or getting an auto loan more expensive. But the Fed’s efforts could be easing as its favored inflation gauge slowed sharply last month, while consumer spending rose modestly, according to reports by the Commerce Department released Friday.

Luxury retailer Neiman Marcus is doubling down with special services and exclusive offerings for its multi-millionaire shoppers who shop an average of 25 times a year and spend upwards of \$27,000 annually. For example, the store recently teamed up with designer fashion brand Brunello Cucinelli to have a fashion show at a local ranch outside of Dallas for its top customer.

Neiman Marcus emphasized it’s hardly ignoring the rest of the customer spectrum, but it noted that given

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a volatile economic environment it pays to invest more in its most loyal shoppers, specifically the top 2% who drive roughly 40% of its total sales.

Chief Executive for American Express Stephen J. Squeri told analysts in an earnings call in January that the company is limiting its focus to wealthier applicants.

"That premium customer base, while not immune to economic downturn, certainly right now is spending on through," he said.

Associated Press staff writers Chris Rugaber and Paul Wiseman in Washington and Dee-Ann Durbin in Detroit contributed to this report.

Follow Anne D'Innocenzio: <http://twitter.com/ADInnocenzio>

## **Pastors: Palm Sunday a balm after Nashville school shooting**

By HOLLY MEYER Associated Press

FRANKLIN, Tennessee (AP) — It's Palm Sunday, and across the greater Nashville, Tennessee, region, many Christians headed to worship services grief-stricken and hurting for the lives stolen too soon in The Covenant School shooting.

Their heartsick pastors sought to bring comfort to those seeking answers to unanswerable questions after a heavily armed assailant turned a regular day into a horror story for the private, Christian grade school in Nashville.

"If a week like this teaches me anything, it's that today is the day to believe," senior pastor Scott Sauls told his congregation at Christ Presbyterian Church which is hosting funerals for three of the six victims..

"None of us is guaranteed tomorrow, let alone the next hour," Sauls said. "The only comfort that exists in life and in death, for body and soul, is that we belong to our faithful savior Jesus Christ."

The promise of the gospel doesn't diminish the pain and the grief, Sauls added. And he acknowledged that scripture is limited when it comes to answering the question of why: "Why this child? Why this beloved educator and wife and mother and grandmother?"

On the first Sunday after the attack — and the start of Christianity's most sobering and sacred week — the tragedy could not and should not be avoided, said Pastor George Grant, a local Presbyterian leader with ties to the school and the adjoining Covenant Presbyterian Church.

"We have to engage with what has happened," he told The Associated Press a few days after the Monday shooting. "The Bible calls us to mourn with those who mourn, to weep with those who weep and so we will."

Authorities say a 28-year-old former Covenant student killed six people at the school before being shot and killed by police. In the aftermath, Grant and other clergy decided to make space in their Palm Sunday services for communal grief.

"Any pastor or preacher that's standing up in a pulpit this weekend is doing so as a wounded healer," said Nashville Catholic Bishop J. Mark Spalding, who believes being in community is key at this time. "In tragedies and disasters, many of us can isolate which doesn't help heal as well as reaching out."

Together on Palm Sunday, and in between victims' funerals, their church members lamented the dead: the three 9-year-olds — Evelyn Dieckhaus, Hallie Scruggs and William Kinney — and Katherine Koonce, 60, the head of the school; Mike Hill, 61, a custodian; and Cynthia Peak, 61, a substitute teacher.

While sense can't be made of the senseless, Grant said Christianity offers a message of hope that's even more pronounced on Palm Sunday, which marks the biblical account of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem before his crucifixion and resurrection.

"Palm Sunday gives us the language and the paradigm to understand that though this tragedy is senseless and afflicting, there is nevertheless hope. There is light for the darkness," said Grant, pastor of Parish Presbyterian Church in Franklin, a city on Nashville's southern outskirts. "There is reason for us to embrace the joys as well as the sorrows of the season."

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It's a message he thinks can be healing for Parish Presbyterian's heartbroken church members who are trying to process what happened. Several congregants have belonged to both churches; Grant himself is friends with Covenant Presbyterian's leaders and also served as the church's first adult Sunday school teacher about 30 years ago.

On the crisp, sunny morning, congregants walked toward the white church nestled on a pastoral edge of Franklin. They exchanged greetings before passing through the maroon doors bearing palm frond crosses. Some took a moment to inquire about one another's well-being following the tough week.

"This is a hard one," said Kim Goff, as coffee and hot water for tea percolated nearby for churchgoers. She explained that since Parish is a part of the same Presbytery as Covenant that "what impacts them impacts us."

She needed Palm Sunday, which allows for mourning with joy. "This is our hope," Goff said. "This is the reason we're here."

Covenant Presbyterian was marking Palm Sunday, too, but their service, closed to the media, was planned for an alternative venue — not their building that includes the school perched atop a hill overlooking Nashville's Green Hills neighborhood, said Molly Sudderth, a Covenant spokesperson.

Along with the core Palm Sunday message of hope in the face of devastation, the Covenant community remained a focus of Parish Presbyterian's first morning service. Grant started off with a knowing acknowledgment that "this has been a really hard week," and went on to preach about the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead and Psalm 118, underscoring how horrors can be met with faith.

"We live in a world where injustice, where mayhem or horrors like our children going off to school on a beautiful spring day ... and are met with a nightmare scenario," he said to the congregation. "Are you angry? You should be. Jesus was. ... Do you weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn? You should. Jesus did."

Before the close of service, they prayed again for the victim's and their families by name as many in the rows of white folding chairs held fresh palm fronds, their faint earthy scent lingering in the air.(backslash)

At Woodmont Baptist Church, a couple of miles from the school, the children's choir has been practicing songs, like "Hosanna" and others, for a Palm Sunday performance, said Pastor Nathan Parker. Woodmont Baptist served as a reunification site for Covenant parents and students after the shooting, a task congregants humbly accepted, Parker said.

During Sunday's service, Parker planned to encourage his congregation to think of God's unconditional promise to save them from their sins and death every time they hear the word "covenant." Due to the circumstances created by the shooting, he said he and his staff also have let themselves off the hook in terms of providing showcase Easter week services this year.

"Nobody needs the 'show' this week," Parker said. "This Holy Week, they need the real hope that comes through the Gospel."

Across the street at Woodmont Christian Church, the Rev. Clay Stauffer, the pastor of one of the young victims and several Covenant students who survived, committed to celebrating Palm Sunday while also helping his church family and the Nashville community heal.

"Death and darkness never have the final say," Stauffer said on Friday before he presided over Evelyn Dieckhaus' funeral service. "We're people of the resurrection, and so we have to remember that as awful and as terrible as this has been, there is a lot of good and a lot of light coming from it."

Stauffer said he is not afraid to dive into policy questions related to the shooting, but there will be time for that later. "I don't have all the answers on that, but I just think that whatever we're doing doesn't seem to be working," he said.

Stauffer knows one thing for certain: "We need Easter this year. We need Easter."

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Associated Press reporter Ben Finley contributed from Norfolk, Virginia.

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## **Blinken: Russia must immediately free 2 detained Americans**

By ERIC TUCKER and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged his Russian counterpart, in a rare phone call between the diplomats since the Ukraine war, to immediately release a Wall Street Journal reporter who was detained last week as well as another imprisoned American, Paul Whelan, the State Department said Sunday.

In the call with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Blinken conveyed “grave concern” over the Kremlin’s detention of journalist Evan Gershkovich on espionage allegations, according to a State Department summary of the call. Blinken called for his immediate release.

Blinken also sought the immediate release of Whelan, whom the statement said was wrongfully detained. U.S. officials said they were considering a similar determination for Gershkovich that could be made at any time. Should that happen, his case would be largely transferred to the office of the U.S. Special Presidential for Hostage Affairs.

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. He is serving a 16-year sentence.

Blinken and Lavrov also discussed “the importance of creating an environment that permits diplomatic missions to carry out their work,” according to the State Department.

The FSB, Russia’s top security agency and successor to the KGB, said Gershkovich was collecting information on an enterprise of the military-industrial complex. Russian authorities detained him last week, the first time a U.S. correspondent has been held on spying accusations since the Cold War.

In its summary of the call, Russia’s foreign ministry said Lavrov “drew Blinken’s attention to the need to respect the decisions of the Russian authorities” about Gershkovich, whom Moscow claims, without evidence, “was caught red-handed.”

The Journal has adamantly denied the allegations and demanded his release. U.S. officials have also called on Russia to let him go, with President Joe Biden telling reporters on Friday that his message to the country was “Let him go.”

The Kremlin said Lavrov also told Blinken it was unacceptable for U.S. officials and Western news media to continue “whipping up excitement” and politicizing the journalist’s detention. “His further fate will be determined by the court.”

The State Department described the detention of Gershkovich as unacceptable.

Emma Tucker, the newspaper’s editor-in-chief, said it was “gratifying” and “reassuring” to learn of Blinken’s call because it shows the U.S. government is taking the case “right up to the top.” The Journal has been unable to get messages to the reporter or learn any official information about him, she told CBS’ “Face the Nation.”

U.S. consular officials have requested a visit with Gershkovich but no announcement of such access has been made. Officials said they were hopeful consular access could be arranged in the coming week but could not speak to when that might happen.

Tucker said the newspaper is hopeful a lawyer might be able to meet with Gershkovich this coming week, and in the meantime has been “pressing constantly for reassurance that he’s not being mistreated in any way.”

Rep. Mike Turner, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, noted that the government has advised U.S. citizens to leave Russia. “This is not unexpected, in that Russia is acting as an illegal state at this point. There are no laws or rules or no international norms that they are following,” Turner, R-Ohio, told CNN’s “State of the Union.”

In alleging that U.S. officials and news media are hyping Gershkovich’s detention, Russian officials are reprising a theme they used in the apprehensions of basketball star Brittney Griner and other U.S. citizens. The Kremlin has said it prefers to resolve such cases quietly and has emphasized the need to follow Rus-

sia's judicial process. Often, that means the chance of progress in U.S. efforts to free its detained citizens isn't likely until formal charges are filed, a trial is held, a conviction is obtained, and sentencing and appeals are completed.

More than 30 news organizations and press freedom advocates have written the Russian ambassador in the United States to express concern Russia is sending the message that reporting inside the country is criminalized.

On Saturday night, Griner, who was detained for 10 months by Russian authorities before being released in a prisoner swap for convicted Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout, issued a statement with her wife, Chelle, calling for the release of the 31-year-old Gershkovich.

"Every American who is taken is ours to fight for and every American returned is a win for us all," the couple said in a statement posted on Instagram.

Interactions between the top U.S. and Russian diplomats have been rare since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, though they did have a brief conversation last month on the sidelines of the Group of 20 conference of foreign ministers in India. It was the highest-level in-person talks between the two countries since the war.

That interaction was their first contact since last summer, when Blinken talked to Lavrov by phone about a U.S. proposal for Russia to release Whelan and Griner. Though Whelan was not included in the one-for-one swap that resulted in the release of Griner, U.S. officials said they remain committed to bringing him home.

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Associated Press writer Hope Yen contributed to this report.

## States aim to boost school safety after Tennessee shooting

By CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — In the wake of an elementary school shooting in Tennessee earlier this week that left three 9-year-olds and three adults dead, state legislatures across the country are moving forward with bills aiming to improve school safety.

The bills have been introduced in blue and red states alike and would require schools to install technology ranging from panic buttons, video surveillance and emergency communications systems. Most have bipartisan support, with lawmakers seeing them as a way to boost school security while avoiding political gridlock on the hot-button issue of gun control. But some experts say teacher safety training is more effective and less expensive than the new technologies, which also can require upgrades or ongoing maintenance that may not be funded.

That hasn't stopped states from Oregon to Missouri to Tennessee from pursuing the systems.

"I was asked by a colleague if our schools will have to become fortresses to keep our kids safe. And I told them yes, if that's what it takes. I don't care if we have to park a tank outside a school," Tennessee's Republican House Majority Leader William Lamberth said.

While Democratic state lawmakers have called for tighter gun laws as a way to stem school shootings, many are now also supporting the school emergency measures that have largely been touted by Republicans.

In Oregon, where Democrats control the Legislature, a bill that would require schools to send electronic notifications to parents as soon as possible after a safety threat occurs passed the state House unanimously this week. Two Democratic lawmakers are the chief sponsors of another bill that would require all public school classrooms to have panic alert devices that would contact law enforcement or emergency services when activated.

If passed, the panic alert bill would make Oregon the fourth state — along with Republican-led Florida and Democratic-led New Jersey and New York — to enact such a law. Several other states are considering similar legislation.

"If there's anything we know, it's that during an emergency, time equals life," said one of the Oregon bill's chief sponsors, Democratic state Rep. Emerson Levy.

Some school districts aren't waiting for legislation to implement new security measures such as panic

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devices.

Las Vegas's Clark County School District, among the 10 largest districts nationwide, is now using a system involving badges called CrisisAlert. The badges can be worn around the neck and pressed to call for help or trigger a schoolwide lockdown.

Olathe Public Schools in suburban Kansas City, the second-largest district in the state, also adopted CrisisAlert. The district has yet to use it to respond to an active shooter situation, according to Jim McMullen, who oversees the district's Safety Services Department and also serves as assistant superintendent of middle school education. But he said school personnel use the badge every day for things ranging from student fights to medical emergencies.

"Earlier today we used it when we had a student who was unconscious. The staff member, instead of leaving the kid to go call for help, was able to just hit their button three times and had a lot of assistance real quickly," he said on Thursday.

"We've gotten tremendous feedback from our staff regarding the fact that it makes them feel safer, empowered," McMullen said.

Panic alert devices gained steam after the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Lori Alhadeff, whose 14-year-old daughter, Alyssa, was among the 17 killed, founded the group Make Our Schools Safe and began advocating for panic buttons. She had texted her daughter as shots rang out that help was on the way.

"It's really so important to be proactive, and to really accept the fact that unfortunately this can happen anywhere at any time, as we've seen over and over again," said Lori Kitaygorodsky, the group's spokesperson. "There's really nothing to lose by being prepared."

Some Republican-led states have boosted funding for school safety in order to help schools pay for new devices like panic buttons. Installing CrisisAlert, for example, costs at least \$8,000 per campus under a three- to five-year contract, according to Will Fullerton, senior vice president for government affairs at Centegix, the Atlanta-based company that makes the product.

The number of schools using CrisisAlert nearly doubled from 2021 to 2022, according to the company. The badge system delivered over 50,000 alerts in the Fall 2022 semester, a 100% increase from the same time the previous year, said vice president of marketing Stacy Meyer in an email.

After a shooter killed 19 children and two teachers last May at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, state officials announced \$105 million for school safety and mental health initiatives. Nearly half of that was slated for bullet-resistant shields for school police and \$17 million was for districts to purchase panic-alert technology.

The Missouri House on Thursday approved a 2024 budget with \$50 million for school safety grants, on top of \$20 million already authorized for school safety in the current year. Schools will be able to use the money on technology including door locking devices, intercom systems and video surveillance equipment.

While one-time grants can allow schools to purchase new technology, they don't always fund upkeep over longer periods of time. Ken Trump, president of National School Safety and Security Services, a consulting firm based in Cleveland, Ohio, said he's found items like security cameras gathering dust in boxes in some of the schools that he's worked with.

"There's no budget to repair, replace and maintain them after they put them in ... Things are pushed into a closet and not used again," he said.

"The basic fundamental tools are not being properly used — staff not being properly trained, doors that are propped open," he said, adding that the focus should be on "situational awareness, pattern recognition ... and then making cognitive decisions under stress."

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Associated Press writers Kimberlee Kruesi and David A. Lieb contributed reporting from Nashville, Tennessee and Jefferson City, Missouri.

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Claire Rush is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative.



Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

## Ukrainian official offers plan for a Crimea without Russia

By KARL RITTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A top Ukrainian official on Sunday outlined a series of steps the government in Kyiv would take after the country reclaims control of Crimea, including dismantling the strategic bridge that links the seized Black Sea peninsula to Russia.

Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, published the plan as Ukraine's military prepares for a spring counteroffensive in hopes of making new, decisive gains after more than 13 months of war to end Russia's full-scale invasion.

Moscow annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, but most of the world does not recognize it as Russian territory. The peninsula's future status will be a key feature in any negotiations on ending the current fighting.

The Kremlin has demanded that Ukraine recognize Russia's sovereignty over Crimea and acknowledge other land gains made by Moscow as a condition for peace. Kyiv has ruled out any peace talks with Moscow until Russian troops leave all occupied territories, including Crimea.

Danilov suggested prosecuting Ukrainians who worked for the Moscow-appointed administration in Crimea, adding that some would face criminal charges and others would lose government pensions and be banned from public jobs.

All Russian citizens who moved to Crimea after 2014 should be expelled, and all real estate deals made under Russian rule nullified, Danilov wrote on Facebook.

As part of the plan, he also called for dismantling a 19-kilometer (12-mile) bridge that Russia built to Crimea. In October, a truck bomb severely damaged the bridge, which is Europe's longest and a symbol of Moscow's conquest of the peninsula.

Russia has repaired the damaged section of the bridge and restored the flow of supplies to Crimea, which has been a key hub for the Russian military during the war. Moscow blamed Ukrainian military intelligence for the attack. Kyiv did not claim responsibility, but Ukrainian officials had repeatedly threatened to strike the bridge in the past.

Danilov also argued for renaming the city of Sevastopol, which has been the main base for the Russian Black Sea Fleet since the 19th century. He said it could be called Object No. 6 before the Ukrainian parliament chooses another name, suggesting Akhtiar after a village that once stood where the city is now.

The Moscow-appointed head of Sevastopol, Mikhail Razvozhayev, shrugged off Danilov's plan as "sick." "It would be wrong to seriously treat comments by sick people. They must be cured, and that's what our military is doing now," Razvozhayev told the Russian state news agency Tass.

Danilov published his plan as Ukrainian troops prepared to use newly supplied Western weapons, including dozens of battle tanks, to break through Russian defenses and reclaim occupied areas in a counteroffensive expected as early as this month.

Russian troops are trying to capture the key Ukrainian stronghold of Bakhmut as part of their efforts to take all of Donetsk province, which is part of Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland of the Donbas. The 8-month campaign for Bakhmut is the longest and potentially deadliest battle of the war.

Russia's latest rocket and artillery attacks killed four civilians and wounded 15 others since Saturday, according to the Ukrainian military. The victims included two men who died in the northern Sumy region early Sunday when a milk truck was hit.

Ukrainian authorities reported that Russian shelling killed another six civilians later Sunday in Kostiantynivka, a small city in Donetsk province. The Russian barrage also damaged numerous residential buildings and wounded eight people, officials said.

In Russia-occupied Melitopol, the Moscow-installed local administration said a Ukrainian rocket barrage on Sunday struck a locomotive depot and damaged an apartment building in the southern city, wounding

six civilians.

Ukrainian officials didn't take direct responsibility for that attack either. But the city's Kyiv-appointed mayor, Ivan Fedorov, jubilantly referred to blasts at the locomotive depot as a culmination of an "explosive week for the occupiers" that featured other hits over the past few days.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, the war has destroyed entire cities and killed tens of thousands of people.

Ukrainian Sports Minister Vadym Huttsait, reaffirming Kyiv's call to bar Russia from the Olympics, said the death toll included 262 Ukrainian athletes.

They include Vitalii Merinov, a four-time world kickboxing champion. Merinov, who had joined the Ukrainian armed forces, died Friday of wounds sustained in action, according to the mayor of the western city of Ivano-Frankivsk.

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

## Activists' network in Mexico helps U.S. women get abortions

By MARÍA TERESA HERNÁNDEZ Associated Press

CHIHUAHUA, Mexico (AP) — Marcela Castro's office in Chihuahua is more than 100 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border, yet the distance doesn't prevent her from assisting women in the United States in circumventing recently imposed bans on abortion.

From the headquarters of Marea Verde Chihuahua, an organization that has supported reproductive rights in northern Mexico since 2018, Castro and her colleagues provide virtual guidance, as well as shipments of abortion pills for women who want to terminate a pregnancy on their own.

This abortion model, in which no travel, clinics or prescriptions are needed, sparked interest in the U.S. — and a surge of requests for help — as the Supreme Court moved to eliminate the constitutional right to abortion last year. But the model was developed by Mexican activists through decades of facing abortion bans and restrictions in most of Mexico's 32 states.

"We don't offer medical attention because we are not doctors," Castro said. "Part of our work, though, is to remove the stigma toward abortion. Although it is a medical procedure, it does not require hospital measures."

To safely advise women on self-managed medical abortions, Castro and her colleagues were trained to become "acompañantes" -- capable of serving as a guide and partner, whether in person or from long distance. They have carefully studied national abortion guidelines and they know by heart some protocols established by the World Health Organization.

Since they do not charge for the help they provide, most "acompañantes" need jobs outside the organizations where they volunteer. Among them are lawyers, psychologists and other professionals. Over the years, they have created a nationwide network that has secured abortion access for Mexican and foreign women, whether or not abortion is legal where they live.

"We are ordinary women working for reproductive justice," Castro said. "We seek what the State has denied us out of prohibition."

Mexican women face a scenario that resembles the U.S., where more than a dozen states -- including Texas -- have imposed sweeping abortion bans. Unless it's justified under certain exceptions, abortion is considered a crime in two-thirds of Mexico's states.

Chihuahua, where Castro lives, is ruled by a conservative governor and its penal code criminalizes most abortions.

Among all other Mexican border states where "acompañantes" support Mexican or American women, abortion is only legal in Baja California. Additionally, a 2021 ruling by Mexico's Supreme Court held that those who get the procedure shouldn't be punished in Coahuila, a state south of Texas.

More than 30 women collaborate with Castro in Marea Verde Chihuahua. They are part of what she calls a binational network, bringing together several Mexican collectives willing to facilitate self-managed abortions in the U.S.

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Most women from the U.S. contact Marea Verde Chihuahua through social media or by someone's referral. Most communicate in Spanish, though the *acompañantes* are able to assist English speakers as well.

After an initial contact, members of the team check their availability and an *acompañante* is assigned to each case. Further communications usually proceed via WhatsApp.

The accompaniment starts with some basic questions to determine the gestational age, how the pregnancy was confirmed, and the woman's overall health. Once the information is evaluated, the *acompañante* proposes how to proceed.

In most cases, medication is advised and the *acompañante* is able to provide a combination of two abortion pills, misoprostol and mifepristone, both considered safe by the World Health Organization and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Although both medications require a prescription in the U.S., misoprostol can be acquired without a prescription in Mexican pharmacies — though some vendors refuse to sell pills to women. Mifepristone can be obtained through some abortion rights organizations.

The work of the *acompañantes* troubles anti-abortion activists in Mexico. One of them, Jahel Torres of a national group called Pasos por la Vida, suggested there were health risks because abortion pills were being distributed by non-medical personnel.

However, the WHO has depicted self-managed abortion as a safe option.

Castro and her colleagues usually send pills by mail and provide virtual follow-up until the abortion is completed. But depending on its personnel and resources, each Mexican abortion collective has its own logistics.

Aborto Seguro Chihuahua, which is part of the binational network, provides long-distance guidance to women in the U.S. but medication is not mailed from Mexico. Instead, the *acompañantes* collaborate with volunteers who transport the pills from Ciudad Juárez, in Chihuahua, to El Paso, Texas, where the packages are delivered either in person or through mailing services.

Laura Dorado works alongside 20 people in Aborto Seguro Chihuahua and says her team handles around 120 abortions per month. Some requests come from Mexico; others from Texas, Arizona and Colorado.

When she receives a message from a woman who is able to travel from the U.S. to Mexico, Dorado can offer some advice. "We have identified some pharmacies in which buying the pills is not a struggle or we suggest staying at a hotel and request the medication by delivery, to keep a low profile."

Dorado said Aborto Seguro Chihuahua mostly receives mifepristone pills from Las Libres, an organization founded 20 years ago in the conservative state of Guanajuato, in central Mexico, where abortion is still banned.

Led by activist Veronica Cruz, Las Libres pioneered in training *acompañantes* to provide virtual guidance for self-managed medical abortions in Mexico and, since 2019, in the U.S. as well.

"In January 2022, we had an average of 10 cases every day. When Roe was overturned, in June, we had up to a hundred," Cruz said.

She said the numbers kept rising until they reached 300 requests per day, all from the U.S. The workload was immense for her team of 10 people, so she created new networks to help.

"In one year we have created more than 20 networks. We are about 200 people helping only the United States," Cruz said.

As with Marea Verde and Aborto Seguro in Chihuahua, Las Libres usually receives requests from Texas, Arizona and Colorado. Occasionally, women also reach out from Florida, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Georgia, California, New Jersey and New York.

Though abortion is legal in some of those states, *acompañantes* believe many of these women are of Hispanic origin and either want to avoid going to an abortion clinic or can't afford to pay up to \$600 to get an abortion where they live.

According to Cruz, many of these women are wary of self-managed abortions, and fighting that stigma has become part of their work.

"Most people think pills aren't safe, so changing all of that so quickly has been a challenge," Cruz said.

John Seago, president of Texas Right to Life, said there has yet to be any intensive effort to prosecute



people involved in supplying abortion pills to Texas residents.

"Texas simply does not have enough policy tools to efficiently stop these practices," Seago said. His organization is pushing for new legislation, he added "so that those breaking Texas law by aiding and abetting abortion digitally or physically will be held accountable."

Nathan Cortez, a professor at Southern Methodist University in Dallas specializing in health law, said he considered it inevitable that women in states with abortion bans would consider options outside the U.S.

"This demonstrates the limits of a state's jurisdiction — the more onerous and unreasonable your state laws are, the more likely you are to push prohibited activities elsewhere." Cortez said.

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## Voters with disabilities often overlooked in voting battles

By AYANNA ALEXANDER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Patti Chang walked into her polling place in Chicago earlier this year, anxious about how poll workers would treat her, especially as a voter who is blind. Even though she was accompanied by her husband, she said she was ignored until a poll worker grabbed her cane and pulled her toward a voting booth.

Like many voters with disabilities, Chang faces barriers at the polls most voters never even consider — missing ramps or door knobs, for example. The lack of help or empathy from some poll workers just adds to the burden for people with disabilities.

"It doesn't help you want to be in there if you're going to encounter those kinds of low expectations," said Chang, 59. "So why should I go vote if I'm going to have to fight with the poll workers? I'm an adult and I should be able to vote without that."

Chang had a better experience when she cast an early ballot in March in the runoff election for Chicago mayor, a race that will be decided Tuesday, even as access to the ballot box remains a challenge across the city for voters like her.

Chicago is among numerous voting jurisdictions across the United States with poor access to polling locations for disabled voters. Since 2016, the Department of Justice has entered into more than three dozen settlements or agreements to force better access in cities and counties under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Many of those places are holding elections this year.

The department's targets are almost certainly an undercount of the number of places with poor access, according to disability rights activists who attempt to track ADA compliance and complaints from voters.

Several, including Chicago, either missed their deadlines without making all the requested changes or asked for an extension.

Chicago's agreement with the federal government started in 2017 but has been extended twice; the current deadline is November 2024, the next presidential election. As of February, the city had 302 polling places that complied fully with the ADA and 327 with low accessibility or none at all for disabled voters.

The expense of bringing aging buildings up to code is one challenge in complying, said Max Bever, a spokesperson for the city's board of elections. Some polling places could be forced to close.

"Things can be identified and surveyed, we can know the status of certain buildings — but actually making and funding the appropriate changes can be a long and difficult process," he said.

People with disabilities make up about one-fourth of the U.S. adult population, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They have been ensnared in battles over access to the polls as many Republican-led states have passed restrictive voting laws in recent years, including over limits on what assistance a voter can receive and whether someone else can return a voter's mailed ballot.

In Wisconsin, disability rights activists scored a victory when they filed a legal challenge in federal court after the state Supreme Court, with a conservative majority, ruled that only the voter can return an absentee ballot. The federal court said that ran afoul of the Voting Rights Act. Nevertheless, voters with disabilities have been complaining that the federal law is being ignored in the run-up to Wisconsin's

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high-stakes election Tuesday, when control of the state's high court could flip.

They say local election officials throughout Wisconsin have been giving incorrect information on websites, in mailings and at polling places saying voters can't receive help or have someone else return their ballot — without making the distinction that such assistance is allowed for voters with disabilities.

Disability must be considered a fundamental right to enhance accessibility throughout the country, said Herbert Humphrey, the ADA coordinator for Jackson, Mississippi.

"Typically, when you hear civil rights, you think about race. But no, civil rights includes the disability community, as well," he said.

Disjointed coordination between election authorities and disability advocates has been a persistent problem in Mississippi, especially related to reliable transportation. It was the reason Lee Cole, who is blind, missed a local election in Jackson in January.

That frustrated Cole, 74, because she said she tries to vote in every election.

"I live in senior housing now and we can't always vote because we can't get to the site, and that's unfortunate," she said.

Mississippi's local and state officials haven't been receptive or collaborative, said Greta Kemp Martin, litigation director for Disability Rights Mississippi.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Martin said the group met with Mississippi Secretary of State Michael Watson to discuss accessibility issues statewide. But Martin said Watson seemed uninterested, except when asking if the group had reached out to the election commission.

"His attorneys were helpful, but we received no follow-up from them about the issues that we outlined," Martin said.

Watson's office said in a statement that it has communicated its efforts to the organization to best assist voters with disabilities in Mississippi and welcomes further dialogue for future elections.

"Ensuring ADA compliance in localized polling places lies with each county, and the Mississippi Secretary of State's Office does not have enforcement authority," the statement said. "Whether the designated polling places are county-owned or privately-owned, the counties are responsible for ensuring the polling places they have selected are ADA compliant."

After conducting routine polling place surveys, Disability Rights Mississippi sent letters in 2021 to state election commissioners and Watson's office about access problems in two small towns, but said it did not receive a response. The letters said the group had found "egregious violations of the ADA."

Local election offices are often burdened with a lengthy list of responsibilities, such as ensuring that equipment works properly and defending against cyberattacks. Because of that workload, disability right advocates say they try to reach out and help ensure that polling places are accessible, said Michelle Bishop, the voter access and engagement manager at the National Disability Rights Network.

"This is a significant investment and I know that elections officials are typically under-resourced to do a multitude of things," she said.

The COVID-19 pandemic also shifted focus from ADA compliance as election offices had to ensure polling places were safe and had to mail and process a flood of mailed ballots, Bishop said.

Poll worker training is a priority, especially to make sure workers and volunteers are sensitive to the needs of disabled voters, said Denise Avant, first vice president of the National Federation of the Blind of Illinois. The group offered to make a presentation during a poll worker class following last year's midterm elections, but the Chicago Board of Elections declined, she said.

The board did let the federation assist in testing voting machines for compliance and to provide guidance on how precinct workers could interact with voters who are blind or have low vision. It expects to work with the organization in the future now that in-person training has returned.

Such training is needed to help poll workers gain a better understanding of how to best help voters with disabilities, said Kelly Knoop, who lives in Louisville, Kentucky, and has cerebral palsy. She uses a machine for those who may not be able to communicate with their own voices.

Knoop's older sister, Karen Heil, also helps her communicate and said workers at their local precinct still seem unfamiliar with their lone accessible voting machine. Jefferson County, home to Louisville, entered

into an ADA agreement with the Justice Department in 2022.

"I sadly just have to say there are so many Americans that are looked upon as not being full citizens and not being worthy of all the rights that we do have," said Knopp, 56. "We just need our lives to be as important as many other minorities."

Associated Press coverage of race and voting receives support from the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## Donald Trump isn't first ex-president to face legal trouble

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump has made history so many times.

The first president without government or military experience. The first to be impeached twice. The first to aggressively challenge the certification of his successor.

Now, he adds another: Even as he hopes to return to the White House in 2025, he is the first former president to be indicted.

The latest line crossed by Trump challenges again the aura of the American presidency, nurtured in the infallibility of George Washington but made human over and over, through scandals born of greed and the abuse of power, corruption and naivete, sex and lies about sex.

Trump is hardly the first president, in or out of office, to face legal trouble.

In 1974, Richard Nixon may well have avoided criminal charges on obstruction of justice or bribery, related to the Watergate scandal, only because President Gerald Ford pardoned him just weeks after Nixon resigned the presidency. Bill Clinton's law license in his native Arkansas was suspended for five years after he reached a deal with prosecutors in 2001, at the end of his second term, over allegations that he lied under oath about his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

Some historians wonder about President Warren Harding's fate had he not died in office, in 1923. Numerous officials around him would be implicated in various crimes, including Interior Secretary Albert B. Fall, whose corrupt land dealings became known as the "Teapot Dome Scandal."

"The walls were closing in on him," presidential historian Douglas Brinkley said of Harding.

Trump's indictment in New York reportedly is linked to how business records were mischaracterized in connection with paying porn actor Stormy Daniels \$130,000 in 2016, shortly before Trump defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton for the presidency, to keep Daniels from going public about a sexual encounter she said she had with him years earlier. Trump denies having sex with her.

Trump also is being investigated for allegedly attempting to change the 2020 vote results in Georgia, a state he narrowly lost to Democrat Joe Biden, and for his role in the riot at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, when Trump supporters attempted to stop the congressional certification of Biden as president. Trump has denied any wrongdoing and called the New York investigation "a witch hunt."

While in office, Trump adopted the view of a Justice Department legal opinion that a president could not be indicted. Once a president leaves office, though, that protection falls away.

Most ex-presidents of the past half-century have led relatively uneventful public lives — creating foundations, delivering lucrative speeches, or in the case of Jimmy Carter, doing abundant charitable works. Nixon's disgrace scarred him for years, though he eventually reemerged to talk about global affairs and counsel aspiring politicians and potential presidents, including Trump.

The immediate cause of Nixon's resignation was the discovery of the "smoking gun" — Oval Office tape recordings, initiated by Nixon himself, that revealed he had ordered a cover-up of the 1972 break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate complex in Washington. By 1974, the scandal had expanded well beyond the initial crime. Many of Nixon's top aides had stepped down and were eventually imprisoned. Nixon himself was a possible target of the Watergate special counsel.

"There were partisans in Congress and on the special counsel's staff who would have liked to see Nixon indicted after the resignation — or at least believed that the pardon was premature," says John A. Farrell,



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author of "Richard Nixon: The Life," a prize-winning biography published in 2017. "But the special prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, had consistently chosen to deal with Nixon via the constitutional, impeachment process."

Farrell notes that Ford's pardon happened so soon after Nixon stepped down that Jaworski's office didn't have time to fully consider charges against Nixon. Ford himself would say that an "indictment, a trial, a conviction, and anything else that transpired" would have distracted the country from more immediate problems.

"This much can be said: Nixon himself was very worried about the possibility (of prosecution), to the point of ruining his health," Farrell said, referring to Nixon's battles with phlebitis, the inflammation of veins in the leg. "He mused aloud about how some of the great political writing in history had been crafted in jail cells. His very worried family reached out to the White House, alerting Ford's aides of the ex-president's deteriorating condition."

The administrations of Nixon and Harding were among several defined by scandal, without the president being charged.

Ulysses Grant, the Union general and hero of the Civil War, was otherwise naive about those around him. Numerous members of his presidential administration were involved in financial wrongdoing, from extortion to market manipulation. Grant himself was caught for a more trivial offense. In 1872, during his first term, he was stopped twice for riding his carriage too fast.

"The second time Grant had to pay a \$20 fine, but never spent a night in jail," says historian Ron Chernow, whose Grant biography was published in 2017.

Tragedy may have spared one future president.

In the fall of 1963, Vice President Lyndon Johnson was out of favor in the Kennedy administration and in possible legal danger because his top aide, Bobby Baker, was under investigation for financial dealings and influence peddling. Johnson, with his own history of questionable finances, was denying any close ties to a man he had once claimed to love as a son.

By the morning of Nov. 22, 1963, Life magazine was planning a investigation and congressional hearings were just getting started. But within hours, Kennedy had been assassinated, Johnson sworn in as his successor and interest in the affairs of Baker had essentially ended.

## Today in History: April 3, Jesse James killed by Robert Ford

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, April 3, the 93rd day of 2023. There are 272 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 3, 1973, the first handheld portable telephone was demonstrated for reporters on a New York City street corner as Motorola executive Martin Cooper called Joel S. Engel of Bell Labs.

On this date:

In 1865, Union forces occupied the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia.

In 1882, outlaw Jesse James was shot to death in St. Joseph, Missouri, by Robert Ford, a member of James' gang.

In 1936, Bruno Hauptmann was electrocuted in Trenton, New Jersey, for the kidnap-murder of 20-month-old Charles Lindbergh Jr.

In 1942, during World War II, Japanese forces began their final assault on Bataan against American and Filipino troops who surrendered six days later; the capitulation was followed by the notorious Bataan Death March.

In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Smith v. Allwright*, struck down a Democratic Party of Texas rule that allowed only white voters to participate in Democratic primaries.

In 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed the Marshall Plan, designed to help European allies rebuild after World War II and resist communism.

In 1968, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. delivered what turned out to be his final speech, tell-

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ing a rally of striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee, that "I've been to the mountaintop" and "seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land!" (About 20 hours later, King was felled by an assassin's bullet at the Lorraine Motel.)

In 1974, deadly tornadoes began hitting wide parts of the South and Midwest before jumping across the border into Canada; more than 300 fatalities resulted from what became known as the Super Outbreak.

In 1978, at the Academy Awards, Woody Allen's "Annie Hall" was named best picture of 1977; its co-star, Diane Keaton, won best actress while Richard Dreyfuss was honored as best actor for "The Goodbye Girl."

In 1996, Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski (kah-ZIHN'-skee) was arrested at his remote Montana cabin.

In 2012, Mitt Romney tightened his grip on the Republican presidential nomination, sweeping primaries in Wisconsin, Maryland and Washington, D.C.

In 2014, David Letterman announced during a taping of the "Late Show" on CBS that he would retire as host in 2015. (Stephen Colbert (kohl-BEHR') was named as his replacement a week later.)

In 2020, President Donald Trump announced new federal guidelines recommending that Americans wear face coverings when in public to help fight the spread of the coronavirus, but Trump immediately said he had no intention of following that advice himself; he said he could not envision himself covering his face while sitting in the Oval Office greeting world leaders.

Ten years ago: The White House announced President Barack Obama would return 5 percent of his salary each month to the Treasury in a show of solidarity with federal workers smarting from government-wide spending cuts. Palestinian militants launched several rockets into southern Israel and Israeli aircraft struck targets in the Gaza Strip in the heaviest exchange of fire between the sides since a cease-fire ended a major flare-up the previous year. Oscar-winning screenwriter and award-winning novelist Ruth Praver Jhabvala, 85, died in New York.

Five years ago: A woman opened fire with a handgun in a courtyard at YouTube headquarters in San Bruno, California, wounding three people before fatally shooting herself; family members said she was upset with the company's handling of her videos and believed she was being deprived of income and views. President Donald Trump said he wanted to use the military to secure the U.S.-Mexico border until his promised border wall was built.

One year ago: Ukrainian authorities found bodies with bound hands, close-range gunshot wounds and signs of torture scattered in a city on the outskirts of Kyiv after the withdrawal of Russian troops. They said that to that point they had found the bodies of 410 civilians in Kyiv-area towns that resembled "a scene from a horror movie." In Sacramento, California, six people were killed and 10 injured in a shootout as bars and nightclubs were closing in the city's downtown. At the Grammy Awards in Las Vegas, Jon Batiste won album of the year for "We Are," Silk Sonic won record and song of the year for "Leave the Door Open," and Olivia Rodrigo won best new artist.

Today's Birthdays: Conservationist Dame Jane Goodall is 89. Actor William Gaunt is 86. Songwriter Jeff Barry is 85. Actor Eric Braeden is 82. Actor Marsha Mason is 81. Singer Wayne Newton is 81. Singer Tony Orlando is 79. Comedy writer Pat Proft is 76. Folk-rock singer Richard Thompson is 74. Country musician Curtis Stone (Highway 101) is 73. Blues singer-guitarist John Mooney is 68. Rock musician Mick Mars (Mötley Crüe) is 67. Actor Alec Baldwin is 65. Actor David Hyde Pierce is 64. Rock singer John Thomas Griffith (Cowboy Mouth) is 63. Comedian-actor Eddie Murphy is 62. Rock singer-musician Mike Ness (Social Distortion) is 61. Rock singer Sebastian Bach is 55. Rock musician James MacDonough (Megadeth) is 53. Olympic gold medal ski racer Picabo Street is 52. Actor Jennie Garth is 51. Actor Jamie Bamber is 50. Actor Adam Scott is 50. Christian rock musician Drew Shirley (Switchfoot) is 49. Comedian Aries Spears is 48. Actor Matthew Goode is 45. Actor Cobie Smulders is 41. Rock-pop singer Leona Lewis is 38. Former actor Amanda Bynes is 37. Actor-comedian Rachel Bloom is 36. Actor Hayley Kiyoko is 32. Rock musician Sam Kiszka (Greta Van Fleet) is 24.