

# Groton Daily Independent

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**Due to the forecast weather for our area, the Groton Area School District will be closed on Tuesday, April 4, 2023. We will continue to evaluate the weather for Wednesday and Thursday but plan to make decisions and announcements day-by-day.**

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## Groton Community Calendar

**Tuesday, April 4**

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.

**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.



"The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away."

CHRISTIAN D. LARSON

## 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.

**Postponed to April 12th:** Chamber Meeting, noon, at City Hall

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## Governor Noem Closes State Government Offices for Winter Storm

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Kristi Noem ordered state government executive branch offices in certain counties be closed Tuesday, April 4, because of the winter storms in South Dakota. Heavy snow and high winds will take place across much of the state.

State offices will be closed all day Tuesday in the following counties: Beadle, Bennett, Brown, Brule, Buffalo, Butte, Campbell, Corson, Custer, Dewey, Edmonds, Fall River, Faulk, Haakon, Hand, Harding, Hughes, Jackson, Jerauld, Jones, Lawrence, Lyman, McPherson, Meade, Mellette, Oglala Lakota, Pennington, Perkins, Potter, Spink, Stanley, Sully, Todd, Tripp, Walworth, and Ziebach.

State offices will close at 12pm CT in the following counties: Clark, Day, Grant, Marshall, and Roberts.

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

Citizens should be prepared to stay home if possible. Some interstate closures have already been announced for this evening. If South Dakotans must travel, they should check the [sd511.org](https://sd511.org) or the SD511 mobile app.

**Brown County offices will be closed all day for Tuesday April 4th, 2023. Due to the weather.**

## South Dakota Department of Health Issues Warning about Fentanyl and Xylazine Mix Threat

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Health (DOH) has issued a warning to the public and medical professionals about the threat of fentanyl mixed with xylazine. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has reported that this mixture is becoming increasingly widespread and poses a significant risk to public health.

“We want to make sure the public is aware of the dangers of this mixture and that medical professionals are equipped to handle any cases that may arise,” said Dr. Tim Southern, Public Health Laboratory Administrator at the South Dakota Department of Health. “It is essential to note that naloxone is an opioid antagonist medication used to reverse an opioid overdose, which can occur with an overdose of fentanyl. But xylazine is not an opioid, therefore naloxone will not reverse its effects, which makes this combination much more deadly.”

Fentanyl is a potent synthetic opioid that is often mixed with other drugs to increase their effects. Xylazine is a sedative commonly used on large animals such as horses and is not intended for human consumption. The combination of these two substances can lead to respiratory depression, seizures, and even death.

DOH urges medical professionals to be vigilant in their drug testing protocols and to report any cases of fentanyl and xylazine mixtures immediately. Guidelines for the treatment of individuals who may have been exposed to these substances are available [here](#).

“The safety of South Dakotans is our top priority, and we will continue to monitor this situation closely and take appropriate action,” Dr. Southern added.

DOH is working closely with the DEA and other state and federal agencies to address this threat and keep the public informed. Anyone who suspects they may have come into contact with fentanyl mixed with xylazine should seek medical attention immediately.

For more information and resources on this issue, please visit <https://doh.sd.gov/>.

## Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

April 4, 2023 – 7:00pm

City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

- Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1

(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)

- Open Sealed Bids for 2023 Street Resurfacing
- Department Reports
- Baseball Concessions – LWCF Grant
- Sign for Groton PD Building
- Park Bathrooms – FEMA Grant – Ted Dickey from NECOG & Ken Hier from IMEG
- Appoint Library Board Members
- 2023-2024 Malt Beverage License Renewals:
  - MJ's Sinclair
  - Ken's Food Fair
  - Dollar General
- Approval of Special Event Alcohol Beverage License – Groton Fireman's Fun Night – April 22, 2023
- Minutes
- Bills
- Economic Development
- Announcement – City Offices to be closed April 7th & April 10th for Good Friday & Easter Monday
- Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
- Establish Miscellaneous Pool Wages
- Hire Summer Employees
- Adjournment

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## Easter Bags delivered around town

Some 51 Easter bags were assembled on Monday and delivered around town, thanks the efforts of The Pantry and Common Cents Thrift Store volunteers. Top left are David Miller and Nancy Larsen; top right are Pat Miller and Diane Warrington; bottom left is Kari Bartling and bottom right is April Abeln.



## The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

### World in Brief

- Roy McGrath, the former chief of staff to ex-Maryland Governor Larry Hogan wanted on corruption charges, died from gunshot wounds after a confrontation with law enforcement agents.
- At least one person was killed, and 30 others were injured after a passenger train carrying about 50 people collided with a freight train in the Netherlands. Rescue efforts are ongoing.
- The University of Connecticut Huskies won the NCAA men's basketball title with a 76-59 victory over San Diego State, becoming only the fifth team to win all six tournament games by double digits since 1985.
- Australia said it would remove TikTok from all federal government-owned devices over security concerns, joining the U.S. and other Western allies who have announced similar measures in recent months.
- Khalid Aydd Ahmad al-Jabouri, a senior member of the Islamic State group, has been reportedly killed by the U.S. military forces in a "unilateral strike" in northwestern Syria.
- A federal jury has ordered Tesla to pay about \$3 million in damages and \$175,000 in non-economic damages to Black former worker Owen Diaz, who endured racist discrimination as a contract worker at the company in 2015.
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin is likely looking for alternative mercenary groups to replace the Wagner fighters in Ukraine as the "high-profile feud" between the group's chief and the Russian leader continues, the U.K. defense ministry said.

- Donald Trump is seeking "absolute immunity" from a lawsuit brought against him by the partner of Brian Sicknick, the U.S. Capitol Police officer who died on January 7, 2021, due to his position as president at the time.

- Wisconsin's Supreme Court election takes place today, with the fate of abortion access and controversial congressional maps at stake.

- Finland is set to officially join NATO, which marks a historic shift for the Nordic country that once believed it was safer outside of the U.S.-led military alliance.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **State employees could receive Noem's paid family leave expansion, despite legislative rejection**

**BY: JOHN HULT - APRIL 3, 2023 5:07 PM**

A state commission could endorse 12 weeks of paid family leave for state employees less than two months after lawmakers voted against changing state law to make that happen.

The Civil Service Commission will consider the rule change during Tuesday's meeting. It would extend paid family leave for new parents from eight weeks to 12 for any full-time state employee with at least six months on the job.

It would also cover 100% of an employee's salary for that 12 weeks, compared to the 60% of salary covered by the current policy.

Commission Chair Barbara Christianson of Rapid City said the board members have known for about a month that their April meeting would involve a rules hearing, but members only recently learned about the rule proposal on paid family leave.

The commission's website shows that the rule was posted at around 1 p.m. Sunday.

"We have had no discussions on it," Christianson said.

That's not out of line with typical commission practice for rules hearings, she said, as commissioners use rules hearings to learn the details of proposals from staff members.

Paid family leave was a pillar of Gov. Kristi Noem's legislative package for the 2023 legislative session, which ended a few weeks ago. Noem successfully pushed to create the current paid family leave program for state employees in 2020.

Since her time in Congress, Noem has framed the issue as a "pro-life" policy that supports women and families. In her State of the State address this January, she asked lawmakers to pass bills that would let more parents in the public and private sectors bond with their children.

Those bills would have done far more than the proposed rule before the commission this week could do.

On the state employee side, the proposal hinged on an insurance plan. House Bill 1151 would have authorized the state to ask for bids and select an insurance company that would cover 80% of the cost of paid family leave for state employees, with taxpayers picking up less than \$3 million to cover the other 20%.

It also would have allowed private companies to buy into that insurance pool, in the interest of lowering premiums for the state and any private businesses that might choose to participate.

State employees could have taken paid leave to care for a sick child, spouse or parent, or to care for family in the event of a deployment for an active-duty military spouse. Private employers would have had flexibility on how much family leave to offer.

Noem policy adviser Rachel Oglesby told lawmakers in the House that the insurance program would soften the budget blow of the policy. Allowing private businesses to buy into the insurance pool would allow the state to encourage the adoption of a benefit more employees have come to expect without using a government mandate.

"House Bill 1151 is not a government subsidy," Oglesby said. "It is an opportunity."

Among its backers were AARP of South Dakota, state employee groups and insurance companies.

A companion bill to the state employee leave plan, Senate Bill 154, would have created a \$20 million pool of grant funds to help private businesses recoup the cost of offering paid family leave.

That bill was killed by a Senate committee on Feb. 15. The House bill died in committee the following day.

At the time, lawmakers said there was no need for the governor's legislation, at least as it related to

state employees.

"There's room to do this within state government without this particular bill, and I hope that moves forward," said Rep. Tony Venhuizen, R-Sioux Falls. "I do think when we get into the state participating in the private market, it's maybe something that goes a little bit further than our body is ready to go."

Oglesby did tell lawmakers on Feb. 16 that the state could expand family leave without a new law, but that the state couldn't buy an insurance policy or expand eligibility without one.

Last year, she said, the state paid out 41,201 hours of paid family leave.

"If we juiced that up to 12 weeks at 100%, the total cost to the state would be about \$2.7 million a year," Oglesby said.

The language of the Civil Service Commission's proposed rule does not spell out the cost to state agencies or make reference to any insurance policy.

State employees will welcome the expansion of benefits, according to Eric Ollila, the executive director of the South Dakota State Employees Organization.

Ollila's group supported both of the paid family leave bills this year. There was disappointment about the failure of the paid family leave policy a few months back, he said, but "it was nice to see that the state wanted to go ahead and do that through the rulemaking process."

The commission is set to meet on the rule at 1:30 p.m. Central time. Some commission members had planned to appear via Zoom, but Chair Christianson said it's unclear if the meeting will be postponed in the face of an anticipated Tuesday snowstorm.

Staff with the Bureau of Human Resources did not immediately reply to requests for comment on Monday. Noem spokesman Ian Fury did not reply to an email and a call on paid family leave.

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

## How South Dakota will spend the first of \$54 million from national opioid settlements

**State creates overdose follow-up program, while local governments rely mostly on law enforcement**

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - APRIL 3, 2023 5:06 PM**

South Dakota received over \$3.5 million from a national opioid lawsuit settlement in the last few months — the beginning of over \$54 million delivered to the state in the next two decades.

Now, the state, cities and counties are figuring out how to spend that money, focusing on opioid addiction treatment, prevention and education.

Opioids were connected to 43 deaths in South Dakota in 2021. And in Sioux Falls, 21 people died due to drug overdoses in 2022, according to Sioux Falls Public Health Director Charles Chima.

Opioids and other drugs have "done great harm" to communities across the country and South Dakota, he added.

"While our police officers continue their impressive work of finding and removing dangerous drugs from our community, these opioid settlement funds will enable the city of Sioux Falls to fund prevention and harm reduction services, including education campaigns to discourage illicit drug use," Chima said in an emailed statement.

The \$3.5 million is made up of funds from the first and second payments from a national opioid settlement, but the state expects to see more cash from additional settlements in the next few years.

**How South Dakota can use the \$54 million**

The national opioid settlement was reached in 2021 to resolve opioid litigation against the country's

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three largest pharmaceutical distributors and one manufacturer. More than \$50 billion in settlement funds is being delivered to state and local governments from the companies accused of flooding communities with opioid painkillers even though they allegedly knew how addictive and deadly the drugs were.

South Dakota is one of 52 states and territories to receive settlement funds. The state will continue to receive yearly payments for the next 18 years.

Funds are split between the state and participating local governments, with the state retaining 70%, or \$2.5 million for the first two payments, and South Dakota counties and cities receiving 30%, or \$1 million collectively, for the first two payments. South Dakota counties and cities will receive roughly \$16.2 million of the state's \$54 million total over the next 18 years.

A second settlement is expected to deliver an additional \$2 million to the state and local governments in its first year, and South Dakota expects to receive even more money from 2022 agreements with pharmacy chains CVS, Walgreens and Walmart and two more manufacturers. It's unclear how much more money South Dakota will receive from those settlements.

The settlements require that the money received from the settlement be used to support opioid addiction treatment, prevention or education. The money can be spent directly by the state or local government, or can be awarded to third-party organizations and recipients.

## **Many counties leave money up to law enforcement, criminal justice**

While some local governments received significant funding so far, other counties and cities received little. Sioux Falls received the largest amount in the first two settlement allocations of about \$230,000, for instance. But 10 counties received less than \$2,000 each for the first two payments of the settlement. Jones County received less than \$500 total.

The state Department of Social Services did not immediately respond to a question about how the allocation formula was determined.

That leaves a range of how cities and counties can use the money, and many of them are relying on local law enforcement to decide how best to use the funds.

Minnehaha County plans to put its \$130,000 toward its portion of the LINK in Sioux Falls, which is a community triage center providing sobering, addiction and crisis stabilization services. The site saw more than 4,000 triage encounters in its first year.

The city of Sioux Falls hasn't finalized how it'll use its funds because of its timing and other impending settlements, but the money will go through the Sioux Falls Health Department, said Shawn Pritchett, director of finance for Sioux Falls.

"We anticipate that funding will be directed to drug use prevention programming and education as well as treatment services, which could include the Link," Pritchett said in an emailed statement.

On the western end of the state, Pennington County will use its initial \$85,000 to hire a substance abuse counselor for its jail and increase counselor training for the drug and alcohol Care Campus, said Auditor Cindy Mohler.

Rapid City appointed its police department to designate how to use the money. Rapid City Police Community Relations Specialist Brendyn Medina said the funds will initially be used to expand the police department's evidence laboratory testing to include drug purity testing.

Medina said the Rapid City evidence lab has seen a 250% increase since 2021 in the number of cases where fentanyl is identified. He also said traffic crashes have risen due to opioid use and overdoses. Narcan – an opioid overdose antidote – was used 48 times by Rapid City Fire and Police in 2022 and 13 times so far in 2023, Medina added.

"With that being the case, understanding the potency or purity of street drugs has been identified as a priority to understand the threat these drugs pose in our community," Medina said.

The improved testing will more accurately identify the amounts of opioids in substances and could alter the type of prosecution in cases, Medina said.

But for Aberdeen, the \$18,800 received so far won't accomplish much, said City Attorney Ron Wager.

"The amount of dollars isn't enough to really do anything major, at least not for a city our size," Wager



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said.

Aberdeen hasn't determined how to use the money, though Wager said drug education programming and supporting a community resource officer are both options. He expects the city will have an idea of how to spend the money by May.

Other counties have discussed putting the money toward a drug court program (Brookings County), distributing funds to local intervention and treatment services (Butte County) and giving the money to local school districts to fund prevention efforts (Grant County), based on county commission meeting minutes.

## **State will create opioid overdose follow-up program with funds**

As for the state, the Department of Social Services and the Department of Health created a four-part strategy on how to use the first allocation of \$1.2 million. The plan was approved by the South Dakota Opioid Abuse Advisory Committee at its January meeting.

The plan establishes a fund for communities and providers to apply for grants; establishes a fund for continued state efforts in prevention, recovery and treatment; supports the state prescription drug monitoring program to ensure opioids are not being over-prescribed; and creates an opioid overdose follow-up program.

The goal of the follow-up program is to increase links between survivors of opioid overdoses and community care. The state DSS will start accepting proposals for organizations interested in partnering for the program, said state DSS Secretary Matt Althoff in an emailed statement.

Agencies that submit proposals will choose what approaches will work best for their communities, Althoff said.

Shaina Smykle, a program specialist supporting substance use disorders and suicide prevention services with the state Behavioral Health Services, said the program will look at how to better help South Dakotans struggling with opioid abuse.

"We would like to reach out and have root-cause conversations within a couple of days after a person experiences an overdose," Smykle said during the November 2022 Behavioral Health Advisory Council meeting. "The goal is meeting their needs and finding what's right for them."

## **Examples of what the settlement money can be used for:**

Treating opioid use disorder, such as expanding treatment and telehealth access for opioid use disorder treatment or supporting workforce development or scholarships for addiction professionals such as behavioral health practitioners.

Connecting people who need help, such as providing intervention training in schools, in the criminal justice system and for youth and young adults.

Supporting people in treatment and recovery, such as providing comprehensive wrap-around services, access to housing for people with opioid use disorder, employment training or educational services for people in treatment, and assistance to deinstitutionalized people with opioid addiction.

Addressing the needs of criminal-justice-involved people.

Addressing the needs of pregnant women, such as expanding treatment and recovery support for neonatal abstinence syndrome babies and providing supports for parenting for women with opioid use disorder.

Preventing over-prescribing opioids.

Preventing misuse of opioids, such as improving media campaigns or supporting youth-focused programs about drug misuse or mental health needs of young adults.

Improving harm reduction, such as increasing the availability of naloxone and other overdose drugs

*Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan whose work has won national and regional awards. She's spent five years as a journalist with experience reporting on workforce, development and business issues within the state.*

## **\$50 billion in opioid settlement cash is on the way. We're tracking how it's spent.**

**BY: ANERI PATTANI - APRIL 3, 2023 5:46 PM**

More than \$50 billion in settlement funds is being delivered to thousands of state and local governments from companies accused of flooding their communities with opioid painkillers that have left millions addicted or dead.

That's an enormous amount of money — double NASA's budget and five times the revenue of an NBA season.

But how that massive windfall is being deployed and how future dollars will be spent seem to be shrouded in mystery. Reporting requirements are scant, and documents filed so far are often so vague as to be useless.

Most of the settlements stipulate that states must spend at least 85% of the money they will receive over the next 15 years on addiction treatment and prevention. But defining those concepts depends on stakeholders' views — and state politics. To some, it might mean opening more treatment sites. To others, buying police cruisers.

Those affected by the opioid epidemic and those working to fight it have an array of ideas: To Marianne Sinisi, who lost her 26-year-old son, Shawn, to overdose in western Pennsylvania, the settlement funds are "blood money" that she hopes can spare other parents similar grief. To Steve Alsum, who works with people who use drugs in Grand Rapids, Michigan, it's a chance to finally reach all those in need. And to David Garbark, who is in recovery from opioid addiction, it's a way to give others in his eastern North Carolina community a second chance, too.

Spending the money effectively and equitably is a tall order, given the persistence and complexity of addiction, which affects individuals and communities, and is the topic of heated debates in scientific research, social services, politics, criminal justice, and even at kitchen tables.

What's more, many states are not being transparent about where the funds are going and who will benefit. An investigation by KHN and Christine Minhee, founder of OpioidSettlementTracker.com, concluded only 12 states have committed to detailed public reporting of all their spending.

The analysis involved scouring hundreds of legal documents, laws, and public statements to determine how each state is divvying up its settlement money among state agencies, city and county governments, and councils that oversee dedicated trusts. The next step was to determine the level and detail of public reporting required. The finding: Few states promise to report in ways that are accessible to the average person, and many are silent on the issue of transparency altogether.

More than \$3 billion has gone out to state and local governments so far. KHN will be following how that cash — and the billions set to arrive in coming years — is used.

Per most of the settlements, governments are required to report only on the 15% of the money that can be used for things unrelated to the epidemic, like offsetting budget shortfalls or fixing old roads. As of March 28, only three states and counties had filed such reports. Although they listed dollar amounts, none said precisely how the money was spent.

State and local governments can enact more rigorous reporting protocols — for example, requiring a publicly available list of every place that receives money and for what purpose — but few have so far.

### **Left in the Dark**

More than 250,000 Americans have died of overdoses from prescription opioids, which were aggressively promoted as painkillers and distributed by a host of health care companies, including Johnson & Johnson, AmerisourceBergen, McKesson, and Walmart. The settlements are meant to compensate and remediate the effects of that corporate behavior.

But many people whose lives have been upended are again feeling traumatized.

Sinisi said she and other parents who've lost kids to addiction have been left in the dark or, worse, treated

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like nuisances by officials in charge of the money.

"They want to look at you as this angry parent who lost a child," she said, "rather than a concerned citizen who wants to see a difference made for other mothers, fathers, and their children."

In Michigan, even the state's Opioid Advisory Commission, which is tasked with evaluating the use of settlement money, has struggled to track the cash.

For six months after the state legislature allotted \$39 million of settlement funds to the health department last summer, little information was made public about how that money would be spent. No news releases. No way for organizations to apply for funds.

"We can't really identify the impact of those dollars if we don't know how they're being used," said Dr. Cara Poland, the commission's chair and an addiction-medicine doctor.

With scant oversight nationwide, many people fear dollars may flow to efforts that research has proven mostly useless but jibe with the local political bent, like arresting people who use drugs, expanding jails, and favoring abstinence-only recovery over medications. They may go to the loudest bidder, with companies promising to find the next groundbreaking treatment and rehab facilities — some with shoddy track records — eyeing the cash.

Not to mention concerns that money will flow to activities that have little to nothing to do with opioid treatment: building new stadiums or public schools. Back in the '90s, these day-to-day budget priorities consumed most of what states won from cigarette companies in the national tobacco settlement, leaving little for anti-smoking programs.

The opioid settlement funds will be different, say state attorneys general who fought for them. In addition to requiring at least 85% of the money be used on opioid-related expenses, most agreements include a list of suggested interventions like increasing addiction treatment for the uninsured and expanding recovery housing.

"We wanted to give states flexibility on what approaches they wanted to adopt," while ensuring money didn't go to "provide corporate tax relief" as the tobacco dollars did, said North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein, who led negotiations for the national settlements.

But enforcement of the 85% standard is, oddly, left to the companies that paid out the money. They are unlikely to be vigilant, legal experts say. The money is committed already and, for many of these multibillion-dollar companies, the settlements are chump change. For example, Johnson & Johnson is set to pay \$5 billion over nine years, but the company reported sales of nearly \$95 billion in the past year alone.

## An Emerging Picture

As the checks start to trickle in, a handful of states are committed to transparency while others seem to be falling short. Missouri has promised to report all its spending in online reports so that anyone can see who receives money, how much, and for what programs. New Hampshire already has posted reports online, and Colorado has created a public dashboard to track how funds are used.

Other states, like Nevada, have taken a middle-of-the-road approach, requiring that recipients report to the legislature or another oversight body, but not ensuring the reports will go public. Some states require audits but don't promise to list specific expenses. And others allow the public to request records but won't provide them automatically.

Then there are states hit hard by the opioid epidemic like Michigan and Ohio, where problems with transparency are already emerging. Each state is expecting to receive at least \$1 billion.

When Poland, of Michigan's Opioid Advisory Commission, realized she was getting little information on how the state's funds were being spent, her commission decided to use its first annual report — published this month — to demand better. "Timely and transparent reporting" to the public is "an ethical responsibility," it said, calling on lawmakers to enact greater oversight for settlement cash recipients and create a public dashboard to track spending.

KHN interviewed nearly a dozen people and filed a public records request to uncover how the state health department is spending the initial settlement funds allocation of \$39 million.

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A budget document obtained by KHN shows that as of Jan. 9, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services had contracted \$3.9 million in settlement funds to 35 grantees. Most are local health departments or syringe service programs that the state health department has previously funded.

An additional \$27 million is set aside for particular interventions, such as growing the addiction treatment workforce, expanding recovery housing, and mitigating the harms of opioid use with medications like naloxone.

And, after KHN's inquiries, the department released a statement that listed similar priorities.

Those initiatives make sense to Jonathan Stoltman, director of the Michigan-based Opioid Policy Institute, which researches stigma and digital privacy in addiction treatment. But he would have liked to have known about them in advance and to have had a clear process laid out for groups to apply for the funds. Otherwise, organizations that are well positioned to use the money to help those most in need may miss a once-in-a-lifetime chance to scale up their work and save lives.

Last summer, when Stoltman inquired about applying for the funds, the health department told him to submit a "high level proposal" to "share around," according to emails reviewed by KHN.

"Anything that is backdoor scares me," said Stoltman. "I got lucky that I found who to talk to, even if it didn't go anywhere."

Steve Alsum, executive director of the Grand Rapids Red Project, which was awarded about \$266,000 to improve the health of people who use drugs, said he expected the state to have an application process with scoring criteria to explain why certain groups were chosen. But, he said, "it hasn't been clear who is making the decision and how it's made."

Jared Welehodsky, who leads the department's efforts related to the settlement, said it is in the process of releasing several competitive grant applications for the bulk of the money. That didn't happen sooner because most payments didn't arrive until the end of 2022 and "we didn't want to comment on how the money was going out when we didn't have money to go out," he said.

## Talk of Keeping the Public Out

In Newark, Ohio, Linda Mossholder, 75, has been inquiring about the settlement dollars at City Council meetings since last summer. As a volunteer with Newark Homeless Outreach, which serves weekly free lunches, she encounters many people who use drugs and wants to see the money help them.

The proud owner of a T-shirt that reads, "Your first mistake is thinking I'm just an old lady," Mossholder has followed up with emails, voicemails, and public records requests. But she hasn't gotten a clear answer about how the city plans to use the nearly \$50,000 it's already received.

In January, Mossholder said, the city's director of public service finally told her the plan was to allocate settlement cash to first responders for naloxone. But when KHN filed public records requests to confirm, City Auditor Ryan Bubb wrote, "No funds have been allocated or spent."

Meanwhile, in northeastern Ohio, a regional board that will control millions of settlement dollars spent a February meeting discussing whether the public should be allowed to access meeting recordings at all.

"I wouldn't open it up to the public, honestly," said Judy Moran, a board member who represents Eastlake, according to a recording of the meeting obtained by KHN. Other board members asked if their gatherings were subject to the state's open-meeting laws.

Moran later told KHN, "Of course the public has a right to know how these funds are disbursed," but she said she worried recordings would allow people to take words "out of context."

In Ohio at least, that may not be a choice for much longer.

A lawsuit brought by Harm Reduction Ohio to open the meetings of a separate board — the OneOhio Recovery Foundation, which oversees the lion's share of the state's expected \$1 billion — is working its way through the courts. A local judge this month rejected the foundation's request to dismiss the lawsuit, writing that "the public deserves transparency."

But OneOhio spokesperson Connie Luck said the foundation is a "private, nonprofit organization, and not a government agency." It has so far allowed public attendance at meetings, but has said it is not required

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to do so.

The final ruling in this lawsuit, which is the first of its kind on opioid settlement funds, will set a precedent for the public's right to information nationally.

In some parts of the country, the prospect of dollars to treat a long-underfunded epidemic brings hope, said Tricia Christensen, who works at a nonprofit tracking settlement funds across Appalachia. When people know what's happening, it not only deters misuse but can reveal surprising successes, she said.

That knowledge is empowering.

"These funds are the cavalry coming in. You're finally getting relief after suffering alone for so long," said Crystal Glass, of southwestern Virginia, who is in recovery from opioid and meth use and now works as a peer recovery specialist.

She hopes officials will involve people affected by addiction in their decisions.

As she put it: Transparency "is letting everyone — I mean everyone — know they can be part of this."

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*KHN's Colleen DeGuzman and Megan Kalata contributed to this report.*

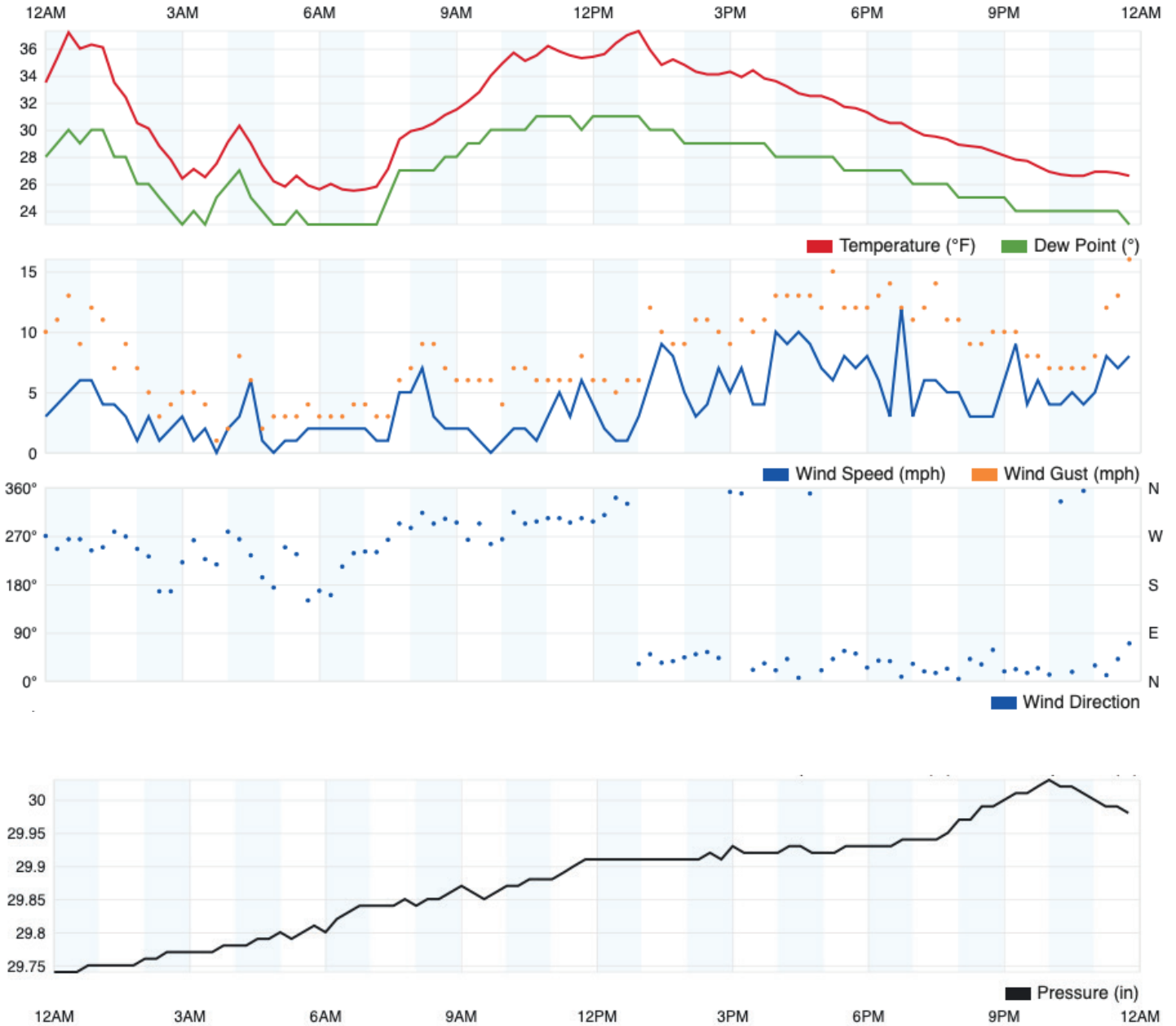
*KHN (Kaiser Health News) is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues. Together with Policy Analysis and Polling, KHN is one of the three major operating programs at KFF (Kaiser Family Foundation). KFF is an endowed nonprofit organization providing information on health issues to the nation.*

*Aneri Pattani, Senior Correspondent for Kaiser Health News, reports on a broad range of public health topics, focusing on mental health and substance use. Her work spans text and audio stories, and she has been heard on NPR and Science Friday. Her stories have received national recognition, including a 2021 award from the Institute for Nonprofit News for reporting on the flawed oversight of addiction treatment facilities in Pennsylvania. She was also part of a team that received the News Leaders Association's 2021 Batten Medal for Coverage of the Coronavirus Pandemic. Before joining KHN, Pattani wrote for Spotlight PA, a collaborative newsroom investigating the Pennsylvania state government. She was a 2019 recipient of the Rosalynn Carter Fellowship for Mental Health Journalism.*

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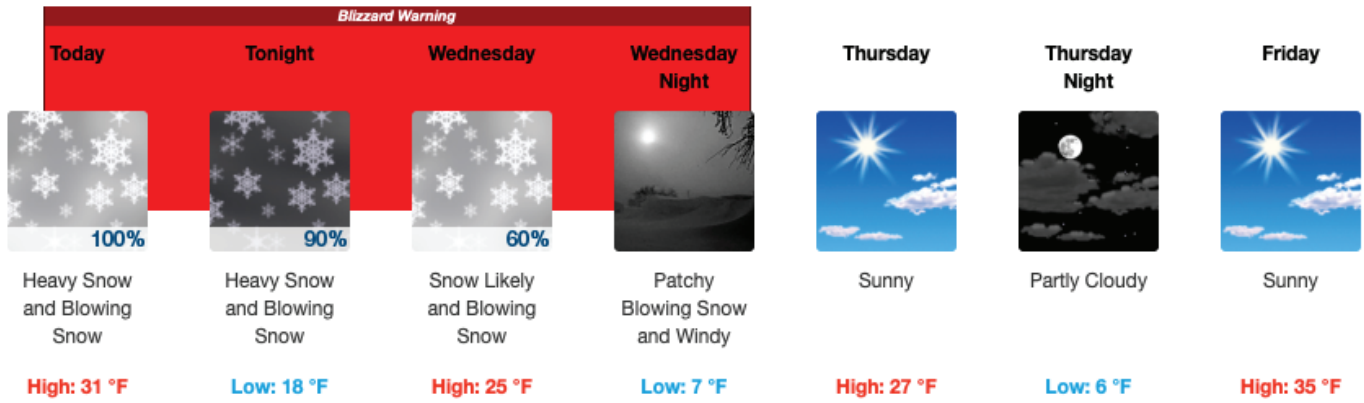
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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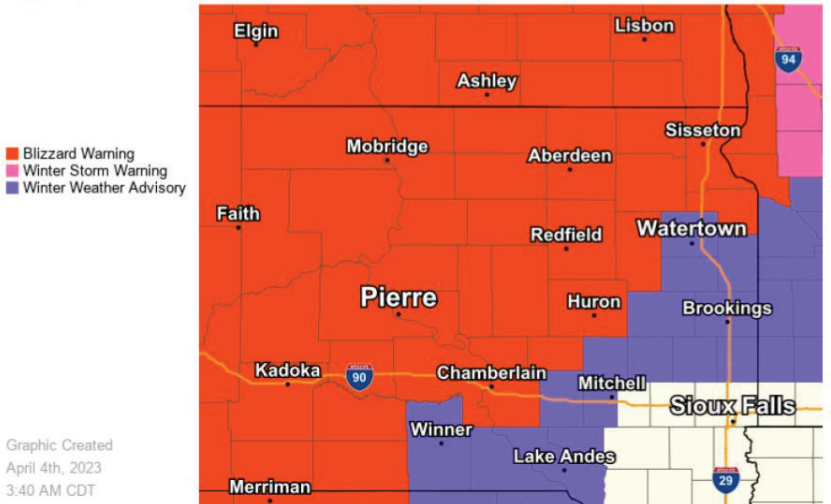
## Major Storm System Today into Wednesday April 4, 2023 6:02 AM

Widespread Impacts Expected

### Key Messages

- Heavy snow accumulations to exceed a foot. Substantial ice accumulations expected in east central/northeast SD and west central MN.
- **Blizzard conditions developing west to east by late this afternoon.**
- Freezing drizzle or freezing rain will lead to extremely icy surfaces and combined with stronger winds may cause damage to trees and power lines.
- Widespread strong winds with gusts of 30-45 mph are expected today increasing to 45-60 mph later tonight into Wednesday.
- Widespread **dangerous to impossible** travel conditions expected Today through Wednesday.

### Winter Watches Warnings and Advisories



### NEW Next Schedule Update

- Tuesday Afternoon.

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.

## Blizzard Warning

**URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE**  
**National Weather Service Aberdeen SD**  
**338 AM CDT Tue Apr 4 2023**

Brown-Spink- Including the cities of Aberdeen and Redfield

...BLIZZARD WARNING REMAINS IN EFFECT FROM 10 AM THIS MORNING TO 4 AM CDT THURSDAY...

- \* WHAT...Blizzard conditions expected. Total snow accumulations of 4 to 14 inches and ice accumulations of a light glaze. Winds gusting as high as 55 mph.
- \* WHERE...Brown and Spink Counties.
- \* WHEN...From 10 AM this morning to 4 AM CDT Thursday.
- \* IMPACTS...Travel could be very difficult to impossible. Widespread blowing snow could significantly reduce visibility. The hazardous conditions could impact the morning or evening commute. Strong winds could cause extensive damage to trees and power lines.
- \* ADDITIONAL DETAILS...Strongest winds will begin later this afternoon and continue after the snow ends.

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**  
**445 AM CDT Tue Apr 4 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.

Moderate to heavy snowfall and strengthening winds later today will promote blizzard or near blizzard conditions, starting out across portions of central and north central South Dakota by early this afternoon, before gradually spreading over into the James River valley by early this evening. Blizzard or near blizzard conditions will persist tonight.

.DAYS TWO THROUGH SEVEN...Wednesday through Monday.

Blizzard or near blizzard conditions are likely to persist into the day on 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: 38 °F at 12:58 PM

Low Temp: 25 °F at 6:40 AM

Wind: 15 mph at 5:07 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 00 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1921

Record Low: -6 in 2018

Average High: 52

Average Low: 27

Average Precip in April.: 0.17

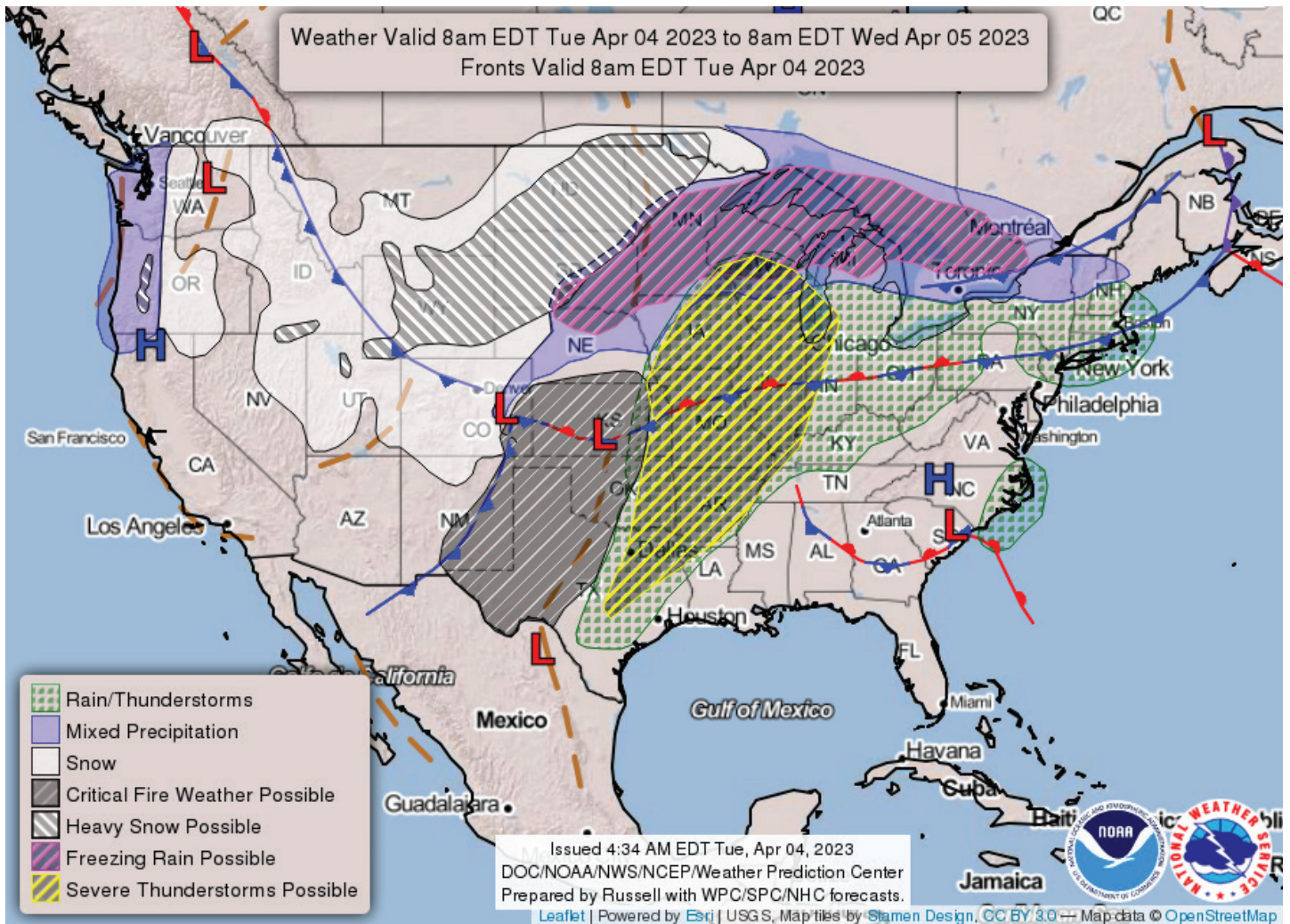
Precip to date in April.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 2.123

Precip Year to Date: 3.93

Sunset Tonight: 8:05:26 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:03:26 AM



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## Today in Weather History

April 4, 1961: High winds of 40-60mph, with 80-90mph gusts, affected Central and Western South Dakota. The most extensive property damage occurred in the Pierre area. The roof was blown off, and one wall damaged at a new motel. One trailer home was blown over, numerous windows and large signboards were destroyed, and roofs sustained damages in Pierre. Total loss estimated \$10,000.

1804: A group of tornadoes slashed a 120-mile path across seven counties in Georgia and one county in South Carolina killing 11 people near Augusta, GA. The tornado's path through heavy timber was still visible some 71 years later as noted in an Army Signal Corps survey.

1923: An estimated F4 tornado killed 15 people and injured 150 at Alexandria and Pineville, LA. 142 homes and businesses in Pineville were destroyed.

1933 - Pigeon River Bridge, MN, reported 28 inches of snow, which established the state 24 hour snowfall record. (4th-5th) (The Weather Channel)

1966: One of the strongest tornadoes in Florida's history moved in from the Gulf of Mexico and ripped through Pinellas, Hillsborough, Polk, and Osceola County. Damage was very severe in the towns of Gibsonia and Galloway in Polk County. 11 people were killed, and 350 were injured. The tornado was classified as F4.

1973 - Sandia Crest, NM, reported a snow depth of 95 inches, a record for the state of New Mexico. (The Weather Channel)

1977: A Southern Airways DC-9 jet crashed near New Hope, Georgia, after being struck by large hail. The hail and associated heavy precipitation caused the engines to flame out. Seventy-two people (including nine on the ground) died.

1977: A massive F5 tornado moved across northern Birmingham, Alabama, killing 22 people and injuring 130. The tornado cut a 15-mile path from just northwest of Birmingham to the town of Tarrant. 167 homes were destroyed, primarily in the Smithfield Estates subdivision. Daniel Payne College sustained substantial damage. At one point, the tornado was three-quarters of a mile wide. The tornado crossed busy I-65, tossing cars and trucks like they were toys. Other tornadoes killed one other person in Alabama and one person in Georgia that day.

1983 - Colorado was in the midst of a three day winter storm. Buckhorn Mountain, located west of Fort Collins, received 64 inches of snow. (Storm Data)

1987 - Rains of five to eight inches drenched eastern New York State, and ten persons were killed in a bridge collapse over Schoharie Creek. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Sunny and warm weather prevailed across the nation. Fort Smith AR reported a record high of 90 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Lower Mississippi Valley to the Southern Appalachians. The thunderstorms spawned seventeen tornadoes, including one which caused two million dollars damage at Baldwin AL. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 90 mph at Bremen GA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A deep low pressure system in northern New York State brought heavy snow to parts of western and central New York during the day. The snowfall total of 5.8 inches at Buffalo was a record for the date, and 9.5 inches was reported at Rochester. Snowfall totals ranged up to 11 inches at Warsaw. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### LITTLE THINGS

An aircraft mechanic was completing his final inspection before a plane's departure. Having made major repairs, he was satisfied that everything was ready. Then he noticed a small drip of water coming from the lavatory. It did not seem serious since it was so small, so he cleared the plane for take-off.

As the plane climbed to its flying altitude, the drip became a little larger. The water began to freeze, and a large piece of ice was formed. Finally, it broke loose, hit an engine and destroyed it. The plane was then forced to make an emergency landing. Although no one was injured, it caused serious and unnecessary damage, and there was a great loss of time. The repair to the plane cost much more than it would have cost if it had been taken care of when it was first noticed.

So it is with sin. It usually begins with a small, stray thought or an unhealthy desire. We allow a vision or idea to grow, expand and develop, and it eventually overwhelms us, and the temptation leads to sin.

God's Word contains an important promise: "With every temptation, He will provide a way out." How marvelous are His power and protection! No matter how difficult the choice may be - if we ask and look for and search thoroughly, we will find His "escape route."

When tempted, we must turn to Him and claim victory in His Name.

Prayer: Father, we cannot live without being tempted, but we can avoid sinning if we trust, obey, and rely on You and in Your Word. Give us victory over sin! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. James 1:13-15



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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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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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 15 Hrs 41 Mins 48  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.03.23

6 27 30 40 52 1

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$2,050,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 41  
DRAW: Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.03.23

2 13 21 45 46 16

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

NEXT 15 Hrs 11 Mins 48  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.01.23

6 7 11 26 35

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

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 41  
DRAW: Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.03.23

5 10 16 30 40 20

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

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 40  
DRAW: Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.03.23

16 30 31 54 68 1

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$170,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 40  
DRAW: Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### **Veto stands: Transgender pronouns OK in North Dakota schools**

By TRISHA AHMED Associated Press/Report for America

Teachers in North Dakota can still refer to transgender students by the personal pronouns they use, after lawmakers on Monday failed to override the governor's veto of a controversial bill to place restrictions on educators.

House lawmakers fell short of the two-thirds majority needed to block the veto, days after Republican Gov. Doug Burgum's office announced the veto and the Senate overrode it.

The bill would have prohibited public school teachers and employees from acknowledging the personal pronouns a transgender student uses, unless they received permission from the student's parents as well as a school administrator. It would have also prohibited government agencies from requiring employees to acknowledge the pronouns a transgender colleagues uses.

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

"Ask yourself, does Senate Bill 2231 treat others the way you would want to be treated?" Democratic Rep. Emily O'Brien of Grand Forks said on the House floor, adding that overriding the veto would perpetuate "discrimination, hatred or prejudice."

Republican Rep. SuAnn Olson of Baldwin said the bill protects freedom of speech for teachers and keeps "inappropriate" topics out of the classroom.

North Dakota will consider other bills this session about transgender students, she said.

Olson said that if lawmakers "are firm on this bill, on girls' athletics, on separate bathrooms, we will strengthen public schools." But allowing what she called an "emphasis on sexuality" in schools would cause students and teachers to abandon the public education system.

State representatives voted 56-36 to override the governor's veto, but 63 votes were required.

All 12 Democrats in the House voted against the bill, as did 24 Republicans. One was Rep. Eric Murphy, of Grand Forks, an associate professor of biomedical sciences at the University of North Dakota.

"I'm tired of these bills. I'm tired of both sides," Murphy said on the House floor. "If a student wants to be called a different pronoun, does that really matter? Is this earth-shattering?"

In a letter to state lawmakers announcing his veto, the governor said, "The teaching profession is challenging enough without the heavy hand of state government forcing teachers to take on the role of pronoun police." The First Amendment already protects teachers from speaking contrary to their beliefs, and existing law protects the free speech rights of state employees, Burgum added.

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

Opponents said the bill targets transgender students who already have disproportionately high risks of suicide.

In 2021, Burgum vetoed a bill that would have barred transgender girls from playing on girls' teams in public schools. Lawmakers didn't override that veto, but they're considering new legislation this session to replicate and expand that bill — including at the college level.

Last week, President Joe Biden denounced what he called hundreds of hateful and extreme state laws that target transgender kids and their families.

"The bullying, discrimination, and political attacks that trans kids face have exacerbated our national mental health crisis," Biden said. "These attacks are un-American and must end."

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Trisha Ahmed is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms

to report on undercovered issues. Follow Trisha Ahmed on Twitter: @TrishaAhmed15

## Sex abuse trial delayed for 'Dances With Wolves' actor

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A Nevada judge postponed on Monday the trial for a former "Dances With Wolves" actor indicted in state court on charges that he sexually abused Indigenous women and girls for a decade in the Las Vegas area.

Clark County District Judge Carli Kierny said the trial in the case of Nathan Chasing Horse will begin May 1 in Las Vegas to give prosecutors and Chasing Horse's public defenders more time to iron out pending motions in the case. His trial had previously been scheduled for April 17.

A Clark County grand jury indicted Chasing Horse, 46, in late February on 19 counts that include charges of sexual assault of a child younger than 16, kidnapping, lewdness and child abuse. Chasing Horse, who is widely known for his portrayal of Smiles a Lot in Kevin Costner's 1990 Oscar-winning film, has pleaded not guilty and invoked his right to a trial within 60 days of his indictment.

The former actor, who has been in custody since his Jan. 31 arrest, is due back in court Wednesday morning for a hearing on a motion asking Kierny to dismiss the sweeping indictment. Chasing Horse and his lawyers argued in their motion that two women identified as victims in Nevada wanted to have sex with him.

Prosecutors and police have said the abuse allegations against Chasing Horse date to the early 2000s and span two countries and multiple states. He also faces criminal charges in U.S. District Court in Nevada and British Columbia, Canada, as well as on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Montana.

Chasing Horse is accused of using his position as a self-proclaimed medicine man to gain access to vulnerable Indigenous women and girls and take underage wives. Authorities have described him as the leader of a cult known as "The Circle," whose members believe he has healing abilities and can communicate to higher beings.

## Webby Award nominations for Harry Styles, Lizzo, Post Malone

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Harry Styles, Post Malone, Lizzo, Doja Cat, Megan Thee Stallion, the cast of "Ted Lasso" and the web series that gave us a kid loving corn are among the nominees for this year's Webby Awards, recognizing the best internet content and creators.

The International Academy of Digital Arts & Sciences announced the nominees on Tuesday, the result of nearly 14,000 entries from 70 countries.

Styles nabbed a nomination for his commercial for AirPods, Trevor Noah for his segments filmed between the scenes at "The Daily Show" and BTS fans for their YouTube uploads called #MyBTStory. Lizzo got one for her hosting her show "Lizzo's Watch Out For the Big Grrrls," in which she hunts for dancers.

Doja Cat's reluctant social video for Taco Bell's Mexican Pizza — "I like my pizza with refried beans/Peep my ad/ Search YouTube/This ain't even Mexican food" — was nominated for best advertising partnership, and faces-off in that category with the collaboration between "Ted Lasso" and FIFA 23.

Nominees include "Recess Therapy," the show that highlighted 7-year-old corn-loving Tariq, Post Malone's listening experience for "Twelve Carat Toothache" and a VR concert by Megan Thee Stallion was nominated for best metaverse, immersive or virtual performance.

In other music nods, Future's "Wait For U" featuring Drake and Tems, Muse's "Compliance," Disturbed's "Bad Man" and Christina Aguilera's reworked "Beautiful" for World Mental Health Day are competing for best music video.

Metallica's teaming up with "Stranger Things" for a collection of Hellfire Club merchandise was nominated for best partnership or collaboration and the social media accounts of Lupita Nyong'o, Stephen Colbert and Jennifer Garner got nods.

A focus on artificial intelligence reflected the tech world's fascination with its promise, including OpenAI getting a nomination for best science website or mobile site, and nods for the Heinz ketchup AI artwork



campaign and the voice-activated AI color system for Sherwin-Williams.

Companies earning the highest number of nominations are Apple with 22, MTV with 15, National Geographic and Netflix each with 14, Audible with 13, CNN and HBO and The Washington Post each with 12, Google and Meta with 11 apiece and Amazon with 10.

Awards are selected by the Academy, while The Webby People's Voice Awards are voted on by fans around the world. Voting for that award is open now until April 20. Winners for all awards will be announced on April 25.

Academy members include drummer, filmmaker and writer Questlove, podcaster Roxane Gay, actor LeVar Burton, comedians Samantha Bee and Ziwe Fumudoh, Girls Who Code founder Reshma Saujani, Savage X Fenty executive Natalie Guzman, fashion designer Tan France, "Abbott Elementary" creator and actor Quinta Brunson, Amazon executive Werner Vogels, podcaster Andy Slavitt, software engineer Tracy Chou and artist Takashi Murakami.

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>

## Finland set to join NATO, dealing major blow to Russia

By LORNE COOK and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Finland is poised to join NATO on Tuesday, a historic realignment triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but the head of the military alliance said no more troops would be sent to the Nordic country unless it asked for help.

Russia has already warned that it would bolster defenses along its border with NATO if the alliance deploys any additional troops or equipment to its new member.

"There will be no NATO troops in Finland without the consent of Finland," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters at the alliance's headquarters in Brussels a few hours before the country joins.

But he refused to rule out the possibility of holding more military exercises there and said that NATO would not allow Russia's demands to dictate the organization's decisions.

"We are constantly assessing our posture, our presence. We have more exercises, we have more presence, also in the Nordic area," he said.

Later Tuesday, Finland is set to officially become the 31st member of NATO and take its place among the ranks of the world's biggest security alliance.

Alarmed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year, Finland applied to join in May, setting aside years of military non-alignment to seek protection under the organization's security umbrella. Neighboring Sweden also applied, but its accession process may take a few months longer.

Finland shares a 1,340 kilometer (832 mile) border with Russia, so its entry will more than double the size of NATO's border with Russia. The move is a strategic and political blow to President Vladimir Putin, who has long complained about NATO's expansion toward Russia.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday that Finland's membership reflects the alliance's anti-Russian course and warned that Moscow will respond depending on what weapons NATO allies place there.

"We will closely monitor what will be going on in Finland and how NATO will use the territory of Finland for the deployment of weapons, equipment and infrastructure next to our border that would potentially threaten us. Measures will be taken dependent on that," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters.

But Peskov also sought to play down the impact, noting that Russia has no territorial disputes with Finland.

It's not clear what additional military resources Russia could send to the Finnish border. Moscow has deployed the bulk of its most capable military units to Ukraine.

Stoltenberg said that once it joins, Finland will benefit from NATO's "iron-clad security guarantee," under which all member countries vow to come to the defense of any ally that comes under attack.

"By (Finland) become a full-fledged member, we are removing the room for miscalculation in Moscow about NATO's readiness to protect Finland, and that makes Finland safer and stronger, and all of us safer," Stoltenberg said.

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Finland's entry, to be marked with a flag-raising ceremony at NATO headquarters, falls on the organization's very own birthday, the 74th anniversary of the signing of its founding Washington Treaty on April 4, 1949. It also coincides with a meeting of the alliance's foreign ministers.

Finland's president, foreign and defense ministers will take part in the ceremony.

Turkey became the last NATO member country to ratify Finland's membership protocol on Thursday. It will hand over the document officially enshrining that decision to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken before the ceremony.

Finland's membership becomes official when its own foreign minister hands over documents completing its accession process to Blinken. The U.S. State Department is the repository of NATO texts concerning membership.

## Donald Trump to surrender to history-making criminal charges

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, ERIC TUCKER and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — An extraordinary moment in U.S. history is set to soon unfold in a Manhattan courthouse on Tuesday: Former President Donald Trump, who faces multiple election-related investigations, will surrender to face criminal charges stemming from 2016 hush money payments.

The booking and arraignment are likely to be relatively brief — though hardly routine — as Trump is fingerprinted, learns the charges against him and pleads, as expected, not guilty.

Trump, who was impeached twice by the U.S. House but was never convicted in the U.S. Senate, will become the first former president to face criminal charges. The nation's 45th commander in chief will be escorted from Trump Tower to the courthouse by the Secret Service and may have his mug shot taken.

New York police are braced for protests by Trump supporters, who share the Republican former president's belief that the New York grand jury indictment and three additional pending investigations are politically motivated and intended to weaken his bid to retake the White House in 2024.

Trump, a former reality TV star, has been hyping that narrative to his political advantage, saying he raised \$8 million in the less than a week since the indictment on claims of a "witch hunt." He has assailed the Manhattan district attorney, egged on supporters to protest and claimed without evidence that the judge presiding over the case "hates me" — something his own lawyer has said is not true.

Trump is scheduled to return to his Palm Beach, Florida, home, Mar-a-Lago, on Tuesday evening to hold a rally, punctuating his new reality: submitting to the dour demands of the American criminal justice system while projecting an aura of defiance and victimhood at celebratory campaign events. At least 500 prominent supporters have been invited, with some of the most pro-Trump congressional Republicans expected to attend.

A conviction would not prevent Trump from running for or winning the presidency in 2024.

Inside the Manhattan courtroom, prosecutors led by New York's district attorney, Alvin Bragg, a Democrat, are expected to unseal the indictment issued last week by a grand jury. This is when Trump and his defense lawyers will get their first glimpse of the precise allegations against him.

The indictment contains multiple charges of falsifying business records, including at least one felony offense, two people familiar with the matter told The Associated Press last week.

After the arraignment, Trump is expected to be released by authorities because the charges against him don't require that bail be set.

The investigation is scrutinizing six-figure payments made to porn actor Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal. Both say they had sexual encounters with the married Trump years before he got into politics. Trump denies having sexual liaisons with either woman and has denied any wrongdoing involving payments.

The arraignment will unfold against the backdrop of heavy security in New York, coming more than two years after Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol in a failed bid to halt the congressional certification of Democrat Joe Biden's win.

Though police said they had no intelligence suggesting any violence was likely, they were on high alert

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for any potential disruptions.

"While there may be some rabble rousers thinking of coming to our city tomorrow, our message is clear and simple: Control yourselves," Mayor Eric Adams said. He also singled out Georgia Republican Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, one of Trump's staunchest supporters in Congress, who is organizing a rally Tuesday at a park across from the courthouse: "While you're in town, be on your best behavior," Adams said.

Trump pollster John McLaughlin said the former president would approach the day with "dignity."

"He will be a gentleman," McLaughlin said. "He'll show strength and he'll show dignity and ... we'll get through this and win the election."

Trump lawyer Joe Tacopina said over the weekend that he hoped the arraignment would be "as painless and classy as possible" despite its unprecedented nature.

But Trump was also defiant. In a post late Monday night on his social media network he lashed out at Biden, suggesting the current president should be facing legal troubles of his own.

Despite that, the scene around Trump Tower and the courthouse where Trump will stand before a judge was quiet overnight. There were signs both supporting and decrying the former president stuck to posts, one urging passers-by to donate to help fund Trump's presidential library and another showing a shouting Trump behind bars.

The public fascination with the case was evident Monday as national television carried live images of Trump's motorcade from his Mar-a-Lago club to a private, red, white and blue Boeing 757 stenciled with his name. From there, Trump was flown to New York, where cameras followed his motorcade into Manhattan and he spent the night at Trump Tower as he prepared to turn himself in.

The former president and his aides are embracing the media circus. After initially being caught off guard when news of the indictment broke Thursday evening, Trump and his team are hoping to use the case to his advantage. Still, they asked the judge in a Monday filing to ban photo and video coverage of the arraignment.

Though prosecutors routinely insist that no person is above the law, bringing criminal charges against a former president carries instant logistical complications.

New York's ability to carry out safe and drama-free courthouse proceedings in a case involving a polarizing ex-president could be an important test case as prosecutors in Atlanta and Washington conduct their own investigations of Trump that could also result in charges. Those investigations concern efforts to undo the 2020 election results as well as the possible mishandling of classified documents at Mar-a-Lago.

Top Republicans, including some of Trump's potential rivals in next year's GOP presidential primary, have criticized the case against him. Biden, who has yet to formally announce that he's seeking reelection next year, and other leading Democrats have largely had little to say about it.

Prosecutors insist their case against Trump has nothing to do with politics.

Tucker and Weissert reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Jill Colvin, Bobby Caina Calvan, Jennifer Peltz and Ted Shaffrey in New York contributed to this report.

Follow the AP's coverage of former President Donald Trump at <https://apnews.com/hub/donald-trump>.

## Chicago chooses between progressive, moderate for mayor

By SARA BURNETT Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Voters in Chicago will choose a new mayor on Tuesday as two candidates with contrasting views on issues including crime, taxes, schools and investment in policing compete to lead the heavily Democratic city, the country's third-largest.

The race pits former Chicago schools CEO Paul Vallas, a moderate Democrat endorsed by Chicago's police union and major business groups, against progressive Brandon Johnson, a former teacher and union organizer backed by the Chicago Teachers Union. Both men finished ahead of current Mayor Lori Lightfoot in a February election, making her the first incumbent in 40 years to seek reelection in the city and lose.

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The top two vote-getters in the all-Democrat but officially nonpartisan race moved to the Tuesday runoff because no candidate received over 50% of the vote.

The contest has centered on the increase in violent crime during the COVID-19 pandemic and soaring property taxes. But it also could have implications for Democrats nationally ahead of other elections, including mayoral races in cities such as Philadelphia and Houston. For both progressives and the party's more moderate wing, the Chicago race is seen as a test of organizing power and messaging, especially with issues salient to big cities, like crime and alignment with law enforcement unions.

Vallas has repeatedly attacked Johnson for past comments in support of defunding police, which Johnson says he wouldn't do as mayor. Still, Vallas — who wants to hire hundreds more officers — says the biggest quality dividing the candidates is experience. The former Chicago budget director, who took over troubled schools in Chicago and elsewhere, says his background will be critical for a city emerging from the pandemic with policing and economic crises.

"This is no time for on-the-job training," Vallas said. "This is no time for someone who has no specifics who really can't answer questions in a substantive way."

Johnson, in turn, has argued Vallas, who has run for office multiple times as a Democrat, is too right-wing to lead Chicago. He noted some of his major donors have also supported Republicans, including Donald Trump, and that the controversial head of the police union has defended Jan. 6 insurrectionists. During a rally late last week with Sen. Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent and progressive standard-bearer, he described his opponent as part of the extremist right and other "greedy profiteers."

"When you take dollars from Trump supporters and try to cast yourself as part of the progressive movement — man, sit down," Johnson said before leading a crowd of several thousand gathered for the rally in chanting "Paul Vallas, take a seat."

Both men have deep roots in the Democratic Party, though with vastly different backgrounds.

Johnson, who is Black, grew up poor and is now raising his children in one of Chicago's most violent neighborhoods. After teaching middle and high school, he helped mobilize teachers, including during a historic 2012 strike, through which the Chicago Teachers Union became highly influential in city politics.

The 47-year-old says that instead of investing more in policing and incarceration, the city should focus on mental health treatment, affordable housing for all and jobs for youth. He has proposed a plan he says will raise \$800 million by taxing "ultrarich" individuals and businesses, including a per-employee "head tax" on employers and an additional tax on hotel room stays. Vallas says that so-called "tax-the-rich" plan would be a disaster for the city's recovering economy.

Vallas, who finished in first place in the February election, was the only white candidate in that nine-person field. The 69-year-old was endorsed by Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, as well as the local Chamber of Commerce. The grandson of Greek immigrants, he grew up working in family restaurants. He has two sons who have worked as police officers, one of whom is now a firefighter.

After working as budget director under then-Mayor Richard M. Daley, Vallas was appointed to take over Chicago Public Schools. He then went on to lead districts in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and in Philadelphia and Bridgeport, Connecticut. He ran unsuccessfully for mayor in 2019.

This election, he has focused heavily on how to improve morale among officers — Vallas was a consultant for the union during its negotiations with Lightfoot's City Hall — and said he would promote a new police superintendent from within the department's ranks.

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Associated Press journalist Teresa Crawford contributed.

## UConn emerges victorious after March Madness full of upsets

By DAVID BRANDT AP Sports Writer

The Cinderellas certainly had their moments in this March Madness. More than a few, actually.

In the end, it was a familiar face that won the NCAA Tournament.

UConn — a No. 4 seed — beat No. 5 seed San Diego State 76-59 on Monday night in Houston for its fifth

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title in the past 24 years. The Huskies and coach Dan Hurley cruised through the tournament in impressive fashion, winning all six games by at least 10 points.

The Aztecs of the Mountain West Conference didn't go quietly, cutting UConn's lead to six points late in the second half before the Huskies used one more run to put the game away. It was San Diego State's first trip to the title game.

Before Monday night, college basketball fans enjoyed three weeks of great moments. Here are a few that stood out:

## FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON SHOCKER

Little-known Fairleigh Dickinson — a private, commuter school in Teaneck, New Jersey — provided an early stunner, becoming just the second No. 16 seed to beat a No. 1 seed with its 63-58 win over Purdue.

Only in the NCAA field due to a technicality, FDU, which went 4-22 last season, won a First Four game in Dayton before the win over the Boilermakers. FDU lost the Northeast Conference tournament title game 67-66, but still received the league's automatic bid to the NCAA bracket because champion Merrimack remains ineligible for postseason play after moving up from Division II to Division I.

## PRINCETON, TOO

Smart kids made it all the way to the Sweet 16 when Ivy League champion Princeton — a No. 15 seed — won not just one, but two games in the tournament to advance to the second weekend.

The Tigers used a late-game run to earn their first NCAA Tournament win in 25 years, beating No. 2 seed Arizona 59-55 before a dominant 78-63 win over No. 7 Missouri.

## TOP SEEDS BITE DUST

Purdue's loss to Fairleigh Dickinson was just the opening salvo in a tough tournament for No. 1 seeds.

The men's tournament did not have a No. 1 seed in the Elite Eight for the first time since seeding began in 1979.

Kansas bowed out in the second round, with Arkansas taking down the reigning national champion Jayhawks. Alabama, the bracket's No. 1 overall seed, succumbed in the Sweet 16 to San Diego State.

Later in the Sweet 16, Miami capped the No. 1 carnage with a dominant 89-75 win over Houston.

## BUTLER'S BUZZER-BEATER

San Diego State's Lamont Butler hit a buzzer-beating jumper that will live a long time in college basketball lore, sending the Aztecs to their first national championship game with a 72-71 win over fellow mid-major Florida Atlantic in the Final Four.

The clock ticking down, Butler dribbled to the baseline, found that cut off and circled back. He stepped back to create a little room and hit a jumper that sent the Aztecs racing out onto the floor and had San Diego Padres fans going wild at Petco Park.

## THAT WAS COOL

Kansas State's Markquis Nowell broke the NCAA Tournament record for assists in a game with 19, including one late in the game that was among the most creative in postseason history.

Nowell found Keyontae Johnson for a reverse alley-oop with 52 seconds left in OT to give the Wildcats the lead for good over Michigan State in the Sweet 16. Nowell appeared to be arguing with coach Jerome Tang right before the pass, catching the Spartans flat-footed in one of the most important moments of the game.

## GREAT GAMES

There were a lot of great games in this year's tournament. Among the best: Gonzaga's 79-76 thriller over UCLA in the Sweet 16.

Julian Strawther hit a 3-pointer with 7.2 seconds left to answer a 3-pointer by UCLA's Amari Bailey, lifting Gonzaga to the wild win over the Bruins. The Bruins stormed back from an eight-point deficit in the final 1:05 and took a 76-75 lead on Bailey's 3-pointer with 12.2 seconds left before Strawther's shot.

## NANTZ'S FINALE

Announcing legend Jim Nantz has called his last NCAA Tournament game.

The 63-year-old called his 354th and final tournament game on Monday night when UConn beat San

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Diego State for the title.

Here's his call of Saturday's buzzer-beating shot by SDSU's Butler in the semifinals. Nantz estimates he's had 20-something such last-second winners over his years in the tournament.

"It's Butler. With 2 seconds. He's gotta put it up. Aaand. He wins it! He wins it! With the jumper!" Then, 5 seconds of silence, followed by, "A San Diego State miracle!"

AP National Writer Eddie Pells, AP Basketball Writers Aaron Beard and John Marshall, and AP Sports Writers Tom Withers and Tom Canavan contributed to this story.

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)

## Grassroots faith leaders navigate a Northern Ireland in flux

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

BELFAST, Northern Ireland (AP) — Teenagers from Catholic and Protestant youth groups lit candles on a Belfast street in memory of those who perished in the Holocaust, then listened solemnly to a warning about the dangers of Northern Ireland's own infamous religious bigotries.

"We all know what prejudice is," said Stephen Hughes, leader in charge of St. Peter's Immaculata Youth Centre, his voice robustly carrying over the twilight rush-hour traffic. "We were encouraged to hate each other because they're Protestant or they're Catholic."

The teens were too young, he noted, to remember "the Troubles" — three decades of sectarian violence that claimed more than 3,600 lives in the late 20th century and left countless more wounded and bereaved.

The violence largely ended 25 years ago this month with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, which laid out a political process for resolving Northern Ireland's future.

But that political process has been turbulent, skirmishes have periodically resurfaced, and Catholics and Protestants remain segregated in many ways.

There's still plenty of work for those in the business of reconciliation and community-building.

The Holocaust memorial event on a January evening was one of a series of small yet earnest activities by two youth groups — the Catholic St. Peter's Immaculata and the Townsend Street Social Outreach Centre, located in an adjacent Protestant neighborhood. Their aim is to build communication and friendship across the walls and habits separating their communities.

The event was commemorating a genocide far greater than the Northern Ireland conflict, but the memorial offered a powerful and relevant warning, Hughes said.

"Our own hatred, the laughs and jokes we make about each other, can quickly escalate," he said.

He urged the teens to be peacebuilders. "Thankfully, you don't know that violence," he said. "The thing is, you're the future."

And then the youths climbed back into their minibus for a stop at McDonald's, where they mingled over Big Macs and fries before heading home to their separate neighborhoods.

Religion, long a part of the problem, can be part of the solution, said Ruth Petticrew, longtime director of the Townsend Street organization. She has led her organization since the Troubles — times when people never knew when they might walk by a building just as a bomb was going off.

"A lot of churches don't preach love, they preach religion," Petticrew said. "Let's show people that love works, but it has to be genuine love, not preaching at them."

The 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement is arriving even as Northern Ireland's population itself is undergoing dramatic change.

Northern Ireland was created a century ago as a six-county entity with a two-to-one Protestant majority — fiercely loyal to the United Kingdom even as the rest of predominately Catholic Ireland won independence from it.

But now, Catholics outnumber Protestants in Northern Ireland — a long-developing but still-dramatic

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reversal that became official with census results announced last year.

Catholics now comprise 42% and Protestants 37% of Northern Ireland's population of 1.9 million, according to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

But in another demographic jolt, the number of people who don't identify with any religion jumped to 17%, up from 10% a decade earlier.

Faith leaders in Northern Ireland say church attendance has shrunk even among those who still identify as Christian, a phenomenon similar to the republic to the south in the wake of scandals in the Irish Catholic Church.

The Good Friday Agreement authorizes a referendum on Irish unification if polls ever indicate it would likely pass.

But nearly twice as many people in Northern Ireland — 50% vs. 27% — would vote to stay in Britain rather than to join Ireland if a referendum were held now, according to a 2022 survey by the Irish Times and an academic project, Analysing and Researching Ireland North and South.

What's more, only 55% of Catholics in Northern Ireland would vote to join Ireland. A fifth of Catholics would stay in the U.K. and another fifth were uncertain.

Secular and other voters are even more mixed — with nearly a third uncertain.

"There's more and more and more people like myself who also don't actually identify with the idea or don't take a position on being part of the U.K. or part of the Republic of Ireland," said Boyd Sleator, coordinator of the group Northern Ireland Humanists. "We should just think about governing ourselves."

Northern Ireland secularists recently won the right to state recognition of nonreligious wedding ceremonies led by humanist celebrants.

Such victories are important, Sleator said. His group is working for causes such as increased integration and teaching on religious diversity in schools. But he'd also like to see all communities work on endemic problems — Northern Ireland's political stalemate, dependence on British tax dollars and loss of educated professionals to other parts of the U.K.

"We're thinking about, 'Oh, we've got all these problems of Catholics and Protestants,'" he said. "It's like, do you? We have all these problems of people just leaving the country because our government can't get along."

All of this churn reflects what many have been saying all along — that the conflict was never about religion alone but also about land, money, power and legal rights.

"The places where a conflict always manifested itself tended to be in areas of social deprivation," said Jonny Clark, program manager for public theology at Corrymeela, an organization that has worked for decades on peace-building.

"Religion was always a part of the background of our conflict and was used to inflame, particularly during the Troubles," Clark said. "But I think nowadays there's just fewer and fewer people going to church, and of those who do, they're really not likely to be the ones causing trouble at weekends."

Even if religion is in retreat, faith-based groups are still working toward reconciliation on a grassroots level.

Few efforts are more striking than what's taking place at the Building Bridges Community Boxing Club.

It operates in the former fellowship hall of a Presbyterian church that has since closed. The building was acquired by 174 Trust, a faith-based community group, and turned into a boxing gym.

It's located astride one of the "peace walls" that divide neighborhoods in an effort to limit sectarian violence. The gym's front door opens onto a predominately Protestant neighborhood, its back door onto a mostly Catholic neighborhood.

That enables the gym to stay open in the evening, accessible to youths from both neighborhoods — even after the gates to the peace wall are closed each night.

Surrounding the boxing rings and punching bags, the walls of the gym are filled with a kaleidoscope of motivational posters — photos of famous boxers past and present mingled with slogans like "BELIEVE" and "ACHIEVE."

Unlike some sports, which are divided along sectarian lines, boxing brings out fans from all communities,

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said the Rev. Bill Shaw, CEO of the 174 Trust, which collaborates closely with the boxing club.

When one young boxer, a Protestant, began to have success in the ring, his newfound Catholic friends from the gym turned out to cheer him on. When one of those Catholic friends had a bout of his own, the Protestant boxer was literally in his corner, Shaw said.

"When people don't know each other and have no contact with the other, you can live with that prejudice and allow it to poison yourself," Shaw said. But it's a different story, he said, "when they actually meet each other. ... That's why we're here."

That was Shaw's own experience, growing up in a solidly Protestant neighborhood and only meeting his first Catholic friend at age 17 — a co-worker with shared interests in football, music and girls.

In the 1990s, Shaw was working as a Presbyterian minister in the small but conflict-ridden town of Portadown. After confronting a parishioner who rarely attended church but claimed to be "fighting for the faith" during a sectarian clash, Shaw said he had a conversion-like experience — leading him from the pulpit to the street, working for reconciliation.

In 1998, within weeks of the Good Friday Agreement, Shaw took charge at the 174 Trust.

Much of his work is at The Duncairn, a community center located in another former Presbyterian church located a few blocks from the boxing gym in a historically embattled neighborhood. Within its stained-glass windows and Gothic arches, The Duncairn today hosts concerts, exhibitions, an Irish-language preschool, a café and support groups.

On the same Holocaust Remembrance Day that their younger counterparts were commemorating, Catholic and Protestant clergy gathered around a table at the Duncairn.

One by one, the clergy members earnestly prayed for an end to prejudice and hatred, followed by contemplative silences and quiet expressions of "amen."

The goal for such centers, Shaw said, is reconciliation rather than proselytizing.

"Faith is what motivates us," said Shaw. "It's not what we're selling."

Another faith-based initiative was evident on a winter evening, when scores of people from multiple churches and neighborhoods gathered in a Methodist sanctuary to pray together, listen to a Catholic speaker and worship with Psalms set to traditional Irish tunes accompanied by fiddle and tin whistle.

It was part of the larger 4 Corners Festival, an annual series of events seeking to bridge the religiously fractured city.

"The legacy of conflict has left us with fear," said the Rev. Martin Magill, a Catholic priest and a festival organizer. "Being able to provide safe spaces is very important."

The declining rates of religious participation, Magill said, might in one sense make peacebuilding easier.

"People from their different denominations realize, oh gosh, we no longer have the resources to be completely independent," Magill said. "It actually makes more sense to pool our resources."

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## Biden to meet with experts on AI 'risks and opportunities'

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Tuesday will meet with his council of advisers on science and technology about the "risks and opportunities" that rapid advancements in artificial intelligence development pose for individual users and national security.

The White House said the Democratic president would use the AI meeting to "discuss the importance of protecting rights and safety to ensure responsible innovation and appropriate safeguards" and to reiterate his call for Congress to pass legislation to protect children and curtail data collection by technology companies.

Artificial intelligence burst to the forefront in the national conversation after the release of the popular ChatGPT AI chatbot, which helped spark a race among tech giants to unveil similar tools, while raising



ethical and societal concerns from the powerful technology.

The council, known as PCAST, is composed of science, engineering, technology and medical experts and is co-chaired by the Cabinet-ranked director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, Arati Prabhakar.

## Train derailment near The Hague kills 1, injures several

By PETER DEJONG and MIKE CORDER Associated Press

VOORSCHOTEN, Netherlands (AP) — A passenger train slammed into a construction crane and derailed near The Hague in the early hours of Tuesday, morning sending two carriages into a field next to the tracks. One person died and 19 were hospitalized, Dutch emergency services said.

Police opened an investigation to establish if any crime was committed. Another independent probe was opened into the cause of the crash.

Television images showed people using temporary bridges and ladders to cross a narrow drainage canal running alongside the rails to reach the stricken train in the darkness. Many windows in the train carriages were broken. It was not clear if that happened during the accident or as passengers attempted to escape.

Two of the bright yellow and blue train carriages came to rest perpendicular to the tracks across the small canal and partially in a field. What appeared to be the front of the train was badly damaged. Other parts of the train were partially derailed.

Video footage from inside the train in the immediate aftermath of the crash showed chaotic scenes as passengers tried to get out of the wreckage in darkness.

The four-carriage passenger train was carrying about 50 passengers at the time of the crash.

John Voppen, CEO of the rail network company Pro Rail, said that the passenger train and a freight train both hit a crane that was being used to carry out maintenance work. He said the crane was on tracks that were not being used by train traffic and it is not clear how the trains collided with the crane.

"We don't understand how this could have happened," he told reporters at a news conference.

The identity of the person killed in the accident was not immediately released and it was not clear if the person was on the train or part of the maintenance team that had been at work on the rails between the cities of Leiden and The Hague when the crash happened around 3:25 a.m. (0125 GMT) in the town of Voorschoten.

Railway company NS also said in a statement that a passenger train, a freight train and a construction crane were involved in a collision, but the company gave no further details.

"Like everyone else, I'm full of questions and we want to know exactly what happened," NS CEO Wouter Koolmees said in a statement. "A thorough investigation must be carried out. At the moment, all attention is focused on the wellbeing of our travelers and colleagues."

The regional coordinator of emergency services said that 11 of the injured passengers were treated in homes near the line and 19 were transported in a fleet of ambulances to five hospitals, including a "calamity hospital" opened in the central city of Utrecht.

"A terrible train accident near Voorschoten, where unfortunately one person died and many people were injured. My thoughts are with the relatives and with all the victims. I wish them all the best," Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said in a tweet.

Dutch King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima also expressed their sympathy in a tweet.

Ingrid de Roos, a spokeswoman for local fire services, told news show WNL that a small fire broke out at the rear of the train but was quickly extinguished.

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Corder reported from The Hague.

## US military says senior IS commander killed in Syria

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — A drone strike carried out by the American-led coalition in northwestern Syria has killed a senior member of the Islamic State group who was in charge of planning attacks in Europe, the United States military said Tuesday.

The man killed Monday in the strike was identified by a U.S. military statement as Khalid Aydd Ahmad al-Jabouri. The military statement added that his death "will temporarily disrupt the organization's ability to plot external attacks."

Monday's strike was the latest by the U.S. military to kill a top official with the extremist group that once controlled large parts of Iraq and Syria, where it declared a "caliphate." From the areas they once controlled, the extremists planned deadly attacks in Europe that killed scores of people. In recent years, such attacks have decreased because the Islamic State group lost the last sliver of land it controlled in March 2019.

The extremist sleeper cells are still launching deadly attacks in Syria and Iraq.

Opposition activists in northwest Syria said the man killed showed up in the area about 10 days ago claiming to be a displaced person from the eastern province of Deir el-Zour, bordering Iraq. Al-Jabouri is one of Iraq's biggest tribes that also has presence in east and north Syria and the man might have said that he is from Deir el-Zour to hide his Iraqi identity as residents of east Syria speak Arabic dialect similar to the one spoken in Iraq.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said on Monday that one person was killed in a drone strike near the rebel-held village of Kefteen. The Observatory's chief Rami Abdurrahman identified the dead man as an Iraqi citizen who was struck with a missile as he spoke on his cellular phone outside the home he rented.

The opposition's Syrian Civil Defense, also known as the White Helmets, said it evacuated the man from the scene of the attack and he later succumbed to his wounds.

The strike was the latest in a series of attacks over the past years targeting al-Qaida-linked militants and senior members of the Islamic State group in northwestern Syria.

Most of those killed by U.S. strikes in the rebel-held Idlib province over the past years were members of al-Qaida offshoot Horas al-Din, which is Arabic for "Guardians of Religion." The group includes hardcore al-Qaida members who broke away from Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the strongest insurgent group in Idlib province.

In February, a drone strike killed two men, whom local activists initially identified as Horas al-Din members. The Observatory later said that one of the two killed was a senior member of the Islamic State group that was defeated in Syria in March 2019.

The founder of the Islamic State group, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was hunted down by the Americans in a raid in Idlib in October 2019. His successor, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, was also killed in a U.S. raid in February 2022 in northwest Syria.

In October, Syrian rebels killed the group's leader, Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, and he has since been replaced by Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurayshi.

None of the al-Qurayshis are believed to be related. Al-Qurayshi is not their real name but comes from Quraish, the name of the tribe to which Islam's Prophet Muhammad belonged. IS claims its leaders hail from this tribe and "al-Qurayshi" serves as part of an IS leader's nom de guerre.

## China seethes as US chip controls threaten tech ambitions

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Furious at U.S. efforts that cut off access to technology to make advanced computer chips, China's leaders appear to be struggling to figure out how to retaliate without hurting their own ambitions in telecoms, artificial intelligence and other industries.

President Xi Jinping's government sees the chips that are used in everything from phones to kitchen ap-

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pliances to fighter jets as crucial assets in its strategic rivalry with Washington and efforts to gain wealth and global influence. Chips are the center of a "technology war," a Chinese scientist wrote in an official journal in February.

China has its own chip foundries, but they supply only low-end processors used in autos and appliances. The U.S. government, starting under then-President Donald Trump, is cutting off access to a growing array of tools to make chips for computer servers, AI and other advanced applications. Japan and the Netherlands have joined in limiting access to technology they say might be used to make weapons.

Xi, in unusually pointed language, accused Washington in March of trying to block China's development with a campaign of "containment and suppression." He called on the public to "dare to fight."

Despite that, Beijing has been slow to retaliate against U.S. companies, possibly to avoid disrupting Chinese industries that assemble most of the world's smartphones, tablet computers and other consumer electronics. They import more than \$300 billion worth of foreign chips every year.

The ruling Communist Party is throwing billions of dollars at trying to accelerate chip development and reduce the need for foreign technology.

China's loudest complaint: It is blocked from buying a machine available only from a Dutch company, ASML, that uses ultraviolet light to etch circuits into silicon chips on a scale measured in nanometers, or billionths of a meter. Without that, Chinese efforts to make transistors faster and more efficient by packing them more closely together on fingernail-size slivers of silicon are stalled.

Making processor chips requires some 1,500 steps and technologies owned by U.S., European, Japanese and other suppliers.

"China won't swallow everything. If damage occurs, we must take action to protect ourselves," the Chinese ambassador to the Netherlands, Tan Jian, told the Dutch newspaper *Financieele Dagblad*.

"I'm not going to speculate on what that might be," Tan said. "It won't just be harsh words."

The conflict has prompted warnings the world might decouple, or split into separate spheres with incompatible technology standards that mean computers, smartphones and other products from one region wouldn't work in others. That would raise costs and might slow innovation.

"The bifurcation in technological and economic systems is deepening," Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong of Singapore said at an economic forum in China last month. "This will impose a huge economic cost."

U.S.-Chinese relations are at their lowest level in decades due to disputes over security, Beijing's treatment of Hong Kong and Muslim ethnic minorities, territorial disputes and China's multibillion-dollar trade surpluses.

Chinese industries will "hit a wall" in 2025 or 2026 if they can't get next generation chips or the tools to make their own, said Handel Jones, a tech industry consultant.

China "will start falling behind significantly," said Jones, CEO of International Business Strategies.

Beijing might have leverage, though, as the biggest source of batteries for electric vehicles, Jones said.

Chinese battery giant CATL supplies U.S. and Europe automakers. Ford Motor Co. plans to use CATL technology in a \$3.5 billion battery factory in Michigan.

"China will strike back," Jones said. "What the public might see is China not giving the U.S. batteries for EVs."

On Friday, Japan increased pressure on Beijing by joining Washington in imposing controls on exports of chipmaking equipment. The announcement didn't mention China, but the trade minister said Tokyo doesn't want its technology used for military purposes.

A Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman, Mao Ning, warned Japan that "weaponizing sci-tech and trade issues" would "hurt others as well as oneself."

Hours later, the Chinese government announced an investigation of the biggest U.S. memory chip maker, Micron Technology Inc., a key supplier to Chinese factories. The Cyberspace Administration of China said it would look for national security threats in Micron's technology and manufacturing but gave no details.

The Chinese military also needs semiconductors for its development of stealth fighter jets, cruise missiles and other weapons.

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Chinese alarm grew after President Joe Biden in October expanded controls imposed by Trump on chip manufacturing technology. Biden also barred Americans from helping Chinese manufacturers with some processes.

To nurture Chinese suppliers, Xi's government is stepping up support that industry experts say already amounts to as much as \$30 billion a year in research grants and other subsidies.

China's biggest maker of memory chips, Yangtze Memory Technologies Corp., or YMTC, received a 49 billion yuan (\$7 billion) infusion this year from two official funds, according to Tianyancha, a financial information provider.

One was the government's main investment vehicle, the China National Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund, known as the Big Fund. It was founded in 2014 with 139 billion yuan (\$21 billion) and has invested in hundreds of companies.

The Big Fund launched a second entity, known as the Big Fund II, in 2019 with 200 billion yuan (\$30 billion).

In January, chip manufacturer Hua Hong Semiconductor said Big Fund II would contribute 1.2 billion yuan (\$175 million) for a planned 6.7 billion yuan (\$975 million) wafer fabrication facility in eastern China's Wuxi.

In March, the Cabinet promised tax breaks and other support for the industry. It gave no price tag. The government also has set up "integrated circuit talent training bases" at 23 universities and six at other schools.

"Semiconductors are the 'main battlefield' of the current China-U.S. technology war," Junwei Luo, a scientist at the official Institute of Semiconductors, wrote in the February issue of the journal of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Luo called for "self-reliance and self-improvement in semiconductors."

The scale of spending required is huge. The global industry leader, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp., or TSMC, is in the third year of a three-year, \$100 billion plan to expand research and production.

Developers including Huawei Technologies Ltd. and VeriSilicon Holdings Co. can design logic chips for smartphones as powerful as those from Intel Corp., Apple Inc., South Korea's Samsung Electronics Co. or Britain's Arm Ltd., according to industry researchers. But they cannot be manufactured without the precision technology of TSMC and other foreign foundries.

Trump in 2019 crippled Huawei's smartphone brand by blocking it from buying U.S. chips or other technology. American officials say Huawei, China's first global tech brand, might facilitate Chinese spying, an accusation the company denies. In 2020, the White House tightened controls, blocking TSMC and others from using U.S. technology to produce chips for Huawei.

Washington threw up new hurdles for Chinese chip designers in August by imposing restrictions on software known as EDA, or electronic design automation, along with European, Asian and other governments to limit the spread of "dual use" technologies that might be used to make weapons.

In December, Biden added YMTC, the memory chip maker, and some other Chinese companies to a blacklist that limits access to chips made anywhere using U.S. tools or processes.

China's foundries can etch circuits as small as 28 nanometers apart. By contrast, TSMC and other global competitors can etch circuits just three nanometers apart, ten times the Chinese industry's precision. They are moving toward two nanometers.

To make the latest chips, "you need EUV (extreme ultraviolet lithography) tools, a very complicated process recipe and not just a couple of billion dollars but tens and tens of billions of dollars," said Peter Hanbury, who follows the industry for Bain & Co.

"They're not going to be able to produce competitive server, PC and smartphone chips," Hanbury said. "You have to go to TSMC to do that."

China's ruling party is trying to develop its own tool vendors, but researchers say it is far behind a global network spread across dozens of countries.

Huawei said in a video on its website in December it was working on EUV technology. But creating a machine comparable to ASML's might cost \$5 billion and require a decade of research, according to industry experts. Huawei didn't respond to a request for comment.

The day when China can supply its own EUV machine is "very far away," said Hanbury.

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AP researcher Yu Bing in Beijing and AP Writer Mike Corder in Amsterdam contributed.

## UConn wins March Madness with 76-59 smothering of SDSU

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

HOUSTON (AP) — After six games and 240 minutes of pure dominance that ran through March, then part of April, it finally became clear there was only one thing that could stop the UConn Huskies.

The final buzzer.

The team from Storrs, Connecticut, topped off one of the most impressive March Madness runs in history Monday night, clamping down early, then breaking things open late to bring home its fifth national title with a 76-59 victory over San Diego State.

"We knew we were the best team in the tournament going in, and we just had to play to our level," said Dan Hurley, who joined Jim Calhoun and Kevin Ollie as the third coach to lead UConn to a title.

UConn's lanky star forward, Adama Sanogo, won Most Outstanding Player honors, finishing with 17 points and 10 rebounds in the final. Tristen Newton also had a double-double with 19 points and 10 boards.

The Huskies (31-8) became the fifth team since the bracket expanded in 1985 to win all six NCAA Tournament games by double-digits on the way to a championship. They won those six games by an average of an even 20 points, only a fraction less than what North Carolina did in sweeping to the title in 2009.

UConn built a 16-point lead late in the first half, only to see the Aztecs (32-7) trim it to five with 5:19 left. But Jordan Hawkins (16 points), — whose cousin, Angel Reese, won MOP honors the night before to help LSU take the women's title — answered with a 3 to trigger a 9-0 run.

"It's absolutely amazing that we both get this opportunity," Hawkins said. "The family reunion is going to be crazy."

Keshad Johnson scored 14 points for San Diego State, which came up one win shy in this, its first trip to the Final Four. Darrion Trammell and Lamont Butler, he of buzzer-beater fame in the semifinal against Florida Atlantic, had 13 apiece.

San Diego State coach Brian Dutcher was an assistant with Michigan back in the Fab Five days, when the Wolverines lost in the final two years in a row. One of the Fab Five, current Wolverines coach Juwan Howard, was there to console his former coach.

"We had to be at our best. We weren't at our best," Dutcher said. "A lot had to do with UConn."

UConn, the favorite and best-seeded team at No. 4 for this Final Four full of underdogs, set the stage for this win over an 11:07 stretch in the first half during which the Aztecs didn't make a basket. Unable to shoot over or go around this tall, long UConn team, they missed 14 straight shots from the floor.

They went from leading by four to trailing by 11, and when they weren't getting shots blocked (Alex Karaban had three and Sanogo had one) or altered on the inside, they were coming up short — a telltale sign of a team that was out of hops after that 72-71 buzzer-beater win two nights earlier.

UConn fan Bill Murray, whose son is an assistant for the Huskies, was one of the few celebrities on hand to watch them make it five for five in title games. This one marked the last that Jim Nantz would call after 37 years behind the mic.

"The one thing I learned through all of this is, everybody has a dream and everybody has a story to tell. Just try to find that story. Be kind," Nantz said as part of his final sign-off from the Final Four.

He's had a lot of UConn stories to tell over the years, though this certainly wasn't the most dramatic.

Even with that brief bout of uncertainty midway through the second half, UConn never truly let the fifth-seeded Aztecs, who overcame a 14-point deficit in the semifinal, start thinking about any more last-second dramatics.

This was a team built strictly for 2023 — replenished by Hurley, who went to the transfer portal to find more outside shooting after back-to-back first-round exits in the tournament. Despite the rebuild, UConn was in the "others receiving votes" category in Week 1 of the AP poll.

"We weren't ranked going into the year, so we had the chip on our shoulder," Hurley said. "We knew

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the level that we could play at, even through those dark times.”

Despite the new-age roster building, there was something decidedly old-school about the way the Huskies took care of business in the early going.

They didn’t even think much about 3-point shooting at the start — didn’t make one until more than 13 minutes into the game — instead skip passing into Sanogo on the post and wearing down SDSU while building the early lead two points at a time.

The Aztecs were too good a team to cave, and an over-pursuing defense is what triggered the late run to within five. But a team built on defense finished the game only shooting 32% from the floor.

“We cut it to five. I think there were people in the stands that thought, ‘Hey, they’re capable of doing it again,’ and we were,” Dutcher said. “But we ran into too good of a team.”

UConn’s latest coronation makes Hurley the third coach to bring a trophy home to Storrs. He joins Calhoun (1999, 2004, 2001) and Ollie (2014).

And Sanogo — make that Adama — adds himself to others on a first-name basis up on that campus — UConn legends like Kemba (Walker), Rip (Hamilton) and Emeka (Okafor). Sanogo averaged 19.7 points and 9.8 rebounds over UConn’s six-game cruise through the tournament.

Once the confetti stopped falling, Sanogo recalled a preseason visit the team received from Okafor.

“After he watched our practice, he was like, ‘I see that I can count on you guys, you guys are a special team,’” Sanogo said.

After UConn put on a March Madness clinic, everyone else can see that now, too.

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AP March Madness coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/march-madness> and bracket: <https://apnews.com/hub/ncaa-mens-bracket> and <https://apnews.com/hub/ap-top-25-college-basketball-poll> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Top25](https://twitter.com/AP_Top25)

## Forecast warns of more severe storms in South, Midwest

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press Writer

Forecasters are warning of more severe weather, including tornadoes, Tuesday in parts of the South and Midwest hammered just days ago by deadly storms.

That could mean more misery for people sifting through the wreckage of their homes in Arkansas, Iowa and Illinois. Dangerous conditions also could stretch into parts of Missouri, southwest Oklahoma and northeast Texas. Farther south and west, fire danger will remain high.

“That could initially start as isolated supercells with all hazards possible — tornadoes, wind and hail — and then over time typically they form into a line (of thunderstorms) and continue moving eastward,” said Ryan Bunker, a meteorologist with the National Weather Center in Norman, Oklahoma.

Just last week, fierce storms that spawned tornadoes in 11 states killed at least 32 people as the system that began Friday plodded through Arkansas and traveled northeast through the South and into the Midwest and Northeast.

The same conditions that fueled last week’s storms — an area of low pressure combined with strong southerly winds — will make conditions ideal for another round of severe weather Tuesday into early morning Wednesday, Bunker said.

Those conditions, which typically include dry air from the west going up over the Rockies and crashing into warm, moist air from the Gulf of Mexico, are what make the U.S. so prone to tornadoes and other severe storms.

The threat of fire danger is expected to remain high Tuesday across portions of far western Oklahoma, the Texas Panhandle, northeast New Mexico and far southeastern Colorado, with low humidity, dry vegetation and wind gusts expected up to 70 mph (113 kph), according to the National Weather Service.

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Associated Press reporters around the country contributed to this report, including Ron Todt in Philadelphia, Andrew DeMillo in Little Rock, Arkansas, Kimberlee Kruesi in Adamsville, Tennessee, Harm Venhuizen

in Belvidere, Illinois, Corey Williams in Detroit.

## Abortion access at stake in Wisconsin Supreme Court race

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — The fate of abortion access in battleground Wisconsin likely rests with Tuesday's outcome of the heated race for state Supreme Court, with the future of Republican-drawn legislative maps, voting rights and years of other Republican policies also hanging in the balance.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court has been under conservative control for 15 years, serving as the final word on a wide array of Republican policies enacted by the GOP-controlled Legislature. The court came within one vote of overturning President Joe Biden's narrow win in 2020.

Democratic-backed candidate Janet Protasiewicz faces Republican-backed Dan Kelly in the race that is the most expensive court race in U.S. history, nearly tripling the previous \$15 million record set in Illinois in 2004.

Democrats hope to win the race to wrest conservative control for at least the next two years, including the run-up and aftermath of the 2024 presidential election. Four of the past six presidential elections in Wisconsin have been decided by less than a percentage point and Trump turned to the courts in 2020 in his unsuccessful push to overturn roughly 21,000 votes.

Protasiewicz, a Milwaukee County judge, largely focused the race around abortion, saying she supports abortion rights, but stopping short of saying how she would rule on a pending lawsuit challenging Wisconsin's 174-year-old ban that was enacted a year after statehood. She called Kelly an "extreme partisan" and claimed that if he wins, Kelly would uphold the state ban. Kelly did not say how he would rule.

Kelly has expressed opposition to abortion in the past, including in a 2012 blog post in which he said the Democratic Party and the National Organization for Women were committed to normalizing the taking of human life. Kelly also has done legal work for Wisconsin Right to Life.

Kelly is a former justice who previously did work for Republicans and advised them on the plan to have fake GOP electors cast their ballots for Trump following the 2020 election even though he had lost. He is endorsed by the state's top three anti-abortion groups, while Protasiewicz is backed by Planned Parenthood and other abortion rights advocates.

In a sign of how personal the race has become, Protasiewicz has been endorsed by a fellow Milwaukee County judge who is also the daughter of the retiring conservative Justice Pat Roggensack. Judge Ellen Bostrom wrote in an opinion piece a week before the election that Kelly was "unfit" to serve because of his involvement in the fake elector scheme.

Protasiewicz called Kelly "a true threat to our democracy" because of that work.

Kelly was endorsed by Trump in 2020 during an unsuccessful run for the court after he served four years on the court following an appointment. Trump did not endorse this year. Protasiewicz's endorsements include Hillary Clinton.

Kelly tried to distance himself from his work for Republicans, saying it was "irrelevant" to how he would work as a justice. Kelly tried to make the campaign about Protasiewicz's record as a judge, arguing that she was soft on crime. He also said that she was "bought and paid for" by Democrats.

The Wisconsin Democratic Party gave Protasiewicz's campaign more than \$8 million, leading her to promise to recuse herself from any case brought by Democrats. Kelly refused to promise to step down from any case brought by his supporters, which include the state chamber of commerce.

In addition to abortion, Protasiewicz was outspoken on Wisconsin's gerrymandered legislative maps, calling them "rigged." Kelly accused her of prejudging that case, abortion and others that could come before the court.

The winner will serve a 10-year term starting in August.

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## Bringing Lolita home: How to release a long-captive orca?

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — An ambitious plan announced last week to return Lolita, a killer whale held captive for more than a half-century, to her home waters in Washington's Puget Sound thrilled those who have long advocated for her to be freed from her tank at the Miami Seaquarium.

But it also called to mind the release of Keiko — the star of the movie "Free Willy" — more than two decades ago. Keiko's return to his native Iceland vastly improved upon his life in a Mexico City tank, but he failed to adapt to the wild and died five years later.

He is the only orca released after long-term captivity.

Advocates say their experience with Keiko will inform how they plan for Lolita's return. But they also stress the differences between their cases.

While they hope to bring Lolita — also known as Tokitae, or Toki — to a whale sanctuary among the Pacific Northwest's many islands, she might never again swim freely with her endangered family, including the nearly century-old whale believed to be her mother.

Here's a look at Tokitae's story.

### HOW DID TOKI WIND UP IN CAPTIVITY?

Native American tribes revere orcas, considering them their relatives.

White settlers had a different view. Fishermen reviled the "blackfish" as competition for salmon and sometimes shot them.

That began to change in 1965, when a man named Ted Griffin bought a killer whale that had been caught in a fisherman's net in British Columbia and towed it to the Seattle waterfront. The whale — Namu — became a sensation.

Namu soon died from an infection, but Griffin had set off a craze for capturing the Pacific Northwest's killer whales and training them to perform, as The Seattle Times recounted in a 2018 history. Griffin corralled dozens of orcas off Washington's Whidbey Island in 1970. Several got caught and drowned when opponents cut the nets, intending to free them.

Many orcas remained nearby, declining to leave as their clan members were hauled out of the water. Among those kept was 4-year-old Tokitae, later sold to the Miami Seaquarium.

By the early 1970s, at least 13 Northwest orcas had been killed and 45 delivered to theme parks around the world; Toki is the only one still alive. The roundups reduced the Puget Sound resident population by about 40% and helped cause problems with inbreeding that imperil them today.

Outrage over the captures helped prompt the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.

### WHY BRING TOKI HOME?

Lolita, now 57, spent decades performing. Last year the Miami Seaquarium announced it would no longer feature her under an agreement with regulators. The 5,000-pound (2,267-kilogram) animal lives in a tank 80 feet by 35 feet (24 meters by 11 meters) and 20 feet (6 meters) deep.

Whales are intelligent, social creatures, and activists have long dreamed of returning Tokitae to her family.

The whale believed to be Toki's mother is the matriarch of L-pod, one of three clans that make up the so-called southern resident killer whales, a genetically and socially distinct population that frequents the Salish Sea between Washington and British Columbia. There are 73 southern residents remaining.

Plans call for bringing Lolita to a netted whale sanctuary of about 15 acres (6 hectares). She would be released into an enclosure the size of a couple football fields within that sanctuary, where she would be under round-the-clock care.

"The first objective is to provide her the highest quality of life we can," said Charles Vinick, a founder of the nonprofit Friends of Toki as well as executive director of the Whale Sanctuary Project. "Whether or not it becomes the dream of having her reunite with L-pod is something we have to rely on Lolita to show us."

Because the southern residents are endangered, advocates would have to obtain additional permits if



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they ever wanted to return Toki fully to the wild. Advocates would likely have to show that introducing another aging whale to feed wouldn't burden the population further.

With financial backing from Indianapolis Colts owner Jim Irsay, they have agreed to support Lolita long term, whether she's reintroduced or not.

For Raynell Morris, an elder of the Lummi Indian Tribe in Washington and a board member of Friends of Toki, the whale's return is fundamental.

"Until she's returned to her family, our family is broken," Morris said. "When she comes home, the web of life will be repaired and restored, and our people will be repaired and restored."

## HOW DO YOU MOVE A 2.5-TON WHALE?

When all the pieces are in place — which could take two years — Lolita will be placed on a stretcher. She'll be lifted by crane into a tank placed on a truck, and the truck driven to a cargo plane.

She'll be flown to Washington, loaded onto a barge, floated to the sanctuary, and lowered by crane into her new home.

Toki's transportation tank will be filled with fresh water — salt water could ruin the plane in the event of a leak. Her caregivers will protect her skin with ointment.

Advocates will work with Washington's Department of Natural Resources to pick the sanctuary site.

There, Toki can begin recovering the strength she might need to rejoin wild orcas, to relearn to hunt and to travel around 100 miles (161 kilometers) per day.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM KEIKO?

Keiko was about 2 when he was captured in 1979. He spent time in Iceland and Canada before being sold in 1985 to a theme park in Mexico City, where he lived in a tank filled with tapwater mixed with salt.

In 1993 he was featured in "Free Willy," prompting a campaign by schoolchildren to get him released. A facility was built at the Oregon Coast Aquarium where the emaciated Keiko could recover before his return to Iceland.

Keiko gained about 1,000 pounds (453 kilograms) in his first year in Oregon.

Vinick, who helped manage Keiko's return, noted that it was always designed as a reintroduction effort. Keiko was in his early 20s — still young for an orca — when he was brought to Iceland in 1998. To teach him to hunt, trainers would launch fish around his pen with a sling shot. Eventually they began escorting him on longer swims in the open ocean.

While Keiko would approach wild orcas at times, he would return to his trainers' boat and generally sought out humans. He swam to Norway on his own — a journey of nearly 1,000 miles (1,609 km). But there again he was attracted to boats and people, and he died, apparently of pneumonia, at about age 27.

"We already knew how easy it is to capture whales," Vinick said. "What we learned with Keiko is how difficult it is to put one back."

Malene Simon of the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources, who conducted a scientific review of Keiko's release, said she was pessimistic about Lolita's chances to learn to hunt after 52 years of being fed by humans.

Still, Tokitae has some advantages. She was slightly older when she was captured, so she would have been already learning to hunt, and she might have more memory of her family songs. Further, researchers know who her family is, unlike with Keiko.

"It'll be therapeutic for her, and she'll get healthier," said Howard Garrett, president of the board of the advocacy group Orca Network. "This is a step toward righting a great wrong that humans have done."

## Alaska oil plan opponents lose 1st fight over Willow project

By BECKY BOHRER Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — Environmentalists lost the first round of their legal battle over a major oil project on Alaska's petroleum-rich North Slope on Monday as a judge rejected their requests to halt immediate construction work related to the Willow project, but they vowed not to give up.

The court's decision means ConocoPhillips Alaska can forge ahead with cold-weather construction work, including mining gravel and using it for a road toward the Willow project. Environmentalists worry that noise from blasting and road construction could affect caribou.

U.S. District Court Judge Sharon Gleason said she took into account support for the project by Alaska political leaders — including state lawmakers and Alaska's bipartisan congressional delegation. She said she also gave "considerable weight" to the support for Willow by an Alaska Native village corporation, an Alaska Native regional corporation and the North Slope Borough, while also recognizing that project support among Alaska Natives is not unanimous.

Environmental groups and an Alaska Native organization, Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic, had asked Gleason to delay construction related to Willow while their lawsuits are pending. They ultimately want Gleason to overturn the project's approval, saying the U.S. Bureau of Land Management failed to consider an adequate range of alternatives.

Gleason said the construction work that ConocoPhillips Alaska plans for this month is "substantially narrower in scope than the Willow Project as a whole," and the groups did not succeed in showing it would cause irreparable harm before she makes a decision on the merits of the cases.

Rebecca Boys, a company spokesperson, said ConocoPhillips Alaska appreciates the backing it has received from those "who recognize that Willow will provide meaningful opportunities for Alaska Native communities and the state of Alaska, and domestic energy for America."

To prevent the worst of climate change's future harms, including even more extreme weather, the head of the United Nations recently called for an end to new fossil fuel exploration and for rich countries to quit coal, oil and gas by 2040.

A ConocoPhillips Alaska executive, Stephen Bross, warned in court documents that an order blocking construction could make it "impossible" for the project to begin production by Sept. 1, 2029, and the company risks having its leases expire if the unit hasn't produced oil by then.

One of the suits, filed by Earthjustice on behalf of numerous environmental groups, says the government analyzed an inadequate range of alternatives "based on the mistaken conclusion that it must allow ConocoPhillips to fully develop its leases." It also says the environmental review underlying Willow's approval didn't assess the full climate consequences of authorizing the project because it didn't analyze greenhouse gas emissions from other projects in the region that could follow.

The Willow project is in the northeast portion of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, where there has been debate over how much of the region should be available to oil and gas development.

The Biden administration in 2022 limited oil and gas leasing to just over half the reserve, which is home to polar bears, caribou, millions of migratory birds and other wildlife. There are multiple exploration and development projects within 50 miles (80 kilometers) of the Willow project, including other discoveries being pursued by ConocoPhillips Alaska, the state's largest oil producer.

The other lawsuit, filed by Trustees for Alaska on behalf of Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic and environmental groups, said federal agencies failed to take a "hard look at the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts" of the Willow project and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service failed to address impacts to polar bears, a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

Bridget Psarianos, lead staff attorney with Trustees for Alaska, said in a statement that Gleason's decision is "heartbreaking for all who want to protect local communities and prevent more devastating climate impacts in the Arctic and around the world. We will do everything we can to protect the region while the merits of our case get heard."

Erik Grafe, deputy managing attorney for Earthjustice in Alaska, said while this round of legal challenges

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“did not produce the outcome we had hoped for, our court battle continues.”

Justice Department lawyers had argued that last month’s decision by the Biden administration approving Willow was “based in science and consistent with all legal requirements.” They also said the environmental review thoroughly analyzed emissions related to the use of oil produced by the project and called the analysis sought by Earthjustice overreaching.

State political leaders, including Republican Gov. Mike Dunleavy, and labor unions have touted Willow as a job creator, expected to produce up to 180,000 barrels of oil a day. That’s significant, because major existing fields are aging and the flow of oil through the trans-Alaska pipeline is a fraction of what it was at its peak in the late 1980s.

Many Alaska Native leaders on the North Slope and groups with ties to the region have argued that the project is economically vital for their communities. Nagruk Harcharek, president of the Voice of Arctic Iñupiat, whose members include leaders from across much of the North Slope, called Gleason’s decision “another step forward for Alaska, Alaska Native self-determination, and for America’s energy security.”

But some Alaska Native leaders in the community closest to the project, Nuiqsut, have expressed concerns about impacts to their subsistence lifestyles and worried that their voices haven’t been heard.

Using the oil that Willow would produce over the 30-year life of the project would emit roughly as much greenhouse gas as the combined emissions from 1.7 million passenger cars over the same period. Climate activists say the project flies in the face of President Joe Biden’s pledges to cut carbon emissions and move to clean energy.

The administration has defended the decision on Willow and the president’s climate record. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, who opposed Willow when she was a New Mexico congresswoman, last month called the project a “difficult and complex issue” involving leases issued by prior administrations. She said there was “limited decision space” and the administration had “focused on how to reduce the project’s footprint and minimize its impacts to people and to wildlife.”

Global demand for crude is expected to continue rising, according to industry analysts and the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

## Lawyers: Ex-Maryland political aide dead after manhunt

By SARAH BRUMFIELD and LEA SKENE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — A former Maryland political aide wanted on corruption charges died Monday after he was wounded while being confronted by law enforcement agents, his lawyer said, following a manhunt that was launched when the man failed to appear for trial.

Attorney Joseph Murtha said the FBI confirmed Roy McGrath’s death to him. He added that it was not immediately clear if McGrath’s wound was self-inflicted or came during an exchange of gunfire with agents.

The FBI had said earlier that McGrath, once a top aide to a former Maryland governor, had been hospitalized following an agent-involved shooting, but declined to elaborate.

William Brennan, an attorney for McGrath’s wife, Laura Bruner, also confirmed the death and said she was “absolutely distraught.”

According to an email earlier from FBI Supervisory Special Agent Shayne Buchwald in Maryland, McGrath was wounded during “an agent-involved shooting” around 6:30 p.m. in a commercial area on the southwestern outskirts of Knoxville, Tennessee. Buchwald said McGrath was taken to a hospital.

Further details, including how McGrath was wounded and what led up to it, were not immediately released. The shooting was under investigation.

“The FBI takes all shooting incidents involving our agents or task force members seriously,” said Buchwald, who declined to confirm that McGrath had died.

McGrath, 53, served as chief of staff to former Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan. He was declared a wanted fugitive after his disappearance, and the FBI has said he was considered an international flight risk.

In a statement, Hogan said he and his wife, Yumi, “are deeply saddened by this tragic situation. We are praying for Mr. McGrath’s family and loved ones.”

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Murtha called the death “a tragic ending to the past three weeks of uncertainty” and said his client always maintained his innocence.

After McGrath failed to appear at Baltimore’s federal courthouse on March 13, Murtha said he believed McGrath, who had moved to Naples, Florida, was planning to fly to Maryland the night before. Instead of beginning jury selection, a judge issued an arrest warrant and dismissed prospective jurors.

McGrath was indicted in 2021 on accusations he fraudulently secured a \$233,648 severance payment, equal to one year of salary as the head of Maryland Environmental Service, by falsely telling the agency’s board the governor had approved it. He was also accused of fraud and embezzlement connected to roughly \$170,000 in expenses. McGrath pleaded not guilty.

McGrath resigned just 11 weeks into the job as Hogan’s chief of staff in 2020 after the payments became public.

If convicted of the federal charges, he would have faced a maximum sentence of 20 years for each of four counts of wire fraud, plus a maximum of 10 years for each of two counts of embezzling funds from an organization receiving more than \$10,000 in federal benefits.

\_\_\_ Brumfield reported from Silver Spring, Maryland. Associated Press writer Brian Witte in Annapolis contributed to this report.

## On India’s shore, rising salinity means daily water struggle

By UZMI ATHAR, Press Trust of India undefined

KOCHI, India (AP) — Anthony Kuttappassera’s family has lived in the same house at the edge of the Arabian Sea for more than a century. He grew up drinking water from the pond and the well outside his home.

But 60 years ago, that water became too salty to drink. Then it grew too salty for bathing or washing clothes. Now, the pond is green, buggy and nearly dry — just like the rest of the wells and ponds in the Chellanam area of Kochi, a city of about 600,000 people on India’s southwestern coast.

Rising seas from climate change are bringing saltwater into the fresh water of places like Chellanam, rendering unusable what had been a vital part of everyday life. And frequent breaks in the pipelines that bring fresh water from inland exacerbates the misery for residents in this village of about 8 square kilometers (3 square miles), requiring water to be trucked in.

Each truckload of water has to be poured into barrels and buckets and carried by hand to the village’s 600 households.

“We do not have clean water for even cleaning ourselves. We are surrounded by water but we do not have any consumable water,” the 73-year-old Kuttappassera said. “When this pond was in usable condition there was no such issue and we had enough water for everything. There was no need for any other source. But now we are using packed water for everything.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: This article is part of a series produced under the India Climate Journalism Program, a collaboration between The Associated Press, the Stanley Center for Peace and Security and the Press Trust of India.

Although saltwater invasion of crucial groundwater supplies is a climate change problem around the world, richer nations can adapt more easily. It hits harder in countries like India, expected to surpass China as the world’s most populous nation this year. India is still regarded as a developing nation even as it has grown into one of the world’s largest economies.

India is the world’s third-highest emitter of carbon dioxide, which contributes to global warming. The nation is increasingly prioritizing a transition to clean energy, with ambitious targets for renewables, a green hydrogen initiative to make clean fuel and a program encouraging individual citizens to live more sustainably.

But that shift will take time. Meanwhile, rising seas, changing ocean patterns, extreme storms, overuse of wells and over-development all contribute to the growing salinity problem in the Kochi region, scientists said. And that challenge in coastal areas comes in a nation where access to freshwater was already an

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issue. Less than half of India's population has access to clean drinking water, according to UNICEF.

"People are suffering because the aquifers are getting salinized," said Bijoy Nandan, dean of marine sciences at Cochin University of Science and Technology. Salinity has increased by 30% to 40% since the first studies of water in the area in 1971, he said.

S. Sreekesh, a professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, studied the worsening threat in the Kochi area looking at satellite, tide gauge and other data from the 1970s through 2020. He found seas rising by about 1.8 millimeters (0.07 inch) a year.

Getting water in Chellanam is always difficult, but the pipeline breaks make it even harder. The daily struggle could be seen during a recent outage that lasted about a month. Bringing the water in by truck — or rowed in via small boats — was only a start in a game of going from bigger pots of water to smaller.

Four giant trucks carrying 36,000 liters of water made it as far as a church parking lot, but couldn't go any farther due to narrow winding streets. Their water was transferred into smaller tankers: 6,000 liters, 4,000 liters and even a toy-like 1,000-liter truck.

Those smaller trucks then made their way toward deliveries along one of the wider roads, stopping every few meters (yards) where large blue barrels were set up. The truck driver would hop out, connect a tube and turn a spigot to slowly fill barrel after barrel. Residents then dipped silvery aluminum 5- and 6-liter pots into the barrels.

Maryamma Pillai, 82, is among residents who wait on a truck nearly every day to get clean water. With no tap at home, she has to either buy water — about 40 rupees, or almost \$0.50, for 5 liters — or wait for the government tanker truck to get it for free.

A heart condition makes it particularly difficult for Pillai to carry her seven pots and buckets the 100 meters back to her home. She has to take breaks as her chest grows heavy.

"I don't have water for anything at home, not even washing my face, so I try to gather water in as many sources — buckets, pots and tumblers — to take back home," she said, thumping her chest to ease the tightness that often comes when she carries heavy objects.

Pillai said water scarcity is getting worse every year as summers become more extreme.

"This was not the case earlier when we used to know how to plan for which season with more water availability but now everything is unknown, unpredictable and unreliable," she said.

Another resident, Karni Kumar, lives far enough away from the main road that it's more convenient to use a wooden boat to cross a small stretch of backwater to get fresh water from the neighboring district of Alleppey. But so many other Chellanam families do the same thing that it can more than double the demand on a single tap in Alleppey — leading to long waits and occasional conflicts with Alleppey residents.

The Rev. John Kalathil, vicar of St. George Church in South Chellanam, said the area's residents have to pay 100 to 200 rupees (about \$1.21 to \$2.42 per day) for the water they need to drink, cook and wash. That can be around 15% of their daily income.

Almost all the wage-earners in his parish are fishermen, with a deep connection and love for the sea that is a source of life for them.

"They call it Kadamma, which means they look at sea as their mother," he said. "But the situation is very terrible for them because of climate change, weather, change in sea and water sources."

## Jill Biden wants champions LSU — and Iowa — at White House

WASHINGTON (AP) — First lady Jill Biden said Monday that she wants the defeated Iowa women's basketball team to be invited to the White House in addition to the national title winner Louisiana State University. She watched LSU's 102-85 victory over Iowa from the stands on Sunday night.

Biden, speaking at the Colorado state capital in Denver, praised Iowa's sportsmanship and congratulated both teams on their performance.

"I know we'll have the champions come to the White House, we always do. So, we hope LSU will come," she said. "But, you know, I'm going to tell Joe I think Iowa should come, too, because they played such a good game."

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The White House didn't immediately respond to a request for comment about whether President Joe Biden would also extend a White House invite to Iowa — and whether it would be a joint visit with LSU or a separate engagement.

Following LSU's victory, Tigers coach Kim Mulkey said she would go to the White House if the team was invited.

LSU star Angel Reese tweeted a link to a story on Jill Biden's remarks on Monday. "A JOKE," she wrote, along with three rolling-on-floor-laughing emojis.

Reese — the Final Four's Most Outstanding Player — has gotten a lot of attention on social media during the past 24 hours, ever since she waved her hand in front of her face while staring down Iowa star Caitlin Clark in the final moments of LSU's win, then pointed toward her finger as if to say a ring was coming.

Clark set the record for points scored in an NCAA Tournament with 191 in six games. If she saw Reese's gestures, Clark didn't seem concerned about them.

Social media lit up in the aftermath, with some believing it was trash talk that's just part of the game while others condemned her for lacking grace in victory. Reese was unapologetic.

"All year, I was critiqued about who I was," Reese said. "I don't fit in a box that y'all want me to be in. I'm too hood. I'm too ghetto. But when other people do it, y'all say nothing. So this was for the girls that look like me, that's going to speak up on what they believe in. It's unapologetically you."

Reese is Black while Clark is white.

Clark, the scoring sensation who was the first with consecutive 40-point games in an NCAA Tournament, made a similar face-waving gesture to no one in particular during Iowa's Elite Eight victory over Louisville.

Iowa did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the invitation.

In her remarks, Biden also marveled at how far women's sports in the U.S. have come since Title IX in 1972 gave women equal rights in sports at schools that receive federal funding.

"It was so exciting, wasn't it," the first lady said. "It was such a great game. I'm old enough that I remember when we got Title IX. We fought so hard, right? We fought so hard. And look at where women's sports have come today."

AP Sports Writers David Brandt, Schuyler Dixon and Eric Olson contributed to this story.

## Tennessee GOP members move to oust 3 Dems after gun protest

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Tennessee Republican lawmakers took the first steps Monday to expel three Democratic members from the GOP-dominant House for their role in a recent gun control protest at the state Capitol.

The extraordinarily rare move resulted in a chaotic and fiery confrontation between lawmakers and supporters opposing the move and has further fractured an already deep political division inside the Tennessee Legislature.

Resolutions have been filed against Reps. Gloria Johnson, Justin Jones and Justin Pearson after they led chants from the House floor with supporters in the gallery last Thursday. The resolution declared that the three had participated in "disorderly behavior" and "did knowingly and intentionally bring disorder and dishonor to the House of Representatives."

Republican Reps. Bud Hulse, Gino Bulso, and Andrew Farmer filed the resolutions. They successfully requested Monday that the House expedite the process and vote on the resolutions Thursday.

Despite support from the Republican supermajority, their requests sparked outrage among supporters watching in the gallery. Their loud jeers led House Speaker Cameron Sexton to demand that they be removed by state troopers. Also during the turmoil, several lawmakers engaged in a confrontation on the House floor. Jones later accused another member of stealing his phone and trying to "incite a riot with his fellow members."

Sexton deemed Jones out of order and cut off Jones' microphone.

Hundreds of protesters packed the Capitol last week calling for the Republican-led Statehouse to pass

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gun control measures in response to the Nashville school shooting that resulted in the deaths of six people. As the chants echoed throughout the Capitol, Jones, Johnson and Pearson approached the front of the House chamber with a bullhorn.

As the three shared the bullhorn and cheered on the crowd, Sexton, a Republican, quickly called for a recess. He later vowed the three would face consequences. Meanwhile, House Minority Leader Karen Camper described their actions as "good trouble," a reference to the late U.S. Rep. John Lewis' guiding principal.

By Monday, Sexton confirmed that the three lawmakers had been stripped of their committee assignments and said more punishments could be on the way. A few hours later, House Republican Caucus Chairman Jeremy Faison referred to Jones as the "former representative" during the evening session.

Pearson and Jones are both freshman lawmakers. Johnson has served in the House since 2019. All three have been highly critical of the Republican supermajority. Jones was temporarily banned from the Tennessee Capitol in 2019 after throwing a cup of liquid at former House Speaker Glen Casada and other lawmakers while protesting the bust of Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest inside the Capitol.

Expelling lawmakers is an extraordinary action inside the Tennessee Capitol. Just two other House members have ever been ousted from the chamber since the Civil War.

## EagleCam shows heavy winds blow nest from tree; eaglet dies

By TRISHA AHMED Associated Press/Report for America

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Viewers of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources EagleCam were heartbroken over the weekend as they watched strong winds from a severe weather system whip a nest holding a newly hatched eaglet out of a tree.

The nature livestream captured the moment the nest fell Sunday morning. A mother eagle crouched in the snow-filled nest as it swayed precariously in the wind. A branch snapped, and the nest collapsed as the mother flew backward. The young eagle was later found dead on the ground, the department said in a statement.

"I was actually crying," said Denise Chung, who said she and her kids watched the nest fall in real time. She told The Associated Press it hit her particularly hard because she knew the eagle lost its baby. "I don't know if it would have hit me so hard if I weren't a mom."

The nest weighed over 2,000 pounds (907 kilograms) and was over 20 years old, the statement said. The department said heavy snow that fell over the weekend — coupled with the weight of the nest — likely just became too much for the branch to support.

Minnesota's EagleCam has mesmerized viewers around the globe for years. People from 180 countries and all 50 U.S. states tuned in three years ago to watch other eaglets hatch, said Department of Natural Resources information officer Lori Naumann.

"During the pandemic, a lot of people couldn't get outside," Naumann said. "So, they tended to turn to nature cameras for mental health improvement."

Over 15,000 people are members of Facebook groups dedicated to Minnesota's EagleCam, including Chung, who told the AP that she has followed the EagleCam for about four years with her kids and husband.

Chung said she posted to Facebook after the nest fell because she couldn't get through to the Department of Natural Resources on the phone. She didn't know the department was already sending staff to help, so she wanted to alert others that the chick — which had just hatched days earlier — was in danger.

The adult eagles were seen flying around the area after the nest fell, the department's statement said. Though the nesting season is too short for the mother to lay another egg this year, the department said it is likely that the parents will rebuild in the same area because eagles are loyal to their territory.

"This is an emotional time for all of us, but please refrain from visiting the nest," the department said. "This was already a major disturbance for the eagles and many visitors will only cause more stress."

The department said the camera will stay on for now.

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Trisha Ahmed is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initia-

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tive. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues. Follow Trisha Ahmed on Twitter: @TrishaAhmed15

## Trump returns to New York to face historic criminal charges

By JILL COLVIN, MICHAEL R. SISAK, TERRY SPENCER and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump returned to New York on Monday to face his historic booking and arraignment on hush money charges related to allegations of sexual encounters. The nation's largest city bolstered security and warned potential protesters it was "not a playground for your misplaced anger."

Trump's long day started with a motorcade ride from his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida to his red, white and blue Boeing 757, emblazoned with his name in gold letters — all carried live on television. The mini-parade took him past supporters waving banners and cheering, decrying the case against him, which stems from payments made during his 2016 campaign, as politically motivated.

Already months into a third campaign to reclaim the White House he lost to President Joe Biden in 2020, Trump and his advisers seemed to relish the attention. Cable networks followed his plane at airports in Florida and New York with video from the air, and a small group of senior campaign aides were joined aboard by his son Eric Trump, who eagerly posted photos of the wall-to-wall coverage from his seat.

The scene was quite different in New York, where Trump will be arraigned Tuesday — facing a judge in the city where he built a national profile in business and entertainment but became deeply unpopular as he moved into politics. Prosecutors say their case against him has nothing to do with politics and have defended the work of Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, who is leading it. City leaders urged calm.

"While there may be some rabble rousers thinking about coming to our city tomorrow, our message is clear and simple: Control yourselves," said New York Mayor Eric Adams. "New York City is our home. ... We are the safest large city in America because we respect the rule of law."

Upon arrival at New York's LaGuardia airport, Trump stepped off his jet alone and directly into a waiting black SUV, with no one greeting him. Only small, sparse groups of supporters lined the route as his motorcade used a police escort to whisk him into Manhattan. From the air, the procession conjured images of a current president on the move rather than a former one facing criminal charges.

Advisers said Trump spent the flight working. In New York, he was meeting with his attorneys, then spending the night at Trump Tower before surrendering to authorities at the courthouse.

The return to New York opened an unprecedented chapter in American history, with Trump the first former president to face criminal charges. He's betting it could actually boost his chances at winning the presidency again next year and his team has boasted of raising \$8 million since word of the indictment broke last week.

But even as Trump aims to find a political advantage, there appeared to be some limits to the publicity he's seeking. In a Monday filing, Trump's lawyers asked the judge overseeing the case to ban photo and video coverage of his arraignment.

Following his court appearance, Trump plans to return to Mar-a-Lago for a press conference Tuesday evening. At least 500 people have been invited, according to a Republican familiar with the planning and granted anonymity to discuss it. Invitees include members of Congress who have endorsed Trump's presidential campaign as well as donors and other supporters.

The former president also bolstered his legal team Monday, adding a third high-profile attorney, Todd Blanche. A former federal prosecutor, Blanche has previously represented Trump's former campaign chairman Paul Manafort.

Security in and around Trump Tower was tight. There were few supporters for Trump or people protesting against him nearby, with a small group hanging "Trump 2024" banners.

"I know that Donald Trump knows that we're out there fighting for him every day," said Brooklynite Dion Cini, who had stretched two pro-Trump banners along police barricades lining Fifth Avenue.

Officials haven't seen an influx of people coming into the city, as was the case in Washington in the



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days before a mob of Trump supporters overran the U.S. Capitol in January 2021. Still, they warned that possessing a weapon in certain areas of the city, including near courthouses, is a crime.

One of Trump's staunchest defenders in Congress, Republican Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, was helping organize a Tuesday morning rally at a park across from the courthouse where Trump will appear, and Mayor Adams took the unusual step of calling her out by name.

"Although we have no specific threats, people like Marjorie Taylor Greene, who is known to spread misinformation and hate speech, she's stated she's coming to town," Adams said. "While you're in town, be on your best behavior."

Trump is facing multiple charges of falsifying business records, including at least one felony offense, in the indictment handed down by a Manhattan grand jury last week. The investigation is scrutinizing six-figure payments made to porn actor Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal.

Both say they had sexual encounters with the married Trump years before he got into politics. Trump denies having sexual liaisons with either woman and has denied any wrongdoing involving payments.

Arriving in Minnesota, where he was touring a factory to promote his administration's economic policies, Biden was asked if he thought there would be unrest in New York.

"No, I have faith in the New York Police Department," the president replied. He also said he trusted the nation's legal system. About the same time Trump was touching down in New York, Biden contrasted his economic agenda with "the last guy who had this job."

As Biden flew back to Washington, a large TV on Air Force One ran Trump headlines as the president stood facing the screen in a conference room with his staff. Biden is expected to formally announce his reelection campaign in coming weeks.

Florida Trump supporters began gathering while the sun was still rising at a West Palm Beach shopping center on the way to the airport, hours before the former president was set to pass along the route.

Boca Raton firefighter Erik Solensten and his retired colleague, John Fischer, put up banners. One was 30 by 6 feet (9 by 2 meters), picturing police officers and firefighters saying, "Thanks for having our backs, President Trump."

"We are fire-rescue. We are prepared and don't like to wait for things to happen," said Solensten, who took a vacation day to show support for Trump. "He needs morale just like everyone else needs morale. He's done more for this country than any 10 presidents combined."

Weissert reported from Washington, Spencer from West Palm Beach, Fla. Associated Press writers Bobby Caina Calvan, Jennifer Peltz, David Bauder and Julie Walker in New York and Lisa Mascaro and Eric Tucker in Washington contributed to this report.

## **A duo once more, Ben Affleck, Matt Damon come up for 'Air'**

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — While Ben Affleck and Matt Damon were writing "The Last Duel," their first screenplay together since their 1997 breakthrough, "Good Will Hunting," they noticed that something in their winding and usually separate careers had been missing.

"I remember my wife said to me one day: 'I haven't heard you laugh like that in 15 years,'" says Damon. "We came out of that experience going: Why aren't we doing this more often? And getting into your 50s you just go: If we don't make it a priority, it's just not going to happen."

Now, more than 25 years after they set out to make it in Hollywood — so entwined that they once shared a bank account — Affleck and Damon are once again a team. Affleck directs and Damon stars in "Air," the new film about Nike's courting of Michael Jordan that opens in theaters Wednesday.

That film, an Amazon Studios original being released theatrically by MGM, is only part of their new collaboration. It's the first release from their new production company, Artists Equity. Affleck is the chief executive, Damon is head of content. Part of its mission is to give prominent crew and cast members a piece of profits.

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To Affleck, "Air" — in which the then-upstart Nike pursues a sneaker deal with Jordan while his mother (played by Viola Davis) advocates for his worth — represents what they hope to do with their new company.

"We believe there are a lot of really meaningful artists on the crew who are underappreciated and undervalued and make a huge difference in the quality of the experience in a film," Affleck said in an interview alongside Damon. "We want to sort of take the approach taken towards Michael Jordan, which is to recognize the artists and say: You're the ones who deserve to be compensated for this. You're generating the art, the beauty, the majesty."

And with "Air," they may have already generated a hit. The film, which co-stars Jason Bateman, Chris Tucker, Chris Messina and Julius Tennon, has drawn rave reviews since its premiere at SXSW. Amazon was so pleased with it that the streamer decided to give it a nationwide release in theaters.

All of which accounts for some of the reasons why Affleck — despite the "Sad Ben Affleck" memes and viral videos of him looking morose at the Grammys — is genuinely happy. There have certainly been ups and downs; Affleck has previously been candid about past battles with alcoholism. But Affleck now finds himself, as he says, "famously unhappy" despite feeling the opposite.

Those memes? Affleck blames them on out-of-context moments and the result of always having a dozen cameras pointed at him.

"The photograph in isolation looks like: Look at this unhappy fellow," Affleck says. "But actually, I'm pretty happy. I have a good life. I'm very lucky. Despite the memes. Maybe my resting face leaves something to be desired."

"You have resting b---- face," chimes Damon, laughing.

But after a tumultuous run as Batman and another turbulent run in the tabloids, Affleck is back to making the kinds of movies that won him best picture a decade ago, with "Argo."

The Los Angeles-based Artists Equity is a kind of bookend to the duo's fabled beginning. They launched it to help set the course for their next chapter (Damon is 52, Affleck 50) and make spending time together more of a requisite. It also allows Affleck to be regularly with his kids from his previous marriage to Jennifer Garner. Last year, he wed Jennifer Lopez.

One person they've convinced in their new endeavor is Viola Davis. Though Jordan's mother was originally a very small role, the NBA legend stressed her importance to the story when meeting with Affleck. Jordan said Davis was the only actor for the part.

Davis recognized what Affleck and Damon were trying to foster. She has her own progressive production company, Juvée Productions, that she runs with her husband, Tennon. (It was behind last year's "The Woman King.") Davis calls working on "Air" one of the best experiences of her career.

"What they're doing is bringing filmmaking back to the artists, which is where it should be," says Davis. "There are so many obstacles in your path as an artist and the biggest obstacle in your path is the business itself. It sometimes looms in front of you."

"What they're doing is what our fantasy is as actors, especially once we've reached a certain level," adds Davis. "We want autonomy and agency."

Upcoming films for Artists Equity include "The Instigators," a heist film starring Damon and Casey Affleck, and "Unstoppable," with Lopez and Jharrel Jerome. Though Lopez's range has been on display in recent films like "Hustlers," Hollywood has often seemed unsure of how to utilize her talent.

"I agree with that observation," says Affleck. "By having a set of expectations thrust upon her, it was inherently limiting. You saw with 'Hustlers' she was really able to show what she can do."

In "Unstoppable," Affleck says, she plays a part not unlike Davis' in "Air," as the mother of a college wrestling champion born with one leg.

"I think she's in her prime," says Affleck. "She's doing extraordinary work in large measure because she's taking that step to take responsibility for what she's doing rather than say, 'This is what I'm being offered.'"

The notion of personal branding is at the center of "Air." Nike at the time was a distant third to Converse and Adidas, but its executives hit on a concept that would presage much of what's since followed in marketing: The shoe wouldn't just worn by Jordan but epitomize him. Now, Affleck notes, people take

for granted that they're brands.

"I've always found that idea confusing and kind of anathema. People are very complicated and contrary and nuanced, and brands are simple," says Affleck. "So the idea that a person can be a brand is a hard thing for me to reconcile. I've never been good at it or had interest in it. Obviously, Michael's brand — excellence, greatness, majesty — if you're going to have a brand, that's one to have."

But the Damon-Affleck brand — if that is a thing — is doing alright. There have been plenty of hiccups along the way for both stars. But the notion of them as a creative duo and two of Hollywood's fastest friends has endured. Who hasn't dreamed of making it in the movies with their best pal? There's affection for them because they have affection for one another.

"Air" did present one new twist in their persisting partnership, though: For the first time, Affleck was directing Damon. It recently dawned on Affleck that the whole tenor of the project was due partly to Damon's support of him as the director.

"It was a very gracious and kind gesture that's characteristic of how Matt's treated me, and this friendship, his whole life," says Affleck. "It's like why you have good friends. When things like this happen, you almost don't even notice that they've made the right choice and been gracious. It's a testament to why we are still friends. I know it's not me."

Damon, not missing a beat, smiles. "I only undermined you behind your back." \_\_\_\_\_

This story has been corrected to show that the film is an Amazon Studios release, not an Apple TV+ original.

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

## Why Leonardo DiCaprio testified at trial of Fugees rapper

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Leonardo DiCaprio testified Monday at the trial of former Fugee rapper Prakazrel "Pras" Michel, who is accused of conspiring to funnel money from a Malaysian state fund to Barack Obama's 2012 reelection campaign. Here is a look at the main characters in the international scandal, and the fund that fueled it.

### THE PRAS PROSECUTION

Michel was a founding member of the influential 1990s hip-hop group the Fugees, along with better-known bandmates Lauryn Hill and Wyclef Jean, who had major hits with "Ready or Not" and "Killing Me Softly With His Song." Prosecutors allege Michel conspired with Malaysian businessman Low Taek Jho to funnel money from 1MDB (1Malaysia Development Berhad), a Malaysian state fund established in 2009 to promote development, to Barack Obama's 2012 reelection campaign through straw donors. Prosecutors have said as much as \$100 million went through Michel, a 50-year-old New York native who has maintained his innocence. His trial began Thursday.

### THE FUGITIVE

DiCaprio testified in the case because of his ties to Low, the alleged architect of the scandal, who has also been indicted in the US but remained an international fugitive as Michel went to trial. The Malaysian financier who helped oversee 1MDB used it to bankroll an extravagant and celebrity-centric lifestyle. He is alleged to have steered billions toward property in Beverly Hills and Manhattan, a superyacht, a private jet and many other splashy purchases. The fund paid for a birthday party for Low where performers included Jamie Foxx, Chris Brown, Ludacris, Busta Rhymes and Pharrell Williams. Britney Spears jumped out of a cake.

### LEO, PICASSO AND 'THE WOLF OF WALL STREET'

DiCaprio, who is not accused of any wrongdoing, has known Michel since the 1990s, and Low professionally and socially for years. The Oscar-winning actor testified that he met and befriended Low at a birthday party in Las Vegas in 2010. Low gave DiCaprio gifts, which he has since returned, including a Picasso painting valued at \$3.2 million and a Jean-Michel Basquiat collage valued at \$9.2 million. The ac-

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tor has since returned both artworks. Low has been a regular donor to DiCaprio's charitable foundation.

Low would use money from the fund to finance the Martin Scorsese film "The Wolf of Wall Street," which starred DiCaprio. DiCaprio testified that he had his team and the studio vet Low first, and they found him to be "a legitimate business person wanting to invest in the movie." The film's producers included Riza Aziz, stepson of then-Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak.

## NAJIB RAZAK'S ROLE

The prime minister became chair of 1MDB when it was established in 2009 with the purported aim of increasing foreign investment. It quickly racked up more than \$12 billion in debt. The fund turned into the epicenter of a massive international corruption scandal. The U.S. Justice Department has said more than half of \$8 billion raised by bond sales was stolen and siphoned off, a revelation uncovered in 2015 when thousands of documents were leaked.

Najib, who investigators said took hundreds of millions to fund his reelection campaign and pay off politicians, has denied any wrongdoing and fired the attorney general investigating him. Malaysian general elections in 2018 ousted Najib and his party. In 2020, Najib was found guilty of seven charges of corruption and sentenced to 12 years in prison. His appeals have been unsuccessful. Najib was acquitted of another charge at his most recent trial.

## OTHER PLAYERS

In 2020, Goldman Sachs acknowledged its role in the embezzlement scheme and paid out more than \$2.3 billion as part of a plea deal with the U.S. government. The firm also reached a \$3.9 billion settlement with the government of Malaysia. In March, a former Goldman Sachs banker named Roger Ng was sentenced in Brooklyn to 10 years in prison for his role in plundering the fund.

A top fundraiser for former President Donald Trump and the Republican Party, Elliott Broidy, was charged with running an illegal lobbying campaign on Jho Low's behalf to get the Justice Department to drop its investigation into 1MDB's looting. Broidy pleaded guilty, but was then pardoned by Trump, so was never sentenced.

## Teacher shot by 6-year-old student files \$40 million lawsuit

By DENISE LAVOIE AP Legal Affairs Writer

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — A Virginia teacher who was shot and seriously wounded by her 6-year-old student filed a lawsuit Monday seeking \$40 million in damages from school officials, accusing them of gross negligence and of ignoring multiple warnings the day of the shooting that the boy was armed and in a "violent mood."

Abby Zwerner, a first-grade teacher at Richneck Elementary School in Newport News, was shot in the hand and chest on Jan. 6 as she sat at a reading table in her classroom. The 25-year-old teacher spent nearly two weeks in the hospital and required four surgeries.

The shooting sent shock waves through the military shipbuilding community and the country, with many wondering how a child so young could access a gun and shoot his teacher.

The lawsuit names as defendants the Newport News School Board, former Superintendent George Parker III, former Richneck principal Briana Foster-Newton and former Richneck assistant principal Ebony Parker.

Michelle Price, a school board spokesperson, said via email that the board had not yet been served with the lawsuit, adding the school division refers all legal claims information to its insurer.

"Our thoughts and prayers remain with Abby Zwerner and her ongoing recovery," said a board statement, calling the safety and well-being of staff and students its utmost priority. "The School Board and the school division's leadership team will continue to do whatever it takes to ensure a safe and secure teaching and learning environment across all our schools."

George Parker, the former superintendent, did not immediately return a cellphone message. A message left on a cellphone listing for Ebony Parker also was not returned.

Foster-Newton's attorney, Pamela Branch, has said she was unaware of reports that the boy had a gun at school on the day of the shooting.

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"Mrs. Briana Foster-Newton will vigorously defend any charges brought against her as a part of the lawsuit filed by Ms. Zwerner and respond accordingly," Branch said in a statement.

James Ellenson, an attorney for the boy's family, said in a statement Monday afternoon that the "allegations in the complaint in reference to the child and his family should be taken with a large grain of salt."

"We of course continue to pray for Ms. Zwerner's complete recovery," Ellenson said. "In that there is still the potential for criminal charges, there is no further comment."

No one has been charged. The local prosecutor said last month that the boy will not be charged, although an investigation is ongoing.

The superintendent was fired by the school board and the assistant principal resigned. A school district spokesperson has said Newton-Foster is still employed by the school district, but declined to say what position she holds. The board voted to install metal detectors in every school in the district and to purchase clear backpacks for all students.

In the lawsuit, Zwerner's attorneys say all of the defendants knew the boy "had a history of random violence" at school and at home, including an episode the year before when he "strangled and choked" his kindergarten teacher.

"All Defendants knew that John Doe attacked students and teachers alike, and his motivation to injure was directed toward anyone in his path, both in and out of school," the lawsuit states.

School officials removed the boy from Richneck and sent him to another school for the remainder of the year, but allowed his return for first grade in fall 2022, the lawsuit states. He was placed on a modified schedule "because he was chasing students around the playground with a belt in an effort to whip them," and was cursing staff and teachers, it says.

"Teachers' concerns with John Doe's behavior (were) regularly brought to the attention of Richneck Elementary School administration, and the concerns were always dismissed," the lawsuit states. Often, after he was taken to the office, "he would return to class shortly thereafter with some type of reward, such as a piece of candy," the lawsuit states.

The boy's parents did not agree to put him in special education classes where he would be with other students with behavioral issues, the lawsuit states.

The lawsuit describes a series of warnings school employees gave administrators in the hours before the shooting, beginning with Zwerner, who went to Ebony Parker's office between 11:15 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. and told her the boy "was in a violent mood," had threatened to beat up a kindergartener and stared down a security officer in the lunchroom. The lawsuit alleges that Parker "had no response, refusing even to look up at (Zwerner) when she expressed her concerns."

At about 11:45 a.m., two students told Amy Kovac, a reading specialist, that the boy had a gun in his backpack. The boy denied it, but refused to give his backpack to Kovac, the lawsuit states.

Zwerner told Kovac that she had seen the boy take something out of his backpack and put it into his sweatshirt pocket. Kovac then searched the backpack but did not find a weapon.

Kovac told Ebony Parker that the boy had told students he had a gun. Parker responded that his "pockets were too small to hold a handgun and did nothing," the lawsuit states.

Another first-grade boy, who was crying, told a teacher the boy "had shown him a firearm he had in his pocket during recess." That teacher contacted the office and told a music teacher, who answered the phone, what the boy told her.

The music teacher said that when he informed Parker, she said the backpack had already been searched and "took no further action," according to the lawsuit. A guidance counselor then asked Parker for permission to search the boy, but Parker forbade him, "and stated that John Doe's mother would be arriving soon to pick him up."

About an hour later, the boy pulled the gun from his pocket, aimed it at Zwerner and shot her, the lawsuit states.

Zwerner suffered permanent bodily injuries, physical pain, mental anguish, lost earnings and other damages, the lawsuit states. It seeks \$40 million in compensatory damages.

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Last month, Newport News prosecutor Howard Gwynn said his office will not criminally charge the boy because he is too young to understand the legal system. Gwynn has yet to decide if any adults will be charged.

The boy used his mother's gun, which police said was purchased legally. Ellenson, the attorney for the boy's family, has said previously that the firearm was secured on a high closet shelf with a lock.

Associated Press reporter Ben Finley in Norfolk contributed to this story.

## Oil producers' cuts could boost gasoline prices, help Russia

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — Major oil-producing countries led by Saudi Arabia said they're cutting supplies of crude — again. This time, the decision was a surprise and is underlining worries about where the global economy might be headed.

Russia is joining in by extending its own cuts for the rest of the year. In theory, less oil flowing to refineries should mean higher gasoline prices for drivers and could boost the inflation hitting the U.S. and Europe. And that may also help Russia weather Western sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine at the expense of the U.S.

The decision by oil producers, many of them in the OPEC oil cartel, to cut production by more than 1 million barrels a day comes after prices for international benchmark crude slumped amid a slowing global economy that needs less fuel for travel and industry.

It adds to a cut of 2 million barrels per day announced in October. Between the two cuts, that's about 3% of the world's oil supply.

Here are key things to know about the cutbacks:

### WHY ARE OIL PRODUCERS CUTTING BACK?

Saudi Arabia, OPEC's dominant member, said Sunday that the move is "precautionary" to avoid a deeper slide in oil prices.

Saudi Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman has consistently taken a cautious approach to future demand and favored being proactive in adjusting supply ahead of a possible downturn in oil needs.

That stance seemed to be borne out as oil prices fell from highs of over \$120 per barrel last summer to \$73 last month. Prices jumped after Sunday's announcement, with international benchmark Brent crude trading at about \$85 on Monday, up 6%.

With fears of a U.S. recession exacerbated by bank collapses, a lack of European economic growth and China's rebound from COVID-19 taking longer than many expected, oil producers are wary of a sudden collapse in prices like during the pandemic and the global financial crisis in 2008-2009.

Capital markets analyst Mohammed Ali Yasin said most people had been waiting for the June 4 meeting of the OPEC+ alliance of OPEC members and allied producers, most prominently Russia. The decision underlined the urgency felt by producers.

"It was a surprise to all, I think, watchers and the market followers," he said. "The swiftness of the move, the timing of the move and the size of the move were all significant."

The aim now is to ward off "a continuous slide of the oil price" to levels below \$70 per barrel, which would be "very negative" for producer economies, Yasin said.

Part of the October cut of 2 millions barrels per day was on paper only as some OPEC+ countries aren't able to produce their share. The new cut of 1.15 million barrels per day is distributed among countries that are hitting their quotas — so it amounts to roughly the same size cut as in October.

Governments announced the decision outside the usual OPEC+ framework. The Saudis are taking the lead with 500,000 barrels per day, with the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Iraq, Oman, Algeria and Kazakhstan contributing smaller cuts.

### WILL THE PRODUCTION CUT MAKE INFLATION WORSE?

It certainly could. Analysts say supply and demand are relatively well balanced, which means production

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cuts could push prices higher in coming months.

The refineries that turn crude into gasoline, diesel and jet fuel are getting ready for their summer production surge to meet the annual increase in travel demand.

In the U.S., gasoline prices are highly dependent on crude, which makes up about half of the price per gallon. Lower oil prices have meant U.S. drivers have seen the average price fall from records of over \$5 per gallon in mid-2022 to \$3.50 per gallon this week, according to motor club AAA.

The cuts, if fully implemented, "would further tighten an already fundamentally tight oil market," Jorge Leon, senior vice president at Rystad Energy, said in a research note. The cut could boost oil prices by around \$10 per barrel and push international Brent to around \$110 per barrel by this summer.

Those higher prices could fuel global inflation in a cycle that forces central banks to keep hiking interest rates, which crimp economic growth, he said.

Given the fears about the overall economy, "the market may interpret the cuts as a vote of no confidence in the recovery of oil demand and could even carry a downside price risk — but that will only be for the very short term," Leon said.

## WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR RUSSIA?

Moscow says it will extend a cut of 500,000 barrels per day through the rest of the year. It needs oil revenue to support its economy and state budget hit by wide-ranging sanctions from the U.S., European Union and other allies of Ukraine.

Analysts think, however, that Russia's cut may simply be putting the best face on reduced demand for its oil. The West shunned Russian barrels even before sanctions were imposed, with Moscow managing to reroute much of its oil to India, China and Turkey.

But the Group of Seven major democracies imposed a price cap of \$60 per barrel on Russian shipments, enforced by bans on Western companies that dominate shipping or insurance. Russia is selling oil at a discount, with revenue sagging at the start of this year.

## WHAT DOES THE WHITE HOUSE SAY?

President Joe Biden addressed the OPEC+ cut on Monday before returning to the White House from a trip to Minnesota, predicting, "It's not going to be as bad as you think."

Earlier, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby expressed U.S. opposition to the move, saying, "We don't think that production cuts are advisable at this moment given market uncertainty, and we made that clear."

But he insisted that the oil market is in a different place from last year when prices surged following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"We're focused on prices, we're not focused on barrels," he told reporters Monday, adding that the U.S. was given a heads-up before the announcement.

The White House response was milder than in October, when cuts came on the eve of U.S. midterm elections in which soaring gas prices were a major issue. Biden vowed at the time that there would be "consequences," and Democratic lawmakers called for freezing cooperation with the Saudis.

Caroline Bain, chief commodities economist at Capital Economics, said the cutback shows "the group's support for Russia and flies in the face of the Biden administration's efforts to lower oil prices."

AP journalists Bassam Hatoum in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Colleen Long in Minneapolis, and Zeke Miller and Seung Min Kim in Washington contributed.

## Nashville police: School shooter planned attack for months

By TRAVIS LOLLER, JONATHAN MATTISE and KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — As students across Nashville walked out of class on Monday to protest gun violence at the Tennessee Capitol following a school shooting last week, police said the person who killed six people, including three 9-year-old children, had been planning the massacre for months.

Police have not established a motive for the shootings at The Covenant School, a small Christian elemen-

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tary school where the 28-year-old shooter was once a student, according to a Monday news release from the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department. Both Nashville police and FBI agents continue to review writings left behind by Audrey Hale, both in Hale's vehicle and home, police said.

"It is known that Hale considered the actions of other mass murderers," police said.

The three children who were killed in the shooting were Evelyn Dieckhaus, Hallie Scruggs and William Kinney. The three adults were Katherine Koonce, 60, the head of the school, custodian Mike Hill, 61, and 61-year-old substitute teacher Cynthia Peak.

Hale fired 152 rounds during the attack before being killed by police. That included 126 rifle rounds and 26 nine-millimeter rounds, according to police.

Outside the state Capitol on Monday, thousands rallied in a call for gun reform, many of them students from Nashville-area schools who walked out of their classes en masse. Some other students sat outside the House speaker's office in the legislative building.

The crowd outside the Capitol echoed chants such as "thoughts and prayers are not enough" and sang along to songs like "All You Need is Love" – adding to it, "and action!" At one point, they sat for a moment of silence, raising posters above their heads that read, "Thoughts and prayers are useless to dead children," "Book bags not body bags," and "2nd graders over 2nd amendment." Some students wore orange shooting-target stickers on their shirts.

Vivian Carlson, a senior at Hume-Fogg High School nearby in downtown Nashville, helped organize her school's walkout. She told the crowd that her biggest fear last week, when the shooting unfolded, should have been "missing the bus or my stepmom scolding me for not cleaning the cat litter box." Instead, she said she was missing English class Monday because politicians are "protecting old laws for a new society."

Carlson, like many others who addressed the crowd, called for changes to Tennessee's gun laws, including a ban on assault weapons, tougher background checks and a "red flag" law. Red flag laws generally allow law enforcement to temporarily confiscate weapons from people whose statements or behavior are deemed to make them a danger to themselves or others.

"To my fellow students, we cannot let this pressure and fire escape us," Carlson said. "Feel the fear as you walk into school and let it inspire you to fight for change. And please, if there is one thing you can do, I beg you to vote."

Tennessee's Republican governor and supermajority Republican legislature have moved to loosen gun laws in recent years. The same day as the Covenant shooting a federal judge quietly cleared the way to drop the minimum age for Tennesseans to carry handguns publicly without a permit to 18 — just two years after a new law set the age at 21.

As thousands swarmed the Capitol, Gov. Bill Lee and state lawmakers held a press conference nearby to unveil legislative proposals that would add more funding for school resource officers and mental health resources.

The proposals included \$140 million to place an armed security guard at every public school, as well as \$27 million to enhance public and private school security. Lee is also proposing adding \$30 million to expand the state's homeland security network that will work with both public and private schools.

The governor's proposals must now clear the Legislature as lawmakers are in their final weeks of the session.

Notably absent from Lee's announcement were any calls to tighten the state's access to guns. As he stood surrounded by top Republican leaders, Lee said he believed that people who are a threat to themselves should not have access to weapons, but also stated that any law designed to address those concerns shouldn't impede 2nd Amendment rights.

He called on the Legislature to find the appropriate solution. Yet that call to action may be short-lived after Sen. Todd Gardenhire, who chairs the influential Senate Judiciary Committee, told reporters that he has no plans to consider any new gun-related bills this session.

"We all agree that we should all find something that we agree upon," Lee said. "I think we can do that and I think we should do that."

Lee added that he had not talked to Gardenhire about his stance on halting new gun legislation.



An AP investigation last year found that most U.S. state barely use the red flag laws touted as the most powerful tool to stop gun violence before it happens. It's a trend experts blame on a lack of awareness of the laws and resistance by some authorities to enforce them even as shootings and gun deaths soar.

Even after the main rally ended Monday, hundreds of protesters remained at the Capitol as lawmakers went into the House and Senate chambers for their evening sessions. Many protesters made their way inside the building, where they sang "This Little Light of Mine" before erupting into chants, "Save our kids!"

The scene recalled a rowdy gun control protest last week. On Thursday, protesters were forced to leave the Senate chamber gallery after yelling, "Children are dead!" — and two Democratic lawmakers caused the House to temporarily shut down by chanting, "Power to the people!" through a megaphone.

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

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

## Autopsy finds cause of death for Irvo Otieno was asphyxia

By SARAH RANKIN Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Irvo Otieno, a 28-year-old Black man whose death last month at a Virginia mental hospital has sparked outrage and led to second-degree murder charges against 10 defendants, died of "positional and mechanical asphyxia with restraints," a medical examiner's office said Monday.

Arkuie Williams, the administrative deputy in the state Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, confirmed the cause of death findings to The Associated Press after attorneys for Otieno's family first shared them in a statement. The manner of death was homicide, Williams wrote in an email.

Otieno, who struggled with mental illness, died March 6 after he was pinned to the floor while being admitted to Central State Hospital in Dinwiddie County.

Video released earlier this month showed sheriff's deputies and hospital employees restraining a handcuffed and shackled Otieno for about 20 minutes after he was forcibly led into a hospital room. For much of that time, Otieno was prone on the floor, pinned by a group so large it blocked the camera's view of him at times.

Personnel who realized he appeared limp and lifeless eventually began resuscitation efforts, the video showed.

"The official cause and manner of death is not surprising to us as it corroborates what the world witnessed in the video," family attorneys Ben Crump and Mark Krudys said in a statement. "In a chilling parallel to George Floyd's killing, Irvo was held down and excessively restrained to death, when he should have been provided medical help and compassion. It is tragic that yet another life has been lost to this malicious and deadly restraint technique."

Seven deputies and three hospital workers have been charged with second-degree murder in Otieno's death.

The local prosecutor who brought the charges has previously said in court that Otieno was smothered to death.

No additional information from the autopsy beyond the cause and manner of death can be released by the medical examiner's office, Williams said.

Otieno was laid to rest last week. Civil rights leader the Rev. Al Sharpton and other speakers at his funeral said his death shows the need for mental health and policing reforms.

Otieno's family and their attorneys have said Otieno was experiencing mental distress at the time of his initial encounter with law enforcement, days before he was taken to the state hospital. He was first taken into police custody in Henrico County March 3, when he was transported to a local hospital for mental

health treatment under an emergency custody order.

Police have said that while at the local hospital, he "became physically assaultive toward officers," at which point they arrested him and took him to a local jail, something Otieno's family says should never have happened given that he was in need of treatment. On the afternoon of March 6, he was transferred to the state hospital, which has a unit that provides care for people admitted from jails or by court order.

Some of the attorneys for the defendants charged in his death have said their clients were only trying to restrain Otieno. Otieno's family and their attorneys have said he posed no danger to them and was simply trying to breathe during the encounter at the hospital shown on video.

All defendants have been granted bond and court records show pre-trial hearings in April or May.

AP sought comment on the medical examiner's findings from defense attorneys for each of the defendants. Attorneys Emily Munn, Emilee Hasbrouck and G. Russell Stone, declined to comment.

Attorney Ed Riley, who represents one of the deputies, said he couldn't comment on the merits of the findings without having seen the full autopsy report. He said he worried that public statements from the attorneys for Otieno's family as well as other public disclosures in the case, including the video, could hinder the defendants' right to a fair trial.

Other attorneys did not respond to phone and email messages seeking comment.

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Associated Press writer Denise Lavoie contributed to this report.

## **Veto stands: Transgender pronouns OK in North Dakota schools**

By TRISHA AHMED Associated Press/Report for America

Teachers in North Dakota can still refer to transgender students by the personal pronouns they use, after lawmakers on Monday failed to override the governor's veto of a controversial bill to place restrictions on educators.

House lawmakers fell short of the two-thirds majority needed to block the veto, days after Republican Gov. Doug Burgum's office announced the veto and the Senate overrode it.

The bill would have prohibited public school teachers and employees from acknowledging the personal pronouns a transgender student uses, unless they received permission from the student's parents as well as a school administrator. It would have also prohibited government agencies from requiring employees to acknowledge the pronouns a transgender colleagues uses.

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

"Ask yourself, does Senate Bill 2231 treat others the way you would want to be treated?" Democratic Rep. Emily O'Brien of Grand Forks said on the House floor, adding that overriding the veto would perpetuate "discrimination, hatred or prejudice."

Republican Rep. SuAnn Olson of Baldwin said the bill protects freedom of speech for teachers and keeps "inappropriate" topics out of the classroom.

North Dakota will consider other bills this session about transgender students, she said.

Olson said that if lawmakers "are firm on this bill, on girls' athletics, on separate bathrooms, we will strengthen public schools." But allowing what she called an "emphasis on sexuality" in schools would cause students and teachers to abandon the public education system.

State representatives voted 56-36 to override the governor's veto, but 63 votes were required.

All 12 Democrats in the House voted against the bill, as did 24 Republicans. One was Rep. Eric Murphy, of Grand Forks, an associate professor of biomedical sciences at the University of North Dakota.

"I'm tired of these bills. I'm tired of both sides," Murphy said on the House floor. "If a student wants to be called a different pronoun, does that really matter? Is this earth-shattering?"

In a letter to state lawmakers announcing his veto, the governor said, "The teaching profession is challenging enough without the heavy hand of state government forcing teachers to take on the role of

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pronoun police." The First Amendment already protects teachers from speaking contrary to their beliefs, and existing law protects the free speech rights of state employees, Burgum added.

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

Opponents said the bill targets transgender students who already have disproportionately high risks of suicide.

In 2021, Burgum vetoed a bill that would have barred transgender girls from playing on girls' teams in public schools. Lawmakers didn't override that veto, but they're considering new legislation this session to replicate and expand that bill — including at the college level.

Last week, President Joe Biden denounced what he called hundreds of hateful and extreme state laws that target transgender kids and their families.

"The bullying, discrimination, and political attacks that trans kids face have exacerbated our national mental health crisis," Biden said. "These attacks are un-American and must end."

Trisha Ahmed is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues. Follow Trisha Ahmed on Twitter: @TrishaAhmed15

## DiCaprio testifies in money-laundering case of Fugees rapper

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Movie star Leonardo DiCaprio testified in federal court Monday morning as part of a trial involving international money laundering, bribery and a prominent rap artist.

Prakazrel "Pras" Michel — a founding member of the iconic 1990s hip-hop group, The Fugees — is accused of funneling money from a fugitive Malaysian financier through straw donors to Barack Obama's 2012 reelection campaign. Five years later, prosecutors say he tried to squelch an investigation into that same financier under former President Donald Trump's administration.

At the heart of the case is Low Taek Jho, usually known as Jho Low. He is accused of masterminding an international money laundering and bribery scheme that stole billions from the Malaysian state investment fund known as 1MDB.

DiCaprio's connection with the case comes from his years-long relationship with Low, who was one of the primary financiers of the movie "The Wolf of Wall Street." Low is currently a fugitive but has maintained his innocence.

According to the charges, Michel essentially became a conduit for Low's pilfered millions and his attempts to influence the U.S. government. Prosecutors allege that from June to November 2012, Low directed more than \$21.6 million to be moved from foreign entities to Michel's accounts in order to funnel money into the 2012 presidential election. They say Michel then paid about 20 straw donors and conduits so they could make the donations in their names and conceal where the money actually came from, according to the indictment.

DiCaprio testified that he met and befriended Low at a birthday party in Las Vegas in 2010. "I understood him to be a huge businessman with many different connections in Abu Dhabi and Malaysia," he said.

The 48-year-old Oscar winner answered questions on the witness stand calmly — occasionally deferring to a fuzzy memory on some details and dates. In addition to his relationship with Low, DiCaprio said he had known the defendant Michel since sometime in the 1990s when they met backstage after a Fugees concert.

Low was known for hosting lavish star-studded parties and group vacations on his private jet to events like the World Cup in Brazil. DiCaprio recounted one particular junket that involved flying to Australia to celebrate New Year's Eve, then flying to Las Vegas to celebrate a second time in one day. Michel was present on some of these trips, DiCaprio said.

Low became a regular contributor to DiCaprio's charitable foundation, and eventually Low floated the idea of providing the primary financing for "The Wolf of Wall Street."

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DiCaprio said he had Low's funding and legitimacy carefully vetted before entering into a business relationship.

"I was given the green light by my team as well as my studio," he said. "He was a legitimate business person wanting to invest in the movie."

DiCaprio also recalled a "casual conversation" with Low in which Low told him he intended to make a large contribution to Obama's reelection campaign.

"It was a significant sum — something to the tune of \$20-30 million," he testified. "I said, 'Wow that's a lot of money!'"

After DiCaprio, multiple witnesses testified that they had been approached by Michel to make shadow contributions to the Obama campaign. Richard Kromica, an investment banker, said Michel told him he had maxed out his legal contribution limit and asked Kromica and his husband Joseph to make a donation on his behalf. Kromica said Michel sent the couple \$80,000 to donate.

In other cases, acquaintances of Michel were offered invitations to high-roller fundraising dinners and told that their attendance would be "sponsored" by Michel and his associates. Jack Brewer, a former NFL player, said Michel wired him \$32,000 to cover his entry into one such Obama fundraiser. But he immediately felt nervous about the arrangement and sent it back.

"It just felt funny to me," Brewer testified. "You're just sending me money and it's not a loan and I'm supposed to donate it to a campaign? That sounds shady to me."

## What's happening with Twitter blue check marks?

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

Elon Musk had promised to take away all of Twitter's blue check marks doled out to Hollywood stars, professional athletes, business leaders, authors and journalists unless they start buying a monthly subscription to the social media service.

Musk's goal was to shove the advertising-dependent platform he bought for \$44 billion last year into a pay-to-play model — and maybe antagonize some enemies and fellow elites in the process.

But the Saturday deadline passed and the blue checks are still there, many with a new disclaimer explaining they might have been paid for or they might not have been paid for — nobody but Twitter really knows. The company didn't return a request to clarify its changing policies Monday.

DOES A BLUE CHECK MATTER?

Matt Darling has been on Twitter for about 15 years and never cared about not having a blue check, though he'd get a kick out of whenever a verified account of "some real-world importance" started following him.

"People on Twitter will joke about blue checks like they're the aristocracy but I don't think anyone actually thought that," except for Musk, Darling said.

Now, Darling finally got a blue check after paying \$11 last month to try out some of the features that come with a Twitter Blue subscription. But seeing it becoming more of a "scarlet letter" under Musk than a symbol of credibility, he used a technique to scrub the blue tick from his profile.

"Now it's a signal of you're a person who's not making good tweets so you have to pay for engagement," said Darling, an economist at the center-right Niskanen Center.

Musk has said that starting April 15, only verified accounts will appear in Twitter's For You feed that recommends what tweets people see. Darling is planning to drop the subscription — it had too many glitches, and he's not looking for more online clout.

"I don't want Twitter to be pay-for-play. I want it to be a place where people writing interesting tweets are getting the engagement," he said.

HYBRID MODEL

Instead of taking away the blue check marks, Twitter on Sunday began appending a new message to profiles: "This account is verified because it's subscribed to Twitter blue or is a legacy verified account."

In other words, singer Dionne Warwick and other high-profile verified users still have their blue checks.

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But so does anyone who pays between \$8 and \$11 a month for a Twitter Blue subscription — and there's no way to tell the difference. (Warwick, for her part, made clear she won't be paying for a blue check because that money will "be going towards my extra hot lattes.")

That hybrid solution was good enough for Star Trek actor William Shatner, who earlier balked at signing up for a subscription but on Sunday tweeted to Musk: "I can live with this. This is a good compromise". But it's not clear if it is a temporary or permanent measure.

## THE EXCEPTION

Twitter did take away at least one verified check over the weekend: from the main account of the New York Times. The account, which has 55 million followers, had previously been marked with a gold-colored check for verified organizations.

But a user pointed out to Musk over the weekend that the newspaper had said publicly it wouldn't be paying a monthly fee for check-mark status, so Musk said he would remove the mark and also disparaged the newspaper's reporting.

## More severe weather forecast for battered South, Midwest

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press Writer

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — While residents across parts of the South and Midwest pummeled by deadly storms and wildfires sifted through the wreckage of their homes Monday, forecasters warned of more severe weather and fire danger in the days ahead across much of the same region.

The fierce storms that spawned tornadoes in 11 states killed at least 32 people as the system that began Friday plodded through Arkansas and traveled northeast through the South and into the Midwest and Northeast.

Here's a look at the severe storms over the weekend and what's expected in the days ahead:

### WILDFIRE DANGER REMAINS HIGH

On the western side of the storm lines that developed Friday were extremely dry conditions in Oklahoma that combined with high winds to fuel several large wildfires that forced interstate closures and sent residents fleeing from their homes.

More than 40 homes were destroyed across Oklahoma, including 30 in an area near the town of Guthrie, about 30 miles (48 kilometers) north of Oklahoma City, where firefighters had urged residents to evacuate.

With their eyes burning and the heat of the flames circling them, Jessica Garinger and her family ran around their 10-acre (4-hectare) property with hoses Friday to save their family home built by Garinger's great-grandfather in Guthrie.

"The wind was so terrible it was just like a blowtorch, and once we would get certain areas put out it would just reignite," she said.

While neighbors evacuated, Garinger said her father, Jim, did not want to leave behind his cherished home, so she and her sister raced to help him. With the help of firefighters, they fought the flames until about 2 a.m., leaving with blisters, scrapes and small burns. Several of the homes nearby burned down.

"It's a miracle that we were able to save the property," Garinger said.

The threat of fire danger remains high Tuesday across portions of far western Oklahoma, the Texas Panhandle, northeast New Mexico and far southeastern Colorado, with low humidity, dry vegetation and wind gusts expected up to 70 mph (113 kph), according to the National Weather Service.

### MORE SEVERE WEATHER FORECAST

Forecasters say more severe weather is forecast for Tuesday afternoon and evening across parts of Arkansas, Missouri into southeastern Iowa and west central Illinois.

"That could initially start as isolated supercells with all hazards possible — tornadoes, wind and hail — and then over time typically they form into a line (of thunderstorms) and continue moving eastward," said Ryan Bunker, a meteorologist with the National Weather Center in Norman, Oklahoma.

The same conditions that fueled last week's storms — an area of low pressure combined with strong southerly winds — will make conditions ideal for another round of severe weather Tuesday into early

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morning Wednesday, Bunker said.

Those conditions, which typically include dry air from the west going up over the Rockies and crashing into warm, moist air from the Gulf of Mexico, are what make the U.S. so prone to tornadoes and other severe storms.

## DEADLY STORMS BEGAN IN ARKANSAS

Arkansas was among the first states hit by the severe weather Friday when a tornado dropped from the sky and tore through the state's capital, Little Rock, destroying homes and businesses, splintering trees and tossing vehicles. At least five people were killed in Arkansas, including four deaths in the rural community of Wynne, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) west of Memphis, Tennessee.

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

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, resulting in at least one death. The governor said 48 others were treated in hospitals, with five in critical condition.

National Weather Service survey teams that earlier confirmed the presence of tornados in New Jersey and Delaware over the weekend said Monday that a tornado also touched down in Pennsylvania. The tornados were generated as a line of severe thunderstorms crossed the region Saturday night. Forecasters said one EF-1 tornado with peak wind speeds of 95 to 105 mph (153 to 169 kph) touched down in Wrightstown and traveled almost 4 miles (6.5 kilometers) to Newtown in Bucks County.

Four other storms were confirmed in New Jersey and one in Delaware, where a person was found dead in a heavily damaged home. The Delaware Emergency Management Agency said it was the first tornado-related death in the state in 40 years.

Nationwide, there were more than 800 severe weather reports over the weekend, including reports of hail, high winds and tornadoes, Bunker said.

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Associated Press reporters around the country contributed to this report, including Beatrice Dupuy in New York, Ron Todt in Philadelphia, Andrew DeMillo in Little Rock, Arkansas, Kimberlee Kruesi in Adamsville, Tennessee, Harm Venhuizen in Belvidere, Illinois, and Corey Williams in Detroit.

## DeSantis signs bill to carry concealed guns without a permit

By BRENDAN FARRINGTON Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Floridians will be able to carry concealed guns without a permit under a bill Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis signed Monday, giving the governor another legislative victory as he prepares a campaign for president.

The governor signed the bill in a private ceremony in his office. His only immediate public comment was, "Constitutional Carry is in the books," which he said in a three-paragraph news release.

The new law will allow anyone who can legally own a gun in Florida to carry one without a permit. It means training and a background check will not be required to carry concealed guns in public. It takes effect July 1.

The arguments over the legislation were divided along political lines, with Republicans saying law-abiding citizens have a right to carry guns and protect themselves. They say most people will still want to get a permit because it will allow them to carry concealed weapons in states with reciprocal agreements and to be able to purchase guns without a waiting period.

However, Democrats and gun safety advocates -- pointing to mass shootings in Florida like the massacre at the 2016 Pulse nightclub in Orlando and the deadly 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland — say the new law will only make the state more dangerous.

"I am pissed," Fred Guttenberg, whose 14-year-old daughter Jaime was killed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, told reporters during an online news conference. "I will chase him down across the state as well as possibly across the country ... because Ron DeSantis today put his signature

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to a bill that guarantees there will be more Jaimes.”

And he said signing the bill behind closed doors makes DeSantis a coward.

“Somebody in Florida may die ... because of this legislation. That will be because of you, Ron DeSantis,” Guttenberg said. “I understand why you hid today ... You are a weak, pathetic, small-minded individual.”

Nearly 3 million Floridians have a concealed weapons permit. While a background check and three-day waiting period will still be required to purchase a gun from a licensed dealer, they are not required for private transactions or exchanges of weapons.

DeSantis has said he thinks Florida should go even further and allow people to openly carry guns. While some lawmakers have pushed for open carry, it doesn't appear the Legislature will pass such legislation this session.

The bill signing comes five years after then-Gov. Rick Scott, a Republican, signed a bill creating gun restrictions after 17 students and faculty were killed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas. Under DeSantis, momentum has swung back toward expanding gun rights rather than placing limits on them, which has earned him praise from gun rights advocates.

“Government will not get in the way of law-abiding Americans who want to defend themselves and their families,” Republican Sen. Jay Collins, who sponsored the bill, said in a news release.

It also comes one week after six people were killed in a Nashville school shooting, a point made by President Joe Biden's administration.

“It is shameful that so soon after another tragic school shooting, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law a permitless concealed carry bill behind closed doors,” said White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre. “This is the opposite of common-sense gun safety.”

## Jailed US reporter's defense appeals his arrest in Russia

MOSCOW (AP) — Lawyers representing an American reporter for The Wall Street Journal arrested in Russia on espionage charges have appealed his arrest, a court in Moscow announced Monday.

Evan Gershkovich, 31, was detained last week in Yekaterinburg, Russia's fourth-largest city. It was the first time a U.S. correspondent had been detained on spying accusations since the Cold War. The Journal has said it “vehemently denies” the charges and demanded his release.

At a hearing Thursday, Moscow's Lefortovsky District court quickly ruled that Gershkovich would be kept behind bars for two months pending the investigation.

On Monday, the court reported that it has received an appeal against Gershkovich's arrest that was filed by his defense, according to Russian news agencies. No date for a hearing on the appeal has been set yet.

Gershkovich was put in Moscow's Lefortovo prison, which dates from the czarist era and has been a terrifying symbol of repression since Soviet times. In the first report of his condition and prison circumstances, a Russian state prison monitor said Monday that Gershkovich was in a quarantine cell while he underwent medical checks, was in a double cell without a cellmate, was reading a book from a prison library, and had access to a TV, radio and refrigerator.

The Moscow-area prison monitor, Alexei Melnikov, wrote on the Telegram messaging app that the journalist hadn't complained about the prison conditions.

“At the time of the visit, he was cheerful. During the conversation there were a lot of jokes,” Melnikov wrote, without specifying when he saw the journalist. The monitor's report couldn't be independently verified.

Russia's Federal Security Service, the top successor to the Soviet-era KGB that is known by the acronym FSB, accused Gershkovich of trying to obtain classified information about a Russian arms factory. The Kremlin alleged that Gershkovich was caught red-handed, without offering details.

U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Monday that the Biden administration was pressing hard for Gershkovich's release. “It's got attention all the way up to the Oval Office in terms of how we can get him home,” Kirby told reporters in Washington.

President Joe Biden himself weighed in on Friday, urging Russia to release Gershkovich. “Let him go,”

Biden told reporters at the White House when asked if he had a message for Russia.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged his Russian counterpart Sunday — in a rare phone call between the diplomats since the start of the Ukraine war — immediately to release Gershkovich, as well as another imprisoned American, Paul Whelan.

## Spiraling housing prices spark worry about Hawaii's future

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

WAIANA, Hawaii (AP) — Tedorian Gallano would like to buy a house for his wife and three youngest children in Hawaii, but real estate prices soared so high eight years ago he moved his family back to his childhood home outside Honolulu — and last year, his older brother followed suit.

Now, eight members from three generations of Gallano's extended family share one bathroom in a house that's so packed they've jerry-rigged an extra bedroom in the garage. Buying a home is "pretty much unattainable for the average working family" in Hawaii, the 49-year-old carpenter said.

"We always seem to have these hot markets that drive the prices up, and then it's the hardworking local families that cannot buy houses who are kind of left out," said Gallano, who's a member of the carpenters' union that's been active on the issue.

Gallano's situation is emblematic of the acute affordable housing crisis afflicting Hawaii, a problem so deep that there's now widespread concern that many of Hawaii's children won't be able to afford to live there as adults. Many residents are fearful their entire state — a diverse and culturally vibrant society with unique values and a complex identity — is being gentrified before their eyes as home prices soar.

The median price of a single-family home topped \$1 million in most areas of Hawaii during the coronavirus pandemic and has declined only modestly since. The state has the fourth-highest per capita rate of homelessness in the nation after California, Vermont and Oregon. On Thursday, new data showed the islands experienced net population loss five of the last six years. In 2022, U.S. census data showed more Native Hawaiians live outside Hawaii than within.

Now, amid growing urgency, both the governor and Hawaii's legislative leaders are making housing a top priority.

In one of his first moves after taking office in January, Democratic Gov. Josh Green created a new housing czar to oversee the effort. One thing Chief Housing Officer Nani Medeiros is focused on is identifying roadblocks and redundant permitting at local and state levels that can hold up construction. The administration also wants to pour \$1 billion into housing programs, including \$450 million to subsidize the construction of affordable dwellings.

Lawmakers have sponsored bills to trim bureaucracy, fund public housing renovations and encourage construction of dense housing on state land next to Honolulu's planned rail line.

Determined to find solutions, a college student taking a break during COVID-19 and a recent college graduate co-founded a nonprofit advocacy organization called Housing Hawaii's Future to lobby on the issue. Nearly 1,500 people have signed their pledge to back more housing.

"It really bothers me that we are saying to the young people of Hawaii, 'It's great that you might have been born and raised and educated here, but now that you've become an adult, you have to leave and you cannot come back,'" said state Sen. Stanley Chang, a Democrat who chairs the Senate housing committee.

The departure of so many Native Hawaiians could dissipate Hawaiian values, like caring for the land, kuleana (sense of responsibility) and lokahi (working together), said Williamson Chang, a University of Hawaii law professor who is Native Hawaiian and not related to the senator.

"There's not a great effort to preserve Hawaiian values if you don't have Hawaiians. In other words, who's going to transmit these values? Who is going to teach these values?" he said.

Some moves to shore up affordable housing by easing development regulations are being met with trepidation by conservationists, who warn that going too far in that direction could endanger the islands' world-famous ecosystems and farmland.

Wayne Tanaka, the director of the Hawaii chapter of the environmental and social justice nonprofit the



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Sierra Club, said efficiencies could expedite needed housing development, but the "devil is in the details." He said the community must also consider the environment, water sources, food security and climate change threats, like severe drought and powerful hurricanes.

"We don't want to just build, build, build and then all of a sudden we don't know how we're going to feed ourselves when the climate crisis shuts down our harbors or dries up the places where we import our food from," Tanaka said.

Currently, housing construction is not keeping up with demand. Only 1,000 to 2,000 new housing units are being built in Hawaii each year. Those numbers are dwarfed by the 50,000 new units a 2019 state-commissioned study estimated would be needed by 2025.

In contrast, in 1973, Honolulu approved permits for some 13,700 housing units, and the state's three other main counties approved more than 4,000, said Paul Brewbaker, an economics consultant with TZ Economics.

In extreme cases, developers face backlogs of years, or even decades.

Kauai County officials labored more than a decade obtaining state and county permits before they could break ground to build affordable homes on former sugar cane land.

Everett Dowling, the president of Maui developer Dowling Companies, said a developer can't begin work on other housing when its money is tied up in a project awaiting permits. Engineers, architects and lawyers also can't move on. And costs escalate.

"The longer you hold a piece of property, the more you spend on it, the less affordable the housing becomes," Dowling said.

Housing director Medeiros said even with the new urgency, some of the reforms might not happen fast enough for her to be able to afford a home. But she hopes her 20-year-old daughter will be able to do so when she's 40 and "my grandchildren hopefully, definitely will," she said.

Housing Hawaii's Future, the youth advocacy group, is also helping to get housing built now.

Evan Kamakana Gates, a Native Hawaiian who is attending Harvard University in Massachusetts, is one of the group's co-founders. He's worried Hawaii might be unrecognizable when he returns home because the people who make it home may not be there.

"That's a real fear," he said. "Being in Hawaii but losing it, in a sense."

## Ricochet, San Diego's surfing therapy dog, dies at 15

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Ricochet, the beloved Golden Retriever who found her calling as a therapy dog when she learned to surf, has died in Southern California.

The 15-year-old canine helped countless veterans and kids during more than a decade providing therapy in the waves off San Diego, according to her owner Judy Fridono.

The dog, who died Friday, was diagnosed with liver cancer last August, she said.

Ricochet was trained to be a service animal, but the energetic pup was more fond of chasing birds than assisting with household chores, Fridono said.

The canine's mission became clear in 2009, when she got on a surfboard with quadriplegic surfer Patrick Ivison. A viral video of their ride got more than 6 million views.

"That day she hopped on the board with Patrick, she was reborn," Fridono said in a 2012 interview with the San Diego Union-Tribune. "She kept running back to the water with her tail wagging like she could finally tell me, 'This is what I want to do.'"

For the rest of her life, Ricochet helped kids with special needs, wounded service members and families of fallen veterans.

She worked as a therapy dog for Pawsitive Teams and the Naval Medical Center San Diego where she supported people with trauma, anxiety and other emotional challenges, the Union-Tribune said.

In addition, Ricochet helped raise \$1 million for charity and the donation of more than 1 million bowls of food for homeless animals, the newspaper said.

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## Disney developing live-action 'Moana' with Dwayne Johnson

NEW YORK (AP) — "Moana" will be the latest Walt Disney Co. animation to get the live-action treatment, and at least one star is coming back.

Disney chief executive Bob Iger announced a live-action "Moana" remake is in development Monday in a call with investors. The production is in the early stages — no director has been announced — but Dwayne Johnson is set to return as the demigod Maui.

"This story is my culture, and this story is emblematic of our people's grace and warrior strength," said Johnson. "I wear this culture proudly on my skin and in my soul, and this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reunite with Maui, inspired by the mana and spirit of my late grandfather, High Chief Peter Maivia, is one that runs very deep for me."

Drawn from Polynesian myths and buoyed by songs from Lin-Manuel Miranda, "Moana" was a massive hit for Disney in 2016, grossing \$643.3 million worldwide. Auli'i Cravalho, who voiced Moana in the original, is to be an executive producer on the live-action version.

## MASTERS '23: 20 years after protests, women still look ahead

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — It started with a letter that Martha Burk figured would never see the light of day. When she mentioned the all-male membership at Augusta National, the National Council of Women's Organization didn't even vote on whether to take action.

"It was a very casual conversation at the end of a board meeting," Burk said in a recent interview. "I had found out about this club and said I was thinking about writing a letter. Everyone said, 'Fine, write the letter.' I never expected my letter to go anywhere. I thought in a few years I might have followed up with a phone call."

There was no need.

Hootie Johnson, the chairman of Augusta National, wrote a three-sentence reply to her that club matters were private. The next day he issued a scathing, 932-word statement to the media that defended the rights of a private club and said a woman joining Augusta National would be on the club's timetable and "not at the point of a bayonet."

So began the biggest controversy in Masters history.

It culminated 20 years ago with a rally during the third round. Burk, wearing a bulletproof vest under a green golf shirt, spoke to about 40 supporters in a lot a half-mile away from Magnolia Lane because authorities denied her permission to protest across from the club.

And then it all went away, or so it seemed. Television sponsors returned in 2005, after the Masters had cut them loose to keep them out of the fray. It wasn't until nine years after the protest that Augusta National announced former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and South Carolina financier Darla Moore had accepted invitations to join.

"We did not succeed in our goal to get the club open to women at the time," Burk said. "They waited a long enough time that we wouldn't get credit. But had we not done that, I think there still would not be women members."

During the course of this battle, Burk was invited to be part of a Golf World magazine cover. The headline was "Year of the Women." She was among five women on the cover as the top newsmakers of the year, and had no way of knowing then that one of them — Suzy Whaley — would go on to become the first female president at the PGA of America.

The landscape has changed over the last 20 years, but not quickly enough for some who still see a great gender disparity. Augusta National has at least six female members wearing green jackets during the Masters.

The most noticeable — and more relevant — change is outside the club.

Two years after Augusta National had its first female members, Whaley in 2014 was elected secretary

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of the PGA of America, a 28,000-strong organization of club professionals. She rose to president four years later. Diana Murphy in 2016 became only the second president in the 121-year history of the U.S. Golf Association.

The Royal & Ancient Golf Club voted overwhelmingly in 2014 to accept women for the first time, and later removed Muirfield from the British Open rotation when the historic golf club in Scotland rejected mixed membership.

Muirfield held a second vote in 2017 and changed with the times. The club known as the "Honorable Company of Edinburgh Golfers" that dates to 1744 not only has female members, it hosted the Women's British Open last year for the first time.

The USGA announced in 2007 the U.S. Women's Open would be going to Pebble Beach, the most iconic venue of the men's U.S. Open. That becomes reality this summer. Also on the USGA calendar is a second staging the U.S. Open and the U.S. Open Women's Open at Pinehurst No. 2 in consecutive weeks.

"If you look at the world, if you look at golf, we've come a long way," Whaley said. "I like to paraphrase Condi Rice. She always talks about suffrage and things that happened before. But also look forward. What can I do to make it better for those who come behind us?"

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Whaley earned her place on that Golf World cover as a high-energy Connecticut club pro who became the first woman since 1945 to qualify for a PGA Tour event. Annika Sorenstam, who also was on the cover, played a men's event two months ahead of Whaley thanks to a sponsor invitation.

Whaley now serves on the board of the Annika Foundation, and they recently caught up while doing a CBS special. Whaley recalls the Masters controversy being "right on top of us" as they prepared to play against the men. They rarely made it through an interview without being asked about it.

"We were all thrown together in this women's movement in golf," Whaley said.

Whaley played the LPGA Tour briefly, married club pro Bill Whaley, had two daughters and never lost the itch for golf. She spent hours observing famed instructors, and it led to her getting certified as a teaching pro by the LPGA Tour and the PGA of America.

After moving to Connecticut, she was recruited to run a public course called Blue Fox Run. The owner, Lisa Wilson Foley, wanted a woman as the head pro. Whaley learned on the job.

She has seen women in roles not many were in 20 years ago — engineers behind the technology of drivers, rules officials, the general manager of a 140-year-old club that hosted the U.S. Open last year, the president of a club is hosting the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles, the C-suite in major golf organizations.

"We can celebrate the progress, where we are today," she said. "My question is where are we going next? What's next for corporate? What's next for media? The bottom line is this — I'm really happy with where we're headed. We need serious support to get where we should be."

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Alex Baldwin is the first woman to be president of Korn Ferry Tour, the primary path to the PGA Tour, and her role is expanding to bring more tours into the pathway.

"We had a dinner in Savannah (Georgia), and we had 60 different title sponsors. We had event operators come out, we had a golf course owner. It was people who represented our tour," Baldwin said. "It literally was 50-50 representation men and women. I've been to a lot of dinners where I'm the only woman. It was a cool moment to have."

The Korn Ferry Tour is where careers began for the likes of Scottie Scheffler and Justin Thomas, Bubba Watson and Zach Johnson.

Baldwin, in her fourth year as president, has noticed fewer questions about being a woman in this leadership role, and she's happy about that. She would attribute the gains more to a changing culture in society, not just golf.

Even so, there are moments that remind her of change. One happened in Chile last week, where the Korn Ferry Tour played for the first time.

"A young woman sought me out — she was involved in a junior program," Baldwin said. "She said, 'I wanted to meet you. You're a woman, and I can't tell you how inspiring that is.'"

Burk never paid much attention to golf before she wrote that letter to Augusta National, and now she only is aware of the sport when the Masters rolls around.

At 81, her time is spent largely on equal pay and other political issues affecting women. She also hosts three-minute podcasts called, "Equal Time with Martha Burk."

Burk, with her Texas twang, never needed a lot of time to get to her point.

"How many women are at Augusta now? Six? That's 2%," she said, basing it on the assumption the club has about 300 members. "Let's do a little math. Women are still pathetically behind in U.S. business, anyway. We've just broken through to 10% (of CEOs) in Fortune 500s. If you equate that — which we ought to — to the membership at Augusta National, they ought to have 30."

One of her kids recently gave her a program called "Storyworth" to share memories. One prompt asked her to tell the craziest thing that ever happened to her. The answer came easily.

She wrote a letter to an all-male club, not fully knowing about Augusta National or the Masters. She recalled her oldest son telling her, "Mother, you have attacked the Westminster Abbey of golf."

"Even though it has been 20 years, people still stop me on the street or remark when they hear my name," Burk concluded in her Storybook entry. "I'm fond of saying the Augusta fight will be on my gravestone."

AP golf: <https://apnews.com/hub/golf> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## Russia blames Ukraine for bomb that killed military blogger

By The Associated Press undefined

Russian authorities blamed Ukrainian intelligence agencies on Monday for orchestrating a bombing at a St. Petersburg cafe that killed a Russian military blogger who fervently supported Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, and they arrested a suspect.

Ukrainian authorities did not directly respond to the accusation, but President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in reference to the attack that he doesn't think about events in Russia, and a senior Ukrainian official earlier described the bombing as part of Russia's internal turmoil.

Vladlen Tatarsky, 40, was killed Sunday as he led a discussion at the cafe on the banks of the Neva River in the historic heart of Russia's second-largest city, officials said. Tatarsky, who had filed regular reports from the front lines in Ukraine, was the pen name for Maxim Fomin. He had accumulated more than 560,000 followers on his Telegram messaging app channel.

The bombing, which also wounded more than 30 other people, was the latest attack inside Russia on a high-profile pro-war figure. Last year, a nationalist TV commentator was assassinated when a bomb exploded in her SUV outside Moscow.

Investigators said they believe the bomb at the cafe was hidden in a bust of Tatarsky that a member of the audience gave him just before the explosion. A video showed him joking as he removed a wrapper to reveal the gold-colored bust of a man wearing a helmet, "What a handsome guy!"

Russian authorities announced the arrest of Darya Trepova, a 26-year-old St. Petersburg resident seen on video presenting Tatarsky with the bust, and classified the case as an act of terrorism. Police had detained Trepova for participating in a rally against the war on Feb. 24, 2022, the day of the invasion, and she spent 10 days in jail.

Designating the case as a terrorist act gives authorities more power to pursue their investigation, increases the maximum punishment and limits the rights of suspects.

The Interior Ministry released a video showing Trepova telling a police officer that she brought the statuette that exploded to the cafe. When asked who gave it to her, she said she would explain it later. The circumstances under which Trepova spoke were unclear, including whether she was under duress.

According to Russian media reports, Trepova told investigators she was asked to deliver the bust, but didn't know what was inside it.

The National Anti-Terrorist Committee, which coordinates counter-terrorism operations, said the bomb-

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ing was "planned by Ukrainian special services," noting Trepova was an "active supporter" of imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Navalny, the Kremlin's fiercest foe who had exposed official corruption and organized massive anti-government protests, is serving a nine-year fraud sentence that he has denounced as a political vendetta.

Navalny associate Ivan Zhdanov warned that authorities could use the claim of involvement by political opponents as a pretext to extend his prison term. He also charged that Russian security agencies could be behind the explosion to cast Navalny's supporters as an "internal enemy."

According to Russian media reports, police tracked down Trepova using surveillance cameras, although she reportedly cut her long blond hair short to change her look and moved to a different apartment in an apparent attempt to escape.

Military bloggers and patriotic commentators compared the bombing to the August 2022 assassination of nationalist TV commentator Darya Dugina, who was killed when a remote-controlled explosive planted in her SUV blew up as she drove on the outskirts of Moscow.

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

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the attacks on Dugina and Tatarsky proved that Moscow was justified in launching what it describes as "the special military operation" in Ukraine.

Moscow has offered a series of explanations for the invasion, denounced by Ukraine and the West as an unprovoked act of aggression, while providing little if any evidence for the charges.

"Russia has faced the Kyiv regime, which has supported terrorist activities," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters. "That is why the special military operation is being conducted."

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the St. Petersburg millionaire restaurateur who heads the Wagner Group military contractor spearheading Moscow's offensive in eastern Ukraine, said he owned the cafe and allowed patriotic groups to use it for meetings. He said he doubts the involvement of Ukrainian authorities in the bombing, saying it was likely launched by a "group of radicals" unrelated to the government in Kyiv.

Zelenskyy brushed off questions about the bombing.

"I don't think about what is happening in St. Petersburg or Moscow. Russia should think about this. I am thinking about our country," Zelenskyy told journalists.

While not claiming responsibility for various explosions, bombings and other attacks within Russia since the invasion began, Ukrainian authorities have often greeted them jubilantly and insisted on Ukraine's right to launch such assaults.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak responded to the news of the bombing by casting it as a result of infighting in Russia.

"Spiders are eating each other in a jar," he tweeted in English late Sunday. "Question of when domestic terrorism would become an instrument of internal political fight was a matter of time."

On Monday, Podolyak said Russia has "returned to the Soviet classics," pointing to its increasing isolation, the rise of espionage cases and an increase in political repression.

Last week, Russia's security service announced the arrest of American reporter Evan Gershkovich on spying charges, the first time a U.S. correspondent has been detained on such accusations since the Cold War. His newspaper, The Wall Street Journal, has vehemently rejected the allegations and demanded his release.

Tatarsky was born in Ukraine's industrial heartland of the Donbas and worked as a coal miner before starting a furniture trade business. When he ran into financial difficulties, he robbed a bank and was sentenced to prison.

He fled custody after a Russia-backed separatist rebellion engulfed the Donbas in 2014, weeks after Moscow's illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. Then he joined separatist rebels and fought on the front line before turning to blogging.

While Russian authorities have silenced alternative voices by shutting down independent news outlets critical of the war and jailing critics of President Vladimir Putin, military bloggers have played an increasingly visible role. While strongly supporting the war, they also have frequently pointed out flaws in Russian military strategy and occasionally criticized the military brass.

Putin saluted Tatarsky posthumously Monday with a bravery award.

## Finland doubling NATO's border with Russia in blow to Putin

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The blue-and-white Finnish flag rises outside NATO headquarters Tuesday afternoon, making Finland a member and doubling Russia's border with the world's biggest security alliance.

The move is a strategic and political blow to President Vladimir Putin, who has long complained about NATO's expansion toward Russia and partly used that as a justification for his country's war with Ukraine.

"What we see is that President Putin went to war against Ukraine with a declared aim to get less NATO," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said. "He's getting the exact opposite."

Like all NATO members, Finland will benefit from the collective security guarantee that an attack on one is considered an attack on all.

NATO has said that it has no immediate intention to step up its presence in Finland. Some members have deployed troops there for war games over the last year.

Russia immediately warned that it would bolster forces near Finland if NATO sends any additional troops or equipment to what will be its 31st member country

Finland has substantial, well-trained armed forces with elite troops capable of operating in the sub-zero temperatures of the high north. The Nordic country also has a large reserve army and is investing heavily in new equipment, including dozens of U.S.-made F-35 fighter jets.

The Finnish flag rising between the French and the Estonian in a ceremony scheduled for 1330 GMT will complete the fastest accession process in the organization's recent history .

Alarmed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year, Finland applied to join NATO in May 2022. Neighboring Sweden also applied, but its accession process will take longer.

The ceremony falls on NATO's very own birthday, the 74th anniversary of the signing of its founding Washington Treaty on April 4, 1949.

"It will be a good day for Finland's security, for Nordic security, and for NATO as a whole," Stoltenberg told reporters on Monday on the eve of a meeting of alliance's foreign ministers in Brussels.

Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko warned that Moscow would bolster its own forces "in case of deployment of forces of other NATO members on the territory of Finland."

"We will strengthen our military potential in the west and in the northwest," Grushko said, according to the state RIA Novosti news agency, although Russia is already having trouble marshaling forces against far-smaller Ukraine.

Finland shares a 1,340-kilometer (832-mile) border with Russia and unlike most members of the alliance, Finland did not cut defense spending and investment after the Cold War.

"They have trained and built a large army over many years and maintain that high level of readiness. Finland is also a country with extremely high level of resilience, of preparedness throughout the whole society," Stoltenberg said.

The country also helps to complete NATO's geographical puzzle by filling in a major gap in the strategically important Baltic Sea region in Europe's north.

On Tuesday, Stoltenberg said, Turkey, the last country to have ratified Finland's membership, will hand the official document enshrining its approval to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

NATO's top civilian official said he will then invite Finland to hand over its own signed documents, to complete the procedure.

Finnish President Sauli Niinistö and Defense Minister Antti Kaikkonen will attend the flag-raising ceremony along with Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto.

"It is a historic moment for us. For Finland, the most important objective at the meeting will be to emphasize NATO's support to Ukraine as Russia continues its illegal aggression," Haavisto said in a statement. "We seek to promote stability and security throughout the Euro-Atlantic region."

Left-wing Prime Minister Sanna Marin had championed her country's NATO accession, and lost a chance at

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another term over the weekend, but joining NATO was widely popular and not seen as a factor in her loss.

Lars Kahre, an entrepreneur from Helsinki, said the country's decision to abandon its military non-alignment was caused by the changes in Europe over the last year.

"For a long time, we have been relying on our independence and neutrality and now we just realize that that's not the path of the future," he told The Associated Press. "Now we need to look for new options for the future."

All 30 allies signed Finland's and Sweden's accession protocols soon after they applied. Turkey and Hungary delayed the process for months but relented on Finland. Turkey has sought guarantees and assurances from the two, notably to crack down on Kurdish groups. Hungary's demands have never been explicit.

NATO must agree unanimously for new members to join, and the vast majority of members are keen to bring Sweden within the fold before U.S. President Joe Biden and his alliance counterparts hold their next summit in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius on July 11-12.

"Sweden is not left alone. Sweden is as close as it can come as a full-fledged member," Stoltenberg said, and he urged Turkey to quickly ratify the country's accession protocol, saying: "my position is that Sweden has delivered on the commitments they made." \_\_\_\_ Jari Tanner in Helsinki contributed to this report.

## 1st moon crew in 50 years includes woman, Black astronaut

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

NASA on Monday named the four astronauts who will fly around the moon late next year, including the first woman and the first African American assigned to a lunar mission.

The first moon crew in 50 years — three Americans and one Canadian — was introduced during a ceremony in Houston, home to the nation's astronauts as well as Mission Control.

"This is humanity's crew," said NASA Administrator Bill Nelson.

The four astronauts will be the first to fly NASA's Orion capsule, launching atop a Space Launch System rocket from Kennedy Space Center no earlier than late 2024. They will not land or even go into lunar orbit, but rather fly around the moon and head straight back to Earth, a prelude to a lunar landing by two others a year later.

The mission's commander, Reid Wiseman, will be joined by Victor Glover, an African American naval aviator; Christina Koch, who holds the world record for the longest spaceflight by a woman; and Canada's Jeremy Hansen, a former fighter pilot and the crew's lone space rookie. Wiseman, Glover and Koch have all lived on the International Space Station. All four are in their 40s.

"This is a big day. We have a lot to celebrate and it's so much more than the four names that have been announced," Glover said.

This is the first moon crew to include someone from outside the U.S. — and the first crew in NASA's new moon program named Artemis after the twin sister of mythology's Apollo. Late last year, an empty Orion capsule flew to the moon and back in a long-awaited dress rehearsal.

"Am I excited? Absolutely," Koch said to cheers from the crowd of schoolchildren, politicians and others. "But my real question is: 'Are you excited?'" she said to more cheers.

The Canadian Space Agency snagged a seat because of its contributions of big robotic arms on NASA's space shuttles and the space station. One is also planned for the moon project.

Hansen said he's grateful that Canada is included in the flight.

"We are going to the moon together. Let's go!" he said.

During Apollo, NASA sent 24 astronauts to the moon from 1968 through 1972. Twelve of them landed. All were military-trained male test pilots except for Apollo 17's Harrison Schmitt, a geologist who closed out that moonlanding era alongside the late Gene Cernan.

Provided this next 10-day moonshot goes well, NASA aims to land two astronauts on the moon by 2025 or so.

NASA picked from 41 active astronauts for its first Artemis crew. Canada had four candidates. Almost all of them took part in Monday's ceremony at Johnson Space Center's Ellington Field, a pep rally of sorts

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that ended with Wiseman leading the crowd in a chant.

Congratulations streamed in from retired astronauts, including Apollo 11's Buzz Aldrin and Scott Kelly, the first American to spend close to a year in space. "Huge risks, huge commitment, eternal benefits for all. What a crew!" tweeted Chris Hadfield, the first Canadian commander of the space station a decade ago who performed David Bowie's "Space Oddity" from orbit.

President Joe Biden spoke with the four astronauts and their families on Sunday. In a tweet Monday, Biden said the mission "will inspire the next generation of explorers, and show every child — in America, in Canada, and across the world — that if they can dream it, they can be it."

\_\_\_\_ The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science and Educational Media Group. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## WWE no longer just a family affair as it joins with UFC

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writer

WWE is saying goodbye to existing as a family-run business as it joins with the company that runs Ultimate Fighting Championship to create a \$21.4 billion sports entertainment company.

The deal announced Monday between Endeavor and World Wrestling Entertainment, on the heels of its biggest event of the year, catapults WWE into a new era after spending decades under the control of the McMahon family.

Vince McMahon purchased Capitol Wrestling from his father in 1982, and took the regional wrestling business to a national audience with stars such as Andre the Giant, Hulk Hogan, "Stone Cold" Steve Austin, John Cena and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. The company, which changed its name to World Wrestling Federation and later World Wrestling Entertainment, hosted its first WrestleMania in 1985.

McMahon, in an interview with CNBC, addressed doubts among some WWE fans and industry experts that he would ever make a deal for the business. "It's the right time to do the right thing. And it's the next evolution of WWE," he said.

In a presentation after the deal was announced, the WWE and Endeavor said that they will cross promote to drive brand awareness and deepen penetration of their overlapping fan base, more than 700 million UFC fans and 1.2 billion WWE fans worldwide.

Ties already exist talent wise between WWE and UFC, with stars such as Brock Lesnar and Ronda Rousey crossing over between the two organizations.

A new publicly traded company will house the UFC and WWE brands, with Endeavor Group Holdings Inc. taking a 51% controlling interest in the new company. Existing WWE shareholders will hold a 49% stake.

The companies put the enterprise value of UFC at \$12.1 billion and WWE's value at \$9.3 billion.

The new business, which does not yet have a name, will be lead by Endeavor CEO Ari Emanuel. McMahon, executive chairman at WWE, will serve in the same role at the new company. Dana White will continue as president of UFC and Nick Khan will be president at WWE.

"Together, we will be a \$21+ billion live sports and entertainment powerhouse with a collective fanbase of more than a billion people and an exciting growth opportunity," McMahon said in a prepared statement Monday.

He also provided some idea of where the focus of the new company will be, saying that it will look to maximize the value of combined media rights, enhance sponsorship monetization, develop new forms of content and pursue other strategic mergers and acquisitions to further bolster their brands.

Confirmation that WWE is being sold comes after McMahon, a majority shareholder of WWE, returned to the company in January and said that it could be on the block with viewership continuing to rise.

Rumors swirled about who would possibly be interested in buying WWE, with Endeavor, Disney, Fox, Comcast, Amazon and Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund all in the mix.

McMahon said on CNBC that there were several buyers interested in WWE, but that combining with Endeavor is the right move.

"It makes all the sense in the world for all these synergies that we have to extract all of the value that



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we can out of the marketplace," he explained.

Media industry analysts viewed WWE as an attractive target given its global reach and loyal fanbase.

The company held its marquee event, WrestleMania, over the weekend. The two-day spectacular, held at SoFi Stadium in California, topped the existing global viewership record by 28% on the first night. On the second night, it beat the existing global viewership record by 33%. Merchandise sales for WrestleMania 39 climbed 20% from a year earlier. Last year, WWE booked revenue of \$1.3 billion.

The company is also a social media powerhouse. It surpassed 16 billion social video views in the final quarter of last year. It has nearly 94 million YouTube subscribers and has more than 20 million followers on TikTok. Its female wrestlers comprise five out of the top 15 most followed female athletes in the world, across Facebook, Twitter & Instagram, led by Rousey with 36.1 million followers.

WWE had more than 7.5 billion digital and social media views in January and February of this year, up 15% from the same time frame a year ago. And WrestleMania 39 had more than 500 million views and 11 million hours of video consumed over the two days of the event, a 42% increase over last year.

The new company plans to trade on the New York Stock Exchange under the "TKO" ticker symbol. Its board will have 11 members, with six being appointed by Endeavor and five being appointed by WWE.

"We like the assets of UFC and also WWE in a world where linear TV is losing market share to streaming, thus live sport content is in high demand," wrote Jeffries analyst Randal Konik said in a note to clients.

The transaction, which was approved by the boards of Endeavor and WWE, is targeted to close in the second half of the year. It still needs regulatory approval.

Shares of World Wrestling Entertainment Inc., based in Stamford, Connecticut, are up 33% this year, but fell nearly 4% in Monday afternoon trading. Shares of Endeavor, based in Beverly Hills, California, slipped more than 7%.

## **Distraction, speeding, alcohol drive up 2021 traffic deaths**

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Nearly 43,000 people died in U.S. traffic crashes in 2021, the highest number in 16 years with deaths due to speeding and impaired or distracted driving on the rise.

The 2021 final numbers, released Monday by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, confirmed earlier estimates by the agency showing a 10.5% increase in deaths over 2020. That's the highest number since 2005 and the largest percentage increase since 1975.

Data shows a 12% rise in fatal crashes involving at least one distracted driver, with 3,522 people killed. That prompted the agency to kick off a \$5 million advertising campaign in an effort to keep drivers focused on the road. Agency officials said such cases likely are under-reported by police.

The number of pedestrians killed rose 13%, and cyclist fatalities were up 2% for the year. The number of unbelted passengers killed rose 8.1%, while fatalities involving alcohol-impaired driving were up 14%.

Speeding-related deaths increased 7.9%, while crash deaths involving large trucks weighing over 10,000 pounds were up 17%.

At a news conference Monday in Seattle, NHTSA focused on distracted driving fatalities, which speakers said are entirely preventable if people stop using their cell phones, eating, or doing other things that divert attention from the road.

"Remember it only takes a moment to change your life forever," said Sophie Shulman, NHTSA deputy administrator.

Steve Kiefer, a retired General Motors executive whose son, Mitchel, was killed in a 2016 distracted driving crash, said cell phones are a primary cause of distraction. But technology is available to prevent it including "do not disturb" modes, as well as apps and in-car systems that watch drivers to make sure they're paying attention.

"All of this technology is available today, and there's no reason we can't use it and roll it out quickly," Kiefer said.

Distracted driving deaths are related to America's addiction to cell phones, said Kiefer, who started a

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foundation with the goal of ending distracted driving. He said 90% of people are aware of the danger of distracted driving, yet 80% admit to doing it. In 25 states with laws against hand-held cell phone use, traffic deaths, crashes and insurance rates have dropped, he said.

"We believe that legislation will change behavior," Kiefer said.

Mitchel Kiefer was driving from home to Michigan State University on Interstate 96 when traffic slowed and his car was hit from behind by a driver who was distracted by her phone, Kiefer said. His car was knocked across the median and into oncoming traffic, where he was killed instantly.

The crash was not reported as involving a distracted driver, illustrating how distracted driving deaths are under-reported, Kiefer said.

Part of the increase in crash deaths is due to people driving more as the coronavirus pandemic waned. NHTSA reported that the fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled increased 2.2% to 1.37 in 2021.

NHTSA also estimates that 2.5 million people were injured in crashes during 2021, up 9.4% from 2020.

The agency said it will release preliminary 2022 traffic death data in the coming weeks. NHTSA estimates that 31,785 people were killed in crashes from January through September last year, down 0.2% from the same period of 2021.

## Jim Nantz bids a fond farewell to March Madness

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

HOUSTON (AP) — Certainly, Jim Nantz could fill an evening weaving tales of the great games and buzzer-beaters he's had the privilege to see, and call, over a storytelling career that made him the voice of March Madness for nearly four decades.

But when asked about his favorite moments as he prepared for the 354th and final game of that journey — Monday's title game — he brought up Delaware State.

The Hornets were a 16 seed when they made what is still their only NCAA appearance back in 2005. They were going against Duke in a first-round game hardly anyone remembers now. Nantz was certain he'd see those Duke players again.

"But those Delaware State kids, they're on CBS, and I envisioned that someday, they're going to have the VHS tape to be able to show their grandchildren and say 'I played in the NCAA Tournament,'" Nantz said during a courtside conversation with The Associated Press the day before the start of his last Final Four. "This tournament is their 'forever.' I always wanted to make sure that I do justice to their story."

The 63-year-old traces his own path to the announcer's table to when he was 9 and living in New Orleans. His dad took him to his first college basketball game.

Working the sideline was a bear of a coach who had a red, polka-dotted towel draped across his shoulder. About 10 years later, that coach, Guy Lewis of the Houston Cougars, would give Nantz, who played golf at the school, a job as the public-address guy for home games at Hofheinz Pavillion. A year after that, Nantz was still living in the dorms at UH when Lewis asked him to host his coach's show.

Nantz's might very well be the voice American sports fans know best. He has guided them through six Super Bowls on CBS and walked with them among the towering pines at the Masters since 1986, when Jack Nicklaus won his sixth green jacket. He'll continue on those assignments for the foreseeable future, but this 37th run through March Madness will be his last.

Some said it might have been perfect if his alma mater, which came into the tournament as a No. 1 seed, was playing in its hometown in the final game of Nantz's basketball journey. That didn't happen, but Nantz believes there's something fitting about a Final Four that came out of the blue like this, with three schools that had never been this far before, and no team seeded better than No. 4 UConn.

He has always loved the underdog tales.

"Storytelling paradise," Nantz called it.

It's been wild, emotional and a little awkward for a man who concedes he likes to tell the stories, not be part of them.

He got a key to the city Friday. Two streets on an intersection outside the stadium were renamed "Jim

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Nantz Way" and "Hello Friends Boulevard."

"Hello Friends" is the comfy-as-a-slipper welcome he coined about 20 years ago. It gives Nantz a moment to connect with the audience and think of his dad, who passed away in 2008 after a long bout with Alzheimer's. The Nantz National Alzheimer's Center is based in Houston.

Nantz's welcome-in message to the telecasts might be planned. Other things aren't.

His call of Saturday's buzzer-beating shot by San Diego State's Lamont Butler in the semifinals — Nantz estimates he's had 20-something such last-second winners over his years in the tournament — plays back like a master class in what his job should be: simple, urgent, much more about the moment than the person talking about it.

"It's Butler. With two seconds. He's gotta put it up. Aaand. He wins it! He wins it! With the jumper!" Then, five seconds of silence, followed by, "A San Diego State miracle!"

Speaking of miracles, there's another announcer who made a name for himself by talking about one. Shortly after this interview was over and Nantz had started talking to some well-wishers, he lifted up his phone and smiled as he showed it to a few folks standing nearby: Al Michaels was calling.

Though many might consider Nantz and the 78-year-old Michaels as contemporaries, there was a sense of the unfiltered excitement Nantz felt about receiving that call. And it gave a glimpse as to why, even after all this time, he has such a strong bond with the millions of people who tune in. In some ways, he's just like us.

Moments earlier, Nantz had recalled hosting the Final Four studio show from the Kingdome in Seattle in 1989 when Magic Johnson popped by for a visit on the set. As Magic and Nantz, both 30 at the time, sat in the corner of the arena, watching the final seconds of the Michigan-Seton Hall title game tick down, the announcer asked Johnson if he ever stopped to soak in everything and reflect on the wonder of all he'd been part of.

"He nods and just says, 'All the time,'" Nantz said. "And today, I think about that. I've had the best seat in the house at the Super Bowl or the Masters or here for my whole career. And I've never gotten over the fact that I'm the one who's blessed with the chance to lend a voice to it, and to tell the story."

AP March Madness coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/march-madness> and bracket: <https://apnews.com/hub/ncaa-mens-bracket> and <https://apnews.com/hub/ap-top-25-college-basketball-poll> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Top25](https://twitter.com/AP_Top25)

## 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 as 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 from witnesses — including from his own lawyer and his former vice president — 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.

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"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 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 objections on executive privilege grounds, 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>

## After March Madness, women's pro basketball options are slim

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

DALLAS (AP) — March Madness may have been the last time for fans to see many of the talented college women players compete.

Players' options for professional basketball careers are limited, whether in the U.S. or overseas — the jobs just aren't there.

"You can be a great college player and not make a WNBA roster," ESPN WNBA analyst LaChina Robinson said. "You're not only competing with players that are currently on roster, but also a ton of women's basketball players overseas that have been honing their skills and waiting for opportunity to break into the WNBA."

The numbers paint a challenging picture.

— There are only 12 WNBA teams and 144 roster spots with most of those being filled by returning players.

— Over the past six seasons, 64% of players drafted made WNBA rosters according to basketball website 'Beyond Women's Sports'. The high mark was 28 of the 36 draftees in 2019. The low was only 20 the year before.

Even if a player does get into the league, it's a battle for playing time.

Only 60% of players drafted got on the court to play minutes their first year since 2017 according to the basketball website 'Her Hoop Stats.' It's part of the reason why five of the first-round picks in 2021 are no longer in the league.

There has been talk of WNBA expansion, but nothing has come to fruition yet. Players often turn to playing professionally overseas, working on their games and looking for another shot to play at home.

Now those jobs are also at a premium.

Brittney Griner's nine-month incarceration in Moscow along with the war with Ukraine has led to the elimination of dozens of potential jobs in Russia.

Griner is back in the WNBA after her nine-month legal fight in Russia, during which she was detained when customs officials said they found vape canisters with cannabis oil in her luggage, then later arrested before being released in a high-level prisoner exchange between the U.S. and Russia.

The lost jobs in Russia has a trickle down on openings in other countries as top players who once played there are looking elsewhere for work.

Longtime agent Brian Dyke said that there are fewer countries now that he can send players to. Besides Russia, China and Korea stopped signing foreign players few years ago because of the coronavirus. Neither has started again. That's roughly another three dozen jobs gone.

"In Korea, everyone used to get \$25,000 a month," Dyke said. "It's a huge loss not having those jobs as those are two of the biggest markets."

Dyke also said he wouldn't send some of his clients to play in other countries because of the political climate.

While the overseas job market is shrinking, there are start-up leagues looking to fill the void.

Athletes Unlimited just completed its second season. Over a dozen WNBA players competed last month in it. The four-team competition in Dallas is an opportunity for players to stay in the U.S. during the off-season and make up to \$50,000 during the five-week season.

Staying in the U.S. is becoming more important with the WNBA now requiring players to be present at the start of training camp. The requirement can impact playing opportunities outside of the league for

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WNBA players. Their overseas contract have to include provisions that allow players to return to the U.S. in the middle of a postseason run overseas.

It all makes the path to a professional basketball career for women harder than ever.

Players had to declare by March 26 if they planned to enter the WNBA draft unless they were still playing in the NCAA Tournament. Those players had 48 hours after their last game to declare. South Carolina's Zia Cooke and Dorka Juhasz from UConn are among players headed to the draft.

Others like 6-foot-6 Elizabeth Kitley from Virginia Tech are staying in college, where they enjoy various amenities due to Title IX, including taking charter flights vs flying commercial. Kitley, a senior, despite being a possible first-round pick is one of many college players who have an extra year of eligibility because of COVID.

The new name, image and likeness (NIL) opportunities women basketball players also have is playing into their decisions on turning pro.

"NIL definitely plays a major role," said South Carolina star Aliyah Boston, who decided to forgo her COVID year and enter the WNBA draft as the likely No. 1 overall pick. "NIL is something that's a blessing. It gives you a head start on life before you need to get there."

Making a WNBA roster isn't something that Boston is going to have to worry about.

Tennessee forward Tamari Key isn't rushing to find out if she would.

"Everyone says college is the best years of your life... why pass up... especially when you have enjoyed your time at the school," the 6-6 Key wrote on social media.

Key, who will return for a fifth-year after missing most of her senior season with blood clot issues, added: "Why go to the league right away when there are potentially not enough spots?"

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## 'Indiana Jones' to premiere at Cannes with tribute to Ford

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

Indiana Jones is swinging into the French Riviera.

"Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny," the fifth film in the Harrison Ford adventure series, will make its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival on May 18, festival organizers announced Monday. Cannes will also pay a tribute to Ford for his career.

The premiere of "Dial of Destiny," directed by James Mangold, comes 15 years after 2008's "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull" premiered at the French festival. "Dial of Destiny," billed as the final chapter in the franchise, will open in U.S. theaters June 28.

"Dial of Destiny," which had been rumored to be heading to Cannes, adds a second megawatt premiere to this year's festival, which kicks off May 16.

On Friday, Cannes announced the premiere of Martin Scorsese's much-anticipated "Killers of the Flower Moon," an adaptation for Apple TV+ of David Grann's bestseller about a series of murders of the Osage Nation in 1920s Oklahoma. Its cast includes Leonardo DiCaprio and Robert De Niro. The film's premiere, set for May 20, will mark Scorsese's first film in Cannes since "After Hours" in 1986.

The full Cannes lineup will be announced April 13.

## Snoop Dogg 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, the company on the verge of being sold and Roman Reigns remaining the undisputed champion, the iconic rapper stepped up in an emergency.

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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 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."

The biggest surprise, though, happened less than eight hours after Reigns pinned Cody Rhodes in the main event when UFC owner Endeavor announced Monday morning it had signed an agreement with WWE to form a new company that will put UFC and WWE under one roof.

Levesque did not answer questions about Endeavor Sunday night, saying he wanted to focus on what happened over the weekend.

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 generated a record gate of \$21.6 million, breaking the previous record by 27%.

Sponsorship revenue eclipsed \$21 million, more than doubling the previous record, while merchandise sales were up 20% over last year.

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."

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.

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.

Reigns continuing his 900-day-plus reign as champion was mostly unexpected. 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

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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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## Community colleges are reeling. 'The reckoning is here.'

By JON MARCUS, The Hechinger Report undefined

When Santos Enrique Camara arrived at Shoreline Community College in Washington state to study audio engineering, he quickly felt lost.

"It's like a weird maze," remembered Camara, who was 19 at the time and had finished high school with a 4.0 grade-point average. "You need help with your classes and financial aid? Well, here, take a number and run from office to office and see if you can figure it out."

Advocates for community colleges defend them as the underdogs of America's higher education system, left to serve the students who need the most support but without the money to provide it. Critics contend this has become an excuse for poor success rates and for the kind of faceless bureaucracies that ultimately led Camara to drop out after two semesters. He now works in a restaurant and plays in two bands.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is part of Saving the College Dream, a collaboration between AL.com, The Associated Press, The Christian Science Monitor, The Dallas Morning News, The Hechinger Report, The Post and Courier in Charleston, South Carolina, and The Seattle Times, with support from the Solutions Journalism Network.

With scant advising, many community college students spend time and money on courses that won't transfer or that they don't need. Though most intend to move on to get bachelor's degrees, only a small fraction succeed; fewer than half earn any kind of credential. Even if they do, many employers don't believe they're ready for the workforce.

Now these failures are coming home to roost.

Community colleges are far cheaper than four-year schools. Published tuition and fees last year averaged \$3,860, versus \$39,400 at private and \$10,940 at public four-year universities, with many states making community college free.

Yet consumers are abandoning them in droves. The number of students at community colleges has fallen 37% since 2010, or by nearly 2.6 million, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

"The reckoning is here," said Davis Jenkins, senior research scholar at the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University. (The Hechinger Report, which produced this story, is an independent unit of Teachers College.)

Those numbers would be even more grim if they didn't include high school students taking dual-enrollment courses, according to the Community College Research Center. High school students make up nearly a fifth of community college enrollment.

Yet even as these colleges serve fewer students, their already low success rates have by at least one measure gotten worse.

While four out of five students who begin at a community college say they plan to go on to get a bachelor's degree, only about one in six of them actually manages to do it. That's down by nearly 15% since 2020, according to the clearinghouse.

Two-year community colleges have the worst completion rates of any kind of university or college. Like Camara, nearly half of students drop out, within a year, of the community college where they started. Only slightly more than 40% finish within six years.

These frustrated wanderers include a disproportionate share of Black and Hispanic students. Half of



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all Hispanic and 40% of all Black students in higher education are enrolled at community colleges, the American Association of Community Colleges says.

The spurning of community colleges has implications for the national economy, which relies on their graduates to fill many of the jobs in which there are shortages. Those include positions as nurses, dental hygienists, emergency medical technicians, vehicle mechanics and electrical linemen, and in fields including information technology, construction, manufacturing, transportation and law enforcement.

Other factors are also contributing to the enrollment declines. Strong demand in the job market for people without college educations has made it more attractive for many to go to work. Thanks to so-called degree inflation, many jobs that require higher education call for bachelor's degrees where associate degrees or certificates were once sufficient. And private, regional public and for-profit universities, facing enrollment crises of their own, are competing for the same students.

Many Americans increasingly are questioning the value of going to college at all.

But they are particularly rejecting community college. In Michigan, for instance, the proportion of high school graduates enrolling in community college fell more than three times faster from 2018 to 2021 than the proportion going to four-year universities, according to that state's Center for Educational Performance and Information.

Those who do go complain of red tape and other frustrations.

Megan Parish, who at 26 has been in and out of community college in Arkansas since 2016, said she waits two or three days to get answers from advisers. "I've had to go out of my way to find people, and if they didn't know the answer, they would send me to somebody else, usually by email." Hearing back from the financial aid office, she said, can take a month.

Oryanan Lewis doesn't have that kind of time. Lewis, 20, is in her second year at Chattahoochee Valley Community College in Phenix City, Alabama, where she is pursuing a degree in medical assisting. And she's already behind.

Lewis has the autoimmune disease lupus and thought she'd get more personal attention at a smaller school than at a four-year university; Chattahoochee has about 1,600 students. But she said she didn't receive the help she needed until her illness had almost derailed her degree.

She failed three classes and was put on academic probation. Only then did she hear from an intervention program.

"I feel like they should talk to their students more," Lewis said. "Because a person can have a whole lot going on."

Employers, meanwhile, are unimpressed with the quality of community college students who manage to graduate. Only about a third agree that community colleges produce graduates who are ready to work, according to a survey released in December by researchers at the Harvard Business School.

Community colleges get less government money to spend, per student, than public four-year universities: \$8,695, according to the Center for American Progress, compared with \$17,540.

Yet community college students need more support than their counterparts at four-year universities. Twenty-nine percent are the first in their families to go to college, 15% are single parents and 68% work while in school. Twenty-nine percent say they've had trouble affording food and 14% affording housing, according to a survey by the Center for Community College Student Engagement.

Community colleges that fail these students can't just blame their smaller budgets, said Joseph Fuller, professor of management practice at Harvard Business School.

"The lack of resources inside community colleges is a legitimate complaint. But a number of community colleges do extraordinarily well," Fuller said. "So it's not impossible."

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Ellen Dennis for the Seattle Times, Rebecca Griesbach of Al.com and Ira Porter of the Christian Science Monitor contributed to this report.

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## Finland's NATO membership: What's next?

The Associated Press undefined

BRUSSELS (AP) — Finland is set to join NATO on Tuesday, days after Turkey ratified the Nordic country's membership and set it on track to become the 31st member of the world's biggest military alliance.

All NATO members must vote unanimously to admit a new country into the alliance.

"This is an historic week," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters in Brussels Monday, on the eve of a meeting of the alliance's foreign ministers. The move, he said, will make "Finland safer and our alliance stronger."

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

Only a few technical steps procedures remain before Finland can join NATO's ranks:

### ACCEPTANCE LETTERS

Turkey will on Tuesday hand its acceptance letter for Finland's accession to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken at NATO headquarters in Brussels. The United States is the depositary, or safekeeper, of NATO under the alliance's 1949 founding treaty.

### SIGNATURES

Stoltenberg will then invite Finland to present Blinken with its own acceptance document, signed by Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto. Finnish President Sauli Niinistö authorized Haavisto to sign the document.

### FULL MEMBERSHIP

Once Finland's membership acceptance document is handed over, the country will officially become a NATO member. A flag raising ceremony will be held at 1330 GMT (1530 CET) in Brussels on Tuesday.

### FINLAND-SWEDEN

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

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

Hungary's parliament also has yet to ratify Sweden's accession to NATO, and it remains unclear when it will do so. Stoltenberg said Monday that he hopes Sweden will join in coming months, before U.S. President Joe Biden and his NATO counterparts meet in Lithuania in July.

## 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.

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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 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 loosened 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 and make it easier to apply online. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas argues that the new rules are designed to

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weaken cartels who help migrants cross into the U.S. illegally.

Mayorkas said recently that officials aim to create "lawful, safe and orderly pathways for people to reach the United States to claim asylum and to cut out the smuggling organizations."

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.

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," she said. "It's like we are going into the same cycle."

Weissert reported from Washington.

## Today in History: April 4, Martin Luther King assassinated

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, April 4, the 94th day of 2023. There are 271 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 4, 1968, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., 39, was shot and killed while standing on a balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee; his slaying was followed by a wave of rioting (Washington, D.C., Baltimore and Chicago were among cities particularly hard hit). James Earl Ray later pleaded guilty to assassinating King, then spent the rest of his life claiming he'd been the victim of a setup.

On this date:

In 1841, President William Henry Harrison succumbed to pneumonia one month after his inaugural, becoming the first U.S. chief executive to die in office.

In 1865, President Abraham Lincoln, accompanied by his son Tad, visited the vanquished Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia, where he was greeted by a crowd that included former slaves.

In 1917, the U.S. Senate voted 82-6 in favor of declaring war against Germany (the House followed suit two days later by a vote of 373-50).

In 1945, during World War II, U.S. forces liberated the Nazi concentration camp Ohrdruf in Germany. Hungary was liberated as Soviet forces cleared out remaining German troops.

In 1949, 12 nations, including the United States, signed the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington, D.C.

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In 1973, the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center were officially dedicated. (The towers were destroyed in the terrorist attack of Sept. 11, 2001.)

In 1974, Hank Aaron of the Atlanta Braves tied Babe Ruth's home-run record by hitting his 714th round-tripper in Cincinnati.

In 1975, more than 130 people, most of them children, were killed when a U.S. Air Force transport plane evacuating Vietnamese orphans crash-landed shortly after takeoff from Saigon. Microsoft was founded by Bill Gates and Paul Allen in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

In 1983, the space shuttle Challenger roared into orbit on its maiden voyage. (It was destroyed in the disaster of January 1986.)

In 1991, Sen. John Heinz, R-Pa., and six other people, including two children, were killed when a helicopter collided with Heinz's plane over a schoolyard in Merion, Pennsylvania.

In 2011, yielding to political opposition, the Obama administration gave up on trying to prosecute mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and four alleged co-conspirators in civilian federal courts and said it would prosecute them instead before military commissions.

In 2015, in North Charleston, South Carolina, Walter Scott, a 50-year-old Black motorist, was shot to death while running away from a traffic stop; Officer Michael Thomas Slager, seen in a cellphone video opening fire at Scott, was charged with murder. (The charge, which lingered after a first state trial ended in a mistrial, was dropped as part of a deal under which Slager pleaded guilty to a federal civil rights violation; he was sentenced to 20 years in prison.)

Ten years ago: Connecticut Gov. Dannel P. Malloy signed into law sweeping new restrictions on weapons and large capacity ammunition magazines similar to the ones used by the young man who gunned down 20 children and six educators in the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre. At least 72 people were killed in the collapse of an eight-story residential building being constructed illegally near Mumbai, India's financial capital. Pulitzer Prize-winning film reviewer Roger Ebert, 70, died in Chicago.

Five years ago: Saying the situation had reached "a point of crisis," President Donald Trump signed a proclamation directing the deployment of the National Guard to the U.S.-Mexico border to fight illegal immigration. Facebook revealed that tens of millions more people might have been exposed in a privacy scandal involving Cambridge Analytica, a Trump-affiliated data mining firm. After the United States said it would impose 25 percent duties on \$50 billion of imports from China, Beijing quickly retaliated by listing \$50 billion of products it could hit with its own 25 percent tariffs.

One year ago: President Joe Biden called for Russian President Vladimir Putin to be tried for war crimes after what he described as "outrageous" atrocities around Kyiv during the invasion of Ukraine. The Senate Judiciary Committee deadlocked, 11-11, on whether to send Ketanji Brown Jackson's Supreme Court nomination to the Senate floor (It would later pass out of committee and she would be confirmed by the Senate three days later.) Kansas claimed its fourth national championship after defeating North Carolina in the finals of the NCAA Tournament in New Orleans.

Today's Birthdays: Recording executive Clive Davis is 91. Author Kitty Kelley is 81. Actor Craig T. Nelson is 79. Actor Walter Charles is 78. Actor Christine Lahti is 73. Country singer Steve Gatlin (The Gatlin Brothers) is 72. Actor Mary-Margaret Humes is 69. Writer-producer David E. Kelley is 67. Actor Constance Shulman is 65. Actor Phil Morris is 64. Actor Lorraine Toussaint is 63. Actor Hugo Weaving is 63. Rock musician Craig Adams (The Cult) is 61. Talk show host/comic Graham Norton is 60. Actor David Cross is 59. Actor Robert Downey Jr. is 58. Actor Nancy McKeon is 57. Actor Barry Pepper is 53. Country singer Clay Davidson is 52. Rock singer Josh Todd (Buckcherry) is 52. Singer Jill Scott is 51. Rock musician Magnus Sveningsson (The Cardigans) is 51. Magician David Blaine is 50. Singer Kelly Price is 50. R&B singer Andre Dalyrimple (Soul For Real) is 49. Country musician Josh McSwain (Parmalee) is 48. Actor James Roday is 47. Actor Natasha Lyonne is 44. Actor Eric Andre is 40. Actor Amanda Righetti is 40. Actor-singer Jamie Lynn Spears is 32. Actor Daniela Bobadilla is 30. Pop singer Austin Mahone (muh-HOHN') is 27. Actor Aliyah Royale is 23.